USE OF THESES

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COLONIAL POLITICAL MYTH AND THE PROBLEM OF THE OTHER: FRENCH AND VIETNAMESE IN THE PROTECTORATE OF ANNAM

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A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the Australian National University

December, 1991
This thesis is based on my own original research.

[Signature]
This thesis explores French colonial perceptions of Vietnamese cultural identity derived from the fusion of collective projections of European Self and Asian Other with the French fallacy of Vietnam as "little China". Colonialism mythologised these perceptions to meet the personal needs of French officials (and others) to feel securely in control of their alien Asian environment. Myths of Self and Other appeared early in colonial Cochinchina, and persisted in their initial form until the twentieth century when political disturbances like the 1908 anti-tax movement in the Protectorate of Annam (Central Vietnam) exposed certain shortcomings. In Annam, the subsequent need to neutralise anxieties about the arcane power of "Annamite tradition" prompted members of the Hue-based Amis du Vieux Hué to update existing colonial myths during the later 1910s.

Their revision resulted in the definitive versions of two politically significant colonial myths that defined Vietnamese (and French colonial) identity for the rest of the colonial period. They are called in this thesis the myths of "old, traditional Annam", and of the union of French genius and Annamite soul. So successful were they that their arguments continued to shape French (and western) understanding of Vietnam and the Vietnamese long into the post-colonial era. These myths, and the legitimating "little China" model they rested on, seemed to most observers to be objectively verifiable by recourse to colonial studies of Vietnamese history, society and customs. But, as this thesis argues, that influential body of understanding owed far less to Vietnam than to the needs and assumptions of an imported European discourse, in which unconscious collective projections of French Self and Vietnamese Other played the dominant role.

The thesis examines that discourse, and the myths and projections at its heart. It begins by sketching in outline the main political trends in the century before French invasion as a framework for assessing the accuracy of Chinese model interpretations of Vietnam at the time. It then moves to colonial Annam, where it considers the concrete circumstances in which the compensatory development of political myths of Self and Other occurred. It then concludes with historical examples of collective projection and political myth, first analysing the colonial model of a Sinic monarchy, and then French images of their colonial selves, and of the Vietnamese Other.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AEP</td>
<td>Archives d’outre-mer (Aix-en-Provence)</td>
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<td>AI</td>
<td>Argus indochinois (Ha-noi)</td>
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<td>Ann</td>
<td>Annam (Sai-gon)</td>
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<td>AQM</td>
<td>Archives d’outre-mer (Paris)</td>
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<tr>
<td>ATK</td>
<td>Avenir du Tonkin (Ha-noi)</td>
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<td>AVH</td>
<td>Association des Amis du Vieux Hué</td>
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<tr>
<td>BAVH</td>
<td>Bulletin des Amis du Vieux Hué</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BEI</td>
<td>Bulletin économique de l’Indochine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BSEI</td>
<td>Bulletin de la Société des Études indochinoises</td>
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<td>CM</td>
<td>Minutes of the Council of Ministers, Hue</td>
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<td>BNNCTC</td>
<td>Bai Nam Nhất Thông Chí [Gazetteer of Bai-Nam]</td>
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<tr>
<td>EA</td>
<td>Echo annamite (Sai-gon)</td>
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<tr>
<td>GG</td>
<td>Governor-General</td>
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<tr>
<td>GGCIC</td>
<td>Gouvernement-général de l’Indochine</td>
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<td>ICNF</td>
<td>Indochine, nouveaux fonds</td>
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<tr>
<td>MinCols</td>
<td>Ministry of Colonies, Paris</td>
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<tr>
<td>MC</td>
<td>Commission d’Enquête sur les Événements du Nord-Annam (Morchè Commission) (1931-32)</td>
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<tr>
<td>NCLS</td>
<td>Nghiêng Cự’u Lịch Sử’ [Historical Researches] (Ha-noi)</td>
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<td>NP</td>
<td>Nam Phong (Ha-noi)</td>
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<tr>
<td>GTBKLN</td>
<td>Quốc Tỷu Đặng Khoa Luc [Register of Metropolitan Graduates]</td>
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<td>RI</td>
<td>Revue indochinoise (Ha-noi)</td>
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<td>RIJE</td>
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<td>RS</td>
<td>Resident Superior</td>
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<td>SN</td>
<td>Souverains et notabilités de l’Indochine française (1943)</td>
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<td>TI</td>
<td>Tribune indigène (Sai-gon)</td>
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<tr>
<td>VNDNBN</td>
<td>Việt-nam Danh Nhân Tu’ Điền [Dictionary of Famous Vietnamese] (Sai-gon)</td>
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<tr>
<td>VS</td>
<td>Vietnamese Studies (Ha-noi)</td>
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In an earlier incarnation, this thesis began life over a decade ago as an attempt to set the Nghe-Tinh soviet rebellion of 1930-31 in northern Annam in its proper regional and historical context. I had become interested in the movement while studying at London University's School of Oriental and African Studies as a British Commonwealth Scholar in the 1970s. Although focused primarily on anti-colonial elements at that time, I found that other problems attracted my attention. In particular, I was struck by the way archival research revealed relations between French and Vietnamese officials in Annam that cut across the neat hierarchy of dominance and subordination usually advanced to explain them. Back in Australia, I decided to pursue this issue in a Masters thesis that examined relations between the French and Vietnamese administrations in Central Vietnam in the three decades before the Nghe-Tinh rebellion. The University of Sydney accepted the dissertation in 1980.

Later that year I moved to the Australian National University to complete my Nghe-Tinh project in the form of a doctorate from the Department of Pacific and Asian History in the Research School of Pacific Studies. However, my scholarship lapsed before I had seriously begun to write. Fortunately, I was able to take advantage of provisions then existing at the ANU which granted former doctoral students an "off-course" status for up to ten years, during which they could submit a completed thesis for examination. After
a few years in the Australian Public Service, I applied for and received leave without pay from the Public Service Board and the Department of Social Security in order to complete my thesis. I should like to take the opportunity here to thank both organisations for allowing me to pursue what must have seemed, from their perspectives, a rather esoteric venture on my part.

By the late 1980s, however, my interest in producing what was, in effect, a regional history began to wane. I found myself drawn increasingly to one of its sub-themes, the way colonial myths, stereotypes, and unconscious projections and perceptions of Vietnamese identity underlay much French policy in Annam. Finally, in mid-1990, inspired in large measure by Tzvetan Todorov’s brilliant analysis of the problem of Otherness in the Spanish conquest of America, I decided to chance my thesis in an exploration of what now most interested me. With the Nghe-Tinh soviets once more receding like the Grail, I took a deep breath and jumped feet first into this new fascinating field. With the exception of much of Chapters Two and Four, the bulk of what follows dates from that adventurous decision.

At the time my enthusiasm masked the realisation of quite how large the topic would prove to be, and the extent of its ramifications for western understanding of Vietnamese culture and identity based on French colonial studies. As a result, the thesis burgeoned in several directions. Unfortunately, with a fixed deadline approaching, it also became something of a race against time when upheavals and distractions erupted into my life after my father suddenly develop-
ed a life-threatening illness. Happily, the university agreed to a generous extension, without which the thesis could never have been completed. I am extremely grateful to my former supervisor, Dr David Marr, to Professor Anthony Reid, and to the Graduate Degrees Committee for their sympathetic consideration at that difficult time.

More generally, I want to thank David Marr for his long-suffering patience with a sometime student, and for his great and unfailing generosity with time and materials. Although I held no formal status within the department over the last years, my irregular position never detracted from his willing scrutiny of my written work. Happenstance, and the hurried circumstances under which it was finally produced, meant that David became the only person to read and comment on the entire thesis in draft, something for which he deserves much more than the thanks recorded here. I should also like to express my real gratitude to Li Ta Na for her helpful comments on Chapter Two, and for her encouragement and intellectual stimulation through 1991.

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Finally, I want to thank my family and close friends, Karen Rush especially. Without their support and encouragement this seemingly interminable (and, for some, inexplicable) project would have sunk several times. Their continued
belief in me kept it afloat on occasions when my own deter-
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to be shared with one's spouse. During that trying time,
Bill endured much with few complaints while quietly setting
about providing the sort of practical support that made it
possible for me to complete on schedule. I could never have
managed without him.

While all those mentioned above share some credit for
the existence of this thesis, I alone am responsible for its
contents, including its errors and shortcomings.
CHAPTER ONE

POLITICAL MYTH AND COLLECTIVE PROJECTION: SOME PRELIMINARY REMARKS

Introduction

This thesis considers two related colonial political myths, and the collective projections of Self and Other at their heart, that together played a significant role in constructing the French colonial model of Vietnamese cultural identity. By extension, they have influenced much western understanding of Vietnamese history, culture, and society as well. They are called here the myths of old, traditional Annam, and of the union of French genius and Annamite soul. Though rooted most deeply in the soil of colonial Annam, or Central Vietnam (Trung-ky), both myths spread far beyond it. By the end of World War One, aspects of their narratives and arguments circulated as common currency throughout the rest of the colony, automatically tendered in explanation of almost anything about the Vietnamese, and much about the French in Vietnam also.

This widespread and unquestioned acceptance reflected the vital function these myths performed in colonial society. Although apparently focused on the Vietnamese past and future, like all living political myths their real concern lay with the present circumstances of their adherents, members of the French colonial community. For them, the myths met two important needs. First, they acted to neutralise and demystify the alien environment by defining Vietnamese identity in terms of acceptable, preconceived French
perceptions. Arising from this, they defined and delimited the political relations possible between colonial French and Vietnamese in ways designed to sustain the necessary illusion of colonial supremacy and superiority over their Vietnamese subjects. In other words, the myths acted to mediate and naturalise the unequal relationship between European Self and Asian Other in colonial Vietnam.

Considered at the general level, there was nothing unique to the French in Vietnam about this. Nineteenth century colonial imperialists used political myths of Self and Other universally to explain and justify their attempt at European (or western) dominance of the world at large. Along with similar economic and political structures of exploitation in conquered and colonised areas, expanding metropolitan powers also imposed shared cultural convictions of European superiority and non-European inferiority. As a result, all such colonial myths bore strong family resemblances, growing as they did from the great nineteenth century European imperial myth sanctioning the White Man's duty to civilise the world in his own image. This parent myth drew on two rich sources of argument and verification. First came the treasure house of stereotypes, preconceptions, and unconscious prejudices horded up over centuries to distinguish Europe from "the East", or civilised Europeans from savages. The second, and probably even more powerfully persuasive at the time, was the intellectual and moral support lent to colonial domination by the "objective" findings of new nineteenth century

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human sciences. The racist dictates of biological determinism found their way into all later nineteenth century European imperial myths, whether primarily metropolitan or colonial in focus.

But although these generic resemblances existed, life in the colonies caused the metropolitan imperial myth to fragment over time in response to the needs of Europeans confronted by quite different local societies. It set off a process of naturalisation which increasingly camouflaged the metropolitan provenance of the myths of Self and Other with assumed local colours. With their foreign roots buried by the accretions of time and experience, these imported perceptions came to appear completely locally-derived and, as such, an accurate reflection of the nature of the colonised people. These assumed truths about the colonised Other often then went on to play a leading role in the colonial political arena.

This thesis considers that general process in relation to certain related political myths enshrining collective projections of French Self and Vietnamese Other in nineteenth and early twentieth century Vietnam. It traces their intellectual roots, and follows their evolution from initial establishment in early colonial Cochinchina to their growing localisation in response to events and circumstances in the politically anomalous Protectorate of Annam. Tracking these increasingly well-disguised versions of imported political myths and projections through their new Asian environment allows us to uncover hidden examples of their influence on people and events, and thus to suggest something of their
effect on colonial Vietnamese history. But the method yields more than this: it exposes the fundamental flaw in most colonial era French interpretations of Vietnamese history and culture. By uncovering the gulf between the influential colonial image of Vietnam as little China and the historical realities of pre-colonial Vietnam, the approach reveals the extent to which the colonial model derived from preconceived conclusions, and myths and projections of Self and Other. It locates the image of Vietnamese identity, as constructed by the colonial French and subsequently accepted in western scholarship, within its proper context as a colonial discourse. That is, to borrow Michel Foucault's definition, it is revealed as part of a set of 'practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak' by using signs 'to do more than ... designate things'.

But before moving to these issues, some basic remarks about certain central and interrelated concepts that recur throughout the study might be useful. They are political myth, the projection of European Self and Colonial Other, and the French fallacy of Vietnam as little China. The next sections introduce each in turn.

Political Myth

Numerous theories of myth abound that define it from religious, psychological, semiological, or sociological

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perspectives. Detailed evaluations of the various theories can be found elsewhere and need not be replicated here. For our purposes a working definition suffices. Broadly, when we speak of myth in this thesis we refer to a narrative form of practical thinking that explains a situation or an event and argues for, or prescribes, a course of action in the world as a consequence of that explanation. Every myth, therefore, has a protagonist and a plot, usually a highly dramatic one. Believers tend to accept its account as true because it fits or helps make sense of their own experiences, while at the same time proposing uncomplicated but apparently appropriate solutions to life's problems. Political myth varies from this in two main ways. First, because it tells the story of a political society, its protagonist is always collective, a group rather than an individual. Second, its narrative interprets the group's current circumstances and validates its contemporary political choices by reference to history, by depicting group members as heroic actors engaged in a vast historical drama within which they form the vital link between (imagined) future and (imagined) past.

Political myths always focus on the present. No matter how far back in time their tales may range, or what other peoples may feature in them, political mythologists are invariably most concerned with contemporary issues. They

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4. The definition that follows paraphrases Tudor, Political Myth, pp.121-39.
appeal to history without being historians: for them, the present sums up the whole purpose and meaning of the past. They ignore objectivity and balance in their historical references, deny the existence of historical contingency and accident, and even dispense with the concept of unilinear time. To political myth-makers the past mainly represents as a valuable source of raw materials, to be quarried for emblematic incidents or individuals that, stripped of context, can be brandished as proof of their basic premises. By using methods that identify a part with the whole, that confuse form with function and theory with practice, or that ignore discontinuities between historical eras, political mythologists smooth out the contradictions and awkward exceptions thrown up by the complexities of human life. When history is misused in this way, as Levi-Strauss remarked, in endows myth with patterns that appear 'timeless'. They are achieved by the myth's distilling the past into a tiny number of essences, whose perennial nature is demonstrated by personal experience, or by appealing to a grab-bag of carefully chosen, but otherwise unconnected, examples.

Mythological thinking displays an omnivorous appetite. It can digest any non-mythic mode of explanation, from historical analysis to scientific hypotheses or analytical models. The process naturalises them into a self-evident, 

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** For example, Mary Midgley has analysed the way socio-biology has mythologised Darwinian evolutionary theory in
unarguable "common sense" which illuminates past, present, and future with 'a clarity which is not that of an explanation but that of a statement of fact'. We should therefore be prepared to find political myth-makers embellishing their narratives with references to history, science, economics, social theory, philosophy, psychology, religion, or whatever else serves; but to do so in a way that betrays their real purpose. That is, they treat these elements as if they were facts in themselves, weighty authorities whose pronouncements independently verified the prescriptions of the myth.

These methodological flaws usually make exposing mythological narratives disguised as history relatively easy. Coming to grips with the actual myth itself poses greater, and ultimately frustrating, problems for a historian, however. To begin with, political myths are evasive in form. Although collective by nature, their existence depends on individual human adherents, who routinely vary the story or argument according to their own circumstances, or the changing needs of their times. Thus no powerful living political myth ever exists in a single "authorised version". Rather, their plastic and polymorphic forms defy a simple or rigorous categorisation. A myth can be stretched, twisted, doubled back on itself, overlapped with other myths, and even rendered self-contradictory in parts without ever calling its essential truth into question for believers. Consequently, as Raoul Girardet recognised, political myths can


never be expected to display anything like the intellectual or analytical consistency associated with systems of political thought.

More frustrating than dealing with the potentially riotous inconsistencies of myth, however, is the strong sense that, past a certain point, an outside observer can never truly apprehend the spirit of the phenomenon. Powerful myths are not only delicate and elusive by nature; they are also charged with unconscious elements. They belong to the realm that Girardet has called the 'imaginaire politique', where they feed on collective emotions and personal passions, on the hopes, dreams, and memories, on the loyalties, and betrayals that so often motivate individuals but so rarely receive their due in historical accounts - and for good reason. They exist, therefore, in a dimension that always remains in part barred to non-communicants. While historians might dissect a particular political myth to reveal its content and arguments, or analyse its development in a given time and place by reference to its ability to satisfy exigent psychological needs or material interests, they can never proceed to lay bare its inner vitality as experienced by true believers. About this crucial factor the historian can only ever speculate, not elucidate. To a genuinely outside observer, all political myths, no matter how generous or noble, are distorted by fanciful or fantastic elements that caricature, rather than comprehend, the complexities of

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** Ibid, p.9.
human life. And if a particular myth stirs no sympathy in such an observer, it becomes easier in turn to doubt the sincerity of those who professed to believe it. Its presence may be glossed over or ignored in historical accounts, and believers' actions put down to expediency or self interest. Since it cannot be rationally explained, myth risks being explained away as something else, as, for example, false consciousness, or a device to endow narrow sectional interests with a broader social legitimacy and respect.

Clearly, as our definition recognised, political myths do defend and advance the interests of particular groups. It is equally true that myths may be appropriated and exploited by individuals, who do not themselves truly believe in them, to manipulate the lives of those who do. But this can never be the whole story: powerful living myths defy such simple reductionism. They contain an extra dimension that these formulas cannot accommodate. Political and other myths can, and do, inspire believers to sacrifice whatever is required, up to and including their own lives, in their drive to realise the myth in the material world. As Jung explained, when such a myth invades peoples' minds, it compels them 'to live the irrational in their own lives, even devoting their loftiest ideals and their best wits to expressing its madness in the most perfect form'.

10 This numinous power has exploded catastrophically onto the historical stage too often in recent centuries for historians to deny or under-

rate its effects, even though its motive force ultimately
defies our rational tools of analysis. Even the individuals
transformed by profound mythic experiences cannot adequately
convey its meaning to others, even when consciously trying
to do so: 'how impossible', as Owen Chadwick has perceptive-
ly commented, does 'the autobiographer find it to describe,
intelligibly to others, what moved his mind at the deepest
well'.

How much harder for historians, usually at several
removes from their subjects, to elucidate the experience of
a group when a myth transmutes beliefs of its members about
themselves, the world, and their rightful place in it.

Faced with the dilemma of trying to explain the inex-
plicable, Girardet resorted to paradox. 'Myth', he wrote,
'can only be understood if it is intimately lived, but to
live it forbids rendering an objective account of it.'

As historians we must accept that in the analysis of political
myth there would always be doors that could never be forced.
Nothing in this thesis seeks to dispute that conclusion. As
Chapter Six shows, we can relate what people said they be-
lieved, and describe some of the apparent links between be-
lief and action; but beyond that we necessarily leave large
blank areas. Evidence for the existence of the myths as out-
lined litters contemporary sources; but when we come to
individual adherents, we can only guess to what extent, or
indeed whether, any particular man truly believed its
prescriptions. In my judgement, active and politically sig-

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11. Owen Chadwick, The Secularisation of the European Mind
significant members of the Friends of Old Hue (*Amis du Vieux Hué*) like Pierre Pasquier or Léon Sogny were convinced that the French colonial myths conveyed truths about themselves, and about the Vietnamese. We find them repeatedly advancing basic elements of the myths, in public and private, to explain contemporary events and circumstances. They present themselves as sincere believers, and I have accepted them as such. I cannot prove, however, that at heart they were not cynical manipulators of convenient colonial dogmas or, as their contemporary, Albert Sarraut, so often seems from the sources, simply full of humbug.

This caveat concludes our comments on political myth. We turn now to unconscious collective projection.

European Self and Colonial Other:¹³ Some Remarks

The pitfalls of exploring political myth pale beside those in the enormous subject of collective projections of Self and Other, even when restricted to the Other in the age of colonial imperialism. The daunting size and scope of the field, and its relative newness in Asian studies, means few specialist monographs exist exploring its features.¹⁴ This

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¹³. Self and Other in this thesis refer only to unconscious collective projections that function within particular human groups as a means of defining and dividing off their own essential nature by comparison with another, different group. "Self" here, therefore, should not be confused with the Jungian archetype of the Self, the psychic prime mover of individuation according to analytical psychology.

¹⁴. Two early studies on the psychology of colonialism touch on some of the issues: O. Mannoni (trans Pamela Powesland), *Prospero and Caliban. The Psychology of Colonisation* (London: Methuen, 1956) in reference to Madagascar; and Al-
section therefore seeks to provide a modest introduction to the subject by sketching in broad strokes the evolution of the dominant nineteenth century image of European Self and non-European Other to serve as background to the discussion in Chapter Six of the colonial political myths based on projections of French Self and Vietnamese Other. We will begin at the most basic level.

In individual psychology, awareness of the "not-I" as separate and autonomous requires the development of consciousness to the point where a person recognises and fully accepts that others have a sense of self, of being "I", which is not merely an extension of one's own. But, as Esther Harding has noted, even 'this state of consciousness is by no means always achieved'. Where individuals fail to develop, or lose sight of, an active awareness of the auto-

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1. For a general history, especially in terms of its racial component, see Thomas F. Gossett, Race: The History of an Idea in America (New York: Schocken Books, 1973); or Jordan, White Over Black, passim.

nomy of the "not-I", they inevitably risk stumbling uncon-
sciously into situations in which their views of, and reac-
tions to, other people are distorted by unconscious self-
projections by their own psyches. In these circumstances,
'we fail to differentiate between the "I" and the objective
"non-I", and, in addition, we fail to differentiate between
the "I", the conscious ego, and the rest of the psyche,
which, because it is unconscious to us, is seen only in
projection to the outer world'. 17

These subjective elements and unconscious projections
also obtrude themselves between an individual's perception
of the outer world and its material objects, so that often
' the object is not seen as it is in itself, but only in a
more or less distorted form'. 18 Where strongly held convic-
tions are concerned, Harding identified a similar process
occurring in the inner realm: 'just as we are convinced that
what we see as the external object is as we see it and not
otherwise, so is our conviction regarding the validity of
our inner vision unshakeable'. In this connection she re-
marked:

We do not fight a man to uphold a certainty, but
only to force him to accept our belief, our con-
viction, of the truth ... Fanaticism rests not on
fact but on psychological projection. It is the
correlate of doubt, not certainty ...

If we move from the individual to the social level, we
find unconscious projections show themselves in collective
forms. At its simplest, this means that they appear as the

received ideas and unquestioned prejudices, the "common sense" and conventional wisdom of a particular time and culture. But they can also attach themselves to specific groups or categories of people, as Jung pointed out. 'Collective contents, such as religious, philosophical, political and social conflicts, select projection-carriers of a corresponding kind — Freemasons, Jesuits, Jews, Capitalists, Bolsheviks, Imperialists, etc'.

We could also add race, ethnicity, and gender to Jung's examples of projection-carriers listed here. And as this list suggests, collective projections need not be benign in their influence. In their more extreme manifestations, the collective eruption of unconscious contents can induce a sort of shared delusion in which people act on their convictions with great enthusiasm and resolution, for good or ill alike.

The religious warfare and persecutions of the Reformation and Counter-Reformation in sixteenth and seventeenth century western Europe illustrate the point. We will consider one special instance of it, the witch plague.

The witch persecution started as an attempt to enforce conformity on poorly assimilated and heterodox mountain communities whose way of life distinguished them from the lowland majority. But it quickly changed. Dominican inquisitors transmogrified the backwoods heretics into the demonic Other as they, the inquisitors, elaborated a vast, system-

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atic demonology of Satan's kingdom, the mirror-image of their own beliefs, from fragments of confessions. Having un-
covered the perversion in one place, it soon appeared else-
where as people learnt to apply the new witch mythology to other idiosyncratic or non-conformist behaviour. So compell-
ing was the unconscious suggestion at its core that sponta-
neous confessions of self-proclaimed witches often conformed to its least details. Although not uncommon in such situa-
tions, reasonable men at the time took the phenomenon as proof positive that the new mythology accurately reflected social reality.\textsuperscript{21}

In their more everyday guise as social facts, clearly pre-existing and external to individuals, collective projec-
tions play a major role in socialisation. They help to re-
gularise cultural categories and to define a person's place in society. But however objective, certain, or self-evident such projections appear to those under their influence, they can only ever be derived from unprovable convictions rather than demonstrable facts. Their unconscious roots show in the emotional, irrational, and even fanatical reactions inspired by serious dissent from their assumed truths. Yet such challenges become inevitable over time, as social and other changes erode the projection's ability to summarise success-
fully the world, or some aspect of it.\textsuperscript{22}


\textsuperscript{22} C.G. Jung (trans R.F.C. Hull), Aion. Researches into the Phenomenology of the Self (Bollingen Series XX, Princeton University Press, 1959), pp.3-35.
Where conflicts arise among overlapping but antithetical projections as, for instance, between competing political ideologies, the tensions inherent in defending unprovable beliefs as absolute truths rise to the surface. Here their own shortcoming and contradictions are liable to provoke change in the beliefs themselves, as the political history of the last two centuries suggests. But where tensions are buried deep beneath the unconscious acceptance of the majority, the world-view projected might endure for a very long time through a slow adaptation of non-essential elements to changing circumstances. Unconscious projections that touch the instinctive lives of everyone, or which structure and organise social power, seem to be among the most persistent and adaptable, as witnessed by the re-emergence of the collective projection of sacred kingship in the twentieth century onto projection-carriers like Hitler and Stalin. 

Similarly, the great paired archetypal opposites of Male and Female and of Self and Other, intertwined at the foundation of western European power structures from the twelfth century at least, were also able to sustain the same hierarchical forms for seven centuries, despite the enormous changes that occurred in European consciousness and in the social and material world. Only with the appearance of modern cons-

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sciousness in the mid-nineteenth century\textsuperscript{24} has their traditional expression in terms of superiority (Male/Self) and inferiority (Female/Other) even been seriously challenged, although by no means replaced.

Two other general points should also be raised here. First, when we speak of the Other, or of Otherness, we never refer simply to strangers, to people unlike one's own who may become familiar with time and experience. Nor do we refer to the ordinary subjective sense of the incidental superiority of one's own group or people. North American Indian tribes, for example, regarded early white missionaries and settlers as manifestly inferior beings; but if the strangers conformed to tribal customs during their stay they were entirely accepted, and could even attain high status.\textsuperscript{25} But even highly acculturated Indians never won similar acceptance in white society, because social conformity alone could not dissolve their projected Otherness.\textsuperscript{26} Their ethnic difference from the majority had been infused with a meaning over which they exercised no control, because it depended on the definitions of the (European) Self.

As this example indicates, the definition of Otherness is inextricably bound to that of the Self. Projected Other-


\textsuperscript{25} James Axtell, \textit{The Invasion Within: The Contest of Cultures in Colonial North America} (Oxford University Press, 1985), Chapter 5 for Canada and Chapter 13 for white Indians further south.

ness arises when the Self refuses to accord an autonomous identity and equality of human worth to people who hold (or are assumed to hold) values and beliefs significantly different from, or at odds with, those of its own (culture, gender, class, or ethnic group). Instead, the Self defines these Others in its own terms, as either the (imperfect) analogues of, or inferior opposites, quality by quality, to its own idealised self-image. As Tzvetan Todorov recognised, the basis of this denial lies in egocentrism, 'in the identification of our own values with values in general, of our I with the universe'.

The sixteenth century Spanish conquest of America provides a classic example of this dual denial. It began with Columbus. On the occasions when the Admiral saw the native Americans as human beings like himself he automatically projected his own values onto them, discovering in them a predilection for Christian conversion that matched his own proselytising purpose. Early sympathisers like Las Casas, too, defended the Indians for their alleged Christian virtues (humility, truthfulness, obedience, chastity, disinterest in wealth), virtues so conspicuously lacking in the conquistadors themselves. At other times, however, Columbus treated the Indians as living objects to be disbursed to

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27. Todorov, Conquest, p.43.

28. As did contemporaneous English reactions to their initial encounters with African Negroes. See Jordan's perceptive account in White Over Black, pp.3-43.

29. Todorov, Conquest, pp.41-46.

his followers as rewards or added as specimens to his collection of exotic flora and fauna for shipment back to Spain. Later conquistadors perfected this form of dehumanising inferiority. In their eyes, the colonised Others became an expendable natural resource to be ruthlessly exploited in the quest for quick wealth, or a source of amusement for men who discovered that in the New World, far from the effective control of Spanish law and morality, they were free to kill or torture the local people on impulse, or for entertainment. At no time, even by their champions, were native Americans perceived as having the least right to their own identity and autonomy.

But like political myth, with which it is so intimately involved, the projection of Self and Other is never uniform and totalitarian. Context matters. This brings us to our second point: distance (geographical, social, cultural) affects the nature of the projection. The further removed from the physical presence of Others, the neater and more self-contained the image appears. At the greatest remove, Otherness may dissolve into symbolic, romantic, or imagina-

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32. Ibid, pp.139-43. As Todorov noted, they pioneered the great contextual gulf between metropole and colonies that made massacre 'intimately linked to colonial wars waged far from the metropolitan countries' [p.144] where the projected inferiority of the local people ensured Europeans felt few social or ethical restraints in their regard. In the 1885-86 conquest war in Central Vietnam, for example, French army units routinely killed almost all Vietnamese surrendering under arms, behaviour utterly unacceptable in Europe. [For examples, see Charles Gosselin, L'Empire d'Annam (Paris: Perrin, 1904), pp.280-84 and 289.] It was only when inferior Otherness became projected on European groups like Slavs and Jews in World War II that comparable scenes recurred in modern Europe itself.
tive representations which, though sparked by the idea of the Other, only ever reflect the interests and needs of the Self. Edward Said's analysis of Orientalism provides a fine example of the way Europeans at home used other civilised peoples as a social mirror in which they could glimpse aspects of themselves (or their Biblical heritage) from unusual angles.\textsuperscript{33} From the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries, almost all Europe's lovingly fashioned dreams and images of "the East" grew out of European needs, desires, and enthusiasms\textsuperscript{34} that bore little, or often no, connection to the living reality of these areas - and even less to the rest of Asia.\textsuperscript{35}

Colonial administrators, however, found themselves in a very different world, in particular those who arrived during the decades in which the colony was being established. Although mentally garbed in the same Orientalist preconceptions as their metropolitan colleagues, many found their experiences unravelled the neat borders, and sometimes even

\textsuperscript{33} For examples of this among nineteenth century French writers on Vietnam, see Peter Baugher, "The Contradictions of Colonialism: The French Experience in Indochina, 1860-1940", PhD, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1980, pp.20-122.

\textsuperscript{34} By over-generalising Said missed the change that began with sixteenth century overseas expansion. In specific cases it can be striking. Cleopatra, who thereafter came to symbolise the East of desire had, ironically, been for the previous two centuries touted as 'a paradigm of female goodness ... who proved her virtue by committing the one act capable of absolving a woman from the baseness inherent in her gender', suiciding for the love of a man, Lucy Hughes-Hallett, Cleopatra. Histories, Dreams and Distortions (New York: Harper and Row, 1990), p.113.

\textsuperscript{35} European fascination with China was equally a matter of 'Europe's impressions ... reflecting Europe's own needs', according to Dawson, Chameleon, p.115.
tore holes in the fabric itself. Far from Europe, without the structures, institutions, and routines of European civilisation and living among an alien people, the complexities of their situation could erode metropolitan certainties. Unstable extremes could develop. Men might become caricatures of their official personas; or unbalanced eccentrics. Others conceived a romantic desire to win the respect and affection of the native peoples. As a local colonial society developed and put down roots, parochial attachments might also grow to the point that colonial priorities could outweigh metropolitan interests: a French Governor-General of Indochina might declare himself in 1928 to a Parisian audience as the 'representative and defender of the interests of the colony vis-à-vis the metropole'.

And more to the point in this context, the simplistic imported images of Self and Other might fracture under pressure

\[36\] Although not referring to a colony, Robert A. Rosenstone's *Mirror in the Shrine. American Encounters with Meiji Japan* (Harvard University Press, 1988) contains fascinating glimpses of the impact that living in a traditional Asian civilisation during early western contact could have on individual westerners.

\[37\] The difference between first and later generations is especially explored in Mannoni, *Prospéro*, Part Three. In early colonial Cochinchina, for example, several young military officers turned officials felt such solicitude for the local people, in the wondering account of a mid-1930s colonial commentator, that they dearly wanted 'to appear [to them] better than their mandarins had been'. J. Perin, 'La vie et l'oeuvre de Luro', *BSEI* (ns), XV, 1-2 (1940), p.23.

\[38\] Though under French sovereignty, Pierre Pasquier, 'La Politique indigène en Indochine', *NP*, 136, Jan-Feb, 1929, p.2. Said rejects the possibility of these differing perspectives, even where his own evidence insists on them. See, for example, his failure to explain Cromer's complaint that colonial administrators may 'treat subjects of local interest in a manner calculated to damage, or even jeopardise, Imperial interests'. *Orientalism*, pp.44-45 (my emphasis).
to reveal perplexing human strangers beneath. When that happened, even the big stick of colonial power might prove insufficient to calm the anxieties generated in the colonial psyche, as we will see in later chapters.

Let us now turn to the historical development of the common nineteenth century projection of white European Self and coloured colonial Other.

Before the discovery of America, the awareness of Self and Other had been framed in religious terms that created an absolute gulf between Christian believer and non-believing Other, whether heretics within or Muslims without. But from the sixteenth century, contact with peoples utterly unsuspected in Europe, neither mentioned in the Bible nor in ancient legend and fable, initiated the slow evolution of a secular projection of European superiority that, by the nineteenth century, had become as absolute in its claims as the medieval formulation. We will briefly chart its evolution.

Arguments over the nature of the indigenous Americans provoked the first steps in the secularisation of the European self-image. Although by 1537 crown and Church had recognised the Indians as 'true men ... capable of receiving the Christian faith', who should not therefore be enslaved,39 neither colonists in South America nor certain thinkers in Europe agreed. The dispute culminated with the famous 1550 debate between Las Casas and the Spanish scholar,

39. Todorov, Conquest, p.161. The projection of identity worked in the Indians favour, for the Pope had been convinced partly because, 'as we have been informed', they 'eagerly hurr[ied] to convert'.
Sepulveda. Both argued from within the contemporary epistemological configuration that relied on establishing resemblances between one thing and another.\textsuperscript{40} To Las Casas the radical egalitarianism of the faith spiritually united all believers, placing Indians and Spaniards at the same end of the Christian/infidel dichotomy. (No-one at the time felt the same about black Africans, who were seen as candidates for slavery, not conversion.\textsuperscript{41}) To Sepulveda, however, the appropriate resemblances were cultural and moral. As the leading Aristotelian of his day, he posited that human society was by nature hierarchical, and that all men varied according to their superior or inferior qualities. On this basis, the Indians' cultural defects (absence of money, writing, clothing) and moral failings branded them as natural slaves.

Sepulveda lost the debate, but in a later defence of his position set down a series of linked resemblances and oppositions that formed one of the earliest secular statements of the superior European Self and inferior Colonial Other.\textsuperscript{42}

\begin{quote}
In wisdom, skill, virtue, and humanity, these people are as inferior to the Spaniards as children are to adults and women to men; there is as great a difference between them as there is bet-
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{40}. Foucault, \textit{Order}, pp.17-44. Jordan, \textit{White Over Black}, p.7 discusses the multiple (and antithetical) meanings of "black" and "white" for the pre-sixteenth century English.

\textsuperscript{41}. For Las Casas' own ambivalence, see Todorov, \textit{Conquest}, pp.170-71. For the unthinking English enslavement of blacks, see Jordan, \textit{White Over Black}, pp.44-98. In the American colonies, Negro conversions only began around the late seventeenth century.

ween savagery and forbearance, between violence and moderation, almost I am inclined to say as between monkeys and men.

Here in outline is one of the fundamental planks which would later support the patriarchal and paternal idealisation of a European Self whose superiority rested on intellectual, technical, and cultural pre-dominance. But equally interesting is the philosophical shift forced by the Church's prior acceptance of the Indians as men. Sepulveda's formulation lacks any unconditional ground of difference comparable to the medieval believer/non-believer dichotomy to sustain the vast disparities asserted between Spanish Self and Indian Other. Instead, it has moved the issue from the absolute to the relative by shifting the emphasis from the either/or imperatives of religion to the social, cultural, and natural world (fathers/sons, males/females, monkeys/men) where fine gradations and differentiation of ranking could occur (not that anyone at the time perceived it in these terms). This relocation formed one essential prerequisite for the evolution of the nineteenth century projection of Self and Other.

The second came not long after. In the seventeenth century a subterranean epistemological change began slowly to transform the way European thinkers approached the business of knowing and understanding. Instead of seeking resemblances, the budding Classical age turned to close measurement and analysis of continuity and differences as the means of discovering general categories and tabulating the
order of nature. Natural history came into being, with the aim of classifying the structures of the visible world. For over a century, Biblical authority and the belief that God had individually created all living things as he wished them to be, delayed its application to mankind. By the mid-eighteenth century, however, its methods were being used to study mankind as part of the animal kingdom, and to order racial varieties.

A bold minority went much further. Self-consciously radical philosophes like Voltaire repudiated scriptural authority for the common descent of mankind as irrelevant for failing to accommodate the New World. Instead, he and others like David Hume toyed with the idea that races actually represented species of men, not simply varieties. Significantly, in its support they tended to present cultural achievements as if they were a function of natural (or racial) differences. For instance, in 1766, when China still equalled Europe in many areas and, in the eyes of many

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45. *Ibid*, pp.44-45, though others had questioned it earlier.

46. This gave rise to the theory of polygeny, which held that races were separately created species of men. It was especially strong in nineteenth century America where the existence of other races posed the issue more urgently than in Europe. See Stephen Jay Gould, *The Mismeasure of Man* (Pelican Books, 1984), pp.30-71; or John S. Haller, Jr, *Outcasts from Evolution* (University of Illinois Press, 1971), pp.69-79.
philosophers, excelled her in rational administrative organisation, Hume mused:47

I am apt to suspect the negroes and in general all the other species of men (for there are four or five different kinds) to be naturally inferior to the whites. There never was a civilised nation of any other complexion than white ... no ingenious manufacturers amongst them, no arts, no sciences ... Such a uniform and constant difference could not happen in so many countries and ages, if nature had not made an original distinction betwixt these breeds of men.

In the mid-nineteenth century speculative history and the new sciences of man took the final necessary step that fused nature and culture as the basis of European superiority. The notion that civilisations could be characterised and ranked according to a single main criterion already existed in the works of Hegel and Marx when, in 1853-54, the French orientalist, Arthur de Gobineau, made race the key. Gobineau's work built on the late eighteenth century discovery of an ancient Indo-European (Aryan) linguistic group in India, and the invention of an ancient Aryan speaking race to match it. In his universal history, the Aryans emerged as the sole culture-bearers of the human species, and thus the founders of every known civilisation.48 Even China, he maintained, owed its civilisation to early Aryan colonisation; and its long stagnation to the dilution of Aryan blood through centuries of intermarriage.49 Ranked immediately below the Aryans came the diligent, industrious

47. Quoted in Gould, Mismeasure, pp.40-41 (my emphasis).

48. For the later political myth of the Aryan race, see Tudor, Political Myth, pp.105-10.

but unimaginative and uninventive folk of the yellow race, the human middle class compared to the Aryan aristocrats. The black race, which in Gobineau’s view could only ever be brought to civilisation by interbreeding with the higher races, crouched far below at the base.  

The development of biological determinism confirmed the racial ladder. In the first place, linear social evolutionary theory held that all cultures had to pass through the same stages of development. It made the social organisation of lower races seem like a set of ‘living fossils’, worth investigating principally because they illuminated the beginnings of Aryan progress. Later nineteenth century social anthropologists like Frazer, Morgan, or Tylor, for whom ‘cultural evolution was but a chapter of biology’, toiled to formulate general theories of human history and institutions that further refined (and in the process reinforced) the racial-cultural nexus. Next came the biological discovery of evolutionary recapitulation in the human embryo. It immediately vindicated the analogy Spencer

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50. For the essence of his racial classification, see Michael D. Biddiss, who has translated and edited his dense prose in Gobineau. Selected Political Writings (London: Jonathan Cape, 1970), pp. 134-44.


52. Spencer’s was the harshest expression of this view but a more modified version circulated widely. Gossett, Race, pp.148-51; and Haller, Outcasts, pp.97-129.

53. Because it employed the same ascending sequence from simple to complex. Haller, Outcasts, p.97.

had drawn between human societies and the lives of individual organisms. A social recapitulationist theory framed in racial-cultural terms resulted, which held, in Spencer's 1895 summation, that 'the intellectual traits of the uncivilized ... are traits recurring in the children of the civilized'.\textsuperscript{55} Those interested in racial (and other) ranking found in recapitulationism a general theory of biological determinism which, as mainstream science, avoided the shortcomings of earlier (but still widely popular) approaches like craniology.\textsuperscript{57} Arguing from anatomy to psychology, intelligence, and culture in general, recapitulationists held that European males equated with civilised adulthood, while yellow races ranked with white (male) adolescence and black with white infancy, or at best childhood. (White women placed at the same level as children or adult male savages.\textsuperscript{27}) In the dictates of biological determinism the European Self could find a basis of superiority as unconditional as that afforded centuries before by the medieval dichotomy between Christian and non-Christian - and for much the same reason. It rested upon absolute convictions so entrenched as to appear simple facts. In the later nineteenth century, established religions slowly ceded much of their legitimat-

\textsuperscript{55}. Spencer's 1895 summary, quoted in Gould, \textit{Mismeasure}, p.117. For recapitulationism in general, see pp.113-22.

\textsuperscript{57}. The technical problems of standardising measurements so that results could be accurately reproduced made craniology scientifically suspect by the end of the century. \textit{Ibid}, pp.83-108.

\textsuperscript{27}. It was also applied to classes and ethnic groups. \textit{Ibid}, pp.103-06 and 115-19 for examples; or Dower, \textit{War Without Mercy}, pp.153-56.
ing power and vitalising force in European society to two
new and numinous symbols that enthralled men's minds: Man
and Matter. Man became 'a finite creature ruling the created
world as the measure and arbiter of all meaning and value',
with Matter 'as the primary reality of the world'. Under
their influence, science ran the real risk of being elevated
(and distorted) into a secular faith whose revealed truths
must be accepted, no matter how unpalatable to any indivi-
dual. The cult of statistical analysis and scientific objec-
tivity projected Truth onto published materials which had
been 'gathered selectivity and then manipulated unconsciously
in the service of prior conclusions'. Conscious aware-
ness that the cult of science was as value-laden as any
other rarely surfaced at the time (and still remains contro-
versial in some scientific circles today), so that western
man 'burn[ed] incense to himself, and his own countenance
[was] veiled from him in the smoke'.

But around the mid-nineteenth century, at the same time
that racist doctrines were sweeping European science and
scholarship, another subterranean discontinuity occurred at
what Foucault has called the archeological level of the
episteme. It inaugurated the modern age. Where the Classical


59. Gould, Mismeasure, p.85. Chapters 2 to 4 provide innu-
merable examples, including some derived from Gould's re-
working of published data.

60. As Midgley's study shows. Evolution, pp.1-49.

61. C.G. Jung, 'The Spiritual Problem of Modern Man', in
Modern Man in Search of a Soul (London: Routledge and Kegan
age had investigated mankind as part of the natural world, the modern study of man as 'a primary reality with his own density, the difficult object and sovereign subject of all possible knowledge', began slowly to take its place. The new human sciences made man a field of study in his own right. But although not apparent to those obsessed with detailing and quantifying the most minute differences between races, classes, and genders, the logical corollary of making man the field of study was, by definition, finitude. If fundamental existential similarities united all within the field, as the new human sciences began to confirm in the twentieth century, then the divisions between what lay within the field must be relative or epiphenomenal in comparison to the absolute difference with what was outside it. The analytic of finitude moves inexorably to sameness, irrespective of apparent diversity. As Foucault put it:

From one end of experience to the other, finitude answers itself; it is the identity and the difference of the positivities, and of their foundation, within the figure of the Same ... [M]odern reflection, as soon as the first shoot of this analytic appears ... moves towards a certain thought of the Same - in which Difference is the same thing as Identity ...

The analytic of finitude ... is always concerned with showing how the Other, the Distant, is also the Near and the Same. Thus we have moved from a reflection upon the order of Differences [in the Classical era] ... to a thought of the

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**2.** Foucault, *Order*, p.310.

**3.** Gossett thought cultural anthropology exposed the fallacies in the racial-cultural nexus [*Race*, pp.416-30] but, as Gould showed, the impulse towards ranking still persisted, in intelligence testing especially. *Mismeasure*, Chapters 5 and 6.

Same, still to be conquered in its contradictions ... 

The gradual rise to consciousness of this analytic provoked no sudden transformations, however. It never caused those nineteenth century social theorists who intuitively sensed it to revise their beliefs. Rather, they incorporated and adapted the analytic to their existing assumptions. Thus, for example, the American cultural evolutionist Lewis Morgan acknowledged the psychic unity of human races made mankind 'one in source, one in experience, and one in progress'. Sadly for the savages, however, whatever advances they managed would never allow them to overhaul superior Aryan peoples. Even contact with higher races could only lead to calamity for lower ones, who lost their own authenticity and with it the chance to progress through 'unassisted self-development'. They became the doomed casualties of evolution. It was a popular view. W.J. McGee, for instance, who believed that human activities 'all diverge in form, yet converge in essential quality and in their effects on mankind', balanced it with the conviction that evolution would ensure the extinction of lower races, either physically or through increasing intermixture with others. The cultural evolutionists imported a teleology into their theories which convinced them that scientific laws guaranteed the future they envisaged. When mankind converged into one race

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**57.** *Ibid*, p.112.

and one culture, it would be our race and our culture: Difference would merge into Identity but, since we were the norm, the Other must become Self, or perish.

Many rejected even this distant prospect. They preferred to put their faith in numbers, especially those that applied the hard data of measurement and quantification to exposing irreducible differences between human groups. But in fact even worst problems lurked here, and it was only by projecting meaning onto the materials that many could be made to serve the intended purpose. We will take as typical an example from French Indochina.

In the early 1880s, two tertiary educated French colonial advocates published a compendium of current information about Indochina. The section detailing the physical features of the Vietnamese opened with the confident assertion that 'the Annamites belong to the yellow race, the Indochinese branch, and the Annamite family'. Four pages devoted to physical characteristics listed their tell-tale small brain weight ('according to Broca, the weight of the Annamite brain is 1,233 grams, that of the European brain being 1,375 grams'), and a host of other carefully measured differences including speed of respiration (at 20 breaths per minute 'almost the same as among Europeans') and heart rate ('82 beats for an Annamite man, 96 for a woman, 80 for an Englishman, and 72 for a Frenchman').

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What most strikes a modern reader about this odd catalogue, apart from its absurdity, is its essential meaninglessness. Heart rate and respiration vary so enormously in individuals in response to environmental factors that the notion of a single average rate, varying constantly according to nationality, gender, and race appears utter nonsense. However, so convinced were Bouinais and Paulus that the data signified something meaningful that they never even noted the figures could only be statistical averages. We are left today with the strong impression that the authors believed the numbers denoted absolute physical differences — that, for instance, 'Annamite' respiration at twenty breaths per minute was a "fact", and one that differed in a measurable (and hence significant) way from 'European' respiration at eighteen breaths per minute. But no such meaning arises from the data, whose disparities are so slight as to suggest similarity rather than difference in a detached observer.

The glittering promise of unconditional European superiority held out by the racial-cultural fusion of biological determinism was ultimately a chimera: the new human sciences could not be forced into contradicting their own inner logic indefinitely. (This, of course, does not imply that individual practitioners of these sciences, and others, might not be more influenced by unconscious preconceptions and projected values than by logic.) Subterranean conflicts became inevitable; and perceived racial divisions hardened as men

49. As the wilder claims of human sociobiologists suggest. For their scientific shortcomings, see Gould, Mismeasure, pp. 324-33; and their philosophical ones, see Midgley, Evolution, passim.
struggled to defend unprovable convictions as scientific facts. Only one means exists by which such magic can be wrought: the transformative power of myth. Social Darwinism, cultural evolutionism, and biological determinism gripped European imaginations so tenaciously not (as men of the time might have argued) because they were good science, nor simply because they served vested interests so well, but because they became mythologised. And once transformed, they spawned new myths of their own.

Myth also disposes of the power to reconstruct the immediate past, and to turn previous beliefs on their heads without appearing to do so. When the most widely-accepted projection of French Self and Vietnamese Other fractured in early twentieth century Annam, exactly that happened. The demands of the changed situation pushed colonial officials (and others) in Central Vietnam to re-formulate the existing colonial myths to explain away the new uncertainties. The process tapped into this subterranean source, whose conflicts it imaginatively resolved in its revised myth of the union of French genius and Annamite soul. Instead of seeking to turn the Vietnamese into Asian Frenchmen, this myth now looked forward to the day when French Self and Vietnamese Other, engaging equally ‘with all their heart in a common work, [would] bring to fruition a new civilisation formed by [their] amalgamation’, as one of the chief mythologists of the time enthused in 1922. 70 Problem solved: Identity and

70. RS Pasquier, inaugurating the Ecole des Hautes Etudes of the Annamite Government at Hue, 24 Nov 1922. AEP GGIC 51080
Difference would merge into Same in the process of creating something new.

We now turn to the fallacy of Vietnam as little China, the central paradigm that organised French colonial understanding of Vietnamese identity, and of the society, culture, and history of pre-colonial Vietnam.

The Little China Fallacy

The French who invaded southern Vietnam in 1859 entered a country about which they and their compatriots at home knew very little indeed. From missionary accounts and other reports they knew to expect a system of government that exhibited similar characteristics to that of China - all of which they duly discovered. The self-styled empire was ruled by a sacred monarch, the Son of Heaven, whose rigidly formal court and sinicised administration were staffed by learned mandarins recruited via public examinations after long years of studying the Chinese classical canon. The people venerated their ancestors and worshipped Confucius. Chinese was the official written language and, as Gabriel Aubaret's hasty translation of the legal code in 1865 showed, the laws were those of China as well. In the next fifteen years nothing they saw from distant Sai-gon, or experienced on their few embassies to the Chinese-style capi-

\[7\] His translation lacked the Vietnamese commentaries on its local application which only appeared with Philastre's 1876 translation. Jean Marquet and Jean Norel, 'L'occupation du Tonkin par la France (1873-1874), d'après des documents inédits', BSEI (ns), XI, 1 (1936), p.94, fn 1.
tal,\textsuperscript{72} challenged their first impressions. A Legation finally opened in Hue in 1875, but the closer perspective merely served to reconfirm the current perception of a government and people ruled by Confucian orthodoxy, and of a court over which 'Chinese etiquette ... reign[ed] as sovereign mistress.'\textsuperscript{73}

That French pre-conceptions of a sinicised Vietnam were so richly confirmed must rank as one of the outstanding political successes of the Tu-Buc reign, which spanned almost the entire period of piecemeal French penetration.\textsuperscript{74} For internal political reasons, the king consciously strove to present his rule in the unblemished garb of Chinese orthodoxy; but while he never convinced all his subjects,\textsuperscript{75} the French believed it absolutely. In the synchronicity of contact, ignorant French expectations and combined with Vietnamese internal policies to ensure that the Europeans failed to sort form from substance in Vietnamese political life. That mid-nineteenth century Vietnam seemed the image of China to foreigners is therefore understandable. However, this is not the little China fallacy.

Clearly, a millenium of Chinese rule and a thousand years of interaction afterwards left a strong imprint on

\textsuperscript{72} There were only six: in 1863, 1864, 1866, 1867, 1868, and 1875. A. Auvray (ed H. Cosserat), 'Dix-huit mois à Hue', \textit{BAVH}, XX, 3-4 (1933), p.210, fn 1.

\textsuperscript{73} Ibid, p.249.

\textsuperscript{74} Enthroned in 1847, he died in 1883, nearly a year after the French invaded the North, and only a month before they imposed a protectorate convention on the royal government itself.

\textsuperscript{75} We return to these matters in Chapters 2 and 3.
Vietnamese life, in particular on the culture of its literate elite and on the forms of its institutional life. To pretend otherwise would be foolish. Like most peoples bordering great and powerful civilisations, the Vietnamese admired, borrowed, and adapted aspects of Chinese material and intellectual culture as they developed their own. But this is not the colonial fallacy, either. The little China fallacy did not refer to the interesting (but hardly unusual) transactions of cultural borrowing but to something quite different. It held as a fact that pre-colonial Vietnam was in all essentials "nothing but" China: its people, culture, and institutions had remained unchanged from when China had ruled a thousand years before, and were thus fully understandable in Sinic terms. Here, for example, is Alfred Schreiner's 1900 distillation of the little China fallacy. During a millenium of Chinese rule, he wrote, Vietnam had taken from China 'everything she was able to give: administration, justice, religion, literature, and science, all came from the Middle Kingdom ... [and] throughout the centuries [of independence that followed], the Annamites [had] not made any progress on Chinese civilisation'.

On the face of it, it is, to say the least, a giant leap in logic to conclude that the existence of a sinicised kingdom in the nineteenth century proved that the country had been suspended in time for a thousand years, transfixed

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70. Alfred Schreiner, Les Institutions annamites en Basse-Cochinchine avant la conquête française, I (Saigon: Claude et Cie, 1900), pp.53-54.
by its unchanged and unchangeable ancient Chinese heritage. Nor, it should be noted, did local history support such a deduction which, the next two chapters will show, fell far short of the mark. For the previous two centuries Vietnam had been caught up in considerable political change and upheaval that had resulted in its emergence in the early nineteenth century united into a dynamic and expansionist South-east Asian state. Despite the Confucian pretensions of the Tu-Buc reign, in 1860 the kingdom’s evolution towards the rigidities of a Confucian state was only about as old as Louis Napoleon’s Third Empire in France. In fact, late Nguyen Vietnam, which the colonial paradigm advanced as typical of ten centuries of cultural and political institutions, was so unusual as to be virtually unique in Vietnamese history.

Yet little or none of this eroded the certainties of the little China fallacy, even after later research had uncovered the basic outlines of pre-colonial history, because the fallacy rested less on French ignorance of Vietnamese history per se than on the racial-cultural formulations of European superiority discussed in the previous section. Here, for instance, is Schreiner’s detailed explanation of why Vietnam never progressed beyond its Chinese heritage. Quite typical of its time in all but length, it is worth hearing more or less in full.

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77. Thus, for example, Schreiner’s long outline of pre-colonial history [Ibid, pp.10-217] never challenged his little China beliefs [pp.53-55].

78. Ibid, pp.54-55.
We hold it much against the Annamites that across the centuries they have never made any progress on Chinese civilisation. Their arts and sciences have always remained very much below those in China. True; but the reason lies solely in their habitat. By itself, Annam ... could little modify the sociological conditions imposed by nature. It unconsciously obeys the immutable laws of racial evolution.

Peoples, like individuals, only progress in the presence of necessary stimulants ... Without needs, no efforts; without efforts, no progress ...

A law seems to regulate contact [between peoples]. When one of the two races is so far behind the other in its evolution, it greatly risks disappearing for, if it rapidly assimilates the vices of the other, it generally acquires none of the [good] qualities. When this happens it is necessary that the people of the advanced culture act with a patience and tact whose usage the hard struggle for existence almost always precludes.

This being so, we see that the Annamite race was placed in such a situation that, fatally, its own progress must be slight. To the East was the sea, to the West and the South savages or at least peoples less civilised than itself. All culture came to them from a single point: from the North. But as its relations with China were neither extensive nor perfectly constant, it necessarily came about that the people of Annam always found themselves behind their powerful neighbour, and all the more so because their torrid climate, their frugal life, and their great rusticity created in them a sum of needs quite inferior to the means of satisfying them.

If we compare Schreiner's exposition with the racial-cultural assumptions discussed in the previous section, its close affinity with the common European perceptions and convictions of the time becomes apparent. We will save this matter for a more detailed discussion in Part Three. A more general survey, taking soundings from the colonial period and beyond, is more appropriate here. Let us begin, then, with Eliacin Luro whose influential 1877 publication, Le
Pays d'Annam helped endow the little China fallacy with intellectual respectability for generations.

Lura's study rested on his own observations of 1860s and early 1870s Cochinchina, and what missionary-scholars and local informants told him. It all convinced him that the Vietnamese were a 'Chinese people' with a 'Chinese civilisation', despite the fact that nineteenth century Nam-ky represented the least sinicised and probably the most culturally diverse region of Bai-Nam. The little China fallacy guided his vision of the past as well. Although allowing that Vietnamese had kept enough 'feeling of their own nationality' to reconquer their independence in the tenth century, Lura nevertheless still believed they had fully accepted 'the laws of the conqueror, [been] fashioned to his customs, and adopt[ed Chinese] literature.' As a result 'emancipation had ... only produced ... the effects of a fortunate decentralisation'. In his view, the imported Sinic political institutions of monarchy, mandarinate, and examinations had then persisted virtually unchanged until the nineteenth century. Thus for Luro and every other

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French author after him, the Vietnamese monarchy replicated its Chinese original in every respect, so that the nineteenth century institution could be perfectly adequately explained by comparison to the original.22

In the tenth century, the Annamite people had completely adopted Chinese civilisation: the indigenous absolute monarchy was definitively established; the king [took] the same titles as the emperor of China, he [had] the same powers.

We must read the canonical books (the Kinh) to get an idea of what a Chinese or Annamite sovereign is, or at least of the education and influence of the mandarins, selected from literate graduates of the public examinations, who surround him.

In this system of pure monarchy, the monarch is imprisoned in the formulas of a poorly defined traditional cult, which goes back more than thirty centuries before our era, and which has no other limits than those of the doctrine of Confucius, followed by all the literati of the nation.

Aware that differences existed between nineteenth century China and Vietnam, Luro accounted for them (as others would also do) from within the little China fallacy. Instead of finding traces of a distinctively Vietnamese identity in these dissimilarities, Luro explained them as an accident of history. By enabling Vietnam to avoid Mongol and Manchurian rule, independence had preserved a purer (or more archaic) Chinese civilisation here, he asserted.23 Without outside forces to set change in motion, Vietnamese civilisation had persisted in stasis.

These widely accepted ideas encouraged a cherchez la Chine methodology among many colonial French writers. Ex-

22. Luro, Pays, pp.89-90. For a compendium of French colonial views of the Vietnamese monarchy, see Robert Petit, La Monarchie annamite (Paris: F. Louiton, 1931). A longer discussion can be found in Chapter Five below.

23. Luro, Pays, pp.76-77.
planations of Vietnamese institutions routinely began by uncovering their Chinese roots, or by tracing their growth by reference to China. We will take Camille Briffaut as an example. So convinced was this author by the little China fallacy that his major study, *La Cité annamite*, repeatedly tagged the Vietnamese 'la race sino-annamite'. For Briffaut, even the quintessential Vietnamese institution, the village, owed its origins directly to China. The first volume of *La Cité annamite* thus opened with a hypothetical history of the birth and evolution of the Vietnamese village which showed that, 'properly speaking, [it] date[d] from the Chinese conquest and owe[d] its existence to the efforts of the [Chinese] victors'. But 'when China lost sovereignty in Annam' its evolution 'stopped short', leaving 'certain forms of its law archaic ...' With 'the Annamite nation reduced to its own resources' after independence, the mainspring of development wound down. In time, static Vietnamese society even lost the ability to copy and assimilate evolving Chinese institutions. When the first Nguyen king promulgated the Qing Code in 1812 it failed: 'Annam was [now] too far behind her educator and could no longer follow without disruption'.

Few academically trained Orientalists who lived and worked within the French community in Vietnam betrayed much

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*45. Ibid, pp.16-17.*
*46. Ibid, p.17.*
*47. Ibid.*
more scepticism about the little China fallacy. Many re-
searchers at the renowned Ha-noi École française d’Extrême-
Orient [EFEO], for example, apparently shared the dominant 
perception of a fundamentally sinicised Vietnam, at least 
according to a 1951 retrospective assessment of their work by Georges Coedès.  

The EFEO had been a late addition to colonial Indo-
china. Only in the 1890s did Vietnam and Cambodia, pre-
viously dismissed as 'simple annexes to sinology or Indian 
studies,' win sufficient scholarly interest to warrant in-
vestigation in their own right; and then most activity cen-
tred on deciphering Ankor and the secrets of defunct Cham 
and Cambodian societies. When it came to the Vietnamese 
past, however, the little China fallacy intruded. As Coedès 
pleased in mitigation for the small body of work devoted to 
Vietnam, the EFEO had not needed to concentrate on recon-
stituting Vietnamese history for the process was relatively 
simple, 'thanks to its annals and to the references of Chi-
inese historians.' In these happy circumstances, the modern 
researcher's task 'essentially consist[ed] of submitting 
this continuous recitation to a severe critique, of comple-
ting it, and of correcting it as need be in the light of other trustworthy documents'. That such a naive method-
ology could be seriously advanced as late as 1951 eloquent-
ly testifies to the tenacity of the little China fallacy.

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**. Georges Coedès, 'Études indochinoises', BSEI (ns), 

**. Ibid. p.437.

**. Ibid, p.452.
Scientific speculation was not immune, either. When the EFEO began to study B"ong-son Bronze Age culture in the 1920s, no-one dreamt its metal technology could have originated anywhere but China. In the initial report on this culture, whose bronze casting techniques are now accepted as South-east Asian in origin,¹¹ Victor Goloubew described it as 'a still rather primitive civilisation where metallurgy, introduced by a foreign people, had been able to develop a little, in the way of a graft.'¹² Those clever foreign innovators, of course, had been the Chinese.

As we might expect, not everyone agreed with every aspect of the little China fallacy. Luro described a far less patriarchal family than many later writers.²³ Pasquier vehemently rejected the common French assertion that Vietnamese literati had simply 'contented themselves with the Chinese classics ... and [had] not known how to produce anything' of their own.²⁴ But despite the occasional demurer over details, most people accepted most of it without question, since it performed so well the valuable role of explaining observable Vietnamese reality. In the early twentieth century, some scholarly experts began to question exactly how much the French did understand about Vietnamese

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life, past and present." The professionals realised, as Marcel Ner put it in 1930, that:

Despite the value of pioneering works, the historical and ethnographical study of Annam is all fairly sketchy ... We are especially disadvantaged concerning the history of institutions, and it is quite difficult for us to discover not only the successive stages belonging to each epoch or each influence but also the present state of legislation and customs.

But such caution rarely escaped from scholarly circles. Certainly, it never dented the armour of received ideas and conventional wisdom that encircled the little China fallacy in wider colonial society. As war loomed in the late 1930s, for instance, the English traveller Alan Broderick reported his French hosts had cheerfully assured him that Annam still remained, in their phrase, 'une ancienne Chine à domicile'.

The August Revolution of 1945 pierced some of the complacency, though without really discrediting the little China fallacy. It jolted Roger Pinto, for one, into the troubling realisation that, despite eighty years of occupation and thousands of learned books and articles, French knowledge of 'the native milieux, of its past and its contemporary evolution ... remain[ed] empirical and fragment-

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"5. For example, Pierre Lusteguy (trans Charles A. Messner), The Role of Women in Tonkinese Religion and Property, (Human Relations Area File, New Haven, 1954) [orig. 1935], on colonial convolutions regarding the legal status of Vietnamese women.


Pinto advocated a more scientific and orderly study of the Vietnamese to plug the gaps in French knowledge; but while such research continued to employ a fundamentally flawed model of Vietnamese life and culture, it could never hope to provide more than limited insights into Vietnamese life.

The August Revolution caused Paul Mus even less intellectual self-questioning. The communist-led Việt Minh revolution did not lead him to question or reject the existing paradigm. Rather, Mus tried to fit the revolution into its axioms. Thus, when he outlined the fundamental principles sustaining Vietnamese political culture in an attempt to change French policy in 1952, his exposition derived directly from the little China fallacy. His discussion of the mandate of Heaven, for example, emphasized how the appearance of a swift and complete transfer of power between former and present dynasties traditionally legitimated a new regime as Heaven's choice in the eyes of the people. Mus' sketch adequately outlined the classical Chinese political concept. However, had he been able to consider Vietnamese history more objectively, rather than theorize about it in Sinic terms, Mus might have noticed an awkward problem with his interpretation: the only documented transfer

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of power that conformed to these supposedly traditional criteria for legitimacy was the August Revolution itself.

The little China fallacy even survived the demise of colonialism entirely. In 1962, ten years after Mus, sixty after Schreiner, and nearly a century after Eliacim Luro had arrived in Cochinchina, the respected Bulletin de la Société des Études Indochinoises in Sai-gon chose to publish an unadulterated re-iteration of the French colonial fallacy masquerading as history. The introduction to an article on the nineteenth century mandarinate by the second generation colonial, Muriel Texier, neatly refined the essence of the little China fallacy - that Vietnam owed everything to China and had made no advances on her Chinese heritage in a millenium of independence - into a single page.

'Even after the establishment of national dynasties', Texier asserted, 'Viet-Nam continued to live an entirely Chinese life as much from the viewpoint of civilisation as of institutions'. This occurred because the Chinese had 'found practically nothing when they arrived', and had so impressed their own culture on the Vietnamese that 'in the tenth century, Vietnam was a country without memories'. Independence therefore had 'inevitably only changed the master, not the political or social structure.' The inevitabil-

100. Although a foreword noted that only 'a certain number of pages from the exposition submitted' had been published, they included the introduction, which could have been excised without affecting the substance of the article. Muriel Texier, 'Le mandarinat au Viêt-Nam au XIXe siècle', BSEI (ns), XXXVII, 3 (1962), p.328.
ity arose because, when left to their own devices, the Vietnamese were incapable of cultural originality or political creativity: 'how even to conceive of another political form of government when they had only ever known and seen one in operation'. From this followed the remarkable fact that the Chinese political institutions of monarchy and mandarinate with which the new kingdom had begun its independence in the tenth century 'subsisted in their entirety' to the end.

The clue to the little China fallacy's longevity lies here in Texier's thought. She presented her breathtaking assertions and sweeping generalisations as if they required no proof beyond their own self-evidence. Confusing form with function and theory with practice the author skipped lightly across whole historical eras, selecting appropriate examples from each with which to construct the story of Vietnamese political institutions. All these factors betray her. Whatever Texier's conscious intent, she was not engaged in writing history but in retelling myth, specifically her version of the myth of old, traditional Annam.

Essentially, the little China fallacy survived as long as it did because it defied close scrutiny; and it defied such scrutiny for decade after decade because it became

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101. Like Schreiner, Texier insisted on Vietnam's isolation. 'Until the XIXth century, [Vietnam] remained practically isolated from the rest of the world: by the configuration of the country, it could only be turned towards China'. As for Champa to the south, she considered it 'hardly probable that its civilisation could have exerted an influence'. Ibid. Neither assertion is historically accurate.

102. As, in my view, was Paul Mus in Sociologie d'une guerre.
mythologised. Derived as much of it was from unconscious European preconceptions and projections of Otherness, it was a prime candidate for the transition from misunderstanding to myth that occurred in the later nineteenth century. As myth, it fleshed out the Vietnamese Other. Its assumptions defined the grandeur and limitations of the "Annamite soul", at the same time that they intellectually supported the central image of the myth of old, traditional Annam, the picture of pre-colonial Vietnamese history as one long, blood stained catalogue of failure. As Part Three will show, key elements of the nineteenth century colonial model of traditional Vietnamese political institutions had already been translated into myth by the start of the twentieth century. The emotional power of the myth charged the little China fallacy with the strength and commitment to sustain its paradigmatic status for another fifty years — and, as a result, to ensure that few twentieth century French (or western) studies of the traditional kingdom, and especially of Nguyen political life and institutions, ever advanced beyond the boundaries of the nineteenth century discourse.

With that point we conclude this brief introduction to political myths, the projection of Otherness, and the little China fallacy. They re-appear in Part Three. In the

meantime we will re-focus our perspectives to concentrate on something the little China fallacy largely misconstrued or ignored – the historical complexities of pre-colonial Nguyen Vietnam, and of its successor, the Protectorate of Annam.
CHAPTER TWO

THE NINETEENTH CENTURY KINGDOM: FROM VIET-NAM TO BAI-NAM

In the preface to his classic study of Nguyen government in the first half of the nineteenth century, Alexander Woodside noted the importance of setting the 1802 foundation of the dynasty against its proper historical backdrop of disunity and civil war. Yet paradoxically, when it came to analysing the institutional history of the first Nguyen reign, the Gia-Long era (1802-1819), Woodside largely failed to carry out his own injunction. When considered in the context of the previous two centuries, it can be argued that the internal political history of the Gia-Long period owed much less to the Chinese model than it did to the continuity of Nguyen government and administration from their southern kingdom (Bang-trong). Applying this different perspective focuses other disagreements with some of the assumptions and conclusions about nineteenth century pre-colonial political history that appear in *Vietnam and the Chinese Model*. The next two chapters raise some of these matters, less to criticise Professor Woodside’s seminal study than to argue that, to understand the nineteenth century kingdom, we need to pay as much attention to its inheritance from former Bang-trong as we do to its relationship to the Chinese model.

Gia-Long's Viet-Nam: Burdens From the Past

In 1802, a single Vietnamese kingdom emerged from the ruins of nearly three centuries of internecine division and devastating civil wars. When the victorious Nguyen king inaugurated the Gia-Long era, by which his reign is known, it signalled several historic changes in the country. The four hundred year old Le dynasty had finally disappeared. In its stead came rulers with no personal connections to the ancient Northern Red River heartland, men for whom its high dikes and bamboo hedges conjured up learned poetic conventions rather than the landscape of the Vietnamese soul. The new rulers, too, shunned the time-hallowed soil of Thang-long (modern Ha-noi) to raise the Dragon Throne in their upstart capital at Phu-xuan (Hue), geographically more central in the new kingdom but emotionally and culturally peripheral to most of its subjects.

Also for the first time, Vietnam assumed its modern contours, as the historic southern advance (the nam tien) slowed to an eddy in the swampy Mekong delta. The new Southern dynasty found itself in charge of a vastly expanded and variform territory, whose administration would pose problems unprecedented in Bang-trong. Added to this, up to 70% of its population inhabited the comparatively compact,

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2. Gia-Long wanted Nam-Viet but the Chinese, for their own reasons, switched the characters to make Viet-Nam. In 1839 Minh-Mang renamed the country Bai-Nam (the Great South) without apparently informing China. Ibid, pp.120-21.

3. Population is hard to assess: anything between 2/3rds and 3/4ths may have lived north of Quang-binh in 1802, given Le Thanh Khoi's estimate of 1.5 million for Bang-trong
and sullenly watchful, northern provinces of former Bang-ngoai (the Trinh lands from Nghe-an north). Here decades of war, famine, and administrative disarray before Gia-Long’s victory had left agriculture devastated and village society uprooted, condemning many Northern peasants to wander the countryside destitute and desperate, their former lands either uncultivated or stolen by local strongmen. It was vital that the new dynasty correct this situation, and defuse the distrust of former enemies by integrating them into a united kingdom, lest gnawing political instability destabilize the state and bring the Nguyen down.

The quest for integration and unity forms a constant undercurrent in the history of nineteenth century Vietnam. At certain times, like the Minh-Mang era, it emerges as a driving force. The institutional reforms and new ideological emphases of this reign (1820-41) arose directly from its predecessor’s inability adequately to address, let alone solve, these two basic political needs. In 1820 the newly enthroned king must have been all too aware of the dangers he faced. A keen student of Chinese history, when Minh-Mang surveyed his disunited inheritance, with its loose, decentralised political and administrative system, the spectre of the seventh century Suy dynasty must breathed coldly at his shoulder. Like the Nguyen, the Suy had united warring principalities into a single empire after centuries of disunity. But they had lost it all to the Tang

in two generations. Eighteen years on, in 1820, nothing in
the view from Hue could have encouraged complacency in
Minh-Mang about the Nguyen's chances of survival, either.

But why had Gia-Long failed at this crucial task? The
simplest answer to this complex question is because neither
the king nor his administration ever really transcended
their Bang-trong origins. No cleansing fire of Chinese oc­
cupation had cauterised social wounds and renewed national
unity of purpose through an independence struggle before
Gia-Long ascended the throne (as had happened for the Le in
the fifteenth century). Instead of beginning as a national
hero, and with a clean political slate, Nguyen Anh had
hacked his way to power over thirty years as the most suc­
cessful of the late eighteenth century warlords. He brought
their methods to the governance of his kingdom. Beneath its
shiny imperial trappings, the Gia-Long regime smelt of its
past. Its failure to respond innovatively to the complex
new problems of victory handicapped Hue's ability to deal
adequately with them. By the 1820s, Gia-Long's failure to
advance the political integration and administrative unity
of the kingdom meant dynastic survival still hung in the
balance. It made a new approach imperative.

We will consider Minh-Mang's responses to the challen­
ge later, after surveying the most intractable of the poli­
tical problems he inherited. Foremost among these was the
nature of the administration itself. To understand it, we
need to glance at its previous history.

In the early sixteenth century, an attempted usurpa­
tion of the waning Le throne had led to decades of civil
war in which the existence of the Le kings came increasingly to depend on powerful protectors. Chief among them were Nguyen Kim and, after his 1545 death, his son-in-law Trinh Kiem. The two families later fell out, however. Nguyen Kim's son, Hoang, in fear of his life, arranged to be offered the post of military commander in distant Thuan-hoa province, the southern-most edge of the empire. In his train went a large number of retainers from his family's Thanh-hoa home district. When Trinh Tung forced the puppet Le king to legitimate his waxing power with the title of *chua* in 1599, the Nguyen held a strategic redoubt from which to challenge Trinh power. Another bloody round of internecine conflict duly ensued between 1627 and 1672.

Outnumbered, but not out-gunned or out-fought, the Nguyen survived the civil war as rulers of an increasingly distinctive polity, Nam-ha in the official records or Bang-trong (the inner way) to its people. The push south distanced Vietnamese of this area socially and culturally, not merely geographically, from their longer-settled Northern compatriots. Loosely organised and locally-adapted, the Nguyen state pulsated with energy and movement. Foreign traders from all areas found welcome. Vietnamese, singly or in family groups, followed their fortune from one area to

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5. An untranslatable title meaning a sort of military dictator under the crown.

another along the shifting frontiers where they alternately fought, or integrated and intermarried, with the Chams, Cambodians and other peoples they found there. In the process, they learned to eat Cham foods, to use and adapt the Cham plough, to modify their marriage customs, and even in some places to adopt Cham style graves. In sum, the most intimate aspects of their lives evolved to meet local conditions very different from those in the North.

At the head of this state stood the Nguyen chua, energetic rulers unafraid of innovation or compromise, in the seventeenth century especially. In this connection, an anecdote from the Chinese Buddhist traveller, Da Shan, who visited Bang-trong in 1694, is illustrative. While conversing with Da Shan one day, a servant's message had sent the chua dashing away instantly, without a word to his guest. The prince later apologised, explaining that he had rushed off urgently to help fight a fire. Such undignified royal conduct and exuberant involvement in life were quite antithetical to the stylised formality cherished by Confucian images of monarchy - and also, no doubt, to the actual behaviour in the courts of both Le king and Trinh chua in contemporary Ha-noi. (It would be another fifty years, in the early 1740s, before the formal outlines of a court were even elaborated in Bang-trong.) Also typical of this pragmatism, the Nguyen rulers welcomed any means of accelerating the development of their southern borderlands. When several thousand Ming loyalist (Ming-huong) Chinese arrived in the late seventeenth century, they found themselves redirected to the far South, where they carved Gia-dinh out of the
Cambodian frontier and turned it into an important trading centre and magnet for further Chinese settlers. The Nguyen also allowed large estates to be developed, not merely peasant family farms, and permitted the enslavement of minority peoples who provided agricultural labourers for the underpopulated far South. Until the 1740s, it was all run by a decentralised administration, divided according to military districts, whose officials, like their Cham predecessors, paid themselves from the taxes they collected. Again until the 1740s reform, the central government in Phu-xuan comprised only about two hundred officials in three departments and three subsidiary bureaux.  

In the eighteenth century an emerging sense of regional identity found political expression. In 1702, Nguyen Phuc Chu' (Minh-vuong) sought to establish a direct tributary relationship with China, that is, to be recognised as an independent king. Rebuffed by Beijing, Nguyen Chu assumed a royal title anyway (quoc chua). Forty years on, his son Nguyen Phuc Khoat (Vo-vuong) formalised the claim to kingship by restructuring the existing administration into

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the traditional six Boards, and by elaborating a proper court over which he ruled as king (vuong). 9

However, the administrative reorganisation modified the structure rather than transformed the basis of the regime. Government still rested on a combination of military force, geographical ties, and kinship links. Soldiers still usually outweighed civilians and, although some new educated families tugged at the fringes of power, members of the chua’s own extensive clan or important old retainer lineages still shared most top posts. Like the Nguyen, most politically important Bang-trong families originally issued from Tong-son district in Thanh-hoa. Over the generations, their families had been woven into a compact elite bound by marriage with the Nguyen, and each other. Their lineage names - Nguyen Huu, Nguyen Cuu, Truong Phuc, Tong Phuc, Nguyen Khoa and so on - pepper the biographies of eminent persons of the pre-dynastic era in the Bai-Nam Nhat Thong Chi [Gazetteer of Bai-nam]. 10

Close kin relations never precluded intense intra-elite rivalry, however, and it was thanks to such a politi-

9. Appointments, Rites, Penalties, Finances, War, and Public Works, with the secretariat (Van chuc) transformed into the Academy (Han lam vien). The 1638 ranking of the chua’s top advisers into ‘the four pillars of the throne’ (the dien rank of dai hoc si) stayed and continued right through the dynastic era.

10. A collection of provincial gazetteers compiled by the Annals Office between 1865 and 1882 (with Central provinces up-dated between 1889 and 1909), BNNNC was published in Chinese in 1909 by Cao Xuan Duc. In quoc-ngu translations, it was later published by the Sai-gon Ministry of Education in the early 1960s and separately by the Ha-noi Historical Studies Institute (1969-71). I have used both sets, but not all volumes were available to me.
cal contest that one of their number, Truong Phuc Loan, helped bring the regime down. As Regent in 1765 Loan placed a child on the throne instead of an older candidate and triggered a political crisis that divided the elite. His unpopularity in the next few years opened the way for a "legitimist" revolt — the Tay-son rebellion — that almost destroyed them all.

Gia-Long grew to manhood during the Tay-son rebellion, and the long struggle that later Nguyen sources called the Restoration (Trung-hung). And when we consider the Gia-Long era against this background, "restoration" seems no misnomer. Certainly where his administrative system is concerned, Gia-Long emerges less as the first Nguyen emperor than as the last Nguyen chua.

Like its Bang-trong predecessor, Gia-Long's regime was decentralised and military based. Restoration era retainers or officials shared almost all senior positions of power. No fixed rules of tenure or uniform mode of recruitment operated throughout the country. In the North, most new officials surfaced via irregular regional examinations, but were largely limited to careers in the civil ranks of the decentralised Northern administration. In the Centre and

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14. Re-established in 1806, the three regional examinations under Gia-Long may have produced fewer than 250 for the reign. Ibid, p.170-71, 180-81 and 220. For a longer discussion, see Chapter 2 below.
South, new recruits came from various sources. In 1802, many families on the fringes of the Bang-trong elite took advantage of the Restoration death toll to slip literate but unqualified members into lower echelon administrative vacancies that would otherwise have gone to older families or their clients. Later in the reign, a handful of graduates appeared; but for over twenty years most men from here gained office by right of birth, through the patronage of a high official, or in response to government appeals for literate men to present themselves for appointment to minor clerical posts. (In this humble way Nguyen Tri Phuong, later one of the most powerful officials under Thieu-Tri and Tu-Buc, began his career in 1820.) After decades without examinations most non-graduates, and some recent laureates, felt more comfortable with demotic Vietnamese script (chu nom) than with Chinese characters, causing official business to be transacted in either language. (Minh-Mang quickly extirpated this particular heresy.)

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15. At least two important nineteenth century political lineages began this way, the Quang-binh lineages of Nguyen Bang Tuan (son Nguyen Bang Giai) and of Hoang Kim Xan (son general Hoang Ke Viem). BNNTC [SG](9), pp.184, 186, and 189; and VNDNTP, pp. 236-37 for the first. BNNTC [SG](9), p.185; and VNDNTP, pp. 91-93 for the second.


18. Model, pp.54-55. Li Tana's research confirms numerous nom items in archival holdings for the Gia-Long era. Some nom poetry also appeared in examinations until the 1830s.
Court behaviour matched the general situation. Though hardly informal, it would have astonished mid-century French observers for whom 'etiquette [was] a sacred thing at the Court of Hue'.¹⁹ The absence of Confucian indoctrinated degree holders from the political elite at court accounted for much of the relatively relaxed atmosphere. Not even the brilliant and influential Trinh Hoai Buc boasted a prestigious academic title.²⁰ Few of Gia-Long's old comrades-in-arms, now high mandarins, fussed overly with the intricacies of court etiquette; and nor did the king himself. Although using the title of emperor (hoang-de), Gia-Long was liable to treat any incautious scholar who saluted him as Son of Heaven (thien tu) to a ribald 'dissertation on the reproduction of humankind', accompanied by 'such explicit words and gestures' as to leave no doubt that his conception and parentage had been anything but celestial.²¹ Regulations governing imperial audiences finally appeared in 1816. Even so, behaviour at court still struck supercilious Chinese as decidedly lax.²²


²⁰. ᵇᴺᴺᵀᴴ [HN](V), p.230. ᴴᴺᴺᵀᴴ, p.354 says he passed some exams in Gia-dinh in 1788. Of Chinese descent, he variously headed the Boards of Finance, Rites, and Appointments under Gia-Long as well as leading the embassy to China that won recognition for the Nguyen.

²¹. Michel Buc Chaigneau, recounting a conversation with the king. Naturally this did not happen on solemn ritual occasions. Souvenirs de Hué (Cochinchine) (Paris: Challamel, 1867), pp.111-12.

²². Model, p.10.
A glance at some of the most far-reaching reforms of the Gia-Long era, and ironically the very ones that made it appear most sinicised, suggests they had more in common with the ad hoc compromises of the chua period than with the carefully sifted institutional borrowings of the Minh-Mang reign. The military and Restoration backgrounds of most of Gia-Long's highest officials apparently failed to equip them with the patience or insight necessary to wrestle at length with the subtleties of education, law, or fiscal reform. Pragmatism and expediency led to the wholesale adoption of the Qing law code, for example, despite the fact that the men charged with reforming the laws had been ordered to base their recommendations on 'the ordinances and statutes of former dynasties, [and] to examine the laws of Hong Duc [the Le] and the Chinese Ching dynasty ...'.

Another major initiative, the establishment of a system of land registers for taxation purposes, seems just as cavalier. Le Quang Binh, President of the Board of War, may have got the job because of his 1790s experience in opening new lands in the far South. Certainly because of this he would have known how landholding varied in former Bang-trong, not to mention between Bang-trong and the former Trinh lands. Perhaps this awareness prompted the ad hoc solution of importing the Chinese system, but not applying it to the South. It was 1818 before the Hue Finance Board bothered to send sample registers to Gia-dinh to begin

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24. VNDNTP, pp.139-40 and BNNTC [HN](I), p.208.
teaching Southerners how to use them; and 1836 before central officials first surveyed the region and brought its people into the Chinese register system.\textsuperscript{29} The centrist intrusion inflamed local feeling. A few years later most of the minority peoples upon whom land registers had also been foisted were in open revolt against Hue.

In 1802, Gia-Long re-established the six Boards and Hanlin Academy (\textit{Han lam vien}) of Vo-vuong's 1740s administrative reforms but, as in the chua era, they co-existed with a military government that ran the country at large.\textsuperscript{26} Senior officers called Protectors (\textit{tran thu}) administered the provinces, with little more than the oversight of education left to their civilian deputies (\textit{hiep tran}). Outside the central area (Quang-binh to Binh-thuan)\textsuperscript{27} which depended on the capital, two overlords (\textit{tong tran}) ruled North and South on Hue's behalf. The posts were filled in rotation, usually for three years, by a tiny number of high ranking generals, trusted lieutenants from the Restoration like Nguyen Van Thanh, Le Van Duyet, Nguyen Van Nhan, and Truong Tien Buu.\textsuperscript{28} The \textit{tong tran} commanded regional armies and headed distinct administrations whose bureaux replicated the

\textsuperscript{29}. Model, pp.164-68

\textsuperscript{26}. \textit{Ibid}, pp.67 and 96 mistakes the 1802 creation of the six Boards and the \textit{Han lam vien} for a Gia-Long initiative rather than a re-establishment of pre-existing structures. For the military government, see pp.102-03.

\textsuperscript{27}. In 1820, Minh-Mang added Thanh-hoa (and its neighbour Nghe-an) to the area ruled from Hue in recognition of the dynasty's roots there. H. Le Breton, \textquoteleft La province de Thanh-Hoa', \textit{RI} (ns), XXIX, 6 (1918), p.610.

\textsuperscript{28}. But Minh-Mang kept Le Van Duyet as \textit{tong tran} of Gia-dinh from 1820 until his death in 1832. \textit{VNDNTP}, pp.119-20.
Hue Boards and performed all government functions in North and South. In addition, the overlords, not Hue, held all regional seals of office and could issue any legal orders on their own authority. As time passed, the Bac-thanh and Gia-dinh-thanh administrations began to evolve their own characters, becoming less directly responsive to Hue and more inclined to use their own methods and procedures. A slow erosion of existing central control followed. Given this, it is hardly surprising that Gia-Long should have set at nought a lifetime of loyal service when, in 1816, circumstantial evidence hinted that Nguyen Van Thanh, at the time Bac-thanh overlord, could be 'nourishing the intention of treason'. The marshal's suicide to order followed not long after. For Gia-Long, an overlord had to be absolutely trustworthy, or dead.

Applying the lesson of his chua ancestors, Gia-Long had prohibited four positions of overweening importance whose prestige and power might one day come to threaten the throne. Yet in practice his own administrative system

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29. Gia-Long's words, quoted in Le Van Phuc, 'La vie et la mort du Maréchal Nguyen-Van-Thieng, vice-roi du Tonkin sous Gia-long', BSEI(ns), XVI, 1 (1941), p.39. Thanh's stature made it a cause célèbre. PNNTC [HN](I), p.212 notes his death as a result of a judgement against his son, which Woodside accepted [Model, p.102]. But Le Van Phuc details incidents in 1812 (at the burial of Gia-Long's mother) and 1816 (over the nomination of the heir apparent) that had caused the king already to doubt Thanh [pp.36-39].

30. There was continuity here, too. Thirty-five years before, Nguyen Anh had murdered a top general, Bo Thanh Nhon, apparently for similar reasons. Maybon, Histoire moderne, pp.195-6.

31. They were no prime minister, no trang nguyen (first doctoral graduate), no position of empress, and no granting the chua-era title vuong. Indeed, Gia-Long preferred to
created two such potential competitors upon whose loyalty
the dynasty had no choice but to rely. While he lived, Gia-
Long’s own great prestige (and ruthlessness) bound the
structure together. But once he died, how long could such a
ramshackle system expect to remain intact?

One other serious problem confronting the new dynasty
needs to be mentioned briefly - the rural crisis in former
Bang-ngoai.

It is hard to generalise about the agrarian situation
in Vietnam by the nineteenth century, as recent studies
confirm.\(^{32}\) But one thing seems clear: while both principalities
suffered agrarian crises in the eighteenth century, in
1802 the residual problems in former Bang-ngoai still loomed
as politically serious.\(^{33}\) Its two most ominous symptoms -
landless peasant vagabonds and private holdings swollen
with stolen communal land \((cong
dien)\) - were reported by
concerned mandarins in the Bac-thanh administration early
in Gia-Long’s reign.\(^{34}\) Furthermore, the return of peace was
not automatically righting the situation. Between 1802 and
1806, the excessive labour demands of fortress building

award noble titles to illustrious men only after death. His
successors, however, proved more forthcoming. Phan Huy Le
et al, \textit{Lich su che do phong kien Viet Nam}, III (Hanoi,
1961), p.430. [Henceforth \textit{CBPK}]

\(^{32}\) Some of the most valuable are gathered in Ngo Kim Chung
and Nguyen Buc Nghinh (trans Georges Boudarel et al),
\textit{Propriété privée et propriété collective dans l’ancien

\(^{33}\) For a discussion of this neglect, see Le Thanh Khoi,

\(^{34}\) For the court’s awareness of the transfer of communal
land, see the documents cited by Vu Huy Phuc in ‘\textit{Chinh sach
cong dien, cong tho cua nha Nguyen nua dau the ky XIX’},
Nguyen military governors helped drive peasants away from another 370 villages in eight delta provinces. Their desertion only further worsened a situation whose true dimensions finally emerged in an 1807 Bac-thanh report which officially estimated almost twenty percent of Northern farm land was no longer being cultivated.

At that point Gia-Long might have solved the Northern rural crisis for generations and won the acceptance of its hard-pressed peasantry into the bargain. Like the first Le kings centuries before, he could have resumed uncultivated or excessive private lands and turned them over to communal ownership. Indeed, Bac-thanh mandarins had urged exactly that course early in the reign, but the court refused. It had settled instead for the communal redistribution of salary lands previously awarded to Le, Trinh, and Tay-son officials and generals, and the promulgation of new communal land statutes forbidding its sale or long-term lease. The regulations even stooped to encouraging disrespect for hierarchy by promising to reward ordinary villagers who denounced infractions by their superiors. But it was hardly

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37. Though in the fifteenth century, there had been Tran clan latifundia to divide, unlike the myriad smaller private holdings of the Nguyen era. Le Thanh Khoi, *Histoire du Vietnam*, pp.138-225.


39. Vu Huy Phuc, 'Chinh sach cong dien', pp.41-42 and 44.
enough. Without at least returning communal lands stolen within living memory, Gia-Long’s measures remained marginal to the lives of struggling smallholders or landless peasants. In times of hardship, especially once peace stimulated population growth, the old cycle was liable to begin anew, with the same dangerously predictable consequences for public order.

Just why Gia-Long failed at this historic juncture is unclear, but pragmatic politics and personal preferences might account for some of it. The king was no peasant rebel turned emperor, bringing rural grudges with him to the throne. Nor did he or his top officials feel ideologically committed to returning excessive private holdings, even those illegally obtained, to communal ownership. On the contrary, his family had encouraged landlords for generations in the far South and they had repaid him with financial backing during the Restoration. Gia-Long was hardly about to dispossess his allies. Further, he thought any land reform would be politically risky, threatening to alienate the people whose support the dynasty needed to

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40. As had happened by 1830, when land registers in 9 provinces from Nghe-an north had to be revised. Nguyen Khac Bam, ‘Gop may y kien ve van de ruong tu trong lich su Viet-Nam’, NCLS, 65 (1964), p.33. CBPK says taxed land expanded by almost 40% between 1820 and 1847 [p.440]; but it never matched a possible doubling of population from 1802 to 1847, as estimated by Nguyen The Anh in ‘Quelques aspects economiques et sociaux du probleme du riz au Vietnam dans la premiere moitié du XIXe siecle’, BSEI (ns), XLII, 1&2 (1967), pp.15-17.

41. Perhaps more to the point, the Tay-son emperor, Quang-Trung, also failed to return land to communal ownership, preferring other means to encourage vagabond peasants back to their homes. Truong Huu Quynh. ‘Tinh hinh ruong dat’, pp.86-90.
survive.\textsuperscript{42} Thus, despite real benefits to the state from increasing the area of communal land,\textsuperscript{43} it was 1839 before Gia-Long’s son, Minh-Mang, approved the transfer of private fields in Binh-dinh to communal title. Even then military conscripts enjoyed priority in its shares.\textsuperscript{44} Although some Gia-dinh landlords offered several thousand mau of private land for the same purpose in 1840, nothing similar ever occurred in the North.\textsuperscript{45} And the basic reason for that – the problem of integrating former bang-ngoai – brings us to the major new issue that faced the victorious Nguyen in 1802, how to forge a single kingdom from two formerly hostile principalities.

Gia-Long’s Failure to Integrate the North

Winning over, not merely pacifying, the North was a perennial problem for Gia-Long, made so in no small measure by Hue’s own contradictory behaviour. While the court recognised the region’s economic and strategic importance, and tried to conciliate its parochial feelings by a variety

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{42} Thus in 1816 he rejected a land reform request from the eminent mandarin, Pham Bang Hung, on these grounds. Nguyen Thieu Lau, ‘La Réforme agraire de 1839 dans le Binh-dinh’, \textit{BEFEO}, XLV (1951), p.120. It is unclear where Hung’s request referred to.
\item \textsuperscript{43} It attracted higher taxes and helped fund socially approved local institutions, as well as contributing to official salaries (until 1839). To Lan, ‘On Communal Land in the Traditional Viet Village’, \textit{VS}, No. 61 (1980), pp.131-46.
\item \textsuperscript{44} Nguyen Thieu Lau, ‘Le Réforme agraire’, pp.124-25.
\item \textsuperscript{45} Vu Huy Phuc, ‘Chinh sach cong dien’, pp.44-45.
\end{itemize}
of symbolic gestures, little in the Gia-Long reign signalled that the Hue court had genuinely made room for Northerners in the new ruling elite. Instead, its policy appeared politically ambivalent, swinging from conciliation and inducement to gratuitous insult, and back again. The pattern began during the Restoration.

In the early 1790s, Nguyen Anh sent emissaries north to solicit support in the struggle against the Tay-son. Although their success was limited, a determined handful of fighters did venture south to join his armies (and, as it turned out, to make their fortunes since restoration military service opened sure access to public office in the Gia-Long era). Then a decade later, Nguyen Anh himself rode north. But this time he cynically chose to manipulate local feeling by posing as a champion of Le restoration in order to win Hanoi in a bloodless victory in 1802. Immediately exposed as a lie, the tactic rebounded politically against the new dynasty, breeding disillusion and distrust where the Nguyen could least afford it. So in 1803, when the desperately understaffed government ordered former Le mandarins to report for duty, the response was hardly overwhelming, as the astonishing reception of the prize catch,

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44. BNNTC [HN](III) records 6, 3 from Ha-noi and 3 from Nam-dinh (pp.214-15 and 345-46 respectively). Of the 3 survivors, one became a high ranking soldier, one a provincial military governor and one a President of the Board of War, the only delta Northerner of the era to head a Hue Board.

47. His banners carried the hallowed anti-Trinh slogan phu Le (restore the Le). Le Thanh Khoi, Histoire du Vietnam, p.339. For Northern reaction, see Langlois' 1802 report quoted in Léopold Cadière (ed), 'Documents relatifs à l'époque de Gia-Long', BEFEO, 1912, pp.55-56.
Nguyen Van, attests. Only a top regional graduate (giai nguyen), not even a tien si, Van found himself catapulted to the stellar heights of 'the four pillars of the throne' when a grateful Gia-Long rewarded him with the supreme title in the Nguyen mandarinate (Can-chanh-dien Bai-hoc-si).

Other conciliatory gestures to Northern parochialism followed. Despite the shrunken communal land base, the surviving scions of the Le and Trinh families received lavish grants of cult land. Ha-noi was refurbished as the auxiliary capital: at one stage Gia-Long apparently even considered making Vinh, in the former Bang-ngoai province of Nghe-an, his capital. In 1806 some ultra-loyal Le officials, returning from self-imposed exile in China, crowned the efforts at symbolic reconciliation when they agreed to ornament the Hue court with their presence. This new trophy of legitimacy, coming hard on the heels of Gia-Long's investiture in Hanoi as tributary monarch by Beijing (that is, of Chinese acceptance of the dynasty), re-emphasized the fact that the Nguyen truly held Heaven's Mandate.

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49. For academic titles and the examination system in general see Model, pp.170-223.

49. **BNNTC** [SG](V), pp.133-34. As an honorific rank, with a lower level office. From a respected Thanh-hoa scholarly family, Van mainly drafted official documents. **VNDNTB**, p. 345 says he died in 1804.


51. Model, p.127.

52. So valued were they that each rated an entry in **BNNTC**, including one who never joined the mandarinate. **BNNTC** [HN] (III), pp.216-19 for the three from Ha-noi, who represent 3/8ths of its Nguyen dynasty entries.
Certain material benefits accompanied the symbolic gestures. Northern officials ran the lower levels of the decentralised Bac-thanh administration. Under the 1803 regulations they enjoyed higher shares and preferential access to communal land, both as mandarins and as examination graduates. Then in 1807, when regional examinations were re-introduced, the North received four sites compared to two in former Bang-trong, plus comparatively large graduate quotas. In 1813, its sites accounted for eighty percent of all regional graduates (cu nhan). But the way the system operated typified the Gia-Long era practice of symbolic concessions empty of political substance. The generous numbers of sites and graduates could not disguise the political irrelevance of examination titles at the time. Gia-Long held only three regional examinations, rather than the six the Le would have held; and he never bothered to bring back the metropolitan examinations that awarded the coveted tien si title. Thus, in reality, far from satisfying Northern expectations, the semi-revived system worked to frustrate them, be they scholarly aspirations or mandarinal ambitions.

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^4. Ibid, pp.195 and 220 (Table 5). Discussed further in Chapter Two below.

^5. Examinations were held in 1807, 1813 and 1819. Model, p.170 says the six year gap began accidentally; but Hue might have accepted it easily, given the nine-year cycle under the Nguyen chua, who also never held metropolitan examinations either. Le Thanh Khoi, Histoire du Vietnam, p.264.
Gia-Long's ambivalence and empty inducements failed to win either the ungrudging allegiance of Northern literati or the loyalty of the villagers. For the peasantry, as previously mentioned, Nguyen policies at best only partly repaired the social dislocation of the continuing Northern rural crisis. Even the benefits of relative peace were offset by the heavy demands of the new governors, backed at every turn by an occupying army recruited from the distant provinces around Hue. The presence of Northerners among the civil mandarins never disguised the reality of power: while naked force might compel acquiescence in Northern villages, it could not coerce loyalty or gratitude.  

Far more important politically was the attitude of literati families (van than) towards the new dynasty. In the North, these families historically provided the natural leaders of peasant communities whose status derived from attested literacy rather than wealth or land ownership. In the villages, certified literacy equalled local elite status. It won exemption from military and corvee duties, as well as eligibility for co-option to village councils. It also qualified men for admission to the village Confucian association (phe tu van), whose discussions of local and national issues made its members the opinion formers in

54. Later French missionary accounts, as quoted in Bui-Quang-Tung, captured the feeling. 'La succession de Thieu-Tri', BSEI (ns), XLII, 1&2 (1967), pp.66-7.

village society. Literate men also usually shared useful links of kinship and friendship with serving mandarins, as well as a common commitment to elite cultural values that made them, as a group, important local brokers of central authority within their villages. But men in these circles remained part of village society. If the behaviour of central officials alienated them from the dynasty, or pushed some into actively championing parochial popular grievances, then local disturbances ranging right up to rebellion were all too liable to follow.**

Winning their support was therefore crucial to the survival of the dynasty. But the disparities Northerners perceived between symbolic gesture and political substance worked to deny Gia-Long acceptance in these circles. The weight of history, and of Northern suspicion, told against him. In this unprecedented situation, the king could not even honour his own ancestors without offending Northern elite sensibilities, as the building of the Thai-mieu showed. In 1806, as Gia-Long welcomed the returning Le loyalist exiles to his court, he also began to raise a commemorative temple within the imperial city at Hue to venerate the 'emperors and empresses [hoang-de va hoang-hau] of the chua period'.*** Projecting the imperium back to Nguyen Hoang not only glorified Gia-Long's ancestors but also in-

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**. For its organisational forms, Ibid, pp.35-44 and 60-75. For a discussion based on mainly French sources, see Yoshiharu Tsuboi, L'Empire vietnamien face à la France et à la Chine, 1847-1885 (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1987), pp.191-95.

***. **BNNTC** [HN](I), p.23. It also venerated their top officials. See L. Sogny, 'Les Associées de gauche et de droite au culte de Thai-mieu', **BAVH**, 1, 3 (1914), pp.293-314.
iated the standard Nguyen version of recent Vietnamese history - that the 1802 foundation of the dynasty had been the restoration of a kingdom already in existence for two hundred years. But this retrospective elevation of the Nguyen chua, by plain implication to Confucian eyes in the North, automatically denigrated several generations of Le emperors - and their officials - as unsanctified impostors. Imperial theory might stretch to the simultaneous existence of two kings (vuong) in one country, but never two emperors (hoang-de).

Orthodox Northern literati might have accepted the Nguyen on the basis that the Tay-son emperor Quang-Trung, not Gia-Long, had overthrown the Le. Other Northern scholars might have followed the anti-Tay-son line of Nguyen Van (the 1803 Can-chanh). In the 1790s, Van had apparently tried to join Nguyen Anh in Gia-dinh. Later, in 1803, he tried to resign from his high appointment on discovering he was expected to work alongside former Tay-son officials in the scratch administration in post-war Phu-xuan. But very few had read the changes and acquired pro-Nguyen credentials in time. And from now on, as the new Thai-mieu announced to all, any accommodation would not be on their terms.

\footnote{For example, Tu-Buc noted on his father's funeral stele: 'Since the foundation of the kingdom to our times, two hundred years have elapsed ...' A. Laborde and Nguyen Don, 'La Stèle de Thieu-Tri', BAVH, V, 1 (1918), p.1.}

\footnote{Just as there cannot be two suns in the sky, neither could there be two emperors, 'two beings of equal dignity who are above all others', according to the Book of Rites. Quoted in Langlet. Tradition vietnamienne, p.166, fn2.}

Henceforth, their ancestors’ high renown and honourable service would count for little at court. And nor did literary skill or a life of learning necessarily smooth the path, as Le dynasty scholars ordered to adorn the court soon discovered. Roughneck Southerners showed scant regard for cherished literary traditions. The wretched fate of their greatest living exponent, the Northern poet Nguyen Du, epitomised their lot under Gia-Long. Forced by his fame into an unwanted mandarinal career and loaded with honours he despised, Du’s inner torment only earned him the disdain of Southern officials at court.

Everywhere they looked in the Gia-Long reign, the Northern elite saw just how catastrophically changed was their place in the state. For many long established scholarly Northern families, the world had turned upside down. Nostalgia, anxiety, and pessimism about the future poisoned their poetry and corroded their confidence.

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43. Though it appears to have done so for Phan Huy Thuc, son of the famous Nghe-an scholar and Tay-son official Phan Huy Ich. According to VNDNTB, p. 384, Gia-Long promoted him to thuong tho (2-1), making him only the second official from former Bang-ngoai that I am aware of who reached that level before the 1840s.

44. From a noble Nghe-an family, Du was recruited in 1802 and in 1804 ennobled and given the elevated title of Bong-cac-dien dai-hoc-si (and, in 1812, the supreme title, Can-chanh). In 1814 he reached his highest post, Vice-President of the Board of Appointments (tham-tri 2-2). [VNDNTB, pp. 230-1] Court records derided him as a ‘frightened man who, each time he presented himself at an imperial audience, was terrified and anxious and could not reply’. Alexander Woodside, ‘The Historical Background’, in Nguyen Du (ed and trans Huynh Sanh Thong), The Tale of Kieu (New York: Vintage Books, 1973), pp.xiv-xvi (quote p. xv) for Du and other examples.

45. For examples, see Model, pp.74 and 136. Woodside’s narrow focus led him to misconstrue Northern elite anxiety. He
died hard. Even in 1835, when most had reconciled themselves to the dynasty under Minh-Mang, a censor still reported that the brash behaviour of Southerners made Northerners at court feel 'ashamed within themselves'.

Had rural distress and elite anxiety remained unstructured, without a common focus to organise shared feelings into joint action, the danger period may have passed in time. Unfortunately for the Nguyen, Northern particularist emotions early ranged themselves under the banner of continued loyalty to an idealised Le king. In 1808, trouble erupted in four provinces around Ha-noi when rebels demanded the restoration of the former dynasty. As one weapon in his armoury, Bac-thanh overlord Nguyen Van Thanh commissioned a poet to use his skills to pacify the people. Not to be outdone, however, the unruly populace riposted with a scathing new ballad denouncing mandarinal exactions.

The quixotic moment was pregnant with the future. Henceforth, in every decade but the 1840s, the free-floating disaffection of Northern peasants (usually expressed in songs sat-

believed it arose from a difference between court optimism and the doubts of 'intelligent Vietnamese outside the court but still within the educated oligarchy' over 'Vietnamese institutional borrowing from China in the 1800's'. [p.75]. Yet all his examples are northern. That some were also mandarins indicates how generalised such feelings were. See Chapter Two for the nineteenth century elite in more detail.


According to Kieu Oanh Mau, Ban Trieu ban nghich liet truyen (Sai-gon: Bo Quoc-gia Giao-duc, 1963), pp.10-12. [Hereafter BNLT] Thanh may have recalled the propaganda value of 1790s pro-Nguyen songs in the south. BNNTC [HN](I), p. 199 (for Hoang Quang); or Duong-dinh-Khue, La litterature populaire vietnamienne (Saigon: np, 1967), p.111.
irising the dynasty or moving laments on their own suffer-
ing) was galvanised into rebellion. Le associations leg-
itimised almost all of them, while specifically Le restora-
tionist revolts disrupted every former Bang-ngoai province
at least once between 1808 and 1883. The absence of real
Le leaders after 1833 proved no handicap. It may even have
been an advantage, since it allowed otherwise unlikely can-
didates like Vietnamese Christians to invoke the magic Le
name. So potent was its appeal in Bac-ky that only one of
the major Vietnamese revolts in the region, that of Phan Ba
Vanh in 1826-27, failed to counterfeit Le credentials.

Pro-Le rebellions were not the only armed disturbances
in former Bang-ngoai under Gia-Long. Chinese bandits, moun-
tain tribesmen, and wandering outlaw bands of dispossessed

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**Footnotes:**

1. For some examples from the 1840s and 1850s from former
Bang-ngoai, see Model, p.134; Bui-Quang-Tung, 'Thiều-Tri',
pp. 53-56; or Nguyen Khac Vien and Huu Ngoc (eds), Antholo-
gie de la littérature vietnamienne, II (Hanoi: Editions en

2. In 1816, 1833-36, 1854, 1861-64, 1871-74 and 1882-83.
For details, BNLT, pp.10-13, 24, 58-59, 108-119, 120-47,
188-95, and 216-21 respectively. Also see Tsuboi, L'Empire
vietnamienne, pp.214-18.

3. The only two were Le Duy Hoan, executed in 1816, and
his son Luong, raised by Highlanders who later rose in his
cause in 1833. Phan Quang, 'Khoi nghia Le Duy Luong', NCLS,
224 (1985), pp.64-70. Minh-Mang deported surviving Le line-
age members to Quang-nam, Quang-ngai and Binh-dinh, and
refused them contact with each other. VNDNTB, p.123.

4. Ta Van Phung in 1861-64 and Le Duy Ba in 1883. BNLT,
pp. 120-27 and 216-19 respectively.

5. At least of those listed in BNLT. Even so, the rebels' banners carried an inscription (phu hoang) that anxious Hue observers feared might mean 'restore the imperial [Le]'. Bang Huy Van, Nguyen Phan Quang, and Chu Thien, 'Mot dien
hinh cua phong trao nong dan duo i trieu Nguyen: Cuoc khoi
nghia Phan-Ba-Vanh', NCLS, 86 (1966), p.23; or BNLT, pp.40-
47.
peasants joined with Le legitimists to make the area a per-
manent theatre of operations. Indeed, it is no exaggeration
to say that the Nguyen reversed the more expected sequence
by conquering their kingdom after founding the dynasty, not
before. One Ha-noi source has counted over fifty armed re-
bellions or disturbances in Gia-Long's eighteen year rule,
involving on average more than five of the thirteen North-
errn provinces every year from 1807 to 1819. The protracted
campaigning in the North contrasted starkly with the
tranquillity in the old Nguyen lands from Quang-binh south.
The Le caste no shadow here. Apart from the recurring an-
nual problem of tribal raids on lowland villages in Quang-
ngai, in only five years were armed disturbances recorded
in these fifteen provinces. None posed any threat to the
state. Three typified the sort of rumbustious eruptions
of normal village life that always attracted administrative
sanctions when they erupted onto a wider stage. They hardly
deserve counting. In Quang-nam, for example, the activities
of a celebrated geomancer stirred up the people, while at
another time a boil-over of village factionalism brought
official intervention on behalf of one side. Only two seem-
ed at all serious, an 1806 disturbance in the former Tay-

73. My calculations, from the chart in Nguyen Phan Quang
and Bang Huy Van, 'Tinh hinh dau tranh gai cap o thoi Gia-
Long', NCLS, No. 78 (1965), pp.9-23 (chart between pp.12
and 13). I interpret their evidence differently from them,
and from Woodside [Model, pp.135 and 311 fn 65], who has
twice misreported the total number of armed disturbances
they counted as 105, rather than 'over 50'. For the second
instance, see Woodside's chapter 'Vietnam, 1802-1867' in
David Joel Steinberg (ed), In Search of Southeast Asia
(Sydney and Wellington: Allen and Unwin, revised ed, 1987),
p.129. Annex One argues in issue in more detail.
son stronghold of Binh-dinh and an 1805 agitation near Hue, where forced labour requisitions to build the new capital rivalled those of the North.\textsuperscript{74}

In 1816-17, a happy concurrence of events removed two potential leaders of any major Northern separatist rebellion at a stroke. In 1816, a son of the serving Northern overlord, Nguyen Van Thanh, was arrested and, under torture, confessed to treason. Almost simultaneously, Le Duy Hoan was caught plotting revolt. Hoan obligingly implicated Thanh’s son in his conspiracy, proof enough for an already suspicious king to order the Grand Marshal’s exemplary suicide.\textsuperscript{75} At that point, the kingdom must have seemed safe from Northern separatism for at least a generation. But the executions never stopped the armed outbreaks, nor reconciled the Northern peasantry to Nguyen military rule. In 1819, shortly before the king’s own death, famine stirred thousands of Thanh-Nghe peasants and mountain tribesmen to rebel. After summoning Le Van Duyet’s army, Gia-Long invoked the same tired policy by ordering Le dynastic temples in Thanh-hoa repaired as a show of royal generosity.\textsuperscript{76} But by then the failure of empty symbolism to conciliate Northern sentiments was undeniable. Only real measures of integration, not rhetorical flourishes, could hope to heal the dangerous rift that still divided the country at the old Trinh-Nguyen border.

\textsuperscript{74} Ibid, p.17 for the examples in the text, and pp.18-19 for the troublesome Thuong of Ba-vach


\textsuperscript{76} BNLT, pp.25-31.
When Minh-Mang ascended the throne in 1820, eighteen years of Nguyen rule had failed to reconcile the North, or even to create mechanisms and incentives to win the willing support of its literati elite families. And far from weakening the hold of politically dangerous regionalism, Gia-Long had entrenched it in the structure of government. Dynastic survival required a break with the past, as Minh-Mang recognised. For the next fifteen years he worked patiently with handpicked officials in Hue to change direction. In the process, they transformed the political and administrative face of the regime and laid the foundations for the mid-century kingdom of French experience.

Minh-Mang’s Creation of Bai-Nam

Readers of Alexander Woodside’s provocative study of early Nguyen government and administration, Vietnam and the Chinese Model, could be forgiven for coming away with the belief that sinicisation was a foregone conclusion. Or, in Woodside’s words, that ‘the heavy if controversial dependence of the Vietnamese imperial tradition upon the Chinese classics and their ideas [was] the preponderant theme of early nineteenth-century Vietnamese politics’,77 and that, even if some uncertainties existed ‘about which Chinese institutions would be renewed or introduced in Vietnam after 1802 and which would not’,78 the process itself was never in

77. Model, p.16. Also see p.18.
78. Ibid, p.76.
doubt. And that, as a corollary, the court could not adopt Chinese institutions, or the king call himself Son of Heaven, without also internalising all the other paraphernalia of the Chinese world view. Otherwise, 'shorn of such classical ideological apparatus, [the king] would not have been believable in the eyes of Vietnamese bureaucrats and the "pale-faced students" (bach dien thu sinh) who were being educated in Vietnam, generation after generation, in the Chinese classics'.

Yet, how true is this of Vietnam and how much is it a result of Woodside's own rigourously nineteenth century frame of reference? A glance at the monarchy during the chua period, for example, certainly disputes the last of the above statements.

The Le emperors, pathetic shadow kings in Hanoi for over two hundred years, remained hoang-de and thien-tu the whole time, although no-one had any illusions about their actual power. No Le emperor from the seventeenth century on could have publicly maintained, according to Woodside's formulation, 'that his own political virtue in the world was unchallengeable, that he had no true competitors for the "mandate of heaven", and that he attracted the respect of foreigners'. On the contrary, it was evident that he could not even command the respect of the chua, in whose

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80. Ibid.
But this 'unheard-of reversal of history' never provoked a wholesale elite refusal, in the stronghold of Chinese scholarly traditions in Vietnam, to serve the usurping Trinh. Many scholars undoubtedly hated it, and some were driven to revolt, but most managed to accommodate themselves to the demands of real politik. The Son of Heaven may not have seemed believable in their eyes, but it never stopped them from serving in his administration. In this example, as in many others, the awkward exceptions of the chua era form the rocks on which many generalisations about pre-colonial Vietnamese history founder.

As the earlier discussion has shown, a frame of reference that includes the chua centuries radically alters the picture of early nineteenth century politics from that in Vietnam and the Chinese Model. From the wider perspective, the 'preponderant theme' of the Gia-Long reign hardly seems 'the dependence of the Vietnamese imperial tradition upon the Chinese classics and their ideas'. Rather, it appears as a theme of continuity with the past, overlaid by a shrugging acceptance of the sinicised titles and trappings that traditionally accompanied the imperium. The spirit of the Gia-Long reign is best judged by the king's own behaviour. How committed to the Confucian role model of the

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81. Langlet, Tradition vietnamienne, pp.107-08, 166-67, 197, 201 and 208-09 for examples of public usurpation of royal prerogatives and powers by the Trinh.

82. From the description of the Northern political situation given the Tay-son leader Nguyen Hue by the turn-coat Trinh general, Nguyen Huu Chinh. Quoted in Le Thanh Khoi, Histoire du Vietnam, p.320.
'sage-king' was a 'first scholar of the kingdom' who only sanctioned irregular regional examinations and never bothered to re-establish the whole system? How serious was a Son of Heaven who, when he finally got around to proclaim ing a list of the "vassals" that bowed to his political virtue in 1815, let it be padded out with the names of France and England, something he knew from the French at court to be laughable? Framed that way, such questions answer themselves.

From the Mac usurpation of the sixteen century until the 1820s, the generations of scholars to whom Woodside refers had lacked the power to coerce the political system into more than a passing resemblance to the "ideal world" preferences of their classical training. Indeed, it is arguable how successful they had ever been in this task, even at the height of the sinicising reforms under Le Thanh-tong (1460-1497). Vietnam never had an entrenched landowning political class similar to the Chinese scholar-gentry, able to transcend dynastic change and defend its members' shared

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83. Burma also appeared, though there was no contact between the two countries until the 1820s. Model, pp.234-39. Given Woodside's interpretive framework, he accords the exercise more seriousness than I think Gia-Long would have.

84. That Gia-Long did not take the ideological apparatus of empire too seriously may help explain an odd error in Chaigueau's memoirs. Chaigueau claimed Gia-Long 'did not want to recognise, as had his predecessors, the suzerainty of the Celestial Empire, despite the demands and threats of ... Peking. [But] Minh-Mang lacked the courage to follow the example of his father ... [and] requested investiture. From the start [he] abandoned the policy of Gia-Long to adopt that of China ...' [Souvenirs, p.242] But Gia-Long had received Chinese investiture in 1806; so perhaps it is Gia-Long's attitude, which the author's father would have known, that he is reporting here.
interests through monopolising a self-perpetuating imperial bureaucracy. Unlike China, in Vietnam the civil mandarinate had spent nearly all its institutional history in centuries of competition with other groups for influence near the throne, with Buddhists under the Ly and Tran and then with the army under the Le. All their successes had depended on active royal backing. Without such support, civil bureaucrats as a group lacked the institutional power to dominate the political system. Thus under the Trinh and Nguyen chua, for example, civil mandarins in both realms had been forced to adjust to centuries of military dominance and a steady erosion of the role and function of Confucian ideology in government, neither of which they could adequately resist.

The forces at play in the sinicisation of the nineteenth century kingdom, therefore, represented no simple continuity with the past. Against the backdrop of the previous three centuries, who in 1802 (or indeed 1819) would have confidently predicted the dynasty's radical departure towards intensive sinicisation? It was no foregone conclusion in the Gia-Long reign, nor was the later burgeoning power of classically-educated examination graduates within the political and power elites of the kingdom. Both had to

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For an overview of the cultural changes in this period when Buddhism flourished (even among the Le kings) and Christianity took root, see Nguyen Khac Vien, 'Traditional Vietnam. Some Historical Stages', VS No 21 (1969), pp.131-48.
be schemed and fought for, and neither could have persisted for long without royal backing, or at least acquiescence.

The Minh-Mang reforms were integral to these later developments. They formed the institutional environment within which classically-trained scholar-bureaucrats in the 1850s and 1860s learnt to manipulate royal support to their own ends. For that reason they need to be considered briefly here.

Political realities in the 1820s dictated Minh-Mang move cautiously towards the centralisation of power: some of Gia-Long's old retainers sniffed suspiciously at his more scholarly son.87 So the king began by consolidating his own base with a number of reforms designed to create a single, centralised imperial bureaucracy, indoctrinated in the Chinese classics and unswervingly devoted to the royal will. Historically, this was an ambitious, even radical, aim. Only once before, in the Hong Buc period of the late fifteenth century, had a Vietnamese king set out to conjure into existence a civil bureaucracy Chinese in both form and style.88 That is, not simply to set up an administrative structure along Chinese lines, which was a commonplace in Vietnamese history, but also to require its members to enact in their lives the high Confucian drama of government

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by "worthy men". Minh-Mang's mandarins were to be moral exemplars, classical role models for the whole of society, rather than simply loyal administrative servants of the crown. The imperial bureaucracy would become the institutional focus of elite aspirations and, as such, the mechanism that integrated regional literati elites into a nationwide network attuned to the life of the capital and committed to the ruling dynasty.

It was a bold strategy, and by the 1820s perhaps the only one likely to reconcile the Northern elite to the new dynasty and integrate its members into the king's service at the highest levels. Minh-Mang began implementing it immediately. He set regional examinations on a regular triennial cycle and, in 1822, restored the metropolitan level whose tien si title traditionally crowned the academic hierarchy. Both moves initially favoured the North, the home of scholarly traditions and Chinese classical studies. By renewing these long-established and familiar academic institutions, Hue signalled for the first time that the dynasty would offer Northerners more than token participation in public life. They responded enthusiastically.99 As the *Quoc Trieu Bang Khoa Luc* [Register of Graduates of the Current Dynasty] shows, from 1822 to 1832 all but one of

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99. Woodside reported a 'sudden flood' of scholars to these examinations in the 1840s; but his figures give the 1820s total as almost identical to the 1840s (179 to 182), with a drop in the 1830s to 144. 1826 had the second highest number in his sample, while the ratio of the 6 sessions from 1822 to 1838 and the five from 1841 to 1847 is 1:1 (969 to 910). The unexplained 1830s' decline may have reflected difficulties in reaching Hue due to revolts. [Model, p.179]
the thirty-five tien si of four examinations came from old Bang-ngoai.  

In 1829 Minh-Mang further finetuned the system by adding a palace examination to grade the tien si, and creating a consolation 'subordinate list' (pho bang) status for men whose metropolitan examination score seemed too low to guarantee success in the palace. Woodside speculated that this secondary list might have been intended to salvage poorer scholars for bureaucratic employment. This seems unlikely: as regional graduates, pho bang already had access to the mandarinate. More probably, Minh-Mang wanted to stimulate scholarship in general, and in the Nguyen heartland provinces around Hue in particular. By 1829, they had yet to produce a single tien si.  

The pho bang title would help swell their numbers, as well as the total number of high academic laureates, men whose classical indoctrination ought to make them paragons of the new imperial bureaucracy; and whose gratitude, too, should make them dynastic stalwarts. (This may explain why no fixed ratio of tien si to pho bang was set, as happened in China at the regional level.) If quantity was the goal, the device proved resoundingly success-

90. The source lists these graduates from 1822 to 1919. Compiled by Cao Xuan Duc and translated into Vietnamese by Le Manh Lieu, it was published in Sai-gon by Bo Van-hoa Giao-duc va Thanh-nien in 1962. The one exception was Phan Thanh Gian from Nam-ky.

91. One pho bang passed in 1829, and the first tien si in 1835. The only tien si from south of Nghe-an until then was Phan Thanh Gian in 1826, and then only because Minh-Mang refused to accept that none but Northerners had passed for the second time in a row. For his reasons, see Truong Buu Lam, New Lamps for Old. The Transformation of the Vietnamese Administrative Elite (ISEAS Occasional Paper No. 66, Singapore: Mazuren Asia, 1982), p.13.
ful. Pho bang averaged 40% of all metropolitan laureates in the next twenty years. Their career success, however, never rivalled that of the tien si.\textsuperscript{92}

That the first generation of tien si (1822-1835) enjoyed brilliant careers was largely due to the king’s personal involvement. For laureates who lived and avoided serious errors,\textsuperscript{93} the tien si degree from these examinations afforded the inner running for middle- to upper-level court positions.\textsuperscript{94} Of the thirty-four noted above, twenty-nine (or 85%) reached posts as lang trung (4-1), thi lang (3-1) or tham tri (2-2) in the six Boards.\textsuperscript{95} A comparison with tien si from the same provinces who graduated in the following decade (six examinations between 1835 and 1844) highlights how special these early careers actually were: of the later thirty-five, fewer than half won comparable positions under Tu-Buc.\textsuperscript{96}

\textsuperscript{92} Or 62 pho bang from 160 laureates in 11 examinations between 1829 and 1848. Of 22 laureates of these examinations who rose to Board president or provincial Governor-General, only 4 (or 18%) were pho bang. My calculations from GTBK. See Annex Two for statistical tables analysing career success, provincial and regional backgrounds and family educational attainments of graduates.

\textsuperscript{93} One had his name chiselled from the tien si stele and several were demoted less spectacularly after reaching high positions.

\textsuperscript{94} Defined as between 4-1, bureaux directors in the six Boards (lang trung) and 2-2, vice presidents of the Boards (tham tri). For an outline of the administrative hierarchy, see Bao Bang Vy, \textit{Nguyen Tri Phuong}, pp.80-83; or Alfred Schreiner, \textit{Les Institutions annamites en Basse-Cochinchine avant la conquête française}, I (Sai-gon: Claude et C,\textsuperscript{95}, 1900), pp.272-80.

\textsuperscript{95} Sample includes Thanh-Nghe-Tinh. My calculations from GTBK, pp.26-50.

\textsuperscript{96} Only 16 or 45%. My calculations. \textit{Ibid}, pp.51-93. Chapter Two discusses the political elite in detail.
The compensatory Northern bias under Minh-Mang also fuelled the meteoric careers of outstanding regional graduates (cu nhan), as two examples illustrate. The first, Nguyen Cong Tru,\(^97\) rocketed through the administration in the 1820s, reaching the rank of vice-president (2-2) attached to the Board of Justice in 1828, a mere eight years after joining. Then in 1835 for a short, heady period Tru became one of the first Northerners\(^98\) to break through to thuong tho rank, although as a Governor-General outside Hue. But his first error sent him crashing four grades. After five patient years he regained 2-1 ranking, only to lose it once more the next year after a military disaster in Cambodia.\(^99\) The second example, Doan Uan, proved more fortunate.\(^100\) A Nam-dinh cu nhan of 1828, he also burned up the hierarchy, reaching counsellor (3-1) in eight years and vice-president (2-2) in eleven when, in 1839, he became a special commissioner charged with the Binh-dinh land reform of that year. From here, he cleared the last and highest career hurdle when Thieu-Tri appointed him to thuong tho rank, with the position of Grand Military Counsellor (tham

\(^{97}\) [VNDNTP, pp.165-68.]

\(^{98}\) The only others I found before him were: the Restoration fighter Bang Tran Thuong from Ha-noi (Board of War); and Phan Huy Thuc, from the famous Ha-tinh Phan Huy family. [VNDNTP, p.384 says Gia-Long made Thuc thuong tho, but his later disapproval of Minh-Mang’s policies caused his career to languish.]

\(^{99}\) Though he remained on the fringes, ranging between 4-1 to 2-2 until his retirement in 1848.

\(^{100}\) Ca-Van-Thinh, 'Le Mandarin Doan Uan, "pacificateur de l'Ouest"', BSEI (ns), XVI, 1 (1941), pp. 42-3. He also won a glowing entry in [BNNTC [HN] (III), pp.346-47.]
tan dai than) in 1845. Of the forty-six tien si from former Bang-ngoai provinces who passed under Ming-Mang, only NguyKhac Tuan and Truong Quoc Dung\textsuperscript{101} matched the success of these two men.

Both the career achievements of high-flying Northerners, and the existence of a final barrier at the 2-1 level, betray a royal hand at work. The same king who lavished executive positions on his mandarin-scholars from the North equally grudged them the appointments of greatest prestige and power at court. The apparent paradox was rooted in contemporary political realities. Minh-Mang lived in a period of engineered change. The affiliations of the past, not Confucian indoctrination, still largely defined the political elite, and provided the surest guarantees of loyalty to the throne. It would still be some time before Minh-Mang's sinicising reforms could hope to subsume old loyalties based on kinship, history, and geography to produce a new elite organised around the orthodox principle of trung-nghia, a sort of grand amalgam of sincerity, unselfishness, upright moral behaviour and faithfulness, all placed (it was assumed) in the service of the dynasty.\textsuperscript{102} Until that time, however, a judicious mix between the existing elite and its anticipated successor remained politically vital. Thus, in the 1830s and early 1840s, men from chua era retainer families and, to a lesser extent, their neighbours

\textsuperscript{101}. That they were both from Ha-tinh was probably also significant. \textit{Đànnając}, pp.37-9 for Tuan and p.43 for Dung, who also receives a short entry in \textit{Vụ🛍Viet}, pp.515-16.

\textsuperscript{102}. For the difficulties of translating trung-nghia into concrete English terms, see \textit{Model}, p.110.
in the Nguyen heartland provinces from Quang-binh to Quang-nghai, or the far South, continued to enjoy a quasi-monopoly of top army and administrative appointments. But equally it was no accident that the first tien si appointed provincial governor under Minh-Mang was Phan Thanh Gian, the sole Southerner among them and a perfect compromise between old and new.

His father’s old elite did not escape Minh-Mang’s reforming zeal entirely, however. In 1821, the king overhauled Gia-Long’s makeshift National College (Quoc Tu Giam) in Hue, established generous scholarships and set its sixty royal family (ton sinh) and upper elite students (am sinh) on a special course of study in preparation for mandarinal careers. Initially many proved less than grateful, preferring the pleasures of Hue to the studious grind Minh-Mang envisaged for them. In 1825, a special test found only three from more than thirty who qualified for bureaucratic

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103 For example, Vo Xuan Can and Nguyen Bang Tuan from Quang-binh [BNNTC (SG)(IX), p.184] and Ton That Luong and Nguyen Khoa Minh from Thua-thien [BNNTC (HN)(I), pp.192 and 206-07]. All became Board presidents during the 1830s and 1840s, and won dai hoc si titles in the top grade of the mandarinate. None held academic titles.

104 One of the best known Nguyen mandarins because of his 1860s dealings with the French, Gian became tien si in 1826 and Governor of Nghe-an briefly in 1829. But a military defeat against Quang-nam bandits in 1831 lost him 4 grades. It was 1835, after routing a pirate band, before he regained a Governorship. Pierre Daudin and Le Van Phuc, ‘Phan Thanh Gian (1796-1867) et sa famille, d’après quelques documents annamites’, BSEI (ns) XVI, 2 (1941), pp.3-4.

105 As it was only an acting appointment, Minh-Mang may have used it to signal the career benefit of high academic titles in his reign, compared to that of his father.

106 Princes were disbarred from the mandarinate, but not their sons.
selection. Nonetheless, from 1827 the college regularly channelled its *ton sinh* and *am sinh* into the mandarinate via relatively superficial triennial examinations.\(^{107}\)

All these upper elite students already enjoyed direct access to the bureaucracy on account of their fathers' high status.\(^{108}\) What was the point of this new formality? It has been interpreted as a response to the mandarinal supply and demand crisis created by applying the Chinese model to Vietnam.\(^{109}\) Certainly a shortage of officials existed, at least in the first reigns. But as *am thu*\(^{110}\) most of these men were already entitled to direct entry. Rather, what Minh-Mang may have been aiming at was to effect a sort of "Confucianisation by stealth" of the younger generation of his father's loyalist elite. By lavishing royal attention on the National College and making its attendance attractive compared to direct appointment as minor clerks, he ensured that the sons of the existing elite were exposed to a greater depth of study - and to the gifted students who had won their Quoc Tu Giam places on merit - before starting their careers. But even more important, he also made a public statement few could have missed at the time. By encour-

\(^{107}\) It tested the Chinese classics and commentaries and Vietnamese legal texts. *Model*, pp.181-83.

\(^{108}\) Generous special statutes favouring mandarins' sons were drawn up in 1819, 1841, and 1844 to regulate their rights of entry either into the Quoc Tu Giam or as junior clerks of the Academy. *Ibid*, p.219.

\(^{109}\) As also occurred with new Chinese dynasties. *Ibid*, pp.180-81.

\(^{110}\) The status which allowed mandarins' son 'shade' privileges on account of the father's high position.
aging the upper elite to submit to an examination process before entering the administration, Minh-Mang reinforced the institutional and attitudinal changes he desired among his officials by applying them symbolically to his own young kinsmen and their relatives.

Reforming the existing political elite from within was a slow process, however. Early friction between those who owed their mandarinal positions to examination success and those who did not was unavoidable, as the stern 1835 report by a censor, Nguyen Ba Nghi, suggests. Nghi depicted Southerners (that is, men from old Bang-trong) as 'flatterers and braggarts' whose 'good fortune' meant that 'everything they say and do occupies the position of advantage'. As a result, Northerners felt 'ashamed within themselves'.

What is particularly interesting about this is that Nguyen Ba Nghi was himself a 'southerner', from Quang-ngai province; but unlike almost all of his fellows, Nghi was academically distinguished. In 1832 he had become only the third man from south of Nghe-an to pass the metropolitan examinations, albeit as pho bang. He clearly sympathised with the 'northerners' at court who, by definition in 1835, were all high examination graduates like himself.

It is fascinating to speculate about what this outburst indicates. Nghi was not yet thirty, and bureaucratically inexperienced. His sympathy may have tempted disgrunt-

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\(^{111}\) Cited in Model, p.135.

\(^{112}\) At the young age of 26, the only recorded graduate for his family. He later rose to tong doc. QTBKLP, p.50 and VNDNTB, p.454.
led Northern intellectuals at court to use him as a stalk-
ing-horse for their own grievances. But, it is also poss-
ible, as Nguyen Ba Nghi's declaration hints, that the Con-
fucianisation strategy was already producing results. We
catch in his words an austere rejection of 'southerners' as
personally unworthy of their good fortune compared to 'nor-
therners', trained Confucians like himself, who knew how to
endure undeserved shame stoically. We may detect, too, a
glimmer of how new cultural and intellectual bonds between
scholar-officials could cut across older regionally based
loyalties. Thus, rather than simply referring to factions
inspired by geographical associations within the bureau-
cracy, as has been suggested,113 in this context and at this
time 'southern' and 'northern' may well have been metaphors
for the rivalry between arriviste examination graduates
(mainly from the North and with whom Nghi identified) and
their academically unqualified superiors from old retainer
elite families. In 1835, after all, two brothers from one
such family - Nguyen Khoa Minh and Nguyen Khoa Hao114 - had
already monopolised two of the six Board presidencies for
years.

Finally, it is also worth mentioning the paradox that
Nguyen Ba Nghi's complaint itself suggests the extent to
which Northerners were being integrated into Minh-Mang's

113. Model, p.135.

114. G. Rivière, 'Une lignée de loyaux serviteurs: les
Nguyen Khoa', BAVH, 11, 3 (1915), pp.298-300. Unusually for
such a family, they originated in Hai-duong, not Thanh-hoa,
though the original ancestor had followed Nguyen Hoang sou-
th in 1558 as a child. Also see BNNTC [HN]I, pp. 206-07.
imperial bureaucracy by the mid-1830s. That a man from Quang-ngai would have raised such a matter, and in such a manner, in the previous reign is frankly unimaginable.

Woodside does not relate how Minh-Mang received Nguyen Ba Nghi's report, but it may be that such court rivalries did not entirely dismay him. Like Le Thanh-tong, the other great reforming emperor before him, Minh-Mang may well have come to appreciate and exploit the political advantages to the throne of tensions between various factions at court which only he could harmonise. As the chua experience showed, the real danger to the monarchy arose not from factionalism per se, but rather when a single faction dominated all others and effectively (or actually) captured the throne. Well-managed diversity, factional disagreements, and competition between officials all worked in the king's institutional favour.

Along with policies designed to imprint the style of orthodox 'Confucian gentlemen' onto the new imperial bureaucracy, three other major reforms to the machinery of government also prepared the ground for the later emergence of a more Confucianised kingdom. Woodside has dealt with the Noi Cac secretariat, the Co Mat council, and the provincial re-organisation of 1831-32 at some length. We need not duplicate his findings here, but only note some significant points.

The Grand Secretariat (Noi Cac)\textsuperscript{116} that appeared in 1829-30 acted as the principal information clearing-house in Hue. As part of their work, Noi Cac officials summarised the contents of incoming memorials and drafted suggested replies before passing them to the throne. In neither case did they function simply as the 'eyes and ears' of the king. Noi Cac officials shared the ideological commitments (and bureaucratic agenda) of the waxing group of scholar-officials in Hue. As time passed, too, the organisation fell prey to the shortcomings common to all in-bred, airless central bureaucratic agencies. Before the decade was out, examples appeared of its officials massaging awkward information into acceptable forms, of giving internal procedures priority over real world imperatives, and of treating presentation and style as ends in themselves. The refining process jeopardised the throne's access to necessary information, and by the late 1830s Minh-Mang often had to bully his Noi Cac officials into providing the details he wanted. But the real danger was long-term. The Secretariat exercised a cumulative subversive influence by its subtle and continuous shaping of information from the world outside Hue along ideologically acceptable lines. If, as happened under Tu-Duc, the king became immured in Hue or lost access to non-bureaucratic opinion and advice, he could easily drift out of touch with political realities outside the capital. It was a predictable outcome in all the cir-

\textsuperscript{116}. Model, pp.86-92.
cumstances, but nonetheless potentially disastrous in high policy matters.

Next in sequence came the provincial re-organisation of 1831-32 that finally toppled the Gia-Long regime by replacing the former regional governments with thirty-one provinces ruled from Hue, grouped into three administrative units (ky).\textsuperscript{117} Although Special Commissioners (\textit{kinh luoc su}) were still occasionally dispatched in emergencies to govern all Bac-ky or Nam-ky, from 1832 onwards their appointments were always temporary and for specific purposes.

Gia-Long's military Protectors (\textit{tran thu}) gave way to Governors-General (\textit{tong doc}), ranking 2-1 in the civil mandarinate, for larger or more difficult areas, and Governors (\textit{tuan phu}), ranking 2-2, for smaller ones. Hue politics, and the hope of promotion to the inner court circle, bulked large in their eyes. As befitting high court officials, most assumed the more remote style commensurate with their rank when possible, preferring to oversee their subordinate financial (\textit{bo chanh}) and judicial commissioners (\textit{an sat}) rather than run their provinces themselves.\textsuperscript{118} But no civil \textit{tong doc} delegated one particular function. For the first time in centuries, the 1831-32 reforms had vested civil authorities in the provinces with control of the army by making the \textit{tong doc} responsible for military matters within

\textsuperscript{117}. \textit{Ibid}, pp.146-50. At this time southern Nghe-an became Ha-tinh province. After 1832 the sub-region is properly called Thanh-Nghe-Tinh, and Thanh-Nghe before.

\textsuperscript{118}. For a summary of the powers of the \textit{tong doc}, \textit{tuan phu}, \textit{bo chanh} and \textit{an sat} see Schreiner, \textit{Institutions}, I, pp.292-305.
his jurisdiction. Although they commanded senior military officers (*lanh binh* 3-1), *tong doc* usually planned and led operations themselves.

Given Minh-Mang’s sinicising goals, and Ming and Qing practice, it seems odd at first glance that superior civil officials personally took the field in military campaigns. A far more orthodox recognition of civil superiority would have been to consign all operational matters to military subordinates for execution. But civilian *tong doc* campaigned in person because they were expected to. Despite Minh-Mang’s conscious reversal of *chua*-style military dominance, the king still gave military affairs a very high priority and expected the same of his senior officials. Indeed, both Minh-Mang and his successor, Thieu-Tri, ignored the civil classification of provincial governorships and appointed the best men available to the posts. As internal rebellion and warfare in Cambodia battered the country in the 1830s and 1840s, successful military officers with no examination titles often found themselves appointed *tong doc* solely on their merits. Even an untutored soldier risen from the ranks, like Nguyen Xuan from Thanh-hoa, might be appointed Governor-General in royal recognition of his

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119. Pay, recruitment, supply, etc were the responsibility of various Hue Boards.

120. Truong Buu Lam misunderstood how late this situation actually appeared in his discussion of the civil command of military force in ‘the traditional government of Vietnam’. *New Lamps*, pp.16-17.

121. I have found biographical data for 12 of them from the *BNNTC* volumes available to me.
That Minh-Mang valued flexibility above dogmatic orthodoxy was shown in 1839 when, doubtless to the horror of some, he cheerfully announced to the assembled court that ideally 'all civil officials should be forced to learn the military arts' and all military officials civilian business. It was for this reason, he explained, that tong doc in the provinces 'alternate[d] between civil and military'.

For the 1830s and much of the 1840s, the hierarchical supremacy of civilian bureaucrats never translated into an automatic monopoly of top provincial appointments. Instead, they had to compete for them with military officers. Whatever their ideological disdain for the army, ambitious civil mandarins knew nothing won royal favour and fast promotion like a successful military campaign, as biographies of numerous high-flying civil officials confirm. Even the quintessential courtier, Truong Bang Que, who later engineered Tu-Buc's accession, was packed off to serve his turn in an 1837 rebel suppression campaign in Thanh-hoa shortly after becoming president of the Board of War.

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122. *BNNTC* [SG](V), p.138.


124. As early as 1825, Hue bureaucrats had placed military achievement last of three factors mitigating official punishments. *Ibid*, p.64.

125. They were also a wild-card gamble since failure meant speedy disgrace. Given this, it seems unlikely many scholars would have wanted to exercise these powers personally, if allowed the choice.

126. With Doan Uan and another top 1840s civil official, Nguyen Bang Giai. Ca-Van-Thinh, 'Doan Uan', p.43. For a short biography see R.B. Smith, 'Politics and Society in Viet-Nam During the Early Nguyen Period (1802-62), *Jnl of*
The last noteworthy reform occurred in 1834 when the Co Mat Vien, the Secret Plans and Strategy Council, was created in a time of escalating regional rebellions. The Council included the king and four 'great ministers' (dai than) who, from the 1840s, were usually Board presidents. Although it later evolved into the central policy making organ in Hue, during its first decade the Co Mat was kept busy dealing with regional revolts (and war in Cambodia), many of which represented local rejection of the centralising reforms of 1831-32, and their aftermath. This blossoming of revolt formed an ironic commentary on Minh-Mang's success in sinicising the bureaucracy. As Hue purists pressed for greater conformity to Chinese models, refractory peasants, Christians, and minority peoples responded with violence. The upshot was that, according to the figures of one researcher, nearly three times as many rebellions broke out under Minh-Mang as Gia-Long, many of them now in the south.

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The Royal Asiatic Society, 1974, pp.157-58; VNDNTB, p.508-09; or Tsuboi, L'Empire vietnamienne, pp.156-58, who places him as president of the Board of War from 1832 (instead of late 1835) which is during Nguyen Khoa Minh's tenure of the post (1832-35), according to Rivière, 'Les Nguyen Khoa', p.299.


128. Mainly Le Duy Luong and Nong Van Van in the North. [BNLT pp.58-61] In the South, the Le Van Khoi rebellion (1833-36), led by defecting local army officers, controlled all Nam-ky at one stage [BNLT, pp.61-69].

129. Though open to criticism (see Annex One), Chu Thien's figures for peasant rebellions provide an interesting comparison of the incidence of revolt under different Nguyen kings. The centralising and sinicising Minh-Mang reign experienced 11 revolts per year, compared to the Gia-Long average of 4, the Thieu-Tri average of 8 and the Tu-Buc average of 3, mostly in the North. My calculations from figures cited in Nguyen Phan Quang, 'Ban h gia phong trao
In 1839, Minh-Mang celebrated his achievements by renaming the kingdom Bai-Nam, the Great South. He could be forgiven a self-congratulatory flourish: nothing comparable had happened in the country since the fabled Hong Buc reforms of the late fifteenth century. In two decades, his intelligent support for local adaptations of tried and tested Chinese institutions of government had renewed the imperial bureaucracy, and begun to knit the country together by drawing the literati elite of all three regions into the administration, and thus towards the dynasty. And while the deeper problems of Northern regional particularism persisted, the nightmare scenario of a well-armed overlord plunging the country into another round of civil war did not.

However, a fundamental flaw threatened the new regime, one which, for all his historical erudition, apparently eluded Minh-Mang. It needed an active king like himself at the centre, able to play the decisive royal role as master, not just arbiter, of the system. The throne needed to manoeuvre between contending interests and conflicting viewpoints, and to manipulate them from above without falling captive to any. Also, the ruling dynast could never afford to forget that he was king of small Bai-Nam, not emperor of China. He had to be able to set the basic premises of Chinese imperial theory and practice in Vietnam against a degree of outsider's scepticism foreign to the growing band of true believers in the Hue bureaucracy. It was all a matter of balance. Too much royal scepticism might prove counter-

_nong dan khoi nghia trong nua dau the ky XIX', NCLS, 61 (1964), p.44._
productive, if not actually disastrous. The debilitating experience of the Wan-li reign in late Ming China, for example, shows how paralysing it could be for such an administrative organisation if the king questioned, then rejected, his role as Son of Heaven, and basically withdrew from government.\textsuperscript{130} In Vietnam, however, a greater danger lay at the opposite extreme. If the emperor embraced the true believers, if he strove too hard to emulate the classical 'sage-kings', if he understood local political realities in terms of Confucian philosophical concepts or Chinese historical examples, the result might prove just as disastrous for the good governance of his Southeast Asian realm.\textsuperscript{131}

Minh-Mang's successor, Thieu-Tri, followed his father and maintained the balance; but the hidden trap snared his unwary son, Tu-Buc. We will conclude with a glance at the first twenty years of this reign, the period in which accidents of history guided Bai-Nam's evolution towards the Confucian kingdom of French experience and expectation, and of the little China fallacy.

\textsuperscript{130}. For the Wan-li emperor and his times see Ray Huang, 1987. \textit{A Year of No Significance. The Ming Dynasty in Decline} (Yale University Press, 1981), esp. pp.1-41, 46-53, and 75-86. Wan-li stopped reading state papers, holding court audiences and filling high bureaucratic posts. As he refused to leave the Forbidden City, officials had to bribe eunuchs to take him messages.

\textsuperscript{131}. Tsuboi, \textit{L'Empire vietnamien}, pp.152-56 for examples.
In 1847, Thieu-Tri's second son ascended the throne in a palace coup against his older brother, Hong-bao, led by Truong Bang Que and with the acquiescence (at least) of General Nguyen Tri Phuong. Hong-bao never accepted it, nor did a minority of the royal family and mandarinate for the next two decades. The new king also felt morbidly insecure and, fearful of a counter-coup, never left Hue again, not even for the Chinese ritual confirming his accession. In 1854, with his latest schemes betrayed, Hong-bao was imprisoned where he soon died. Against the advice of Truong Bang Que, the Confucian monarch baulked at executing his brother’s sons. Instead, stripped of their royal status, they lived closely confined for ten years. Months after their release in 1864, the discovery of a royal family conspiracy against Tu-Buc sent them back into preventative custody. But they were a magnet for discontent in the turbulent early 1860s. Finally, in 1866 another group of elite plotters, aiming to replace Tu-Buc with Hong-bao’s oldest son, managed to invade the palace with a large armed band. As a result, almost twenty years after his disputed access-

132. Staged in Ha-noi under the three previous kings. The titular vassalage was China’s way of codifying international relations with border states.
ion, a badly shaken king terminated the whole painful episode by executing his nephews. 133

It is impossible to discuss the first half of the Tu-Buc reign without taking into account the succession crisis and the shock waves it sent racing through the country. Bui Quang Tung’s scholarly monograph explores many of its consequences, including the body blow it struck to the budding acceptance of Nguyen dynastic legitimacy in the North (as suggested by the renewal of Le restorationism after nearly twenty years of quiescence). From 1854 onwards, Heaven’s anger at the royal fratricide became the standing explanation in the North for every disaster besetting the kingdom. The perceived loss of royal virtue provided both an invitation and a pretext to revolt by cloaking simmering regional resentments in a priceless aura of legitimacy. The feeling permeates a pro-Le declaration of 1871: 134

Within the borders of our Southern kingdom ... good fortune has descended through the noble generations of the Nguyen dynasty. But Tu-Buc is unworthy to be king, [having] secretly coveted the throne of heaven [and] brought harm to his nearest kin ... Mountains collapse in Binh-dinh, floods inundate Phu-xuan, droughts and deluges follow one another ... In truth, Heaven and Earth cannot tolerate it; spirits and men cry out angrily at the injustice ...

By the 1850s, the Northern countryside was already a prey to long-term inflation and increasingly bitter sectarian

133. Bui-Quang-Tung, ‘Thiều-Tri’, pp.31-50; and Tsuboi, L’Empire vietnamiennne, pp.127-47. This echoes the fate of My-Duong, the son of prince Canh, Gia-Long’s oldest son and heir who had died in 1801. Plots surrounding My-Duong enabled Minh-Mang to reduce him to a commoner. Rebels from within the elite also championed his rights, for instance Le Van Khoi in 1833. VNDNTD, pp.158 and 280.

ian conflicts with Catholics. To these difficulties were added, from the 1850s on, uncontrolled coastal piracy and the free-booting depredations of Chinese bandit armies, spilling across the open border. One or the other threatened life and property in virtually every province. In this situation, the debasement of royal authority and legitimacy that followed Tu-Buc's accession and Hong-bao's death not only undermined attempts to uphold order but, by licensing revolt, actively pushed the region further into the anarchy that would engulf it over the next thirty years.

The succession crisis and its aftermath also played a crucial role in the later evolution of Minh-Mang's Bai-Nam towards the forms of a Confucian state. Before considering this, we need to outline what we mean by a Confucian state. Ideally, such a state was centralised, very hierarchical, and bureaucratically ruled. Scholars trained in the Confucian classics and overwhelmingly recruited by public examination monopolised state offices. The governing ideology prized harmony and encouraged people to behave with propriety by conforming to a small number of social models drawn from family relationships. The elite expressed power and hierarchical status through well-defined rituals which derived much of their authority and legitimacy from being

\[13^a\] Ralph Smith outlined a similar analysis to that which follows, but believed the Minh-Mang reforms and the public expressions of Confucian ideology by the throne made Vietnam a Confucian state before the end of the Thieu-Tri era. But government practices before Tu-Buc strongly suggest any such change was after 1847. "The Cycle of Confucianisation in Vietnam", in Walter Vella (ed), Aspects of Vietnamese History (Asian Studies at Hawaii No 8, University of Hawaii, 1973), pp.2-21.
perceived as handed down from an idealised past, itself the
custodian of all worthy cultural values and ideas.

It was also a state in which the dominant bureaucracy
constantly impressed upon the otherwise autocratic ruler
his need to conform to its ideal of monarchical behaviour.
By the nineteenth century, what that meant was two-fold.
The king had to body forth in public (that is, to his court
and officials) the ritual and symbolic qualities of the
imperial Son of Heaven, the incarnation of hierarchy and
power on earth and of man's connection with the cosmos. In
addition, he had to behave as a sage-king, as a being supe-
rior to the business of everyday politics, whose virtue at-
tracted to his service men of talent and morality, upon
whose advice he depended for the proper administration of
the kingdom.

As Joseph Levenson has noted, all this represented an
attempt to control and channel an otherwise authoritarian
power which was inherently non-Confucian. Unrestrained mon-
archs all too willingly used their power to ends which Con-
fucian educated officials found unacceptable, like waging
war, murdering rivals (including family members), or
favouring eunuchs. Kings generally preferred 'wielding
power to change the world, not for emanating perpetuation
of a changeless pattern'\textsuperscript{136} as the interests of the king's
officials, and the powerful scholar-gentry class from which

\textsuperscript{136}. Joseph R. Levenson, 'The Suggestiveness of Vestiges:
Confucianism and Monarchy at the Last', in David S. Nivison
and Arthur F. Wright (eds), \textit{Confucianism in Action} (Stanfo-
drd University Press, 1959), pp.252-60, quote p.257. These
ideas were expanded in \textit{Modern China and Its Confucian Past,
they sprang, dictated. In China, the institutional contest between throne and bureaucrats gave rise to a pattern in which, put most simply, the impersonal organisational continuity of the bureaucracy gradually wore down the monarchic dominance that marked the start of each dynasty. As the institutional self-interest of the mandarinate frustrated effective personal rule, kings turned to allies like eunuchs to circumvent the administrative machine. From there, with the monarchical institution on the defensive, it only needed the accession of a weak incumbent to send the dynasty spiralling into decline, and members of the scholar-gentry class onto the look-out for its replacement.

This sort of pattern never developed in Vietnam, partly because the kingdom lacked the permanent landed class whose interests it protected. Nor had a Confucian state ever evolved there, despite the various Chinese elements routinely incorporated into different dynastic administrative systems since independence. Vietnamese kings (or chua) had always insisted on their right to exercise personal power whereas, politically and institutionally, a Confucian state disadvantaged the king. The Confucian role stripped the monarch of his political flexibility at the same time that it endangered dynastic survival by making him, more or less, a tool of the ruling bureaucracy. It was a situation that only an immature, imperiled, or indoctrinated king would freely accept. In 1847, by chance, an individual came

\[137\] Huang, 1587, *passim* for this transition under the Ming.
to the throne in Hue who met all these qualifications and who, for nearly twenty years, seemed willing to try.\textsuperscript{139}

For all that Minh-Mang’s reforms laid the foundations for a Confucian state, he himself would never have allowed it to develop. As Woodside has shown, Minh-Mang valued his flexibility highly and insisted on it despite the arguments of his most orthodox officials.\textsuperscript{139} Tu-Buc’s situation, however, was quite different. A teenage \textit{littératuer} with no interest in public administration before ascending the throne,\textsuperscript{140} Tu-Buc shared his officials’ Confucian ideology from the start. But even if he had not, his disputed accession, and his touchy defensiveness concerning its legitimacy,\textsuperscript{141} left him scant room to manoeuvre. Conforming to the scholarly ideal of kingship strengthened his credentials and shored up the loyalty of the increasingly Confucianised \textit{van than} circles in the country at large.

\textsuperscript{139}. Tu-Buc may have tried to impose a more personal rule in the 1870s, after the coup leaders had died. In 1875, for example, he appointed the first Northern \textit{thuong tho} since 1845, and allowed imperial clan members to become politically significant. Both may indicate the throne’s attempts to find new allies outside the existing political elite. Tsuboi, too, stated that after Phuong’s death in 1873 the Co Mat became a ‘simple consultative organ with no real authority’ because Tu-Buc took personal charge, in foreign policy especially. [\textit{L’Empire vietnamienne}, p.232] All this happened after the period under discussion, and in any case does not counter its argument.

\textsuperscript{139}. An excellent example is his debate over contact with the west, though the text contains several others. \textit{Model}, pp.289-93.


There was to be a price for this, however. The traumas of the Tu-Buc reign slowly transformed the provincial literati elite (and the lower mandarinal levels) from a distant audience of the court into a sort of constituency whose interests Hue could not afford to alienate too far. And by mid-century, one of the main demands of this constituency had become preserving the sinicised structures of government that allowed civil mandarins to grasp political predominance in the state for the first time in centuries. High court officials, examination candidates, and local literati could all find common cause in defending the status quo that sustained their own positions. When the national interest demanded effective reforms to counter the French threat from the 1860s on, the only ones acceptable all derived from the Confucian canon, and basically advocated little more than the better application of existing principles and procedures.\textsuperscript{142}

The few maverick mandarinal voices calling for modernising reform, like the Nghe-an Catholic Nguyen Truong To\textsuperscript{143} or the Nam-dinh tien si and royal favourite, Tran Bich


\textsuperscript{143} There is much western literature on To. See, for example, Thai Van Kiem, 'Nguyen Truong To. Patriote réformist, poète et homme d'action', BSEI (ns), XLVII, 3 (1972), pp. 489-502; or Georges Boudarel, 'Un lettré catholique vietnamien du XIXe siècle qui fait problème: Nguyen Truong To', in Alain Forest and Yoshiharu Tsuboi (eds), Catholicisme et sociétés asiatiques (Tokyo: L'Harmattan/Sophia University, 1988), pp.159-204.
San, were rejected in Hue, if not always by Tu-Buc personally. After two tu tai graduates led a widespread anti-Catholic and anti-court revolt in 1874 in Nghe-Tinh, following the latest treaty with the French, the prospect of non-Confucian reform dimmed even further. In this climate of opinion, it is perhaps no surprise that as late as 1878 Tu-Buc awarded first place in the palace examinations to a pious recitation arguing that the exercise of royal virtue alone would suffice to dissolve misunderstandings with the French and ensure peace, without the need to reject true civilisation as the Japanese had done. The Son of Heaven in later nineteenth century Bai-Nam could be no social innovator.

Personal considerations as well as political factors in 1847 had helped push Tu-Buc towards the Confucian ideal of kingship. The role suited his character and interests. Physically weak, often ill and depressed, the retiring

144. Or Tran Hy-Tang, a name bestowed by Tu-Buc personally after he topped the 1865 tien si. In 1868, he memorialised the king seeking, among others, reforms to the Six Boards and the court. Senior officials impeach him for treason, but Tu-Buc saved his life. Plainly destined for great things, he died young and suddenly in 1877, on the eve of leading an embassy to France. GTBKL, pp.148-51; and VNDNTB, pp.444-45.

145. Tran Tan and Bang Nhu Mai. Court records say thousands of Catholics were killed. Tsuboi, L'Empire vietnamienne, pp.205-211. Tsuboi also asserts that the van than deserted Tu-Buc after the revolt, but gives no supporting evidence.


147. Although Tu-Buc in 1847 had praised his father for adopting 'new ideas, advantageous to administration'. A. Laborde and Nguyen Bon, 'Tu-Duc', p.8.
schorlar was also a deeply filial son. To Truong Bang Que, 
the prince must have appeared pleasingly malleable. He sha-
red neither Hong-bao’s administrative predilections nor his 
outgoing character. And also unlike Hong-bao, his brother 
was not close to Truong Bang Que’s great rival, Nguyen Bang 
Tuan, and, after Tuan’s 1845 death, his son Giai. Placing 
Tu-Buc on the throne, therefore, would foil the schemes of 
Que’s factional rivals at the same time that it elevated a 
politically untutored eighteen year old whose nature promi-
ised he could be manipulated into entrusting the substance 
of power to his father’s old tutor and close confidant. Tu-Buc 
would embody the Confucian sage-king and first scho-
lar of the empire admirably, while Que and his henchmen got 
on with the business of government. And though it is im-
possible to say definitely without much more research, for 
some years that is largely what seems to have happened.

With hindsight, the accession of Tu-Buc looms as one 
of those cross-road events when history takes a deep breath 
and plunges blindfold along an uncharted path. Its politi-
cal consequences, almost all unfortunate, resonated down 
the years encouraging disunity and unrest at the worst 
possible time for the kingdom’s security. Even at the last

148. Thieu-Tri had left Hong-bao (assisted by Tuan, Presid-
ent of the Board of Rites) as regent in Hue in 1842 when he 
gone to Hanoi for his Chinese investiture. Tsuboi, L’Em-
pire vietnamienne, pp.134-35.

149. Ibid, pp.157-60. It was 1850 before Que relinquished 
the title of Regent.

150. From Tsuboi’s excellent account it appears circumstan-
tially possible that Que may even have had a hand in Thieu-
its baleful legacy continued: by enthroning a sterile king, the coup stored up a succession crisis for 1883 as well. Its effects in the North have been noted. Its political and administrative consequences are less well known, largely because of the dearth of research on the Tu-Duc reign. It is likely, however, as some evidence suggests, that the coup caused a realignment of political forces in the court and bureaucracy which would contribute significantly towards the later evolution of Bai-Nam in the direction of a Confucian state. We will conclude with a glance at some salient points.

Although sharing the same narrow regional base as the older loyalist elite, the main coup leaders, Truong Bang Que and Nguyen Tri Phuong, and their later factional allies like Phan Thanh Gian and Tran Tien Thanh\textsuperscript{181} were all comparatively new men.\textsuperscript{182} After 1847, the names of many of the old political lineages like the Nguyen Khoa, the Nguyen Huu, or the Tran Binh\textsuperscript{183} disappear from the highest offices for a generation, although the new men themselves were soon integrated into the Hue elite by marriage alliances with

\textsuperscript{181}. Thua-thien tien si from a minor mandarinal family, he reached Van minh dien and thuong tho, but was murdered by his fellow Regents not long after Tu-Duc’s death. VNDNTB, pp.475-77; and QTBKLI, p.60.

\textsuperscript{182}. Tsuboi says Que’s family had served as minor officials for generations under the chua. However, as they did not follow Nguyen Anh south, and his father served the Tay-son as a district magistrate, they were obviously not members of the elite. L’Empire vietnamienne, p.156.

\textsuperscript{183}. Except for occasional individuals like the 1838 tien si Nguyen Cuu Truong, a descendant of Nguyen Cuu Kieu but apparently from a less powerful branch of the lineage. OANNTE [SG](9), pp.188-89; and QTBKLI, pp.56-58.
the royal clan. And though products of the examination system themselves, they begrudged sharing the spoils of power equally with Northerners. Minh-Mang’s hope for integrating the North via the high offices of the imperial bureaucracy suffered a swingeing blow after 1847. Without an active royal champion, men from Bac-ky disappeared from the ranks of the thuong tho for a generation as factional preference favoured men from central Trung-ky. Finally, we should note that Phuong, Que, and Gian shared an important formative experience: all three had worked closely with Minh-Mang to implement major centralising reforms in the later 1820s and early 1830s. Phuong had joined, and later headed, the infant Noi Cac secretariat until receiving his first military command in 1835, while Que and Gian had been among the earliest Co Mat dignitaries. In every way that mattered, these men and their followers were products of the Minh-Mang era.

The new dominant clique owed their offices to ability, not birth, and their success to mastery of the administrative apparatus they had helped Minh-Mang set up. Their power base lay in the bureaucracy, and further selected sinicisation of government clearly promoted their interests. In

154. In particular, Que’s oldest son married a princess, while Phuong’s second son married Tu-Duc’s own younger sister. Bao Bang Vy, Nguyen Tri Phuong, p.249.

155. Phuong had no title, but Que had been the first cu nhan from Quang-ngai, in 1819 [VNDNTB, p.508], while Gian and Thanh were tien si.

156. At least, I have found none between Doan Uan in 1845 and the brief appointment of tien si and royal favourite Nguyen Van Phu (or Tu Gian) in 1875. VNDNTB, pp.295-97; and QTBDKL, pp.85-88. For elaboration, see Chapter Two below.
1848, that is exactly what happened. That year saw Minh-Mang’s 1827 special mandarinal entry scheme for *ton sinh* and *am sinh* through the National College scrapped. Henceforth, sons of the elite who sought mandarinal entry by this means had to be over thirty and able to pass a tough examination before gaining a low level appointment. And if their literary talents proved inadequate in practice, they were to be sacked. Am *sinh* still enjoyed all the advantages of more books, better teachers, and a government stipend at the Quoc Tu Giam; but the principle had now been established that they had to prove real scholastic achievement before beginning an official career.

In 1848 this move may well have shored up Truong Bang Que’s bureaucratic power base. But as a corollary, it necessarily raised the numbers and heightened the influence of classically-trained scholars in the mandarinate. Twenty years later, it brought an unexpected sequel. Que had set a precedent which other scholar-bureaucrats used in 1865, the year of his death, to flex their own political muscle and win a real degree of control over the source of mandarinal recruitment. This took the kingdom a giant stride towards a Confucian state. Since 1844, all sons of civil officials from the first to fourth grades in Hue, and one son of a fifth grade mandarin, had been classified as *am thu* and eligible for ‘shade’ or inherited entry to the mandarinate. In 1865 their rights shrivelled. Only one son per civil official from the third grade up, or military mandarin from

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the second grade and higher, could henceforth become *am thu*
with the right of direct entry. All other sons enjoyed *am sinh* benefits, but had to take their chances in the normal examination system.\(^{158}\) Nothing signifies more the way the power of orthodox scholar-officials had grown in the bureaucracy since 1847 than this unprecedented reform which placed their ideological goals ahead of the family interests of the most senior officials.

Tu-Buc approved this change, and a second reform of the same year which equally underlines the growing institutional preponderance of the mid-century bureaucracy. This other reform operated to protect the majority of mandarins from the random, intrusive power of the king and of their own superiors, as well as from the advantages previously enjoyed by their more talented colleagues. Nguyen kings had consciously exercised the royal prerogative to reward and punish as one of their main levers of bureaucratic control. And although direct evidence is scanty, biographies hint that superior mandarins and promising lower officials also developed links of friendship or patronage. In 1865, however, bureaucratic reformers effectively depoliticized mandarinal ranks below the fourth grade by promulgating a statute that fixed standard probation and promotion periods for regional graduates up to the fifth grade. No matter how brilliant a new *cu nhan*, or how strongly recommended by a superior, none could even aspire to a district magistrature in less than four or five years. Any mediocrity who stuck

to his post and avoided serious error could expect to reach the same level automatically after twelve.\textsuperscript{159}

Taken together, these two statutes represented a major institutional victory in the cause of bureaucratic self-regulation. They minimised the effect on the organisation of disruptive actions from outside or heterodox elements from within by walling them behind a barrier of uniform, impersonal rules and strictly applied written regulations. The sinicising goal consensus and organisational priorities of the classically-trained scholar-officials within the mandarinate had finally triumphed over the throne’s need for flexibility and diversity, a trend whose roots Woodside had already uncovered in the 1840s.\textsuperscript{140} If allowed to flourish unchecked, it guaranteed that in time only men socialised into the organisational culture of the mandarinate after long years of apprenticeship would ever become eligible for promotion to the highest posts in the land — and, of course, to other politically sensitive positions like those in the Noi Cac.\textsuperscript{161} The result, whether intended or

\textsuperscript{159}. Muriel Texier, ‘Le mandarinat au Viet-nam au XIX\textsuperscript{e} siècle’, BSEI (ns), XXXVII, 3 (1962), pp.359-60. A different statute applied to tien si, as the exceptional career of Tran Bich San showed. Tien si in 1865, he leapt from district magistrate (5-2) to provincial judicial commissioner (4-1) in two years and, after three years mourning for his father, became tuan phu (2-2) of Ha-noi province in 1874. VNDNTB, pp. 444-45.

\textsuperscript{140}. For examples, see Model, pp.90-1.

\textsuperscript{161}. Tsuboi thought mandarinal power vis-à-vis the king ‘fragile and unstable’ because their ‘authoritarian organisation’ and mutual surveillance ‘reinforced the absolute position of the sovereign’. While correct at the individual level, it ignores the comparative increase in institutional power of the mandarinate due to the growing complexity and sinicisation of the system. L’Empire vietnamienn, p.157.
not, enormously strengthened the mandarinate as an entity. For the first time in Vietnamese history the possibility existed, in institutional terms, of the throne's being captured by the bureaucracy as happened in China. (For what it is worth, this is how French observers in the 1880s understood the relationship.**\(^{193}\))

It might be argued from the Chinese example that the 1865 reforms merely represented the normal point of transition from a time of personnel shortages and institutional irregularities early in a new dynasty, as the examinations and mandarinate were being set up, to their routine later operation.**\(^{193}\) This is may well be true for China. In Vietnam, however, the mid-nineteenth century development was unique. The bureaucracy had never previously been able to win unchallenged institutional preponderance because competition within the political system, with the military in particular, had always denied it. Although shallow rooted in economic and social terms, from the late 1860s the predominance of classically-trained scholar-bureaucrats in the state was nonetheless real, however ultimately transitory, as their contemporary victory over the military confirms.

**\(^{192}\) Thus Dutreuil de Rhins in 1876 wrote that Tu-Duc only 'appeared to be king but in reality was as powerless as a slave', an opinion echoed by the Legation doctor, Auvray, in 1880. Vicomte de Bizemont in an 1884 book also described the king as 'a fetish in the hands of his ministers'. The first is quoted in Chu Thien, 'May nhan xet nho ve nhung cuoc nong dan khoi nghia trieu Nguyen', *NCLS*, 19 (1960), p.14. The second is from 'Dix-huit mois à Hue. Souvenirs et impressions', *BAVH*, XX, 3-4 (1933), p.255. The third is cited in Nguyen Van Phong, *La Société vietnamienne de 1882 a 1902, d'après les écrits des auteurs français* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1971), p.113.

**\(^{193}\) As Woodside does in regard to the first example. *Model*, pp.180-81.
In the perspective of the previous three centuries, perhaps the clearest measure of bureaucratic success in the first half of the Tu-Buc reign was the disappearance of military mandarins from provincial governorships. As noted earlier, Minh-Mang and Thieu-Tri had deliberately presided over a competitive system in which civil and military mandarins vied for these posts on merit. But the last example of this practice recorded in the Dai-Nam Nhat Thong Chi appeared in 1854, when Nguyen Trong Thao became tuan phu of Hung-yen for a few years. And this may well have been a special case, for Thao had been Colonel of the Palace Guard and then Military Governor of Hue during the early insecure years of Tu-Buc’s reign and may have won the king’s personal favour. Certainly the soldier whose troops crushed the 1866 attempted coup in Hue, Le Si, never received promotion outside the military stream as part of his lavish rewards, despite being a graduate of Minh-Mang’s military school and the son of a Gia-Long officer. Yet while soldiers lost access to civil positions, high military commands stayed open to civilians. Some of the main commanders of the later

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164. *BNNTC [SG](15),* p.140-41.

165. He was promoted to general (*thong che*), ennobled as the Kien-dung *nam*, and awarded a gold plaque and *kim tien* medallion. In 1883, Si reached marshal (1-1) and died defending Thuan-an in 1884. *BNNTC [SG](9),* p.189.

166. The great exception was Ton That Thuyet. A military mandarin without academic title, son of a general, he became *thuong tho* of War in 1881 and a regent late in Tu-Buc’s reign. He is the only such example I have found. Tsuboi, L’Empire vietnamienne, pp.237-39; or *VNDNTR*, pp.422-23.
Tu-Be era, men like Hoang Ke Viem\textsuperscript{167} and Vo Trong Binh\textsuperscript{168} were graduates who had uncovered hidden martial talents in the course of their civil duties. Although these scholar-generals valued military success as a source of royal rewards, few bothered with the details of military affairs. They showed little interest in professionalising the army.\textsuperscript{169} They allowed an endemic misuse of troops for private purposes. They let modern weaponry fall into disrepair.\textsuperscript{170} As a result, an army already suffering from government neglect was run down even further under their stewardship.

All this is a far cry from a Minh-Mang’s enthusiasm for western technology, or a Thieu-Tri’s insistence that his highest court officials learn to use muskets.\textsuperscript{171} By the 1860s, however, the political flexibility that had bred these attitudes was, like the attitudes themselves, largely a thing of the past. In its place, in Hue in particular, we find the burgeoning institutional forms and attitudes of a

\textsuperscript{167} For a brief biography, see Tsuboi, L’Empire vietnamienne, pp.239-41; or \textit{VNDNTB}, pp.91-93.

\textsuperscript{168} From Thua-thien, Binh passed \textit{tu tai} under Gia-Long. He rose to become \textit{hiep bien dai hoc si} (1-2) and assistant commander of Bac-ky. In 1883, he lost 3 provinces there to the French. \textit{BNNTC} [HN](I), pp. 185-86.

\textsuperscript{169} If anything, the few financially-driven army reforms from the late 1870s tended to turn it into a local militia. Tsuboi, L’Empire vietnamienne, pp.254-56.


\textsuperscript{171} \textit{Model}, pp.282-83.
Confucian state. It was this polity that French officials from the 1860s on observed and experienced, much to their own frustration. Two years negotiating the Treaty of 1862 that ceded three Nam-ky provinces to France led Gabriel Aubaret, for instance, to describe Vietnam in the classic terms of the little China fallacy: 172

In this country enslaved by custom and much more subjugated to the rites than China because of the absolute isolation in which it has remained until the present day ... we have been obliged to consider it an immense step that we were admitted into the sacred precinct formed by the king's palace. Your Excellency knows that king Tu Duc condescends to be seen while at such a distance and in such shadow that he does not cease to be in the eyes of his suspicious Court the sort of mysterious divinity from which above all he draws his strength.

Several key elements of the colonial perception of pre-colonial Vietnam appear here in embryo, in particular the vision of Vietnam as a land out of time, beyond the dynamics of history, and ruled by a monarch who, like the Pharaohs of old, was a god to his people. In this changeless, immobilised kingdom, all eyes focused on the Chinese Confucian past, while the most scrupulous obedience to the tyranny of "the rites" ruled the lives of everyone from the sacred emperor, hidden like an idol in the depths of his palace, to the faceless peasant in the field.

Nineteenth century European attitudes towards China predisposed the French to these views, as we will see in Chapter Five. But contemporary Bai-Nam provided a perfect peg upon which to project them. Every contact with Hue and its mandarins, immured in the Chinese architecture of pow-

er, engaged in Chinese rituals, steeped in Chinese learning, even cultivating Chinese leisure pursuits, confirmed and reconfirmed the little China fallacy until it became a truism, a cliche that explained anything and everything about the maddening country. Yet, as we have just seen, the mid-century kingdom represented no unchanging example of a millenial tradition of government. Its form and policies had been produced by recent events, shaped by chance and by the choices of men from the possibilities available within their history and culture. It would be part of Vietnam’s tragedy that this Confucianised state apparatus, the most unsuited and least flexible of all political forms available to it, should be the very one evolving on the eve of colonialism.

Just as the French at the time, and later, misconstrued what mid-century Dai-Nam actually meant in terms of Vietnamese history, so they also misunderstood much about the political elite who ran it. This elite, and its passage to colonialism, form the subject of the next chapter.
CHAPTER THREE
THE NINETEENTH CENTURY POLITICAL ELITE

Current Models of the Pre-Colonial Elite

No systematic western research has been carried out into the political elite of nineteenth century Vietnam. Most modern historians have tended either to follow their colonial predecessors,¹ or to make general assumptions about the nature of the elite based on anecdotal evidence. As the interpretation advanced in this chapter differs significantly from existing views of the Bai-Nam elite, we shall begin by summarising the current models.

Scholars who basically accept the French colonial model, like Truong Buu Lam, generally see the mandarinate and the political elite as one and the same.² They portray it as a non-hereditary group normally recruited by public examination from provincial literati circles (van than). The van than did not monopolise its recruitment, however. The literate son of the lowliest peasant, once armed with a high examination title, could equally become a mandarin and as-


pire to (and attain) the highest honours and positions in
the land. Such success hardly came easily, but the mandarinate attracted all ambitious eyes since it represented 'the sole real engine for social advancement' at the time.³ 'No other organised elite existed to challenge this literate and administrative body because in no other sphere of activity could one gain social prominence'.⁴ Fortunately, in these circumstances, the mandarinate remained an open elite. A history of mandarinal service in one's family, Dr Lam conceded, might create 'influential connections [that] could be useful on several counts',⁵ like providing access to better education or special entry provisions. But although such advantages meant some families 'remained mandarinal through several generations',⁶ their numbers were few as 'it was definitely not easy to transmit status in traditional Vietnam'.⁷ The reforms of the Minh-Mang reign underlined his point: quoting a survey of biographies in the Dai-Nam Nhat Thong Chi and Quoc Trieu Bang Khoa Luc Dr Lam claimed that, after these reforms, only 'approximately 20% of [later] degree-holders issued from mandarinal families'.⁸

In Vietnam and the Chinese Model, Alexander Woodside sketched quite a different picture from that of Dr Lam. Even

³. Tsuboi, L'Empire vietnamienne, p.179.
⁶. Ibid, p.19
⁷. Ibid, p.18.
⁸. Ibid, p.24. But this misunderstands the sources cited, as fn.63 below discusses.
so, he paid surprisingly little detailed attention to the nineteenth century political elite, despite the central role its members played in the institutional reforms at the heart of his study. Few recognisable mandarinal figures emerge from his pages; and when they do it seems as much - or more - for their literary as their political significance. We meet the Nghe-an mandarin, Nguyen Cong Tru, for instance, with a frequency hardly justified by his likely access to continuing power. Although a protege of Minh-Mang (as we saw previously) and therefore not without influence during that reign, Tru nevertheless proved unable to translate royal patronage into a permanent position at the top of the administrative ladder. Twice promoted 2-1, he quickly fell from grace both times, so that his career essentially passed at 2-2 or well below. The absence of status markers betrays his failure to break into inner court circles; never ennobled, Tru also failed to win any of the politically-sensitive honorifics that crowned mandarinal success.

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10. Model, pp.29, 35, 61, 136, 175-76, 217, 235 and 277. Properly speaking, Tru was from Nghe-an as Ha-tinh was not created until he was over forty.

11. VNDNTB, pp.166-68. In 1835 he reached thuong tho rank briefly, as tong doc of Hai-An. In 1840 he became a head Censor, but involvement in a military defeat in Cambodia in 1841 saw his demotion.

12. The 'four pillars' at the dien level of dai hoc si, the three 'imperial tutors' (thieu su, thieu pho and thieu bao) all ranked 1-1; and their deputies, three tutors and four hiep bien dai hoc si, ranked 1-2.
Perhaps equally significant, he also received no posthumous promotion or awards, despite his fine literary reputation.

This modest career record pales in comparison with those of men of genuine power and influence, like the two great court rivals of the late Minh-Mang and Thieu-Tri eras, Truong Bang Que and Nguyen Bang Tuan. These natives of central Trung-ky each collected prestigious titles from the first mandarinal grade and positions at the top of the second during the course of their careers, as well as accumulating further distinctions after death. In this contest, Que took the prize: in 1847 Tu-Buc awarded him the supreme mandarinal title of Can-chanh-dien (1-1) as well as the otherwise royal title of Quan-cong. This latter honour elevated him to the august company of Le Van Duyet and a mere three other officials who, between 1802 and 1884, achieved this singular reward. Furthermore, both men left sons who also scaled the mandarinal heights. Nguyen Bang Giai became hiep bien dai hoc si (1-2) while still a tong doc, but died in office comparatively young in the early 1850s. Posthumously promoted, his tablet was venerated in the national

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13. Quang-ngai born head of the Board of War and Quang-binh born President of the Board of Rites respectively. Tsuboi, L'Empire vietnamienne, pp. 134-35. For short biographies, see VNDNTB, pp.508-09 and pp.236-37.

14. Normally reserved under the dynasty for sons of emperors, only eight officials won the title in the whole nineteenth century, three of them under the Protectorate. A. Laborde, 'Les Titres et grades héréditaires à la cour d'Annam', BAVH, VII, 4 (1920), p.392. It was more common in the chua era. For example, eleven members of the Quang-binh Nguyen Cuu political lineage won the title from the time of its founder, Nguyen Cuu Kieu, to the Restoration. BNNTC [SG](9), p.178 and [SG](15), pp.128-29.
Hien-luong pagoda opened in Hue in 1858. Two of Que's five mandarinal sons also excelled, most notably Truong Quang Ban, who became President of the Board of War and a Co Mat Minister from 1889 to 1901. Promoted hiep bien dai hoc si in 1891, Ban won posthumous recognition as Bong-cac dien dai hoc si in 1914. In addition, at least two of Que's children married into the imperial clan.

When we see several of these elements - titles from the first mandarinal grade, positions at the top of the second, ennoblement, posthumous promotion, veneration in pagodas devoted to the cult of outstanding officials, marriage into the imperial clan, and administrative power and political influence extending over at least two generations - gracing the same career, it invariably indicates a man of power and substance at the highest court level. Yet neither Que nor Tuan, who exhibited all these hallmarks of nineteenth century political importance, appear in the pages of Vietnam and the Chinese Model. Their absence may have reflected Woodside's comparative focus and his essentially cultural

15. BNNTC [SG](9), p.186. The family's hopes for political recovery died with Giai's tien si son, Hanh, killed by Northern rebels in 1862. BNNTC [SG](9), p.189.


17. His oldest son, Tru, became pho ma (husband of a princess) [VNDNTB, p.509] and a daughter was the principal wife of prince Tung-thien. [H. Le Breton, 'La Vie de S.E. Hong Khang (L'un des derniers lettres d'Annam)', BAVH, XX, 3 (1933), p.172] Tsuboi cites two nineteenth century French sources that say another daughter married Tu-Buc but I have found no corroboration of it. Tsuboi, L'Empire vietnamienne, pp.133-34.
and institutional concerns. But it also suggests a relative low priority on the politics and political history of the period, something borne out by the way the author's comments on the politics of the period emerge as asides scattered throughout the book. When it comes to the political elite, most comments are located in a chapter on the examination system, itself indicative of Woodside's general views on the subject. We outline them below.

Broadly speaking, Woodside identified an 'educated oligarchy' within which a 'civil bureaucratic elite' or 'bureaucratic ruling class' existed. A gulf of 'profound differential acculturation' separated these groups from the population at large, and placed a major cultural barrier in the path of peasants' sons aspiring to mandarinal office. Already economically handicapped, few could ever hope to ride the rising levels of 'professional acculturation [and] of social and cultural change' demanded by the increasingly sinicised examinations to emerge finally, after years of effort, as new-made officials. Nor did the dynasty expect to harvest many mandarins from the people. It preferred instead to cultivate families with 'traditions of service to the bureaucracy' and high examination passes. To encourage and reward their efforts, the court presented status conscious

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18. *Model*, p.75
elite families with three or more generations of doctoral graduates a prized silken banner to flaunt their fame above the family threshold. The paucity of books and the lack of public libraries outside Hue and Ha-noi also conspired against peasants' sons compared to the offspring of these "great scholar families" (ho dai khoa) and others in the educated elite who transmitted a precious horde of accumulated books and knowledge to their descendants. As a result, talent tended to cluster in a select number of families whose traditions of success in the examinations were firmly established.24

The long examination process inexorably refined a mandarinal elite with 'semi-alien or alien trappings and attributes'.25

The Vietnamese bureaucrat looked Chinese; the Vietnamese peasant looked Southeast Asian. The bureaucrat had to write Chinese, wear Chinese-style gowns, live in a Chinese-style house, ride in a Chinese-style sedan chair, and even follow Chinese-style idiosyncrasies of conspicuous consumption, like keeping a goldfish pond in his Southeast Asian garden.

But not every part of the kingdom contributed their sons equally to this highly sinicised elite. The eight provinces

23. In his seminal essay, 'The Traditional Village in Bac Bo: Its Organisational Structure and Problems' [VS, No 61 (1980), p.43], Nguyen Tu Chi defined them as families containing members with high academic honours over several successive generations. But only about 100 families produced multiple graduates that included metropolitan laureates between 1822 and 1884, of whom only nine counted three generations or more. This is fewer than 3% of all metropolitan graduates. [My calculations from information in Annex 2, Table 6B]


25. Ibid, p.199 for both quotes.
south of Phu-yen 'came within the compass of the examination system only barely'.\textsuperscript{24} Between 1822 and 1862, they managed only four metropolitan graduates from a total of 258.\textsuperscript{27} Cultural and ethnic diversity, comparatively late settlement by Vietnamese, and the greater interest among comfortable families in owning land ahead of academic titles, all helped account for the shallow Confucian penetration here. Equally important was the fact that for Southerners 'the examination system was not the sole road to power'\textsuperscript{28}—army service continued to open doors to high office, while the sons of Gia-Long's many officials and military officers recruited from this region also inherited the right of direct mandarinal entry. At the northern geographical extreme, ethnic diversity and limited Vietnamese numbers also effectively disbarred the mountainous provinces of Tuyen-quang, Cao-bang, and Lang-son from full participation. Indeed, educational standards here were so low that in 1844 the National College in Hue had to give tribute students from these provinces special lenient tests to avoid general failure.\textsuperscript{29} Between 1822

\textsuperscript{24} Ibid, p.218.

\textsuperscript{27} My calculations from \textit{OTOKL}. [Annex Two, Table 1] All calculations and tables from this source are my own and henceforth will not be separately documented.

\textsuperscript{28} Model, p.219 offers two 1830s examples, though elsewhere the period of strong military influence in government is attributed to Gia-Long [for example, pp.171 or 222].

\textsuperscript{29} Ibid, p.183. Tribute students (\textit{cong sinh}) were nominated annually by districts and prefectures. They enjoyed major advantages in the examinations, thanks to the better facilities in Hue and to a government stipend that let them study full time.
and 1919, no scholar from these three provinces ever passed *tien si* or *pho bang*.

But, in Woodside’s view, prejudice against men from the North imported far worse distortions into the operation of the examination system. He found evidence of this discrimination in two main areas. First, he pointed to the inequitable distribution of examination sites. Until 1834 six existed: at Gia-dinh for Khanh-hoa and points south; at Hue for the provinces between Phu-yen and Quang-binh; at Vinh for the Nghe-Tinh region; at Thanh-hoa (until 1834) for itself and Ninh-binh; at Nam-dinh for Nam-dinh, Hung-yen, Hai-duong, and Quang-yen; and at Ha-noi for the remaining eight northern provinces. What struck Woodside in this was the anomaly of ‘several convenient sites in underpopulated central Vietnam’ compared to the ‘lack of enough sites in the more densely populated north’. Obvious to contemporaries, this distribution pattern ‘constituted a major source of [Northern] grievances against the dynasty’, Woodside added.

Second, a growing regional imbalance in graduate numbers, between Ha-noi and Hue especially, exacerbated the disparities. Under Gia-Long in 1813 and 1819, Ha-noi had outstripped Hue (39 to 26 in total). But by the 1840s twice as many *cu nhan* graduated in the capital as Ha-noi

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30. Four were mountainous border provinces and hardly produced any candidates.


32. *Ibid*, p.222. This must include *tu tai*, as a table on p.220 shows 16 *cu nhan* from Ha-noi and 9 from Hue in 1813.
(213 compared to 107).\textsuperscript{33} The reversal reflected deliberate policy. Scholarship should adorn the capital: there could be only one National College (\textit{Quoc Tu Giam}), and it was in Hue. As a corollary, however, scholarly Northern families who refused to migrate to Hue\textsuperscript{34} could not avoid lessening their sons' educational opportunities, he maintained. Simmering Northern resentment at the situation finally boiled over in public in 1862. No doubt swept away by the sense of betrayal that shocked the assembled doctoral candidates at the news that the court had ceded three Southern provinces to the French, one daring Bac-ky scholar exploited the "current events" question to accuse the court point-blank of favouring scholars and officials from the Centre at the expense of the North.\textsuperscript{35} Such political dynamite could not be ignored, and Tu-Buc hastened to the hapless defence of his government's record. It was a futile gesture for, as we will soon see, the Northern scholar's charge was irrefutable, although not for the reasons Woodside adduced.\textsuperscript{36}

Anti-Northern discrimination certainly existed in the nineteenth century kingdom. But, by and large, it did not skew the regional examination system in the way Woodside

\textsuperscript{33}. \textit{Ibid}, p.222.

\textsuperscript{34}. As no such pattern of migration shows up in \textit{OTBKL}, it cannot have been significant. The source does note some residential changes, but none from Ha-noi to Hue.

\textsuperscript{35}. \textit{Model}, p.214.

\textsuperscript{36}. The protest itself may not have failed entirely. As Table 1 in Annex Two shows, in 1862 doctoral laureates from the North outnumbered those from the Centre for only the third time since 1835. It also held for two examinations in a row, something not seen since the early 1830s.
described, even if contemporary Northern opinion liked to believe it did. Woodside's evidence in this regard crumbles under closer examination. To begin with, rather than disadvantaging the North, the location of examination sites in the first decades of Nguyen rule overwhelmingly favoured former Bang-ngoai over former Bang-trong (four to two), as we saw in the previous chapter. Even after Minh-Mang carved Ninh-binh from northern Thanh-hoa in 1820 (and brought the rest of Thanh-Nghe under Hue's administrative wing), Ninh-binh scholars continued to attend the Thanh-hoa site until its abolition in 1834. It was certainly not before then that Thanh-Nghe-Tinh's centuries-old identification with the North began to weaken. Until the mid-1830s, then, even the most astringent Northern critic could not in honesty point to 'several convenient sites in central Vietnam' when manifestly North and Centre housed two sites apiece, with one shared between them.

Further, when regional graduate quotas favoured Hue over Ha-noi in the later 1840s, the Centre was hardly the thinly populated area Woodside described. Court tax records in 1847 showed 251,388 registered (adult male) inhabitants in the region feeding the Hue site (Quang-binh to Phu-yen) compared to 357,956 in the graduate producing provinces of Bac-ky (that is, Ninh-binh, Ha-noi, Hai-duong, Son-tay, Bac-ninh, Nam-dinh and Hung-yen). In addition, the Hue site

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37. Model, p. 194.

38. Or a 40/60 ratio. These were the only Bac-ky provinces to produce metropolitan graduates in 100 years. There can be no dispute about the Vinh site either, since the registers counted 165,901 taxpayers in Nghe-Tinh in 1847. Figures from
had to cater for scores of candidates from outside its feeder area. The well-prepared scholars at the National College attended here, as could potentially hundreds of Southerners who enjoyed an inherited access to its facilities.\textsuperscript{39} Given this, it seems unduly harsh for a later historian to condemn as flagrant bias the small premium the capital enjoyed in cu nhan graduate numbers by the late 1840s.\textsuperscript{40}

Setting this matter aside for the moment, there remains another problem with Woodside's discussion of anti-Northern discrimination: he never addresses its political consequences. Did this discrimination mean, for example, there were fewer Northerners in the Nguyen mandarinate, or at least in positions of power? And if so, how did that influence the political history of the pre-colonial kingdom, or the process of sinicisation of government in the first half of the nineteenth century? Questions like these bear directly on our understanding of the Nguyen kingdom, and on some of the underlying assumptions in Vietnam and the Chinese Model, yet they receive scant attention there. In a later quick sketch of the mandarinal elite, however, Woodside does suggest that the anti-Northern bias he had identified earlier never mattered much politically. He wrote: 'Vietnamese officials of

\begin{quote}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{39} Sons of officials who had helped Gia-Long found the dynasty could opt for any site but most chose Hue. [Model, p. 223] As few Northerners qualified, I have assumed a Southern provenance. As many such officials lived into the Minh-Mang reign, there must have been a steady supply of eligible sons until around the mid-century.

\textsuperscript{40} The Hue total roughly equalled that of Ha-noi and Nam-dinh combined. \textit{Ibid}, p.222.
the early 1800s came on the whole either from long-established scholar families, mostly in the north ... or from loyal officers in Gia-long's army and navy who had come mostly from the centre and from the south'. Northerners won entry thanks to 'Gia-long's revival of the civil service examination system in 1807 [which] permitted many [Northern] families to ... maintain a continuity of influence and power'.

We will return to this description of the nineteenth century political elite in the next section. For the moment, let us sum up the existing models. For the colonial model and its modern interpreters, the central characteristics of the nineteenth century Vietnamese political elite were its openness (both in terms of initial recruitment and later advancement) and its relatively large-scale turnover of constituent families within a couple of generations. In Woods-side's view, almost the opposite pertained. In normal times, the mandarinal elite stood on a very narrow cultural base. Generations of examination competition had bred certain families with carefully nurtured traditions of royal service and repeated examination success. The vast cultural gulf between them and the rest of the population kept social mobility at a crawl in either direction, and helped retain elite status among such families for many generations. And although the new men of the Nguyen dynasty showed anti-Northern bias in the first half of the nineteenth century, the

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examination system nevertheless worked to ensure that many old scholarly Northern families continued to exert power and influence within the mandarinal political elite.

Both models are untested, and base their claims more on assumptions and anecdotal evidence than on quantified data. Yet questions about the degree of openness of the Nguyen political elite, or the relative influence of Northern families within it, are far better addressed by statistical methods. Fortunately source materials exist that lend themselves to quantification, and an analysis based on them follows in the next section. But before turning to it, we should outline the working model of the mandarinal political elite that it employs.

Although a vast gap between ‘those who are honourable and those who are despised’\(^\text{42}\) separated officials from the common people, once inside the elite of office not all mandarins enjoyed political influence. In this respect, the organisation sub-divided into three groups. The great majority, toiling in positions graded five and below and usually posted outside Hue, played almost no political role within the elite. This attribute belonged to their superiors in the court-based political elite, and in particular to a small number of men at the summit of the military and administrative hierarchies who formed an effective power elite. The effective cut-off point for membership of the political elite appears to have been the upper level of the fourth

grade, as the material analysed and the status of the posts classified at 4-1 suggest.\textsuperscript{43} Almost all court ranked, they included, among others, two of the four mandarinal positions held by royal family members,\textsuperscript{44} as well as certain significant (if secondary) offices like the Director of the National College, the deputy heads of the Han Lam Academy, provincial judicial commissioners (\textit{an sat}), and various central officers charged with the direction of important court functions like ceremonial (\textit{hong lo tu khanh}). Though not necessarily influential, men in such positions were surely seen as political actors, that is, as men whose opinions might be heard at court. In addition, as noted previously, men at this level and higher escaped the 1865 regulations that standardised bureaucratic promotion procedures. That men in the fourth grade depended on the hazards of politics and the chance of royal favour for promotion implies they appeared to their contemporaries as similar to superior officials.

The personal influence and degree of power enjoyed by men in the political elite depended on their personal con-

\textsuperscript{43} This also differs from earlier accounts, which seem to rely on Luro. In \textit{Le Pays d'Annam} (Paris: Leroux, 1897, 2nd ed, p.99), Luro proposed a tri-partite schema in which the first three mandarinal grades formed the political elite, as the title, \textit{ong lon} ('your eminence'), indicated. Men in the 4th to 7th grades comprised an elite of office, as shown by their title \textit{ong quan} ('respected official'). The structure may have worked for the Gia-long era, when provincial Protectors ranked in the third grade; but it seems inadequate after the Minh-Mang reforms. Schreiner [\textit{Institutions}, pp. 272-79], however, advanced the same model, as did Smith [\textit{Politics and Society'}, pp.162-63] who sourced it to an undated University of Sai-gon PhD thesis by Nguyen Si Hai entitled "To-chuc chinh-quyen trong-uong thai Nguyen so, 1802-47" (which I have not seen).

\textsuperscript{44} Two Vice-Presidents of the Royal Family Administration (\textit{ton nhon phu}), whose Presidents were in the first grade.
nections, achievements, talents, and perceived luck. Effective and continuous power, however, lay with members of the upper echelon, close to the throne and often responsible for more than one function at a time. In declining order of political significance, civil members comprised the presidents of the six Boards, men ranked at thuong tho or higher but usually working outside the capital, the dozen provincial tong doc, and probably the two chief censors. Its military members included the marshals of the five armies, the chief admiral, most or all of their six immediate subordinates and maybe a few other senior officers in royal favour at the time. Immediately beneath them came an intermediate group of men, usually ranked 2-2. Not all mattered politically, despite their position and status, since the group naturally divided between men at the upper limit of their careers, and high-flying aspirants jostling for the top jobs. Numbering a few dozen at most, their ranks included Board vice-presidents (tham tri), the Governors of lesser provinces (tuan phu), certain senior court functionaries, and important lesser generals or regimental commanders like the head of the Imperial Guard. Lower graded men who enjoyed the king’s personal favour, and thus the possibility of royal patronage, should also be figured among them.48

48. Such relationships often began through working together in a central organ like the Noi Cac as, for example, with the Bac-ninh tien si, Nguyen Tu Gian who briefly reached thuong tho and the Co Mat in 1875. Tu-Duc’s admiration for Gian’s personality and literary talent made him a royal confidant during his years in the Noi Cac. OTPKL, pp.85-88; and VNDNTB, pp.295-97.
The political elite and the power elite, as defined above, form the main focus of the statistical analysis that follows.

The Nineteenth Century Elite: A Statistical Profile

This section tests the propositions that the political and power elites within the civil mandarinate were fully open to talent, and that many long-descended scholarly Northern families continued to wield power and influence at either or both levels. It proceeds by examining two sets of evidence, before concluding with a new model of the nineteenth century political elite derived from the evidence presented.

The first set of evidence comes from a survey of biographical materials in the *Quoc Trieu Bang Khoa Luc*, the *Bai Nam Nhat Thong Chi*, and secondary sources such as biographical dictionaries and historical journals. These sources have yielded a very reasonable sample of 164 men in the power elite and its 2-2 fringes, spread across most of the nineteenth century. Table One tabulates the data by province, region, and educational qualifications in order to test Woodside’s view that their examination expertise worked to assure many old scholarly Northern families a continuity of influence and power under the Nguyen.

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**Note.** To maintain uniformity between the tables, 'North' in the discussion refers exclusively to Bac-ky (minus Thanh-Nghe-Tinh), although it was 1820 before they were separated. This creates a small distortion for the earlier period which is negligible overall.
**TABLE 1: EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS OF 164 TOP CIVIL OFFICIALS [1-1 TO 2-2] FROM 1802 TO THE EARLY 1890s**

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<th>2-1</th>
<th>2-2</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<td>ts pb cn</td>
<td>ts pb cn</td>
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<td>3 3 -</td>
<td>1 6 2 1 1</td>
<td>19</td>
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<td>2 - - -</td>
<td>10</td>
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<tr>
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<td>- - 2</td>
<td>1 - - -</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
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<td>- - 1</td>
<td>1 - - -</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
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<td>- - 1</td>
<td>- - - -</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>- - -</td>
<td>- - - -</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>2 - 1</td>
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<td>39</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nam-Ngai*</td>
<td>- 1 1 1</td>
<td>2 3 -</td>
<td>2 - 1 1</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Binh-dinh</td>
<td>- - - -</td>
<td>4 - 1</td>
<td>- 1 -</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khanh-hoa</td>
<td>- - - -</td>
<td>1 - -</td>
<td>- - -</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3 4 7 9</td>
<td>13 6 9 23</td>
<td>16 5 5 9</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**ts - tien si**  
**pb - pho bang**  
**cn - cu nhan**  
**less - tu tai/huong tien, am thu, local provincial pass, or no examination title mentioned in biographical data**  

* provincial volumes from *BNNTC* unavailable

First, it is evident from the table that examination success provided the overwhelming means of mandarinal recruitment for the Bac-ky men in the sample: 95% of them had passed *cu nhan* or higher. Overall, while the North contributed a disproportionately low 23% (or 17 from 73) of the

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**Note:** My calculations from *QTBKL*, *BNNTC*, *VNDNTB*, and from *BAVH* and *BSEI*. The Vietnamese sources do not always note examination titles. *BNNTC* mentions *tu tai* degrees, so I have assumed that no title there means no degree; but *QTBKL* ignores *tu tai* for graduates’ relatives. *VNDNTB* is erratic. These variations have led *tu tai*, *am thu*, and unqualified men, plus unknowns, to be classed together.
men at 2-1 or higher, all but one held tien si or pho bang titles. Cross-checking with biographies in GTBK, however, shows the vast majority were new men. Only three came from families with high examination passes who supplied officials to the political elite for two generations or more.\textsuperscript{48} Indeed, the source suggests that genuine "great scholar families", with three or more generations of metropolitan graduates among their members, were very thin on the ground in the nineteenth century. GTBK data revealed a mere nine such families for all Vietnam.\textsuperscript{49} These included only four from Bac-ky delta provinces who boasted ancestors with tien si degrees or high mandarinal positions under the Le. On the face of it, this suggests that the sons of long-descended "great scholar" Northern families either failed to attend, or failed to pass, the metropolitan examinations under the Nguyen. Whatever the case, however, four such families hardly qualifies as continuity of power and influence.\textsuperscript{50} Indeed, Table One queries the extent to which Northerners, new men or not, actually enjoyed real political power in the nineteenth century. On a per capita basis, men from

\textsuperscript{48} They were: Bui An Nien, whose tien si father reached tuan phu [GTBK, pp.157, and 158-59]; and Nguyen Tu Gian, whose grandfather had been a Gia-Long tri huyen and whose son reached 4-1 [GTBK, pp.85-88, and 179]. Though not 2-1, Hoang Te Mi's family, where both father and son reached 2-2, has also been counted here. [GTBK, pp.30, and 155]

\textsuperscript{49} See Annex Two, Table 6B.

\textsuperscript{50} These are recognised scholarly families only, that is, with at least one tien si within the previous four or five generations (which is as far back as Cao Xuan Duc went). Average literati families, with several generations of regional passes and middling officials in their ranks, are not counted. In any case, it was not to them that Woodside referred.
Bac-ky and Trung-ky should have shared high positions and titles more or less equally, especially if Woodside's model was correct. Early imbalances should have evened out over ninety years. Instead, the table demonstrates that almost three times as many in the sample came from Trung-ky provinces as from Bac-ky (or 66% compared to 23%). If we narrow the focus to holders of the prestigious mandarinal titles that indicated membership of the power elite, we find more than ten times the number from Trung-ky as from Bac-ky (23 to 2). Even then, both the Bac-ky mandarins in the sample who won these accolades did so under the French Protectorate.\textsuperscript{31} In all, over two-thirds of the Trung-ky sample attained positions in the power elite proper (\textit{thuong tho} or \textit{tong doc}), while over half the Bac-ky sample lingered on its fringes at 2-2.

Having said this, however, we must acknowledge a degree of hidden anti-Northern bias in Table One. The tiny number of Northerners recorded there partly reflects an inherent distortion in one of its main sources, the Gazetteers of the \textit{Dai-Nam Nhat Thong Chi}. It requires some explanation.

In each \textit{DNNTC} volume there appears a section, entitled \textit{Nhan Vat}, devoted to commemorating notable provincial sons under various dynasties. Highly selective and variable in content, the sections in no way compare to a modern 'Who's Who'. For most periods, the aims of the court compilers echoed those of Plutarch: to enshrine for posterity the

\textsuperscript{31} Bui An Nien, \textit{thuong tho} and \textit{hiep bien dai hoc si} in the 1890s \cite{QTBKL, pp.158-59}; and Nguyen Trong Hop (or Hiep), \textit{Van-minh-dien dai hoc si, thuong tho}, Co Mat minister and Regent during the Thanh-Thai minority \cite{QTBKL, pp. 151-55}
careers of outstanding individuals (and lineages) in the political elite; and to praise the virtues of exemplary figures whose lives embodied particular, usually Confucian, virtues.\footnote{Luu Van Binh (1802-1862) provides a typical example of many in the second category. A Quang-binh pho bang of 1853, his personal integrity and benevolence won universal admiration. His entry recounts how, when the people of his second district magistrature heard of Binh’s impending promotion to a more prestigious position in Hue, they banded together and, with tears and lamentations, succeeded in detaining the mandarinal paragon a further six years before finally relinquishing him to a long-awaited promotion in the capital.\footnote{When it came to entries for the Nguyen period, however, the court compilers apparently added a third criterion, the need to acknowledge and repay the dynasty’s debt of gratitude to men who had sacrificed their lives in its cause. Such reparation formed both a sacred duty and a political necessity. It also helped to insure against future disasters by mollifying the spirits of the dead. Despite the Confucian...}}

\footnote{Though two were noted in Buddhist terms: Nguyen Van Nhi, a Gia-Long/Minh-Mang era tong doc from Quang-binh who was revered as ‘a living Buddha’ (Phat song) [\textsc{Bnntc} [SG] (9), p. 182]; and Nguyen Huy Dy, a Thanh-hoa tong doc of 1881 who later retired to Bac-ninh as a Buddhist recluse in the early colonial period. [\textsc{Bnntc} [SG](15), p.145] Nguyen Van Tuyen of Quang-binh even became as a supernatural genie with healing powers after his death. Originally descended from a high Le official, Tuyen was a Gia-Long provincial Protector whose son was a provincial military commander (lanh binh) 3-1. [\textsc{Bnntc} [SG](9), p.181]}

\footnote{He died soon after. His son and grandson, both cu nhan, later became mandarins. The son reached 4-1 at court, and the grandson became a district magistrate in the 1890s. [\textsc{Bnntc} [SG](9), p.190].}
Chinese trappings of empire, the king and court knew along with every other Vietnamese how malevolent the spirits of the unsatisfied dead could be, especially those who had died violently. The court took care to honour the least of those faithful officials, not only the most celebrated. Although the emperor claimed jurisdiction over the spirit realm, only a fool trifled unnecessarily with the revenge of the dead. Even the examinations opened with a ritual exhortation:

(Souls) having to revenge a grievance come in first! (Souls) having to show their gratitude come in after! Candidate scholars come in last! (Bao oan gia tien nhap! Bao an gia thu nhap! Si tu gia thu thu nhap!)

From Gia-Long on, Nguyen dynasts lavished resources on discharging their duties to the dead. Along with building commemorative temples and pagodas for royal clan members who had died prematurely, and for the parents of successive Queen-Mothers, the kings also raised numerous shrines to

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**45.** Several also received further posthumous promotions under Minh-Mang and later kings.

**46.** Like other dynastic founders, one of Gia-Long's first acts in 1802 was to build a temple in Hue in which village tutelary deities from the whole country were gathered for secondary worship (and imperial control). BNNTC [HN](1), p.63.

**47.** Quoted in Nguyen Ngoc Huy, 'Fate', pp.279-80.

**48.** Including one for prince Canh and two to venerate chua era princes and princesses. BNNTC [HN](1), pp.66-67 lists them.
honour worthy past officials. As one among several, for example, Gia-Long constructed a pagoda to venerate the spirits of meritorious Restoration era officials (*Mieu Trung hung Cong than*) that housed the tablets of 2,860 men. (A few more were added later, in 1823 and 1851.) In 1820, Minh-Mang took up the sacred trust and began work on a pair of matching pagodas. The first honoured 114 distinguished officials, chief among them three members of important retainer families (the Nguyen Huu of Thanh-hoa and Thua-thien, the Nguyen Cuu of Quang-binh, and the Nguyen Khoa of Thua-thien). The second, somewhat less discriminating, saluted the spirits of all soldiers and sailors who had died in the line of duty.

In 1858, Tu-Buc inaugurated a last great in-gathering of souls when over five hundred received ritual welcome in two new Hue pagodas. The pagoda of Goodness (*Hien-luong*) venerated Pham Bang Hung and Trinh Hoai Buc, two famous Gia-Long mandarins (the first Tu-Buc's own grandfather), and a further thirty-nine other civil officials; while the complementary pagoda of Faithfulness (*Trung-nghia*) honoured 471 military officers killed on active service. (As a rough index of unrest over the previous forty years, more than twelve times the number of spirits thronged this pagoda compared to the Hien-luong.✉)

The Gazetteer shared this royal preoccupation. For the Centre and South, it carefully salvaged the names of officials notable only because they had died for the Nguyen, and ✉ The source does not say if the event was connected with the Franco-Spanish expedition of that year. *BNNTC [HN](1)*, pp.70-71.
listed them at the conclusion of each district's entries.  
When it came to important Northerners, this third goal seemed to predominate as nowhere else. The Nhan vat sections in all Bac-ky volumes available to me (Ha-noi, Hung-yen, Ninh-binh, Nam-dinh and Hai-duong) differed markedly from the norm for former Bang-trong provinces. It was not simply, as one might expect, that entries for the chua era formed a tiny proportion of the total (3 from 33 for the five provinces).\textsuperscript{49} We find a different criterion governing the choice of provincial worthies. Thus although these five provinces produced seventy-seven tien si and pho bang graduates from 1822 to 1856 (roughly the period the \textit{BNNTC} surveyed), only three rated a mention, with two restricted to a bare recitation of official positions.\textsuperscript{50} Instead, the bulk of entries (20, or 60\%) commemorated the exemplary loyalty of men who had sacrificed their lives fighting for the Nguyen in Bac-ky. Thus, for Nam-dinh, that nursery of scholars, the only civil mandarin deemed worthy of note was Doan Uan, the 1840s thuong tho. Even then, his entry lavished most attention on the military exploits in Cambodia for which Uan was ennobled and posthumously promoted to hiep bien. All the other Nam-dinh entries comprised soldiers, two from the Restoration

\textsuperscript{49}. All joined Gia-Long in the 1790s and died in the Restoration. Thanh-hoa was able to muster a respectable chua era tally (12 from 21) by claiming retainer families from Tong-son district who had followed Nguyen Hoang south, or joined the Nguyen later. Many re-appear in one or more of the Binh-Tri-Thien volumes, indicating their high prestige.  

\textsuperscript{50}. That Hoang Te Mi, as both son and father of a tien si, came from one of nine genuine great scholar families of the nineteenth century [see fn 23 above] is not even mentioned. Cf. \textit{BNNTC} [HN](3), p.218 with \textit{GTBKL}, p.30.
and eleven others killed by Northern rebels or bandits in
the 1830s or early 1850s.\(^2\)

This bias means that provincial gazetteers reveal vir-
tually nothing about Northern participation in the Nguyen
mandarinate\(^3\) (and thus have distorted Table One to some
unknown extent). However, they do offer historians something
far more precious, an insight into the unselfconscious mind
of the Hue political elite of the late Tu-Buc reign. In par-
ticular, they illustrate the low regard in which these men
habitually held the North, and Northerners. By inference,
too, they suggest how little clout men from Bac-ky could
muster at court, unable as they clearly were to prevent
family or friends from being casually written out of their
own provincial histories. It defies belief that, with the
sole exception of sparsely settled Phu-yen, every province
south of Quang-binh managed to discover at least one early
nineteenth century son worthy of commemoration in their
provincial Gazetteer; yet Hung-yen province in Bac-ky appa-
rently could not find a solitary individual of note in more

\(^2\). The eleven, for whom almost no personal details appear,
were venerated in the pagoda of Faithfulness in 1858. \textit{BNNTC}
[HN](3), pp.345-48 (pp.346-47 for Doan Uan).

\(^3\). It is puzzling, therefore, that Truong Buu Lam claimed
a survey of biographies in \textit{BNNTC} and \textit{QTBKL} showed about 20% of
post-Minh-Mang degree holders came from mandarinal famil-
ies [see fn 9 above]. \textit{BNNTC} does not routinely include fa-
mily details, for Bac-ky especially. While \textit{QTBKL} records cu
nhan and above for family members of laureates, it ignores
tu tai titles, and is mute on whether academically-qualified
relatives pursued bureaucratic careers. (Not all graduates
did.) It is thus impossible to determine from either source
what proportion of degree holders came from mandarinal fami-
lies, even for tien si and pho bang.
than fifty years. During the period surveyed, hundreds of men from these five Northern provinces would have served the dynasty as officials, many reaching senior positions. Yet, with few exceptions, Hue mandarins in the National History Office (Quoc su quan) in the 1870s and 1880s only nominated those who had died for the Nguyen as provincial nhan vat. We need not hammer the point further. In the self-definition of the political elite at court, Northerners simply did not rate.

Fortunately, given the unknown degree of bias in Table One, other statistical evidence exists that allows us to profile a key element in the nineteenth century mandarinate with greater accuracy. This second set of information comes from analysing the personal and career data for metropolitan graduates (tien si and pho bang) contained in the Quoc Trieu Bang Khoa Luc. The source is not perfect: it occasionally lacks data; and the amount of career detail per entry can vary from several paragraphs to a single line, even for very senior officials. But despite its flaws, QT-BKL remains a priceless historical tool for analysing the political and power elites of the Nguyen kingdom. It opens a statistical

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44. Nine are listed for earlier dynasties. DNVC [HN](1), pp.298-301. There was at least one candidate: Bui Ngoc Qui, tien si in 1829, who reached tong doc, took part in an embassy to China and wrote two books. QT-BKL, p.42.

45. In all, there were twelve. Three were Le loyalist exiles who joined Gia-Long in 1806 and three were killed by bandits. Only six typical Nguyen scholar-officials appeared. Compare this to the 6 Nam-ky provinces: almost 60% (43 from 75) were pre-1802, but of the remaining thirty-two entries, fourteen were high civil officials (1-1 to 2-2), none of whom died fighting, while only one of the eighteen soldiers had been killed in battle.
window onto a group of men who, in Woodside’s estimation, ‘formed the nucleus of the Nguyen civil service’. And given its catalogue format, any biases that emerge from its analysis should reflect social and political realities, not distortions within the source.

Let us begin with the regional backgrounds of metropolitan laureates who reached the power elite (1-1 to 2-1) before colonial appointments intruded, that is, of men who passed the examinations between 1822 and 1856 (Table Two). The sample is surprisingly small: a mere twenty-six (including five pho bang) from a possible 278 of these celebrated graduates managed to reap the fruits of power. Obviously, with only one in ten attaining the summit of administrative power, academic distinction of itself conferred no automatic passport to ultimate career success. But the right regional background certainly helped. While the twenty-six men hailed from eleven provinces (six Northern, four Central

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>level*</th>
<th>Bac-ky</th>
<th>Trung-ky</th>
<th>Nam-ky</th>
<th>Thua-thien</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-1a</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-1b</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>totals</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* 1-1 one of 4 top dai hoc si working at 2-1
  1-2 hiep bien dai hoc si working at 2-1
  2-1a Board President (thuong tho) as highest post
  2-1b Governor-General (tong doc) as highest post

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** Model, p.179.

** The data are in Annex Two, Table 5.
and one Southern), exactly half were natives of Ha-tinh (7) and Thua-thien (6) in Trung-ky.

The right regional credentials also made all the difference between winning through to the inner sanctum of court power, or finishing one's career as a provincial governor. Four-fifths of the men from Trung-ky - including all the Thua-thien contingent - reached the heart of court and administrative power as Board presidents (thuong tho). For Northerners, however, the reverse pertained, with a virtually identical proportion (77%) ending their careers as provincial tong doc. The distribution of high mandarinal titles among them further underscores the point: of the five in the sample who won these glittering prizes, four came from Thua-thien and none from the North.

In such a small sample statistical correlations must be very high to be significant - as they are. The remarkable inverse correlation between regional background and ultimate career success is particularly striking. It suggests that an invisible barrier routinely prevented almost all Bac-ky tong doc from ever breaking through to the select ranks of power-holders around the king in Hue, the vast majority of whom through the century derived from Trung-ky provinces.

But what of the political elite formed by the first four grades? Can a similar pattern of discrimination be detected here, too? The tables below supply the answer.

Table Three gives a proportional and numerical analysis of the comparative career success of tien si and pho bang

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* Among those from Thua-thien were three pho bang.
within these grades. For simplicity's sake, four areas have been selected that highlight regional, sub-regional, and provincial differences. The provinces of Ha-noi and Nam-dinh, which together accounted for nearly half of all Bac-ky metropolitan graduates, represent the North. Nghe-an and Ha-tinh appear as a control, and as a special sub-region in northern Trung-ky. Binh-Tri-Thien stands for central Trung-ky, with Thua-thien province presented separately for comparative purposes. The first three areas produced comparable graduate cohorts, with Thua-thien responsible for nearly half the Binh-Tri-Thien number.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 3: COMPARISON OF CAREER SUCCESS OF TIEN SI/PHO BANG FROM SELECTED AREAS (examinations: 1822 - 1862)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. 60% [34]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% cohort (93%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I. Ha-noi/Nam-dinh  
II. Nghe-Tinh  
III. Binh-Tri-Thien  
IV. Thua-thien province

Comparisons between those who:
- a. reached the top two grades  
- b. reached the top four grades  
- c. never reached higher than district official, or  
- d. spent their careers in education

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** This includes a small colonial distortion. The 1862 examination raises the total to 289, of which the sample represents 56%: 56 from Ha-noi/Nam-dinh; 50 from Nghe-Tinh; 56 from Binh-Tri-Thien; and 25 from Thua-thien. The selected areas produced comparable graduate numbers over the whole period (1822 to 1884): 81, 77, and 82 respectively.
While similar proportions from the first three areas reached grades one to four, a correlation between regional (and provincial) backgrounds of those who won promotion to the power elite in the second and first grades, and those who did not, is manifest. Only one-quarter of Northerners in the political elite actually progressed to the second grade, compared to a third from Thanh-Nghe-Tinh, half (47%) from the central Trung-ky area, and two-thirds of the men from Thua-thien province. The correlation at the other extreme is almost as striking. While one-third of all Bac-ky metropoli-tan graduates produced in these forty years either remained in education or languished as district magistrates, only one-sixth of the sample from the two Trung-ky areas suffered the same fate. But comparing Thua-thien directly with Ha-noi and Nam-dinh best underlines the correlation between power and provincial background. For the two Northern provinces, twice as many metropolitan graduates passed their careers in teaching or in district posts as ever reached the top two grades of the mandarinate. For Thua-thien, on the other hand, the pyramid reversed: four times as many laureates attained the top two grades as spent their careers in the districts or in education. 71

One last table considers career fluctuation among the sample in the top two grades. The chance of dismissal, or demotion by several grades, posed a relatively common hazard for imperial bureaucrats, even at a high level. It acted as

71. Binh-Tri-Thien result was in inverse proportion to the two Northern provinces, with twice as many in the top grades as in teaching or the districts.
an important lever of royal power over senior officials, and one that no Nguyen sovereign shrank from using. Such dismissal or demotion was only rarely final, however. After a period in the administrative wilderness (or sometimes the army), many mandarins resuscitated their careers and scrambled up the promotion ladder once more. Not everyone could hope to regain lost ground, however. Even to return to within two grades of their previous best required not only luck and skill but, as Table Four suggests, the right background and connections as well.

TABLE 4: RATE OF SUCCESSFUL REINTEGRATION OF DISMISSED OR DEMOTED TIEN SI/PHO BANG FROM THE POLITICAL ELITE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>grades</th>
<th>I</th>
<th>II</th>
<th>III</th>
<th>IV</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a</td>
<td>b</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2/5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>4/9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5/11</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>5/10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1/5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>4/15</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2/13</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13/34</td>
<td>8/29</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8/38</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5/19</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

as % [38%] [69%] [27%] [37%] [21%] [37%] [26%] [–]

I - Ha-noi/Nam-dinh
II - Nghe-Tinh
III - Binh-Tri-Thien
IV - Thua-thien province

column a shows the numbers dismissed or demoted from the total number in the sample

column b shows numbers who failed to rise within two grades (or higher) of their original level

Table Four charts the rate of successful reintegration among men in the Table Three sample who were demoted or dismissed from the top four grades.\(^2\) The sample is necessarily

\(^2\) Only those for whom QTDKL provides sufficient data are included. If the text says 'committed an error' without det-
tiny, and by itself could hardly be regarded as persuasive. But its confirmation of earlier results lends this table its significance: once more we find a strong correlation between provincial background and career success. The table shows that Ha-noi and Nam-dinh graduates in the sample suffered a major career set-back at nearly twice the rate of their peers from the central Trung-ky provinces. Their chance of career resuscitation fared even worse. Fewer than one-third of the Ha-noi/Nam-dinh sample clawed back to within two grades of their former positions, compared to two-thirds from the two Trung-ky areas—and every single man from Thua-thien.

In terms of access to the highest grades and supreme positions of power, as well as the chance of successful re-integration after a major career derailment, analysis of the OTBKl graduate data repeatedly reveals a pattern at work. Positions of political power and influence in the nineteenth century mandarinate were not open to equal competition on merit. Special advantages accrued to men born in Thua-thien province (and, to a lesser extent, in central Trung-ky), while men from Bac-ky provinces encountered a level of discrimination that can only be described as systemic.\(^\text{73}\) There seems no reason to assume this pattern only affected tiên sì ailing its consequences, the man is omitted. The raw data are in Annex Two, Table 3.

\(^\text{73}\) An alternative explanation, of course, is that men from Bac-ky quit the mandarinate early in statistically significant numbers. But if so, we would have to ask why; and part of the answer might lie in their anticipation of anti-Northern discrimination, a feeling which certainly existed. A more sensitive barometer than OTBKl would be needed to reveal if such a self-sustaining cycle developed.
and pho bang from the North. But nor, we should add, did it automatically exclude every delta Northerner from winning through to the power elite, especially those like Doan Uan in 1845 or Nguyen Tu Gian in 1875 who attracted royal patronage. Nineteenth century Vietnamese history teems with exceptions to every generalisation. Nevertheless, despite this caveat, the statistical analysis overwhelmingly backs the conclusions of the more selective data in Table One.

* * *

The nineteenth century mandarinal political and power elites that emerge from these tables differ from the predictions of existing models. Instead, the statistical evidence best fits a regionally-based model of the nineteenth century political elite, dominated by men from Hue and its surrounds and, until the 1860s, from the far South, intermixed with a quantum of men from the northern Trung-ky provinces of Thanh-Nghe-Tinh. As the nineteenth century progressed, the existing elite of the Gia-Long reign prolonged its access to power by making room for newcomers from the same region, and by effectively changing its own spots. Until the 1830s, leading elements of the Nguyen political elite sprang from three main sources: from chua era lineages of note; from newer Restoration era military retainers; or from families at the edge of the former elite who benefited from the losses of the previous quarter-century to place literate but unqualified members in the lower echelons of the administration in 1802, or shortly thereafter. Part way through the Minh-Mang era it began to change, however, as royal encouragement for the examination system endowed
academic title-holders with real career advantages within
the reformed imperial bureaucracy. As graduates (including
men from the North) who lacked ties of kinship or patronage
with older elite families began trickling into higher court
positions in the 1830s, few in the existing elite could have
missed the threat this implied to their own continued power.
What elite family could afford to ignore the warning in Phan
Thanh Gian's meteoric rise from tien si to acting tuan phu
in three short years? And what unqualified mandarinal aspir­
ant from central Trung-ky could fail to be disturbed by the
swift successes of exemplary Northern cu nhan like Nguyen
Cong Tru or Doan Uan at Minh-Mang's encouraging hand?

As examination titles gained administrative signific­
ance, the ambitious sons of existing officials at all lev­
els positioned themselves to acquire the academic degrees
that would enable them to ride out the changes - and, as a
corollary, to contain the influx of outsiders that threaten­
ed the existing distribution of power and influence. Gradu­
ate quotas, which had favoured the North under Gia-Long when
they were politically irrelevant, now expanded in the exami­
nation sites patronised by the existing elite. Thus despite
Nam-ky's lack of scholastic depth and paltry history of Con­
fucianisation, Sai-gon's cu nhan numbers rose during the
Thieu-Tri reign to an extraordinary 87, or 80% of the com­
parable Ha-noi figure.74 Central Trung-ky families, their
sights set higher than their Southern cousins, aimed at the
more prestigious metropolitan examinations. Despite failing

74. Model, p.222.
to produce a single tiến sĩ before the mid-1830s, by the end of the 1840s the seven Nguyen heartland provinces (Quang-bình to Bình-dình) boasted between them almost as many tiến sĩ and pho bang for the decade as the whole of Bac-ky (48 to 53). This result, like their later career success as revealed in our tables, owed much less to chance than to deliberate choices. As Woodside explained, "it was at these higher examinations ... that emperors personally were most inclined, and able, to influence the results" and, he might have added, that candidates' identities were virtually impossible to keep secret from the initial examiners.

The 1847 coup that enthroned Tu-Bùc brought a new generation of leaders from the same region muscling into the circle of power around the throne. All shared similar backgrounds as senior civil officials deeply involved in implementing the Minh-Mang administrative reforms. As a result, the coup promoted further sinicisation of government at the same time that it entrenched the existing regional dominance of the political elite. A consummate bureaucratic politician like Trương Bang Que could man the mandarinal ramparts far more effectively against Minh-Mang's Northern proteges (and their successors) than could the sons of Gia-Long's elite, mostly first generation graduates still climbing the promotion ladder. For the next thirty years, the promising Bac-ky assault on the citadels of court power launched in the 1830s and 1840s ran out of momentum. Even the most brilliant Northerners found their hopes frustrated.

\(^{73}\) Ibid, p.220.
and falling short of the mark. While their careers routine-ly ended outside the court as tong doc, their less talented confreres found themselves systematically relegated to the lower reaches of the political elite, and of the bureaucracy in general.

In the nineteenth century kingdom, the right Trung-ky regional credentials (and, of course, the network of personal connections and family relations they implied) began and remained the greatest single asset for any ambitious mandarin. It was as true for military officers as for tien si or pho bang graduates. Even men with lowly tu tai titles from central Trung-ky provinces beat Bac-ky doctoral laureates into the power elite by two to one when averaged over the whole century.

The 1860s loss of the South only exaggerated the trend for men from Trung-ky to exercise the substance of military and political power. The next section considers them, and their differing passages to colonialism.

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74. Of forty-three generals in the first two grades for whom biographical data were found, the most northerly came from Thanh-hoa (6). Fifteen came from Phu-yen and provinces further south, while the remaining twenty-two (51%) were from the Quang-binh to Binh-dinh heartland.

77. Or 32 to 16. Among their number were Tran Binh Tac, a Quang-binh tu tai who reached hiep bien in 1882 and negotiated the Harmand convention in 1883 [PNNIC [SG](9), pp.74-75; and VNDNTR, pp.454-55], and the sons of Truong Bang Que. [QLKL, p.75 lists a nephew as tien si in 1842 and gives Que as the only other graduate (cu nhan or higher) in the family. Orband, 'Les Morts de 1914', p.62 confirms it for Ban.]
Trung-ky Regional Elites and the Colonial Challenge

Two politically significant regional elites evolved in nineteenth century Trung-ky. One revolved around the Hue area, the other Thanh-Nghe-Tinh. Each group depended on a special (but dissimilar) relationship with the Nguyen ruling house to smooth their access to political and administrative success. Even so, their attachments to the throne remained too diverse to bring about a real social integration between the two elites. However, until the French invasion pared personal and political commitments to the bone, the universal Confucian vocabulary of loyalty to the throne plastered over the fissures and disguised their depth. When colonial invasion shattered the apparent consensus, it thrust into stark relief the divergent bases upon which these two elite circles generally founded their loyalty to the Nguyen dynasty. In the crisis of the 1870s and 1880s, conflicting loyalties would propel many members of the Thanh-Nghe-Tinh elite down the road to anti-colonial resistance, in opposition to most of the Hue-based elite who ultimately sided with the French.

Myriad personal factors always influence the decisions individuals make, or fail to make, at crucial historical junctures. Nevertheless, in this instance transpersonal matters like the differing well-springs of identity and of attachments to the dynasty that separated the two Trung-ky elites undoubtedly played a major part in the polarisation. Not everyone followed suit, of course; but the evidence strongly suggests that many in the central Trung-ky elite
found their most profound commitment lay in the living bonds of blood and kinship they shared with the Nguyen (and each other), forged and reFORGED over generations. In Thanh-Nghe-Tinh, on the other hand, many felt regional pride, nourished by a deeply-ingrained sense of patriotic duty and bred in the bone by centuries at the heart of national power, far more compelling. We will briefly consider each in turn.

The Tay-son rebellion and subsequent Restoration had decimated the Nguyen royal clan. Nguyen Anh himself only became chua after the deaths of four men with stronger claims, including his uncle Hue-vuong and his cousin Muc-vuong as well as his own father and older brother. In 1820, when the newly enthroned Minh-Mang turned his reforming eye upon them, the living descendants of seven generations of polygamous rulers numbered a mere two hundred,\textsuperscript{7\textordmasculine} including Gia-Long’s own relatively modest progeny of thirteen sons and eighteen daughters, and their children.\textsuperscript{7\textordmasculine}

In the past, except for the successor, chua’s sons had all been called ton that. Now Minh-Mang decreed Gia-Long’s male descendants be differentiated from ton that in the seven non-imperial Nguyen chua lineages by special patronymics, laid down for twenty generations by the king himself. At the same time, he organised imperial princes and their descendants into a formal status hierarchy and endowed them


\textsuperscript{7\textordmasculine}. Modest compared to Minh-Mang’s 78 sons and 64 daughters, or Thieu-Tri’s 29 sons and 35 daughters. Ton That Con, \textit{Hoang Toc Luoc Bien} (Hue, 1943), pp.19–25. By the 1880s, there may have been 1000 descendants of Gia-Long.
with generous state stipends and other entitlements. A new regulatory body (ton nhon phu) was also established to supervise the affairs of the extended royal family. Its directors, the ta ton chanh and huu ton chanh, held the two highest ranked mandarinal positions. The king no doubt never intended these two office holders to become the political rivals of the senior mandarins ranked just below them in the first grade. By the early 1880s, however, in the hands of long-serving princes Tho-xuan and Tuy-ly, the two ton chanh would come to exercise a personally-hazardous political authority in the court, thanks to the insecurities of Tu-Duc.

If Minh-Mang's formal organisation changed the appearance of the royal family, his reforms never altered one of its basic functions. As always, the royal (now imperial) clan still served to bond the political and military elite to the throne, whether they be existing families or outstanding newcomers. Gia-Long's children, for example, were

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16. Laborde, 'Les titres', pp.386-406. Huong (or Hong), Ung, Buu, and Vinh were current in the colonial period. It was also probably in 1820 that royal concubines were organised into nine grades, whose personal allowances ranged from 1000 quan and 48 sets of clothes down to 180 quan (all plus rice). Under Minh-Mang, imperial princes received 500 quan and princesses 360 (both plus rice), compared to tong doc who got 300 quan plus rice, according to CBPK, pp.433-35.


22. Tho-xuan served continuously as Ta ton chanh from 1840 to 1885; while Tuy-ly held the office from February 1889 to November 1897. [Ton That Con, Hoang Tac, p.31.] But Tuy-ly had earlier worked in the Ton Nhon Phu at the lower level from 1862, and had been promoted huu ton chanh in 1882, according to L. Sogny, 'Les Familles illustres: Son Altesse le Prince Tuy Ly', BAVH, XVI, 4 (1929), pp.190-92.
mostly disbursed in strategic marriages designed to shore up old and new alliances. Thus as the new-made sixteen year old chua in the dark days of 1778, Nguyen Anh had sealed the allegiance of Vo Tanh (and his large private army) in Gia-dinh by offering the general an infant daughter in marriage.\(^3\) Later he rewarded another new ally, Nguyen Huynh Buc, by wedding two daughters to Buc's sons.\(^4\) Other children found spouses among long-standing retainer elite families like the lineage descendants of Nguyen Huu Dat,\(^5\) or newer followers of proven worth like Ho Van Boi.\(^6\) The use of marriages to strengthen existing bonds or to forge new ones with promising outsiders was hardly limited to the royal clan. Although most marriages in elite circles were arranged between social equals, or with the royal clan, polygamy provided enough offspring for elite families to gamble a child on a talented stranger. In exactly this way one of the more celebrated pre-dynastic officials, Bao Duy Tu, the son of a lowly wandering comedian, started his spectacular rise to power. Tu so impressed the governor of

\(^3\). \textit{PhnTc} [HN](5), p.229; and \textit{VndntB}, pp.527-29. Both say Vo Tanh married Nguyen Anh's daughter when they joined forces in 1778; but the girl must have been far too young.

\(^4\). \textit{VndntB}, pp.255-58. Buc had rallied to Nguyen Anh despite the latter's murder of his leader, Bo Thanh Nhan, in 1781. After saving the chua's life in 1782, Buc was given the Nguyen surname and treated like a family member.


Qui-nhon in a chance conversation that the canny official rapidly recruited him as a son-in-law. 87

The evidence that exists suggests that this dual marriage strategy continued through the nineteenth century, though with one significant exception. In terms of political significance, it remained closely focussed on central Trung-ky and the South. Few Northern families, or even ones from Thanh-Nghe-Tinh, secured their children's spouses among the imperial clan. The political function of royal polygamy, however, has tended to disguise the pattern.

Like his chua forebears, the emperor routinely took numerous concubines from among mandarinal families as a way of reinforcing royal influence among them. 88 If as a consequence, as Gia-Long explained to Chaigneau père, this meant the king felt obliged to accept any mandarin's daughter offered to him, 89 as the century passed many of these women must have been Northerners. Yet their presence has left almost no historical trace since, with the exception of Tu-Buc, their later royal masters had all fathered several sons while still princes. All Nguyen heirs came from among these sons whose mothers, whether legitimate wives or concubines, in turn all came from Bang-trong families. 90 They

87. L. Sogny 'Les Associés de gauche et de droite au culte du temple dynastique de Thai-Mieu', BAVH, I, 4 (1914), pp. 305-08. It may be on his account that the Nguyen allowed sons of actors to contest the mandarinal examinations.


89. Ibid, p.124 (fn 1).
automatically outranked later additions in the rigid hierarchy of royal concubines, unless a newcomer managed to attract royal attention long enough to bear a son. (From 1847 to 1883, under the sterile Tu-Buc, not even this slim hope existed.)

In reality, then, royal polygamy masked a situation in the nineteenth century in which all the matches that mattered in terms of the succession had been formed long before any king's accession, between princes and daughters of upper elite families from central Trung-ky and Nam-ky.

Where imperial princesses were concerned, circumstances (if not necessarily intentions) ensured the dual strategy continued, and that few - if any - ever married outside Bang-trong families. Competition for these high status wives was quite fierce; and dynastic regulations laid down that only sons or grandsons of men from the top two grades of the mandarinate, civil or military, even be considered as royal consorts (pho ma).

This automatically disposed of virtually all families north of Quang-binh during the first two reigns. Then later Tu-Buc's sterility caused the supply

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1. Conceiving a son was not always easy, even for long term partners: Hong-bao's mother had been married for about 6 years, and Tu-Buc's for 4, before bearing sons. Low status concubines must have had very poor chances. Bui-Quang-Tung, 'Thieu-Tri', pp.37-38

2. L. Sogny, 'Cérémonial d'autrefois pour le mariage des princesses d'Annam', BAVH, XXI, 3 (1934), pp.146-47.
of imperial princesses to dwindle alarmingly: from 1847 to the early 1880s, only thirty became available. Such precious commodities needed careful distribution. Two at least went for old-fashioned strategic political reasons, to help weave the families of important new men into upper elite circles within a single generation. Thus Truong Quang Tru, the oldest son of Truong Bang Que, and Nguyen Lam, second son of Nguyen Tri Phuom, both became pho ma on their fathers' account. Tu-Buc wed Lam to his own younger sister in 1864 as a public gesture of affection and appreciation for Nguyen Tri Phuom's successes against the Ta Van Phung rebels in the North. Later, when Tu-Buc bowed to political necessity and adopted heirs, he also married a full sister of his third adopted son (the future king Bong-Khanh) into the family of his powerful court favourite, Nguyen Van Tuong, whose own background had been quite unassuming. The marriage sought to raise Tuong's standing, and bind him more closely to the future of the dynasty. Although not entirely successful in this case, the strategy worked well in most others. Over the century it created a dense inter-

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93. Ibid, p.147. They were all daughters of Minh-Mang and Thieu-Tri.
96. For example, four of Nguyen Huu Bo's children married imperial spouses: two became queens (of Bong-Khanh and Thanh-Thai) and two became pho ma even though, after 1883, short tenures and boy-kings made royal princesses almost as vanishingly rare as before. Sogny, 'Nguyen Huu Bo', p.204.
locking network of living relationships that inextricably bound the fortunes and emotions of the central Trung-ky upper elite to the Nguyen dynasty - though not before a severe trial in the 1860s.

As mentioned previously, some elements among the mandarinal elite and royal family never had accepted Tu-Buc’s irregular accession. After Hong-bao’s death their disaffection simmered below the surface in Hue until the French invasion of the South, and the Treaty of 1862. When Tu-Buc made peace in the South in order to free his forces for the rebellions sweeping the delta North, he surrendered three provinces steeped in Restoration significance, and which housed the lineage homes of several important court families, including his own mother’s. Attempts to negotiate their return stalled at the last minute in mid-1864, stoking upper elite outrage in Hue. In January 1865 an imperial half-brother, Hong-tap, the pho ma Truong Van Chat, and several mandarins and royal clansmen were captured plotting to murder Phan Thanh Gian and Tran Tien Thanh, the king’s closest advisers after Truong Bang Que’s retirement and, unlike Que, staunch advocates of the peace policy. Then in 1866 one of prince Tung-thien’s sons-in-law, Boan Trung, stormed the palace with an armed band in a bid to replace Tu-Buc with Hong-bao’s oldest son. Tung-thien

A son of the 1890s mandarinal strongman, Nguyen Than, also married the oldest daughter of the short-lived king Duc-Buc. SN, p.58.


only averted personal disaster by handing over his daughter and grandchildren, bound hand and foot, to Tu-Buc's mercy. They survived, unlike possibly nineteen others, among them all Hong-bao's male descendants. The double failures, and the reprisals they unleashed, effectively purged dissent. From the mid-1860s Tu-Buc's throne was safe from his turbulent relatives, most of whom now closed ranks politically behind him.

But further north, in Thanh-Nghe-Tinh, matters progressed quite differently. For centuries history had dealt this region a unique role that bred a special sense of identity and destiny among its people. Settled since the Bronze Age, Thanh-Nghe had experienced the thousand year Chinese domination along with the rest of the North. Its people had manned the frontline against the Chams before independence, and later swelled the centuries-long push south that finally dispossessed them. A tough frontier area under the Tran, the region had served as the dumping ground for exiled bandits and outlaws from the delta provinces. All these qualities came to the fore after the Ming invasion of the early fifteenth century when two anti-Chinese rebellions broke out from here. The second put Le Loi on the throne, surrounded by the Thanh-Nghe warrior clans who had helped him to power. From then on, families with their roots in Thanh-Nghe villages strode centre stage of

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**Bui-Quang-Tung, 'Thieu-Tri', pp.83 and 88.

100 There had been an earlier anti-Chinese rebellion here, against the Tang in 722. People from the area also fought the Qing in 1788. Ninh Viet Giao, 'Nghe Tinh. People and Traditions', VS, No 59, 197?, pp.31-35.
Vietnamese history. For the next three centuries they successfully contested a long and sometimes bitter struggle with men from the Red River delta for power and influence under the Le. When two of their number, the Trinh and the Nguyen, extended that rivalry geographically, other Thanh-Nghe families ranged themselves equally behind the new contenders. Right through the chua period, ambitious adventurers from the area, and from the Nguyen home district in particular, filtered down into Bang-trong to swell the ranks of Thanh-Nghe families already riding high in the chua's service.

The transformed political fortunes of the region entailed other consequences too. Although Thanh-Nghe remained the principal area of military recruitment under the Le, contact with the court in Ha-noi gradually made its leading families more culturally sophisticated. As generations passed, they developed a passion for scholarly pursuits that spread to the region generally. By the seventeenth century, despite the continued military orientation of the


102. For example, Tong Van Khoi, Nguyen Huu Thuy (who wed a chua's daughter in the mid-eighteenth century) and his father and brother, and Tran Cong Lai. PNNTC [SG](15), pp. 131, 132, and 134 respectively.

103. Elite soldiers, who enjoyed benefits for themselves and their children, were recruited on the basis of 1:3 registered males here, compared to 1:5 in the delta. Le Thanh Khoi, Histoire du Vietnam, p.257.

old warrior families, they had nevertheless amassed enough educated members to take on and beat the delta literati at their own game.\textsuperscript{105} Under the Le the two provinces built a reputation for scholarship and examination success. Indeed, in poorer Nghe-an, the examinations came to form a vital element in the survival strategies of literate families. While preparing for the examinations, students received preferential access to the best communal fields, and after graduation they were rewarded with extra shares depending on the level of their degree.\textsuperscript{106} Such small local incentives might not have mattered unduly to the long-descended scholarly families Woodside described, with their generations of contact at court. But for middling literati families, struggling to ride out the accelerating disasters of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, they represented a great opportunity to accumulate assets. As a result, a sort of examination industry developed here, as families laboured over the generations to produce regional graduates to serve on village councils and staff the middle reaches of the Trinh and Le bureaucracy.\textsuperscript{107}

\textsuperscript{105} Taylor. 'Literati Revival', pp.22-23 describes how the contest was also waged in terms of Confucian concepts.

\textsuperscript{106} Amounts differed. In Tri-le (Anh-son district), for example, where roughly two-thirds of rice fields were communal, graduates got from 0.5 to 2 mau (for tien si) extra. Ninh Viet Giao, ‘Vai net ve cong dien cong tho o Nghe-an truoc va trong thoi gian 1930-1931’, in Nong Thon Viet Nam Trong Lich Su, I (Ha-noi, 1977), pp.161-63. It may be for the same reason that the poor central province of Quang-binh, where Ngo Buc Thinh found almost all rice fields were communal until the twentieth century, was also a nursery of scholars. ‘Cac quan he so huu dat dai cua lang xa o Quang Binh’, Idem, pp.387-400.
In 1802, when the dynasty changed, Thanh-Nghe found itself uniquely placed to benefit. Although the Le had gone, Thanh-hoa retained its status as the imperial province and still housed important dynastic temples, albeit of a different family. And the Nguyen were quick to acknowledge their ancestral links. When Gia-Long re-established regional examinations in 1807, Thanh-hoa and Nghe-an each received a site, while all other Bac-thanh scholars had to squeeze into Nam-dinh and Ha-noi. Graduate numbers were also high. When Minh-Mang re-introduced metropolitan examinations in 1822, Thanh-Nghe men responded in force: from 1822 to 1884, the area accounted for 25% of all metropolitan graduates. GTBK data shows two other interesting matters: this area accounted for the smallest number of graduates recorded as the sole laureates from their families (47 or 50%); and of the rest, 90% of the families claimed only two generations of graduates. Taken together, this suggests that nineteenth century metropolitan laureates from here generally were not descended from Le dynasty tien si or high officials so much as from the

107. Phan Binh Phung’s family seems typical. Although descended from Phan Nhu Tinh, who reached tong doc, no-one in the next twelve generations under the Le is mentioned as reaching a similarly high appointment, despite there being numerous scholars and officials in each generation. Even so, the family was very important locally, Bao Trinh Nhat, Phan-Binh-Phung (1847-1895) (Sai-gon: Tan Viet XB, 1957), p.6.

108. Model, p.220. For three examinations (1813, 1821, and 1825) the Ha-noi site totalled 67 cu nhan and Nam-dinh 89, while Thanh-Nghe reached 105.

109. See Annex Two, Tables 6A for data. In central Trung-ky, 67% were sole graduates compared to 61% in Bac-ky. The second comparison is 67% and 73% respectively.
middling literati families of regional graduates, still doggedly pursuing their traditional academic strategy but now with spectacularly better results. But while many from Thanh-Nghe-Tinh were new to high mandarinal honours, few were new to Confucian studies, unlike most of their contemporaries from central Trung-ky. This seminal distinction would come into its own in the second half of the nineteenth century.

As the century progressed, the ebbing retreat of Le restorationism away from the dynasty's home area and towards the Northern delta provinces exemplified the evolution of Thanh-Nghe-Tinh into a distinctive, intermediary zone, no longer fully of the North but not quite integrated into the Centre either. This does not mean that families here failed to make connections outside the area, for mandarinal or scholarly friendships between men from different elite circles could and did lead to marriages between family members. But such change is naturally slow, and in the nineteenth century it remained shallow, lacking the depth and breadth of collateral relationships produced by generations of interconnections. So while van than circles here

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110. The descendants of Phan Nhu Tinh in An-dong village (Ha-tinh) are typical. No-one in the previous three generations under the Le passed tien si, so its members appear in QTBK'L as without earlier graduates, although other sources assert numerous generations with good passes. Between 1822 and 1919 they then went on to produce seven tien si and pho bang among a total of eleven higher graduates. QTBK'L, pp. 45-46, 91, and 171 for the Phan Binh Phung branch; and 71-72, 194, and 195 for the other.

111. Here a mere 8% of metropolitan laureates between 1822 and 1884 were second generation graduates, compared to 17% in Bac-ky and 26% in Thanh-Nghe-Tinh.
pledged loyalty to the Nguyen, it was conditional Confucian trung-nghia they offered, unsupported by ancestral guarantees or the visceral sureties of blood and kinship. At heart the commitment remained fundamentally ambiguous. No proper Confucian since the master himself had ever accepted trung-nghia as absolute and personal, or believed that an official owed total loyalty to his prince in all circumstances. Confucius had taught in The Analects, ‘if [a prince’s] personal conduct is not correct he may issue orders, but they will not be followed.’\textsuperscript{113} Later Xun Zi developed the theme: ‘submission to what is right’, he wrote, ‘not to what has been commanded by ... one’s prince [is] the most righteous action’.\textsuperscript{114} Mencius capped it. A king whose conduct had forfeited his right to the title might be killed with impunity, he implied in response to King Xuan’s question about the assassination of King Zhou:\textsuperscript{115} He who outrages the benevolence proper to his nature is called a robber; he who outrages righteousness is called a ruffian. The robber and ruffian we call a mere fellow. I have heard of the cutting off of the head of the fellow Zhou, but I

\textsuperscript{112}. Such marriages could also split families rather than unite them. For example, in the late 1880s Tran Tram, from a Gia-Long retainer family of Quang-nam, found himself with one sister as a high ranking concubine of king Bong-Khanh, and another as the fugitive wife of Phan Binh Phung, leader of the anti-French (and anti-court) can vuong rebellion in Nghe-Tinh. Bao Trinh Nhat, Phan-Binh-Phung, p.9; and Nguyen Tien Lang, ‘Quelques mandarins d’hier’, BAVH, XXVI, 2 (1939), p.158 who discreetly mentions only the first.


\textsuperscript{114}. Ibid, p.29.

\textsuperscript{115}. Ibid, p.28.
have not heard of the putting of a sovereign to
death, in his case.
The time bomb concealed in these deeply ingrained senti-
ments began ticking in the 1860s, in response to the pro-
tracted French colonial crisis and the contradiction that
Hue's irresolute responses inexorably produced between
national independence and dynastic survival.

The French threat galvanised the patriotic emotions
and combative traditions of Thanh-Nghe-Tinh and split open
the fissures between the two Trung-ky elites. In 1858, at
first word of the Franco-Spanish expedition, the feisty
octogenarian Nguyen Cong Tru demanded royal permission to
lead troops south in person.\(^{114}\) In 1859, a further ten Nghe-
an scholars echoed his request, with one winning command of
a military column in the South as a result.\(^{117}\) But as the
fighting dragged on, the peace faction at court waxed more
powerful and their outspoken opponents, like the Nghe-an
tien si and high official Ho Si Tuan, found themselves
quietly banished to distant appointments, or their careers
blocked.\(^{118}\) Although some mandarins from the area continued

\(^{114}\) Binh Xuan Lam, 'Phong trao dau tranh vu trang chong
xam luoc phap cuoi the ky XIX o Nghe-Tinh: nhung dac diem
phat trien, nguyen phan that bai, y nghia lich su', NCLS,

\(^{117}\) Ho Tuan Niem and Phan Huu Thinh, 'Truyen thong yeu

\(^{118}\) Tuan was appointed governor of Quang-yen, where he
soon died in 1862. Ibid.
to criticise the peace policy in the 1860s, the initiative increasingly passed to the local \textit{van than}.

In 1865, like-minded Nghe-an literati met in Vo-liet village, later to became an important "Red Soviet" during the 1930-31 rebellion, and agreed to set up 'groups of righteous scholars' (nghia si doan). The groups rapidly multiplied through Thanh-Nghe-Tinh. In 1873, they formed the organisational sinews of rebellion, the structure that sustained the Scholars' Revolt of 1874 in which thousands of Vietnamese Catholics died at the hands of van than rebels, outraged by the court's latest dealings with the French. The rebels' 1874 proclamation exposed the dangerous ambiguity of Confucian doctrine in patriotic hands:

The present crisis involves the salvation of the state; there is no place in it for personal interests ... If you, men of justice and fidelity, allow yourselves to live without taking part in the worthy struggle for the State, Heaven will never forgive you. We are not afraid to die. Even if we have not yet received authorisation by royal decree and even if we might be punished by his majesty the emperor, it makes no difference; it must still be done. We will ask his permission afterwards. In any case, if we succeed in exterminating [the French and the Christians], we must at least become national heroes.

That mere subjects should dare to set their judgement above his own was intolerable for an authoritarian like Tu-

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\textsuperscript{119}. For example, the junior censor Phan Huan publicly denounced the Treaty of 1862 [Binh Xuan Lam, 'Phong trao dau tranh', p. 25], while Vu Pham Khai wrote a book against the peace policy. Van Tan, 'Vu Pham Khai. Mot van than yeu nuoc dung dau phai chu chien duoi Trieu Tu-Buc', NCLS, No 141 (1971), pp.3-8. Khai was born in 1807 in the part of Thanh-hoa that later became Ninh-binh province.

\textsuperscript{120}. Tsuboi, \textit{L'Empire vietnamienne}, pp.207-210 for the whole proclamation of 19 March 1874. The quotes form the peroration.
Buc, whose early Confucian views had been so tempered by experience that he now professed that teaching 'total and devoted obedience' to the king was the principal aim of all education.\textsuperscript{121} Furious at the slowness of the repression, Tu-Buc enlisted French assistance. But sending Nguyen Van Tuong on a French war vessel to engage the rebels\textsuperscript{122} could only exacerbate the emerging contradiction between national salvation and dynastic survival. For many in Thanh-Nghe-Tinh literati circles, the 1874 revolt finally unravelled their ties to the Nguyen.\textsuperscript{123} Upper elite families, eyes on the mandarinal prize, held out until the 1880s; but ultimately they too had to choose between their own patriotic traditions and the Nguyen dynasty. After Tu-Buc's death in 1883, the mandarinal tien si Nguyen Xuan On\textsuperscript{124} and Phan Binh Phung resigned their official posts and returned home to prepare for armed struggle. It followed in 1885,\textsuperscript{125} with the


\textsuperscript{122} Tsuboi, \textit{L'Empire vietnamienne}, p.250. The revolt is outlined at pp.247-51. There was a particularly high death toll among its many thousands of victims and participants.

\textsuperscript{123} Tsuboi claimed the \textit{van than} in general deserted Tu-Buc after 1874, but gives no evidence for the rest of Trung-ky. At this stage I believe it was mainly a Thanh-Nghe-Tinh phenomenon. \textit{Ibid}, p.251.

\textsuperscript{124} Binh Xuan Lam, 'Phong trao dau tranh', pp.26-27 \textit{Tien si} in 1871, On had reached 3-2 at court but was demoted to educational director in Quang-binh before becoming a resistance leader at age fifty-five. \textit{OTDKL}, p.179-80.

active participation of more mandarins, scholars, and graduates here than in anywhere else in Trung-ky.¹²⁸

The 1880s resistance war fractured the Thanh-Nghe-Tinh elite. Families from the same village and whose clans had intermarried, like those of Phan Binh Phung and Hoang Cao Khai (who became the 1890s kinh luoc of Tonkin), were split by their conflicting choices.¹²⁷ In villages like Quynh-doí, and in families like that of Ho Ba On¹²⁹ (whose grandson, Ho Tung Mau, became a founder of Vietnamese communism with Nguyen Ai Quoc in Canton), anti-colonialism meshed with emotional commitments to family and ancestors after several members died fighting the French in the 1880s, and later.¹²⁹

Indeed, until the early 1930s Thanh-Nghe-Tinh acted as the


¹²⁸ Gosselin, L'Empire d'Annam, p.247 said of north Annam: 'all business was suspended [and] mandarins, especially of higher rank, abandoned almost all their posts to swell Thuyet's following'. GTK data also shows that of the 20 metropolitan graduates between 1865 and 1884 who fought or died in the can vuong movement, 11 came from Thanh-Nghe-Tinh, plus 2 from nearby Quang-binh. Central Trung-ky only provided 7, of whom 5 came from Quang-nam.

¹²⁷ Khai tried to convince Phan Binh Phung to surrender in the mid-1890s. Their exchange of letters over the issue is discussed in Marr, Anticolonialism, pp.66-68. Vietnamese translations of the complete letters are in Bao Trinh Nhat, Phan-Binh-Phung, pp.202-209.

¹²⁸ An-sat (provincial judicial officer) of Nam-dinh, who fought on when the French attacked in 1883 after his superiors had deserted their posts. He later died of his wounds at home. Ho Tuan Niem and Phan Huu Thinh, 'Xa Quynh Boi', p.69. Also see Ho Tung Mau's biography in Trinh Chi (ed), Nhung nguoi cong san (Ho Chi Minh City, 1976), pp.81-86.

¹²⁹ Ibid, pp.70-71.
vanguard and flag-bearer of militant anti-colonialism in Central Vietnam, and arguably in the whole country.  

Events in Hue triggered the heroic defiance of court and colonialism among an important sector of the Thanh-Nghe-Tinh elite and literati in the later 1880s. We will complete the chapter by returning to the capital, and the central Trung-ky elite that dominated its politics.  

* * *  

In Hue, two main events shaped the early 1880s. The first had its roots in France in 1879, when a change of government scrapped the anti-expansionist policy of the previous six years and brought to power men willing to heed the incessant demands of their compatriots in Indochina for further military advances.  

Three years later, in May 1882 in the Red River delta, the final French conquest began in earnest. Then in July 1883 the death of Tu-Buc triggered the second. His political testament unleashed and exacerbated the succession crisis stored up since 1847 by nominating an heir he did trust, surrounded by an unworkable group of antagonistic advisers. To three mandarinal Regents - Tran Tien Thanh, a peace advocate, General Ton

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130. Thus Nghe-Tinh supplied two-thirds of the patriotic authors of the time anthologised in Hop tuyen tho van yeu nuoc va cach mang dau the ky XX, according to Nguyen Trong Con, 'Xo-viet Nghe-Tinh', p.10. Many leading twentieth-century anti-colonial militants like Phan Boi Chau, Hoang Trong Mau, Ho Chi Minh, Tran Phu, Ha Huy Tap, Le Hong Son, Le Hong Phong, and Nguyen Thi Minh Khai also came from here.

That Thuyet, leader of the war faction, and the opportunist Nguyen Van Tuong - Tu-Buc had added his mother and principal wife as counsellors of the new king, and the heads of the Ton Nhon Phu, Princes Tho-xuan and Tuy-ly, as special advisers to the government. Within days a palace coup demolished the impossible structure and left the deposed Duc-Buc to starve to death. Thuyet and Tuong, now masters of the court, enthroned one of Tu-Buc's younger brothers as Hiep-Hoa.¹³²

Internal and external factors collided with swift, terrifying force a mere one month later. Determined to impose a protectorate, the French sent a naval squadron that bombarded Thuan-an, and ranged the coast with casual brutality.¹³³ Then the ranking diplomat, Harmand, issued a nightmare ultimatum that triggered the court's two darkest fears, the invincibility of French arms and the destruction of the dynasty:¹³⁴

We could, for we have the means to do it, destroy your dynasty from top to bottom, even to its


¹³³. Pierre Loti, an officer with the force, wrote about the operations for Le Figaro, including a description of sailors massacring hundreds of Vietnamese soldiers unnecessarily. It caused a storm in Paris that almost brought his recall, and was censored for later publication. Loti never understood the fuss: 'I found them [the sailors] sublime and thought people would admire them, not realising I was writing for cissies'. Quoted in Alec G. Hargreaves, The Colonial Experience in French Fiction (London: Macmillan, 1981), pp.69-70.

roots, and take for ourselves all the kingdom ... as we have done in Lower Cochinchina. You should take note of this since [you]... cannot seriously resist our armies ...

If you reject [the ultimatum] you must expect the greatest misfortune. Imagine the most awful thing and you will still be short of the truth. The Empire of Annam, its dynasty, its princes, and the court will have signed their own [death] warrants. The name of Vietnam will no longer exist in history.

From 1860, an ineradicable fear of modern weaponry, and of Vietnamese helplessness to withstand it on the battlefield, had driven court relations with the French.135

To Tu-Buc, another war with France could only spell disaster and further loss of territory. He refused to consider it, even when, as with the Garnier expedition in the North in 1873, royal forces could have prevailed against the isolated garrison in Hanoi.136 Now the fate that Tu-Buc's schemes and subterfuges had striven to avoid materialised before his hapless successor, and before a court still stunned by the Regents' coup.137 The promise of annihilation catalysed the doomladen hysteria over French firepower that had sapped official policy for two decades. The court

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135. For a outline of the arguments see Bang Huy Van, 'Cuoc dau tranh guia phai "chu chien" va nhung phai "chu hoa" trong cuoc khang chien chong phap o cuoi the ky XIX', NCLS, No. 94 (1967), pp.29-40.

136. Thus he stopped Hoang Ke Viem and Ton That Thuyet from attacking Ha-noi: 'Today you ask to fight; tomorrow you will repeat the request. But if we fight continuously without success, will we have any country at all left for our mothers and children in the future?' Quoted in Bo Bang, 'Trieu dinh Hue', p.75.

137. For an insider's view of the court at the time, see Huynh Con and Jean Jacnal, 'Mémoires de son excellence Huynh Con', RI (ns), XL, 3&4 (1924), pp.188-200.
crumbled, and an initial protectorate convention was signed in August 1883.

In the following months, Hiep-Hoa tried to inch away from the Regents with the support of some close relatives, in particular Prince Tuy-ly and his sons. For a short time Tuy-ly even became the sole diplomatic intermediary with the Hue Legation. But the Regents outflanked the hazardous manoeuvre in November, this time by the dethronement and open murder of Hiep-Hoa and the assassination of Tran Tien Thanh. Tuy-ly, refusing to lend his name and authority to men who had carried out 'the worst crime that a subject can commit', vainly sought sanctuary with the French. Handed over almost immediately, he was imprisoned with several sons and a nephew. Another of his sons, Huong-sam, was executed. The decision to scatter them in exile throughout central Trung-ky may well have saved them from clandestine murder.

The Regents' open contempt for ritually enthroned kings, and the mutilation of the principle of monarchy this entailed, defiled the symbolic heart of government. But with the exception of Phan Binh Phung, whose denunciation of the first regicide had earned him a spell in prison, the Regents' power cowed the court into uneasy acquiescence for the next two years. In the North, however, the desecra-


139. Ibid, pp.194-95. Sogny, 'Nguyen Huu Bo', p.190 says two other sons of Minh-Mang, also imprisoned by the Regents, were freed by Nguyen Huu Bo in 1885.

140. On his release he returned to Nghe-Tinh to organise armed resistance.
tion of kingship eroded the will to resist among hard-pres-
sed officials, some of whom might have fought on for the
king but not for Thuyet and Tuong. Others, like Nguyen Huu
Bo, simply refused to obey the Regents' orders. By the
start of 1884, however, it hardly mattered. Hue's writ no
longer ran in the North, where the French had already begun
to organise their own civil administration without even in-
forming the Vietnamese government.

In Trung-ky, the climax came in July 1885, on the
anniversary of the signing of the Protectorate Treaty of
1884. Thuyet staged a surprise attack on the recently re-
inforced French garrison in Hue before fleeing the capital
with the latest king, Ham-Nghi, the Dowager Empresses, and
much of the court. But within a few days the party divided.
Thuyet and the king took to the mountains; the empresses
and princes wound their doleful way back to the devastation
in Hue, and to the French. With the decision taken, they
never faltered. Prince Tho-xuan accepted the presidency of
a hastily-assembled military council barely a week after
Ham-Nghi's flight. Tuy-Ly, in exile in Quang-ngai, equally
rejected requests to lead local resistance forces and
hastened back to the capital as soon as possible. As the

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141. Ordered to commit suicide, Bo refused. Nguyen The Anh,
Withering, pp.10-11. Sogny, 'Nguyen Huu Bo', p.188 says the
Regents tried to have him killed in February 1885.
143. A. Delvaux, 'La Légation de France à Hue et ses premi-
144. Sogny, 'Tuy-ly', p.195. He later became principal Reg-
ent for Thanh-Thai (1889-1897).
country rose around them in enthusiastic and bloody response to the Can vuong (Aid the King) proclamation Thuyet had issued, the French slowly recognised the need to set their own king on the throne in Hue to counter the appeal of the fugitive Ham-Nghi. In September, they enthroned the last adopted son of Tu-Buc, with a French guard of honour, as Bong-Khanh. From then on the imperial clan as a group openly embraced French protection.

So did a large proportion of the central Trung-ky political elite. General Hoang Ke Viem, for example, recalled to Hue as a thuong tho after losing a Bac-ky strong-point to the French in early 1884, stayed at his post in 1885. In 1887 he won promotion to Imperial Tutor rank (Thai-tu Thieu-bao) and a seat on the Co Mat, before retiring in 1889. From an important, but still comparatively junior posting (ranked 3-1) in the Northern administration, Nguyen Huu Bo catapulted to the mandarinal summit almost overnight as the effective Vietnamese head of the Co Mat, reorganising the government of his son-in-law, Bong-Khanh. For some months before his death in 1887, he also became the most powerful Vietnamese in the North as the imperial commissioner (kinh luoc su) at the head of the Tonkin mandarinate. But even more significant was the way the next generation of leading families from the Hue-based elite rallied to the Protectorate. Phan Thanh Liem,

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143. UNDPTR, p.93.

whose father Phan Thanh Gian had suicided over the loss of the South in 1867, became a *tong doc* under Bong-Khanh.\(^{147}\) The sons of Truong Bang Que, who father had urged resistance to the invaders, accepted high office under the new order.\(^{149}\) The Nguyen Khoa returned to prominence, supplying ministers and *tong doc* until the end of colonialism.\(^{149}\)

Tran Tien Thanh’s son, Hoi, rose through the mandarinate to reach *hiep bien* in 1919, in time to preside over the very last triennial examination.\(^{150}\) Tran Binh Phac, son of Tran Binh Tuc and the thirteenth minister from his long-descended Nguyen retainer lineage, also reached *hiep bien*. He died in peaceful old age in 1914,\(^{181}\) unlike his nephew Tran Binh Khuyen, who was killed at his post by communist rebels in December 1931 as *tri phu* of Anh-son district, Nghe-an.\(^{182}\)

The list could continue without even including the new graduates from solid, if less successful, families like Cao Xuan Duc\(^{183}\) or Huynh Con,\(^{184}\) whose later high rank derived

\(^{147}\) _VNNDT", p.394.


\(^{182}\) CM, 30 Dec 1931. AOM INCF 290/2505. According to BAVH membership lists, Khuyen, a *tri phu* in the early 1920s, spent 1923 to 1927 managing Baron Perignon’s concession at Tour Cham before rejoining the administration.

\(^{183}\) From a Nghe-an family, he had fought in the 1870s
from their active co-operation with the French military in the *can vuong* repression. But its point is made. Nothing like this wholesale defection had happened in Vietnam since sections of the Red River delta literati had chosen to collaborate with the fourteenth century Ming invaders. And even then, it is doubtful that they represented quite the roll-call of luminaries that we find in the 1880s. Why did the Hue ruling elite go over to the French almost *en masse*?

In the first place, the psychological ground for collaboration had been thoroughly prepared since the 1870s. The kingdom's steady deterioration was evident to all, but in a highly centralised system presided over by a jealous autocrat and driven by an inflexible bureaucratic machine, the possibility of needed reforms, urged since the mid-1860s, became less likely as time passed. Forced back on the king (and court) for solutions, Tu-Buc's hand-wringing incapacity to address, let alone resolve, the country's manifold problems bred frustrations in the provinces and a fated sense of inertia and impotence in Hue.\(^4\) Along with this went a debilitating erosion of resources. The loss of the South, indemnities to the French, and inflation and creeping anarchy in the North, all took a worsening toll on state revenues. The imperial clan in Hue grew increasingly impoverished,\(^5\) while administrative finances gradually

\(^{4}\,5\) Huynh Con and Jean Jacnal, *'Mémoires',* 1-2 (1924), pp.31-52 and 3-4 (1924), pp.181-204 for this period.

\(^{5}\) Tsuboi, *L'Empire vietnamienne*, pp.241-46 and 251-57 for an outline. For Tu-Buc's feelings, see the autobiographical account on his funeral stele.

\(^{6}\) According to Dr Auvray, members of the royal family who depended on Tu-Buc's generosity were so poor by 1880
disintegrated. As early as the mid-1870s, even quite high officials in the North found they needed to wait for one, two, or even three years to receive their meagre pay and rations.\(^{157}\) As time passed, the situation only worsened. It set in motion a vicious circle in which endemic official corruption corroded organisational ideals and public probity, which only further demoralised the ruling elite.

To this must be added the morale-sapping hysteria about western military supremacy, fed by Tu-Buc's stubborn insistence on compromise and negotiation with the French, whatever the circumstances. Though hardly a disinterested witness, Pètrus Ky, described a fatalistic Northern officialdom in 1876 as more or less waiting for the axe to fall: 'they are all convinced of the impossibility of making the least resistance to the French and that if France wanted to take the country she could do so without much difficulty or expense'.\(^{158}\) But if any one thing lay at the root of the pragmatic acceptance of collaboration in the 1880s, it was undoubtedly Tu-Buc's 1873 use of French forces against the Nghe-Tinh scholars' revolt. At a stroke, the king had symbolically changed the French from absolute to conditional enemies. In a sense, he had legitimised them as a regional

\(^{157}\) As Pètrus Ky reported to the Admiral-Governor of Cochinchina from his conversations with them. P.J.B. Truong Vinh Ky (trans and ed P.J. Honey), *Voyage to Tongking in the Year At-Hôi (1876)* (London: SOAS, 1982), pp.123-24.

\(^{158}\) *Ibid*, p.125.
power who might properly be called on to help restore order within the kingdom. It set a dangerous precedent for harried mandarins in the war-torn and bandit-ravaged North, too often besieged in their own yamens. By the end of the decade Nguyen Huu Bo, for one, had taken the next logical step of regarding the French as less of a menace to the social fabric of the kingdom than the anarchy that surrounded him. This lack of imaginative insight into the nature of the French threat, as not merely political but fundamentally social and cultural as well, spread more widely through upper elite circles as the 1880s progressed. In the desperate circumstances of mid-1885, many at court found themselves prepared to accept the illusion that French protection represented the lesser of two evils that confronted them.

The final catalyst for collaboration, however, was the usurpation of power by Thuyet and Tuong, and the manifest threat they posed to all that the central Trung-ky political elite valued most highly. The Regents’ disregard for Tu-Buc’s will, their assassination of at least two ritually enthroned kings, their imprisonment of high-ranking and influential imperial clansmen, and their murder of opponents of the stature of Tran Tien Thanh, all rankled with the intimidated and silently embittered court. But it was the threat to dynastic survival among the carnage and chaos

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189. According to Huynh Con, in the late 1870s Nguyen Huu Bo, then governor of Hanoi, tried to mount such a joint operation against the Black Flags bandits. Con was one of his subordinates at the time. Con and Jacnal, ‘Mémoires’, (3-4, 1924), pp.185-86.
that followed Thuyet's surprise attack on the French garri-
son in Hue that galvanised the imperial clan and their up-
per elite relatives into focusing clearly on their para-
mount goal - the preservation of their family and dynastic
heritage.

In one traumatic night, French artillery had blown
apart their world as it exploded the magisterial calm of
Hue. Hong-khang's experiences typified many. With one sis-
ter killed in the French counter-attack, Hong-khang offered
to escort another to her husband while he himself sought
his elderly mother, a daughter of Truong Bang Que. In the
countryside, prince and princess suffered strip-searches,
robbery, and rough handling. Hong-khanh was almost beaten
to death by one group before escaping to arrest by the
French as a suspect spy. Released by them, he was robbed
again of all but a loincloth. When he finally came across
his mother both were destitute. With state stipends lost in
the administrative collapse, necessity forced them to turn
to a French missionary, Mgr Allys, for help. As a result, a
grandson of the Nguyen emperor who had banned Christianity
found himself dependent on the charity of Vietnamese Catho-
lics for his family's survival. Far worse things had hap-
pened to the common people for decades in the North; but
nothing quite so shocking had ever burnt itself into the
cultured consciousness of the sheltered imperial clan.
Hong-khanh for one never forgot it - nor its lesson of
preserving dynastic loyalty above all else.140
For imperial clansmen, the enthronement of Gong-Khanh brought not simply a welcome illusion of normality, and the chance to restore order and respect for hierarchy and status in a world gone mad. It also provided an opportunity to snatch as much as possible from the fire before it was consumed. The French riot of vandalism and looting in the Imperial City in the months following the July attack had conjured up the hideous spectre of cultural annihilation that the Harmand ultimatum had first raised. To lay the ghost, a scared and vengeful imperial family and high political elite scapegoated Thuyet and Tuong. The Regents, not the French, had ‘considered the Sovereign and the Empire as nothing [and] had thrown them away as if they were without value’, Nguyen Trong Hiep thundered in the North. Thanks to their disloyalty and usurpation, ‘the government had almost been overthrown’ and everything almost lost, echoed the proclamation announcing Gong-Khanh’s accession. From July 1885, the royal clan and their elite kin closed ranks to save whatever they could under the French in Annam, and to consolidate their position around a functioning, if necessarily straitened, Nguyen monarchy. When the French proposed a new king the Grand Empress Dowager, Tu-Buc’s moth-

140. Le Breton, ‘Hong Khang’, pp.174-76 and 188 for his teaching his grandchildren about ‘the sufferings of the people and the Royal Family during the time of troubles’.

141. For the devastation, see Nguyen The Anh, Withering, pp.22-23. It was undoubtedly deliberate: General Prudhomme, for example, camped in Thieu-Tri’s cult temple until the end of November. Delvaux, ‘La Légation de France’, p.70.

er, eagerly agreed, and praised their generosity. Her proclamation betrayed no hesitations:

> if we do not act according to the circumstances, the nine ancestral altars of the kings will remain deserted [and] the people ... will have no one on whom they can rely ... We should not be opposed to the good intentions of men [ie the French] who have given us back what was lost and restored what was broken ...

> A kingdom with a grown king already possesses the principal ingredient of its happiness; thus it is for us, first because it has satisfied the wishes of the dead kings, and then because we content the appeals of the people. The kingdom henceforth has [its king] and I, an old woman, can see again the magnificence of days passed.

That it was Trung-ky which mattered to the imperial clan and the court elite was underscored soon after. In early 1886, the Grand Dowager Empress offered the new and apparently more sympathetic civilian Resident General, Paul Bert, to relinquish all claims to Tonkin in exchange for internal administrative autonomy in Annam, respecting its customs and traditions. Bert countered with another proposal: he would rescind the convention that allowed direct French rule to be extended in all but name to Trung-ky, imposed on the court on 30 July 1885, in exchange for the granting of plenipotentiary powers to the Tonkin kinh luoc. The court agreed. It was a political masterstroke for the

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144. The offer was first made in later 1884, with some Tonkin revenues sought in exchange. Nguyen The Anh, *Withering*, pp.15 and 24.
French: in place of an already unworkable convention they got 'all the advantages of annexation [in the North] without its inconveniences', plus a fund of good will in Hue for simply reverting to the Treaty of 1884. By then, Bert knew it was politically risky in France to be fighting two major wars in Indochina, and that Tonkin mattered more. It made sense to cultivate a co-operative Royal Government in Annam while the French concentrated on pacifying the North. To that end, Bert ordered the return of looted cult and palace treasures, and insisted French officers publicly treat the king and high mandarins with the respect their official dignity demanded.

After Ham-Nghi's capture in 1888 deprived the resistance of its greatest rallying-point, the court may have felt a guarded optimism about the future. Some even let themselves dream of a resurgence, as did Tu-Buc's literary consort, Nguyen Thi Bich, in a contemporary poem: 'Under the protectorate there are high mandarins once more. Surely they will recover and govern as in the past', she sang.

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146. The Ferry government had already fallen in 1885 over the cost of the Tonkin expedition.

147. Model, p.111. Woodside gives the first line as 'there will again be high mandarins', but 'láí co quý quan' could also be in the present tense, as here. To Woodside the poem typified a bureaucratic, cyclical view of history that minimized the significance of dynastic collapse because it assumed the traditional administrative system would continue. This seems an odd view for a royal consort to take, especially given how far the Nguyen went to preserve the dynasty. If as seems likely, however, it was written in the late 1880s (Woodside gives no date), it may have reflected a strain of court optimism arising from the loose Protectorate regime of the time.
But the past that would be recovered under colonialism in Annam would not be that of Vietnamese experience so much as an amalgam of French myths and misunderstandings nourished by the self-interest of the central Trung-ky political elite.

The nineteenth century political elite, and their twentieth century successors, could accept French Protection - and the later the colonial myth of their own history and political culture as "old traditional Annam" - because they were not the dogmatic and bankrupt custodians of a millenial Confucian tradition, as the French had expected and the little China fallacy predicted. Though trained in the classical canon, none came from long-descended scholarly families, sinicised in depth over many generations. For most, their Confucian studies overlaid more basic and enduring commitments to ancestral duty, historical loyalties, regional ties, and the survival of family and kin. All these considerations combined to teach them their primary loyalty lay with the Nguyen dynasty. Some, like Nguyen Huu Bo, lineage descendant of Nguyen Huu Dat, held that French intervention had saved the state from its own decadence; and that, under the Protectorate, the people might 'walk progressively on the path to prosperity and well-being'. But only in collaboration, only, as he urged the French on his death bed, if:

you leave our mandarins to exercise their functions while following your wise advice and conforming to your enlightened policy ... Let the dyn-

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asty of the Sovereigns of the Kingdom of Annam continue to be perpetuated in the future as now. These are my dearest wishes ...

At no time in 1880s Trung-ky did many outside Thanh-Nghe-Tinh willingly gamble the dynasty's future (and their own) on a gloriously hopeless, last ditch effort before the bar of national history to try to avoid their impending colonial fate. Like their chua era ancestors, most of the central Trung-ky elite settled for pragmatism and political accommodation, preferring to defend their homes, families, and customary usages with whatever inglorious practices came to hand.

The outsiders who rose to prominence in collaboration with the French took an even more minimalist view. Opportunists like Hoang Cao Khai consoled themselves that the will of Heaven had manifestly altered. Times had changed and men must change with them, he tried to persuade the die-hard rebel Phan Binh Phung in 1894:‡‡

When the capital was lost, and the king's carriage began its travels, you stood up bravely to answer the call of righteous fidelity. Taking all things into account, at that time you behaved properly ... But things have changed. Ask yourself if your life can continue this way any longer. Even the unintelligent, with little education, know the answer is no. How is it that a man like you, an outstanding individual, does not see that too? ... Man may act, but Heaven determines the outcome of his actions ...

For the hard-fisted realist Nguyen Than, the man who dug up Phan Binh Phung's bones to burn and scatter, collaboration appeared as the only viable option. Vietnam's fate had been sealed, he declared brutally. France would be master of the

country for centuries — and anyone who wanted to live had better be obedient and submit.~

We will conclude our description of the historical setting by tracing the colonial evolution of the nineteenth century political elite, and its further compromises under colonialism, in the next chapter.

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CHAPTER FOUR

PROTEGES AND PROTECTORS: NEW ELITES IN ANNAM

In his introduction to political myth, the British political scientist Henry Tudor cautions that myth-making is 'a fairly ordinary human activity'.¹ Political myths, he adds, are 'historical phenomena; and if we wish to understand them, we had best attend to the concrete circumstances in which they occur'.² That is the aim of this chapter. It surveys the political changes in the Protectorate from the 1897 arrival of Paul Doumer to the early 1920s, the main period of local adaptation of the political myths considered in Part Three. It also sketches the groups most closely involved in the process: the collaborating Vietnamese elite, and the local French community.

We begin with the historical overview.

Trung-ky in the Colonial Cauldron, 1897-1908

As we have seen, the political elite in Hue surrendered to the French and collaborated with colonialism out of a sense of obligation to their dynastic ancestors, and in the hopes of salvaging as much as possible of the current regime (and their own positions) under the Protectorate Treaty of 1884. For the next twelve years the move seemed successful, even though the 1889 death of Bong-Khanh had allowed

². Ibid, p.139.
the French to order the succession and influence the choice of Regents, Nguyen Trong Hiep and later Nguyen Than, under Prince Tuy-ly's nominal authority. Than and Hiep had both earned their preferment by ruthless repression of anti-French resistance fighters in the North and Centre; but both, Hiep especially had enjoyed sufficiently distinguished careers before 1884 to make them acceptable at court.³

Distracted by the conquest war in Tonkin, direct French influence in Annam barely penetrated beyond the capital, their key mandarinal allies, and the posts of the Garde indigène militia. In the early 1890s only six small Residences existed outside Hue.⁴ However, when the Tonkin war ended in 1896, so did the circumstances justifying such loose, indirect rule in Annam.

In 1897, the new Governor-General, Paul Doumer, realised that peace had opened a window of opportunity for radical change. He ruthlessly rammed through an agenda of administrative and economic reform that transformed Indochina. In five energetic years, Doumer set up the fiscal,

³. Hiep, a tien si and thuong tho from an old Northern scholarly family, had been royal delegate (kinh luoc) in charge of the Tonkin mandarinal administration before returning to Hue. [ GTBK], pp.151-55]. Nguyen Than from Quang-ngai, a much lesser figure, had been governor of the mountain hinterlands of Nam-Ngai in 1885 before military successes made him thuong tho of War, according to his account to Paul Doumer in Indochine française. Souvenirs (Paris: Vuibert et Nony, 1905), pp.161-63.

⁴. Ibid, pp.163-64. Also see Alexis Auvergne, 'Note sur les réformes effectuées en Annam de 1897 à 1901' in Paul Doumer, Situation de l'Indo-Chine (1897-1901) (Hanoi: Schneider, 1902), pp.425-6; and Alphonse Delvaux, 'La Légation de France et ses premiers titulaires (1875-93)', BAVH, III, 1 (1916), pp.70-74. Auvergne wrongly claimed résidents existed in all provincial seats from 1886. France had the right, but lacked the resources or interest.
administrative, and economic framework that persisted, despite its numerous flaws, until the end of colonialism. At the Union level, he turned the frail General Government, which had existed in name only since 1887, into a powerful central body with its own budget raised from customs and indirect taxes (régies) on alcohol, salt, and opium. He also attacked the bureaucratic parochialism that riddled colonial administration by creating a single Indochinese civil service into whose new structure he organised all French officials.

Second only to his influence at the Union level was Doumer's impact on Annam. Rejecting arrangements that made French colonialism 'more apparent than real' here, he replaced them with head-spinning speed in 1897-98. Fundamental constitutional reforms came first, in September 1897, mere months after his arrival. As young king Thanh-Thai attained his majority, the monarchy found itself stripped of its political and administrative powers and reduced to a figurehead. Without warning, the royal administrative role was summarily transferred to the Resident Superior: the Frenchman even became ex officio head of the Ton Nhon Phu, the royal family council. From then on, the king's only real constitutional function became sealing into law the

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5. For the General Government, see Francis Decaux, Les pouvoirs du Gouverneur Général de l'Indo-chine (Lille, 1919). For the administrative changes, see Jean Suignard, Une grande administration indochinoise: les service civils de l'Indochine (Paris: Larose, 1931).

6. Auvergne gives the fullest account of the changes. 'Note', pp.425-32.

ordinances made by the Council of Ministers. He could issue no written instructions, not even in regard to his own personal affairs, without prior French permission. From 1897 to the end of colonialism, the 'sole weapon of the Protected monarch [was] refusal. He [could] not act, he [could] only abstain', although always at the risk of being removed himself.

The Co Mat, too, completed the colonial evolution started in July 1885 when a French official, de Champeaux, had become Minister of War. Doumer reformed it into a centralised Council of Ministers which became in turn the sole administrative organ of the re-organised Royal Government, now known as the Government of Annam. Under the presidency of the Resident Superior, the new Council adopted French as the language of its deliberations. French delegates arrived in the Hue ministries to oversee their operations, while a rapidly expanding network of residents plugged the gaps in the countryside. Recruited from Cochinchina or from among junior military officers, they often brought little local knowledge — and even less local sympathy — to their new roles. Simultaneously, Doumer set up a Protectorate Government empowered to raise and levy direct taxes on the local economy. He also gave it a new head. Doumer dumped the long-serving incumbent Resident Superior, Ernest Brière,

9. Thanh-Thai could not even organise a pleasure trip on his own initiative, though no other objection to the proposal existed. RS Luce, Confidential Report on King Thanh-Thai's conduct, 30 July 1902. AEP GGIC 9620.

who had dared criticise his proposed salt régie as unpopular and impolitic, in favour of a former Resident Superior of Laos and Tonkin, Léon Boulloche. Two years later the job went to the young Alexis Auvergne, whose enthusiasm for modernisation and will to direct rule matched Doumer's own.  

In 1901, as Doumer's term concluded, Auvergne praised the new constitutional system as a 'wonderfully flexible instrument' that allowed the Protectorate 'complete, absolute supervision over all the branches of the [mandarinal] Administration' without wounding any local feelings.  

Doumer, too, claimed that by not 'changing anything in the character of the Protectorate as it appeared to the population, by leaving the Royal Government all its prestige, all its legal initiative, and, indeed, enjoying the same responsibility for measures taken in the eyes of the subjects of the kingdom, it [had been] possible to ameliorate its administration, to give French representatives an influence more effective than apparent, to work towards the economic

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10. Auvergne (RS 1900-1902, and 1903-04), a former naval doctor, had been deputy résident in Vinh (1886-1892) at the age of 27 before fighting in Tonkin. Brière was Resident Superior for much of the 1890s (1891-1894, and 1895-1898). Boulloche, a professional Resident Superior, arrived in 1887. He became RS in Annam (1894, 1898-1900), Laos (1895-95), Tonkin (1897) and Cambodia (1901-02). For short biographies, see J. Brébion, Dictionnaire bio-bibliographique ancienne et moderne de l'Indochine française [henceforth DBB] (Academie des sciences coloniales, Paris, 1935), pp.15, 45, and 50 respectively.

prosperity of the country, and to open it up to French colonialism.\textsuperscript{12}

Whether these smooth lies formed part of a political strategy designed to appease the growing current of metropolitan opinion opposed to assimilationist colonial policies is hard to say. They may have owed more to the common European assumption that, in Asia, 'form always prevail[ed] over substance, when it [was] not the substance itself',\textsuperscript{13} to borrow Pierre Pasquier's pithy 1931 formulation. In this regard, the two men may have arrogantly reasoned that preserving the traditional facade of government alone ensured the local people did not notice the fundamental changes Doumer had imposed. But whatever the case, both men knew nothing of the sort had happened. Doumer had intended his changes to be profound - and profoundly disturbing - and they had been implemented with an eye to fast results, irrespective of local factors. As Doumer himself later put it, before his arrival no-one 'had been able to do better or go further' in Annam; but though 'everything remained to be done', he had become 'master of the hour'.\textsuperscript{14} Under his control, the General Government, 'henceforth giving impulses everywhere [would] draw Annam from its political and

\begin{footnotes}
\item[13] CM, 3 Nov 1931. AOM ICNF 290/2505.
\item[14] He also claimed it all happened 'without haste, without shocks and without causing offence', something quite untrue in Annam. Doumer. \textit{Souvenirs}, p.164.
\end{footnotes}
economic stagnation'. Gradualism, or genuine indirect rule, had no place in his calculations.

This crass spirit of mastery and Olympian certitude, muted until then by circumstances in the Protectorate, also infected many post-Doumer French appointees in Annam. They, eagerly embraced the challenge of jolting its traditional society with modernising 'impulses'. Unhappily, however, time quickly showed they lacked the resources available elsewhere to fund modernising development projects. As a result, in Annam their 'impulses' rarely went beyond the brash application of self-interested western notions of uniformity, regularity, and economic rationality to almost any institution outside the family. For ten years, in a fever of administrative activism, Protectorate officials took a fiscal bludgeon to customary rights and expectations in the name of Progress.

The Royal Government fell early victim to a bout of chain-saw surgery intended to cut it down into a subordinate colonial agency on the Tonkin model. Doumer began the


16. Chapter Six considers the role of Doumer's projection of identity onto the Vietnamese in this sense of certainty.

17. For example, soon after his arrival in 1906 RS Levecque demanded economies in the palace in regard to customs arising from the king's sacral nature. Noting the king's everyday utensils were discarded after use, Levecque stigmatised the practice as simple waste and insisted the ministers find a way of 'avoiding the disappearance of objects which could be used for several years', even though a mere 800p was involved. CM, 26 May 1906. AEP GGIC 20131

process in 1900 by promulgating new retirement provisions for mandarins that ignored their special status as royal servants and reduced them to simple bureaucrats.\textsuperscript{19} From then on, the Protectorate hacked away at organisational ethics or practices inconsistent with its needs or aims, while also modifying the traditional education system and the examinations to colonial ends. And much worse followed.

Doumer had short-changed the court in 1898 when he transferred its fiscal powers to the Protectorate Government in exchange for an indemnity supposedly equal to the previous tax collection.\textsuperscript{20} By 1902, the Government of Annam found itself in serious financial straits. Imperial family stipends were heavily economised,\textsuperscript{21} while French officials leapt at the chance to rationalise the mandarinate. Between 1902 and 1907 they abolished thirty percent of all mandarinal positions in Hue, plus many others in the provinces.\textsuperscript{22}

\textsuperscript{19} Previously mandarins needed the king's approval to retire. For details of the early reforms, see Roy Jumper and Nguyen Thi Hue, \textit{Notes on the Political and Administrative History of Vietnam, 1802-1962} (Saigon, 1962), pp.97-99.

\textsuperscript{20} He only handed over the amount received in Hue after official disbursements in the provinces, which he called corruption. [Doumer, \textit{Situation}, pp.14 and 93, and \textit{Souvenirs}, p.163.] The court had to pay all officials and royal family stipends from the reduced receipts, which only rose from the original 935,000 piastres to 960,000p. by 1915-16. Of that, the royal family alone consumed 200,000. RI, 29 July 1901, pp.666-69; and AOM ICNF 203/1496 & 203/1498.

\textsuperscript{21} Only 387 stipends remained. They were restricted to current recipients and fixed between 38p and 400p, with no family members under 21 eligibility. Letter of RS to GG, 19 Jan 1909. AEP GGIC 9620

\textsuperscript{22} In Hue civil numbers fell from 404 to 278, and military from 471 to 352. Nguyen The Anh. \textit{Phong-trao Khang-thue mien Trung nam 1908} (Sai-gon, 1973), p.11, fn 1. To fund the pay increases of 1906, 70 positions were abolished,
Along with the cuts went direct French interference at every level of its operation. From 1898 on, the French had begun openly to meddle in mandarinal affairs, with only a perfunctory show of consultation. Now even that caution evaporated. The Resident Superior made all senior appointments, while in the provinces *résidents* replaced, or dismissed, mandarins in their jurisdictions on their own authority. As the court complained in a letter from Thanh-Thai to Doumer, dated 19 Mar 1900. AEP GGIC 9620

23. RS Levecque's report of 15 May 1908, quoting an earlier report. AOM ICNF 50/598
local résidents.²⁶ Caught in the cross-fire between warring French officials, mandarins felt perilously exposed. Morale plummeted. Further, many unseasoned résidents, impatient for results rather than reasons for failure, treated their Vietnamese counterparts with a "humiliating disdain".²⁷ It was a dangerous mix. With fewer than fifty French administrators spread among four to five million Vietnamese, the Protectorate relied on the mandarins for essential services and information. But by 1906, as the reformist scholar Phan Chu Trinh bluntly warned Governor-General Beau in his famous letter of that year, 'there [was] not a mandarin ... who [did] not tremble in fear in the presence of a French official ... at the simple thought of antagonising him by his answers or of incurring his anger'.²⁸ In these difficult circumstances, the desire for self-preservation led many Vietnamese into 'the habit of saying "good", "very


²⁸. From the French translation in ATK, 5 Ap 1922. This partisan political tract needs careful handling. David Marr has correctly noted that, as an expression of Phan's ideas, 'there is no reason not to take this letter at face value'. [Vietnamese Anticolonialism, 1885-1925 (University of California Press, 1971), p.163.] But its blanket denunciations of mandarins in office and refusal to blame colonialism for any of the problems it described do raise questions of intent. So does its (Confucian) solution of replacing existing mandarins with 'carefully chosen people' whose authority would be backed by improvements in French conduct. Though not naming himself or his friends, it is hard to imagine who else Phan saw in this role. For a longer analysis, see Cooke, "Protèges", pp.216-24.
good" to all [French] proposals', and shrugging off the consequences as a French responsibility.

However, for a minority of mandarins and some provincial literati, from central Trung-ky especially, the years in which the old order was disintegrating brought not only fear and anxiety but hope as well. The chance for modernising regeneration and progress, so resolutely resisted under the previous regime, finally seemed possible. Reformist literati outside the administration, like Phan Chu Trinh, began to open small businesses, set up plantations, and found schools specialising in the new western learning, all the while passionately arguing for thoroughgoing reforms to customs and institutions as part of developing the country. These men have received most scholarly attention; yet they were not unique at the time. Within a mandarinate reformist scholars universally condemned as corrupt, obscurantist, and the self-interested champion of outmoded customs and institutions, numbers of officials also tried hard to interest the French in a reform program in many ways.

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29. According to the complaints of Thanh-hoa literati collected by a former servant of RS Dufrenil in May 1908. ADM ICNF 50/598. They added: 'The Administration considers the king and mandarins as reeds, it keeps all the power and treats the interpreters and literati as sand ... [But] the French cannot rule alone; they need the co-operation of the mandarins, interpreters, and literati. They must therefore treat them with respect.'

30. For an interesting example of these views from a senior collaborating mandarin, see Hoang Cao Khai, En Annam (Ha-noi, 1910), pp.7-25.

31. Marr, Anticolonialism, Chapters 6 to 8; or Nguyen Hien Le, Dong-Kinh Nghi-thuc (Sai-gon, 1956).
similar to that advocated by Phan Chu Trinh. They failed for the same basic reason as the reformists: most French officials at the time, in Annam especially, considered the Vietnamese as a backward people incapable of breaking the bonds of their own Chinese past. Most Frenchmen regarded Vietnamese aspirations and stumbling experiments in change in much the same light as they would have seen the clumsy attempts of young children to determine their own futures. But even if Vietnamese reforming hopes had not been patronised or squashed, Doumer’s modernising program held no place for them, designed as it was to serve French colonial ends, not Vietnamese national needs. Thus even pro-French mandarins made little impact on French officials in these years.

If the mandarins became increasingly politically ineffectual and their status deteriorated in these years, the real victim of Doumerism remained young king Thanh-Thai. The full brunt of the changes bore down on him personally as on no-one else. The young king’s restricted court upbringing had poorly-prepared him for the sudden eruption of colonial activism, or for the Protectorate’s abrupt reversal of policy towards the throne. Doumer scorned Paul Bert’s former policy of public respect for the forms of the sacred monarchy and the king’s majesty. Instead, his re-

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33. For more detail, see Cooke, "Proteges", pp.79-103.
forms insisted the king act like any other bureaucrat, discharging his allotted duties and accepting the discipline of routine procedures and appropriate channels. But Thanh-Thái could never reconcile himself to this pinched royal role. In 1900, for example, he flew into a futile rage on discovering that he must seek the permission of a French official to access his own treasury when he exceeded his monthly allowance.34 Far worse, and almost casual, humiliations followed.35 All underscored the monarchy's new figurehead status and political irrelevance, as did French reactions to his vain outbursts of frustrated defiance.36 Already wayward in the 1890s, as the pressure intensified Thanh-Thái's behaviour grew progressively more erratic, hysterical, and brutal towards collaborating officials (and their daughters unfortunate enough to be married to him).37

34. Letter of 19 Mar 1900. AEP GGIC 20313

35. For example, Thanh-Thái had to host to dinner, at his own expense, most French travellers passing through Hue: 'The palace became a table d'hôte, and the imperial master of the house, the centrepiece of the menu, was devoured with the eyes like a curious beast', as Jean Ajalbert recalled. Ces Phenomènes, Artisans de l'Empire (Avignon: Edouard Aubanel, 1941), p.238.

36. For examples, see RS Luce's confidential report of 30 July 1902. AEP GGIC 9620

37. The Resident Superior three times entered the palace on his own authority to removed women kidnapped from Hue. On the last two occasions, he also released maltreated royal wives. Leveque in particular hated the king, insisting he desist from 'activities that the Representative of the Protectorate [could] not excuse'. Luce's report [AEP GGIC 9620]; and CM, 23 Oct 1906 (for quote) and 25 May 1907. AEP GGIC 20131
As early as 1902, high court mandarins had pleaded for his removal, while the people of Hue reportedly despised him as "the Frenchmen's king". When the experienced Acting Resident Superior, Paul Luce, realised the extent to which royal prestige had declined in a few years, it disturbed him considerably. He rightly recognised that diminishing the monarchy could only expose the French politically in Annam. As he warned, it made 'France, and France alone, in the eyes of the natives ... responsible for what the King has done until now, and for what he will do in future'. He might well have added that without the illusion of continued royal power, the Vietnamese would also hold the French responsible for what the Royal Government did as well. Luce's report exposed Doumer's conceit - that his system allowed the Protectorate to act unseen behind a facade of Royal Government responsibility - virtually as soon as it had been formulated. Yet despite this, and despite the almost universal French loathing for the king, Thanh-Thai actually had to murder a palace official before the Protectorate moved against him. Even then, only the Council's frantic threat of mass resignation convinced Paris to drop a proposal that would have still kept Thanh-Thai on the throne as 'a minor in tutelage'. In September

38. CM, 29 Aug 1902. AEP GGIC 9620

39. Luce's report of 30 July, 1902. AEP GGIC 9620

1907 a seven year old son was enthroned as Duy-Tan, and the court breathed more easily for a while.

Nothing symbolises more the difference Doumer made in Annam than this outright rejection of the received wisdom of the 1880s concerning the sacred monarchy. Whereas the king had appeared to Bert and his generation as the indispensable intermediary whose great authority and prestige cloaked colonialism in legitimacy, Doumer and his followers never believed it, despite their occasional lip-service to the notion. Instead, as we will see later, in their version of the myth of old, traditional Annam, the sacred monarchy, like almost everything else in the Protectorate, represented just another anachronistic failure, a doomed relic of a disappearing past and thus irrelevant to the new colonial future.41 For Doumer, outside the royal citadel ‘everything [in Annam] was transformed’. Thanks to France (and himself), ‘European realism had penetrated [and] was conquering, putting its imprint onto men and the land’. Even the celebrated rites, ‘however sacrosanct they might be’, could not escape soon being ‘retouched, made more flexible, and modernised’. How could the things of the failed past, whether monarchy or ‘archaic pagan ceremon[ies]’, hope to be ‘kept intact’, Doumer asked, before the ‘great levelling of

41. Or in Courtellement’s words: the throne of ‘the emperors of Annam is today crumbling and the dust of history will soon bury its last traces ... The conquering civilisation [has] overthrown the former edifice of this age-old kingdom and a new future will soon bloom ...’ L’Empire française, pp.107 and 109.
human life and customs' wrought by France's broad roads, steel girded bridges, and advancing railways? 42

Within this grandiloquence lurked another, but unasked, question: what could the backward Vietnamese contribute to this masterpiece of a superior civilisation? Plainly they could give only their labour and resources; and about that contribution they were given no choice. As part of his 1898 budgetary reforms, Doumer required the five regional administrations to fund themselves, and their future economic development, from direct taxation of the local economy. But in Annam, despite a stream of new charges, the local subsistence economy could never generate by itself the funds required for the massive infrastructure projects that so bedazzled Doumer and his disciples. They reacted, however, not by modifying their demands but by squeezing whatever they could from the local economy. Rural mandarins quickly learned that extracting full payment of the inventive tax and corvée dues levied by the expanding Protectorate guaranteed they pleased their new masters, and eased the pressure on themselves. Not all reneged on their duties towards the people, 43 but few dared resist the demands of cash-strapped French officials (or colonists) indefinitely.

So while Doumer and the Trung-ky peasants watched the old order collapse around them, only the Frenchman smiled.

42. All quotes, Doumer, Souvenirs, pp.171-73.

43. For example, the father of Tran Phu, first general secretary of the Indochinese Communist Party, is said to have committed suicide in March-April 1908 rather than force Quang-ngai peasants to perform additional corvée at French behest. Trinh Chi (ed), Nhung Nguoi Cong San (Ho Chi Minh City, 1977), p.10.
After a century of relative fiscal stability, insatiable new demands spiralled around the people. The Protectorate condensed changes that had taken a decade or more in North and South into a few short years in Trung-ky, with predictable traumatic results. Taxes on previously free goods and services, like markets or forest produce, dealt subsistence livelihoods a savage blow, while the General Government’s salt and alcohol monopoly threatened to wipe out small peasant industries vital to family survival. Traditional land and head taxes also changed beyond recognition almost overnight in 1898-99. Suddenly, all taxes (and many commuted corvée days) had to be paid in scarce silver, rather than copper and kind. A high uniform head tax replaced regionally variable rates. The previous sixty-seven fiscal categories of communal and private agricultural and other land unilaterally shrunk to ten, in a process which also saw the tax owed on most fields rounded upwards. Rate increases by administrative fiat, like levying centimes additionelles on head taxes, soon followed. As the Ministry of Colonies


In 1907, for example, they added 8%. [CM, 10 Nov 1906. AEP GGIC 20131] Another method compensated for inaccuracies in traditional tax registers by deeming, without land survey, an extra amount of land which was then taxed. Court records suggest its impact: in the nine provinces from Thanh-hoa to Phu-yen (where data appear uncorrupted) the area of taxable land rose by 38% between 1899 and 1906. Overall, the amount of land tax paid increased by 90% in the same period. My calculations from BNNTC [SG], various volumes, 1960-65.
admitted after the 1908 anti-tax movement shook Annam: 'it could be said that we administer Indo-China as if the natives could have no other relations with us than the payment of the charges we impose on them'.

In 1901, Doumer had congratulated himself for bringing 'order and probity into .. the kingdom's finances ... without increasing the charges'. Few peasants would have agreed. For them, the status quo had dissolved into fiscal instability, arbitrary exactions, and a losing battle between ancestral rights and new state prerogatives. And it was pain for no gain. Despite the pressure, between 1899 and 1908, Protectorate revenue rose overall by only 30%, virtually all of it from direct taxes on the peasant economy and the sale of market licences. Yet in 1908 three items alone - French residencies, the Garde indigène militia, and the court and mandarinate - consumed two-thirds of the budget. One quarter of all outlays went to pay European personnel. Public works, by contrast, consumed under

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44. MinCols, Note on events in Annam, 3 Sept 1908. AOM ICNF 50/598

47. Doumer, Situation, p.93.


49. From 2,030,820 p. to 2,915,000 p. Auvergne, 'Note', p. 430; and 1908 budget receipts at AOM Indochine K63(36).

50. These sources accounted for 96.5% of all revenue. My calculations from Budget receipts at AOM Indochine K63(36).

51. All calculations Ibid. It was still an improvement over 1901 when they consumed 81% of revenue, according to figures published in RI, No. 145, 29 July 1901, p.666.
12% of revenue, of which irrigation, its sole enterprise of direct benefit to the peasantry, received the derisory sum of 10,000 piastres (or 3.5% of the public works budget). Education and health were even worse served, together accounting for a mere 5.5% of outlays, half of which disappeared on the salaries of a few Europeans.

But from the peasants' perspective, far worse was the endemic abuse of unpaid, conscripted labour that took them away from food production, or from the petty trading and handicrafts that helped them survive and meet the state's other imposts. For French résidents (and others), corvée labour appeared a "cost-free" traditional means of carrying out small projects for which no other funding existed. The Protectorate thus repeatedly sliced away the days originally devoted to local works, so that by 1907 only two remained for essential village needs. As the work still had to be done, communal authorities joined the queue of mandarins, French militia officers, and colons who routinely and illegally requisitioned peasant labour. The practice weighed most heavily on poor peasants who, in the absence of official tax cards, had no way of proving they had already discharged their obligation. Corvée abused rankled so deeply that it finally sparked the spontaneous demonstration, in Quang-nam in late January 1908, which triggered an

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\(^{32}\). For the convolutions of the corvées, see 'Documents. Le voyage du Gouverneur-Général en Annam', RI, No. 93, 15 Nov 1908, pp.667-69.

\(^{33}\). For various Quang-nam examples, see Phan Chu Trinh (ed and trans Le Am and Nguyen Q. Thang), Trung Ky Dan Bien Thi Mat Ky (Sai-gon, 1973), pp.28-32.
anti-tax movement that swept through central and southern Trung-ky in the following months.\textsuperscript{a4}

The tax riots themselves posed no threat to Protectorate control. Mostly more noisy than dangerous, they rarely topped a thousand and crowds usually dispersed after passing their grievances to the mandarin or French résident. Nevertheless, they shook the local colonial administration to the core, and panicked Fernand Levecque into summoning white troops from Tonkin. This was largely because the movement had caught the Protectorate entirely unawares, with no effective warning and little hard information about the state of popular feeling either before or after it erupted.\textsuperscript{a5} The mask of deference worn by the mandarinal 'Agents of France'\textsuperscript{a6} had hidden peasant discontent, and much more, from French eyes. Although most Vietnamese officials had been silently distancing themselves from the Protectorate for years, cultural arrogance or reforming zeal had deceived many post-Doumer officials into mistaking their apparent command of the mandarinate for control of

\textsuperscript{a4} *Ibid*, p.28 insists on the spontaneous character of the first demonstration. For the whole movement, see Marr, *Anticolonialism*, Chapter 8; or Nguyen The Anh, *Phong-trap*, passim. Peter Baugher and Vu Ng U Chieu have translated Phan Chu Trinh's account as *A Complete Account of the Peasants' Uprising in the Central Region* (Centre for Southeast Asian Studies, Wisconsin-Madison, Monograph 1, 1983). As a political tract written largely from memory, however, its claims need more cautious treatment than they allow.

\textsuperscript{a5} RS Levecque obfuscated the point, but fooled neither GG Bonhoure or the Ministry. See Mincol's Historical Note on the Recent Troubles in Annam, 25 July 1908 [AOM Indochine A30 (115) Carton 22]; or Bonhoure's letter of 10 Ap 1908. AOM ICNF 50/598

\textsuperscript{a6} GG Bonhoure's description of mandarins in office in Annam. Report of 22 July 1908. AOM ICNF 50/598
the countryside. As one of the most senior French officials in Annam later realised, with hindsight intervening, 'mandarins, from the ministers down, seeing their powers reduced, [had] detached themselves from their functions and very cleverly abstained from giving any information, leaving to the Protectorate Government a responsibility that no longer fell on them'. As 1908 revealed, however, it was not a responsibility the French could shoulder alone.

By acting after Doumer as if no limits existed to colonial power in Annam, French officials had in fact proven the opposite. Comfortable assumptions of French supremacy over their alien environment fractured under the uneasy realisation that physical factors limited their direct administrative control in Annam. The 'superficial state of [French] organisation, the vast extent of territory that an Annamite province represent[ed], the smallness of the means at [French] disposal [and] the difficulties and slowness of communications' all conspired to force the Protectorate to rely on the active and willing co-operation of Vietnamese mandarins here. As grudging as the admission appeared, even the high-handed Fernand Levecque had to acknowledge its truth.

In the current state of our organisation ... we cannot do without the help of the mandarins. To

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57. Levecque ignored the few dissenting résidents, according to Bonhoure (who was, admittedly, no admirer). Report of 22 July 1908. AOM ICNF 50/598
58. Ibid.
60. Ibid.
the extent they lose influence and authority, we
ourselves lose it.

How to restore and bolster that influence and author-
ty, and to ensure it worked for colonial ends at least as
much as mandarinal self-interest, became the major polit-
ical problem for the French in Annam after 1908. Despite
various attempts, the Protectorate never managed to solve
it, as the rebellions of 1930-31 would later reveal. To a
considerable extent, the roots of this failure also went
back to 1908, in this case to the French explanation of the
anti-tax movement, and its proposed political remedy.

The blood had scarcely dried in mid-1908 before a
round of finger-pointing exculpation began. French adminis-
trators found culprits everywhere, even occasionally in the
Doumer administrative and fiscal system. However, most
settled blame on the reformist scholars. Because most of
their activities had been open and uncontrolled by the ad-
ministration, the reformists had quickly attracted official
French suspicions that portrayed their schools and commer-
cial enterprises as 'pretexts' behind which they were 'or-
ganising themselves to fight French authority'. By a
logical sleight-of-hand, French officials characterised

**1. Bonhoure blamed aspects of the Doumer system; but added
the administration was locked into it by, inter alia, the
huge debts run up for capital development. Report of 22
July 1980. ADM ICNF 50/598

Ironically, clandestine anti-colonial opposition groups had
an easier time in Annam in these years as they had only the
militia to contend with, and Protectorate officials had few
reliable sources of information. Patrice Morlat, *La Repres-
sion coloniale au Vietnam (1908-1940)* (Paris: L’Harmattan,
1990), pp.40-41.
Vietnamese reformists, like the movement they supposedly led, as reactionary and traditionalist. Levecque, for example, who claimed to find a critical spirit among the handful of graduates of French schools in Annam, could not detect anything modern or progressive about the reformist literati. Rather, they were mere mean-spirited malcontents. Having failed to win mandarinal positions, 'pride of caste' made them refuse 'to lower themselves' to agriculture, industry, or commerce, he reported. Thwarted in their ambition, they had turned instead to 'exploit[ing] the resentment all people feel at all times towards taxes' and, disguising their political motives, had stirred up the 'ignorant and hard-working people'. Acting Governor-General Bonhoure, too, dismissed them as nothing new, simply 'skilful sophists, intelligent lettrés, recruited from the restless literati class which, in all periods in the history of Annam, has caused difficulties for the government'.

But Bonhoure also faulted the French Protectorate. In his view, reforming zealots from Levecque down had forgotten, ignored, or flouted the punctilios of form and style so vital in this area. They had disregarded the fact that 'all novelty, even that favourable to the natives, risk[ed] being exploited against [the French] in Annam'. By denigrating the monarchy and disdaining the mandarins, Protectorate officials had lost sight of the basic principle that,  

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*3.* The people would not have knowingly supported political revolt, he added. Levecque's report of 15 May 1908. AOM ICNF 50/598

*4.* Bonhoure's confidential report of 22 July 1908. AOM ICNF 50/598
in this conservative bastion, preserving 'form and respect for political traditions [provided] excellent ways to gain the confidence of the people'.\textsuperscript{45} The ministry in Paris entirely concurred. The instigators of the anti-tax movement, 'princes, former mandarins, and literati', all still seen by the people of 'old Annam' as their 'natural leaders', had been provoked, among other things, by the 'profound modifications' imposed by the Protectorate on a court and government system which they had believed 'beyond change, since it rested on scrupulous observance of the Chinese morality that [had been] theirs for centuries'.\textsuperscript{46} The myth of old, traditional Annam returned to reassure them.

The analysis suggested its own solution. France should revive the Paul Bert strategy of symbolic restitution, of compromising over the symbols and public forms of royalty and mandarinal office to win back the influential support of the alienated local political elite. In this special bastion of Sinic traditions, public French respect for age-old customs and institutions seemed to offer the easiest and most effective means of ensuring order and tranquillity among the people. The assumed millenial Annamite past, blithely consigned to oblivion a decade before, rebounded onto the Protectorate political agenda with a vengeance. It would remain there until the end of the colonial era.

To execute the policy reversal, Paris appointed an 1886 aide of Paul Bert, Antoni Klobukowski, as Governor-

\textsuperscript{45} Both quotes, letter of 8 May 1908 to MinCols. ADM ICNF 50/598

\textsuperscript{46} MinCols' Note, 3 Sept 1908. ADM ICNF 50/598
Before the court in Hue, Klobukowski invoked the spirit of his 'late, lamented master who from the first had understood the Annamite soul' before signalling a retreat from the worst excesses of Doumerism. In a simple statement whose sentiments had not been officially expressed for over a decade he declaimed: 'our entire policy in Annam is based on respect for institutions and customs, in a word, on everything to which the Annamite people are particularly attached.' In private session with the Council he spelt out what the rhetoric meant: the Protectorate would shore up the monarchy and share local administration with a functional Government of Annam in exchange for effective and responsible co-operation from its officials. Mandarins would become honoured collaborators, not scorned subordinates, and their opinions (albeit non-binding) would be sought in all matters effecting the Vietnamese. But the Doumer fiscal system stood, as did his changes to the Government of Annam.

Over the next months, Klobukowski and his hand-picked Resident Superior, Groleau, worked to restore and protect the hierarchical integrity of the mandarinate. General Government employees found themselves placed under the political control of the Protectorate and, along with résidents, worked to restore and protect the hierarchical integrity of the mandarinate. General Government employees found themselves placed under the political control of the Protectorate and, along with résidents,

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[47] A professional diplomat, he worked in Indochina from 1882 to 1887 and later married one of Bert's daughters. DBB, pp.213-14.


[70] Ibid, pp.654-7 for speeches and Council minutes. The minutes are also held at AEP GGIC 20131.
forbidden to interfere directly in mandarinal affairs. In 1909 Groleau follow-up by implementing a cumbersome consultative process that required regular meetings between résidents and provincial mandarins, with the minutes routinely dispatched to Hue for vetting. Where local disagreements arose between the two sides, the details had to be passed to Hue for resolution.71 These 1909 structures and procedures then remained in operation until World War Two.

Klobukowski's procedural reforms successfully rescued the Government of Annam from casual French interference in its lower levels. But in solving one problem, the Governor-General unwittingly helped create another, potentially far more dangerous, one. Although Klobukowski later disingenuously claimed that his policy in Annam had 'put back in their place the people and things that ten years of a regime conflicting with the customs of the natives and clashing with their interests had profoundly disturbed',72 manifestly it had not. Nor had he intended to turn the clock back to the early 1890s, despite such rhetoric. His goal had always been to make the colonial system more effective by a judicious accommodation, where necessary, to its Asian environment.73 But the political environment in Annam had changed in ways Klobukowski never really understood. As a

71. RS Groleau's Circular on the application of GG Klobukowski's instructions about the role and attitude of French authorities in the provinces, 1909. AEP GGIC 21745.


73. This aim underlay some his other bureaucratic reforms, as the 1908 circular on administrative arrangements showed. Reprinted in Decaux, Les Pouvoirs, pp.17-18.
result, his reforms miscued and helped bring about some quite unintended consequences in the next decades.

Trung-Ky Becomes "Old, Traditionalist Annam": 74 1908-1920

Several factors combined to make 1908 the watershed year in the brief colonial history of Central Vietnam. Before the anti-tax movement, few French officials had assumed Central Vietnam required any special political treatment, nor offered any particular resistance to colonial modernisation. The French interpretation of the anti-tax riots stood that judgement on its head. Under its influence in the decade that followed Trung-ky completed its colonial evolution. From being 'Cochinchina properly speaking' 75 in Luro's account, it had become 'Annam properly speaking' by Doumer's day. 74 Now it took on its mythological guise as old, traditional Annam, the kingdom whose 'old, conservative people', 77 as Pierre Pasquier described them in 1923, required policies sympathetically tailored to their special character and circumstances. This section and the next consider some of the elements that


74. Doumer, Souvenirs, p.32.

77. RS Pasquier, report to GG on primary education in Annam, 2 Jan 1923. He added: 'What is good for Annam is not necessarily good for Tonkin or Cochinchina'. AEP GGIC 51080
made Annam seem so different to Frenchmen in those years from the other Vietnamese regions.

First, the repression of the anti-tax movement began the process by clearing the field of most non-mandarinal progressive elements in the Vietnamese community in Trung-ky for nearly a generation. In one blow, it eradicated almost the entire intellectual leadership of the reformist movement among provincial literati. Levecque had blamed their propaganda and activities for the outbreak of peasant unrest, and he demanded the Council arrest as many of these offenders as it could catch. Under French supervision, mandarinal courts sentenced 435 people, almost all provincial reformist literati, to exile on Con-son island, or penal servitude in the fever-ridden mountain prison at Lao-bao, for periods ranging from nine years to life.\footnote{Nguyen The Anh, \textit{Phong-trao}, pp.116-17. They included Phan Chu Trinh, though his metropolitan reputation and earlier involvement with the Ecole française in Ha-noi later won him better treatment and later exile to France. [Note on the Phan Chu Trinh affair, 13 Mar 1909. AOM Indochine A30 (116) Carton 22] Levecque's report of 15 May 1908 shows his deep involvement in the repression. AOM ICNF 50/598.}

At the same time, Levecque presided over a purge of the mandarinate which left it far more homogeneous than it had been in the previous decade. While the courts sentenced fifteen officials,\footnote{Nguyen The Anh, \textit{Phong-trao}, pp.116-17, 132-33, 167-69 for mandarinal casualties.} Levecque ruthlessly hunted down any others who had shown sympathy for the reformists by such actions as investing in their businesses, or whom he suspected of leniency in the repression. All mandarins with
young relatives involved were also punished.  

Rank protected no-one: Prince Tung-thien's son, the loyal Hong-khang, found himself among the four provincial governors sacked in the shake-out. Levecque believed him weak because, as tuan vu of Ha-tinh, he had only arrested men against whom evidence existed, and then had sentenced them according to the evidence presented rather than according to the province's rebellious reputation.

On the French side, 1908 was equally as significant. Although the movement had never threatened colonial control, it still left many Protectorate officials deeply uneasy. Shocked by their lack of warning, and the large scale of the unrest, it disturbed their comfortable certainties of French superiority. Vague doubts began to gnaw in many minds, and the new political climate of enforced co-operation following Klobukowski's reforms did nothing to assuage them. Many French administrators in Annam lost their earlier assurance that they bestrode the Asian landscape as masters of its alien Otherness. Many stumbled, and found themselves slowly sucked into the mire where they floundered about trying to deal with mandarins as more or less equals, as counterparts rather than subordinates. From 1908 onwards, formerly sharp lines of command began to unravel ambiguously around the edges. No-one remained unaffected, not even the man at the very top.

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80. Levecque's report of 15 May 1908; and Dufrenil's note of 22 Sept 1908. Both ADM ICNF 50/598

81. H. Le Breton, 'La vie de SE Hong Khang (L'un des derniers lettrés d'Annam)', BAVH, XX, 3 (1933), p.184.
Although the Resident Superior's political authority increased after 1908, its successful exercise in regard to the Government of Annam became less overt, more a matter of subtle manipulation and of persuasion rather than autocratic dictation. Before the anti-tax movement, Council minutes reveal the extent to which domineering Residents Superior like Levecque had tried to run the Vietnamese administration through their bullying of the ministers in Council and control of the French délégués in the ministries. But 1908 ended official tolerance for that style of rule. In August 1908, even before Klobukowski's arrival, Levecque had been dismissed on the grounds that he lacked the 'subtle diplomacy' and the 'tact and understanding of the customs of the country' which had suddenly materialised as essential qualifications for the Resident Superior in Hue. Yet while the official emphasis shifted to suasive personal relationships and respect for local customs, French officials received little more than generalities or platitudes to guide them through the strange and unfamiliar territory.

Not all made the crossing safely. Two more Residents Superior after Levecque would end their careers prematurely by straying too far across the invisible line into the no-man's land of politically unacceptable conduct. In 1913, following a public hue and cry, Georges Mahé was dismissed for excavating for buried treasure in king Tu-Buc's tomb.

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4. We return to him below. DBB, p.249.
Then in 1920, after king Khai-Dinh warned the Governor-General he would abdicate over proposed tax rises, Acting Resident Superior Tissot was also hustled out of Hue in favour of Pierre Pasquier, a man with a 'deep experience of the native soul and a profound understanding of the political and administrative institutions of the country'. In the twelve years between 1908 and 1920, three Residents Superior of Annam wrecked their careers on political miscalculations that their superiors considered offended too deeply against local customs. Nowhere else but in old, traditional Annam did this happen—nor would it have happened in those years. Trung-ky had become a special case.

This sense of Annam's uniqueness functioned on two levels: as a psychological fact in French colonial minds reinforced by the experience of daily life in Trung-ky. We will consider them in turn.

As we noted before, 1908 had exposed the hidden flaw in the Doumer system here. The structural weakness of the Protectorate made the French dependant on a mandarinate that 1908 had suddenly revealed as something other than the plaint colonial agency of French imagining. And the local people, too, had shown themselves unstable, capable of being transformed virtually overnight from their usual tractable and industrious selves into a irrational, riotous mob ready to explode into violence at the lying instigation of their traditional leaders. Thoughts like these stirred

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anxieties deep in French minds about the real extent of colonial penetration in this region where, as the long-serving official Bonhoure put it, 'the old literary tradition [had been] maintained with the most constancy and the national spirit [had] most strongly survived'. Here more than anywhere else loomed the dark spectre of "Annamite tradition", an arcane power whose reactionary force opposed all for which France stood. In the decade after 1908, everywhere Frenchmen looked in Trung-ky they perceived, not the rapid westernising change that had so delighted Doumer, but the inertia of old Annam, where the stifling grip of archaic traditions and customs had made 'the progress of [modern] ideas and institutions slower than anywhere else,' to quote Albert Sarraut in 1917.

But while Sarraut found the amorphous power of "Annamite tradition" a challenge, others like Georges Mahé perceived it as more sinister, an ill-defined threat to himself and to the colonial power with which he identified. This feeling comes through very clearly in his extraordinary, 'very confidential' 1912 report on the old and ailing minister, Cao Xuan Duc.

An intelligent pragmatist, Duc had joined the French in Tonkin in the early 1880s. Unlike many of his collaborating colleagues, however, he had retained an independence

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**87.** Bonhoure, Report of 22 July 1908. AOM ICNF 50/598

**97.** GG Sarraut, Report on the Political Situation, 9 Apr 1917. AOM ICNF 18/166

**98.** RS Mahé, Very Confidential Report on Cao-Xuan-Duc, 4 May 1912. AEP GGIC 9620
of mind that often brought him into conflict with colonial officialdom. Appointed Minister for Public Instruction in 1907, he had gone on to fight a losing battle to preserve what was valuable from the past while pursuing a policy of selective modernisation. In the Council his vigorous (but unsuccessful) opposition to the newly-appointed Georges Mahé's plan to set age limits for candidates at the triennial examinations incurred the Resident Superior's enmity, and something more. To Mahé, Duc transmogrified into the personification of post-1908 "Annamite tradition". 'On the pretext of attachment to the rites of the past', Mahé reported, 'he presents himself as the most active representative of the past and of the ideas of stagnation against which we strive to react'. Duc's subversive powers seemed so all-pervasive to the Frenchman that Mahé added 'propositions made by the Council were often perverted' in practice by his influence.

When the septuagenarian minister fell ill, therefore, Mahé felt unable to ask for his resignation simply on the ground that 'his health no longer allowed him to exercise his functions'.

This course could create enormous difficulties. It might happen that HE Cao-Xuan-Duc will not accept being retired, and he need only remark that

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99. For a biography, see Charles Patris, 'Notice nécrologique: SE Cao-Xuan-Duc', BAVH, XX, 4 (1923), pp.436-64.

99. Thus Duc was the only minister to suggest any reforms to Klobukowski in his 1908 Council meeting. 'Voyage', pp. 666-70.

91. Mahé's report, p.4. AEP GGIC 9620

92. All quotes Ibid, p.5.
HE Truong-Nhu-Cuong, President of the Regency Council, is the same age and that therefore retirement from office must be applied to both.

Perhaps HE Truong will judge it opportune on this occasion to support HE Cao and will demand to be retired or offer his resignation himself. If such an eventuality occurred, it would result in serious embarrassment which it is in our interests to avoid at the moment ...

This fretful catalogue of hypothetical problems appears no balanced assessment of the situation by a man confident in his ability to rule. Rather, Mahé's report opens a rare window onto the hidden fears and anxieties that stirred in many French minds during these years when confronted by individuals or institutions that attracted the disquieting projection of Vietnamese Otherness in the potent guise of mysterious "Annamite tradition". By identifying Duc with this shadowy force, Mahé inflated the old minister into an opponent mighty enough to thwart Protectorate policy from being implemented in Annam. He became to the Frenchman a figure compelling enough to galvanise into anti-French activity a supine colonial lackey like Truong Nhu Cuong, a man whom Albert Sarraut later accurately described as someone 'on whose loyalty we could count in all circumstances'.

If we consider Mahé's 1913 assault on Tu-Buc's tomb against this background, it seems less an act of arrogant stupidity than a defiant gesture of bravado, a sort of direct challenge at its source to the menacing power of "Annamite tradition" that Duc, by then no longer a minister, had personified for the Resident Superior.

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93. GG Sarraut, Report of 24 May 1917. AOM ICNF 18/166
As we mentioned earlier, the psychological sense of Annam's uniqueness in French colonial minds at this time received daily reinforcement from the experience of living and working in the Protectorate. French officials in Annam did face practical difficulties quite dissimilar from those of their colleagues in Tonkin or Cochinchina. Here most provincial residents and their assistants lived in tiny isolated groups scattered along a thousand kilometres of rugged coastline. Most lacked any French community life to balance and sustain them. In 1908 the garrison town of Hue, the concession-port of Tourane, and Thanh-hoa town, which housed some small colonial businesses, were the only places in which the French population topped fifty. The next largest settlement, Nha-trang in the far south, only boasted a couple of dozen Europeans because it included the staff of the Pasteur Institute of medical research. Poor communications compounded the isolation. Annam's only railways ran between Vinh and Nam-dinh in the north and, from 1906, between Hue and Tourane. All other résidencies had to make do with often impassable roads, or an infrequent coastal launch service. In 1871, not quite ten years after the first provinces had been ceded to France, Cochinchina al-

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95. H. Cosserat, 'La Route mandarine de Tourane à Hué', BAVH, VII, 1 (1920), pp.129-34.
ready held a much higher European population in a far more concentrated area that Annam would do forty years later.86

Not only were they fewer in number and more isolated here, but in the decade after 1908 French officials in Annam also found that Klobukowski's policy of conciliation with the mandarinate evolved rather differently in practice than he had anticipated. What should have been a matter of developing a more collaborative style in relation to their Vietnamese counter-parts unwittingly came to entail changes in the substance of the relationship as well. Essentially this occurred because most Vietnamese officials, from the ministers down, effectively refused their part of Klobukowski's one-sided bargain. Instead of shouldering most of the responsibility for good government as he had hoped, most Vietnamese officials in the purged mandarinate persisted in the pre-1908 view of public affairs as essentially a matter for the French. Many preferred instead to concentrate more on exploring the greater latitude that the changed political conditions after 1908 increasingly opened up for the pursuit of their own private interests, which they did in ways that often eluded effective French control. During the 1910s, dealing with the slippery Government of Annam became a qualitatively different experience for French officials than handling their Vietnamese subordinates in the two other regions.

Indeed, so successfully did elements within the mandarinate pursued their own agenda during this decade that, by the 1920s, circumstances had brought about a situation in which the Protectorate gradually accepted that it could essentially only exercise a haphazard and diminishing control over the Annam mandarinate as a whole. The interaction of two basic factors accounted for this development. First, in the post-1908 decade, the operation of Klobukowski's system allowed the ministers to come to dominate the mandarinate via a shady network of patronage that cut across or ignored the formal structures of administration. And second, French administrative dependence on the Government of Annam set up a contradiction between public policy and political necessity within which mandarinal malfeasance could flourish virtually unchecked. The remainder of this section discusses each in turn.

When Doumer centralised the Council of Ministers into the sole organ of the Government of Annam in 1897, he had assumed that the Resident Superior as president would control the ministers and thus the mandarinate from the top down. But as we saw, other colonial officials began almost immediately to pressure the Council's institutional authority over its rural subordinates. By 1908 very little of it remained. Klobukowski tried to resurrect the Council's former prestige and authority, although apparently without ever realising how much of the Council's slim ethical basis had been whittled away in the previous decade. As a result, 

97. GG Bonhoure, letter of 8 May 1908, and confidential report of 22 July 1908. Both AOM ICNF 50/598
when he placed mandarinal personnel matters solely in the hands of the Council in 1908, and charged the ministers to advise on them, the reform did not thereby provide 'the most serious guarantees' of impartial decisions, as the Governor-General claimed to believe. Rather, it handed the ministers a new and potentially lucrative lever of control over ambitious mandarins while equally presenting them with the tempting opportunity to traffick in their administrative influence.

The impartial personnel decisions Klobukowski dreamed of required either honest and disinterested ministers, or a Resident Superior up to their tricks and as well informed as they about the private affairs of scores, if not hundreds, of Vietnamese officials. Neither condition applied. Between 1910 and 1920, the weight of local knowledge and institutional continuity lay with the ministers. Seven Residents Superior passed through Hue in those years, only four appointed from Annam. Among the ministers, however, a central core remained in office for over a decade: Huynh Con (1902-1917), Truong Nhu Cuong (1902-1917), Ton That Han (1906-1923), and Nguyen Huu Bai (1906-1932). And where Klobukowski had intended the Council be consulted in

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99. 'Voyage', p.664; or CM, 13 Oct 1908. [AEP GGIC 20131]

100. For Residents Superior until 1916, see DBB, pp.19-11.

100. He returned as Regent during the Bao-Bai interregnum (1925-1932). For his career, see E. Levadoux, 'Ephémérides annamites. S.E. Ton That Han prends sa retraite', BAVH, X, 4 (19230, pp.393-94. Like the other three, his later career success rested on service in the can vuong repression.

mandarinal appointments, archival material shows that within two decades Protectorate practice had allowed ministerial preferences to become far more decisive. 102

The roots of this development went back to the 1910s, when Council members had first began to manipulate the changed political climate in Annam to their own ends. During these years, the ministers in particular enjoyed a real freedom of manoeuvre because, for many senior French officials, they had come to incarnate or at least symbolise the arcane force of "Annamite tradition". Thus whatever irritation or anxiety the Council or its individual members might sometimes cause senior French officials at the time, the Protectorate never moved against them. On the contrary, ministers won 'a licence in their bearing, in their conduct, in their deeds, and in their words ... that had never been tolerated before', 103 as Eugène Charles reported when he took over from the disgraced Mahé in 1913. And although Charles talked toughly about curtailing this freedom, he never seriously disciplined any ministers. Nor did he remove any, notwithstanding Governor-General Roume's express demand that Truong Nhu Cuong and Huynh Con be retired in

102. Council minutes for the 1910-1920s were not available during my research at Aix; but those at the rue Oudinot archive from the early 1930s showed a marked difference in this respect from those before 1908. Despite rebellion in Nghe-Tinh, personnel matters provoked far the livelier and longer-running debates in Council. CM, 1930-32. AOM ICNF 290/2505-06

103. Quoted in GG Roume's report on the events in Annam, 20 May 1916, pp.16-17. AEP GGIC 7F-50 (2) Both attributed their manoeuvres to the 'uncertainties' of a Regency period.
May 1916.\textsuperscript{104} When put to the test, no-one in the Protectorate Government in those years wanted to risk provoking a popular outburst by touching these supposedly-influential defenders of customs and traditions.\textsuperscript{105} And by 1916, as the circumstances surrounding king Duy-Tan's attempted revolt suggest,\textsuperscript{106} the ministers themselves understood the situation quite well and knew how to exploit it to their own ends.

In May 1916, teenage king Duy-Tan had quit the palace in the hope that a war-time revolt would force the French to re-negotiate the Protectorate Treaty. Unknown to him, only weeks before Governor-General Ernest Roume had written to the Colonial Ministry in Paris outlining a plan to abolish the monarchy and extend direct administration to Annam-Tonkin. Duy-Tan unwittingly played right into his hands. Almost on the point of leaving for France, Roume hurried to Hue expressly to forestall the succession until he could lobby Paris in person. He failed. Resident Superior Eugène Charles (according to Huynh Con's memoirs)\textsuperscript{107} had warned the court of the Governor-General's hidden agenda. In personal interviews in advance of the Council meeting, each minister held out bravely against Roume's pressure in de-

\textsuperscript{104} Ibid

\textsuperscript{105} GG Sarraut described this as a wartime policy, but RS Mahé had used a similar reason for not seeking Duc's resignation in 1913. Report on Changes in Senior Personnel, 24 May 1917. AOM ICNF 18/166

\textsuperscript{106} For more detail, see Cooke, "Proteges", pp.112-129.

\textsuperscript{107} Huynh Con and Jean Jacnal, 'Mémoires de son excellence Huynh Con', RI (ns), XLI, 9-10 (1924), p.249. Con said it was himself and Nguyen Huu Bai Charles warned.
fence of the monarchy. It was, of course, a matter of self-defence as well: no king meant no ministers, either. Through it all none hinted that they knew of Roume's proposal. Instead, they played the high card of "Annamite tradition", as understood by the French political myths.

Men who had consistently rejected Thanh-Thai's futile demands for his traditional rights as king now discovered that administration would become impossible in Annam without a reign title by which to date documents, and that without a king on the throne the people would refuse to pay their taxes. Even more important, they explained at the special Council meeting, rebels still at large held royal proclamations sealed by Duy-Tan himself. Without a new king to invalidate them, they would encourage bad elements and might even spark uprisings in Tonkin and Cochinchina as well. At the crucial moment, Roume dared not call their bluff on any of it, or on their discreet threat to withdraw co-operation en masse without an immediate succession. The Governor-General backed down and agreed that Buu-Bao, son of the first collaborating king, Bong-Khanh, should

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108. Though Huynh Con and Boan Binh Nhan wavered somewhat, according to transcripts by Du Pac de Marsuli, 9 May 1916. AEP GGIC 7F-50 (2)

109. Possibly a reminder of the can vuong movement, but more likely a reference to the recent troubles instigated by a royal pretender, Phan Xich Long, in the South. Morlat, La Repression, pp.41-42 and 44-46.

110. RS Charles contradicted none of it; and the minutes recorded nothing from him during the meeting. CM, 10 May 1916. AEP GGIC 7F-50 (2)
take the throne as, in Nguyen Huu Bai's words, the 'sole legal candidate'.

Having trumped Roume with the Sinic card, however, the 'faithful observers of the traditions and rites of our State', as the court described itself, went on almost immediately to reveal just how little Confucian orthodoxy actually now meant to them. In a proclamation to the Resident Superior of Tonkin announcing Khai-Binh's accession, they condemned Duy-Tan for 'fail[ing] in his duties towards his august ancestors and towards the Protecting Spirits of the country, as well as [for] showing ingratitude to the Protectorate'. With a novel extension of Mandate theory they concluded: 'His mandate is declared to have fallen'. In other words, the court was claiming the Mandate of Heaven as personal to the king, not attached to the whole dynasty, and as less in heaven's gift than its own (in conjunction, of course, with the Protectorate). But no French official at the time remarked on this radical departure from Chinese tradition in "old, traditional Annam". They may have still be too 'stupefied', too 'surprised and amazed', as the doyen of Annam colonists, de Monpezat put it, that 'a child whose mind [they had] had the privilege of

111. Ibid. In private he had been far more flexible: 'Give us a king, it doesn't matter who'. If Buu Bao was unacceptable, 'indicate another and we will accept him'. Most ministers had wanted Ham-Nghi back, but knew it was unlikely. Du Pac de Marsuli, 9 May 1916. AEP GGIC 7F-50 (2)

112. All quotes from the court's Proclamation to RS(TK), 15 May 1916. AEP GGIC 7F-50 (2) (my emphasis)

113. GG Roume, chronology of events, 10 May 1916. AEP GGIC 7F-50 (2)
forming’, whose every act had been observed, ‘and whose way of thinking should have been known to [them]’ could then foment a revolt under their very noses, without the Protectorate hearing a word about it until only hours before it occurred.

Reporting the meeting later, Roume wondered uneasily if the ministers had known more than they let on. Their protestations of loyalty had seemed sincere enough; but if they were, where was their foresight and common sense? Duy-Tan’s mercurial behaviour over the previous year or so had broadcast his intentions to any willing to hear them. Had the ministers, like the Protectorate, mistaken the young king’s actions for adolescent tantrums? Roume worried. Was he faced with ‘calculation or real ineptitude’ on their part? Neither he nor Sarraut in 1917 could fathom it.

Nor could Protectorate officials, who played safe and passed up the opportunity of Khai-Binh’s enthronement to retire the two oldest ministers as Roume had insisted. Nor would they have gone until the end of the War, Sarraut later confirmed, if the Council’s disregard for Khai-Binh’s opinions had not so irritated the new king that he requested their removal on the basis that the law required ministers to retire at seventy. Reporting the changes, Sarraut

114. Letter of Monpézat, Annam representative on the Colonial Council, to GG Roume. 15 May 1916. AEP GGIC 7F-50 (2)


116. GG Sarraut’s report of 24 May 1917. AOM ICNF 18/166 He mainly suspected Nguyen Huu Bai.
could hardly disguise his relief that the departure of the
two ministers, only belatedly characterised as 'supposedly
influential personalities',\textsuperscript{117} had passed almost without
notice.

For Sarraut, the occasion suggested two interesting
developments in Annam. First, it showed 'the masses [were
now] attached to [the French] by feelings having other
causes than the influence or prestige of these high manda-
rins';\textsuperscript{118} and second, that unlike his immediate predeces-
sors the new king 'strongly want[ed] to play his role and
not be ... the prisoner of a Council of Ministers whose ob-
seious but tyrannical tutelage [had previously] forbade
him all personal initiative'.\textsuperscript{119} Taken together, they form-
ed the earliest expression of the neo-traditional and pro-
monarchical policies that, with Sarraut's blessing as Colo-
nial Minister in the early 1920s, Pierre Pasquier later
tried to implement in Annam, first as Resident Superior
(1921-25) and then as Governor-General (1928-32). This
politique indigène rested on Pasquier's conviction that
'the ritual and quasi-religious prestige of the king re-
tain[ed] all its strength' in the 1920s,\textsuperscript{120} and that it
could be placed in the service of the French if the Protec-

\textsuperscript{117} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{118} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{119} GB Sarraut's report on the political situation in
Indochina, 9 Apr 1917. AOM ICNF 16/166
\textsuperscript{120} Note of 17 Oct 1921, printed in Continuité de la
politique du Protectorat en Annam-Tonkin avant et après
l'avènement de sa majesté Bao Dai (Documents politiques,
Sérié 1, Hanoi, 1934), p.10. [Henceforth CPP]
torate freed him from the power of his usurping ministers, the men who 'since Dong-Khanh [had been] the real heads of the government'.

But Pasquier's insistence that the king, not his ministers, channelled the force of tradition in old, traditional Annam came too late to stop or reverse existing trends. By 1921, the established ministers, Nguyen Huu Bai in particular, had already riddled the mandarinate with complex networks of influence and patronage. After seven years absence from Annam, the revelation of systemic corruption at the highest levels of the Government of Annam struck the new Resident Superior with great force. In 1921 Pasquier reported the existence of an 'edifice of lies, extortion and corruption' at court, with ministers and senior officials deeply involved in protecting the networks from which they drew 'personal profits'.

Eighteen months later, he described 'a sense of clientage growing more and more among mandarins in office, [with] corruption poorly repressed because of the links that bind and interconnect the interests of serving officials'. Mandarinal positions went 'to the highest bidders, or those with the best connections', he added.

With Nguyen Huu Bai's appointment as Chief Minister in 1924, these shady networks of graft and patronage became

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121. Ibid, p.7.
122. As the revelations suited his policy, he may have exaggerated in some respects. Ibid, p.8.
institutionalised within the Government of Annam, at least according to Acting Resident Superior Thibaudeau's private recollection in 1934: 126

No-one knowledgeable in the ways of this pays could fail to know of the predominant, if not exclusive, role of Nguyen Huu Bai [in those years]. All or almost all the mandarins in office owed their nominations to him ... Rare were the previous nominations, promotions, and designations that had not been the object of transactions ... Some [mandarins] accommodated themselves, others deplored the situation, [but] all or almost all found ways to make the population bear the expenses incurred and those envisaged for the future.

There must have been some substance to the charges since Bai amassed such a fortune in office that, despite his poor Catholic background, he retired to a Quang-tri concession large enough to contain hundreds of peasants settled in four villages. 128 This level of asset accumulation from an official salary alone seems improbable, although in the 1920s only the crusading Argus Indochinois of Hanoi dared publicly accused him of corrupt dealings. 127

If those who understood "the ways" of Annam in the late 1920s and early 1930s knew all about Nguyen Huu Bai's illicit activities, as Thibaudeau casually asserted, why

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126. RS Thibaudeau, report on political and administrative matters, July 1934, pp.12-13. AOM ICNF 330/2664

127. Nguyen Tien Lang,'Quelques mandarins', p.137; and VNDNTB, p.259.

128. It accused his wife of peddling influence through a shop-front. AI, 14 Dec 1927. Earlier that year, it had also published detailed denunciations of Vuong Tu Bai, governor of Quang-binh and later a minister, whom it said delegated his corrupt dealings to a particular underling. AI, 12 Feb, 19 Mar, and 23 Apr 1927. Cf. similar charges in 1923 against the governor of Phan Rang, Nguyen Hy, a son of Nguyen Than. AI, 8 Aug and 27 Oct 1923.
did he remain in office? His energy and usefulness to the French certainly worked in his favour; but the main reason was not personal. It lay in French organisational dependence on the mandarinate, and the contradiction it caught the Protectorate in. As Levecque had realised in 1908, so long as mandarinal co-operation remained indispensable for colonial administration in Annam, political necessity forced the French to defend the collective honesty and competence of its essential allies in public, whatever individual administrators might think in private. This meant, as Levecque had also realised, the Protectorate could never respond to general or unsubstantiated allegations against its closest mandarinal allies who, by definition, formed the most likely targets of anti-French elements. Official action over anonymous complaints could only play into their enemies' hands, while undermining mandarinal confidence in the French.

As mandarins came to realise the latitude they enjoyed in these circumstances, those with influential patrons especially, the French attitude placed a screen of myth, distortions, and empty gestures over their collective behaviour, behind which few French cared to peer too closely. Tokenism replaced the sort of decisive action that would have signalled a genuine French refusal to tolerate abuse

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129. For examples, see Roume's report of 20 May 1916, pp. 14-16 [AEP GGIC 7F - 50(2)]; or GG Sarraut’s report of 24 May 1917 [AOM ICNF 18/166]. Pasquier’s 1921-22 reports were only published in 1934, and then as part of a political exercise designed to show that the Bao-Bai reforms had dealt with the old abuses.
of official authority. The Protectorate might exhort the mandarins to proper behaviour through paternalist platitudes,\textsuperscript{130} royal homilies,\textsuperscript{131} and Council directives;\textsuperscript{132} but the only 1920s mandarin ever to be dismissed remained the minister Boan Binh Nhan, for an intrigue against Khai-Binh that helped cause the removal of Acting Resident Superior Tissot.\textsuperscript{133} Politics aside, experience taught delinquent mandarins they had nothing more to fear than mild administrative sanctions during the 1920s. The first reported dismissal of another Annam official appeared in 1930, when a Thua-thien mandarin, who had been accused of torturing an extortion victim to death, was sacked after an enquiry. No report of subsequent criminal charges followed, however.\textsuperscript{134}

If ordinary people made allegations against mandarins the Protectorate demanded hard proof, as well as insisting that accusations be tried in the mandarinal courts. Few cared to risk the possibility of retribution afterwards by

\textsuperscript{130} Cf. GG Klobukowski urging mandarins 'to accept a real part of the responsibility for decisions' since résidents asked for their (non-binding) advice: 'Everyone must believe in the usefulness of the common task they are carrying out'. 'Voyage', p.664.

\textsuperscript{131} Cf. Khai-Binh's 1919 Royal Ordinance forbidding corruption among the mandarins. EA, 2 Mar 1928 for full text.

\textsuperscript{132} Cf. a 1916 directive ordering mandarins 'always [to] accept responsibility for their actions' and to 'discharge their duties fully'. CM, 12 July 1916. AEP GGIC 7F-50 (2)

\textsuperscript{133} Boan Binh Nhan (or Duyet) was demoted to tuan vu and retired. EA, 27 Aug 1921. RS Pasquier alluded to him in CPP, p.9.

\textsuperscript{134} AI, 5 Mar 1930. The press did however report occasional mild sanctions as, for example, when the military governor of Hue used his men to steal government material and he lost three grades, but kept his position. AI, 20 Sept 1924.
denouncing one set of mandarins to another. In any case, under the Gia-Long Code which still ruled such matters in Annam, making false accusations could itself become a crime if a case failed. In 1923, Pasquier set up a mandarinal Commission of Inquiry into official corruption, but it sank on exactly this problem. Although ‘the most serious complaints’ might be made before French officials, a later Resident Superior, Eugène Le Fol reminisced, no-one would repeat them to the mandarins of the Commission. The myth of old, traditional Annam saved him from seeing any sensible caution in their behaviour. For Le Fol it represented just one more example of the frustrating ‘Annamite mentality’ at work, of that ‘general indifference and passivity of the population’ which tied French hands in such matters. It was equally thanks to this pervasive attitude, Resident Superior Yves Châtel complained in 1931, that while mandarinal offenders might be caught and punished in Tonkin, ‘in Annam it [was] rare to be able to confound the guilty and difficult to get sufficient sanctions levied against them’.

Yet if the guilty had been confounded, why did it still prove difficult ‘to get sufficient sanctions levied against them’ in Annam? The answer lay not in the local mentality, but in the operation of the shady networks of protection and patronage upon which the real influence of

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13a. All quotes, RS Le Fol recounting his experience in 1923. Not surprisingly, the ministers all agreed that the problem lay in the people’s stupidity. CM, 11 Feb 1931. AOM ICNF 290/2505

13b. CM, 1 May 1931. AOM ICNF 290/2505
the ministers, and of Nguyen Huu Bai especially, actually rested. Essentially, Council ministers enjoyed personal rather than collective authority: it flowed from their control of client networks rather than the formal operation or the nominal rules of the administration. Clearly this perverted the proper functioning of the administration; but it also undermined colonial control of the mandarinate via the Council of Ministers. As a group, the Council lacked the will and authority to try to force mandarins protected by its individual members to obey its collective directives. By the 1930s the whole mandarinal system had become tainted by practices that placed protected individuals effectively beyond the reach of legal or administrative sanctions. Two examples from the Council's own records illustrate the problem.

In March 1931, towards the end of the communist rebellion in Nghe-Tinh, the Council discussed sending a strongly worded circular to rural mandarins demanding, for a second time, that they stop 'profiting from the circumstances to commit abuses'. This time, they threatened to bring 'the full rigour of the law' against anyone who disobeyed after receiving the second circular.\(^{137}\) Four months later, when angrily informing the Council he had discovered a long-running tax fraud by Binh-dinh mandarins, the new Resident Superior, Yves Châtel, took the trouble to warn ministers that 'from now on [he] intended to apply the law when district heads [were] presumed guilty of corruption'.\(^{138}\) Taken

\(^{137}\) CM, 11 Mar 1931. ADM ICNF 290/2505\(^{138}\)
together, the examples suggest that, by the early 1930s, the mandarinal administration had become so corrupt and arrogant in Annam that even a major rebellion could not frighten all its members into a short-term display of sensible prudence, nor goad Hue into much more than tardy threats of punishment against its most politically-inept officials.

The root cause of the problem lay in the French refusal to accept responsibility for colonialism in Annam under the dual administrative system. While the Vietnamese shared in administration, the French insisted they be accountable for its results; but while the French monopolised power, the Vietnamese held them responsible for the consequences of colonialism. From 1908 onwards, each side blamed the other and justified itself, while maladministration and malfeasance flourished uncontrolled in-between.

It was a situation tailor-made for unconscious projection and mythological solutions, something the circumstances of the French administration also facilitated. The next section considers this factor in more detail.

139. My emphasis. CM, 28 July 1931. AOM ICNF 290/2505

139. Cf. the exchange between RS Châtel and Vuong Tu Bai. Châtel: 'They wait inside their yamens ... thinking always of their personal profits, saying that ... if they are too maladroit [and get caught], they will pass some time in a ministry before ... getting another profitable position at the head of a district'. Bai responded: 'As long as you, M. le Résident Supérieur, have not taken measures of necessary rigour, nothing will happen. There will always be the same life of blissful ease among the mandarins, the same indifference to the fate of those they administer'. CM, 11 Aug 1931. AOM ICNF 290/2505
In the decade after 1908, the resurgence of the Government of Annam and the unexpected complexities involved in co-operating with its mandarins did help make the Protectorate seem qualitatively different in French eyes - slower, older, and more traditional. Nevertheless, in these years the principal reason for the difference Frenchmen perceived between Trung-ky and other regions of colonial Vietnam lay elsewhere, outside the purview of colonial myths. Annam was different; but not because Trung-ky alone clung tenaciously to some deep, mystical bond with its supposedly age-old Sinic customs and traditions. The French needed to look no further than themselves for an explanation. Modernisation required investment and progressive reforms cost money: the slowness of economic and social change in post-1908 Trung-ky, which so justified and reinforced the myth of old, traditional Annam, basically reflected the lack of colonial investment and the chronic under-funding of the Protectorate budget. More than anything else, French colonialism transformed Trung-ky into "old, traditional Annam". This section considers the financial constraints that helped make the region so apparently impervious to change in the early twentieth century.

In 1908, Klobukowski's promise of no new taxes stopped dead the previous decade's modest expansion of revenue. With the exception of a 24% hike in 1913-14, revenue only grew by 2.5% from 1909 to 1912 inclusive, and then 4% between
1915 and 1919. In these circumstances, to implement any expensive new programs also required impolitic new tax increases, and usually failed to gain approval. Even a vital project like upgrading the Mandarinal Road linking Hue with Ha-noi and Sai-gon to allow wheeled traffic along its whole length had to wait for General Government funding. Improvements to the local peasant economy fared much worse. For instance, despite the existence of detailed plans for irrigation works dating back to the early 1900s, and Klobukowski's promise of their speedy implementation, real work only started in 1918.

Financial factors also shackled the introduction of western education. A rickety Franco-Vietnamese school system had been set up in 1906; but by 1911, despite high Vietnamese demand for modern education, it still only provided 1,596 places. The local Catholic system, by contrast, offered 604 places to fewer than 10% of the population.

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141. J. De Fargues, 'Travaux publiques', BAVH, XVIII, 1&2 (1931), p.215. From 1913 to 1930, the General Government spent 19 m. piastres upgrading it as Colonial Route 1.

142. In Thanh-hoa. For Klobukowski's promise, 'Voyage', p. 659. For the work, de Fargues, 'Travaux', pp.224-25. Smaller works, also delayed for financial reasons, were occasionally undertaken as famine relief, as occurred in 1916. 'La Situation politique de l'Indochine en 1916', RI (ns), XXVI, 11-12 (1916), p.472.

143. The Catholic system also had 30 French-born teachers compared to 2 in public schools, a number only reached in 1918 (31 from 150). [L'Annam scolaire. De l'enseignement traditionel annamite à l'enseignement franco-annamite, (Ha-noi: IDEO, 1931), pp.12-22 and 96-112 for pre-1919.] In 1911, the church also supplied many more places in vocational training (300 to the government's 100). Report on the 1910-1911 scholastic year by the head of the Annam Education Service. AEP Annam R.1.
Lack of resources also delayed until 1919 the implementation of the 1917 general re-organisation of public instruction, which included the abolition of the traditional examination system. Even then fiscal restraint ruled, with the Acting Resident Superior, Tissot, directing résidents to 'modify the current system only to the extent that communal and local budgets could cover the costs of innovation, and where the Education Service is capable of supplying sufficient personnel.'

(This should be contrasted to the explanation for tardy educational reform in Annam offered two years later by the metropolitan mythologist, Charles Régismanset, who blamed 'the less direct means of [French] action' and 'the greater strength of tradition in this pays' for the unsatisfactory result.)

It would require the massive General Government subventions of the 1920s before any serious and sustained educational effort began in colonial Annam. Indeed, Trungky benefited enormously from the General Government’s post-War policy change to large-scale regional subventions. Between 1921 and 1929, 25.1 million piastres, or one-third of its total budget, came directly from this source. For

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146. Thanks to these funds the 1921 education budget jumped 94% in a year. Bernard, Maurice Long, p.134.

147. Cf. Tonkin where a similar amount (24.5 m) formed only 17% of the local budget. From 1913 to 1920 Annam had only received 3.9 m in GG subventions. My calculations from Résumé statistique relatif aux années 1913 à 1940 (Hanoi: IDEO, 1941), p.37.
the first and only time, circumstances in the 1920s allowed the Protectorate Government to initiate social reforms and public works without undue pressure on the local peasant economy. But one group never escaped the iron grip of fiscal restraint, even in the 1920s. Ironically, it was the French personnel of the Protectorate Government itself.

European officials, indispensable in these years in areas like administration, security, medicine, engineering, and education, were also very costly. As a result, these functions remained constantly understaffed, virtually from Doumer on. The civil service suffered most. Although Annam contained the largest area and the second highest population in colonial Vietnam, it always employed the smallest number of French administrators, a situation further exacerbated by the personnel reductions of the First World War. Post-War recruitment moved slowly and, as new functions developed, serving officials found themselves spread thinly, and liable to transfer at short notice. The possibility of several years' tenure in the same province, relatively common before the War, became unusual after it.

148. 1920s outlays on capital works stayed around 18% of the expanding budget, but proportional expenditure on health and education doubled. In 1930 these items accounted for 45% of the budget, with health and education consuming 3.14 m. (or 27%). For total outlays, Ibid, p.36. For public works, de Fargues, 'Travaux', p.213. For education, L'Annam scolaire, p.22; and for health, Dr Normet, 'L'Assistance médicale', BAVH, XVIII, 1&2 (1931), p.199.

149. In 1912 Annam had 48 compared to 75 in Cochinchina or 81 in Tonkin. The number had been stationary for years. Jumper and Hue, Political and Administrative History, p.94.

150. As indicated by data on postings published in ATK, which also shows a similar pattern among French teaching personnel, in the early 1920s especially.
Budget strictures equally ruled security matters. To open scratch militia posts in the developing highlands required the closure or rationalisation of others in the more populous lowland provinces.\textsuperscript{151} Even the Sûreté was not exempt. Budgetary pressures repeatedly denied 1920s requests from Annam Sûreté Head, Léon Sogny, for more resources, especially for more trained staff.\textsuperscript{152} By 1930 Annam Sûreté fielded only ten French officers and seventeen trained Vietnamese subordinates, with a further twenty-three in the identity service. At the same time, the Cochinchina Sûreté disposed of 109 Europeans and 356 Vietnamese agents supervising a geographically compact population numbering perhaps two-thirds of that of Annam.\textsuperscript{153}

While fiscal restraint stalled colonial economic and social development in the 1910s, it also subtly affected French administrative style and practices. Fewer personnel not only increased the isolation and work-loads of existing résidents;\textsuperscript{154} it also encouraged them to cut corners, and

\textsuperscript{151} RS Le Fol’s evidence, MC interview 1, p.34. AOM ICNF 332/2684. Document 181 gives militia numbers by province, 1913-1931. French officer numbers fell from 76 in 1913 to 57 in 1930. AOM ICNF 334/2688

\textsuperscript{152} Annual Sûreté reports, 1926-27, pp.38-9; 1927-28, p. 21; and 1928-29, pp.21-22. AEP GBIC 7F 18.

\textsuperscript{153} Two French officers were on leave and one detached to the identity section in 1930. Morlat, La Répression, p.135, fn.14. Cochinchina Sûreté also had 74 clerks. Figures from Guy Gran, "Vietnam and the Capitalist Road to Modernity. Village Cochinchina, 1880-1940", PhD, Wisconsin-Madison, 1975, p.212.

\textsuperscript{154} At the turn of the century there had been 3 French administrators and 5 clerks at Vinh Residency discharging less complex tasks than those of the 2 Frenchmen stationed there in 1920s, Résident Bottini complained to the Morchê Commission. MC interview 30, p.3. AOM ICNF 332/2684
to give only perfunctory attention to their more time consuming or tedious duties. In 1909 Resident Superior Groleau had urged résidents to 'divest [themselves] to the greatest degree possible of a part of the office work that [had] absorbed [them] until then in order to visit [their] provinces frequently'. But the cumbersome bureaucratic regulations he established to govern relations between the two administrations in the countryside produced the opposite effect. By multiplying résidents' written tasks, Groleau's system guaranteed they spent more time in their offices, while its extra demands also served to justify the informal practice of organising work to suit their own interests. Important routine matters might fall victim to the circumstances. Thus, for instance, the upkeep of local prison, police, and conviction registers, and their monthly communication to Hue, was repeatedly 'lost sight of in most provinces' in 1913 and 1914, despite the real difficulties it created for the proper supervision of mandarinal justice and surveillance of former political prisoners. Around the same time, too, monthly résidents' reports revealed a

188. Complaints about such practices appeared in RS Levecque's Circular to Résidents, 25 Ap 1908 and RS Dufrenil's confidential report of 22 Sept 1908 [both AOM ICNF 50/598], as well as in Pasquier's Note of 17 Oct 1922, CPP, p.17.

189. 1909 circular on the application of GG Klobukowski's instructions about the role and attitude of French authorities in the administration of provinces. AEP GGIC 21745


similar laxity. Every province duly returned twelve; but although they took the form of standard, pre-printed questionnaires, not one man managed to fill in all twelve fully or consistently. As a result, Hue lacked a full statistical record of the most basic rural information like the local piastre exchange rate, or the rice price.

The same slackness might infiltrate the newly complicated relations with Vietnamese officials. The Protectorate's permanent lack of resources could easily lead résidents into informal accommodations and expedient compromises with the men on whose co-operation they relied for essential tasks like maintaining order, gathering political and other information, and collecting taxes. Although the situation is unclear for the 1910s, certainly by the 1920s laissez-faire French supervision of mandarinal justice lent itself to such bureaucratic formalism.

Under the Gia-Long Code, which regulated purely Vietnamese affairs, district and provincial mandarins acted as local magistrates whose courts initially deal with all cases. By Protectorate direction, the provincial résident could only involve himself after the event, when translated summary copies of judgements landed on his desk to be scrutinised for errors in law or deliberate mandarinal obfuscation designed to disguise abuse of process. If they found a problem, résidents could not ask [the mandarins] to change a judgement they had pronounced, but [had] to leave them the entire responsibility for their actions vis-à-vis the

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139. The 1914 reports were the only ones available during my research. They are held at AEP Annam E1, E2, and E3.
court'. Instead, the abuses or errors they had discovered had to be flagged for the Resident Superior’s attention, and the files sent to Hue, where they piled up awaiting his final decision. In practice, then, the integrity of the system depended mainly on the knowledge, interest, skills, and attitudes of a transitory handful of Frenchmen in the provinces, most of whom lacked the time or ability to check original documents (many still in Chinese) and probe the circumstances of apparently routine cases that crossed their desks.

With such a system, 1920s résidents could supervise mandarinal justice from their offices, and devote the rest of their time to the myriad new demands arising from the increased tempo of colonial change. It all depended on individual choices in particular circumstances, something local mandarins learned to note carefully. Where non-Vietnamese speaking résidents became distracted by other matters, or revealed themselves as too gullible, or too willing to accept ad hoc compromises, mandarinal corruption or abuse of power could flourish. Early 1920s Thanh-hoa provides an example. There the résident’s blind trust allowed his Vietnamese clerks to form a cabal with certain district mandarins, supported in turn by their provincial superiors and protected from Hue, that carried out ‘intolerable exac-


161. In 1925, one correspondent claimed a 300 case backlog of files pending decision in Hue, with more arriving daily. Al, 14 Feb 1925.
tions' under the résident's unsuspecting nose. In 1920s Annam, the Protectorate system operated to facilitate rather than discourage such situations, for the colonial administration contained too many officials who 'could not find the necessary time to know [their] province[s], guide and supervise the mandarins, and repress abuses', and who consequently discharged their functions from behind 'walls of ignorance'.

Fiscal constraints helped foster the growth of dangerously irresponsible maladministration in rural Annam during the 1920s. At the same time, they handicapped the security service's ability to uncover and suppress incipient political opposition outside a small, well-known anti-colonial circle. To a very real extent, the Sûreté's analysis of rural Annam in the 1920s rested on conjecture or political myth rather than on hard information. Apart from résidents, who rarely afforded security matters the priority the service thought they warranted, the skeletal Sûreté in Hue depended mainly on paid informers. As far as provincial mandarins were concerned, little of value emerged. For all of 1929 nothing untoward appeared in the reports of Nghe-an provincial mandarins to alert the Council of the coming storm, according to Resident Superior Le Fol's evidence to the Morchê Commission.

142. RS Pasquier's note of 13 Dec 1922, CPP, p.17.
143. From Suignard's conclusions about the whole Service, including Annam officials. Les Services civils, pp.157-63 (quotes p.157).
144. MC interview 1, pp.7-8. [AQM ICNF 332/2684] Earlier he had explained that communist propaganda spread easily
Disarmed, the Sōreté never guessed at the real situation by the end of 1929. As late as June that year, Sōreté Chief Sogny predicted that no general disorder should be feared in Annam, 'neither for the present, nor it seem[ed] for the immediate future'.145 Sogny never knew — then or later — that a clandestine anti-colonial group, the Tan Viet party, had recruited and organised hundreds of members in Nghe-Tinh villages since 1926; nor that their involvement in local issues, especially defending communal land against usurpation by notables, had won them peasant respect in numerous villages.146 They would soon form the organisational backbone of the Nghe-Tinh Soviet rebellion. When a wave of political assassinations rolled across rural Nghe-an from October 1929 to February 1930, leaving forty notables dead,147 it quickly silenced all local informants.

145. Sōreté report for May-June, 1929, p.1. AEP GGIC 7 F 16(3)


147. Evidence of Ho Bac Khai, governor of Nghe-an from February to September, 1930. MC interview 2, p.4. AOM ICNF 332/2684
Hue never realised that a large-scale rebellion had actually begun. Even after a bloody May Day demonstration in Vinh in 1930 alerted the French to a security problem, it was not until violent demonstrations erupted in September that they realised the extent to which Protectorate power was crumbling in Nghe-Tinh villages, and began to organise ruthless counter-measures.

It was no accident that the longest-running twentieth century anti-colonial and pro-communist revolt in Vietnam should have occurred in late 1920s Trung-ky. In this region alone an under-funded and over-stretched colonial administration, incapable of penetrating the countryside itself, had delegated the oversight of purely Vietnamese affairs to a self-serving mandarinate over whose members it exercised little effective control. As the 1920s progressed, the administrative system that resulted allowed mandarinal corruption and abuse of power to flourish behind a facade of French supervision. In pursuit of their own self-interest, Vietnamese officials manipulated the information they passed to colonial authorities, withholding or colouring it to suit themselves rather than French political needs. In the end, the system became so flawed that it actually facilitated rebellion: not only did it allow a serious revolt to take root and grow, virtually without warning the French; but when the colonial authorities began belatedly to respond to the challenge, the ineffectual administrative tools at their disposal only helped prolong the rebellion.

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1**. As the Morché Commission report, Part Two, clearly reveals. AOM ICNF 212/1597
But now let us move our focus from the administrative system to the two groups that supplied most of its members. We will consider the colonial collaborating elite first, before concluding the chapter with an outline of the French community in Annam.

The Protectorate Elite of Colonial Trung-ky

As in the nineteenth century, mandarinal families still comprised the core element of the twentieth century Trung-ky elite. But by 1908, both elite and mandarinal administration were deep into a colonial transformation. The former predominance of the royal clan and of families from the old Bai-Nam political elite had slowly eroded from the 1690s on. Privately distrustful of men who had held power under Tu-Buc, colonial officials replaced them on retirement with former subordinates from the can vuong repression who seemed less doubtful in their eyes. The French clients that elbowed their way into the administrative elite now came largely either from lesser literati families, or from the Catholic community. The first were acceptable: in the nineteenth century, talented men from undistinguished literati backgrounds had often worked their way into the political elite through talent, luck, and diligence, especially in bandit or rebel suppression. Catholics, on the other hand, had been social outcasts, and often figured among the bandits and rebels being suppressed. Their new elite status represented an extraordinary reversal that requires further comment.
Catholicism pre-dated colonialism in Trung-ky by more than two centuries. The authorities had never welcomed it, however, because of its foreign derivation, its rejection of the ancestral cult, and the communal exclusiveness of its converts. Intermittent bans and persecutions began in the eighteenth century, but were suspended in the South during the Restoration in deference to Nguyen Anh’s French and Catholic supporters. Gia-Long continued the policy of toleration but, from Minh-Mang on, later Nguyen kings reverted to banning Christianity as a standing challenge to the universalist claims of the state ideology.

Catholics appeared *ipso facto* as dissidents and potential rebels, both in the eyes of the state and of actual rebels who tried to enlist them as allies. Some Christians also acted on their rebellious reputation in defiance, according to one missionary source, of their pastors. The most important, Ta Van Phung, instigated a major Le restorationist rebellion in the Red River delta in the early 1860s, with covert French support, partly to help

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170. Hong-bao had tried to win Catholic support [Bui-Quang-Tung, ‘La succession de Thieu-Tri’, *BSEI* (ns), XLII, 1&2 (1967), pp.43-45] and they were also involved in Le Van Khoi’s revolt in the South (1833-36).

171. In 1859-60, according to Louvet in *La Cochinchine religieuse*, 'the bishop could not in conscience call on [Christians] to revolt against their legitimate sovereign', asking 'are we to be taken for revolutionaries or Garibaldian condottiere?' Quoted in Jean Marquet and Jean Norel, 'L’Occupation du Tonkin par la France (1873-74), d’après des documents inédits', *BSEI* (ns), XI, 1 (1936), p.105.
relieve the French forces invading the South.\textsuperscript{172} By then, of course, Catholics may have felt they had little more to lose: the court had already banished missionaries on pain of death (and executed recalcitrants), banned all Christians from the administration, and decreed their villages be broken up.\textsuperscript{173} If so, they were wrong. As Vietnamese Catholics soon discovered, they still had their lives to lose; and many did, as events of the 1860s inextricably linked them in the popular mind with the foreign invaders as the enemy within.

The Treaty of 1862, which ceded three Nam-ky provinces, had also imposed religious toleration, but Hue proved unable or unwilling to implement it. As public order disintegrated in the North from the 1860s on, polarisation along religious lines hardened, to the detriment of both sides. Religion and politics fatally entwined. Francis Garnier's mad attempt to take Tonkin with a handful of troops in 1873 triggered the deaths of thousands, Catholic and non-Catholic, in an orgy of payback killings.\textsuperscript{174} The Catholic massacres in Nghe-Tinh during the Scholars' Revolt of the following year have already been mentioned. And Vietnamese Christians, responding aggressively and at times with provocative opportunism, did little to reduce the escalating violence.


\textsuperscript{174}. Le, Missions-Etrangères, pp.126-131.
Outside Nghe-Tinh, hatred simmered below the surface in Trung-ky until early 1884, when the first killings occurred.\textsuperscript{175} The real slaughter came a year later, when can vuong partisans settled accounts in a campaign which, in places, approached systematic extermination. In five weeks in Quang-tri, for instance, about half the Catholic population was murdered, and many small settlements wiped out. Over eighty percent of the people of Cao-xa, maternal home of the later Chief Minister, Nguyen Huu Bai, died in a few days in September 1885. By October his old school, An-ninh Seminary, remained the sole Catholic community in Quang-tri not devastated, and then only because it had withstood assault for nearly a month.\textsuperscript{176} Bai himself had picked up a minor interpreting post in Hue the year before: it may well have saved his life. Certainly nowhere much outside Hue offered real safety for Catholics in late 1885. In August, for example, General de Courcy's dwindling command in Hue had reacted slowly to missionary accounts of the southern Trung-ky massacres. When help finally arrived, over twenty thousand Catholics had died, along with eight French missionaries.\textsuperscript{177} Similar scenes bloodied the entire region; and

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\textsuperscript{175} Delvaux, 'La Légation de France', pp.49-50.
\textsuperscript{176} Pierre Jabouille, 'Une page de l’histoire du Quang-Tri. Septembre 1885', BAVH, X, 4 (1923), pp.395-426 details a tally of 8,000 deaths. Also see A. Laborde, 'La Province de Quang-tri', BAVH, VIII, 3 (1921), pp.115-128. Father Girard, who withstood the siege, headed the seminary into the early 1920s.
\textsuperscript{177} Delvaux, 'La Légation de France', p.67. Alfred Schreiner, Abregé de l’histoire d’Annam (Saigon, 1906), pp.426-29 claimed over 20,000 deaths in Binh-dinh alone (or nearly 60% of the community), and all but two settlements destroyed. The Société de Saint Augustin said about 30,000
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some demographic data suggest that the Catholic communities from Quang-tri south had not yet recovered in the early 1920s from the mid-1880s massacres.\textsuperscript{178}

For mission-educated Catholics who survived, the next years teemed with opportunities to join colonial military columns as interpreters and, in the process, to forge valuable links with French officers in the suppression of can vuong (and other) rebels. For men like Ngo Binh Kha\textsuperscript{179} and Nguyen Huu Bai in the later 1890s, the backing won in these years served as a springboard for a jump into the mandarinate at much higher levels than their qualifications warranted, or would have otherwise been possible.\textsuperscript{180} At the time, they and others like them must have appeared, to French patrons and former enemies alike, as colonial stooges planted in the heart of the court. But their situation felt more ambiguous to the Catholics themselves, prompting numbers of them to refuse to act as simple French lackeys. As the later career of Nguyen Huu Bai in particular would illustrate, some Catholic mandarins in Annam accepted the Protectorate out of mutual interest rather than common cause. Other factors weighed too heavily with them.

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\textsuperscript{178} From a comparison of tables in 'Les Missions catholiques en Indochine (Oct 1924)', p.93. AOM ICNF 198/1475 (1).

\textsuperscript{179} \textit{VNDNTB}, p.133. He was the father of Ngo Binh Diem.

\textsuperscript{180} Bai, as his enemies never forgot, was a mere 'scholar without academic title' when he joined the mandarinate. Nguyen Tien Lang, 'Quelques mandarins', p.131
Some were negative. Although the colonial military may have saved many Catholic lives in 1885-86, many thousands more had been lost due to French unpreparedness and their tardy responses to Catholic pleas for help. Furthermore, not all French left their anti-clericalism at home when they went to Indochina, so that Vietnamese Catholic officials met discrimination and prejudice, as well as support and encouragement, from Frenchmen. Experience also suggested that if the French were saviours, they were not always reliable ones. For the new Catholic mandarins, prudence dictated they forge links outside the French colonial establishment to balance their historically precarious position. Seeking to win over a covertly hostile, court-based elite might require tact and patience, but it entailed no hardship. The seductive panoply of king, court, and mandarinate, so long denied them, beckoned the former Catholic pariahs, even in its reduced colonial form. Once settled in Hue, most quietly chose to emulate the cultural conservatism of the Hue-based elite rather than act as the Trojan horse for colonial change.

The first glimmers of this unexpected development became public in 1907, when the Catholic, Ngo Binh Kha, became the only high court mandarin to protest the dethronement of Thanh-Thai publicly. His unlikely gesture of traditional propriety cost Kha his mandarinal position – and his

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161. Thus a 1890 Tonkin résident closed churches, forbade new conversions, and invited recent converts to revert to their former religious status. 'Les missions catholiques', p.105. AOM ICNF 198/1475 (1)
pension — but won precious praise for his gesture in the saying: 'day vua khong Kha, dao ma khong Bai' (Kha would not overthrow the king, nor Bai violate the royal tomb). How far the couplet circulated outside Catholic circles is moot, but its import was plain: on the two occasions when devotion to king and dynasty had been most recently tested, only Catholic ministers had acted like true Confucians and loyal subjects. This proposition laid the groundwork for the later colonial rapprochement between the previous enemies, an alliance of interests that came to define the Protectorate elite of Annam.

In the early twentieth century, the glad Catholic embrace of elite cultural conservatism probably did more to stamp the style and character of the 1880s Hue-based collaborating elite onto its colonial successor than did many of those sprung from the older elite's own ranks. By then, the brightest members of its first colonial generation, young imperial clansmen especially, had already reviewed their position under an interventionist Protectorate Government and begun moving to non-mandarinal careers. Any hopes princely families might have held of returning to the comparative financial security of earlier decades faltered in 1890 with the first reductions in state stipends. They


184. The analysis derives from biographical details in contemporary journals, archival references, SN and BAVH.
vanished completely in 1903. Almost all the stipends that survived the second cuts, none of which could now be inherited, had emerged virtually worthless. Few of the thousand or so members of the imperial clan enjoyed independent wealth. Necessity compelled their sons to find a source of income. Some preferred to throw themselves on their families for support, with one disgruntled group taking this strategy to a sacrilegious extreme in 1902 by pillaging imperial ancestral tombs. Most others, however, looked to the expanding opportunities that their privileged access to modern education made available.

Royal clansmen and their upper elite relatives had flocked to the mandarinate after 1885; but in the 1890s and 1900s few found favour on account of their parentage. Most lacked the one credential — active service in the can vuong repression — common to virtually all mandarins with the inner running before 1908. While such French proteges could apparently do no wrong, or at least be waived punishment for their errors, mandarins from even the best connected families enjoyed no such latitude. A comparison of some administrative sanctions illustrates the point. In 1897, as bo chanh of Thanh-hoa, the Catholic Nguyen Huu Bai, sent a consignment of flawed fruit to the king as part of the pro-

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105. In that year 387 stipends were fixed between 38 and 400 piastres p.p.a. Letters of GG Broni, 6 Sept 1902 and of RS Groleau, 19 Jan 1909. AEP GGIC 9620

106. My only hard data for the imperial clan are for 1820 and 1943. For 1943, Ton That Con gave 4,922 imperial descendants, with a further 5,800 in the ton that lineages. Hoàng tộc luc bội bien (Hue, 1942), passim.

107. Letter of RS Auvergne, 23 March 1903. AEP GGIC 9620
vince’s annual tribute. Although fined a year’s salary, his pardon followed immediately and he was soon promoted.\textsuperscript{188}

Six years later another \textit{bo chánh}, this time the young Than Trong Hue in Quang-nam, lost four grades and was suspended for omitting a ritual gesture in a public ceremony. The two men could not have been more dissimilar. Scion of an old loyalist family and husband of one of Prince Kien-thai’s daughters, Hue also boasted, uniquely for the time, seven years’ education in France, including three at the Ecole coloniale.\textsuperscript{189} It is possible that resentment at his French education partly explains the harshness of his punishment; but the point is that no French official intervened to mitigate it, nor did the court feel obliged to tread carefully here as with Bai. Other anecdotal evidence equally supports the conclusion that only \textit{can vuong} veterans won special French favour at the time.\textsuperscript{190}

Given all this, it is no surprise that when the Quoc Hoc college, with its modified French curriculum, opened in Hue in 1898, young royal clansmen and their upper elite relatives rushed to exploit their privileged access. For several years after, half the students, and the great bulk of

\textsuperscript{188}. Nguyen Tien Lang, ‘Quelques mandarins’, p.133. Of course, favourable treatment of royal favourites could also occur traditionally.

\textsuperscript{189}. Ho Đac Khai, ‘S.E. Than Trong Hue’, BAVH, XIII, 3 (1925), pp.209-10; and Pierre Pasquier’s funeral speech, BAVH, XIII, 3 (1925), pp.212-13. Hue worked in Tonkin until 1921, when recalled by Pasquier as a minister. His marriage made him an uncle of king Khai-Dinh.

\textsuperscript{190}. Ton That Tram and Tran Tram, both from old loyalist elite families, suffered similarly harsh punishments in the 1890s. Nguyen Tien Lang, ‘Quelques mandarins’, pp.145-46 and 155-56 respectively.
Quoc Hoc graduates, came from these circles.\textsuperscript{191} Although most families ensured one son at least entered the mandarinate, others came under less pressure to follow suit. Many young Quoc Hoc graduates therefore moved straight from the college into the lower levels of the French administration as secretaries, clerks, and interpreters, positions elsewhere filled by much less exalted individuals.\textsuperscript{192} A small number went further, electing to study western versions of traditional professions like medicine and teaching in higher colonial institutions. Three of Prince Tuy-ly's grandsons, for example, stood among the first such professionally qualified Vietnamese in these fields in Annam.\textsuperscript{192} In 1907, as Phan Chu Trinh and his reformist friends argued about the need for modern education with conservative literati, Ung-thong, an early graduate of the Hanoi Medical Faculty, was quietly starting to work in Hue Hospital.

After 1908, when Klobukowski's reforms enshrined respect for local customs and traditions (and for those who symbolised them) as official Protectorate policy, young

\textsuperscript{191}. They formed a disproportionately higher number of graduates as, unlike others who took private jobs before finishing, they rarely quit early. \textit{L'Annam scolaire}, pp.96-101; P. Antoine, 'L'Enseignement' \textit{BAVH}, XVIII, 1&2 (1931), p.183; and E. Le Bris, 'Le Quoc Hoc', \textit{BAVH}, III, 1 (1916), p.80.

\textsuperscript{192}. For example, Ung-uy, 1905-1915 [\textit{SN}, p.101]; Ung-bang, 1902-17 [\textit{SN}, p.3]; Ung-binh, 1904-1911 [\textit{SN}, p.5]; Buu-trung, 1912-31 [\textit{SN}, p.96]; or Buu-thao, 1907-1920 [\textit{SN}, p.83].

\textsuperscript{193}. Ung-thong [\textit{SN}, p.87], and his cousins Ung-qua, a teacher, and Ung-hoat, a later graduate of the Hanoi medical faculty. Léon Sogny, 'Les familles illustres: Son Altesse le prince Tuy-Ly', \textit{BAVH}, XVI, 4 (1929), p.198 for examples of the professions practiced among his 400 descendants.
elite men found the road to mandarinal success once more smooth. Biographies in *Souverains et Notabilités de l'Indo-chine française*,\(^1\)\(^2\) admittedly a limited source, show several, whose careers had begun in teaching or the French auxiliary bureaucracy, now drifting back into the mandarinate under the changed conditions.\(^3\)^\(^4\) The traditional cachet attached to being an official still exercised its allure, and so too, no doubt, did the easing of Protectorate pressure on its Vietnamese collaborators. Even so, not everyone returned exclusively to the mandarinal path. The early exploration of non-mandarinal activities continued. In Annam, members of the older, pre-colonial elite thus beat everyone but Catholics by a generation into the new professions and opportunities created by colonialism. They became leaders in the new fields. Pioneering entrants in the colonial bureaucracy now equally found their families' connections, prestige, and status won them influence among their peers. And if they tired of the French service, their language skills and family contacts eased lateral transfers into senior mandarinal positions. Thai Van Toan, a grandson of Prince Tung-thien, provides one outstanding example. After graduating from the Ha-noi College of Interpreters in 1900, Toan joined the Protectorate service where he later headed

\(^{1}\) Hanoi: IDEO, 1943.

\(^{2}\) So many that, in 1936, one-third (or 23/67) superior mandarins were royal clan members, despite fifty retirements in 1933-34. Jumper and Hue, *Political and Administrative History*, p.100. The high proportion arose from special treatment for royal clan members, which had seen 'several' become provincial governors out of turn, according to CM, 29 Sept 1931. AOM ICNF 290/2505
the employees' Amicale des Fonctionnaires Indigène des Résidences, before transferring to the mandarinate in 1924. A minister by 1929, he remained in Bao-Dai's cabinet until 1941.\textsuperscript{196}

Similarly when the tiny professional sector began to expand in the 1920s, Tuy-ly's grandson, Ung-thong, emerged as the doyen of Vietnamese doctors in Annam and a leading member of several medical and educational societies.\textsuperscript{197} By then the next generation of the collaborating elite had begun to emulate the pioneers, but in far more diverse fields. For instance, the sons of the 1910s minister Ho Bac Trung (himself a grandson of Prince Tung-thien) spread themselves between the mandarinate, surgery, mining engineering, law, and pharmacy.\textsuperscript{198} In their case, as in many others, elite families prolonged their early advantage by using their impeccable credentials as loyal collaborators (and their greater resources) to send sons, and occasionally daughters, to study in France. Descendants of nineteenth century luminaries even moved into commerce. The Quang-ngai grandsons of Truong Bang Que, for example, became businessmen in the 1920s, successfully exploiting their access to

\textsuperscript{194}. \textit{SN}, p.93 for a career summary. For family details, see Le Breton, 'Hong Khang', p.174.

\textsuperscript{197}. Apart from official appointments like to the Grand Council of Economic and Financial Interests in 1935-36, he also belonged to various charitable organisations and had been a founder member of the Du Hoc Hoi, an association for promoting overseas study founded in 1927 in Hue. \textit{SN}, p.87

\textsuperscript{198}. Ho Bac Khai (\textit{SN}, p.39) became the high mandarin in Annam. His brothers Di (\textit{SN}, p.18), Lien (\textit{SN}, p.49), Biem (\textit{SN}, p.19), and An (\textit{SN}, p.19) respectively took professional degrees in France.
capital and official contacts;\(^{199}\) while another of Tuy-ly's ubiquitous grandsons, Ung-du, the local agent for Standard Oil and Derobert et Fiard between 1907 and 1914, moved into plantation agriculture.\(^{200}\) Others settled for more parasitic activities like acting as guarantors for public works contracts,\(^{201}\) something that might have been quite lucrative in the 1920s when the public sector, and construction especially, boomed.

As their forebears had done under Minh-Mang, in the early decades of colonialism leading families in the old Nguyen loyalist elite proved once again able to change their spots to save their skins. Families whose interests and commitments had pushed them to collaborate in 1885 remained resilient enough to respond pragmatically to whatever opportunities arose in the rapidly changing times. It goes without saying that these qualities of flexibility, pragmatism, and a relative openness to the new found no echo in the little China fallacy, nor the later French myth of old, traditional Annam. Yet many older elite families in the early twentieth century displayed these attributes, just as they had in the nineteenth. Even so, the most surprising example of their willingness to modify former attitudes in response to new circumstances remained, as noted earlier, their willingness to accommodate formerly-despised

\(^{199}\) They were sons of Truong Quang Bang. A. Laborde, 'La Province de Quang-ngai', BAVH, XIII, 3 (1925) p.166.

\(^{200}\) SN, p.22.

\(^{201}\) For examples, see Nguyen Van Trinh and Ung-Trinh, 'Le Quoc Tu Giam', BAVH, IV, 1 (1917), pp.48-49.
local Catholics within elite ranks.

The *rapprochement* that started with Ngo Binh Kha in 1907 blossomed in the 1920s on the basis of strong Catholic commitment to the monarchy. Nothing could have suited the older Hue elite more. Their whole position in the Protectorate hinged crucially on preserving the Nguyen monarchy. Without a king there would be no court, no ministers, and no Government of Annam, for Vietnamese administration would stop at the provincial level as in the North and South. Exactly why Catholics became such avowed monarchists is less immediately obvious. Part of the reason probably lay in the same desire for acceptance that had motivated the first generation of Catholic mandarins. But perhaps equally as important was the influence of mission conservatism.202

Once assured of security of person and property, and with freedom of religion guaranteed, the missions and leading Catholic families in the early twentieth century found much to admire in the authoritarian traditional kingdom. Like the missions, it had demanded respect for existing order and hierarchy, of which monarchy remained the great enduring symbol. It had also upheld similar values like moderation, propriety, obedience to authority, and acceptance of one's lot in life. By the late 1920s, Catholic conservatism in Annam, as expressed in a 1927 anti-communist tract by a well-connected Vietnamese priest, had attained a level of autocratic elitism and reactionary conservatism

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202 Thus it was not until the 1930s that the apostolic vicariats of the Societe des Missions étrangères changed their seventeenth century names and configurations to reflect contemporary realities.
that would have passed unnoticed at Tu-Buc's court. In an apocalyptic vision of universal collapse into communist chaos, from which only the Catholic Church could save the world, Father J-M Thich denounced communism for taking current events and politics, which are the business of government, and discussing them with the poor and the young, who do not know how to reflect on things and examine them properly, [in order to] take advantage of the wickedness and greed of the lower orders, and with wild and violent means to speed their aims.

Buried in a footnote there appeared an astonishing eulogy to the system of government that had martyred his nineteenth-century co-religionists. It suggests just how deep the anachronistic Catholic attachment to the monarchy and the institutions of the pre-colonial kingdom could run.

The *hoang trieu hoi dien*, the laws of Gia-Long and Minh-Mang, are important and it is not true that they are no good, that we should follow the laws of European civilisation. It is still unnecessary to change. The social organisation of earlier days (excluding the program of studies and religion) was truly excellent.

By the end of the 1920s, only mission opposition to mixed marriages prevented leading Catholic families from full integration into the older court-based elite. But even here the Church ultimately fell short of its goal. In 1933 the marriage of young king Bao-Bai to a wealthy Southern Catholic heiress finally provided a symbolic representation of the attachment of Vietnamese Catholics to the protected

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204. Ibid, p.35, fn 1.
throne. The union roused great Church opposition. The Vatican refused a special dispensation for any future children, while the bride's father and uncle, two of the missions' chief patrons in Cochinchina, found themselves briefly excommunicated for refusing to withdraw from it. Without Governor-General Pasquier's personal backing, the marriage may never have taken place. All the fuss proved that for a less politically sensitive cause, and a less exalted personage, the prospects of intermarriage without conversion still remained vanishingly slight. But by then the need for such reinforcing family bonds had lessened, thanks to the 1920s fusion of Catholic and "Confucian" conservatisms as the basis of the new Protectorate elite.

This Catholic "alliance," seconded by its members' strategic early expansion throughout the new colonial sector, helped ensure that many older elite families around the throne survived the difficult transitionary years to emerge later at the head of the new colonial collaborating elite. They set the style that others followed. Individuals from these older elite families, and imperial descendants in

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205 RS Thibaudeau's report, July 1934, pp.19-23. [AOM ICNF 330/2664] He does not give Pasquier's reasons, though he may have seen the marriage as a symbolic means of drawing Southerners, Catholics, and French educated youth to the throne. Her family's wealth also undoubtedly helped, given the state of the Annam treasury. Bao-Dai does not mention Pasquier's involvement beyond saying he introduced them in Ba-lat: he may not have known of it. Bao-Dai, Le Dragon d'Annam (Paris: Plon, 1980)

206 Ngo Binh Diem embodied this Catholic/Confucian fusion. Thus the 1950s American dispute over 'whether Diem [was] basically a Confucianist with a Catholic overlay, or vice versa' [Bernard Fall, The Two Vietnams (New York and London, 1963), pp.236-37] was a historical nonsense based on ignorance of colonial Annam.
particular, formed the public face of the Protectorate elite for most French officials. They worked opposite each other in the provinces, while in Hue they also socialised together in key cultural, educational, and charitable organisations. The Amis du Vieux Hué (AVH), the Enseignement mutuel, and the Ligue des Amis de l'Annam provided a social stage on which the collaborating elite could enact legitimising traditional virtues like scholarship, benevolence, and civic-mindedness, while underscoring their status in more or less equal relationships with the French.

Members of the older elite also led many of the progressive associations set up in 1920s Trung-ky. For example, the first Vietnamese women’s association in the area was established in Hue in 1926 by Bam-Phuong, daughter of a prince and herself married into one of the great loyalist families from the chua era, the Nguyen Khoa. Then when the 1930s

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207. In the 1920s, every Annam province was headed at least once by men from the imperial clan or who were matrilineal descendants of Nguyen kings, not to mention several others in tan that lineages.

208. The Enseignement mutuel, under the patronage of the Alliance française, was active in Hue from 1914, with other branches at Thanh-hoa, Ha-tinh and Quang-ngai. Letter from Délétie, Inspecteur-conseil to RS Annam, 8 Jan 1915. AEP Annam R1. The other two are discussed below.

209. They were also used to vet socially ambitious individuals from outside upper elite circles. Denis Le Phat An, rich uncle of the future Nam-Phuong empress, won entree to Hue elite circles in this way, mainly through charitable activities in the Ligue des Amis de l'Annam. [ATK, 17 July 1928 and 7 Aug 1929] He was also an AVH member, as was Nam-Phuong’s younger sister briefly.

210. A grand-daughter of Minh-Mang. In ‘Või nu su Bam Phuong’, Song Huong, No. 12, April 1985, np, Tran thi Nhu Man said Bam-Phuong had herself needed to use the domestic skills she later taught in the Nu Cong Hoc Hoi (Women’s Work-Study Association) because her new husband’s family, the Nguyen Khoa, were ‘in decline’. If so, it must have
Buddhist regeneration movement reached Annam via the Hue Society for Buddhist Studies, Bam-Phuong's brother-in-law, the retired minister Nguyen Khoa Tan, became its first president, followed by one of her nephews, Ung-bang. The later 1920s Association to Encourage Study in the West, (An-nam Nhu-Tay Du-hoc-bao-tro-hoi) under the presidency of the Catholic Chief Minister, Nguyen Huu Bai, provided the main exception. Even so, men from older elite families still figured prominently among its other office holders and council members.

By the start of the 1920s, almost everything the French saw in Annam, and almost all the Vietnamese they associated with on a relatively equal footing, repeatedly validated in their eyes the colonial image of a region steeped in its age-old Sinic past. Yet, as we have seen, this picture was historically false or misleading on almost every count. Outside Thanh-Nghe-Tinh, Trung-ky lacked the depth of Chinese tradition found in the North: the nineteenth century spread of Chinese orthodoxy in Nguyen government and Trung-ky society stood in contrast to two centuries of

been early in the century, as two of her husband's brothers, Tan and Ky, later became Council ministers. For the Association, see David G. Marr, *Vietnamese Tradition on Trial, 1920-1945* (University of California Press, 1981), pp.214-16.

211. For a short biography, see Nguyen Tien Lang, 'Quelques mandarins', pp.160-61.


213. Plus some newer colonial families. They are listed in its journal, *Du Hoc Bao*, No.3, 1 Sept 1927, pp.14 and 32.
quite different experience in former Bang-trong. In the colonial era, too, "old, traditional Annam" was no timeless land wedded to its Sinic heritage in anything but French myth. On the contrary, its leading families had successfully met the colonial challenge in the early twentieth century, just as they done previously under Ming-manh. Against much tougher odds this time, they had neutralised the threat posed by the Catholics, the single group that might have monopolised the vital intermediary role between French rulers and Vietnamese subjects. Instead of competing with their former enemies, Catholic mandarinal families threw in their lot with them in a process that made many almost indistinguishable, socially and culturally, from their elite models. Their adopted elite values spread a patina of "tradition" over the new Catholic mandarins that hid from casual French observers just how extraordinary, in historical terms, was their presence at the heart of the new colonial elite.

That so many Frenchmen, officials especially, failed to understand what was happening in front of them testifies in part to the power of their own preconceptions, and to the explanatory force of the colonial myths of Vietnamese society and culture constellating around them in Annam at the same time. We will complete the chapter by sketching the French community, whose members contributed so much to the final form of those myths.
The French Community in Annam

While it is convenient to refer to "the French in Indochina," the phrase can be deceptive. It conjures up a unitary image when in fact the small civil French population, only thirty thousand by 1930, subdivided into local communities that could vary considerably in social composition, as well as in the interests and expectations of their members. During most of the period under review, the French community of Annam stood at one extreme of the colonial social continuum. Its members faced challenges from their environment quite at odds with those experienced by most of their fellows in Cochinchina or Tonkin, while its peculiar social profile before the mid-1920s reinforced its members' sense of parochial difference.

In the first place, the community was tiny: the 1921 census counted 1,843 French in Annam, or barely 12% of the total in Vietnam. And unlike Tonkin or Cochinchina, they overwhelmingly comprised single or unaccompanied males. Most worked for the colonial administration, with professionals like teachers and doctors, or lesser functionaries in services like customs or public works, far outnumbering the fifty administrators of the Civil Service. Missionaries

214. The best general work is Meyer, La Vie quotidienne, passim.

215. Of the 16,256 French in Indochina in 1921, 14,563 were in Vietnam. By 1929, the civil population had reached 30,040, with 27,400 in Vietnam. For 1921, 'La population de l'Indochine', BEI, 153, Mar-Ap 1922, p.163. For 1929, 'La population européenne de l'Indochine', BEI, Jan 1930-A, pp.A38-A40
formed the next largest group. Outside three towns (Tour-
ane, Hue, and Thanh-Hoa), population density was very low:
as late as 1923, for example, all the French in Ha-tinh
province (plus the provincial mandarins) could still dine
together in one room. And until the 1920s' expansion in
the means of communication, some still remained days, rath-
er than hours as elsewhere in most of colonial Vietnam,
from their nearest fellows. Even after new roads had been
built, old reputations died hard. In the mid-1920s, for in-
stance, Protectorate officials reputedly still considered
Quang-ngai a 'filthy posting where fever, boredom, and iso-
lation wore down the miserable, poorly-connected [soul]
that the Administration sen[t] there.' This reflected
that fact that, until repairs to the Mandarinal Road during
the War, it had taken eight days' march from Faifoo or Qui-
nhon to reach the Residency. No comparable posts had exist-
ed in the South for decades, and only parts of the distant,
predominately non-Vietnamese, mountain border provinces
rivalled it in the North.

The second peculiarity of the French community in An-
nam - its largely official derivation - reflected the rela-
tive lack of new colonial entreprises here. Notwithstanding
Doumer's blithe predictions of rapid economic development,
Trung-ky rarely attracted colons or investors. It held

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214. ATK, 4-5 June 1923.

217. A. Laborde, 'La province de Quang-Ngai', BAVH, XII, 3
(1925), p.153. For 1920s road building, see De Fargues,

218. For Doumer, see Situation, pp.56-60. Yet Auvergne had
reported that French concessions only rose from 6 to 42
no easily accessible, unexploited natural resources like the Northern coalfields; nor large tracts of semi-wasteland suitable for quick agricultural development, like the Mekong delta marshes. On the contrary, it contained some of the worst terrain, poorest land, and most erratic climate in Indochina. Until the 1920s, footpaths outnumbered roads, and few commercially viable links existed to the mountainous hinterland. And topping off the other drawbacks, almost no reliable economic information could be had about the region. When Doumer founded the Annam Mixed Chamber of Agriculture and Industry in 1900, that 55 of its 110 members described themselves as missionary-planters, compared to a mere 15 colon-planters, was not surprising. Until after the First World War, under-capitalised, part-time planters, whether officials or missionaries, numerically predominated in a colonial agricultural sector limited to the small-scale production of tea, coffee, share-cropped rice, and animal pasturage. Between 1903 and 1924, the total acreage under concession scarcely changed (41,000 h. to 44,000 h.), while the actual area under production never topped 20,000 hectares until 1925. In agriculture, as in every other

between 1897 and 1901 ('Note', pp.433-35). A rare successful businessman like H. Bogaert had to spread his interests very widely to off-set the smallness of the economy. H. Bogaert, 'Thaun An de 1883 à nos jours', BAVH, VII, 3 (1920), pp.329-40; and ATK, 12 Ap 1926.


colonial sector, growth stalled until the mid-1920s - and even then much of it only happened on paper. 221

TABLE 1: FRENCH POPULATION OF COLONIAL VIETNAM, 1929

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<th>CC</th>
<th>TK</th>
<th>VN</th>
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<td>men</td>
<td>1449</td>
<td>6120</td>
<td>3454</td>
<td>11023</td>
<td>12372</td>
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<td>624</td>
<td>4431</td>
<td>2871</td>
<td>7926</td>
<td>8582</td>
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<td>1721</td>
<td>4255</td>
<td>4584</td>
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<td>447</td>
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<td>4196</td>
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<td>5920</td>
<td>8335</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>3398</td>
<td>16475</td>
<td>15862</td>
<td>35735</td>
<td>38530</td>
</tr>
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* under 15 years
Source: 1929 Census [BEI, Jan 1930-A, pp.A38-A40]

The demographic imprint of this masculine, bureaucrat-ic community remained at the end of the 1920s, as the 1929 census summary in Table One shows. In Annam, males over the age of 15 still comprised nearly 50% of the civil community, compared to 37% in Cochinchina and 22% in Tonkin. In 1929, women still accounted for barely 21% of the French civil population in Trung-ky, compared to approximately 30% in the other two Vietnamese pays. Even so, this was much higher than in the pre-War years.

221. The 1920s mining boom typifies the problem. From 1925 to 1931, Annam averaged 27% of personal authorisations per year; but at the same time its average share of active permits fell (to 17.5%), as did requests for concessions (to 12%). Actual production averaged a mere 0.75% of the Indochina total, peaking in 1930 at 2% of the colony's mineral output. [My calculations from figures in 'Renseignements d'Indochine. L'Industrie minière de l'Indochine en 1932', BEI- B, Sept-Dec 1933, pp.875-83.] The late 1920s rubber speculation in the highlands equally brought little actual development: of the 87,133 h. under provisional concession in 3 provinces in 1929, only 7,818 (or 9%) were cultivated. My calculations from Rapport agricole de l'Annem pour l'année 1929 (Hanoi, 1930), p.84.
Similarly, if we examine the professions of adult men in 1929, as given in Table Two below, we find that almost half still worked for the administration, compared to one fifth in Cochinchina or one-third in Tonkin. Again, the

<table>
<thead>
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<th>TABLE 2: ACTIVE CIVIL POPULATION BY PROFESSIONS, 1929</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>a. officials</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>colonial services</td>
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<th><strong>b. non-officials (men only)</strong></th>
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<td><strong>totals</strong></td>
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Source: 1929 Census, BEI, Jan 1930-A, pp.A38-A40

The majority filled low status positions in customs, public works, or the post office. Elite administrators of the Services civils provided a tiny 14.5% of government employees in Annam, compared to an average of 35% in the other Vietnamese regions. In addition, employment opportunities outside the administration still remained limited. More than
half the non-official adult males in Annam clustered in two census categories: agriculture, hunting and fishing (29%); and religious (27%).

The small proportion of commercial employees indicated the low level of economic development, despite the hopes of the mid-1920s. Only 15% of non-official adult males here made their living in commerce, compared to 51% in the South and 22.5% in the North.

However, the 1929 census did capture the significant underlying change of the 1920s - the gradual growth of urban family life as the French community norm (although still on a small scale compared to the other regions). From 1921 to 1929 the French population of Trung-ky almost doubled (from 1,843 to 3,398). As children under fifteen and their non-working mothers formed half the French population by the end of the decade, it must be assumed that they accounted for much of the 1920s demographic growth. This development re-organised interests and changed priorities within the community to bring them more into line with the desire and expectation of post-War French residents in Annam to lead a more normal family life than had their predecessors.

By the end of the 1920s, Annam had ceased to be the isolated, exotic backwater of earlier years, both in French perception and experience. The spread of roads and motor vehicles stimulated the existing trend of focusing on Residency towns: more distant, rural délégations were clos-

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212. Cf. 13% in the South and 17% in the North.

213. For a personal comparison between the pre-War situation and the late 1920s see René Vanlande's 1930 interview with GG Pasquier. ATK, 18 Nov 1930.
ed, while officials limited their tournées to day trips to the parts of their provinces accessible by car. The advent of sanitation and paved roads, plus the addition of sporting and other facilities, provided welcome amenities that improved life in provincial seats, as did the supply of piped water and electricity by private entrepreneurs from the mid-1920s. It all helped to tame the foreign perils of tropical Asia and, ultimately, to insulate newer members of the French community materially and socially from their otherwise alien surroundings. By the end of the 1920s, the colonial retreat to Residency towns had effectively left only missionaries, colons, and petty functionaries of the Garde indigène, Forestry, and Customs services in the countryside. There may well have been fewer French in the hinterland in 1930 than there had been under Doumer thirty years before.

However, this transformation of French perceptions of Annam did not derive solely from 1920s material changes. Its psychological roots lay in the 1910s, when the need to accommodate French colonialism to "Annamite tradition" had pushed many leading French figures here into reworking existing colonial political myths as a means of resolving their predicament. Chapter Six considers this process; so for the moment we shall simply note its significance, and

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224. RS Le Fol, MC interview 1, p.34. AOM ICNF 332/2684.

225. For examples, see reports on activities in Nha-trang (Annam, 20 May 1926), Bong-hoi (ATK, 13 Jan 1924) and Ha-tinh (ATK, 4-5 June 1923). Electricity reached Faifo and Qui-nhon in late 1925 and early 1926 (ATK, 6 and 30 Jan 1926), while piped water reached Ha-tinh town in late 1926 (ATK, 2 Mar 1926).
not digress too far from the aim of this chapter, which is limited to presenting the specific circumstances in which they myths flourished. To that end, most of this section focuses on the 1910s and early 1920s.

At that time, French society in Trung-ky largely comprised single men drawn from two extremely hierarchical organisations, the colonial administration and the Catholic Church. Its ruling ethos reflected these bureaucratic and hierarchical origins, with seniority and official position conferring (and defining) social status. At its apex stood the Resident Superior, with the various Heads of Protectorate or General Government services below him. Provincial résidents and heads of the bureaux of the Residence Superior, flanked by the Hue Commandant of Troops and the four French bishops of Annam's apostolic vicariats, ranked next. Then came a sprinkling of long-term and relatively successful local businessmen, like Monpèzat, Bogaert, and Rigaux, who moved easily in official circles and often represented Annam on various quasi-official consultative councils.

In the newly-complicated political conditions after 1908, many of these men, officials especially, became involved in trying to understand the mysteries of the "Annamite soul" (l'âme annamite) in order to contain or neutralise the potentially perilous force of tradition in Annam. Their personal circumstances encouraged the endeavour: unlike any other time, in the years between 1908 and the early 1920s comparatively few social, familial, or other barriers separated Frenchmen in Annam from their Vietnamese environment. While some welcomed the chance to immerse
themselves in Vietnamese elite culture, many more felt psychologically exposed, as they tried to negotiate the hidden pitfalls in collaborating with Vietnamese and respecting local traditions, institutions, and customs. For them, Georges Mahé's 1913 disgrace provided a worrying reminder of the high price that falling too foul of "Annamite tradition" might exact from their own careers.

Fortunately, anxious times called forth their own solution. In that same year an organisation appeared in Hue that quickly devoted itself almost exclusively to charting the depths of the Annamite soul — the Association des Amis du Vieux Hué (AVH). The AVH owed its existence to missionary Father Léopold Cadière, a devotee of Vietnamese language, history, and culture who had lived among his parishioners in rural Quảng-tri and Quảng-binh since 1895. In 1913, alarmed at the visible deterioration of historical sites, and fearful that the past was 'disappearing before our very eyes', he organised seventeen French and Viet-


namese friends in Hue \[228\] into a modest learned society pledged to ‘research, conserve, and transmit old memories of a political, religious, artistic, and literary order, both European and indigenous, that attach[ed] to Hue and its surroundings’.\[229\] These recovered materials, and the discoveries he anticipated from members’ research missions into the countryside, would then be published in a quarterly bulletin ‘of a scientific character’,\[230\] the *Bulletin des Amis du Vieux Hué*.

But far greater needs were to kidnap Cadière’s conservation project, transforming his humble learned society into the darling of the Protectorate and the organisational expression of French life in Hue. In its heady first decade, these needs turned the AVH into the dream factory in which local French mythologists crafted and burnished the versions of the Vietnamese past and visions of the Franco-Vietnamese future that we will discuss in Chapter Six. The speed with which the AVH’s influence spread suggests the timeliness of its creation. Within a year its original membership had tripled and, more significantly, it had enlisted the official (and personal) backing of both Governor-General Sarraut and Resident Superior Charles. By 1917, its now 209 ordinary members already included most senior ad-

\[228\] They included Léon Sogny, permanent Head of the Annam Sûreté (1916–1941), and two top officials of the later 1920s, Bonhomme and Le Fol. The three Vietnamese were prince Buu-liem, Bao Thai Hanh, and Nguyen Binh Hoe. *BAVH*, I, 1 (1914), p.93.


ministrators and résidents in Annam, among whom numbered four future Residents Superior (Friès, Jabouille, Le Fol, and Châtel). Current or later Heads of Protectorate Services like Education (Délétie), Treasury (Gras), Health (Sallet, Normet, and Gaide), Forestry (Guibier), and Security (Sogny) also figured among its active members. Leading businessmen like Bogaert, Rigaux, and Cosserat had also joined early. The fact that many were "old Annam hands", men who had spent the greater part of their working lives in the Protectorate, added weight to its pronouncements. By the 1920s, the Bulletin enjoyed an international reputation and everyone adjudged the AVH an expert and authoritative body.

The existence in its ranks of 'numerous native colleagues represent[ing] the elite of their nation' added an extra lustre to the accumulated French expertise. The AVH had early attracted members from the imperial clan and their friends and relatives in Hue inner elite circles.

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231. Though not Pasquier until he became Resident Superior in 1920, after which he became an enthusiast.


234. By 1917, members included two Nguyen Khoa brothers (Tan and Ky), three Ho Bac brothers (Khai, Ham and Be), prince Buu-liem, Thai Van Toan, nine imperial descendants and nine royal family members (Ton That) from fifty seven Vietnamese, or just under half. BAVH IV, 4 (1917), pp.344-48.
In its first decade, Vietnamese accounted for thirty to forty per cent of AVH members, with men from the imperial clan and royal family forming a consistent core of one-third to one-quarter of their ranks.\textsuperscript{239} Ministers of the Government of Annam also regularly attended meetings until well into the 1920s. All these men knew the value of cultivating multi-stranded relations with influential Frenchmen; but other motives also moved them, in particular, the organisation's fascination with elite culture and history. This abiding French interest in their ancestors and relatives flattered and gratified the Hue-based elite. It also subtly and continuously reinforced their elite status in French eyes, both personally and politically. So highly did they value the AVH that at one stage elite Vietnamese members even mooted the possibility of printing a \textit{quoc ngu} version of the \textit{Bulletin}.\textsuperscript{234} But not all Vietnamese shared their enthusiasm. The active participation of mandarinal superiors also drew prudent or ambitious subordinates into the AVH in these years: in 1920, for instance, the promotion of two long-standing Vietnamese members to provincial governorships resulted in their sponsoring between them almost one-third of that year's Vietnamese applicants.\textsuperscript{237}

\textsuperscript{239}. My calculations from membership data (summarised in Table Three) which, with attendance and minutes of each meeting, appeared at the end of every annual volume.

\textsuperscript{234}. The request failed on financial grounds; but also because Cadière maintained no translators, nor Vietnamese capable of editing a \textit{quoc ngu} version of the \textit{Bulletin}, could be found in Hue. BAVH, XIII, 4 (1926), pp.459-60.

\textsuperscript{237}. Tran Binh Bach and Bang Ngoc Danh sponsored 15 from 47 new members. My calculations from membership details in
Numerous Protectorate officials no doubt joined for the same reason, finding in AVH membership an easy means of attracting the favourable notice of superiors who were deeply involved in the Association. For men stationed in Hue, membership may have represented simply another diversion, like tennis or the club; or a means of proclaiming their own status in local French society by rubbing shoulders each month with its leaders. And of course for the minority truly captivated by Vietnamese elite culture, the Association offered a spiritual home in its ranks.

Irrespective of their motives, however, everyone found in the Friends of Old Hue a safe haven, a source of psychological re-assurance and comfort, and a strong affirmation of their own French identity. Even its form as a provincial learned society sounded a familiar echo of home. Simple membership associated the least educated among them with the most celebrated cultural values of metropolitan society like rational analysis, intellectual enquiry, and artistic taste and refinement. They won gratifying praise as scholars and Frenchmen from visiting dignitaries. In 1922, for example, the respected Collège de France orientalist, Professor Sylvain Lévy, lauded the Association as embodying a peculiarly French genius of generosity and humanitarianism that acknowledged 'the true, the beautiful and that which everywhere gives honour and dignity to human life',


wherever it was encountered. Heady praise also came from Governors-General who visited in person to 'tell us that our work was good because it served the French cause'.

So predominant was the AVH at this time that it effectively formed the organised expression of the French cultural life of Hue. Friends of Old Hue involved themselves in an extraordinary array of activities. They played a practical part in town planning and beautification projects in Hue. They hosted concerts and tried to encourage a renaissance of indigenous art. Their taste imprinted itself on items as diverse as postage stamps and the design of a war memorial of 'purely Annamite character', which later cropped up in other Vietnamese areas. In 1922, the Association won the great accolade of officially representing Annam at the Marseilles Colonial Exposition. A similar coup followed in 1923, when Resident Superior Pasquier appointed leading French and Vietnamese members to the commission charged with organising and operating the government-funded Khai-Binh Museum. (As a symbol of Annam's mythic Franco-Vietnamese past, the museum occupied the same palace pavilion that housed the AVH itself.)

242. For details, Cadière, 'Œuvre', pp.31-43.
244. The AVH's collection, begun in 1916, was transferred to the Museum, which had recorded over 7,000 visitors by 1926. P. Jabouille, 'Musée Khai Binh: Historique du Musée', BAVH, XVI, 2 (1929), pp.89-100. Badly damaged in 1945, the remains of its library and collections were then dispersed.
Given all this, the Association’s sudden crash in the middle 1920s seems at first quite surprising. As Table Three shows, overall membership peaked in 1925; but it fell almost immediately, with local French numbers dwindling.

<table>
<thead>
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<th>TABLE 3: AVH MEMBERSHIP, 1916 - 1931</th>
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<td>FRENCH</td>
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<td>[royal clan]</td>
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<td>total</td>
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Source: my calculations from AVH membership data

* listed as serving administrateurs

badly. Meetings became very infrequent: instead of twelve or more per year as in its first decade, its members managed barely three or four ill-attended gatherings in the mid-1920s. Two, rather than four, Bulletins began appearing per year. In addition, Protectorate Vietnamese outside the royal family and upper elite also drifted away, preferring to join the newer, practical organisations, often founded by Vietnamese themselves, that seemed to promise more immediate and direct benefits to their own people. As interest

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244. Analysis of Vietnamese membership shows:
 - from 1920-25 76 joined, of whom 90% lived in Annam; and
 - from 1926-30 24 joined, of whom 60% lived in Annam.
By 1927 only 9 remained from the 1920 intake of 47.
waned, so did membership dues. By 1927 only a special ex gratia official subvention, followed by repeated annual subsidies, saved the Bulletin. Although the numerical decline levelled off in the later 1920s, from then on only the dedication of founder members like Cadière or Sogny prevented the AVH from degenerating further into a venerable but essentially moribund colonial monument. What had gone wrong?

Two principal factors accounted for the AVH's sudden reversal of fortune. In the first place, its mythologising had ended up too successful for its own good. By the early 1920s, as Chapter Six will show, the locally-adapted myths of Self and Other it had developed were circulating widely in Indochina, and even in France. As a consequence, much of the anxiety about "Annamite tradition" that had fuelled the AVH's phenomenal rise and expansion in Trung-ky evaporated. From the mid-1920s, it actually became the sort of learned society Cadière had originally envisaged, with predictable results.

Second, the Protectorate was changing. We have already mentioned how the post-War growth in French family life was modifying the social profile of the community, along with the personal expectations of many of its members. And behind it, speeding the transition, surged a new wave of confidence unseen since Doumer's days. From 1925 to 1930 especially, an investment boom seemed set to revolutionise the

meagre Protectorate economy. In 1926 alone, the area of land under concession sky-rocketed from 59,000 hectares at the start to a record 307,000, as rubber stock speculators blitzed the central and southern highlands, sight-unseen. The already expanding public works program, especially road and railway construction, boomed in anticipation of coming demand. New businesses opened, as French and Vietnamese alike looked forward to unprecedented prosperity. Past 1925, as the mise en valeur bulked large on the horizon, interest in the intellectual exploration of the Annamite cultural world paled before the exciting prospect — never to be realised in fact — of exploiting its material resources.

Right on cue a different French organisation appeared that embodied the new interests — the Ligue des Amis de l'Annam. In most respects, the Ligue formed the antithesis of the Amis du Vieux Hué. Set up in 1926 by businessmen, colons and missionaries, plus a few Vietnamese business figures, it boldly rejected official members and refused government subventions until 1930. It also attracted the participation of French women, as the AVH had never done, for the Ligue focused on practical rather than intellectual goals. It channelled their energies into high status chari-

\[\text{\textsuperscript{244}}\text{. For more details, see Charles Robequain (trans Isabel Ward), The Economic Development of French Indochina (Oxford University Press, 1944), Chapters 4 to 6; Roule, 'Colonisation', pp.239-51; De Fargues, 'Travaux publiques', pp. 213-22; and L. Gilbert, 'Les Produits: produits d'origine végétale', BAVH, XVIII, 1&2 (1931), pp.128-40.}\]

\[\text{\textsuperscript{247}}\text{. For office holders and main members see ATK, 7 Aug 1929.}\]
ty work like the Ligue's first major project, the Pierre Pasquier anti-tuberculosis clinic in Hue. Typical of the Ligue's ethos, the project targeted an issue of equal concern to colonial economic interests and to the growing number of French families who risked catching the disease from infected Vietnamese. Unlike the AVH, the Ligue acted upon its Vietnamese environment from outside and above, with well-defined psychological and social barriers separating its members from the objects of their charity. No echo remained in its activities of the romantic idealism of the AVH, where French and Vietnamese literati 'worked together without distinction of race, origins, profession, material situation, or social rank', in the rousing estimation of its 1920 President, Guibier.

That Ligue members felt free to ignore the mysteries of the Annamite soul and concentrate on creating the robust health that 'gives the human machine a good yield' perfectly symbolised the new assurance among the French in later 1920s Annam. But it was not only the long-delayed prospect of economic growth that bred such optimism. It also owed a great deal to the AVH's earlier success in exorcising the spectre of "Annamite tradition" that had haunted French minds after the anti-tax movement of 1908. Thanks to their efforts, Annamite tradition had been pene-

250. Dr Normet, Director of Annam Health Service, laying the first stone of the Pasquier Clinic in Hue. ATK, 23 July 1928.
trated, dissected, defined, and categorised in ways that defused its mystery. By making it intelligible, French science had made it controllable as well. Thus Pasquier's neo-traditional policies in the 1920s and early 1930s rested absolutely on the conviction that his (and other Frenchmen's) knowledge and experience of the "Annamite soul" had grown sufficiently subtle and deep to allow him to manipulate its elements in Trung-ky for colonial political ends.

While Annam always remained 'a traditional land' in French colonial eyes, by the end of the 1920s only romantics still perceived it as mysterious or alien. For most colonial French, the mythologising of the AVH had secured this formerly insecure borderland between French Self and Vietnamese Other by arming them with an all-purpose understanding of Vietnamese cultural identity which, although apparently locally derived and historically validated, had been unconsciously designed to satisfy collective French needs. No matter how little the colonial French might have actually known about Vietnamese people, past and present, from the mid-1920s their knowledge of the Vietnamese Other seemed complete, certain, and enduring. The myths that conveyed this knowledge barricaded the French Self safely behind the conviction that, come what may, the Vietnamese Other could never again surprise or dismay the local French society by assuming unknown, ill-defined, or psychologically threatening forms.

This point leads us to Part Three, to a closer consideration of certain aspects of this powerful French colonial construct. We begin in the next chapter with an assessment of the influential French model of Vietnam as little China, and its inherent shortcomings; before concluding in Chapter Six with an analysis of the myths and projections of Self and Other touched on lightly throughout this chapter.
CHAPTER FIVE

THE COLONIAL MODEL AND ITS SHORTCOMINGS

Introduction

As we mentioned in Chapter One, the colonial fallacy that portrayed traditional Vietnam as a backward imitation of China arose in part from the synchronicity of first contact. Frenchmen holding erroneous preconceptions about China confronted a newly sinicised Vietnamese government in the nineteenth century, and drew their own conclusions in the form of the little China fallacy. Right from the start Vietnam's presumed Chinese cultural identity mediated French experiences and observations of the mid-nineteenth century kingdom. No-one eluded its unconscious grip, not even men like Luro or Philastre who strove for a degree of balance and objectivity.¹ To other French officials, themselves political actors in the great drama of colonisation, the evidence of their own senses sufficed to confirm what European scholarship had already prepared them to find. To these busy, practical men, the little China fallacy became the paradigm that elucidated the Vietnamese present by reference to its model and mentor, old China.

¹ I stress the point because of the heavy and often uncritical reliance both Truong Buu Lam and Yoshiharu Tsuboi have placed on nineteenth century French materials, and secondary works based directly on them. See Lam, New Lamps for Old: The Transformation of the Vietnamese Administrative Elite (ISEAS Occasional Paper No. 66, Singapore, 1982), Part One; and Tsuboi, L'Empire d'Annam face à la France et à la Chine (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1987). Tsuboi's bibliography lists only three Vietnamese primary sources (and no secondary ones) compared to four pages of mainly colonial French sources.
It also organised their understanding of the Vietnamese past. The French who came to Asia in the later nineteenth century were primed to discover Bossuet’s ‘immutable Orient’, and duly did so. They believed that to understand contemporary Vietnam they needed to uncover its age-old patterns and lay bare the fixed laws that governed its essentially timeless culture and cyclical history. The little China fallacy proved invaluable in this endeavour by focusing their attention on the assumed well-spring of Vietnamese cultural identity in China. Convinced that the fundamental elements of Asiatic societies persisted unchanged and unchanging over time, and confronted by a sinicised Bai-Nam, the conclusion followed almost inevitably that Tu-Buc’s kingdom represented simply the latest flowering of age-old ideas and institutions planted long before by the Chinese. The seductive but false French belief that the mid-nineteenth century typified all previous eras set off a process of colonial redefinition of Vietnamese history and identity that ended in an intellectual colonisation of the country’s past no less thorough than the military invasion that allowed Europeans to dominate and distort its colonial present.  

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2. Cited in A. Bouinais and A. Paulus, L’Indo-Chine française contemporaine, II (Paris: Challamel, 2nd ed, 1885), p.654. They complimented Bossuet on his insight, given that the Chinese and Vietnamese annals which confirmed his usage had been unknown in the seventeenth century.

3. The later nineteenth century Vietnamese political elite also engaged in historical revisionism, though more consciously than the French. Court chronicles tried to match the dynasty’s unorthodox past to the Chinese model in order to enhance its legitimacy. Thus while a superficial reading of court sources may seem to confirm the Sinic colonial model, it misconstrues their intent as highly selective political tracts whose content, aimed partly at future generations,
The elision of Vietnam and China defined the nature of Vietnamese culture for the French as basically derivative and unoriginal. To colonial French observers, the testimony of Vietnamese history proved that the local people lacked the creativity and vitality necessary to effect progressive change by their own unaided efforts. Vietnamese absorbed this view of themselves in turn, along with the little China fallacy, in their school history texts and through the French-language press and other colonial organs. Obviously such a useful explanation of Vietnamese society and culture provided a valuable ideological prop for the colonial order, sweetening French conquest with the implicit promise that it offered a modern future otherwise beyond the reach of the ineffectual Vietnamese.

Few would condone this premise now; but several of its less offensive aspects continued to be accepted, even by Vietnamese, until quite recently. Despite its inadequate historical basis, the imprint of the little China fallacy can still be detected in scholarly works published as late as the 1980s. Yet even in instances where colonial model comparisons of Vietnam to China might seem valid or useful at first glance, careful examination almost always reveals the basic flaw. The little China fallacy never measured


4. For an early example, see Leopold Cadière, Résumé historique de l'histoire d'Annam (Quinhon: Libraire Imprimerie, 1911); or for a later one, Nguyen van Huyen, La Civilisation annamite (Hanoi: IDEO, 1944).

5. See fn. 1 for two examples.
traditional Vietnam against China as an historical entity, but against a China of European imagining. The "China" to which it appealed was an intellectual construct built on an earlier European fascination with the interplay of identity and difference between reported Chinese institutions, customs, or norms and those prevailing in Europe. In other words, it was to a projection of Chinese Otherness (as defined by the collective European Self) that the nineteenth century French model (and its advocates) compared traditional Vietnam. The China of the Chinese people, about which Europeans knew precious little at the time, scarcely entered into it.

We will demonstrate the point by considering some of the key nineteenth century European beliefs about China that would equally underpin the colonial French image of traditional Vietnamese political institutions.

China Through The Looking Glass

Raymond Dawson has devoted an entire volume to exposing the cavalcade of European ignorance of China through the centuries, including our own. As it repeatedly shows, until recently China mainly functioned in the European mind as a social mirror whose bright surface reflected the changing 'history of the observer rather than the observed'. Even at the height of China's fashionableness in the eighteenth century, European interest in her civilisation rarely progress-

ed beyond the superficial. In an era charmed by *chinoiserie*, Enlightenment philosophers reacted against absolutism at home by adopting as a political ideal the Jesuit vision of the Chinese empire. On the basis of second- or third-hand reports many, including Voltaire ('the human mind could not imagine a better government'), championed its assumed utopia as a model for European reform.

Yet, even then, not everyone agreed. Montesquieu, Condorcet, and Herder figured among those who preferred to harp the old, perennial themes that contrasted Asiatic servility with Europe's genius for liberty, or Oriental stagnation with western progress. These ancient antitheses attained their apotheosis in the nineteenth century mania for vast, unilinear schemes that ranked all human civilisation from contemporary Europe, unchallengeable on the topmost rung, down to the lowest primitives. This new intellectual fashion dashed China from its eighteenth century pedestal, even before biological determinism delivered the knock-out blow to all but the white race. The backward, agricultural Chinese empire now aroused far more scorn and contempt among Europeans than admiration.

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Hegel’s 1830s exposition of the Chinese Other in the guise of analysing Chinese history typifies the change. But we consider it here for another reason as well: a generation later, the same beliefs about China, still resting on supposition rather than knowledge, would re-emerge as central to Eliacin Luro’s seminal account of traditional Vietnamese political institutions.

In *The Philosophy of History*, Hegel described the Chinese empire as ‘the only durable kingdom in the world’. It was no accolade, however. The empire endured because its principle has such substantiality that ... it is at once the oldest and the newest [empire]. Early do we see China advancing to the condition in which it is found at this day ... Every change is excluded, and the fixedness of a character which recurs perpetually takes the place of what we should call the truly historical. China ... lies, as it were, still outside the World’s History ...

The Chinese themselves he characterised as alien to all Europe cherished most, a people weighed down by a ‘servile consciousness’ and the ‘meanest opinion of themselves [...] and of humanity in general’. Nor when it came to the political

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organisation of the kingdom could Hegel find anything to admire. A theocratic despotism, the spirit of its constitution had, he asserted, 'always remained the same'. Only two classes existed, with a gulf between them. On one side stood the emperor, the one 'ever wakeful, spontaneous active Soul', and on the other, everyone else, lumped together in 'absolute equality [in which] all the differences that exist are possible only in connection with the administration'. Although granting that imperial princes and sons of high officials enjoyed some precedence, Hegel traced it exclusively to their fathers' administrative positions. There was 'properly [speaking] no elevated rank, no nobility among the Chinese ... [so that] only those have a share in the administration of affairs who have ability for it'. Such extreme meritocracy elicited no praise, however: equality without freedom only meant despotism.

Although Hegel noted that Chinese government had often been held up as an ideal in Europe, he profoundly disagreed. Rather than representing a masterpiece of human reason, he dismissed it as more like 'a convenient habit' that persisted as imperturbable as 'the course of nature, [which] goes its own way, at one time as at another'. Neither conscientiousness nor a sense of honour had ever kept a single mandarin up to his duty, he added. Only the fear of punishment,

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15. Ibid, p.120.
and the active oversight of the emperor, the sole legal power in the land, motivated officials. The emperor's role thus loomed as absolutely paramount: ¹⁹

In virtue of his position he is obliged personally to manage the government and must himself be acquainted with and direct the legislative business of the Empire ... Notwithstanding this, there is little room for the exercise of his individual will for the whole government is conducted on the basis of certain ancient maxims ...

Any imperial failure doomed the entire system, leaving it 'paralysed from head to foot, and given over to carelessness and caprice'. ²⁰

The extent to which nineteenth century Europeans considered China an unchanging, homogeneous Confucian society in thrall to its past cannot be exaggerated. At best China appeared to them, to quote Ranke, in a state of 'eternal standstill'; ²¹ at worst it typified, as for Marx, a 'fossil form of social life'. ²² So all-encompassing did Chinese bondage to its Confucian past appear to Europeans that in 1854 Gobineau, a trained Orientalist, described the country as ruled by a 'tyranny of rites and traditions'. ²³

Authority is ... in fact quite restricted, for ... in this empire, whose governing principles have never varied in regard to essentials, what former times considered good has become, simply because of that, better today. Tradition is all-powerful,

¹⁹. Ibid, p.123.
²¹. Quoted in Dawson, Chameleon, p.65.
and is already a tyranny over an emperor [if he] stray in the least detail from the usages followed by the ancestors ... The Son of Heaven can do everything, provided he only ever wants to do what is already known and approved.

The principal cause of this situation, Gobineau claimed, lay in the dominance of the public examination system, in which success required reiterating what previous generations had known, in an identical form. Developing or expounding new ideas only guaranteed failure and disgrace. As a result, the 'verbose compilations' of Chinese literature all 'lack[ed] a critical faculty'.

The little China fallacy applied these and other erroneous assumptions directly to a traditional Vietnam that was often doubly damned in the process. Not only did it make Đại-Nam appear trapped in a mindless emulation of all things Chinese; but, as we saw in Chapter One, by factoring in negative local elements, like the supposed deleterious effects of climate and geography on Vietnamese abilities, the French model also implied that local attempts to imitate China were inevitably doomed to degenerate in maladroit Vietnamese hands. It was a useful premise, for it enabled French observers to characterise variations from assumed Chinese models as examples of the corruption or decay of customs over time rather than of Vietnamese cultural originality.

While certain twentieth century colonial authors took issue with particular elements of the little China fallacy, in some areas its assumptions persisted with unquestioned authority. In the colonial analysis of the traditional mon-

archy and mandarinate in particular, its axioms always ruled supreme. Much of this unchallenged primacy can be traced back to the influential analysis of these institutions found in Eliacin Luro's highly-regarded study, *Le Pays d'Annam*, which derived almost entirely from the little China fallacy. The next section considers Luro's projection of Chinese Otherness onto pre-colonial Vietnam.

Luro and the Colonial Model of the Traditional Kingdom

A young naval officer, Luro joined the Native Affairs unit of the infant Cochinchinese administration in 1865. After lengthy language study at the College of Interpreters, he became a provincial magistrate in 1868, only to be recalled to Saigon in 1869 as Philastre's deputy in the Bureau of Native Justice. A close and sympathetic observer of Vietnamese life in Cochinchina, Luro recognised that France could not 'dominate straight off a civilisation two thousand years old, and that [the French] could only become its master after having studied it deeply and by conserving its basic principles'. As a consequence, he strenuously advo-

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27. For details of his life see *BSEI* (ns), XV, 1&2 (1940) which is entirely devoted to him and his family.

cated the training of French administrators in Vietnamese language and customs before being allowed to take up official duties. In 1873, the administration concurred and set up of a short-lived Probationers' College in Saigon under his initial direction.\(^{29}\) As class notes, Luro produced the *Cours d'administration annamite*,\(^{30}\) the first such detailed French study and the basis for his posthumously published and far more widely-known *Le Pays d'Annam*.

In the early 1870s, Luro ranked himself with Philastre and Father Legrand de Liraye as one of a tiny handful of French experts on Vietnam.\(^{31}\) And certainly where he described Vietnamese life from first-hand observation and personal knowledge, his comparatively objective accounts deserve their high reputation. But where Luro had to rely on second-hand sources, and on local informants who themselves might actually possess little personal knowledge of, or insight into, particular matters, his account must be treated

\(^{29}\) Founded in 1873 in Saigon with a mammoth curriculum, poor results forced its closure in 1880.

\(^{30}\) The later colonial myth-maker Charles Régismans set hailed the *Cours* as 'the breviary of numerous generations of administrators' [*Le Miracle français en Asie* (Paris: Editions Crès, 1922), p.182]. In fact, it had almost been lost: only odd hand-written copies had survived until 1905, when thirty were finally printed. L. Malleret, 'Le Souvenir de J.-B. Eliacin Luro en Cochinchine', *BSEI* (ns), XV, 1&2 (1940), p. 9. Aware of its errors and poor organisation, Luro had earlier forbidden its publication in the hope of remedying its faults in *Le Pays d'Annam*. According to Alfred Schreiner, who closely studied the two texts, Luro died before properly succeeding in this aim. *Les Institutions annamites en Basse-Cochinchine*, III (Saigon: Claude et Cie, 1902), pp.ii-iv.

\(^{31}\) Because they alone could read the Sino-Vietnamese script in which many documents were written. G. Taboulet (ed), 'Jean-Baptiste-Eliacin Luro, Inspecteur des Affaires indigènes en Cochinchine', *BSEI* (ns), XV, 1&2 (1940), p.76.
accordingly. The outline of traditional monarchy and mandarinate in *Le Pays d'Annam* falls under this caution. The author never left Cochinchina, nor even observed a functioning royal administration at one remove, for all mandarins had either resigned or quit the South while he was still studying at the Interpreters' College. The first permanent court representative in Saigon, the consul Nguyen Thanh Y, only arrived in 1876, the year Luro himself left. But if the Frenchman quizzed Southern literati about the kingdom's government, a pitfall yawned. Had any been royal officials previously, they could only have been lowly clerks, with few insights into a government whose Neo-Confucian facade they themselves had never penetrated. Yet if Luro turned to written texts, their Sinic orthodoxy would have sent him back, like all his other sources, to the little China fallacy, or to comparisons with Europe. As a result, Luro's outline of king, ministers, and mandarinate in *Le Pays d'Annam* basically represented, as for Hegel and Gobineau before him, an unconscious exercise in delineating the Asian Other by comparison to the European Self, whether by direct analogy or indirectly, via a European projection of China.

Let us analyse two examples more closely, beginning with Luro's problem of accounting for an "Annamite aristocracy" in a society where, the author also insisted, absolute equality reigned between all citizens.

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32. *VNDNTE*, pp.301-02

33. Luro probably also consulted the same Catholic sources as he had done for his outline of early Vietnamese history - Legrand de Liraye, the works of Father Bouilleveaux, and Pétrus Truong Vinh Ky. *Pays d'Annam*, p.64.
Luro began his account confidently, with a formulation straight from Hegel.\textsuperscript{34} Vietnamese government was pure monarchy, he declared. Unlike Europe, neither parliament or nobility counterbalanced the king’s power. ‘Equality between citizens is absolute; accession to office is open to everyone; we notice no other social distinctions than those which attach to office, merit or wealth’.\textsuperscript{35} As with Hegel’s China, Luro began by identifying only two classes: the emperor and the people. But, unlike Hegel, he knew from personal observation that a ‘sort of nobility’ also existed, which he then laboured to explain by muddled comparisons with Europe. The "Annamite aristocracy" became ‘a class which, for the lack of a better expression, we can designate by this term; but we must be careful not to use it here in its ordinary sense and to believe in the existence of a hereditary aristocratic class’.\textsuperscript{36} Distinguished military or civil service alone won noble rank and, although it might be inherited by one descendant, its value diminished with each inheritance. The family of even the most exalted individual returned to the commonality after five generations, unless outstanding service won further ennoblement. Again with Europe in mind, Luro noted that noble ‘birth serve[d] for nought’ when it


\textsuperscript{36}. Luro, Pays d’Annam, p.85 (my emphases).
came to 'exercising a public function' in Vietnam; examination success alone gave access to office. Noble titles afforded 'no right to political, administrative or military functions', and provided 'only a simple social distinction accompanied by certain rights of precedence in public ceremonies and some immunity from taxes'. After two disjointed pages, he concluded by re-iterating the purely honorific nature of Annamite nobility. A French reader could have been forgiven for wondered why something of so little significance to the Vietnamese had detained the author so long.

Yet, despite Luro's slighting assessment, attaining noble rank mattered very much in the Nguyen kingdom. Luro's problem was that nineteenth century practice fitted neither the Sinic axioms of the colonial model nor, even less, any explanation by analogy that took European aristocracy as a norm. Luro's comparison of "Annamite" and European aristocracy succeeded only in revealing what it was not. His floundering comments shed so little light on the real meaning and value of noble rank in Vietnam that he even missed mentioning its most salient feature, as we will see below. Later French writers avoided Luro's predicament by finding European analogies that managed to make Vietnamese nobility sound unexceptional, even familiar. Thus Schreiner, for instance, claimed it paralleled 'our Legion of Honour' in several points; while Pasquier summed it up with a long reference to a French author's vision of a non-hereditary

37. All quotes, Ibid, p.86.
38. Schreiner, Institutions (I), p.235.
nobility of excellence. Both approaches failed as badly as Luro's in conveying what noble rank actually meant in nineteenth century Vietnam. The little China paradigm, with its axiomatic Confucian presuppositions, hid the reality from French eyes.

Like most other Frenchmen, Luro held as a great fundamental truth that the 1860s primacy of classically-educated examination graduates in Vietnamese society and administration had persisted from time immemorial. But applying this notion to the concept of "Annamite aristocracy" hid its essential character. Until the eve of colonialism, soldiers formed the vast majority of ennobled men for whom I have found biographical details. And where civilians were concerned, almost all had won noble status as a direct consequence of military success, just as in the chua era. Gia-Long had wanted such titles limited to senior officers whose courage had helped defend and preserve the state, with only occasional grants to old and very distinguished civilian officials. Otherwise, his Code laid down, even high court mandarins should only be ennobled after death, an injunction that contemporary biographies suggest his successors largely obeyed. As a result, very few nobles existed (cer-

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40. Luro, Pays d'Annam, p.97; or Schreiner, Institutions (I), p.271.

41. Thus 17 of the 19 Trung-ky men ennobled between 1800 and about 1870 were generals; even Truong Bang Que's first noble title only came after his sole military campaign. The one exception I have found was the poet Nguyen Du.

42. CBPK, p.430.
tainly not enough to describe as a 'class'), almost all of them active or former generals.\textsuperscript{43} Given this, the egalitarian assertion by Luro (and others)\textsuperscript{44} that a quite lowly (civil) official might be ennobled at a higher level than his superiors clearly never happened in practice; while the one basic fact about noble rank in nineteenth century Vietnam - that it was essentially a military prerogative - never appeared. Nor is it adequately acknowledged in any other colonial account I have seen, thanks to the camouflage the little China fallacy drew so effectively over actual Vietnamese practice.\textsuperscript{45}

Luro's odd insistence on absolute equality between all subjects also needs further comment. In all but a narrowly western and legalistic sense, it is quite misleading. Far from being egalitarian, as it suggests, traditional Vietnam was 'fortement hierarchisée',\textsuperscript{44} to quote one of the more sensitive of the next generation of French observers. Luro's emphasis most likely reflected conventional European thinking about China, compounded by his own experience and obser-

\textsuperscript{43} In some respects, noble titles seem the military equivalent to honorifics in the first grade of the mandarinate for civil officials.

\textsuperscript{44} Luro, Pays d'Annam, p.86 claimed that 'a low official could merit and obtain the highest degree of nobility (Cong) while a superior official might have to be satisfied with the fifth degree (Nam)'. Schreiner, Institutions (I), p.235; and Pasquier, L'Annam, p.80 agreed; but no-one cited any examples, probably because they had none.

\textsuperscript{45} Although Schreiner [Institutions(I), p.236] did note that the two highest titles were mainly reserved for soldiers, biographies show that lower titles usually went to military achievers as well.

\textsuperscript{44} Diguet, Annamites, p.121.
vation in Nam-ky. As noted above, Hegel believed their lack of legal rights before the king rendered all subjects equal, a comparison other French writers adopted and which manifestly rested on projected European norms. But Luro's knowledge of the South may well have seemed to verify the idea. Still thinly populated and comparatively rich, the nineteenth century Nam-ky elite placed greater stress on accumulating land and wealth than academic titles, and the other prized honours, awards, and exemptions that bestowed social distinction and higher status on families in the poorer regions north of Binh-dinh. It is also possible that, in the 1860s, with almost all its great political and military families resettled in Hue, Nam-ky at the time may well have exhibited far fewer gradations of status than would have been encountered anywhere else in Vietnam.

But whatever the reason, Luro's sweeping assertion of absolute equality misrepresented social reality at the same time that it badly misconstrued the way the political system actually worked, at least in regard to access to office and later career success, as Chapters Two and Three have argued. His disparaging dismissal of noble rank ('only a simple social distinction accompanied by certain rights of precedence in public ceremonies and some immunity from taxes') was similarly misplaced. In the first place, tax exemption re-


49. Luro, Pays d'Annam, p.86.
presented a keenly sought privilege in nineteenth century Vietnam. It became so widespread after Tu-Buc began selling lesser mandarinal grades that one authority has estimated, by 1897, ten percent of the tax payers in Ha-noi province enjoyed complete legal exemption. So highly was it esteemed that early colonial administrations felt obliged to offer it to their own employees on the same basis as the mandarins.  

Second, Luro missed something far more important, the family dimension. Though vested in individuals and diminishing over time as he described, a noble title nevertheless swelled the prestige of the recipient’s family. It enhanced their status and magnified their influence in local affairs. Patents of nobility, cherished documents bearing the king’s own seal that could be ritually presented to the recipient’s ancestors, took pride of place on family altars; while the state, not his descendants, met much of the costs of the illustrious man’s cult through the grant of land or money. Families could thus enact the more elaborate rituals of ancestor worship (which in turn served to uphold their elite status) at comparatively little expense to themselves. Irrelevant in Europe, and absent from Luro’s Eurocentric compar-

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30. Vu-Van-Hien, ‘L’Impôt personnel et les corvées de 1862 à 1936’, RIJE, 13 (1940), pp.93-99. In South and North it was reduced in 1903 and 1914, and then abolished in 1920 and 1919 respectively, but continued unchanged in Annam until 1928.

isons, these factors nevertheless loomed large in Vietnamese calculations.

From the 1880s, later French writers elaborated the notion of equality between subjects into a powerful image of traditional Vietnam as a sort of dual society. While apparently egalitarian or democratic at its village base, at the national level it remained autocratic, ruled by a distant imperial hierarch whose bureaucracy welcomed all talented graduates on merit alone. French observers believed that unrestricted access to education, combined with a policy of reserving official positions for laureates of public examinations, ensured that 'the poorest of coolies could make [his intelligent son] into an official whose merits would ennoble him'. Their exemplars, however, all tended to be either special cases, as with Nguyễn Văn Tuong, or quite inappro-

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52. Schreiner, Institutions (I), p.238 and Pasquier, L'Annam, p.81 mention it briefly as a grant to assure posthumous homage.

53. For other examples see Nguyen Van Phong, Société, pp. 109 and 117-118. Schreiner, Institutions (I), pp.254-55 also calls the people 'democratic or republican'. It was equally applied to China. Cf. H.B. Morse's description of China as 'an autocratic rule superposed on a democracy' in The Administration and Trade of the Chinese Empire (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1908), p.46.


56. Tsuboi says Tuong's career only really blossomed after he was sent to negotiate with the French in Hanoi in 1874 and claimed full credit for the success. L'Empire vietnamienne, pp.234-35.
appropriate, as with Phan Thanh Gian, whose literate father had been a minor government employee before falling foul of his superiors.\note{Luro, Pays d’Annam, pp.101-04. P. Daudin and Le Van Phuc, 'Phan-Thanh-Gian 1796-1867 et sa famille, d’après quelques documents annamites', BSEI (ns) XIV, 2 (1941), pp.34-5.}

Certainly it was true that able men did sometimes rise high from humble beginnings; but talent alone never sufficed in the nineteenth century. Under the Nguyen, such men needed the right regional credentials too: had Gian or Tuong been Northerners, neither might have made his mark. Although no legal barriers existed, and peasants may well have fantasized about their sons conquering the mandarinate, most knew full well that:  

Kings’ sons will always become kings, while sons of the pagoda watchmen will sweep the banyan leaves.

While the system never operated so rigidly as to exclude brilliant outsiders, in normal circumstances very few men moved into or out of the political and administrative elite in one generation. (Indeed, French conquest arguably brought the greatest turn-over in Nguyen elite ranks for a century, or more.) The slow ascent (or decline) of families over two and more generations was far more usual than the meteoric rise of a gifted individual in one. Huynh Con’s family typified the process.\note{Cited in Phan Thi Dae, Situation de la Personne au Viêt-Nam (Paris: Editions du Centre de la Recherche scientifique, 1966), p.40.}

\note{Huynh Con and Jean Jacnal, 'Mémoires de son excellence Huynh Con', RI (ns), XL, 1-2 (1924), pp.31-52.}
tai regional graduate, had forfeited his government stipend after failing his second attempt at cu-nhan. Returning home, he married the daughter of a comfortable local literati family - one of whose sons later reached tham-tri (2-2) - and devoted himself to Sino-Vietnamese medicine and other literate pursuits. His son Con passed cu-nhan and then tien-si at his second attempt, in 1877. This success brought marriage with a daughter of one of his father's former class-mates now elevated to thuong-tho, the influential Vo Trong Binh.

The adoption of a literati way of life, the accumulation of examination titles over generations, and the pursuit of strategic marriage alliances, all characterised a previously undistinguished family's infiltration of the nineteenth century literati and political elites. Once in the system, the privileges and educational advantages accorded the sons or grand-sons of district magistrates (or higher)^4^ meant that, in normal times and barring disaster, it was easier to perpetuate elite status than to achieve it in the first place.

So why did most Frenchmen highlight the one-in-a-million individual jackpot in preference to the common experience of almost all Vietnamese? Largely, the answer lies in their unconscious projection of identity onto Vietnam. The crucial factor, as Peter Baugher has argued, was the narrowly legalistic interpretation of liberty and equality prevalent under the Third Republic. From the 1880s, with the Republic firmly established and the battle for universal primary education won, bourgeois officials and politicians in

[^4^]: As discussed previously in Chapter Two.
France believed that the absence of legal barriers to the pursuit of official or public careers left every Frenchman free to rise as far as his abilities merited. Superficial resemblances in the Vietnamese situation attracted a projection of identity: Paul Doumer’s aide, Louis Salaun, for one, was not alone in claiming that mandarins were recruited by a democratic system of examinations quite similar to the ones we ourselves use to select our officials. Few, if any, colonial accounts recognised that, whatever the theory, in practice inherited advantages skewed the mandarinal system to favour the few over the many, as the existing elite intended it to do. Like various other colonial perceptions of Vietnamese customs or institutions, the French image of careers wide open to talent, and of ‘an administration based on the principle of the broadest democracy: the accession to office by merit alone’, was distorted by unconscious projections, in this case of identity. They reveal more about the French observers than the Vietnamese observed.

Let us now turn to our second example of little China errors in Lura’s understanding of traditional political institutions. This time we focus on the single most important of them, the monarchy. Lura’s formulation, whether acknowledged or not, went on to appear in almost every French colonial description of traditional Vietnamese kingship. It became the standard account, to which later authors only

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^1. Peter Baugher, "The Contradictions of Colonialism", PhD, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1980, pp.47-49, quote p. 47. Though he did not use the concept of projected identity, Baugher’s study provides numerous examples of it.

ever contributed greater detail and texture. And when it came to delineating the attributes of the Vietnamese king, Luro (and all the rest) immediately invoked the European image of the Chinese Son of Heaven as the key to his local replica. We begin with a summary of Luro's ideas.

Like Hegel had done for China, Luro described Vietnam as a theocratic despotism. Responsible to Heaven alone, the sacred monarch retained all legal powers and exercised every superior office in the land. Everything emanated from him, and returned to him, without priesthood, hereditary aristocracy, or parliament to intervene. The 'first literatus of the kingdom, that is to say, the most faithful observer of

\[\text{\textsuperscript{3}}\] Thus some or most of what follows is reproduced in Bouinai and Paulus, L'Indo-chine fran̈aise, p.653; Schreiner, Institutions (I), pp.228-29; Pasquier, L'Annam, pp.66-67; Petit, Monarchie, pp. 38-41 and 48-49; Nguyen Van Huyen, Civilisation annamite, pp.106-07; and even, as ironic testament to the strength of the colonial model, by the last Vietnamese king, Bao-Dai, in Le Dragon d'Annam (Paris: Plon, 1980), p.52. Others like Diguet, Société, pp.121-23 described identical characteristics but in their own words.

\[\text{\textsuperscript{4}}\] In his Resumé (pp.62-3), Cadière quoted a passage from Legrand de Liraye's Notes historiques sur la nation annamite (which Luro had earlier cited) that described independence from China in terms very similar indeed to those Luro himself would later use.[Pays d'Annam, p.76-77]. This raises the question of the influence of missionary-scholars like Bouillevaux or Legrand in forming Luro's conceptions, where personal observation was impossible. His outline of the monarchy may have drawn more directly on such sources than on contemporary European beliefs about the Chinese emperor, but I have not had access to their writings to cross-check.

\[\text{\textsuperscript{5}}\] It is beyond the scope of this thesis to explore the errors in the nineteenth century European image of the Chinese monarchy as expounded in Luro and Hegel. Published works readily expose many, however. See, for example, Joseph R. Levenson, Confucian China and its Modern Fate, II (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1964); Jonathan D. Spence, Emperor of China, (Penguin Books, 1977); or Paul Rule, 'Traditional Kingship in China', in Ian Mabbett (ed), Patterns of Kingship and Authority in Traditional Asia (London: Croom Helm, 1985), pp.44-57.
the doctrine of Confucius', the king was also Son of Heaven, a 'title symbolic of his submission to traditional religious ideas ...' The system was 'monarchy pure, absolute, without control, without effective constitution, without any other limits than powerful custom, become almost ritual, and a code transmitted from time immemorial, from dynasty to dynasty'. From the tenth century onwards, when the newly-independent Vietnamese king had taken 'the same titles as the emperor of China [and] the same powers', the monarchy had remained explicitly Chinese and Confucian in nature and form.

We must read the canonical books (the Kính) to get an idea of what a Chinese or Annamite sovereign is, or at least of how he is educated and of the influence of the mandarins, chosen from the literati graduates of public examinations, who surround him.

In this system of pure monarchy, the monarch is imprisoned by the formulas of a poorly defined traditional cult that goes back more than thirty centuries before our era, and which has no other limits than those of the doctrine of Confucius, followed by all the literati of the nation.

Like Hegel's image of a Chinese mandarinate as imper­turbable as 'the course of nature', Luro's monarchy recalls a natural phenomenon far more than a human institution. The glacial inertia of Sinic tradition had ground on its inexor­able way 'from time immemorial', with its immutable immens­ity erasing all real differences between epoches and dynas­ties within Vietnam, and between independent Vietnam and China. The kingdom ruled by Gobineau's 'tyranny of the

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* Ibid, p.90
rites' thus existed in space, but not time. At its centre stood a series of interchangeable sacred emperors, each at once master and victim of the system, bound by the exigencies of 'minutely detailed practices of religious ceremonial borrowed from [Chinese] traditions and sacred texts'. But no small matters, these: the fate of the dynasty hung on the king's discharging his all sacred duties scrupulously.

Confucius and the philosophers of his school have traced the rules of conduct of the emperor; if he strays from them he sins, he forfeits his mission, he loses the "mandate of heaven" (Thi'en Mang).

To lose the mandate of heaven is to lose the empire, for when a sovereign governs tyrannically history shows us, every now and again, a superior man steps forward at the decisive moment, echo of the ideas of all, and declares that the sovereign has lost the mandate of heaven. This fatal excommunication, engendered and reverberating in the public consciousness, is enough to make the dynasty fall. But this [slow] evolution of minds ... entails frightful sufferings, for it is an act of impiety, a sacrilege, to revolt against the one who holds the mandate of heaven.

Yet revolt provided no real solution. It could only establish a new dynasty, since 'an Annamite [or] a Chinese can hardly comprehend government without the monarch, official representative of the purely rational morality of Confucius while being at the same time pontiff of a hereditary and traditional national cult'. Burdened with the same

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40. Cf. Hegel's view, later refined by Marx, that oriental states were doomed by their nature to repeat the same cyclical pattern, whether their rise and fall following external conflicts or dynastic upheaval. 'This history too is, for the most part, really unhistorical, for it is only the repetition of the same majestic ruin.' Hegel, History, p.106.


71. Luro, Pays d'Annam, p.91.

72. Ibid.
flawed institutions, the new dynasty could only ultimately fail like its predecessors. The root of the problem lay in the belief that government, as an expression of royal authority, could never be questioned by the people. Instead, they had to rely on superior officials, and ultimately the king himself, to detect and put right any administrative wrongs they suffered. Echoing Hegel, Luro noted that, 'in the last analysis, everything [came] down to the king'. Yet circumstances invariably doomed him to failure. How could a man 'ordinarily raised in the harem and kept distant from business during his youth' be expected to fulfil the onerous task of personally supervising the entire administration? It could not be done. With the king's 'will, intelligence and strength for work' rarely up to requirements, it left 'the sovereign motor of this very powerfully centralised machine ... almost always inert'. The administration lacked 'regulatory impulses', the people found themselves 'fatally misgoverned', and revolt festered yet again.

To a foreigner, the public face of the Tu-Buc reign displayed so many of these pessimistic and doctrinaire features that it must have seemed like proof positive of the colonial model. But as we saw in Chapter Two, it was only under Tu-Buc that the kingdom had begun to evolve towards the rigidities of a Confucian state, so dissimilar from the Nguyễn rule of the previous two centuries - and then for reasons not canvassed by the French colonial model. Nor, it should be noted, did the constricting Neo-Confucian imperial

ideology of the mid-nineteenth century, so central to the colonial paradigm, tower over all Vietnamese history in the way the French assumed.

Confucianism had only finally displaced Buddhism as the official imperial ideology under the fourteenth century Le (though it had increased in power under the later Tran). But by the seventeenth century, the unorthodox chua system in Ha-noi began slowly to erode standards of official Confucian studies in the North.\[^{74}\] By Minh-Mang's 1820 accession, organised Chinese studies had been in serious decline for nearly a century. Although their revival formed a key component of the king's strategy for dynastic survival, Woodside judged that resuscitated Confucian studies had not yet struck deep local roots by the mid-century.\[^{75}\] Certainly we see nothing comparable in Nguyen Vietnam to the robust and diverse Confucian discourse of contemporary China. Given this, the narrow scholasticism that the French perceived in Vietnamese Confucianism at the time may have not only derived from their own expectations of its supposed venerable and sacrosanct status. It could also have reflected the still rather artificial and self-consciously imported nature of organised Chinese studies, and their limited social role.


\[^{75}\] Model, pp.223-33. Woodside does not mention its parlous state in the previous century.
Another factor may also help explain the mid-nineteenth century French experience of Vietnamese Confucian studies as a matter of rote learning and intellectual rigidity. In the absence of a flourishing local Confucian discourse, revived Chinese studies depended heavily on the patronage of the Hue court. But as we saw in Chapter Three, the majority of high policy makers at court for almost the entire pre-colonial nineteenth century came from families lacking deep scholarly traditions. Most were first, or at best second, generation laureates for whom the main significance of Confucian studies lay in their central role in the official examination system. When Minh-Mang's reforms began to alter the political climate in Hue in the 1830s, the existing, regional-based elite found in the examinations a means to prolong their own status and power, and to continue rationing outsiders' access to the royal administration. For these men, revived official Confucianism essentially represented a means to an end, rather than an end in itself. Most had memorised the stock literary formulas necessary to produce the passable poetry expected of an educated man, and had digested the narrow range of classical knowledge and opinions required to succeed in the regional examinations. But once in the administration, few cared to stray beyond the limits of accepted accomplishments into the by-ways of philosophical speculation or literary invention; nor did they encourage it in

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76 According to a passage quoted by Tran Trong Kim, Minh-Mang himself realised the problem late in his reign. Scholars too often approached the examinations the wrong way, he complained, happy to reproduce 'antiquated and worn-out formulas' because they only cared about winning the academic title. *Việt-nam Su-luoc* (Sai-gon, Tan-Viet XB, 1958), p.435.
others. Thus, ironically, when the little China fallacy applied Gobineau's misconception of Chinese intellectual life as a formulaic re-iteration of the past to Bai-Nam, it seemed to explain quite well what the French observed in mid-century Vietnam. But the reasons behind it had nothing in common with the racial-cultural explanations proposed by Gobineau, and often seconded by later colonial Frenchmen.

The French misconstrued the Confucianism they encountered at the court of Tu-Buc. They interpreted its role and significance through the filter of their own ignorance and prejudice, and then projected their own image backwards over the entire Vietnamese past. Not even the court mandarins of the Nguyen Annals Office, ordered by Minh-Mang in 1820 to 'weigh and compromise' official records to ensure they conformed to proper Sinic orthodoxy, rivalled the nineteenth century French in fixing a sinicised mask on the Vietnamese past. By accepting the Chinese imperial ideology of the Tu-Buc reign at its face value, Luro and the rest unwittingly paid the new Sino-Vietnamese elite the great compliment of taking them at their own best estimation, at their own ideal self-image. And by imagining contemporary Vietnamese politi-

77. For the difficulties of Cao Ba Quat, who did so wander, see Model, pp.225-33.

78. For French description of the pre-colonial Vietnamese character that might have come straight from Gobineau's chapter on the yellow race, see E. Mathieu, 'L'évolution intellectuelle et sociale des Annamites sous l'influence française', BSEI (ns), V, 3 (1930), pp.166-170.

cal institutions represented ten centuries of unbroken Confucian continuity, the nineteenth century French created - and later enforced as colonial political fact - an image of the Vietnamese monarchy appropriate to their understanding of such a supposedly age-old, Confucianised political order. For them, the king became "nothing but" the Confucian Son of Heaven, 'a being of quasi-divine essence, [hidden] in his palace like an idol in the depths of the sanctuary',\textsuperscript{\textendash}whose 'premier duty above all' lay in 'respect for the Rites'.\textsuperscript{\textendash}1 Incorporated into later colonial political myths of the Vietnamese Other, this nineteenth century French misconception would cast a long shadow into the twentieth century.

Luro's account of the Vietnamese monarchy based itself almost entirely on classical Chinese texts, in much the same way that most nineteenth century Vietnamese would have done in similar circumstances. But while both concerned themselves more with Sinic theory than contemporary practice, few Vietnamese literati would have removed the royal institution from time and history to the extent that Luro's dogmatic assertions effectively did. Nothing in Luro's account hints, for example, that history furnished numerous examples of kings (or rulers) acting with 'great patriarchal absolutism' and flouting 'the rules of conduct traced by Confucius' without losing power as a result.\textsuperscript{\textendash}2 Ignorance may played a

\textsuperscript{\textendash}0. Diguet, Société, p.122.


\textsuperscript{\textendash}2. As Schreiner noted a generation later. Institutions (I), p. 224. But his explanation was racial: as the king chose his ministers, 'for anyone who knows the Asiatic char-
part; but the whole tone of his account suggests the cause lay elsewhere, in the influence of the contemporary European Orientalist discourse.

The earlier excerpts from Hegel and Gobineau have already suggested how many pre-existing European assumptions about China surfaced unacknowledged in Luro's description of traditional Vietnamese political institutions. His fundamental methodology also reflected a similar source. European Orientalists at the time stressed the analysis of classic texts and ancient scriptures as the best means of reconstituting the essence of "Oriental" religious, political, or cultural institutions in their pristine (and hence most authentic) state. Understanding their changing manifestations over time or their contemporary usages paled before the intellectual quest to reconstruct idealised, essential forms. Luro's outline of Vietnamese political institutions unquestionably fits this project. His voice joined with those of other early French writers like Aubaret, Legrand de Liraye, Landès, Philastre, Sylvestre, men later so often copied, to produce an Indochinese annex to the wider Orientalist discourse of the time. Together they erected the framework of a written 'tradition ... whose material presence or weight, not the originality of a given author, [was]

acter, this observation suffices and makes clear how an intelligent and active emperor ... could integrally encompass whatever he wished' [p.225]. For a sample of the range of French views, see Nguyen Van Phong, Société, pp.112-15.


94. Schreiner, Institutions (III), p.iv.
really responsible for the texts produced out of it'. In the form of the little China model of Vietnamese culture and identity, their collective contributions combined to wield a formidable intellectual authority, especially where the monarchy was concerned. We need only glance at Robert Petit's 1931 study, La Monarchie annamite, for instance, to discover the extent to which later researchers assumed the nineteenth century model had summarised all essential knowledge of the subject. As a result, no colonial study ever perceived the kingship as we would understand it now, as primarily an indigenous Vietnamese institution influenced by Chinese models, rather than a Chinese institution stranded in Vietnam. Their value is correspondingly limited.

The imprint of these colonial and Orientalist assumptions lingered long after the demise of French colonialism. As late as the 1960s, we still find scholarly accounts that based themselves directly on the little China paradigm. We conclude the section with two brief examples, one describing the traditional state and the other the monarchy.

The first, from a second generation colonial scholar, Paul Mus, presents a heavily-romanticised image of the mid-nineteenth century kingdom as if it typified all previous centuries.  

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**86**. Said, Orientalism, p. 94.

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**86**. John T. McAlister, Jr and Paul Mus, The Vietnamese and Their Revolution (New York and London: Harper and Row, 1970), p. 31. Examples abound. For instance, the authors asserted that an aristocracy based on great estates and political offices 'could not happen in Viet Nam because the emperor never granted permanent titles. The entailed estates were always ritualistic and symbolic...'[p. 33] True of the Nguyen (1802-1884), it was wrong for the Tran (1226-1400),
The traditional Vietnamese state was conventionalised in accordance with Confucian political thought; it was withdrawn behind a wall of Chinese characters and guaranteed conformity to the models provided by Chinese tradition ...

A principal goal of the ritualistic state, we are told, lay in preventing villagers from going astray, so that it is its chief "ministers" ... [formed] a kind of high tribunal sitting in judgement upon lapses from the Confucian model. Therefore, the state recruited its personnel for all but the humblest positions from the literati, whose learning consisted entirely of Confucius, the classics, and the commentaries.

China provided a description of this sort of system in a rich collection of writings and exegeses. Society was the content of its own literature .... [and all ideals] to be achieved lay in the past. Since present evils resulted from neglect of the Confucian model, their cure lay not in innovation but in return to the ideal ...

The 'Confucian balance between the ritualistic state and the autarchic village' enabled the state to assure 'unity and order in the world by a harmony between human institutions and the laws of nature, and the learning of China sustained that tranquillity'.

All Vietnamese history from the tenth to thirteenth centuries, and most of the rest, escapes this particular model. Where in its timeless vision of preter-human traditional harmony can dynamic, pragmatic Bang-trong fit? How can it accommodate the nearly two centuries during which, in whose extended clan became just that sort of aristocracy; and also for the eighteenth century, though more by default than design in the North. Le Thanh Khoi, Histoire du Vietnam des origines à 1862 (Paris: Sudéstasie, 1981), pp.128-30 and 172-73.

87. McAlister and Mus, The Vietnamese, p.32.

88. Ibid p.36.

89. Ibid, p.42.
an 'upheaval unheard-of in history', the Trinh chua reduced a long sorry procession of pathetic Le emperors to ritual figureheads, bereft of virtue or substance? What can it hope to tell us of the Gia-Long era, or even the activist Minh-Mang reign in which Hue imposed a Chinese land tax system on Southern villagers more or less at sword-point? Innumerable exceptions remain, but the point is surely made. Using Chinese political theories and models as a guide to pre-colonial history can only ever partly elucidate traditional Vietnam, and then mainly the later fifteenth and mid-nineteenth centuries, both times of emphatic sinicisation. More often, however, Vietnamese historical experience fails to conform to the expectations of what effectively seems little more than a European projection of Chinese Otherness onto old Vietnam. The Vietnamese past can only be forced into this doubly-distorting Euro-Sinic mould by violating its indigenous integrity, or by ignoring everything that does not fit.


Although the eighteenth century witnessed the nadir of Chinese-style imperial kingship (hoang de), the "little China" image of the monarchy as a primordial Confucian in-

\footnote{The 1780s' general Nguyen Huu Chinh, quoted in Le Thanh Khoi, Vietnam des origines, p.320.}
stitution, unchanged by time and wielding the same sacred authority regardless of era or circumstance, still weaves its magic over the analysis. Occasional disclaimers appear in footnotes to admit that practice contradicted theory at the time: in the text, however, the traditional discourse triumphs. Thus we hear how, in the eighteenth century, 'the greatest respect surrounded the sacred person of the sover- reign, the Son of Heaven';\footnote{Ibid, p.46.} that 'the King was an absolute monarch who required the obedience of all his subjects' and whose 'edicts always demanded immediate execution';\footnote{Ibid, p.52.} how 'the sovereign ... [was] identical with the kingdom of which he was a sort of incarnation',\footnote{Ibid.} and so forth. 'One can hardly insist too much on the religious role of the King', we are told, 'for, in Vietnam, religion as manifested in the rites overshadowed all other preoccupations'.\footnote{Ibid.} None of this hints that the situation of the eighteenth century emperors, stripped of all but ritual duties, may have differed in any respect from that of most previous (and later) kings. We even hear that in the 1720s Trinh Cuong twice refused to usurp the last imperial prerogatives\footnote{Ibid, p.45.} of the degraded Le hoang de 'for fear of lèse-majesté',\footnote{To dress in imperial yellow in 1721, and to perform the sacrifice to Heaven and Earth in 1724. Ibid, pp.44 and 46.} without any sugges- tion that providing Qing China with a pretext to intervene

\footnote{Ibid, p.44.}
on behalf of a deposed Le emperor, as would later happen in 1789, may have provided a far more compelling reason for the Trinh to maintain the status quo.

Despite the abundant evidence of royal humiliation and institutional decline in the sources, Bang Phuong-Nghi still advanced the standard interpretation of monarchy à la chinoise. He managed this by the extraordinary expedient of combining king and chua, for political purposes, into a composite 'royal authority'. The strategy certainly ensured that the eighteenth century would fit the author’s opening "little China" generalisation ('royal power in Annam had not changed, in principle, since its appearance')

but at real cost to the analysis. Blinkered by a preconceived conclusion, Bang’s account of eighteenth century kingship forfeited the opportunity to formulate new insights into the circumstances of a time when, as we suggest below, the Vietnamese monarchy may well have been evolving in ways that affected both royal institution and basic principle alike.

The early colonial image of traditional Vietnam as a timeless Confucian kingdom, ruled by Sinic rites and traditions incarnated in its sacred emperor, essentially unchan-

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**. For the extent of Trinh usurpation of royalty, see Langlet, Tradition, pp.89 fn.6, 97 fn.1, 107-08, 167 fn.1, 207 fn.1 and 2, and 208 fn.3. For the Trinh’s casual king-making, see K.W. Taylor, ‘The Literati Revival in Seventeenth-Century Vietnam’, Jnl of SE Asian Studies, XVIII, 1 (March 1987), pp.2-5.

**. For examples see Bang Phuong-Nghi, Institutions publiques, pp.50-52.

100. Ibid, p.43 (my emphasis).
ged and unchangeable for a millennium, informed French understanding of Vietnamese identity and institutions all through the colonial era, and beyond. Foremost among its errors must be counted its classical Chinese definition of the Vietnamese monarchy. To a degree that most French never understood, the simple fact of colonial domination posed a standing challenge to dynastic legitimacy in Vietnam. So when men like Pasquier implemented pro-monarchical policies based on their "little China" image of a Confucian king, they only compounded the problem. By seeking to draw the king closer to colonialism, they unwittingly severed the Protected Vietnamese monarchy even further from its indigenous roots. Where similar policies in Cambodia left some royal prestige intact at the end of colonialism, in Vietnam French ignorance of the popular expectations of kingship made it extremely unlikely that the ritual monarch in Hue would be able to survive the difficult transition from colonialism to independence. Some thoughts on this indigenous monarchical ideal conclude the chapter.

King and People in Late Traditional Vietnam

In traditional Vietnam, as in pre-modern societies elsewhere, monarchy functioned as both an institution and an ideal. Though people at all levels of society shared certain basic expectations of what royalty was and should be, elites and peasants tended to prize different aspects of these common beliefs more highly than others. We have touched on the sovereign in Chinese theory, and mentioned
something about what the Nguyen king meant to members of the Trung-ky political elite. But let us now turn to what the monarchy seems to have signified for Vietnamese peasants; and suggest how circumstances in the century and a half preceding colonialism might have effected the popular attitude towards the kingship.

The first manifestation of Vietnamese monarchy provides an early indication of what the king meant to his people. When Vietnam won its independence in the tenth century, the new rulers adopted two ceremonial Chinese terms for kingship: vuong, which later became the title that Trinh and Nguyen chua ruled under; and de or hoang de, which signified the imperial Son of Heaven. But alongside them stood an indigenous Vietnamese term for "king", vua, with a quite different import. Vua meant, in Keith Taylor's estimation, 'a ruler who governs according to the established customs and traditions of the people'; while the more formal Chinese terms implied for Vietnamese 'a commission to rule from above, without any sympathetic link to the people themselves'. When written in demotic Vietnamese (nom), Taylor added, vua combined the Chinese character for vuong with the nom character for "father", conveying the intimate sense of a ruler with fatherly attributes.101

The projection of parental qualities onto the king appears quite frequently in pre-industrial monarchies; the Russian Tsar's sentimental title of 'the little white father', for instance, springs readily to mind. In China (and

Vietnam), in a tradition dating back to Mencius at least, we similarly find the king designated as 'the father and mother of the people'. One among innumerable such examples can be found in Nguyen Hue's 1788 edict announcing his accession as the Guang-Trung emperor: 'The way may vary, and times may be easy or harsh, but the Sage has only one line of conduct - to follow the way of Heaven in governing the country, and to make himself the father and mother of the people'.

It is possible that members of the elite may have basically understood this notion, and the title that went with it, as a conventional metaphor describing the king's ideal relations with his subjects. For the peasantry, however, it may have carried a far more concrete meaning. In Vietnam, with its strong emphasis on family, for the king to proclaim himself 'father and mother of the people' conveyed a symbolic freight that was far from abstract. It suggested a superior power that gave life to the people, nurtured and protected them, defended and guided them, and chastised them with a loving hand when necessary. Nor did it imply a one-way relationship. As we will see later, it could also contain a filial sense of reciprocal obligation, a feeling that the people owed a life-debt to their king in return for his land and care. In peasant life and imagination, as Woodside noted, the vua figured as no remote and

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102. Quoted in Huynh Le (ed), Hop tuyen tho van Viet Nam the ky XVIII nua day the ky XIX, III (Ha-noi, 1978), p.327. [Hereafter TVVN] It is also interesting to note that Dioguet, a close observer of ordinary Vietnamese, reported that the king's most valued title was 'Father and Mother of the People'. Annamites, p.122.
forbidding sacred hierarch but as a 'protector figure (like
the Vietnamese kitchen god or vua bep)'. This does not
deny that the king's majesty also inspired popular fear and
awe; peasants who experienced his authority via royal offi-
cials wisely feared it. At the same time, however, few con-
founded the king's mandarins (or their behaviour) with the
vua ideal.

A strong analogy seems to exist between popular mon-
archism as outlined here and the peasant notion of Heaven
described by Léopold Cadière. Beneath its encrusted Sinic
accretions, Cadière detected an indigenous core within the
notion of "Heaven" which echoes the feelings clustered
around the idea of the king. For peasants, Heaven (troi)
signified not the impersonal Sino-Vietnamese thien to which
the emperor sacrificed but an imminent presence accorded,
like ong vua, the respectful familial title of "father's
father" (ong). Ong troi ordered all that occurred in the
world, and in human life, whether for good or ill. Heaven
might not prevent human wickedness, but nothing eluded it.
It understood the motives and intentions hidden in men's
hearts and would redeem the innocent who begged it for jus-
tice, while punishing the transgressor. Like ong vua on a
cosmic scale, ong troi personified 'an all-powerful being,
intelligent and good, omniscient and just, to whom one had

\[103\] Model, pp.9-18, quote p.12

\[104\] L. Cadière and A. Bonhomme, 'Annam. Les Habitants (Po-

pulations, Langues, Religions)', in BAVH, XVIII, 1-2

(1931), pp.83-86. Also see L. Cadière (trans I.W. Mabbett),
'Religious Beliefs and Practices of the Vietnamese' (Monash
University Centre for Southeast Asian Studies, Working Pap-
recourse in suffering, as one instinctively called on one's father or mother; Troi oi! "Oh Heaven": Cha oi, Me ai: "Oh! father, Oh! mother, help me in my pain"!.

Furthermore, despite Chinese imperial theory, not just anybody could take the throne and become the people's vua. Any aspirant to kingship who wished to attract a popular following needed the support of the spirit powers. To be descended from auspicious ancestors, particularly from one buried by heaven in a king-maker hole (huyet de vuong), provided one of the strongest popular tokens of other-worldly backing. Without the honour of a heavenly burial (thien tang) among his forebears, or other fateful indications like omens and prophecies predicting success, only the most extraordinary individual could have hoped to gather sufficient support for a successful tilt at the throne. Binh Tien Hoang (968-979), for example, may have fought his way to the kingship as a great warrior; but the tale of how he had fooled a Chinese geomancer to bury his own father's bones in a king-maker hole discovered by the Chinese, was soon circulating among the people. All dynastic founders, including the Trinh and Nguyen, boasted an ancestor buried by Heaven - and took care that it was widely known. Lesser imperial graves also acted as a source of spiritual power for the ruling dynasty, so that plots to destroy them

105. The translation is as given in Cadière and Bonhomme, 'Les habitants', p.84.


ranked second to treason. It was to eradicate any lingering traces of ancestral power that Gia-Long not only destroyed the Tay-son brothers' graves and those of the previous two generations, but equally sacked that of their distant Nghe-an ancestor for good measure. It was also for this reason that Nguyen Van Thanh's denigration of the site of Gia-Long's mother's grave in 1812 was said to have helped foster the royal suspicions that finally cost the Grand Marshal his life in 1817. But despite the best precautions, inherited merit and virtue (phuc duc) alone could never sustain a dynasty indefinitely. Successive kings had to replenish the family stock, lest one day they find it all squandered, and with it their grip on the throne.

None of this was entirely unknown to the French. Early colonial observers of Vietnam understood something of these spiritual and occult matters, but never thought them worth incorporating into their model of the monarchy. As nineteenth century rationalists, they preferred instead to dismiss it all as superstitious nonsense. Gabriel Aubaret's reactions in his 1863 translation of the *Gia-dinh Thong-Chi* were typical. He disposed of these beliefs and the cosmological system upon which they rested in two short notes:

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109. *Ibid*, p.342. This was most unusual, and reflected Gia-Long's hatred for the Tay-son, which also caused the Nguyen to deny Quang-Trung had ever been a legitimate king. By contrast, Gia-Long ostentatiously tended the Le tombs in Thanh-hoa.


110. G. Aubaret (trans), *Histoire et Description de la Basse-Cochinchine (Pays de Gia-dinh)* (Paris: Imprimerie im-
The inhabitants of the empire of Annam are extremely superstitious ... We could say that their religion is entirely a matter for diviners and sorcerers;

and

It is quite impossible to follow the inhabitants of the empire of Annam in their suppositions about the influence of the stars; their total ignorance of the system of the world denies all serious criticism.

Aubaret far preferred the Confucian Chinese concept, remarking at one point that when the text mentioned 'heaven, or Thien ... it [was] the same as that referred to in the philosophy of Confucius'. That may have been correct for the part-Chinese Trinh Hoai Buc, author of the Gia-dinh Thong-Chi, but not for all Vietnamese.

If, as we have argued, the peasants expected their king to nurture, defend, and protect them like a parent, how did these beliefs and expectations fare in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries when the Trinh chua reduced the captive Le kings to a token imperial status, deprived of all but ritual duties? Though evidence is scanty, some suggests that the peasant concept of monarchy adapted over time to the changed circumstances: and that it did so differently in Bang-trong and Bang-ngoai.

As mentioned earlier, traditional kingship always operated on two levels. It was at once the ruling institution and a collective ideal, the embodiment of an unconscious projection of sovereignty that bestowed a numinous autho-

péridale, 1863), pp.31 and 70 respectively. Cf. Schreiner's scathing comments on the same issue in Institutions, II, pp.144-47.

111. Aubaret, La Basse-Cochinchine, p.50.
rity on the incumbent. The royal personality thus kindled was¹¹² a divine force which inhabits a man ... the king heals the sick, he brings prosperity to the country. This tendency to make the king responsible for the prosperous passage of events was particularly accentuated in China ... but it still remains active today in our democracies where the man in the street automatically accuses "the government" as a whole of being responsible for matters totally beyond its control.

If the ruling monarch consistently rebuffed collective expectations, however, he might cease to embody the projection of sovereignty. Usually the erosion of royal legitimacy that accompanied the withdrawal of the projection would encourage contenders, one of whom would ultimately replace the discredited king or dynasty. But such a crisis of confidence might instead prompt an institutional evolution that increasingly divorced the sacred or emblematic aspects of monarchy from the mundane and political functions of rulership. Something of this sort may have happened very early in Japanese history, for instance. For well over a millenium here everyone recognised that the imperial family's direct descent from the Sun Goddess uniquely qualified it to intercede with their divine ancestor on behalf of the nation; but few further believed it endowed the emperors with any special role or rights in government.¹¹³


When the Trinh chua prevented the Le vua from carrying out his royal responsibilities, there are some indications that, by the eighteenth century, a similar divergence between the monarchical institution and ideal may have begun in Vietnam. We will consider the Northern situation first.

By the 1660s, the Trinh had bowed to political necessity and kept a Le on the imperial throne. But they had also dispensed with any illusion of subordination to him. The chua set up his own court, appropriated royal terms of address, usurped royal prerogatives like the dispensation of moral precepts to the populace, and ceased to prostrate himself before the throne except during the sacrifice to Heaven and Earth, which only the Son of Heaven could properly perform. That the king should be so publicly humiliated and banished from government contradicted all Chinese imperial theory and practice as well as the historical experience of independent Vietnam. Yet by the late

114. They feared provoking Chinese intervention or inciting challengers to 'restore the Le', including the Nguyen from the south. A solemn oath, supposedly sworn by Trinh Kiem, may also have stayed them, as it promised that 'while the Le are preserved the Trinh live; if the Le fall, the Trinh will disappear'. Of course, it may equally have been invented later to justify the status quo. Quoted in Nguyen Ngoc Huy, 'Fate', p.330.

115. For Trinh arrogation of the royal role, see Langlet, Tradition vietnamienne, p.89, fn.6, p.97, fn.1, pp.107-08, p.167 fn.1, p.207 fn.1 & 2, p.208 fn.3.

116. In this context, "public" refers to the literate elite. Taylor, 'Literati Revival', pp.2-5.

117. As Ray Huang noted, government based on ritual monarchy could only function if everyone believed in it, and acted on that belief, including the Son of Heaven himself. 1587, A Year of No Significance (Yale University Press, 1981), pp.46-47, 75-103.
seventeenth century ambitious mandarins and literati aspirants had managed to accommodate themselves to the Trinh dictatorship, even creatively adapting Chinese political concepts to cloak their manoeuvres around the Trinh power-holders. In one striking example, a Trinh chief minister was attacked in Neo-Confucian terms hitherto only appropriate to the king:

The government of a state depends on the chief minister (te tuong): the prosperity or decline of government thus depends on the integrity or depravity of a single man ... Over the last years, earthquakes, floods, comets, droughts, locusts, and other strange phenomena have appeared, but no mandarin of the court has dared denounce [the chief minister's] faults.

And if the mandarinate lacked orthodox Confucian convictions, the usurping chua could not have pretended to the role of sage-king, either. Even Trinh Tac, who encouraged a short-lived literati revival in the mid-seventeenth century, remained capable of the decidedly non-Confucian gesture of offering the heads of army mutineers in sacrifice to the spirit of a senior adviser whom they had murdered.

Nevertheless, the major victims of the situation remained the people, who suffered a century of civil war followed by a gathering rural crisis. From the 1720s to the 1750s, almost continuous peasant rebellions, many under the slogan 'restore the Le, exterminate the Trinh' (phu Le, diet Trinh), exhausted Bang-ngoai. Although this wave of revolt finally subsided, when the Tay-son general Nguyen Hue mar-


\[11c.\] Langlet, Tradition vietnamienne, p.195 (my emphasis).

\[120.\] Ibid, p.164. The mutiny occurred in 1674.
ched on Ha-noi in 1786, the revered *phu* Le inscription on his banners drew crowds of supporters, as it would also do in 1802 for Nguyen Anh. The first episode is understandable; the second far less so. In the interim, the last Le king had called in a massive Chinese army to restore him to the throne after Nguyen Hue finally deposed the dynasty in 1788. At the bar of Vietnamese history, this act alone should have permanently damned the Le, descendants of the hero who had liberated the country from the Ming invasion in the fifteenth century. Yet clearly it did not. As we saw in Chapter Two, stubborn Le restorationism persisted in the North, with one early 1860s pretender (Ta Van Phung) even willing to foment a rebellion in the delta as a diversionary tactic to help the French expeditionary forces seize national territory in the South. Le loyalism troubled the Hue government right up to the imposition of the Protectorate. Even in the 1930s, the sentiment endured among diehards in Tonkin.

Why was this? Le Thanh Khoi has speculated that under the Trinh the Le became idealised in a folk-memory of the golden age under the dynasty's early kings. But this explanation alone seems inadequate to account for Northern intransigence before the claim of Nguyen Hue (the ritually

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123. Alan Broderick reported northerners told him of a Le king hidden in the mountains, waiting to come forth, whom Broderick compared to King Arthur of Britain. *Little China* (Oxford University Press, 1942), pp.37 and 149.
enthroned Quang-Trung emperor), and then of Gia-Long and his successors. As we noted previously, ordinary Vietnamese did not assume that royal merit and virtue automatically continued indefinitely. They also accepted that, when times changed, even the most virtuous could not prevail against the will of Heaven. Classical Chinese (and Vietnamese) political theory and practice reinforced these ideas by teaching that the man upon whom Heaven bestowed its mandate became Son of Heaven, irrespective of his antecedents. On the face of it Gia-Long, who came to the throne fourteen years after the last Le king had fled to China, apparently disposed of all the attributes necessary for kingship. Yet obviously many Northerners did not agree, and forced his army to campaign in old Bang-ngoai for the entire reign. Why was the new Son of Heaven unacceptable here?

It may be that this popular refusal fully to legitimise the political status quo reflected a subterranean fracturing of the monarchical ideal in the North long before 1802. Two things might have happened. As the idealisation of the Le progressed in the chua era, the long-frustrated vua ideal and the Le imperial clan may have coalesced in some Northerners' minds, causing them to see the salvation of the state as conditional on the restoration of a functioning Le vua. Or conversely, some Northerners may have slowly invested the centuries-old imperial house with an aura of "divine right" to the ritual monarchy, regardless of where actual power lay.\textsuperscript{123} Events in 1802 hint at

\textsuperscript{123} Such an evolution was not unthinkable, given Nguyen Van Huyen’s 1944 remark about the colonial monarchy: ‘Just as the head of the family must carry out the ancestral
this second development (though either or both might have occurred). Why would Bang-ngoai literati, who surely suspected Nguyen Anh would not return the Le to full power in 1802, still suspend disbelief far enough to hope he would "restore the Le", as his banners proclaimed? Could phu Le by then have come to imply restore the Le as emperor (hoang de), while someone else ruled as chua and vuong? 

Of course, it may be that we are starting at shadows here. A closer examination of other factors, regional particularism especially, might adequately explain the subsequent failure of the Nguyen to embody the vua ideal for their Northern peasant subjects. Much more research is necessary. What is clear, however, is that the Nguyen did fail to incarnate the monarchical ideal for very many ordinary Northerners, especially under Tu-Buc. A glance at some popular 1850s satirical songs (ve) from the former Bang-ngoai area of Nghe-Tinh illustrate the point. By linking Tu-Buc’s irregular accession with the catalogue of disasters that followed, the songs communicated his failure to live up to the popular monarchical ideal. Thus we hear in one that:127

Since the enthronement of Tu-Buc, 
There has been neither peace nor plenty.

cult, [so] the king must make sacrifices on the altars of his [ancestors]. And as the greatest of his ancestors is heaven, the emperor must offer a ceremony to it, the Nam Giao’. Civilisation annamite, p.106. (my emphasis)

126. Quoted in Bui-Quang-Tung, 'La Succession de Thieu-Tri’, BSEI (ns), LXII, 1-2 (1967), pp.52-56 and 73-76.

127. Ibid, p.54.
Another spelt out the indictment in more detail.\footnote{\textit{Ibid}, p.74. The full Vietnamese text, with a French translation, is at pp.74-75.}

From when I grew up until now, 
\textit{Ong vua Tu-Buc has messed everything up.}
The people are hungry 
But their plaints never reach his ears.

Both money or rice 
Simply dwindle away. 
(Once) \textit{ong vua Tu-Buc took the throne}
The harvests were lost.

And when the king failed as \textit{vua}, as a third mid-century verse suggests, his orthodox gestures as Confucian \textit{hoang de} might also attract popular scorn and ridicule. Thus when Tu-Buc rendered Minh-Mang's 1830s "ten moral prescriptions" into poetry for recital and study in the villages, some disaffected Northern wags riposted in kind:\footnote{My free rendition of a French version in Nguyen Khac Vien and Huu Ngoc (eds), \textit{Anthologie de la littérature vietnamienne}, II (Ha-noi: Editions en Langues étrangères, 1973), p.12. I have assumed a northern provenance by comparison with southern poetry discussed below.}

\begin{verbatim}
\begin{quote}
It's fun to attend the theatre,
And swimming leaves nobody sad.
We'll manage to watch a procession,
And even a funeral's not bad.
But to go hear the 'Ten Prescriptions',
You'd have to be stark, staring mad.
\end{quote}
\end{verbatim}

In former Bang-trong, by contrast, the people felt quite differently about the Nguyen dynasty.\footnote{Cf. the description of Tu-Buc in an 1860s Nam-ky proclamation: 'King Tu-Buc is both sage and intelligent'. Chu Thien et al, \textit{Tho van yeu nuoc nua sau the ky XIX (1858-1900)} (Ha-noi, 1972), p.376. [Henceforth \textit{TVYN}]}

As we saw in Chapter Two, the Le stirred no hearts here, either before or after Gia-Long's accession. Although the Nguyen \textit{chua} had never arrogated the \textit{hoang de} title, they had twice tried to establish an independent tributary relationship with...
China after which, had they succeeded, they might well have proclaimed themselves hoang de in the eighteenth century, instead of simply vuong.\textsuperscript{131} As it was, over the generations of Nguyen rule here, the notions of chua and vuong gradually fused with that vua—but of a vua without Sinic imperial trappings. Evidence for this appears in numerous poems, tracts, and proclamations of Southern partisans in the 1860s, all of which invoked the Nguyen king in Hue indifferently as vua, vuong or chua. As these appeals sought to rouse a mainly peasant audience to risk their lives fighting the French, we must assume the authors employed the strongest arguments and images they knew. And if so, what they said reveals, over and again, a bed-rock acceptance of the mid-century Nguyen king as vua in the South. In addition, the appeals also confirm the centrality of a reciprocal sense of obligation between king and people in peasant monarchism, the crucial factor lacking in relations between the Southern dynasties (both Tay-son and Nguyen) and their new Northern subjects.\textsuperscript{132} Let us consider some typical examples.


\textsuperscript{132} The regional bias disappears in current translations. Both Nguyen Khac Vien and Huu Ngoc (eds), Vietnamese Literature (Ha-noi, 1987) [henceforth VL] and Truong Buu Lam, Patterns of Vietnamese Response to Foreign Intervention: 1858-1906 (Monograph Series No. 11, Southeast Asian Studies, Yale University, 1967) always give "king", regardless of the Vietnamese original. TVVN also invariably glosses chua as vua/vuong in Southern materials. As for hoang de (or similar), I have never found it used of the Nguyen king in Southern materials of the period.
The first excerpts come from the elegy to the resistance fighters of Can-giuoc by the blind poet and village teacher, Nguyen Binh Chieu:\textsuperscript{133}

You believed that:

Every inch of earth, every green shoot comes by the chua’s favour and is tended on behalf of our homeland ...  
Living you venerated the vua, dead you do so still  
...  
In the shrines of our righteous warriors fragrant incense burns, giving thanks due to the words ‘king and land’ [vuong tho].

The second occurs in a 1862-63 appeal by the partisan leader, Truong Cong Binh. It weaves together personal family and Nguyen king with human obligations to heaven and earth and to the chua/vua to create a moral universe in which the living should repay their debt of life to family, king, and country:\textsuperscript{134}

I believe, in the words of the song, that  
Water comes from a spring, trees from their roots;  
Thus if all living people have teeth and hair,  
how can they not recognise their chua or their father?  
If all living people have homes and families, how  
can they not know fidelity and filial piety?  

Are we not men who stand on the ground and hold up the sky?  
In everything imbued with the same customs, the subjects of one country!

\textsuperscript{133}. For a short biography, see VL, pp.405-06, and for a full English translation, pp.407-12; or Truong Buu Lam, Patterns, pp.66-72. Disagreements between the two prompted my own literal translation, from TVYN, pp.49-50.

How can you claim to 'help the chua pacify the country'?
How can you say you 'attend to family (and) found the empire'?

Reason allows we must discharge our moral obligation bravely and loyally,
To repay the past, those nine months spent in our mothers’ wombs;
Reason allows that wife must advise husband and child urge father
To acquit our past [debts accrued] from living on the land of our vua, our fistful of food and simple shelter.

The sentiments expressed in these examples suggest that, if not the peasants themselves, then the local partisan leaders who led them against the French in the 1860s, often in opposition to the court, did so not only from the desire to defend their homes. They were also motivated by a sense of moral and material obligation, 'to acquit past debts' to the Nguyen chua/vuong/vua, whose land and protection had helped their families survive for generations.

It should be noted, too, that nothing in the excerpts quoted above confirms Truong Buu Lam's belief that Southern partisans felt court disapproval trapped them in a conflict of loyalty between Hue's orders and the need to fight. Dr Lam considered this conflict caused resistance fighters to draw 'a careful distinction between the person of an individual king and the moral principle of loyalty to the monarchy' which then let them to fight in the name of 'a ruler who would be worthy of that title'. This transformed the monarchy into 'an idealised institution not tarnished by any accidental deviation from the ideal'. The famous lines quoted above, however, suggest that while Southern

135. Patterns, p.10 (my emphasis).
guerillas did cherish a monarchical ideal, it was rather more concrete. They did not fight from some abstract principle of loyalty, but from a sense of indebtedness to the ruling king, to repay their ancestors' rice- and life-debts to his ancestors. And this, they accepted, might require obedience to a higher duty than Hue's orders. This notion comes through strongly in Nguyen Binh Chieu's elegy for the resistance leader, Truong Cong Binh: The high mandarins had failed their king in the crisis, but the people had not— as their chua ought to recognise.\(^{13}\)

Despite royal orders to ignore the enemy, 
His loyalty equalled the people's deep fidelity. 
He helped [them] with full and utter devotion to repay their human debt. 
No proper chua would care to call him a rebel-lious subject.

The last line of the poem highlights the fundamental sense of moral reciprocity underlying the peasants' ideal perceptions of their relations with the king. Both sides had to play their parts properly for the relationship to thrive. A king who reneged on his duties— whether in fact or in popular perceptions— would sooner or later exhaust the stock of obligation stored up by his predecessors, along with the fund of royal virtue also inherited from them. If the people's sense of connection to the ruler faded, so ultimately would their active loyalty. In the short term, others, like evil advisers (or the Trinh chua under

\(^{13}\). My translation from *TVYN*, p.52. Lam, *Patterns*, p.11 also gives the following from Truong Cong Binh: 'The Emperor (sic) calls us rebels but in the depth of his heart he cannot help but praise our loyalty. When the day of victory comes, not only will the Emperor forgive us, he will furthermore grant us all kinds of awards'.
the Le), might be popularly blamed for the royal failure.
But if the king's perceived inability to protect and defend
the people persisted too long, it would bankrupt their sen-
se of moral obligation towards the ruling house and fatally
erode the collective projection of sovereignty that had
legitimised the dynasty.

Once set adrift from the ruling family, peasant monar-
chism became a subversive force, free to attach itself to
anti-dynastic rebels or mystical hero-figures. And all the
while between revolts, it continually undermined the reg-
nant king by blasting his shortcomings in terms of a vua
ideal that everyone recognised and cherished. The peasant
projection of moral reciprocity onto the vua ultimately
made popular monarchism as conditional as the trung-nghia
offered the emperor by his most proper Confucian officials,
and for similar - if less well-articulated - reasons. The
Nguyen might have held that 'loyalty to the king and loy-
ty to the country were equivalent'.
Luro and the French
might have insisted that revolt equalled sacrilege. But the
Northern peasants who swelled successive anti-Nguyen rebel-
lions did not see themselves as traitors. Rather, by mid-
century, they regarded themselves as men acting to right a
great wrong that had brought disaster on all, and to re-
place an impious impostor with a true Le vua.

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137. Huynh Kim Khanh, Vietnamese Communism, 1925-45 (Cor-
nell University Press, 1982), p.29 incorrectly generalising
what was a court and Southern attitude in the nineteenth
century.

138. See, for example, the 1871 proclamation quoted in
Chapter 2, p.104.
mained loyal, but to an ideal image of the defunct Le rath-
er than to the ritually enthroned, Chinese-invested Son of
Heaven in Hue.

The French knew of the unrest in the North, and the
lack of popular support for the Nguyen that fuelled it. But
just as role of the spirit world never found a place in the
colonial model of Vietnamese monarchy, neither did these
contemporary facts modify French understanding of the Viet-
namese Son of Heaven. Seminal commentators like Luro pre-
ferred to seek their inspiration in ancient Chinese texts
and Sinic political theories. Their official successors of
the 1880s, however, did incorporate current events; but in-
terpreted them in ways that served to confirm existing as-
sumptions about the fundamentally religious and ritual nat-
ure of the Confucian monarchy, and of the people's unshake-
able attachment to their 'living idol' in Hue. We will
conclude with the "proof" of the 1880s.

From Cochinchina and Paris, Eliacin Luro had theorised
about the king's imprisonment within the minutiae of mille-
nial Confucian rites and traditions inherited from China.
Men who travelled to Hue in the 1870s and 1880s added an
extra dimension to the royal predicament. Although 'in ap-
pearance the absolute master of the life of his subjects,
from the greatest prince to the weakest beggar', Tu-Buc was
'in reality the slave of his ministers', according to the

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139. Marcel Monnier in 1899, quoted in Nguyen Van Phong, Societe, p.112.
1879-1880 Legation doctor, Auvray.\textsuperscript{140} Like Tu-Buc's situation, that of the 'ghost kings' who succeeded him, all mere 'hostages and victims'\textsuperscript{141} of the regents, proved Luro's prediction of inevitable royal failure beneath the burden of their mammoth administrative task. It also revealed how the king's dependence on his ministers, the real powers behind the throne,\textsuperscript{142} always risked leaving the monarch as 'a fetish in the hands of his ministers'.\textsuperscript{143} Yet the king's weakness never reduced the authority of his government. The royal word remained law, as the 1885 can vuong (aid the king) movement demonstrated. When his July 1885 surprise attack on the Hue garrison failed, the regent Ton That Thuyet had fled with young king, Ham-Nghi, whom the French claimed to be Thuyet's prisoner. Yet the king's captivity never discredited the can vuong edict: issued over the royal seal and in his name, it raised the country at his command.\textsuperscript{144} The French never realised that more than the awesome prestige of the Son of Heaven was involved here, that Ham-Nghi's defiant appeal had also invoked the vua

\textsuperscript{140} If only because he was so poorly informed. A. Auvray (ed H. Cosserat), 'Dix-huit mois à Hue', BAVH, XX, 3-4 (1933), p.255.

\textsuperscript{141} Bouinais and Paulus, L'Indo-chine française, p.654.

\textsuperscript{142} Bao-Bai's bitter complaint that he was only 'a theatrical character who appeared occasionally in scenes but never led the play', would have surprised many nineteenth century French, who saw the pre-colonial king as more likely to symbolise than wield power. Dragon, p.52.

\textsuperscript{143} De Bizemont's description in 1884, quoted in Nguyen Van Phong, Société, p. 113.

\textsuperscript{144} For the war generally see Marr, Anti-colonialism, pp. 44-72 or Charles Gosselin, L'Empire d'Annam (Paris: Perrin, 1904), pp.248-306 for Trung-ky.
ideal. After twenty-five years of piecemeal invasion, the
king had finally shouldered his paramount duty in the popu-
lar tradition, to 'raise the people in the just cause and
drive out the invader',\textsuperscript{145} in Quang-Trung's words from a
century before.

Though they misjudged its cause, two months of massac-
re and anarchy convinced the French that, like it or not,
they needed a royal presence in Hue to counter the appeal
of the fugitive Son of Heaven in the mountains. In Septem-
ber 1885, General de Courcy personally enthroned the last
available adopted son of Tu-Buc, and Ham-Nghĩ's elder bro-
ther, as Bong-Khánh. But concessions to the new king came
grudgingly. It took until end of November for the new com-
mander, General Prudhomme, to move his quarters from Thieu-
Tri's mausoleum,\textsuperscript{146} while Bong-Khánh himself was summoned to
French dinner parties and expected to give private audi-
ences to even junior officers.\textsuperscript{147} Worse followed in February
1886. Prudhomme decided to test further Bong-Khánh's 'will-
ingness to break with the age-old errors of the monarchy
that made the sovereign an inaccessible myth to his sub-
jects'\textsuperscript{148} by sending him off at Tet in an open carriage to
drive around Hue. The ensuing sensation convinced Prudhomme

\textsuperscript{145}. Quoted in Nguyen Khac Vien, Histoire du Vietnam (Par-

\textsuperscript{146}. Alphonse Delvaux, 'La Légation de France à Hué et ses
premiers titulaires (1875-93)', BAVH, III, 1 (1916), p.70.

\textsuperscript{147}. Nguyen The Anh, The Withering Days of the Nguyen Dyn-
asty (ISEAS, Research Notes and Discussions No. 7, Singa-

\textsuperscript{148}. Quoted in Gosselin, L'Empire, p.246.
that the sacred emperor need only show himself to his sub-
jects to quell the fighting,\textsuperscript{147} a plan the new Resident
General, Paul Bert, put into operation a few months later.
The short tour became a humiliating fiasco since, as Gos-
selin later put it, Bong-Khanh's only popularly respected
quality was 'his relationship to Tu-Buc'. Otherwise the
populace felt 'indifference, defiance, or hated him'.\textsuperscript{180}

But no matter how far an individual king's majesty was
debased, Frenchmen believed the royal institution itself
suffered no permanent damage. Provided the Son of Heaven's
religious function remained inviolate, in the long run so
did his numinous influence over the people. Thus, in Paul
Bert's 1886 view, if the Protectorate began to treat king
and court respectfully in public,\textsuperscript{181} guaranteed the age-old
rites, and restored the appearance of local traditions, it
would cloak colonialism in undimmed royal authority. The
king would effectively act as intermediary between the Pro-
tectorate and the people. In other words, if king and court
collaborated with colonialism on the basis of French res-
pect for the forms of Sinic rites and traditions in Annam,
ultimately the rest of the population would follow. France
might then rule unseen from behind the throne, as so many
powerful ministers had done before. It all depended on
their respecting the sacral nature of the Son of Heaven,

\textsuperscript{147}. \textit{Ibid}; and H. Cosserat, 'Les Fêtes du Tet en 1886 à

\textsuperscript{180}. Gosselin, \textit{L'Empire}, p.239.

\textsuperscript{181}. 'As he lacks this authority ... it is incumbent upon
us to give it to him by dint of attention and respect'.
which meant in practice on preserving intact his Confucian ritual duties.

The Son of Heaven of French imagining might possibly have lived with this arrangement, however uncomfortably: the Vietnamese vua could not. A collaborating king fundamentally betrayed his highest duty - the vua was supposed to drive off invaders, not attend their dinner parties. For Confucian educated literati, too, a proper king had to behave like one: a too willing conformity to foreign behaviour and western usages equally scandalised their image of royalty, regardless of whether supposedly vital rituals like the Nam Giao were still performed. So although the court, when pressed, managed to make whatever adjustments were required to preserve the Nguyen monarchy, popular and literati ideals of a true or proper king proved far less flexible. As a result, despite contrary colonial expectations and the assurances of the myth of old, traditional Annam, the protected king in Hue could never appear generally as 'the living symbol of the nation'. Instead, where Nguyen kings had embodied both monarchical institution and ideal for nearly two centuries in former Bang-trong provinces, new colonial conditions withdrew the projection of sovereignty that had sustained those perceptions from their twentieth century successors. It left the Son of Heaven in Hue a politically ambiguous figure in the Nguyen heartland. A deceptive aura of popular interest might still cling to him, but it derived much more from the glamour that attached to the ancient institution than from the

182. Petit, Monarchie, p.32.
numinous authority of its incumbent. The captive king in Hue, like the Le hoang de before him, lost the power to inspire awe (or even obedience) among those who gained most from his institutional survival; while for many others, the monarchy drifted into irrelevance as all but a permanent symbol of division, defeat, and betrayal.

No matter how carefully the foreigners preserved the imperial ritual role, long after it had vanished in China, a protected Vietnamese monarch could never passively endow colonialism with the legitimacy by association that various Frenchmen from Bert to Pasquier asked of him. Royal bondage to foreigners flouted too far the expectations of literati and popular monarchism alike. But the Sinic model of monarchy, and the colonial myths into which it was later incorporated, blinded most French to the indigenous elements in Vietnamese kingship, and to its increasingly equivocal standing in colonial Vietnam. By the 1920s, some conservative Vietnamese began to hope that, by evolving into a constitutional monarchy, the kingship might be brought safely into the future. But instead, the French insisted on defining (and treating) the institution as inherently "Confucian" and ritualist. The Convention of 1925, which handed Protectorate administration to French control during the

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1. For example, the mandarin Nguyen Ba Trac (an emigre follower of Phan Boi Chau in the early 1900s), who argued a constitutional monarchy would be a natural extension of its Confucian predecessor in "Giai thich nghia chu Tan-cuong", *Du Hoc Bao*, 7 (1 Nov 1927), pp.11-17. More cautious claims came from Pham Quynh, "Vers une constitution", *NP*, 151 (June, 1930), pp.39-46; or Nguyen Nang-Quoc, "Lap hien la gi?", *NP*, 153 (Aug 1930), pp.134-136 and "Giai nghia hien-phap", *NP*, 154 (Sept 1930), pp.335-41.
minority of Bao-Bai, spelt out these essential elements of the royal role in colonial perceptions. First came the assertion that:

the multiplicity of business [did] not allow the Sovereign to intervene personally in the daily administration of the country, while still continuing to assure the execution of the first of his duties, which remains the celebration of the rites upon which depend the order and peace of the kingdom ...

After that there followed a guarantee to honour 'the spirit of the Kingdom's oral constitution'. Pasquier had already defined what this meant in a 1922 report, in language almost straight from Luro. It was based ... on the scrupulous observance of the rules and precepts of the Chinese canonical books to which it is always necessary to refer when we want to understand the mechanism of power and the absolute and imperative general rules which harmonise in a perfect equilibrium the different institutions that help the son of Heaven govern the Empire.

Or, as the Convention held, it promised that Protectorate administration would conform to 'the ritual prescriptions that enable[d] the Sovereign holding the mandate of Heaven to reign, but which delegate[d] to the Ministers the care of governing and administering the Empire'.

Pasquier never altered any of his convictions about the nature and principal role of the Protected monarchy, as as October 1930 address to the Conseil de Gouvernement de

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184. All quotes from Document 4 in Continuité de la politique française du protectorat en Annam-Tonkin avant et après l'avènement de sa majesté Bao-Dai (Documents politiques, Série No.1, Hanoi 1934), pp.21-22.

l'Indochine made plain. Although its import occasionally disappeared later into the cloud of reformist rhetoric surrounding Bao-Bai's return, it had clearly foreshadowed what the abrogation of the 1925 Convention would bring - no modernising institutional evolution but a monarchical restoration 'in line with Annamite national tradition'.

After so long a dynastic past, the land of Annam could not cease to be a Kingdom. The Head of State, even in the eyes of modernised Annamites, must stay the privileged being who perpetuates the ancestral cult, personifies the collective soul and acts as the Father and Mother of his subjects. Dignity and prestige are his indefectible attributes. Popular instinct refuses to admit any other constitutional form ... The devolution of royal duties must avoid politics and be regulated solely by a monarchical statute ...

Most contemporary colonial French opinion, shaped by the myth of old, traditional Annam, echoed these sentiments about the monarchy. Most Vietnamese also routinely approved them in public, whatever they may have thought in private. But by the 1920s some more outspoken individuals had begun to reject them. One was Phan Chu Trinh, who denounced Khai-Binh from exile in France. In 1922, Pasquier had accompanied the king on an official visit to France that delivered his only son, the future Bao-Bai, to his

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187. All quotes from ATK supplement, 28 Oct 1930. The same words also appear in a speech titled 'Education et politique', in NP, No. 155 (Oct 1930), p.31.

188. For example, see Ernest Tisserand, 'Variétés sur l'empereur d'Annam' [ATK, 9 Dec 1925] for the contemporary king described directly from Luro; or Jean Joly, 'Une autre cause du malaise annamite' [ATK, 9 Ap 1930] which accounted for the lack of French authority among Vietnamese by saying they only recognised as legitimate authority based on the 'delegation of divinity'. Similarly, for Marc Dandolo in 1931, the king remained 'the personage who symbolises and personifies for Annam the social and moral ideal, [and] fidelity to the ancestral heritage'. 'La Monarchie en Annam', ATK, 17 Ap 1931.
future education in Paris. On their landing in Marseilles, the old reformist scholar had tried unsuccessfully to re-
monstrate with Khai-Binh in a seven point petition that was later printed in France. Its idiosyncratic mix of demo-
cratic and Confucian grievances failed to impress Pasquier, or the Native Consultative Chamber back in Annam. But some of Phan's denunciations of Khai-Binh as no true king sprang directly from the heart of the literati imperial model. On that score alone, they might have given pause for reflection, had Pasquier been less convinced of the right-
ness of his neo-traditional policies - and far more mod-
est about his own ability to penetrate and manipulate Viet-
namese tradition.

But Pasquier was a mythologist, not simply a policy maker; and he had never seen the pre-colonial monarchy. As a twenty-one year old fresh from studying the colonial dis-
course on Vietnam at the Ecole coloniale, he had arrived in Indochina in November 1898, a year after Doumer's reforms

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157. Phan Chu Trinh (trans Tran Huy Lieu), 'That Dieu Tran', NCLS, 66 (1964), pp.15-21 and 31. They were: obscenely venerating monarchical power; exceeding the royal pow-
er to reward and punish; enjoying people kneeling and prostrating themselves before him; living in luxury; not dress-
ing in the proper style; living a dissolute life; and mak-
ing a suspect trip to France.

160. They were outraged, apart from anything else, that Phan presumed to 'speak in the name of the people of Annam, whom we alone represent'. GG to MinCols, notes on the meet-
ing of the Native Consultative Chamber, 31 Oct 1922. AOM ICNF 316/1916

160. Pasquier's period as Resident Superior is analysed at greater length in Nola Cooke, "Proteges and Protectors: Re-
lations Between the Protectorate Government and the Govern-
ment of Annam, 1897-1925", MA, University of Sydney, 1980, pp.130-171.
had cut the kingship down into a ritual and constitutional
automaton. Edouard Diguet, who brought thirty years’ local
experience to his assessment of the colonial monarchy, took
a more sober view of what Doumer had actually accomplished.
It is worth hearing in some detail.\textsuperscript{142}

Since high antiquity, the Annamites ... have lov-
ed to surround the majesty of their sovereign
with a mysterious and divine character. It would
have been useful ... to conserve this character
for the emperors we ourselves have placed on the
throne ... and against whom the people already
hold [the fact that they are] our creatures. But
like curious, clumsy children, we have broken the
idol which represented the Annamite conception of
royal majesty. The emperor Thanh-Thai ... promen-
ades in a carriage with one or two of his wives
and is thus promiscuously exposed, which does
great damage to his prestige. What do his sub-
jects think of it?

You could see it in their eyes in the festivi-
ties of 1897, at Saigon, and the Exposition at
Hanoi in 1902. Someone whom an Annamite regards
without a frisson of respectful fear, with simple
curiosity ... cannot be his King. He thinks with
bitterness that we could have left intact the ma-
jesty of his Emperor, since we had already taken
his Sovereignty.

By the 1930s, Diguet’s insights were bearing fruit.
Although an aura of glamour and curiosity still clung to
the monarchy in Annam, in the early Bao-Bai years especial-
ly, colonialism was drying up at its source the spiritual
power that had eminated from, and sustained and legitimis-
ed, earlier Nguyen kings. Colonialism kept a king on the
throne who neither could nor would embody the popular vua
ideal. As a result, the people of twentieth century colo-
nial Trung-ky were forced to learn, as had those of Bac-ky
for three centuries before them, to live with a \textit{hoang de}
empty of substance, and no true vua on the throne.

\textsuperscript{142} Diguet, \textit{Les Annamites}, p.123.
The certitudes of myth hid this politically-hazardous development from Pasquier and fellow French mythologists. It is to these colonial myths that we now turn.
CHAPTER SIX

MYTHS AND PROJECTIONS OF SELF AND OTHER IN COLONIAL ANNAM

Introduction

Rather than move directly to the various myths and projections of French Self and Annamite Other that comprise the bulk of this chapter, it seems useful to begin with a few more general comments about the nature of projected Otherness.

First, as we mentioned in Chapter One, unconscious projections of Otherness are always bound to a corresponding unconscious image of the collective Self, even if only implicitly. Projected Otherness cannot exist without this referent point. Self and Other form a dyad of superior/inferior, or inner/outer, in which the attributes and qualities of both are defined, controlled, and apportioned by the Self. The elements of projected Otherness thus always mirror the unconscious needs of the Self, no matter how distorted the image becomes in the process. Regardless of how external or objective the projection feels to those who hold it, irrespective of how well it apparently fits the projection-carriers, or the extent to which it seems to result from an actual experience of other people, Otherness derives from the Self and not those to whom it is attached.

The projection flattens the humanity and complexity out of the Other. It does not seek to explore the rich, vibrant, and contradictory life of the projection-carriers rather than to constrain them within certain fixed limits.
acceptable to the Self. Obviously, Otherness needs to incorporate some characteristics native to the projection-carriers to be believable; but when the Self reifies these selected features into a model of the Other's identity, it can only result in a flawed and lifeless approximation. Although this depiction of the Other may seem comprehensive and convincing to members of the collective that created it, in reality it is a one-dimensional representation.\(^1\)

Whereas individual human beings might enjoy a dynamic and creative relationship with their own culture, modifying its expression to a variety of ends and circumstances, the Other cannot. Its cultural identity is imprisoned within the limited perceptions of the Self and only evolves when the needs of the Self change. In the short term at least, if the actions of real people in the real world breach the limitations of projected Otherness, it avails them little. Their actions are less likely to challenge the truths of the projection for those who hold it than to make themselves appear as exceptional as freaks of nature.\(^2\) The surest

\(^1\) Edward Said has denounced the way European Orientalists represented Orientals, and their utter conviction in the accuracy of their representation. Yet both arose from the projected Otherness at the core of Orientalism. The Other can only ever be a representation, for the Self creates it; while members of the collective that unconsciously shaped a projection of Otherness would logically be the ones to comprehend it most fully, as Said shows European Orientalists claiming to do of the East. But such claims, of course, reveal nothing about how much they understood the human projection-carriers beneath the distorting mask of Otherness. For Said's views, see Orientalism (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978), pp. 20-22, 34-35, 40-42, and Chapter II generally.

\(^2\) The 1879 comments of the French psychologist, Gustave Le Bon, on female intelligence provide a perfect example: 'Without doubt there exist some distinguished women, very superior to the average man, but they are as exceptional as
way of withdrawing a projection of Otherness remains the lengthy process of making more equal the unequal power relations which sustain and nourish it.

Second, this centrality of the Self also tends to limit perceptions of the Other to comparisons with qualities that the idealised Self claims as typical. The essential features of the Other thus naturally appear as either identical to, or inferior, from, those attributed to the collective Self. The third possibility, that the existence of authentic differences between human groups does not negate equality of human value, is too antithetical to co-exist with a projection of Otherness. Todorov's analysis of the sixteenth century European discovery of the Americas illustrates the point. If a Spaniard essentially saw the local people as human beings like himself, he projected identity on them. This buried their authenticity beneath his conviction that they shared (or wished to share, or deserved to have) the same basic values as himself. But if he began from a premise of difference, the local people immediately attracted a projection of sub-human inferiority. In either case, the Spanish redefined the native Americans using European cultural values as the natural norm. While the two projections often bred different behaviour towards the local people, both rested on the same bed-rock refusal to accord them an autonomous identity with any equality of human worth. Whether depicting the native peoples as same or sub-

the birth of any monstrosity, as, for example, of a gorilla with two heads; consequently we may neglect them entirely'. Quoted in Stephen Jay Gould, The Mismeasure of Man (Penguin Books, 1981), p.105. We return to Le Bon below.
human, each perception rejected the possibility of their being 'a human substance truly other, something capable of being not merely an imperfect state of [oneself]'.

Todorov's work at times seems to suggest that individual sixteenth century Spaniards in America tended to favour either perceptions of identity (missionaries especially) or inferiority in their relations with the Indian Other. In colonial Vietnam, however, we find a strong move towards combining elements of identity and difference into what became a single, all-purpose image of the Vietnamese Other. As we will see later, this useful adaptation allowed the Other to appear comfortably Same, while nevertheless remaining re-assuringly Inferior.

It may be that we find in this trend an echo of the earlier subterranean shift in the European episteme that Michel Foucault identified, and which we mentioned in Chapter One. In Foucault's view, this change precipitated the intellectual revolution that preceded the development of the new human sciences from the mid-nineteenth century. This process also pioneered a new analytic, which Foucault defined as one of finitude, as basically 'concerned with showing how the Other, the Distant, [was] also the Near and the Same'. But while traces of this analytic can be detected in colonial French perceptions of the Vietnamese, we invariably find it balanced there with an absolute insist-

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ence on the inherent inferiority (whether in racial-cultural or other terms) of the colonised people. This colonial duality is hardly surprising, of course, for the conviction of western superiority necessarily formed the key-stone of the entire imperial endeavour: nothing strips colonial dominance of its own sense of legitimacy more quickly than a real belief in the equality of human value between coloniser and colonised. But as the human sciences began to expose the underlying resemblance between Distant and Near, it fostered a corresponding unconscious colonial need to inflate the validating conviction of the superiority of the French (or western) Self and the inferiority of the colonial Other.

In the metropole, thousands of miles from the psychological threats of alien colonial Otherness, the conviction of superiority sat easily on most who bothered to think of it. No-one much in France, for example, thought to question it until well after World War One. Metropolitan demands ensured this luxury eluded many in the colonies, however. Political considerations in the imperial democracies required that their colonial administrations be seen to justify their domination by implementing enlightened, modernising policies. In effect, it meant colonial governments were

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* For an excellent discussion of this basic idea, see Albert Memmi (trans Howard Greenfeld). The Colonizer and the Colonized (New York: Orion Press, 1965), passim.

**. Despite occasional colonial lapses, a more or less universally clear colonial conscience reigned in France until almost the 1930s, as Raoul Girardet shows in L’Idee coloniale en France de 1871 à 1962 (Paris: Editions de la Table Ronde, 1972), Parts One and Two.
required to demonstrate western superiority by their practical results. Not only did this encourage them to inflate their achievements, but it also limited the sort of inferiority French officials might project onto the Vietnamese. Unlike sixteenth century Spaniards, for instance, they could not dismiss the Other as sub-human, or beyond any rational comprehension, without automatically damning their own chances of effecting modernising change. As that marvellous metropolitan mythologist, Charles Régismanset, intuitively recognised, it was essential to renounce ideas like ‘the Annamite soul is unfathomable’, or ‘the secret mentality of Far Eastern races is beyond our western comprehension’, because they a priori ‘paralysed men of action’ in the colonies. Instead, they had to proceed:

according to the admirable formula of Newton ... that everything must be done as if the Annamite soul was not impenetrable to us, as if we could understand it and act on it deeply. All conception to the contrary, in art as well as politics, would be worthless, a conception of hopelessness which would take from us all motive and all justification for action.

So while some colonials might cheerfully hang contemptuous stereotypes of inferior Otherness on all Vietnamese, depicting them as, for instance, a people who ‘knew nothing of deeper feelings’ and lived in ‘bestial immobility’, as ‘cunning’ and ‘irrational’ as children, most officials

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8. Ibid, p.179 (emphasis in original).

could not afford the indulgence. To succeed in their mission, they had to establish a relationship with the local people, or with some part of them at least, which would enable French rule to routinely demonstrate the moral, material and intellectual superiority of western civilisation, not simply its military supremacy. They needed to feel they could understand, and be understood in return. The problem of striking the right balance between identity and inferiority in their relations with the Vietnamese Other helped place administrative officials in the front rank of colonial myth-makers in Vietnam, and in Annam especially. Most of this chapter concerns their various solutions, and the way they merged into a composite, all-embracing image of Vietnamese cultural identity that met all colonial needs, and persisted to the end of the French era - and beyond.

Before considering the first such myth, that of Vietnam as ancient Rome and the projection of identity that powered it, a few final comments should be made. Although it is hard to write about projections of Self and Other without seeming to reify them, they are not meant to be understood here as concrete phenomena. As psychic forces, however, they were nonetheless real and consequential in colonial Vietnam, even though their affects on the material world were felt indirectly, through the behaviour of those influenced by them, rather than as factors in their own right. Their presence can therefore be detected, but never quantified.

Indeed, their great strength lay precisely in their unconscious nature and in their collective expression,
which together made them largely invisible to the contemporary colonial French. While we say that the French held the projections, in a real sense it would be more accurate to say that, by being collective and unconscious, these projections of Self and Other held sway over those who projected them. Together they acted as an impenetrable camouflage around the colonial discourse on Vietnamese cultural identity. Some individuals with open minds might have questioned aspects of the discourse; and not everyone truly believed all the political myths that explained and justified the relations between French Self and Vietnamese Other. But it required more than a sceptical, inquiring mind for any contemporary to become genuinely aware of the extent to which French understanding of the Vietnamese grew from elements of European culture, systematically interpreted and re-interpreted over time. It required a dour struggle, and one against the spirit of times, before any contemporary might become aware that the popular images of French (Self) and Vietnamese (Other) current in colonial society were not separate and autonomous, but directly and intimately related. Certainly no-one has emerged from my research who managed to accomplish this supremely difficult feat in colonial Vietnam.

Nor was it likely, given the psychological pressures for conformity that helped defend the small, colonial community from the alien majority encircling it. Anyone who took the first step towards awareness of the way colonial myths shrouded French understanding of the Vietnamese, or seriously questioned the extent to which the conventional
wisdom of the little China fallacy was more convenient than wise, ran straight into an adamantine wall of collective expectations that defended French superiority from the inferior Vietnamese. Even the minority who recognised these as prejudices and stereotypes felt their suggestive power as a strong undercurrent pulling them towards public conformity with conventional opinions and behaviour, whatever their private caveats. As we remarked in Chapter One, we can never identify for sure how many of the men who manipulated the ideas and images of colonial political myths of Self and Other were essentially true believers, or some species of political opportunists (or both). But what does seem incontrovertible is that no French person who lived and worked for a number of years in colonial Vietnam escaped the influence of these interlocking collective projections of Self and Other. The interaction between unconscious projections and conscious French attitudes created a special psycho-social space, intermediate between the French and Vietnamese communities, that became the political arena in which the public drama of relations between coloniser and colonised was enacted before a mainly French audience. And in this arena the influence of the projections ensured that, no matter how rational, benevolent, or masterful the poses of the French actors might seem to themselves, it was a theatre of the absurd in which the irrational and the unconscious took starring roles.

Let us turn now to various myths and projections of Self and Other that would finally merge into the all-
purpose colonial image of Vietnamese cultural identity that outlasted its French creators.

Early Projections of Identity: From Fustel to Doumer

The sixteenth century Spanish conquistadors and missionaries who travelled to America found there an utterly alien human society. By the later nineteenth century, however, such an experience was no longer possible for educated Europeans. Distant, unexplored places still existed, of course, but none of their inhabitants could ever appear so totally foreign. The great scientific laws of linear cultural evolution and biological determinism had categorised all the world's peoples, whether they realised it or not.

From their comfortable studies, nineteenth century European intellectuals had divided all humanity into four basic categories, hierarchically organised with primitive savages at the base, beneath inferior races locked in varying degrees of barbarism. Above them came backward cultures like China or India, enervated beneath the dead weight of millenial traditions. At the top stood the white Aryan race, global culture-bearers of civilisation and progress.

When Frenchmen went to Cochinchina from the later 1860s on, most carried this grand evolutionary ladder in their heads, and knew exactly where their race stood, and where the Vietnamese ranked. Unfortunately, however, in newly-conquered Cochinchina the fact of French racial-cultural superiority could not automatically solve the myriad
practical problems of ruling a complex Asian society about which very little real information could be had.

On Hue's orders, most mandarins had stripped their offices before withdrawing, thus depriving the new rulers of competent collaborators at the same time they denied them the written compilations necessary to administer the population according to local law and custom. In 1865 Gabriel Aubaret's hasty translation of the Gia-Long Code finally became available to French administrators, but lacunae and errors reduced its practical value. Circumstances made direct administration inevitable, yet opinion divided over whether to introduce French methods and institutions immediately, or whether to preserve the existing system as far as possible, modifying it in ways designed to bring the populace gradually to higher French civilisation. Debate continued for over a decade. While the latter approach appealed in principle, practical difficulties damned its chances. If Frenchmen wanted to rule effectively through existing institutions, they obviously needed to understand them first. But before they could even hope to plumb the depths of Cochinchinese life, they needed to be competent in Chinese characters, their local Sino-Vietnamese usage,

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11. Luro in 1871 believed the Vietnamese could be assimilated, but only 'if they were guided by [French] men knowing them deeply, possessing all their science, and always ready to prove, by word or deed, the superiority of our intelligence and our civilisation'. G. Taboulet (ed), 'Jean-Baptiste-Eliacin Luro, Inspecteur des Affaires indigènes en Cochinchine', BSEI (ns), XV, 1-2 (1940), p.64.
and the spoken language and its romanised script, at least in Luro's view. The majority, not surprisingly, recoiled from the mammoth task, and never progressed beyond the vernacular at best. Yet despite their cultural and linguistic ignorance, French officials still had to administer their provinces, dispense justice, and maintain public order.

The 1879 promulgation of the French penal code, a giant stride towards assimilation, finally ended much of their dilemma. But by then, however, the ground had been well prepared for such a change by the first politically significant colonial projection of Vietnamese Otherness, and the myth of Vietnam as ancient Rome that carried it.

As a political scientist, Henry Tudor has argued that political myth is a form of practical thinking that addresses problems in the real world, however wrong or fanciful its solutions might appear to outsiders.

In their efforts to understand this world of pragmata, of things endowed with moral or utilitarian value, men view their circumstances in the light of their purposes, and their explanations are simultaneously justifications and prescriptions... [W]hen practical considerations are foremost, men tend to believe what, at that moment, they find it convenient or necessary to believe.

This describes very well what happened in early 1870s Cochinchina. Many Frenchmen there turned to myth to explain their circumstances and to assure themselves that, despite their actual ignorance of the Vietnamese, they could nevertheless sufficiently understand their new subjects to rule

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12. Ibid, pp.90-93 for his curriculum in the Collège des Stagiaires.

them. The role of the myth was to convince colonial French officials that they could solve their dilemma by introducing elements of their own laws and institutions into the South. Its explanation succeeded in this by re-defining the Vietnamese, and uncovering their "real" relationship to the French. The myth involved derived directly from the metropole, but its great local success ensured that no-one noticed, let alone questioned, its foreign provenance.

The myth relied heavily on de Coulange's 1864 imaginative reconstruction of ancient Roman, Greek, and Aryan life, *La Cite antique*. When the book reached the colony in the late 1860s it caused a sensation. 'Its readers who had come to Cochinchina saw with stupefaction those institutions elucidated by Fustel from bits and pieces of text ... re-animated and living fully before their very eyes'.

Fustel's insights helped snap into sharp focus what some Frenchman here had been slowly piecing together for themselves from personal experience and native informants. Suddenly, the fundamental basis of Vietnamese society, the family, was stripped of its exoticism and stood forth in its true colours as the very image of the ancient Roman *gens*. *La Cite antique* became 'a guide for our administrators', with at least one young inexperienced official reportedly taking all his judgements on family law straight

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from its pages. And why not? Jules Silvestre, a great admirer of the work and the ranking expert on native justice after the 1876 departure of Philastre, certainly concurred. His two volume Considerations sur l'étude du droit annamite brandished the myth of Vietnam as ancient Rome as the intellectual key to unlock the whole traditional system of religion, family, and state:

Annamite legislation, like its customs, proceeds from the patriarchal regime, which was the constitutive regime of the ancient family, [and] which was and has still remained, in these civilisations stationary for so many centuries, the unique, the true religion. It is also on this religious base that the constitution of government rests, for the domestic rules have invaded the state, which is only considered as one big family of which the sovereign is the father and mother.

The myth wove itself into nineteenth century colonial understanding of Vietnamese society. Even a keen observer like Edouard Diguet, with thirty years' experience in the country, commented on the great similarities between the contemporary Vietnamese family and the Roman gens described

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18. Quoted in Ner, 'L'oeuvre de Fustel', p.204, fn.2 The first sentence also appears in Pierre Lusteguy (trans Charles Messner), The Role of Women in Tonkinese Religion and Property (Behavioural Science Translations. Human Relations Area File, New Haven, 1954), p.9. Silvestre's study was not available to me.
by Fustel. A long-serving civil official, Camille Briffaut, consciously produced his two volume La Cité annamite in homage to Fustel. Five years as Governor-General (1897-1901) taught Paul Doumer that contemporary Vietnam provided 'scenes of Greek antiquity ... [for] we find once more in the ancestral cult of the Annamites and Chinese, in the altars raised in their homes, [and] in their family laws, the primitive religion of the ancient cities of Europe'.

'At the base of all societies [are] the same guiding principles', a young Pierre Pasquier informed his Marseilles audience at the 1906 colonial exposition. Thus 'the first chapters of the Cité antique applied to the Annamite people, and if the wise historian had been able to understand these yellow people as well as we do today, he would have seen, still alive, the customs that his synthesizing genius was able to reconstitute'.

As these quotations suggest, by the early twentieth century the basic elements of the myth had assumed the status of conventional colonial wisdom. So well entrenched did it become that contrary observation of Vietnamese life

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22. For other examples, see Ner, 'L'œuvre de Fustel', pp.190-91; and Lusteguy, Role of Women, pp.9-11.
and dissenting expert opinion proved unable to dislodge the notion of the Vietnamese gens until the 1930s. 23

Certainly there were enough superficial similarities between Vietnamese domestic life and the practices described by Fustel to carry the projection. Even so, at first glance such enthusiasm for the idea of absolute equivalence between ancient European and contemporary Vietnamese society may seem odd, given the rampant racism of the time. Yet its popularity in colonial Vietnam lay precisely in that equivalence, or rather in the projected identity at its core. The myth worked by linking a major postulate of linear cultural evolution - that all societies developed according to the same principles - to Fustel's reconstruction of ancient life. The result transformed the alien social environment of Cochinchina at a stroke. Where French ignorance had populated it with potential snares and threats, the projected identity at the heart of the myth dispelled the dark clouds to reveal to delighted colonial eyes what had been hidden all along, the landscape of their own European past. The Vietnamese Other now became the French Self at an earlier stage of cultural evolution. Armed with a simple and convincing explanation of the basic principles underlying Vietnamese society everyone, even newcomers, felt assured they could rule effectively. The comfortable illusions of modern scientific knowledge replaced doubts and anxieties, and allowed Frenchmen who wished to do so to

23. Luro never mentioned Fustel because he described the family as he saw it, as Le Maitre commented dryly in a review of Briffaut. For the arguments against importing Fustel, see Lusteguy, Role of Women, pp.11-13.
"understand" the Vietnamese without ever having to compromise their social and psychological distance. Passing the wand of scientific western intellect over Asian strangeness had transmogrified apparently profound differences into basic similarities, while at the same time perching the colonial French Self safely on a cultural pedestal two millenia high above the Vietnamese Other. Not surprisingly, the myth enjoyed great success.

Occasional non-believers, like Philastre in 1873, warned of the dangerous error of 'talking and acting in an atmosphere ... where our illusions and desires are taken for reality', and where the idea that 'the Annamites like all our reforms' had been repeated to the point of becoming 'an article of faith'. But he was already too late. Too many officials found the myth too useful to want to question it too closely. To quote Marcel Ner, who in 1930 still seemed more than half-convinced of its truth, Fustel's work had enabled the French 'to grasp beneath the almost total opposition of the two civilisations, the profound kinship of origins'. Not only that, but Vietnam provided 'an echo of [France's] own past', a past that, as Fustel's work had also proven, still persisted in the form of 'hidden survivals' in contemporary French society. It thus forged 'a principle of mutual comprehension and mutual sympathy' between French and Vietnamese, as it marked no 'irreducible

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24. Quoted in Osborne, French Presence, p.45.
differences between the two peoples [but only] their relative place on the road of progress'.

In other words, the classic projection of identity within the myth allowed colonial French officials to believe that they comprehended the Vietnamese, and equally important, that the Vietnamese could and did understand and appreciate what their colonial tutors were achieving for them. The projection of identity created a relationship, and a special one at that, between the Frenchmen and the "French of Asia", as one enduring colonial image insisted on depicting the Vietnamese. Paul Doumer's aide, Louis Salaun, spoke for many (Doumer included) in 1903 when he remarked that 'many common tendencies [let] the Annamites understand our French way of governing', making them 'capable of understanding, if not the general spirit of modernity, at least some of its traits'. Indeed, Doumer's reforms implicitly rested on this projection of identity between modern Vietnam and the ancient European world,

28. All quotes, Ner, 'L'oeuvre de Fustel', p.191. While perhaps not entirely convinced, but the balance of the article shows Ner was no sceptic either.

29. It was first suggested by the English envoy Crawfurd in the early nineteenth century, apparently as a compliment to Gia-Long's military organisation. Louis de Grammont's 1864 usage in Notice sur la Basse-Cochinchine echoed this. But later French interpreted it more widely, and no doubt as more complimentary than originally intended. In 1906 Pasquier extended its use by describing Vietnamese history as full of parallels with French history [L'Annam, p.18]. Very popular during his term as Governor-General, it provides a classic example of projected identity rather than a consciously deceitful political ploy, as Nguyen Van Trung believed. [Chu ngoi thuc dan, pp.153-55.] The Grammont excerpt is from Jean Ajalbert (ed), L'Indochine par les francais (Paris: Gallimard, 1931), pp.112-13.

27. Quoted in Baugher, "Contradictions", p.22.
although further refined by a generation’s colonial experience.

That Doumer’s policies rested on his own projections of Self and Other would surprise no-one who had read his later memoirs, *L’Indochine française. Souvenirs*. As the volume makes painfully clear, projected identity so coloured the Governor-General’s reminiscences that he apparently saw or understood little in Indochina beyond himself. Like the British Carl Jung observed in 1930s colonial India, ‘all living in Europe ... in a sort of bottle filled with European air’, Doumer’s memoirs also reveal that, although physically transported to Asia, mentally the author never left home. The same idiosyncratic bases for judgement served him as well in the colony as they did in France. For instance, when Doumer first met Thanh-Thai in 1897, he reported that the young man’s firm handshake and direct gaze instantly outweighed the reports he had received about the king’s cruelty towards his wives and servants.

No-one can stop me from believing that the eyes and the hand of a man reveal something of his character, and [I am] favourably biased towards a straight look, and a firm and frank handshake. Nothing in [Thanh-Thai’s] eyes or hand ... led me to believe that he was deceitful or fundamentally wicked. I was then ready to accord him confidence and sympathy ...

Doumer’s other published opinions of Vietnamese appear equally idiosyncratic, and for the same reason: all were ultimately clothed in projections from his own unconscious

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mind. Examples litter *Souvenirs*. Let us take, for instance, his opinion of Nguyen Trong Hiep. At Doumer's first meeting with the Regents in Hue in 1897, he had held a short 'vague and ordinary conversation' with Hiep, mediated through an interpreter and in the presence of others. Through it all Hiep had displayed 'great reserve', Doumer recalled. Nevertheless, the god-like power of projection enabled the Doumer to 'quickly understand what was the state of the soul of the man whose approach had captivated me, but whom I had not yet learned to know'. But sure enough, over time the Governor-General's personal qualities caused Hiep to 'open himself to me as he had never done to any other Frenchman', and in the process entirely to confirm the accuracy of Doumer's (projected) first impressions.

The Frenchman was similarly immediately able to penetrate Thanh-Thai to the depths. In 1897, Doumer attended the Nam-Giao sacrifice to Heaven and Earth, over which the emperor presided in person. During what the Governor-General deemed the boring and repetitious hours of the ceremony, he insisted on engaging the king in 'long discussions on a hundred different subjects, man to man', forgetting for the purpose of this anecdote that at the earlier reception he had needed an interpreter. But Doumer's perspicacity, not historical accuracy, was the point of this story; so in those few hours snatched from the ceremony, Doumer boasted,

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30. All quotes, *Ibid*, p.156 (my emphases). Similarly Columbus believed he could understood what the Indians thought, as well as what they said to each other, without a word of their language. Todorov, *Discovery*, pp.38-42.

he was able 'to penetrate' the king's mind, and to understand fully his 'character, his intelligence, [and] his value'. And just as with Nguyen Trong Hiep, 'my judgement was confirmed later', he wrote, 'during five years when I knew his daily life, when I saw him often [and] when, won over by the confident sympathy that I showed him, he opened himself to me and let me see the depths of his soul'.

Archival evidence from the Doumer term repeatedly instances Thanh-Thai's genuine sense of grievance at the Doumer reforms, and his erratic, angry behaviour in public. Yet in his memoirs, the former Governor-General rejected it all. Doumer held steadfastly to his conviction that he alone had understood the king, a man who, by happy chance, thought and felt in much the same way that Doumer would have done in his place.

When it came to the Vietnamese in general, Doumer projected identity and inferiority onto different segments of the population: the common people, as modern citizens in the making, attracted his projected identity, while the traditional mandarinal elite, doomed products of a bankrupt Sinic culture, attracted a projection of inferiority. Men at the time may have felt this perceived duality arose from

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33. This unconscious projection may colour some reports more than others. For instance, as Doumer found the Sinic rites a source of mockery [*Ibid*, p.171], his claim that Thanh-Thai also made fun of the Nam-Giao in 1901 [*Ibid*, p.173] needs to be treated cautiously. At the same ceremony (or that of 1904), Jean Ajalbert for one reported seeing the king deeply offended by a French résident's mocking jibe directed at the ritual. Ces Phenomènes, Artisans de l'Empire (Paris: Aubanel, 1941), pp.235-40.
their greater colonial experience of Vietnamese society; but, implicitly at least, it seems more predicated on assumptions about whom the local friends and foes of colonial reform would most likely be. In any case, Doumer's enthusiastic advocacy and the reform program that rested on this differential perception of traditional elite and peasantry, helped ensure its widespread success among Protectorate officialdom in the decade between 1897 and 1908.

Full of metropolitan contempt for senile Asiatic traditional culture and set on westernising reform and economic development, Doumer's projections of inferiority and identity manifestly reflected his own personal desires and orientation. If Doumer decided at first sight that Thanh-Thai chaffed at the bonds of tradition and the rites, he became the object of unconscious projected identity, irrespective of the young king's own thoughts and desires. If the effete mandarinal elite, on the other hand, appeared to Doumer as champions of those same rites and traditions, they became immediately characterised as doomed relics of a past age. Occasional individuals, the 'perfect type of the mandarin' (like his good friend Nguyen Trong Hiep) were, Doumer owned, 'capable of being regenerated, of understanding, of learning, and of acting'. But few attained this stature in his eyes. As with the Court, he dismissed most as simply 'defend[ing] former beliefs, and age-old traditions and mores'.

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34. Souvenirs, p.161.
deserved oblivion, along with the impotent and exhausted 'old Asiatic pomp' that he had found in Hue: 'archaic as possible, grandiose [and] brilliant, but senile, [giving] a greater impression of nobility than of power, of representation rather than action'.

When it came to the ordinary people, however, Doumer's conviction that they welcomed and supported his program — and that they comprised exactly the premium labour force required to implement it — brought an encomium flooding from his pen. The Vietnamese became 'incontestably superior to all the neighbouring peoples', for none (among whom he numbered the Siamese and Laos) had withstood their advance. In all Asia only Japan shared a 'race of equal value and [one which] resemble[d] them'.

The Annamite makes an excellent soldier, disciplined and courageous. He is a model worker, a good cultivator in the countryside, a fine worker, and a deft and ingenious artisan in the towns. He is superior, as a worker as well as a soldier, to all the peoples of Asia with which one can compare him. It is moreover a general rule that I have verified over there on twenty diverse types of humanity, and which I have also been able fully to confirm in Europe: the men valiant in work are valiant in war, or otherwise, courage is one. If a man is courageous in the face of fatigue, he is courageous before danger and death.

The discredited former elite, shackled to China through the ages, had fallen into desuetude and irrelevance along with its once great model and mentor. The future lay with

\[36. \text{Ibid, p.167.}\]

\[37. \text{All quotes, Ibid, pp.32-33.}\]

\[38. \text{He attributed it to their sharing 'une parenté ancienne'. Ibid, p.33 (emphasis in original).}\]
courageous and hard-working people. They formed the natural allies of colonial progress, as proven by the resemblance between their sterling qualities and those of Europeans (or 'men'), at least according to Doumer's own idiosyncratic estimations. But the proof of the proposition lay else­where, in Doumer's comparisons with the lot of the people before and after his reforms in Annam. Personal observation convinced the Governor-General that the people embraced his liberal regime and the benefits and opportunities colonial­ism afforded them. A short five year term had brought changes 'everywhere outside the royal citadel': for the first time in history, the king's subjects in Annam enjoyed 'a free life, the right to move (se mouvoir), to work as they wished, to acquire, to own'.

This "friend and foe" ascription, which depicted the peasantry as the natural allies of colonialism and the dis­possessed former elite as its natural enemies, enjoyed almost unchallenged primacy in the Doumer decade. And even after events caused a re-assessment, the conviction that the common people ultimately remained pro-French retained its place in the colonial armoury of validating images and justificatory arguments. The extent of this conviction in French circles may have reflected how widespread in colon­ial society was the sort of arrogant self-deception that can so easily accompany the exercise of disproportionate power. But few questioned it, thanks in part to the intel­lectual respectability bestowed from two main sources:

39. *Ibid*, p.171. This is Doumer's description of the 'common lot of the subjects' of Annam after his reforms.
European conceptions of the Chinese; and the universally accepted colonial interpretation of the Vietnamese past. We will consider them briefly in turn.

A longheld European perception of the Chinese (and hence the Vietnamese) portrayed them as inherently and fundamentally materialistic. Hegel, for instance, insisted the 'distinguishing feature' of the Chinese character was that 'everything which belongs to the Spirit - unconstrained morality in practice and theory, Heart, inward Religion, Science and Art properly called - [was] alien to it'.\textsuperscript{40} For Gobineau, the notion of material utility supplied the key to all of Chinese civilisation. It ruled government, philosophy, literature and religion, with daily life proving no exception: 'If this yellow multitude is peaceful and submissive, it is on the condition they persist without any feelings foreign to the most humble notion of physical utility'.\textsuperscript{41} Less derogatory in tone, and inspired by a projection of identity rather than inferiority as in Hegel and Gobineau, we find versions of these ideas marshalled in support of Governor-General Ernest Roume's 1916 proposal to abolish the monarchy in Annam. Although Roume conceded that a 'vague religious character' still adhered to the person of the king, he insisted it signified little politically. 'The man of the people, the peasant especially, hardly [knew] more of the kingship than the mandarinal hierarchy


of which he complain[ed]'. As sensible men, Roume argued, the peasants would 'certainly always prefer to have direct dealings with French officials ... [as], in [their] essentially practical mind[s], material preoccupations dominate[d] over theological speculations'.

The second source was the perdurable French image of the traditional kingdom as a manifest failure, in one way or another. Paramount among its perceived deficiencies on most French lists came the kingdom's inability to give the people what they most keenly desired, the material benefits of peace and good order. The great strength of French colonialism, on the other hand, lay precisely in its capacity to deliver the peace and material prosperity so long denied under the inept rule of the mandarins. In many French eyes, this single factor was enough to guarantee popular acceptance of colonialism. As reforming Governor-General Maurice Long asserted in 1921, the people 'put up with, accept, or want to preserve our regime because they feel they are better off than before, because they have a more assured material life ...'. By then the idea had become a colonial article of faith. We find it, for instance, in the 1927 trial of sixteen young men detained for trying to quit the country illegally. During the trial, the prosecutor took time to explain to the young malefactors how their own people made no sense of the grievances against the government they had

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42. All quotes, Roume's report on events in Annam, 20 May 1916, p.27. AEP GGIC 7F-50 (2)

raised in court. Rather, liberated by France from the age-old Chinese yoke, ‘the laborious population was grateful to the protecting nation for being able to work and progress in peace ... It is tranquillity they desire and nothing more’, he patiently added, ‘confidant that the protecting administration will progressively ameliorate their lot’.44

But political myths can hold opposites to be true, selecting one over the other as circumstances required. So alongside the comfortable image of the people as ‘hard-working, disciplined, and docile towards reasonable directions’,45 we find a equally compelling but quite contradictory image of the common people, one based on projected inferiority.

Although events of 1908 would catapult this perception to prominence once more, its muffled presence can be detected well before. Alfred Schreiner, for instance, had never shared the idealisation of the peasantry that often accompanied unconscious projected identity. For him, the stern dictates of biological determinism rendered such sentimentality meaningless. As he prophesied in 1906, the Vietnamese ‘mentality [would] require centuries before [the common people] could leave behind their servile and vegetative life, for at present they [learned] nothing, want[ed] to learn nothing, and [forgot] nothing either’.46

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45. Ha-Tinh Résident Monnet’s farewell speech, ATK, 4-5 June 1923.
This obduracy, in Schreiner's view, sprang from an Asiatic ‘racial characteristic’ that caused Mongol people stubbornly to refuse ‘to accord [Europeans] the intellectual superiority of which we furnish them daily proof’. But, he warned grimly, ‘the psychological and physiological action of four thousand years on the yellow race [could] not be destroyed or modified in a few years’. It would take centuries, and probably require ‘bloody struggles’ to achieve, one of ‘the hard necessities demanded by progress in the clash of two civilisations as opposed as [were] those of our two races’. A minority opinion among officials in Annam at the time, the anti-tax movement soon apparently vindicated this pessimism.

In 1908, Resident Superior Levecque’s reports show he still shared the Doumerist projections of identity and inferiority, and the "friend and foe" ascriptions that went with them. As we saw in Chapter Four, his analysis of the movement presented the reformists scholars as merely literati malcontents, unable to adjust to the demands of changed times. Material self-interest principally motivated them, especially anger that the Protectorate had abolished numbers of the useless and costly mandarinal sinecures they had formerly enjoyed. But instead of turning to productive work, they had chosen to deceive the ‘peaceful and hard-working’ people, whom the lies of men they still respected had unwittingly astray. Indeed, peasant participation in the anti-tax movement struck Levecque as a cruel irony.

47. All quotes, Les Institutions annamites, I (Saigon: Claude et Cie, 1900), p.189.
Most, he reported, had only attended the agitators' meetings because 'French schools and French ideas' had spread among them a new critical spirit, which had resulted in a popular interest in public affairs for the very first time. Sadly, however, the foreign skills of analysis and reason still remained too new to them, and they had fallen victim to literati casuistry. But Levecque assured their vicarious revenge, deeply involving himself in the punishment meted out to the literati double-dealers. Under his watchful eye mandarinal courts gaol ed more than four hundred, many for lengthy terms.

Both Levecque's explanations of the anti-tax movement, and his over-reaction to it, seem at least partly unconsciously motivated. The unexpected movement threatened both his sense of mastery over the Protectorate, and his projection of Vietnamese Otherness that perceived the people as grateful to France for her reforms, and for the chance to toil in peace. The otherwise fantastic claim that French ideas and education had catalysed an intellectual rebirth and kindled a new spirit of public awareness among the people only makes sense in these terms. As a matter of evidentiary fact, it is simply untrue: in 1908 modern education had scarcely touched the upper elite, let alone penetrated the peasantry. But the spread of French education was never

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46. RS Levecque, report of 15 May 1908. ADM ICNF 50/598.

47. By his own account, Levecque hardly stopped short of making out the warrants: 'I gave [the Council] my thoughts, I shared my advice with them, I put at their disposal the forces they would require', but 'the arrests were made in its name, the sentences pronounced by its tribunals.' Ibid, p.25.
more than the obvious explanation for something far more significant - the appearance of new behaviour among the Vietnamese, or, at least, new in terms of French perceptions of Vietnamese cultural identity. It should be recalled that the little China fallacy held the Vietnamese to be incapable of development and cultural innovation on their own. By definition, then, when something new occurred among them it must have resulted from an outside influence. The "new" phenomenon noticed in 1908 was that 'whereas previously [the people had] only shown themselves careless of public affairs, absolutely passive before the authorities, entirely obedient to the orders of the mandarins', a considerable number of young Annamites now 'interested themselves in the news, discussed and criticised the acts of the Administration'. To Levecque, such a development logically implied the spread of French ideas and education beforehand.

By why nominate young men of the people, rather than modernist literati like Phan Chu Trinh, as the standard-bearers of this new critical faculty? The most likely answer lies in the influence of the Doumerist "friend and foe" ascription, which Levecque shared. The ordinary people, who welcomed other colonial reforms, would be naturally eager to embrace French ideas, unlike the disgruntled, sinicised

\[\text{\textsuperscript{50}}\text{. Ibid, p.11.}\]

\[\text{\textsuperscript{51}}\text{. It also served Roume, who reported 'the faculties of analysis and criticism [had] developed among the people somewhat under the influence of our ideas and our schools'. As with Levecque, it is difficult to take the claim at its face value. Report of 20 May, 1916. AEP GGIC 7 F-50 (2)}\]
literati whom colonialism had rendered obsolete. The expectations of projected inferiority guided his analysis, and helped change reform-minded scholars into reactionary traditionalists, whose commitment to the dying past disqualified them from contributing to the future. The Resident Superior may have believed his analysis wholeheartedly. But rather than rid Annam of literati reactionaries, the repression he unleashed succeeded instead in destroying any chance that Vietnamese outside the administrative-based elite might create a modernising role for themselves in the Protectorate. Levecque swept away its intellectual leadership at a stroke, leaving the field free for the new Protectorate elite. It would be the mid-1920s before moderate reformers dared again to enter the public arena in Annam.\textsuperscript{22}

However, as we saw, not all French officials agreed with Levecque. For many, the unexpected riots shattered the image of Annam peasants as liberal free-marketeers in the making. Far from being peaceful men led astray, the anti-tax movement had exposed the peasantry as the incarnation of all that was most treacherous and unpredictable in "Annamite tradition". In 1912, when Camille Briffaut explained Vietnamese peasant violence in terms of an atavistic racial flaw, his analysis pointed in the general direction that others were also exploring. For Briffaut, the peasants'\textsuperscript{22}

\textsuperscript{22}. For reminiscences about life before and after the campaign to pardon Phan Boi Chau in 1926, and the national movement of mourning for Phan Chu Trinh in 1926-27, see Bao Duy Anh, 'Hue vo buoc dau vao doi cua toi', Song Huong, No. 6, April 1984. For these events generally, see David G. Marr, Vietnamese Tradition on Trial, 1920-1945 (University of California Press, 1981), pp.15-23.
blood was permanently tainted by the heritage of ancient Giao-Chi, that is, of Vietnam before its long Chinese instruction in civilisation. From deep in the peasant soul, the violent impulses of their nomadic forebears might burst forth at any time, and for no apparent reason, swamping the discipline learned from China with a 'brutal suddenness'. When a peasant felt '"too oppressed in his spirit" - the phrase that sums up all his complaints against the authorities [... or] against the weather', he might suddenly throw off all traces of law and restraint, 'abandon his fields, his house, and his tombs, threaten everyone and become uncontrollable'.

In these circumstances, the Chinese ideas and institutions that exercised some restraining influence over the otherwise atavistic and unpredictable peasant masses clearly retained a political role under colonialism. And as we saw previously, the events of 1908 pushed the French in Annam back into a hasty collaboration with the previously despised traditional (Sinic) elite, or those who now seemed like them. Yet, equally clearly, the Protectorate could not wholly rely on this local elite, whose mandarinal members had shown themselves less than satisfactory colonial agents in the years before 1908. The obvious solution lay in Frenchmen themselves learning how to penetrate "Annamite tradition" to its depths, if only to feel secure in their ability to understand and guard against its tenacious power over the Annamite souls of the Protectorate Vietnamese.

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This became the great project of the Friends of Old Hue in its first decade of existence. But before we consider their contribution, we need to introduce the pre-1908 version of the myth of old, traditional Annam. We also need to analyse the valuable new conceptual tool that became available to colonial mythologists about that time, one which proved indispensable to the re-working of myths of Self and Other in Annam. The next two sections address them in turn.

The Myth of Old, Traditional Annam

The myth of old, traditional Annam ostensibly always told the story of the failure of the traditional kingdom. But because, like all political myths, it existed to account for contemporary circumstances and to prescribe or justify practical policies or programs in the present, the myth never solely or simply concerned the former kingdom. Whether as an actor in the drama, or as a clearly discerned presence hovering in the wings, France always shared the stage with old Vietnam. This feature, if nothing else, betrayed the myth's fundamental interest as the current relationship of French Self and Annamite Other, projected backwards in time. Generally, the earlier the version, the more overt the French role. In Paul Doumer's 1905 account, which we consider in detail here, France assumed a larger role than Vietnam itself, as one might have expected from a man like Doumer. With him, as with the metropolitan mythologist
Charles Régismandset in 1921, the story of old Annam reads more like the foundation myth of colonial Indochina.

We will reproduce Doumer's version in full, for it is rare to find an entire myth in two short paragraphs.

In the 17th and 18th centuries, the French busied themselves with Indo-China. They exercised a sort of protection over the different States, and the kingdom of Siam like the Empire of Annam owed to our compatriots their means of defence, their internal organisation, and their momentary successes. Then we forgot; French activity spent itself entirely in Europe, and the missionaries established on Indo-Chinese soil alone formed the chain linking the past to modern events. It was for them that we intervened and, finding a government whose competence was defective, which was incapable of maintaining order in its provinces, of giving internal peace to its subjects and security to its guests, we had to substitute ourselves progressively for it.

The Empire of Annam acquired its greatest power a century ago when advised and led by Frenchmen. Become an integral part of France, the modernised empire, the new Indo-China, can attain a prosperity and a glory beyond the wildest dreams of the ancestors of our present subjects. The Annamites are convinced of it; we ourselves have no doubt of it, and we must act with this faith.

Doumer's personal version organises the elements of the myth in ways most useful for his purposes. But with one major exception, it still contains (or implies) nearly all

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a4. An entirely different version of the French foundation myth told how successive governments never stopped dreaming of a return to France's Asian empire, cruelly lost after her eighteenth century defeat by England in India. For examples, see A. Bouinais and A. Paulus, L'Indo-Chine française contemporaine, I (Paris: Challamel, 1885, 2nd ed), p. xi; or Marcel Dubois' Preface in Gervais Courtellemont, L'Empire colonial de la France, L'Indo-Chine (Paris: Challamel, 1901), pp.ix-x. In this instance, Doumer was more accurate, as Raoul Girardet confirms in L'Idée colonial en France de 1871 à 1962 (Paris: Table Ronde, 1972), pp.4-10.

a5. Doumer, Souvenirs, p.33. I have reversed the order of the two paragraphs.
the major themes of other common versions of the myth. The five main themes here will be analysed individually. They are summarised as follows. France's long historical relationship with Indochina gave her a right to rule there. Her domination must be for the good of the local people since, as history had proven, without French help the Vietnamese had been too incompetent to maintain order and peace. But with France returned, the Indochinese people could know good government and material security once more. And under France's long-term guidance and care, the failed Annamite past, with all its traditional paraphernalia, would give way before a future beyond its wildest imaginings.

Let us consider them in turn.

Doumer's preposterous claim of previous French 'protection' over 'Indo-china' seems a personal quirk, and need not detain us. But the grossly exaggerated role attributed to Nguyen Anh's French officers turns up quite often, if only because it so readily naturalised the French presence in Vietnam. It gave colonialism local historical roots, something the Friends of Old Hue (among others) devoted much time and energy to uncovering. It also invoked an imagined tutelary relationship in the past that foreshadowed the idealised tutelary relationship of the colonial present.

As a general point, it is worth noting here that such

**Régismanset, Miracle française, p.233.**

**7.** For their labours, see L. Cadière, 'L'Oeuvre des Amis du Vieux Hue (1913-1923)', BAVH, XII, 4 (1925), pp.24-29. Cf. RS Pasquier's 1921 analogy between the 'union of French and Annamites of previous times' and contemporary colonialism. BAVH, VIII, 4 (1921), p.304.
inflated claims for the influence of the few Frenchmen at Gia-Long's court usually signal a colonial political mythologist at work. Luro, for instance, simply noted their presence: 'some officers of merit' had joined Nguyen Anh in 1788, he wrote, and the prince had been 'helped by French advice'. Pasquier, however, who knew they had not ruled from behind Gia-Long's throne, could not help positing an almost equally fantastic role for them. After describing the Nguyen imperial tombs in L'Annam d'autrefois, he indulged his predilections by musing whether their 'majestic dispositions', and the 'general aspect of avenues and paths which recall our Versailles', did not in fact indicate 'an intervention of our taste brought to the court by the French mission'. The idea is scarcely credible, yet Pasquier advanced it as 'possible'.

The second theme in Doumer's account - the total incompetence of all previous Vietnamese government - forms a classic statement of a great French colonial truth: when left to their own devices, Vietnamese (or Indochinese) could not govern themselves effectively. Thus when France withdrew to Europe, and the essential outside direction and

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^59. For example, Régismanset wrote: 'With the Gia-Long emperor, Annam knew its hour of grandeur. But was not this grandeur above all due to French advisors ...? ' Miracle française, p.233.


^61. Pasquier, L'Annam, p.89.

^61. It was a harsher variation on an Orientalist theme Said discusses, which usually referred to representative self-government rather than any effective government. Orientalism, pp.33-36.
guidance lapsed, the 'momentary' successes of the former kingdom vanished. Local government collapsed into its naturally defective (or normal) state. But once France returned to Asia, maladministration in Indochina had, like a magnet, drawn her progressively to replace the rule of native disorder with European competence. In effect, modern French colonialism in Indochina had resulted from the failure and ineptitude of the traditional regime.

In historical terms, it is hardly credible for a Frenchman to condemn traditional Vietnam for endemic warfare when his own country had scarcely managed more than two consecutive decades without a war since the sixteenth century, not to mention the internal episodes of bloody religious strife, revolution, and civil conflict that punctuated the same period. But such comparisons do not interest mythologists; and it is myth, not history, that concerned Doumer (and others) here, as a glimpse at Luro's opinions illustrates.

Where the next colonial generation found only warfare, disorder, and chaos, Luro had discerned a dynamic, expanding people, 'fortified for ten centuries by its contact with Chinese civilisation and rejuvenated by the blood of the various races they had subjugated or incorporated in their extension towards the south'. So powerful was this Vietnamese génie for expansion, 'already ages old', that France might even encounter difficulties trying to halt it, he cautioned. However, he added with some special pleading,

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if the French in Cochinchina learned to understand the Vietnamese sufficiently to 'guide their aptitudes and develop them to their highest degree of perfection', if they could 'capture their confidence [and] make them appreciate our civilisation', then France could exploit this native dynamism to her own ends and 'be assured [of] the empire of Indochina'.

Luro based this assessment on personal experience in Cochinchina. But unlike his derivative, third-hand Orientalist account of the Vietnamese monarchy, few of his compatriots in the mid-1870s (or after) wanted to hear a traditional Asian kingdom described in such terms. Most preferred the views of linear cultural evolutionists and biological determinists, who depicted Asian civilisations as sunk in immobility, and hopelessly backward.

By the twentieth century, the saga of Vietnamese struggles for independence and southern expansion that had so impressed Luro now appeared universally as a sorry tale of endless warfare and continual disorder. Each episode served to underline the former regime's utter inability to give its suffering people peace. Even a sympathetic spirit like Cadière sadly agreed. In a 1911 school history text he wrote: 'It seems that a doom weighs on the Annamite people: their history is only one long series of civil wars; when struggle ceases on one side, it begins on another'.

For many political myth-makers, the former kingdom's perennial failure to ensure peace and internal order virtually by it-

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43. All quotes, Luro, Pays d'Annam, p.84.

44. L. Cadière, Resumé de l'histoire d'Annam (Quinhon: Librairie imprimerie, 1911), pp.74-75.
self explained, validated, and prescribed the French colonial presence. For example, when Charles Régis manset, doyen of the metropolitan colonial mythologists, surveyed the millenial history of Vietnam and Cambodia, he found its basic theme was fundamental incapacity of the Indochinese races, always given to domination from without, ... to govern themselves'. For two thousand years, their history had been one long travail of 'internal struggles, dramas, pil lages, and carnage', until the French 'saviour gods' had arrived, bringing 'rest and peace'. (Given this, it is not surprising that colonial mythologists greeted the revolts of 1930-31 as further proof that more than a few short decades of colonial rule would be required to uproot the baleful influence of the millenial past, so deeply imprinted in the Annamite mentality.)

Other metropolitan mythologists cast a wider net, tracing this administrative incompetence to a fundamental flaw in all traditional Asian kingdoms, not simply those of Indochina. This generalisation underscored its derivation in current European myths of biological determinism and Aryan racial-cultural supremacy. In 1903, for instance, Louis Salaun noted that although reasonable laws existed on paper, 'Annamite efforts found themselves marked, as [were] those of the great part of Asiatic peoples, by an impotence in their execution that had made European intervention

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**. All quotes, Régismanset, Miracle française, pp.146-47.

**. See, for instance, Lt-Col. Bonifacy’s re-telling of a similar version of the myth in 'Les Révoltes en Annam. Leurs Repressions', ATK, 22-May 1930.
possible'. And even if, as Gervais Courtellemont accepted in 1901, European intervention in the form of Doumer's economic program was costing the native tax-payer dearly in Vietnam, it nevertheless represented a fair exchange for order and peace. French rule meant 'the inestimable benefit of peace - internal and external - which over twenty centuries they [had] not known ... [Where] anxieties for the morrow [had] always been the lot of the Annamite people ... today present generations [could] expect to enjoy a state of peace'.

Native incompetence had given place to European competence and good order. But this happy state could only continue while France remained in control of Indochina. The Vietnamese (like the Indochinese races in general) needed the governance of a higher civilisation to guarantee them the benefits of peace, progress, and the security of goods and person, all previously unknown to them. Only the French could maintain the intricate modern administrative structures upon which it all depended since, by definition, the backward local races lacked the ability to do so.

This deficiency was less a matter of education and learned skills than of race, as Colonial Minister Sarraut informed the Chamber of Deputies in 1921. The most intelligent Indochinese, he confided, knew that 'the faculties of their own race alone' did not afford the same abilities for government and administration as those of the French, whom

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'long, hard centuries of prolonged effort [and] research ... [had] endowed with a magnificent scientific and moral patrimony'. The Indochinese peoples needed France. It would be many years before 'the more or less backward races' of the colony would be 'capable of disengaging a sense of nationality from their amorphous mass, with the will and capacity to find their way without help ... through the ever growing number of pitfalls in international life and the competition of modern peoples'. Any premature independence must spell catastrophe, not for France of course but for the local people, doomed to 'disorder, anarchy and revolt, until another great power stepped in' to impose colonialism once more. Then would they bitterly regret the lost protection of 'an idealistic France, all of whose actions and institutions [were] impregnated with fraternity and justice', unlike the other colonial powers. Doumer doubtless agreed entirely. The same conviction implicitly sustained his version of the myth of old, traditional Annam. Indeed for him history had already demonstrated it. Years of previous French influence and 'protection' during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries had still failed to impart the art of good government to the backward Vietnamese. A mere fifty years after their compatriots had raised up a flourishing empire for Gia-Long, Frenchmen returned to the region in the mid-nineteenth century to dis-

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49. Quoted in full in Régismanset, Miracle française, pp. 342-46. Pasquier agreed in 1928, according to 'La politique indigène en Indochine', NF, 135, Nov-Dec 1928, p.43.

70. Cited in Régismanset, Miracle française, pp.343-44.
cover disorder, insecurity, and maladministration. Doumer stood convinced that the Vietnamese would finally attain modern French standards; but, as "history" had taught, it would be a work of very long duration, and certainly something that they could never hope to accomplish alone.

This brings us to the fifth theme, and the major point of disagreement between most pre- and post-1908 colonial versions of the myth of old, traditional Annam - the contemporary political significance of traditional culture.

Doumer never questioned the colonial myth equating Vietnam and ancient Rome that clothed the earliest projection of identity between French Self and Vietnamese Other. For him, Vietnam provided 'a vision of an abolished world (un monde aboli) that Europe had known in ancient times and that we see suddenly appear at a distance of four thousand miles or three thousand years'.71 The key word here, however, was the active participle 'abolished'. Change required will. Europe's advance had depended on its people putting the past behind them and uprooting the sort of age-old customs and ingrained traditions that had struck Doumer so forcefully in Annam in 1897. Protectorate Vietnamese could only progress in the same way. Full of the future and his own plans, the feeble charms of Annam's traditional culture never detained a Governor-General who wished only to give the Vietnamese what, projecting identity, he knew they wanted most, a future beyond anything dreamed of by their ancestors. And as we saw in Chapter Four, he acted with

cheerful ruthlessness to set it in train.

Doumer's contempt and disdain for bankrupt Sino-Vietnamese civilisation, coupled with his desire for speedy reform, guided his policy and practice in Annam. Although forced by the Treaty of 1884 to keep the facade of monarchy and mandarinate, the Governor-General acted in every other way according to his expressed belief that the conquest war had made France the 'sovereign nation' in Annam.72 While preserving the traditional forms of royal government might help soothe local sensibilities in a transitional era,73 the previous regime had nothing further of value to contribute to the new order. It had already degenerated irreparably into 'abuses ... faults [and] vices'.74 So when Doumer recited the Protectorate litany of France's pledge to 'maintain the kingdom's internal and external security, [and to] respect the life, mores, beliefs, [and] religious practices of the Annamite people', his failure to mention its traditional administrative institutions represented no mistake or oversight. In Doumer's view, the interests of France and of the local people neatly coincided in replacing the worn-out previous regime with 'the administrative procedures and economic means of action of European civilisation'.75 Not even the rites, which he characterised as 'for us [French] ... a subject of mockery', could avoid being overhauled and

74. Souvenirs, p.164.
75. Ibid.
modernised, if they were to persist into the near future. In the decade after Doumer's appointment, many other French in the colony shared these expectations of the imminent collapse of Annam's age-old Sinic institutions. In 1901, for instance, we find Courtellemont portraying Thanh-Thai as a 'sad and idle fantôme du souverain', wandering the empty palaces of Hue. Bereft of all but ceremonial duties, his throne was 'crumbling' and about to be 'buried beneath the dust of History'. As for his so-called kingdom, 'reduced to its simplest expression, [it had become] a sort of administrative division [and] properly speaking ... no longer exist[ed]'. But from the death of the past came life: 'In Annam ... a new future will soon bloom, so different from the past that the old survivors of disappeared regimes will have to ask themselves if they are dreaming'.

The few Frenchmen at the time who admired aspects of the traditional past, like Pasquier, resigned themselves to, rather than welcomed, the fact that 'the court was dying and [the] dynasty fading away'. Suspicious progressives denounced even such mild expression of regret. In 1906, for instance, one advised those Annam-Tonkin administrators whose studies of the Vietnamese past had 'allowed

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76. Ibid, p.171.
79. He still saw it as a failure, but in mainly in terms of its intellectual limitations. Otherwise, he Sino-Vietnamese elite culture and idealised its past. We return to his views below.
them to be seduced by the ancient institutions' into wanting to restore them that theirs was an impossible dream. 'The institutions of other times', the author thundered, could 'not be adapted to the current needs of a land already in contact with a western power for several years', and whose people, caught up in 'constant transformation', only 'aspir[ed] to a better state [and] turn[ed] their eyes to the future'. The moribund weight of tradition that had previously shackled them must no longer be allowed to 'fix them in an immutable order of things, nor stop them from ... being transformed in their turn'. In these circumstances, the sole reason the writer would allow for studying local tradition was to gain a fund of knowledge that would enable colonial officials to implement reforms in ways that least offended the native mentality and sensibilities.\textsuperscript{e1}

Nothing in the exciting decade following Doumer's arrival in 1897 suggested to the colonial French that "Annamite tradition" posed a special barrier to modernisation and colonial change; or that the Protectorate of Annam epitomised its region of greatest power. But as we have seen, the anti-tax movement shook those assumptions to the core. "Annamite tradition" rebounded into the Protectorate political arena; and in circumstances which made penetrating its secrets, comprehending its ways, and disarming its potential threats, matters of both personal and public importance to Frenchmen in Trung-ky, officials especially.

Fortunately, however, a new conceptual tool had been

\footnote{\textsuperscript{e1} Z, 'La tradition et l'enseignement', \textit{RJ}, No. 36, 30 June 1906, pp.905-09, quotes p.905.}
developed in the metropole which promised to deliver exactly the results now required in Annam. We find reference to it in Klobukowski's 1908 speech to the court when he described Paul Bert, his 'late lamented master', as a man who had 'from the first moment understood the Annamite soul'.

In Bert's few months in office in 1886, he had displayed no especial sensitivity to the Vietnamese, projecting as crude a perception of identity on them as any of Doumer's. But it was less Bert the man than Bert as the symbol of reconciliation between court and Protectorate that Klobukowski invoked. And by using the term, "Annamite soul", he sought to stress the sincerity of his promise to respect local customs and traditions.

Klobukowski's pledge implicitly acknowledged the growing metropolitan influence of the ideas of Gustave Le Bon. In 1894, Le Bon had produced a short volume, Lois psychologiques de l'évolution des peuples, that basically argued a people's racial soul resided in their religious, artistic and philosophical beliefs, customs and traditions, and in the formative heritage of their past. If this racial

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32. 'Documents. Le Voyage du Gouverneur-Général en Annam', R1, No. 93, 15 Nov 1908, p.657 (my emphasis).
33. 'I like this people very much because it resembles the French people; it is industrious, it loves the family, and it obeys the laws and authorities'. From Chailley-Bert's Paul Bert au Tonkin, quoted in Baugher's translation, from "Contradictions", p.66. The original was not available to me.
34. Regarded as a mainstream scientist, Le Bon was the main founder of crowd psychology.
soul sickened, it doomed any people's moral well-being and hopes for their future. Le Bon's ideas spread more slowly in colonial circles, partly because they ran counter to the dominant assimilationist trends of the time. Even so, we find their clear imprint in the conclusion to Pasquier's 1906 lectures, L'Annam d'autrefois, when, for instance, he called for France to 'study the [Annamite] past' so she could 'learn to lead [the Annamites] towards the future'. They also appeared in his caution that France not destroy, 'under a merciless centralisation, the originality of a distant people', and in his warning that, although the 'hasard des évolutions' had placed the Annamites under French care, 'a people's evolution [must ultimately be] made by itself', so that France needed to 'respect the génie of the Annamite race'. Indeed, as Resident Superior and Governor-General, most of Pasquier's politique indigène owed its basic inspiration to Le Bon.

By 1919, Le Bon's remarkably successful work had been reprinted fifteen times, while his concept of racial soul would soon help justify the French government's official change of colonial policy from assimilation to association in 1920. In Vietnam, its impact on colonial mythologists of

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e6. Raymond F. Betts, Assimilation and Association in French Colonial Theory, 1890-1914 (Columbia University Press, 1961), pp.68-69 says Le Bon's views only penetrated colonial circles after Léopold de Saussure popularised them in 1899 in Psychologie de la colonisation française dans des rapports avec les sociétés indigènes. I have not seen this volume; but certainly quotations from it in Betts and Baugher ["Contradictions", pp.102-113] seem almost identical to Le Bon.

e7. Pasquier, L'Annam, pp.337-38. But he chose to use génie where Le Bon would have used âme.
Self and Other can hardly be exaggerated. The next section outlines its most significant points in some detail.

Racial Soul, Annamite Soul, and French Genius

In 1894 the psychologist Gustave Le Bon published a short popularisation of the main findings of his studies of the evolution of races, cultures, and civilisations. The work aimed 'to describe the psychological characteristics that constitute the soul of races (l'âme des races) and to show how the history of a people and its civilisation derive from these characteristics'; to demonstrate that 'the mental constitution [of peoples] follows from their history'; and that 'the elements of which a civilisation is composed: its arts, institutions and beliefs, are the direct manifestations of the racial soul and cannot for this reason pass from one people to another'. Overall, he wanted to elucidate the 'great permanent laws directing the march of each civilisation', the 'most general and most irreducible' he nominated as 'the mental constitutions of races'.

Le Bon was a biological determinist of long standing. Like Gobineau before him, and many contemporary colleagues, the urge to expose and combat the dangerous and unnatural notion of equality between races and genders drove Le Bon

**. All quotes, Lois psychologiques, pp.18-19.
**. Ibid, p.17.
***. Despite a corpus of similar works, Le Bon liked to see himself as a lonely crusader: 'not a psychologist, not a
far more than any scientific aim. In 1879, for instance, as a disciple of the French craniologist, Paul Broca, he had published a study of female intelligence that claimed women 'represent[ed] the most inferior form of human evolution'. With children and savages, they ranked far below 'an adult, civilised [European] man', Le Bon's measure, then and later, of human superiority. *Lois psychologiques* extended this attitude to humanity in general.

Le Bon denied the value of individuality. However much people might seem to vary, he insisted most members of the same race 'always share[d] a certain number of common psychological traits, as stable as the anatomical characters that allow the classification of species'. As the simile suggested, changes in these racial mental and psychological traits only happened very slowly. It took at least ten centuries, he estimated, to create the 'commonality of feelings and thoughts' that formed a people's soul, and then only weakly. To forge a national soul needed much more. Although the 'network of feelings, ideas, traditions, and beliefs which formed the soul of a collectivity of men'

traveller, not a statesman with the least learning [failed to] know to what extent [egalitarianism was] wrong; and yet how few have dared to oppose it'. *Ibid*, p.16.

*1. Cited in Gould, *Mismeasure*, p.105. In *Lois psychologiques* Le Bon used the 'insuperable chasm' that separated 'a civilised man and a woman, even if she were highly educated' to symbolise the gulf between races. Like men and women who shared 'common interests, common feelings but never the linkage of common thoughts'[p.46], races too were fundamentally separate and unequal. For his ranking, see pp.38-47.


*3. *Ibid*, p.27. Thus he believed the French did not yet form a race, although the English did [pp.63-64].
might appear anywhere, a national soul required the 'notion of la patrie as we know it today'.\textsuperscript{4} Clearly, only the West could qualify.

If individuals did not count, neither did the current generation. Because a racial soul took centuries to form, the influence of heredity, of long generations of ancestors fixed in the same area and intermingling their blood, dwarfed all else in importance. In Le Bon's view, 'it [was] by its dead, much more than by its living, that a people [was] led',\textsuperscript{5} for the dead played 'the preponderant role in a people's existence [... as] the creators of its morality and of the unconscious motives of its conduct'.\textsuperscript{6} This meant any single person 'always and above all [was] the representative of his race', joint inheritor of a common 'aggregate of ideas and feelings' whose influence 'in reality, rule[d] all the evolution of a people'.\textsuperscript{7}

Two elements in particular from this fund of beliefs and feelings directed the evolution of races: character; and guiding ideas become unconscious sentiments.

To Le Bon, character above all meant the exercise of will. Perseverance, energy, self-control, and self-denial all helped to form it, along with 'morality' defined as an 'hereditary respect for the rules upon which society's existence rest[ed]'. The superiority of English character,


\textsuperscript{5} Ibid, p.27.

\textsuperscript{6} Ibid, p.189.

\textsuperscript{7} Both quotes, Ibid, p.26
for example, explained how '60,000 Englishmen [held] 250 million Hindoos beneath their yoke, many of whom were at least their equal in intelligence, and some of whom surpass[ed] them immensely in artistic taste and the depth of their philosophical understanding'. Character's significance far outstripped that of intellect. Education might raise the intelligence of a lesser race, for intellectual discoveries easily passed between peoples; but character needed centuries to form, or be transformed. It was due to 'this chasm between the mental constitution of diverse races' that Europeans had 'never succeeded in getting inferior peoples to accept their civilisation ... [Its] forms of thought, logic, and above all the Occidental character' could only emerge from the crucible of the centuries.

If education could only effect superficial improvements, not genuine advances, in inferior races it was hardly worth pursuing, for real hazards attended the close relations between races it required. Different peoples, Le Bon warned, could 'neither feel nor think nor act in the same way, nor by consequence understand each other'. If a higher people foolishly tried to guide the mental evolution of their inferiors, rather than leaving them to develop by painful centuries of effort, the misplaced charity risked 'disorganising [their] mental structure'. If that occurred, the inferior race could only plunge 'to a lower

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*98. Ibid, p.44. As Aryans, Hindus placed among the superior races, though the lowest ranked of them. [p.40].


100. Ibid, p.46.
level than that which it would have reached by itself'.

With Gobineau, Lewis Morgan, and many others, Le Bon thus inveighed against the dangers of racial mixture that destroyed racial originality. Though slow to constellate, a people's soul could be irrevocably harmed relatively quickly by the admixture of foreigners, 'even in small numbers'. They caused a people 'to lose the ability to defend the features of their race, the monuments of their history, the works of their forebears'. But for Le Bon, such contact imperilled superior races as much as their inferiors. He cited the fall of the Roman Empire as a cautionary example: the barbarian invaders had respected and admired Rome, and wanted to preserve it, he maintained, but 'the simple influence of their mixture was enough to destroy the Roman soul', and with it the empire.

The second major influence on racial evolution came from a tiny number (at most two or three) of 'fundamental guiding ideas in the realm of the arts, sciences, literature or philosophy'. Their greatest effect occurred after they had percolated down from 'the fluid regions of thought to the stable and unconscious region of sentiments'. Once there, beyond the reach of reason, they might persist almost indefinitely. Even if superseded, they did not van-

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101. Ibid, p.79.
104. Ibid, p.144.
ish but rather joined the 'heritage of outdated ideas, opinions, and conventions that [ordinary] people still accep-
t[ed], even though they could not withstand a moment's rea-
soned analysis'. 106 'Precisely this network of traditions, ideas, sentiments, beliefs, [and] common modes of thinking create[d] the soul of a people'. 107

The stronger this network, the more perdurable the racial soul, as Asia illustrated. Europeans might like to imagine that Asiatic sovereigns ruled according to their 'whims', Le Bon commented, but in fact their lives were 'enclosed in singularly narrow limits. In the East, much more than elsewhere, the network of traditions [was] powerful. Religious beliefs ... preserve[d] all their empire, and the most tyrannical despot never clash[ed] with two sovereigns he [knew were] infinitely stronger than himself: tradition and opinion'. 108 Of these ruling ideas, religious ones 'always formed the primordial element of the life of peoples, and consequently of their history'. 109 A new religion always engendered a new civilisation. But the link between religion and civilisation could also be fatal. As history showed, 'nothing [was] so destructive as the dust of dead gods', for 'the civilisation born under their in-
fluence pass[ed] away with them'. 110

110. Ibid, p.166.
Only the most advanced peoples like modern Europeans, whom 'the greatest differentiation and hierarchy [separated...] from Orientals', might hope to meet such dangerous times without disaster. But their hope of success in this, as in so much else, depended on the influence of a tiny elite of 'beaux génies'. This small band of white, civilised males alone disposed of the ability to synthesize 'the grandeur of their times and their race', while sharing on behalf of their race, the glory of having accomplished all the works of progress that benefited humanity. Yet this indispensable elite now found itself threatened by the false prophets of egalitarianism, and the foolish demands of women for equal rights, demands which could only 'finish, if [they] triumph[ed], by making the European man a nomad without home or family'. But should Europeans blindly succumb to the chimera of equality, they would become 'its first victims. Equality can only exist in inferiority', Le Bon warned. 'Times of savagery alone have realised it.'

Contemporaries believed Le Bon's work scientific; and some later scholars have dignified it by treating it as a theory. But if we measure the ideas outlined above against the minimum definition of political myth presented in Chapter One we find it revealed as political myth mas-

111. All quotes, Ibid, pp.167-68. Similarly, to succeed, statesmen had to embody the dreams and ideas of their race.

112. Ibid, p.17.


114. Cf. Betts, French Colonial Theory, Chapter Four; or Baugher, "Contradictions", pp.102-08 which discusses the contradictions between theory and practice.
As noted there, a political myth is a story involving its collective protagonist in a dramatic plot which, as it unfolds, explains the group's present circumstances and argues for, or prescribes, practical action to defend or improve its position. *Lois psychologiques* fits this definition exactly. The noble but embattled elite of civilised European males, among whom Le Bon counted himself, forms its protagonist. Despite embodying the soul of their superior race, by the end of the nineteenth century some began to feel their formerly unquestioned conviction of supremacy challenged by the subterranean shift in the *episteme* that Foucault identified. The underlying analytic of Sameness in modern consciousness was slowly moving towards the unity of Identity and Difference. It appeared at home in the mindless egalitarianism of the masses and the alarming demands of women; and elsewhere in the contact with lesser races whose contagious inferiority threatened to drag their superiors down to their own level. Through a series of linked episodes, *Lois psychologiques* also built up a vestigial plot that argued, implicitly and explicitly, for policies and practices to reinforce the natural separation between European and inferior races or, failing that, for the least possible contact to save higher races from the potentially disastrous impact of their inferiors. Finally, if nothing else, Le Bon's methodology repeatedly betrayed him as a myth-maker. All the techniques of political mythologists mentioned in Chapter One (and more) are marshalled in the work in order to make all human history conform to a single
explanation, valid in all epoches and for all peoples.

When shorn of Le Bon's personal preoccupations and tailored by local mythologists to suit their particular needs, the myth of the racial soul, plus many of its supporting arguments, enjoyed extraordinary influence in the colonial French psyche in Indochina. Its imprint is manifest everywhere one looks, in newspaper articles, speeches, and archival sources, but most of all in political myths from the 1920s on, for in the colonial context it became the key that unlocked everything about the Vietnamese.

In the first place it reconfirmed the little China fallacy as an article of faith. What else could Vietnam be after all those centuries but innately Chinese?

Of myriad examples from the 1920s, let us take Lieutenant-Colonel Bonifacy, retired Colonial Infantry officer turned journalist in 1920s Ha-noi. Bonifacy numbered among the 'relatively few colonial mythologists in Indochina who openly declared himself 'an assiduous reader of Lebon'.

Most, as with Pasquier above, tended to use his ideas as their own, or as if they were common knowledge. In a 1922 article, Bonifacy congratulated Pasquier as Resident Superior for setting up a college intended to impart a practical education in the customs and traditions of the

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115. An interesting variation appears in a 1930 article that deals almost exclusively (and unconsciously) with contemporary projections of French Self and Annamite Other, 'L'évolution intellectuelle et sociale des Annamites sous l'influence française', BSEI (ns), V, 3 (1930), pp.165-86. Its author, E. Mathieu, gives the characteristics of a racial soul (a people's 'mentality, its atavism, its intrinsic qualities, its beliefs, and its ancestral traditions') but instead attributes them to 'le génie d'une race' [p.177].
pays to probationary Annam mandarins. The new Ecole des Hautes Etudes existed to fill a role at which the Hanoi University Ecole du Droit had conspicuously failed: to provide young mandarins with practical instruction, in Pasquier's words, in the 'choses des usages, the folk-lore, the traditions [and] the rites' of Annam, the lack of which left them 'strangers among their brothers, incapable of understanding their thoughts and feelings, ignorant of the motive forces that guide their actions'. In practice, however, this meant teaching them about Annam's Chinese heritage, which Bonifacy found both wise and admirable.

Previously Annamites only learnt matters taught in China; this could be criticised, but we might respond that Annamite legislation was copied from the Chinese, that their language draws all its abstract words from the Chinese, that in Annamite the names of countries, towns, provinces, and individuals are Chinese, that their religion, arts [and] the rites derive from Chinese rites, religions [and] arts, in a word that Annamite culture is none other than Chinese culture (la culture annamite n'est autre que la culture chinoise).

From this spring-board, Bonifacy jumped (as did many others) to argue for the retention of Chinese characters in colonial public schools as the only sure way to avoid cutting Vietnamese civilisation off from its roots, and from its past achievements. Without Chinese education, in other words, the health of the Annamite soul would suffer. In a

116. Speech at the opening, 24 Nov 1922. AEP GGIC 51080 The School, closed in 1925, replaced the former Hau-Bo, whose far more theoretical orientation had equally failed. For a scathing critique, see Ho Bac Khaï, 'L'Ecole des Hau-Bo. Pepinière des mandarins', RI (ns), XXV, 5-6 (1917), pp.393-405. An unsigned version of the article is held at AEP GGIC 48045

117. 'Opinion. Ecole des Hautes Etudes du Gouvernement Annamite'. ATK, 1 Dec, 1922. (my emphasis)
delightfully unselfconscious example of projected identity, he went on to warn that, without a Chinese education, Vietnamese children risked no longer being able to access their own literary heritage. The great number of homonyms in quoc ngu, he asserted, would make poetry written in their own language unintelligible to children without Chinese ideographs to help them differentiate the meanings. But even worse, without a knowledge of Chinese, Vietnamese would find themselves unable to converse with their own families: 'without it, it would no longer be possible for Annamites to express themselves, as the names of family relations, except for mother and younger brother (or sister), are Chinese'.

By proving that the past was 'also the present', Le Bon's ideas also validated the post-1908 Protectorate policy of mining the traditional past for 'elements of decision and knowledge for the future', as Régimanset put it in 1921. Again, examples proliferate. The missionary-columnist AGAT, for instance, wrote in 1924 that it was not external features like skin colour, or the shape of eyes and nose, that separated peoples. Rather, they were differentiated above all by the more or less common fund of ideas, customs, and mores that we call ... their soul. This soul, composed of diverse elements, is

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118. Sans lui, il ne serait plus possible aux Annamites de s'exprimer, les noms de parenté même, sauf mère et frère (ou soeur) cadet, sont chinois.


120. All quotes, AGAT, 'Les Enseignements de l'histoire d'Annam. IX'. ATK, 22 Mar 1924.
translated in two ways which, at heart, are only one, religion and philosophy.

The Annamites posed no exception to 'this law'. To comprehend their soul, he insisted, the French needed to examine the 'sediments left by the great current of ideas from China, notably the ancestral cult, Taoism, Buddhism, and Confucianism'. But they must advance courageously to the heart of Vietnamese difference in order to make an exact assessment of 'the philosophical and religious ideas upon which the Annamite soul [was] based'. Thus empowered with deep knowledge, the French would be able 'to judge with complete discernment whether there [existed] elements capable of raising the Annamite nation once more, and of rehabilitating it before history'.

But for the French to be able to 'judge with complete discernment' the depths of the Annamite soul implied two things: that they disposed of extraordinary cultural and intellectual powers; and that, Le Bon to the contrary, races could understand each other. In the metropole, Le Bon (and his biological determinist colleagues) enjoyed the luxury of distance from the Other. Despite his expressed fears, Le Bon could have experienced few direct and personal challenges to his conviction of superiority. Colonials, on the other hand, who had to dwell in the midst of Otherness, needed to guard their defences and constantly shore up the personal sense of mastery and superiority that enabled them to function effectively. In Vietnam, experience taught that the local people might, at any time and for no apparent reason, act in unexpected and even dangerous
ways. Such behaviour confronted colonial society with the disturbing reflection of its actual ignorance and potential insecurity. So while colonial state power was never seriously endangered before its collapse in the aftermath of World War Two, currents of insecurity stirred with dark unease below the surface of many individuals' lives, especially those outside the towns. When not expressed in brutalities,\textsuperscript{121} the repressed fears and anxieties manifested in the colonial arena as inflated, and obviously compensatory, assertions that the French Self enjoyed absolute supremacy over, or total knowledge of, the Vietnamese Other. As we saw with the wide acceptance of the myth of Vietnam as ancient Rome, and of the comforting projection of identity at its core, whatever met the deepest needs of the collective Self, however preposterous, illogical or contradictory they might seem to outsiders, could be adopted, adapted, and mythologised to satisfy the needs of the time. And once mythologised, they moved in the realm of mentalities, where the rules of the material universe did not hold paramount sway.

This is what happened in twentieth century colonial Vietnam to the long-standing metropolitan concept of \textit{le génie français}. In its usual meaning, the term denoted the French image of their own national character, which is how \textit{génie} is usually translated in English. In colonial Viet-

\textsuperscript{121} Periods of political unease might focus such fears: on two occasions in the mid-1920s, the mere sight of Vietnamese youths joking among themselves provoked physical attacks by enraged Frenchmen, each convinced the Vietnamese had been laughing at him personally. Reports in \textit{EA}, 24 April 1925 and \textit{Annam}, 31 May 1926.
nam, however, le génie français came to signify something far more important— the god-like power and perception of the French Self as an actor in the colonial political arena. With only rare exceptions, by the 1920s we find le génie français commonly used to summarise the attributes of the colonial collective projection of French Self. To convey something of that grandiose sense we have rendered it here as 'the French genius'.

In France, the notion of le génie applied equally to peoples and individuals. On the personal level, it paralleled the English concept of "genius", denoting writers, artists, or scientists of brilliance, or statesmen and generals of renown. It was, for instance, in this sense that Le Bon used it to refer to the 'beaux génie' of elite European males. On a collective level, it was used to sum up aspects of national (or racial) character that were often presented as essentially active in nature. As we saw, Luro attributed a génie for expansion to the Vietnamese. In 1901, Marcel Dubois of the Comité de l'Asie française, praised the English génie for commerce that allowed the British to create a trading relationship with their great

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122. Pasquier was one, though it may have been a personal vanity. Despite L'Annam's debt to Le Bon, Pasquier avoided "l'âme" and applied "le génie" to French and Vietnamese alike. Then in the 1920s, when most others differentiated between le génie français and l'âme annamite, Pasquier often chose l'âme for both as, for example, when describing his vision of 'Annam, age-old but being reborn' through the 'union of the Annamite soul and the French soul'. 'La Mission des étudiantes françaises', ATK, 25 Dec 1924.

123. Later, as a professor at the Sorbonne, he wrote in Systèmes coloniaux et peuples colonisateurs that France possessed 'un génie colonial'. Quoted in Régimanset, Miracle française, p.21.
Indian colony that enriched themselves handsomely. (This he compared to the French empire at the time which, in Asia especially, attracted little investment and paid few dividends.\textsuperscript{124}) But while Dubois might encourage France to borrow some successful colonial techniques from the Anglo-Saxons, he warned in the process that she must always take care 'to guard [her] originality [and her] personality'.\textsuperscript{125}

We must slightly modify our character without thereby suffocating the genius of our race (le génie de notre race), without suppressing all idealism and indeed all enthusiasm. Let us know, above all, how to preserve our native generosity towards the peoples that Destiny has placed under out domination.

Notions of French idealism and generosity surface repeatedly in the metropolitan image of le génie français. French conviction in the superiority of their civilisation, however defined, was not new. It had existed long before the Revolution infused it with a sense of mission civilisatrice, and Napoleon’s armies carried it throughout Europe at bayonet-point. Unlike the later image of "the White Man’s Burden", it had formed a fundamental part of French self-definition long before the imperial expansion of the later nineteenth century. Nevertheless, colonialism provided the French civilising mission with a vaster, and more challenging, field of endeavour than ever before, as men from Francis Garnier onwards recognised. His 1864 view of


\textsuperscript{125} Courtellemont, L’Empire coloniale, p.15.
le génie français, and of the colonial duty it imposed on a France who was true to herself, well summarises a later widespread current of French opinion vis-à-vis the colonies, first in colonial circles, and later generally. "This generous nation", wrote Garnier, "whose opinion rules civilised Europe and whose ideas have conquered the world, has received from Providence a higher mission, that of emancipation, of calling to light and liberty, races and peoples still enslaved by ignorance and despotism".

But in Vietnam, to penetrate the Annamite soul, disarm its atavistic tendencies, and enlist its positive qualities in support of the Protectorate, required powers more god-like than the idealism, generosity, humanity, and intellectual gifts with which France was so well endowed. And so, from necessity, it acquired them — or at least, the projection of the colonial French Self as le génie français did. Let us consider some brief examples.

In our earlier discussion of the myth of old, traditional Annam, we saw how, as part of Le Miracle français en Asie, Charles Régimansset described the nineteenth century French as 'saviour-gods' bringing the boon of peace to the long-suffering Indochinese multitudes. A few years later Pierre Pasquier conveyed the same sentiment to his Vietnamese friends in the AVH when he told them, in 1924, that

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126. For a longer discussion, see Girardet, L'Idée coloniale, pp.81-93 and 117-35.


128. Régimansset, Miracle française, p.147.
France had not only given them: peace, security, your goods and your persons, the economic development of your soil, [and] the augmentation of your riches. She also brings you the wonderful secret which is going to quicken and bring into bloom your own qualities, the nourishing ideas of your [own] thought. Through "the French miracle" your souls will be augmented, the field of your conceptions widened, not because of any renunciation or tabula rasa, but rather by moving beyond the level of your culture and, by means of your renewed faculties, [to beyond] where you have been at standstill for centuries.

An even more blatant example of the quasi-divine nature attributed to the colonial French Self comes from Albert Sarraut, the man who, as Colonial Minister in 1923, would describe the French colonial doctrine as 'the Declaration of the Rights of Man as interpreted by St Vincent de Paul'. A few years earlier, in 1917, a reform of the Tonkin Law Code had extended some basic legal guarantees to the people in the North. In Annam, it should be noted, the scarcely modified Gia-Long Code still regulated the lives of five million Vietnamese. But Governor-General Sarraut seized on the Tonkin reform as the pretext for an extraordinary example of colonial mythologising. A slightly condensed version follows.

Before our arrival in Indochina one could say that, despite the benevolent laws conceived for them by sage monarchs, the Annamite people were like a sort of amorphous, obscure, confused mass, where the individual disappeared into the group, was drowned in the community ... Man, weak and powerless before the all-powerful State, was only

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129. Speech to a visiting delegation of French schoolgirls at the AVH. 'La Mission des etudiantes', ATK, 25 Dec 1924.

130. At a meeting of the Academy of Colonial Sciences, reported in BAVH, X, 4 (1923), p.498.

one grain in a pile of sand. This pile of beings obeyed passively through the centuries whatever it was ordered to do by an absolute authority which disposed of the masses according to its will, without having to answer for abuses of power before a superior law limiting the right of the sovereign himself ... The laws protecting the individual meant what the mandarin who applied them [said they] meant, or the monarch who supervised their application. No legal recourse was possible against the supreme power. ...

Well, what has been admirable in the action of France ... is precisely that, thanks to her ... the rights of the individual have finally taken a precise outline. ... [T]he patient and maternal hand of France has drawn upon the immense clay of the native community to make models and create there "individualities", having rights for themselves, accompanied by guarantees whose existence is henceforth recognised and consecrated by superior, tutelary law. From the previous human dust, the action of France has made men!

In some respects, all additional commentary seems superfluous before such a breathtaking example of colonial mythology. Nevertheless, some aspects should be highlighted. It is interesting to note, for example, how at the start Sarraut separated the 'sage monarchs', who had conceived the 'benevolent laws', from the 'absolute authority' that disposed of the cowed and passive multitudes, for it hints at the pro-monarchical politique indigène which he would toy with, and which Pasquier later fully embraced.

But for our present purpose, the conclusion is more relevant: 'from human dust' France had made 'men'. We are not simply confronted here with a grotesquely over-blown metaphor, though Sarraut certainly delighted in them. Rather, we see in this a re-assuring signal from the leading Frenchman in the colony to all his local compatriots in the form of a stylised representation of the roles of Self and Other in the colonial arena. Like Pasquier's speech that we
excerpted above, it re-confirmed the convictions of colonial French about their "true" identity and the "real" nature of the Vietnamese, at the same time that it traced the appropriate relationship between the two. And in this endeavour it proved successful enough to feature as one of only two examples of Sarraut's voluminous output selected by Jean Ajalbert for his 1930 collection, designed to showcase French insight into Indochina, L'Indochine par les français.

The second significant element in Sarraut's story is the extraordinary degree of inferiority projected onto the Vietnamese of the traditional past - neither animal nor vegetable, they appear here in the metaphor of grains of sand, or human dust. At the turn of the century, when Doumer projected inferiority onto the Vietnamese past and its contemporary representatives, he disparaged the traditional elite for its failures but never metaphorically portrayed its members - and certainly not the stout peasants - as anything less than human. Rather, for Doumer, (French) Self and (Vietnamese) Other had been identical two thousand years before; and would be so again in the future he was working to bring about. But far from being "ourselves in the past", for Sarraut in 1917 the pre-colonial Vietnamese appeared as only potentially human, requiring the intervention of a French demiurge to transform them into real men (like the European Self). The comparison reveals the growing inflation of the projected French Self since Doumer; just as it suggests why the fusion of inferiority and identity that increasingly occurred after 1908 made the rework-
ed myths of Self and Other so attractive and tenacious in later colonial circles. Integrating both aspects of projected Otherness made it possible for a supposed 'indigéno-ophile' like Sarraut to project, with a clear liberal conscience, literally dehumanising inferiority onto the Vietnamese, while simultaneously applauding their transformation into real men, thanks to the intervention of the French Self.

In this example, Sarraut projected inferiority onto a (mythologised) Vietnamese past, and identity onto a (mythologised) colonial present. Others, among them at times the Friends of Old Hue, switched the focus and preferred to project inferiority onto contemporary Annamites and identity onto the distant future, when the union of French genius and Annamite soul would give birth to a fine, new civilisation in the Pacific. We will conclude with this myth and projection.

The Union of French Genius and Annamite Soul

As we discussed in Chapter Four, Leopold Cadière and some French and Vietnamese friends had formed a small, learned society in 1913 to research and conserve historical memorabilia, information, and artefacts relating to old Hue. Very soon, however, the needs of the time had turned the AVH it into a work-shop where, equipped with modern new

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132. Sarraut claimed he had been accused of this by some, in a 1920 speech. Cited in Régismandet, Miracle française, p.346.
tools supplied by Le Bon's myth of the racial soul, its members crafted and burnished colonial myths and projections of Self and Other to perfection.

Le Bon, as we saw, had insisted that conserving a people's heritage of philosophy, literature, art, and religion uncontaminated by foreign influences played a vital role in preserving the health of its racial soul. Armed with this knowledge, and alarmed that cross-cultural experiments were attracting certain Vietnamese artists and craft workers, the AVH determined early in its existence to stem the corrosive influx of western artistic notions, so detrimental to the native soul - and, of course, so liable to muddy the crisp divisions they strove so hard to preserve between Same/Self and Different/Other in the complex situation of the 1910s.

The AVH's perceptions and responses to this double danger typified the pattern that underlay all versions of the myth of the union of French Self and Vietnamese Other, even Sarraut's extreme account above. On an analytical level, its emphasis on Annamite failure redeemed by French intervention manifestly recalled the myth of old, traditional Annam. The principal difference was that this time the myth concerned itself more with natural flaws in the Vietnamese Other, the innate characteristics which the exigencies of history might influence for good or ill. In this myth, French intervention acted to rescue the Vietnamese from themselves, and to re-make them in conformity to a better (higher, culturally purer) standard.

As with almost everything else in its first decade of
existence, the AVH's desire to stimulate an indigenous artistic renaissance in Annam neatly fitted this template. Local art, AVH members agreed, had fallen into 'a profound and regrettable decline' for three basic reasons. First they blamed the former government, for by refusing artists and artisans their liberty, it had caused the most talented to practice their skills only inside their families. Next, earlier prosperity had given way to poverty; and, in that situation, the 'the apathy inherent in the race' had done the rest.\(^3^3\) Happily, colonialism had solved the first two problems – and it could overcome the third as well, but only if the French respected certain crucial principles, as Edmond Gras reminded the Association in 1915.\(^3^4\)

It was essential to carefully avoid wishing to impose on these future artists our conceptions of art, our western vision, our decorative motifs. [...] All their models] must remain Annamite, for it is a Renaissance that we want to guide, not a dangerous and useless Revolution that we seek to foment. If a transformation of Annamite art is to come about, it must logically ... be born from the génie of the race alone. And this will occur because we will have been anonymous and wise educators, and not pretentious trouble-makers. [...] The great vital principle of art, the essential condition of all creation, the source of all artistic progress, from the artisan to the master, is respect for the individuality of each, for the temperament of the individual as of the race. It is only at this price that servile imitation can be avoided, and even worse plagiarism, decadence, [and finally] death

\(^{133}\). Edmond Gras, 'Quelques réflexions sur un enseignement d'art en Annam', BAVH, IV, 4 (1917), p.457. The article was read at the meeting of 27 Oct 1915, shortly after Orband had given a very similar lecture at the Alliance française, according to fn.2. Cadière, 'L'Oeuvre', pp.37-40 also deals with these efforts between 1915 and 1921. At the time Gras was Head of the Annam Treasury.

\(^{134}\). Both quotes, Gras, 'Un enseignement d'art', p.458
Though evident to the French, unfortunately these fundamental truths tended to escape most local Vietnamese artists, sculptors, painters, and architects. They failed to open their eyes to the admirable things of a past full of teaching that they no longer [knew] how to see or that they [saw] without understanding. What [was] needed [was] to utilise the remarkable gifts of imitation of their race ... by [allowing them] to make comparisons with the past ... [and with works of] the Chinese and Japanese, their [former] great teachers of art ...

'Make no mistake', Gras concluded, 'Art is necessary to the life of a people. It is more than a manifestation of its well-being. Art is the corner-stone of a civilisation'.

Thanks to its superior ability to analyse and comprehend the nature of the Vietnamese Other (imitators, not innovators; apathetic and thus liable, if left to themselves, to neglect to the point of amnesia the corner-stone of their civilisation), the French Self knew how to act to effect the changes necessary to save Vietnamese culture from the passivity of the Annamite soul. Gras' exposition illustrates perfectly the relationship between le génie français and l'âme annamite in this myth and projection. The active French Self initiates and effects, while the passive Annamite Other is acted upon.

One wonders whether Protectorate officials in the

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133. Ibid, p.460.

135. Cf. RS Pasquier's 1921 description of Annam as 'this country, where forgetfulness seems to have been borrowed from nature'. BAVH, VIII, 4 (1921), p.304. Or Guibier's comment that AVH members charged themselves 'to conserve that which resists time and all its attacks, but will not survive the forgetfulness of men: the very essence of things, their spirit, their soul ...' 'Le Gouverneur-général au "Vieux Hué"', BAVH, VII, 4 (1920), p.480.
1910s would have been quite so interested in fostering an
Annamite artistic renaissance if more of their energies had
been engaged in projects of genuine colonial change. Cer-
tainly as the 1920s advanced, the whole issue seems to have
narrowed to the activities of the Khai-Binh Museum. In the
1910s, however, the Friends of Old Hue threw themselves
into the task. Leading members met to draw up plans for an
Artistic Commission based on ideas Gras (and Orband else-
where) had advanced.\textsuperscript{137} It bore fruit the next year. An
Exposition of items, mainly borrowed from Vietnamese mem-
bers and their friends, 'amazed' Governor-General Sarraut
and other important 'personages' visiting Hue for the Nam-
Giao sacrifice of 1918 with its richness and elegance.\textsuperscript{138}
But as with the later Khai-Binh Museum, also run under the
Association's auspices, this Exposition never aimed simply
to display, but to educate local artists and artisans in
their own culture by providing them with models for
imitation.\textsuperscript{139} The crusading desire to extirpate the 'mi-
européen mi-annamite',\textsuperscript{140} wherever encountered, even led
members in 1915 to consider holding a contest to discover
the most beautiful examples of purely Annamite portals in

\textsuperscript{137}. L. Cadière, 'Projet pour l'organisation et le deve-
loppement de la Commission artistique des A.V.H.', BAVH,

\textsuperscript{138}. Cadière, 'L'Oeuvre', pp.39-40. Its success led to a
plan for an annual artistic Salon, which seems not to have
eventuated.

\textsuperscript{139}. P. Jabouille, 'Musée Khai-Binh: Historique du Musée',
BAVH, XVI, 2(1929), pp.92-93.

\textsuperscript{140}. Cadière, 'L'Oeuvre', p.39.
Hue, and to reward the owners. This vigilance also extended to certain musical performances arranged by some members of the Association, which 'confine[d] themselves to traditional music', with no attempts at 'musique métisse' allowed.

AVH perceived this project not as an attempt to censor Vietnamese artistic expression but as a generous and disinterested endeavour to preserve Vietnamese (racial-cultural) originality and stimulate a (controlled) renaissance by rescuing its arts from oblivion. Unconscious self-interest played a large part, however, especially the need to define and control cross-cultural contacts between French and Annamite. Like the officials in 1908 who saw reformist scholars acting outside administrative control as traditionalist malcontents rather than unauthorised experimentors in social change, so AVH members a decade also rejected and disparaged the novel, unconventional, experimental, cross-cultural, and evolving elements in Vietnamese arts and crafts. Whereas Levecque believed he championed modernity, the AVH strove to restore the traditional artistic heritage of the past. Yet like Levecque's discovery of a new critical faculty spreading among the people in 1908, the AVH's vision risked equally being blinkered by their own unconscious projections, in this case by their vision of Sino-Vietnamese elite culture pushed uniformly backwards in time. And although they were advised by their Vietnamese

141. Ibid.
142. Ibid, p.44. Though the traditional music turned out to be rather hard to appreciate for many.
friends, it nevertheless remained French views of what constituted good taste in Annamite art that basically dictated what was collected, preserved, and made available for current and future generations of artists to copy.

Their keenest collaborators, men from the royal clan and the Hue-based elite, products themselves of families with only a few generations of intensive sinicisation, willingly co-operated in this task. Amassing orthodox Sino-Vietnamese credentials enhanced their own self-image, as well as their links with French officials. But beyond that, a supporting role in the AVH as the mute, stylised chorus of the 'lettered aristocracy of the Annamite people' sufficed for most of them.\textsuperscript{143} They left to French members the heroic role of knights-errant, drawn by the romantic desire to defend old Hue and its traditional Sinic civilisation, as Cadière poetically portrayed the Association in a 1917 address. Inspired perhaps by the presence of Sarraut, Cadière let his fancy roam free. In a rather surprising metaphor from a missionary, he enthused at length about Hue as a beautiful woman whom a 'foreign knight' had loved from afar for centuries; and who, though 'defend[ing] herself shyly' from his first passionate advances, had soon 'given herself totally' to his embrace.\textsuperscript{144}

\textsuperscript{143}. As Cadière described them in 'Annex B. Notice sur la "Burma Research Society"', BAVH, IX, 4 (1922), p.375. Although Vietnamese did author articles, the minutes show they rarely spoke at meetings, probably because of poor French.

\textsuperscript{144}. 'Allocution du Redacteur du Bulletin', BAVH, IV, 1 (1917), pp.6-7. A rather more conventional sexual metaphor was of 'a marriage of convenience at the start progressively becoming a marriage of inclination', as AVH
In 1914, Cadière had dreamt of a learned society whose studies rested on intellectual and scientific rigour¹⁴⁵ and, looking back over its first decade of existence, he insisted on the scientific nature of the work they had achieved.¹⁴⁶ To its editor, the Bulletin served the Annamite cultural world like a herbarium 'that serve[d] the scientist to bring order into vast nature'.¹⁴⁷ Yet from quite early on, numbers of published articles and the atmosphere of the meetings that seeps through the minutes, seem far more romantic and antiquarian than rigorous or scientific. It was probably for this reason, rather than the 'lack of scientific spirit or love of science'¹⁴⁸ which Cadière charged them with, that kept most young French educated Vietnamese, outside the inner circle of collaborating families, from involving themselves with the Friends of Old Hue. But neither Cadière's disappointment at this aloofness, nor his uncharitable assessment of western-educated youth, sprang from personal causes alone. Modern science

President Gaïde put it at a reception for GG Merlin in 1923. Projected identity made him see this result as natural and 'inevitable, [for were] not the versatility, intelligence, finesse and irony of the Annamite race essentially French qualities?' 'Allocution de M. le Dr Gaïde', BAVH, X, 4 (1923), p. 503.

¹⁴⁵. He sought descriptions that were 'exact, precise, detailed, minute, in a word, scientific'. L. Cadière, 'Plan des recherches pour “Les Amis du Vieux Hué”', BAVH, I, 1 (1914), p. 6.


¹⁴⁷. From Cadière's speech to a visiting Parliamentary delegation. BAVH, X, 4 (1923), p. 483

¹⁴⁸. Cadière, "Burma Research Society", p. 378. To his chagrin, the British group attracted many western-educated natives into its ranks, unlike the AVH.
played a talismanic role in colonial mythology: the possession of science formed the essential characteristic that invariably distinguished advanced from backward races. It was to superior European science, for example, that the French Self usually attributed the ability of the *génie français* to penetrate and comprehend the Annamite soul.

But "science" enjoyed another role in colonial myth in Vietnam, one which required a certain degree of Vietnamese co-operation to carry out. Science provided the fructifying force by which the union of French genius and Annamite soul would bring forth 'a new civilisation, original and charming', on the Pacific shores. Pasquier explained it all to a group of visiting French school-girls in 1924. France, he revealed, had brought to the Annamites 'what Asia [had] always lacked: a method of thought to germinate and make fruitful [its] conceptions'. Despite being the birthplace of all great religions, and still teeming with 'prophets, magi, thaumaturges [and] even sages', Asia until now had never spawned a single 'thinker, in the philosophical sense of the word'. But at last, thanks to France, its opportunity had arrived. And despite the difficulties posed by the forces of 'blind resistance', by the 'obstinate ignorance of those who, contemptuous of the present day would call down anathema in the name of archaic and outworn traditions', the chance to create this new (hybrid) civilisation some time in the future represented 'a fine undertaking for a people' and an 'admirable ideal to propose to them'.147
But what if the people to whom it was offered had other ideas? Basically, the myth rejected this possibility, for it defined the ability to think clearly as a European attribute. Further, the Annamite role in its grand schema was passive. Like Sophia by Logos, the (feminine) *l'âme annamite* would be penetrated, quickened, and fructified with new life by the decisive intelligence of the (masculine) *génie français*. No place existed here for the Annamite Other to presume to initiate, or to act for itself. It was not up to young Vietnamese, for instance, to pretend to judge for themselves the value of French colonialism - not even implicitly, as in ignoring the benefits offered by joining a scientific society like the AVH. Such puzzling refusals to grasp opportunities reinforced negative racial stereotypes, drawing an uncharacteristically stinging comment even from a well-wisher like Cadière.

But as the 1920s proceeded, young western-educated Vietnamese increasingly irritated French colonial mythologists. Numbers of them insisted on stepping outside the limits of projected Otherness (and therefore of behaviour acceptable to the French Self) to act on and test out their own evolving sense of identity. But as we mentioned in the Introduction, in colonial society this became a perilous path for those who trode it: rejecting the projection by being oneself in public automatically challenged both the power structure it supported and the collective sense of Self that controlled and defined Otherness. We often get

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435. All quotes from 'La Mission des étudiantes françaises', ATK, 25 Dec 1924. The whole speech forms an almost complete statement of Pasquier’s version of this myth.
the impression from the sources that such people tended to
focus French disquiet, distrust, and anger well before they
had actually committed themselves to any genuinely anti-
colonial course. Their public refusal, wittingly or not, to
conform to the perceptions of Otherness projected by the
colonial Self seems to have been offence enough. The offi-
cial attitude towards Phan Chu Trinh in Annam immediately
comes to mind in this context; but too so does the
treatment of many among the 1920s generation. To colonial
mythologists, their behaviour made them seem neither fish
nor fowl, having willfully rejected their own culture with-
out, however, being capable of understanding (rather than
simply imitating) that of France.

AVH stalwart and Annam Sûreté Chief, Léon Sogny, for
example, sneered in 1926-27 at this new generation with its
'superficial western studies' and its 'illusions about the
extent of its knowledge'. One could not reason with such
'semi-educated, semi-evolved malcontents', Sogny repon-
ted, for he had tried to show them the error of their ways
and failed. Fortunately, their foolish disdain for their

150. But ironically projected identity helped save him.
Phan’s attacks on the traditional regime had found favour
in some French circles at the time, and predisposed GG Klab-
bukowski to favourable treatment. Ultimately he was allowed
to go into exile in France. ‘Note on the Phan Chu Trinh af-

151. All quotes, Annam Sûreté report, 1926-27, pp.1-3. AEP
GGIC 7-F 18

152. Others experienced it, too, including the French
judge who found himself arguing the benefits of colonialism
with Nguyen The Nghiep in the dock, before imprisoning him
for trying to leave the country illegally. ‘Le Procès de
own traditions would ensure they enjoyed no political influence over the peasants.

Other colonial French tried paternally to direct this misguided youth back to its own cultural roots. The journalist, Peyrot, for instance, urged in 1929 that Pierre Pasquier's *L'Annam d'autrefois*, reprinted and newly fashionable during his Governor-Generalship, 'should be in the hands of all the students of Cochinchina and Tonkin'. Pasquier's untimely death in 1934 would eulogise him as the French magician of the Annamite soul, something he was said to 'comprehend, in the true sense of the word, that is to say with all his sensibility tending towards the gift of divination'. But even before this apotheosis, the influence of colonial myths of Self and Other caused Frenchmen like Peyrot to believe that Pasquier understood the Vietnamese better than they understood themselves. And by studying *L'Annam d'autrefois*, therefore young Vietnamese would discover the truth about the French (Self) as well learning,

from a Frenchman of the elite, respect for the traditions that they stupidly pride themselves on despising. They would be instructed on the real sentiments that decide our conduct in this land, where we have not come to destroy but to add to what already exists. They would draw from it a lesson in good taste and moderation that would [also] not be superfluous. Listening to M. Pas-

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183. 'Pierre Pasquier', ATK, 21 Jan 1934. Cf. RS Thibaud-deau's eulogy to the Council: 'Governor-General Pasquier was an Annamite in his thinking and in his heart. We all considered him as the guide who was surest, clearest, and most to be listened to and respected'. CM, 18 Jan 1934. ICNF 291/2508

quier proclaim the excellence of certain of their institutions, they would be persuaded that we do not despise them as they make out.

Peyrot's plea to young French-educated Vietnamese to let the French (Self) redeem their flaws, and remake them closer to the real nature of the Vietnamese (Other) showed the influence of the AVH's mythologising from the previous decade. By then, however, this refractory and turbulent youth, whose behaviour flouted both their own people's fine traditions and French expectations, had driven some long-standing AVH members virtually to disown them entirely. In 1933, for example, Hippolyte Le Breton rejected many of his own former students as 'much more French than Annamite'. It was no compliment, however, to be branded as 'impatient to command before having learned to obey, impatient to arrive per fas et nefas, seeking only to satisfy [their] gross pleasures'.

But also by then, Le Breton's twenty-five years in Annam had brought him full circle, to an emotional identification with the (idealised) Annamite past. He mourned the loss of the former Rites, which by comparison with current times now seemed to present 'certain admirable aspects', as did the example of the disappearing society that had produced them. Consonant with this came a personal identification with the traditional literati whom, thirty years before, Doumer and his ilk had happily consigned to the garbage bin of history.

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156. Ibid, p.204. He even dated the article, 'Hue, 1
Let us study, through the example that "the Life of the Illustrious Men of Annam" gives us, the beauties of the wisdom of the Far-East, in order to learn to safeguard them.

And myself too, like the fine lettré of Annam, ... am turning towards the past, regretting to see extinguished, little by little, what used to be true, good, great, and fine in "le lettré".

This example underlines the increased flexibility and sophistication available in colonial myths and projections of Self and Other by the 1930s. In this instance we see how identifying with a nostalgic, idealised Vietnamese representation (like the honest hard-working son of the soil, or the old scholar steeped in Chinese learning) could let a colonial Frenchman dismiss or question the authenticity of living, contemporary Vietnamese whose lives had been changed or distorted by colonialism. Reacting against the disappointments of the present, he could still imagine, and indulge himself in, a sympathetic sense of connectedness with the "real" or "essential" qualities of Vietnam or the Vietnamese Other.

This degree of sophistication in perceptions of Self and Other reflected the extent to which the colonial political myths that validated the projections had, by the end of the 1920s, been naturalised and locally-adapted. To all French (and many Vietnamese eyes), they appeared historically grounded in Vietnamese sources, based on objectively-verifiable facts rather than French projections and imported metropolitan perceptions. Their foreign roots had long

March, 1933 (6th day of the 2nd lunar month, of the cyclical year qui-dau, 8th of the Bao-Bai era)."
been forgotten in a maturing process that merged and inter-layered all the qualities of projected inferiority and identity. It resulted in a composite, all-purpose image of Vietnamese identity, unconsciously organised to satisfy the vital colonial needs of security and superiority vis-à-vis the colonised Vietnamese. For this reason, it should be stressed that no matter how anchored in native history, culture and society colonial understanding of the Vietnamese might have appeared, nor how much individual Frenchmen like Pasquier might have admired aspects of the Vietnamese tradition, the colonial myths and projections of Self and Other upon which the colonial understanding of Vietnamese cultural identity rested never transcended their racist origins in nineteenth century European imperialist myths and projections. Images of Vietnamese cultural identity contaminated by these sources, even at second hand, should therefore no longer be accepted by scholars without a prior critical reassessment or much more corroborative research.

But the great, enduring success of these myths of Self and Other in colonial Vietnam, and of the little China fallacy that they championed and mythologised in turn, derived less from their apparent naturalisation or the support they leant to dreams of racial superiority. Rather it arose from their ability to unify the paired opposites of Same and Inferior in the projection of Vietnamese Otherness. Where 1908 had unconsciously challenged the easy French sense of mastery over their alien environment, by 1928 the problem was resolved. The French Self now owned the Vietnamese Other: from then on, nothing the Other did could ever again
threaten to take the Self so completely by surprise. Vietnamese actions might still anger or disappoint Frenchmen, of course; but even examples of that frustrating 'mentalité incompréhensible', always lurking in the dark recesses of the native mind, could be adequately accounted for. All exits were covered, all entries guarded, and all borders patrolled, for the past, the present, and the future.

The myths also provided for all expected political eventualities, as Pasquier illustrates in our concluding example. Pasquier's knowledge of the Annamite soul assured him that blind, atavistic forces persisted deep within it. They might take the form of reactionary traditionalism or, among the peasants especially, of fatalism, credulity, and sudden violence. To the Governor-General in 1928, the anti-tax movement took the form of a sort of sickness, a mass contagion welling up from that deep region of sentiments, beyond the sway of reason, that Le Bon had shown most motivated the common people. As Pasquier informed a Parisian audience:

The amorphous masses ... who forget benefits received, who let themselves be lulled by words and chimeras, and who abandon themselves to the great fatalism which weighs on all Asiatic destinies.

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1. The title of an ATK article concerning peasant deaths consequent on sleeping with their heads on railway lines. The practice irritated the author: railways were meant to symbolised colonial progress; but by 'tak[ing] the railway for a bedroom', peasants implicitly domesticated the French achievement to their own uses. And despite the title, the author could explain the practice on the basis of natural Vietnamese Inferiority: the peasants hoped the noise of the train would wake them, but 'forgot the depths of the Annamite slumber' and died instead. ATK, 15 Sept 1928

... [would] for an hour of intoxication follow all those willing to speak of their chimera.

It is in this psychology of the native masses, the Annamites especially, that we must find the explanation of our marvellous conquest, made with four men and a corporal ... [It also explained 1908] when the bewitched people, following leaders [and] without understanding anything of the import of what they were doing, suffered a sort of vertigo, a real epidemic contagion which pushed them into the wildest adventures.

And it is this understanding of the instability of the masses, whom education has not yet been able to modify, that could cause some fear of spontaneous infatuations against which the suggestions of reason would be in vain.

When the Nghe-Tinh rebellion broke out two years later, its explanation lay ready at hand, indeed, anticipated by the myth. Not only did Pasquier admonish the people of the two rebellious provinces in its terms, but the official enquiry into the revolt, the Morché Commission, listed its argument as a direct cause of the rebellion:

The Annamite peasant, whose credulity is extreme, accepted all [the communists promises of land and tax reform] without troubling themselves about whether they [could be] realised. But [the peasant] only asks to be deceived, for between reality and the supernatural, his simple, naive soul, in whose depths is imprinted a certain oriental poetry, will always go towards the latter.

Not only did the myth explain the forces of blind peasant atavism, it equally accounted for potential political difficulties with all other Vietnamese, moderates included. The problem would be solved with the appearance, some time in the future, of the first Vietnamese generation of logic-

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140. 'Proclamation du Gouverneur-général', ATK, 8 Oct 1930. He also demanded they 'listen to those who speak to you in the name of a powerful nation which wants to protect you against your own weakness'.

al thinkers. Until then, however, the local people would manifestly require French guidance; but France might find it difficult to understanding all their demands, since they themselves were not yet capable of thinking them out and expressing them clearly. Once more, Pasquier explained the problem in 1928.

Between the two extremes of the old, lettré opposition, 'the enemy of government whatever its form ... violently aristocratic and oligarchic', on the one hand, and the revolutionary nationalists who (as Annamites) were 'incapable of founding a doctrine [and] seek among foreigners [for] a program, a formula', on the other, stood an 'intelligent patriotic elite'. When this group properly evolved, they would join France in founding a new civilisation in Asia. Pasquier had spoken at length with representatives of these men, and had found them 'remarkably intelligent, with great finesse of mind, fine penetration of thought, [and] much wisdom'. Unfortunately, however, they could not 'define their demands clearly and exactly'. Their problem stemmed from moral rather than material (or political) causes: it was a matter of 'susceptibility, of self-respect'. And, he might have added, they needed to serve an apprenticeship in logic for, while they 'confusedly sought social equality, ... often through incomprehension they [were] incapable of practising and utilising the freedom already accord[ed] them'.

By 1928, then, the myths of Self and Other covered all

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102. All quotes, Pasquier, 'La Politique', pp.45-46.
contemporary political possibilities, and met all medium
term eventualities, with the promise of a glorious result
in the long term. But it could all only come to fruition,
as Pasquier urged the French Government in 1931, if France
held fast to her 'apostolic ideal' in Indochina. Elements in the metropole were beginning to acquire some
doubts by then; but in the colony he need not have worried.
By the 1930s, the political myths he had helped shape had
become integral to the thoughts and perceptions of the
entire French community. Few might have believed every
feature or image, but none at the time disputed the power-
ful colonial discourse on identity they had helped create
and sustain.

And so well adapted to Vietnam did its images and
arguments appear, so apparently historical, so seemingly
locally derived, that these representations of Vietnamese
cultural identity, past and present, developed a life of
their own in western scholarship that enabled them to
outlive the society of their birth by several decades.

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163. Resume of GG Pasquier's speech to the Superior
Colonial Council, 30 Apr 1931. AOM ICNF 331/2675
A Note on Popular Rebellions in Early Nguyen Vietnam

In the late 1950s and 1960s, Marxist Vietnamese historiography of the pre-colonial Nguyen period repeatedly claimed that the dynasty had been widely rejected right from the start, and that this popular revulsion had been expressed in continuous outbreaks of anti-dynastic peasant revolt. In the words of Tran Van Giau, it seemed like 'anyone who wanted to raise a rebellion against the court could influence large numbers of the peasant masses to support him, whether he was a civilian or a soldier, of high or common status, literate or illiterate, from the coastal plains or the Highlands.'¹ In 1959, using published Nguyen court records, Chu Thien counted about five hundred such uprisings in eighty years, excluding banditry and 101 foreign incursions.² In 1964 Nguyen Phan Quang sharpened Chu Thien's rounded figures into the following table of popular uprisings per reign:³

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reign</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gia-Long (1802-1820)</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minh-Mang (1820-1841)</td>
<td>234</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thieu-Tri (1841-1847)</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tu-Duc (1847-1883)</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>466</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


³. Nguyen Phan Quang, 'Phong trao nong dan', p.44.
By the 1970s, the image of 'peasant rebellions (khoi nghia cua nong dan) [breaking] out continuously and everywhere' in Nguyen Vietnam had assumed the status of an historical datum for Ha-noi historians. From there it moved into western historiography, with both Alexander Woodside and Le Thanh Khoi incorporating versions of it in their writings on the era. But a closer examination of the methodology underlying the analysis, and of the figures upon which the interpretation rests, reveal such basic flaws that the Ha-noi claim must be set aside, for the Gia-Long reign at least.

First, unexplained discrepancies exist between different researchers' results. In 1959, Chu Thien reported that his figures derived from an analysis of the Dai-Nam Thuc Luc Chinh Bien (the court Historiographies). When Nguyen Phan Quang and Bang Huy Van examined the Gia-Long era in detail in 1965, they too consulted the Thuc Luc, among other sources including French historical studies. Yet despite making a wider search, the second authors only reported 'over 50' revolts, or almost one-third fewer than Chu Thien.

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Thien. They made no attempt to reconcile the discrepancy with the earlier total, nor even to note it, notwithstanding Nguyen Phan Quang’s own published endorsement of Chu Thien’s higher figure the previous year. What became of twenty missing rebellions?

Errors in calculation alone seem unlikely to account for such a large disparity in results. Rather, it suggests conflicting definitions over what constituted a ‘peasant uprising’, which is what both sources supposedly counted. But nothing in either text indicates if this was in fact the cause of the discrepancy. We therefore have no way of assessing which figure is more acceptable - or, indeed, whether either should be regarded as accurate. After all, Kieu Oanh Mau, the Confucian chronicler of nineteenth century anti-dynastic rebellions, only recorded eleven internal revolts for the Gia-Long era in his 1901 volume based on much the same sources. Yet Chu Thien’s figures form the main statistical plank sustaining the interpretation of general and unprecedented peasant unrest from the start of the Nguyen era. The failure (or inability) of subsequent researchers to verify his total for the Gia-Long period must call all his figures into question. Until the basic data are re-examined, then, Ha-noi historians’ claims about the scope of nineteenth century peasant revolt must

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10. Kieu Oanh Mau, Ban trieu ban nghich lietuyen, trans Tran Khai Van (Sai-gon, 1963), pp.6-28
be treated far more cautiously than they have been, especially for the Gia-Long period.

Second, a consideration of the evidence adduced to support the 1960s thesis of immediate, generalised and ongoing peasant rejection of the dynasty raises serious doubts about how many of these so-called "peasant rebellions" were any such thing. For the Gia-Long reign, the main question revolves around the appropriate classification of the armed raids of Highland tribes against settled Vietnamese lowland communities in Quang-ngai. In cases like the later Nong Van Van revolt in Bac-ky, for example, such movements clearly represented anti-government rebellions, though hardly qualifying for the "peasant" tag that Chu Thien and others have awarded them. But where the Thuong of Ba-vach are concerned, the situation is far less obvious.

The Ba-vach tribes (Cua, Hré, Sédang, Bhanar and Dié) bulked large among the mountain peoples characterised as 'high savages' (Moí cao), 'wild savages' (Moí hoang) or 'barbarian devils' (ac man) by south-central Trung-ky Vietnamese. Their tribal lands lay beyond the Ba-vach pass, historically at or past the fringe of Vietnamese political influence and control. Tribes from this region had first clashed with Vietnamese troops in 1540; but afterwards both sides settled into a pattern of co-existence for two centuries.

From the mid-eighteenth century on, however, the Ba-vach Thuong earned their lowland reputation as the cruel-

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11. I am grateful to Li Ta Na for this linguistic data.
lest, least predictable, most uncontrollable, and terrify-
ing of the Highland peoples. In the reign of chua Vo-vuong (1738-65), bad harvests in the mountains coincided with a Vietnamese push to subject these distant tribes to regular control and taxation by the Bang-trong authorities. Food shortages and official harrassment sparked large-scale raiding into Quang-ngai by the Da-vach Thuong in 1750. Chased back into the mountains in 1751, the Thuong were tricked into submission by Nguyen Cu Trinh, who also tried to redress their justifiable grievances against corrupt local officials. An uneasy peace followed until 1770, when similar circumstances triggered a second major assault on the coastal plains that only ended with the Tay-son rebellion a couple of years later.\(^\text{12}\) Thirty years of civil strife followed. In the nineteenth century, Nguyen court documents recorded repeated raids on Vietnamese communities in Quang-ngai by the marauding Thuong of Ba-vach. On several occasions in the first reign, Gia-Long's great general, Le Van Duyet, marched his army from the South to repress them, but always without lasting success. Finally, late in the reign, the throne accept Duyet's advice and ordered the construction of a "Great Barbarian Quelling Wall" (Trinh Man Truong Luy), with 115 ten-man watch towers strung along

its 150 kilometres. Even so, it failed to stop the raids, which continued for many years after.

In the light of this background, then, how should these attacks be classified for the Gia-Long reign? Is it appropriate to regard them as 'peasant rebellions' against the Nguyen dynasty, as Chu Thien and others have done; or as 'class struggles' (dau tranh giai cap) as Nguyen Phan Quang and Bang Huy Van have termed them? And should we accept the Thuong of Ba-vach, as Nguyen Phan Quang and Bang Huy Van have done, as nghia quan (partisans of the just cause) engaged in a khoi nghia (righteous revolt) against Gia-Long?14

The first issue is easily dismissed. The anachronistic pseudo-Marxist terminology of class struggle has no place in the analysis of this phenomenon in late traditional Vietnam. Nor should the fantastic assumption that ethnically-distinct mountain tribes can be subsumed analytically within the category of "Vietnamese peasantry" be accepted. Clearly, raiding Highland warriors should not be confused with 'peasant rebels', nor can their incursions be regarded as 'class struggles' in any meaningful sense of the term.

The second matter holds more interest. Up to a point, the Thuong raids were politically motivated, and anti-Nguyen. Tribal peoples had fought in the Tay-son army, and some may have continued to begrudge the Nguyen their victory, during the Gia-Long reign especially. But for most,


raids on the coastal settlements reacted less against the ruling family than against royal attempts to push effective Vietnamese control deeper into the mountains. Thuong incursions dramatised tribal peoples' unwillingness to surrender their autonomy to lowland political control, at the same time, it should not be forgotten, that they provided real economic benefits to those involved. From a Vietnamese perspective, therefore, it seems ironic to say the least to designate as "partisans of the just cause" nineteenth century tribal warriors who routinely preyed on Vietnamese villages in order to rob or enslave the occupants, and who almost always retreated to their mountain redoubts rather than fight the royal forces sent to defend the peasants. That the Thuong rejected outside control, rather than simply the Nguyen dynasty, was also underlined at the end of the century. When the French began to extend colonial power to the Highlands in the late 1890s, they met the same stubborn resistance as the Vietnamese had earlier done. It required six suppression campaigns, plus numerous patrols by French-officered Garde indigène equipped with modern weapons, before most of the moutain peoples from Quang-nam to Phu-yen submitted to colonial authority. Even then, as late as 1905, only the appearance of a strong French force served to deter the Sedang of Binh-dinh from their 'usual January incursions' against Vietnamese villages. In historical context, then, it is surely more appropriate to classi-

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fy these disturbances among the incidents of banditry and foreign incursions that Chu Thien, Nguyen Phan Quang and Bang Huy Van classed separately from internal revolts and peasant rebellions.

If we exclude the Thuong raids as cross-border, inter-ethnic conflicts, quite a different picture of Vietnamese popular unrest during the first reign emerges from that presented by Nguyen Phan Quang and Bang Huy Van. Although the authors accepted that, south of Nghe-an, the struggle movement against Gia-Long lacked the scope and cohesion seen further north, they nevertheless insisted that 'the central and southern Trung-bo regions, just like the Gia-dinh area, were not peaceful places during the eighteen year Gia-Long reign', and that 'khoi nghia worth recording broke out' in the Centre during these years.\(^1\) They backed these contentions with a chart (reproduced below) that tabulated the years of armed disturbances, province by province, between 1802 and 1819. Quang-ngai featured on it each year of the reign, outstripping every other province as a hot-bed of revolt — but only, according to the text, on account of the Ba-vach Thuong. It was to this chart — and the Quang-ngai example in particular\(^2\) — that Alexander Woodside sourced his claim that rebellions in the Gia-Long

\(^1\) Ibid, p.17.

\(^2\) Woodside, Model, p.311, fn 65. A later essay stressed the point: 'some 105 discernible peasant uprisings have been counted for the brief eighteen years of Gia-Long's reign, including eighteen, or one per year, in just one province (Quang Ngai).’ ‘The Historical Background’, in Nguyen Du (ed. and trans. Huynh Sanh Thong), The Tale of Kieu (New York: Vintage Books), 1973, p.xiv.
period were 'well distributed regionally'.\textsuperscript{18} (It is also apparently due to a misreading of the chart that he has consistently misreported its authors' findings as 105 uprisings under Gia-Long instead of the 'over 50' mentioned in the text.\textsuperscript{19})

But deleting the Thuong raids changes the pattern of internal revolt under Gia-Long dramatically. Popular unrest emerges as an almost exclusively Northern phenomenon, as the authors' own table confirms when divided into former Bang-ngoai and former Bang-trong, as we have done. Even as it stands, without any amendment, the table shows disturbances running at almost four to one in favour of the North (81 to 24). Subtracting the Thuong raids from the southern total sends the years of disturbances there plummetting to a mere six. And, once more excluding Quang-ngai, we find that only four out of fifteen provinces were involved, none of them south of Binh-dinh, compared to one at least in every former Bang-ngoai province.\textsuperscript{20}

Thus, rather than prove the thesis that the whole country rejected the Nguyen right from the start, the only detailed statistical evidence presented in \textit{Nhien Cuu Lich Woodside, Model, p.135.}

\textsuperscript{18}. While 105 entries appear on the chart, it does not record separate incidents but only marks the years in which disturbances occurred in individual provinces. It does not indicate whether multiple outbreaks may have happened in the same province in any one year, nor whether consecutive entries for particular provinces represented the same or different uprisings. Its value is limited accordingly.

\textsuperscript{20}. The authors claimed that, despite the failure of court records to report khoi nghia in Nam-ky during the period, 'regular disorders' still occurred there ['Bau tranh giai cap', p.19]. They never marked any on the chart, however.
Su in the 1960s indicated the opposite. For the Gia-Long reign, the basic Northern provenance of anti-dynastic uprisings is incontrovertible, and suggests that, like Mac Bang Dung in the sixteenth century and Quang-Trung in the late eighteenth century, Gia-Long proclaimed his dynasty before conquering his kingdom.

**TABLE: ARMED DISTURBANCES IN THE GIA-LONG REIGN**

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| Lang-son       | + | + |
| Cao-bang       | + |
| Tuyen-quang    | + | + | + | + | + |
| Thai-nguyen    | + | + | + | + | + | + | + | + |
| Quang-yen      | + |
| Hung-hoa       | + | + |
| Kinh-bac       | + | + | + | + |
| Hai-duong      | + | + | + |
| Son-nam-thuong | + | + | + | + | + | + |
| Son-nam-ha     | + | + | + | + | + |
| Son-tay        | + | + | + | + | + |
| Thanh-hoa      | + | + | + | + | + | + | + |
| Nghe-an        | + | + | + | + |
| Quang-binh     | + |
| Quang-tri      | + | + |
| Quang-duc      | + |
| Quang-nam      | + |
| Quang-ngai     | + | + | + | + | + | + | + | + | + | + | + | + | + | + |
| Binh-dinh      | + |
| Phu-yen        | + |
| Binh-hoa       | + |
| Binh-thuan     | + |
| Gia-dinh       | + |

Every year marked + there was an armed disturbance in the area.

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<th>Soh-tay</th>
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**Table 1: Doctoral Graduates (Tien Si/Pho Bang) by Province**
### Table 2. Graduate Numbers per Decade, 1822-1879.

#### A. By region

#### B. By selected areas

#### Table 2A

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These three areas produced 65% of all doctoral graduates in the period, in roughly comparable proportions:

- **Ha-noi/Nam-dinh** = 22% of all graduates (or 53% of all Bac-ky graduates)
- **Nghê-Tinh** = 20% of all graduates (or 36% of all Trung-ky graduates)
- **Binh-Tri-Thiên** = 23% of all graduates (or 40% of all Trung-ky graduates)
TABLE 3: ANALYSIS OF COMPARATIVE CAREER SUCCESS OF METROPOLITAN GRADUATES, BY SELECTED AREA (1822-1862)

Introductory notes

- The period chosen gives the biggest sample while largely avoiding colonial distortions.
- The years represent successive examinations.
- Administrative grades (1-5) include both classes, thus:
  1 includes the 8 đại học sĩ;
  2 includes both levels of provincial governor (tổng đốc and tuấn phủ) and heads of ministries (thượng-tho) plus their deputies (tham-tri).
- In education, 4 refers mainly to teachers at the Quốc Tu Gián and 5 to provincial professors (dốc học).
- ‘Phủ’ refers to those whose highest recorded grade was district magistrate (tri phủ (5-2) or tri huyện (6-2)).
- ‘Other’ refers to any other position in grades 6 and 7.
- UNKNOWN includes those with insufficient details, those who did not become mandarins, and those who were awarded honorary grades without holding office.
- Bold numbers show the highest career grades achieved (ignoring later fluctuations or posthumous promotions).
- Information in brackets summarises individual career fluctuations noted in the text, thus:
  [B]: dismissed
  [Bx]: dismissed; reintegrated and reached numbered level
  [Bx*]: dismissed; rejoined education at numbered level
  [BM]: dismissed, redeemed himself in the military
  [DR]: demoted, and allowed to retire
  [Dx]: demoted, but finished career at indicated level
  [D]: demoted; no further information
  [Dx*]: demoted to indicated level in education
  [Xx*]: ‘transferred’ to indicated level in education
  [E]: text say ‘caught in error’, but without details.
  where x is the number of the new mandarinal grade.
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<td>phu/h.</td>
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<td>5</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<td>0</td>
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<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>24</td>
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TABLE 5. PROVINCIAL BACKGROUND OF TIẾN SĨ/PHÓ BẢNG WHO REACHED THE POWER ELITE [1-1 TO 2-1] BEFORE 1884 (examinations of 1822 to 1856)

**A. Data**

**Note**
Those who were dismissed or demoted and failed to regain their original rank are indicated by an asterisk; from Bắc-kỳ provinces appear in bold type; pho bang are underlined.

**Posthumous promotions are not included.**

**Abbreviations**

Highest ranks:
1-1 One of the dien rank of đại học sĩ, or an 'imperial tutor'
1-2 One of the four hiếp biên rank of đại học sĩ
2-1a Board President - thuong tho
2-1b Provincial Governor-General - tang doc

**Provinces:**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1822</th>
<th>1826</th>
<th>1829</th>
<th>1832</th>
<th>1835</th>
<th>1838</th>
<th>1841</th>
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<table>
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<th>2-1b</th>
<th>2-1b*</th>
<th>2-la</th>
<th>2-1b</th>
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<td>[HN]</td>
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1842 1843 1844 1846 1849 1851 1853 1856

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2-1a</th>
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<th>2-1a*</th>
<th>2-1a*</th>
<th>2-1a*</th>
<th>2-1a</th>
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<td>[TT]</td>
<td>[TT]</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-2</td>
<td></td>
<td>[TT]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>[TT]</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[ST]</td>
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### Analysis

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<td>Total</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thừa thiên</td>
<td>6 (or 23%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 at 1-1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 at 1-2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 at 2-la</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 at 2-1b</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 at 1-1 (or 100%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 at 1-2 (or 66%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 at 2-la (or 18%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0 at 2-1b</td>
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</table>

**Thương-tho’**

The men in the top two grades were **thương-tho’**, giving a total of 16 Board Presidents.

Their provincial backgrounds were:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Province</th>
<th>Grade</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Trung-ký</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bac-ký</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nam-ký</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thừa-thiên</td>
<td>[1*]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bác-ninh</td>
<td>[1*]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vĩnh-long</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hà-tĩnh</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nam-dinh</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quảng-ngãi</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quảng-nam</td>
<td>[*]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

ie Trung-ký totalled 13 (or 81%).

Of those 16, 4 were dismissed or demoted [*] and never regained **thương tho’** status (although the Bác-ninh **thương-tho’**; Nguyễn Tư Gian, rose again to **tổng đốc**).

**Tổng đốc**

There were 9 Provincial Governors (**tổng đốc**) listed.

Their provincial backgrounds were:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Province</th>
<th>Grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Trung-ký</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bac-ký</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nam-ký</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hà-tĩnh</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bác-ninh</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hậu-duệng</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hà-nội</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sóc-tây</td>
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</table>

ie Bác-ký totalled 7 (or 77%).

**Phó bảng**

The sample contained 5 **phó bảng** (or 19%).

Their backgrounds were:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Province</th>
<th>Grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Trung-ký</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bac-ký</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nam-ký</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thừa-thiên</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nam-dinh</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quảng-ngãi</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

ie all three from Thừa-thiên reached 1-1 to 1-2.
TABLE 6. FAMILY EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUNDS OF TIEN SÝ/PHÓ BANG, BY SELECTED AREAS (1822-1884)

Notes

A. Central Trung-ky (Bình-Trị-Thiên and Quảng-nam)
B. Thanh-Nghê-Tinh
C. Bắc-ky (Hà-nội, Nam-định, Bắc-ninh)

NB: QTBKL does not record relatives with tử t'ai titles.

The 10 provinces provide an 80% sample of all graduates (including all families over two generations), and subdivide into areas with roughly equal cohorts.

Table 6A. Generations of graduates per area

<table>
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<th></th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>total</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sole grad</td>
<td>70 (67%)</td>
<td>47 (50%)</td>
<td>65 (61%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>others</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1st gen</td>
<td>16 (15%)</td>
<td>18 (19%)</td>
<td>13 (12%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd gen</td>
<td>7 (8%)</td>
<td>24 (26%)</td>
<td>18 (17%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>same gen only</td>
<td>11 (10%)</td>
<td>4 (4%)</td>
<td>11 (10%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

graduates who became fathers, uncles, or grandfathers of cu nhan or higher graduates (into the twentieth century)
graduates whose fathers, grandfathers, or uncles already had high academic titles. Where graduates fitted both categories, they appear here.

Table 6B. Nineteenth Century 'Great Scholar Families'

The table examines family success rates over generations. Families counted once only.
QTBKL includes details of close patrilineal relatives, as well as matrilineal uncles and (unspecified) nephews and cousins.
Four Northern families included one generation under the Le.

<table>
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<tr>
<th></th>
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<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>total families</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>with multiple grad</td>
<td>30 (30%)</td>
<td>36 (42%)</td>
<td>31 (31%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[multiple ts/pb]</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of those families -

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 gen only</td>
<td>6 (20%)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>7 (22%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 gen</td>
<td>23 (76%)</td>
<td>32 (89%)</td>
<td>20 (64%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 gen</td>
<td>1 (3%)</td>
<td>4 (11%)</td>
<td>3 (10%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 gen</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1 (3%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

two Hà-tĩnh families produced 3 ts/pb graduates each
including non-consecutive generations
including Hoàng Tế Mẫu who moved from Sông-tây to Hà-nội
GLOSSARY OF VIETNAMESE WORDS

Personal Names or Titles

<table>
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<th>English Name</th>
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<td>Hà Huy Tập</td>
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<td>Bùi Ngọc Quí</td>
<td>Hảm-Nghi</td>
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<td>Hiệp-Hoa</td>
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<td>Hồ Tùng Mẫu</td>
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<td>Hồ Sĩ Tuyên</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Boàn Trường</td>
<td>Huế-vu'o'ng</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Huỳnh Công</td>
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Kiến-dụng nam
Kiến-Phú'ô'c
Kiến-thái vu'o'ng
Khải-Bình

Lê Duy Bá
Lê Duy Hoàn
Lê Duy Lu'o'ng
Lê Duy Minh
Lê Hồng Phong
Lê Hồng So'n
Lê Lợi
Lê Phát An
Lê Quang Bình
Lê Sĩ
Lê Thành-tông
Lê Văn Duyệt
Lê Văn Khôi
Lu'u Văn Bình
Lý

Mạc
Minh-Mạng
Minh-vu'o'ng
Mục-vu'o'ng
Mủ-Du'o'ng

Nam-Phu'o'ng
Nông Văn Văn
Ngo Bình Diễm

Ngô Bình Khả
Nguy Khắc Tuan
Nguyễn Ái Quốc
Nguyễn Ánh
Nguyễn Bá Nhi
Nguyễn Công Trú'
Nguyễn Cu'u Kiêu
Nguyễn Cu'u Tru'o'ng
Nguyễn Du
Nguyễn Bằng Giai
Nguyễn Bằng Hành
Nguyễn Bằng Tuấn
Nguyễn Bình Chịếu
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Minh-hu'o'ng
tổng độc
tổng tran

Nam Giao
tôn sinh
nam tiền
tôn thật
Nơi-các
tuần phủ
Nữ Công Học Hội
Thái-miêu
nghĩa sĩ đoàn
Thái-tử Thieu-bảo
nhan vật
Tham tán đại thần

Ông lỗ'n
tham tri
ông quan
thiên táng
ông trừ'i
Thiên-tử
Phật sùng
Thieu bảo
phe tu' văn
Thieu phó
phó bảng
Thieu su'
phó mả
thông chế
phức đư'c
Thu'q'ng
quán
thu'q'ng-tho'
quốc chưa
trạng nguyên
Quốc Học
trần thụ
quốc ngữ'
tri huyễn
Quốc Tụ' Giám
tri phụ

tạ tổn chánh
trườ'nh'
tê tu'ô'ng
trung-nghĩa
Văn chúc
Văn-minh-diện Bài-học-sĩ
văn thần
vẻ
Việt-Minh

Vinh
vua
vua bếp
vũ ㄎ fooled
vũ ㄎ fooled thơ

Phrases
An-nam Như-tây Du-học-bào trố-hội
Báo cần gia tiên nhập!
Báo ăn gia thủy nhập!
Sĩ tử gia thủy nhập!

dây vua không Khả, Đạo mà không Bài
phù Lê diệt Trịnh
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