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INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

| | |
|----------------------------|----|
| Roots of S. VN Nationalism | 1 |
| Lapthe Flora — US General | 15 |
| Inside An Loc | 15 |
| The Lotus & the Storm | 16 |
| Fall/Autumn | 16 |



SAIGON ARTS, CULTURE & EDUCATION INSTITUTE



To Research, Document & Promote Vietnamese-American Culture

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Roots of South Vietnamese Nationalism (Part 1)

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South Vietnamese history could be divided into:

- the ancient root from the antiquity to the late 16th century,
- and the southern root from the 17th to 20th century.

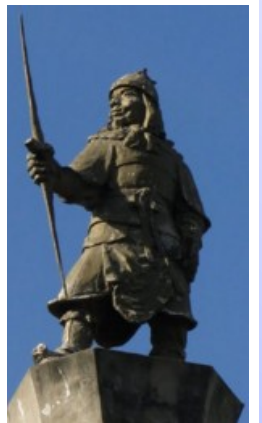
THE ANCIENT ROOT

Archeologists have placed the birth of Vietnam back to the Bronze Age some four thousand years ago and categorized it as the Phùng Nguyên Culture. The latter is defined as a late stone and early bronze culture. (1) Time and time again, the Vietnamese have turned to their ancient past to justify their un-wavering commitment to independence.

1. The first king was Dương Vương who was followed by Lạc Long Quân or Dragon Lord. Since they predated Vietnam's recorded history, these kings were mythic or mytho-historic rather than actual historical figures. Vietnamese history began with the eighteen Hùng Kings (Hồng Bàng dynasty) who reigned over a territory called Văn Lang from 2879 to 258 BCE. The Vietnamese past being anchored into the third millennium BCE revealed the longevity of the Vietnamese civilization and the fine distinctions between Vietnamese and Chinese history and culture. Since the thirteenth at fifteenth centuries, historians at royal courts have constructed a Vietnamese "southern" history that is "parallel with and a response" to the "northern" or Chinese culture. (2) That part of early history has been documented in two books of tales: *Việt Điện U Linh Tập* (VDULT, Compilation of Potent Spirits in the Viet Realm, 1329) (3) and *Lĩnh Nam Chích Quái* (LNCQ, Wonderful Stories of Lĩnh Nam, 1492) (4)



2. In 258 BCE, King An Dương (Pacifier of the South) took over Văn Lang renaming it Âu Lạc. (5) In 111 BCE, the Chinese in turn conquered Âu Lạc and incorporated it to China as the Giao Chỉ province. Âu Lạc and Giao Chỉ were the precursors of the Vietnamese state. This story is remembered by the common people as the tale of the Magic Crossbow. (6) An Dương and Triệu Đà fought for the control of the Red River delta. King An Dương's daughter Mỹ Châu fell in love with Triệu Đà's son, Trọng Thủy. After the two got married, with the help of his wife Trọng Thủy stole An Duong's cross bow that had allowed him to remain invincible throughout the years. Without the bow, An Dương easily fell under the attack of Triệu Đà. He escaped with Mỹ Châu and later killed her when he realized that she had given away the secret of the Magic Crossbow. When he discovered her body, Trọng Thủy jumped into a well to join her in death. The story explained how Vietnam was assimilated into the Chinese empire.



3. In 39 CE, the Trưng Sisters, Trưng Trắc and Trưng Nhị, (?-42) from Mê Linh, the capital of the former

Continue on next page

Roots of S. VN Nationalism...

Hùng kings, led the revolt by chasing the Chinese out of Giao Chỉ after more than a century-and-a half of foreign domination. The cause had to do with the "law," although it was not clearly specified. Han officials apparently wanted to restrain one Giao Chỉ lord who was championing the inheritance rights of women to whom he was related by marriage against efforts by the imperial Han regime to assert Han ideas about land ownership. The Trưng sisters reigned as the first Queens over an independent state for over two years before being overwhelmed by Ma Yuan and his army. The latter came from China during the monsoon season (May-October) when the waterlogged region did not allow troop movement. They established themselves at Cổ Loa, king An Dương's old fortress and during the dry season of 42 CE waged a series of battles during which they captured and killed the Trưng sisters and her troops. He spent another year to reestablish the control of the Chinese receiving the submission of local leaders, building new garrisons and fortifying towns, settling his troops on lands which they could support themselves. He issued new rules and imposed Han regulations over Giao Chỉ. The Chinese imposed a strict control over the province that would last until the tenth century CE.

The Trưungs, however, still had a strong following. They left behind them a legacy of heroism that to this day characterized them as resisters to Chinese aggression. They were mourned, venerated and a cult to these heroines began locally at first. Later temples were built to perpetuate their cult because they had been found over the years to be responsive to people who came to them with wishes. (7)

Less well known than the Trưungs, was Lady Triệu Ẩu (8) who also commanded some troops that rebelled against the Chinese in the third century AD. She was remembered for the following words:

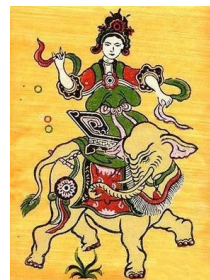
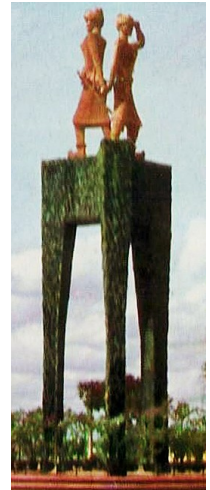
"My wish is to ride the tempest, tame the waves, kill the sharks. I will not resign myself..."

4. It was Ngô Quyền (898-944) who defeating the Chinese at the battle of Bạch Đằng recovered the country's independence for the second time in 939 CE. He lured Chinese vessels into the Bạch Đằng River where on his order iron-tipped poles had been planted in the bed of the river. When the tide began to ebb, his troops counterattacked. Withdrawing Chinese vessels became impaled on the poles and were destroyed by the Vietnamese. The heir of the southern Han who perished in the battle ended Chinese ambitions over Vietnam for that period. Following their defeat, the southern Han empire split up into many kingdoms and gave Ngô Quyền the unique opportunity to proclaim himself king of the newly born Vietnamese nation, the first after almost one thousand years of Chinese domination. Ngô Quyền established his capital at Cổ Loa, which is now twenty kilometers north of present day Hanoi. His untimely death in 944 led to further infighting between the various Vietnamese factions as he left no heir. (9)

This was the second time that Giao Chỉ (Vietnam) had acquired its independence from China. The first time was under the Trưng sisters from 38 to 40 CE although it was only for two years. This second independence period would last until the fifteenth century.

5. Lý Thường Kiệt (1019-1105) born Ngô Tuấn rapidly rose in rank to become a skillful military leader and to earn a royal surname of Lý. As the Chinese Song were preparing for war against the Viets, Kiệt led a preemptive strike on the Chinese stronghold of Nanning destroying the Song navy at Qin Zhou and Hepu in 1075. At the head of a land-naval force of 100,000 troops, he laid the siege on Nanning which fell in forty-two days. The Song never saw it coming and never thought the Viets would be capable of such an action. Kiệt destroyed the town, the navy, and took lots of captives when he withdrew home.

The Song forces counter-attacked the following year. The Viets set up underwater obstacles at the Bạch Đằng estuary, through which the Chinese must come in to go upriver to Thăng Long. Their naval forces got stuck at the Bạch Đằng estuary. The land forces crossed the border and arrived at the Cầu River about forty-five kilometers northeast of Thăng Long. They attacked the Viets' inland fleet and came to thirty-five kilometers of the capital where they were pushed back to the northern side of the Cầu River. A stalemate ensued during which Song forces were decimated by the inclement climate.



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Roots of S. VN Nationalism...

The Viets suing for peace gave the Chinese the excuse to pull back to China. It has been said that Kiệt wrote a few verses that were sung in temples in the middle of the night to give heart to his soldiers and to sow doubt among Song soldiers,
 The mountains and rivers of the South belonged to southern king.
 The border has been fixed in the book of Heaven.
 How dare you, uncouth rebels to invade our land?
 Your armies will be annihilated.

Although these may not be the real verses that were sung because when written in Chinese, they would be unintelligible to Viet soldiers. Second, Kiệt was not known to be a literary person and had never written any literary work. What the poem tried to express was that the southern empire existed with its own mandate of heaven and there was a border that separated the northern and southern empires. Violating this border would lead to reprisals. (10)

6. Then came the Mongols, whom the Vietnamese repulsed on three different occasions, the last two by Trần Hưng Đạo (1228-1300). No other country had accomplished that feat before against the mighty Mongols.

In the 1250's, Kublai a grandson of Genghis Khan was fighting against the southern Song. While he attacked from the north, he sent Uriyangqadai to attack the Song from the west in a pincer movement. Because of the mountainous terrain, Uriyangqadai had to swing into Đại Việt, as the country was called at that time, before attacking the Song from the South. The Vietnamese Trần king refused to let him enter Vietnamese territories and threw his Mongol envoys into jail. In 1257, Mongol troops emerged from the mountains and advanced toward the Red River delta and the capital Thăng Long. The king had to evacuate the city, but after a few skirmishes, the Trần were able to push the Mongols back into the mountains. (11)

In the fall of 1282, the king called all the noblemen to the Diên Hồng meeting at Pha Lai, fifty kilometers east of Thăng Long. Pha Lai was a strategic point where the northern mountains ended and where four rivers from the north and west converged before splitting into many channels leading to the sea. Chinese troops coming from the northeast were expected to arrive at this place before heading to the capital. Battles will be fought at this place and at nearby Vạn Kiếp where the estates of Trần Hưng Đạo were located. All noblemen committed themselves to fighting except for a few disgruntled people who declined the invitation. Knowing the intent of the Mongols, the Trần had prepared for war. Trần Hưng Đạo was made commander-in-chief of the army. He was one of Vietnam's greatest strategists, but sensitive and shrewd enough to seek out as lieutenants several tacticians of considerable daring and combat ability. His proclamation to his officers written in the *Bình Thư yếu lược* (Resume of Military Tactics) is a classic example of virile, martial patriotism. He told them he had shared dangers and pleasures with them in the past and bestowed on them promotions and allowances. Then they had slacked off. Should the Mongol army arrive, they would take everyone prisoner and the Vietnamese would lose everything from families, properties to country. But if the officers trained their men well, they would win and their names would be registered "in the book of history." And he would give them more awards, like wives, slaves, land, and treasure. (12)

The Mongols returned in force for the second attack in 1285 after having vanquished the southern Song; they controlled most of present-day China and Mongolia and proclaimed the Yuan dynasty in 1271. While during the first attack, they were indirectly aiming at Đại Việt, the goal of this attack was to subdue the Vietnamese. Chinese entered Đại Việt from four different directions. Toghan, Kublai's son with his troops from Guangxi, crossed the border and arrived to the Red River delta from the north-east through the Lạng Sơn Province to meet with Omar's forces that came upstream on the river from the east. Less than a month later, the Mongols took over Thăng Long. The Mongol forces in Yunnan commanded by Nassirudin advanced down the river from the northwest and also entered Thăng Long. A fourth Mongol force under the leadership of Sogetu came from the South.

Soldiers were tattooed with letters reading, "Death to Mongols" and signs were distributed warning them, "If the enemy come, everyone must fight them. If you are not strong enough, you are allowed to flee, but do not surrender to them." Some Trần forces were sent to face and slow down Sogetu's forces. Attempts were even made to negotiate for peace with Toghan who demanded that the Trần kings appeared before him in person. The latter refused.



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Roots of S. VN Nationalism...

The senior and junior Trần kings (13) facing the prospect of being crushed within the Mongol forces fled by boat down the river to the sea and up the coast to the Chinese border toward Quảng Ninh. They disembarked at Ba Chẽ, walked over the mountains on foot to the Bạch Đằng River where they embarked and went by sea to Thanh Hoá in southeast Đại Việt. Toghan thinking that the Trần were in the northeast pulled back toward Thanh Long and sent Omar and Sogetu to search for them down the river. As the kings had disappeared into the sea, some troops seeing a potential disaster looming defected to the enemy.

Retreating Trần armies concentrated in present day Nam Định, ninety kilometers southeast of Thăng Long. Toghan and Omar went to their pursuit. The Trần forces counterattacked but were defeated and Trần Bình Trọng was captured. He refused to eat and to give the enemy any information. The Mongols then offered him riches and honor if he served them. He replied, "It is better to be a ghost in the southern kingdom than a prince in the north." He was beheaded. (14)

Suddenly, the Trần forces arrived from Thanh Hoá by boat moving up the river. Trần Hưng Đạo defeated Mongol forces at Hưng Yên. Trần Quốc Toản led the attack at Tây Kát, Trần Nhật Duật at Hàm Tử, Trần Quang Khải at Chương Dương. As the Trần armies broke into Thăng Long, Toghan quickly pulled back toward the northeastern mountains, Nassirudin toward the western mountains. Sogetu and Omar unable to locate the Trần in Thanh Hoá came up the river toward the capital hoping to meet with Toghan. The two Trần kings defeated them at Tây Ké and Sogetu was captured and killed while Omar fled down the river to the sea. Toghan and Nassirudin crossed the border into China and the Trần returned to Thăng Long six months later. In 1286, enemy prisoners were sent back to China.

The Mongols returned to Đại Việt for the third time in the winter of 1287-1288. Toghan came down through the northeastern mountains into the province of Lạng Sơn like the last time and met at Vạn Kiếp with Omar's fleet coming up the river from the east. They proceeded toward Thăng Long. Several days later, as Omar supply fleet came up the river, it was completely destroyed by the Vietnamese. The loss of the supply fleet doomed this Mongol campaign. Toghan and Omar waited in vain for the supply fleet that never came. After sitting in Thăng Long for one month and running out of supplies, Toghan pulled back toward Vạn Kiếp where he was joined by Omar who was still looking for his fleet. After another month had passed and without food, the Mongol army had to pull back. Toghan crossed the border while Omar's fleet going down the river was ambushed and destroyed by Trần Hưng Đạo.

Kublai continued to make plans to invade Đại Việt until his death in 1294. But his troops, which were scattered thin by campaigns in Burma and Java were tired of wars and never had the chance to return to Đại Việt. Đại Việt noblemen and troops that had defected to the enemy were punished according to their cases while those who did their duties were appropriately rewarded. After that, lists of names that had surrendered to the Mongols and later captured from the Mongols were burned to symbolically put an end to the matter and to "soothe rebellious inclinations." (15)

7. Lê Lợi (1385-1433) and Nguyễn Trãi (1380-1442)

In 1396 as the Trần dynasty was faltering, the strongman Lê Quý Ly tightened his grip on the court and tried to reorganize it. He, however, did not have the chance because the Chinese Ming in 1407 swooped down to assert their domination over Giao Chỉ. While the people in Giao Chỉ reluctantly accepted Chinese control, the people in Thanh Hóa began rebelling against the Ming.

Lê Lợi in 1418 began ambushing Ming columns and attacking outposts. He was defeated in 1422 and sued for peace. He paid an indemnity, was given fish, salt, rice, and farm implements, and settled down. In 1426, as the new Chinese king decided to pull his troops out of Giao Chỉ, Lê Lợi went to the offensive attacking one outpost after another, cutting the supply lines, isolating outposts, controlling the countryside, and calling on people to join his army. Having controlled the southern provinces, he moved to the Red River delta and placed his enemies under siege. In 1427, he defeated two relief armies coming from China. Wang Tong, the Chinese commander-in-chief in Giao Chi sued for peace. He gave Chinese prisoners boats, horses and provisions to return to China. Nguyễn Trãi penned the famous declaration of victory over the Ming.

He appointed Nguyễn Trãi to organize the civilian administration and to write letters soliciting the submission of Ming officials and people serving the Ming. Nguyễn Trãi, whose father was a scholar, had received an excellent classical education.



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When the Ming arrived, he lived in hiding for many years to avoid serving in their government. Eventually he joined Lê Lợi as an advisor. He remains a towering figure in Vietnamese literary history because many of his letters to Ming officials, a proclamation of victory over the Ming, a biography of Lê Lợi, and his poems are available for consultation today while very little else had survived from before his lifetime. When the Ming came to Giao Chỉ in 1407, they carted away all the literary, historical, and legislative works the Vietnamese had produced and no one knew what had happened to these materials since.

Roots of S. VN Nationalism...

While Lê Lợi was a Thanh Hóa fighter, Nguyễn Trãi was a man of the Red River delta. The image of Lê Lợi and Nguyễn Trãi working together was comforting because one century later these two groups would be fighting against each other. Even if Nguyễn Trãi's contribution was only to write the proclamation, to be an efficient and capable administrator, and a voice of moderation among Lê Lợi's bloodthirsty lieutenants, that support was substantial enough in the tumult of the time. But more than that, Nguyễn Trãi had played a major role in shifting Lê Lợi's aim, strategy, and tactics. Lê Lợi was only an insurgent without vision and significance waging a guerilla warfare in the Thanh Hoá province in the beginning of his uprising. And all of the sudden, he went on the offensive, striking the vulnerable positions of the Ming forces, going from one objective to another, mobilizing the upland population, and laying down the foundation for a new dynastic regime. That idea may have come from his group of fighters but most likely from Nguyễn Trãi who possessed a large knowledge of history, had observed Ming administration while evading it, and held strong opinions about government. Nguyễn Trãi was the person who most likely understood the implications of the new Chinese leader's decision to pull out of Giao Chỉ and urged Lê Lợi to take advantages of the circumstances. (16)

In 1428, Lê Lợi recovered Vietnam's independence for the third time after 20 years Chinese domination. (17)

8. K.W. Taylor for the sake of simplicity suggests to divide Vietnamese history into four periods: (18)

- The period of Chinese domination from 111 BCE to 939 ACE as briefly described above that ended with the second independence from China.
- The Lý period from the tenth to the early thirteenth centuries during which the royal court was under the influence of a strong Buddhist culture mixed with cults of popular spirits, occult skills of Daoist priests, and erudition of Confucian scholars. This contrasts with the Trần period which spearheaded a strong Confucian culture.
- The Lê and southern expansion led to a new southern frontier perspective during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. North and South became two separate and different states for more than two centuries. The northern empire turned inward and remained attached to Chinese culture while the South associated itself with Cham and Khmer cultures turned toward modernity, rice culture, and trade with the Asian world.
- The modernization period began with the colonialization by the French in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries followed by the expulsion of the French and the war between North and South that fought over competing visions of a future Vietnam. (19)

THE SOUTHERN ROOT

Throughout history, heroic figures from the seventeenth century onward have anchored Vietnamese past into the main historical root. They are the continuation of past valor and sacrifice that made Vietnamese history heroic.

1. Chúa Nguyễn Hoàng (1525-1613)

The Lê dynasty which had been reigning over Đại Việt (as Vietnam was known at that time) since 1428 had seen its authority slowly declining by the sixteenth century. Đại Việt was about the size of present day North Vietnam and part of central Vietnam; it shared its southern borders with the Cham Empire. Around King Lê were a few chúa or lords who were high class noble men. When Trịnh Kiểm became the Lê's official regent, his brother-in-law Nguyễn Hoàng immediately knew the Trịnh and Nguyễn houses were headed toward confrontation since both of them vied to replace the Lê. He wisely asked for the advice of sage Nguyễn Bình Khiêm who after thinking for a while told him, "In the region of Hoành Sơn is room to stand for a thousand years." (20)



Hoành Sơn is in reality a huge chain of mountains that abut to the sea. South of Hoành Sơn laid the region of Thuận Hóa (modern provinces of Quảng Bình, Quảng Trị, and Thừa Thiên) where Nguyễn Hoàng's headquarters was located. Thuận Hóa was crossed by four rivers that dumped into the sea: the Gianh River in the north where the modern city

Continue on next page

Roots of S. VN Nationalism... of Đồng Hới is located; fifteen kilometers south is the Nhật Lê River where the walls to protect the southern kingdom would be built in 1630; thirty kilometers south is the Bến Hải River that marked the division between North and South Vietnam (1954-1975); and seventy kilometers south of Gianh River is the Perfume River where Huế is located. In the seventeenth century, the Gianh River delineated the geographic division between the northern and southern kingdoms. The Nguyễn's original headquarters, which was located close to the Bến Hải River was gradually moved south to Huế on the Perfume River.

Heading the advice of the sage, chúa Nguyễn Hoàng pretended to be ill and asked his sister to request Trịnh Kiểm to dispatch him as a military commander of the Thuận Hóa region. The distant South was at that time not a glamorous area, but a place where criminals were banished and where political dissidents sought refuge. Wanting to get rid of a potential enemy, Trịnh Kiểm immediately agreed and by 1558, Nguyễn Hoàng and his retinue landed in Thuận Hóa, near modern day Quảng Trị. For many years, he organized and managed the lands he was placed in charge. He returned to the North in 1569 and 1593 to fight for King Lê. He completely turned his back to Thăng Long (Hanoi) in 1600 when he returned to the South for good. (21) As he was 75 at that time, he spent the remaining years as a good administrator of the new South.

The land was fertile and productive. The Vietnamese pioneers who had learned to rely on their own resources and initiative, were free to work under the protection of Nguyễn soldiers. Rice was abundant. Silk and sugar were exported for manufactured goods. The port of Hội An attracted Chinese, Japanese, and Portuguese merchants. Each year Nguyễn Hoàng dutifully sent a tribute to the Lê emperor as a vassal. While visiting the Perfume River, he reportedly was visited by a goddess who prophesized that a great lord would come and build a temple on the hill by the river and that a new and enduring kingdom would be established. The goddess' name was Thiên Mụ. He accordingly built a temple there on the ruins of an earlier Cham temple. The Thiên Mụ Pagoda at Huế still stands there, although the distinctive lower tower was built in the nineteenth century.

Nguyễn Hoàng died peacefully in 1613 at the age of 88. By relocating to an unglamorous South and becoming a visionary administrator, he built that place into a new kingdom, which in time would stand as an equal to the northern kingdom. Without him, Vietnam would not have been a large country as it is today.

2. Đào Duy Từ (1572-1634)

In 1627, the northern Trịnh unleashed the first attack on the southern Nguyễn in order to subjugate it. Multiple other attacks would follow during the next 50 years turning it into the Fifty-Year War or first full scale north-south Vietnam War (1627-1675). Like in the fourth Vietnam War (1954-1975), it was a war of aggression waged by the North to control and subdue the South.

The northerners invaded the south by sea and land. They brought in two hundred thousand men with three hundred elephants bearing artillery. An advance guard of two hundred ships filled with soldiers followed by twenty-four large ships carrying headquarters staff and royal retinue and five hundred support boats. The battle lasted for several weeks at the mouth of the Nhật Lê River in Thuận Hoá until a southern elephant charge pushed back the northerners. (22)

This is where Đào Duy Từ came into the picture. Following the Trịnh retreat, the mayor of Qui Nhơn, Trần Đức Hòa came to congratulate Nguyễn Phúc Nguyễn and introduce his son-in-law, Đào Duy Từ who became Nguyễn's advisor for the next few years. Đào Duy Từ was a learned Thanh Hoá man who was blocked from seeking a governmental position because, according to Confucian laws at the time, his father was an entertainer. He thus decided to go south where his talents were valued and enrolled into Trần Đức Hòa's service. He did so well that Hòa gave him his daughter in marriage.

He studied the terrain of the Nhật Lê River basin and noticed that the mountain slopes are less than ten kilometers from the coast line north of the river. This was the choke point that could prevent any land invasion from the north. In 1630 and 1631, he had two walls built there. The first wall reached the coast line at the mouth of the Nhật Lê River. It was called the "wall of the teacher" (Trường Thầy) in reference to Đào Duy Từ, but later renamed Đồng Hới Wall. A second wall, which was built parallel to but ten kilometers south of the first one was known as Trường Đức Wall. The walls were six meters high with cannons mounted every twelve to twenty meters. A third line of fortification called the Trường Sa Wall or the "long sand wall," was built on the shoreline almost perpendicular to the first two. An iron chain was stretched across the mouth of the Nhật Lê River to prevent any boat to enter. In the rectangle formed by the mountain and the walls was built a fortress to house the defenders. A fourth wall was added later north of the Đồng Hới Wall to provide an additional defensive line.

A foundry was established nearby to provide a steady supply of guns, cannons, and shells and was manned by a team of nearby villagers. Đào Duy Từ then proceeded to reorganize the conscription system in the South to provide enough recruits for the defense of the walls. The country was divided into ten mobilization districts with three alone around the Nhật Lê



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River indicating a heavy militarized area. Major mobilization occurred every sixth year with a smaller conscription every intermediate three years. A system of taxes was also set up and levied on all male inhabitants. It was based on eight categories of people with no taxes on indigents and deserting guests. Tax rates were less in Thuận Hoá than other parts of the country. Within a few years, Đào Duy Từ's initiatives affected every aspect of Nguyễn Phú Nguyễn's government.

For the next five decades, despite repeated attacks the northern army was unable to breach the Thuận Hoá walls to invade the South. The peace earned allowed the Nguyễn to expand his control further south. Đào Duy Từ's unusual abilities, while discredited in the north, were appreciated and put to work in the south.

3. Chúa Nguyễn Ánh (1762-1820)

In 1777, Nguyễn Ánh, the last heir of the Nguyễn dynasty fled into the marshes of the Mekong Delta to avoid being captured by the Tây Sơn rebels. (23) He made his way to Hòn Đất close to Hà Tiên. There he met Pigneau de Behaine who fed him and talked to him daily at the foot of a banyan tree. The meeting was fateful indeed. Had the prince not headed to Hòn Đất, he would not have met the prelate. Had the prelate decided not to settle in the Hòn Đất area, the encounter would never have occurred.

What transformed the fifteen year old prince--third in line to the throne, chased and ruthlessly hunted down by the Tây Sơn and then hidden in a forest without retinue, army, or funding --into an empire builder, a leader and unifier of people was the dream of a man who knew he was predestined to run a Vietnam bigger than anyone could ever imagine. He would relentlessly work for the next twenty five years to fulfill that dream.

What transformed a thirty-seven year old and obscure missionary into a king maker and empire builder was the dream of a man who aspired to build a Catholic Empire in the East. He attached himself to the service of Nguyễn Ánh thinking that by helping the prince recover his throne, he would realize his own dream.

Nguyễn Ánh returned to Saigon a few months later after the southern generals retook the city. He ascended to the throne in 1780 at the age of eighteen and proceeded to build up his administration, shore up his army and navy, and win other followers to his cause.

The Tây Sơn attacked Saigon again in 1782 where they massacred about 20,000 people. Nguyễn Ánh recovered the city late that year. The Tây Sơn took Saigon again for the fourth time in 1783 forcing Nguyễn Ánh to flee for his life to Siam. He came back the same year with an army of Siamese soldiers but was beaten back. He ran to Bangkok and returned to Gia Định/Saigon only in 1788. Gia Định became Nguyễn Ánh's stronghold and the only place in the country that had resisted inclusion into the Tây Sơn territory. It was from this power base that he would launch his attack to regain control of his kingdom.

Running the affairs of the Gia Định prefecture, he reestablished order in the prefecture as lawlessness had become rampant after a decade of war. He imposed harsh punishments for robbers and plunderers. He even sent out soldiers to suppress bandits. (24) Taxes and mobilization were implemented and the Gia Định citadel was built in 1789 with a royal palace in the middle. In Gia Định he stayed connected to Siam and Cambodia. From there, he sent emissaries to other Southeast Asian states that recognized the South. Through sea route, he could also obtain western military supplies from other countries.

Nguyễn Ánh, however, had to prove himself before winning the confidence of the military groups, the Chinese, western adventurers and missionaries. He had to walk a fine line and manipulate the balance of power within this heterogeneous group. He would accept Tây Sơn soldiers who surrendered and wanted to serve in his army. He gave men of talent opportunities to advance under the regime. Lê Văn Duyệt tended buffaloes in his youth. His obscure past did not prevent him from becoming a good soldier and general in the Nguyễn's army. In 1803, when Nguyễn Ánh after being enthroned as emperor Gia Long, asked him to remain in Huế to help build the Huế citadel, Lê Văn Duyệt argued that his men were tired after years of war and just wanted to return home. Duyệt, however, continued to serve his emperor until the latter's death in 1820. (25)

For the next six or seven years, Nguyễn Ánh started seasonal campaigns: he would sail north in the spring, take a chunk out of the enemy's land, build forts and leave garrisons to take care of them, and then withdraw to the south with the monsoon rains. The process would repeat itself again each year. His advances were slow, methodical, but always directed northwards. His actions and techniques did not have the brilliance and the impetuosity of the Tây Sơn Nguyễn Huệ (1753-1792): (26) they were based on practical and logical matters. His genius lay in his steadfastness and perseverance: he was more like an ant worker than a sprinter. It took him twenty five years to regain his throne during which he almost lost his life on many occasions. But he was always at work: fighting and rebuilding. He was a healer and unifier: he worked with Chinese, Khmers, Chams, Vietnamese, and foreigners, northerners as well as southerners. He was the perfect image of the oriental buffalo. Another person would have quit a long time ago. That was the reason why historians had misjudged him. (27)



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Roots of S. VN Nationalism... Shipbuilding played an important role in Nguyễn Ánh's quest to reclaim his throne. His main 1,500 meter-long shipyard was located in Saigon between Saigon and Thị Nghè Rivers. After 1835 under Minh Mạng, most shipbuilders and workers left Vietnam for Chantaburi, Thailand which became the next important Asian maritime state while shipbuilding in Vietnam gradually decreased in importance and became extinct in 1857. (28) Had shipbuilders continued their work under Minh Mạng, Vietnam would have had a strong navy that would have deterred the French invasion.

Nguyễn Ánh undertook agrarian reforms in Gia Định. Devastated by the constant wars with the Tây Sơn, the region became underexploited causing local owners and farmers to suffer economically. Large amounts of lands were just brought under cultivation and soon resulted in a surplus of grains. Rice granaries were established locally first then as the battlefronts shifted northwards, new granaries were built close to the fronts to provide food for moving troops. By 1800, revenue from overseas trade rose to 489,790 quan compared to total state revenue of 380,700 quan for the Nguyễn from 1746 to 1752. By that time, Saigon and Bangkok had become two prominent economic and political centers in Southeast Asia. (29) By 1 June, 1802, Nguyễn Ánh had re-conquered the country he had lost twenty five years earlier. That was a bittersweet victory for a man who had spent half of his life chasing a dream under overwhelming odds. In a ceremony given in Huế, he officially ascended to the throne under the name of Gia Long or Prosperity (30) He, however, did not take the title of Emperor for that would come only a few years later when the Chinese recognized him as the official ruler of Vietnam. Nguyễn Ánh was among one of the most astute and persistent leaders in Vietnamese history. He understood the basics of government and knew how to form alliances. Yet without Saigon, which was an international seaport and a multi-cultural ethnicity, he would not be able to achieve what he did. "The rise of the south that brought the Thirty-Year War to an end was the rise of Saigon and of the large view of the world that had developed there." (31)

Standing in the land of the future--Saigon and the new South--where trade, technology, and freedom reigned, Nguyễn Ánh decided to retreat into the past--Huế and Confucianism. He chose tradition instead of modernization and in so doing led his successors to a downhill course. Maybe he did not like what he saw. Maybe he was scared of what modernity could bring to his reign and his successors. Maybe he yearned for stability within an autocratic regime after two decades of daily fighting, instead of political instability and challenge. But westerners, on the other hand, continued to move ahead technologically and militarily and it would only be a matter of time before they jumped in and took over a poor and backward country. (32)

4. Võ Tánh

When Nguyễn Ánh returned from Siam in 1788, he invited Võ Tánh--one of the reputed southern warlords of the time--to join him. As Võ Tánh came with his staff, the prince made him a general and gave his sister Princess Ngọc Dư in marriage. From the beginning, Võ Tánh proved to be a brilliant officer. He surrounded and defeated Tây Sơn General Phạm Văn Thám (1789); he beat General Đào Văn Hồ and took the Điện Khánh Citadel (1790). He held Điện Khánh while holding the Tây Sơn at bay (1794). In 1797, he followed Nguyễn Ánh to Quảng Nam where he defeated Tây Sơn General Nguyễn Văn Ngu at Đãi Chiêm (Cửa Đại). He then crossed the river Mỹ Khê (Quảng Ngãi) and defeated Admiral Nguyễn Văn Giáp.

In 1799, he again followed Nguyễn Ánh north and attacked the city of Qui Nhơn that eventually fell. The city was renamed Bình Định (Pacified), which his troops then held against the Tây Sơn who becoming the assailants put up the siege on the town. By holding the Tây Sơn troops around Bình Định, he allowed Nguyễn Ánh to take over Phú Xuân (Huế).

Tây Sơn General Trần Quang Diệu held the siege of Bình Định both on land as well as at sea for fourteen months. Nguyễn Ánh tried to break the naval siege, but could not. At one time, Nguyễn Ánh ordered Võ Tánh to leave town and let his subordinate supervise the defense. Võ Tánh refused to abandon his soldiers and turned down the request. Having spent all his ammunitions and food, Võ Tánh had no choice but to discuss the surrender with his opponent, General Trần Quang Diệu. He said,

"I, the general, deserve to die. But please spare my soldiers who had not done anything wrong." After Diệu agreed, he had all the remaining gunpowder collected; he mixed it with straw, stood on the pile under the flagpole, and blew himself up by lighting it. That was the signal for his soldiers to open the gates of the city. General Diệu, seeing Võ Tánh's bravery, ordered his soldiers to give him a full state funeral and to spare Võ Tánh's soldiers. Later, Nguyễn Ánh remembering Võ Tánh's sacrifice had his remains collected and transferred to Phú Nhuận, Gia Định province for burial with full honors. (33)



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5. Lê Văn Duyệt (1763-1832)

Roots of S. VN Nationalism...

Born in 1763 in Quảng Ngãi (central Vietnam) of poor parents, he tended buffaloes during his youth. His parents later moved with him to Gia Định. Afflicted with un-descended testes at birth, he was recruited as a eunuch in charge of the royal household before displaying his military ability. Despite his lack of education he, however, had great talents in war and administration. A simple man and a dignified general, he was loved by his men and people because he was recognized as fair. He was dressed very simply and disregarded protocols. He once appeared at a court audience late because he was busy watching cockfighting. He then explained in detail to the king about how funny it was to watch cockfighting. To southerners, he was a local hero who would later have his own shrine in Saigon.

Lê Văn Duyệt followed Nguyễn Ánh into Siamese exile, survived many perilous adventures and followed Nguyễn Ánh in his northward conquest of Vietnam. In late spring of 1799, while Nguyễn Ánh sailed with his war fleet northwards to attack the Tây Sơn's main port of Qui Nhơn, Duyệt led the troops on land. Nguyễn Ánh told Duyệt to march with his troops to northern Bình Định and block the passes leading from the northern province of Quảng Ngãi to Bình Định. Duyệt enlisted the help of local Ede mountain chiefs for that purpose. As the Tây Sơn moved through the passes in two columns, one of the columns dissolved in panic when its forward scout yelled "Nai" upon seeing a herd of deer. Nai was also a northern slang word for soldiers of Gia Định who came from the Đồng Nai ("deer field") River. Tây Sơn soldiers picked up the "Nai, Nai," from the scout and fearing an enemy ambush began running away. They were not as fearsome as they were a couple of decades earlier. (34)

The following year, while General Võ Tánh was still trapped in the besieged town of Qui Nhơn, Duyệt, guided by allies among the local highlanders shifted behind the backs of Võ Tánh's besiegers and broke into the lowlands of Bình Định. A few weeks later, he used fire ships to seize the town of Qui Nhơn that Võ Tánh had surrendered to the Tây Sơn.



Nguyễn Văn Thanh and Lê Văn Duyệt were Nguyễn Ánh's two most capable generals. On the eve of a battle in 1800, Nguyễn Văn Thanh offered Duyệt a glass of wine and said, "Let's drink to give us strength." Duyệt refused claiming that only those who were afraid would borrow strength from wine. He would have no use of it. Whether there was truth to this anecdote or not, it reflects the conflicting tendencies in Nguyễn Ánh's entourage that was made of people of different classes. Nguyễn Văn Thanh was a northern learned man who later moved south and a general who sought a point of entry into the Huế royal court. Lê Văn Duyệt, on the other hand, was an open-minded but uneducated soldier who while supporting Nguyễn Ánh, did not care for the Huế court refinements and vagaries: he was content to have as little to do with the court. (35)

Gia Long chose his fourth son, Chi Đàm (future King Minh Mạng) as his heir bypassing Prince Cảnh's son, Mỹ Đàm. Chi Đàm, a well learned Confucian was renowned for his hostility to Christianity. Minh Mạng never forgot Duyệt's opposition to his selection and did everything in his powers to undermine the general. He posted him to Gia Định, away from the court as soon as he was crowned emperor in 1820. (36) This was perfectly fine with Duyệt who had wanted to return to his Gia Định hometown two decades earlier.

Minh Mạng and Lê Văn Duyệt could not be more different because of their upbringing. Duyệt was a soldier trained in the South among southerners: he was as straight and blunt as he could be without worrying about hurting anyone. He could qualify as a "southern gentleman" or a real bear. He earned his rank and title through hard and often dangerous work. He had minimal education and was considered to be "coarse and ignorant" by the people at the court. Minh Mạng on the other hand was trained and educated by Huế court officials. A fine product of eastern civilization, he was knowledgeable in Confucian dialectics and rarely said what he thought. He was introverted and imbued of his knowledge and authority. He was used to all the intrigues and manipulations of the court. He was the ultimate politician: cunning, dangerous, and resourceful.

Both men therefore, differed on many issues, especially religion. Since Duyệt and the government of Gia Định embraced freedom of speech, they treated Christians deferentially. The latter were able to practice their religion openly and to build a church in the middle of Cho Lon, Saigon's suburb. On the other hand, Minh Mạng, a learned Confucian, had strong and negative feelings against Christianity. He did not like the religion on the ground that it did not protect ancestor worship.

The second disagreement between the two men related to the handling of convicts. Northern convicts were sent to the South and vice versa. Since there were more rebellions and more people living in the North than in the South, the flow of convicts went from North to South. Convicts in Gia Định were given the chance to redeem themselves by working on the lands they were given until they completed their sentences. Convicts' wives and children could join them in their workplaces. Once convicts were pardoned, they could enroll themselves into the army: they were then called *hồi lương*. Rebels from the northern provinces of Thanh Hoá and Nghệ An were also sent to the South as convicts. They were enrolled as soldiers once they pledged

Continue on next page

Roots of S. VN Nationalism... allegiance to the Gia Định government. Minh Mạng, however, believed that convicts should complete their sentences and that enrolling them into administrative work was akin to breaking the rule of law.

The third disagreement centered on the Chinese who were living at that time in Saigon/Cho Lon and surrounding areas and who were suspected of smuggling rice and opium. Continuing war and insurrections caused disruptions in the production and distribution of rice. There was also an increase worldwide requirement for rice in the early nineteenth century. Price of rice rose between 50 to 100% in the North between 1825 and 1830. Gia Định's rice, which was about half the price of world market, incited people to smuggle out rice. Foreign products (linen, flannel, muskets, teapots, knives, swords, and so on) which attracted Vietnamese consumers were brought back. Each boat trip between Vietnam and Singapore would bring its owner 200-400% profits over costs. This lucrative business incited people to smuggle out rice.

The influence of the Chinese in the South pushed the Gia Định government to protect them from the regulations of the Huế government. While the Huế court specifically forbade the Chinese to get involved in maritime rice trade, Gia Định gave them free reins. The Chinese later evaded Huế maritime ban by using Vietnamese as front men: boats were registered under Vietnamese or Vietnamese concubines of Chinese. (37)

Between 1802 and 1832, Gia Định Thành was a semi-autonomous area with its own administration. More than one century after its annexation by the Vietnamese, the South remained a frontier country that was not fully integrated within the Huế government. Lê Văn Duyệt was the most powerful of the three governors during that period as he was Nguyễn Ánh's right handyman, enjoyed the longest tenure and held this position twice: 1812-1813 and 1820-1832.

Duyệt was the person who specialized in crisis requiring military responses. He led an army to Cambodia to control the Khmer rebel Ke who was causing problem to Khmer King Ang Chan in 1820. He carried out four major operations in Quảng Ngãi between 1803 and 1819 against the "stone wall" barbarians, Vietnamese settlers in Quảng Ngãi (central Vietnam) who rebelled against the authorities in Hue. In 1819, he spent several months in Nghệ An and Thanh Hoá (North Vietnam) to quell banditry and insubordination that had risen out of control following the reunification of the country. This was due to incompetence and corruption of local officials that forced peasants to flee from their villages and soldiers to rise in mutiny. His method of pacification was based on the cooperation of local people, although he also punished corrupt officials, but forgave unpaid taxes, and reduced corvée. (38)

Although supporting the central Huế government, Duyệt remained faithful to the Gia Định's particular needs of catering to the Chinese and the Christians' special interests. As Minh Mạng decided to centralize all powers, rifts between Saigon and Huế multiplied as previous prerogatives enjoyed by Duyệt were progressively taken away from him. This decision led to the Lê Văn Khôi's rebellion.

Lê Văn Duyệt from Minh Mạng's perspective was a political nemesis who not only opposed his ascension to the throne, but also maintained an autonomous power base in Gia Định that resisted the Huế government. Nguyễn Ánh who had lived and struggled in the South for a quarter of a century, may have found this attitude quite normal. But for an autocratic ruler like Minh Mạng, it simply meant insubordination. Instead of applying law and social discipline and encouraging righteous behavior, he believed Lê Văn Duyệt had allowed illegalities and tolerated evil customs like gambling. Southerners had become arrogant, lazy and rebellious. He patiently waited until Duyệt died (1832) before venting his wrath on him and the South.

6. The Lê Văn Khôi's revolt

Following Duyệt's death, all the privileges previously reserved to southerners were revoked. The previous five southern military areas under the military control of five generals were reorganized into five tỉnh or provinces. Gia Định which previously encompassed the lands of Biên Hòa to Hà Tiên was reduced to being the sixth province. The six southern provinces were called Lục Tỉnh Nam Kỳ. From 1833, Minh Mạng decreed a prohibition of Christianity. Christians who had been tolerated under Lê Văn Duyệt were suppressed. Churches were destroyed and Christians were ordered to step on a cross to prove they had renounced their religion. Those who did not were jailed and sentenced to death. Many escaped abroad or suffered from martyrdom. Minh Mạng ordered members of Lê Văn Khôi's family in Cao Bằng be seized. Chinese's and convicts' privileges were curtailed.

A special inspector, Bạch Xuân Nguyễn, was assigned to unearth and manipulate any "crime" suggestive of resistance against the Huế government. (39) He found "evidence" of widespread corruption and abuse of power by the late governor and his associates. He called for a posthumous humiliation of Lê Văn Duyệt (desecration of his tomb), the execution of sixteen members of his family, and the arrest of his subordinates. Whether the charges were true or fabricated remained unknown.

All these actions caused the south to revolt against Minh Mạng. The king's men were the first to suffer as a result. On 18

Continue on next page

Roots of S. VN Nationalism...

May, 1833, rebellious officials took Bạch Xuân Nguyễn hostage and brought him to Lê Văn Duyệt's wife. She counseled them not to harm him. They, however, led him to Duyệt's tomb and beheaded him for his deeds against Duyệt. Lê Văn Khôi, Duyệt's adopted son declared his rejection of Minh Mạng's authority. (40) The rebels then assassinated Nguyễn Văn Quế, the new governor general installed by the Huế government. They launched attacks against imperial troops stationed in the South. Within three months, all the southern citadels fell into the rebels' hands. The easiness with which untrained rebels were able to take over the whole south suggested a weak imperial army that would not be able to resist a French invasion three decades later. Thousands of people joined the rebels as soon as rebellion broke out in the Saigon citadel. They were inspired to avenge their benefactor, Lê Văn Duyệt and to take down the Nguyễn regime. The same people who struggled so hard over the decades to shore up the Nguyễn regime were at the core of taking it down. Christians, Chinese, settlers, and former convicts were involved in this rebellion. Lê Văn Khôi may have asked the Siamese for help. Siamese troops showed up at strategic points along the western borders of Vietnam, although their main focus was to wrestle the control of Cambodia away from Minh Mạng. The rebels held out against imperial troops until September 1835. When the revolt was quelled, six rebel leaders were sent to Huế for execution. Among them were the Catholic missionary Marchand who was accused of being the leader of the Christians and Nguyễn Văn Trầm, the Chinese Minh hương (41) who took over the revolt after Lê Văn Khôi's death. The third was Lu Tín, the M6inh hương who was accused of enrolling the help of the Chinese. In the end, many Christians were either killed, captured, or relocated to another area. More than two thousand Gia Định Christians moved to Siam. The royal army recovered five provinces by the end of 1833 and forced the rebels into the Saigon citadel, which resisted for two more years. Once the citadel was captured, thousands were killed by the royal army and 1,200 men and women were buried alive in a mass grave near the citadel close to an area where the 10,000 Chinese killed by the Tây Sơn years ago were buried. Lê Văn Duyệt's tomb was flattened under Minh Mạng's order, although Duyệt was rehabilitated by King Tự Đức thirteen years later (1848). Saigon and the South were terrorized by all these executions and murders and unrest persisted as repression would continue until 1837. For a long time, they would not trust the Huế regime. And when the French landed in Saigon two decades later, their lukewarm support for the Huế regime suggested a failure of the central regime to recognize the South's particularities.

7. Võ Duy Ninh (1804-1859)

Born in the province of Quảng Ngãi, central Vietnam, he was well known for his scholarly achievements. He passed the mandarin examination with honors and became a mandarin in Phú Yên before taking other positions at the imperial court. In 1858, he participated in the fight against the French and turned back their attacks in Đà Nẵng under the direction of General Nguyễn Tri Phương. In November 1858, he was made deputy commander of the citadel of Saigon and in 1859 elevated to province chief of Gia Định Province when the French began their forays in this area. For one month, he put up a tough defense, which was overwhelmed by French military might. Sensing he was unable to resist, he killed himself on his own sword. Ninh was the first and highest court official to kill himself in the fight against the French.

**8. Phan Thanh Giản (1796-1867)**

The man who had the misfortune of dealing with the French was Phan Thanh Giản. He was born in 1796 from a Chinese family that had taken refuge in the Vĩnh Long Province of the Mekong Delta in the late seventeenth century. Very gifted in letters, he passed the mandarin exam with flying colors at the young age of twenty-six. He was also the first southerner to receive this distinction as southerners would rather get involved in commerce than compete for governmental positions. He gradually climbed through the ranks and by 1831, Minh Mạng appointed him as the province chief of the Quảng Nam Province in central Vietnam.

The Quảng Nam Province being the last Cham region to be integrated into the newly unified empire had remained unsettled with its frequent rebellions against the Huế government. The defeat of the troops that Giản had sent to quash one of the rebellions caused him to lose his government position. For him, this was one of the many sudden political downfalls that were followed by similar rapid reinstatements to previous positions.

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Roots of S. VN Nationalism... These momentous changes in fortune gave us a glimpse of a man who was primarily motivated by duty, one who brushed successes and failures in a stoic, dignified almost fatalistic manner.

Reinstated a year later, he became a member of the *Cơ Mật Viện* (Privy Council of the Empire), a close advisory group of the Empire). He was then sent to the province of Bình Thuận to quash another Cham rebellion, which he successfully completed this time. The success landed him a second time in 1836 back to Quảng Nam, the unsettled Cham region. When Minh Mạng decided to visit the area, Giản being afraid that the presence of the monarch would further enflame political passions, advised him not to. The monarch, thinking Giản had deliberately lied to him by telling him the region was pacified while it was not, sacked him for the second time from his position. Giản, however, was reinstated two months later.

In 1838, he was sacked for a third time for having forgotten to place his seal on a document. He was reinstated a few months later. Giản accepted demotions and new assignments with courage and dignity. A real southern gentleman, he was the only one who could tell Minh Mạng truthfully what he thought. However, he served him faithfully and kept his mouth shut. This attitude endeared him to the Nguyễn who kept him around through three successive reigns: Minh Mạng (r. 1820-1840), Thiệu Trị (r. 1840-1847), and Tự Đức (r. 1847-1883). Despite repeatedly sacking his minister, Minh Mạng who loved poetry often read aloud poems that the latter composed.

The court at the time of the French invasion was divided between the *chủ chiến* (war advocates) and *chủ hòa* (peace advocates). The *chủ chiến* argued that they needed to fight the invaders regardless of its consequences. However, they did not provide any strategy to confront French armament superiority. They also failed to rally the mass--which the central government had antagonized during the Lê Văn Khôi rebellion--against the invaders. The *chủ hòa*, on the other hand, suggested that people would suffer more in a protracted war and in the face of inadequate and inferior armament.

Phan Thanh Giản and Lâm Duy Hiệp were dispatched to Saigon --then occupied by the French--to negotiate peace. The



"unequal treaty" was signed on 6 June, 1862 granting the three eastern provinces (Gia Định, Mỹ Tho, Định Tường) to France along with a payment of four million dollars in indemnity. (42) The court ratified the treaty in April 1863.

The role of emperor Tự Đức in the negotiation process is still debated today. On the news of the concessions of the provinces, Tự Đức became enraged. He called the negotiators "criminals" who had overstepped their roles and duties. Yet he continued to let them keep their positions as well as negotiate with the French. Tự Đức suffered a bout of smallpox in 1845 that probably had left him sterile. Exceedingly erudite, he was sickly and less assertive than his brother, the designated crown prince Hồng Bảo. Profiting from his disability, the minister at court Trương Đăng Quế either altered or forged Thiệu

Continue on next page

Roots of S. VN Nationalism...

Tri's testament in order to promote him as the next king. Having a malleable king would free the hands of the minister. It did not also help that Tự Đức was under the spell of a domineering mother. Viewed as a usurper and unable to have children, he carried severe handicaps, which he could not overcome despite his erudition. When he understood a problem, he failed to come up with a logical decision to deal with it. He then passed on responsibility for plans and actions to his officials who would squabble over decision making. (43) That leadership failure eventually doomed his government, especially at a time when the French made the commitment to invade Vietnam. By 1863, Giản being sixty-seven of age, had submitted his retirement twice. The emperor turned him down on both occasions. For a long time, Phan Thanh Giản foresaw the loss of new provinces for he was aware of the French's intentions. He tried to warn the imperial court and even requested troops and armaments to beef up southern defenses, but to no avail. Tự Đức just complained about the loss of past territories without making any effort, military or otherwise, to prevent any further loss. The French by taking over the three southwestern provinces in 1867 besides the three eastern provinces they had acquired in 1862 had completed their control over the South, which became a French colony. Phan Thanh Giản, the respected elderly mandarin returned home worn out and dejected. Despite his good will, he was unable to mount a significant opposition to the French. He declared, "But their [French] flag may not be allowed to fly above the fortress while Phan Thanh Giản is still alive." He returned to the emperor all badges of office and the twenty-three royal awards acquired in a lifetime of distinguished service and decided to starve himself to death in his straw-thatched hut. For being an honest administrator, he had remained a poor man.

He was weak but still alive after two weeks of fasting. After taking additional poison, he died at the age of seventy-one, poor and dispirited, although a great servant of the kingdom.

An investigating commission found Phan Thanh Giản and the other officials guilty of dereliction of duty. It suggested that Giản should be spared of posthumous decapitation since he had committed suicide. Tự Đức, however, decided to revoke Phan Thanh Giản's and Lâm Duy Hiệp's titles, positions, and grades and to have their names removed from the stele of tiến sĩ degree holders in Huế. Their bodies were exhumed and beheaded and the sentence was to be enforced for a thousand generations. Phan Thanh Giản, however, was rehabilitated by the Huế government eighteen years later and recovered posthumously all his titles and diplomas.

Notes

1. Taylor Keith. *History* 2-3. Phung Nguyen takes its name from the archeological Phùng Nguyên site about eighteen kilometers east of Việt Tri.
2. Ibid, 3-4: The Vietnamese have always tried to distinguish between the "northern" Chinese culture and their "southern" Vietnamese culture, although the region they occupied at that time corresponded to present-day North Vietnam. Present day South Vietnam did not exist and was in fact a part of the Khmer and Cham empires. More to that later.
3. Vo, Nghia *Legends*, 47-51. The VDULT was written by various authors in the thirteenth century and finalized in 1329 by Ly Te Xuyen. This 70-page manuscript contains 27 stories related to various personalities of the time: sovereigns, ministers, supernatural powers.
4. Ibid, 57-76. The LNCQ, written between 1370 and 1400, was edited by Vũ Quỳnh in its final form in 1492. It is a history of Vietnamese "pre-historical" times and deals with the Dragon Lạc Lord and the Hung kings.
5. Văn Lang occupied an area that comprises present day southern China (Guangdong) and North Vietnam.
6. Vo, Nghia. *Legends* 103-108. In the story, King An Dương and the Chinese Triệu Đà (Zhao To).
7. Le Thanh Khoi, *Le Vietnam*: 100-101; Taylor, *History*, 20-21; Vo, *Legends*: 112-114; Taylor, *Birth* 37-41. Only the matriarchal system of Giao Chi could allow the Trungs, daughters of the chieftain at Giao Chỉ to take over the command of Vietnamese troops and to direct them during the war. Vo, Nghia. *The Trung Sisters Revisited*, 2015: 14-51.
8. Vo, Nghia. *Legends*: 115-116. Lady Triệu being a commoner had less followers than the Trungs causing her insurrection to be short in duration.
9. Taylor, *History*, 46; Le Thanh Khoi, *Le Vietnam*, 134.
10. Ibid, 80-85.
11. Le Thanh Khoi 180; Taylor, *History*: 124-125.
12. Marr, *Anticolonialism*, 12-13.
13. This is a set up unique to the Tran dynasty, which called for a senior king, in this case 38 year-old Tran Hoang tutoring the junior king, 20-year old Trần Kham along with a two-year old crown prince Trần Thuyên. This system allowed an uninterrupted succession and prevented any confusion or conflict in case of sudden death of the reigning king, as it often happened with other dynasties.
14. Toan Thu: 192.
15. Taylor, *History*: 133-137; Le Thanh Khoi, 183- 189.

Continue on next page

Roots of S. VN Nationalism...

16. Ibid, 179-186.
17. Ibid, 183-186. Lê Lợi who was from the Thanh Hoá region fought the Chinese for ten years before defeating them.
18. Ibid, 10-12.
19. See chapter XII: The Two Vietnams: The northern communist government being communal and disciplined and the southern government allied with the capitalist world being more individualistic and relatively free.
20. Taylor KW. Nguyen Hoang and the Beginning of Vietnam's Southward Expansion. In Reid A. *Southeast Asia in the Early Modern Era*. Ithaca, NY, Cornell University. 1993: 42-65.
21. Taylor, *History*: 255-257. Lord Trinh wanted to keep Nguyễn Hoàng close to him to watch him. Profiting from a rebellion by Trinh generals who guarded the lower section of the Red River, Nguyễn Hoàng sailed through the area and returned to Thuận Hóa.
22. Ibid, 275-276. The northern Trinh lord worrying about family members plotting against him at Đông Kinh (Hanoi) withdrew his army.
23. The Tây Sơn-Nguyễn Nhạc, Nguyễn Lu, Nguyễn Huệ--were born in present day central Vietnam. Their forefathers who were originally from the Hồ family in Nghệ An, moved to the south and changed their surname to Nguyễn. The Tây Sơn by revolting against the Nguyễn spearheaded the Thirty-Year-War that lasted from 1771 to 1800.
24. Taylor, *History*: 381.
25. Woods CB, *Southern Vietnam under the Reign of Minh Mang*, 25-30.
26. The youngest of the Tây Sơn, he was a remarkable warrior and strategist. He used blitzkrieg to win his battles against the Nguyễn, the Trịnh, the Siamese, and the Chinese Qing. He was, however, a poor administrator. After proclaiming himself King Quang Trung in 1788, he died possibly of a stroke four years later at the age of forty. He was often compared to the French Napoleon.
27. Sellers N. *The Princes of Ha Tien*. Brussels, Belgium, Thang Long. 1983: 121.
28. Li Tana. Ships and Shipbuilding in the Mekong delta. In Cooke N. *Water Frontier*. New York, Rowman. 2004: 119-135.
29. Li Tana. The Water Frontier. In Cooke, 2004: 1-12.
30. Gia Long by the way is the combination of words from the two former capitals of the South 'Gia Định' and North 'Thăng Long.' By using this combination, he may want to suggest that he had reunified the country and moved the political center of gravity to a third city, Hue.
31. Taylor, *History*, 397.
32. Vo, *Saigon*, 44-45.
33. Le Thanh Khoi: 320-321; Vo, *Saigon*: 38. Võ Tánh was preceded in death by his deputy Ngo Tung Chau, who took poison.
34. Taylor, *History*: 391.
35. Vo, *Saigon*: 36; Taylor, *History*: 400-401. Lê Văn Duyệt, although a general, remained simple and rustic in character and was more comfortable with his soldiers than courtesans.
36. Woods CB. *Southern Vietnam*, 56-57.
37. Ibid, 69-81.
38. Taylor, *History*: 414-415.
39. Woods, 85-88.
40. This is not to suggest that Lê Văn Khôi was a hero, but to imply that the spirit of the South--commerce, trade, free spirit--had permeated into the minds of southerners and that they will protect it by all means.
41. The Minh hương or Chinese Ming expatriates came to Phú Xuân (Hue) in 1680 asking the Nguyễn lords for asylum. Being loyalists of the deposed Ming dynasty, they were forced to shave their forehead and wear a pig tail like the Mongols or be decapitated. Although the majority followed the new rule, 3,000 Chinese fled to Vietnam by boats.
42. Taboulet G. *La Geste Francaise*, 474-476.
43. Taylor, *History*: 436-440.

Part 2 will be available in newsletter #87, Jan 2016.

Continue on next page

Lapthe Flora: A Chinese Vietnamese US General

Colonel Lapthe Flora of the Virginia National Guard, Class 1987 VMI, was nominated and confirmed for the rank of Brigadier General on 8/5/2015 by the 114 U.S. Congress. He is the fifth member of '87 and the second Vietnamese to pin on stars.

Born in Saigon in 1964, Flora has been through many trials and tribulations to get to where he is today. Following the Communist capture of Saigon in 1975, Flora said, he and his brothers fled the city to avoid being drafted in to the North Vietnamese military.

According to Flora, after he spent over three years in the jungle he joined the "boat people" and fled to Indonesia, where he spent a year living in three separate refugee camps. When he arrived in the U.S., he said he was helped by people of many different backgrounds. He quickly learned English and soon finished his high school education in only three years.

Although he is from Vietnam, Flora is ethnically Chinese and speaks Cantonese, as well as Vietnamese, so when he came to Virginia he had to learn English as a third language. He said, "It's the most difficult language of all."

"I came here with nothing, penniless, the t-shirt on my back, sandals on my feet," said Flora. "I did have a tremendous amount of determination and a tremendous amount of will power."

After high school Flora attended VMI where he earned a bachelor's degree. Following college he joined the Virginia Army National Guard's 1st Battalion, 116th Infantry regiment where he has served in every position from platoon leader to battalion commander.

Flora's story is not only a reflection of the hard work and determination of the Pacific Asian people, but also a testament to the perseverance that has helped shape the American people for over 230 years.

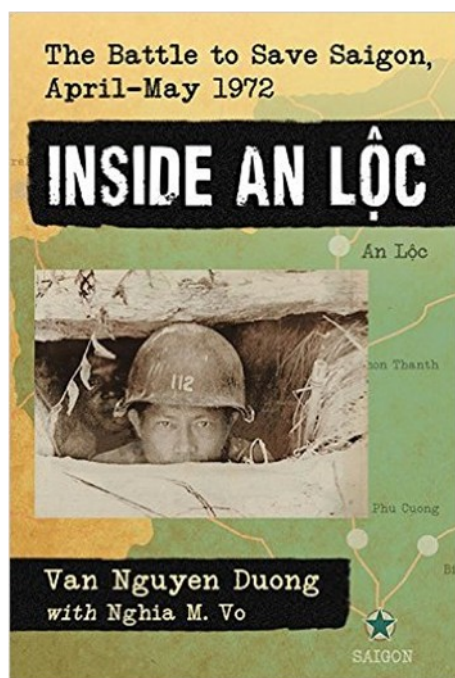
"As an Asian American I am very, very proud of my heritage," said Flora. "But I am equally proud and honored and grateful, first and foremost, to be an American."



<http://vko.va.ngb.army.mil/virginiaguard/news/june2009/AsianPacific.html>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JHmCONz0qW8>

Inside An Loc: Van Nguyen Duong, Nghia M. Vo



The Battle of An Loc was one of the bloodiest battles in the Vietnam War and a defining moment in the history of the Republic of South Vietnam. A few square blocks tucked among vast rubber tree plantations, the provincial town was thought to be of little strategic value to the North Vietnamese. Yet for 66 days in 1972, it was the scene of savage house-to-house street fighting as artillery and mortar fire pounded the town daily until almost nothing was left standing. Facing three North Vietnamese infantry divisions, General Le Van Hung defended the town with 7,500 men, vowing to "die with An Loc." A decisive victory for the South Vietnamese, the battle came at a time when the United States had begun pulling out of Vietnam and few American troops were on the ground. No foreign reporters were on hand and the action was ignored or misreported by the world press. This book tells the story of An Loc from the unique perspective of an officer who shared a bunker with the general during the fight.

Available on Amazon

<http://www.amazon.com/Inside-Loc-Battle-Saigon-April-May/dp/0786499346/>

The Lotus and the Storm: Lan Cao

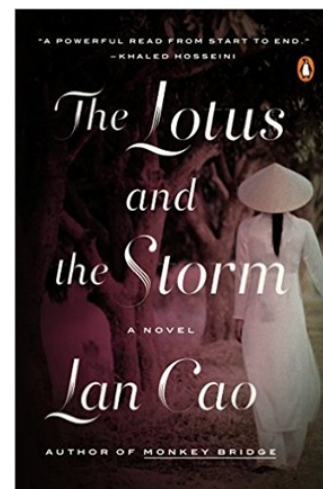
https://youtu.be/6a1_WYdUtFI

A singular work of witness, inspiration, and courage, *The Lotus and the Storm* marks the welcome return of Lan Cao's pitch-perfect voice, telling the story only she can tell.

Four decades after the war, Vietnam's flavors of clove and cinnamon have been re-created by a close-knit refugee community in a Virginia suburb. But the lives of Minh and Mai, father and daughter, are haunted by ghosts, secrets, and the loss of their country. During the disastrous last days in Saigon, in a whirl of military signals and helicopter evacuations, Mai never had a chance to say goodbye to so many people who meant so much to her. What happened to them? How will Mai cope with the trauma of war—and will the *thay phap*, a Vietnamese spirit exorcist, be able to heal her?

Available on Amazon

<http://www.amazon.com/Lotus-Storm-Novel-Lan-Cao/dp/0143127616/>



Fall by Pham Huu Phuoc



Scenic railway, White mountain Forest nat.park, New Hampshire, USA 17/10/2015

Pham huu Phuoc

