ACADEMIC CONFERENCE — HOÀNG GIÁP ĐINH NHO HOÀN (1671–1715): HIS LIFE AND HIS WORK

Complete English translation of the conference papers

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Translator's note

This volume is the complete English translation of the papers delivered at the conference devoted to Đinh Nho Hoàn (1671–1715), who passed the metropolitan examination of 1700 at the rank of *Hoàng giáp*, served as *Đốc trấn* (governor) of Cao Bằng, and was deputy envoy of the Đại Việt embassy to the Qing court in 1715.

The order of the texts follows the official list of conference papers, in five parts: I. Official career — II. Poetry and letters — III. Family and lineage — IV. Historical remains — V. Tributes.

Conventions. Vietnamese official titles and ranks are kept in Vietnamese at first occurrence and glossed in parentheses. Chinese place names appear in the Sino-Vietnamese form used by the authors, with the common equivalent in parentheses (thus Yên Kinh / Beijing). Poems written in Chinese characters are given in Sino-Vietnamese transcription followed by a prose rendering of the sense. The authors' own notes and bibliographies are preserved as they stand.

Completion. The translation is complete: all thirty-one surviving papers are translated in full, with their poems, stele texts, tables and notes. The six papers listed in the official programme whose files are missing are enumerated above.

Discrepancies. The sources contradict one another on several points of fact — the number of surviving poems, the last official title, the place and moment of death, Lady Phan Thị Viên's age, the readings of the lines quoted. These divergences have not been harmonised: they are translated as they stand, paper by paper, and belong to the scholarly discussion the volume sets out.

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PART I. OFFICIAL CAREER — MANDARINAL OFFICES AND STATE SERVICE

1. Hoàng giáp Đinh Nho Hoàn (1671–1715) and his contributions to the country

Trần Quốc Chân — Vietnam Association of Psychological and Educational Sciences

[source: 28.doc]

Mặc Trai Đinh Nho Hoàn came from the village of Gôi Mỹ in Yên Ấp canton, today Sơn Hòa commune, Hương Sơn district, Hà Tĩnh province. At the age of thirty he placed first in the second rank — that is, *Hoàng giáp* — at the examination of the year Canh Thìn, the twenty-first year of the Chính Hòa era (1700). At that time Lord Trịnh Căn (1623–1709) was pursuing a policy of tightening examination standards, so that contemporaries judged the Canh Thìn examination to have selected genuinely able laureates. Indeed, of the eighteen men who passed alongside Hoàng giáp Đinh, many obtained only the third rank, that of *Tiến sĩ*, yet later became celebrated for their letters and their careers and were highly regarded both by the official histories and by the society of their day — such as Doctors Nguyễn Hiệu (1674–1735) (1) and Nguyễn Công Hãng (1680–1732). As for Hoàng giáp Đinh Nho Hoàn himself, who held office at court for fifteen years, it is regrettable that the official histories, like a number of other works, record his offices and his contributions only in the barest outline. Nevertheless, if we know how to draw on and analyse the historical materials that relate to him, it is possible at least partly to sketch his role and what he gave to the people and the country.

According to the stele recording the donation of rice fields to the ancestral shrine, erected in his native village and composed by Mặc Trai himself (2), we learn that only two years after his success in the great examination, in the year Nhâm Ngọ (1702), the court appointed him *Tham chính* (commissioner) of Sơn Tây province — an office above that of district magistrate, ranking in the fourth degree. Then, in the year Giáp Thân (1704), he was appointed *Đốc trấn* (governor) of Cao Bằng. That Lord Trịnh Căn entrusted the governorship of Cao Bằng to Hoàng giáp Đinh Nho Hoàn reflects the court’s confidence in, and high estimation of, his ability and his virtue. The histories tell us that in the year Ất Mùi, Vĩnh Thịnh era (1715), after Đinh had been appointed deputy envoy to China, Lord Trịnh Cương appointed as governor of Cao Bằng his fellow laureate and colleague, Doctor Nguyễn Công Hãng. The *Miscellaneous Records of Successive Dynasties* (hereafter *LTTK*) (3) report that Hãng at first had no wish to go. But the

governorship of Cao Băng had the reputation of being a "fat" post; Lord Trịnh wished to bestow that emolument on Nguyễn Công Hãng and therefore sent him. Sure enough, in the year Đinh Dậu, Vĩnh Thịnh era (1717) — only two years later — Governor Nguyễn Công Hãng was recalled to the capital by Lord Trịnh Cương to serve as right vice-minister of the Ministry of War, of the third degree; and the following year (1718) he was appointed chief envoy at the head of our embassy to China, to announce the death of King Lê Hy Tông and to thank the Qing emperor for having agreed to the changes and reductions in tribute proposed by the previous embassy — the very one in which Hoàng giáp Đinh had served as deputy envoy. Nguyễn Công Hãng's course, so similar to that of Hoàng giáp Đinh Nho Hoàn a decade earlier, helps us to see that Đinh Nho Hoàn was a laureate of both virtue and ability, and was accordingly favoured, esteemed, recommended and promoted by king and lord to the governorship of Cao Băng, before being recalled to court to serve as deputy envoy in our country's embassy to China in the year Ất Mùi (1715).

Cao Băng was at that time a strategically important border region, where frontier disputes broke out frequently and where bandit bands from China repeatedly crossed over to plunder. The so-called "Chinese merchants' stele" indicates that during Hoàng giáp Đinh's governorship of the province, the Chinese showed him respect and gratitude for having created favourable conditions for their trade with our country to prosper. This proves that the economy of Cao Băng developed under his governorship, that social conditions there were stable, and that banditry no longer ran unchecked. This is precisely one significant contribution that Đinh Nho Hoàn made to the people and the country during his term as governor.

Under Lord Trịnh Cương, the selection of members for the embassies sent to China was treated as a matter of particular importance. Chief and deputy envoys were all chosen from among high officials at court holding at least the doctorate, men recognised for their ability, their integrity and their high standing. The memorial (*khải*) of Doctor Nguyễn Công Hãng tells us something of the criteria applied at this period in choosing the heads of embassies: "… Whether we are held in light or in high regard is not a matter of a single envoy; it truly bears on making a distant and foreign neighbour respect or despise us. Hence envoys must be chosen from among men who argue well and know much; what is sought today are ministers of weight and of fine virtue… If, then, they are not men of true, singular and extraordinary talent, how could they answer [the lord's] generous and earnest intentions in the selection of envoys? …" (*LTTK*, op. cit., p. 276). The appointment of Hoàng giáp Đinh Nho Hoàn as deputy envoy of our embassy of the year Ất Mùi (1715) therefore proves that he was a minister of weight, trusted by the court and highly regarded for his ability, his virtue and his standing.

The official histories, however, record nothing specific about the deputy envoy Đinh Nho Hoàn's own contribution to this diplomatic mission. All that remains is the memorial presented to Lord Trịnh before the departure of the embassy in which Đinh served as deputy envoy. It contains the following passage: "Your servants venture to think that the sending of ministers on embassy is first recorded in the *Book of Odes*. The former kings and sages of the Zhou, to show their solicitude for their subjects and their compassion for the hardships and toil of envoys upon the road, themselves composed the three stanzas of the poem *Hoàng hoa*, which they had passed to the musicians and set to strings and flutes, so as to manifest an attentive and affectionate heart. Poets have recorded that event for the instruction of later ages. In sum, it was a broad virtue and a generous intention. Later ages too sent ministers on embassy, and the histories make mention of it, but these were merely charges assigned and carried out, in the

hope of continuing the good name of the ancients… Our country, from the Đinh, the Lý and the Trần onward, has always maintained embassies and friendly relations with China. As for sending envoys to convey the sovereign's views in the ceremonial of foreign relations, custom was generally followed, men being appointed in turn. Deep attachment between sovereign and envoy did sometimes exist, but it had never been seen expressed in poems set to music, in the manner of that brilliant style of the Zhou at Chengzhou!… Today we see with reverence that His Lordship [Trịnh Cương — author's note] personally oversees all the affairs of state and cultivates friendship with neighbouring lands; this embassy is the first since he took up the succession. Your servants, of slender means and slight talent, find themselves the object of particular attention and chosen for the embassy: their hearts are at once glad and abashed, so vast is the favour that reaches down even to the lowly… On the day your servants took their leave at the foot of the steps, they received precious words, encouragement and attentive consolation, and the gift of two poems in the national language: the first exhorting them to attend diligently to their mission and to convey the court's intentions; the second teaching them to keep the advantage in diplomatic speech; the last wish being that the two words 'merit and renown' should be fulfilled. In the lord's poems the brushstroke shines like the star Khuê, the voice of the verse rings like gold and jade, words and meaning are full and complete, revealing a scrupulous and heartfelt affection. This is the happy encounter of a lifetime, and a thing rare in a thousand years! Your servants, having raised the poems to read them, were stirred to the bowels and moved to the marrow. Seeing that this favour runs deeper than the ocean and this virtue weighs more than the high mountains, your servants, were they shattered ten thousand times over, could not repay one ten-thousandth of it!… They wish only that the sacred person may enjoy ten thousand years of long life, rising like the sun and constant as the moon; that the strength of the country may be as firm as Mount Tai and as bedrock; that the state may endure for ever. Your servants, sheltered by his august protection and looking up to his great good fortune, aspire only to see the matter brought to a close and the work accomplished. They respectfully submit this memorial of thanks that it may come to the lord's knowledge." (*LTTK*, op. cit., pp. 216–217).

The embassy sent to China in the year Ất Mùi (1715), the first of Lord Trịnh Cương's reign, consisted of chief and deputy envoys who were all laureates of the great examination, doctors of the third rank — such as Nguyễn Công Cơ, Lê Anh Tuấn and Nguyễn Mậu Áng; only the deputy envoy Đinh Nho Hoàn belonged to the second rank. The style and the ideas of the memorial cited above therefore certainly owe something to Hoàng giáp Đinh's participation and counsel. Although the histories do not record the substance of the embassy, the words and phrases of this memorial let us see that Lord Trịnh Cương had entrusted our embassy with the heavy responsibility of debating and disputing with the Qing court a number of questions important to relations between the two countries at that time. Notably, for the first time in history, the lord presented the embassy with two poems in *nôm* script, setting out his instructions and his requirements. The text of these two poems has not been found to this day. The two poems that Lord Trịnh Cương presented to the following embassy, that of the year Mậu Tuất (1718), have however survived. We reproduce them here for reference:

Poem I (original in Chinese characters).

Sino-Vietnamese transcription:

> Hoàng đạo thanh di, diệu sứ tinh Minh thời trọng tuyển, thuộc thời anh Vân tiên chỉ xích Khâm Chu bệ Nhật lộ tam thiên Vũ Hán tinh Bão phụ trung thành xa thượng khuyết Kích ngang từ sắc bá Yên Kinh Tân ân cựu phục cung thiên chỉ Hào phụng qui lai điệp quốc vinh.

Rendering of the sense:

> Broad is the royal road, and bright the envoy's star; He bears the insignia of his charge, a man of high talent. His flowering brush reaches up to the celestial court; Over the long leagues, massed banners seem to see him off. His loyal heart draws near the palace gates; At Yên Kinh our country's envoy shines out. Heaven's will grants a fresh favour: He brings home victory and glory for his land.

(Vietnamese verse translation by Hương Nao.)

Poem II (in *nôm* script):

> Stone and gold are his constancy, iron is his heart; Steadfastly this mission holds to filial duty and loyalty. Right and advantage will be weighed with care in the exchanges; Principle and expediency he will sound out: therein lies his guard. By his high worth the phoenix and the luan will be known; His standing, made firm, will be more solid than Mounts Tai and Song. May this work be quickly accomplished and renown swiftly follow: Thus will the word *hưu đồng* be wholly fulfilled.

The content of this memorial and of these two poems allows us to picture the charge that Lord Trịnh Cương laid upon the chief and deputy envoys of our embassy of the year Ất Mùi (1715): to conduct the exchanges, replies and disputes with sufficient skill that they should be reasonable, peaceable and advantageous to the country. As for military and defensive matters, these were to be weighed and calculated carefully in speech, so as to let slip no state secret. The lord furthermore had full confidence in the ability of our envoys and in their steadiness, likened to Mounts Tai and Song, hoping they would not betray that trust, that they would fulfil their charge with distinction and bring home to the country the joy of victory (4).

The histories record only that in the year Bính Thân, Vĩnh Thịnh era (1716), the embassy in which Hoàng giáp Đinh served as deputy envoy returned home successfully. What concrete results it obtained, the histories do not say. Yet throughout his rule Lord Trịnh Cương attached great weight to relations between our country and its large Chinese neighbour, out of a concern to preserve concord so that "the people of a small country might live and work in peace". Disputes over frontier sovereignty, and the incursions and plundering of Qing bandit bands, were therefore very probably among the important questions that the embassy of the year Ất Mùi raised and disputed with the Chinese court. May we not think that it laid the groundwork for the diplomatic successes of later embassies, until in the year Mậu Thân, Bảo Thái era (1728), the Qing emperor was obliged to return to us forty *dặm* of frontier land, in what is now the Hà Giang region, which they had encroached upon? (4)

There is one specific matter that our embassy of the year Ất Mùi proposed and that the Qing court accepted: the question of tribute. "… The customary tribute objects, such as incense burners, flower vases of gold, silver basins…, may all be reckoned in ingots of gold and silver, then handed over to the Guangxi finance commission, which will receive them and place them

in store. Elephant ivory and rhinoceros horn are all exempted and need no longer be sent. As to the number of escorts, it may be reduced with discretion: only a few agents and officials need proceed to the capital…" (*LTTK*, op. cit., p. 220). We all know how heavy the annual tribute owed by our country to China was. Earlier, for instance, under the Cảnh Trị era (1663), the yearly tribute comprised four sets of gold incense burners and flower vases weighing 209 taels, twelve silver basins weighing 691 taels, twenty rhinoceros horns and twenty elephant tusks… (5), besides a considerable body of escorts and bearers who had to be brought all the way to Yên Kinh, across deep rivers and perilous mountains, over several thousand kilometres. It was very likely thanks to the sharp and well-founded argument of our embassy of the year Ât Mùi (1715) that the Qing emperor agreed that the gold and silver objects, which we had previously been required to have wrought, need henceforth be delivered only as ingots; others, such as rhinoceros horn and elephant ivory, were exempted outright; the number of bearers was reduced, and delivery could be made in Guangxi, without having to reach Yên Kinh (Beijing) by roads long, difficult, exhausting and costly in the extreme. Considering only the two embassies sent to China in Ât Mùi (1715) and Mậu Tuất (1718), each lost a deputy envoy on the road: Hoàng giáp Đinh Nho Hoàn and Doctor Nguyễn Tất Bột (6). This was a diplomatic success of real consequence, which the embassy of the deputy envoy Đinh Nho Hoàn secured for the country. It is deeply to be regretted that when the embassy returned home to report its successes to king, lord and court, the deputy envoy Đinh Nho Hoàn had already died, barely arrived at Yên Kinh. But it is certain that before departure, and over several months on the road, the leaders of our embassy discussed in detail the strategies of reply and argument to be used with the Qing court, so as to carry out the tasks they had been given. It is certain that in his capacity as deputy envoy, Hoàng giáp Đinh Nho Hoàn too offered counsel of value. Thus, although he perished on the road in the performance of his duty and could not receive in person the praise of king, lord and court for the diplomatic successes the embassy brought home, those successes plainly could not have been achieved without his fitting contribution.

Hoàng giáp Đinh Nho Hoàn also left posterity a body of poetic writing, including poems composed during his embassy to Yên Kinh. We have no ambition here to analyse the beauty and originality of Mặc Trai's poetry. But several pieces he wrote to present to Chinese literati or in reply to them — such as "Presented to the recluse Bao of Hankou" and "Presented to the aged poet Ma Qixian of Jinling" — tell us that his literary gift was esteemed and praised even abroad, and that his poems and inscriptions were sought after. Likewise, at Mặc Trai's death, the Kangxi emperor of the Qing composed a poem of condolence and charged court officials with performing the funeral rites, which proves that even Chinese rulers and officials held his virtue in high regard.

This brief sketch of the career and merits of Hoàng giáp Đinh Nho Hoàn, together with the recently recovered and published *Mặc Trai thi tập*, shows him to have been a figure of Vietnamese history whose gifts to the people and the country were precious, and of whom we, his posterity, are deeply proud.

References

1. The years of birth and death of Doctor and *Tham tụng* Nguyễn Hiệu are given differently in works both old and new. Here we rely on the genealogy of the Nguyễn lineage of his native village, Nông Trường commune, Triệu Sơn district, Thanh Hóa province.

2. Đinh Nho Hoàn, *Mặc Trai thi tập*, Văn học Publishing House, 2009, p. 289.
3. Ngô Cao Lãng, *Lịch triều tạp kỉ*, vol. I, Social Sciences Publishing House, Hanoi, 1975.
4. One Chinese *dặm* equals 500 m; the land recovered was therefore 20 km in length.
5. National History Bureau of the Nguyễn Dynasty, *Khâm định Việt sử thông giám cương mục*, vol. II, Education Publishing House, 1998.
6. Quốc Chấn, *The Heads of the Capital Thăng Long (13th–18th Centuries)*, Education Publishing House, 2010, pp. 93 and 102.

2. The mandarinal offices held by Hoàng giáp Đinh Nho Hoàn

Dr Nguyễn Hữu Tâm — Institute of History

[source: 17.doc]

I. Notes on the background of Đinh Nho Hoàn (1671–1716)

Đinh Nho Hoàn was a descendant of the Đinh lineage, an "illustrious family and respected clan" of Sơn Hòa commune, Hương Sơn district, in Hoan Châu (today Hà Tĩnh). The clan genealogy records that the Đinh of Sơn Hòa descend from the great general Đinh Điền, one of the four companions of Đinh Bộ Lĩnh — with Nguyễn Bặc, Lưu Cơ and Trịnh Tú — boys of the same age who herded buffalo, cut grass and played at war with reed stalks for banners, and who later became his close comrades-in-arms on the road to suppressing the "twelve warlords" and then founding the Đinh dynasty. Historians have set great store by the contribution of these village companions of Đinh Bộ Lĩnh (924–979): "Whenever the First Emperor planned a battle, he invariably deliberated with the four of them. All were foremost among those who assisted the royal mandate." When the Đinh dynasty was established in 968 they became the "four pillars of the court", Đinh Điền holding the office of *Ngoại giáp*, in charge of military affairs beyond the borders.

Đinh Phúc Diên is precisely the founding ancestor of the Đinh of Sơn Hòa. A subordinate officer of General Lê Tuấn Mậu, he fought for the Lê against the Mạc; after his commander's death he brought his brothers and their families to take refuge in Nghệ An and settled in the village of Bình Hòa (today hamlet 3 of Sơn Hòa commune), Hương Sơn district. In the seventh generation, Đinh Nho Công (1637–1695) moved from Bình Hòa down to the village of Gôi Mỹ (also in present-day Sơn Hòa commune). A diligent student, well versed in the classics and the histories, he placed first in the provincial examination (*Giải nguyên*), then, at the metropolitan and palace examinations, obtained the associate doctorate in the year Canh Tuất, the eighth year of the Cảnh Trị era (1670), thus becoming the first laureate of the Đinh Nho lineage.

The stele bearing the names of the doctors of the Canh Tuất examination, eighth year of the Cảnh Trị era (1670), still preserved at the Quốc Tử Giám, records the thirty-one laureates of that examination, among them "Đinh Nho Công, of An Ấp commune, Hương Sơn district", on the list of twenty-seven who passed in the third rank as associate doctors.

Bùi Dương Lịch's *Notes on Nghệ An* record the following: "Đinh Nho Công, of An Ấp commune, Hương Sơn district. According to the *Register of Laureates*, he placed first in the provincial examination and became an associate doctor at the examination of the year Canh Thìn, under Lê Huyền Tông, eighth year of the Cảnh Trị era (1670); he rose to the office of assistant censor

(*Thiêm đô Ngự sử*) before being demoted to *Tự khanh*. He was the father of Đinh Nho Hoàn." The author adds information on the notable achievements of Đinh Nho Công and his descendants during his provincial service in Sơn Tây: "The *Continuation of the Annals of Đại Việt* records: 'Under Lê Hy Tông, thirteenth year of the Chính Hòa era (1692), the *Tham chính* of Sơn Tây, Đinh Nho, having been placed in the highest category in the assessment of his performance, was promoted to assistant censor. His descendants were numerous and in every generation produced men of letters.'"

Đinh Nho Công had two wives and twelve children, of whom six were sons. Đinh Nho Hoàn was his third son, by his wife of the Đặng lineage. He was born on the fifth day of the tenth month of the year Tân Hợi, ninth year of the Cảnh Trị era — that is, 7 November 1671. Writing of himself, Đinh Nho Hoàn notes: "My parents had twelve children; I, Mặc Trai, am one of the younger ones."

Đinh Nho Hoàn bore the courtesy name Tồn Phác and the pen name Mặc Trai (or Mặc Ông). Tradition holds him to have been intelligent and devoted to study; from childhood his father trained him directly, and when older he studied under several renowned masters of the capital, Thăng Long. His son-in-law, Doctor Nguyễn Trọng Thường, who passed the examination of the year Nhâm Thìn, eighth year of the Vĩnh Thịnh era (1712), under Lê Dụ Tông, wrote in his preface to the *Mặc Ông sứ tập*, of his by then deceased father-in-law: "He was a gentle and scrupulous man, intelligent by nature and eager to learn; there was no book he had not read, and in occasional verse he was especially outstanding."

At the age said to be that "of standing firm" (thirty), Đinh Nho Hoàn saw his name inscribed on the golden tablet at the Quốc Tử Giám, at the examination of the year Canh Thìn, twenty-first year of the Chính Hòa era (1700). He passed as a doctor of the second rank — that is, *Hoàng giáp* — placing fourth among the nineteen laureates of that examination. That session produced neither a *Trạng nguyên* nor a *Bảng nhãn*: only Nguyễn Đình Úc, of Thanh Trì, obtained the first rank, third name, the title of *Thám hoa*. The *Continuation of the Annals of Đại Việt*, the *Miscellaneous Records of Successive Dynasties*, and above all the stele of the doctors of the Canh Thìn examination, twenty-first year of Chính Hòa (1700), record that session clearly, together with the list and native places of the laureates. The stele text indicates that more than two thousand candidates sat that examination, and that only nineteen, the most outstanding, were selected.

II. The offices successively held by Hoàng giáp Đinh Nho Hoàn

At thirty, in his full vigour, and with the ardour of a Confucian scholar fresh from the examinations, Đinh Nho Hoàn entered the mandarinate with enthusiasm. His whole equipment was the classical learning accumulated over his younger years, and he meant to put that learning at the service of the Lê–Trịnh state. The sources say little about the course of his career, but the details reflected in the histories of the period and in the family genealogy allow us to see that his official path was relatively smooth and distinguished.

Đinh Nho Hoàn himself gave a very brief account of it: "At the Canh Thìn examination, at the age of thirty, I placed second in the metropolitan examination and was granted the second rank (*Hoàng giáp*). In the mid-autumn month (the eighth) of the year Nhâm Ngọ — that is, September 1702 — I was sent on service to the circuit of Sơn Tây. In the first month of autumn

(the seventh) of the year Giáp Thân — that is, August 1704 — I was sent as *Đốc trấn* of Cao Bình (Cao Bằng)…" On the basis of this self-account, Professor Ngô Đức Thọ holds that "after passing the examination, Đinh Nho Hoàn served for some two years as a supernumerary at the Hàn lâm Academy, and was then appointed *Tham chính* of the circuit of Sơn Tây; less than a year later he was transferred to the office of *Đốc trấn* of the prefecture of Cao Bình, that is, Cao Bằng…"

Here we need to look more closely at the Lê–Trịnh system of appointing doctors on leaving the examinations. The scholar Lê Quý Đôn (1726–1784), in his *Brief Notes of Things Seen and Heard*, describes very clearly the Lê dynasty's regime of preferment: "Our dynasty, from the restoration to the present, has treated doctoral laureates with the greatest generosity and appointed them to very high office." He then concludes: "These five marks of favour, compared with what has been done in China from the institution of the examinations until now, are without precedent."

Lê Quý Đôn also reports the first office conferred by the Lê dynasty on doctoral laureates according to their rank of placement: "After his triumphal return to his village, the doctor comes back to the capital; then the court proposes and confers office. At the first appointment, the *Trạng nguyên* receives the office of *Thị giảng*, the *Bảng nhãn* that of *Thị thư*, the *Thám hoa* that of *Thị chế*, the *Hoàng giáp* that of *Hiệu lý*; as for ordinary doctors, since the restoration they began to be given the office of *Giám sát*…"

The restored Lê dynasty thus inherited the system of offices granted to newly qualified doctors instituted under Lê Thánh Tông (1460–1497). After passing as *Hoàng giáp* at the Canh Thìn examination, twenty-first year of Chính Hòa (1700), the first office Đinh Nho Hoàn received was that of *Hiệu lý*, that is, corrector at the Hàn lâm Academy. Both the table of offices of the Hồng Đức era (1470–1497), under Lê Thánh Tông, and that of the Bảo Thái era (1720–1729), under Lê Dụ Tông, place the Hàn lâm Academy corrector among the civil offices, in the seventh degree, principal class. It was a post of the pen: the corrector's duty was to revise the writings held at the Academy. Đặng Xuân Bảng writes in his *Supplementary Studies in History*: "Table of offices under the Lê… The Hàn lâm Academy (charged with drafting proclamations and patents) comprises the offices of *Thừa chỉ*, *Thị độc*, *Thị giảng*, *Thị thư*, *Hiệu lý*, *Hiệu thảo*…"

According to Đinh Nho Hoàn's own account, in the eighth month of the year Nhâm Ngọ (September 1702), that is, somewhat more than two years after passing and while holding the office of corrector at the Academy, he was again "sent on service to the circuit of Sơn Tây" by the Lê–Trịnh court — without his specifying what duty was assigned to him. It is not clear on what source other than the genealogy of the Đinh of Sơn Hòa, in Hương Sơn (Hà Tĩnh), Professor Ngô Đức Thọ relies in asserting that Đinh Nho Hoàn was "appointed *Tham chính* of the circuit of Sơn Tây".

The Lê–Trịnh took over the method of assessing the merits and performance of officials in post practised by earlier dynasties, with a "merit assessment", or triennial review. In the year Quý Dậu, fourteenth year of the Chính Hòa era (1693), "in winter, in the twelfth month, rules were fixed for assessing the merits of clerks. The assessment was divided into four categories: 1. upright and able; 2. slothful; 3. ordinary; 4. rapacious and devious. For all subordinate staff of the offices of the capital and of the provinces, a merit assessment was to be conducted every three years, in order to determine dismissals or promotions. This rule was established as a

lasting regulation." Phan Huy Chú passed the following judgment on the Lê–Trịnh method of assessment: "At that time the deadlines for assessment were very strict; among officials of the capital and the provinces, one with good results was invariably promoted to high office and charged with many affairs, while one placed in the lowest degree had to be demoted… The laws were clear and severe, scholars vied with one another in effort, and the office-holder held himself to bearing and integrity: hence that age was called peaceable. Such was the effect of a well-applied rule."

Đinh Nho Hoàn had qualified only a little over two years earlier and was holding the office of corrector at the Hàn lâm Academy: this may be seen as the period of "probationary official" (*thí quan*, 試官) of the *Hoàng giáp* of the Canh Thìn examination (1700). In September 1702, that is, before the three-year term, he was, by order of the court, transferred to the circuit of Sơn Tây to take charge of local administration. It can therefore be seen that this "transfer" — or, in modern parlance, this "rotation of cadres" — was quite unusual and came before the prescribed assessment term.

One question calls for an answer: was he sent to Sơn Tây to assume the important office of *Tham chính* of the circuit?

We all know that the administrative organisation and local government of the Lê–Trịnh period essentially retained the division instituted under Lê Thánh Tông. The country was divided into *trấn*, prefectures, districts, sub-prefectures and communes. The Lê–Trịnh converted the circuits established under Lê Thánh Tông into *trấn*, distinguishing inner from outer *trấn*. The inner *trấn* were those of the lowlands: Hải Dương, Sơn Nam, Sơn Tây and Kinh Bắc; the outer *trấn* were those of the remote and coastal regions: Hưng Hóa, Lạng Sơn, Thái Nguyên, Tuyên Quang and An (Yên) Quảng. The two *trấn* of Thanh Hoa and Nghệ An were left unchanged. The North, governed by the Lê–Trịnh, comprised eleven *trấn*; together with Thuận Hóa and Quảng Nam, under the Nguyễn lords in the South, the country had a total of thirteen *trấn* in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

The administration of each *trấn* under the Lê–Trịnh rested on three bodies: the *Trấn tỵ*, the *Thừa tỵ* and the *Hiến tỵ*, commonly called the "three offices". The *Trấn tỵ*, fairly close to the military command office of Lê Thánh Tông's time, was charged with holding military authority and with local patrol and defence.

The *Trấn tỵ* held the widest authority in the province, above both the *Thừa tỵ* (administration office) and the *Hiến tỵ* (surveillance office). At its head stood a *Trấn thủ*, a *Đốc trấn* or a *Lưu thủ* — "the titles differ, but the function of governing the *trấn* is one and the same" — generally a senior military officer appointed by the court. Ordinary *trấn* received a *Trấn thủ*; but for the three circuits of Cao Bằng, Lạng Sơn and Nghệ An, "border affairs being numerous and vexatious, the office of *Đốc trấn* was instituted; and Thanh Hóa, being an essential base, received separately the office of *Lưu thủ*".

The administration office had administrative duties: military and civil affairs, population registers, collection of monies, and litigation. Its head, the *Thừa chính sứ*, was of the third degree, secondary class.

The surveillance office was specifically charged with judicial matters: memorials to the sovereign, investigations, impeachments, searches, interrogations, collegial inspections, assessments of officials, and tours of inspection.

The head of the administration office was the *Thừa chính sứ*, assisted by a *Thừa chính phó sứ*, a *Tham chính* and a *Tham nghị* — the *Tham chính* being of the fourth degree, secondary class, and the *Tham nghị* of the fifth degree, secondary class. The surveillance office had as its head the *Hiến sát sứ*, of the sixth degree, principal class, and as his deputy the *Hiến sát phó sứ*, of the seventh degree, principal class.

Thus, had Đinh Nho Hoàn been appointed *Tham chính* of the circuit of Sơn Tây, this would fit poorly with the rule of the five marks of favour granted by the Lê–Trịnh to new doctors, as reported by Lê Quý Đôn: “One appointed in the provinces, in the *trấn*, is appointed to the two offices of administration and surveillance, and always receives the seal as head in title, and not a deputy’s post.” In other words, had he been given the office of *Tham chính*, he would have been only a deputy — what Lê Quý Đôn calls a second-rank post — to the *Thừa chính sứ* of the Sơn Tây *trấn*. But under the rule of appointment he ought to have received the headship in title of one of the two offices. Considering the degrees fixed under the Lê–Trịnh, the *Thừa chính sứ* was of the third degree, secondary class, whereas Đinh Nho Hoàn was still only of the seventh degree, principal class; even if promoted before the three-year term, he could not have leapt five steps to the fourth degree, secondary class, and the office of *Tham chính*, still less seven steps to the third degree, secondary class, and that of *Thừa chính sứ*. Hence, in our view, Đinh Nho Hoàn was not “appointed *Tham chính* of the circuit of Sơn Tây” in 1702.

What office, then, was entrusted to him? In terms of the Lê–Trịnh system of offices, that of corrector at the Hàn lâm Academy, which he held during his first two years of service, was of the seventh degree, principal class, equivalent to that of *Hiến sát phó sứ*. Accordingly, when transferred to Sơn Tây, he was appointed *Hiến sát sứ*, of the sixth degree, principal class, which accords with the Lê–Trịnh rules of promotion inherited from Lê Thánh Tông: “When the office of *Hiến sứ* falls vacant, men from the censorate offices and the six services, long practised in their work, must be appointed to it… For the surveillance office is the awe-inspiring post of a province, and is therefore held to be important.” This appointment at the same time respected the favour granted to laureates sent to the provinces, namely the holding of the seal in title of the administration and surveillance offices.

This leap of two steps, from the principal seventh degree to the principal sixth, was not an isolated case under the restored Lê. In the third year of the Chính Hòa era (1682) the rules of assessment already provided: “One assessment a year, in three degrees; only after three years are promotions and demotions decided. Officials of the capital and the provinces who have completed three years of service and been placed three times in the highest degree are promoted by two steps and receive in addition a gratuity of fifty quan of good coin…” Later, in the third year of the Vĩnh Thịnh era (1707), it was again provided: “It is laid down that three assessments all placed in the highest degree entail promotion by two steps…” This exceptional promotion of 1702 allows us to affirm that in a little over two years of probationary service at the central court, Đinh Nho Hoàn had at once shown his diligence and his capacity for work, and had earned, in the appraisal of merits, the confidence of the court and of his colleagues as to his integrity and his ability.

For all the reasons adduced above, we affirm that in the eighth month of the year Nhâm Ngọ — that is, in September 1702 — Đinh Nho Hoàn was appointed *Hiến sát sứ* of Sơn Tây, in the sixth degree, principal class.

After nearly two years in that office, in August 1704 the court sent him as *Đốc trấn* to Cao Bằng: “In the first month of autumn (the seventh) of the year Giáp Thân — that is, August 1704 — sent as *Đốc trấn* of Cao Bình (Cao Bằng).” To this day no source has been found indicating how long he held office at Cao Bằng.

Yet both the *Continuation of the Annals of Đại Việt (1676–1789)* and the *Miscellaneous Records of Successive Dynasties* record: “Year Giáp Thân, twenty-fifth year of the Chính Hòa era (1704)… in the eighth month, in autumn, Nguyễn Mại was made *Đốc trấn* of Cao Bằng.”

Thus, at almost the same time, Đinh Nho Hoàn (August 1704) and Nguyễn Mại (September 1704) are said to have been sent as *Đốc trấn* to Cao Bằng. Does the genealogy of the Đinh of Hương Sơn contain some confusion here? In our modest view, a genealogy transcribed over many generations is liable to the phenomenon whereby “three copies lose the original”. We therefore suppose that Đinh Nho Hoàn’s departure for Cao Bằng must be placed after September 1704, the date of Nguyễn Mại’s appointment — perhaps in the years 1705–1706. His time as *Hiến sát sứ* of Sơn Tây would then not have lasted under two years (from September 1702 to August 1704), as the genealogy states, but three years or more, until 1705 or 1706 — at least until the assessment term — before the court sent him as *Đốc trấn* to Cao Bằng. The office of *Đốc trấn* was then equivalent to that of *Đốc thị* of the Nghệ An *trấn*. Phan Huy Chú informs us: “The offices of *Đốc đồng* and *Đốc thị* were instituted at the beginning of the Lê restoration. In the *trấn* the office of *Đốc đồng* was instituted, to try lawsuits; in the *trấn* of Nghệ An the office of *Đốc thị* was instituted, sharing in the management of the frontier. The *Đốc đồng* was taken from among officials of the fourth or fifth degree and below, the *Đốc thị* from among those of the third or fourth degree. Sometimes, too, a man was chosen according to circumstance, without regard to degree.”

As to when he left his post at Cao Bằng, we fully endorse the interpretation of Professor Ngô Đức Thọ, who analyses the poem *Ngộ Phúc Kiến khách Khâu Đỉnh thần lai phỏng* 遇福建客丘鼎臣來訪 (“Meeting Khâu Đỉnh Thần of Fujian, who came to visit me”) together with Đinh Nho Hoàn’s own headnote: “Formerly, at Cao Bằng, he [Khâu Đỉnh Thần] was a guest in my house; since we parted, five years have passed before we met again.” From this Mr Ngô draws the scholarly conclusion: “There are therefore grounds for supposing that he remained at Cao Bằng until about 1710, when he was recalled to the capital.”

Đinh Nho Hoàn’s appointment as *Đốc trấn* of Cao Bằng reflects the court’s high confidence and attests his capacity to govern. We all know that in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries Cao Bằng, Lạng Sơn and Nghệ An received particular attention from the Lê–Trịnh court, which regarded these regions as strategic and as areas of “vexatious frontier” — hence the institution of the office of *Đốc trấn*. The official placed at the head of these rugged and crucial marches had countless duties, chiefly the maintenance of security and order among the population and the suppression of frequent banditry: “To suppress bandits, keep the local population at peace, and try cases of banditry and gambling… As soon as a district magistrate reports that bandits are in hiding, he must take prompt measures and, as the case requires, proceed to their capture, so that malefactors are finally put down and the population left in

peace. If his guard is not rigorous and his orders neglected, he shall be prosecuted for breach of the law…" The court further laid down severe rules to prevent abuses and arbitrariness by local officials, a source of harassment for frontier populations: "It is forbidden to create at will offices not provided for by regulation and to unleash them to trouble the people. In case of infringement, the surveillance office shall impeach the offender so that he may be tried and punished according to the gravity of the case."

During his governorship of Cao Băng, Đinh Nho Hoàn not only discharged well the duties the court had entrusted to him, but left behind numerous achievements for the benefit of the population, and a grateful memory among the ethnic communities and among the Chinese merchants who passed through in trade. To facilitate commerce in this difficult and remote border region, he had the roads repaired and the rocky rapids blasted so that boats might pass easily, and had the inspection of goods speeded up, so that Chinese traders could bring their wares to market in time. To perpetuate the memory of his benefactions, "the Chinese merchants of Cao Băng gathered funds and erected a stele before the gate of their guild hall to celebrate the virtue of Governor Đinh".

Besides the heavy charge of governor, Đinh Nho Hoàn regularly devoted time to learning about and caring for the lives of the ethnic minority peoples. With the heart of a romantic and lyrical poet, and a good grasp of the concrete history of the land he administered, he used his brush to write poems on peace, on urging the frontier people to do good and reject evil, on the beautiful sites of the region… "He composed the *Hoán tỉnh châu dân từ* in *nôm* script, a long song of one hundred and forty-eight lines in *lục bát* metre, calling on the local people to do good and forsake evil so as to settle and prosper, after the war between the Lê–Trịnh power and the Mạc had ended in the latter's defeat… as well as ten poems celebrating the scenic spots of Cao Băng, known under the title *Cao Băng thập thủ*…"

Assessing the value of this collection, Nguyễn Thị Lâm wrote: "In the *Cao Băng thập thủ*, under Đinh Nho Hoàn's brush, the green mountains and clear waters of this far corner of the country appear in strokes truly vivid and engaging, deeply marked with the particular colour of the Cao Băng country. People and landscape seem to merge; here and there one glimpses an old citadel, a temple where incense smoke curls, the indigo silhouettes of the local peoples going in and out of the caves, the monastery bell ringing in the night, the clear flute of the fishing village, the woodcutter's song on the mountainside, freshly whitewashed houses, the bustle of the market on the river landing… It is a realistic picture of a life gradually reviving after a long period of turmoil. The author's attachment to the land of Cao Băng is moreover bound up with a very high consciousness of his responsibility towards country and people."

It can thus be seen that Governor Đinh Nho Hoàn's singular attachment to Cao Băng expressed a deep love of country and people, and at the same time revealed, in an official of the Lê–Trịnh, an awareness of the need to preserve the integrity of the frontier territory.

After some four or five years governing the Cao Băng frontier, rich in merit and achievement, he was recalled by the court to Thăng Long around 1710. According to Bùi Dương Lịch in his *Notes on Nghệ An*, Đinh Nho Hoàn rose to the office of right vice-minister of the Ministry of Works.

The Ministry of Works was responsible for ramparts, bridges and sluices, roads, construction, the craft corps, works of repair and building, as well as the prohibitions relating to mountains

and forests, gardens, watercourses and ponds, and for hearing appeals brought before the Works service. The left and right vice-ministers were both deputies to the minister in each of the six ministries, of the third degree, secondary class. From 1710, then, Đinh Nho Hoàn stood with full dignity as a high dignitary of the capital, with the office of right vice-minister of Works.

Five years later, in 1715, while heading the Bureau of Seals, charged with the custody of the great seal and the other important seals of state, he was designated by the court as deputy envoy of the legation sent to the Qing court. The Nguyễn historiographers recorded this embassy precisely: "Year Ất Mùi, eleventh year of the Vĩnh Thịnh era (1715), under Lê Dụ Tông; in the first month, in spring, envoys were dispatched to the Qing… Chief envoys: Nguyễn Công Cơ, left vice-minister of Finance, and Lê Anh Tuân, chamberlain of the Imperial Stud; deputy envoys: Đinh Nho Hoàn, chamberlain of the Bureau of Seals, and Nguyễn Mậu Áng, secretary in the Personnel service, went to the Qing to present the annual tribute. The following year Công Cơ and the others returned home…" Unhappily, in the course of this important embassy, the deputy envoy Đinh Nho Hoàn died on the road, before reaching Beijing. He left the manuscript of a collection of embassy poems, which his son-in-law, Doctor Nguyễn Trọng Thường, later arranged and entitled *Mặc Ông sứ tập*. The circumstances of his death are recorded in many later works, such as the *Notes on Nghệ An* and the *Miscellaneous Records of Successive Dynasties*. The National History Bureau of the Nguyễn in particular writes in the *Khâm định Việt sử thông giám cương mục*: "Year Đinh Dậu, thirteenth year of [the Vĩnh Thịnh era] (1717), in the tenth month, in winter. Honour was paid to the virtuous and faithful woman, Lady Phan [Viên, of Do Lễ commune, Hưng Nguyên district], wife of Đinh Nho Hoàn. Nho Hoàn had gone on embassy to China and died on the way. After the coffin had been brought back and buried, Lady Phan hanged herself to follow him in death. The matter being reported to the court, it had rice fields assigned for her cult, conferred on her posthumously the title *Á thận phu nhân*, had an ancestral shrine established for her worship, and bestowed a gilded tablet bearing the two words 'faithful widow', hung at the door of her house in her honour."

As to whether the court later conferred any further posthumous office on the deputy envoy Đinh Nho Hoàn, we have to this day no definite evidence. We know only that the genealogy of the Đinh lineage records that he was raised to the rank of tutelary deity, under the title "The Deity Đắc đạt Đại vương Tuân lương Lượng trực Đoan túc Dực bảo Trung hưng".

From his entry into Lê–Trịnh public life in 1700 until his departure from this world in 1716, Hoàng giáp Đinh Nho Hoàn, over nearly two decades of effort, rose through several high offices at court. He fully displayed his capacity for government and discharged outstandingly every responsibility entrusted to him. His death on the road, in the service of the embassy, plainly manifested the devotion of the subject who "carries out his sovereign's mandate to the end". The example of an unblemished career, together with the faithful death of his wife and of himself, deserves the respect and admiration of the lineage's descendants and of later generations alike.

Chronology of Đinh Nho Hoàn (1671–1716)

Date	Event / office	Degree	Notes
1671	Born at Gôi Mỹ		

Date	Event / office	Degree	Notes
	hamlet, Sơn Hòa commune, Hương Sơn		
1700	Passed as doctor of the second rank (*Hoàng giáp*), Canh Thìn examination, Chính Hòa 21		
Aug. 1700	Corrector (*Hiệu lý*) at the Hàn lâm Academy	7th degree, principal class	
Sept. 1702	*Hiến sát sứ* of the Sơn Tây *trấn*	6th degree, principal class	
late 1705 – early 1706	*Đốc trấn* of Cao Bằng	4th degree, principal class	Composed the *Hoán tỉnh châu dân từ* in *nôm* and the ten poems of the *Cao Bằng thập thủ*
1710	Right vice-minister of the Ministry of Works	3rd degree, secondary class	
c. 1713	Chamberlain of the Bureau of Seals		
1715	Deputy envoy of the legation to the Qing		Many embassy poems, arranged after his death by his son-in-law, Doctor Nguyễn Trọng Thường, under the title *Mặc Trai sứ tập*
1716	Died on the road to the Qing court, aged forty-six		

Year Ất Mùi, Double Fifth festival (June 2015). Written in the Quan Nhân study.

3. Đinh Nho Hoàn, a gifted governor whose name lives on with the land

Đinh Ngọc Viện — Propaganda and Education Commission of the Cao Bằng Provincial Party Committee

[source: 05.doc]

I. The land of Cao Bằng

Cao Bằng lies in the north-east of our country; its northern and north-eastern sides adjoin China along more than 333 km of frontier. To the west it borders the provinces of Tuyên Quang and Hà Giang; to the south, those of Bắc Kạn and Lạng Sơn. From ancient times Cao Bằng has been regarded as an essential "palisade" shielding the north-east of the fatherland.

Cao Bằng covers a natural area of 6,724.72 km^2, of which mountains and forest make up more than 90 per cent. According to 2014 figures, the population of the province was 519,702, of whom 94.2 per cent belonged to ethnic minorities.

From the centre of Cao Bằng a road network serves both the interior and the exterior of the province. The provincial seat lies in the middle of the city of Cao Bằng, which is itself set in a narrow basin at the meeting of several rivers: to the east the Bằng and the Củn, to the west the Hiến. The shape of the city centre suggests a peninsula. In the outskirts stand Mount Kỳ Sầm to the north, Mount Luân Sơn to the south, Mount Kim Pha to the east (also called the Mountain of Lady Hoàng), and the Khẩu Sơn (Khau Khẩu) range to the west. The poet Hoàng Đức Triều (An Định) celebrated the beauty of the town:

> On three sides three rivers roll their tumbling waters; On all four sides four pillars stand at dizzying height.

From of old, Cao Bằng has held a position of key strategic importance for the whole north-east of Việt Nam. A look back through history shows it: in the whole country, few places have borne the character of a capital as often as the Cao Bằng region, in varying degrees of extent. As early as the third century BCE the region bore the name of the kingdom of Nam Cương. This is the subject of the legend *Cẩu chủa cheng vùa* ("Nine lords contend for the throne"), an ancient tale very widespread among the Tày. The legend relates that at the end of the Hùng period there existed a kingdom of Nam Cương, comprising the western part of present-day Guangxi (China), the whole Cao Bằng region and the north-east of Việt Nam. The kingdom of Nam Cương comprised ten *mường*; the central one was the residence of King Thục Phán, and its capital was called Nam Bình — today Cao Bình, Hưng Đạo commune, city of Cao Bằng; the nine surrounding *mường* were governed by nine lords.

The kingdom of Nam Cương grew ever stronger and more prosperous. At that time the neighbouring kingdom of Văn Lang, that of the Hùng king, was weakening and was moreover facing invasion by the Qin; the Hùng king entrusted Thục Phán with command of the resistance against them. After the victory, the Hùng king yielded him the throne, and Thục Phán merged the two territories to found the kingdom of Âu Lạc, taking the title An Dương Vương and establishing his capital at Cổ Loa (Đông Anh, Hanoi).

It may therefore be affirmed that, legendary though it is, this account contains a historical kernel whose essential content is plain: from the very founding of the country, the land of Cao Bằng was a political and social centre — and consequently a cultural centre too — of the ancient Việt-Tày people, who contributed greatly to building and defending the country from prehistoric times.

In the eleventh century Vietnamese history records a further episode: the land of Cao Bằng again became a centre, with its capitals at Nà Lự (Na Lữ), Hoàng Tung commune (Hoà An), and

Cao Bình, Hưng Đạo commune (city of Cao Bằng). This was the kingdom of Trường Sinh, then of Đại Lịch, then of Đại Nam, headed by Nùng Tồn Phúc and Nùng Chí Cao, natives of the cave of Tượng Cần (today Ngọc Xuân ward, city of Cao Bằng).

With such historical depth, the place name Cao Bằng (Cao Bình) was officially recorded in the sources very early: it first appears in Nguyễn Trãi's *Dư địa chí*, written in 1438. The work states: "Bồ and Hoà An are in Cao Bằng. Bồ is a river name, Hoà An is a river name. Cao Bằng was formerly the outer territory of the Vũ Định circuit; to the north-east it adjoins the two Guang; to the south-west, Thái Nguyên and Lạng Sơn. It has one circuit prefecture, four sub-prefectures and 273 villages and communes. This is the fourth palisade on the northern side." At the end of the sixteenth century (1592) the Mạc withdrew to Cao Bằng, accompanied by some hundreds of people, and Mạc Kính Cung again chose Cao Bình for his capital. There the Mạc established a court with official reign eras, through three generations of rulers: Mạc Kính Cung, Mạc Kính Khoan and Mạc Kính Vũ. They set up a government, conducted state affairs, and held examinations — provincial and metropolitan — to recruit the talent needed to help them rule and administer all the provinces of the north-east of Đại Việt.

Under King Lê Hiến Tông, in the second year of the Cảnh Thống era (1499), the Thái Nguyên circuit was divided into the *trấn* of Thái Nguyên and the *trấn* of Cao Bằng. Nguyễn Siêu's *Đại Việt địa dư toàn biên* states clearly: "It was in the second year of the Cảnh Thống era (1499) that the *trấn* of Cao Bằng was separately established… then, in the second year of the Vĩnh Trị era (1677), the Mạc having fallen, the Lê re-established the *trấn* of Cao Bằng. A high dignitary was placed there to govern it…" The seat was then transferred from Cao Bình to Mục Mã — formerly the Mạc horse-breeding station — which is the centre of the present-day city of Cao Bằng.

Under the Tây Sơn, Nguyễn Huệ – Quang Trung reorganised the administrative system. Since the personal name of Quang Trung, Nguyễn Quang Bình, had to be avoided, all localities containing the word *Bình* had to be renamed, usually to *Bằng*. Thus the *trấn* of Cao Bình became Cao Bằng (1789). At the beginning of the Nguyễn dynasty the old name Cao Bình was restored, but the habit of the taboo meant that from then until today it has continued to be called Cao Bằng. The *Đại Nam nhất thống chí* notes it clearly: "Under the Tây Sơn it was called Cao Bằng; our dynasty followed this at the start of the Gia Long era, instituting there the offices of *trấn thủ*, *hiệp trấn* and *tham trấn*; in the seventh year of the Minh Mệnh era (1826) the name was changed to the prefecture of Trùng Khánh; in the twelfth year (1831) the *trấn* was made a province."

According to *The Names of the Villages and Communes of Việt Nam at the Beginning of the Nineteenth Century*, an administrative gazetteer of the Gia Long era (1802–1820), the units of the Cao Bằng *trấn* comprised 4 sub-prefectures, 27 cantons and 233 communes, hamlets, wards, streets, camps and caves. Thạch Lâm sub-prefecture had 14 cantons and 133 communes, hamlets, streets, camps and caves.

According to the *Register of the Villages and Communes of Tonkin*, published in Hanoi in 1928, the province of Cao Bằng comprised 1 prefecture, 8 sub-prefectures, 33 cantons (the canton of Cao Bằng appears here for the first time) and 230 communes. Hoà An prefecture had 7 cantons and 54 communes.

After the August Revolution of 1945, Cao Bằng entered a new historical period along with the whole country. In 1948 the government decided to abolish the prefecture, canton and circuit levels. The level above the commune and below the province was uniformly named the district. Cao Bằng then comprised eleven districts and towns: the town of Cao Bằng, Hoà An, Hà Quảng, Bảo Lạc, Nguyên Bình, Thạch An, Phục Hoà, Hạ Lang, Quảng Uyên, Trùng Khánh and Trấn Biên.

On 3 October 1950 Cao Bằng was fully liberated from French colonial rule. On 27 December 1975 the provinces of Cao Bằng and Lạng Sơn were merged into the province of Cao Lạng, with its seat at the town of Cao Bằng. Then, on 29 December 1978, Cao Lạng province was again divided into the two provinces of Cao Bằng and Lạng Sơn; the two districts of Ngân Sơn and Chợ Rã (now Ba Bể), belonging to Bắc Thái province (now Bắc Kạn), were incorporated into Cao Bằng province.

II. To the distant marches

Đinh Nho Hoàn, courtesy name Tồn Phác, pen name Mặc Trai, was the third son of Đinh Nho Công and his wife of the Đặng lineage (Sơn Hoà commune, Hương Sơn district, Hà Tĩnh province). He was born on the fifth day of the tenth month of the year Tân Hợi, ninth year of the Cảnh Trị era — that is, 7 November 1671 — in the reign of Lê Huyền Tông. Intelligent and devoted to study from childhood, tutored by his father, he acquired a taste for learning very early and applied himself diligently; when older he came to the capital to study under several renowned masters. At thirty he passed as a doctor of the second rank — that is, *Hoàng giáp* — at the examination of the year Canh Thìn, twenty-first year of the Chính Hoà era (1700), in the reign of Lê Hy Tông (1676–1705, with two eras: Vĩnh Trị, 1678–1681, and Chính Hoà, 1681–1705). Of this episode Đinh Nho Hoàn wrote: “My parents had twelve children; I, Mặc Trai, am the third. At the Canh Thìn examination, at the age of thirty, I placed second in the metropolitan examination, and at the palace examination I was granted the second rank (*Hoàng giáp*). In the mid-autumn month (the eighth) of the year Nhâm Ngọ (September 1702) I was sent on service to the circuit of Sơn Tây. In the first month of autumn (the seventh) of the year Giáp Thân (August 1704) I was sent as governor of Cao Bình…” — that is, present-day Cao Bằng. (The name was changed in 1789: after King Quang Trung’s accession, localities bearing the word *Bình* were renamed *Bằng* so as not to coincide with the sovereign’s name, Nguyễn Quang Bình; the *trấn* of Cao Bình has been called Cao Bằng ever since.)

According to the work *The Examination Laureates of Việt Nam*, after passing as a doctor of the second rank, Đinh Nho Hoàn was appointed corrector at the Hàn lâm Academy for about two years, then given the office of *Tham chính* of the circuit of Sơn Tây; nearly two years later, from February 1704, the court transferred him to the office of governor of Cao Bình (Cao Bằng).

At that period, finding someone to take up the governorship of Cao Bằng was genuinely difficult. The *Dư địa chí*, citing the *Ác thủy ký* (“Notes on Malign Waters”), states that all four sub-prefectures of Cao Bằng — Thạch Lâm, Quảng Nguyên, Thượng Lang and Hạ Lang — were places of “fearsome spirits and poisonous waters”, exactly as in Nguyễn Thư Hiên’s saying: “The power of Thanh, the spirits of Nghệ, the waters of Hưng Hóa and Thái Nguyên, the ghosts of Cao Bằng and Lạng Sơn — all are much to be feared.” This was indeed a considerable obstacle, first of all in matters of climate and health, for men who came from elsewhere to serve there. Even an official as capable as Nguyễn Công Hãng, in whom King Lê and Lord Trịnh

Cương had full confidence, when designated to govern Cao Bằng, pleaded excuses to delay — and was appointed governor after Đinh Nho Hoàn. On this point the histories are very clear: “In winter, in the twelfth month [of 1715], Nguyễn Khắc Thuần, governor of Cao Bằng, was recalled to the capital and the assistant censor Nguyễn Công Hãng was sent to replace him.”

There was at that time a man of the sub-prefecture named Uyên Hiệp who, passing himself off as Mạc Trạch, was stirring up and deluding the population and preparing a revolt. But the plot was discovered and could not break out. The lord, judging that Nguyễn Khắc Thuần had handled the matter badly, recalled him to the capital. He ordered the court to deliberate on the choice of a replacement; the officials put forward a few names, but none met with his approval. The governorship of Cao Bằng was an office of the first importance; the lord wished to confer it on Công Hãng and therefore sent him. He had Đỗ Bá Phẩm hint to Hãng what his intention was, but Công Hãng replied: “I beg not to be removed from Your Lordship’s immediate service, and do not wish to take up a post in a distant sub-prefecture.” The lord insisted and sent Bá Phẩm again to persuade him; only then did Công Hãng submit and come to give thanks. The lord allowed him to act at his own discretion.

From the late seventeenth to the mid-eighteenth century, the political and social situation in Cao Bằng was decidedly complex, for this had been the old Mạc base since the beginning of the sixteenth century, and it was a border region into which Chinese bandit bands frequently spilled over to plunder. Historical reality from the mid-seventeenth century onward has proved it: the weakening of the central feudal state, no longer able to consolidate and closely administer the marches as before, meant that several areas of our northern frontier passed into the hands of local chieftains and Chinese feudal lords.

Broadly speaking, throughout the seventeenth century the land of Cao Bằng was a burning theatre of war: the Lê–Trịnh troops had repeatedly to “march up to the land of Cao Bằng”, leaving behind the plaints and lamentations of so many wives and mothers parted from their husbands and sons.

After Cao Bằng was recovered from the Mạc, the Lê–Trịnh court showed still greater concern for this land. One of the most effective measures contributing to stabilising the situation there was the reorganisation of the local administrative apparatus and the recruitment of talented men to assume the heavy work of a march still burdened with difficulties and obstacles.

Among local offices, “the office of *Trấn thủ* in the circuits is conferred by special edict”, and it plays a vital role, since it concentrates all authority in one pair of hands. That is why the Lê kings and Trịnh lords ordinarily entrusted this function to intimates. For the remote frontier *trấn*, king and lord often had it held concurrently by the governors of the inner *trấn*, or charged a close courtier with it. Those who received the governorship of Cao Bằng had to enjoy the particular confidence of king and lord. It was in this context that Đinh Nho Hoàn was appointed governor of Cao Bằng. Reviewing the governors of Cao Bằng — Đoàn Tuấn Hòa and Ngô Sách Tuân in the late seventeenth century, then Đinh Nho Hoàn, Nguyễn Công Hãng, Nguyễn Ngọc Huyền and Mai Thế Chuẩn in the first half of the eighteenth — all were great laureates, Confucian scholars gifted for administration. Of one it was said that he “wiped out the rebel bands by great military strategy and reassured the people by letting them experience the effects of civilisation”; of another, that he “had the talent of soothing the people and repelling brigands, so that the frontier inhabitants could live and work in peace…”. It was

precisely thanks to the ability and diligence of these governors that this frontier belt, formerly in constant agitation and disorder, gradually came into order and became a firm palisade on the northern frontier of Đại Việt.

It may be said that from the late seventeenth century through the first three decades of the eighteenth, the political and social situation in Cao Bằng was fairly stable. Hence, in the second year of the Bảo Thái era (1721), King Lê and Lord Trịnh Cương had the "garrison troops of Cao Bằng abolished. By the old rule, local troops from Thái Nguyên took turns to garrison Cao Bằng. The lord, considering that the country had long enjoyed peace, that the frontier was without incident and that the native troops were adequate for defence, abolished the garrisons in order to lighten the hardship of the rotations." At the same time the court allowed the two offices of administration and surveillance, together with the prefectures and districts of the *trấn* of Cao Bằng, Tuyên Quang, Hưng Hóa and Lạng Sơn, to suspend appointments to post, all the duties of those offices being transferred to the governor of the *trấn*.

III. A name that lives on with the land

During his governorship of Cao Bằng (1704–1710), Đinh Nho Hoàn had many works carried out to develop the economy and serve both country and people: repairing roads, and blasting the rocky rapids of the Bằng Giang so that boats could move and trade with ease. At that time the junks of Chinese merchants — whom local people commonly called "visiting traders" or "visitors", "Hoa merchants" or "Hoa" — came up the Bằng Giang in numbers to trade; but previously they had to wait a long while, losing much time before their goods were inspected and circulation permitted. Under Đinh Nho Hoàn's governorship, the channel was opened and cleared right up to the frontier — along the stretch from the Cao Bằng seat to Tà Lùng in Phục Hoà district, today an international border crossing, where rapids, falls and vegetation abounded, he had the rocks broken, the trees felled and the channel cleared, so that boats moved easily — and he ordered that the inspection of goods be done quickly, much like present-day customs formalities, to the advantage of cargo owners. Thanks to this liberal policy and his practical help, the Hoa merchants of Cao Bằng and the visiting traders prospered more and more, grew wealthy, and the population was well provided for. Out of this development there grew up, at the Cao Bằng seat, the "Visitors' Street" — also called Thầu Street, that is, the trading street, right by the bank of the Bằng. (Thầu Street is today one of the large and handsome streets of the city of Cao Bằng and bears the name of the hero and martyr Kim Đồng; the name Thầu Street has continued to be given to the row along the Bằng river, to mark its proper function as a street of trade and exchange; it remains today a busy commercial quarter of the city.)

The development of the seat created favourable conditions for the development of other parts of the province, in production as well as in trade and business. The people's life became comfortable and the political and social situation stabilised; hence the court "abolished the garrisons of Cao Bằng", on the ground that "the country had long enjoyed peace, the frontier was without incident and the native troops were adequate for defence; the garrisons were therefore abolished to lighten the hardship". To perpetuate the memory of Governor Đinh Nho Hoàn's benefactions, the merchant community — overwhelmingly Chinese — gathered funds and together made a stele, erected before the gate of the guild hall, celebrating the virtue of Governor Đinh. (The site of the guild hall and the stele was towards the lower end of Kim Đồng

Street and Thâu Street, opposite the stretch running from the Phong Lan Hotel to the present-day Hợp Giang lower secondary school.) The stele reads:

> From of old, praise of the virtue of great officials waits until they have left their post; a shrine or a stele is then raised, and gratitude, even expressed years later, is not held to be late.
>
> Yet the lord governor has been at Cao Bằng only five months, and we, visiting traders, already sing his praises: it is that his loyalty, his rectitude, his magnanimity and his measure have awakened our gratitude.
>
> This could not wait for years; hence we raise a stele before the guild hall, on which we record his merits as follows:
>
> He is a native of Nghệ An province, where from generation to generation letters are cultivated and from generation to generation doctors are produced. He himself passed as a doctor of the second rank; in his offices, at the capital and in the provinces, he joined to this a decisiveness that has made him held up as an example. Soldiers and people alike have felt his benefactions. We, visiting merchants, knew nothing of it; we knew only that songs filled the roads and praises the markets.
>
> For our own part, these are the benefactions we owe him.
>
> Formerly the river of Giang Tây was most dangerous: bamboo grew in mid-channel and rocks broke the surface. Boats and junks, on approaching, knew well that these must be avoided; but at high water, when the current is strong, they could not do so in time, capsized at once, and their goods sank entire. The yearly losses were beyond reckoning.
>
> On his arrival he rode out to inspect the place, hired workmen to blast the emergent rocks and clear away the bamboo grown in mid-channel. Since then boats have had neither to dodge nor to sink. Our people, passing that spot, point to the riverbed and say to one another: “This we owe entirely to him.” That is one merit.
>
> Formerly, when our junks arrived, the *trấn* official questioned and taxed us with excessive severity, so that we had to break our journey; today those abuses are wholly abolished. Formerly, when our goods arrived, the clerks refused to inspect them and they spoiled from waiting too long. Today, the junk once arrived, inspection is made at once, bolts of silk are sealed without delay, and on the junk’s departure the pass is issued on the spot; nor do the market overseers any longer dare to harass us.
>
> That is a second merit.
>
> At the mouth of the Mục river the waters usually freeze at the end of winter or in spring; the water falls, navigation becomes difficult, and one must sometimes follow the frozen channel for twelve days to reach the market: it is not the rocks, it is the shallows.
>
> At the end of summer and in autumn, by contrast, the waters are high and the current violent, which is harder still: either one’s anchor parts or one’s pole snaps — it is truly dangerous, and it delays. And yet the taxes were not reduced, the schedule having been fixed long since without regard for us. He alone had compassion on merchants exposed to such risks and reduced our taxes; for this we hold him in deep

> gratitude. He also gave us a sealed certificate, so that thereafter the tax collectors could no longer harm or vex us: at last we see what equity in office means. That too is a merit.
>
> We see that his heart is clear as a mirror and pure as a painting. In all ages there have been officials compassionate towards the people; but none had yet cared for visiting merchants as he does.
>
> Long ago Lord Yang Shuzi, in robe and cap, went about at an unhurried pace, and a hundred peoples felt his virtue; it is said that on Mount Xian a tall stele remains.
>
> Today he too is a Yang Shuzi, and our Mount Xian is this guild hall.
>
> His loyalty moves even the beasts; His virtue in office makes the trees and grasses green. We respectfully wish him high office and weighty rank: How greatly we, visiting traders, admire him and hope in him!

Đinh Nho Hoàn remained governor of Cao Băng until about 1710, when the court recalled him to the capital; there he received the office of chamberlain of the Bureau of Seals, that is, custody of the seals at the Hàn lâm Academy, and was later raised to that of Minister of Personnel. (His recall to the capital and his time at Cao Băng he recorded later, during his embassy to the Qing in 1715, in a poem relating his meeting on the road with a Chinese friend who had once come to trade at Cao Băng: since their parting, five years had passed before they met again.)

During his governorship of Cao Băng, Đinh Nho Hoàn did not merely contribute greatly to economic and social development, making Cao Băng a prosperous land: he also had the gift of composing many poems celebrating the remarkable scenery and the hospitality of the inhabitants, and of writing to instruct the people, calling on them to do good and forsake evil so as to settle and prosper after the end of the war between the Lê–Trịnh court and the Mạc. The poem in *nôm* script, in six-eight metre, one hundred and forty-eight lines long, now preserved at the Institute of Hán Nôm Studies — the *Hoán tỉnh châu dân từ* — takes the form of a didactic ballad calling on the people to "settle and prosper, do good, forsake evil…", in a form easy to remember and recite, so that each might "correct himself".

During his years of government in the remote and isolated marches of Cao Băng, Đinh Nho Hoàn travelled incognito to many places in the *trấn*, both to observe affairs among the people and to visit and contemplate the beauties of the region. On these journeys the landscapes and the people of Cao Băng nourished his inspiration: he composed as many as ten poems in *nôm* celebrating the scenic spots of Cao Băng, gathered in the collection *Cao Băng thập thủ*, now held at the Institute of Hán Nôm Studies.

Thus it can be seen still more clearly that Đinh Nho Hoàn gave to the marches of Cao Băng his talent, his virtue and his whole heart.

The ancients said that when the wild goose has flown far off, the print of its feet remains on the sand. From the time when Đinh Nho Hoàn governed Cao Băng, many of his deeds remain, handed down to posterity like those prints. The praises addressed to him are not excessive: he was truly a man in whom talent, virtue, character and merit were joined, and thereby helped the court to keep the strategic march of Cao Băng peaceful and prosperous for many years. His name will therefore remain bound to this land for ever.

4. The spreading of his thought among the people of the Ô district

Nguyễn Minh Tuân — Institute of Hán Nôm Studies

[source: 19.doc]

Đinh Nho Hoàn (1670–1716), pen name Mặc Trai, was a native of An Ấp commune, Hương Sơn district, Hà Tĩnh province. His lineage was among the most renowned for the number of men who distinguished themselves in it: Đinh Nho Công, his father, Đinh Nho Điển, Đinh Nho Quang… He passed as a doctor of the second rank (*Hoàng giáp*) at the examination of the year Canh Thìn, twenty-first year of the Chính Hoà era (1700), under Lê Hy Tông, served as governor of Cao Bằng, and then as right vice-minister of the Ministry of Works. In the eleventh year of the Vĩnh Thịnh era (1715) he was appointed deputy envoy to carry the annual tribute to the Qing court, but fell ill on the return journey and died (1716); he was posthumously granted the office of left vice-minister of the Ministry of Personnel.

Of his writings, only two titles are known today, both held at the Institute of Hán Nôm Studies. The first is the *Mặc Ông sứ tập* (shelf marks VHv.1443; A.1409; A.2823), which gathers landscape poems composed on the road to China, pieces exchanged with and offered in farewell to friends, and occasional poems expressing longing for country and home. The second is the *Hoán tỉnh châu dân từ* (shelf mark AB.185), composed during his governorship of Cao Bằng. This collection contains ten poems celebrating the scenic spots of Cao Bằng, known under the title *Cao Bằng thập thủ*, and the piece *Hoán tỉnh châu dân từ*, in *nôm* script, one hundred and forty-eight lines long in *lục bát* metre, calling on the local population to do good and forsake evil so as to settle and prosper, after the war between the Lê–Trịnh power and the Mạc had ended in the latter's defeat.

It may be said that the work Đinh Nho Hoàn left behind, small though it is, is very highly regarded by scholars: "Đinh Nho Hoàn's poetry is fluent and gentle, filled with feeling, savour and beauty, and expresses with warmth his love of his native land and his national pride." His works have nevertheless scarcely been studied or fully presented. Considering the *Hoán tỉnh châu dân từ* alone, one sees that Đinh Nho Hoàn's brush helped to awaken the whole population of the district — and, more broadly, the Vietnamese people of that time — after a long period of turmoil.

This article therefore sets out to note a few features of Hoàng giáp Đinh Nho Hoàn's contribution to spreading his thought among the people of the district, through the *Hoán tỉnh châu dân từ*, so that readers may judge for themselves and see more clearly what he gave to the country.

1. The question of the text

The manuscript of the *Hoán tỉnh châu dân từ* 喚醒州民辭, shelf mark AB.185 (Institute of Hán Nôm Studies), comprises 16 pages measuring 21 × 31 cm. It is entirely in *nôm* script, in a regular and clear hand.

The cover bears: 喚醒州民辭 *Hoán tỉnh châu dân từ*, and 烏州近錄摘錄 "Extracts from the *Ô Châu cận lục*"; the first column of the first page reads: 這書由烏州近錄摘出別為一集非是欠 — *giá thư do Ô châu cận lục trích xuất biệt vi nhất tập phi thị khiếm*, that is: "This book is

extracted from the *Ô Châu cận lục* and bound separately as a distinct collection; it is not a defective work." In fact, Dương Văn An's *Ô Châu cận lục* contains no *Hoán tỉnh châu dân từ* at all. On the joining of these two works, Professor Trần Nghĩa, in *The Hán Nôm Heritage of Việt Nam — An Annotated Catalogue* (p. 815), holds that this can only have happened at the time of copying.

The contents of the manuscript fall into two parts. The first transcribes the *nôm* piece entitled *Hoán tỉnh châu dân từ*, one hundred and forty-eight lines long in *lục bát* metre. The second transcribes the ten poems celebrating the scenic spots of Cao Bằng, the *Cao Bằng thập thủ*: *Na Lữ cổ thành* (the ancient citadel of Na Lữ), *Hoàng Sơn tình vọng* (the view of Mount Hoàng Sơn after rain), *Khâu Sầm mộ vân* (evening clouds over Khâu Sầm), *Đồng Lân dạ chung* (the night bell at Đồng Lân), and so on.

2. An outline of the content of the *Hoán tỉnh châu dân từ*

After the upheavals of the Mạc period, to prevent a bewildered and discouraged people from sinking into vice, Đinh Nho Hoàn wrote this appeal of one hundred and forty-eight lines, urging the people of the district to live in loyalty and duty, to respect the teacher, to live in concord with their brothers, to help one another, to shun drink and theft, to cultivate virtue, to lead a thrifty and upright life, to live in harmony with their neighbours, and so forth.

> Nhỏ ấy em, lớn ấy anh, Xử trong hương đảng mỡ khinh tuổi già. Tóc xanh thả lụy đầu tơ, Chú cha người khác, chú cha ta nào. Mỡ khinh khó, mỡ khoe giàu, Bụng no xót kẻ ăn nau cho cùng. Làm người sinh tử nợ chung, Một niềm điếu tuất cảm thông ở đời…
>
> The younger is the junior, the elder is the elder; in the village, do not despise old age. You of the green hair, shed tears before heads of white silk: another's uncle and father — are they not our own? Do not despise the poor, do not parade your wealth; with a full belly, pity to the end the one who eats badly. To be human is to share the debt of life and death; one same compassion for mourning and distress makes fellow feeling in this world…

Towards one's parents one must know piety and reverence, for it is they who passed life on to us. Moreover they endured untold hardship to raise us from birth to adulthood. Nothing can equal the kindness of parents.

> Ngay thờ vua, thảo thờ cha, Thần thiêng xem xét, trời già chứng minh… Xương da là của cha cho, Sống thời cung kính, thác lo phụng thờ. Ân tình vời vợi cao xa, Bao nhiêu nước mắt liêu nga nhiễm đầy.
>
> Loyalty in serving the king, filial piety in serving the father: the spirits examine, and old Heaven bears witness… Bone and flesh are the father's gift; while they live, revere them; when they die, see to their worship. Their kindness is boundlessly high and far; how many tears have soaked the reeds.

As to study, he urges everyone to apply himself diligently to learning and to the shaping of his character, and not to give way to sloth: only so is a good life obtained.

> Vâng sao soi sáng thánh kinh, Chẳng thầy mở thẳm thì mình ắt mê. Tuyết sâu ba thước chân giày, Đạo thầy ghi bút, nghĩa thầy tạc xương.
>
> The star lights the sacred books; without a teacher to open the depths, one is certain to go astray. Three feet of deep snow beneath the shoes: the teacher's doctrine, set it down with the brush; his kindness, carve it into your bones.

As to work, he urges everyone to be industrious and diligent, which will make a household prosperous, and not to scorn farming and let time pass to no purpose.

> Việc nông là gốc, há chơi, Dãi dầu có tiết, nghỉ ngơi có ngày. Ba xuân phun phún mưa bay, Mẫu nam trở đất, ruộng tây đắp bờ. Thu về lúa đã đến nhà, Cúi nuôi con cái, ngửa thờ cha ông.
>
> Farming is the root; it is no game. Toil has its season, rest has its day. In the three months of spring the fine rain drifts: in the southern acre the earth is turned, in the western field the dyke is banked. When autumn comes the rice is home: bending down, one feeds one's children; looking up, one honours one's forebears.

Lastly, to women he recommends keeping the moral bearing prescribed by the Confucians, taking the three obediences and the four virtues as their standard.

> Nữ nhi phận gái đào tơ, Nước thanh ấy tiết, gương như là lòng. Câu tứ đức, chữ tam tòng, Thờ chồng chồng cậy, thề lòng lòng tin. Cửa xuân khóa khóa then then, Lòng ghi khắc khắc, nghĩa bền vân vân.
>
> Daughter, in your lot as a young peach tree, let clear water be your virtue and the mirror your heart. The four virtues, the three obediences: serve your husband and he will rely on you; pledge your heart and he will trust it. The gate of spring, locks upon locks and bolts upon bolts; the heart engraves and engraves again, and duty holds and holds.

The above is no more than an outline of the work's content. Yet it is enough to show with what skill the author cast his matter in a sung form, rhymed and cadenced, supple and flowing. This method allows the reader to read easily, to remember easily and to remember longer.

3. The author's thought

To understand the origins of the formation of Hoàng giáp Đinh Nho Hoàn's thought and character, the following factors can hardly be overlooked.

— The influence of a lineage of upright and dauntless tradition, of proven firmness of character, struggling against arbitrary power and violence, against the evil and vice that harm country and people.

— The deep influence of the thought, culture, learning and character of his forebears, and above all of the idea that one must be close to the people and care for them.

— A life of frugal poverty, honest and simple, led at An Ấp, Hương Sơn district, Hà Tĩnh province, which gave him an intimate understanding of the people's feelings and compassion for their circumstances.

— The absorption of many currents of culture and thought drawn from the books of the Three Teachings, and above all from Confucianism; from the cultural and intellectual tradition of the people; from the finest culture of the Lê–Trịnh age; from the historical reality of his time; from the concrete experience of his own life — all of it fused and raised into a system of thought proper to the age of national revival that followed the Mạc upheavals. Đinh Nho Hoàn's thought is thus representative of the thought of Đại Việt in the first half of the seventeenth century. His conception of humanity and justice, though the notion is Confucian, therefore departs slightly from that of Confucius and Mencius, and entirely from that of the Song neo-Confucians: it is animated by a spirit of closeness to the people and of service to them. For him, to love one's country is to love one's people: here is expressed the aspiration to build a peaceful and prospering country in which the people are fed and happy.

— Đinh Nho Hoàn was influenced not only by the tradition of his lineage and family; he did not merely receive a systematic and wide-ranging education and inherit from his forebears the idea of closeness to the people; he did not merely lead a plain and simple life, close to the people and steeped in their feelings: he also inherited the precious and lofty traditions of more than a thousand years of building and defending the country. Reckoning from the day the country regained independence after more than a thousand years of northern domination, Đinh Nho Hoàn appears as the crystallisation of the best of his age, of which the Lê–Trịnh period is the very expression. There the two main axes of the age's thought, both of ancient national tradition, are seen most clearly: patriotism and humanism. These two currents developed through the course of history upon two firm foundations: the democratic spirit and the spirit of openness. Đinh Nho Hoàn's thought and writing, and the *Hoán tỉnh châu dân từ* above all, manifest very clearly this distinctly Đại Việt character, this democratic and open spirit of the Lê–Trịnh age. He is indeed the crystallisation of what that age had that was finest, most refined and most elevated, joined to the concrete reality of the country at the beginning of the seventeenth century.

The democratic spirit in Đinh Nho Hoàn's patriotism — his conception of the people, his doctrine of closeness to them — he summed up thus:

> Tám ngàn mạch nước sâu dài, Dân làm cội rễ, nền xây vững vàng. Mặc khâm chóp đáp đẳng thường, Xuất dân muốn lấy, lòng hăng đưa dân. Góp bao nhiêu tiếng cộc căn, Da trâu, lông thỏ khuyên răn châu này.
>
> Eight thousand water-veins, deep and long: the people are the root on which the structure is firmly built. […] what one would draw from the people, the heart always returns to them. I have gathered so many rough words; with buffalo hide and hare's fur I admonish this district.

For him, the Confucian formula "loyalty to the prince, love of country" properly means love of the people. To be loyal to the king is to love the country; and to love the country is to love the people, for "the country takes the people as its foundation", or "the people are the root of the state". Loyalty to the king therefore coincides with love of country and compassion for the people. King, country and people are one.

This sung piece is also his meditation on history, on the collapse of a dynasty, in order to identify the fundamental cause of the disaster of a lost country: that dynasty did not have the people's hearts.

> Nhớ người xưa chửa muốn bình, Xui loài ngụy Mạc gửi mình dân ta. Nó luông thói mãng kiêu xa, Còn đòi phân mặt chúa nhà bao đang. Khiến dân cày để liềm mang, Ruộng dâu bỗng hóa chiến trường hư không! Chính ra châm độc cái ong, Trời người đều giận, chẳng dong loài tà. Mịt mùng tên pháo xông pha, Núi non chìm nổi, trẻ già lênh đênh. Nó là nghịch tặc nhơ tanh, Áo vàng đâu có dắp mình đầu đen! Dân ta đợi nó lộng then, Bởi chưng để dạ cho nên chau mày.
>
> Remember: long ago, when peace was not yet willed, the brood of the false Mạc came to lodge itself among our people. They gave themselves over to arrogance and display, and claimed besides to share the standing of the master of the house. They made the ploughman lay down his sickle, and the mulberry fields turned suddenly into an empty battlefield! They loosed the wasp's venomous sting: Heaven and men alike were angered and did not spare that perverse brood. Through the murk arrows and cannon rushed; the mountains sank and rose, young and old drifted homeless. They are foul rebels: the yellow robe was never made to cover black heads! Our people waited until they had done playing with the bolt, and it was from keeping this in their hearts that their brows were knit.

Thanks to this meditation, today's reader understands better why the Mạc collapsed. According to Đinh Nho Hoàn, whoever has the people has strength; a strong people means the country endures and develops; a weak people means a weak country, and sometimes a country lost; without a people there is no country.

In the *Hoán tỉnh châu dân từ* the author returns to many themes as to a refrain: loyalty and filial piety, prince and parents, the kindness of father and mother, the rejection of gambling and drink, the bond of husband and wife, the importance of farming, and so on. All belong to one and the same body of thought, by which he means to point out the way to everyone and keep them from going astray. Here too is the expression of his ardent and deep attachment to country and people.

Đinh Nho Hoàn was a Confucian, but his writings do not sound the Confucian voice alone: Buddhist thought is present too. So with the images "the spirits examine, old Heaven bears witness" and "the teacher's doctrine, set it down with the brush; his kindness, carve it into your bones". Where the Confucian pattern of engagement and withdrawal can be passive and rigid, the Buddhist suppleness — entering in order to go out, going out in order to enter — comes to nourish and complete his thought. The stillness of Buddhism and the purity of Confucianism blend, giving his thought harmony, balance and flexibility. Đinh Nho Hoàn held that balance with a superior and extraordinary strength of character: firm and elevated, placing love of country and compassion for the people above all.

In sum, at a turning point of history, Đinh Nho Hoàn was able to find with lucidity what was right, the right direction, the right way to live. He thus becomes the man who crystallises the finest values of the culture, thought and literature of several centuries, and then raises them to a new level. It seems that whatever his age held most precious gathered in him, because he clearly understood and firmly grasped the law of history's movement, joined to it his own movement in life, knew how to seek the right way to live and to renew himself upward, in order to build a better life for people and country.

From a literary point of view, the work also shows a style at once supple and sharp, light and firm, close in its reasoning, vigorous in its language, courteous and self-effacing yet not without force. All of it proceeds from the thought of humanity and justice. The text is not long, but in it the author sums up fully, skilfully and most convincingly the whole movement from a complex history to the pacification of the people, drawing on the noble traditions of the nation.

It may be observed that Đinh Nho Hoàn's *nôm* song is neither showy nor over-polished, that it does not constrain itself or use difficult rhymes, while still keeping its nobility, its elegance and a sense that overflows the words: therein lies its distinctive character. In general his manner is fluent and renders with subtlety the emotion felt before a landscape, with associations that are sometimes unexpected and happy.

Yet to understand Đinh Nho Hoàn's thought and writing, to trace his feeling to its source, one must place the author within the development of history and of literature, examine how he received, inherited and created, and above all consider him from the standpoint of the Lê–Trịnh age: only then does the full greatness of his writing, his learning and his thought appear, as has been said above. He is indeed the crystallisation of the finest culture and thought of the Lê–Trịnh age, raised by him to new brilliance at the beginning of the seventeenth century, amid the nation's real struggle to defend the country.

For the nation's history, Đinh Nho Hoàn is an outstanding politician and diplomat, a thinker of the first rank, whom many generations, through many upheavals, continue to honour and acknowledge.

Master Mặc Trai's place in the hearts of the people — not only among the inhabitants of the district but throughout every region of the country — truly deserves to be honoured.

So that readers may better grasp Hoàng giáp Đinh's thought through his *nôm* piece, we give below the complete transcription.

Hoán tỉnh châu dân từ

> Lịnh nhà chúa búa nhà trời, Vâng trên chăn dưới, phải lời phân minh. Nhớ người xưa chửa muôn bình, Xui loài ngụy Mạc gửi mình dân ta. Nó luông thói mãng kiêu xa, Còn đòi phân mặt chúa nhà bao đang. Khiến dân cày để liềm mang, Ruộng dâu bỗng hóa chiến trường hư không! Chính ra châm độc cái ong, Trời người đều giận, chẳng dong loài tà. Mịt mùng tên pháo xông pha, Núi non chìm nổi, trẻ già lênh đênh. Nó là nghịch tặc nhơ tanh, Áo vàng đâu có dắp mình đầu đen! Dân ta đợi nó lộng then, Bởi chưng để dạ cho nên chau mày. Rày mừng móc đượm cỏ cây, Mặt rồng chiêm chiếm năm mây rủ lèo. Dân Nghiêu thuận thể lòng Nghiêu, Ghín noi lý chính, mỡ đeo thói tà. Ngay thờ vua, thảo thờ cha, Thần thiêng xem xét, trời già chứng minh. Làu làu năm mối, ba diềng, Trong ngoài nhóc nhóc [ ] là người. Ngay có mười, thảo có mười, Ngay vì hay thảo, thảo dời làm ngay. Hai vâng nhật nguyệt dõi bày, Ở ăn nội lộc, mỡ khuây nhà vàng. Dâng ca đòi dặm khang trang, Chớ quên đức ấy hoàng vương võ vè. Vật nào còn sót chở che, Cây khô mọc lá, rễ tre nảy chồi. Sinh ra mống, dưỡng là đôi, Tưởng khuây khuây vắng, trạnh ngùi ngùi lo. Xương da là của cha cho, Sống thời cung kính, thác lo phụng thờ. Ân tình vời vợi cao xa, Bao nhiêu nước mắt liêu nga nhiễm đầy. Trai thành trà muối no ngày, Hương ngưng một triện lọ bày ba sinh. Vầng sao soi sáng thánh kinh, Chẳng thầy mở thẳm thì mình ắt

mê. Tuyết sâu ba thước chân giày, Đạo thầy ghi bút, nghĩa thầy tạc xương. Lệ hoa đóa đóa đưa hương, Anh em nặng tiếng trong tường bao đang. Dầu lòng cung hữu chẳng thường, Chưng sau ra mặt suối vàng thẹn cha. Trăng già thề nhẫn tuổi già, Vợ chồng chẳng khá lìa sơ lõi nghì. Khó nào quản, xấu nào nề, Lấy hay kính thuận xướng tùy làm hơn. Tơ trời năm sắc gồm chen, Nỡ đem thói bạc nhiễm đen biển rời. Chim kêu chíu chít cuối trời, Còn hay tìm bạn huống người ta vay? Tấc tin khá sót năm mây, Được người ích hữu dan tay mới đành. Nhỏ ấy em, lớn ấy anh, Xử trong hương đảng mỡ khinh tuổi già. Tóc xanh thả lụy đầu tơ, Chú cha người khác, chú cha ta nào. Mỡ khinh khó, mỡ khoe giàu, Bụng no xót kẻ ăn nau cho cùng. Làm người sinh tử nợ chung, Một niềm điếu tuất cảm thông ở đời. Việc nông là gốc, há chơi, Dãi dầu có tiết, nghỉ ngơi có ngày. Ba xuân phun phún mưa bay, Mẫu nam trở đất, ruộng tây đắp bờ. Thu về lúa đã đến nhà, Cúi nuôi con cái, ngửa thờ cha ông. Tê mi châm chén rượu nồng, Thốt xoang chín khúc nông công mừng rồi. Nhiều phen nắng đổ bồ hôi, Mượn con tất suất hứng thôi tả lòng. Khó thời đắp đổi kiệm dùng, Chớ mang răng chuột cản rông của người. Đạo chương rờ rỡ gương soi, Nương ba thước phép, quan trời chi tha. Chớ đam đổ bác lòng tà, Tay liền phủi sạch, sản nhà tàn không. Được thua cãi quấy thề rông, Sướng tay con đổ, phí công cha làm. Chớ đua kiện cáo thói phàm, Trời căm lòng độc, người phàm thói ngoan. Con dè ỷ, vợ phàn nàn, Chẳng hay chở của về quan ích gì. Gan tráo tráo, mặt bì bì, Ngông nghênh khéo tể lê tê khéo dơ. Sân Chu khúm núm quỳ thưa, Búa giơ dựng gáy, roi giơ giật mình. Chớ buông thói dữ mọc nanh, Dĩ uy hống hét người lành vẫy đuôi. Chớ lòng cậy của làm mồi, Vẩy nguôi nước mắt, dãi chùi cháy gan. Khi đi dặm liễu hàng nhàn, Chớ lòng ngạo trưởng trước đoàn tranh tiên. Khi cày khẳm mạch dõi thiên, Chớ lòng xu lợi, chẳng phen nhượng bờ. Ông kia đầu tuyết bời bời, Thấy người đeo đội mình thời chịu thay. Cơ cảm ứng trở bàn tay, Kính già trời báo đành hay được già. Nữ nhi phận gái đào tơ, Nước thanh ây tiết, gương như là lòng. Câu tứ đức, chữ tam tòng, Thờ chồng chồng cậy, thề lòng lòng tin. Cửa xuân khóa khóa then then, Lòng ghi khắc khắc, nghĩa bền vân vân. Đẹp chiều ở, thuận chiều ăn, Lọ trong hơi xạ da ngần làm chi. Chớ đua ngạo ngật phủ phê, Hương luông năm thức áo xuê năm mùi. Chớ đua cách thảng điệu đòi, Khi đi lặn nguyệt, khi cười lét hoa. Cũ càng quếch quác thú ta, Chanh chua mặc khách, trẻ già mặc ai. Miễn cao tiết gái hơn người, Chẳng phiên khong khởi, chẳng nài thanh tân. Thói ở kiệm, nết ở cần, Tửu tương ngài ngại, tảo tần chăm chăm. Canh khuya nương bóng song châm, Chỉ luồn áo tuyết, lâm rân bóng đèn. Nữ công dám trễ lòng rèn, Sương châm dãi nắng nhạt then tiếng cầm. Cát kia lá đã bóng âm, Đỗ kêu trên động cái chim hoàng hoàng. Vơi đầy thôi rỏ thời không, Thấp cao khảm lục, xách mang dăm hoè. Lâu lâu ven vẹt chẳng hề, Ngôn từ ren rén, thể tề lâng lâng. Vậy lòng quân tử mới băng, Bõ khi thức lục dưới trăng chau mày. Vậy nên hơi hỡi đấy nay, Lòng vàng yên diện gìn tày con thơ. Những nhưng nhân nhượng thói xưa, Vô hoài mỹ chủng tâm cơ chẳng dùng. Bốn dân chức nghiệp thong dong, Lễ văn cửa cửa, nhân phong nhà nhà. Vâng trên đồng đức trung hòa, Đầm hâm hai thuở, sởn sơ muôn loài. Tám ngàn mạch nước sâu dài, Dân làm cội rễ, nền xây vững vàng. Mặc khâm chóp đáp đẳng thường, Xuất dân muôn lấy, lòng hăng đưa dân. Góp bao nhiêu tiếng cộc căn, Da trâu, lông thỏ khuyên răn châu này.

Rendering of the sense, couplet by couplet. The text is old and in places corrupt; passages whose reading remains uncertain are marked with brackets.

1. The lord's command is Heaven's axe; obedient above and shepherding below, the word must be made plain. — 2. Remember: long ago, when peace was not yet willed, the brood of the false Mạc came to lodge itself among our people. — 3. They gave themselves over to arrogance and display, and claimed besides to share the standing of the master of the house. — 4. They made the ploughman lay down his sickle, and the mulberry fields turned suddenly into an empty battlefield. — 5. They loosed the wasp's venomous sting; Heaven and men alike were angered and did not spare that perverse brood. — 6. Through the murk arrows and cannon rushed; the mountains sank and rose, young and old drifted homeless. — 7. They are foul rebels: the yellow robe was never made to cover black heads. — 8. Our people waited until they had done playing with the bolt; it was from keeping this in their hearts that their brows were knit.

2. Let us rejoice today: the dew soaks grass and trees, and the dragon's face appears little by little among the five clouds with their trailing veils. — 10. People of Yao, conform to the heart of Yao; follow carefully the straight reason, and do not cling to perverse ways. — 11. Loyalty in serving the king, filial piety in serving the father: the spirits examine, and old Heaven bears witness. — 12. Let the five relations and the three bonds shine out; within and without, the crowding multitude [ ] are men. — 13. Loyalty has ten degrees and piety has ten; loyalty is born of piety, and piety turns into loyalty. — 14. The two lights, sun and moon, illumine all; living on the domain's revenues, do not forget the golden house. — 15. Let songs rise over leagues of plenty; do not forget the virtue by which the sovereign gives you peace. — 16. What creature would remain outside his shelter? The dry tree puts out leaves, the bamboo root sends up a shoot.

3. Birth comes of a single seed, but nurture goes by two; one thinks to forget, and the absence returns, and the heart contracts. — 18. Bone and flesh are the father's gift; while they live, revere them; when they die, see to their worship. — 19. Their kindness is boundlessly high and far; how many tears have soaked the reeds. — 20. Sincere fasting: tea and salt suffice for the day; let one coil of incense burn — what need to display the three existences? — 21. The star lights the sacred books; without a teacher to open the depths, one is certain to go astray. — 22. Three feet of deep snow beneath the shoes: the teacher's doctrine, set it down with the brush; his kindness, carve it into your bones. — 23. The pear blossom, bloom by bloom, gives out its scent; between brothers, what good are harsh words within the walls? — 24. If brotherly respect is not constant, one will later appear at the Yellow Springs ashamed before one's father.

4. Beneath the old moon one swears until old age; husband and wife must neither part nor fail in duty. — 26. Do not shrink from poverty, do not disdain plainness; better mutual respect, one leading and the other following. — 27. Heaven's threads, of five colours, are woven together; how bring oneself to blacken them through ingratitude? — 28. Birds chirp at the sky's edge and still know how to seek companions: how much more should men. — 29. An inch of trust is worth more than the five clouds; only by taking the hand of a profitable friend is one at peace. — 30. The younger is the junior, the elder is the elder; in the village, do not despise old age. — 31. You of the green hair, shed tears before heads of white silk: another's uncle and father, are they not our own? — 32. Do not despise the poor, do not parade your wealth; with a full belly, pity to the end the one

who eats badly. — 33. To be human is to share the debt of life and death; one same compassion for mourning and distress makes fellow feeling in this world.

5. Farming is the root; it is no game. Toil has its season, rest has its day. — 35. In the three months of spring the fine rain drifts; in the southern acre the earth is turned, in the western field the dyke is banked. — 36. When autumn comes the rice is home; bending down, one feeds one's children; looking up, one honours one's forebears. — 37. Level with the brows one pours the cup of strong liquor; the nine verses are struck up, and the labour of the fields is celebrated. — 38. How many times the sun has made the sweat run; one borrows the cricket's song to say what is in the heart. — 39. In hardship one makes shift and saves; do not take the rat's tooth to gnaw another's goods. — 40. The rules shine like a mirror; leaning on the three feet of the law, Heaven's officials do not forgive.

6. Do not give yourself to gambling with a wayward heart: in a turn of the hand all is swept clean and the patrimony reduced to nothing. — 42. Winnings and losses, quarrels and idle oaths; the son's hand delights in casting the dice and wastes the father's labour. — 43. Do not vie in lawsuits, that vulgar habit; Heaven hates venomous hearts, and men hardened cunning. — 44. The children shrink away, the wife complains: what good is it to cart one's goods to the court? — 45. A brazen liver, a thick face; arrogance that thinks itself clever is merely sordid. — 46. In the court of Zhou one bows and kneels to answer: the raised axe makes the nape bristle, the raised whip makes one start. — 47. Do not let the fangs of cruelty grow, nor make honest men cringe by force. — 48. Do not count on wealth as bait: wiping away tears does not quench the burning liver.

7. When you walk quietly beneath the willows, do not set your heart on defying your elders by disputing the lead. — 50. When you plough along the furrows, do not set your heart on chasing gain and never yielding a dyke. — 51. That old man with his snowy head: seeing another bear a load, he takes it on in his stead. — 52. The spring of retribution turns like the palm of a hand; honour the old, and Heaven will grant you to grow old.

8. Daughter, in your lot as a young peach tree, let clear water be your virtue and the mirror your heart. — 54. The four virtues, the three obediences: serve your husband and he will rely on you; pledge your heart and he will trust it. — 55. The gate of spring, locks upon locks and bolts upon bolts; the heart engraves and engraves again, and duty holds and holds. — 56. Handsome in her bearing, accommodating at table: what need of musk and pearly skin? — 57. Do not vie in arrogance or abundance, in five kinds of perfume and robes of five scents. — 58. Do not vie in affected manners, walking to eclipse the moon, laughing to make the flowers squint. — 59. The old and the plain, there is our pleasure; leave sourness to others, and to each his youth or his age. — 60. Let it suffice that a woman's virtue raise her above the rest, without boasting of anything or demanding to be thought fresh.

9. A habit of thrift, a character of diligence: before wine one hesitates, at work one persists. — 62. Late in the night, in the window's shadow, the needle; the thread passes through the snow-white cloth, the lamp trembles. — 63. In women's work, would one dare slacken? Under dew and blazing sun, the lute's sound fades. — 64. Over there the vine's

leaves already cast shade; the cuckoo calls above the cave, and the yellow bird answers. — 65. Emptiness and fullness, measured, come to nothing; [low and high, deep waters and green…]. — 66. Always clear, never swerving; speech held in, bearing even and serene. — 67. Only then is the noble man's heart at rest, and the vigils spent knitting the brows beneath the moon repaid.

10. This, then, is what I call out to you today: keep a heart of gold and a peaceful face, as one keeps a small child. — 69. Always the deference of the old ways; do not cherish fine seed out of calculation. — 70. The four orders of the people at their callings, unconstrained; rites and letters at every gate, humanity in every house. — 71. Obedient above, in one and the same virtue of harmony; warmth in every season, and the ten thousand creatures verdant. — 72. Eight thousand water-veins, deep and long: the people are the root on which the structure is firmly built. — 73. [ ] what one would draw from the people, the heart always returns to them. — 74. I have gathered so many rough words; with buffalo hide and hare's fur I admonish this district.

Nguyễn Minh Tuân

5. Hoàng giáp Đinh Nho Hoàn in the historical sources

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[source: 21.doc]

Đinh Nho Hoàn was the third son of Đinh Nho Công and Lady Đặng. His personal name was Toản, his courtesy name Tồn Phác, his pen name Mặc Trai (also Mặc Ông). Born in 1671, the ninth year of the Cảnh Trị era, he belonged to the eighth generation of the Đinh Nho lineage, long known as a house of standing in the land of Hoan Châu. The *Khâm định Việt sử thông giám cương mục* (hereafter *Cương mục*) records: "Đinh Nho Hoàn is a native of An Ấp, Hương Sơn district." The Đinh Nho lineage owes its renown to the number of its members who rose to distinction: Đinh Nho Công, Đinh Nho Hoàn's father, Đinh Nho Điền, Đinh Nho Quang… Bùi Dương Lịch's *Notes on Nghệ An* and Nguyễn Hoàng Ân's *Register of Notables of Hà Tĩnh* both state that his father, Đinh Nho Công, placed first in the metropolitan examination at the age of thirty-four, at the examination of the year Canh Thìn (1670), under King Lê Huyền Tông, and rose to the office of assistant censor. Đinh Nho Hoàn's younger brother, Đinh Nho Côn, who passed the provincial examination, rendered great service and was made Marquis of Hương Nghĩa. Đinh Nho Hoàn was well endowed and reputed intelligent from childhood; taught besides by his father, he passed the four sessions at fourteen (1684) and placed first in the provincial examination at twenty-three (1693). At twenty-four his palace dissertation was placed in the highest category and he was admitted to the inner cabinet. At thirty he passed as a doctor of the second rank at the examination of the year Canh Thìn (1700).

The *Continuation of the Annals of Đại Việt* mentions the examination of 1700; it says nothing directly of Đinh Nho Hoàn, but one can see that this session recruited a good many able men: "Canh Thìn (1700). In the second month, the metropolitan examination of the country's licentiates; Nguyễn Hiệu and eighteen others passed (Hiệu, of Lan Khê commune, Nông Cống district). [Earlier,] the lord had often dreamt that a man from Lan Khê would place first, and had spoken of it to the minister Lê Hy. [Now] it proved true."

The *Register of Examination Laureates of the Successive Dynasties of Đại Việt* records: twenty-first year of the Chính Hòa era, examination of the year Canh Thìn (1700), nineteen doctors. In the first rank, second name, stands Nguyễn Đình Ý; in the second rank, three men: Tạ Đăng Huân, Hồ Phi Tích and Đinh Nho Hoàn.

Fifteen men passed in the third rank as associate doctors: Nguyễn Hiệu, Trần Tuấn, Đặng Quốc Đinh… The same work notes of Đinh Nho Hoàn: "Đinh Nho Hoàn, of the Hương Sơn district, An Ấp village, passed at thirty and rose to the office of right vice-minister of Works; sent on embassy by order, he died on the road and was posthumously granted that of left vice-minister of Personnel. Son of Nho Công."

Some months later the lord had the palace examination held, at which Đinh Nho Hoàn passed as a doctor of the second rank (*Hoàng giáp*); but in recording this examination the *Continuation of the Annals of Đại Việt* does not name him, stating only: "Nguyễn Đình Ức was granted the first rank, third name (*Thám hoa*)… as is set down in the *Register of Laureates*; Tạ Đăng Huân and two others passed as doctors of the second rank (*Hoàng giáp*); Trần Toàn (of Nghĩa Đô, Từ Liêm district) and fourteen others passed as associate doctors." Fortunately Ngô Cao Lãng, in the *Miscellaneous Records of Successive Dynasties*, describes this examination more carefully (the Canh Thìn examination, fifth month of 1700) and names Đinh Nho Hoàn among the three placed in the second rank: "Palace examination. Granted: to Nguyễn Đình Úc, the first rank, third name (*thám hoa*); to Tạ Đăng Huân, Hồ Phi Tích and Đinh Nho Hoàn, all three the second rank (*hoàng giáp*); to Trần Toàn, Nguyễn Hiệu and thirteen others, the third rank, associate doctors."

The examination regulations and the form of the compositions did not differ greatly from earlier practice, but the topics no longer followed the hunt for Chinese quotations and allusions. "At this examination the set poem and dissertation topics were: *Hiệp thượng hạ, thừa thiên hưu*, in heptasyllables; *Nhật nguyệt thăng hàng*, in pentasyllables, on the rhyme *tê*, with twenty-five rhymes required; and a dissertation on *Diên phi, ngư dược*. Only Nguyễn Đình Úc and Nguyễn Quốc Bảo composed in proper form…

— Nho Hoàn, of An Ấp, Hương Sơn district, thirty years old, passed;…"

The text of the stele of the doctors of the Canh Thìn examination, twenty-first year of Chính Hòa (1700), recalls the throng of candidates: "There were then more than two thousand competitors, and the most outstanding were selected, Nguyễn Hiệu and eighteen others. In the fifth month they were summoned to the palace examination; Nguyễn Đình Ức was placed in the first rank, Tạ Đăng Huân and two others in the second, Trần Toàn and fourteen others in the third. On the twenty-second day the names of the successful candidates were called out, and the officials of the Ministry of Rites carried the golden tablet to hang before the gate of the College. They were then given robes, caps and insignia, the silver flower and the Quỳnh banquet; they rode through the streets on horseback and returned in triumph to their villages. The favours and rewards were truly of the greatest solemnity. Only the engraving of the names in stone could not be carried out, since for several earlier examinations no stele had been erected either…; wishing to restore the old usage, it was ordered that the steles of all the examinations still lacking them be engraved and set up at once. For the Canh Thìn examination, your servant was ordered to compose the text."

The stele engraves, in the first rank, one name: Nguyễn Đình Ức (Nguyệt Áng commune, Thanh Trì district); in the second rank, three: Tạ Đăng Huân, Hồ Phi Thích and Đinh Nho Hoàn (An Ấp commune, Hương Sơn district); in the third rank, fifteen: Trần Toàn, Nguyễn Hiệu… After passing, Đinh Nho Hoàn held several important offices. The work *Notables of Hà Tĩnh*, citing *The Examination Laureates of Việt Nam*, writes: "after passing, Đinh Nho Hoàn was appointed to the Hàn lâm Academy for about two years and then given the office of *Tham chính* of the circuit of Sơn Tây." But the authors of *Notables of Hà Tĩnh* were probably mistaken in their citation. In fact Ngô Đức Thọ, in *The Examination Laureates of Việt Nam*, writes only that Đinh Nho Hoàn "rose to the office of right vice-minister of Personnel". It is in his article "Hoàng giáp Đinh Nho Hoàn and the *Mặc Ông sứ tập*", published in the *Nghệ An Cultural Review*, that Ngô Đức Thọ mentions his time at the Hàn lâm Academy. The text runs: "After passing, Đinh Nho Hoàn served as a supernumerary at the Hàn lâm Academy for about two years, then was given the office of *Tham chính* of the circuit of Sơn Tây; less than a year later he was transferred to the office of *Đốc trấn* of the prefecture of Cao Bình (that is, Cao Bằng)." Ngô Đức Thọ is, however, somewhat mistaken about the chronology of the career, and above all about the year in which he took up his post at Cao Bình. On the citation above, it would be 1703. In truth, in 1700 Đinh Nho Hoàn was a supernumerary at the Hàn lâm Academy; in the eighth month of the year Nhâm Ngọ (1702) he was given the office of *Tham chánh* of Sơn Tây; and in the seventh month of the year Giáp Thân (1704) that of *Đốc trấn* of Cao Bằng, as his own note, cited below, indicates.

The major histories — the *Continuation of the Annals of Đại Việt*, the *Khâm định Việt sử thông giám cương mục*, and so on — do not say what office he held before setting out on embassy (1715); but a note of Đinh Nho Hoàn's reads: "… In the mid-autumn month (the eighth) of the year Nhâm Ngọ (September 1702), sent on service to the circuit of Sơn Tây. In the first month of autumn (the seventh) of the year Giáp Thân (August 1704), sent as governor of Cao Bình…" These are probably facts that the national history failed to record in full, and it is for this reason that our searches through the sources have turned up nothing on his time in Sơn Tây and Cao Bình (Cao Bằng). "Thus, after passing, Đinh Nho Hoàn served as a supernumerary at the Hàn lâm Academy for about two years, then was given the office of *Tham chính* of the circuit of Sơn Tây; less than a year later he was transferred to that of *Đốc trấn* of the prefecture of Cao Bình (that is, Cao Bằng). During his time at Cao Bằng he carried out many works of benefit to the people, such as repairing roads and blasting rocky rapids so that boats could move and trade with ease. Chinese trading junks coming over to trade had previously to wait a long time before their goods were inspected and allowed to circulate. Under Đinh's governorship it was ordered that inspection be done quickly, for the convenience of cargo owners. Remembering this, the Hoa merchants of Cao Bằng gathered funds and erected a stele before the gate of the guild hall celebrating the virtue of Governor Đinh. No document records how many years he governed Cao Bằng. But one of his poems relates his meeting, on the embassy road, with a Chinese from Fujian who had come to trade at Cao Bằng: since they parted, five years had passed before they met again; there are therefore grounds for supposing that he remained at Cao Bằng until about 1710, when he was recalled to the capital."

The Chinese merchants trading in the area made a stele to preserve the memory of Đinh Nho Hoàn's benefactions and placed it before the guild hall; it is called the "stele of virtue in government" (*Đức Chính bia*). It sets out three great merits: "repairing the roads and blasting

the rocky rapids in the river so that boats might pass freely; reducing the vexations of goods inspection at the border crossing; lowering the taxes."

According to the *Topographical Notes on the Districts of Hà Tĩnh Province*, it was on account of his work as governor of Cao Bằng that the court "abolished the garrisons of Cao Bằng", since "the native troops were adequate for defence; the garrisons were therefore abolished to lighten the hardship". Bùi Dương Lịch's *Notes on Nghệ An* record that Đinh Nho Hoàn rose to the office of right vice-minister of the Ministry of Works — the office he held, therefore, on his return from Cao Bằng; and that the office of *Thượng bảo tự khanh*, which he held at the time of the embassy, was "the office of keeper of the seals at the Hàn lâm Academy".

Đinh Nho Hoàn was a cultivated and incorruptible man. To express his resolve, he had a stone chime made, called the *Khánh Mặc Trai*, and hung it in his study to admonish himself and set an example to his descendants. The *Khánh Mặc Trai* is now kept at the Gôi Mỹ temple, and the dedication engraved on it has been translated by Professor Ngô Đức Thọ (Institute of Hán Nôm Studies): "Every inanimate object, left at rest, is silent; struck, it sounds. But the sound each gives out differs from one object to another. That of the chime is limpid, of a light rhythm, and yet high and resonant, like the elevation of a man. Loving that sound, I therefore went to the expense of having one carved, hung it to the left of my hermitage and named it the *Khánh Mặc Trai*, so as to strengthen my resolve."

In the life and career of Đinh Nho Hoàn, the most notable episode is his embassy as deputy envoy. The *Cương mục* records of the legation sent to the Qing: "Year Ất Mùi, eleventh year (1715). In the first month, in spring. Envoys were dispatched to the Qing. Chief envoys: Nguyễn Công Cơ, left vice-minister of Finance, and Lê Anh Tuấn, chamberlain of the Imperial Stud; deputy envoys: Đinh Nho Hoàn, chamberlain of the Bureau of Seals, and Nguyễn Mậu Áng, secretary in the Personnel service — they went to the Qing to present the annual tribute. The following year Công Cơ and his party returned home, bearing an edict of the Qing emperor providing that, among the objects of the annual tribute, the gold incense burners and flower vases and the silver basins might henceforth, in the quantities fixed, be replaced by ingots of gold and silver handed over to the officials of Guangxi, who would receive them in store; that ivory and rhinoceros horn would be exempted; and that the number of attendants would be reduced with discretion."

Phan Huy Chú, in the *Institutions of the Successive Dynasties*, in the section on foreign relations, records likewise: "In the year [1715] (corresponding to the fifty-fourth year of the Qing Kangxi era), Nguyễn Công Cơ, Lê Anh Tuấn, Đinh Nho Hoàn and Nguyễn Mậu Áng were sent to bear tribute to the Qing. On his return Nguyễn Công Cơ brought a note from the Ministry of Rites stating that, by edict of the Qing emperor, tribute objects such as gold incense burners and flower vases and silver basins were, at equal weight, to be cast into gold and silver ingots and presented as tribute, handed over to the Guangxi finance commission for safekeeping, while ivory and rhinoceros horn were exempted."

The *Miscellaneous Records of Successive Dynasties* record the same, more briefly: "Year Ất Mùi, eleventh year [of the Vĩnh Thịnh era] (1715) (Qing, fifty-fourth year of the Kangxi era). In the first month, in spring. The chief envoys Nguyễn Công Cơ and Lê Anh Tuấn and the deputy envoys Đinh Nho Hoàn and Nguyễn Mậu Áng were all ordered to go to the Qing to deliver the annual tribute."

Before setting out, he asked leave to return to his village to settle family affairs before coming back to the capital. Once there, Đinh Nho Hoàn installed the youngest son of his eldest brother, Đinh Nho Hoành, as heir to the ancestral cult, had a hermitage built, and then gave the commune fifteen acres of rice land and one hundred quan to provide for the offerings of the four seasons. He had the stele *Mặc tử tôn bia* set up for the instruction of his descendants.

The itinerary of the embassy is very sparsely recorded in the sources that have come down to us; the national history is extremely summary here. The following are the rare documents available on Đinh Nho Hoàn's mission of 1715: "In the middle of that month the legation crossed the Nhị Hà river and halted at the Điêu Ngạc relay station; it presented a memorial of thanks [to Lord Trịnh], the substance of which is as follows:

"Your servants venture to think that the sending of ministers on embassy is first recorded in the *Book of Odes*. The former kings and sages of the Zhou, to show their solicitude for their subjects and their compassion for the hardships and toil of envoys upon the road, themselves composed the three stanzas of the poem *Hoàng hoa*, which they had passed to the musicians and set to strings and flutes, so as to manifest an attentive and affectionate heart. Poets have recorded that event for the instruction of later ages. In sum, it was a broad virtue and a generous intention. Later ages too sent ministers on embassy, and the histories make mention of it, but these were merely charges assigned and carried out, in the hope of continuing the good name of the ancients.

"Our country, from the Đinh, the Lý and the Trần onward, has always maintained embassies and friendly relations with China. As for sending envoys to convey the sovereign's views in the ceremonial of foreign relations, custom was generally followed, men being appointed in turn. Deep attachment between sovereign and envoy did sometimes exist, but it had never been seen expressed in poems set to music, in the manner of that brilliant style of the Zhou at Chengzhou!

"Today we see with reverence that His Lordship personally oversees all the affairs of state and cultivates friendship with neighbouring lands; this embassy is the first since he took up the succession. Your servants, of slender means and slight talent, find themselves the object of particular attention and chosen for the embassy: their hearts are at once glad and abashed, so vast is the favour that reaches down even to the lowly.

"On the day your servants took their leave at the foot of the steps, they received precious words, encouragement and attentive consolation, and the gift of two poems in the national language: the first exhorting them to attend diligently to their mission and to convey the court's intentions; the second teaching them to keep the advantage in diplomatic speech; the last wish being that the two words 'merit and renown' should be fulfilled. In the lord's poems the brushstroke shines like the star Khuê, the voice of the verse rings like gold and jade, words and meaning are full and complete, revealing a scrupulous and heartfelt affection. This is the happy encounter of a lifetime, and a thing rare in a thousand years! Your servants, having raised the poems to read them, were stirred to the bowels and moved to the marrow. Seeing that this favour runs deeper than the ocean and this virtue weighs more than the high mountains, your servants, were they shattered ten thousand times over, could not repay one ten-thousandth of it.

"They wish only that the sacred person may enjoy ten thousand years of long life, rising like the sun and constant as the moon; that the strength of the country may be as firm as Mount Tai

and as bedrock; that the state may endure for ever. Your servants, sheltered by his august protection and looking up to his great good fortune, aspire only to see the matter brought to a close and the work accomplished. They respectfully submit this memorial of thanks that it may come to the lord's knowledge."

On the road of the embassy he composed poems, of which more than one hundred and thirty have been gathered. The whole was later assembled by his son-in-law, Nguyễn Trọng Thường, in the collection *Mặc Ông sứ tập*. The original is now held at the Institute of Hán Nôm Studies. It contains poems on the landscapes passed through (the Nhị Hà river, the Nam Quan pass, the town of Ngô Châu, the temple of Ma Yuan…); occasional poems (remembering the king, the country, his parents…); pieces exchanged with and offered in farewell to friends; the note on the founding of the cult rice fields; the inscription engraved on the stone chime of the Thượng Bảo temple; and the precepts teaching his descendants loyalty and filial piety.

He unhappily fell gravely ill and died on the road: "In the year Ất Mùi (1715), while holding the office of chamberlain of the Bureau of Seals, he was appointed deputy envoy of the legation bearing the annual tribute to the Qing; he fell ill and died on the way (1716), and was posthumously granted the office of left vice-minister. His concubine, of the Phan lineage, on learning of his death, took her own life to follow him. The world praised her as 'chaste and steadfast'. The court granted her a horizontal panel bearing the two words 'faithful widow', conferred on her posthumously the title *Á thân phu nhân*, and ordered a temple to be established for her worship in An Ấp commune."

On the date of the deputy envoy Đinh Nho Hoàn's death, confusion persists to this day. The genealogy of the Đinh of Sơn Hoà states that he fell ill and died on reaching Wuhan. However, examining his posthumous papers, we find that the poem written at the furthest point is *Quá Hoàng Hà*, composed when the legation had crossed the river into the territory of Hebei (China), and that no piece was written at Yên Kinh (Beijing). Next comes *Bệnh trung ức Tú Thuỷ tiên sinh*, which tells us he was ill; but the sickness was probably only beginning, since his mind was still clear enough to compose. Then follow three pieces of felicitation for the Qing emperor's birthday: anxious no doubt about his health, he had probably written them in advance so as to have them ready when the legation entered the palace for the ceremony. After those three pieces there is nothing that records any impression or scene at Yên Kinh. Reading the preface of the posthumous collection closely, we find that his son-in-law Nguyễn Trọng Thường also writes: "It is to be regretted that he unhappily died outside the walls of Yên Kinh."

It can therefore be established that Đinh Nho Hoàn did not die on the return journey but on the outward one: he fell ill just after entering the territory of Hebei and died in the vicinity of Yên Kinh. On arrival, the legation submitted a memorial to the court announcing the death. The Qing emperor sent an official of the Ministry of Rites, Gan Lai, to perform the funeral rites, and had the body encoffined, in an inner and an outer coffin, so that the legation might carry it home. Bereaved, the legation, once the formalities of presenting the memorial and the congratulatory gifts to the Qing emperor were complete, rested some ten days and then hurried homeward. Travelling by land and by water, in the fourth month of the year Bính Thân (May 1716) Nguyễn Công Cơ's legation reached Thăng Long: the journey out and back had taken nearly sixteen months. The chief envoy Nguyễn Công Cơ went to court to report the death of the deputy envoy Đinh; the court sent the right vice-minister of Rites, Tạ Đăng Huân — who

had passed at the same examination as the deputy envoy — to perform the funeral rites, and posthumously granted Đinh Nho Hoàn the office of Minister of Personnel.

Lê Quang Định, in the *Unified Geography of Hoàng Việt*, records the episode under the heading "33. Temple of the Valiant Woman": "This temple is in An Ấp commune, Hương Sơn district; the spirit of the Valiant Woman is worshipped there. It is said in the *Lives of Valiant Women* that under the Lê there was in An Ấp commune a beloved concubine of Hoàng giáp Đinh Nho Hoàn, of pure and grave countenance, who from her youth excelled in music and was well versed in letters. At fifteen Đinh Nho Hoàn took her as concubine; barely two years had passed, and that deep affection had not yet been repaid, when one day Nho Hoàn was ordered to go on embassy to the northern country. She went with him, unable to part from him, and vowed to keep chastity and a wife's duty; he for his part firmly obeyed the king's order and, before departing, left her a silk robe. The journey passed quickly, the days flew like a shuttle, and Nho Hoàn suddenly fell ill and died on the embassy road. At the news she wept and wished to die with him. When Nho Hoàn's coffin was brought back for the funeral, she took her own life with the silk robe he had left her. Hearing of this, King Lê rewarded her most generously, ordered the people of the commune to raise a temple for her worship, granted her twenty acres of cult rice land, and bestowed a gilded panel engraved with the three characters 'gate of the faithful widow', hung before the temple door; the characters still shine today, and the incense has never ceased to burn."

Lady Phan's suicide is recorded in many sources. She was ranked among the glorious women, the "faithful widows". Phan Thị Viên was the daughter of an official of the Phan lineage, of Do Lễ village, Hưng Nguyên district; she entered her husband's house at eighteen. On the day the *Hoàng giáp* set out, she crossed the Nhị Hà river to accompany him as far as the Lã Côi relay (Gia Lâm). The *Hoàng giáp* took off the robe he was wearing and gave it to her; no one imagined that after her husband's death on the embassy road she would use that robe to take her own life and follow him.

Hoàng giáp Đinh Nho Hoàn had two daughters, one of whom married Nguyễn Trọng Thường, of Trung Cần village, Thanh Chương district. Nguyễn Trọng Thường had passed as a doctor at the examination of the year Nhâm Thìn (1712), three years before his father-in-law's departure on embassy. He later rose to the office of right vice-minister of Personnel. Đinh Nho Hoàn's personal effects were afterwards sent back by the court to his family in the village. Among them was the manuscript of the poems his father-in-law had composed on the embassy road. Nguyễn Trọng arranged the pieces in the order of the itinerary, added a few annotations, wrote a preface and gave the collection the title *Mặc Ông sứ tập*.

By a strange coincidence, Doctor Nguyễn Trọng Thường later met the same misfortune as his father-in-law. In the third year of the Long Đức era (1734) he too was ordered to go on embassy to the Qing; on the return journey, having reached Hankou, he fell ill and died. The official history does not record this detail, but the *Register of Laureates of the Successive Dynasties* and the *Notes on Nghệ An* fortunately do.

Thus, through the historical sources that have come down to us, we have to some extent clarified the life and career of Hoàng giáp Đinh Nho Hoàn, a man of talent and virtue, reputed intelligent from childhood. After passing the examinations he held a great many offices; his most important contributions were those of his governorship of Cao Bình, then, on his return to

the capital, his appointment to the Hàn lâm Academy, and above all his embassy of 1715–1716. Although he never reached Yên Kinh, his poems and travel notes constitute a vast poetic legacy, Đinh Nho Hoàn's contribution to the classical literature of our country. To these must be added, from his governorship of Cao Băng, the *Hoán tỉnh châu dân từ* in *nôm* script, a song of one hundred and forty-eight lines in *lục bát* metre calling on the local population to do good and forsake evil so as to settle and prosper, and finally the ten poems on the scenic spots of Cao Băng, the *Cao Băng thập thủ*. It may be affirmed that Đinh Nho Hoàn is not only a historical figure of the land of Hương Sơn in Hà Tĩnh; he is also a statesman, a diplomat and a poet of great learning.

Hanoi, 4 June 2015

6. The metropolitan and palace examinations of the year Canh Thìn (1700)

Đinh Văn Đạt — Head of the History Subcommittee, Liaison Committee of the Đinh Lineage of Việt Nam

[source: 06.doc]

The examination system opens in our country in the year Ất Mão (1075), when King Lý Nhân Tông had an examination held under the title "Broad learning in the classics and the three Confucian sessions". At the end of that session the king placed Lê Văn Thịnh at the head of the list — what would later be called the title of *Trạng nguyên*. The Lý held seven examinations, the triad of the three top names not yet existing.

Under the Trần, procedures were already fairly elaborate. In the year Thiên Ứng (1232) the king had the examination for "students of higher learning" organised, divided into three ranks, and fixed one examination every seven years. That of 1239 admitted fifty-one laureates, including the three top names: Nguyễn Hiền, at thirteen, was *Trạng nguyên*, Lê Văn Hưu was *Bảng nhãn*, and forty-eight were "students of higher learning", that is, doctors in the later terminology. In 1304 King Trần Anh Tông had an examination held from which Mạc Đĩnh Chi emerged as *Trạng nguyên* and Nguyễn Trung Ngạn as *Hoàng giáp*. In the same year the newly acceded king Trần Duệ Tông changed the name of the examination for "students of higher learning" to the doctoral examination. The titles of *Trạng nguyên*, *Bảng nhãn*, *Thám hoa* and *Hoàng giáp* were termed *cập đệ*; ordinary doctors were held to have passed by assimilation. The Trần dynasty held nineteen examinations for students of higher learning and for the doctorate.

The Hồ redefined the rules and added a session in mathematics.

Under the later Lê, King Lê Thái Tông had the erection of the doctors' steles begun at the Temple of Literature and the Quốc Tử Giám in Thăng Long (present-day Hanoi); but it was only under King Lê Thánh Tông, in 1484, that the work of "cutting the stone" — one stele per examination — was completed.

As to the examination in which Đinh Nho Hoàn took part, the facts are these.

In the year Canh Thìn (1700), twenty-first year of the Chính Hoà era, in spring, in the second month, King Lê Hy Tông summoned the scholars of the whole country to the metropolitan examination, with the following topics:

Poetry: *make virtue the principle of government*.

Phú: *build a lasting state*.

The examination officers, answerable to King Lê and Lord Trịnh, were:

- Trịnh Quán, deputy commander of the rear fire camp, Thái bảo, Duke of Tuyên, as superintendent;
- Nguyễn Quán Nho, censor-in-chief, counsellor, Viscount of Hương Giang, as director of the examination;
- Nguyễn Thế Bá, left vice-minister of Justice, counsellor, Baron of Khánh Sơn, and Hoàng Công Tú, right vice-minister of Rites, counsellor, Baron of Thi Khánh, as invigilators.

Before the metropolitan examination, Lord Trịnh dreamt that a man from Lan Khê would place first, and spoke of it to King Lê Hy Tông.

The metropolitan examination of the second month of that year Canh Thìn resulted in Nguyễn Hiệu, of Lan Khê commune, Nông Cống district, Thanh Hoá province, aged twenty-seven, placing first. Lord Trịnh's dream had indeed come true.

That metropolitan examination admitted, by order, nineteen candidates in due form; Nguyễn Hiệu placed first, exactly as in Lord Trịnh's dream. Among the nineteen was Đinh Nho Hoàn, of Hương Sơn, in what is now Hà Tĩnh province.

In the fifth month of the same year Canh Thìn (1700), twenty-first year of the Chính Hoà era, the palace examination was held for the nineteen who had passed in the second month. The king examined the candidates in person and retained nineteen, all of whom were rewarded and appointed to office. The results of that year's palace examination were:

- *Trạng nguyên*: none.
- First rank, doctor *cập đệ*, second name, that is, *Bảng nhãn*: one, Nguyễn Đình Ức.
- *Thám hoa*: none.
- Second rank, doctors *xuất thân*, that is, *Hoàng giáp*: three, namely Tạ Đăng Huân, Hồ Phi Tích and Đinh Nho Hoàn.
- Third rank, doctors *xuất thân*: fifteen, namely Trần Toàn, Nguyễn Hiệu, Nguyễn Quốc Bảo, Đặng Quốc Đỉnh, Bùi Hữu Nhâm, Nguyễn Trung Quán, Lê Hữu Hỷ, Nguyễn Y, Lại Duy Chí, Trương Minh Lượng, Nguyễn Đình Tướng, Nguyễn Quốc Quang, Nguyễn Công Hãng, Ngô Đình Thạc and Nguyễn Phấn.

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7. The embassy of the year Ất Mùi studied through an old stele in Kinh Bắc

Nguyễn Tá Nhí — Institute of Hán Nôm Studies

[source: 20.doc]

The embassy of the year Ất Mùi (1715), by which the Lê court sent envoys to bear the annual tribute to the Qing, is amply mentioned in the sources, but always in the most general terms; of the concrete circumstances of that Đại Việt legation we still know little. Recently, having had occasion to help a member of the Bắc Giang museum staff carry out his project on the *Study of the Stone Inscriptions of Bắc Giang Province*, I came to know of the stele *Phụng vãng Bắc sứ bi từ*, in the village of Phúc Tăng, Việt Yên district, whose contents bear precisely on this embassy.

The stele *Phụng vãng Bắc sứ bi từ* is now kept in the ancestral hall of the Nguyễn Đức lineage, Phúc Tăng commune, Việt Yên district, Bắc Giang province. It is cut from the blue stone of Mount Nhồi, Đông Sơn district, in the circuit of Thanh Hóa. Its author is the clerk Nguyễn Đức Nhậm, of the Kinh Bắc circuit camp, who wrote it on an auspicious day of the twelfth month of the year Đinh Dậu (1717), thirteenth year of the Vĩnh Thịnh era, under Lê Dụ Tông. The stele has four faces, measuring 128 × 96 cm, carved with motifs of dragons and phoenixes, carp and lotus flowers. The text is engraved entirely in Chinese characters, in a clear hand; it comprises thirty-six columns and about fifteen hundred characters. The four faces bear different titles and different contents:

Face 1: *Phụng vãng Bắc sứ bi từ*, presenting the northward embassy of the inner-service official Nguyễn Đức Huỳnh and the undertaking of the villagers of Phúc Tăng to honour him as a posthumous deity. The text also states that he gave the village one hundred and twenty taels of silver and five acres of good rice land.

Face 2: *Phụng sự Hậu Thần bi*, recording the joint ennoblement of the official's father and mother. Nguyễn Đức Huỳnh's father, the venerable Nguyễn, received by grace the title of *Tham nghị* of the circuit of Hưng Hóa, and his mother, the venerable Lady Đinh, that of principal wife. Both were likewise elected posthumous deities, with a cult instituted at the communal house.

Face 3: *Tùy vãng Bắc sứ tả ký*, presenting the official's younger brother, the sub-prefect Nguyễn Đức Thành. He accompanied his elder brother on the embassy, and it was he who brought his coffin home to the village in 1716.

Face 4: *Tôn vi Trùm trưởng phụng sự chi bi*, recording the election by the villagers of Phúc Tăng of the official's elder brother, Nguyễn Quang Trạch, as village elder, and the rites of his future cult.

The text tells us that the man honoured as posthumous deity at the communal house of Phúc Tăng is Nguyễn Đức Huỳnh, Marquis of Tăng Thọ, assisting minister of state, *Đặc tiến Kim tử Vinh lộc đại phu*, subdirector of the inner secretariat of the military bureau, left subdirector of the ceremonial bureau, posthumously raised to grand chamberlain — a native of Phúc Tăng village and a member of the legation of the year Ất Mùi. Born on the twenty-seventh day of the third month of the year Đinh Mùi (1687), intelligent by nature and gifted in strategy, he had served Prince Tấn Quang, Trịnh Bính, and built up a considerable record. In 1709 he was appointed subdirector of the navy, commanding the warships that followed the lord on his campaigns against bandits in the various regions. At the end of the year Giáp Ngọ (1714) he was assigned as inner-service official in charge of the convoy section, taking with him his adopted sons Nguyễn Đức Tuyên, Nguyễn Đức Viên, Nguyễn Đức Cơ, Nguyễn Đức Tuấn, Nguyễn Đức

Phương and Nguyễn Đức Phần, together with his younger brother Nguyễn Đức Thành, then sub-prefect of Kim Hoa district, all incorporated into the legation, and carrying the whole of the tribute by boat to the frontier for delivery to the Qing.

The stele further records this detail: on the day the legation was about to set out, the official Nguyễn Đức Huỳnh, Marquis of Tăng Thọ, received from the lord a poem in the national language, which gladdened his heart and stiffened his resolve. The detail agrees perfectly with what Ngô Cao Lãng records in the *Miscellaneous Records of Successive Dynasties*.

That work states that in the first month of the year Ất Mão the Lê court sent the chief envoys Nguyễn Công Cơ and Lê Anh Tuấn, and the deputy envoys Đinh Nho Hoàn and Nguyễn Mậu Áng, to bear the annual tribute to the Qing. In the middle of the first month the legation crossed the Nhị river and halted at the Điêu Ngạc relay in Gia Lâm district; there the envoys drew up a memorial of thanks addressed to the lord at Thăng Long. It contains this passage: “On the day your servants took their leave at the foot of the steps, they received from the lord words of gold and jade, and the most attentive consolation and encouragement. The lord furthermore made them a gift of a poem in the national language. The poem opens by urging them to carry out their mission well and to convey the court’s intentions. Then comes instruction in the proper conduct needed to keep face in diplomatic dealings. Lastly the wish that merit and renown may be accomplished. The lord’s brushstroke shines like the star Khuê, the words of the poem ring like gold and jade, and the meaning is full and deep. This is not merely the happy encounter of a lifetime; it is a rare thing in any age. Your servants passed the poem from hand to hand to recite it, pondering every intention, and their hearts were deeply moved. This favour is truly deeper than the ocean and this virtue heavier than the high mountains; were they shattered ten thousand times over, your servants could not repay one ten-thousandth of it.”

The lord’s verses in the national language had that weight indeed: they made so many ardent envoys ready to give up their own lives to discharge the duty the court had laid upon them — among them the deputy envoy and *Hoàng giáp* Đinh Nho Hoàn, and the convoy official Nguyễn Đức Huỳnh.

The stele tells us that on the sixteenth day of the eleventh month of the year Ất Mùi (1715), the column led by Nguyễn Đức Huỳnh, carrying the tribute, reached the Hoài Âm relay in Sơn Dương district, Jiangsu province, where misfortune struck: many men fell seriously ill. Nguyễn Đức Huỳnh did not recover and breathed his last there. His younger brother, the sub-prefect Nguyễn Đức Thành, and the rest of the party hastily shrouded him and laid the coffin temporarily in the garden of a monastery by the river, until the legation, on its return in the year Bính Thân (1716), could bring it home. Describing the return of the Phúc Tăng official’s coffin to his native village, Nguyễn Đắc Nhậm writes in accents of pathos:

> “Ten thousand leagues of mountains and passes, a journey of the greatest difficulty — and yet the cortege bearing his coffin crossed deep rivers seemingly without hardship, and passed the range of the Five Ridges as one walks over level ground. His simple soul returned safely to his old village and native land: is it not that Heaven had penetrated his loyalty, that the spirits had recognised the uprightness of his character, and that they had arranged all things so that matters should come out thus? The people of his country, great and small, young and old, who had always respected his firmness and owed him much, seeing him die in the discharge of his

> duty, at once agreed to elect him posthumous deity and to offer him worship each year, wishing to raise high his cypress-like constancy and his sunflower heart, and to show him the affection of village and neighbourhood."

Looking more closely at the noble sacrifice of the official Nguyễn Đức Huỳnh and of the deputy envoy Đinh Nho Hoàn, we see that they bore on frail shoulders an enormous charge: the oversight and conduct of a mass of tribute so cumbersome that few could picture it. The *Khâm định Việt sử thông giám cương mục*, compiled by the National History Bureau of the Nguyễn, cites the *Việt thuật* of the Qing scholar Huang Shanmin: "In the year Quý Mão (1663), Kangxi era, the country of An Nam sent envoys to bear tribute. The tribute comprised: 1. four sets of gold incense burners and flower vases, weighing 200 taels in all; 2. twelve silver basins, weighing 691 taels in all; 3. twenty rhinoceros horns and twenty elephant tusks."

The *Việt thuật* further indicates that the tribute also included many precious products of the country of An Nam:

- 60 catties of aloeswood;
- 148 catties of ordinary-grade aloeswood;
- 30 catties of scale-grade aloeswood;
- 50 pieces of white atractylodes perfume;
- 8,000 sticks of black incense;
- 200 bolts of white silk.

This colossal mass of tribute exhausted the strength and wits of how many Vietnamese legations, and forced loyal and dutiful envoys to leave their lives in a foreign land. The convoy official Nguyễn Đức Huỳnh had covered only half the road when he had to remain by the Yangtze, waiting for his brother Nguyễn Đức Thành to fetch him the following year. The deputy envoy Đinh Nho Hoàn went further, but the weight of that mission took all his strength. These noble sacrifices by the envoys of the southern country made the celestial court think again, and it had to consent to alter that harsh tribute regime. The *Miscellaneous Records of Successive Dynasties* report that in the sixth month of the year Bính Thân (1716) the Vietnamese legation led by the chief envoy Nguyễn Công Cơ returned to the capital of Thăng Long. Nguyễn Công Cơ and his party brought back a note from the Qing Ministry of Rites stating that, by order of the emperor, the ordinary tribute objects such as gold incense burners and flower vases and silver basins might all be converted into ingots of gold and silver handed over to the Guangxi finance commission, which would receive and store them, so that they need no longer be carried all the way to Yên Kinh. Ivory and rhinoceros horn were entirely exempted. The number of bearers assigned to transporting the tribute was likewise reduced with discretion: only a few attendants need proceed to the capital.

This may be regarded as a favour of the Qing towards Việt Nam; and so the envoy Nguyễn Công Cơ drew up, in the name of the Vietnamese court, a memorial of thanks, in genuinely humble terms:

> "Recently, in the sixth month of the fifty-fifth year of the Kangxi era (1716), when our country's minister, one Nguyễn Công, returned home, he further received a note from the celestial court's Ministry of Rites stating that henceforth, among An Nam's tribute objects, all vessels of gold and silver might be replaced by gold and silver in

> metal, and that rhinoceros horn and ivory would be exempted. In raising the note and passing it from hand to hand to read it, your servants were seized with emotion, looking up to the benevolent heart of the Son of Heaven, who soothes his subjects with a kindness as vast as heaven and earth."

Did the Qing Son of Heaven really feel such concern for the people of the Việt country? There is no need to debate it: everyone knows already. That remission of tribute was nothing other than the price, dearly paid, of the courage and fidelity of sons of the Việt country such as the deputy envoy Đinh Nho Hoàn and the official Nguyễn Đức Huỳnh. Their noble sacrifice did indeed lighten the burden of Vietnamese envoys in later generations. That devotion the court knew of, and history has recorded it; more than that, the villagers in their affection raised them to the rank of posthumous deities, honoured for ever. At the end of the stele *Phụng vãng Băc sứ bi từ*, the clerk Nguyễn Đắc Nhậm writes:

> *Sự tuân thương văn ư dư. Dư duy phù! Ký sự giả tất kê chi văn nhi sự quan phong hóa tất tại dân di. Phù! Trung tín tưởng hậu tục, cô quân tử chi sở hỉ đạo dã! Ức dư văn chi kiệt trung tiết giả dĩ hoạch âm báo, dĩ công khu trì vạn lý, tận tụy quyên khu thiên tất phúc cập tông tính, tương lai hữu dĩ xương thịnh, công chi tộc hĩ; Chí nghĩa mệnh giả một vi minh thần, công chi di hiểm nhất trí tuy tử do sinh thiên tất tưởng kỳ huân cao, kim hậu hữu dĩ hiển hách, công chi linh hĩ. Cảm ứng chi lý hào phát bất sảng, hương hỏa chi phụng dũ cửu dũ kinh ư thiên tải chi hạ hĩ! Toại bị thuật kỳ điên mạt, lặc vu mân thạch dụng thùy vĩnh cửu vân.*

That is to say:

> "The matter being complete, the villagers asked me to compose the text. I hold that to record an event one must write it down; and that if the event bears on the education of manners, it must rest in what is constant in men. Ah! that the loyal and sincere man be rewarded is a generous custom, and therefore the noble man cherishes the Way. I have heard, moreover, that he who gives his loyalty entire receives a hidden felicity in return: he who rode ten thousand leagues and gave himself until he forgot himself — Heaven will surely bless his kin, and his house will flourish generation after generation. He who keeps his duty becomes at death a luminous spirit: he who faced danger to the point of forgetting his own body, though dead, is as though still living; Heaven will reward his merit, gloriously, and he will indeed be powerful. The law of Heaven's response does not swerve by a hair's breadth; from now on the incense of his cult, the longer it lasts, the firmer it will hold, and so for a thousand years to come. I have therefore related the matter from beginning to end and engraved it in stone that it may be handed down long."

The official Nguyễn Đức Huỳnh has been honoured as a posthumous deity by the villagers of Phúc Tăng, who have kept his cult for exactly three hundred years; and the deputy envoy Đinh Nho Hoàn receives the same respect and veneration from the village of An Âp. More than that, the Đinh lineage, together with many scholars from all over the country, is today holding a conference to give thanks to them. The noble sacrifice of the envoys of the year Ât Mùi (1715) not only lightened the burden borne by the envoys of later generations: it also saved the lives of many sacred beasts, wild elephants and rhinoceroses, and reduced the hardship of the many

people of Đại Việt who were obliged to hunt them. The noble sacrifice of the deputy envoy Đinh Nho Hoàn has therefore been of very great use.

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8. Some scattered reflections on Hoàng giáp Đinh Nho Hoàn

Colonel Nguyễn Khắc Thuần

[source: 09.doc]

Reading the list of authors who have written for the conference devoted to Hoàng giáp Đinh Nho Hoàn, sent to me by the head of the Đinh Nho lineage of Sơn Hòa, I feel still more keenly how vast the subject is: much remains to be discussed before the thick dust of time can be blown away and we can fully make out the features of an eminent scholar, a man of high virtue and great renown, whose whole life was clear in its intentions towards his country, his people and his native place. Several ideas I had been pursuing for some time have already been taken up by other researchers, and their wide learning will certainly have carried them through. I therefore asked the head of the lineage, Đinh Nho Quỳ, and Professor Đinh Phạm Thái for leave to write on a few minor questions, as they come, so as to bring my modest share to the conference.

1. Did Hoàng giáp Đinh Nho Hoàn die on the outward road, or after completing the embassy and while preparing to return?

Studying Đinh Nho Hoàn's posthumous papers, one finds that the poem written at the furthest point is *Quá Hoàng Hà*, composed when the legation had reached Hebei. There is no poem at all about Yên Kinh. After *Quá Hoàng Hà* comes *Bệnh trung ức Tú Thủy tiên sinh*: he was doubtless ill by then, but still lucid and "well enough" to set down in verse what he felt on visiting Master Tú Thủy. Then follow three pieces of felicitation for the Qing emperor's birthday — three poems, but also three official texts the deputy envoy had prepared in advance to present at the imperial audience. After those three pieces, no poem records the least impression or scene of Yên Kinh. This is why, in his article "Hoàng giáp Đinh Nho Hoàn and the *Mặc Ông sứ tập*", page 12, line 27, prefixed to the *Mặc Trai sứ tập* (Literature Publishing House, Hanoi, 2009), Ngạn Xuyên Ngô Đức Thọ writes: "It can therefore be established that Đinh Nho Hoàn did not die on the return journey but on the outward one: he fell ill just after entering the territory of Hebei and died in the vicinity of Yên Kinh." With all the respect due to Ngạn Xuyên Ngô Đức

Thọ, a leading specialist in Hán Nôm, we venture a different view: the deputy envoy Đinh Nho Hoàn died once his mission was complete, and not on the outward journey as Ngô Đức Thọ maintains.

We rest this proposal on three grounds.

First. After the death of Hoàng giáp Đinh Nho Hoàn, on the twenty-seventh day of the twelfth month of the fifty-fifth year of the Kangxi era, the Kangxi emperor sent the vice-director of the Ministry of Rites, Gan Lai, to read the funeral oration of the Qing court. It contains this line:

> At the Tiger Pavilion he bowed in thanks, his eyes raised to Heaven; That task had just been completed.

"That task had just been completed" means that he had accomplished the mission received from the king of Nam Việt: the presentation of tribute. In other words, he died after reciting the pieces of felicitation for Kangxi's birthday. Once his remains had been brought home, the Lê king held solemn funeral rites for him. The court's oration contains these lines:

> Travelling the road of the Zhou, he thought he must apply himself to the affairs of state; He went far to show his merit: who would have thought that on the return he would give up his soul?

Does "on the return" not mean that he died on the way back, the business of state accomplished?

Second. In the Đinh Nho lineage of Sơn Hòa the following story is handed down: "After the arrival of deputy envoy Đinh Nho Hoàn's legation at Yên Kinh, it went with the other legations to the imperial palace, but no one came to receive them; they saw only a single character, *đông*, hanging on the gate. The legations went away crestfallen, wondering anxiously on what day Kangxi would receive them. It was otherwise with Đinh Nho Hoàn's legation: on seeing the character *đông*, the deputy envoy knew at once that the audience would fall on the eighteenth day of the twelfth month — the three characters *thập* (ten), *bát* (eight) and *nhật* (day) together making up the character *đông*.

On the eighteenth day of the twelfth month, only the legation of the southern country came before the Kangxi emperor. The gates were flung wide, and Kangxi praised the deep learning of the envoys from the South. Learning that the man who had deciphered the character *đông* was the deputy envoy Đinh Nho Hoàn, the emperor greatly esteemed his talent and offered him a cup of the imperial wine." It is perhaps for this reason that Kangxi had to write in his oration: "We feel today a boundless grief." Grief for one who had "crossed seas and climbed mountains"; regret for an accomplished scholar dead before his time.

Third. To conclude from the mere absence of poems written at Yên Kinh that he died before reaching it is not convincing. Perhaps, being ill, he no longer had the strength to write once the common business was settled; perhaps the poems he composed at Yên Kinh have been lost.

For these reasons it seems to us that the deputy envoy Đinh Nho Hoàn died outside the walls of the palace at Yên Kinh, once the business of state was complete.

2. The mausoleum of Đinh Nho Hoàn, now in ruins

The land of Nghệ is a country where relics and famous sites are heaped upon relics and famous sites. Every village there has its communal houses, pagodas and shrines, sediments of the traditional culture of the region.

Unhappily, after 1945, at a time when "the peasantry rose up" and held all this to be a survival of the old regime and an obstacle on the road to socialism, we "dug out the stump and tore up the root" of these relics. Professor Ninh Viết Giao, a scholar who devoted his whole life to the culture of the land of Nghệ, once said:

> Of the historical and cultural relics of the land of Nghệ, only two or three parts in ten remain since 1945. And of those two or three parts, ninety to ninety-five per cent are disfigured.

The relics of Sơn Hòa, in Hương Sơn, shared that fate. Under the policy of merging cults (1946–1947), the temple of Bình Hòa (on the site of the present Lý Chính Thắng high school) and the temple of Đông Mỹ (near the Sắn Trà mausoleum), both connected with Đinh Nho Hoàn, were "merged", then dispersed and effaced. What remained of the Buddhist sanctuary on Mount Tháp has also gone, and the magnificent pagoda that Trần Nhân Tông (1258–1309) himself had built now lives only in the memory of the old and in books. The young people of Sơn Hòa believe Mount Tháp is so called because its shape resembles a bell tower, and no one knows any longer that an imposing campanile once stood there, its bell sounding morning and evening. Another renowned pagoda, which weighed on the hearts of pilgrims, was that of Ngọc Sơn — the local people call it the Bục Bục pagoda. Built under the later Lê, it had been raised by the Lê king in memory of the soldiers who fell in the campaign against the Ming on the Thiên Nhãn line, and to mark the court's gratitude to Empress Trần Thị Bích Ngọc, who had made An Ấp — today Sơn Hòa — into an agricultural estate serving as a rear base for the resistance against the Ming. It was so vast that its demolition, begun in 1955, was only "finished" around 1975. At the beginning of 1975 the main sanctuary still stood, with dozens of Buddha statues, smashed, one keeping a head, another a torso, another its limbs. Then the sanctuary was looted, the statues buried or broken up to clear the ground for the village elders to plant tea — and the Bục Bục pagoda disappeared. If the Gôi Mỹ temple survives today, it is because it was merged with the communal house of Gôi, then served as a printing works for Resistance currency, and afterwards as the seat of the administrative committee of Sơn Hòa commune. Serving as workshop and office, it was, within and without, enormously "disfigured" to suit the needs of the work; and after that merger, the communal house of Gôi, one of the most renowned in the region, disappeared in its turn. The recent restorations of the Gôi Mỹ temple, for want of knowledge of the architecture proper to historical monuments, have turned many of its features from "several centuries old" into "one year old".

The tomb of the doctor and censor-in-chief Nguyễn Tự Trọng — a provincially listed monument, the first laureate of Hương Sơn district — had to give way to a new road; and so hundreds of documents in Chinese and *nôm*, edicts, patents and diplomas belonging to the censor Nguyễn Tự Trọng vanished after that removal. The shrine house of Doctor Nguyễn Tự Trọng, whose ridge beam bore the six characters "built in the first month of spring of the Thành Thái era", was after the land reform mislaid in another locality, where it served as a warehouse and a cooperative store; his descendants have recently bought it back, but it was

already much damaged. Speaking of the losses of cultural heritage on the soil of Sơn Hòa, one cannot pass over the burning of dozens of precious libraries. Sơn Hòa was the meeting point of many houses of standing, rich in laureates of the great examinations and in high officials. All were incorruptible magistrates, lovers of poetry and poets themselves. The homes of these families therefore held studies where an enormous mass of books, Eastern and Western, ancient and modern — the Hán Nôm holdings above all — had accumulated. During the land reform these libraries were burnt. Professor Nguyễn Khắc Phi, son of Hoàng giáp Nguyễn Khắc Niêm, has still not recovered from that painful memory: the library of his house burnt for three days. Had these collections survived intact, how much about Hoàng giáp Đinh Nho Hoàn, about the other notables, about the great events and the cultural history of Sơn Hòa could today be elucidated in the fullest and truest way.

To return to Đinh Nho Hoàn. After his death, the Qing court helped the legation to carry out a most careful encoffining for the repatriation of the body. Transporting a corpse over seven or eight months of road necessarily required a special method of embalming. So it was with the chief envoy Giang Văn Minh, who also died on embassy (1638): tradition holds that the abdomen had to be opened, all the viscera removed and mercury poured in to preserve the body as far as Việt Nam. No document describes this technique precisely, but we may affirm that it was a high Chinese art, used only in exceptional cases. Đinh Nho Hoàn's remains were carefully prepared, fit to be brought home, and then carried on to be buried in his native Sơn Hòa. The Lê king granted the Đinh lineage a plot of 750 m^2 for a mausoleum, and five acres of rice land for the upkeep of the cult. On the tomb his descendants planted many precious species, among them a heavily fruiting *săn trà*; hence the people of Sơn Hòa call his burial place the mausoleum of Lord Hoàn, or the Săn Trà mausoleum. The mausoleum was as old as his death; it was therefore a grove of ancient trees, tall and broad, whose roots tangled from one to another like hammocks. The elders of Sơn Hòa have told us that around 1950 the trees of the mausoleum were still well kept and that dozens of species of birds came there to nest. Had the mausoleum survived, several of those trees would surely have received the label of "heritage tree of Việt Nam". Instead, the Săn Trà mausoleum had to make way for a commune irrigation channel. The century-old trees were felled. The tomb had to be moved. Since it had no mound, it cost the descendants much effort to find it. It comprised "a coffin within, a sarcophagus without". The sarcophagus was of a particular material, never precisely analysed; but the descendants and the head of the lineage present that day judge that it measured 2.40 m long, 0.80 m wide and 0.90 m high, and was made of lime mixed with a special additive, both very hard and impermeable. It is thanks to it that, nearly four hundred years later, Hoàng giáp Đinh Nho Hoàn's coffin remained perfectly preserved. The young men of the Đinh lineage and its sons-in-law were mustered to lift the sarcophagus and carry it whole to the cemetery, but in vain: it was too heavy. A few expedients — a sliding board, a pulley — failed. On that day (7 March 1976) there was neither crane nor forklift; the descendants had to resolve, with heavy hearts, to break the sarcophagus open to take out the coffin. Breaking it was no easy matter either, but it was done.

The coffin was intact, its paint included: trapezoidal, the foot of the lid curved up like the prow of a shoe, wrapped in eighteen layers of brocade embroidered with dragons and phoenixes. At the ancestral burial ground of Áng Phần the descendants again gave him a provisional burial, save that there was no longer an outer sarcophagus.

In 1985, the tomb having subsided, a ritual exhumation became necessary. The plan, deliberated and proposed by the lineage council, was approved by all. On opening the coffin, the surprise was complete: the body was entirely intact. He was tall and heavily built, the skull broad and capacious — a sign that he was a tall, sturdy man with a wide brow. Another surprise: the coffin contained no grave goods at all, not even the three ritual coins usually placed in the mouth of the deceased. Looking back, the head of the lineage judges that the repatriation of the remains, ordered by the Kangxi emperor, was indeed solemn — coffin and sarcophagus, brocades embroidered with dragons and phoenixes — but also somewhat hurried, to the point of omitting the three ritual coins.

After the destruction of the Sản Trà mausoleum and the removal of the tomb of Hoàng giáp and left vice-minister Đinh Nho Hoàn, the descendants of the Đinh lineage came upon a document, the *Hưởng yên phổ tự*, a text in Chinese characters translated into quốc ngữ by the licentiate Nguyễn Cự (of Nam Đàn, father-in-law of Đinh Nho Dật, father of Doctor Đinh Nho Chương) and kept today by the latter's family.

The document is explicit: "When the coffin of the left vice-minister Đinh Nho Hoàn was brought back to the village, Lady Phan (Phan Thị Viên, second wife of Đinh Nho Hoàn) went out to meet it and prostrated herself, showing extreme grief and sorrow. That night, Lady Phan hanged herself with the silk robe (*la ỷ*) the deputy envoy had given her before parting at Lã Côi (present-day Yên Viên, in Gia Lâm), thus keeping faith with her husband. The following morning Lady Lê, the principal wife, discovered her; overwhelmed with grief, she had the offerings prepared and performed the funeral washing of Lady Phan. At the encoffining, an envelope was found containing a 'Funeral oration for the left vice-minister Đinh Nho Hoàn' and two letters, the 'Letter of thanks to Mother Phan' and the 'Letter of thanks to Lady Lê'. On reading them Lady Lê was distraught and deeply moved; she carried Lady Phan's text before the deputy envoy's coffin and read it there, and sent members of the household with gold, silver, the letter of thanks and the gifts announcing the death to the home of Lady Phan's mother, at Gio Lễ commune, Hưng Nguyên district, Nghệ An (today the communes of Hưng Thông and Hưng Đạo and the town of Hưng Nguyên).

"An auspicious day and a favourable site having been chosen for the burial of the deputy envoy Đinh Nho Hoàn, Lady Lê composed a funeral oration for Lady Phan and had her buried beside Đinh Nho Hoàn's tomb at the Sản Trà mausoleum."

It was through this that the Đinh lineage discovered that beside Đinh Nho Hoàn's tomb lay also that of Lady Phan, herself a figure of the national culture. Accordingly, in 2011, the Đinh Nho lineage undertook to search for Lady Phan's grave at the Sản Trà mausoleum. The search failed; the lineage had to content itself with taking a handful of black earth to give her a symbolic burial beside that of the deputy envoy Đinh Nho Hoàn.

Thus, in the removal at the Sản Trà mausoleum, the Đinh lineage had to destroy an ancient tomb and lost the grave of an eminent figure.

Thus a historical monument — the mausoleum of the deputy envoy Đinh Nho Hoàn — was destroyed before it could be listed. Thus a grove of century-old trees was felled for a commune irrigation work, before it could receive the title of "heritage tree of Việt Nam". In his lifetime the scholar Ninh Viết Giao, who had come to do fieldwork there and learnt of the matter, said bitterly:

> This is an exceptional funerary complex, of which there are not many equivalents in Việt Nam, and an object of study for several disciplines. The price paid for ignorance is too high — higher than we imagine.

Đinh Nho Hoàn's mausoleum was an unlisted relic and at the same time a reserve of ancient trees; it no longer exists. Through this conference the writer would raise a question: we have lost too many historical and cultural relics. How are we to protect and enhance what remains, so that these monuments may do their work? Have we not done far too little to make the heritage law understood by the Party committees, the authorities and the people of the localities that hold relics? It is time for local cultural services to advise Party committees and authorities, so as to organise that understanding and raise the sense of responsibility among local people, that the heritage law may truly enter into life.

3. The providential bond of Đinh Nho Hoàn and Nguyễn Trọng Thường

At the beginning of 1715, Đinh Nho Hoàn was appointed deputy envoy of the legation to the Qing. The road ran ten thousand leagues and the climate was harsh; he fell ill and died. The Qing helped with his encoffining, coffin and sarcophagus, and with the transport of the remains to his village for burial. The Kangxi emperor also sent a funeral oration setting out his merits clearly.

In the history of Việt Nam's dynasties, the officials sent on embassy were all men of wide learning and great ability, laureates of the examinations. And so, over nearly two years on the long road from Thăng Long to Beijing, the Vietnamese envoys all wrote poetry and prose. Thus there formed in our literary history a vein of embassy poetry and prose, whose representative figures are Nguyễn Trung Ngạn (1289–1374), Phùng Khắc Khoan (1528–1613) and Nguyễn Du (1765–1820). A laureate, an accomplished scholar, a renowned author of his day, the envoy Đinh Nho Hoàn did no differently. Every land he passed through, every stirring of longing for country, home and king, he entrusted to verse. Fortunately for Đinh Nho Hoàn, and for the posterity that we are, after his death, in mid-autumn of the year Đinh Dậu (1717), his son-in-law, Doctor Nguyễn Trọng Thường (1681–1735), pen name Cửu Đường, of Trung Cần village, Thanh Chương district (today Trung Cần hamlet, Nam Trung commune, Nam Đàn district, Nghệ An province) — moved by a deep attachment of son to father, by the mourning that parts the living from the dead, and by the sympathy of a living author for an author who died in his country's service — searched long in "the chests and caskets sent back by the court" for the poems written on the embassy road, wrote notes and a preface, and brought out the collection *Mặc Trai sứ tập*.

Nguyễn Trọng Thường passed as a doctor at the examination of the year Nhâm Thìn, eighth year of the Vĩnh Thịnh era (1712), under Lê Dụ Tông, and rose to the office of right vice-minister of Personnel. A renowned author of his day, his work has been lost. There survive a few stele texts, notices, memorials to the throne, postfaces, prefaces and introductions, together with some poems. Among the more notable: the "Text of the restoration stele of Ngưỡng Đức" and the "Temple of Letters of Thanh Chương district"; among notices, "The library of the Lê lineage"; among memorials, "Thanks for the gift of a poem", "Thanks for a promotion", "New Year greetings"; among postfaces, the "Postface to the *Treasure Handed Down in the Family*" and the "Introduction to the *Register of Laureates, Combined Edition*"; among prefaces, the "Preface to the genealogy of the Trần lineage of La Sơn district"…

In the preface he set at the head of the *Mặc Trai sứ tập*, Nguyễn Trọng Thường writes: "… In the year Ất Mùi (1715) he was ordered to go on embassy to the northern country. Wherever he passed, he composed. The poems in the national language, in *nôm* script, and the regulated poems in Chinese characters illuminate one another; whether he uses parable, pentasyllable or heptasyllable, the variety is only the more complete.

"In a word, the language and the feeling never stray from the two essential principles: loyalty to the king and filial piety towards one's parents."

Nguyễn Trọng Thường adds: "… Overcome with sorrow and regret, I searched in my father-in-law's chests and caskets sent back by the court, and found the autograph manuscripts he had left. I classified them piece by piece and respectfully gave them the title *Mặc Trai sứ tập*, adding such notes as I could supply to make them easier to read, in the hope that they may shine before later generations."

And, as Doctor Nguyễn Trọng Thường had hoped, three hundred years later the *Mặc Trai sứ tập*, which he edited, annotated and prefaced, has been published by the Literature Publishing House and widely made known to the public. In the first edition (2002), the Literature Publishing House paid tribute to his work. It is thanks to him that an author of such importance as Đinh Nho Hoàn has kept, across the years, ninety-three poems written on the embassy road. Time has passed and its dust has veiled much of our forebears; but approaching Doctor Nguyễn Trọng Thường through the *Mặc Trai sứ tập* shows him to be a man of culture whose contributions touch many fields, and notably the collecting, presenting and promoting of the cultural values handed down by the fathers.

In the third year of the Long Đức era (1734), nineteen years after his father-in-law Đinh Nho Hoàn's death, Doctor Nguyễn Trọng Thường was in his turn ordered to go on embassy to the Qing. His mission accomplished, he fell ill on the return journey, having reached Hankou, and died. (His tomb is still at Hankou, in China; but at the conference on the Nguyễn Trọng lineage of Trung Cần, in Nam Đàn, organised by the Institute of History, the Nghệ An department of culture, information and tourism, and the Nguyễn Trọng lineage, on 4 May 2015, some maintained that he did not die on that journey.)

Should we believe that a providential bond united son-in-law and father-in-law, Doctors Nguyễn Trọng Thường and Đinh Nho Hoàn? Let us give thanks to Heaven and the Buddha: it is to that bond that posterity owes having in hand today the *Mặc Trai sứ tập*, a collection brimming with humanity, steeped in feeling for the country, and classical in its poetic craft.

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9. Hoàng giáp Đinh Nho Hoàn, a shining example of moral character in public office

Phạm Hải and Phan Đăng Thuận

[source: 25.doc]

A shining example radiates through the ages. Today our generation gives thanks and pays homage to the moral character of the ancients: "to hold office with clear sight, fairness and

integrity; to help the people fulfil their aspirations; to make them eat their fill, dress warmly and grow prosperous; to make the sovereign's virtue shine forth and the laws of the state plain." Such was the official career of Hoàng giáp Đinh Nho Hoàn.

Đinh Nho Hoàn, courtesy name Tồn Phác, pen name Mặc Trai (also Mặc Ông), personal name Toản, was the third son of Đinh Nho Công and his wife Lady Đặng. He was born on the fifth day of the tenth month of the year Tân Hợi, ninth year of the Cảnh Trị era (7 November 1671), in Sơn Hòa commune, Hương Sơn district, Hà Tĩnh province.

His official career began after he passed as a doctor of the second rank (*Hoàng giáp*) at the examination of the year Canh Thìn, twenty-first year of the Chính Hòa era (1700). He was a supernumerary at the Hàn lâm Academy, then *Tham chính* of the circuit of Sơn Tây, and less than a year later was transferred to the office of governor of the prefecture of Cao Bình (Cao Bằng).

In that post he saw to promoting what was useful and removing what was harmful: repairing roads, blasting rocky rapids so that boats could move and trade with ease. Previously, Chinese trading junks coming over to trade had to wait a long while before their goods were inspected and allowed to circulate; under his governorship it was ordered that inspection be done quickly, for the convenience of cargo owners, and taxes were lowered for the merchants who came to trade with us from Jiangxi, Jiangnan, Guangdong, Guangxi, Fujian, Huguang and Chaozhou. His reforms helped to widen commercial exchange between the two countries.

Remembering this, the Chinese merchants trading in the region gathered funds to erect, before the gate of the guild hall, a stele celebrating the virtue of Governor Đinh, called the "stele of virtue in government" (*Đức Chính bia*). It sets out his three great merits:

- repairing the roads and blasting the rocky rapids in the river, so that boats might pass freely;
- reducing the vexations of goods inspection at the border crossing;
- lowering the taxes.

In the discharge of his office he was always concerned with "the rise and fall of the world", which bears on the people's happiness: he was truly a scholar steeped in the morality and the finest thought of the doctrine of "loyalty and filial piety". Intelligent and studious from childhood, he was taught by his father, the assistant censor and doctor of the examination of the year Canh Tuất, eighth year of the Cảnh Trị era (1670), and then received instruction from several renowned masters on reaching the capital.

In the Confucian teaching on which he was nourished, loyalty (*trung*) is a major category, at once moral and political. Confucius says: "Let the prince employ his subjects according to the rites, and let the subject serve his prince with loyalty" (*Analects*, *Hiến vấn* chapter) — a conception of the moral order. But "to govern with loyalty" (to apply the ordinances with entire uprightness) already contains a political element (*Analects*, *Bát dật* and *Nhan Uyên* chapters).

The official must be clear-sighted, must act fairly and conduct himself with integrity. Being of integrity, he has no covetousness; being fair, he does not swerve; being clear-sighted, he can set manners right. Possessing these three qualities, he can then govern men. The noble man gives his loyalty entire and puts his abilities at the service of applying the ordinances. Who does not

want quiet? Who does not want wealth? The noble man educates so that everyone may grow prosperous. He devotes himself to humanity and justice to bind men's hearts; he leads them by rites and music to bring their natures into harmony; he manifests the sovereign's virtue so as to spread the great transformation and make the laws of the state plain, until there is no longer occasion to punish. To regard the king's subjects as one's own children is to be loved by them as a father. The *Book of Odes* says: "The noble man, affable, is the father and mother of the people." The chapter "Preserving filial conduct" states: "There is no filial piety that is not valued at the price of loyalty" — without loyalty, no piety. The *Classic of Loyalty* raises a whole series of matters: one must avoid losing one's office, losing one's emoluments, and above all letting one's parents be dishonoured. "Therefore the noble man who practises filial piety must first be loyal." To serve the king with piety is thus loyalty; and to entire loyalty come blessings and favours, so that one may with all one's heart honour and support one's parents. According to the *Classic of Filial Piety*, however, the noble man's way probably runs from piety towards parents to loyalty towards the prince: "To serve the prince with piety is loyalty."

Loyalty and filial piety are articulated together, lean on one another and complete one another. Thus the Confucian teaching, the maxim — cultivate oneself, order one's household, govern the state, pacify the world — and the way of loyalty and piety were with him the object of constant exercise, in order to raise his learning, perfect himself, keep his moral bearing high and pure, and put his talent at the service of king and country.

The legacy Hoàng giáp Đinh Nho Hoàn left posterity is not only a shining example of moral character in public office: it is also, for the literature of our country, a work of the greatest price, the *Mặc Ông sứ tập*.

Professor Ngô Đức Thọ (Institute of Hán Nôm Studies), who has studied, transcribed and translated this collection, cites Bùi Dương Lịch's *Notes on Nghệ An*: "Đinh Nho Hoàn rose to the office of right vice-minister of the Ministry of Works", after his return from Cao Băng, and to that of *Thượng bảo tự khanh* — at the time of the embassy, the office of keeper of the seals at the Hàn lâm Academy. On the embassy of 1715, all the histories carry the same entry: "Year Ât Mùi, eleventh year of the Vĩnh Thịnh era (1715), in spring, in the first month, envoys were sent to the Qing."

On that embassy he held the office of deputy envoy. On the road he composed landscape poems, pieces voicing longing for his native place and his country, poems of exchange, farewells to friends, and pieces of exhortation to his descendants. As his son-in-law, Doctor Nguyễn Trọng Thường, writes in his preface to Mặc Ông's embassy collection: "… The language and the feeling never stray from the two essential principles: loyalty to the king and filial piety towards one's parents…"

In his poem "Feelings on the anniversary of my mother's death, the 17th of the seventh month", he weeps silently, his throat tight, before a stick of incense burning down in a foreign land; he looks towards his village, leagues away and veiled by clouds, and grieves that he cannot pour the three ritual cups for his mother. He laments having lost her at the age of three, and asks himself whether being loyal to the king is not also a way of doing honour to one's parents.

"To do honour to one's parents": that is precisely loyalty and filial piety, what Confucians of every age have held most precious.

As for the landscape poems and the pieces of exchange and farewell, it is as Professor Ngô Đức Thọ says: “Such fine lines must be taken as an aesthetic message reaching us across the centuries.” The value of thought and art in the *Mặc Ông sứ tập* makes it so many jewels shining among those of our country’s literature.

It is regrettable and painful that the deputy envoy Đinh Nho Hoàn fell gravely ill and died on that embassy. As deputy envoy to the Qing he received the highest praise from the emperor, for his character and for his talent. At the news of his death, both the Qing emperor and the Lê king expressed keen regret and composed funeral orations for the ceremony.

Under the Cảnh Hưng era, the court raised him to the rank of “Đặc Đạt Đại Vương” and conferred on him the title of tutelary deity “Tuấn lương Trực đoan túc Dực bảo trung hưng”.

He had two wives: the principal wife, of the Lê lineage, personal name Vệ, of Hữu Băng commune (today Sơn Băng), and the secondary wife, Phan Thị Viên, of Hưng Nguyên district, to whom the king granted the gilded panel “gate of the faithful widow”. She is renowned not only for keeping faith with her husband but also as a gifted woman of letters. Under the Cảnh Hưng era she received the title “Trinh Nhât Á thận phu nhân”; under the Nguyễn, that of tutelary deity “Lương tĩnh thục diệu nhàn uyển Dực bảo trung hưng”.

A cultivated and incorruptible man, to admonish himself, set an example to his descendants and express his resolve, he had a stone chime made, called the *Khánh Mặc Trai*, and hung it in his study. The dedication engraved on it, translated by Professor Ngô Đức Thọ, reads:

> “Every inanimate object, left at rest, is silent; struck, it sounds. But the sound each gives out differs from one object to another. That of the chime is limpid, of a light rhythm, and yet high and resonant, like the elevation of a man. Loving that sound, I therefore went to the expense of having one carved, hung it to the left of my hermitage and named it the *Khánh Mặc Trai*, so as to strengthen my resolve.”

Besides the *Khánh Mặc Trai*, he had a stele erected for the instruction of his descendants:

> “Whoever is a descendant of Mặc Ông must be loyal and filial, honest, upright, diligent and thrifty, content in poverty; must advance as a man of duty and withdraw as a good farmer.
>
> No pride or debauchery, no insolence towards superiors, no lawsuits, no gambling or dice. Only on this condition may you come near my hermitage.”

These precepts, and the moral quality of their author, have had great effect and have been handed down long after him.

The tradition of the lineage and the education of its descendants in the doctrine of loyalty and filial piety keep, from a humanist point of view, all their value. As Hoài An Nguyễn Văn Thanh, translator of the *Classic of Loyalty*, puts it, it has “developed in a new direction, after the manner of what President Hồ taught the people’s armed forces of Việt Nam: ‘loyal to the Party, filial to the people; accomplish every mission, overcome every difficulty, defeat every enemy.’ This is the thought of the *Classic of Loyalty*, into which Uncle Hồ breathed a new spirit.” Today, with deep reverence, we remember Đinh Nho Hoàn, a loyal, filial and virtuous man, who put his talent at the service of country and people, a shining example in the nation’s history, who

did honour to the Đinh lineage and proved himself a worthy descendant of the great general Đinh Điền, a loyal minister and "member of the house of Đinh".

Hanoi, 28 July 2015

PART II. POETRY AND LETTERS — CRITICISM OF THE POEMS IN CHINESE AND IN NÔM, AND OF STELE INSCRIPTIONS

10. A survey and appreciation of Đinh Nho Hoàn's embassy poetry through the *Mặc Ông sứ tập*

Prof. Lại Văn Hùng and Lê Thanh Hà — Institute of Lexicography and Encyclopaedia of Việt Nam

[source: 13.doc]

An overview of embassy poetry

Việt Nam and China have maintained diplomatic relations for thousands of years. So that these relations might proceed smoothly, the dynasties of the two countries dispatched many legations to one another throughout the medieval period. It is precisely from these relations that the current of embassy poetry arose in medieval Vietnamese literature. Vietnamese envoys were not only diplomats of wide culture: they were also gifted poets. On medieval Vietnamese embassy poetry, the following authors and works may provisionally be named in chronological order.

In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, under the Trần, Đinh Củng Viên (?–1294) is the envoy whose poetry has come down to us earliest (one piece). Phạm Sư Mạnh (fourteenth century) composed *Quá Tiêu Tương*, *Ô Giang Hạng Vũ miếu* and other pieces during his embassy to China in 1345. Mạc Đĩnh Chi (1280–1346) was praised by the Yuan for his diplomatic and literary gifts during his embassy of 1308 and left one poem, *Quá Bành Trạch phỏng Đào Tiêm cựu cư*. Nguyễn Trung Ngạn (1289–1370) wrote a collection of embassy poems, the *Băc hành tạp lục*, during his mission to the Yuan in 1314. Phạm Mại (dates unknown) left *Băc sứ ngẫu thành*; Nguyễn Cổ Phu (dates unknown), *Băc sứ ứng tỉnh đường mệnh tịch thượng phú thi*, during his embassy to the Yuan in 1335.

From the fifteenth to the early nineteenth century, Vietnamese embassy poetry in Chinese characters developed very strongly. Many envoys left collections: Vũ Cận (1527–?), *Tinh thiều kỷ hành* (1581); Đào Nghiễm, *Nghĩa Xuyên quan quang tập*; Phùng Khắc Khoan (1528–1613), *Mai Linh sứ hoa thi tập* (1597); Đào Công Chính (1623–?), *Băc sứ thi tập*; Nguyễn Quý Đức (1648–1720) and Nguyễn Đình Sách (1638–1697), *Hoa trình thi tập* (1690); Đặng Đình Tướng (1649–1735), *Chúc Ông phụng sứ tập*; Nguyễn Đăng Đạo (1651–1719), *Nguyễn Trạng nguyên phụng sứ tập* (1697); Lê Anh Tuấn (1671–1763) and Nguyễn Công Cơ, *Sứ hoa tập* (1715); Đinh Nho Hoàn (1671–1715), *Mặc Ông sứ tập* (1715); Nguyễn Công Hãng (1680–1732), *Tinh sà thi tập* (1718); Phạm Khiêm Ích (1679–1741), *Kinh Trai sứ tập*; Ngô Đình Thạc, *Hoàng hoa nhã vịnh*; Lê Hữu Kiều (1691–1760), *Băc sứ hiệu tần thi* (1737); Nguyễn Kiều (1694–1751) and Nguyễn Tông Quai (1693–1767), *Sứ hoa tùng vịnh* (or *Sứ hoa thi tập*) (1741–1742); Trịnh Xuân Chú (1704–

1763), *Sứ Hoa học bộ thi tập*; Lê Quý Đôn (1726–1784), *Tiêu Tương bách vịnh* (1760–1762), also called *Liên châu thi tập*, now lost; Nguyễn Huy Oánh (1713–1789), *Phụng sứ Yên Kinh tổng ca tịnh nhật ký* (1765–1766); Đoàn Nguyễn Thục (1718–1775), *Đoàn Hoàng giáp phụng sứ tập* (1771); Hồ Sĩ Đông (1738–?), *Hoa trình khiển hứng tập* (or *Dao Đình sứ tập*) (1777); Phan Huy Ích (1751–1822), *Tinh sà kỷ hành* (1790); Ngô Thì Nhiệm (1746–1803), *Yên đài thu vịnh* (or *Hoa trình thi phú sao*) (1793); Vũ Huy Tấn (1749–1800), *Hoa nguyên tuỳ bộ tập*; Nguyễn Đề (1761–1805), *Hoa trình tiêu khiển hứng tiền hậu tập*; Trịnh Hoài Đức (1765–1825), *Sứ hành quan quang*, also called *Bắc sứ thi tập* (1802); Nguyễn Du (1766–1820), *Bắc hành tạp lục* (1813–1814) …

This list is incomplete, yet it already represents several thousand poems — and some prose pieces — on the theme of embassy. As to content, the envoy-poets ordinarily confide to them their thoughts and feelings along a distant itinerary full of difficulty and hardship, weighed down by the heavy responsibility towards country and nation entrusted to them by the court. Alongside pieces of courtesy and exchange — matched rhymes, poetic contests, dedications — the majority are landscape poems: they display a fine talent, let feeling overflow before nature and living things, speak the longing for the native land, and at the same time reflect responsibility towards the state, national pride, and pride in Vietnamese culture and letters.

Some features of Đinh Nho Hoàn's embassy poetry

1. The author

Đinh Nho Hoàn (1671–1715) 丁儒完, pen name Mặc Trai (also Mặc Ông), courtesy name Tồn Phác, was a native of An Ấp commune, Hương Sơn district, Hà Tĩnh province. Third son of Đinh Nho Công and his wife of the Đặng lineage, he was born on the fifth day of the tenth month of the year Tân Hợi, ninth year of the Cảnh Trị era (1671). The Đinh Nho lineage there is well known for the number of its members who rose to distinction: Đinh Nho Công, his father, Đinh Nho Điển, Đinh Nho Quang… Intelligent and devoted to study from childhood, he came when older to the capital to study under several renowned masters, and at thirty passed as a doctor of the second rank (*Hoàng giáp*) at the examination of the year Canh Thìn, twenty-first year of the Chính Hoà era (1700), under Lê Hy Tông. He then served as governor of Cao Bằng, and afterwards as right vice-minister of Works. In the eleventh year of the Vĩnh Thịnh era (1715) he was appointed deputy envoy to the Qing; he unhappily fell ill and died on the road (1715), and was posthumously granted the office of Minister of Personnel.

Đinh Nho Hoàn is the author of the collection *Mặc Ông sứ tập*; five of his poems in Chinese characters also appear in Lê Quý Đôn's *Toàn Việt thi lục*. The *Mặc Ông sứ tập* gathers landscape poems composed on the road (the Nhị Hà river, the Nam Quan pass, the town of Ngô Châu…), which express the author's feeling and his longing for his country; to these are added pieces exchanged with and offered in farewell to friends, the note on the founding of the cult rice fields, the inscription engraved on the stone chime of the Thượng Bảo temple, and the precepts teaching his descendants loyalty and filial piety. The title of the collection is not Đinh Nho Hoàn's own: his son-in-law Nguyễn Trọng Thường, having found the drafts written on the road, put them in order, added a presentation, and entitled the whole *Mặc Ông sứ tập* as a mark of respect.

2. Examination of the manuscripts

Three Chinese manuscripts of the *Mặc Ông sứ tập* 默翁使集 survive, all held at the Institute of Hán Nôm Studies:

- manuscript VHv.1443, 72 handwritten pages, format 28 × 16;
- manuscript A.1409, 70 handwritten pages, format 26 × 10, copied by the École française d'Extrême-Orient; its regular hand is fairly clear and fairly easy to read;
- manuscript A.2823, 60 handwritten pages, format 26 × 18; examination shows it was copied during the Tự Đức era (1848–1883).

Besides these three, another work, the *Chỉ Trai văn tập* (shelf mark VHv.97), also transcribes poems by Đinh Nho Hoàn; but the characters there are cursive and therefore harder to read than in A.1409. It can be established that VHv.97 was copied during the reign of Đồng Khánh (1886–1887). (These determinations are taken from Professor Ngô Đức Thọ's research on the manuscripts of the *Mặc Ông sứ tập*.)

In 2009 the *Mặc Ông sứ tập* 默翁使集 was published in a selected translation of 93 poems out of the 113 pieces in Chinese characters, together with some prose texts, by the Literature Publishing House under the title *Mặc Trai sứ tập*, with an introduction by the poet Anh Chi. The work Đinh Nho Hoàn left is not abundant, but scholars hold it in high esteem: "Đinh Nho Hoàn's poetry is fluent and gentle, filled with feeling and fine savour, and expresses with warmth his love of his native land and his national pride" (*General Collection of Vietnamese Literature*, vol. 6, p. 315).

Comparing the Chinese text and transcription of manuscript A.1409 with the *Mặc Trai sứ tập* volume published by the Literature Publishing House, one finds a number of divergences, probably due to typesetting. Here is the comparative table.

No.	Poem	A.1409	2009 edition	p.
1	*Quá Lã Côi dịch*	峯 *phong*, peak	封 *phong*, to confer; vast; to seal	36
2	*Quá Yên Dũng huyện Yên Ninh tự*	芝泥 *chi nê*, the seal set on a sealed wrapper	泛泥 *phiếm nê*, drifting	39
3	*Ngộ Phúc Kiến khách Khâu Đỉnh Thần lai phỏng*	遇 *ngộ*, to meet	character 遇 omitted in typesetting	45
4	*Ức Trung Dũng Thiều phó Đặng tôn đài hồi thi trình thượng nhị thủ*	斥 *xích*, here the call of the warbler	斤 *cân*, axe; a unit of weight	49
5	*Ức nhũ mẫu kí dữ đồng niên*	琴 *cầm*, zither	character 琴 omitted	55

No.	Poem	A.1409	2009 edition	p.
	Thái Bộc tôn đài			
6	*Quá Thành Đoàn*	琴 *cầm*, zither	character 琴 omitted, hence the disorder of the lines “Các hạ thi cầm trần tướng khoan / Thành ngoại hựu giang giang hữu thị / Ky hoàn hồng động ức Trường An” in the Chinese text	59
7	*Hạ Minh giang thuyền*	湧 *dũng*, water welling up	勇 *dũng*, brave	65
8	*Hạ Minh giang thuyền*	滙 *hối*, water eddying	潰 *hội*, water breaking the bank	65
9	*Hạ Minh giang thuyền*	兀 *ngột*, dazed, giddy	凡 *phàm*, to comprise; ordinary	65
10	*Quá Thái Bình thành*	驚咱 *kinh thính*	驚聽 *cảnh thính*, faulty transcription	67
11	*Quá Thái Bình thành*	此 *thử*, that place	此 read *sơ*, faulty transcription	68
12	*Thái Bình Tham tướng thiết yến đương tịch sách ngâm tức ứng khẩu vân*	涵 *hàm*, ample and generous	函 *hàm*, box, container	71
13	*idem*	泄 *tiết*, to disclose	節 *tiết*, bamboo node; festival	71
14	*idem*	琴 *cầm*, zither	character omitted	71
15	*Đáp Hữu Doanh Chu Đại Tổng trấn quan yến tiếp*	營 *doanh*, camp, official residence	盈 *doanh*, full	79
16	*idem*	建 *kiến*, here in	見 *kiến*, to see, to	79

No.	Poem	A.1409	2009 edition	p.
		建武, the place name Kiến Vũ	meet	
17	*idem*	敢 *cảm*, to dare, to step forward	感 *cảm*, to be moved	79
18	*Đáp Tả Giang đạo tẩy yên tiếp túng du Viên Khâu Cực Lạc*	園 *viên*	榮 *vinh*, wrong character	81
19	*Cửu Thứ Ninh thành dư cảnh*	天 *thiên*, in *Thiên Ninh tự*	扁 read *thiên*, wrong character	83
20	*Nam Ninh hoán thuyền thích ngộ thiên tệ bất ninh thả chu phu loạn trạo tọa ngọa nguy khổn nhân tư cảm tác*	敢 *cảm*, to dare	感 *cảm*, to be moved	87
21	*Đáp Tưởng bạn tống tặng phiến tịnh hương nhị tuyệt*	絕 *tuyệt*, quatrain	絕 read *thủ*, faulty transcription	91
22	*idem*	漁 *ngư*, to fish, fishing boat	魚 *ngư*, fish	91
23	*Đại Quách khuê phụ tiễn Quách bạn thướng Yên Kinh*	代郭 *Đại Quách*, on behalf of Quách	大郭 *Đại Quạt*, wrong character and transcription	95
24	*Tặng Quách bạn hoàn nhị tuyệt*	絕 *tuyệt*, quatrain	絕 read *thủ*, faulty transcription	97
25	*idem*	貺 *huống*, to compare; circumstance	況 *huống*, to bestow	97
26	*Quá Ô Man than*	千 *thiên*, thousand	天 *thiên*, sky	102
27	*idem*	稳 *ổn*, settled	隱 *ẩn*, wrong character	102
30	*Bạc Đông Tân dịch dạ văn thôn kê tư cảm*	吾又憶吾居 *ngô hựu ức ngô cư*	line omitted in typesetting	120
31	*Quá Quế Bình*	桂平縣 *Quế Bình*	桂平縣, faulty	128

No.	Poem	A.1409	2009 edition	p.
	huyện nhân Chung Doãn xuất phiên cầu thi toại đề	*huyện*	transcription	
32	*idem*	瑞 *thụy*, auspicious sign	端 *đoan*, beginning	129
33	*Nhân Chung Doãn vấn cập Đặng Thiếu phó tôn đài nhân đại khoa danh đạo thúc quật tác*	旄 *mao*, the yak-tail standard of the legation	髦 *mao*, a child's forelock	131
34	*Quan Âm các đề tự cảnh*	薛蘿 *tiết la*	薛羅, the character 羅 is wrong	153
35	*Thị nhật vãn thiên chu thứ Quế Hoa Đường đường họa Thái Bộc tôn đài vận*	晚 *vãn*, late	往 *vãng*, past	161
36	*Tặng Bình Lạc phủ Mộ chính đường*	政 *chính*, public affairs	正 *chính*, upright	166
37	*Dương sóc đồ trung nhân Mộ chính đường thứ vận tiễn thi kiêm tặng thượng phẩm phiến nhất bả nhưng phục thứ tiễn vận tạ tha*	—	the line "Dương sóc đồ trung nhân Mộ chính" was wrongly carried over into the preceding poem	166–168
38	*Đề Bình Lạc Ẩn Sơn đình*	光 *quang*, light	先 *tiên*, first	170
39	*Đề Tượng Tỵ sơn*	人 *nhân*, man	人 read *quân*, faulty transcription	175
40	*Đề Thuần sơn*	雨 *vũ*, rain	宇 *vũ*, space	177
41	*idem*	端 *đoan*, beginning	瑞 *thụy*, auspicious	177
42	*Hạ Trần Phủ nhị tử nhập*	翰 *hàn*, of the Academy, of	寒 *hàn*, cold	182

No.	Poem	A.1409	2009 edition	p.
	Hàn lâm	letters		
43	*Quá Trường Sa thành*	煙 *yên*, smoke	安 *yên*, peaceful	201
44	*Tiễn Lư ỵ sinh hồi An Nhân quận*	耳 *nhĩ*, here in the place name Hùng Nhĩ	年 *niên*, year; wrong character	215
45	*idem*	度 *độ*, degree; to save	渡 *độ*, the ferry landing	215
46	*idem*	誰 *thùy*, who	垂 *thùy*, to hang; the frontier	215
47	*Quá Tương Âm huyện đề Thanh Thảo hồ*	岳 *nhạc*, high mountain	岳 read *ngạc*, faulty transcription	219
48	*Đề Động Đình hồ*	晚泛 *vãn phiếm*, drifting at evening	晚泛 read *phiếm văn*, faulty transcription	224
49	*Động Đình hồ hoài cổ*	滄 *thương*, vast	蒼 *thương*, blue-green	227
50	*Đăng Hoài Ninh tháp mạn đề*	手 *thủ*, hand	首 *thủ*, head, foremost	258
51	*idem*	丹 *đan*, red; the palace	安 *an*, peaceful; wrong character	258
52	*idem*	霄 *tiêu*, the expanse of sky	宵 *tiêu*, small	258
53	*Du Trường Sinh am*	偕 *giai*, all together	偕 read *hài*, faulty transcription	269
54	*Tặng Kim Lăng thi ông Mã Kỉ Tiên kỳ nhị*	人 *nhân*, man	因 *nhân*, cause	274
55	*idem*	唐 *đường*, the Tang dynasty	塘 *đường*, square pond	274
56	*Phỏng thi họa Thanh khách Đào Văn Độ*	舊情 *cựu tình*, old affection	九情, *cửu*, the number nine	277
57	*Đề Yên Tử kỵ*	飲 *ẩm*, to drink	欽 *khâm*, to revere; imperial command	279

This table shows a fairly high number of divergences between manuscript A.1409 and the volume published by the Literature Publishing House: forty wrong Chinese characters, twelve

faulty transcriptions, five errors of omission or disorder in typesetting. Chinese having many homophones of different meaning, several errors arise from a poor grasp of sense; one should be understanding on this point. Such faults are nevertheless much to be regretted, and one hopes they will be better corrected in future reprintings and revisions of the *Mặc Trai sứ tập*.

3. What makes Đinh Nho Hoàn's embassy poetry distinctive

The embassy of 1715 is fairly fully recorded in the sources. The *Continuation of the Annals of Đại Việt* notes: "Ất Mùi, eleventh year [of the Vĩnh Thịnh era] (1715) (fifty-fourth year of the Qing Kangxi era). In spring, in the first month. Nguyễn Công Cơ, Lê Anh Tuấn (of Thanh Mai commune, Tiên Phong district), Đinh Nho Hoàn (of An Ấp, Hương Sơn district) and Nguyễn Mậu Áng (of Kim Sơn commune, Gia Lâm district) were sent on embassy to the Qing." The *Khâm định Việt sử thông giám cương mục* further gives each man's office: "Chief envoys: Nguyễn Công Cơ, left vice-minister of Finance, and Lê Anh Tuấn, chamberlain of the Imperial Stud. Deputy envoys: Đinh Nho Hoàn, chamberlain of the Bureau of Seals, and Nguyễn Mậu Áng, secretary in the Personnel service." The legation set out in the middle of the second month of 1715, travelling now by boat, now by carriage, to Yên Kinh (present-day Beijing), to present the sovereign's letter and the gifts, offer birthday greetings, make enquiries and carry out some other diplomatic business. The *Continuation of the Annals of Đại Việt* further notes: "In the year Bính Thân, twelfth year of the Vĩnh Thịnh era (that is, the fifty-fifth year of Kangxi, 1716), in the eighth month, the envoy Nguyễn Công Cơ and the legation returned to our country."

The embassy collection closest in time before Đinh Nho Hoàn is Nguyễn Đăng Đạo's *Nguyễn Trạng nguyên phụng sứ tập* (1697) — a work now untraceable. In 1697, appointed chief envoy, Nguyễn Đăng Đạo led our legation to the Qing to bear tribute and to reclaim the territories of the two cantons of Tuyên Quang and Hưng Hóa unlawfully encroached upon by native chieftains in Qing service. His mission lasted from the first month of the year Đinh Sửu (1697) to the fourth month, in summer, of the year Mậu Dần (1698); it achieved its aim by bringing to Yên Kinh a letter setting out the frontier question clearly to the Qing emperor — something several of our legations had failed to do over many years. The envoy who immediately follows Đinh Nho Hoàn is Nguyễn Công Hãng, with the *Tinh sà thi tập* (1718); but a search of the Institute of Hán Nôm Studies collection turns up no work of that title: only the *Băc sứ thi tập*, shelf mark VHv.2166, a manuscript in a good hand, easy to read, 72 pages, format 26 × 15 cm, which brings together two embassy collections, those of Đào Công Chính and Nguyễn Công Hãng. It is the only volume preserving the latter's work. According to the *Băc sứ thi tập*, on the embassy of the fourteenth year of the Vĩnh Thịnh era (1718), Nguyễn Công Hãng, then right vice-minister of War, was appointed chief envoy at the head of the legation sent to the Qing.

Since the embassy collections closest before and after Đinh Nho Hoàn's journey have not been recovered in full, we shall, in order to bring out what is distinctive in his poetry, compare some representative pieces of the *Mặc Ông sứ tập* with poems from Nguyễn Huy Oánh's *Phụng sứ Yên Kinh tổng ca tịnh nhật ký* (1713–1789), who was sent in 1765–1766 — a work translated in selection in the *Selected Works of Nguyễn Huy Oánh*, published by the Writers' Association Publishing House in 2005.

The *Mặc Ông sứ tập* differs first from Nguyễn Huy Oánh's *Phụng sứ Yên Kinh tổng ca tịnh nhật ký*, and from most other embassy collections, in that Đinh Nho Hoàn's poetry contains few minute notations in the manner of a travel journal: on such a day, at such a place. The very title

of Nguyễn Huy Oánh's work — *General Song of the Embassy to Yên Kinh, with Journal* — states the difference plainly. In the whole *Mặc Ông sứ tập*, only a few pieces are dated: the one for the Lê king's birthday, "Ngũ nguyệt thập cửu nhật ngộ Diên Thọ tiết dạ ức ỷ bồng độc tọa nhân đề", and the one for the anniversary of his mother's death, "Thất nguyệt thất thập nhật ngộ mẫu thân kỵ nhật cảm tác". One sees from this that Đinh Nho Hoàn set himself to write in order to confide to the poem his loyalty to the king and his piety towards his parents, and not to record and relate in detail what he encountered on the way.

The legation's itinerary combined water and land routes across very different regions. First came the crossing of the Nhị Hà river, then the northern relays up to the frontier. The crossing of the Nhị Hà marks the opening of the journey, and all the envoy-poets have treated it. The lines of *Độ Nhị hà khiển đề*, in the *Mặc Ông sứ tập*, give us the beauty of the landscape and Đinh Nho Hoàn's joyful, confident, optimistic and expansive feeling, for whom this great and honourable mission is only a long journey whose victorious return he already appoints:

> Hương trời thơm nức muôn trùng nước Sóng Nhị rờn xanh mấy dặm mờ Sào quế chèo lan, gian hiểm thử Hiếu trung lòng trọn, lợi danh xa Ngày về thắng lợi thuyền hoa sứ Nở nụ cười vui gặp bến xưa
>
> *(Vietnamese version by Cao Thế Lữ)*
>
> The fragrance of heaven perfumes the endless waters; the waves of the Nhị go green over hazy leagues. Cinnamon pole and orchid oar: here is the trial of danger. Piety and loyalty whole in the heart; profit and fame far off. On the day of victorious return, the envoy's flowered barque will break into a glad smile as it meets the old landing.

In the *Phụng sứ Yên Kinh tổng ca tịnh nhật ký*, the crossing of the Nhị and the halt at Ái Mộ hamlet likewise open the journey and state the heavy responsibility of the mission:

> …Ly câu vang nhịp ca nhanh Sớm chiều Ái Mộ vượt thành trú chân Sứ người tạc dạ hoàng ân Đinh ninh mấy chữ ân cần một chương…
>
> *(Vietnamese version by Lại Văn Hùng)*
>
> … The parting cup rings to the quick beat of song; from morning to evening, past the city, we halt at Ái Mộ. The envoy engraves the royal favour on his heart, and repeats with care the few words of a chapter full of solicitude…

If the crossing of the Nhị opens the embassy, the passage of the frontier is its boundary stone: it marks the hardships, the toil and the perils to come, and the legation's national responsibility. Past the gate one is in a foreign land, the homeland behind, the ordeal ahead. Đinh Nho Hoàn says as much in *Quá quan thượng*:

> Then đời khó dễ như nhau Mệnh vua muôn dặm dám đâu sai lời Gian lao hầu suốt cuộc đời Ngày qua cửa ải khổ mười phần hơn.
>
> *(Vietnamese version by Cao Thế Lữ)*
>
> The hinge of the world holds easy and hard as one; the king's command reaches ten thousand leagues: how fail it? The hardship will have lasted almost a whole life, but on the day one passes the frontier the burden is ten times heavier.

Nguyễn Huy Oánh, in the *Phụng sứ Yên Kinh tổng ca tịnh nhật ký*, says the same in lines that belong more to the narrative of an itinerary and report chiefly facts:

> …Nam Quan then khóa mở toang Bên đài Chiêu Đức biểu chương dâng bày Kho Đông bạc phát tiền thay Họ tên sứ bộ tỏ hay từng người
>
> *(Vietnamese version by Lại Văn Hùng)*
>
> … The bolt of Nam Quan swings wide open; beside the Chiêu Đức pavilion the memorial is presented. At the Eastern store, silver is issued in exchange for coin; the names of the legation's members are declared one by one.

Past the Nam Quan gate one enters Chinese territory: new and varied landscapes, a source of inspiration for the envoy-poets. To the supreme honour of the scholar is added the great joy of the artist. Among China's famous sites, the Yellow Crane Pavilion is one of the most singular, and every one of our legations that passed there left a poem on its scenery and on the poet's feeling. Đinh Nho Hoàn does not confine himself to describing nature: he also states his high ambition, with a touch of soaring detachment, like an immortal, in *Quá Vũ Xương thành đề Hoàng Hạc lâu*:

> Ngòi cũ kê vàng còn lửa nóng Vườn nay táo đỏ vẫn hương thơm Giá như núi Phượng lên cương được Thổi sáo đua tài ai dám hơn
>
> *(Vietnamese version by Cao Thế Lữ)*
>
> Under the old stove the yellow millet still keeps its fire; in today's garden the red jujube still gives out its scent. If only I could climb to the ridge of Phoenix Mountain, who would dare vie with me in the art of the flute?

Nguyễn Huy Oánh, in his *Yellow Crane Pavilion*, borrows instead the scene of the place to speak his longing for country, home and kin, and the sadness that goes with it on the road:

> Sóng khói mù khơi đất rắc mây Cảnh lúc tạnh trong như họa vẽ Bút từ khi gác chẳng thơ hay Tây nam quê cũ nhìn xa thẳm Thân tạm về thôi kiểu muộn ngày
>
> *(Vietnamese version by Nhất Phàm)*
>
> Waves and mist far off, the land strewn with clouds; the scene, when the weather clears, is sharp as a painting. Since the brush was laid aside, not one fine line. Towards the south-west, the old country, one looks into the distance; this body will return only for a while, and the day is already late.

Besides famous historical sites, China offers many natural landscapes, grand, beautiful and out of the ordinary, whose beauty is bound up with some legend — so much inspiration for the poets of a legation. Đinh Nho Hoàn states his high ambition, his taste for freedom and his scholar's pride not only in the Yellow Crane Pavilion poem but again in *Đề Yến Tử ky*:

> Kim Lăng trú đậu ăn chơi Chim nay lạ nước lạ trời đến đây Chờ dòng trong vụt cánh bay Chí cao đâu phải nơi đây sông hồ
>
> *(Vietnamese version by Cao Thế Lữ)*

> At Kim Lăng we halt and take our ease; and here is the bird come from a strange land and a strange sky. It waits for clear water to open its wing at a stroke: a high ambition has no business with these rivers and lakes.

Nguyễn Huy Oánh passed the same Swallow Rock, but his *Đề Yên Tử kỵ nhất luật* inclines to a lively description of the scene and of the life of the people there, without speaking, as Đinh Nho Hoàn does, of ambition or freedom:

> Lau dầm sương tuyết ba phần trắng Gió thổi chuông chùa nửa dặm bay San sát mũi thuyền âu xếp đội Giỡn đùa sóng nước giữa trời mây
>
> *(Vietnamese version by Nhất Phàm)*
>
> The reeds steeped in frost and snow are three parts white; the wind carries the monastery bell half a league. Crowded, the prows of the boats; the gulls fall into squadrons and play in the waves between sky and cloud.

Our envoy-poets did not only sing landscapes: they also composed on monuments linked to China's great servants and captains. Visiting the temple of Guan Di at Ngô Châu, Đinh Nho Hoàn praised Guan Yu's military career, and above all his loyalty and piety, which men respect and to which they offer worship:

> Quất xích thố cùng đời tranh đế Hán Múa minh đao mở đất đến Ngô Giang Phụng thờ khói nhẹ bay lên đỉnh Miếu mạo nghìn thu thoang thoảng hương
>
> *(Vietnamese version by Cao Thế Lữ)*
>
> Spurring the Red Hare, he contended with the age for the Han throne; whirling the gleaming blade, he opened the land as far as the river of Ngô. The light smoke of worship rises to the summit; the shrine, these thousand autumns, gives off a faint perfume.

In the same spirit — loyalty and piety for a root, self-forgetting to hold to the greater duty — Nguyễn Huy Oánh too composed on visiting the temple of Yue Fei, in *Đề Nhạc Vương miếu*:

> Hơn chục năm ròng lập chiến công Đá bền trời thấu tấm kiên trung …Kẻ phàm chỉ đắm vì tư lợi Có được lưu danh sử sách không
>
> *(Vietnamese version by Nhất Phàm)*
>
> More than ten whole years piling up feats of arms; firm as stone, Heaven has fathomed his unshakeable loyalty. … Common men drown in their own advantage: will their names ever be set down in the histories?

To visit new landscapes, to reach famous places, to be received with attention, to widen one's learning and one's knowledge of China and the Chinese — none of this prevents the essential thing, for the legation, from remaining the constant anxiety to be equal to the nation's honour, together with an ever-present longing for country, family and kin. With the feeling of a man on the road, in a foreign land, it is on festival days that the longing and the thoughts of the envoy-poets come out most clearly. In *Đoan ngọ tiết đề*, Đinh Nho Hoàn speaks not only of remembering the king, home and country: he speaks higher still of his firmness of soul and his heart towards king, country and state, and of the heavy responsibility and mission borne by himself and the legation:

Linh bồ kết cỏ thả trôi sông Rong ruổi tâm hùng sách với gươm Năm Ngọ ngày rày châu cửa khuyết Năm nay thuyền đậu bến ngô hương Không nhà đất khách bùa không chỗ Thương nước thương dân quạt chẳng buông Lòng nghĩa khí vời cao vạn trượng Lưỡi gà nướng tụng hướng quê hương

(Vietnamese version by Cao Thế Lữ)

The sacred sweet flag is knotted and set adrift on the river; the valiant heart rides the road with book and sword. In the year of the Horse, on this same day, I stood at audience by the palace gates; this year the boat is moored at a foreign landing. Homeless in an alien land, the amulet has nowhere to hang; loving country and people, the fan never leaves the hand. The sense of duty rises ten thousand fathoms high; the roasted cock's tongue recites towards the native land.

The same traveller's feeling, meeting the Double Fifth in a foreign land, appears in Nguyễn Huy Oánh as a vague and melancholy longing, in *Lữ thứ Đoan dương*:

… Tựa ghế nghe đàn âm thoảng đến Ngắm hoa lựa chữ tứ nồng hương Hôm nay chốn ngự bày toàn rượu Sầu nổi đầy vơi chén nhấp suông

(Vietnamese version by Lại Văn Hùng)

… Leaning on the chair, I hear the zither's notes drifting to me; I look at the flowers, choose my words, and the inspiration turns fragrant. Today, at the host's, all is laid out for drinking; sorrow rises and falls, and the cup is drained to no purpose.

In sum, what precedes shows that Đinh Nho Hoàn's poetry in particular, and his literary work in general, deserve a more careful and attentive presentation. His embassy poetry has many distinctive features worth study, as Nguyễn Trọng Thường's presentation to the *Mặc Ông sứ tập* already said: "… Wherever he passed, he composed occasional pieces. The poems in the national language and the regulated poems illuminate one another; whether he uses the pentasyllable or the heptasyllable, he is the more complete as to genres. In short, his words and feelings do not stray from two main axes: loyalty to the king and filial reverence towards parents…" Đinh Nho Hoàn wrote the *Mặc Ông sứ tập* attending to poetic idea and image, and not to the minute notation of a travel journal, as most other embassy collections do. His poetry is on the whole little conventional, little formulaic. When it describes nature, its beauty is fresh and savoury; when it describes people, it is ample, clear and close. He does indeed borrow the scene to lodge feeling in it, but the feeling in his poetry is not only the memory of king, country and kin: it also speaks the high ambition and responsibility of an envoy, the manly drive of the scholar and gentleman, and the breadth of soul and spirit of freedom of a poet. The remarks in this article are therefore only the barest general outline of Đinh Nho Hoàn's *Mặc Ông sứ tập*; one hopes that more precise, more complete, deeper and broader pages will soon follow.

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11. Humanist thought in the poetry of Đinh Nho Hoàn

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[source: 23.doc]

The diplomats of the feudal period were ordinarily deep scholars, well versed in letters and of wide learning. They certainly composed many poems on the embassy road; but for various reasons we can today enjoy very few intact collections — those of Đinh Nho Hoàn (1671–1715) or of Nguyễn Du (1765–1820). We thus know the one hundred and thirty-two poems in Chinese characters, in regulated and in ancient form, of the *Băc hành tạp lục*, composed by Nguyễn Du in 1813 (Quý Dậu) when he led the legation to China (1813–1814).

The first pieces of Đinh Nho Hoàn's embassy collection *Mặc Ông sứ tập* — published today under the title *Mặc Trai sứ tập* — like those of Nguyễn Du's *Băc hành tạp lục*, were composed on leaving Thăng Long, and the last were still written on Chinese soil; the difference is that Nguyễn Du came home, while Đinh Nho Hoàn died in a foreign land.

Most of the envoys' writings record what they saw, the manners and ways of the world, the reflections of the road; most of the poems were composed while travelling by water in China. Historical conditions and circumstances differing, Đinh Nho Hoàn's thought and tone are far removed from Nguyễn Du's. Living in a country torn by upheaval, in a corrupt society, among fickle and unpredictable hearts, beset by personal difficulties and by contradictions that tore at him, a man of genius with a sharp brush and a keen, feeling soul, Nguyễn Du has a muted, blocked tone, anxious about the world, returning several times to his white hair, sighing in compassion for a tormented existence — like the fate of the beautiful and gifted Kiều.

With the same artist's soul, the poetry of Mặc Trai Đinh Nho Hoàn is deeply marked by humanity, by affection for people, by love of nature and of his native land; and, notably, he returns to loyalty and filial piety again and again. Wherever he goes, he merges into nature. In his poetry, mountains, rivers, grasses and trees have a soul. Every place he passes leaves him a poem, with sharp and skilful strokes: he describes a landscape, a person, he comments, he reflects on famous sites, monuments, historical figures and legends; he records his meetings, conversations, poetic contests and exchanges with friends, guests and the officials who received him along the way. His poetry is philosophically deep without being dry, rich in images, with some very lively lines. Let me give a few examples. Take the two lines from the body of the poem "Đề Quân Sơn", describing Mount Quân and its twelve peaks in the middle of Lake Dongting:

> Thập nhị phong phù nga mãn kháo Tam thiên trúc đốt ngọc lang can.

Following the literal translation of Professor Ngô Đức Thọ, a specialist in Hán Nôm studies, in the *Mặc Trai sứ tập*:

> Twelve peaks float like the coiled hair of beauties; three thousand bamboos glow red, jade and coral.

Contemplating Mount Quân at daybreak, Mặc Trai wrote the two closing lines of "Quân Sơn hiểu vọng":

> Nhất bích thanh minh tiên kháo dục Trâm kê tân chỉnh ngọc vô hà
>
> A single jade, limpid and clear: immortals are bathing there; pin and coil just set again, and the jade without a flaw.

Or the closing line of "Quá Vu Hồ huyện, đề Vọng Phu ky", where the poet, describing the Rock of the Wife Awaiting Her Husband in Vu Hồ district after rain, uses a very vivid comparison:

> Thấp ngân tà thảo số hành thư
>
> On the flattened grass, a few damp traces: so many lines of writing.

I do not wish, in this article, to enter into a detailed analysis of these pieces and lines, so skilfully descriptive — Mặc Trai's poetry has a great many of them. I want above all to speak of his humanity: it shows in loyalty and filial piety, in love of his native land, in concern for the people, in compassion for the poor and for those who toil.

Loyalty, piety, love of country and a nagging longing for his native village recur constantly in Mặc Ông's poetry. Thus the two closing lines of "Quá Ô Man tư quốc cảm tác":

> Trung hiếu nhất đan năng kiện ngã Lệnh môn tảo vãn tấu hồi thiều
>
> Loyalty and piety of one heart keep me strong; sooner or later the palace gate will ring with the music of the envoy's return.

Such was Đinh Nho Hoàn's longing and hope all along the road.

Scarcely had he left the Nhị Hà landing, about to pass into a foreign land, than he already pictured his return with the mission accomplished, in "Độ Nhị Hà khiển đề":

> Hoa tường cao yết công thành nhật Hi phỏng tiền tân đái tiều phong.

Which Nguyễn Nam Long (pen name U Cốc Khách) renders thus:

> On the day the work is done and we return, the flowered mast will stand high; I shall come again to visit the old landing and gaze at it with a smile.

The embassy boat has left the Nhị Hà behind, and already he remembers every familiar persimmon and mulberry tree of the village, in this line from "Hồi tưởng độ Nhị Hà nhật, nhân tác":

> Lậu ấp tử tang tài nhất niệm
>
> In a single stirring of thought: the persimmon and mulberry of the poor village.

Arrived at Lạng Sơn, his heart still turns towards the capital, Thăng Long:

> Ky hoài hồng động ức Tràng An (in "Quá Thành Đoàn")
>
> In a foreign land, the heart in tumult turns towards Tràng An.

He goes by the king's command; but at the frontier, his gravity shows in "Quá quan thượng":

> Thế cơ vô dị diệc vô nan Vạn lý hàm tiên cảm dị nan Nhân bách niên thân đa khổ nhật Quá quan nhất nhật thập phân nan.
>
> The hinge of the world knows neither easy nor hard; ten thousand leagues with the letter in my mouth: dare I complain? In a life of a hundred years the body knows many days of hardship; but the day one crosses the frontier it is ten times heavier.

"Quá Thái Bình thành" contains this line:

> Vân khan thiên ngoại tường nam điểu
>
> I watch the clouds: beyond the sky a southern bird is wheeling.

The eight-line heptasyllabic poem "Mộ bạc Tương Tư châu, nhân cảm đề" offers, in the developing and closing lines, a singular comparison and a deep longing:

> Yên gian thụ hữu song cự ảnh Nhạn ngoại hương vô nhất tự thư Duẩn mỹ tuyền cam trăn lật tục Tiêu sơn vân hạ niệm ngô lư.
>
> In the mist the trees raise two shadows like whiskers; beyond the wild geese, not one letter from home. Sweet shoots, fresh spring water, hazelnuts and chestnuts of the country: under the clouds of Mount Tiêu, I think of my thatched house.

Far from his home, far from his country, he thinks constantly of the people and remembers his land. "Đề Bình Lạc Ấn Sơn đình" ends on these two lines:

> Đăng lâm bất thị tòng ngô dục Ngô ức ngô dân thả niệm dân
>
> If I climb up here, it is not for my own pleasure: it is that I think of my people, and think of the people still.

A Confucian of a feudal order, Hoàng giáp Đinh Nho Hoàn nonetheless always felt for poor labourers, for hard-pressed farmers, for the old nurse with her bent back. The official who wishes to keep the people at peace and to govern them well, he held, must know how to be concerned for them. He writes in "Quá Quý huyện":

> Cam đường âm bạc khủng vô tình
>
> In the thin shade of the wild pear, I fear I may want feeling.

In the two closing lines of "Quá Ngô Châu thành", the poet is indignant at injustice:

> Mãn thành nha phủ đôi kim cẩm Lục dã dân cao khủng vị khô
>
> Throughout the town the yamens pile up gold and brocade; in the green countryside the people's fat, I fear, is not yet dry.

In “Quá Hán Dương đề Hán Khẩu phố” he contrasts wealth and poverty and pities the farmer who lives between sun and dew:

> Phú thương cầu cát tri hà hứa Thùy mẫn nông phu thích cốt hàn
>
> The rich merchant seeks his splendour — how far will it go? Who will pity the farmer whom the cold pierces to the bone?

Hoàng giáp Đinh Nho Hoàn prized a plain and upright life and condemned corruption. This appears in “Quá Tương Đàm kinh Bao Da miếu đề”:

> Thiên tài hà thanh khai tiếu xỉ Nhất hào quan hối viễn Diêm La Nhi tôn mạc thán vô điền địa Y, Phó viên lâm hữu kỉ xa.
>
> For a thousand years the clear river has bared its teeth and laughed; not one hair of official bribery, and one keeps the King of Hell at bay. Children and grandchildren, do not complain of having neither field nor garden: did Yi Yin and Fu Yue have so much land and so many carriages?

He thus invokes the example of two Chinese ministers famed for their integrity, Yi Yin and Fu Yue, to instruct the coming generations and to warn those who hold office.

Đinh Nho Hoàn was a dutiful son. He lost his mother at three. On the anniversary of her death, the seventeenth day of the seventh month, he was still tossed about on the road and could only compose the poem “Thất nguyệt thất thập nhật ngộ mẫu thân kị nhật cảm tác”:

> Khả lân tam tuế thất huyên đường Hiếu cảm kim triêu hựu dị hương Lữ thứ thông vô tam điện giả Bồng song khấp tận nhất chi hương Vân noa mã thủ gia hà tại Lệ thấp chinh khâm ý bội thương Độc biến Lục Nga hôn tự mộng Trung quân hoặc diệc hiển thân phương

Đinh Nho Quỳ, head of the Đinh Nho lineage of Hương Sơn, says he was much moved and struck on reading this poem. Despite many shortcomings, I venture the following version:

> At three I lost the hall of day-lilies: what pity! This morning piety seizes me again, and in a foreign land. On the road, the grief of having no three cups to pour; at the rush-mat window I weep out my tears over a single stick of incense. Clouds veil the horse’s head: where then is home? Tears soak the travelling robe, and the heart redoubles its pain. I have read the *Lục Nga* through, my mind as in a dream: to be loyal to the sovereign — is that not also a way to honour one’s parents?

From the very outset, before even crossing the frontier, he addressed two poems to the *Thiếu phó* Đặng with the feeling of a son for a father, under the title “Ức Trung dũng Thiếu phó Đặng Tôn đài hồi thi trình thượng”. At the same time he wrote “Ức nhũ mẫu kí dữ đồng niên Thái bộc tôn đài”, addressed to a fellow laureate of his year, to express his affection and remembrance for his wet nurse.

In the opening and closing lines below, the poet remembers her:

> Ba ba lão nhũ ỷ môn quyền Tự cách vân quan nguyệt kỷ viên …… Phản bô bất như phi điểu loại Bàng giang không thán Tử Dư hiền

> White-haired, the old nurse leans against the doorpost; since the cloud-pass parted us, how many full moons? …… To return the mouthful, I cannot do as the bird does; by the river I sigh in vain before the virtue of Tử Dư.

Mặc Trai invokes Tử Dư, famed for his piety towards his mother, as an example to follow.

In the first of the two poems addressed to the *Thiếu phó* Đặng, he wrote:

> Nghĩa kiêm phụ tử Đẩu Sơn tề Bất thí Băng Hồ dữ Nhị Khê …… Đản nguyện sinh hoàn bồi khoản tịch Vô tâm phận ngoại bộ sa đê.
>
> The duty binding us as father and son equals the Dipper and the mountain; it yields nothing to that of Băng Hồ and Nhị Khê. …… I wish only to come back alive and keep you company at table, with no ambition beyond my portion, walking the sandy dyke.

Wherever he is, at whatever hour, his heart clings to the hope of a peaceful return. “Quá Ô Man than” too contains these lines:

> Uy vũ huân cao khung nhưỡng tại Ôn linh tiểu sứ kiện sinh hoàn
>
> Majesty and might, high merit, heaven and earth abide; may the kindly spirits bring the humble envoy home safe and sound.

By a cruel irony, it was not to be so for Mặc Trai.

Đinh Nho Hoàn’s filial piety always goes together with loyalty to the prince. The closing line of the poem on his mother’s death anniversary already says so:

> Trung quân hoặc diệc hiển thân phương (to be loyal to the sovereign is also to bring honour to one’s parents).

When the embassy boat halted at Nam Ninh, he composed poems in which he opened his heart, among them these lines:

> Hoàn tưởng ngô nhân sinh vũ nội Trung quân hiếu phụ lưỡng đương vi
>
> I reflect that we, born within the universe, have two duties to fulfil: loyalty to the prince and piety to the father.

At night, the boat moored by the riverbank, hearing a cock crow, he thinks again:

> Trung quân hiếu phụ ngô nhân sự (“Loyalty and piety are our human business, all our life long” — in “Bạc Đông tân dịch dạ văn thôn kê, tự cảm”).

From the very first two pieces of the *Mặc Trai sứ tập*, the poet stresses loyalty and piety and speaks his attachment to the king. Here are those two poems.

Độ Nhị Hà khiển đê

> Chu phiếm tân xuân áp vãn hàn Giang đình yên bãi độ giang can Thiên hương nặc thấu thiên trùng thủy Bích luyện bình phô thập lý lan Quế trạo lan tương sơ thí hiểm Thần trung tử hiếu lợi bài gian Hoa tường cao yết công thành nhật Hí phỏng tiền tân đái tiếu khan

Following Nguyễn Nam Long's literal translation:

> The boat glides in the new spring and presses down the late cold; the banquet over at the river pavilion, we cross to the far bank. The fragrance of heaven pierces a thousand folds of water; a green silk spreads level over ten leagues of waves. Cinnamon oar and orchid pole: the first trial of danger; the subject's loyalty and the son's piety put profit and guile aside. On the day the work is done, the flowered mast will stand high, and I shall go to see the old landing again, a smile on my lips.

Arriving at the Lã Côi relay, he wrote "Quá Lã Côi trạm", recalling the days when he accompanied the king on progress with the other officials, composing verses:

> Tiêu phong tình vọng nhất loa khai Dịch tử phi truyền dĩ Lã Côi Lưỡng ngạn thiều hoa hồng lữ điếm Bán giang hàn nguyệt bạch đồng ngôi Tăng gia lương nạp băng lê vãng Cổ miếu minh cầm nhiễu thụ lai Bôi tưởng long loan tuần hạnh nhật Thiên tài tân phủ các xao thôi

Following the literal translation of Professor Ngô Đức Thọ in the *Mặc Trai sứ tập*:

> In clear weather the woodcutter's peak opens like a conch; the relay courier announces in haste: we are at Lã Côi. On both banks the splendour of spring reddens the inns; mid-river, the cold moon whitens the masts. The monk goes off, leaning on his staff, to carry the provisions; at the old shrine, songbirds wheel about the trees. Cup in hand, I think of the days of the royal progresses, when a thousand talents vied in polishing their verses.

The boat reached Ngô Châu on the day of the Double Fifth, and he composed a poem to speak his heart:

> Nhân phùng ngũ ngũ phiếm linh bồ Thư kiếm trì khu độc tráng cư Ngọ nhật ngọ niên bồi ngụy khuyết Kim niên kim nhật bạc Ngô Châu Ái ưu hữu mộng huy hoàn phiếm Ky lữ vô môn thiếp ngãi phù Trượng nghĩa chính lăng thiên lý khí Hoàn thiêu kê thiệt vọng tung hô
>
> On the Double Fifth we knot the sacred sweet flag and set it adrift; book and sword ride the road, and only a valiant heart remains. In the year of the Horse, on the day of the Horse, I served at the palace gates; this year, on this day, the boat lies moored at Ngô Châu. Love of country and care for the people: even in dreams the fan stays in hand; travelling, with no door to hang it on, the mugwort charm lies useless. The sense of duty rises straight up, a breath that carries a thousand leagues: I still roast the cock's tongue and acclaim towards my homeland.

For the king's birthday, the nineteenth day of the fifth month, he composed two poems of good wishes, among them these lines:

> Trung ái nhất xoang thiên lí nguyệt Tử viên kiều vọng đạt thiên minh
>
> A heart wholly of loyalty and love beneath the moon of a thousand leagues; towards the purple enclosure I lift my eyes until dawn.

“Loyal to the prince, loving one’s country”: to be faithful to the king is to love one’s land. Like so many other scholars of his time, Đinh Nho Hoàn expressed his patriotism in this way, and all the more while travelling in a foreign country.

Đinh Nho Hoàn’s surviving poems are doubtless only a small part of what he composed over his lifetime. Fortunately we can still enjoy a complete set of the pieces written on the road to China: Đinh Nho Liêm and his collaborators presented ninety-three of them in the *Mặc Trai sứ tập* — and those are his last poems.

The three hundredth anniversary of Đinh Nho Hoàn’s death (1715–2015) is approaching: Hương Sơn district, in his native province of Hà Tĩnh, together with the Đinh Nho lineage, plans to hold a conference on Hoàng giáp Đinh Nho Hoàn, in memory of an incorruptible official, a diplomat and a poet of deep humanist thought.

12. The *phú* “Crossing Dongting Lake”

Translated by Đinh Xuân Hường

[source: 07.doc]

English translator’s note. This piece is not a conference paper but an edition of a text: Đinh Xuân Hường gives the Chinese original from the Mặc Ông sứ tập, *its Sino-Vietnamese transcription, a literal Vietnamese gloss, and then a Vietnamese verse rendering. We reproduce here the original and the transcription, and give a line-by-line rendering of the sense based on the literal gloss. That gloss carries the editor’s question marks in several places: the lines concerned are marked. The poem is a* bài luật *— an extended regulated sequence — of one hundred five-syllable lines.*

過洞庭湖賦長篇排律一百言

孟秋湖上作

荆楚八千里 / 洞庭弟一奇 / 瀾已淮帶控 / 沔澡泊衿維 / 浩渺通雲夢 / 漫茫吐月池 / 軒遊龍嫋嫋 / 舜駕水漪漪 / 烟白濤挼白 / 灘鷖石漾鷖 / 千潯含翠壁 / 數島著蛾眉 / 眼逐飛禽遠 / 誰能古哲追 / 君山無地著 / 香酒有欒知 / 湖退鷗雛穩 / 珠堆蚌殼敲 / 數杯紅漢武 / 千幹緣湘姬 / 一碧窮波唱 / 三更咽楚詞 / 龍書傳橘井 / 鷁葉泛鴟皮 / 香發楸蘭岸 / 凉回楊柳枝 / 雲開糜子國 / 宮窈楚腰兒 / 書院含青漾 / 螢囊照碧洏 / 夜飄春紙白 / 聲到大黯湄 / 仙去松山黯 / 鴻眠芷渡蕤 / 敲篷驚翠浪 / 憩岸喚材醨 / 春謝二喬遠 / 臺怜八桂遺 / 霜鐘通寂島 / 烟寺爽睛腮 / 柳綠美人渚 / 梧丹大將祠 / 夕波亭曳翠 / 青草澤黄璃 / 真樂知何許 / 前遊豈得私 / 文山頻作賦 / 居士幾敲詩 / 洗浴無巢耳 / 翔汀有雉雌 / 平沙新白篆 / 夕照淡黄篩 / 採女蓮香袖 / 詩翁雪搭髭 / 屏開仁智長 / 人且性情頤 / 霧滑魚船蘚 / 藥扶澤國羈 / 岳樓何等樂 / 原諒為誰悲 / 巫峽人来遠 / 瀟湘艇泛遲 / 離騷怜醒醉 / 怨慕似孤婺 / 簑笠能消慮 / 烟霞可樂饑 / 茄蘆風外鈎 / 蓿苜月中炊 / 雙鬢滄浪老 / 孤蓬磊石坻 / 蘋邊窗猛拍 / 膾後笛黄吹 / 饒翠饒青好 / 何名何利爲 / 鶯花猶代謝 / 山水不盈虧 / 一鴈鳴霜去 / 雙麂掠水移 / 鶴山雲列枸 / 鹿驛雨翻絲 / 仙呂逍遥日 / 希文憂愛先 / 烟波驚旅夢 / 家國動遐思 / 卸詔賓金闕 / 乘槎奉土儀 / 秋高湖鏡展 / 月小客神怡 / 觀水觀瀾稱 / 濯纓濯足宜 / 高歌飄一葉 / 浮白望三峗 / 拊缶心無累 / 烹茶脚正垂 / 飯甘魚子薄 / 羹耐鼈裙卑 / 乾没人從偽 / 神明德不欺 / 平生存信義 / 今日仰扶持.

Sino-Vietnamese transcription

Quá Động Đình hồ phú — trường thiên bài luật nhất bách ngôn. Mạnh thu hồ thượng tác.

Kinh Sở bát thiên lí / Động Đình đệ nhất kì / Lan dĩ Hoài đái không / Miện táo bạc câm duy / Hạo miểu thông Vân Mộng / Man mang thổ nguyệt trì / Hiên du long niệu niệu / Thuần giá thuỷ y y / Yên bạch đào noa bạch / Than lê thuỷ dạng lê / Thiên tâm hàm thuý bích / Số đảo trứ nga mi / Nhãn trục phi cầm viễn / Thuỳ năng cổ triết truy / Quân sơn vô địa trứ / Hương tửu hữu loan tri / Hồ thoái âu sô ổn / Châu đôi bạng xác khi / Số bôi hồng Hán Vũ / Thiên cán lục Tương cơ / Nhất bích cùng ba xướng / Tam canh yết Sở từ / Long thư truyền quất tỉnh / Nghịch diệp phiếm si bì / Hương phát thu lan ngạn / Lương hồi dương liễu chi / Vân khai mi tử quốc / Cung yểu Sở yêu nhi / Thư viện hàm thanh dạng / Huỳnh nang chiếu bích nhi / Dạ phiêu xuân chỉ bạch / Thanh đáo đại kình mi / Tiên khứ tùng sơn ảm / Hồng miên chỉ độ nhuy / Xao bồng kinh thuý lãng / Khế ngạn hoán tài ly / Xuân tạ nhị kiều viên / Đài linh bát quế di / Sương chung thông tịch đảo / Yên tự sảng tinh tai / Liễu lục mỹ nhân chử / Ngô đơn Đại tướng từ / Tịch ba đình duệ thuý / Thanh thảo trạch hoàng li / Chân lạc tri hà hứa / Tiền du khởi đắc tư / Văn Sơn tần tác phú / Cư sĩ cơ xao thi / Tẩy dục vô sào nhĩ / Tường đinh hữu trĩ thư / Bình sa tân bạch triện / Tịch chiếu đạm hoàng si / Thái nữ liên hương tụ / Thi ông tuyết đáp tư / Bình khai nhân trí trưởng / Nhân thả tính tình di / Vụ hoạt ngư ngột tiển / Lê phù trạch quốc ki / Nhạc Lâu hà đẳng lạc / Nguyên Lượng vị thuỳ bi / Vu Hiệp nhân lai viễn / Tiêu Tương đình phiếm trì / Li Tao linh tỉnh tuý / Oán mộ tự cô vụ / Thoa lạp năng tiêu lự / Yên hà khả lạc cơ / Gia lô phong ngoại câu / Túc mục nguyệt trung xuy / Song tấn thương lãng lão / Cô bồng lõi thạch chi / Tần biên song mãnh phách / Khoái hậu địch hoàng xuy / Nhiêu thuý nhiêu thanh hảo / Hà danh hà lợi vi / Oanh hoa do đại tạ / Sơn thuỷ bất doanh khuy / Nhất nhạn minh sương khứ / Song phù kinh thuỷ di / Hạc sơn vân liệt cẩu / Lộc dịch vũ phiên ti / Tiên Lữ tiêu dao nhật / Hi Văn ưu ái tiên / Yên ba kinh lữ mộng / Gia quốc động hà tư / Tá chiếu tân kim khuyết / Thừa tra phụng thổ nghi / Thu cao hồ kính triển / Nguyệt tiểu khách thần di / Quan thuỷ quan lan xứng / Trạc anh trạc túc nghi / Cao ca phiêu nhất diệp / Phù bạch vọng tam nguy / Phụ phẫu tâm vô luỵ / Phanh trà cước chính thuỳ / Phạn cam ngư tử bạc / Canh nại miết quân ti / Kiền một nhân tòng nguỵ / Thần minh đức bất khi / Bình sinh tồn tín nghĩa / Kim nhật ngưỡng phù trì.

Rendering of the sense

Composed at the beginning of autumn, on the lake.

1. Kinh and Sở, over eight thousand leagues:
2. Dongting is the foremost wonder of them.
3. Its waters, girdled by the Hoài, are held in;
4. the Miện comes to wash the hem of its robe there.
5. Vast and boundless, it joins with the Vân Mộng;
6. immense, it pours out the pool of the moon.
7. Beneath the eaves the dragon glides, undulating;

8. Thuân's chariot passes, and the water ripples.
9. The mist is white, and the wave crumples that whiteness;
10. the shoal is dark, and the rock makes that blackness undulate.
11. A thousand fathoms hold an emerald wall enclosed;
12. a few islands wear the eyebrows of a moth.
13. The eye follows the birds in their distant flight:
14. who could overtake the sages of old?
15. Mount Quân has no ground to stand on;
16. it has only the fragrance of wine and the friendly tree.
17. The lake has withdrawn, the young gulls are at rest [*reading uncertain*];
18. pearls heap up, the oyster shells tilt.
19. A few cups have flushed Emperor Wu of the Han;
20. a thousand balusters green the dwelling of the Lady of the Tương.
21. A single sheet of azure sings to the end of the waves;
22. at the third watch the *Songs of Sở* choke in the throat.
23. The dragon book transmits the well among the mandarin trees [*reading uncertain*];
24. the leaf-boat drifts, the kingfisher settles on the bank [*reading uncertain*].
25. Fragrance rises from the orchid shore;
26. coolness returns among the willow branches.
27. The clouds open on the land of Mi Tử;
28. the palace recedes, where the slender waists of Sở are.
29. The library is bathed in a green swell;
30. the firefly-purse lights up tears of jade [*reading uncertain*].
31. Night sets a white spring paper flying;
32. the sound carries to the shore of the great whales.
33. The immortals gone, the pine mountain darkens;
34. the wild goose sleeps, and the iris droops at the ferry.
35. A knock on the rush roof startles the green wave;
36. we halt at the bank and call for a thin wine.
37. Spring takes its leave: the two Kiều are far away;
38. the terrace grieves: the eight cassia trees have been moved.
39. The bell in the frost reaches the solitary island;
40. the monastery's smoke brightens the faces.
41. Willows green the islet of the beauties;
42. the sterculia reddens the shrine of the Great General.
43. At evening the wave trails its green along the pavilion;
44. the green grass is steeped in a calyx yellow.
45. True joy — where is it to be found, who knows?
46. Before setting out, could one have foreseen it?
47. Văn Sơn often composed *phú*;
48. the Layman more than once struck out his poem.

Nothing is washed, no nest is set in order;
from the sandbank a hen pheasant takes wing.
The level sand bears a brand-new seal of whiteness;
the sunset sifts a pale yellow over it.
On the sleeves of the gatherers, the scent of lotus;
on the old poet's temples, snow.
Opening the screen enlarges humanity and wisdom;
and there a man nurtures his nature.
In the mist the fish grazes the moss on the boat;
the goosefoot sustains the exile of the water country.
The Pavilion of Nhạc — what joy was its own?
And Nguyên Lượng — for whom did he grieve?
From the gorges of Vu, men come from far;
on the Tiêu Tương, the boat drifts slowly.
The *Li Tao* makes the sobering drunkard weep;
the plaint and the longing are those of a solitary widow.
Straw cloak and hat can allay one's cares;
mist and sunset glow can make one forget hunger.
Lotus stalks and reeds, out of the wind, like fish hooks;
the lucerne burns in the midst of the moon.
Both temples have grown old with the green wave;
the lone wormwood at the foot of the great rock by the water.
The duckweed beats hard against the window;
the feast over, the yellow flute sounds.
More green still, more blue: all is beautiful.
For what renown, for what gain?
The oriole's song serves as farewell;
mountains and waters are never too much nor too little.
One wild goose cries in the frost and goes;
two teal cut the water and move off.
On Crane Mountain the clouds range the goji berries;
at Deer Relay the rain turns over its threads.
Tiên Lữ had his days of free wandering;
Hi Văn put others' cares first.
Mist and waves startle the traveller's dream;
home and country stir distant thoughts in him.
To hand back the edict before the golden gate;
to board the raft, bearing the produce of the land.
Autumn stands high, the lake's mirror spreads;
the moon is thin, and the guest's spirit lightens.
To look at water is properly to look at its swell;

90. to wash one's cap strings there, to wash one's feet: each in its season.
91. One sings aloud, and a leaf drifts away;
92. the white cup raised, one looks towards the Three Peaks.
93. One beats the jar, the heart unencumbered;
94. one makes tea, legs dangling.
95. The rice is sweet, the fish lean;
96. the soup will bear a little turtle skirt.
97. In times of decline men follow what is false;
98. but before the clear-sighted spirits, virtue does not cheat.
99. All my life I have kept faith and duty:
100. today I commit myself to their support.

Editor's notes

Translated from the *Mặc Ông sứ tập*. — *Văn Sơn*: Wen Tianxiang. — *Cư sĩ*, the Layman: Su Dongpo. — *Tiên Lữ*: Lü Dongbin. — *Hi Văn*: Fan Zhongyan. — *Cẩu kỉ*: the name of a plant.

13. The poet Đinh Nho Hoàn on embassy

Vương Trọng — Writers' Association of Việt Nam

[source: 22.doc]

A legation's journey is a magnificent chance to go and see the world and make poetry of it; but this privilege is not shared equally among all envoys: it favours the envoy-poets, who make up a fairly small proportion of the corps of ambassadors, even though these were generally Chinese-trained scholars and examination laureates. From Đại Việt's first envoy, Đinh Liễn, who set out in 972, to the last legation under the Manchu Qing in the nineteenth century — nearly a thousand years — how many missions have gone and returned; and yet the embassy poetry left to our country's literary history remains fairly modest. Professor Ngô Đức Thọ recalls: "Under the early Lê there were more than thirty legations, but from none of them does a whole collection survive; from only fifteen envoys are there from one to a few pieces…" Loss for various reasons cannot be ruled out; but there is a fact: when an envoy is not a poet, composing is no need of his. The essential thing is to discharge the diplomatic duty received from the king; and if he writes two or three poems, they still bear on that matter — he rarely looks with the eye of a poet on a journey of observation.

The poet Đinh Nho Hoàn is quite otherwise. It may well be that he performed his duty as deputy envoy brilliantly; but, as a poet, he scarcely speaks of it in his verse. To be exact, once, at the very outset of the journey, he mentions the order to light the lamps and bring out the tribute chests to check the seals; apart from that, almost all the poems work upon feeling and landscape along a road of ten thousand leagues. I do not subscribe to this judgment passed on his poetry: "In short, his words and feelings do not stray from two main axes, loyalty to the king and filial reverence towards parents." Perhaps his son-in-law, overwhelmed by his father-in-law's sudden death, wished to stress his most respectable qualities; but to make that judgment the presentation of the collection seems to me mistaken. If the *Mặc Trai sứ tập* were exactly as that formula has it — turning solely on the two words loyalty and piety — what monotony and

what sadness! No: this collection is not that. The poet knew how to work feeling and landscape to the full from the departure from Thăng Long, at the crossing of the Nhị Hà and then at the Lã Côi relay, with descriptive lines that are concrete, lively and poetic:

> Lưỡng ngạn thiều hoa hồng lữ điếm Bán giang hồng nguyệt bạch đồng ngôi
>
> Mid-river, the cold moon, and the sails drying in the sun; on both banks the music rings out and the banners blaze.

Description of landscape is one of Đinh Nho Hoàn's strengths — a strength here exercised on foreign soil, which the author sees for the first time although he has long known it from books. Hence there is hardly a poem without its landscape lines, of remarkable skill, in which scene and feeling merge:

> Ngân tán mãn thành du tử nguyệt Kim xuy thiên lý cố nhân phong
>
> The moon, like a traveller, scatters her silver over the whole city; the wind of old friends carries the sound of metal a thousand leagues.

("Meeting Khâu Đình Thản of Fujian, who came to visit me.") That "wind of old friends" — what a find, and how apt for a long-awaited reunion!

Đinh Nho Hoàn does not care to describe by the conventions of classical poetry. He describes precisely, in detail, so that the reader may picture the scene as he saw it:

> Bán thốc thú lâu thôn họa giốc Nhất chi điều phố bối tình loan
>
> Half the garrison's stilt houses sink into the sound of the horn; a desolate street turns its back on the mountain range in clear weather.

("Passing the town of Lạng Sơn.") What a capacity to compress meaning into two heptasyllables!

Then:

> Đạm nham trúc thúy âm nghi hạ Thanh giản liên hoàng vị xứng thu
>
> On the quiet rock the green bamboo casts a summer shade; by the clear stream the yellow lotus opens in full autumn savour.

("Passing the town of Vĩnh Châu.")

It would be hard indeed to list all the fine landscape lines in this collection. Under his brush pass so many famous sites of vast China: the city of Quế Lâm, the Đồng Tước terrace, the Tiêu Tương river, the temple of Bao Zheng, the Yellow Crane Pavilion, Lake Dongting… Embassy poetry is a poetry of itinerary: not only the itinerary of landscapes, but that of the author's feelings and thoughts before those landscapes, and before the people met on the way. On this need for exchange and conversation he has a line that is very fine and very singular:

> Hải ngoại nhàn nhân thị cố nhân
>
> Abroad, to meet a man of leisure to talk with is to find an old friend again.

("Presented to the aged poet Mã Kỷ Tiên of Kim Lăng.")

On this journey the poet exchanged verses with and offered them to many people: a physician named Lư, a recluse named Bao, a prefect named Vương, a fellow guest at an inn… These exchanges reveal not only his poetic gift: they make known another fine quality of Đinh Nho Hoàn, who lived open and friendly with everyone.

There is one theme that cannot be passed over: longing for one's village and one's country. It is the major theme of almost all embassy collections. Poets are melancholy and sensitive by nature; it happens that scarcely have they left home than they feel adrift, like Nguyễn Du: "Tài qua Long Vĩ thủy / Tiện thị dị hương nhân" — barely across the Long Vĩ river, and already a man of another country. So then, on embassy, ten thousand leagues from country and village, how not to feel the want? So it is with Đinh Nho Hoàn: the further north the road climbs, the further he goes, the more the longing multiplies. At the Ô Man shoal he feels that "Điều điều thiên lý bang hương nguyệt" — over a thousand leagues of winding road, the moon of his native land still follows him. Moored at the Tương Tư shoal, he grieves: "Nhạn ngoại hương vô nhất tự thư" — beyond the flight of the wild geese, not one word from home. On this theme, the piece most moving for the reader is doubtless the poem "Feelings on the anniversary of my mother's death, the 17th of the seventh month".

In this poem, every line is fine and every thought chokes the throat:

> Khả lân tam tuế thất huyên đường Hiếu cảm kim triêu hựu dị hương Lữ thứ thông vô tam điện giả Bồng song khấp tận nhất chi hương Vân gia mã thú gia hà tại Lệ khấp chinh khâm ý bội thương…
>
> Pity the child orphaned of his mother at three: today, on the anniversary of her death, he is in a foreign land. No three cups of wine to pour in offering; the stick of incense barely out, he weeps in silence. Clouds veil the horse's head, the dew soaks through; tears drench the hem of the robe all along the road.

Then, having no other recourse, the poet consoles himself: "Trung quân hoặc diệc hiển thân phương" — to be loyal to the sovereign, is that not also a way of honouring one's parents?

"The subject's loyalty, the son's piety" often go together in his poetry:

> Cố quốc mộng triền bồi tử khí Ky thần vọng kịch phụng lưu hà
>
> The unceasing dream of the homeland comes with a purple haze; the distant subject gazes with all his strength, but must follow the drifting clouds.

("That evening, late, the boat moored at Quế Hoa lake, matching the rhymes of the chamberlain of the Imperial Stud.")

The author's loyalty is sometimes expressed entire in the very title of a poem, which may be translated thus: "On the nineteenth day of the fifth month, the Diên Thọ festival on which long life is wished to the king; at night, recalling things past, sitting alone leaning against the boat, I write this poem under the stress of feeling"… Clearly this is an important theme of the collection, since the author takes loyalty to the king and piety towards parents as his own duty — *Trung quân hiếu phụ ngô nhân sự*. But apart from this theme, the *Mặc Trai sứ tập* successfully develops many others.

The ordinary envoy and the envoy-poet, when they compose, differ not only in their choice of subject: on the same subject they differ greatly in feeling, in sharpness, in gift. The ordinary envoy borrows poetry to speak of affairs; the envoy-poet borrows affairs to speak poetry, to lay open his soul, his feelings and his philosophy. Đinh Nho Hoàn is not merely a poet: he is a gifted poet, deserving close attention in our classical literature. He knows how to find a very poetic way of expressing scenes familiar to all:

> Tiêu Ba Ngạc Mịch tổng thôn tình Tịnh quốc kiều khôi nhất Động Đình
>
> The lake swallows at one gulp the four rivers Tiêu, Ba, Ngạc and Mịch; in this kingdom of ponds and marshes, Dongting is first.

("On Lake Dongting.")

Or again: *Tư hạc cô lâu khởi Hạc phong* — it is out of longing for the crane that the solitary shrine springs up on the peak of Crane Mountain. Here is a poet's way of seeing and thinking, "of the first order", far beyond ordinary description.

As has been said, landscape in his work is not conventional: it is concrete, on several planes. The landscape holds feeling, and the feeling there is weighty, in keeping with the author's own wish: "Hy văn nhất ký ái ưu thâm" — that each thing written should carry within it a deep solicitude. This demand dwells permanently in true poets today, and in those of the future.

Most of the pieces in the collection are regulated heptasyllabic octaves. There is no need to discuss rules of tone and linkage in a poet such as Đinh Nho Hoàn. But one technical point struck me: the rhyme. It is known that in the regulated heptasyllabic octave the five level-tone syllables ending lines 1, 2, 4, 6 and 8 rhyme together. Yet it is rare to find those five syllables rhyming absolutely identically. Even the model poem on the Ngang pass, by Bà Huyện Thanh Quan, lets an *oa* sound slip in among four *a* sounds. In Đinh Nho Hoàn, by contrast, there must be more than a dozen pieces with absolute rhyme: entirely in AN for piece 1, in IÊN for 7, in IÊU for 25, in Ư for 31, in AO for 35, in ÂN for 51, in IÊU for 57, in ƯƠNG for 60, 64 and 75, in AO for 68, in ÂM for 69, in IÊU for 80 and 83, in AI for 88…

In poetry, absolute rhyme is not necessarily better than approximate rhyme; but in a form like the regulated octave, one must be a poet of very rich vocabulary to hold absolute rhyme through a whole piece without the line ceasing to be natural or the sense being forced. Let me add a figure here: in the *Tale of Kiều*, Nguyễn Du uses absolute rhyme in 52 per cent of the lines, and there are five passages of more than ten lines each, the longest of fifteen lines, entirely in absolute rhyme. In his Chinese poems, regulated heptasyllabic octaves, the proportion of pieces with absolute rhyme is likewise fairly high. Here is a meeting between two poets from the same Hà Tĩnh.

Reading Đinh Nho Hoàn's *Mặc Trai sứ tập*, I think of Nguyễn Du's *Bắc hành tạp lục*, an embassy collection born ninety-nine years later.

Here are the resemblances:

- They are the works of two poets from Hà Tĩnh who went on embassy.
- The first poem is in both cases written from Thăng Long, although Nguyễn Du set out from Phú Xuân.

- The embassy road not having changed, the same famous places appear in both collections.
- The legation's journey lasts fourteen months in both cases.
- Both poets made the embassy a journey of observation for writing, and left the world two outstanding collections that enrich Vietnamese classical literature.

And the differences:

- Đinh Nho Hoàn was deputy envoy, Nguyễn Du chief envoy.
- Đinh Nho Hoàn appears more vigorous and more optimistic than Nguyễn Du before the obstacles of the journey.
- Đinh Nho Hoàn dies as he approaches Yên Kinh, while Nguyễn Du brings his legation home to the capital, Phú Xuân.

A few proposals

In only half the time of an embassy — some seven months — Đinh Nho Hoàn composed more than a hundred poems of this quality. It may therefore be taken as certain that he had written a great deal before setting out; let us try to recover those works. If we cannot, it will be because they have been lost — certainly not because they never existed.

In this collection the publisher has used several different verse renderings. That is an advantage, but it can also disorient the reader — not so much through differences of craft between the translations as because they sometimes point towards two distinct meanings. Thus the line *Đế hôn nhật nguyệt độc tam canh*, from piece 4, is glossed literally as: "Where the sun and moon rise, time has already passed to the third watch"; yet the first verse rendering has it "The king's command, morning and evening, remains present to the mind", the second "From morning to evening the third watch is surely already flickering", the third "In the distant village, sleeplessness eases at the third watch". The first is far removed from the literal gloss and from the other two. How is the reader to grasp the author's own meaning?

Some translators render one line of the original by two Vietnamese lines, which gives the translation twice as many lines as the original. In my view, this will not do.

These are a few modest remarks, which I submit for your attention with a view to a reprinting of the collection. I wish the conference every success.

Hanoi, 3 July 2015 — Vương Trọng

14. "Ten Poems of Cao Bằng" by Governor Đinh Nho Hoàn

Prof. Đinh Khắc Thuân — Institute of Hán Nôm Studies

[source: `02.doc`]

Đinh Nho Hoàn (1670–1716), pen name Mặc Trai, was a native of An Ấp commune, Hương Sơn district, Hà Tĩnh province. He was born and raised in a Confucian family with a tradition of examination success, rich in men who rose to distinction: Đinh Nho Công, his father, Đinh Nho Điển, Đinh Nho Quang… He passed as a doctor of the second rank (*Hoàng giáp*) at the examination of the year Canh Thìn, twenty-first year of the Chính Hoà era (1700), under Lê Hy

Tông, and rose to the office of governor of Cao Bằng, then to that of right vice-minister of Works. His literary gift led to his appointment, in the eleventh year of the Vĩnh Thịnh era (1715), as deputy envoy to bear the annual tribute to the Qing; he unhappily fell ill and died on the embassy road in 1716. He was posthumously granted the office of left vice-minister of Personnel.

Though he died early and was taken up with official duties, he composed a great deal. From the embassy alone, left unfinished, he has bequeathed a collection of great value: the *Mặc Ông sứ tập*, which gathers landscape poems written on the road to China, pieces exchanged with and offered in farewell to friends, and occasional poems expressing longing for country and home.

From his time governing Cao Bằng he also left the *Hoán tỉnh châu dân từ*, in *nôm* script: a song of one hundred and forty-eight lines in *lục bát* metre calling on the local population to do good and forsake evil so as to settle and prosper, after the war between the Lê–Trịnh power and the Mạc had ended in the latter's defeat. Last come ten poems celebrating the scenic spots of Cao Bằng, the "Ten Poems of Cao Bằng". The manuscript bears the shelf mark AB.185 and is held in the library of the Institute of Hán Nôm Studies (1). His whole œuvre is preserved today in that institute's Hán Nôm collection. The annotated catalogue of the Hán Nôm heritage presents it thus:

> **1436. HOÁN TỈNH CHÂU DÂN TỪ / 喚醒州民辭**
>
> Composed by Đinh Nho Hoàn / 丁儒完, of An Ấp commune, Hương Sơn district, Nghệ An province, who passed as *Hoàng giáp* at the examination of the year Canh Thìn (1700) and served as governor and supervising censor of the finance service of the Cao Bằng *trấn*.
>
> 1 manuscript, 16 pp., 31 × 21, with Chinese characters. AB.185. MF.1663.

1. A *nôm* song, in six-eight metre, calling on the people of Châu Ô, after the upheavals of the Mạc period, to live in loyalty and duty, to respect the teacher, to live in concord with their brothers, to help one another, to shun drink and theft.
2. *Cao Bằng thập thủ*: ten poems celebrating the scenic spots of Cao Bằng, such as *Na Lữ cổ thành* (the ancient citadel of Na Lữ), *Hoàng Sơn tình vọng* (the view of Hoàng Sơn after rain), *Khâu Sầm mộ vân* (evening clouds over Khâu Sầm), *Đồng Lân dạ chung* (the night bell at Đồng Lân)…

() *The cover reads:* Hoán tỉnh châu dân từ, extracts from the Ô Châu cận lục*. The first column of page 1 states: "This book is extracted from the Ô Châu cận lục and bound separately as a distinct collection; it is not a defective work." But Dương Văn An's* Ô Châu cận lục* contains no *Hoán tỉnh châu dân từ* at all. The joining of these two works can only have happened at the time of copying.

> **2144. MẶC ÔNG SỨ TẬP / 默翁使集**
>
> Composed by Đinh Nho Hoàn 丁儒完, edited by Doctor Nguyễn Trọng Thường 阮仲常 (his son-in-law) in the fifteenth year of the Lê Vĩnh Thịnh era (1719).
>
> 3 manuscripts, 1 preface, 1 presentation. VHv.1443: 72 pp., 28 × 16. A.1409: 70 pp., 26 × 10. A.2823: 60 pp., 26 × 18.

Poems composed by Đinh Nho Hoàn on his embassy to China: landscapes of the road (the Nhị Hà river, the Nam Quan pass, the town of Ngô Châu, the temple of Ma Yuan…); occasional pieces (remembering the king, the country, his parents…); pieces exchanged with and offered in farewell to friends… The note on the founding of the cult rice fields, the inscription engraved on the stone chime of the Thượng Bảo temple, the precepts teaching his descendants loyalty and filial piety…

() *See also the* Mặc Ông sứ tập* section in the *Mặc Ông Chỉ Trai Lê tham thi văn hợp biên*, VHv.97.

The work Đinh Nho Hoàn left is not abundant, but scholars hold it in high esteem: "Đinh Nho Hoàn's poetry is fluent and gentle, filled with feeling, savour and beauty, and expresses with warmth his love of his native land and his national pride" (2). His works have nonetheless scarcely been studied or presented in full. Recently the *General Collection of Vietnamese Literature*, vol. 6 (*Literature of the Period of Trịnh–Nguyễn Partition*, ed. Bùi Duy Tân, Social Sciences Publishing House, Hanoi, 2000), selected five poems in Chinese characters and the complete text of the *Hoán tỉnh châu dân từ*.

As for the ten poems on the landscapes of Cao Bằng, they are all *nôm* poems in regulated form, heptasyllabic octaves, with an occasional six-syllable line interposed. This manner is already found in Nguyễn Trãi's *Quốc âm thi tập* (1380–1442), in Lê Thánh Tông's *Hồng Đức quốc âm thi tập* and the authors of the Hồng Đức era (1470–1497), in Nguyễn Bỉnh Khiêm's *Bạch Vân quốc ngữ thi* (1491–1585)… The theme of the "eight sites" or "ten sites", of foreign origin, has long been taken up by many of our own poets: *The Eight Sites of West Lake*, *The Eight Sites of the Lạng Sơn Camp*, *The Ten Sites of Hà Tiên in the National Language*…

In the *Cao Bằng thập thủ*, under Đinh Nho Hoàn's brush, the green mountains and clear waters of this far corner of the country appear in strokes truly vivid and engaging, marked with the particular colour of the Cao Bằng country. People and landscape seem to merge; here and there one glimpses an old citadel, a temple where incense smoke curls, the indigo silhouettes of the local peoples going in and out of the caves, the monastery bell ringing in the night, the clear flute of the fishing village, the woodcutter's song on the mountainside, freshly whitewashed houses, the bustle of the market on the river landing… It is a realistic picture of a life gradually reviving after a long period of turmoil. The author's attachment to the land of Cao Bằng is moreover bound up with a very high consciousness of his responsibility towards country and nation.

This is a precious document, which can help us to know better the man and the work of Đinh Nho Hoàn, and his activity at the head of this march of the country under the Lê–Trịnh. We present below the ten *nôm* poems on Cao Bằng by Governor Đinh Nho Hoàn (transcription and annotation by Nguyễn Thị Lâm).

Cao Bằng thập thủ — Ten poems on the scenic spots of Cao Bằng

English translator's note. The poems that follow are in Vietnamese, written in nôm *characters; we give the transcription into the national script as established by Nguyễn Thị Lâm, followed by a rendering of the sense. The language is old and in places difficult; the editor's notes are given at the end.*

1. Na Lữ cổ thành — The ancient citadel of Na Lữ

Bốn vách thành xưa dựng cội ngàn, Nền hương khói thuở gian quan. Ngàn hàng cây đổng bày con mác, Năm đóa mây che rợp bóng tàn (3). Đất cũ nhà vua vàng đá vững, Xương khô họ Mạc cát lầm tan. Tôi ngươi tới đấy vai quyền nặng, Đáu đáu (4) mười phân một phiến đan.

The four walls of the ancient citadel stand at the foot of the old forest; the altar still smokes with the incense of times of trial. A thousand rows of trees raise their spearheads; five corollas of cloud make a canopy of shade. The old royal land, gold and stone, holds firm; the dry bones of the Mạc dissolve into dust. The servant who comes here bears authority on his shoulders: with a whole heart, ten parts in ten, a single piece of scarlet loyalty.

2. Hoàng Sơn tình vọng — Hoàng Sơn after rain

Da trời rửa sạch băng tờ, Chất ngất Hoàng Sơn vẻ vẻ ưa. Cây thuở mưa thôi xanh rợp rợp, Đá khi nắng số bạc phơ phơ. Khe kiều chim gióng tiêu (5) về sớm, Động khẩu hoa ngâm khách ở trưa. Dửng dửng miếu thần hương chửa lạnh, Khí thiêng nghi ngút lại hơn xưa.

The skin of the sky is washed clean, smooth as a sheet; Hoàng Sơn rears up, and its look is pleasing. The trees, the rain over, are green with thick shade; the rocks, under the sun, whiten and lie bare. At the stream's bridge a bird calls, the woodcutter goes home early; at the cave mouth the flowers murmur, the guest lingers at noon. At the spirit's shrine, impassive, the incense is not yet cold: the sacred breath rises stronger than before.

3. Khâu Sầm mộ vân — Evening clouds over Khâu Sầm

Lớp chớp (6) mây hôm quyến nhạn về, Non Sầm trướng (7) rủ so le. Rợp đầu đá bạc ngàn hàng tán, Lạt ngọn cây xanh mấy cỗ xe. Lạc khách áo sen ra cửa động, Bận người lắt (8) hạnh xuống cầu khe. Trông nhà chửa thuở ngưng con mắt, Lại véo von đâu địch nhạn kia.

The evening clouds pile up and hold back the homing geese; Mount Sầm lets its uneven screens hang down. Above the white rocks, a thousand rows of shading canopies; on the green summits, a few carriages fade. A stray guest in a lotus robe comes out of the cave; people busy themselves picking apricots and go down to the stream's bridge. The eye turned homeward has not yet come to rest, and already, from somewhere, the geese's flute is modulating.

4. Đèo Liêu tân nguyệt — New moon at the Liêu pass

Lòng vọng chuông hôm mới nện chày, Đèo Liêu quế đã mọc trời tây. Loan nghi gương lẻ bay bờ khói, Vượn khiếp cung treo khóc lọt mây. Đường tỏ mục (9) về hương bén mặt, Búa doanh tiêu mạn ngọc in tay. Trăm hoa những biết chào duyên mới, Nối nữa Trường An (10) một khách hay.

The heart listens for the evening bell, just now struck; at the Liêu pass the moon's cassia has grown in the western sky. The *luan* hesitates before the solitary mirror,

flying to the misty bank; the gibbon starts at the hanging bow, and its weeping pierces the clouds. The road brightens, the herd boy returns, the village smell reaches his face; axe in hand, the woodcutter idles, and jade marks his palm. A hundred flowers know only how to greet the new favour; and one knowing guest prolongs Trường An still further.

5. Đông Lân dạ chung — Night bell at Đông Lân

Trăng kia quán khói nọ kìa làng, Vẳng vẳng chuông đâu chốn lửa hương. Nền tĩnh thổ (11) cao khi nện máy, Thiền thiên tỏ thuở chú (12) giá sương. Đèn ngày vì nước khêu chong mộng, Gối khách lo nhà thức vội vàng. Lòng vọng nghe thôi mới biết, Từ bi nọ khéo mênh mang.

There the moon, here the inn and its smoke, there the village; far off a bell, in some place of fire and incense. The base of the Pure Land rises when the clapper is struck; the sky of meditation clears at the hour when the spell congeals the dew. The daytime lamp, for the country's sake, is trimmed, and one keeps vigil in dream; on the traveller's pillow, care for home wakes him with a start. The heart, from listening, understands at last: how vast that compassion is.

6. Xảo giang ngư địch — A fisherman's flute on the Xảo river

Vạn giang (13) trời muộn ác sư tà, Này địch ai đây chập chập hòa. Đứt nối xoang trên thuyền chở nguyệt, Nỉ non kêu đốt bếp hâm trà. Nhạn lạ tiếng bay sao lãng, Cá quen hơi vẫy sóng hoa. Kẻ tôi con nghe dễ trạnh, Lo ngay đền nước, thảo đền nhà.

At the fishing village the day is late, the sun goes down; whose flute is this, coming into tune by fits and starts? The phrase breaks off and resumes on the boat laden with moonlight; its plaint calls for the fire to be lit and the tea warmed. The goose, a stranger to that sound, flies off distracted; the fish, used to the air, stirs and makes the wave flower. The subject and the son hear it and are easily moved: loyal, they discharge their debt to the country; dutiful, to the house.

7. Mục thành hoa phố — The trading street of Mục thành

Lớp chớp chân thành mấy dãy hàng, Ngày ngàn dặm khách mười phương. Biển (14) bày mực lạt rêu y sĩ, Vách quét vôi nồng cửa phú thương. Nương gió miết neo (15) thuyền bãi Sở, Lồng mây năm sắc của sông Tương. Lầu thưa mái nọ còn hơi hả, Suối lợi bên kia ghét chẳng màng.

At the foot of the rampart a few rows of shops crowd together; every day, travellers from a thousand leagues, from the ten directions. The physician's signboard shows its faded ink and its moss; fresh lime whitens the rich merchant's door. Borne on the wind, the boats grip their anchors at the Sở shoal; the five colours of the clouds enfold the Tương river. Under that thinly roofed house it is still warm; the spring of profit, on the other side, is scorned and left alone.

8. Biên đình thu giác — Autumn horn at the frontier post (16)

Sa thành (17) lạnh lẽo mảng tin thu, Nọ giác ai đâu tiếng nhỏ to. Trên cật ngựa Hồ tâu dửng dửng (18), Dưới con cờ Hán thổi vo vo. Trạnh thuở sương hoành đượm

(19), Ai oán nghĩ khi cỏ lục khô. Kẻ chống thành gan có sắt, Chinh bào chi khứng (20) để xâm châu.

The citadel of sand, chilled, takes in the news of autumn; whence comes that horn, its sound now faint, now swelling? On the back of the Hồ horse, a report is made half aloud; under the Hán banners, the wind whistles. The heart is stirred at the hour when the frost thickens; one laments in thinking that the green grass is withering. He who holds the rampart has iron in his bowels: a man who has worn the war tunic will not suffer the province to be encroached upon.

9. Mạnh Tuyền giang thị — The market at the Mạnh Tuyền landing

Đất tròn bồ duyên (21) nước xuyên oanh, Rậm so le mấy quán tranh. Thuyền nổi lá tre lan mặt nước, Dù trương nhú nấm rợp ngàn xanh. Muối nhiều duyên hải yêu như ngọc, Tiền có châu ưa diện nữ anh. Nhận khách thương kia cho thấu lý, Nguồn tham hay cạn chớ lanh chanh.

The land rounds into a bank of rushes, the water crosses and encircles it; dense and uneven, a few thatched stalls. The boats float like bamboo leaves scattered on the water; the opened parasols spring up like mushrooms and shade the green. Salt brought in plenty from the coast is loved like jade; money flows in, and there is pleasure in adorning beauties. Receive those merchants with your eyes open: the spring of greed soon runs dry; do not rush at it.

10. Án Lại tiêu ca — Woodcutters' song at Án Lại

Non Án dâu hôm bóng xế phiêu, Ca dắng dỏi (22) mấy ngươi tiều. Vang động đá dường treo ngọc, Dội hương trăng mẽ phủ thiều (23). Cao khoáng (24) giơ tung trời đất Hán, Biếc xanh thề thốt nước non Nghiêu. Bạn tri âm nọ nông nàn bấy, Suối có cầm thông có tiếng tiêu (25).

At Mount Án, at evening, among the mulberries, the slanting shadow drifts; the song rises, ringing, from a few woodcutters. The echo shakes the rock as though jade hung there; it sends back a fragrance, and the moon seems to beat the time of a celestial music. Vast and high, the song leaps over the sky and earth of the Hán; deep blue, it swears fidelity to the mountains and waters of Yao. That friend who understands the sound, how warm he is: the stream has its zither, and the pine its flute.

Notes

(1) The cover reads: *Hoán tỉnh châu dân từ, extracts from the Ô Châu cận lục*, and the first column of the first page: "This book is extracted from the *Ô Châu cận lục*, bound separately as a distinct collection; it is not a defective work." In fact Dương Văn An's *Ô Châu cận lục* does not contain the *Hoán tỉnh châu dân từ*. The joining of the two works can only have happened at the time of copying (after *The Hán Nôm Heritage of Việt Nam — An Annotated Catalogue*, ed. Trần Nghĩa and François Gros, p. 815).

(2) *General Collection of Vietnamese Literature*, vol. 6, op. cit., p. 315.

(3) *Tàn*: in fact the word *tản* (parasol, canopy), transcribed here as *tàn* for the sake of the rhyme.

(4) *Đáu đáu*: with a stubborn, single heart.

(5) *Tiều*: the woodcutter.

(6) *Lớp chớp*: like *lớp lớp*, layer upon layer. *Quyến*: to think of, to be attached to.

(7) *Trướng*: a mountain range spread out like a screen.

(8) *Lắt*: to pick, to break off (a Central Vietnamese term): "to go into the garden and pick a few fragrant shoots".

(9) *Mục*: the young buffalo herder.

(10) *Trường An*: the capital of ancient China from the Han onward; later the word came to mean the capital.

(11) *Tĩnh thổ*: the Pure Land, the world of bliss, the Buddha's land.

(12) *Thiền thiên*: the sky of meditation. *Chú*: the ritual master's secret formula.

(13) *Vạn giang*: the fishing village on the river. *Ác*: the solar orb, the sun.

(14) *Biển*: a board of wood or light metal bearing an inscription.

(15) *Neo*: a two-pronged iron anchor dropped to the bottom to hold a boat.

(16) *Biên đình*: the frontier, the border zone.

(17) *Sa thành*: the citadel in a land of sand and dust.

(18) *Dửng dửng*: to raise the voice halfway.

(19) This line has only five syllables.

(20) *Khứng*: to consent (an archaic term). The line means that one who has worn the war tunic will not let his resolve soften.

(21) *Bồ duyên*: the bank of rushes, a kind of sedge.

(22) *Ca dăng dỏi*: a song that rises without break and carries far. "*Dăng dỏi* in the ear, the sound of flutes and strings" (*Quốc âm thi tập*).

(23) *Phủ*: to beat time. *Thiều*: the *thiều* music.

(24) *Cao khoáng*: high and broad.

(25) *Cầm thông*: the wind in the pines, which sounds like a zither. *Tiêu*: the vertical flute.

15. The *Mặc Trai sứ tập* within the tradition of poems written before famous sites in foreign lands

Bùi Thiết — Hanoi University of Culture

[source: 36.doc]

Hoàng giáp Đinh Nho Hoàn (1671–1715), on his mission as deputy envoy of the Đại Việt legation to the court and emperor of the Qing, set out in mid-February 1715 and followed the road our legations customarily took; unhappily, before it reached Beijing, he fell ill and died.

A statesman and a diligent public servant, entrusted with many important offices at the capital and in the provinces, he had little leisure to write; or, if he wrote, it was not much — unless his work has been lost, so that it is now hard for us to reach. Fortunately, during the embassy, having a certain leisure and no urgent business to settle, and passing through the famous sites of a foreign land, he found himself compelled — perhaps against his will, perhaps by impulse — to do in verse the work of an "amateur cameraman". His poems set out his state of mind, his innermost thoughts, his attitude before each monument and before his age. It has been said that Mặc Trai's poetry, whatever its brush and its measure, expresses loyalty to the country and piety towards parents and ancestors. This is true of almost all literary men of all periods, from the remotest past to the present.

The *Mặc Trai sứ tập*, published in Vietnamese in 2009, comprises ninety-three poems in Chinese, all transcribed in Sino-Vietnamese and translated into the national script, which allows the reader to enjoy his inspiration and gives whoever wishes to go deeper a text both necessary and sufficient. Almost all these poems were composed on the embassy road, over thousands of kilometres, through many days and nights of waking and sleeping, drinking wine and contemplating the mountains and waters of a foreign country — sometimes joyful scenes, more often sad ones, waking the memory of his native land and meditation on a distant and turbulent past.

Before each site of that foreign land, Mặc Trai has his own way of looking, like no one else's. From his verse one may draw out a few broad currents of feeling, more or less pronounced.

First, the expression of an extremely heavy responsibility: that of going on embassy to a neighbour that has caused our country and our people much trouble. Even today many imagine that an embassy is merely a leisurely diplomatic journey — all the more so a tribute mission according to historical custom. Mặc Trai went to the Qing as an envoy of Đại Việt; he does not dwell on the legation's responsibility, but on crossing the frontier gate into the territory of the Great Qing he composed *Quá Quan thượng*, translated as "At the Pass" — better, "At the Frontier Gate". Original:

> Thế cô vô dị diệc vô nan Vạn lý hàm tiên cảm tị nan Nhân bách niên thân đa khổ nhật Quá Quan nhất nhật thập phân nan

Vietnamese version:

> The hinge of the world holds easy and hard as one; the king's command reaches ten thousand leagues: how fail it? The hardship will have lasted almost a whole life, but the day one crosses the frontier the burden is ten times heavier.

Crossing the frontier gate is no exhausting climb; and yet, according to Mặc Trai, it is ten times harder than an ordinary day. It is not the hardship of body and muscle but that of a mission: to preserve the country's good name before a neighbour that is "a great state of small men",

forever seeking to humiliate and absorb its neighbours — as so many Đại Việt legations have witnessed and had to face, so as not to let the nation's honour be insulted.

Second, before the grand sites laden with the tragic and heroic history and culture of the foreign land, Mặc Trai admires and praises, but without abasing himself or being ashamed of his own country: he keeps his head high and affirms with pride that he is a man of Việt.

The poem *Đề Tượng Tỵ sơn* bears witness. Vietnamese version:

> A far-off place, aloof from the world's dust; the mountain wind whistles and swallows the dark rain. The moss gleams, the flowers leap, the sky is a brocade of stars; the rock juts out, and the moon floods it with silver light. It is pleasant to make one's tryst on Thuấn's high mountain — this is no summit as low as Kê Sơn. Born in the commandery of Tượng, facing north, I remember always the man of the South, and my heart does not falter.

Mặc Trai contemplates Thuấn's mountain in its grandeur; compared with Mount Mồng Gà (Kê Sơn), only three or four hundred metres high, in his own country, it is no small thing — and yet he is proud to be a man of the commandery of Tượng, a man of the South, for thousands of years past.

Likewise in *Đề Độc Tú sơn tự*. Original (extract):

> Việt Sơn do tại Việt thành tại Thả bồi huân phong ý Bách khan

Vietnamese version:

> The mountain of Việt is indeed the one of old; the citadel of Việt is still here. Leaning back against the foot of the tree, I look at the southern sky in the wind.

In another setting, before the temple of Phục Ba — Ma Yuan — at the Ô Man shoal, Mặc Trai takes pride in the deeds of the two Trưng sisters, in *Passing the Ô Man shoal, on the temple of Ma Phục Ba*. Vietnamese version:

> At Quế Lâm, Ma Yuan keeps his majesty for ever; at Lãng Bạc, the two Ladies rise, splendid and loyal. The bronze pillar is not yet worn away, the water post is cold; the two circuits of Nga and Quảng stand proud.

Mặc Trai does not follow the thought of the famous poets before the Yellow Crane Pavilion, and is not overawed by Cui Hao's celebrated Tang poem (Vietnamese version):

> Who rode the yellow crane, and where has he gone, that the Yellow Crane Pavilion stands alone and bare? The yellow crane departed long ago; a thousand years of white clouds are flying still. At Hán Dương the river clears, the trees line up; on the far shoal of Anh Vũ the green grass is thick. The native land is lost in the twilight; on the river, mist and waves: whose heart do they sadden?

Take Cui Hao's last two lines: *Nhật mộ hương quan hà xứ thị / Yên ba giang thượng sử nhân sầu* — "The native land is lost in the twilight; on the river, mist and waves: whose heart do they sadden?", in Tản Đà's Vietnamese version. With these two lines Cui Hao speaks his nagging homesickness at every nightfall, far from his country; he watches the mist drift lightly on the

river and takes it for the blue smoke of the hearth, at the hour when the mother prepares the evening meal for the whole household. This recalls the line: “Even without the twilight mist, I long for home” — Huy Cận, in *Tràng giang*, from the days of the New Poetry movement.

Nor is he detached as Nguyễn Du is in his *Yellow Crane Pavilion* (Vietnamese version):

> Where and since when have the immortals gone? Their trace remains here, down to the shore. Today comes, yesterday goes; Lư is dreaming still; the crane has flown, the pavilion is empty, and Hạo still makes verses. Beyond the veranda, mist and waves stretch to infinity; before the eyes, the row of trees seems hardly real. To whom shall I open this hoarded feeling? The bright moon and the cool wind remain indifferent to it.

The last two lines, *Trung tình vô hạn băng thùy cổ / Minh nguyệt thanh phong dã bất tri*, show that before the ruin of the Yellow Crane Pavilion Nguyễn Du is not sad: he is on the contrary quite indifferent to everything, even to the bright moon and the cool wind, because he has no one to whom he might open what he carries within.

Then comes Mặc Trai’s poem, *Passing the town of Vũ Xương, on the Yellow Crane Pavilion* (Vietnamese version):

> The crane gone, the pavilion still has Crane Mountain; above the pavilion’s vault, a few higher vaults. On the Xương river the moon’s shadow strikes against the door; on the Hán Dương range the stars glitter at the curtain. Under the old stove the yellow millet still keeps its fire; in today’s garden the red jujube still gives out its scent. If only I could climb to the ridge of Phoenix Mountain, who would dare vie with me in the art of the flute?

The last two lines — *Phượng sơn tại nhĩ như kham giá / Xuy địch ưng năng học thứ ông*, that is: if one could ride up Phoenix Mountain close by, whoever wished to excel at the flute would have to come and learn it from this old man — have nothing left of the diffuse melancholy before a ruin. Before the same Yellow Crane Pavilion, Cui Hao is vaguely sad, Nguyễn Du unfeeling, and Mặc Trai nurses a hope that rises above the rubble: as though he would not leave behind the thousand-year sorrow of a fallen tower, but rather what still stands — Phoenix Mountain, higher even than the Pavilion — and, if he could climb it, would play the flute there and teach his art to all who dream of leaving a flautist’s name.

Third, a current of attachment to village and country runs deep through Mặc Trai’s poetry, all through his days of embassy; at every feature that recalls his homeland, he remembers his village and his distant country away to the south. He is homesick before he has even crossed the frontier. Barely arrived at the town of Lạng Sơn, he is already thinking of Tràng An, for his family lived at Thăng Long. In *Passing the town of Lạng Sơn*, the last two lines:

> To live outside the walls, the river close by the market; in a foreign land, the thought returns to Tràng An.

River crossings above all recall to him the Ngàn Phố of his own country, the Nhị Hà at Thăng Long… It is rivers that bring him the most feeling. So in *Changing boats at Nam Ninh*, the end of the piece:

> The soul's dream returns to Câu Lậu; the red disc rises over the native land. This makes of me a proud old man, riding the waves and the mist.

Likewise in *At evening, the boat moored at the Tương Tư shoal*:

> Veiled moon, the boat lies at the Tương Tư shoal; sadness comes, and sword and zither are left stupefied. In the dusk we seek a monastery: pity for the traveller; the boat settles low to avoid the wave, the fisherman refuses. Behind the smoke, four trees, two coiled dragons; beyond the reach of the cranes' wings, not one letter. Sweet spring and young shoots, a garden heavy with fruit: at the foot of Tiêu Sơn, the heart tightens at the memory of home.

Mặc Trai's poetry also reserves for his close kin — his mother, his nurse — accents rare even among the greatest poets. The poem *Remembering my nurse*:

> The old nurse leans against the door, her back bent; at her age her body must be very weary. What remedy shall I ask for to dispel this sadness? In the midst of a foreign land, O companion of my examination year! In the garden at home, the chestnuts and the hazels; here, on this branch, men and horses, verse and music. Falling short of the bird that feeds its mother, I sigh; beside the carriage, I bow a thousand times before Tử Dư.

And for his mother, Mặc Trai has this poem, *Feelings on the anniversary of my mother's death, the 17th of the seventh month*:

> Pity the child orphaned at three: today, on the anniversary of his mother's death, he is in a foreign land. No three cups of wine to pour in offering; the stick of incense barely out, a tear falls in secret. Clouds veil the horse's head, the dew soaks everything; tears flood the hem of the robe all along the road. I have recited the verses of the *Lục Nga* through: the heart believes it has come home, morning and evening. This word loyalty, I strive to fulfil — and it is also the word piety, the duty I render.

Reading this poem closely, I think of a six-eight quatrain by the poet Đinh Phạm Thái, also on his mother:

> The old flock has settled, all white, on the clump of bamboo; the sunset clouds have gone off towards the distant glow. The gaze fixed on that place, the native land: if only I still had an old mother to wait for.

Two poets of the same lineage, more than two hundred years apart: one weeps for a mother who died very young, when the child was only three; the other has no old mother left, and is himself at the age called rare. One vein, one current of poetry running through the generations of a single lineage in remembrance of the mother: it is deep, and one cannot read it without a tear.

One might draw from the *Mặc Trai sứ tập* all his affection for his kin, his village and his country, so as to understand the man and his feelings during those sad days in a foreign land; but we shall return to this on another occasion.

One last thing about Mặc Trai: a vague premonition concerning the day when the legation would return to report its success to the sovereign. He speaks a great deal of the return; his anxieties and expectations may be noted. Arrived at the Ô Man shoal, he has two poems that both express hope:

> The sacred breath of heaven and earth, all that majesty: may they let the envoy go and come freely.

And:

> At the inn, the flute of the third watch; loyalty and piety, and the joy of being in health. Sooner or later the day of return draws near: at the city gate the envoy's music will sound.

And in *Remembering Trung Dũng…*:

> I wish only to come back alive, to serve the wine on the mat at home and walk the dyke outside the walls.

It is as though anxiety appears, and a keen desire to stay alive in order to return.

But he has something like a premonition, or an ill omen; and although he uses words full of hope, he cannot hide what is certainly going to befall him and the legation. One sees it in reading his poems in order. The premonition appears very early, from the departure from Thăng Long. In *Feelings on crossing the Nhĩ Hà river*, he writes:

> On the day of victorious return, the envoy's flowered barque will break into a glad smile on meeting the friends of former times.

Who are these "friends of former times"? Why not "old friends"? In popular speech, "friends of former times", "people of former times" mean the dead; and with friends of former times one can only exchange a smile — not serve them wine or walk with them outside the walls.

Arrived at the Lã Côi relay, the premonition is more painful still; in *Passing the Lã Côi relay*, he writes:

> We call for the lamps to be lit to examine the tribute chests; and suddenly all is empty and the bell is cold.

Is this not the foretelling of the body brought back by boat to Thăng Long, everything gone icy, the tribute chest the legation carries home being his own corpse?

And had that truth not been foretold as early as his arrival in Cao Bằng, in the poem *Meeting a guest from Fujian in mỵ chamber*?

> Soon, in a foreign land, without a home: if we are to meet again, it will only be in a dream.

One reads that line with sadness: Mặc Trai was about to join the dead, and whoever wished to see him again could do so only in a dream.

Writing about Mặc Trai's poetry is not my strong suit; these are only rapid views, which I wished to share.

Hanoi, 21 April 2015

16. Doctor Nguyễn Trọng Thường and Hoàng giáp Đinh Nho Hoàn's embassy poetry collection

Prof. Chương Thâu — Institute of History

[source: 32.doc]

There is an old popular saying: "The men of Thanh rely on power, the men of Nghệ on the spirits." The land of Nghệ, comprising the two provinces of Nghệ An and Hà Tĩnh, is likewise held to be "a sacred land that produces men of distinction". On this land, generation after generation, there have appeared many illustrious ministers and able generals, men of high talent and great virtue, laureates of the highest examinations, whose writings dominated their age. This "sacred land" has produced many "men of distinction" who left services to their native place and to the nation.

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, under the rule of the Lê kings and Trịnh lords, the home district of Nam Đàn counted many "illustrious families and respected clans"; in the Nguyễn Trọng lineage of Trung Cần commune (now Nam Trung) there arose in particular a doctor named NGUYỄN TRỌNG THƯỜNG, who passed at the examination of the year Nhâm Thìn (1712), under King Lê Dụ Tông. He is counted among the "four tigers", that is, the four men who excelled in verse and prose, along with Nguyễn Chương, Đỗ Minh and Lê Đăng Truyền.

The sources agree that Nguyễn Trọng Thường was a doctor of upright, loyal and generous character; wherever he served in the provinces the people praised him. Under the reign of Long Đức the court raised him to the dignity of *Gia hạnh đại phu*, right vice-minister of Justice and chamberlain (1734); he was appointed to go on embassy to the Qing and died on the return journey (1735). He was posthumously granted the office of left vice-minister of Personnel and the title Duke of Cần, and then, at a second investiture, that of Minister of Works.

No less important: Doctor Nguyễn Trọng Thường was the son-in-law of a distinguished scholar of Hương Sơn district, Hà Tĩnh province — Hoàng giáp Đinh Nho Hoàn, of An Ấp commune (now Sơn Hòa, that is, Gôi Mỹ). The Đinh Nho lineage there is a "respected clan", renowned in the land of Nghệ. As Nguyễn Trọng Thường himself says: "He was a gentle and scrupulous man, intelligent by nature and eager to learn; there was no book he had not read, and in occasional verse he was especially outstanding." At the examination of the year Canh Thìn, twenty-first year of the Chính Hòa era (1700), he passed as a doctor of the second rank (*Hoàng giáp*). More than two thousand candidates sat that examination, and only the nineteen most outstanding were selected, among them Đinh Nho Hoàn in fourth place: his renown was resounding. To become the son-in-law of such a laureate was an honour for the young Doctor Nguyễn Trọng Thường; he certainly informed himself carefully about his father-in-law and took pride in his standing as a "worthy son-in-law". Of every stage of his father-in-law's career Nguyễn Trọng Thường knew the detail — and above all of the months of the embassy to the northern country (1715–1716).

Đinh Nho Hoàn was then deputy envoy, with the office of chamberlain of the Bureau of Seals, alongside the deputy envoy Nguyễn Mậu Áng, secretary in the Personnel service, in the legation led by the two chief envoys Nguyễn Công Cơ, left vice-minister of Finance, and Lê Anh Tuấn, chamberlain of the Imperial Stud, sent to bear the annual tribute to the Qing. On the way, before reaching Yên Kinh (Beijing) and dying suddenly, Đinh Nho Hoàn had discharged all his duties, even to composing the three pieces of felicitation for the Qing emperor's birthday. The rest of the time, passing the stages of the road, the historical monuments, the shrines of great Chinese figures, he composed occasional poems. But one sees plainly that all these poems bring the author back to his own country, itself a land of charming mountains and waters, a country of brocade with no lack of heroes and valiant women — and that is the dominant feeling of the poet Đinh on this embassy.

In the course of this historic journey, Đinh Nho Hoàn set down a manuscript of embassy poems which his son-in-law Nguyễn Trọng Thường later gathered under the title *MẶC ÔNG SỨ TẬP* — the embassy collection of Master Mặc Trai, Mặc Trai being Đinh Nho Hoàn's pen name.

Nguyễn Trọng Thường writes plainly: "I, Thường, in my grief and regret, searched the trunk and caskets the court had sent back to the house, and found the autograph drafts he had left; I sorted and arranged them piece by piece, and respectfully gave them the title *Mặc Ông sứ tập*, noting there what I knew so as to ease the reading, in the hope of making what he left of his will shine before the generations to come… The son-in-law, Nguyễn Trọng Thường, secretary in the Works service, pen name Cửu Đường, wiped away his tears to write this presentation."

This proves that in gathering his father-in-law's collection, Nguyễn Trọng Thường took pains to reread it very closely, to arrange the pieces one by one within Mặc Ông's manuscript, and to add notes on what he knew so as to ease the reading, in order to bring to light what his father-in-law had left. It shows in this son-in-law a careful, serious and methodical labour, worthy of esteem — and forbids us to overlook the "high quality" of the collection.

Nguyễn Trọng Thường's presentation further tells us that Mặc Ông's posthumous papers were not limited to these 117 poems: there were also some pieces in *nôm* and prose texts, all expressing loyalty to the king and piety towards parents, which he did not include in the *Mặc Ông sứ tập* as we have it. And out of these 117 selected poems, today's editors — the team of Ngô Đức Thọ, Cao Thế Lữ, Thái Kim Đỉnh and Đinh Phạm Thái — retained only 93 for publication, under the title *Mặc Trai sứ tập* (Literature Publishing House, Hanoi, 2009).

The *Mặc Trai sứ tập*, derived from the *Mặc Ông sứ tập*, is held by these scholars to be "a whole poetic legacy" and "a journal of the embassy itinerary". Everywhere he passed, Mặc Ông composed — poems in Chinese and poems in *nôm* which illuminate one another, now in pentasyllables, now in heptasyllables, all different, and the more complete as to genres.

The team that established the *Mặc Trai sứ tập* praises the collection for its "poetic images of a fresh and savoury singularity", and comments in winged terms: "The painter makes his picture with powders and colours; the poet Mặc Ông weaves words into a work of art out of the very fibres of a subtle soul that catches the radiations of the outer world in distant space…"

Is Mặc Ông's poetry indeed such? It is for men of letters and intellectuals to debate further. For the generation of those who make and study poetry today, it must nonetheless be

acknowledged that most of his pieces may be ranked among renowned poems — and especially within the genre of the embassy poetry and prose of distinguished scholars, past and present.

And to whom do we owe this collection, which our descendants will go on praising? For that reason we express our gratitude to Doctor Nguyễn Trọng Thường, of Trung Cần commune, Nam Đàn district, who once had respect enough, and an eye keen enough, for his father-in-law Hoàng giáp Đinh Nho Hoàn of Sơn Hòa, Hương Sơn district, that our literature should possess this fine work.

We who come after, men of the land of Nghệ, offer a stick of incense before the souls of these eminent forebears of our country, on the occasion of the two hundred and ninetieth anniversary of Mặc Ông's death and the two hundred and eightieth of Nguyễn Trọng Thường's.

Hanoi, in the first month of autumn of the year Ất Mùi (2015) — Ch. Th.

PART III. FAMILY AND LINEAGE

17. On Lady Phan Thị Viên, secondary wife of Đinh Nho Hoàn

Thái Huy Bích — former vice-chairman of the People's Committee of Hưng Nguyên district

[source: 35.doc]

I. What the sources say of Lady Phan Thị Viên

1. Lady Phan Thị Viên appears in the sources. Lê Quang Định's *Unified Geography of Hoàng Việt* (Vietnamese translation by Phan Đăng, Thuận Hóa Publishing House, p. 438) writes of the temple of the Valiant Woman: "This temple is in An Ấp commune, Hương Sơn district; the spirit of the Valiant Woman is worshipped there. It is said in the *Lives of Valiant Women* that under the Lê there was in An Ấp commune a beloved concubine of Hoàng giáp Đinh Nho Hoàn, of pure and grave countenance. From her youth she excelled in music and was well versed in letters. At fifteen Đinh Nho Hoàn took her as concubine. Barely two years had passed, and that deep affection had not yet been repaid, when one day Nho Hoàn was ordered to go on embassy to the northern country; she went with him, unable to part from him, and vowed to keep chastity and a wife's duty, while he himself felt an attachment beyond measure. Before leaving her, he gave her a silk robe. The journey passed quickly, the days flew like a shuttle, and Nho Hoàn suddenly fell ill and died on the embassy road. At the news she wept and wished to die with him. When Nho Hoàn's coffin was brought back for burial, she took her own life with the silk robe he had given her long before. Hearing of this, King Lê rewarded her most generously, ordered the people of the commune to raise a temple for her worship, granted her twenty acres of cult rice land, and bestowed a gilded panel engraved with the three characters 'gate of the faithful widow', hung before the temple door. The characters still shine today, and the incense has never ceased to burn."

2. The *Complete Annals of Đại Việt*, vol. I, *Continuation of the Principal Annals* (trans. Nguyễn Kim Hưng and Ngô Thế Long, Social Sciences Publishing House, 1982, pp. 103–104), contains this passage: “Honour was paid to the virtuous and faithful woman, Lady Phan. Lady Phan, of Do Lễ commune, Hưng Nguyên district (in Nghệ An), was the secondary wife of Đinh Nho Hoàn. Nho Hoàn went on embassy to the North and died on the road. After he had been brought back and buried, Lady Phan, in her grief, hanged herself. The matter came to the court’s notice. Orders were given to grant cult rice fields and to confer on her posthumously the title *Á Thân Nhân*. A temple was raised for her worship — a shrine still stands today in An Ấp commune, Hương Sơn district — and a gilded panel engraved with the two characters ‘faithful widow’ was bestowed and hung in her honour.”

3. The *Cultural Monograph of Hưng Nguyên District* (ed. Ninh Viết Giao, Nghệ An Publishing House, 2009, p. 750), under the heading of notable figures of Hưng Nguyên, writes of Lady Phan Thị Viên: “A faithful widow, native of Do Lễ commune; it is not yet known from which village of Hưng Nguyên district. She married Đinh Nho Hoàn, a native of Gôi Vỹ, now Sơn Hòa commune, Hương Sơn district, Hà Tĩnh province. During the Vĩnh Thịnh era (1705–1720), Đinh Nho Hoàn, who had passed as *Hoàng giáp* and served at court, was assigned to the legation sent to the Qing. His task perfectly accomplished, he fell gravely ill on the return journey and died on the road. When his body reached the house, she threw herself down and wept most piteously. The burial done, she hanged herself to ‘follow’ her husband.

“Lady Viên was a secondary wife, but she was her husband’s companion in poetry, and the two lived as kindred spirits. Before dying she composed a poem in Chinese lamenting her husband, in words both grieving and firm. That poem is recorded in the genealogy of the Đinh Nho lineage. After her death, the Lê conferred on her the title Faithful Widow and, in 1717, had the people of Gôi Vỹ raise a temple for her worship, with twenty acres of cult rice land.”

4. According to the *Hương Yên phổ tự*, the oldest genealogy of the Đinh Nho lineage, Lady Viên’s father held the office of *Thủ bộ*; unjustly convicted, he was cleared by Đinh Nho Công (1637–1695) and released. Later, when Đinh Nho Công returned to the capital to hold the office of *Thiêm đô* — probably assistant censor, fifth degree, principal class, of the Censorate, roughly the equivalent of today’s supreme procuracy — he took the *Thủ bộ* with him. The Đinh Nho genealogy reads: “he entered service at the *nha môn*”. This may be understood thus: once cleared, the *Thủ bộ* was transferred by Đinh Nho Công to the capital to serve as his assistant, that is, as a minor official of the Censorate. *Nha môn* means the courthouse. As for the office of *Thủ bộ*, the *Dictionary of Vietnamese Offices* states: “*Thủ bạ* (that is, *Thủ bộ*): a title of the minor civil service; the village *thủ bạ* is in charge of civil registration.” The *Thủ bộ* was thus an official of the lowest grade, yet still of the ninth degree, secondary class: he must have studied and passed at least as a bachelor, and drew a stipend from the court.

Đinh Nho Hoàn died in 1716, and his body did not reach the house until ten months later; in 1717 Lady Viên died to follow her husband, at the age of twenty-one. She would therefore have been born in 1696, a year after Đinh Nho Công’s death.

When Lady Viên was three — by our estimate, in 1698 — the *Thủ bộ* fell gravely ill; on the point of death, he took his daughter’s hand and charged her to repay the debt to the assistant censor who had cleared him.

When Lady Viên was fifteen — by our estimate, in 1713 — her mother, amid the troubles, took her to open a stall at the Đồng Xuân market in Thăng Long. It was there that, by chance, Đinh Nho Hoàn, "walking out to take the air, saw a clean stall and stepped in to rest". This heaven-ordained meeting made Phan Thị Viên the secondary wife of the *Hoàng giáp*, in 1714, thus fulfilling the *Thủ bộ*'s dying wish. Their life together was short, but their attachment extreme, and it has entered history.

The Đinh Nho genealogy tells us rather little about her family, but informs us fairly well about her literary gift. It preserves three of the ten poems she composed in farewell to her husband setting out on embassy, one funeral oration for him, one poem of gratitude to her mother and one poem of gratitude to the principal wife, Lady Lê. All are written in Chinese.

II. Research and hypotheses on the origins of Lady Phan Thị Viên

To this day no Phan lineage of Hưng Nguyên district claims Lady Phan Thị Viên, whom both the Lê and the Nguyễn courts honoured and deified. We therefore have no direct evidence as to her father and mother. The question must accordingly be approached by degrees, in the hope of recovering reliable information.

1. Research

Investigation of Do Lễ commune shows that throughout the long period from the Lê to the Nguyễn its name did not change. It comprised three villages fairly far apart, along a small river now silted up and turned to rice fields. The first is Đôn Nhượng village, now in Hưng Đạo commune. The second is Yên Nậu village, now in Hưng Thông commune. The third is Ngọc Điền village, now wards 1, 2, 3 and 4 of the town of Hưng Nguyên. The Phan lineages of Đôn Nhượng and Ngọc Điền produced, in the feudal period, no laureate above the rank of bachelor. Only Yên Nậu village had a Phan lineage of good standing, which still preserves its genealogy; here is its opening (partly translated):

> "On the sixteenth day of the seventh month of the seventh year of the Tự Đức era (1854). At Yên Nậu village, Do Lễ commune, Thông Lãng canton, Hưng Nguyên district, Anh Sơn prefecture. We, Phan Công Phu and Phan Công Tịch, together with our brothers of the lineage, have reflected together thus: the tree has a root, the water has a source. It is thanks to our ancestors, who founded our patrimony, that our lineage has been able to develop as it has to this day… Our ancestor Phan Công Thu came to take a wife in our village and begot Phan Công Tiến…"

In summary, what follows states that Phan Công Tiến remained some time at Yên Nậu, then went to take a second wife at Đan Nhiễm village and became the founding ancestor of the Phan branch there, although his tomb is at Yên Nậu. Some of his descendants returned to the ancestral village at Yên Nậu, among them Phan Công Lãng. The genealogy of the Phan lineage of Yên Nậu is very summary; it reads in part:

> "… Can Trạch, styled Công Lãng, returned to Yên Nậu village, Do Lễ commune, Hưng Nguyên district."

His tablet reads:

> “Our ancestor, formerly Marquis of Thập Lý, raised to the office of *Tri bộ*, converted to the Buddha’s way, the venerable Phan, courtesy name Công Lãng, posthumous name Mẫn Trực. He begot Công Cơ, who died young, Công Nhu, and three daughters.”

That is: Phan Công Lãng, also called Can Trạch, returned to Yên Nậu village, Do Lễ commune, Hưng Nguyên district. In his lifetime he was Marquis of Thập Lý, promoted *Tri bộ*, and followed the Buddha’s way. He had two sons and three daughters. The elder son, Phan Công Cơ, died young; the second was Phan Công Nhu.

The Yên Nậu Phan genealogy also states that Phan Công Nhu, son of Công Lãng, rose under the Lê to the office of deputy commissioner, then was promoted commander of the palace guard, before serving in Hải Dương province. He died on the eighth day of the fourth month. His tomb is in Hanoi — it should rather read Thăng Long, now Hanoi. Công Nhu had three children, two sons and a daughter. The elder son, Phan Công Bảng, a soldier garrisoned at Hải Dương, took a wife there and became the founding ancestor of the Phan lineage of Đan Thà commune, Đường Hào district, Hải Dương province. The second son, Phan Công Thục, took a wife at home in Do Lễ commune and continued to develop the Phan branch at Yên Nậu. The daughter was named Phan Thị Nguyên; the genealogy does not say who her husband was.

The great Phan lineage of Hương Cái commune (now Hưng Tây commune, Hưng Nguyên district)

1. The founding ancestor is Phan Nhân Trung, of La Sơn district, Đức Quang prefecture (now Đức Thọ district, Hà Tĩnh province). In the year Tân Mão, second year of the Hồng Đức era (1471), he chose this region to clear and to found a village south of Kẻ Ngòi. He died on the fifteenth day of the first lunar month, year unknown. His tomb is on the summit of Mount Thần, Tràng Đề commune, Hải Đô canton, Hưng Nguyên district (now hamlet 3, Nghi Mỹ commune, Nghi Lộc district).

2. Phan Nhân Chính, son of the founding ancestor Phan Nhân Trung, was born in the reign of Lê Thánh Tông (1442–1497). He rose to the office of vice-minister.

3. Phan Tiến Thọ, son of Phan Nhân Chính, passed as a doctor in the fourteenth year of the Nguyên Hòa era (1546) and rose to the office of Minister of Finance.

4. Phan Nhân Kinh and Phan Nhân Tông, both sons of Phan Tiến Thọ, each rose to the rank of minister.

5. Phan Duy Nhã, who placed first in the provincial examination, rose to the office of prefect of Đức Quang. Here the genealogy breaks off for several generations; the descendants of the Yên Nậu Phan lineage have joined it up thus:

6. Phan Công Diễn (possibly the same as Công Thu). — 7. Phan Công Tiến. — 8. Phan Văn Giao. — 9. Phan Công Lãng. — 10. Phan Công Nhu. — 11. Phan Công Thục. — 12. Phan Công Phu. — 13. Phan Công Hành. — 14. Phan Công Vinh. — 15. Phan Công Hoan (now ninety-one years old).

The descendants of Phan Bội Châu, at Đan Nhiễm village, have joined the genealogy from the tenth generation thus:

10. Phan Công Hộ, second son of Công Lãng, younger brother of Trác Nhu of Yên Nậu village. — 11. Phan Công Trì. — 12. Phan Công Phổ. — 13. Phan Bội Châu, born 1867.

2. Hypotheses on the origins of Lady Phan Thị Viên

Lady Phan Thị Viên's family has the following characteristics.

First, with such poetic gift and such virtue, she can only be a scholar's daughter. In the past a few well-off families had their sons learn Chinese from childhood, and yet few of them passed the examinations: most came to nothing. That a daughter should learn Chinese was exceedingly rare. Now, if there was a girl "of pure and grave countenance, who from her youth excelled in music and was well versed in letters", as the sources say, it cannot be maintained that she came of a common family. She had moreover lost her father at three. Her mother must have been a capable woman, from a family of good breeding, to raise alone a child of such talent and virtue. From this we infer that she was born into a family of Confucian tradition.

Second, her father had held office, and had moreover lived in Thăng Long. One must have held office to be falsely accused of corruption and imprisoned for years. Đinh Nho Công took him into his service at the courthouse in Thăng Long, that is, as an assistant under his orders. It is possible that at this time he brought his wife and children to Thăng Long. After the *Thủ bộ*'s death, mother and daughter would have withdrawn to some neighbouring province — Hải Dương, for instance — to bring up the child. So at least one may suppose, since the Đinh Nho genealogy reads: "Later, the mother of that girl, amid the troubles, brought her child to Thăng Long." And then: "One day, having leisure, he [Nho Hoàn] went out to take the air in Cửa Nam street, saw a clean stall and stepped in to rest." At that time, going from Nghệ An to Thăng Long took more than ten days on foot and cost a good deal. Had Lady Viên's mother farmed the land in her home commune of Do Lễ, she would have struggled to feed herself and could certainly not have taken her child to open a stall in Thăng Long.

Third, Lady Viên having been born around 1696, her father must have been born by about 1670, that is, three hundred and forty-five years ago.

From these deductions it emerges that Phan Công Lãng could be the father of Lady Phan Thị Viên. The offices of *Thủ bộ* and *Tri bộ* are both minor: might the genealogy not have confused them? If so, Phan Công Nhu would be Lady Viên's brother.

It may be that on the *Thủ bộ*'s death his widow took her children, Phan Công Nhu and Phan Thị Viên, to Hải Dương to make a living and bring them up. Some time later she would have gone to Thăng Long to open a stall, and there met Hoàng giáp Đinh Nho Hoàn by chance.

The foregoing is only one way of approaching the question from the documents gathered. The evidence is not yet sufficient to affirm it with certainty. We propose that the Đinh lineage and scholars continue the inquiry so as to reach an accurate conclusion on the origins of Lady Phan Thị Viên.

Hưng Nguyên, 1 June 2015

18. A sketch of the life of Lady Lê, principal wife of Hoàng giáp Đinh Nho Hoàn

Đinh Nho Quỳ

[source: 26.doc]

I. Introduction

It would truly be a gap if, in speaking of "the life and work of Hoàng giáp Đinh Nho Hoàn", we said nothing of his first wife, Lady Lê, whose personal name was LÊ THỊ VỆ.

To gather material, I went to the native village of her father's family, which the *Hương Yên phổ tự* mentions only briefly: "The principal wife was of the Lê lineage, personal name Vệ, of Đông village, Hữu Băng commune, daughter of a house of letters, a woman of good bearing."

It was therefore certain that at Sơn Băng — formerly Hữu Băng — there was, in the hamlet of Đông, a great Lê lineage. One fine morning, less stifling than the days before, I chose "a good day and a good hour" and set off on my battered old Dream — which nonetheless "serves me well" — over the Nầm bridge to the hamlet of Đông, now called xóm Đông Sơn, in Sơn Băng commune. Some seven hundred metres from the Nầm bridge, the Lê ancestral hall stands on the right, going from Nầm towards Phố Châu, close to the new National Road 8. The gate runs parallel to the road, while the building's main orientation remains the old one, facing the Ngàn Phố river (see the photograph).

According to the member of the Lê lineage I was able to meet on arriving, the ancestral hall has just been restored thanks to contributions from descendants on both the paternal and maternal sides and from a few patrons, chief among them Mr Lê Thiều and his grandson through the female line, Hồ Mậu Hòe. Previously, though it had not been destroyed by bombs, it had fallen into serious disrepair through time and weather. When I asked him about the lineage's origins, he replied: "The head of the lineage knew it very well and had written it down carefully, but he has just died. One of his grandsons has put the genealogy online, I believe." The next piece of information proved more useful. To my question — "Is this indeed the Lê ancestral hall, and was this place formerly the village of Đông, in Hữu Băng commune?" — he answered: "That is right. This village was formerly called the village of Đông. It seems the Lê ancestor came from Thạch Hà to clear the land and found a hamlet here; then, when the population was sufficient, he asked the mandarin's leave to found a village, which was granted, and the village was given the ancestor's name, Đông, that is, Lê Đông — hence the village of Đông, today xóm Đông Sơn."

That answer filled me with joy, for the surprise ran quite counter to what I had supposed: I had thought the village of Đông took its name from lying east of Hữu Băng commune — the more so as I had pictured the ancestral hall "near the Nầm bridge". And here it bore its founder's name! After taking some photographs I took my leave and went home to "switch the machine on at once" and search for "the Lê lineage of Sơn Băng". The result exceeded my hopes. I give here a summary, gathering what bears on Lady Lê's origins, with a few photographs in support.

II. The origins of Lê Thị Vệ's family

"The ancestors of this branch of the Lê lineage come from Trung Liệt commune, Thạch Hà district, near Mount Nài. The founding ancestor, LÊ ĐÔNG, went up to Hữu Băng commune to clear the land and found a hamlet, and then asked the authorities' leave to found a village." From the genealogy: "Lê Đông obtained the right to call in inhabitants and found a hamlet; he was permitted to establish a village, which therefore took his name: the hamlet of Đông. In 1978, when the inhabitants of Đông village were moved, a bulldozer dislodged the foundations

of his ancestral house and brought up a stone slab bearing the genealogy of our Lê lineage." On that slab are four lines:

> Trưởng nam thừa mạnh chân vi danh Văn võ khoa đồ tôn vi sinh Thân thượng kế thừa nghiêm khóa tử Thạch bi minh kí thế trâm anh
>
> The eldest son takes up the charge, and his name is established; letters and arms, the way of the examinations, give life to the descendants; from father to son passes the strict discipline of study; the stone stele keeps the inscription: a line of caps and ribbons.

Summary of the first part of the genealogy, so far as it concerns Lady Lê

- Founding ancestor: LÊ ĐÔNG, settled at Thạch Hà. Wife: Thái Thị Sở.
- Eldest son: Lê Mậu Lâm. Principal wife: Đào Thị Sả.
- Lê Mậu Lâm had two children: 1. the elder, Lê Đắc Lộc, who had a daughter married at An Ấp — this is precisely Lady Lê Thị Vệ. Text of the genealogy: "The elder, Đắc Lộc, had a daughter married at Yên Ấp; there is today a hermitage and a shrine." 2. the younger, Lê Nhân Cơ, whose wife was Thái Thị Phú.
- They had two sons: the elder Lê Khoan Hồng, the younger Lê Khoan Bình.
- First grandson of the younger branch: the ancestor Trường, under the Lê a provincial licentiate, district magistrate of Thanh Chương, then prefect of Thiên Trường…

Remarks on this extract of the genealogy

The ancestor of the Lê lineage of Đông village — today xóm Đông Sơn, Sơn Bằng commune — is LÊ ĐÔNG, a native of Trung Liệt village, Thạch Hà district, who migrated to Hương Sơn, where he cleared the land and founded a village under the Lê.

Đông begot MẬU LÂM.

Mậu Lâm had two sons; the elder had no son but a daughter married at An Ấp. The genealogy gives neither her name nor her husband's, but its notice bears the words *kim hữu am miếu*, "there is today a hermitage and a shrine". Set beside the *Hương Yên phổ tự*, this daughter married at An Ấp and provided with a hermitage and a shrine CAN BE NO ONE BUT LADY LÊ THỊ VỆ.

Reading the following generations, one may pass this judgment on the lineage. From the founding ancestor Lê Đông to his son Mậu Lâm, and then to his great-granddaughter Lady Lê Thị Vệ, the family had "standing in the village community" but as yet no rank in the sense of the examinations. This agrees with the *Hương Yên phổ tự*'s notice on Lady Lê: "daughter of a house of letters, a woman of good bearing" — nothing more. But in the fourth generation the ancestor Lê Trường passed as a provincial licentiate under the Lê and held the offices of district magistrate of Thanh Chương and prefect of Thiên Trường. The "Lê lineage of Đông village" thus rose gradually to the rank of "great clan", as the four lines of the stone slab said: "… letters and arms, the way of the examinations, give life to the descendants; from father to son passes the strict discipline of study…"

III. What Lady Lê brought when she entered the house of the assistant censor Đinh

Let us begin by estimating her year of birth and that of her marriage into the household of the assistant censor at Yên Ấp. According to the *Hương Yên phổ tự*, "Lady Lê lived seventy-six years; her death anniversary is the fourth day of the sixth month."

According to the inscription on the column of the *Khánh Mặc Trai*, set up in the seventeenth year of the Cảnh Hưng era (1756) at the Gôi temple, besides the donors of rice fields there appears "Lê Hoàng Viễn, who gave fifty quan for the supply of robes and caps" (translation by Ngô Đức Thọ). On my hypothesis — set out in my other paper, "Matters still to be clarified concerning the family and the death of Hoàng giáp Đinh Nho Hoàn" — the Gôi temple was established "in due form" to add the cult of Đinh Nho Công and Đinh Nho Hoàn, on the site of Lady Lê's former house. Why? Because by that date Lady Vệ was dead and her three daughters married. I conclude that by 1756 the mourning for Lady Vệ was complete; she would therefore have died in 1753, aged seventy-six, which gives a birth year of 1753 – 75 = 1678, subtracting 75 to allow for "the year of birth counted as one". Compared with Đinh Nho Hoàn's birth year, 1671, this would make Lady Vệ seven years his junior: the result seems to me reasonable and acceptable. It further follows that she entered the assistant censor's household at sixteen, that is, around 1694; a year later the assistant censor died (1695), and six years after that (1700) her husband passed the great examination as a doctor of the second rank. All these markers are only conjectures — but quite logical and quite plausible, are they not?

Let us return to the main matter.

According to the genealogy of the "Lê lineage of Đông village" that I was able to read, Lady Vệ was the daughter of Lê Mậu Lâm and granddaughter of the founding ancestor Lê Đông, who founded "the village of Đông in Hữu Bằng commune". It is certain that father and son were wealthy and had standing in the community; and one needed a proper education to be village head. And naturally they brought up their children properly — among them their great-granddaughter, Lady Vệ. One sees, then, that the *Hương Yên phổ tự*'s notice — "daughter of a house of letters, a woman of good bearing" — is perfectly accurate.

On entering her husband's house she was indeed "the assistant censor's daughter-in-law", but the patrimony was negligible, for the assistant censor discharged his office "with integrity and competence": "Our forebear was noble and illustrious, but he kept his heart pure, so that there was no patrimony; he could allot each of his sons only seven *sào* of rice land" (the words of Hoàng giáp Đinh Nho Hoàn in his note on the donation of the cult rice fields, cited in the *Hương Yên phổ tự*). That is why, at the time she became his daughter-in-law, her husband was pursuing his studies in the capital; she had to ask her parents to meet his costs: "Lady Lê's parents sent three hundred quan and fifty loads of dried areca nuts to the capital every year to pay for the lord's studies" (*Hương Yên phổ tự*). This may be counted her FIRST MERIT in the house of the Đinh. It is thanks to his wife's support and encouragement, joined to his intelligence and to a "gift for study beyond the common", that in 1700 he "passed the great examination".

When he had become a high dignitary, she was respectfully called "Lady Lê", but she kept the good bearing of her house: she "treated the maids and concubines well"; and when her husband served far away and wrote to entrust her with heavy tasks — buying land, having stelae carved

by the craftsmen — she neglected none of them. Witness the inscription engraved on one of the three stelae she had made, now at the Gôi temple:

> *Hoàng Triều Vĩnh Thịnh vạn vạn niên chi bát, Nhâm Thìn trọng thu cốc nhật; Tứ Canh Thìn khoa Đệ nhị giáp Tiến sĩ xuất thân, Hoằng tín Đại phu, Thượng Bảo tự Tự khanh, Hoan Hương Mặc Trai Đinh Nho Hoàn tự Tồn Phác, nhiệm chính thất LÊ THỊ VỆ cẩn thức.*

Translation by Tống Trần Tùng: “Under the reigning dynasty, Vĩnh Thịnh era, eternal among the eternal, year eight, the year Nhâm Thìn, on an auspicious day of the second month of autumn (1712). He on whom the king conferred the second doctoral rank at the examination of the year Canh Thìn, *Hoằng tín đại phu*, chamberlain of the Bureau of Seals, Mặc Trai Đinh Nho Hoàn, courtesy name Tồn Phác, of Hương Sơn district in Hoan Châu, charged his principal wife LÊ THỊ VỆ to have this respectfully engraved.” (See the article “Hoàng giáp Đinh Nho Hoàn and the stelae of the Gôi temple”, by Tống Trần Tùng.)

Then, when he set out on embassy, she remained at home with the secondary wife, Lady Phan, and they lived in good harmony: “sisters” of absolute deference, without a sharp word, keeping vigil together by the lamp for news of “him who was beyond the passes”. Their mutual regard went so far that when Lady Phan went back to see her mother, and her mother wished to keep her a few days, she absolutely refused, so as to return to the principal wife, “with a heart wholly submissive”.

Then the bad news came; and another unlooked-for grief followed when, before the husband’s funeral could even be held, the woman who had shared with her — “Since the horse’s hoof took the road, your servant and I have had but one dream” — suddenly departed, for this reason: “one must set one’s robe straight to go and serve the Jade Emperor; if your servant does not die, who then will serve him?” (from Lady Phan’s letter of gratitude to Lady Lê before taking her own life). But rising above all her grief, Lady Lê took the household firmly in hand so that the funerals of her husband and of the secondary wife should be worthily carried out. It was she who chose “the Sản Trà plot” as her husband’s resting place, with Lady Phan beside him; grass and great trees then flourished there, and the place became the “Sản Trà mausoleum” — until in 1976 it was “levelled to the ground”. At the burial she also composed a funeral oration for the secondary wife, which proves that she herself understood poetry and letters. And afterwards? For three long years, in the shrine of her husband’s cult, which was also the place where she had lived with her children, she still discharged her duty: “To burn incense at the ancestral shrine, and see besides to the offerings of rice.”

Devoted to her husband’s family, faithful to “the rule of the three obediences and four virtues”, she raised three daughters to adulthood.

The eldest married an officer of the Văn lineage, of Đông Tràng village (now Sơn Châu commune); her husband dying young, she returned to her father’s side and installed as heir to the cult a man of the village’s Phan lineage, at the hamlet of Nội Thập (reading uncertain).

The second married the minister and doctor Nguyễn Trọng Thường, of Trung Cần village (now Nam Trung commune, Nam Đàn district); she bore Nguyễn Thượng Hiền and Doctor Nguyễn Trọng Đương (or Đang).

The third married the provincial licentiate Nguyễn Đăng Quỵ, district magistrate of Quỳnh Lưu, a native of Mỹ Dụ village, Hưng Nguyên prefecture. Having no child, she returned to her father's side and built a house at the "Rú hamlet" (in the present-day commune of Sơn Hòa), where she lived until her death.

IV. Conclusion

In writing about Lady Lê, I admire all the more the family of Đinh Nho Công, who knew how to choose a daughter-in-law answering fully to the phrase "ten parts in ten". And, reasoning as we do today, I do not know whether it was the destiny that "the powers above" reserved for the *Hoàng giáp*: to have two wives whose qualities COMPLETE ONE ANOTHER INTO ONE, to offer him — talent, good bearing, piety and fidelity.

19. The faithful widow Phan Thị Viên: from historical figure to literary character

Phạm Quang Ái — deputy editor-in-chief of the *Hà Tĩnh Cultural Review*

[source: 34.doc]

The collection *Truyền kỳ tân phả* by the woman of letters of the Hồng Hà, Đoàn Thị Điểm (1705–1748), contains six tales of the marvellous; but according to scholars only the first three are certainly hers (1): *Hải khẩu linh từ*, *Vân Cát thần nữ* and *An Ấp liệt nữ*.

Đoàn Thị Điểm's tale *An Ấp liệt nữ* may be summarised thus. Under the Vĩnh Thịnh era (1705–1719), in the time of Lê Dụ Tông, there lived a young doctor named Đinh Hoàn, pen name Mặc Trai, of An Ấp village, Nghệ An province; his parents had died early and he had few brothers. Grown up, he founded a family; but as his first wife bore him only daughters, he took as concubine the daughter of an official of the Nguyễn lineage. She had a calm bearing and dignified speech; she excelled at embroidery and sewing, and had besides a renowned literary gift. On entering her husband's house she held herself strictly and showed him great deference. Đinh Hoàn both loved and respected her. Often, home from court and at leisure, the two exchanged verses in great accord; these exchanges were recorded in the collection *Quan Thư họa minh*. In the year Ất Mùi (1715) the court appointed him chief envoy to carry tribute to the Qing at Yên Kinh — present-day Beijing. At this news she showed her disquiet and anxiety: he would have to cross passes and torrents, climb falls and rapids, be washed by wind and rain, plunge into the cold of a foreign land. On the day of departure, after exchanging farewell poems, he took off his gauze robe and gave it to her as a keepsake. In fact the legation's journey was of untold difficulty. Frail in health, Đinh Hoàn fell ill on the road. On reaching Yên Kinh his condition became critical, and he breathed his last on the thirtieth day of the twelfth month. The coffin of the chief envoy Đinh was brought home. Struck as by lightning, she fell unconscious; then, rousing herself, she composed a funeral oration for her husband, of extreme pathos.

The days passed, and the ceremony of the first anniversary of the death came round. Taking advantage of the household's being busy, she went into her room, tore the gauze robe he had given her before leaving, and hanged herself.

The matter was reported to the court, which had an altar established and the great cartouche "Temple of the chaste and valiant lady" carved and hung before the shrine.

Compared with the *Vân Cát thần nữ* and the *Hải khẩu linh từ*, the tale *An Ấp liệt nữ* is therefore much simpler in plot and almost devoid of fiction. This is because the *Vân Cát thần nữ* is a story laid upon a story: the figure of Liễu Hạnh, before becoming the goddess of Vân Cát in the *Truyền kỳ tân phả*, had already been mythologised to the highest degree. As for the *Hải khẩu linh từ*, the time factor operates: the suicide of the palace lady Bích Châu was some three centuries distant from the moment of writing, and had gathered many layers of legend and popular marvel. The suicide of the valiant woman of An Ấp, by contrast, was contemporary: the realistic character remains very marked. Moreover, the suicide of the lady Bích Châu is a sacrifice for the great cause, for "loyalty", hence its tragic and heroic quality, which touches readily and lends itself to mythologising better than that of the valiant woman of An Ấp — a sacrifice for "chastity", for a private affection, and a manifestation of a woman's "virtue".

Since it dealt with a real man and real events, occurring in the author's own lifetime, the tale *An Ấp liệt nữ*, unlike the others, was conditioned by the frame of current affairs: Đoàn Thị Điểm could not let her brush run and invent, as she could with stories separated from her by a long historical distance.

It is regrettable that, through distance and the difficulty of information at the time, the woman of letters "of the city" did not learn everything that had happened to the valiant woman "of the countryside", in the land of An Ấp. For the life of the valiant woman of An Ấp contains many singular and engaging episodes; had the woman of letters of the Hồng Hà known them, her talent would have left us quite another *An Ấp liệt nữ*, far more singular and far better than the tale in the *Truyền kỳ tân phả*.

Besides being summary and unmixed with invention, the *An Ấp liệt nữ* also contains some confusions over the name of its principal character. And that confusion did not occur only once, with Đoàn Thị Điểm: Hoàng giáp Bùi Dương Lịch (1757–1828), a noted biographer of the following generation, from the same country and the same district as the real figure, made the same mistake in his *Nghệ An ký*. In the *Truyền kỳ tân phả* the author states only that the valiant woman of An Ấp was of the NGUYỄN lineage and AN OFFICIAL'S DAUGHTER, without specifying her home or her name. The *Nghệ An ký* speaks of her in its notice on Đinh Nho Hoàn: "Đinh Nho Hoàn, of An Ấp commune, Hương Sơn district. According to the *Register of Laureates*, he passed as a doctor at thirty, at the examination of the year Canh Thìn, under Lê Hy Tông, twenty-first year of the Chính Hòa era; he rose to the office of right vice-minister of Works, was sent on embassy by order, died on the road, and was posthumously granted that of left vice-minister of Personnel. He was the son of Đinh Nho Công. His concubine, PHẠM THỊ (THUẦN), was honoured with the title of faithful widow by the king's order" (2).

In 1996, having obtained access to the genealogy of the Đinh Nho lineage of Hương Sơn (Hà Tĩnh) through Đinh Xuân Vịnh, Professor Hoàng Hữu Yên corrected these confusions and added some new episodes to the life of the valiant woman of An Ấp — absent from the *Truyền kỳ tân phả* — in an article in the *Hán Nôm Review* (3).

First, the valiant woman of An Ấp was of the PHAN lineage, not the Nguyễn lineage as Đoàn Thị Điểm has it, nor the Phạm lineage as Bùi Dương Lịch writes (perhaps through an error in the national-script edition?). Her full name was PHAN THỊ VIÊN, not Thuần as in Bùi Dương Lịch. He doubtless confused the name of the valiant woman of An Ấp with that of the valiant woman of Trảo Nha (Can Lộc). The latter was called Phan Thị Thuần; she was from Vĩnh Gia village,

Lai Thạch commune, Thiên Lộc district (now Can Lộc), and was born several decades after Đinh Nho Hoàn. She was the wife of the general Ngô Cảnh Hoàn (1740–1786), who fell in battle against the Tây Sơn on the Thủy Ái river. At the news of her husband's death she had a funeral altar raised for him on that river, then threw herself in and drowned. Under the reign of Gia Long an edict conferred on her posthumously the title of faithful widow.

Here is the biographical supplement given by Hoàng Hữu Yên. "Đinh Nho Hoàn's first wife was of the Lê lineage, personal name Vệ, of Đông village, Hữu Băng commune, in the same district; she had three daughters and lived seventy-six years. His secondary wife was of the PHAN lineage, from another district; she took her own life at her husband's death, and is commonly called the Faithful Widow. Her name was PHAN THỊ VIÊN; she was from Do Lễ village, Hưng Nguyên prefecture, Nghệ An province. The story of the vice-minister Đinh's meeting with her in the capital, Thăng Long, and of their union, contains many singular episodes.

"It happened thus: under the Cảnh Trị era (1633–1672), in the time of King Lê Huyền Tông, the vice-minister's father, Doctor Đinh Nho Công, was appointed inspecting censor of Nghệ An province. On the occasion of a natural calamity he received the king's mandate to examine the prisons and see whether any innocent men were held there. There was then in the Nghệ An gaol a *thủ bộ* of the Phan lineage, long imprisoned, whom the circuit officials held to be an unpardonable criminal. The inspecting censor, having re-examined the case, found a miscarriage of justice and ordered his immediate release.

"Promoted assistant censor, he took the *thủ bộ* into his service at the courthouse. Shortly afterwards the *thủ bộ*'s wife bore a daughter. When the daughter was three, he fell ill; knowing himself lost, he called the child and lamented: 'I owe it to the assistant censor Đinh, who re-examined my case and had me released, that I am as though restored to life. That benefaction is vast as the sea and high as the sky: when will it ever be repaid? You who are a girl, will you be able to help me in anything?' So saying, he closed his eyes.

"Later, amid the troubles, the *thủ bộ*'s wife took her daughter to Thăng Long and settled in the Đồng Xuân quarter. The girl was then at the age of the full moon; her bearing was dignified and her conduct exemplary, and all praised her. In the capital, young scholars of good family wished to ask for her hand, but the mother would give her to no one. At the same period Đinh Nho Hoàn, the assistant censor's son, having passed the great examination, held a post in a ministry, and everyone knew his name.

"One day of leisure, the Academy official of the Đinh lineage — Đinh Nho Hoàn, on leaving the examinations, had been appointed corrector at the Hàn lâm Academy — walking along the streets, saw a clean stall and stepped in to rest. There was in the shop only an old woman to receive customers. Catching sight of him, the mistress of the place was startled; she quietly asked a servant the visitor's name, home and office. Hearing the answer, both astonished and delighted, she asked further: 'Would the gentleman be the son of the assistant censor?' The servant answered that he was.

"Then, inviting him to take tea, she said timidly: 'This old woman is the wife of the *thủ bộ* of your circuit. Your honoured father drew my husband from the cell and saved his life; that benefaction my husband could not repay before he died. Who would have thought that today I should meet the son of the assistant censor? My joy is boundless. We have but one daughter; on his deathbed my husband, tormented at not having repaid his debt, held her hand and

lamented without end. She is now grown: if the gentleman would take her into his affection, I would offer her to serve you, so as to satisfy the heart of the departed.' So saying, she called her daughter to greet him. After reflecting for about half an hour, the Academy official declared: 'From of old, matrimonial meetings are fixed beforehand; to meet today a wise and virtuous person is yet another benefaction left me by my late father.' He took her as secondary wife. On entering her husband's house she was just sixteen; the four virtues — work, bearing, speech, conduct — were complete in her. She knew letters besides, understood poetry, and knew what was fitting: hence the principal wife held her in affection.

"In the year Ất Mùi, under the Lê Vĩnh Thịnh era, the left vice-minister was charged with an embassy to the Qing. She went with him as far as the Lã Côi relay and said: 'Your servant has heard that a great man who cannot be a general may be an envoy, and that to settle the affairs of state by speech is also a fine thing. May my lord keep a loyal and upright heart like the able envoys of old, and not linger over regret for wife and children.' She then took up the brush and wrote at one stroke ten poems: 'I beg you to read them on the way: it will be as though your servant went with you.' In return, on the point of departure, he took off the gauze robe he was wearing and gave it to her.

"Back at home, alone with a lamp and a pillow, she could not sleep. From morning to evening, what sadness! She often made poems of it, imagining what was happening far away beyond the passes, and wrote without ever exhausting her grief.

"Now, on the way, the legation had to pass through many trials. The chief envoy Đinh fell ill and died at the very moment of reaching Yên Kinh. The Qing emperor had funeral rites performed and the body escorted home. When the coffin reached the frontier gate, she went there to prostrate herself before it. That night, returning to her room, she took the gauze robe her husband had given her at parting and hanged herself.

"The example of her death was reported to the court by the governor, and King Lê issued an edict of praise, granted her the gilded panel 'gate of the faithful widow', and ordered the circuit to raise a temple for her worship close by the vice-minister's stele.

"Under the Lê Cảnh Hưng era she received the honorific title 'Trinh Nhất Á Thận phu nhân'. Under the Nguyễn, that of 'LƯỢNG TỊNH THỤC DIỆU NHÀN UYỂN DỰC BẢO TRUNG HƯNG PHÚC THẦN' (emphasis by Đ.N.Q.).

"The faithful widow of the Phan lineage, personal name Thị Viên, was only twenty-one when she died to follow her husband."

In his notes Hoàng Hữu Yên states two important things: first, that the biographical supplement on Lady Phan Thị Viên is his own summary of the genealogical documentation supplied to him by Đinh Xuân Vịnh; second, that he intends to publish thereafter the ten poems composed by Lady Phan Thị Viên. On the first point, we do not know the nature of the documentation supplied by Đinh Xuân Vịnh, but this supplement contains inaccuracies and lacks some VERY IMPORTANT EPISODES. On the second, we have not yet found, to this day, where he might have published those ten poems of Lady Viên.

According to the GENEALOGY OF THE ĐINH NHO LINEAGE of Hương Sơn, Hà Tĩnh, communicated to us by the teacher Đinh Nho Quỳ, head of the lineage, the first part of Lady

Phan's life is roughly as Hoàng Hữu Yên summarises it; but what follows contains important episodes that scholars cannot overlook.

First episode. During the days of waiting for her husband's return, Lady Viên went to see her mother at home, at Do Lễ, in Hưng Nguyên district. Her mother wished to keep her a while to distract her, but she firmly refused and said: "My husband is on embassy along a distant and painful road; my anxiety is beyond measure — how should I stay here and be distracted? This very day I ask leave to return to the principal wife, to be respectful and obedient to her in all things."

Second episode. After Lady Phan had hanged herself, the Đinh household carried her letter to her mother. Among the Phan, everyone lamented and pitied her; only the mother said: "From of old, it is rare that a woman should have virtue enough to keep her honour. Who would have thought my daughter capable of it? To die thus is as good as to live: what is there to complain of? I beg you to carry this answer to my daughter's soul: let her follow the vice-minister and serve him upon the white clouds, and let her not remain unreleased for the sake of this old woman."

These episodes serve to draw the character and moral conduct of mother and daughter alike, and to make the story of the valiant woman logical and coherent. Without so virtuous a mother, how could there have been so steadfast a daughter? Moreover, the daughter's steadfastness expresses not only the father's dying will and the mother's gratitude: it expresses too the perfect accord, zither and lute, between her and Hoàng giáp Đinh Nho Hoàn. One may say that within destiny there was a happy union, and within the debt of gratitude a deep meeting of souls. Lady Phan's suicide was not only a matter of duty and of the rule of the three obediences: it was also a matter of love.

Again according to the GENEALOGY OF THE ĐINH NHO LINEAGE, only three of the ten poems offered to her husband survive. The genealogy does, however, record in full what she wrote before she died: the "FUNERAL ORATION FOR THE VICE-MINISTER", the "LETTER OF GRATITUDE TO LADY LÊ" and the "LETTER OF GRATITUDE TO HER MOTHER". This little that remains is enough to leave posterity a valiant woman of An Ấp who was indeed an EXTRAORDINARY WOMAN, WHOLLY FAITHFUL IN DUTY AND IN LOVE, AND GIFTED WITH A POET'S SOUL AND A LITERARY TALENT WORTHY OF HER AGE'S ADMIRATION (emphasis by Đ.N.Q.).

Notes by the person who posted the text (Đinh Nho Quỳ)

1. At the end of his article the author respectfully presents the surviving writings of Lady Phan: three poems (transcription and literal translation) and three prose texts (literal translation). These documents appear in the appendix to the *Genealogy of the Đinh Nho Lineage of Hương Sơn, Hà Tĩnh*.

2. The passages set in a different typeface are my own doing and mark emphasis — for which I ask the author's pardon.

3. My personal view: I note some INACCURACIES in Hoàng Hữu Yên's article "Who was the valiant woman of An Ấp?".

a. Đinh Nho Hoàn was only DEPUTY ENVOY and not chief envoy in the legation of the year Ất Mùi — the chief envoy was Nguyễn Công Cơ, left vice-minister of Finance.

b. The sentence “when the coffin reached the frontier gate, she went there to prostrate herself before it” is false: after accompanying her husband to the Lã Côi relay, she had returned to her husband’s village, An Ấp, where she lived with the principal wife, Lady Lê. She could not therefore have gone up to the FRONTIER GATE, at Lạng Sơn, to prostrate herself there and returned THAT SAME NIGHT to her room, at An Ấp, to take her own life.

Notes by the author, Phạm Quang Ái

1. Trần Thị Băng Thanh and Bùi Thị Thiên Thai, “The relations between the *Truyền kỳ tân phả* and popular festivals”.

2. Bùi Dương Lịch, *Nghệ An ký*, Vietnamese translation, Social Sciences Publishing House, Hanoi, 1993, p. 290. — Article published in the *Hà Tĩnh Cultural Review*, no. 202, May 2015.

3. and 4. Hoàng Hữu Yên, “Who was the valiant woman of An Ấp?”, *Hán Nôm Review*, no. 4 (29), 1996, pp. 62–65.

20. The saintly beauty in the writings of Lady Phan Thị Viên, secondary wife of Hoàng giáp Đinh Nho Hoàn

Cao Hồng Huê

[source: `30.doc`]

He who has been educated, if he does not establish his person, at least establishes his word. Lady Phan Thị Viên, secondary wife of Hoàng giáp Đinh Nho Hoàn, is an exceptional woman. Exceptional because her intrepid death touched the king’s heart, and he conferred on her the title “Á Thận phu nhân”, granted her the gilded panel with the two characters “faithful widow” to honour her, had an ancestral temple established by edict, and later still raised her to the rank of tutelary deity under the fine titles “LƯỢNG TỊNH THỤC DIỆU NHÀN UYỂN DỰC BẢO TRUNG HƯNG PHÚC THẦN”. Such is the grand establishment of her person.

But she did not establish her word, that is, she did not make letters her career. The texts and poems she left to posterity are so many glittering jewels. During the time she lived as secondary wife to Đinh Nho Hoàn, they exchanged poems when official business left him leisure; those exchanges had been recorded in the collection *Quan Thư họa minh* (according to the genealogy *Hương Yên phổ tự*), which has unfortunately not been found to this day. At the moment of parting, at the Lã Côi relay, she gave him ten poems, so that, as she told him, “he might have them to lighten the road”. Of those poems only three have been recovered. Then, when she took her own life, Lady Lê found in the pocket of her robe three prose texts: the “Funeral Oration for the Vice-Minister”, the “Letter of Gratitude to her Mother” and the “Letter of Gratitude to Lady Lê”. That is all that survives of her work. But in reading them I sense a talent that is indeed that of glittering jewels; and the more closely I read them, the more “happy surprises” I find. I

should like to set out those happy surprises here, beginning with the farewell poems — but I must open with a phrase from the “Funeral Oration”:

> *Hướng giả tràng đình tặng cú* (Formerly, at partings, we offered each other verses.)

By this phrase one measures how rare it was for a wife to enjoy so perfect an equality of happiness in the marriages of old. At most one may cite Đoàn Thị Điểm with Nguyễn Kiều, or Hồ Xuân Hương with the canton chief Cóc, exchanging verses. One must look back over the history of East Asian family culture to measure the novelty of this view of conjugal equality in the *Hoàng giáp* and his wife. Let us imagine for a moment what those words cover: a world of accord and conjugal equality, in the days when she was preparing her husband’s departure. Honour, pride — and so many obstacles. So much tenderness and regret between an elegant, cultivated husband and a beautiful, intelligent wife. He leaves with no date fixed for his return. Ten poems soaked in tears. Besides those ten poems “offered in verse to one another”, how many gestures and cares for an ardent couple on the point of separation. Let us add that they were “not of an age”, but “well matched”. These two, the man of talent and the beauty, sitting to exchange poems, make a fine picture, exemplary of the household of a great dignitary of old. That is enough to measure their mutual affection — as in the modern Việt Nam of the early twentieth century, that century of “European civilisation”. What a feeling, worthy of esteem, and how far ahead of its time!

The happy surprise I felt on reading the three surviving poems is this.

First poem

> Hành hành bất thị cố quan san Kì hử ư tình dục thoại nan Vi thẩm HỒI VĂN hà nhật kí Khuyến quân vô cửu Bắc thiên hàn
>
> You go, you go — these are no longer the mountains and passes of home; so much in the heart, and so hard to say. Not knowing what day I shall send my *hồi văn*, I beg you not to linger long under the cold northern sky.

The happy surprise lies precisely in the third line, which contains a literary allusion. She invokes Tô Huệ, a woman of the highest intelligence in ancient China, and her *Chức cẩm hồi văn*. That poem woven on silk conceals a secret of extreme ingenuity; only a learned person could compose a piece of so novel and captivating a form, and only the emperor could decipher it and grasp what Tô Huệ wanted. She was asking the emperor to let her husband come home, being unable to bear the hardships of the frontier any longer. Having read the poem, the emperor consented to recall him. The use of this allusion proves that Lady Phan knew Chinese literature and could make that knowledge serve her speech and her writing. Through it she slips into her poem her anxiety for a husband setting out for a foreign country, under an unknown sky and unknown mountains, amid the miasmas of forest and hill — that is, her anxiety for his health, and her wish that he complete his mission quickly. Should it drag on too long, your servant would do as Tô Huệ did and compose a *Chức cẩm hồi văn* to present to the sovereigns of both countries and obtain her husband’s return. The detail of the “cold northern sky” shows the author’s subtlety and intelligence. Why? Because she had never been to China and yet knew that it is very cold there. It had been enough for her to read the poems of Li Bai, Cui Hao, Du Fu and the Hundred Schools of China to know thoroughly the sky, the land and the climate of the foreign country. Only serious study and a quick intelligence could bring such

felicitous allusions into a poem. In her day the modern notion that “the writing is the man” did not exist; and yet, reading her writings today, posterity will know who she was. The words, the images, the literary allusions are so many mirrors of her person, of a gentle, reserved and dignified character, exemplary of the four virtues. Her writings tell us that she was intelligent from childhood and properly educated: all of it fused in her into a woman at once learned, saintly and kind. She is a woman whose poetic gift and intelligence command admiration.

Second poem

> Đô Mục, Lưu thần kì ngộ dị Tô khanh, Phú Bật hữu nhân nan Nài công vật dị thuyền quyên cố Đái đắc TRUNG LƯƠNG nhị tự hoàn
>
> Đô Mục, Lưu Thần: such marvellous encounters are rare; Lord Tô, Phú Bật: such men are hard to find. Do not, for the sake of a pretty woman, turn aside from your task; bring home rather the two words “loyalty and goodness”.

Skilled in allusion, she invokes Du Mu, a famous poet of the late Tang, who met a serving girl as beautiful as an immortal. Du Mu made an appointment to marry her in ten years; but he overran the term, and the girl married. Regretting the lost chance, Du Mu composed a poem to rid himself of his attachment: “*Tự thị tầm xuân khứ hiệu trì / Bất tu trù trướng oán phương thì*” — it is my own fault for going too late in search of spring; what good is it to grieve at having missed the fragrant season?

But the most important name is doubtless Fu Bi. A native of Henan under the Song, he was sent by the emperor on embassy to the Khitan, who had invaded Song territory and were encamped there, to demand the lands back; by the force of his arguments he persuaded the Khitan, who withdrew their troops. He was made commissioner of military affairs and rose to the title of Duke of Trình. Lady Phan is truly subtle: she need only name Fu Bi for the deputy envoy to understand what she means. To understand one another — that is this. The accord of souls — that is this. Clearly poetry brought the two of them pleasures reserved for those who understand each other.

Lưu Thần and Nguyễn Triệu too met immortals: in the space of a single game of chess, and when they returned to the world below several generations had passed. For her, the embassy is a grave and difficult matter — *hữu nhân nan* — what we should today call “setting private feeling aside for the common good”. The whole of the second poem lies in one counsel: that her husband keep intact his “loyalty to the prince and love of country”, and that thought of a young wife not make him neglect his charge — *Nài công vật dị thuyền quyên cố* — but that he “bring home rather the two words *lương trung*”. By this poem she urges her husband to devote himself wholly to affairs of state and not to be distracted by longing for his young wife. She was a powerful moral support to him; such accord of hearts is rare in any age. Above conjugal love she places love of country and responsibility to the state. These are words from the depths of her heart.

Third poem

> Kim triều thành thị do Nam quốc Dị nhật y quan thị Bắc triều Liệt nhật thu sương quân phận nội Thiếp tương thùy vị trọng yêu kiều

> Today the city is still under the sky of the southern country; tomorrow, robes and caps will be those of the northern court. Blazing sun and autumn frost are your lot, my lord; and for whom should your servant prize her youth?

In this third poem the words change but the substance of the charge does not: it is still the "heavy burden of the embassy" that is stressed, and still the same faithful attachment. The line reminding her husband that "blazing sun and autumn frost are his lot" invites him delicately to skill in diplomatic dealings, to discharge his mission so as to satisfy "the two kings of the two countries"; and not, for a young wife, to wear "a downcast air". A firm charge, yet full of tenderness and pain.

Such are the surprises I found in reading the three surviving poems she offered her husband before parting. Three poems, one soul. We call her "lady" out of respect; in truth she was of the age one calls "miss". So young, and able to write verses of such beauty of feeling, which still hold surprises for our posterity. Three centuries have passed, and the thought, the language and the feeling of these poems remain new, remain modern.

And her prose? Her poems are fine, but her prose is a masterpiece. Let us read first the "Funeral Oration for the Vice-Minister". It is built in four parts, like every funeral oration: first part, the invocation, four lines; second part, the exposition, twenty lines on the vice-minister's career; third part, twelve lines of boundless grief; last part, the attitude, resolve, feelings and wish of the one who officiates. The text seems brief, but in scope and literary worth it yields nothing to the famous funeral orations. What astonishes me is that the author was barely past twenty and already had the range of a writer and a poet. To my mind this is the masterpiece of a valiant woman. She is a writer of great stature. Let us read the opening lines:

> Ô hô! Phu quân hà chi Hà hữu vọng nhi vô quy Hà tiết mao hề cực lạc Hà kì vị hề sầu kì
>
> Alas! Where has my lord gone? Why wait for him, if he does not return? Why has the yak-tail standard fallen so soon? Why has the mount ridden off so fast?

Grief and regret appear from these first lines. The alternation of four- and five-character phrases produces something like a choked sob. And the question that awaits no answer — "why does he not return?" — wrings the hearer's heart. The phrase speaks of death as though he were still alive, gone off somewhere and not yet home. From the opening, the air of mourning and loss is in every word she writes. This loss is too great. He fell gravely ill and died on the embassy road. That great merit we should today call that of a hero fallen for his country, for the great business of the state. That sacrifice amid hardship the court held in high esteem: the king, remembering it, granted him the title "*Kim tử Vinh lộc đại phu*, left vice-minister of Rites by exceptional grant".

In the following part she recalls with sorrow his career and merits by opposed images, splendour and desolation: "*Hướng giả khinh cầu phi mã — kim yên đan triệu tề nhi*" — formerly, resplendent, on horseback and in a fur cloak; today, funereal, white carriage and red banner. More than once she uses the image of the yak-tail standard falling like snow to speak of the greatness of her loss: "at the hour when the standard falls like snow, your servant and you are left adrift like a cypress boat" (Letter of Gratitude to Lady Lê). The expression is a little worn, but it is perfectly placed here. More painful still: she loses a friend of the heart, a kindred

soul. "*Hướng giả tràng đình tặng cú — kim yêu phỉ lệ ai từ*" — formerly, at partings, we offered each other verses; today, funeral songs and tears of mourning. Antithesis is the strength of parallel prose in the funeral oration. The allusions are chosen with skill and finesse: "*Liêu liêu nhạn tín, vọng vọng thiên nhi*". The arrangement of the sentences, the building of the members, the parallelism of the words are perfectly executed. Let us remember that she was then barely past twenty. Was she mature enough to write a text of such scope? To write phrases so firm and so musical, one must be an extraordinary being.

The most moving and doubtless the finest passage is the last — from "*Dư kì khể khoát; hạt tư truy tùy*", to live apart, better to die and follow him, to "*cam tâm minh mục — dị nhi dị nhi*", to close the eyes willingly, life is over. The four-syllable phrases sound firm, compact, decisive. This passage is in appearance a funeral oration: it is in reality an oath. She vows to join her husband at the Nine Springs; for to live without him has no meaning, and it is better to die with him so as to be "*vị tỵ dực điểu — viên liên lí chi*" — birds whose wings are joined, trees whose branches meet. The image is wholly popular, but it is apt and beautiful for her vow. The phrase here is an oath, and it holds like a driven nail: "*Sinh nhi câu trất; hạnh vô duỵ lỵ*" — to support the knee, to hold out the towel; from first to last, a single fidelity. It is in this passage that there rises, immense, the figure of a woman kind, limpid and lofty; and it is here too that the "reason for her death" appears, simple and yet immense. She writes her instructions to her mother and to her kin on both sides with extreme care — then goes serenely, her reason being to go down there and serve her husband as she did in life: "*Tụ thỉ mỹ tha, các thành ngô chí. Ngã gia hương hỏa tu quân tử hề thi tảo tần. Đề sở ỵ quan; nguyện thiếp thác hề cung thị phụng*" — we had sworn to serve one husband all our lives; but our roads part: to burn incense at the ancestral shrine and see to the offerings of rice is your part; to set one's robe straight and go to serve the Jade Emperor — if your servant does not die, who then will serve him? (Letter of Gratitude to Lady Lê.) Who could hold back tears at reading these lines?

In the letter of gratitude to her mother, some phrases tear the heart: "*Cốt truyền thuyết thảo băng tâm, hạnh viết ngã gia hữu tử. Tư duy đồng huyệt; nguyện thỉ mỵ tha. Huyết lệ hóa đô, liên đại quỵ minh chi cáo. Đan than vi tử, tràng minh vọng cực chi ân*" — a daughter must look to her purity; happily it may be said that our house has a child worthy of her kin. Today I ask to die and follow my husband, and I swear to have no second heart. A few words of tears of blood I send in place of the announcement of my return to the shades. A red heart still unspoilt, and that thanks to a boundless kindness.

Conclusion

Great, intrepid was her death. Her death is the extraordinary death of a valiant woman — what medieval literature calls *tiết nữ tháo*, the steadfastness of the valiant woman. This brilliant and admirable death differs greatly from that of Mỵ Ê, a real episode of the Lý period recorded in Lý Tế Xuyên's *Lives of Illustrious Ladies*, in the *Việt điện u linh*. Mỵ Ê was the wife of the king of Champa. When Lý Thái Tông had defeated that king, he had Mỵ Ê and her maids taken to serve him. Mỵ Ê refused, wrapped herself in a blanket and threw herself into the river. The king praised her and conferred on her the title "Hiệp Chính Hựu Thiện phu nhân". Two deaths: Mỵ Ê's is suffered; Lady Phan's is prepared, clean, dignified, limpid and noble. The images of the mandarin duck and the *loan* in the phrase "*uyên loan thất ngãu, nhi nữ tình si*" — even beasts go in pairs, how much more human beings — are moreover true to nature: when one dies, the other pines and dies too. Her death is a giving of self for the great cause; it is the high morality

of “sacrificing one’s person to fulfil humanity, giving one’s body to keep one’s duty”; it is the demonstration of the age-old rule of “following one alone to the end”.

History records other women who died for their husbands. Under the Trần, Lady Lê Thị Ta (1295), on hearing of the death of her husband Phan Mưu, sent on embassy to the Yuan, refused food for several days and died. Lady Đoàn, wife of the general Ngô Phúc Du, from the country of Can Lộc (Hà Tĩnh), rowed out in 1876 to midstream to take her own life on learning that her husband had fallen in battle. But the figure of Lady Phan is doubtless the finest of all the valiant women of the southern sky. The care with which she prepared her death attests the nobility of her character. More than that, what we are speaking of here is a poet’s temperament. She is the shining example of the Confucian three obediences and four virtues, that essential morality which so many generations have cultivated. She has entered legend as a saint, and her intrepid death shook the feudal power itself: from the edict that granted her the panel “faithful widow” to honour her, with orders to local officials to raise a temple, allot rice fields and funds for the offerings of the four seasons, one passed gradually to the higher title of “Á Thận phu nhân”, and finally to that of tutelary deity with the six fine characters I quoted at the outset. She is honoured today at the Gôi Mỹ temple (Sơn Hòa commune, Hương Sơn district, Hà Tĩnh) together with her husband Đinh Nho Hoàn, her father-in-law Đinh Nho Công and her husband’s younger brother Đinh Nho Côn — all raised to the rank of tutelary deities under the Nguyễn. What an honour:

> Above, to GUARD the country; below, to SHELTER the people. One house, FOUR TUTELARY DEITIES — what glory!

21. Đinh Nho Hoàn and his wife Phan Thị Viên in several old documents

Đào Tam Tỉnh

[source: `04.doc`]

Đinh Nho Hoàn (1671–1715), courtesy name Tồn Phác, pen name Mặc Trai (also Mặc Ông), was a native of Gôi Mỹ village, Yên Ấp canton, now Sơn Hòa commune, Hương Sơn district, Hà Tĩnh province. He was the third son of Doctor Đinh Nho Công and his wife Lady Đặng. Having passed as a doctor of the second rank (*Hoàng giáp*) at the examination of the year Canh Thìn, twenty-first year of the Chính Hòa era (1700), under Lê Hy Tông, he held in succession the offices of supernumerary at the Hàn lâm Academy, *Tham chính* of the Sơn Tây circuit, governor of Cao Bình prefecture (Cao Bằng), right vice-minister of Works, and chamberlain of the Bureau of Seals. After his death he was granted the title of left vice-minister of Personnel. The court had a shrine established for his worship and conferred on him by edict the title Đặc Đạt Đại Vương.

In the year Ất Mùi, eleventh year of the Vĩnh Thịnh era (1715), he was sent on embassy to the Qing, fell gravely ill there and died; his remains were brought home for burial. His secondary wife, Phan Thị Viên, a native of Do Lễ commune, Hưng Nguyên district, took her own life out of excess of grief, and the court conferred on her by edict the title of chaste and valiant lady. Many books and old documents record this episode. We present here some of the most significant, in Chinese, among those that have come down to us.

The *Bách thần sự tích* (1) carries the following notices on Đinh Nho Hoàn and on his secondary wife of the Phan lineage.

Chinese text:

弘信大夫陪從尚寶寺卿禮部左侍郎壽山侯丁相公特達大王靈神廟一所在香山縣安邑社原是本社人奉黎朝進士弟入侍王府府僚陪從奉使北國死節冇功奉冇敕封特達大王命立廟祀潘氏貞一亞慎夫人靈祀廟一所在香山縣安邑社原是興元縣由禮社人姓潘諱圓十六歲歸禮部左侍郎壽山侯為側室纔一年壽山侯奉使北國損故及歸骸骨到家夫人年十九歲發棺詳記隨節自縊伊族以事洞達奉有敕封為亞慎夫人贈節婦侗三金字并給本社田貳畝村族人奉祀

Transcription:

Hoằng tín Đại phu, Bồi tụng, Thượng bảo tự khanh, Lễ bộ Tả Thị lang, Thọ Sơn hầu Đinh tướng công Đặc Đạt Đại vương linh thần: miếu nhất sở, tại Hương Sơn huyện, Yên Ấp xã, nguyên thị bản xã nhân. Phụng Lê triều Tiến sĩ đệ. Nhập thị Vương phủ, phủ Liêu Bồi tụng, phụng Sứ Bắc Quốc. Tử tiết hữu công, phụng hữu sắc phong Đặc Đạt Đại vương, mệnh lập miếu tự.

Phan Thị Trinh Nhất Á Thận phu nhân linh từ: miếu nhất sở tại Hương Sơn huyện, Yên Ấp xã, nguyên thị Hưng Nguyên huyện, Do Lễ xã nhân, tính Phan, húy Viên. Thập lục tuế quy Lễ bộ Tả Thị lang, Thọ Sơn hầu, vi trắc thất tài nhất niên. Thọ Sơn hầu phụng Sứ Bắc Quốc tổn cố, cập quy hài cốt đáo gia. Phu nhân niên thập cửu tuế, phát quan tường ký, tùy lang tự ải, ý tộc dĩ sự đồng đạt, phụng hữu sắc phong vi Á Thận phu nhân, tặng Tiết phụ, đồng tam kim tự. Tinh cấp bản xã điền nhị mẫu, thôn tộc nhân phụng tự.

Translation:

Powerful spirit: *Hoằng tín đại phu*, counsellor, chamberlain of the Bureau of Seals, left vice-minister of Rites, Marquis of Thọ Sơn, Lord Đinh, Đặc Đạt Đại Vương. One shrine, in Yên Ấp commune, Hương Sơn district; he was a native of that commune. Passed as a doctor under the Lê. Admitted to service in the lordly palace as counsellor of the bureau of affairs, he was sent on embassy to the northern country. Having died in the service of the state with merit, he received by edict the title Đặc Đạt Đại Vương, with orders to establish a shrine for his worship.

Shrine of Lady Phan Thị Trinh Nhất Á Thận. One shrine in Yên Ấp commune, Hương Sơn district; she was a native of Do Lễ commune, Hưng Nguyên district, of the Phan lineage, personal name Viên. At sixteen she became secondary wife of the left vice-minister of Rites, Marquis of Thọ Sơn, and was so for only one year. The Marquis of Thọ Sơn died while on embassy to the northern country, and his remains were brought home. Lady Phan was then nineteen; the encoffining completed, she hanged herself to follow her husband, without informing the lineage. She received by edict the title Á Thận phu nhân and that of faithful widow, with three characters of gold, together with two acres of rice land granted to the commune so that village and lineage might maintain her cult.

Through the *Bách thần sự tích* we learn the divine titles and the edicts granted to Đinh Nho Hoàn and to Lady Phan Thị Viên; his degree and offices, her chaste and valiant death, and the sites of their shrines.

His divine title: *Hoằng tín đại phu*, counsellor, chamberlain of the Bureau of Seals, left vice-minister of Rites, Marquis of Thọ Sơn, Lord Đinh, Đặc Đạt Đại Vương, powerful spirit.

Hers: shrine of Lady Phan Thị Trinh Nhất Á Thận.

Title conferred on him: Đặc Đạt Đại Vương; on her: Á Thận phu nhân.

Đinh Nho Hoàn's doctoral degree, as the above document gives it, is confirmed by the stelae of the Temple of Literature and the Quốc Tử Giám in Hanoi. The collection *Stelae of the Quốc Tử Giám of Hanoi* records:

> Stele no. 55. Text of the names of the doctors of the examination of the year Canh Thìn, twenty-first year of the Chính Hòa era. Stele erected on the second day of the third month of the thirteenth year of the Vĩnh Thịnh era of the kingdom of Việt. [This examination passed one laureate in the first rank, three in the second and fifteen in the third.]
>
> Second rank, three doctors:
>
> … Đinh Nho Hoàn: An Ấp commune, Hương Sơn district [placed third, after Tạ Đăng Huân and Hồ Phi Tích] (2).

The shrines of both stand at Yên Ấp, Hương Sơn district, the native village of Hoàng giáp Đinh Nho Hoàn.

Bùi Dương Lịch's *Nghệ An ký*, written under Gia Long (1802–1820), in Nguyễn Thị Thảo's translation, notes of Đinh Nho Hoàn:

> Đinh Nho Hoàn, of An Ấp commune, Hương Sơn district. According to the *Register of Laureates*, he passed as a doctor at thirty, at the examination of the year Canh Thìn, under Lê Hy Tông, twenty-first year of the Chính Hòa era (1700); he rose to the office of right vice-minister of Works, was sent on embassy by order, died on the road, and was posthumously granted that of left vice-minister of Personnel. He was the son of Đinh Nho Công. His concubine, Phạm Thị [Thuần], was honoured by the king's order with the title of faithful widow (3).

The translator Nguyễn Thị Thảo wrongly rendered the character *Phan* as *Phạm*, and even wrote "Phạm Thị [Thuần]": hence the confusion over the name of the *Hoàng giáp*'s secondary wife. Bùi Dương Lịch's Chinese text has, on the concubine of the Phan lineage:

> 妾潘氏奉旌節婦族其門
>
> *Thiếp Phan Thị phụng tinh tiết phụ tộc kỳ môn.*

The original Chinese, on page 292 of the Chinese section, therefore indeed reads *Phan Thị*, not *Phạm Thị*. The translator mistook the lineage and at the same time confused her with Ngô Cảnh Hoàn's wife, Phan Thị Thuần.

Phan Thị Thuần was the wife of the general Ngô Cảnh Hoàn, of Trảo Nha village, now Đại Lộc commune, Can Lộc district, Hà Tĩnh. Ngô Cảnh Hoàn served under the Lê–Trịnh up to the office of commander-in-chief, at the head of the Tiền Trạch corps, and fought the Tây Sơn troops marching on Thăng Long (1786) at the mouth of Thúy Ái (now Thanh Trì, Hanoi). He fell in battle with his two sons. His wife, Phan Thị Thuần, also of Trảo Nha, on learning of his death, showed no grief. She said: "To die for the country is a glorious death; why grieve over it?" Then she had an altar raised with her household at the very place where her husband had fallen, and charged her people: "When I am dead I wish only that my body be near his and sink with him to the bottom of the water; do not fish it out to bury it elsewhere." So saying, she calmly threw herself into the river and drowned; she was only twenty (4). Her temple was raised in the village and is called the temple of the "loyal and valiant lady".

Phan Thị Thuần, wife of Ngô Cảnh Hoàn, is therefore also a loyal and valiant woman, like Phan Thị Viên, wife of Đinh Nho Hoàn at Gôi Mỹ — but she died seventy-one years later. Does this coincidence between two figures of Vietnamese history, both from Hà Tĩnh, two men bearing the name Hoàn, and two secondary wives who took their own lives to follow their husbands, explain the translator's confusion in the *Nghệ An ký*? Bùi Dương Lịch's Chinese text is exact and free of error.

The *Hương Sơn phong thổ ký* gives very clear and fairly complete information on the origins and the notable episodes in the lives of Đinh Nho Hoàn and his wife Phan Thị Viên:

> Đinh Nho Hoàn, of Hoàn Mỹ village, Yên Ấp canton, passed as a doctor of the second rank and rose to the office of chamberlain of the Bureau of Seals. During his governorship of Cao Băng he did what was useful and removed what was harmful. All celebrated his virtue. Merchants from the Qing had a stele carved which reads: "His sincere loyalty moves even birds and fishes; his ordinances and benefactions are known even to grass and trees." Sent on embassy to China, as far as Yên Kinh, he gave himself wholly to his country; the northern court praised his merits. He died in the course of the embassy. The Kangxi emperor of the Qing composed a funeral oration in which one reads: "To live by the examinations is a glorious life; to die for the state is to die as one lives." The coffin brought home, King Lê sent an official to perform the rites. The villagers asked to raise a temple, and he received by edict the title "Quang ý Đoan túc Dực bảo Trung hưng tôn thần". His second wife, Phan Thị Viên, was likewise a remarkable woman, skilled at sewing and gifted in letters, and sure in her craft. As the household lived in perfect concord between the spouses, the family was at peace; a collection of her writings survives and is still recited today. She had not served him long when it was learned that he was assigned to the legation. She said: "Would a great man in this world consent to keep his hands and feet bound in his village? One wish only: that the word loyalty may shine. As for your servant's lot — faded powder, spent rouge, mourning silk and rosy sorrow — it is not worth worrying about." Whoever heard her was moved. When the day of departure came, she offered him ten farewell poems, among them these lines: "*Đỗ Mục, Lưu Thần kỳ ngộ dị; Tô Khanh, Phú Bật hữu nhân nan. Khuyến quân vật dĩ thuyền quyên cố; đái đắc trung trinh nhị tự hoàn*" — marvellous encounters after the manner of Du Mu and Lưu Thần are easy; to find men like Lord Tô and Fu Bi is hard; I beg you not to burden yourself with this beauty, and to return with the two words loyalty and uprightness. When the coffin was brought back, she took the silk kept as a keepsake and made of it

> a noose to hang herself. Thus the two were buried on the same day, in a single tomb. The matter being reported, King Lê deliberated and ordered a shrine to be raised, conferred on her by edict the title of chaste and valiant lady, allotted twenty acres of cult rice land and entrusted her worship to the villagers. She then received the title "Trai Tĩnh Thục Sa Nhàn Uyển, Dực bảo Trung hưng tôn thần" (5).

Through the *Hương Sơn phong thổ ký* we further learn that the *Hoàng giáp*'s secondary wife was a woman of good bearing, gentle, gifted in letters, of an advanced Confucian cast of mind — in short, accomplished in the four virtues and in fidelity, worthy of being honoured as a loyal and valiant goddess, as the court's edict has it: "Trai Tĩnh Thục Sa Nhàn Uyển, Dực bảo Trung hưng tôn thần".

It was out of sympathy for Phan Thị Viên's love and steadfastness towards Đinh Nho Hoàn that the woman of letters of the Hồng Hà, Đoàn Thị Điểm, wrote the deeply moving tale *The Valiant Woman of An Ấp*, in the *Truyền kỳ tân phả*. The tale speaks of Lady Phan Thị Viên's literary gift through her funeral oration for her husband, of which here is an extract:

> Alas! My lord was a man of distinction in the kingdom, an auspicious sign for the world, a unicorn among the living; his virtue was high, his writings luminous.
>
> Passed at the great examination, he served in many places; sent on embassy, he rode the long road; he raised towards the North the standard of Su Wu, and towards the southern gates turned his thought unceasingly.
>
> For loyalty of heart he yielded nothing to Nguyễn Trãi;
>
> for the brilliance of his services he yielded nothing to Nghị Trai.
>
> But what! Old Heaven did not sustain him, and the wise man has left this world.
>
> Was it needful to bury the tree of jade in the earth, to break the pair of mandarin ducks on a night of snow, and leave your servant's heart in such disorder?
>
> […]
>
> Well then, it is done!
>
> The water that flows does not return; the fallen flower, what remains of it?
>
> Rain falls in drops on the banana leaves, and I dream of the land of the Three Gorges;
>
> clouds cover half the sky, and the mountains of the Nine Doubts are far off.
>
> The gauze curtain is cold: where is the zither and the lute?
>
> The room is empty and silent: only his robe remains there.
>
> I reflect that, clear-sighted in life, he knows still after death:
>
> why not let your servant follow and serve him?
>
> If shade and light are henceforth parted, and this love cannot be fulfilled,
>
> your servant asks today to give her life in order to follow you.
>
> Your servant has not said everything; may my lord hear it and remember. (6)

Let this extract close the story of a figure of the land of Nghệ, Đinh Nho Hoàn, a man of many gifts and of a feeling heart, whose career left a debt still owed to his country, and of his wife

Phan Thị Viên, a woman who loved her husband to the highest degree there is in this world. That story keeps its echo for ever in the books and in the memory of generations. We bow with respect before the limpid, noble and faithful love of Đinh Nho Hoàn and Phan Thị Viên.

Notes

1. *Bách thần sự tích — Lives of a Hundred Deities of the Land of Nghệ*, compiled by scholars under the Nguyễn. Kept at the temple of Mai Phụ commune, Hà Tĩnh. Collected, transcribed and translated by Đào Tam Tỉnh.
2. Đỗ Văn Ninh, *Stelae of the Quốc Tử Giám of Hanoi*, Culture and Information Publishing House, Hanoi, 2000, pp. 437–441.
3. Bùi Dương Lịch, *Nghệ An ký*, books I and II, translation and notes by Nguyễn Thị Thảo, revision by Bạch Hào, Social Sciences Publishing House, Hanoi, 2004, p. 318 (national-script section) and pp. 291–292 (original Chinese text).
4. *Topography of the Districts of Hà Tĩnh Province — Topographical Notes on Can Lộc District*, translation by Thanh Minh, introduction and notes by Thái Kim Đỉnh, Hà Tĩnh Department of Culture and Information, 2001, pp. 65–66.
5. *Topography of the Districts of Hà Tĩnh Province — Topographical Notes on Hương Sơn*, pp. 35–37.
6. *Vietnamese Narrative Prose of the Medieval Period. Short stories: Đoàn Thị Điểm, The Valiant Woman of An Ấp*, translation by Ngô Lập Chi, Education Publishing House, Hanoi, 2001, pp. 344–362.

List of works devoted to Đinh Nho Hoàn or bearing on him

1. Bùi Thiết, *Dictionary of Hà Tĩnh*, Hà Tĩnh Department of Culture and Information, 2000, 920 pp.
2. *The Examination Laureates of Việt Nam (1075–1919)*, ed. Ngô Đức Thọ, with Nguyễn Thúy Nga and Nguyễn Hữu Mùi, Literature Publishing House, Hanoi, 1993, 1027 pp.
3. Cao Lãng and Xiển Trai, *Lịch triều tạp kỷ*, vol. 1, translation and notes by Hoa Bằng, revision by Văn Tân, Social Sciences Publishing House, Hanoi, 1975, 324 pp.
4. *Đại Nam nhất thống chí*, vol. 1, National History Bureau of the Nguyễn, directed by Cao Xuân Dục, compiled by Lưu Đức Xứng and Trần Xán, translated by Hoàng Văn Lâu, Labour Publishing House – East-West Cultural and Linguistic Centre, Hanoi, 2012, 1022 pp. Nghệ An province, pp. 815–860.
5. *Đại Việt sử ký tục biên (1676–1789)*, translation and critical study by Ngô Thế Long and Nguyễn Kim Hưng, revision by Nguyễn Đổng Chi, Hồng Bàng – East-West Cultural and Linguistic Centre, 2012, 534 pp. (see also the Social Sciences edition, Hanoi, 1991).
6. *Register of Laureates of Nghệ An*, translated from the *Lịch triều đăng khoa lục* of Vũ Miên and Uông Sĩ Lãng and the *Quốc triều khoa bảng lục* of Cao Xuân Dục, supplemented by Cao Xuân Tiêu, Nghệ Tĩnh provincial library, 1976, 39 typewritten pp.
7. Đinh Nho Hoàn, *Mặc Trai sứ tập*, collected and edited by Đinh Nho Liêm, transcription, literal translation and study by Ngô Đức Thọ, verse translations by Cao Thế Lữ, Thái Kim Đỉnh and Đinh Phạm Thái, Literature Publishing House, Hanoi, 2009, 303 pp.
8. *Ancient Villages of Hà Tĩnh*, vol. 1, Hà Tĩnh Department of Culture and Information and Union of Literary and Artistic Associations, 2000, 468 pp. — Hồ Hữu Phước, “The village of Gôi Mỹ”, pp. 110–119.

9. and 10. *Lê triều lịch khoa Tiến sĩ đề danh bi ký* (collection of stelae bearing the names of the doctors of the Lê examinations), books 1–4 and book 4, compiled by Cao Viên Trai, translated by Võ Oanh of Hà Tĩnh, Ministry of Education – Documentation Centre, Saigon, 1962.
10. Ngô Cao Lãng, *Lịch triều tạp kỷ*, vol. 2, supplements by Xiển Trai, translation and notes by Hoa Bằng, revision by Văn Tân, Social Sciences Publishing House, Hanoi, 1975, 339 pp.
11. Nguyễn Lương Bích, *A Short History of Vietnamese Diplomacy in Earlier Ages*, People's Army Publishing House, Hanoi, 1996, 279 pp.
12. Nguyễn Q. Thắng and Nguyễn Bá Thế, *Dictionary of Historical Figures of Việt Nam*, General Publishing House of Ho Chi Minh City, 2006, 1690 pp.
13. *The Doctors and Licentiates of the Nguyễn Dynasty*, by Bùi Hạnh Cẩn, Nguyễn Loan and Lan Phương, Culture and Information Publishing House, Hanoi, 1995, 1110 pp.
14. Ninh Viết Giao, *Dictionary of Figures of the Land of Nghệ*, General Publishing House of Ho Chi Minh City, 2008, 796 pp.
15. Phan Huy Chú, *Lịch triều hiến chương loại chí*, vol. 5: military institutions, bibliography, foreign relations, translated by Phạm Huy Giư, Trịnh Đình Rư and Cao Huy Giu, revised by Đào Duy Anh, Trẻ Publishing House, Ho Chi Minh City, 2014, 520 pp. — Foreign relations, from p. 320.
16. Thái Kim Đỉnh, *The Examination Laureates of Hà Tĩnh, from the Trần to the Nguyễn*, Union of Literary and Artistic Associations of Hà Tĩnh, 2004, 244 pp.
17. *Trạng nguyên, Doctors and Licentiates of Việt Nam*, by Bùi Hạnh Cẩn, Minh Nghĩa and Việt Anh, Culture and Information Publishing House, Hanoi, 2002, 1151 pp.

22. The legend of the faithful widow Phan Thị Viên

Nguyễn Thị Hương Quế — Nghèn upper secondary school, Can Lộc, Hà Tĩnh

[source: `12.doc`]

Through all upheavals and the passing of the years, the descendants of the Đinh Nho lineage of Sơn Hòa and the people of Sơn Hòa still preserve many traditions and many writings of the illustrious Phan Thị Viên, second wife of the left vice-minister and *Hoàng giáp* Đinh Nho Hoàn.

The story of her union with him is steeped in the deep humanity of the ancients: "to return a peach for a plum", "who sows kindness reaps duty". Here it is. Long ago, under the Cảnh Trị era of the Lê, Doctor Đinh Nho Công (1637–1695) received the court's mandate as inspecting censor of the Hoan Châu circuit. That year there was a great drought; the censor of Hoan Châu, inspecting his jurisdiction, examined the prisons to see whether any innocent men were held there. In the gaol he found a *thủ bộ* of the Phan lineage, long detained: the provincial officials ranked him among the unpardonable criminals, but it was in fact a miscarriage of justice. He examined the case thoroughly and ordered his release. Out of prison, the *thủ bộ* Phan brought him all that remained of his household goods in thanks; not only did he refuse, but he took Phan into his service at the courthouse when he was raised to the office of assistant censor. Far and wide people praised the integrity and competence of the censor Đinh Nho Công, who judged rightly, disdained gold and silver offered in thanks, and took in those whom fortune had struck down.

Freed and enjoying Đinh Nho Công's care, the *thủ bộ* Phan felt a boundless gratitude. Falling gravely ill, he took the hand of his wife and of his three-year-old daughter and charged them:

"I owe it to the assistant censor Đinh, who established my innocence, that I am as though restored to life. That benefaction is vast as the sea and high as the sky, and I do not know when it may be repaid. You who are a girl, if you can help me in anything to thank him, strive to do so."

So saying, the *thủ bộ* Phan breathed his last.

The troubles having come, his widow took her daughter to Thăng Long and settled at Cửa Nam, living from day to day by small trade; but her late husband's charge weighed on her heart without cease. The *thủ bộ*'s daughter, Phan Thị Viên, grew up beautiful in face and character, excelling beyond others in letters, music, women's work and household management. How many times did the sons of good families in the capital send letters and messages: mother and daughter kept silent.

The assistant censor's third son, Đinh Nho Hoàn, carried on the house, passed as *Hoàng giáp* at the examination of the year Canh Thìn, under the Chính Hòa era, and served in a ministry. A union willed by Heaven and the Buddha: one evening of clear moon and cool wind he was walking in the streets. Seeing a small, clean and tidy stall, he went in to take tea. It was an old woman with snow-white hair and a keen eye who received him. Scarcely had she caught sight of him than her heart tightened. She asked the servant the name and home of this young official. The servant answered; astonished and joyful, she prostrated herself before him and said:

"The assistant censor saved my husband's life. My husband had no time to repay him before he departed. To return a peach for a plum, to drink the water remembering the spring — that is now."

Then, timidly:

"This old woman is the wife of the *thủ bộ* of your circuit. Your father drew my husband from an unjust death in the cell, and it was as though he had begotten him anew. That benefaction had not been repaid when he passed away. Who would have thought that today I should meet the assistant censor's son? Is this not a design of Heaven and the Buddha? I have only one daughter; and on his deathbed my husband held her hand and lamented the deep debt owed to your father. She is now grown; seeing her good bearing and her intelligence, many people have taken an interest in her of late, but we have always refused. Today I offer her to serve you, so as to discharge that debt and satisfy the departed at the Yellow Springs."

So saying, she called her daughter to greet the vice-minister.

He was wholly surprised by this meeting. After a moment's silence, he declared:

"A union is fixed by Heaven; to meet a person of worth is yet another benefaction left me by my father."

Not long after, the vice-minister Đinh Nho married Phan Thị Viên as his second wife. On entering the house of the Đinh she was just sixteen. The principal wife, Lady Lê, was very

pleased that her husband had taken a second wife accomplished in the four virtues, capable, lettered, good at composition, knowing outwardly precedence and propriety, and inwardly piety and kindness.

In the year Ất Mùi of the Vĩnh Thịnh era, the vice-minister Đinh Nho Hoàn received the court's charge as deputy envoy to the northern country. Lady Lê being detained by the management of the house in the village, it was the second wife, Phan Thị Viên, who accompanied him to the Lã Côi relay (now Yên Viên, Hanoi). In the sadness of parting she said to him:

"Your servant ventures to think that a great man who cannot be a general may be an envoy, and that to settle by speech the peace of the state is a fine thing. May my lord, in a foreign land, keep a loyal and upright heart like the good envoys of old, and not let himself be taken up with wife and children."

Then she handed him a brocade purse containing ten poems of her own composition:

"I offer them to you so that, on the long road, they may lighten the longing for country and home."

Of these ten poems, seven have unfortunately been lost. The three that remain are enough to show posterity her poet's soul. She has contributed to the Vietnamese current of the "soldier's wife's lament" pieces steeped in conjugal love, in humanity and in fidelity to country and people.

First poem

> Hành trình bất thị cổ quan san Kỳ hử ư tình dụ thoại nan Vị thẩm hồi văn hà nhật ký Khuyển quân vô cửu bắc thiên hàn

Vietnamese version by the author:

> A foreign land, unknown mountains and waters; this feeling I would speak, how am I to set it out? I hold the zither beside the red banner: leave those cold days of that distant China.

Second poem

> Đỗ Mục Lưu thần kỳ ngộ dị Tô Khanh Phú bất hữu nhân nan Nó ông vật dị thuyền quyên cố Đại đắc trung hương nhị tự hoàn

Vietnamese version by the author:

> Đỗ Mục and Lưu Thần met immortals: an easy thing; envoys like Lord Tô and Fu Bi: far harder to find. Do not, for a young wife, let yourself be won by regret: the two words goodness and loyalty await their day.

Third poem

> Kim Triều thành thị do Nam Quốc Dị nhật ý quan tự Bắc Triều Liệt Nhật thu sương quân phận nội Thiệp tương thùng vị trọng yêu kiều

Vietnamese version by the author:

> Today the city lies under the sky of the southern country; tomorrow it will be the northern court, in the cold wind. The envoy must be like the sun, like the freezing wind; and your servant, in her youth, will keep her heart crimson.

Moved at the moment of parting, the deputy envoy Đinh Nho Hoàn took off the robe he was wearing to cover her with it, then, uncertain of heart, got into the carriage. She stood motionless, following with her eyes the receding carriage, in a regret impossible to tell.

A poet himself, the deputy envoy was certainly much moved, on the long road, by reading the poems she had given him. These are songs of a true soldier's-wife lament in the country's literary history — a firm lament, in which reason prevails over feeling, and duty and love of country over the grief of separation. The allusions in the three poems prove that she knew culture and letters. The rigour of the prosody, the rhyme, the thought, the image and the music of each piece proves that she handled the regulated form with an accomplished and compressed technique. Her poems overflow with feeling without ever growing maudlin: each is a word of affection that urges the one who leaves to walk firmly and keep uprightness and loyalty towards country, village and family.

Having accompanied the deputy envoy, she returned from the capital towards An Ấp and stopped to see her mother at home, at Do Lễ (now Hưng Đạo commune and the town of Hưng Nguyên, Nghệ An). Her mother wished to keep her a few days; she said:

"My husband is on embassy to the northern country, on a long and painful road; my anxiety is such that I no longer have the heart to stay and keep you company. This very day I ask leave to return to An Ấp, to be respectful and obedient in all things to the principal wife."

Understanding her daughter's heart, Lady Phan let her go, not without sadness, to her husband's village.

Back at An Ấp, alone with a lamp and a pillow, she no longer slept, no longer found savour in food, and her heart hung upon the northern sky. She set down her overflowing feelings in poems, to read them to her husband on the day of his return. Unhappily the poems she wrote over more than a year — husband in the North, wife in the South — do not survive. Did they survive, with her deep knowledge of letters and the feeling of a young woman whose husband is on a hard mission in a foreign land, posterity would today read verses overflowing with humanity and exemplary in craft.

Then the bad news reached An Ấp: the deputy envoy had fallen ill and died in the northern country. Lady Viên was left as though without a soul, speechless; but many other deep thoughts set her on her feet again. The nights of waiting for the body to come from the North were nights when the lamp in her room never went out. Conjugal love, filial love, her bond with the elder wife burned within her. She took up the brush to confide all this. That she neither wept nor lamented like other women set the lineage and the village talking. More than one held her ungrateful.

On the day the deputy envoy's coffin reached An Ấp, she came out to prostrate herself before it. That night, in her room, she took the robe he had given her at parting, made a noose of it and took her own life to remain faithful to her husband.

Having lost her husband, and then Lady Viên, the principal wife, Lady Lê, was in the depths of grief. It was at Lady Viên's encoffining that the family found three farewell writings in her hand: a funeral oration for the vice-minister, a letter to her mother, Lady Phan, at Do Lễ, and a letter to Lady Lê. Lady Lê's heart was as though rubbed with salt. The writings left by Phan Thị Viên are overwhelming in their tenderness for a husband dead before his time. In the funeral oration for the vice-minister Đinh she wrote:

> Ô hô! / Phu quân hà chi / Hà hữu vọng nhi vô quy / Hà tiết mao hề cự lạc / Hà kỳ vị hề sậu kỳ
>
> Y! / Hướng giả khinh cừu phì mã / Kim yêu đan triệu tố nhi / Hướng giả tràng đình tặng cú / Kim yêu phỉ lộ ai từ / Liêu liêu nhạn tín / Vọng vọng thiên nhi / Hồn tiêu loan cánh / Trường đoạn la y
>
> Y! / Sinh ư khoa giáp / Danh thọ bảng bi / Tử ư quốc sự / Chí thù cách thi / Giả vinh giả ai / Hà xá hà bi / Thiếp khỉ bất tri / Sự nan khấp chuyển / Vạn lệ hà tỳ / Thiếp khỉ bất tri / Trần gian nhất nhật / Minh phủ thiên kỳ
>
> Y! / Uyên loan ngật ngẫu / Nhi nữ tình si / Bạo vu trù bạn / Phiếm bách trù y / Túng giao thiên thọ / Bách dị vi kỳ / Chung thương bồ liễu / Đồ mai chung quỳ / Dự kỳ khế khoát / Hạt tự truy tùy / Vi tỵ dực điểu / Viên liên lý chi
>
> Y! / Sinh nhi cân trất / Hạnh vô duy ly / Cửu nguyên hữu phụ / Hà bất tiến di / Ỷ lư hữu mẫu / Hà bất tâm di / Cam tâm minh mục / Dị nhi dị nhi / Ô hô phu quân! Giám ty giám ty / Ô hô! Y hi

Rendering of the sense:

> Alas! Where has my lord gone? Gone — and why does he not return, leaving your servant in grief? The yak-tail standard, why has it fallen so soon? The mount, why has it ridden off so early?
>
> Ah! Formerly resplendent, on horseback, in a fur cloak; today funereal, white carriage and red banner. Formerly, at partings, we offered each other verses; today, funeral songs and tears of mourning. One watches for news borne by the wild goose: nothing. One scans the horizon: where then? Looking at the phoenix mirror, the soul is lost; seeing the gauze robe, the entrails tighten.
>
> Alas! In life he passed the examinations; his name remains upon the stele. Dying for the affairs of state, he fulfilled his wish. To live or to die, so it goes: what use is lamenting? Your servant is not ignorant of it: the dead do not return, and weeping avails nothing. Your servant is not ignorant of it: one day in the world of the living is a thousand days in that of the shades.
>
> Alas! The mandarin duck, the phoenix, in an instant have lost their mate; a woman's doting heart dreads solitude. The single pillow is cold: to whom shall I complain? The cypress boat drifts: with whom shall I take counsel? Were Heaven to grant me a hundred years, this frail willow body would fill its place in vain. To live apart — better to die and follow him: to be the birds whose wings are joined, the tree whose branches meet.
>
> Alas! To support the knee, to hold out the towel: from first to last, a single fidelity. At the Nine Springs is my father: why not go to him? Leaning at the door is my mother:

> why not set her heart at rest? I close my eyes willingly: it is done, it is done. Alas, my lord! See, see your servant's heart. Alas! Ah!

Although she was a second wife, the perfect bearing of two women of high culture meant that Lady Lê and Lady Viên kept a deep attachment for one another. In her farewell writing, Lady Viên expressed her heart:

> Thiết niệm thiếp / Thân thế phù bình / Phong tư bồ liễu / Hàn môn tiều tụy, cảm vãn quế tú giai nhân / Cự mộc huy oanh, cửu mộc hà chu nhã hóa / Hà hạnh thước sào đông Phúc Khánh / Thực đa chung vũ quảng bao dung / Tự tòng nhân bí sàng chinh, thiếp dữ quân tử cộng nhiễm hoài nhân chi mộng / Nhất đán tiết mao tuyết lạc, thiếp dữ quân tử đồng canh phiến bách chi thi / Tự thỉ mỹ tha, các thành ngô chí / Ngã gia hương hỏa, tu quân tử hề thi tảo tần / Đế sở y quan, nguyện thiếp thân hề cung thị phụng / Tâm thậm tràng nhi phác thậm đoản, cảm tích châu trầm / Tử chi nhật do sinh chi niên, hạnh duy đan chiếu

Rendering of the sense:

> Your servant reflects in secret that she is of a floating condition, like foam, of a bearing frail as the willow; come of a poor and withered house, she has dared call herself a fair one of the laurel; sheltered beneath a great tree, she received her breeding from you, madam. We have shared a roof and sung together of the magpie's nest; and your indulgence recalls to me the younger brother's song. Since the horse took the road, you and I have had the same dream; and the day the standard fell like snow, you and I were left adrift like the cypress boat. We had sworn to serve one husband all our lives; but our roads part: to burn incense at the ancestral shrine and see to the offerings is your part; to set one's robe straight and go to serve the Jade Emperor — let your servant go and serve him. The heart is long and life is short: should I regret the pearl that sinks? The day of my death shall be as the year of my life; let only my sincerity light me.

In the letter of gratitude to her mother, the heart of a loyal and dutiful daughter has left posterity both grief and admiration:

> Bất năng tất hạ thừa hoan, tốt tiết sảnh ôn chi luyến / Vị học đình tiên hý thái, cự tình ly biệt chi thư / Như hà như hà, tri tội tri tội / Như chất đàm uyển chuyển, tiếu thâm khuê cô / Vô đoan hiệp mộng hủy xà, hà hành tịch đầu loan phụng / Trinh kỳ kỷ hỉ, thượng vô phụ mẫu duy ly / Xuân mộng vi viên, thúc nhi công gia bất tại / Thệ bất Lý thê, Trương phụ tự sài tục nữ gia lưu / Cẩu truyền tuyết tháo băng tâm, hạnh viết ngã gia hữu tử / Tư duy đồng huyệt / Nguyện thỉ mỵ tha / Huyết lệ hòa đô / Liêu đại minh chi cáo / Đan thần vị tử / Tràng minh vọng cực chi ân / (Sở hữu ngân can lượng phụng vi từ mẫu thọ)

Rendering of the sense:

> Not having been able, at your knees, to give you that joy, nor to keep you warm in winter and cool in summer, not having yet danced in the courtyard as the child who delights her parents, here comes to me from elsewhere a letter of separation. What to do, what to do? I know my fault, I know my fault. Of a pliant and quiet nature, I used

> to laugh in the seclusion of the inner rooms. Without cause the dream of the serpent came — whence, at evening, the meeting of the phoenixes? My fidelity rejoiced not to have left my parents in separation. The spring dream was still round, and now the husband is no more. I swear not to do as the wife of Lý nor as the wife of Trương, those ordinary women bound to their households. A daughter must look to her purity of snow and ice; happily it will be said that our house has a child worthy of her kin. I think of the common grave; I vow to have no second heart. These tears of blood that I mingle, let them stand for the announcement of my return to the shades. My red heart is not yet dead: let it repay for ever that boundless kindness. (Herewith a few taels of silver that I send to wish my tender mother long life.)

The funeral oration for the deputy envoy, composed by Lady Viên, was read by Lady Lê before the coffin. Lady Lê sent to Do Lễ, to Lady Phan, gold, silver and Lady Viên's letter of apology to her mother.

On receiving the letter from the Đinh Nho, all the members of the Phan lineage of Do Lễ grieved and lamented; only the mother said calmly:

"From of old, it is rare that a woman should have virtue enough to keep her honour. Who would have thought my daughter capable of it? To die thus is as good as to live: what is there to complain of?"

She added, with care, to the people of the Đinh household:

"I beg you to carry this to my daughter's soul: let her follow the vice-minister and serve him upon the white clouds, and let her not remain unreleased for the sake of this old woman."

At Lady Lê's, an auspicious day having been chosen, she and the lineage held the funerals of the vice-minister and of Lady Phan Thị Viên at the Sắn Trà mausoleum.

The two tombs were placed side by side at the Sắn Trà mausoleum. Weeping for Lady Viên, so dutiful and so faithful, who had lived only twenty-one years, Lady Lê composed a most moving funeral oration, in pathetic words and with a heart-rending sense, which she read before her coffin. That text has unfortunately been lost.

The suicide of Lady Phan Thị Viên, second wife of the vice-minister and deputy envoy Đinh Nho Hoàn, was reported to the court by the provincial governor. King Lê, seized with admiration for her loyalty, her chastity and her piety, addressed her his praise and granted her the gilded panel with the three characters "gate of the faithful widow", hung before her door. He issued an edict conferring on her the title Á Thân Nhân, ordered the provincial officials to raise a temple for her worship, and allotted rice fields so that incense might burn there all year, that her virtue might light those who came after.

The legend of Lady Phan Thị Viên is a tale of the Vietnamese woman under the feudal order. The cultural values of the Vietnamese woman today may have changed, but her virtue, her poetic gift and the nobility of her character retain their full worth. Through this legend we have occasion to understand better the woman of the past, and to know and admire a gifted woman of letters. Her writings have largely been lost; but the six surviving texts are enough to secure her a deserved place in Vietnamese letters.

23. The Đinh of Kim Khê and the Đinh Nho of Hương Sơn share a common ancestress, Lady Hoàng Quý

Đào Thị Thu Vân — General Museum of Nghệ An Province

[source: 10.doc]

The Đinh lineage of Kim Khê village, now in Nghi Long commune, Nghi Lộc district, Nghệ An province, in fact descends from the Đinh Phúc lineage, which came from the North to hide from the troubles when the Mạc usurped the Lê throne. It first settled at Thu Lũng village, Hiếu Hợp commune, now Nghi Thu ward, Cửa Lò town, and then came to settle at Kim Khê, where it has remained to this day.

In 1527 Mạc Đăng Dung rose up, overthrew King Lê Cung Hoàng and mounted the throne, inaugurating the Mạc dynasty. The official Đinh Phúc Tiên, secretary in the finance service, with his mother and his brothers Đinh Phúc Diên, Đinh Phúc An and others, fled the troubles and took refuge in the hamlet of Thu Lũng. After their mother's death the brothers agreed to disperse in order to escape pursuit. The eldest, Đinh Phúc Diên, went to Hương Sơn and settled there; he later pursued, with Phạm Phúc Kính of Hữu Băng village in the same district, the enterprise of "supporting the Lê and destroying the Mạc". After the Lê restoration he received the title "Tả Hiệu Điểm, Marquis of Công Tây": he is the first ancestor of the present-day Đinh Nho lineage of Hương Sơn. His younger brother, Đinh Phúc Tiên, stayed to tend their mother's grave, then settled at Kim Khê, forming the Đinh lineage of the land of Nghệ. Đinh Phúc Tiên passed the provincial examination in the twenty-seventh year of the Hồng Đức era (1496), under Lê Thánh Tông, inaugurating a lineage of laureates renowned in the land of Nghệ.

Phúc Tiên's fourth-generation descendant, Đinh Phúc Thượng, passed as *Sinh đồ* — the equivalent of the baccalaureate under the Nguyễn — at the examination of the year Quý Hợi, Vĩnh Tộ era (1623), under Lê Thần Tông. His younger brother, Đinh Phúc Hào, passed as *Sinh đồ* at the examination of the year Mậu Thìn, tenth year of Vĩnh Tộ (1628). From this point the Đinh Phúc lineage became the Đinh Văn lineage, with figures renowned in letters and successful at the examinations. Đinh Văn Công passed as *Hiệu sinh* at two examinations, in 1652 and 1656. Đinh Văn Quận and Đinh Văn Đồng, two brothers, both passed as *Hiệu sinh* at the same examination of the year Đinh Sửu, eighteenth year of Chính Hòa (1697), under Lê Hy Tông. Đinh Khắc Tế passed as *Hiệu sinh* at the examination of the year Mậu Tuất, fourteenth year of Vĩnh Thịnh (1718), under Lê Dụ Tông. Đinh Văn Thực passed the provincial examination — the equivalent of the bachelor's degree under the Nguyễn — in the year Kỷ Mùi, fifth year of Vĩnh Hữu (1739), under Lê Ý Tông. Đinh Giai Tiệp passed the provincial examination in the year Đinh Mão, seventh year of Cảnh Hưng (1747), under Lê Hiển Tông. Đinh Gia Thái did so in the year Kỷ Mão, twenty-first year of Cảnh Hưng (1759). Đinh Trọng Thư did so in the year Kỷ Hợi, fortieth year of Cảnh Hưng (1779), and received the office of commander of the second rear corps, Baron of Kim Xuyên. Đinh Trọng Phiên did so in the year Quý Mão, forty-fifth year of Cảnh Hưng (1783). Đinh Văn Viện, son of Đinh Văn Thực, did so in the year Đinh Mùi, first year of Chiêu Thống (1787), under Lê Mẫn Đế. Đinh Văn Hiêng passed as a bachelor in the year Tân Tỵ, second year of Minh Mệnh (1821). Đinh Văn Phác passed as an associate doctor of the third rank in the year Nhâm Ngọ, third year of Minh Mạng (1822). Đinh Trần Khanh passed as a licentiate in the year Ất Dậu, sixth year of Minh Mệnh (1825); he did not enter the mandarinate but taught at home, living with forbearance and generosity and

readily helping the poor, so that the people loved him and made him canton head to protect them. Đinh Văn Chất, son of Đinh Văn Kế, grandson of Đinh Văn Phác and great-grandson through the female line of the great poet Nguyễn Du of Tiên Điền, passed as an associate doctor of the third rank in the year Ất Hợi, twenty-eighth year of Tự Đức (1875). Đinh Văn Châu passed as a bachelor in the year Giáp Ngọ, sixth year of Thành Thái (1894), and then as a licentiate in the year Bính Ngọ, first year of Duy Tân (1906). Đinh Văn Chấp passed as a doctor of the second rank (*Hoàng giáp*) in the year Quý Sửu, seventh year of Duy Tân (1913). Đinh Văn Thể passed as a licentiate in the year Ất Mão, ninth year of Duy Tân (1915). In modern times the descendants of the Đinh lineage have gone on cultivating this tradition of study and success, and count among them highly qualified figures such as the doctor of Buddhist studies Đinh Văn Nam. The Đinh lineage of Kim Khê has given its native place and the nation illustrious figures, recorded in the country's histories and honoured for ever.

Đinh Hồng Phiên, first named Giáp, second son of the secretary Gia Thái, pen name Chỉ Hiên, passed the provincial examination in 1783. At the examination of the year Đinh Mùi, first year of the Chiêu Thống era (1787), he passed the third stage of the metropolitan examination, the equivalent of the *Phó bảng* under the Nguyễn. Under Gia Long he received the office of scholar of the Eastern Pavilion, with the title Marquis of Khê Đình, and was appointed deputy envoy to the Qing, then compiler at the National History Bureau and head of mission. His native village, then called Ông La, thereafter took the name Kim Khê, after his title Marquis of Khê Đình; he also had the Đình market established and the Khoa Trường bridge built — thirty metres long, six wide, on ironwood piles, with an ironwood plank deck and a roof of yin-yang tiles. The *Veritable Records of Đại Nam* say of him:

> "Đinh Hồng Phiên, a provincial licentiate of the Lê period, was appointed director of studies of Quảng Nam"; and, in the year Mậu Dần, eighteenth year of Gia Long (1819): "Đinh Hồng Phiên, director of studies of Quảng Nam, was appointed scholar of the Eastern Pavilion and deputy envoy to bear tribute to the Qing."

This legation was to be led by Nguyễn Du as chief envoy, but it never set out, Nguyễn Du having died of a sudden illness. Đinh Hồng Phiên and the great poet Nguyễn Du had become related by marriage. According to the genealogy of the Nguyễn lineage of Tiên Điền, Nguyễn Du had three wives: the principal wife, of the Đoàn lineage, who bore him a son; a second wife, Lady Võ, who bore him a son, Nguyễn Ngũ, skilled in arms and a district magistrate under Minh Mạng, and a daughter, Nguyễn Thị Tiêm, married to Doctor Đinh Văn Phác, eldest son of Hồng Phiên. Phác begot Biện; Biện begot Đinh Văn Giáo, who passed the first two stages of the provincial examination, Doctor Đinh Văn Chất, the top-of-his-year Uyển, and the licentiate Châu. Under Minh Mạng, for having let a "false Tây Sơn edict" slip into the compilation bureau, Đinh Hồng Phiên was demoted to instructor of Bình Dương, then teacher of Tân Bình, in Gia Định. In 1832, Lê Văn Khôi rose against the court, seized the citadel of Gia Định and the six southern provinces, named Đinh Hồng Phiên grand preceptor and presented him with a banner embroidered with the four characters "grand chamberlain of the Ministry of Rites". In 1833, Lê Văn Khôi having failed, Đinh Hồng Phiên was condemned by the court to "extermination of the three degrees of kinship" and executed with his five sons. Fortunately his grandson Đinh Văn Kế was hidden and saved by the people. Đinh Hồng Phiên was renowned for his poetry, which the Minh Mạng emperor praised in exchanges of verse; he left eleven poems, one dynastic poem and ten branch poems.

Đinh Văn Phác, born in 1790, eldest son of Hồng Phiên, pen name Song Kim Bá, passed as a licentiate in 1821 and, the following year, as an associate doctor of the third rank at the examination of the year Nhâm Ngọ, third year of Minh Mạng (1822). He was a compiler at the Hàn lâm Academy, then appointed prefect of Bình Thuận. His principal wife was Nguyễn Thị Tiềm, pen name Nghi Nhân, daughter of the vice-minister of Rites, that is, of the great poet Nguyễn Du. Lady Tiềm was gentle and virtuous, and beloved of her kin. When her husband was beheaded with his father under the sentence of "extermination of the three degrees of kinship", and the coffin was brought home, she embraced it and wept until her voice failed and life left her. Kin and villagers, moved to pity, called this "two souls buried together".

Đinh Văn Chất (1843–1887), pen name Trực Hiên, eldest son of Đinh Văn Kế, grandson of Đinh Văn Phác, great-grandson through the female line of the great poet Nguyễn Du, passed as a licentiate in 1868, then as a doctor of the third rank, second name, at the examination of the year Ất Hợi, twenty-eighth year of Tự Đức (1875). He was prefect of Nghĩa Hưng. When the French seized the North, he organised with patriotic scholars, troops and people a fierce resistance. His forces being too weak, he failed and returned home to answer the Cần Vương call. With the scholars and notables of his province he raised volunteers and unfurled the banner of insurrection in Nghi Lộc district. The insurgents then moved their base to the mountainous region of Ba Con Bò, at Thạch Bàn, Thanh Chương district, and continued the fight against the French. The colonial forces concentrated their troops, tightly encircled the base and cut all supply routes; the fighting grew fierce, the insurgents suffered heavy losses and he was captured by the French, who handed him to the southern court for trial. In the year Đinh Hợi, under Đồng Khánh, he was condemned for lèse-majesté and struck with the decree of "extermination of the three degrees of kinship". His grandfather, Doctor Đinh Văn Phác, was also condemned by the court, and his name chiselled out and erased from the doctors' stele at the Temple of Literature in Huế.

Đinh Văn Chấp (1882–1953), first named Chí, pen name An Kim, second son of Doctor Đinh Văn Chất. When his father was struck with the sentence of extermination he was only six; fortunately a woman of the village, moved to pity, covered him entirely with a blanket and carried him away, saving him from death. His maternal grandmother, Thuận Ký, of Vinh, took him across to Khu Vị, Đông An, in Fujian province (China), where his mother's family fed and educated him. Eleven years later (1898), the family's situation at home having calmed, he was brought back to Việt Nam to continue his studies. He had to change his name and declare himself ten years younger, so as not to match his father's case and to escape pursuit. In 1909 a maternal relative serving at court, Lê Huy Thản, stood surety for him and had him admitted to the Quốc Tử Giám in Huế. He studied while teaching at Phong Lai village to earn enough to support his family and himself. He passed as a licentiate in 1912, and the following year as first in the palace examination and doctor of the second rank (*Hoàng giáp*), at the examination of the year Quý Sửu, seventh year of Duy Tân (1913). He served as director of studies of Quảng Nam, prefect of Vĩnh Linh (Quảng Trị), of Hòa Đa (Bình Thuận), of Bồng Sơn (Hoài Nhơn), of Tư Nghĩa (Quảng Ngãi), was then promoted judicial commissioner of Khánh Hòa, judicial commissioner and then administration commissioner of Hà Tĩnh. During his time in Hà Tĩnh, Doctor Đinh Văn Chấp went up to Hương Sơn to burn incense at the ancestral hall of the Đinh Nho lineage, in Gôi Mỹ village (now Sơn Hòa commune), and offered there this couplet:

> *Phổ tồn bản hà, cảm vong Hoan Ái nhị châu kinh thế đại — Tộc đồng địa diệc phi, dĩ Lam Hồng thiên cổ nhất Giang Sơn.*

> The genealogy keeps its source: how forget the two circuits of Hoan and Ái, which have passed through the generations? The lineage is one though the lands differ: by the Lam and the Hồng, a single country these thousand years.

He was afterwards governor of Quảng Ngãi, vice-minister of Personnel and compiler at the National History Bureau. A serious disagreement having set him against the pro-French minister Nguyễn Khoa Kỳ and the governor-general Robin, he accepted early retirement — in reality a dismissal. In retirement he took pleasure in translating the Chinese poetry of the Lý and Trần periods, publishing more than a hundred pieces in the reviews *Nam Phong* and *Hữu Thanh*. He also composed poems and prose marked by an aesthetic sense deeply steeped in Buddhism and meditation.

The Đinh lineage of Kim Khê distinguished itself not only in letters: it is also renowned for its military men. It preserves today two patents conferred on the general Đinh Văn Thực, an officer of the time of Lê Cảnh Hưng. Đinh Văn Thực (1722–1795) was the second son of the *Sinh đồ* Đinh Khắc Tế. Handsome, vigorous, of a peaceable and composed character, he was renowned for his studies. At thirteen he was already champion of the wrestling contest of the whole Kim Khê canton; skilled with sabre and sword, he carried off the region's arms prizes year after year, and few could match him. He passed the provincial examination in the year Kỷ Mùi, fifth year of Vĩnh Hữu (1739), under Lê Ý Tông. In the twelfth month of that same year he was enlisted and appointed head of a rear-guard detachment, under the commander-in-chief, the Duke of Phùng, to fight the rebels. His merits earned him, in the eighth year of Cảnh Hưng, promotion to general *Phấn lực*, brave of the bureau of orders, centurion of the lower class. In the thirty-second year of Cảnh Hưng (1771) he was raised to general *Tráng tiết*, brave of the bureau of orders, second chiliarch, with the middle rank of *Kỵ úy*. Here is the transcription of the Cảnh Hưng patent:

> *Sắc Phấn lực tướng quân Hiệu lệnh tỵ tráng sĩ Bách hộ Hạ trật Đinh Văn Thực, vi dĩ hậu Ninh Trấn quân doanh ưu binh tùy phụng sai Nghệ An đạo, Thống lĩnh quan Đại tư đồ Đoan Quận công tiến thảo trấn Ninh, trận tiên nỗ lực trảm đắc tặc quắc, phù hoạch tặc đồ, thu hoạch tượng, mã, súng khẩu đẳng hạng, phá hữu công tích, dĩ kinh chỉ chuẩn, ứng trặc Phó thiên hộ chức. Khả vi Tráng tiết tướng quân Hiệu lệnh tỵ tráng sĩ Phó thiên hộ, trật Kỵ úy trung liệt. Cố sắc!*
>
> *Cảnh Hưng tam thập nhị niên, thập nguyệt, sơ bát nhật.*

Translation:

> Patent to Đinh Văn Thực, general *Phấn lực*, brave of the bureau of orders, centurion of the lower class. Formerly an elite soldier at the camp of the Ninh circuit, he followed the commander-in-chief of the Nghệ An army, the grand steward Duke of Đoan [Bùi Thế Đạt], to suppress the rebels in the Ninh circuit; he charged at the head of the battle, strove to cut off the rebels' heads, took prisoners, seized elephants, horses and first-class weapons, and gained merit: he had already received the order to be raised to the office of second chiliarch. He is now promoted general *Tráng tiết*, brave of the bureau of orders, second chiliarch, with the middle rank of *Kỵ úy*. Such is the patent.
>
> The eighth day of the tenth month of the thirty-second year of Cảnh Hưng (1771).

Besides talent in letters and arms, the Đinh lineage of Kim Khê also counts members who entered Buddhist orders and distinguished themselves there, such as Đinh Văn Nam. Đinh Văn Nam (1917–2012), in religion the Venerable Thích Minh Châu, was the third son of Doctor Đinh Văn Chập. Active in Buddhist affairs from 1936, head of the office of Vietnamese Buddhist Studies, he was one of the founders of the Đức Dục Buddhist Studies Circle and of the Buddhist Family Association. In 1952 he went to study in Ceylon, learning English and Pali at Colombo, then attended the Nava Mahavihara at the University of Bihar, in India. He obtained a special English diploma (B.A.), a doctorate in theology and a doctorate in the Pali language. In 1956 he was the first Vietnamese to climb, with a Tibetan lama, a Japanese Buddhist student and a Nepalese, to Vulture Peak (Gṛdhrakūṭa), where the Buddha left his trace. In 1958, Uncle Hô, visiting India, had himself photographed alone with him and directed him towards returning home to carry on patriotic and revolutionary Buddhist work once his studies were complete. He was the first foreigner and the only Vietnamese to obtain the doctorate in Pali in India, the honorary degree being presented to him in person by the Indian prime minister. He held the offices of vice-president of the Patronage Council of the Buddhist Church of Việt Nam; member of the executive committee and vice-president of the Asian Buddhist Conference for Peace (ABCP); president of the Vietnamese national centre of the ABCP; vice-president and secretary general of the Central Executive Council of the Buddhist Church of Việt Nam; rector of the Higher Institute of Buddhist Studies of Việt Nam; and deputy to the National Assembly from the seventh to the tenth legislature. He left a considerable and valuable body of Buddhist writing, translation and compilation: *Xuanzang, Pilgrim and Scholar*; *A Comparison of the Pali Milindapañha and the Chinese Sūtra of the Monk Nāgasena*; *Faxian, the Humble Pilgrim*; *Life of the Buddha Śākyamuni*; the *Dīgha Nikāya*; the *Saṃyutta Nikāya*; the *Majjhima Nikāya*; the *Aṅguttara Nikāya*; the *Khuddaka Nikāya*… For having translated the five *Nikāyas* into Vietnamese, he received from the central committee of the Buddhist Church of Thailand, through the Thai Buddhist University, the title of doctor honoris causa in Buddhist studies.

The genealogies and surviving documents show that the Đinh lineage of Kim Khê, Nghi Long commune, Nghi Lộc district, is indeed a lineage renowned for its tradition of study, its laureates and its patriotism. Generation after generation it has produced outstanding men in the fields of culture, education, the army, Buddhism and the economy…

It may be said that in every age it produced eminent talents who helped to defend, build and develop their native place and the nation. It is a lineage whose leading figures fought without reserve against arbitrary power and in defence of what is right. In fifty-four years this same lineage — from the scholar of the Eastern Pavilion and Marquis of Khê Đình, Đinh Hồng Phiên, to Doctor Đinh Văn Chất, that is, from 1833 to 1887 — was twice struck by the Nguyễn court with the decree of “extermination of the three degrees of kinship”, for having fought arbitrary oppression and refused the capitulation and compromise with the French colonisers then practised by the southern court. The descendants of the Đinh lineage continue today to cultivate this precious tradition and help to make theirs one of the most glorious lineages of Nghệ An and of the country.

24. The *Song Thanh gia ký*, from An Ấp to Thanh Liêu, and Doctor Đinh Nhật Thận

Bùi Văn Chất

[source: 29.doc]

The *Song Thanh gia ký* (雙清家記) is the account composed by Hữu Mưu — that is, Đinh Nho Mưu — on the circumstances and formation of the Đinh branch of Thanh Liêu, Thanh Chương district, which came from An Ấp in Hương Sơn.

The Đinh lineage of An Ấp was originally a great clan of Gia Viễn, in Ái Châu — Gia Viễn today belongs to Ninh Bình province. When the troubles came, four brothers went together to Hoan Châu and scattered across the districts to found settlements: one at Yên Hồ, Nam Đường; one at Kim Khê, Chân Phúc; one at Đan Hải, Nghi Xuân; and one at An Ấp, Hương Sơn.

> *Phổ tồn bản / hà cảm vong / Hoan Ái nhị châu kinh thế đại Tộc đồng địa / diệc phi dị / Hồng Lam thiên cổ nhất giang sơn*
>
> 譜存本何敢忘獾愛二州經世代 / 族同地亦非異鴻藍千古一江山

That is:

> The genealogy keeps its stock: who would dare forget the two circuits of Hoan and Ái, through the generations? The lineage is the same, the place is not different: by the Hồng and the Lam, a single country these thousand years.

This couplet, offered by Hoàng giáp Đinh Văn Chấp (1893–?), of the Kim Khê branch at Nghi Lộc, in homage to the ancestral hall of the Đinh Nho lineage of An Ấp, is proof of it.

A. The Hương Sơn branch (summary)

1. First ancestor Phúc Diên, who cleared the land of Bình Hòa; he later gained merit in suppressing rebels and received the office of *Tả hiệu điểm*, Marquis of Công Tây. Died aged 93.
2. Ancestor Phúc Trường: passed the four sessions with distinction at 21; at 27, passed the composition examination with high marks. Died aged 60.
3. Ancestor Phúc Bảo: passed the four sessions at 19. Died aged 72.
4. Ancestor Chính Tính: passed the four sessions at 20. Died aged 72.
5. Ancestor Phúc Khánh: passed the four sessions at 25. Died aged 82.
6. Ancestor Hữu Luân (1602–1676), sub-prefect, Baron of Nhân Phái: passed the four sessions at 16. Born at the hour of the Horse, the seventh day of the fifth month of the year Nhâm Dần (1602); died at the hour of the Dog, the eighteenth day of the third month of the year Bính Dần (1686). Died aged 85; death anniversary on the 18th of the third month.
7. Seventh-generation ancestor: Nho Công, assistant censor, father of the Đại vương. Passed as a doctor in the year Canh Tuất (1670), died aged 59. He had two wives: the first, of the Đặng lineage, bore him three sons, Nho Trạch, Nho Huân (who died young) and Nho Hoàn; the second, also of the Đặng lineage, bore him Nho Thận, Nho Thường and Nho Côn.

Eighth generation

- 8.1. Nho Trạch, personal name Thuần, passed the scholars' examination.
- 8.2. Nho Huân, of exceptional gifts for study, who died young.

- 8.3. Nho Hoàn, personal name Toản, doctor, left vice-minister of Rites.
- 8.4. Nho Thận (whom some documents wrongly confuse with Doctor Đinh Nhật Thận, of the thirteenth generation).
- 8.5. Nho Thường, passed the scholars' examination, district magistrate of Tương Dương.
- 8.6. Nho Côn, commander-in-chief, Marquis of Hương Nghĩa.

Issue of the eighth generation

8.1. Nho Trạch had six sons: 9.1 Nho Thực, who passed the scholars' examination; 9.2 Nho Gia, who accompanied an embassy to the North and received the office of sub-prefect, dying young; 9.3 Nho Liêu, scholar of the Chiêu Văn pavilion; 9.4 Nho Mỵ, who passed the scholars' examination; 9.5 Nho Thái, who passed the scholars' examination; 9.6 Nho Hoằng, a scholar raised to the rank of *triều liệt đại phu*, adopted son of the Marquis Tả.

(8.2) and (8.3): no known issue.

8.4. Nho Thận had three sons: 9.1 Nho Uy; 9.2 Nho Ngụ; 9.3 Duy Phiên.

8.5. Nho Thường had 9.1 Nho Mật.

8.6. Nho Côn had 9. Nho Tôn, Marquis of Tiên Duệ.

Ninth generation: Nho Tôn, Marquis of Tiên Duệ.

Tenth generation: Nho Bạt, heir to Nho Tôn's cult (9.6), who emigrated to Thanh Liêu. Under the Nguyễn Tây Sơn, Nho Bạt's branch took the surname Nguyễn.

Eleventh generation: Nho Bạt begot 11.1 Nho Thành and 11.2 Nho Mưu.

Twelfth generation: 12.1 Nho Mãn; 12.2 Nhật Thận (or Viết Thận).

B. Doctor Đinh Nhật Thận

Đinh Nhật Thận (1815–1866), courtesy name Tử Uý, pen name Bạch Mao Am, was born in the year Ất Hợi (1815) in Thanh Liêu commune, Thanh Chương district, Nghệ An province, on the bank of the Lam river. His father had six sons, of whom he was the second. His mother came from a Catholic family.

He studied under the licentiate Thọ Nhạc, of Đồng Luân village (same district), then under the scholar Nguyễn Hữu Tố, a renowned master of the day.

As a schoolboy he was already reputed very intelligent. At twenty he passed as a bachelor.

At the next examination, that of the year Đinh Dậu (1837), he took up his mat and shelter and sat again. At the Nghệ examination the chief examiner was Lâm Duy Nghĩa, severe by nature and no friend to candidates from Nghệ. Where twenty-two licentiates were usually passed each year, only five passed that year. Đinh Nhật Thận went home having failed. The papers were sent to the capital. The king declared: "The land of Nghệ has always produced many talents; how is it that so few passed this year? Let the bachelors, then, be allowed to sit the metropolitan examination."

The metropolitan examination fell in the year Mậu Tuất (1838), the nineteenth year of Minh Mạng; Đinh Nhật Thận passed it, then at the palace examination came out first among the doctors — and he was the youngest of his year.

Once he had passed, he stayed in the capital to pay his respects to the officials. Someone wished to test his gift and challenged him to learn a dictionary by heart. Without hesitating he took the book home and, the next day, recited it from end to end. Such things made his talent known, and it was to his extraordinary gifts that he owed his entry into the company of the famous scholars of the day.

Under Gia Long and Minh Mệnh the pacification had only just been completed and the people still regretted the Lê. Only under Thiệu Trị and Tự Đức did true prosperity and peace come: the capital then became the meeting place of the talents of the three regions. There were at court two poetic schools. On one side the circle of the princes Tùng Thiện and Tuy Lý, of Trương Đăng Quế and Nguyễn Đăng Giai, which the court treated with deference — though not necessarily the more loved by scholars. On the other, that of Cao Bá Quát, Nguyễn Văn Siêu, Nguyễn Hàm Ninh and Đinh Nhật Thận. Doubtless that is why the friendship among the latter grew so close: their meetings in the capital, where they sang and exchanged verses, were days of unmixed pleasure. Later, even when Đinh Nhật Thận had to suffer for a friend, he surely remembered those days and bore no grudge against the one who had gone astray.

Shortly afterwards he was given office. But his character was upright and he could not bear the bridle. Scarcely a prefect, he was called into question and had to return home. In 1843, the third year of the Thiệu Trị era, he was reinstated; but as he was about to take up his new post he declared himself ill and stayed at home. From then on he resolved to give up his career and to go home and enjoy the pleasures of the fields.

He founded a hamlet, called Gia Hội, between the villages of Thanh Liêu and Tiên Hội. In front of it flowed the Lam, behind it rose a range of mountains: the site was of extreme beauty. He called in settlers, founded a farmstead, and turned a tract of waste ground into a thriving hamlet.

Each day he taught, then read, and above all read medical books. He was soon held to be a renowned physician of the region; he saved many people and cured illnesses in an almost miraculous way. His leisure hours he spent on horseback. When one saw a man with hair falling to his shoulders, a crepe scarf about his neck, riding a white horse, everyone knew at once that it was Doctor Đinh.

Sometimes he went north to the house of the commissioner Siêu, or to the capital to find Ninh and exchange verses. Often too he set out alone to see beautiful places. One day, passing the temple of Cờn, in the north of Nghệ An province — the temple of a queen and two princesses of the Chinese Song dynasty, cast ashore in the southern country after their dynasty fell, and one of the most venerated in Nghệ Tĩnh — he glanced at the couplet painted on the pillar:

> *Biện kinh nhất nhật thiên vô Tống / Càn hải thiên niên Việt hữu thần.*
>
> At the capital of Bian, in one day, Heaven took away the Song; at the sea of Càn, for a thousand years, Việt has had its deities.

The parallelism is perfect, word for word, and everyone admired it. He, however, laughed, pronounced it ignorant, took a stone and chiselled out the characters, objecting:

“The Song first established their capital at Bian, then moved to Guang, to Min, to Hang. It was only on reaching Hang that they lost the country, and that the queen was cast ashore among us. The first line is therefore false. Besides, to set ‘one day’ against ‘a thousand years’ is both superfluous and weak.”

He replaced the couplet with these two lines:

> *Địa khí bắc nhi nam, Biện Quảng Mân Hàng quốc mạch Thanh linh kim tự cổ, Cao Tào Hướng Mạnh gia phong.*
>
> The breath of the land runs north to south: Bian, Guang, Min, Hang, the veins of the realm; the pure power of today is that of old: Gao, Cao, Xiang, Meng, the tradition of the houses.

The sense is very clear: Gao, Cao, Xiang and Meng are the four lineages that in China produced the most queens.

Though he was “out of the bridle”, he could not remain undisturbed.

In the seventh year of Tự Đức (1854) the so-called Locust rebellion broke out in Tonkin. His friend Cao Bá Quát became its military adviser. Cao was soon captured. But the court went on suspecting the rebel’s friends.

One day Đinh Nhật Thận was arrested without warning. Taken to the provincial seat, he was shown the evidence of his treason. It was a letter he had written to a friend on the other bank, inviting him to come and play *tổ tôm* and to bring the pack of cards, which the guards had intercepted:

> *Tứ tướng dĩ cụ / Chỉ khiếm nhất viên / Tương bách nhị binh / Độ hà kịch chiến.*
>
> The four generals are ready; only one man is missing. Bring a hundred and twenty soldiers and cross the river for battle.

Explain as he might, he was taken to the capital to be tried.

While he was still in custody, the officials suddenly came for him and invited him to drink; he did not understand why, but emptied his cup unperturbed. The king had ordered the court dignitaries to compose on a carving representing “the hidden dragon, the dragon in shadow”. The officials had submitted nearly fifty lines, all rejected by the king. Someone remembered the quickness of mind of Đinh Nhật Thận, then in prison, and hastened to ask him to think of something. He recited at once:

> *Đại Thuấn thâm sơn nhật / Gia Cát thảo lư thần.*
>
> Great Shun, in the days of the deep mountain; Zhuge Liang, in the morning of his thatched hut.

Presented to the imperial gaze, the couplet struck King Dực Tông, who admired its skill: to sing “the hidden dragon, the dragon in shadow” by saying “the virtue of great Shun when he lived

deep in the forests, Zhuge Liang when he kept hidden in the countryside" was to say its whole spirit.

Later he cured the mother of a great dignitary, thanks to his medical learning. He was soon released, but kept in the capital, without leave to return home.

The poem *Thu dạ lữ hoài ngâm* — Lament of a Traveller's Thoughts on an Autumn Night — was composed precisely during this enforced residence. The sadness of the exile made him write admirable lines. Confined at Huế, before the light beauty of Mount Bình and the Perfume River, he overflowed with feeling for his native land. He composed this piece to dispel his sorrow — and perhaps also, deliberately, to move the sovereign.

In what year he was allowed home is not known. From then on he escaped the yoke of office entirely. He died in the year Bính Dần (1866), the nineteenth year of Tự Đức.

Postscript. On the doctor's direct descent, Mr Đinh Viết Hiếu, head of the Đinh branch of Đức Nhuận (now Thanh Liên commune), and Mr Đinh Viết Quý, of the Đinh branch of Thanh Liêu (now Thanh Tiên), have told us by telephone: (1) the site of the doctor's temple, at the end of Gia Hội village, is one the villagers dare not touch — but it is regrettable that the national road along the right bank of the Lam now passes through it and cuts his old garden in two; (2) his descent comprises the following generations: the doctor begot the schoolmaster Tánh (or Tính, in the pronunciation used by Professor Nguyễn Tài Cẩn); the master Tính begot Đệ; Đệ begot the two brothers Quán and Huy — the latter in hamlet 9 of Thanh Thịnh commune.

Sources

- Genealogy of the Đinh lineage of Thanh Liêu, preserved and supplied by Mr Đinh Viết Hiếu.
- *A Study of the Poetry of Đinh Nhật Thận*, by Nguyễn Tài Chắt and Nguyễn Tài Cẩn.

25. Observations drawn from the papers of three eighteenth-century envoys from Hà Tĩnh

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[source: `18.doc`]

Introduction

In the eighteenth century, under the Lê kings and Trịnh lords, from 1702 to 1783, Phan Huy Chú lists in his *Institutions of the Successive Dynasties* fifteen embassies, comprising forty-five envoys. Three of these were led by men from Hà Tĩnh: Hà Tông Mục (1653–?), chief envoy in 1702, under Lê Hy Tông, twenty-third year of the Chính Hòa era (a legation of four); Đinh Nho Hoàn (1671–1715), deputy envoy in 1715, under Lê Dụ Tông, eleventh year of the Vĩnh Thịnh era (a legation of four); and Nguyễn Huy Oánh (1713–1789), chief envoy in 1765, under Lê Hiển Tông, twenty-sixth year of the Cảnh Hưng era (a legation of three). Several conferences have already been devoted to them and a number of documents on these embassies have been published [1, 2, 3].

Of Hà Tông Mục's embassy far too few documents survive: all that is known today is the panel presented by the Kangxi emperor, *Nhược Xung Hiên*, and the poem he offered to the Korean envoy [3]; his writings from the time of the embassy have not been found. Of Đinh Nho Hoàn's, we have only the translation of ninety-three poems out of the one hundred and fifty-five he left; it is regrettable that the whole of his embassy writing, the *Mặc Ông sứ tập* collected and copied by his son-in-law Nguyễn Trọng Thường, has not been fully transcribed and translated — which greatly limits anyone wishing to know his work. Of Nguyễn Huy Oánh we have the *Phụng sứ Yên Đài tổng ca*, already presented [2]; other related collections — the *Băc dư tập lãm*, the *Hoàng Hoa sứ trình đồ*, the *Hoàng Hoa tiểu dãn* — have been much presented but not yet translated and published in full. From what we have, this paper would treat three points: these men's attachment to their families, to their native places and, above all, to their country — including the very concrete matter of defending Việt Nam's sovereignty.

Attachment to family

Almost all envoys composed poems during their missions, later gathered in various ways into collections. The most notable are Nguyễn Quý Đức's *Hoa trình thi tập*, Đinh Nho Hoàn's *Mặc Ông sứ tập*, Nguyễn Công Cơ's *Sứ hoa thi tập*, Ngô Đình Thạc's *Hoàng hoa nhã vịnh*, Lê Hữu Kiều's *Băc sứ hiệu tân thi*, Nguyễn Tông Khuê's *Sứ hoa tùng vịnh* and *Sứ trình tân truyện*, Lê Quý Đôn's *Liên châu thi tập*... In them one notices above all poems exchanged with foreign literati, pieces exchanged with travelling companions, landscape poems, and the expression of longing for country, village and kin.

In the documentation on the two embassies of Đinh Nho Hoàn and Nguyễn Huy Oánh [1, 2], many pieces bear on attachment to family; the most characteristic is Đinh Nho Hoàn's poem for the anniversary of his mother's death (Vietnamese version by Thái Kim Đỉnh) [1]:

Feelings on the anniversary of my mother's death, the 17th of the seventh month

> I grieve that I lost my mother at three; and on the day I might repay my debt of piety, here I am far away. In a foreign land, heart tight, with no wine for the offering; at the hut door the tears flow, and the stick of incense blurs. The clouds play at the horse's head: where then is home? The eyes weep with sorrow, the hem of the robe is soaked. The song of the *Lục Nga* ended, the soul enters the dream... To make loyalty one's filial piety: is that not it?

And Nguyễn Huy Oánh's poem, *Reflections on the anniversary of my father's death* (Vietnamese version by Lại Văn Hùng):

> It is not for poverty, it is to repay a kindness; I have bent my efforts to honours so as to bring my parents glory. The years pass, the months press, and here is the anniversary day; the heart tightens and the mind is spent a hundredfold. At the offerings I could not present the precious dishes; over mountains and waters my two feet still run. My mother at home surely understands the traveller's heart, gleaning at the southern stream a few handfuls of artemisia.

Both poems have one general sense: greater piety — distinguishing oneself so as to honour one's parents — must be held above lesser piety, which consists in caring for them in sickness.

Attachment to the native place

The seventh piece [1] — *Remembering my nurse, addressed to my fellow laureate the chamberlain of the Imperial Stud* — in which the name of Mount Kê Sơn, Mount Mồng Gà, appears, has been translated by Thái Kim Đỉnh:

> Hair of frost, leaning at the door, my mother awaits her son; since then, how many times has the moon of home been full? What remedy would drive off sadness in a foreign land? To whom, if not to the friend of happy days, confide what is in my heart? Mồng Gà, the mountain village, the garden and its fruit; the horse's back, the verses, and the long leagues of mountain and water. I cannot, like the bird, return the mouthful to my mother; I praise in vain Zengzi, who kept his soul entire.

Passing the street of La Sơn — whose name coincides with that of La Sơn district, his native place — Nguyễn Huy Oánh wrote *Passing the Street of La Sơn* (Vietnamese version by Trần Bá Chí):

> Wooden doors and inlaid houses open at the roadside; a cup of wine, a bowl of tea, and the traveller lingers. Autumn has come, the maple leaves fall one by one; the wind plays in the willow branches hanging on every side. The fishing boat, out from the landing, sets the reeds rustling; purple terrace and green clouds, the mountain steeped in mist. My district's name is the same as this street's: this scene makes me think of home.

Mount Kê Sơn, the street of La Sơn: a mountain's name and a street's name are enough to recall to the envoys their country and their kin.

Attachment to the country

Beside attachment to family and native place, the documentation is abundant on attachment to the country and on Việt Nam's sovereignty, frontiers and islands included.

In the diplomatic history of Đại Việt, after Phùng Khắc Khoan, Nguyễn Huy Oánh is the second case — and doubtless the last — of an envoy who exchanged poems with the representatives of all three countries of the East Asian region, in two pieces offered to the Korean envoy, *Presented to the Envoy of Cao Ly*, and to the envoy of the Ryūkyū — today Japanese territory — *Farewell to the Japanese Envoy on his Departure*. Through the channel of language and poetry, this envoy of the Lê court expressed richly the political and diplomatic thought and inspiration proper to his age, and more generally to the Vietnamese dynasties: a spirit of equality and concord among states, founded on mutual knowledge and respect, and an affirmation of national sovereignty and civilisation. In *Presented to the Envoy of Cao Ly*, Nguyễn Huy Oánh situates each one's own space within the fully autonomous and unified existence of states, from boundaries and geographical position to historical origins, language and customs:

> Vũ trụ đồng bao quát, Cơ tâm tự bức viên. Thành Thang quân viễn tổ, Viêm Đế ngã gia tiên. Đảo tự phân chư quốc, Tinh hà cộng nhất thiên.

Translation:

> This universe embraces all; each land cultivates itself to its own fullness. Cheng Tang is your distant ancestor; the Fiery Emperor is mine. The islands, great and small, divide into states, but all lie under one and the same starry sky.

In *Farewell to the Japanese Envoy on his Departure*, Nguyễn Huy Oánh writes (Vietnamese version by Nguyễn Thanh Tùng):

> Hủ cương (1) hư lộ (2) các thiên nhai, Đa sĩ hân phùng đại mễ (3) gia. Nhật tống phù nê (4) ninh hoạt kế, Thủ châm tiên tố (5) cộng kim la (6). Kiệt nô (7) dương mại (8) tây tôn (9) bộ, Thái lạc (10) minh đông (11) a tướng (12) toa. Hoa cái (13) lực ca (14) phi cảm nghĩ, Mạn tương phấn địa (15) ngô tình đa.

Translation:

> On a cloudy day, each of us goes off to his own corner of the sky; after long waiting, I have the honour of meeting Your Excellency. The sun accompanies the ship's departure: one must know how to adapt; the hand pours the cup of tea, and we converse together. Only yesterday we walked together in the mountains; tonight, like a shuttle, you sit upon the water. Young and of great talent, I would not dare match myself with you; I take the liberty of using the brush to confide all that I feel.

The poet's own notes

1. *Hủ cương* 朽岡 means "cloud" (雲). In Japanese: *kumo*. The author here uses Japanese words written in Chinese characters. This notation is found in works such as the *Huayi yiyu* (Japanese vocabulary), the *Chouhai tubian*, the *Huangming yuwo lu* (abridged vocabulary). The same applies to the cases below.
2. *Hư lộ* 虛路 means "day" (日). In Japanese: *kyou*.
3. *Đại mễ* 大米 means "official" (官). Japanese not identified.
4. *Phù nê* 浮泥 means "boat" (船). In Japanese: *fune*.
5. *Tiên tố* 鮮素 means "tea" (茶). Japanese not identified.
6. *Kim la* 金羅 means "to speak, to think" (尖). Japanese not identified.
7. *Kiệt nô* 傑奴 means "yesterday" (昨日). In Japanese: *kinou*.
8. *Dương mại* 羊賣 means "mountain" (山). In Japanese: *yama*.
9. *Tây tôn* 西孫 means "to walk about" (遊). Japanese not identified.
10. *Thái lạc* 採落 means "night" (夜). In Japanese: *yoru*.
11. *Minh đông* 明東 means "water, river" (水). In Japanese: *mizu*.
12. *A tướng* 阿將 means "to sit" (坐). Japanese not identified.
13. *Hoa cái* 華蓋 means "youth" (少年). In Japanese: *wakai*.
14. *Lực ca* 力哥 means "clever, quick-witted" (聰明). Japanese not identified.
15. *Phấn địa* 粉地 means "brush" (筆). In Japanese: *fude*.
16. Author's note: "using the speech of Y Chu". This "speech of Y Chu" is in fact Japanese transcribed in Chinese characters. Y Chu may be the name of the Japanese envoy — in Japanese, *Korechika*.

What is remarkable about this poem is that Nguyễn Huy Oánh used words taken from Japanese–Chinese glossaries to compose his farewell piece for the Japanese envoy. Thus, even

while Chinese characters served as the common and official language and script among the countries "of the same writing", Nguyễn Huy Oánh, wishing to know his interlocutor's own language so as to exchange with him better and understand his people, deliberately learned and used Japanese — which attests the breadth of view of his diplomatic activity, directed towards the nation's highest interest.

Đỗ Thị Thu Thủy, a doctoral candidate, observes:

> "In the poems offered to the Korean and Japanese envoys, the character of 'same writing', as a feature of regional culture, is the dominant thought and inspiration running through diplomatic exchange poems in general. Considered within relations among countries 'of the same condition', regarded as 'peripheral' and 'vassal' in the 'Chinese-style world order' — Việt Nam, Korea, Japan — 'same writing' is a cultural dialogue that contributes positively to establishing an East Asian tradition of friendly relations, in the spirit of 'all brothers within the four seas' and 'great friends dwelling together'. Moreover, this tacitly expresses an intention to debate and to contest the Hoa–Di distinction — the notion of a hierarchy between great and small countries — belonging to the Chinese 'celestial court', and to affirm that Việt Nam and the other countries of the region are nations of ancient civilisation and letters, not 'barbarian countries'. To reject Hoa–Di is also to limit the political privileges and cultural imposition of the Chinese dynasties, and to bring peoples closer on a basis of respect, knowledge and equality."

It is truly regrettable that the documentation on Hà Tông Mục's embassy should be so slight; but fortunately his poem addressed to the Korean envoy survives [3], written in Chinese, of which here are the transcription and translation:

Presented to the Envoy of Korea

> Chu nguyên vạn lý cộng khu trì, Tái lập đàm gian chí ý thù. Đạo lý uyên nguyên do nhất quỹ, Y quan lễ nhạc khước đồng phù. Úy thiên các cẩn hầu triều độ, Nhậm sĩ đồng quy vương hội đồ. Lưu thủy cao sơn cầm tái cổ, Tri âm thế hữu Tử Kỳ vô.

Translation:

> Over ten thousand leagues of the Central Plain we travel the same road; we have hardly spoken a moment before your views strike me as singular. Yet doctrine, in its deep source, has always been one; robes and caps, rites and music likewise agree. Fearing august Heaven, each attends the audience according to form; scholars on mission converge upon the royal assembly. Flowing water and high mountain: the old zither sounds again — is there still in this world a Zhong Ziqi to hear it?

Earlier, in the twentieth year of Chính Hòa (1699), Hà Tông Mục had been sent by the Lê–Trịnh court to negotiate with Qing representatives to prevent Chinese officials from encroaching on the land of Bảo Lạc (Tuyên Quang circuit, now part of Cao Bằng). The Qing representative, Cen Zhifang, yielded to his arguments and withdrew his troops. The people of the Bảo Lạc march thereby gained peace.

The envoy Đinh Nho Hoàn having unhappily died on the road to Yên Kinh, he had no occasion to meet the envoys of other countries; and since his embassy writings have not yet been fully translated and presented, this section remains empty as far as he is concerned.

Thanks to the collaboration of lineage descendants and scholars, the documents on the embassies of the three envoys from Hà Tĩnh, under the eighteenth-century Lê, are gradually being collected and published, together with scholars' observations. The participation of descendants in the work of interpretation is necessary: they are the ones who know the usages, the customs, the dates of ceremonies and death anniversaries, and their remarks sometimes open new lines. Thus, concerning the two poems on the anniversaries of Đinh Nho Hoàn's mother and Nguyễn Huy Oánh's father: translating the latter, Lại Văn Hùng wondered what event of the ninth month could have prompted these *Reflections*; the descendants indicated that the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month was the anniversary of Nguyễn Huy Oánh's father's death, which allowed a more accurate translation. Our view is that within the lineage, loyalty is placed above filial piety.

Conclusion

By way of conclusion, a few proposals.

The three envoys from Hà Tĩnh — Hà Tông Mục, Đinh Nho Hoàn, Nguyễn Huy Oánh — accomplished in the eighteenth century, under the restored Lê, the mission received from their sovereign, and the Qing held them in high esteem: Hà Tông Mục received from the Kangxi emperor the wooden panel *Nhược Xung Hiên*; Nguyễn Huy Oánh received from the Qianlong emperor the wooden panel *Đẩu Nam Tuần dự*; and for Đinh Nho Hoàn, the Qing emperor composed a text and sent an official of the Ministry of Rites to perform the funeral rites.

The lineage descendants should join with scholars and with the people of their home regions to find further documents on their lineages' illustrious figures, and first of all the embassy writings, then arrange for their translation and presentation for scholars' use.

The concrete contributions to Việt Nam's sovereignty attested by the writings and documents of these embassies should be studied.

The ancestral hall and tomb of Hà Tông Mục, like those of Nguyễn Huy Oánh, have been listed as national historical and cultural monuments. The file for listing the tomb and shrine of Đinh Nho Hoàn should be drawn up without delay: it would be our way of thanking him for what he did for the people and for the country.

References

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26. The enlightened lord Trịnh Cương, the successful organisation of the embassies and the gains of the diplomatic struggle with China

Nguyễn Thị Phương Hoàn

[source: 16.doc]

Introduction

Đinh Nho Hoàn sat the examinations, passed them and served under the Lê kings and Trịnh lords. The man who then held real power was Trịnh Cương, a lord whom posterity ranks among the enlightened princes. By examining his policy, his programme of domestic reform, the seriousness with which he organised the embassies and the skill and firmness of his diplomatic struggle with China, we have occasion to measure better the stature of the diplomat that the deputy envoy Đinh Nho Hoàn was. That is why we venture to set out this subject.

The enlightened prince Trịnh Cương

Trịnh Cương is the sixth lord of the restored Lê period; he held power from May 1709 to October 1729. Eldest son of Prince Tấn Quang, Trịnh Bính, and great-grandson of Định Nam Vương Trịnh Căn, he was chosen for the succession under the rule of the direct line.

In 1709, on the death of Lord Trịnh Căn, An Đô Vương Trịnh Cương came to power. In the ninth month of the year Giáp Ngọ (1714), King Lê Dụ Tông conferred on him the titles of grand marshal, regent general and Prince An. He went to pay homage at the dynastic temple and to present himself to King Lê Dụ Tông at the Vĩnh Thọ palace. His conduct has been judged proper and modest, in keeping with a subject's duty to his prince: holding real power, he never affected to eclipse the Lê king as previous lords had done.

One day, when court dress was under discussion, the dignitaries advised him to wear yellow when receiving his subjects; he refused, holding that yellow was reserved for the king and that it was enough for the lord to wear purple to distinguish himself from his officials. In 1724, Trịnh Cương was charged with performing the sacrifice at the Nam Giao altar in the king's place; but at the ceremony he refused to stand where the king stood to officiate. This conduct earned him added respect.

Over more than twenty years of rule, Lord Trịnh Cương applied himself diligently to the affairs of state, valued scholars and cared for men of talent. He employed three able and virtuous young dignitaries — Doctors Lê Anh Tuấn, Nguyễn Công Cơ and Nguyễn Công Hãng — to help him govern. He boldly undertook several tax reforms tending to social equity and to the people's advantage. The sources record that once, in the middle of the night, preoccupied with taxes and reforms, Trịnh Cương had his two ministers, Công Hãng and Anh Tuấn, woken and summoned to the lordly palace to work.

When Trịnh Cương came to power, every member of the Trịnh lineage had troops of his own. He ordered them disbanded and kept only a force under the unified command of the lordly palace, to prevent kinsmen from tearing one another apart, "the skin boiling the flesh". He reorganised the palace army into six camps, recruiting able-bodied men from the four circuits

and from Thanh and Nghệ, and set six commanders skilled in strategy at their head. The country's military strength under Trịnh Cương was thus considerable and strictly disciplined.

Trịnh Cương worked with all his strength to cleanse the administrative apparatus and to promote scholars and men of talent. In 1723, on Nguyễn Công Hãng's proposal, he allowed the people to post comments on local officials. Many corrupt officials were thus exposed, and many cases of oppression of the people and of corruption were tried fairly. In 1726, Nguyễn Công Cơ having reported to him that the examinations gave rise to much fraud and that most of the powerful men's sons passed as licentiates were without talent, Trịnh Cương had a re-examination held and failed twenty-eight candidates, among them the son of the minister Lê Anh Tuấn, the son of the Duke of Huân, Đặng Đình Giám, and the adopted son of the eunuch Đỗ Bá Phẩm. All were handed over to the court of justice to be questioned and punished. Công Cơ, who had dared to make a frank and accurate report, was promoted *Thiếu bảo*.

Raised in silk, untempered by war, Trịnh Cương was nonetheless a lord without display or love of pleasure, without arrogance or hauteur, and wholly bent on building the country. His twenty years of power were twenty years of prosperity, without war, without internal strife, and the country's economy recovered.

One of his successes over those twenty years was to maintain concord with the northern country and to obtain the return of several regions of the northern frontier unlawfully occupied by China. To achieve this he took the greatest care over the organisation of the legations sent as far as Yên Kinh, and won great successes on the diplomatic front. The memorial of Doctor Nguyễn Công Hãng, chief envoy of our legation of the year Mậu Tuất, fourteenth year of Vĩnh Thịnh (1718), addressed to Lord Trịnh, reads: "Lord Trịnh Cương takes the utmost care over friendship with neighbouring lands and frequently sends embassies of goodwill", so that "the people of a small country may live in peace".

According to the official history, most of our legations went to China to bear tribute, to congratulate the emperor on his accession, to attend his funeral, or to announce the accession of our own king. But written documents show that under Trịnh Cương they had another and important task besides: to "contest" and "debate" with the Chinese court over territorial disputes and the weight of the tribute.

Trịnh Cương chose the members of the legations himself, accompanied them himself at their departure with his instructions, and went out himself beyond the walls to receive them on their return. The memorial of our legation of the year Ất Mùi, eleventh year of Vĩnh Thịnh (1715), tells us that, for the first time in the history of our embassies to the northern country, the lord presented the legation with two poems in *nôm* before it set out. In them he urged them to "attend to their mission and convey exactly and fully the will of our court; to keep the advantage in diplomatic speech; and finally he wished that the two words merit and renown be accomplished". These two *nôm* poems are lost, but the sources have preserved the two poems Trịnh Cương gave to the legation of the year Mậu Tuất (1718) — one in Chinese, the other in *nôm*.

Poem in Chinese (transcription):

> Hoàng đạo thanh di diệu sứ trình Minh thời trọng tuyển thuộc thời anh Vân tiên chỉ xích Khâm Chu bệ Nhất lộ tam thiên Vũ Hán tình Bão phú trung thành xa

phượng khuyết Kính ngang tứ sắc bá Yên Kinh Tân ân, cựu phục, cung thiên chỉ Hảo phụng quy lai điệp quốc vinh.

Vietnamese version:

> Broad is the royal road, and bright the envoy's way; he who bears the insignia of his charge is, in time of peace, a man of high talent. His brush rises to the celestial court; over the long leagues, massed banners seem to escort him. His loyal heart reaches the palace gates; at Yên Kinh our country's envoy shines out. Heaven's will grants a fresh favour: he brings home victory and glory for his land.

Poem in *nôm*:

> Đá vàng là tiết, sắt là lòng Khăn khẳn thư này việc hiếu trung Nghĩa lợi ổn tường trong vấn đáp Kính quyền nhẫn thấu ấy quan phòng Giá cao ắt thấy xem loan phượng Thế trọng thêm bền vững Thái, Tùng Công thấy, kịp nên, danh kịp toại Đã đành một vẹn chữ hưu đồng.
>
> Stone and gold are his constancy, iron is his heart; steadfastly this mission holds to filial duty and loyalty. Right and advantage will be weighed with care in the exchanges; principle and expediency, sounded to the bottom: therein lies his guard. By his high worth the phoenix and the *loan* will be known; his standing, made firm, will be more solid than Mounts Tai and Song. Let the merit be seen, the work accomplished, the renown obtained: thus will the word *hưu đồng* be wholly fulfilled.

The content of these two poems shows that, under Trịnh Cương's direction, the legations' chief task at Yên Kinh was to set out, contest, discuss and dispute matters of state with China. Hence the lord's charge to them: "Have a loyal heart and prudent speech; let nothing of military secrets slip out; keep a proud countenance; let the work be accomplished and renown follow, and bring glory home to the country."

Trịnh Cương's requirements for embassies being very high, chief and deputy envoys were all laureates of the great examination, skilled in speech, quick in reply, capable of argument, of strong build, tall, of grave bearing and proud and dignified manner, trained in court affairs at every level, genuinely talented and boundlessly faithful to the country's interest. From the moment Trịnh Cương came to power, the four heads of legation were men of superior merit who had already served country and people well: the two chief envoys, Nguyễn Công Cơ and Lê Anh Tuấn, had passed as doctors of the third rank at the examinations of the year Đinh Mùi (1697) and the year Giáp Tuất (1694); the two deputy envoys, Đinh Nho Hoàn and Nguyễn Mậu Áng, were likewise laureates of the great examination — Đinh passing as *Hoàng giáp* at the examination of the year Canh Thìn (1700), Nguyễn as a doctor at the examination of the year Tân Mùi (1691). The subsequent legations of Trịnh Cương's time, in Mậu Tuất (1718), Tân Sửu (1721), Bính Ngọ (1726) and Kỷ Dậu (1729), likewise had as their heads laureates of great renown, such as Nguyễn Công Hãng, Hồ Phi Tích, Phạm Khiêm Ích and Đinh Phụ Ích.

Before the legations set out, Trịnh Cương also held competitions in argument on the questions to be negotiated at Yên Kinh. Only those whose compositions were judged excellent received the charge of chief or deputy envoy. Attached as he was to the diplomatic struggle with China, he set for the rhetoric examination the following subject: "Draft an official dispatch in reply to the governor-general of Yunnan, setting out the arguments establishing that the frontier posts at

Tuyên Quang and Hưng Hóa, together with the copper mine of the Mã Yên country, dependent on Đô Long, all belong to our country's territory and lie far from the prefecture of Khai Hóa in Yunnan; that our country has kept and protected these lands generation after generation, and that there is no usurpation of the prefecture of Khai Hóa." Đoàn Bá Dung's composition took first prize, Nguyễn Đình Hoàn's second. Accordingly, in the fourth month of the year Ất Tỵ (1725), Trịnh Cương appointed Doctor Nguyễn Đình Hoàn, then a counsellor, and Đinh Phụ Ích, then governor of Lạng Sơn, to confer with Qing representatives and to investigate and survey the limits of the cantons of Lộc Bình and Tư Lăng. In the year Kỷ Dậu (1729), Đoàn Bá Dung was sent as chief envoy to thank the Qing emperor for having returned the wrongfully occupied lands.

Our country's diplomatic history has acknowledged it: it is thanks to the good organisation of these legations — as to men and as to arguments and negotiation — that Trịnh Cương's twenty years of power saw the frontier at peace and friendship maintained. The legations' diplomatic struggle brought the country many gains. Thus, under the Cảnh Trị era (1663), we had to deliver to China each year four sets of gold incense burners and flower vases weighing 209 taels, twelve silver basins weighing 691 taels, twenty rhinoceros horns, twenty elephant tusks… Thanks to the skilful argument of the legation of 1715, that of the deputy envoy Đinh Nho Hoàn, the gold and silver objects no longer had to be wrought, rhinoceros horn and ivory were abolished, the number of bearers reduced, and the tribute had only to be handed to the administration commissioner of Guangxi, without having to be carried for months on end to Yên Kinh — which removed many dangers and much hardship.

A great diplomatic success of this period concerns the forty *dặm* of land at Vị Xuyên that the Qing had usurped before Trịnh Cương's accession. We claimed them in vain, the Chinese emperor refusing to return them and even moving troops forward to intimidate us. Trịnh Cương struggled with skill, patience and flexibility: using the fine text of claim previously drafted by Đoàn Bá Dung and Nguyễn Đình Hoàn, addressed to the Qing emperor, and the incisive argument of the legations, he obtained that in the year Mậu Thân (1728) the Qing were obliged to return the encroached lands to us.

Epilogue

The age in which Đinh Nho Hoàn made his place, made his career and served his country is that of Lê and Trịnh rule, whose effective holder was Trịnh Cương — whom history ranks among the enlightened princes for his achievements in domestic government and in diplomacy, and for having known how, by skilful and flexible yet firm and patient means, to preserve intact the country's sacred sovereignty.

A survey of some sources on Trịnh Cương and his twenty years of government leads us to the following observations.

1. Đinh Nho Hoàn was an upright and capable official. From his success at the great examination to his death, he constantly enjoyed Trịnh Cương's favour and promotions. Each of his offices was higher than the last: proof that he always turned his heart towards country and people.

2. To be appointed deputy envoy, he had to pass difficult tests. His composition on the country's sovereignty, addressed to the Chinese emperor, has not come down to us; but

we have grounds to affirm that it must have been a penetrating and apt text, subtle and adroit in handling propriety, summing up national pride before a great country and inflexible firmness in defending every inch of sacred territory.

3. His brilliant achievements during his governorship of Cao Bình (Cao Bằng) certainly counted in Trịnh Cương's choice of him as deputy envoy. Few officials, then or now, have had the people raise them a stele in their lifetime, and less than a year after taking office. He achieved it: he was able to keep concord at the frontier and to turn the northern country's advantages to account in raising and strengthening that march of the country.

4. Considering the age in which Đinh Nho Hoàn made his place and his career, one sees still better his character, his services, his talent and his virtue — and that is precisely the intention of the present writer, in the hope of helping to draw more fully the high qualities of Hoàng giáp Đinh Nho Hoàn.

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PART IV. HISTORICAL REMAINS

27. An Ấp – Sơn Hòa: a sacred land that gives birth to heroes

Colonel Nguyễn Khắc Thuần

[source: 01.doc]

From of old, scholars who study an illustrious figure examine closely his native place and his lineage — the first factor that determines the formation, nurture and development of his character, his virtue, his talent and what he gives. In that spirit we have gone into the field many times, to the old An Ấp, today Sơn Hòa commune (Hương Sơn district, Hà Tĩnh province), to learn about the country and lineage of Hoàng giáp Đinh Nho Hoàn.

The old An Ấp, today's Sơn Hòa, is one of the districts the people of Nghệ honour as "sacred land, men of distinction".

Sacred land, because it was formed by alluvium and has received the sacred breath of a thousand mountains and a thousand rivers. The Ngàn Phố is not deep, but it has long been ranked among the "sacred rivers", for it gathers the waters of thousands of small streams of the Annamite range, curves round Sơn Hòa commune, empties at Tam Soa where it forms a confluence busy with boats and landings, and then pours into the Sông La and the Sông Lam to reach the sea. At every annual flood the Ngàn Phố lays down over Sơn Hòa layers of silt charged with the sacred breath of heaven and earth, of the thousand springs, the thousand hills and the

thousand trees of the Annamite range. It is thanks to this silt that the land of Sơn Hòa stays green in all four seasons, that the rice fills out, that the trees bend under their fruit, and that the villages are prosperous, the waters blue and the hills green, beautiful as in a painting.

Fertile land, good geomancy: the people of Sơn Hòa — rice farmers, silkworm keepers and weavers, woodcutters — are all industrious, hard-working, diligent in study and attentive to the affairs of state, village and lineage. The work is hard, and yet the girls have hair long as a stream and skin white as jade, and the boys are tall and sturdy.

The people of An Ấp are proud of their river, for it has carried and nourished a great many legends of this mountain country. The boats on it are not large, but they are heavy with folk songs, with *ví* and *dặm* steeped in love of the land. From of old and to this day, the Ngàn Phô passes for a river of poetry, music and painting.

Backing onto Mount Thiên Nhẫn, the old An Ấp receives both the sacred breath of "the first neighbour, water" and that of "the second neighbour, mountain". The mountain deity, for the people of An Ấp, is Thiên Nhẫn — an ancient mountain, formed in the Cenozoic at the same time as Trà Sơn and Hoành Sơn. Its name is explained in several ways. Some scholars hold that it is a thousand fathoms high, hence *Thiên* (thousand) *Nhẫn*. In our view the most convincing explanation lies in its geopolitical position: seen from afar, the mountain looks like a long rampart, and its outline suggests a thousand horses turned towards the Eastern Sea, manes flying, at full gallop. Local people simply call it the "Mountain of the Thousand". Thiên Nhẫn is not high, but it is ranked among the "sacred mountains", for every inch of its soil bears in sediment famous places, scenic sites, historical and cultural monuments, witnesses to the struggle against enemies within and without and to the building of the country by the people of Nghệ. The mountain is broad and noble in outline, the river winds gracefully: hence this land has touched the hearts of many men of letters. Travellers and illustrious men who have passed here have left poems and prose in which the description of places and people is steeped in tenderness. King Trần Nhân Tông (1258–1308), on progress in the South, halted here. He praised a country of bright climate, generous manners and dutiful people, and had a Buddhist pagoda built on Mount Tháp. Years and upheavals have made a ruin of it, but the very name Mount Tháp still evokes for posterity an imposing and silent old pagoda amid the forest, whose bell, every evening, set the whole mountain country ringing.

Under the later Trần, Queen Trần Thị Bạch Ngọc left the capital with her intimates to come and build here one of the richest estates, to store provisions and weapons, to recruit and train able-bodied men, and to support Lê Lợi when he came to free Nghệ An from the Ming yoke.

A welcoming land: the old accounts of the migrations of great lineages from every region of the country towards An Ấp and Sơn Hòa are steeped in humanity, in attachment to the land, and in the maxim "gourd, love the pumpkin too". The *Hương Yên phổ tự*, the oldest genealogy of the Đinh Nho lineage, has recorded the legend of the *White Cloud Hermitage*, a story of deep humanity about friendship. It is told that at twenty-eight Đinh Nho Công left the plough to follow a master to the capital and study the classics. In those days of strangeness in the northern country, a student supervisor of the Trần lineage, a native of Ái Châu, helped and supported him wholeheartedly. In the third month of the year Kỷ Dậu, Đinh Nho Công took leave of him to go home and prepare for the provincial examination. On the day of the test, having reached the foot of the Eo Trèo pass — a pass of Thiên Nhẫn, on the track from Thịnh

Xá and Văn Giang towards Nam Đàn — he suddenly saw a white cloud following him and shading him. Then the supervisor Trần appeared, took his hand affectionately and said:

“I congratulate you: next year you will pass, your work will be accomplished and your name made. Do not forget your old friend. In memory of what has been, have a small hermitage built for me, where incense may burn for ten thousand generations.”

So saying, he vanished. The burning sun turned mild, and Đinh Nho Công’s step was eased.

The examination passed, his name made and his triumphal return to the village accomplished, Doctor Đinh Nho Công had a small hermitage built at the place called Cồn Mai to offer worship to the supervisor Trần: the White Cloud Hermitage — today Cồn Trúc, behind the Thịnh Xá temple — where incense burns all year in his memory. Not content with building this hermitage, he took the supervisor’s grandson, Trần Xuân Đâu, as his adopted son. Trần Xuân Đâu’s mother was from Gôi Vị village; hence the genealogy of the Tống Trần lineage of Sơn Hòa reads:

> “Following his mother, he came to Gôi Vị, and became the adopted son of the Great King Đinh.”

According to Tống Trần Tùng’s recent research in his *Nghĩa Quận công Tống Tất Thăng*, Trần Xuân Đâu is the ancestor of the Tống Trần line of An Ấp. Taken in and adopted by Đinh Nho Công, settled on the land of An Ấp, the Trần lineage prospered there, its descendants multiplied, studied well and produced many laureates. Remembering that their ancestor was in fact of the Tống lineage, a descendant of the Duke of Nghĩa, Tống Tất Thắng, who had taken refuge in the Văn Giang region — part of the old An Ấp canton — and then had to take the name Trần, the descendants of Trần Xuân Đâu resumed the name Tống Trần. The Tống Trần lineage of An Ấp has counted, over many generations, men of high learning, broad views and great designs in the service of country and people. Its ancestral hall, now in Sơn Hòa commune, is listed as a historical and cultural monument.

One of the great lineages present early on the land of An Ấp is that of a third-generation descendant of the Duke of Cương Quốc, Nguyễn Xí: the guard commander Nguyễn Đình Quang, eldest son of the *Thái bảo* Nguyễn Kế Sài — whose ancestral hall is at Quỳnh Mỹ, Quỳnh Lưu, Nghệ An. He sent his son Nguyễn Đình Lô, who served under the early Lê and received the title Marquis of Thiên Lộc, to settle here with his family, forming the Nguyễn Đình lineage of Sơn Hòa. Marquis Nguyễn Đình Lô begot Nguyễn Tự Trọng, the first doctor of Hương Sơn district. The genealogy of the Nguyễn Đình lineage sums up his life thus:

> “The doctor and censor-in-chief Nguyễn Tự Trọng, styled Lord Nguyễn, was born in the year Ất Tỵ (1485), the twenty-fifth year of the Hồng Đức era, under Lê Thánh Tông. He was born into a Nguyễn line that counted several generations of great dignitaries of the later Lê. His father, Nguyễn Đình Lô, a great dignitary under Lê Thánh Tông, rendered great services and was honoured by the king with the second-rank title of Marquis of Thiên Lộc. He was the direct grandson of the guard commander Nguyễn Đình Quang, great-grandson of the *Thái bảo* and great pillar of the realm Nguyễn Kế Sài, and fifth-generation descendant of the Duke of Cương Quốc Nguyễn Xí, who twice founded the early Lê dynasty.”

The distant ancestor of the Nguyễn Khắc lineage of Sơn Hòa came from Thanh Liệt village, Thanh Trì district, in Hanoi. According to Professor Nguyễn Khắc Phi, a fourteenth-generation descendant, the ancestor Nguyễn Khắc Văn, also a high dignitary, came to settle with his descendants at Nam Đàn, in Nghệ An, after his retirement. One of his grandsons, Nguyễn Khắc Kinh, judging this region flourishing, crossed to Thịnh Xá to settle and founded the Hương An branch — Hương Sơn and An Ấp — of this renowned lineage. Men of worth match their soil: settled at Sơn Hòa, the Nguyễn Khắc lineage has produced many illustrious names. In the thirteenth generation, Hoàng giáp Nguyễn Khắc Niêm, born in 1889, who passed as a doctor of the second rank at eighteen at the examination of the year Đinh Mùi, was Minister of Rites, prefect of Thừa Thiên and governor-general of Thanh Hóa. In the fourteenth, all his children were men and women of talent: Nguyễn Thị Vàng, a senior specialist in traditional medicine; Nguyễn Khắc Viện, physician, eminent researcher and great cultural figure, honoured many times at home and abroad in many fields; the physician and poet Nguyễn Thị Thiều Anh; the doctor of theology and letters Nguyễn Khắc Dương; the writer Nguyễn Khắc Phê, former chairman of the Arts and Letters Association of Thừa Thiên-Huế; the professor of literature Nguyễn Khắc Phi, former deputy director and editor-in-chief of the Education Publishing House.

The genealogy of the Đinh Nho lineage traces its origins to the great general Đinh Điền, of the house of Đinh at Trường Yên, Ninh Bình — that of Đinh Bộ Lĩnh. But unfortunately it records events only from the founding ancestor Đinh Phúc Diên, a subordinate officer of Lê Tuấn Mậu, of the party that supported the Lê against the Mạc. After Lê Tuấn Mậu's murder, Đinh Phúc Diên and his two brothers, Phúc Tiên and Phúc An, took their families to seek refuge in Nghệ An. Phúc Diên settled in Bình Hòa village — today hamlet 3 of Sơn Hòa, Hương Sơn; Phúc Tiên settled in Nghi Lộc district, and Phúc An in Hưng Nguyên. Phúc Tiên's branch is the junior one, at Kim Khê village, now in Nghi Long commune, Nghi Lộc district, Nghệ An. Đinh Phúc Diên's brothers were four and not three, but what became of the youngest is unknown. Đinh Phúc Diên's mother and brothers first came to Kim Khê; only Phúc Tiên remained there, while the eldest, Phúc Diên, crossed the Sông Lam to settle at An Ấp, today Sơn Hòa.

The genealogy of the Đinh of Sơn Hòa still preserves this tradition. While serving as district assistant at Đông Ngạn (Thanh Hóa), Hữu Luân (1602–1676) rescued a drifting Chinese junk. He supplied the crew with provisions and money to return home. In gratitude for this kindness, the junk's owner later brought him a geomancer of the Ngô lineage, saying:

"To thank you for giving us back our lives, we dare offer neither gold nor silver, which would offend the purity of your heart: we bring you this master, who in our country has brought prosperity to many houses, to repay your goodness."

Hữu Luân was overjoyed; he declared himself ill, gave up his post and returned to An Ấp with Master Ngô. He said to him:

"This humble house came from Ái Châu nearly a hundred years ago; in each generation there is only one son, and children come late. In each generation we have studied diligently, but the honours of the examinations have not come."

Master Ngô reflected a moment, then answered:

“Your house has accumulated goodness for several generations, so the tombs are all at peace. I mean to repay my debt to your house: I shall examine the mountains and waters of Hương Sơn and spare you nothing. As far as your house’s felicity reaches, my eye sees it: wealth and honours, and in every generation illustrious scholars, are already before my eyes.”

Master Ngô stayed a few months. He designated a burial site on Mount Trai Sơn — in present-day Sơn Tiến — and had both parents interred there together. He declared:

“This is auspicious ground: generation after generation you will pass the examinations.”

Master Ngô also established a dwelling on a plot that had belonged to a censor of the Nguyễn lineage, named Vân Trọng, who passed as a doctor at the examination of the year Nhâm Tuất (1502) and rose to the office of censor-in-chief, two of whose sons had also passed the examinations, but whose descendants had neglected the land and let it go to waste. The Đinh exchanged good rice fields with the Nguyễn for this plot in order to establish their dwelling. The land being sacred — the fathers’ tombs, a favourably oriented house — the descendants of Đinh Phúc Diên at An Ấp passed the examinations generation after generation, and the house prospered.

The seventh-generation descendant of Đinh Phúc Diên, Đinh Nho Công (1637–1695), was a good farmer but much given to the classics. He passed as a doctor at the examination of the year Canh Tuất, eighth year of the Cảnh Trị era (1670), and became the lineage’s first laureate. He was *Tham chính* of the Sơn Nam circuit, then recalled to the capital and promoted assistant censor. He had two wives and six sons; the sixth, Đinh Nho Côn, settled at Thanh Liên village — today Thanh Tiên commune, Thanh Chương district, Nghệ An — founding a junior branch of the Đinh lineage of Hương Sơn. In the fourth generation of that branch, Doctor Đinh Nho Thận is the author of the *Thu dạ hoài ngâm*, a lament of which Professor Đặng Thai Mai said that it is “one of the four finest laments of Vietnamese classical poetry”.

Đinh Nho Công was an upright and capable official; many traditions record the propriety of his conduct. One of them is the affair of the *thủ bộ* of Hưng Nguyên whom he cleared, and from which the legend of Phan Thị Viên arose.

Đinh Nho Hoàn was the third son of Đinh Nho Công and his wife, Lady Đặng, of the great Đặng lineage of Võ Liệt, in Thanh Chương.

The *Hoàng giáp*’s younger brother, Đinh Nho Côn, who placed first in the provincial examination, was a man of letters and arms, of an intrepid character; Lord Trịnh Doanh appointed him commander of the Nghệ An garrison, quartered at Kỳ Hoa, and he received the title Marquis of Hương Nghĩa. Đinh Nho Công’s house counts three men — Đinh Nho Công, Đinh Nho Hoàn, Đinh Nho Côn — and one daughter-in-law, Phan Thị Viên, wife of Đinh Nho Hoàn, honoured by the court as deities and tutelary spirits. The eulogy of the “four tutelary deities of the Đinh lineage” has this couplet:

> “Above, to guard the country; below, to shelter the people. One house, four tutelary deities — what glory!”

Four tutelary deities in one house: this is doubtless a record of achievement and service rendered to the country by a single family.

Born in a sacred land with deep cultural sediment, raised among men of worth, in the warm cradle of a family steeped in humanity, Đinh Nho Hoàn became naturally and simply an illustrious scholar and servant of the state. That is doubtless why, in what remains of his work, posterity meets so many acts of gratitude towards his country and his family, and why, in his *Mặc Trai sứ tập*, the reader senses so much warmth for his country, his home and those who gave him life.

The sacred land gives birth to heroes: the cultural tradition of old An Ấp is taken up and carried forward by the generations that follow. Remarkable sons continue to be born and to grow up on this land of Sơn Hòa, and their lives and work add further lustre to that tradition: the cultural figure Nguyễn Khắc Viện; Đinh Nho Liêm, former member of the Party central committee and first deputy minister of Foreign Affairs; Lieutenant General Nguyễn Đường; Tống Trần Đào, former deputy minister of Agriculture; Professor Hà Học Hợi, former standing deputy head of the central commission for ideology and culture; the professor and poet Đinh Phạm Thái, vice-chairman of the council of academic titles for metallurgy; Professor Đinh Nho Chương; Professor Đinh Dũng; Colonel Đinh Nho Bát, former member of the Party committee bureau and head of the political department of the Fourth Military Region; Colonel Nguyễn Đình Quế, former deputy head of the political department of the Fourth Military Region… In many families — that of the three brothers Đinh Nho Dật, Đinh Nho Bát and Đinh Nho Chú, for example — sons, daughters, daughters-in-law and sons-in-law are all doctors or professors.

Many descendants of the Đinh Nho lineage have carried forward their ancestors' tradition of study and, in difficult conditions, have worked with passion to reach their goal. So Đinh Xuân Vịnh (1911–2015, sixteenth generation of the junior branch): holding only the "diploma" — the equivalent of today's lower-secondary certificate — he collected, studied and then copied out his work by hand into school exercise books three times over — the first version lost through the war, the second spoilt by the weather. It comprises forty notebooks of one hundred and twenty pages each, some forty thousand entries; for this personal work he received in 1994 the first prize of the Folk Arts Association and, in the same year, the third-class Labour Medal awarded by the State.

Among the young who have surpassed themselves must be named Đinh Việt Anh (seventeenth generation of the junior branch), a blind woman holding three degrees — social sciences and humanities, education, English — and a successfully defended master's dissertation. Or again Đinh Nho Minh (eighteenth generation of the junior branch, son of Đinh Hùng), direct grandson of the late Đinh Nho Liêm (1924–2008), first deputy minister of Foreign Affairs, who prepared on his own a set of high-quality interviews and obtained from a prestigious American university a full four-year scholarship, estimated at more than four billion đồng. His promise deserves praise: once graduated, to go on to a doctorate in diplomacy so as to return and serve the country, as his grandfather once did.

A district with few people and little land today counts more than a hundred professors, doctors, scholars and writers who quietly give their intelligence to the country. Sơn Hòa, sacred land, has given and still gives many men of worth to the work of renewal. The tradition of study, achievement and service that successive generations maintain at Sơn Hòa makes the scholarly tradition of old An Ấp shine.

Colonel Nguyễn Khắc Thuần — Vinh, Nghệ An.

28. Gôi Vị temple, shrine of the “faithful widow”, wife of Hoàng giáp Đinh Nho Hoàn

Nguyễn Trí Sơn — director of the Hà Tĩnh provincial museum

[source: 31.doc]

In the village of Gôi Vị, in the old canton of Yên Ấp, today hamlet 5 of Sơn Hòa commune, Hương Sơn district, Hà Tĩnh province, stands an ancient temple, built exactly two hundred and ninety-eight years ago and known by several names: Gôi temple, Gôi Mỹ temple, temple of the Faithful Lady. The first two come from the village’s name — Gôi Vị, Gôi Mỹ, in Yên Ấp canton, Hương Sơn district. The third denotes the shrine of the secondary wife of the chamberlain of the Bureau of Seals, *Kim tứ Vinh lộc đại phu*, Hoàng giáp Đinh Nho Hoàn: Phan Thị Viên, of Do Lễ village, Hưng Nguyên district, Nghệ An province. Lady Viên excelled at poetry and was not only a virtuous wife but her husband’s literary companion. He having died on the return journey from his embassy to China, she took her own life to follow him once his body had been brought home to the village, leaving her contemporaries and posterity a long regret. The matter being reported to the court, King Lê conferred on her the two characters “faithful widow”, charged the villagers of Gôi Vị with raising a temple for her worship and granted her twenty acres of cult rice land.

According to several sources — the *Đại Nam nhất thống chí*, the *Việt sử thông giám cương mục chính biên*, vol. XVI, and the genealogy of the Đinh Nho lineage of Gôi Vị village — the “Faithful Lady” was named Phan Thị Viên and was the second wife of the left vice-minister and Hoàng giáp Đinh Nho Hoàn. A native of Do Lễ village, Hưng Nguyên prefecture, Nghệ An province, her year of birth is unknown; she died in the year Đinh Dậu, 1717, under Lê Dụ Tông, thirteenth year of the Vĩnh Thịnh era.

The story is told thus. Long ago, under the Vĩnh Trị era of the Lê (1676–1679), the vice-minister’s father, Doctor Đinh Nho Công, received the king’s mandate as inspecting censor of the Hoan Châu circuit, in Nghệ An. That year there was a great drought; by the king’s order he inspected his jurisdiction and examined the prisons to see whether any innocent men were held there. There was then in the gaol a *thủ bộ* of the Phan lineage, long detained, whom the provincial officials held to be an unpardonable prisoner. The inspecting censor, examining the case, understood that there had been a miscarriage of justice and ordered his release. Later, promoted assistant censor, Doctor Đinh Nho Công took this Phan into his service at the courthouse. Some years afterwards, the *thủ bộ*’s wife bore a daughter. When the child was five, the *thủ bộ* fell gravely ill; near death, he took her hand and lamented: “I owe it to the assistant censor Đinh, who re-examined my case and had me released, that I am as though restored to life. That benefaction is vast as the sea and high as the sky, and I do not know when it can be repaid; but you are only a girl — in what could you help me?” So saying, he breathed his last.

Later, amid the troubles, the mother took her daughter to Thăng Long and settled at the Đồng Xuân market, near the South Gate. The girl was then fifteen; her face and her conduct were such that everyone praised her. Sons of good families in the capital sent countless letters and messages, but the mother would give her to no one. Now, as though by a union willed by Heaven, the third son of the assistant censor Đinh Nho Công, Đinh Nho Hoàn, had followed in his father’s footsteps: having passed as *Hoàng giáp* at the examination of the year Canh Thìn,

twenty-first year of the Chính Hòa era (1700), he had been appointed left vice-minister of Rites, and everyone knew his name. One day of leisure, walking in Cửa Nam street, he saw a clean stall and stepped in to rest. The old woman who kept the shop, mother of the Phan girl, was startled at the sight of him; she asked the attendants about this official of the Đinh lineage. Knowing for certain that he was the son of the assistant censor who had once saved her husband, she invited the *Hoàng giáp* to take tea and said: “This old woman is the wife of the *thủ bộ* of your circuit. Your father drew my husband from the cell. That benefaction my husband could not repay before he died. Who would have thought that today I should meet the assistant censor’s son? I have only one daughter. On his deathbed my husband, tormented at not having discharged the debt, held her hand and lamented. She is now grown; if you would take her into your affection, I would offer her to serve you, so as to discharge that benefaction and satisfy the departed.” So saying, she went in to call her daughter to greet him. The vice-minister Đinh Nho Hoàn reflected long, then replied: “From of old, unions are fixed beforehand. To meet a person of worth today is yet another benefaction left me by my late father.” He therefore married the Phan girl as secondary wife. On entering her husband’s house, Phan Thị Viên was sixteen; work, bearing, speech and conduct were equally accomplished in her, and she knew letters besides and excelled in poetry.

In the year Ất Mùi, under Lê Dụ Tông, eleventh year of the Vĩnh Thịnh era (1715), the left vice-minister and chamberlain of the Bureau of Seals Đinh Nho Hoàn was charged with an embassy to the Qing. On the day of departure, Phan Thị Viên accompanied him as far as Lã Côi — today Gia Lâm district, Hanoi — and confided to him: “Your servant has heard that a great man who cannot be a general may be an envoy, and that to settle the country’s affairs by speech is also a fine thing. May my lord keep a loyal and upright heart like the good envoys of old, and not dwell on concern for his wife and children.” She also composed ten farewell poems, of which only three have come down to us.

First poem

> Hành hành bất thị cố quan san Kỷ hử ra tình dục thoại nan Vi thẩm hồi văn hà nhất ký Khuyến quan vô cửu Bắc thiên hàn

The author’s gloss:

> Once the step is taken, mountains and waters will be strange to you; this feeling I would confide is hard to say in full. One day I too shall learn the “brocade woven with reversible verse” and present it to obtain your return: do not stay long there in China, where the cold is sharp.

Second poem

> Đỗ Mục Lưu thần kỳ ngộ dị Tô khanh Phó bật hữu nhân nan Ngã ông vật dị thuyền quyên cố Đái đắc trung lương nhị tự hoàn.

The author’s gloss:

> That Đỗ Mục and Lưu Thần met immortals is an easy thing; that Lord Tô and Fu Bi conducted their embassies well is far harder. I beg you not to trouble yourself because I am a young wife. Bring home rather the two words goodness and loyalty.

Third poem

> Kim triền thành thị do Nam quốc Dị nhật ý quan thị Bắc triều Liệt nhật thu sương quân phận nội Thiếp tương thuỳ vị trọng yêu kiều

The author's gloss:

> The city where you are today still belongs to the southern country; tomorrow, robes and caps will already be those of the Chinese court. Your charge as envoy requires you to be like the burning sun and the cold autumn wind. As for your servant, so young, why ask anyone to adorn her?

Before parting from her, Hoàng giáp Đinh Nho Hoàn left her the robe he was wearing. She waited sadly for the day of his return. While he was on embassy, she often turned her feelings into poems.

Unhappily, his mission accomplished, the deputy envoy Đinh Nho Hoàn fell gravely ill on the return journey and died at Wuhan, in China. The Qing emperor Kangxi composed a most moving funeral oration. The Lê court had his coffin brought back to the village to be buried with honour, and itself composed a most pathetic oration. Once the coffin had reached the village, Phan Thị Viên hanged herself to follow her husband, leaving a funeral oration for him, a poem of apology to her mother and a poem of farewell to Lady Lê, the principal wife. Her funeral song for her husband is of extreme sadness and great firmness; one reads in it among other lines:

> To die for the affairs of the state is to fulfil a man's wish. To live or to die, so it goes: what use is lamenting? The dead do not return: what use is weeping? …

The suicide of Phan Thị Viên, secondary wife of the *Hoàng giáp*, left vice-minister and deputy envoy Đinh Nho Hoàn, was reported to the Lê court by the provincial governor. The king praised her as a woman of fidelity and duty, had his officials grant twenty acres of cult rice land, conferred on her the title *Á Thận phu nhân*, had an ancestral temple established for her worship and granted her a gilded panel bearing the two characters "faithful widow". She died at about twenty-one.

The old chronicles record: "Đinh Dậu, thirteenth year (1717), fifty-sixth year of Kangxi under the Qing; in the tenth month, in winter. Honour was paid to the woman of fidelity and duty, Lady Phan, secondary wife of Hoàng giáp Đinh Nho Hoàn. Nho Hoàn had gone on embassy to China and died on the road. After the coffin had been brought back and buried, Lady Phan hanged herself to follow him in death. The matter being brought to the court, orders were given to grant cult rice fields, to confer on her posthumously the title *Á Thận phu nhân*, to establish an ancestral temple for her worship and to grant her a gilded panel bearing the two characters 'faithful widow', hung at the door of her house in her honour." (*Việt sử thông giám cương mục chính biên*, vol. XVI, p. 160.)

By the custom of the time, Phan Thị Viên being a secondary wife, Gôi Vị temple also received the following cults:

- that of her father-in-law, Đinh Nho Công, who passed as a doctor in the year Canh Tuất (1670), Cảnh Trị era, under Lê Huyền Tông, rose to the office of assistant censor and was

raised after his death to the title “Anh nghị Đại vương”, and then, under the Nguyễn, to that of “Dực bảo Trung hưng phúc thần”;
- that of her husband, Hoàng giáp Đinh Nho Hoàn.

Gôi Vị temple was thus built in Gôi Vị village, Yên Ấp canton, to offer worship to Phan Thị Viên, second wife of Hoàng giáp Đinh Nho Hoàn. The gilded panel bearing the three characters “gate of the faithful widow” is today kept at the ancestral hall of the Đinh Nho lineage, in Gôi Mỹ village, Sơn Hòa commune. In the course of history, Gôi Vị temple has not only been the place of her worship: it served as a meeting place for the revolutionary activists of Gôi Vị village in preparing the seizure of power in the August Revolution of 1945. During the war against the United States it long housed the offices of the people’s committee of Sơn Hòa commune. Today its conservation and restoration are not taken in hand as they should be, and the monument is seriously deteriorating.

Moss-covered and venerable, Gôi Vị temple stands in an enclosure of more than a thousand square metres, beside the surfaced inter-village road. Its scale makes it the largest in the region, and it has become the place where the cults of several other monuments have been gathered. Its architecture comprises, from the outside inward, the gate system, the enclosure wall, the spirit screen, the left and right galleries, the lower sanctuary and the upper sanctuary, of differing structures, which together form an imposing and grand ancient complex. The temple bears the mark of Lê-period architecture, with a ground plan of remarkable symmetry and harmony in a broad space. The woodcarving is of extreme delicacy and great suppleness, and the law of symmetry is strictly observed, especially in the lower sanctuary. Popular motifs — the fish turned dragon, the phoenix, the crane, the elephant, the horse — are rendered so vividly that the temple is at once sacred and familiar. It also preserves several valuable ancient objects: two stone elephants, one stone chime and three stelae, all connected with the life of Hoàng giáp Đinh Nho Hoàn, Phan Thị Viên’s husband, and carrying many messages that would deserve study.

In sum, Gôi Vị temple is a historical and cultural monument nearly three centuries old, built in a prosperous and studious village, in a widely open setting. It is the shrine of a woman who had the courage to keep faith with her husband by following him in death, leaving an infinite regret to her contemporaries and to us, her posterity: Phan Thị Viên, wife of Hoàng giáp Đinh Nho Hoàn, left vice-minister and deputy envoy to China, who died on the way back from his mission. Worship is also offered there to two doctors of the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries under the Lê: Doctor Đinh Nho Công and Doctor and Hoàng giáp Đinh Nho Hoàn, who gave much to the country and to their native place. This too is an expression of our people’s morality: to drink the water remembering the spring.

For its historical, cultural and artistic value, Gôi Vị temple was recognised by the people’s committee of Hà Tĩnh province and listed as a provincial-level historical and cultural monument by decision no. 1592/QĐ-UB-VX of 8 August 2005.

Hà Tĩnh, in the burning days of the summer of 2015.

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29. Matters still to be clarified concerning the family and the death of Hoàng giáp Đinh Nho Hoàn

Đinh Nho Quỳ

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Reading the historical data and the papers prepared for the conference "Hoàng giáp Đinh Nho Hoàn: His Life and His Work", and then recalling the days spent with the descendants searching for, moving and exhuming our forebear's tomb, many things still unknown about him have come back to me like flashes. I have thought about them, worried over them, without being able to answer myself satisfactorily. On the occasion of this conference I should therefore like to open my heart before everyone, and above all to ask the scholars, the learned and the competent institutions for their views on the points that perplex me, concerning the family and the death of Hoàng giáp Đinh Nho Hoàn.

Here then are my perplexities — which are doubtless also those of a number of descendants of the Đinh Nho lineage — and which I should like to see cleared up. They concern the death of Hoàng giáp Đinh Nho Hoàn, and his household in his native village, at An Âp, Hương Sơn district.

I. On the death of Hoàng giáp Đinh Nho Hoàn

We put two questions.

1. Why did he die?
2. When did he die: before or after reaching Yên Kinh?

These two perplexities have the following starting points.

a. Why are the legations sent to the northern country under the Lê all recorded very fully in the official histories — including the poems the king or lord gave the envoys before their departure, so as to settle the conduct they were to hold — while the legation of the year Ât Mùi (1715), of which Đinh Nho Hoàn was deputy envoy, is not, and indeed extremely sparsely? The *Hương Yên phổ tự*, the oldest genealogy of the Đinh Nho lineage, reproduces thus a text engraved on a stele of the year Mậu Tý (1708): "He was appointed to the embassy; the king gave him two imperial poems in the national language, together with an accompanying poem; then he returned to the village to settle his household affairs…" Where then are those imperial poems today, and why have the histories copied nothing of them? It should be noted that of the three stelae preserved at the Gôi temple, the middle one — four engraved faces — was engraved

in two campaigns: we infer this from the difference of the strokes, the second engraved face showing a broader and shallower line. The engraver of the second campaign would thus have "added" events later than Đinh Nho Hoàn's death.

b. Is it quite certain that he died before reaching Yên Kinh? Here again the sources are very sparse, and indeed vague. The *Đại Nam nhất thống chí* has: "… Under the Vĩnh Thịnh era, Hoàn was assigned to the legation sent to the Qing and died on the road…" But does "on the road" mean outward or homeward? Going by the date of his death alone — the 27th, or the 28th, of the twelfth month of the year Ât Mùi — is it so certain that the Kangxi emperor received the envoys of the various countries on New Year's Day? And is it enough to observe that no piece in the *Mặc Ông sứ tập* speaks of Yên Kinh? And how are we to understand this: in the *Hương Yên phổ tự*, Đinh Thái Lãng, a twelfth-generation descendant (1753–1809), who calls Đinh Nho Hoàn his "forebear at four removes", records the episode in which the latter deciphers the character *đông* — taken as composed of *thập*, *bát* and *nhật* — and infers that Kangxi would receive the envoys only on the eighteenth day. Did Đinh Thái Lãng invent this story, or did he have it from someone? That he invented it is surely out of the question: a great-great-grandson of Đinh Nho Hoàn, he was *Triều liệt đại phu* and reader-lecturer of the Hàn lâm Academy — an educated man would not have engaged in such falsification. (It has previously been supposed that the genealogy confused this with the embassy of the son-in-law, Nguyễn Trọng Thường; but at the recent conference of the Nguyễn Trọng lineage, on 4 May 2015, we saw no paper mention this episode: so it is probably not that.) Which legation, in truth, does it concern? Answering that question should not be very difficult for historians.

c. As a rule, most envoys who died in China were cremated there and their remains repatriated. Đinh Nho Hoàn, by contrast, was encoffined "in an inner and an outer coffin" — a very complicated and very costly procedure, especially for transport at that period. Could it be that the Kangxi emperor had received him and appreciated his gift for repartee and his poetic talent? Or is there "some delicate reason that the histories have not recorded"? And why does one read, in the funeral oration of the Qing court read before the coffin by Cam Lai: "… At Lake Dongting he bowed in thanks and gazed; *that task had only just been brought to completion*, and now he consents to leave this world"? What is this task "only just completed"? It can hardly be that of gazing at Lake Dongting.

d. Note further what the exhumation brought to light. In 1976 the Sản Trà mausoleum, where Đinh Nho Hoàn and the faithful widow Phan Thị Viên rested, had to be moved by decision of the higher authorities to make way for an irrigation work. The descendants of the Đinh Nho lineage, on both the paternal and maternal sides, men and women, therefore had, on 6 and 7 March 1976, to open the tomb where he lay peacefully at the mausoleum in order to move him to the Áng Phần cemetery: the outer coffin enclosing him had to be broken, and the inner coffin brought up whole for provisional reburial. In 1985, the tomb having subsided, the descendants had to carry out a second, ritual exhumation on 25 April. And the secret, after more than two hundred and sixty years, allowed itself to be glimpsed. I set it down here for the generations to come and for everyone.

First: he had been encoffined in China after his death, "in an inner and an outer coffin". The material of the outer coffin is unknown; all that is known is that it was waterproof, in the form of a rectangular box, 240 cm long, 80 cm wide and 90 cm high (according to the minutes of the meeting of all the descendants of 7 March 1976, which resolved to break the outer coffin and

bring the inner coffin up whole, without opening its lid, to Áng Phần). The descendants of Đinh Nho Cừ, sixteenth generation of the junior branch, still keep a fragment of that outer coffin in their ancestral house.

The inner coffin, smaller, was trapezoidal in form, but the foot of its lid curved upward like the prow of a shoe — a form reserved for great dignitaries and sovereigns of old. It measured 220 cm long, 70 cm high at the head and 80 cm at the feet. It was wrapped in nine thicknesses of brocade embroidered with dragons and phoenixes.

e. And his body? On 25 May 1985, at the ritual exhumation, I saw with my own eyes, when the lid was opened — minutes were drawn up, which I keep — this: “The whole of the skeleton is intact, nothing is missing, not even the finger and toe bones. The skull is large and the brow high; the long bones, arms and legs are long.” The whole entirely filled the urn, which we had cast ourselves in cement, larger than the earthenware urns sold on the market, because we had foreseen that we might not be able to fit everything in.

But, strangely, the coffin contained no grave goods — not even the minimum required at encoffining, the three coins placed in the deceased’s mouth (minutes of 25 April 1985). From this I draw the following observation: the help given by the Chinese to our legation for the encoffining — which the legation certainly could not have carried out alone, for want of materials and means — attests *great respect, but without care*, not to say *haste*. How is this to be explained?

Examination of the bones further shows that he was *tall, robust and intelligent*, and not “small, short-legged and sickly”. I regret only that we had no camera to keep an image; and, still more, that no one in the group present at the exhumation paid attention to the colour of the bones — a few of them confining themselves to peering about to see whether there were any precious objects.

Let me add this: it is said that he fell ill because of the “harsh climate”. I think that in the whole legation he was the only one to have been hardened to the “cold that pierces to the bone” by his years of governing Cao Bằng, before the embassy.

All these elements gathered at the exhumation — “in every misfortune there is some good fortune” — may perhaps, thanks to this laying bare, allow us at last to know where the truth about his death lies.

g. On the occasion of the conference “Cultural and Academic Tradition of the Nguyễn Trọng Lineage of Trung Cần, Nghệ An”, I was given the proceedings. Reading the bibliography, on page 305, I found this passage from the *Thanh Chương huyện chí* on the figures of the Nguyễn Trọng lineage of Trung Cần: “Nguyễn Trọng Thường, doctor of the examination of the year Nhâm Thìn, eighth year of Vĩnh Thịnh (1712)… In the year Quý Sửu (1733), promoted left vice-minister of Works, titled Marquis of Cần Xuyên, pen name Cửu Đường, he received the mandate to go on embassy. On the day of departure he left behind a copper box and charged his household: ‘You are to open it only when you have news.’ Then he set out. Having reached Hankou, he fell ill and died. On receiving the notice of death, his household opened the box: he had predicted in it the day, the month and the year of his illness and death…” (Bùi Dương Lịch, *Thanh Chương huyện chí*, Nghệ An Publishing House, pp. 67–68.)

Reading this passage, here is what I think. Setting aside the marvellous elements — such as the story of the girl of Lake Dongting who "loves" Nguyễn Trọng Thường and appoints to meet him in a future life at the Ba Lăng relay — what remains genuinely historical in this account? Could it not be that the *abnormal death of his father-in-law Đinh Nho Hoàn* had warned him of a similar death in the course of an embassy to the northern country? An idea comes to me here which I would gladly affirm: everyone at the time — the members of the legation, the dignitaries of the Lê court — *knew*, but it had to be that "Heaven knows, Earth knows, you and I know" and no one else. That being so, would the son-in-law have dared publish all his father-in-law's posthumous papers — the poems he may have composed at Yên Kinh, the pieces exchanged with Kangxi? And under such a tacit injunction, what historian would have dared write according to his heart, like Sima Qian, or like the grand annalist Dong Hu, who dared record without evasion the affair of the Peach Garden (*Chronicle of the Eastern Kingdoms*, chapter 51: the killing of Duke Ling of Jin by Zhao Chuan in the Peach Garden)? And later still, to blur the death of Nguyễn Trọng Thường, an author wrote of him, in the *Lịch đại danh hiền phổ*, an account steeped in the marvellous: young and poor, Nguyễn Trọng Thường studied very well; in the evening, studying alone, he often saw a beautiful girl come and distract him. Finding this strange, he tried one night to take hold of her; she refused, appointed to meet him in a future life at the Ba Lăng relay, and vanished at once. (I summarise the plot. — Đ.N.Q.)

II. Where was his household in his native village?

The question is this: at An Ấp, where was Đinh Nho Hoàn's house — more exactly the house of his principal wife, Lê Thị Vệ, and his three daughters?

Let us first say a word about the role of the *Hoàng giáp*'s principal wife, Lady Lê Thị Vệ. The genealogy *Hương Yên phổ tự* says only this, very briefly: "She was of the Lê lineage, personal name Vệ, of Đông village, Hữu Băng commune. Daughter of a house of letters, a woman of good bearing."

To clarify her family circumstances, I went to her village and established that she was the great-granddaughter of the ancestor Lê Đông, a native of Tịnh Liệt commune, Thạch Hà prefecture, who came to Hương Sơn to clear land with landless people and found a hamlet, then asked the authorities' leave to found a village. Leave was granted and, seeing Lê Đông's merits, they gave his name to the village. Thereafter Lê Đông's descendants, following their fathers' example, cultivated study, produced several laureates and the family grew rich. The Lê lineage thus became a great clan of the Sơn Băng country. On entering as a bride the house of the assistant censor Đinh Nho Công, Lady Lê kept the rule of her fathers' house, established at Đông village. In her husband's success her share was very great. Let us read this passage from the *Hương Yên phổ tự*: "The Great King's house was of honest poverty, and ordinary days were of narrow straits. While he studied in the capital, he lived essentially on the money his wife's parents sent him. (The forebear had been so noble and so illustrious, but he kept his heart pure, so that there was no patrimony: he could allot each of his sons only seven *sào* of rice land.) Lady Lê's parents sent three hundred quan and fifty loads of dried areca nuts to the capital every year to pay for his studies. She herself treated the maids and concubines well." This passage shows that Đinh Nho Hoàn's house, before his success, was in straitened circumstances, son of an assistant censor though he was. There lived then at An Ấp the family of his eldest brother, Đinh Nho Trạch; by custom the eldest remains in the parents' house so as later to be heir to the cult. Đinh Nho Hoàn's family could not therefore have lived in the same

place — that is, where the ancestral hall of the Đinh lineage stands today. Where then were the house of Lady Vệ and her three daughters? A relatively plausible location may be inferred: the very site of today's Gôi temple, or at least an adjoining plot.

Here is what we base this on.

1. Why are the upper sanctuary of the Gôi temple — which some call the rear sanctuary — and the position of Đinh Nho Hoàn's three stelae arranged in such disorder? In other words: which was established first, the stelae or the temple? Had the stelae been set up after the temple, they would certainly have been placed properly and in good alignment, and above all in an open space allowing their characters to be read. Yet the wall of the rear sanctuary, on the left as one looks from outside, comes almost against the face of the third stele. One may therefore think that *the temple was built later, and the stelae earlier*. That is, this place was formerly the house of Lady Vệ and her three daughters, and the stelae were raised when Đinh Nho Hoàn, gone to govern Cao Bằng, charged his wife at home with buying rice fields and having her husband's instructions engraved.

2. Why is there at the temple a couplet one member of which deserves attention: *Áo Trạch thần cao Hoàn địa thiên niên tú khí*? It may be understood thus: "there is a hermitage dedicated to the deity Áo, to the west, on fine ground where the sacred breath has gathered for a thousand years". Let us understand that this ground — where the temple was established — bore a small hermitage to the west; the *Áo Trạch* is a kind of shrine to the deity of the soil, ordinarily placed west of the dwelling. One may therefore infer that Lady Vệ's house stood doubtless right beside that hermitage; and that, from the death of Đinh Nho Hoàn and Lady Phan until the royal edict of 1717, Lady Lê Thị Vệ and her children must necessarily have offered worship to the two deceased in their own house — that is, in Đinh Nho Hoàn's private house at An Ấp — according to the custom of the daily offering of rice during the first hundred days.

At that date there was certainly not yet any edict of the court honouring the young woman.

3. Considering the successive investitures granted by the king to Lady Phan Thị Viên, to Đinh Nho Công, to Đinh Nho Hoàn and to Đinh Nho Côn, the following conjecture may be advanced. The first, for Lady Phan Thị Viên, in 1717, carries only this, according to the *Complete Annals of Đại Việt*, vol. I, p. 103: "Honour was paid to a woman of Do Lễ commune, Hưng Nguyên district (Nghệ An), secondary wife of Đinh Nho Hoàn. Hoàn had gone on embassy to the North and died on the road. After he had been brought back and buried, Lady Phan, in her grief, hanged herself. The matter came to the court's notice. Orders were given to grant cult rice fields, to confer on her posthumously the title *Á Thận phu nhân*, to establish a temple and to grant her a gilded panel engraved with the two characters 'faithful widow' in her honour." The *Hương Yên phổ tự* has: "The court conferred on her by edict the two characters 'faithful widow' in her honour, and had a temple established for her worship *right beside, to the right of the stūpa* (my emphasis — Đ.N.Q.) of the left vice-minister; it further granted her one hundred and fifty quan and twenty acres of communal rice land at the place called Tàm Tang — in front of the present-day Sơn An primary school — for the offerings." This may be explained thus: Lady Lê was not yet dead at that date; for convenience, the villagers would therefore have placed her cult beside that of the deity Áo, next to the vice-minister's stūpa. (That stūpa still exists and stands in the main sanctuary, at the rear of the present Gôi temple.) This proves that Đinh Nho Hoàn's stūpa existed *before* the temple was founded. With today's scientific and technical means,

archaeologists could date its construction and *answer with certainty* the doubt I have just set out.

Under the Cảnh Hưng era, in the seventeenth year (1756), Lady Phan Thị Viên was made *Á Thận phu nhân*, Đinh Nho Công *Anh Nghị Đại Vương* and Đinh Nho Hoàn *Đặc Đạt Đại Vương*. At that date Lady Vệ was dead and her three daughters married; Đinh Nho Hoàn's house had become deserted, and there doubtless remained in it only "an altar, three tablets and three incense burners where the incense was cold and the fire out". The elders and the villagers would therefore have "taken it for common use" in order to gather the three cults conveniently there: Đinh Nho Công, Đinh Nho Hoàn and Lady Viên.

Then came, under the Nguyễn, a final investiture: Lady Viên was made "Lượng Tịnh Thục Diệu Nhàn Uyển Dực Bảo Trung Hưng Phúc Thần"; Đinh Nho Công, "Đoan Túc Dực Bảo Trung Hưng Phúc Thần"; Đinh Nho Hoàn, "Tuấn Lương Lượng Trực Đoan Túc Dực Bảo Trung Hưng Phúc Thần"; and Đinh Nho Côn, "Đoan Túc Dực Bảo Trung Hưng Phúc Thần". The Đinh Nho lineage thereafter counted four tutelary deities in a single family: the father Đinh Nho Công, two of his sons and one daughter-in-law. To "offer fitting worship to four deities", the temple then had to be built "in due form" — doubtless in the year Ất Sửu of the reign of Khải Định (1925), according to the note on the scroll panel on the façade of the present Gôi temple. And the position of the upper sanctuary has not changed since: it is doubtless the very ground of the old house where the principal wife, Lady Lê, and her children lived.

Supplementary note. The following tablets are found today at the Gôi temple.

1. In the main sanctuary: two tablets of the same dimensions, the same make and the same script, hence of the same period — the old tablets of Đinh Nho Công and Đinh Nho Hoàn. In the same niche is another tablet, of different dimensions, bearing: "INVESTED BY EDICT — ĐOAN TÚC DỰC BẢO TRUNG HƯNG, GRAND STEWARD, DUKE ĐINH" (identity not established).

2. In the right-hand bay, on entering: the tablet and niche of Lady Phan Thị Viên — an old one, damaged and missing several characters, and a new one, remade at the end of the year Giáp Ngọ (2014).

3. In the left-hand bay: three tablets.

a. The largest bears: CAO SƠN CAO CÁC MẠC VƯƠNG.

b. TABLET OF THE VENERATED DEITY OF THE LOCAL SOIL.

c. TUTELARY DEITY OF THE PLACE, KIM ĐỒNG AND NGỌC NỮ, INVESTED BY EDICT OF THE REIGNING DYNASTY, NIỆM TRỪ LINH ỨNG BẢO TRUNG HƯNG LINH PHÙ.

This last tablet is of the same dimensions, make and colour as Lady Phan Thị Viên's old tablet.

PART V. TRIBUTES

30. The Đinh Nho lineage (Hương Sơn, Hà Tĩnh): upholding and advancing the tradition of the house of Đinh

Đinh Nho Thanh

[source: 11.doc]

The Đinh Nho lineage stems from a great clan of Gia Viễn, in Ninh Bình. When the troubles came, four brothers went together to the land of Nghệ around 1543–1546, then scattered across the districts of Nam Đàn, Nghi Lộc, Hương Sơn… The one who settled at Hương Sơn is the first ancestor of the Đinh Nho lineage; his scholarly name was Phúc Diên. Settling first at Bình Hòa village, in An Ấp canton, he cleared land and founded a hamlet, then, having rendered service in suppressing rebels, received the title *Tả Hiệu Điểm*, Marquis of Công Tây. Nearly five centuries have passed; the descent has multiplied into two great branches, senior and junior, and the present generation, in 2015, is the twentieth. Assessing the Đinh Nho lineage of Hương Sơn, the licentiate Hồ Hữu Phước, a member of the Hà Tĩnh Historical Society, wrote: "The Đinh Nho lineage is a great clan of long standing in Hương Sơn and in the land of Nghệ. It has produced many figures celebrated in the examinations, in the mandarinate and in arms." (Article "The Đinh Nho lineage of Hương Sơn", *Hà Tĩnh* newspaper, 17 April 1999.)

Let us briefly review what illustrates this judgment. From the outset, the will to rise above difficulty and the loyalty to prince and country that animated the first ancestor passed to the following generations. In the seventh generation, Đinh Nho Công was twenty-seven and his studies still unfinished; encouraged by his parents and resolute himself, he passed as a doctor at thirty-four, at the examination of the year Canh Tuất (1670), Cảnh Trị era, under King Lê Huyền Tông. His son Đinh Nho Hoàn then passed as a doctor of the second rank — that is, *Hoàng giáp* — at the examination of the year Canh Thìn (1700), Chính Hòa era, under King Lê Hy Tông. Đinh Nho Hoàn's brother, Đinh Nho Côn, who placed first in the provincial examination, gave up letters for arms and commanded the troops of the Đông Thành and Lương Sơn circuits. All were, after their success, employed by the king and rendered service to people and country. Together with the legend of the faithful widow Phan Thị Viên, this later earned the house of Đinh Nho Công — father and children — elevation by the court to the rank of tutelary deities, hence the couplet:

> Above, to guard the country; below, to shelter the people. One house, FOUR TUTELARY DEITIES — what glory!

Later, continuing this tradition, many families have succeeded to the point that they may be called, in modern times, "illustrious houses and respected clans": such is that of the three brothers Đinh Nho Dật, Đinh Nho Bát and Đinh Nho Chú, sixteenth generation of the senior branch, whose sons, daughters, daughters-in-law and sons-in-law are all doctors of science or engineering and professors — Đinh Nho Chương, Đinh Thị Khương, Đinh Nho Hào, Nguyễn Phương Chi, Đinh Như Hà Bình…

Some singular figures of our own day should also be mentioned. First Đinh Xuân Vịnh, sixteenth generation of the junior branch: holding only the "diploma" — the equivalent of

today's lower-secondary certificate — with no academic title or degree, he produced, out of a passion for research, a manuscript work of more than forty school exercise books, forming a pile some sixty centimetres high and comprising nearly forty thousand entries, embracing history, geography, literature… This work earned him the first prize of the Folk Arts Association in 1994 and, in the same year, the third-class Labour Medal awarded by the State.

The young people who have overcome poverty, hardship and even an unkind fate to succeed deserve admiration too. Đinh Nho Nam, eighteenth generation of the junior branch, born with a disability that makes walking difficult, nonetheless excelled in his studies and took a degree in information technology with distinction; he is today deputy director of a software company in the South. Đinh Việt Anh, seventeenth generation of the junior branch, blind in both eyes, took two degrees with distinction — education and foreign languages. She also taught herself Chinese and Japanese, which she speaks fluently; in 2014 she and her husband obtained their master's degrees with distinction, the first master's degrees awarded to two blind people in Việt Nam. Đinh Nho Minh, eighteenth generation of the junior branch, grandson of the late Đinh Nho Liêm, first deputy minister of Foreign Affairs, then in his second year at the Foreign Trade University, prepared on his own a set of outstanding interviews addressed to one of the top American universities, Tufts, and obtained a full scholarship of 220,000 US dollars. It is admirable that he told everyone he wished, once graduated, to go on to a doctorate in international relations so as to return and serve his country in diplomacy, as his grandfather did before him.

Looking more closely, field by field, at what the descendants of the Đinh Nho lineage have given the country over nearly five centuries, one sees it still more clearly.

I. Politics

From his settlement at Hương Sơn, the first ancestor pursued with Phạm Phúc Kính, of Hữu Băng in the same district, the enterprise of "supporting the Lê and destroying the Mạc"; he received the title *Tả Hiệu Điểm*, Marquis of Công Tây — that is, in the Lê hierarchy of the day, the second degree, secondary class, of the military career. Many of his descendants afterwards entered public service. Đinh Nho Công received the office of assistant censor; in discharging it he was upright, honest and able, and the king bestowed on him the four characters "high and firm in speech" together with a gold coin as encouragement. Hoàng giáp Đinh Nho Hoàn, as soon as he had passed, was appointed by the king corrector at the Hàn lâm Academy, then sent on service to the Sơn Tây circuit, governor of Cao Bình, chamberlain of the Bureau of Seals, and finally deputy envoy of the legation sent to the Qing in the year Ất Mùi. Dying on the road, he received from the king the title "*Kim tử Vinh lộc đại phu*, posthumous name Giản Tịnh, exceptionally raised to the office of left vice-minister of Rites". His brother Đinh Nho Côn was commander-in-chief, Marquis of Hương Nghĩa. Under the Nguyễn, Đinh Nho Điễn, fourteenth generation of the senior branch, who passed as a doctor, rose to the office of assessor at the Ministry of Justice and compiler at the National History Bureau, with the rank of chamberlain of the fourth degree, principal class. In the Đông Du movement, Đinh Nho Bộc was active alongside Ngô Quảng; his brother Đinh Nho Thục was active in the Tonkin Free School movement and fell ill crossing the sea to Siam — at the point of death, in his delirium, he was still crying: "Drive out the French!" In the Nghệ Tĩnh soviet movement, it was again sons of the Đinh Nho lineage who were among the first Party members and helped found the first communist cell of Hương Sơn district: Đinh Nho Khoách, provisional deputy secretary of the

district committee in 1930, and Đinh Nho Đang, secretary of the district committee in 1931. Later, Đinh Xuân Bính was chairman of Hương Sơn district. Continuing this tradition, Đinh Nho Liêm — sixteenth generation of the junior branch, like Đang, Khoách and Bính — was a member of the Party central committee at the fifth and sixth congresses and first deputy minister of Foreign Affairs. Among the younger: Đinh Xuân Việt, standing deputy secretary of the Hà Tĩnh provincial committee; Đinh Mạnh Đôn, director of the Party school; Đinh Nho Thìn, vice-chairman of the city of Vinh; Đinh Nho Thiềm, member of the provincial committee and director of Hà Tĩnh radio and television; Đinh Việt Anh, member of the bureau of the Vietnam Blind Association. The family of Đinh Nho Huề, sixteenth generation of the junior branch, has received from the State the title “family that has served the nation well”.

II. The army

For modern times, in the nation’s two great wars of resistance, one may note: the security colonel Đinh Nho Tùng, sixteenth generation of the senior branch; Lieutenant Colonel Đinh Nho Đang, sixteenth generation of the senior branch, former commander of the Third Military Region; Colonel Đinh Nho Chiêm, seventeenth generation of the senior branch, former head of the finance department of the Fourth Military Region; Colonel Đinh Nho Công, seventeenth generation of the junior branch, head of the finance department of unit 113; the colonel formerly military attaché at the embassy to the Russian Federation; and the Saigon clandestine fighter Đinh Thị Liên, sixteenth generation of the senior branch.

III. Culture

Hoàng giáp Đinh Nho Hoàn left, besides the *Mặc Trai sứ tập*, the *nôm* collection *Cao Bình thập thủ*, the *nôm* song of one hundred and sixty-eight lines *Hoán tỉnh châu dân từ*, the notices engraved on the stele of 1708 and the inscription of the *Khánh Mặc Trai* of 1712. Đinh Nhật Thận, great-grandson of Đinh Nho Côn, settled at Thanh Liên (Thanh Chương, Nghệ An), is the author of the *Thu dạ lữ hoài ngâm*. Đinh Nho Huề, sixteenth generation of the junior branch, wrote the epic poem *The Việt Băc Resistance*. Quỳnh Dao — that is, Đinh Nho Diệm — published the collections *Moon Threads* and *Under the Jiangsu Bridge*. Several descendants have held responsibilities in the press: Đinh Nho Khôi, sixteenth generation of the junior branch, editor-in-chief of *Hà Nội mới*; Đinh Nho Liêm, of the Sơn Tân branch, editor-in-chief of the *Hà Tĩnh* newspaper; Đinh Việt Anh, editor-in-chief of the review *Đời Mới*, central organ of the Vietnam Blind Association.

IV. Science and technology

In traditional medicine, the practitioner Đinh Nho Chấn — called the venerable Hàn Cống — treated by the methods of eastern medicine and also wrote a materia medica, the *Trung Việt dược tính hợp biên*. In western medicine: Dr Đinh Thị Hòa, head of the haematology department; Dr Đinh Thị Bích Thu, lecturer at the Hanoi medical faculty. In other disciplines: Đinh Như Hà Bình, doctor of science; Đinh Nho Thanh, doctor in cybernetics and information theory; Đinh Thị Khương, doctor in economics; Đinh Nho Chương, doctor of science in mathematics; Đinh Nho Hào, professor; Đinh Thị Oanh, doctor in agronomy; Đinh Nho Hồng, doctor; Đinh Phạm Thái, doctor in metallurgy; Đinh Dũng, doctor and director of the Institute of Information Technology.

Conclusion

The descendants of the Đinh Nho lineage have always been conscious of the need to rise so as to prove worthy of their forebears' tradition. A notable feature is that most of the descendants, daughters-in-law and sons-in-law show a high sense of responsibility in life as in the building of their native place and their nation, and bring honour to the lineage. The efforts of today's descendants have certainly been nourished deeply by the precepts that the eighth-generation ancestor, Hoàng giáp Đinh Nho Hoàn, left to his family before setting out on embassy:

To my descendants

> *Tu Trung Hiếu, phác hậu / Thanh Kiệm, Lạc bần / Tiến vi Nghĩa sĩ / Thoái vi Lương nông / Vật Kiêu dâm / Vật Phạm thượng / Vật tranh tụng / Vật Đổ bác / PHƯƠNG KHẢ CẬN TƯ AM*
>
> Cultivate loyalty and filial piety, plainness and generosity; purity and thrift, contentment in poverty. Going forward, be men of duty; withdrawing, be good farmers. No pride, no dissipation; no offence against superiors; no litigation; no gambling. **Only then may you come near my hermitage.**

Paraphrase in Vietnamese verse:

> You who are a descendant of Mặc Ông, be honest and generous, dutiful and loyal, thrifty and industrious. When the household is in straits, stay cheerful and resolved to make your way. If you gain office and power, take the people as your root and let your heart be full of humanity. If you withdraw to plough with your people, keep yourself honest and put humanity first. Flee pride and greed at once; towards your superiors, know respect and measure. Do not go to law over trifles; from gambling, keep well away. All of you, keep faithfully the RULE OF THE HOUSE: only then may you come to my hermitage and offer worship there.

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31. Following "the old road of carriages, the soul of autumn grasses"

Phạm Quang Đẩu — Writers' Association of Việt Nam

[source: 14.doc]

The immortal line from Bà Huyện Thanh Quan's *Remembering Thăng Long* (1805–1848) that gives this article its title suits some sons of Gôi Mỹ (Sơn Hòa, Hương Sơn, Hà Tĩnh) who have just made the journey to the land of Cao Bằng, at the crown of the country, in the hope of finding some trace left by their ancestor. That ancestor, more than three hundred years ago, at the age of thirty, passed as a doctor of the second rank — *Hoàng giáp* — and then became a shining star in both diplomacy and poetry in our history. And after his success, in 1704, the court appointed him governor of Cao Bình, that is, today's Cao Bằng. He is Hoàng giáp Đinh Nho Hoàn (1671–1715).

Early this year, on the tercentenary of his death (1715–2015), the Hà Tĩnh Department of Culture, Sports and Tourism and the Đinh Nho lineage of Hương Sơn decided to hold a conference. A paper sent to the editorial committee by Professor Đinh Khắc Thuân, of the

Institute of Hán Nôm Studies, revealed that during his governorship of Cao Bình, Đinh Nho Hoàn had composed the *Hoán tỉnh châu dân từ*, a *nôm* manuscript with shelf mark AB.185, and the *nôm* collection *Cao Băng thập thủ*. Although his governorship did not last long, his mark is clear: instruction of the people, raising of the level of learning, development of trade, in a province that even today remains one of the poorest in the country. From this the head of the Đinh Nho lineage of Hương Sơn, Đinh Nho Quỳ, had a sudden idea: since ten poems by the ancestor celebrating the scenic spots of Cao Băng had been recovered, his descendants would follow "the old road of carriages" he had travelled and visit the places he names. This pilgrimage is chiefly symbolic, though one still hopes to lay hands on some trace, or at least to reach those places to breathe the air and feel that "soul of autumn grasses" which may still linger where the ancestor lived and worked, on the frontier march.

The party of pilgrims numbered five, led by the head of the Đinh lineage of Gôi Mỹ; all had followed the path of study to a bachelor's or doctoral degree in the natural sciences. And Đinh Phạm Thái, a somewhat "absent-minded" metallurgist, has besides the poetic gene of the Đinh blood: he writes verse too.

The departure met with a hitch. The representative of the provincial culture and information service, unexpectedly detained, could not come, which shook the head of the lineage; he nonetheless set out alone for the station, to join at Hanoi the kinsmen with whom he had an appointment. On the morning of 15 March 2015, the descendants of the Đinh Nho lineage in Hanoi, on both the paternal and maternal sides, joyfully welcomed the "chief" come from home. That meeting further strengthened the will to go back to the source, and they set out the same day. But up to the last minute the party had made no contact on the spot, except that the lineage's liaison officer in Hanoi, Đinh Nho Bảng, had kept the number of a certain Đinh Danh Phương, who held some position or other at Cao Băng and whom he had met in passing at the national gathering of the Đinh lineage at Ninh Bình in 2013. In the early afternoon, "at the good hour", the party set off from the Gió Biển Đông fish restaurant on Tô Hữu street. The seven-seater sped along the Hanoi–Thái Nguyên motorway; on entering the territory of Cao Băng it began to lurch more and more as the road climbed through passes, slopes and hairpins. The same question then came to everyone's mind: on that far-off day at the beginning of the eighteenth century, by what means did our forebear the *Hoàng giáp* travel to his post as governor, and how long was he on the road? His great-great-grandchildren in the car all answered the same thing without consulting one another: on horseback, or carried in a palanquin by relays of bearers — and no doubt he sometimes got down and walked at his ease with his retinue. As to time: from the capital Thăng Long to the *trấn* of Cao Bình is some hundred and fifty *dặm*, more than two hundred kilometres; the road then was narrow, rough, full of climbs, ravines and heights, and passed through many dense forests where wild beasts lurked — so it must have taken at least a fortnight, travelling by day and resting by night. Today his descendants need only eight hours, seated in an air-conditioned car, with a few stops to stretch their limbs. Towards ten in the evening a flat, brightly lit expanse appeared before them: the town of Cao Băng, recently promoted to a third-category city. The party spent the night in a "three-star" hotel in the town centre, the Hoa Việt.

In the morning, a middle-aged man with a kindly face came knocking at the door and introduced himself: Đinh Danh Phương. He first asked after the health of each of the older travellers, tired after a long stage, then invited the whole party to breakfast on duck noodle soup, the local speciality. Sitting over tea, he telephoned another member of the lineage, Đinh

Ngọc Viện, head of the propaganda commission of the provincial committee, to arrange a proper reception. Only then did the party learn that Đinh Danh Phương was a provincial official: director of the Department of Home Affairs. He then took the party to his department. Shortly afterwards Viện came to greet the visitors; the two men quickly grasped the purpose of the journey and provided a driver who knew the terrain well, to trace the old governor's remains through the ten poems. The same thought came again to the pilgrims who had climbed to this frontier of the country: the ancestor must surely be showing them the way, for everything to fall into place so smoothly.

On enquiry, there was no need to go far: the governor's residence stood in the heart of today's town, beside the Bằng river, sluggish at low water, turbulent and muddy at flood. Of the old citadel the upheavals have left nothing; all that is known is that the site of the residence is today occupied by a three-storey building belonging to the Cao Bằng Tourism Joint Stock Company, on Kim Đồng street — Thầu street in French times. And the Hoa Việt hotel stands within that same company's grounds. So, by a happy fate, the party of pilgrims, all descendants of the *Hoàng giáp*, had spent the previous night on the exact site of his old residence — a place answering to the line of Bà Huyện Thanh Quan as a modern reader takes it, looking back at a golden past: "The old trace of carriages, the soul of autumn grasses; on the ground of the old palace, the shadow of the setting sun."

The four-star Bằng Giang hotel stands at the river mouth formerly called Mục Thành, where the great stele raised by the Chinese merchants in praise of Governor Đinh Nho Hoàn once stood. Things have changed and the stele has gone, but the genealogy of the Đinh lineage of Sơn Hòa has preserved its contents. It says that the river was most dangerous, with bamboo growing in mid-channel and rocks breaking the surface; at flood, boats reaching that point could no longer avoid them, struck and capsized, and their goods sank entire, sometimes with men aboard, at incalculable loss. Barely in office, the governor inspected that dangerous passage and, at low water, brought workmen to blast the emergent rocks and pull out the bamboo stumps in the channel, so that boats had no more accidents. He then earned another merit no less worthy of memory: reducing taxes and vexations, so that merchants could land conveniently and quickly. The stele ends with these lines of respect and admiration: "His loyalty moves even the beasts. His virtue in office makes the trees and grasses green. We respectfully wish him high office and weighty rank. How greatly we, visiting traders, admire him and hope in him!"

On the reinforced-concrete bridge that spans the Bằng today, the party stopped to look towards the river mouth, the rapids, the old guild hall; further off appeared the Hoàng Sơn range, bluish, winding like a silk scarf — exactly as the governor describes it in the second poem, *Hoàng Sơn after rain*: "The skin of the sky is washed clean, smooth as a sheet; Hoàng Sơn rears up, and its look is pleasing…" Suddenly the song of a Chinese nightingale rang out by the river. Đinh Nho Bảng, the lineage's liaison officer in Hanoi, seemed spellbound by it. He ran after the bird to the far end of the bridge; he came back a few minutes later, beaming, with a small cage in which a street nightingale was hopping about. How it matched the poem written three hundred years earlier: "At the stream's bridge a bird calls, the woodcutter goes home early; at the cave mouth the flowers murmur, the guest lingers at noon. At the spirit's shrine, impassive, the incense is not yet cold: the sacred breath rises stronger than before."

Băng Giang street is not far from the bridge; it is busy with people, and it is where Chinese merchants have traded for generations. Many memories came back to the Đinh metallurgy professor there. It was in that very place, in the last years of the past century — when he had not yet heard of the *Cao Băng thập thủ* — that he had stopped many times, bathed in that stretch of river and waited for his coach ticket to go up to the Tĩnh Túc tin mine and supervise his students' fieldwork. In those days there was only a modest row of lodging houses with bamboo-slat floors and windows looking out on the Băng.

Without lingering, the car took the road to the historic cave of Pác Bó, but stopped five kilometres from the town centre, before the temple of Khâu Sầm, at Ngần hamlet, Vinh Quang commune, Hòa An district. Past the shaded gateway, the party was received with honour by the temple keeper, Bùi Đức Ga. This is the shrine of Nùng Trí Cao, raised under King Lý Thái Tông to the rank of first-order deity for having driven back the Song. The *Hoàng giáp*'s third poem, *Evening clouds over Khâu Sầm*, says not a word of Nùng Trí Cao's merits: it is purely a landscape poem, in which the "evening clouds" serve to express longing for home — "The evening clouds pile up and hold back the homing geese; Mount Sầm lets its uneven screens hang down… The eye turned homeward has not yet come to rest, and already, from somewhere, the geese's flute is modulating." Through this poem one can picture the ancestor standing silently before the ancient temple, his eyes fixed on his native land, to the south.

Not far from the temple of Nùng Trí Cao, in Hưng Đạo commune, also in Hòa An district, stands the pagoda of Đồng Lân, built under the Lê and the Mạc, wholly destroyed, then rebuilt under the reign of Thiệu Trị, in the mid-nineteenth century. In later restorations, all the inscriptions — the pagoda's name, the couplets — have been set in the national script: another way for the descendants to express national pride. Notably, there is also an ancient bronze bell cast with the four characters "peace for the country, quiet for the people": its hanging loop having broken, this precious bell rests on the ground, and a newly cast one has been hung for daily use. To the party's surprise, on stepping through the Buddha's gate they came upon a young nun sweeping up bodhi leaves, of a gentle and grave beauty, her velvet eyes deeply sad. They learned her worldly name — Nguyễn Thị Minh Hân — and that she had only just taken the habit, and nothing more: for what reason had this beautiful nun followed the abbess Thích Diệu Không and left the world to settle here?

Hoàng giáp Đinh Nho Hoàn has a poem, *Night bell at Đồng Lân*, one of the finest of the ten. It may be that the "peace for the country" bell is more than three hundred years old, and that one night its sound carried through the void to the governor's ear, and the poet's inspiration flowed from his brush — first these lines describing the silent, unreal night: "There the moon, here the inn and its smoke, there the village; far off a bell, in some place of fire and incense…" But concern for country and people remains the dominant inspiration: "… The daytime lamp, for the country's sake, is trimmed, and one keeps vigil in dream; on the traveller's pillow, care for home wakes him with a start. The heart, from listening, understands at last: how vast that compassion is."

The party's last stop of the day was the citadel of Na Lữ, from the poem *The ancient citadel of Na Lữ*. It is the furthest point from the town centre, some fifteen kilometres away, at Đền village, Hoàng Tung commune (Hòa An). It is also called the temple of King Lê, is listed as a national historical monument, and holds its festival on the sixth day of the first lunar month.

The citadel of Na Lữ was built in the eleventh century. In the fourteenth, to resist Ming incursions, the Tày chief Bế Khắc Thiệu and Nông Đắc Thái raised troops and established themselves there. In 1431 Lê Lợi came in person to subdue them and had the place restored; the inhabitants then raised a "living shrine" to Lê Thái Tổ. In 1592 the Mạc, having fled to Cao Bằng, took the citadel of Na Lữ and set up their palace there, through three generations of rulers. In the second year of the Vĩnh Trị era (1677) the Mạc were defeated by the Lê and finally routed by Đinh Văn Tả, who drove them into China. Đinh Văn Tả was a fine Lê general, recorded in the histories, a native of Hải Dương. According to an unverified report, he came originally from Hưng Nguyên, in Nghệ An, and was of the same blood as Hoàng giáp Đinh Nho Hoàn.

On reaching the citadel gate, seeing a channel of clear water and an old man washing his jacket in it, one recalled Đinh Nho Hoàn's line, in the poem *Passing Kỳ Dương district, on the Ngô stream*, from the *Mặc Trai sứ tập*: "The monk washes his robe and crosses the Hương bridge." Today's "monk" is a veteran who looks after the old citadel; he hurried home to dress properly and come out to welcome the party, and related that Cao Bằng too has a Đinh lineage, all descendants of Đinh Văn Tả.

Of the ten poems on the scenic spots of Cao Bằng, the first, *The ancient citadel of Na Lữ*, is written differently: it dwells little on clouds, sky and water, and reasons entirely on the affairs of the world. Indeed the citadel of Na Lữ has seen many fires of war and the rise and fall of several dynasties: "The four walls of the ancient citadel stand at the foot of the old forest; the altar still smokes with the incense of times of trial. A thousand rows of trees raise their spearheads; five corollas of cloud make a canopy of shade. The old royal land, gold and stone, holds firm; the dry bones of the Mạc dissolve into dust…"

To each poem its place: a whole day allowed only half of them to be covered. The Liêu pass, the Xảo river and Mạnh Tuyền could not be reached, partly for want of time, and partly because the local people themselves do not know all these old names. In any case, measured against the original aim, the journey succeeded in the essentials.

The farewells to Đinh Văn Tả's descendants were cheerful and full of fraternal warmth. After all, the Đinh of Hà Tĩnh and those of Cao Bằng have a common ancestor, even if there has not yet been leisure to trace the thread. Taking leave of Đinh Danh Phương, Đinh Ngọc Viện and their families, the Đinh of Hương Sơn arranged to meet again at the end of the year, for the tercentenary of the death of a common ancestor, the pride of the Đinh lineage throughout the country: Đinh Nho Hoàn.