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Vietnamese Studies

TRADITIONAL VIETNAM

SOME HISTORICAL STAGES

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No 21

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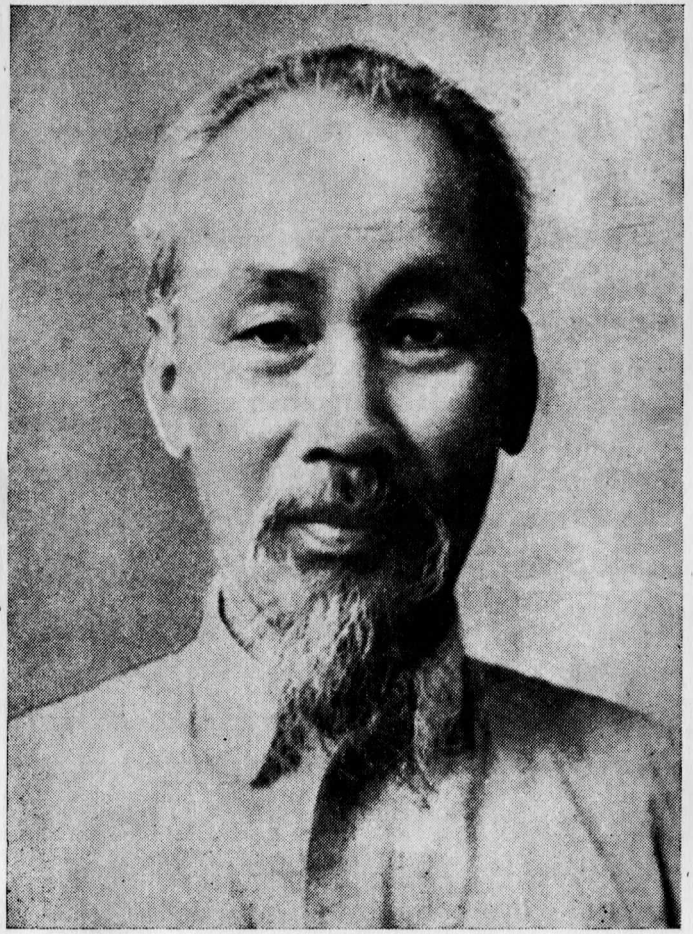
Editor: **Nguyen Khac Vien**



President HO CHI MINH

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Contents

The drawing on the front cover reproduces a decoration engraved on a bronze drum of the Dong Son period (1st millenary B.C.).

The above articles have been written by NGUYEN KHAC VIEN on the basis of works done at the Hanoi Institute of Historical Studies.

THE Vietnamese nation took shape in the course of several thousand years. Her history, particularly the pre-colonial period, is still little known abroad. Old books, especially those written during the colonial days, often give an inaccurate account of the historical process. These last fifteen years or so, works by Vietnamese historians have shed new light on many problems. However, written in Vietnamese, they are not easily accessible to the foreign public.

Pending the publication of a general history of the Vietnamese people, we have collected in the present issue a few articles which may give a concrete idea of the great stages of Vietnamese history before the colonial conquest. We shall try to give a broad outline of each period, with information on various aspects: social, economic, political, military, cultural. We are aware of the sketchy character of these articles, the aim of the present issue of Vietnamese Studies *being merely to fill a gap. Those of our readers who want to go more deeply into certain problems may write to the Institute of Historical Studies in Hanoi.*

This issue comprises articles on

1. *The origins*
2. *The Ly and Tran periods (11th-14th centuries)*
3. *The Le period (15th-16th centuries)*
4. *The 18th century: The Tay Son*
5. *Cultural evolution in the 18th century.*

I — THE ORIGINS

From the Stone Age to the Bronze Age

Paleolithic and Neolithic

VIET-NAM is located in Southeast Asia, where the appearance of anthropoids had been noted in many places.

In August 1965, in a cave located on the territory of Tan Van village, Lang Son province, the discovery was made of remains of an anthropian and teeth of another one, close to the Sinanthropus. Those remains are still being studied, but the date of their appearance may be put, according to preliminary investigations, at the Middle Pleistocene, about half a million years ago.

The first traces of a real human industry had been found in November 1960, on Mount Do in Thanh Hoa province. At a height of 20-30 metres above the level of surrounding ricefields, were found thousands of chipped stone splinters: cutters and scrapers. Among those splinters were almond-shaped hand-axes, carefully chipped on both faces, and typical of the Chellean period. The existence of a Lower Paleolithic in Vietnam was thus confirmed.

In many caves in Yen Bai, Ninh Binh, and Quang Binh provinces, where bones of a post-Pleistocene fauna had been unearthed, teeth and jaw-bones of *Homo sapiens* were discovered. And so man had continued to subsist over a long period, gradually improving his tools, albeit very slowly.

Towards the end of the Paleolithic, the Red River delta had not yet been completely silted up. Man had settled in the limestone hills bordering the plains, in roomy habitable caves located near rivers and forests where fish and game abounded. Tools were made from pebbles found in the streams. In Hoa Binh and Bac Son centres of lithic culture have been discovered in caves, with tools, utensils, hearths and ashes, and kitchen remains, especially shells and bones.

Tools were made of roughly-chipped stone and were ellipsoid-,disc-,or almond-shaped: cutters, scrapers rectangular axes. Pebbles served as pestles to crush nuts and grain. Gradually appeared the so-called Bac Son axe, of polished stone. Tools made of animal bones and horns have been seldom found. It is probable that bamboo was widely used to make stakes, arrows, cutters... A section of a bamboo trunk could serve as a vessel, or even a cooking pot (this is still the case at present in the highlands). So did coconuts, gourds and calabashes. Pottery made its appearance in the Bac Son period. At first, baskets of plaited bamboo were coated with clay to make them watertight. Fired, they lost their bamboo frames and became earthenware. Eventually pottery was made without any bamboo frame.

Food-gathering and hunting were the main activities. No traces of agriculture, no remains of domestic animals, except perhaps the dog, have been found.

In the same period, along the coast of Trung Bo, man lived mostly from fishing. Shells from mollusks which had served as food made up enormous heaps,

five or six metres high and several thousand square metres in area, the most typical of which have been found in Quynh Luu (Nghe An province). Those heaps of empty shells contain also bones of mammals (deer, buffalo, dog) and pestles with hollowed stones, which served to crush grain. Many stone tools have been unearthed.

Under a shell heap in Quynh Van, several tombs have been found grouped together. The deceased had been buried in a sitting position, with bent knees, together with a few tools and adornments, the latter being made of shell, bone, stone, or little perforated beads of baked earth. There are ornaments on the pottery. On the walls of a cave in Hoa Binh, a drawing has been found representing a being with an animal body and a human head, but with horns. The presence of shells in caves far from the sea-coast, and that of stone tools in coastal places where stone was not available seems to be evidence of some sort of exchange between those regions.

Towards the 3rd millenary B.C., when deltas and coastal plains had taken their present-day shapes—with some places not yet silted up—,there developed from north to south, on the basis of pre-existing centres, many Neolithic ones: on the littoral of Trung Bo and of Ha Long bay, in caves and other sites in the Central Highlands, in eastern Nam Bo... Particularly worthy of note is the recent discovery of a series of Neolithic sites strung out along the banks of the Red River, from Phu Tho province to near Hanoi. The most characteristic site is Phung Nguyen (Phu Tho), discovered

in 1958 and excavated in 1959. There was found a rich Neolithic industry of polished stone having reached a high level, much well-decorated pottery, and traces of fabrics. Dwellings were no longer located in caves, but in the open. Recent excavations have shown that the area of that Neolithic culture comprised essentially the present-day midlands north of the Red River, where legend puts the cradle of the Vietnamese nation. This is the PHUNG NGUYEN civilisation.

Polished st one implements became more and more specialized. Axes and shoulder axes (or ones with tenons for hafting) were well-polished, with regular geometrical forms, various sizes and shapes, and set in hafts. Man knew how to saw, drill, and use various instruments to fell trees, clear large expanses of ground, build boats, make wooden and bamboo implements, scrape tree-bark and hides, make rings, bracelets, ear-rings and beads out of bone, shell, or stone.

Pottery-making reached a high level. The use of the potter's wheel and the oven made it possible to obtain items of good quality and various sizes and shapes : pots and vases, adorned mostly with geometrical patterns. Bone needles, spinning-wheels and shuttles of baked earth prove the existence of weaving and clothes-making. Along the coasts and near rivers and streams, sinkers of baked clay have been discovered. So have projectiles of the same material for hunting with blow-pipes.

The practice of agriculture and animal-breeding is confirmed by the discovery of hoes, big earthen grain

containers, pig and buffalo bones. It seems that rice was grown in burnt-out forest clearings on hill-slopes and in submerged fields in the plains. Indochina is one of the regions where rice-growing had appeared at the earliest date.

While man continued to live in caves in mountainous regions, in recently discovered sites in the plains, one has found traces of dwellings made of wood and bamboo, whose sizes seem to prove that they were collective ones. Vestiges of dwelling places spread over tens of thousands of square metres, an area equivalent to that of present-day villages. The innumerable artefacts found in those places indicate the presence of thousands of people, making up a multi-clan tribe. Houses were probably built on stilts, as among the present-day mountain-dwelling ethnic minorities. The annals say that "our ancestors built elevated houses to ward off attacks by tigers."

The wholesale manufacture of implements and the large quantities of adornments and decorated pottery show that division of labour had reached a high level. The dead were buried together with implements, ornaments and pottery, often collectively. Equality in death proves that class differentiation among the living did not yet exist.

*

Skulls found in Hoa Binh, Bac Son, Quynh Van, Minh Cam, suggest that the people belonged to the Australo-Negroid group. However, Mongoloid elements

appeared at a very early date. Cross-breeding of Mongoloids coming from the north and Australo-Negroids gave birth to the group of southern Mongoloids who at first co-existed with the others but finally became predominant. Ethnic groups now living in Viet-Nam all belong to the group of southern Mongoloids, but bear more or less pronounced Australo-Negroid features. What happened was racial cross-breeding from which sprang an autochthonous group which developed its own culture — not massive migration bringing in any external civilization. The study of stone tools and pottery from various Neolithic and Mesolithic sites proves the continuity of an internal evolution unfolding on the spot with its own original features.

The Bronze Age

TOWARDS the end of the second millenary B.C., copper and especially bronze made their appearance. Vietnamese soil contains many deposits of copper, tin, lead and zinc, and bronze industry underwent remarkable development. Western archaeologists — whose excavations were followed by veritable plunder — have given the bronze civilization in Viet-nam the name of DONG SON civilization, the first important site having been discovered in Dong Son, Thanh Hoa province. In fact, Dong Son represents an advanced stage of the Bronze Age, and many sites have been discovered in recent years all over the territory of Viet-nam, with large quantities of artefacts ; all told, about thirty sites with tens of thousands of artefacts.

The first copper, then bronze objects appeared beside polished stone implements and earthenware with a still Neolithic character. Sandstone moulds for manufacturing axes, spears, and knives have been found in many places. The quality of the bronze and the shapes improved little by little, eventually ending up with the remarkable creations of Dong Son. This evolution took many centuries. While it was marked by external elements, these were not decisive, as claimed by Western archaeologists.

On the strength of insufficient information, and inspired by more or less pronounced racist and colonialist feelings, some Western archaeologists have even put forward the theory that the bronze art of Vietnam had come from... Europe.

Recent discoveries have revealed three important facts :

— The bronze art appeared on the basis of Neolithic industry ;

— It underwent a long evolution which brought it to the remarkable creations of Dong Son ;

— It spread all over the territory of Viet-Nam, and recently-discovered sites have revealed a wholly original unity of civilization. (1)

(1) Excavations made by Vietnamese archaeologists since 1959 took place essentially in these sites : Thieu Zuong, in Thanh Hoa province ; Co Loa, near Hanoi ; Viet Tri ; many sites in Phu Tho province ; Dao Thinh, in Yen Bai province ; Son Tay, Ha Dong, Ha Tinh, Hoa Binh, Bac Giang provinces, etc. They revealed many vestiges of the Bronze Age. These discoveries have been at the origin of many studies by and debates among Vietnamese historians.

Discovered bronze artefacts are of the most diverse kinds: production implements like ploughshares, axes, scythes, scrapers, chisels for woodworking, needles, gravers, fish-hooks; domestic utensils like vessels, pots, basins, jars; weapons like arrowheads, spears, sabres, knives, halberds, armour; musical instruments like bells, drums; art items like bracelets, statuettes, etc.

The most remarkable objects are, incontestably, the bronze drums. They have been found in many places in Southeast Asia and China, but it is generally recognized that the finest had been discovered in Viet-nam. The one found in Ngoc Lu is 63 centimetres high, 79 centimetres in diameter, and of cylindrical shape. In the middle of the upper face is an image of the sun with radiating beams, and sixteen concentric rings with the most various decorations : geometrical patterns, flocks of deer and aquatic birds, human figures, some playing musical instruments, others pounding rice, others beating drums. The men are clad in garments made of feathers of aquatic birds, which give them an aspect of bird-men—with probably a totemic significance. They dance to the tune of clappers. There are also small buildings and houses on stilts and, on a circular swelling below the head, boats and warriors carrying axes, javelins and arrows.

Those drawings and decorations present a double character — realistic and stylized — which testifies to the high artistic level of their authors. Most bronze artefacts are also well ornamented or finely shaped.

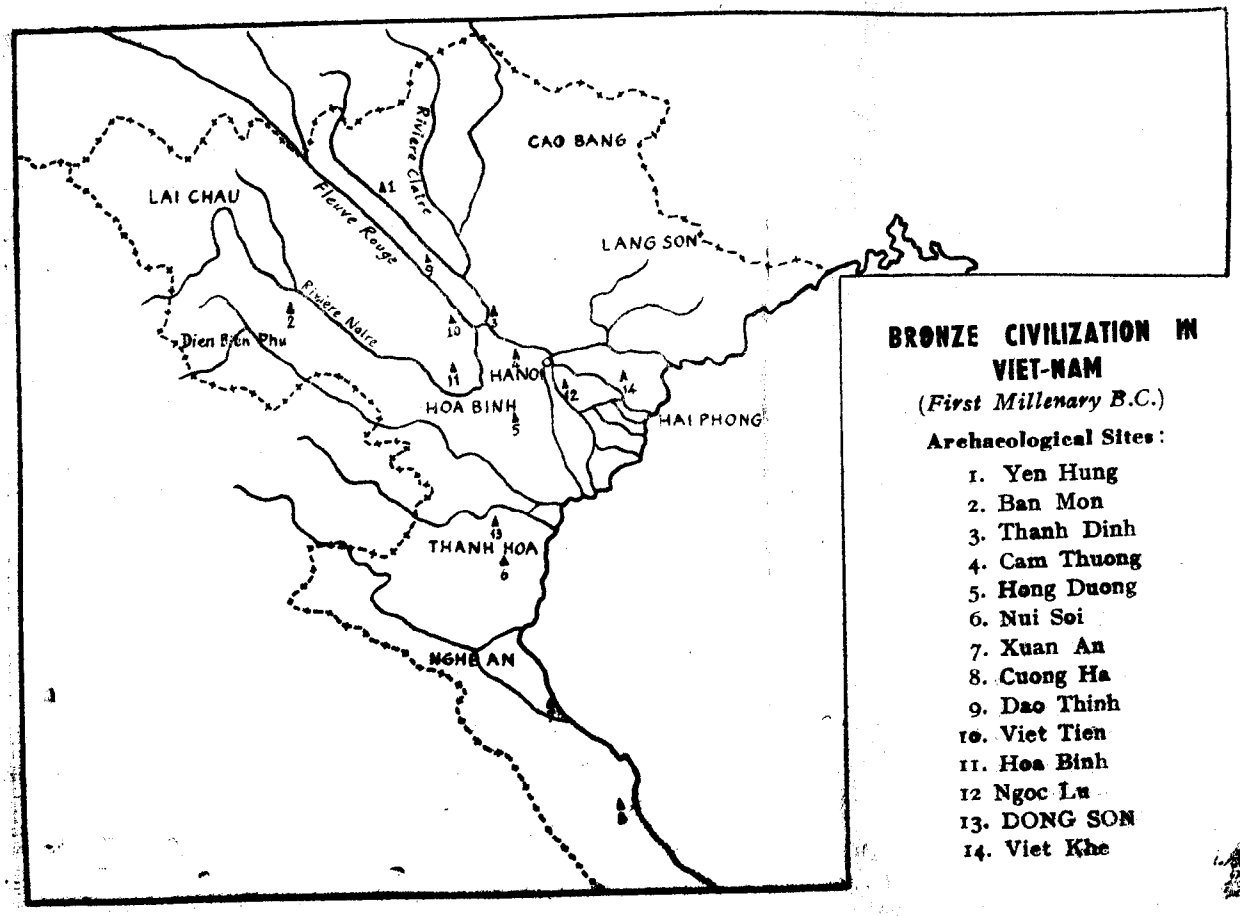
civilization. The bronze drums were used during important festivals and ceremonies, especially invocations for rain.

Bronze ploughshares, scythe and sickle blades, drawings on implements representing rice plants or people pounding rice—all testify to the development of agriculture. While cultivation on burnt-out forest clearings continued, irrigated rice-growing also developed. River and sea fishing was widely practised. Handicrafts, pottery making and bronze casting, having reached a high level, began to be separated from agriculture. On pottery vessels, traces of plaited bamboo strips can be seen : basket-making must have known a brilliant development.

Drawings on the bronze drums represent big houses on stilts and big junks, some with towers, an evidence of great progress in wood-working.

Overseas exchanges, especially with certain regions in Southern China and Indonesia, are proved by the discovery in tombs of various objects and weapons of the Warring Kingdoms period (5th-3rd centuries B.C. in China) while bronze drums of Dong Son manufacture were sold in far-away lands.

In short, by the end of the first millenary B.C., over vast areas of Vietnamese land, a high level of material and artistic civilization had been reached.



BRONZE CIVILIZATION IN VIET-NAM

(*First Millenary B.C.*)

Archaeological Sites:

1. Yen Hung
2. Ban Mon
3. Thanh Dinh
4. Cam Thuong
5. Hong Duong
6. Nui Soi
7. Xuan An
8. Cuong Ha
9. Dao Thinh
10. Viet Tien
11. Hoa Binh
12. Ngoc Lu
13. DONG SON
14. Viet Khe

The HUNG "Kings" and the "Kingdom" of VAN LANG

ARCHAEOLOGICAL discoveries, especially the unearthing of a series of Neolithic sites along the Red River from Phu Tho province to the neighbourhood of Hanoi, the legendary history recorded in the annals, and indications in old Chinese books have supplied concordant information, more or less precise, on the beginnings of Vietnamese history.

Early Chinese historians used the term BACH VIET (The Hundred Yues) to designate populations living south of the Yangtse river. In fact, this was a generic term which involved various ethnic groups, among them the LAC VIET, who lived in the plains and coastal regions of present-day North Viet-nam and part of present-day Chinese Kwangtung province.

The Lac Viet then comprised fifteen tribes, with a fixed habitat. They practised rice-growing in flooded fields, tattooed their bodies with images of aquatic animals, chewed betel, lacquered their teeth in black, pounded rice with handpestles. A series of significant legends are related to this period:

The lord LAC LONG QUAN had married AU CO, who bore him one hundred sons. One day, he said to his wife: "I am a Dragon, you a Fairy. We can't remain together." He took fifty of his sons with him to the plains and coastal regions, while the other fifty followed their mother to the mountains. One of Lac Long Quan's sons inherited his throne and was the founder

of a dynasty of 18 rulers known as the Hung "kings." Legendary history puts the beginning of the Hung dynasty as far back as 4,000 years ago.

The "kingdom" was called Van Lang and was made up of fifteen tribes, the main one being that of Me Linh, in Bach Hac, near present-day Viet Tri. The Hung kings ruled through *lac hau* (civilian chiefs) and *lac tuong* (military chiefs) and *bo chinh* (subaltern officials). The throne was hereditary; so were, probably, the functions of *lac hau* and *lac tuong*. Thus an aristocracy had come into being, while primitive communes still subsisted, where social differentiation gradually deepened. War between various groups supplied slaves.

The last of the Hung kings had a daughter of great beauty. Two suitors presented themselves. One was SON TINH, the mountain genie, and the other THUY TINH, the water genie. The king promised he would grant his daughter's hand to whichever came first with the required wedding gifts. Son Tinh arrived first with the gifts, married the princess and took her to the mountain to live with him. The frustrated Thuy Tinh unleashed his waters against Son Tinh, but the latter proved to be the stronger of the two. However, at the same period each year, the struggle resumes between the genies, ending invariably in the victory of Son Tinh. This legend reflects the struggle put up by the people against the floods caused each year by the rivers in spate at the time of the summer monsoon. It is certain that right from the dawn of their history, the Vietnamese people had to organize themselves to bring the waters

under control, hence the necessity for them to get together and build a centralized organization, which was gradually consolidated as the deltas of the great rivers were conquered.

The Au Lac Kingdom

WHILE the Lac Viet organized themselves in the plains and coastal regions, they maintained exchanges with the TAY AU (or AU VIET) who lived in the mountain regions of present-day Viet Bac, and also in some parts of present-day Chinese Kwangsi. The Tay Au were the ancestors of the Tay, Nung, and Choang, who now live in North Viet-nam and South China. They made up a federation of tribes, whose centre was in present-day Cao Bang province. War also broke out from time to time between the Tay Au and the Lac Viet.

Towards the end the 3rd century B.C., THUC PHAN king of the Tay Au, defeated the last of the Hung kings, and merged the territories of the Tay Au and the Lac Viet into the kingdom of Au Lac, in the year 258 B.C. He took the regnal title of AN ZUONG and set up an embryonic state, with a "Court" and an army which was, according to traditional history, a few score thousand strong. The territory of Au Lac comprised present-day North Viet-nam down to the Hoanh Son spur, without the mountainous areas south of the Red River and the mountainous western parts of Thanh Hoa and Nghe An provinces.

After his victory over the Hung, King An Zuong transferred his capital from the hilly regions to the plains, to CO LOA (about twenty kilometres from present-day Hanoi). The Co Loa citadel is the most important historical vestige of ancient Viet-nam. It was constituted by three rings of walls arranged in a spiral, the outer ring measuring about 8,000 metres in length, the walls being 12 metres thick (25 metres at the base) and 3-4 metres high. The earth walls were protected by pottery screens in some places, by wide and deep moats linked to the Hoang Giang river, and by watch-towers and other defences. In 1959, at a place 300 metres from the southern ramparts, was unearthed a stock of several thousand bronze arrowheads. Soon after, around the citadel were discovered stone and bronze axes and arrowheads. In 1966, three bronze ploughshares were found.

The Co Loa citadel was a very important defence work built with great art. Any external assault would run into a series of complex defensive works. Communication between the citadel and the local rivers made it possible to combine land and water operations. The volume of earth moved to build it was about two million cubic metres.

The construction of the citadel was probably not all smooth sailing; the people pressed into service to build it must have revolted many a time. Legend has it that "demons" had disrupted the building work until the Golden Tortoise genie came and offered his help. When the citadel was completed, the genie

presented the king with a magic claw which, used as a trigger on a crossbow, would give it devastating power against any enemy.

The size of Co Loa and the presence of important stocks of bronze arrowheads point to the existence of a professional army and an embryonic state apparatus. The Au Lac kingdom was born at the peak of the Bronze Age, towards the 3rd century B.C. We have seen above how agriculture and handicrafts had blossomed, which pre-supposes a relatively complex division of labour.

What was the nature of the State and society in the kingdom of Au Lac? Opinion is divided among Vietnamese historians. Some think that Au Lac society was one with slaves, a fairly elaborate economic organization, and a State with a well-consolidated regular army, as evidenced by the Co Loa citadel and the stocks of arrowheads. Inter-tribal wars are thought to have supplied most of the slaves who served as domestics, participated in agricultural and handicraft work, or were employed in the building of big defence works. The primitive commune remained solid, however, although some of its members might become slaves.

Other scholars, while admitting the existence of slaves in Au Lac society, think that in the main it was not a slave one; production forces, although relatively developed, were not yet sufficient to allow the setting up of a real exploiting class, a class State. One should not be fooled by the terms used to designate the "king",

the "nobility" and the "functionaries" of those times. Such works as the dykes and fortresses could have been built even by primitive communes. By and large Au Lac society remained one where the primitive commune, albeit on the way to disintegration, was predominant.

It must be said that neither thesis was definitely supported by archaeological researches and documents collected so far. A number of facts seem to confirm the slave hypothesis, but give no precise indication as to the way of life and numbers of the ruling classes and the slaves, the economic, political and juridical relationships between them, and the functioning of the State. Researches, especially archaeological ones, are still continuing, and one may hope that more facts will shed new light on that so important period of Vietnamese history.

However, as a result of archaeological research over the last few years, the following facts have been established:

— The existence of man on Vietnamese territory as early as the Paleolithic;

— The continuous development of human societies from the Stone Age to the Metal Age following an original pattern which depended essentially on internal, not external factors (although the latter might play a more or less important role according to the various periods);

— The blossoming of a very brilliant bronze civilization which proved that society had grown beyond its primitive state in the few centuries preceding the present era;

— The necessity of building works to bring water under control, which implied a centralized organization ;

— The prolonged persistance of rural communes and the long-delayed appearance of private land ownership.

The well-established fact is that towards the end of the first millenary B.C there had appeared an original and vigorous civilization, especially in the deltas and surrounding areas, which was soon to be subjected to a decisive trial : confrontation with Chinese feudal expansion. The best proof of its strength and originality is that it did not allow itself to be assimilated, and following a long resistance, was to become an independent national culture.

II — THE CENTRALIZED FEUDAL STATE:

The LY and TRAN Dynasties

(11th to 14th Centuries)

AFTER a long period of subjection to the Chinese feudal empire, a period marked by numerous insurrections, the Vietnamese people finally won back their independence in the 10th century (1). Following the recovery of independence, the country gradually turned toward the creation of a centralized monarchic state. This centralization was made necessary by a double requirement : the construction of great hydraulic works, particularly dykes and canals for the development of agriculture, and the safeguarding of national independence against the attempts at reconquest by the Chinese Imperial Court.

However, before a strongly organized monarchic state could be set up the country had gone through a period of instability during which the tendencies to feudal comminution still persisted. It was only with the establishment of the LY dynasty in 1009 that the monarchy could achieve real stable power. The TRAN, who succeeded the Ly in 1225, continued this work of

(1) The most important insurrections were those of
— the two Trung sisters (40-43)
— Trieu Thi Trinh or Dame Trieu (248)
— Ly Bon, who founded the Kingdom of Van Xuan (544)
— Mai Thuc Loan (722) and Phung Hung (791)
— Khuc Thua Zu, (905) whose victory inaugurated the period of independence. An attempt at reconquest by the Chinese feudal court was smashed by Ngo Quyen in a battle on the Bach Dang river (939).

national unification and building until the end of the 14th century. During 400 years, the country developed vigorously in many fields.

The Economic, Social and Political Regime under the Ly and the Tran

AFTER his accession, LY CONG UAN, whose regnal name was Ly Thai To, ordered the transfer of the capital to THANG LONG, the site of present-day Hanoi, in 1010. Thang Long was to remain the capital until the 19th century. He decreed a general amnesty and the destruction of all torture instruments. In 1054, his successor LY THANH TON named the country DAI VIET. Under the Ly and Tran dynasties, the regime was continuously consolidated, and it was only by the close of the 14th century that deep transformations took place.

Economic Development under the Ly and the Tran

The king owned all the land by right. The State, however, directly exploited only a small portion of this land, part of which was distributed to members of the royal family and high dignitaries as appanages and domains, and taxes were levied on land owned by villages and individuals. Thus, we have an agrarian regime with several sectors:

- State-exploited land;
- Appanages and domains;
- Communal land; and
- Private land.

Land distributed to the nobles and high dignitaries belonged to two categories. There were appanages whose beneficiaries had at their disposal both the land and the men; the peasants had obligations only to the local seigneur, and were not required to pay taxes or provide labour to the State. In the great domains, the peasants paid rent and taxes to the owner and at the same time, had obligations to the State, and remained direct subjects of the monarchy. Marshal LY THUONG KIET, for instance, received in appanage 4,000 peasant households, but his domain comprised another 10,000 households. Appanages and domains remained property of the king. When a seigneur died, his heirs might inherit his land, but they might also be dispossessed by the king.

Appanages and domains greatly increased in number under the Tran, when nobles and dignitaries endeavoured to reclaim new lands, of which they took possession. Some of them used their power to seize land belonging to villages and individuals. In these appanages and domains, the peasants were real serfs, while the seigneurs kept a large number of domestic slaves. The Ly had forbidden the sale of young men to be used as slaves, but the order was rescinded under the Tran.

The slaves comprised former criminals, insolvent debtors, war prisoners. In periods of famine, children were

sold by their parents as slaves. Some seigneurs owned thousands of serfs and slaves. These could not own property or have access to public functions. Particularly under the Tran, the nobles had their own armed forces.

Buddhist monasteries also constituted large domains with serfs and slaves.

The liberation of these serfs and slaves was the great social movement which was to shake the regime to its foundation.

The larger part of the land, however, belonged to the villages, which paid rent and taxes to the royal administration. The village population was periodically required to provide labour for the construction of roads, dykes, canals, and to do military service. The communal land was periodically distributed among the villagers, under the direction of notables, naturally in a manner profitable to the latter.

Land appropriation by individuals became increasingly frequent under the Ly; as early as the 11th century, the Ly had to promulgate legislation on the sale and purchase of land. A class of peasant-owners thus appeared, in face of the seigneurs with large domains.

The Ly and Tran kings attached great importance to agriculture. At the beginning of each year, continuing a tradition inaugurated by Le Hoan, the king himself made a symbolic gesture by ploughing a plot of land, following a ceremony in honour of the god of agriculture. In 1038, when King Ly Thai Ton was advised by a mandarin not to demean himself by such

ploughing, he said: "If I myself did not do some ploughing as an offering to the god, how could I set an example to the entire people?".

Those who stole or killed buffaloes were severely punished by law.

The dykes were given especial attention and mandarins were held responsible for their maintenance. The construction of numerous dykes and other hydraulic works is recorded in the annals: Co Xa dyke in 1108, digging of the Dau Nai canal in 1029, of the Lam canal in 1050, of the Lanh Kinh canal in 1089. The Tran on several occasions had dykes repaired and canals dredged. Particularly in 1382, they ordered the digging of several canals in Thanh Hoa and Nghe An provinces, and in 1390, of the Thien Duc canal, now the Song Duong. Dykes were built along the Red River, the Thai Binh, Ma and Chu rivers, and every year, following the harvest, the responsible mandarins inspected the dykes and directed maintenance and repair work. In August 1315, when the water level rose dangerously, King Tran Minh Ton personally directed the work. A mandarin advised him against such occupation: "It becomes kings to practise great virtues, not to devote themselves to little things"; but another dignitary retorted: "When the country is threatened by a big flood or a severe drought it is a king's duty to take direct part in carrying out the necessary measures. This is the best way to practise great virtues."

Dykes were also built along the coast to exploit new land formed by the silt accumulating at the mouths of rivers.

With administrative centralization, internal peace and the safeguarding of national independence, agriculture, the cornerstone of the economy, could develop favourably. History records few severe famines under the Ly and the Tran. The kings sometimes decreed a reduction of taxes, in order to encourage the peasants.

Handicrafts also developed rapidly. Cotton, silk and brocade weaving reached a high level. Multicoloured brocades were exported or presented to the Chinese Imperial Court. The development of silver, gold, tin and lead mining gave birth to numerous metal-working and jewelry-making trades. The State minted copper coins, set up workshops for the manufacture of weapons, cult objects, and court garments. Bronze melting, especially for making bells, developed rapidly. Pottery with high-quality enamels made great progress. Bricks, tiles, and earthen statues made in the Ly period were famous.

Printing from engraved wood plates contributed to the development of education and the diffusion of Buddhist literature.

The development of handicrafts led the Tran kings to divide the capital into districts, each of which was specialized in some trade. In the 13th century, the capital had 61 districts each of which was occupied by a guild.

VIET-NAM IN THE ELEVENTH CENTURY (DAI VIET)

The growing shipbuilding industry was able to build big junks with as many as one hundred oars. The capital Thang Long became the great commercial centre of the country, and markets were created in many places. A Mongolian ambassador who visited the country in the 13th century related that village markets gathered twice a month, with "plenty of goods", and on the highways a market was seen every five miles. There were also relays established by the authorities, where travellers could rest.

Trading between the delta and the mountain regions developed rapidly, the plains exchanging salt and iron tools for forest products. Trading with China was practised at special places near the frontier or at the ports. In exchange for fabrics, the Chinese got essential oils, ivory, salt and other minerals. The silk trade was subjected to rigorous regulations by the State, which sometimes engaged in commercial operations. Javanese and Siamese vessels came to Van Don port for Vietnamese goods.

In 1280, King Tran Nhan Ton instituted a unified unit of length for wood and textiles.

Commerce thus began to develop, but merchants were not held in high esteem, and external trade was tightly controlled by the State.

Social Life under the LY and the TRAN

At the top of the social edifice were the king and the royal family, who lived at the royal palace situated in

what is now the Ngoc Ha district. The columns and woodworks were painted red and decorated with dragons, phœnixes and Immortals. At the main palace gate stood a pavilion with a big bell.

Anyone wishing to present a request or petition to the king would ring the bell. The king often wore a dark yellow robe and a red coat. In mid-autumn he would preside over a water festival (probably on the Great Lake) with hundreds of gondolas and various entertainments, especially a water puppet show. From the middle of the lake emerged a huge gold-coloured tortoise bearing on its back three platforms on which dancers performed.

Besides the royal family, the feudal class comprised mandarins, court dignitaries, holders of large domains, land-owners sprung from great families. The higher offices were reserved for members of the great aristocratic families; only the sons of such families and of mandarins had access to the mandarin competitions. The Buddhist bonzes should also be counted among the feudal class, as the monasteries constituted great domains tilled by serfs.

The popular classes comprised peasant owners, merchants, free peasants in the villages, craftsmen, serfs and domestic slaves. They were forbidden by law to dress and wear ornaments like the privileged classes. The slaves could only marry people of their own class.

The Administrative, Military and Judicial Organization

Since the very beginning of their reign, the Ly endeavour to consolidate the State apparatus. The country was divided into twenty-four provinces entrusted to near relations of the royal family. The centralized monarchy governed with the assistance of this aristocracy. The princes of the blood had their personal appanages and their own armed forces. The Court hierarchy was a strict one with a double body of civil and military mandarins. These mandarins received no salaries, and lived on the rents and taxes paid by the population under their administration. But gradually a mandarin bureaucracy came into being, paid by the monarchy with taxes on land holdings, handicraft and forest products, and market sales. Little by little, the administration lost its familial character.

Bonzes played an important role as advisers to the king. The founder of the Ly dynasty was put on the throne with the help of a prominent bonze, Superior Van Hanh. Bonze Vien Thong was entitled to honours reserved for the heir to the throne.

In 1242, a village administrative machine was instituted by the Tran. Until then, the royal administration covered only the province and district levels.

The monarchy gave special attention to the building of a powerful army. Serfs were not taken into the army, and commanding positions were reserved for members of aristocratic families, the highest posts for members of the royal family. For the protection of

the king and the royal palace there was a special guard. Military service was extended to the whole population, except the serfs. The conscripts underwent a period of training, then returned to their villages to continue their work on the fields. This policy of the peasant-soldier made possible the mobilization of large forces whenever necessary. Training was done regularly and, according to a Chinese ambassador at the time, was of a high level. Under the Tran, the princes and seigneurs owners of great domains had their own armies made up of serfs and slaves. Sons of great families were trained in the art of war in a military school. TRAN HUNG DAO, who defeated the Mongols, wrote a handbook on military art for his officers' use.

The Ly also introduced a written legislation. In 1042, King Ly Thai Ton ordered his mandarins to "amend the laws and regulations so as to adapt them to the present circumstances, to classify them, to collect them into a penal code which can be easily understood by all." It is reported in the annals that the code, when completed and made known to the population, was welcomed by all. The redemption of delinquents and criminals was regulated; extremely severe punishment was decreed for the "ten capital crimes," particularly that of rebellion. Under the Ly it was forbidden to sell 18-year-olds as slaves; there were laws on the protection of draught animals and on the mortgage of land. Penalties were prescribed against piracy and extortions by mandarins. This legislation was perfected by the Tran. It should be noted that the law gave special attention to the prevention of rebellion.

The Problem of the Ethnic Minorities

While the delta had a homogeneous Viet (or *kinh*) population, the mountainous regions were inhabited by numerous ethnic groups, and the relations of the central government with these mountain populations constituted a most thorny problem for the monarchy. The historical relations between the Viet majority nationality and the minority nationalities had a dual character of integration and antagonism. On the one hand, the delta and the highlands were economically complementary and needed each other; they were also closely bound by the necessity of a common defence against foreign aggressors. The different nationalities therefore had a tendency to unite progressively into a single nation. On the other hand, the Viet feudalists, particularly the monarchy and the mandarins, sought to exploit and oppress the minority nationalities, which led to frequent revolts and the ensuing reprisals.

In the 11th century, when the Ly dynasty began, the frontiers of Dai Viet in the north and northwest had not yet been clearly delimited. Particularly important were the common frontiers with China in the north and northeast; these regions were inhabited by TAY and NUNG people whose allegiance was of prime importance for the Dai Viet kingdom. It was vital to incorporate them in the nation.

The Ly kings often sought alliance with local chiefs by giving them princesses of the blood in marriage, or by marrying their daughters. These alliances made it possible to constitute a defensive zone along the

Chinese frontier. However, this policy of alliance was accompanied by military operations, and in every reign, one or more expeditions were conducted against mountainous regions, some led by the king in person.

The revolt of NUNG TRI CAO, in Cao Bang province was the most important one. The *Nung* formed an ethnic group related to the *Thai* and *Tay*, living on Dai Viet territory and in South China. In 1036 a Nung chief proclaimed himself king, repudiating the suzerainty of the Ly. He was beaten and captured in 1036 by King Ly Thai Ton. His son Tri Cao succeeded in 1041 in carving for himself a territory which he named the Dai Lich kingdom. But he too was captured by the Ly troops, and King Ly Thai Ton made him chief of the region. Later he again rebelled and seized localities in South China to set up a kingdom. Only with great difficulty did the Chinese imperial troops defeat him at last in 1053. Whenever pursued by Chinese troops Tri Cao would request assistance from the Ly, who, however, did not dare to send troops into China.

The Safeguarding of National Independence

DESPITE repeated failures, the Chinese imperial dynasties had not given up the hope of reconquering Dai Viet. It was the glory of the great Ly and Tran dynasties to have defended national independence, the Ly against the Sung in the 11th century, and the Tran against the Mongols in the 13th century.

The Struggle against the Sung: LY THUONG KIET

Frontier incidents between Dai Viet and the Chinese empire were revived by Nung Tri Cao's revolt, which also revealed the weakness of the Sung in South China. The Quang Nguyen district, rich in precious minerals, was claimed by both parties; but the Ly kings, as we have seen above, had practically incorporated the region into the Kingdom through a clever policy of alliances.

At the Court of China, there still was a faction who advocated the reconquest of Dai Viet. In 1069, in an attempt to find a remedy to a serious economic and social crisis, the Sung emperor gave full powers to a bold reformer named Wang Ngan-che. As the results of the reforms proved disappointing, Wang Ngan-che, to save the Sung's prestige and seize Dai Viet's wealth, decided to send a great expedition against the Ly. In 1074, the provinces of South China received the order to strengthen their armies, arm combat junks, and stop trading with Dai Viet.

At the Ly court, the reigning king being only ten years old, all powers were concentrated into the hands of Generalissimo LY THUONG KIET, who decided to take the offensive to forestall the Sung.

Two army corps totalling 100,000 men were sent to China in 1075, one by land under the command of TONG DAN, a Nung chief, the other by sea, under the command of Ly Thuong Kiet himself. The latter cleverly exploited the Chinese population's discontent

with Wang Ngan-che's reforms, and appeared as the liberator of the peoples of South China. Placards were posted up to denounce the reformer and proclaim that Ly Thuong Kiet's only desire was to ensure the welfare of the people. The Ly troops were enthusiastically welcomed by the population and easily occupied many localities. The Generalissimo invested the Yungchow stronghold which fell after 43 days of siege, on March 1st, 1076. The citadel was razed to the ground ; other strongholds suffered the same fate.

The Sung prepared for a counter-offensive by forming a coalition with Champa and the Khmer kingdom. In April 1076, having attained his aim which was to destroy the Chinese staging bases, Ly Thuong Kiet withdrew his troops from Chinese territory. Early in 1077, the Sung troops, having forced their way through the frontier passes, faced the Ly army across the Nhu Nguyet river (now the Cau river). Fierce fighting ensued and the Sung army was unable to cross the river. It was in the course of this battle that Ly Thuong Kiet composed a poem and had it recited during the night, making his men believe that the river god was speaking:

Over the southern mountains and rivers, the Emperor of the South shall reign,
This was written down in the Book of Heaven.
How dare those barbarians invade our soil?
They will surely meet with defeat.

Its morale higher than ever, the Ly army repelled the attackers, who were also decimated by diseases. Ly Thuong Kiet then made a peace proposal, which

included the cession of five frontier districts (now Cao Bang and 'Lang Son provinces). The Sung accepted. It was in 1077. Two years later, through negotiations, the Ly recovered the ceded territory.

Ly Thuong Kiet was the architect of victory. An outstanding strategist, he was also a great politician who knew how to win the hearts of the populations and inspire his troops with enthusiasm. The solidity of the regime established by the Ly was confirmed by this brilliant victory over the Chinese imperial armies. The Tran further strengthened the country's armed forces, which enabled them, two centuries later, to repel the Mongol invasion.

The Glorious Resistance against the Mongols

IN the beginning of the 13th century, Gengis Khan, having unified Mongolia, started a war of conquest against China. In 1253, Kubilai conquered the Nam Chieu kingdom (now Yunnan province), thus reaching the Vietnamese frontier. The Mongols demanded passage through Dai Viet in order o attack the Sung from the South (1257), but the Tran refused to comply. A Mongol army invaded Dai Viet, smashed the defences, seized the capital Thang Long which was put to fire and sword. The Tran king left the capital, which was also abandoned by the population. The Mongol army could get no food supply and fared badly in the tropical climate. A Vietnamese counter-offensive drove it out of the capital. In his retreat the

enemy was attacked by local partisans belonging to an ethnic minority group in the Phu Tho region.

That was the first Mongol defeat.

When they had become the masters of China, the Mongols grew more and more exacting towards Dai Viet. Despite concessions by the Tran, the Mongol Court remained intransigent, dreaming of conquering both Dai Viet and Champa. Relations between the two countries remained tense, and the Mongol envoys behaved arrogantly at the Tran Court. But the Tran were not inactive, and seriously prepared for the defence of the country.

In 1281, TRAN ZI AI, a member of the royal family, was sent as an envoy to China. The Mongols persuaded him to accept their investiture as King of Dai Viet. He returned to the country with an escort of one thousand soldiers to ascend the throne, but the Mongol escort was beaten and he was captured.

In the meantime, the Mongols had completed preparations for an expedition by sea against Champa. By the close of 1282, a Mongol general, Toa Do (Gogetu) landed in Champa and seized its capital in 1283. But the Cham resistance decimated the Mongol armies. In 1284, Toa Do began withdrawing his troops, regrouping them in the northern part of Champa, near the Vietnamese frontier, awaiting further developments.

For Kubilai had been preparing for a powerful expedition against Dai Viet and Champa, under the command of his son Thoat Hoan (Toghan): 500,000 cavalrymen and infantrymen were to rush southward

to push the frontiers of the Mongol empire to the southernmost part of the Indochinese peninsula.

King Tran Nhan Ton was aware of the enemy's design. As early as 1282 he had assembled and consulted all princes and high dignitaries on actions to be taken: the unanimous answer was to fight. Prince QUOC TOAN, who was only sixteen, recruited a guard of a thousand men to go to the front. At the close of 1283, all princes and great dignitaries were ordered to put their troops under the supreme command of TRAN HUNG DAO. A congress of village elders from all over the country was convened, and the following question put to them: "Should we capitulate or fight?" A great cry rose from the assembly: "Fight!"

The Mongols demanded that their troops be allowed to pass through Dai Viet territory for the invasion of Champa. At the close of 1284, they crossed the frontier. The Vietnamese forces, totalling a mere 200,000 men, could not withstand the first impact. Tran Hung Dao ordered the evacuation of the capital and was asked by the king: "The enemy is so strong that a protracted war might bring terrible destructions upon the people. Wouldn't it be better to lay down our arms to save the population?" The Generalissimo answered: "I perfectly understand Your Majesty's humane feelings, but what would become of our ancestors' land, of our forefathers' temples? If you want to surrender, please have my head cut off first." The king was reassured. Hung Dao wrote a handbook on military art for his officers' use and issued a famous appeal which so inflamed his men that they all tattooed on their

arms : " Death to the Mongols ! " In the villages placards were posted up which enjoined the population to resist the invader by every possible means and, in case of necessity, to take refuge in the forests and mountains and continue the struggle.

In early 1285, the Mongols captured several positions, crossed the Red River and entered Thang Long. The capital was ransacked, its inhabitants massacred. General TRAN BINH TRONG was made prisoner. As the enemy tried to win him over he said : " I would rather be a ghost in the South(1) than a prince in the North ! (2) " — and was executed. The Mongol general Toa Do left Champa to effect a junction with the army led by his colleague O Ma Nhi (Omar). A Vietnamese army under the command of Tran Quang Khai was beaten off when it tried to block his way in Nghe An province. The Mongol fleet was cruising on the Red River. Many princes and nobles, among them LE TAC and TRAN ICH TAC, betrayed their country. The Tran Court had to take refuge in Thanh Hoa province. The Mongols were masters of the greater part of the Red River delta and of Thanh Hoa and Nghe An provinces, that is the major part of the country.

However, in the process the Mongols were forced to scatter their forces into a multitude of vulnerable posts and patrols whose task was to keep open their communications. In the first months of 1285, in the Midlands, local chiefs inflicted losses on the Mongols

(1) Meaning Viet-nam.
(2) Meaning China.

while in the delta the population, creating a vacuum before the enemy, denied them all sources of supply and put them in a most difficult position. The determination of the Tran command could thus be brought into full play.

From Nghe An province, Toa Do's troops, harassed by guerrillas, tried to move up the Red River and join the Mongol army stationed farther north. The Tran sent 50,000 men to meet them, and the Mongols suffered a severe defeat at Ham Tu (Hung Yen province). Fired by this victory, Tran Hung Dao's troops dashed towards the capital. CHUONG ZUONG, an outpost 20km south of Thang Long, was taken. And while the Tran king with his troops eft their Thanh Hoa refuge to advance toward the capital, the population rose up, harassing the rear of the Mongol armies. Enemy troops evacuated Thang Long and withdrew north of the Red River. The bulk of the Vietnamese forces was hurled against Toa Do' army, which was crushed at Tay Ket in July 1285 ; the Mongol general was killed, 50,000 of his men captured.

After posting troops along the road of the enemy's retreat towards China, Hung Dao staged a frontal attack against the Mongol army. As the latter recoiled, it fell into murderous ambushes. Thoat Hoan, the Mongol commander-in-chief, escaped by hiding in a bronze cask. By August 1285, the whole country had been liberated, and the Mongol army of half a million men beaten.

Kubilai was forced to give up a planned invasion of Japan to make preparations for a revenge expedition

against Dai Viet. As the Tran princes sought to recruit new troops, Generalissimo Tran Hung Dao told them: "The strength of an army lies in its quality, not numbers." And to the anxious king he said: "Our troops are now better trained, while the enemy, having suffered defeat, has lost his morale. Victory will be easier."

In late 1287, Thoat Hoan again crossed the frontier with 300,000 men while a Mongol fleet of 500 vessels was heading for the Vietnamese coast. The Tran king again left the capital. The Mongol general O Ma Nhi sent him this warning: "Even if you fled to the skies I would go after you. I would pursue you to the bottom of the seas, to the heart of the forests, if necessary!" The Mongols sought to occupy more and more territory, only to find a vacuum around them. The Yuan (name of the Mongol dynasty) annals related: "The Giao Chi (Dai Viet) population hid their rice and fled." The invading army ran short of supply. Thoat Hoan ordered the capital set afire, then withdrew north of the Red River; during that time his troops were constantly harassed by the Tran army and the population.

At Van Don on the coast (near present-day Hong Gai), General TRAN KHANH ZU kept a tight watch on Mongol supply convoys. He caught the enemy fleet by surprise, destroyed it and seized the food cargoes. The enemy was greatly demoralized on hearing the news. The Mongols pillaged the population, who resisted heroically. Thoat Hoan was told by his generals: "We have no more citadels left, no more food; the strategic passes have been lost, and summer will soon come with its train of diseases. We'd better withdraw." The

Mongol retreat was effected by land through Lang Son and by sea, with a fleet sailing down the Bach Dang river.

Tran Hung Dao used Ngo Quyen's old stratagem: iron-tipped stakes were planted at the mouth of the river. Then General PHAM NGU LAO was sent to Lang Son to occupy the mountain passes. Tran Hung Dao himself took the bulk of the troops across the Hoa river (Kien An province) and launched a big offensive. When crossing the river, Hung Dao made this public oath: "If the Mongols are not defeated, we will not recross this river."

At high tide, the Mongol fleet sailing down the Bach Dang was engaged by a small Vietnamese fleet which soon retreated. O Ma Nhi 's forces were pursuing it when Tran Hung Dao's army turned up. The Mongol fleet beat a hasty retreat, but by this time the tide was ebbing and the Mongol junks broke up on the iron-tipped stakes. O Ma Nhi was made prisoner, 100 of his junks were destroyed, another 400 captured (April 3, 1288).

Thoat Hoan was terrified on learning the news, and hurriedly withdrew. His troops were decimated during their retreat. That was the third Mongol defeat. In late 1288 the Tran king wisely sent a mission to China to negotiate, offering a tribute to the Mongol Court. In 1289, he returned to the Mongols the captured generals and officers. The Chinese Court wanted more than this formal recognition of suzerainty but its demands were not accepted. In 1293, the Mongols began organizing another expedition but Kubilai died in 1294 and his

son Timour discarded the project. The new ruler established friendly relations with Dai Viet, which continued to pay yearly tribute to the Mongol Court.

The principal cause of the victory over the Mongols was the strength of the socio-economic regime established under the Ly and the Tran, and the correct military line followed by the Tran command. The monarchy and the nobles had developed agriculture and instituted the peasant-soldier regime; and so when war came, the whole nation united around its chiefs, each man becoming a combatant. The chiefs of ethnic minorities in the mountainous regions also contributed to victory. National unity became a reality. National consciousness, moulded in the course of many centuries of struggle against foreign aggressors and consolidated by the establishment of a stable centralized power, had been considerably strengthened. Generalissimo Tran Hung Dao never failed to seek the support of the population in his fight against an enemy superior in number and armament, and used appropriate strategy and tactics. He readily left the towns, and even the capital, in case of necessity, avoided combat when the enemy was too strong, resorted to harassment by guerrillas, resolutely took the offensive whenever circumstances were favourable. The fierce determination of the command galvanized the men.

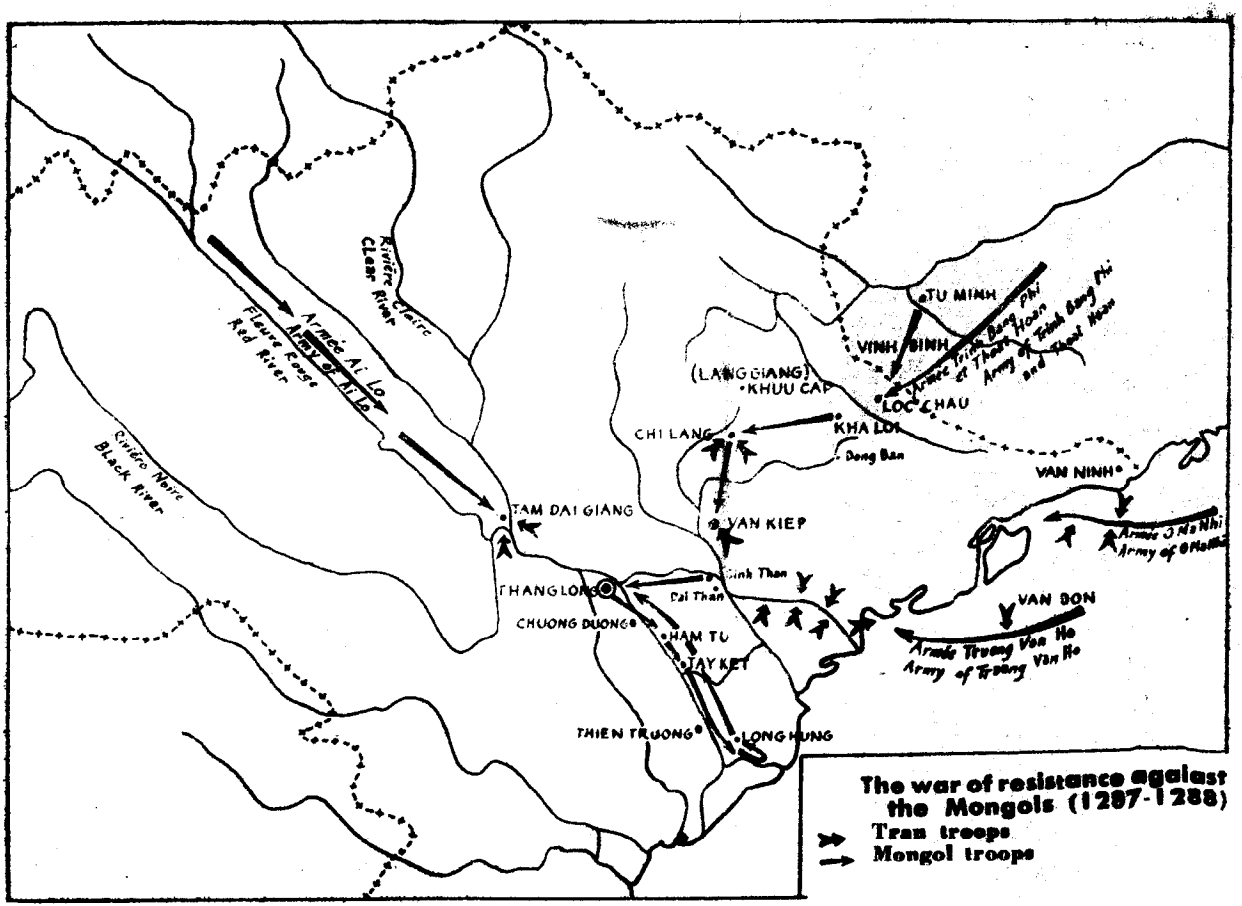
Shortly before Tran Hung Dao died in 1300, King Tran Anh Ton, coming to visit the Generalissimo, asked him: "What should we do, in case of a new invasion from the North?" Hung Dao replied: "The

enemy relies on numbers. To oppose the long with the short — there lies our skill. If the enemy makes a violent rush, like fire and tempest, it is easy to defeat him. But if he shows patience, like the silkworm nibbling at the mulberry leaf, if he proceeds without haste, refrains from pillaging the population, and does not seek a quick victory, then we must choose the best generals and elaborate adequate tactics, as in a chess game. The army must be united and of one mind, like father and son. It is essential to treat the people with humanity, so as to strike deep roots and ensure a lasting base." Ever since, the memory of Tran Hung Dao is honoured at the Kiep Bac temple.

Cultural Development under the LY and the TRAN

(11th-14th Centuries)

THE consolidation of national independence, economic development, and the constitution of a stable centralized power under the Tran and Ly dynasties brought about the development of national culture, which was original though strongly influenced by Chinese civilization. Public and spiritual life was inspired by two great doctrines : Buddhism and Confucianism. Amalgamating with national traditions, these doctrines constituted a fund of ideas and creeds common to literature and art


Armée Ai Lao
Army of Ai Lao
Fleuve Rouge
Red River
Rivière Claire
Clear River
Rivière Noire
Black River
TAM DAI GIANG
THANG LONG
CHUONG DUONG
HAM TU
TAY KET
THIEN TRUONG
LONG HUNG
Dai Than
Tinh Than
VAN KIEP
CHI LANG
(LANG GIANG)
KHUU CAP
KHA LOI
Dong Ban
TU MINH
VINH BINH
LOC CHAU
VAN NINH
VAN DON
Armée Trần Bang Phi
Army of Trần Hoan
Armée Trương Văn Hổ
Army of Trương Văn Hổ
The war of resistance against the Mongols (1287-1288)
Tran troops
Mongol troops

The Predominance of Buddhism

Buddhism was at its apogee under the Ly, whose accession to the throne had been favoured by the Buddhist clergy. The latter received in return the highest privileges. The kings themselves were interested in the study of doctrines and often took bonzes as advisers. The pagodas owned great domains cultivated by serfs and the bonzes were exempted from taxes and military service. Kings and princes had large numbers of pagodas built and bells cast, and promoted the diffusion of sacred books. In 1018 King Thai To sent a mission to China to collect texts of the Tam Tang ; in 1068, King Thai Ton patronized the creation of the *Thao Duong* sect, and several kings became patriarchs of Buddhist sects. Princes and nobles followed their example. Beautiful pagodas were built under the Ly, some of which have been preserved to this day : Quan Thanh (Great Buddha) in Hanoi, built in 1102 ; Zien Huu (1049) ; Bao Thien (1056) ; Keo, in Thai Binh province. The favourite Y Lan, having ordered the assassination of one of her rivals, spent the rest of her life building one hundred pagodas to redeem herself.

Vietnamese Buddhist sects and schools were founded. After the victory over the Mongols, King TRAN NHAN TON gave up his throne in 1293, retired into a monastery and, together with two other bonzes, founded the *Truc Lam* (Bamboo Forest) sect. A doctrinal work of the Tran period, the *Khoa Hu Luc*, has been preserved, of which the following lines may give an idea:

Nothing is born,
Nothing dies.
When this has been understood,
Buddha appears,
The round of avatars ends.

King TRAN THAI TON, who reigned from 1225 to 1258, in the foreword to a doctrinal work related how he had sought a monastic life :

"Ever since the King, my father, handed over the Kingdom to me, then only a child, I have never been free from care. I told myself : 'My parents are no longer there to give me advice, it will be very difficult for me to win the people's confidence. What should I do?' After deep thinking, I came to the conclusion that to retire into the mountains, to seek Buddha's teachings in order to know the reasons of life and death and to pay homage to my parents would be the best of ways. I decided to leave. On the 3rd day, 4th month of the 5th year of the Thien Ung reign, I dressed like a commoner and left the palace. To the guards I said : 'I want to mix with the people, learn about their hardships, and know their thoughts.' Seven or eight men followed me; when the hoi *hour had passed, I crossed the river then told the truth to the guards, who burst into tears. The next day, while passing the Pha Lai ferry, I hid my face in order not to be recognized. We spent the night at the Gia Chanh pagoda. The next day, we went straight to the top of the mountain where the Great Master Truc Lam resided. Overjoyed, the Great Master greeted me with these words :*

'The old bonze that I am, who has retired into the midst of the forest, whose body is nothing but skin and bone, who

lives on wild herbs and berries, drinks from the stream and wanders among the trees, has a heart which is as light as the clouds and unburdened like the wind. Your Majesty has left his sumptuous palace to come to this remote place. May I ask you what imperious necessity has prompted you to make this journey ?' With tears in my eyes, I told him :

' I am very young, my parents are no longer in this world and here I am, alone, reigning over the people without any support. I think that thrones have always been fragile and so I have come to these mountains with the only desire of becoming a buddha.' The Great Master replied : 'No, Buddha is not to be found in these mountains, he is in our hearts. When the heart is at peace and lucid Buddha is there. If Your Majesty has an enlightened heart, you immediately become Buddha, why then seek elsewhere?'

(The Court came to beseech the King to return and the prime minister threatened to commit suicide if the King refused).

The Great Master took my hand and said : ' Since you are King, the will of the Kingdom must also be your will, the heart of the Kingdom must also be your heart. The whole Kingdom is now asking you to return, how can you refuse? There is however one important thing you should not forget when you are back in your palace : to study the sacred books.' I returned to the palace, and against my will, remained on the throne for some decades. In my leisure time I would assemble eminent old men for the study of the Thien doctrine (Dhyana) and of the sacred books, none of which was omitted. When studying the Diamond sutra, I often stopped at the sentence : ' Never let your heart cling to any fixed thing.' I would then close the book, and remain a long time in meditation. Enlightenment came to me and I composed this initiation to the Thien..."

It would be naive to think that in that period Buddhism contented itself with these purely spiritual exercises. It was the state religion with its pomp and activity ; it provided the people with extra-terrestrial consolation, the ruling class with supernatural prestige, and some minds with means of escape ; it was tinged with superstitions in many of its manifestations and with Taoism in its doctrine. Anyway, it left a lasting imprint on the Vietnamese soul. However, as the monarchic order was gradually consolidated, social hierarchy became increasingly complicated, and the royal administration extended its power to the detriment of the aristocracy. Buddhism no longer sufficed.

The Progress of Confucianism

In a society whose members had to unite closely in face of great natural calamities and the permanent danger of foreign invasion, and were placed under the absolute power of a monarch governing through a complex mandarin bureaucracy, a doctrine was needed to direct the mind of each individual towards his social obligations, obedience and loyalty to the monarch, and unconditional respect for social hierarchy. The Chinese imperial dynasties had since the Han made

Confucianism the State doctrine; the Vietnamese monarchy was to adopt it gradually.

In 1070, Ly Thanh Ton had the "Temple of Literature" built, a school dedicated to Confucianism and his disciples, where the sons of high dignitaries received moral education and training in administration. In 1075, the first mandarin competitions took place, through which Confucian scholars could acceed to public office; but they were open only to the sons of aristocratic families. In 1086, competitions were held to recruit members of the "Academy", whose task was to keep archives and write royal edicts. In 1089 the mandarin hierarchy was strictly organized. The appearance of Confucianism on the scene was the consequence of a double phenomenon: on the one hand the necessity to create a mandarin bureaucracy, on the other hand the increasing access of educated commoners to public office. At first, these men were given only subaltern positions, the higher offices being reserved for members of the royal family and of the aristocracy.

Confucian culture grew in importance under the Tran; the competitions were better codified and held more regularly. The title of "doctor" was bestowed, enhancing the prestige of Confucian studies. Institutes were created in the capital for the study of Confucian literature; subjects for the competitions comprised in particular the composition of poems, royal ordinances and proclamations, and essays on classical literature. Besides the public schools appeared private schools under the direction of famous personalities, the most

prominent of whom was CHU VAN AN. In the cultural field, Buddhist bonzes were increasingly eclipsed by Confucian scholars; in 1243, the title of doctor was awarded to LE VAN HUU, who was to become Viet-nam's first great historian.

The Confucian scholars more and more vigorously claimed positions in public life, in face of nobles of military origin, often uneducated, and Buddhist bonzes. In the 13th century, the ideological struggle between Buddhism and Confucianism became increasingly acute, a struggle which reflected the antagonism opposing the nobles, owners of great domains, to the fast-growing class of peasant-owners of popular origin. Besides, the great domains were shaken by revolts of serfs and domestic slaves at the close of the 13th century. Thus a dividing line was drawn between the aristocracy and the Buddhist clergy on one side, and on the other the class of peasant-owners allied with the serfs and slaves, having the Confucian scholars as their spokesmen in the ideological field.

"In face of Buddhism which affirmed the vanity, even the unreality of this world, preached renunciation, and directed men's minds towards supraterrestrial hopes, Confucianism taught that man is essentially a social being bound by social obligations. To serve one's king, honour one's parents, remain loyal to one's spouse until death, manage one's family affairs, participate in the administration of one's country, contribute to safeguarding the peace of the world, such were the duties prescribed by Confucianism to all. To educate oneself, to improve oneself so as to be able to assume all those tasks, — this should

be the fundamental preoccupation of all men, from the Emperor, Son of Heaven, down to the humblest commoner."(1)

The scholars directed their attacks not only against Buddhist beliefs, but also against the place granted them by the State and society. The historian Le Van Huu wrote :

"The first Ly king, hardly two years after his accession to the throne, at a time when the ancestral temples of the dynasty had not yet been consolidated, had already had eight pagodas built in the Thien Duc district, and many others restored in different provinces; he kept more than one thousand bonzes in the capital ; much wealth and labour had thus been wasted ! Those riches had not fallen from the sky, that labour had not been supplied by the gods ; to do such things was to suck the blood and sweat of the people !"

The scholar Le Quat lamented :

"To implore Buddha's benediction, to dread his malediction — how had such beliefs become so deeply rooted in the hearts of men ? Princes of the blood and common people alike squandered their possessions for the cult of Buddha, quite happy to give them away to pagodas, as if they had been given a guarantee for life in the other world. Wherever there was a house, one was sure to find a pagoda next to it ; a crumbling pagoda was soon replaced by a new one ; bells, pagodas, drums, towers, half of the population were engaged in making these things."

(1) Nguyen Khac Vien, *Marxism and Confucianism in Vietnam* ; in *La Pensée*, October 1962.

Truong Han Sieu also made a direct attack on the bonzes :

" Scoundrels who had lost all notion of Buddhist asceticism only thought of taking possession of beautiful monasteries and gardens, building for themselves luxurious residences, and surrounding themselves with a host of servants... People became monks by the thousands, so as to get food without having to plough and clothes without having to weave. They deceived the people, undermined morality, squandered riches, were found everywhere, followed by numerous believers ; very few of them were not real bandits."

But several centuries were to pass before Buddhism was eliminated from the scene, at least from public office, and Confucianism could stand alone. Competitions on the three doctrines (Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism) still took place under the Tran kings. No war of religion ever broke out in Viet-nam. By the 14th century, however, Confucianism had risen to pre-eminence.

The Birth of a National Literature

With the recovery of independence, a national literature took shape and gradually developed. Popular and oral literature in the national language became ever richer, but it was difficult to date most of the works, songs, stories, and tales handed down from generation to generation. In the 10th century there appeared a scholarly literature in classial Chinese, the common cultural language in the Far East, using

Chinese ideograms. But more and more the necessity was felt to develop a script for the Vietnamese language ; the *nôm* script, derived from the Chinese, was created. The exact date of its creation was not known, but the first works in *nôm* appeared in the 14th century.

The first works in classical Chinese were mostly Buddhist texts expounding the doctrine, or expressing the bonzes' reactions to some events. Let us cite for example a poem by the bonze VAN HANH, who died in 1018.

Man is a shadow, gone as soon as born,
The trees, so green in spring, are bare in autumn.
Greatness and decline, why should we care ?
The destiny of men and empires is like a dew-drop on a grass leaf.

Bonze VIEN CHIEU (998-1090) was also a poet; let us cite a couple of his verses :

Escorted by the wind, the sound of the horn slips through the bamboos.
With the moon riding behind, the shadows of mountains climb the ramparts.

With the consolidation of the kingdom, Buddhist inspiration on the evanescence of things gave way to the contemplation of nature ;then with the struggle for national independence, patriotism prevailed in the writings. The same men who in peace time sang the beauty of the land took their pens at critical moments to exalt the national struggle.

King Tran Nhan Ton, who victoriously fought against the Mongols, left this twilight landscape :

Villages grow dim in the mist,
They now vanish, now re-appear in the sunset.
Buffalo-herds blowing their horns take their cattle home,
A flock of white egrets swoop down on the fields.

His general Tran Hung Dao, when the country was invaded by the Mongols, wrote a proclamation to the army which is one of the most beautiful jewels of our national literature :

"(...) I can neither eat nor sleep, my heart aches, and tears flow from my eyes ; I am enraged at being unable yet to tear the enemy to pieces, pluck out his liver, taste his blood (...) But you are neither disturbed nor ashamed by the humiliation suffered by your King and your fatherland. You who are officers and generals of our royal army, how could you serve the enemy without feeling hatred ? How could you listen to the music greeting enemy envoys without choking with anger? You spend your time watching cock fights, gambling, tending your gardens, looking after your wives and children. You are busy making money and forget about State affairs. The pleasures of hunting prevail in your minds over your military preoccupations. You are absorbed in wine and song. If the country were invaded by the Mongols, your cocks' spurs would not be able to pierce their armour, your gambling tricks could not replace military strategy. You may possess immense gardens and fields but even a thousand taels of gold could not redeem your lives. Your wives and children would only encumber you ; all the gold in the world could not buy the

enemy's head, your hunting dogs could not drive him away, your wine could not intoxicate him to death, sweet songs could not seduce him. Then both you and I would be in the enemy's clutches. Not only could I no longer enjoy my appanages, but you too would lose all your privileges ; not only would my family be broken up, woe would also befall your wives and children ; both royal ancestral temples and your own ancestors' graves would be trampled upon ; dishonour would stain both my name and yours, not only during our lifetime, but for centuries to come. Would you then persist in pleasure-seeking ?"

Among the authors who left literary works, let us cite MAC DINH CHI (who died in 1346), TRUONG HAN SIEU (who died in 1354), CHU VAN AN (who died in 1370), NGUYEN TRUNG NGAN (1289-1370), PHAM SU MANH who in 1345 led a mission to China, and LE QUAT. Truong Han Sieu glorified the two victories won in 939 and 1288 on the Bach Dang river, in a famous poem ending with these verses :

The enemy has fled, peace is restored for centuries to come,
Terrain played no role, noble virtues were decisive.

Of this period two works of religious tendency remain: *Viet Dien U Linh*, a collection of texts on genii, divinities, and divinized famous men, which was attributed to LY TE XUYEN, and *Thien Uyen Tap Anh*, a collection of texts and biographies of bonzes up to the Tran dynasty.

Literature in *nôm* appeared in the 14th century with NGUYEN THUYEN and NGUYEN SI CO whose works, though mentioned in the annals, have not

come down to us. Tradition has it that when King Tran Nhan Ton married princess Huyen Tran to the King of Champa in exchange for the Ô and Ly districts, his act was severely criticized in satirical poems in *nôm*. The appearance of poems in *nôm* was an important landmark in the development of national literature. By the end of the 13th century, HO QUY LY had translated the *Kinh Thi* (Book of Poems), a classical Confucian work, into *nôm*.

The Ly-Tran period also saw the appearance of the first historical works. Under the Ly, DO THIEN compiled a history of the country ; his book, now lost, was mentioned in *Viet Dien U Linh* and *Linh Nam Chich Quai*. An annals department was created under the Tran. TRAN TAN wrote *Viet Chi*, a monograph, to which the great historian LE VAN HUU often referred when he compiled in 1272 *Dai Viet Su Ky* (History of Dai Viet) in 30 chapters, extending from Trieu Da to the end of the Ly dynasty. Le Van Huu's work was also lost, but it extensively inspired the complete history of Dai Viet written later by NGO SI LIEN. At the close of the Tran dynasty *Dai Viet Su Luoc* (Short History) was written by an anonymous author. This book was to be reprinted in China in the 18th century. It is reported in the annals that HO TON THOC wrote two historical chronicles, *Viet Su Cuong Muc* and *Nam Viet The Chi*. Both these works were lost. Under the Tran, chronicles were also written which related military exploits in the wars against the Mongols and the Kingdom of Ai Lao. Le Tac, who had taken refuge in China, wrote *An Nam Chi Luoc* in the beginning of the 14th century.

The Arts under the Ly and the Tran

Independence and stability led to the development of a national art, marked with Chinese, and to a lesser degree, Cham influence. Under the Ly, Cham influence was felt particularly in music. According to *An Nam Chi Luoc*, in Tran times " people played on a small cylindrical drum introduced from Champa, which had a clear and pure sound. This drum was used in the great music played only for the king ; even princes and dignitaries were not allowed to play great music, except for ceremonies. Guitars — *cam, tranh, ti ba* — with seven or two strings, and flutes of various kinds could be used by all, nobles or commoners. Countless pieces were played."

The *chèo* popular theatre, which had first appeared in the 10th century, continued to develop. A prisoner captured during the Mongol invasion, named Ly Nguyen Cat, introduced the *tuong* theatre (Peking opera) at the close of the 13th century.

It is in the fields of architecture and ceramics that the Ly period excelled. With the spread of Buddhism, many pagodas were built. Some among the most famous ones have been preserved to this day. Unfortunately however, ravages by war and the climate have destroyed the major part of the art works of this period. What remains can only give us an idea of what was built those days.Some works of the Ly period have been erroneously classified by French historians under a previous period, that of Dai La (9th century).

On the stele of Linh Xung, erected in 1126, an inscription says that *"wherever there was beautiful scenery a pagoda was built."* One of the essential characteristics of these pagodas is to be in harmony with the surrounding landscapes, the buildings nestling amidst the trees, and the gardens and ponds being an integral part of the construction ; most often, the landscape was framed by a hill or a winding stream, and the slow ringing of bells in the calm morning or evening seemed part of nature (1).

Some pagodas must be of important sizes, since they could accommodate thousands of pilgrims coming for great celebrations. The Zien Huu pagoda, commonly known as the One-Pillar pagoda built in 1049, was a graceful pavilion built on a stone pillar standing amidst a pond, the whole thing looking like a blooming lotus flower.

The lotus flower motif often appears in construction. This flower symbolizes beauty and purity, for "though springing from mud it is free from the stench of mud." Stone pillars, some of important sizes, often rest on "lotus flowers" ; vestiges of a pillar of the Giam pagoda built in 1086 show a base of 4.5m. in diameter and a shaft of more than 3.5m. in circumference. At the foot of some of these pillars are carved stones representing waves, and the columns seem to emerge from a raging sea. A couple of

(1) This is in striking contrast with the Catholic churches, which make a discordant note amidst Vietnamese villages, seeking to dominate nature.

dragons climb the shaft, describing graceful but vigorous spirals.

The pagodas have curved roofs and often comprise a tower (stupa), which may have as many as twelve stories. These pagodas are noted for their architecture and their statues and sculptures.

At the Phat Tich pagoda, the pillar bases bear stone sculptures representing the *bo* tree (of Buddhist enlightenment) in the centre with two worshippers presenting offerings and behind them, four musicians dancing and playing on various instruments. The ground is littered with flowers. The atmosphere is gay, the gestures graceful: we are far from Buddhist meditations on the unreality of this world.

Vestiges found in the northwest suburb of Ha-noi, where stood the palace of the Ly, show a great variety of sculptures, statues, and decorative motifs on ceramics. A frequent motif is the crocodile, with a raised head, protruding eyes looking right and left, palpitating nostrils; the body is lithe and the beast standing on its hind legs seems ready to jump. Stylized lions in ceramics have also been found.

Recent diggings (1965) at the site of the Chuong Son pagoda, built in 1105, uncovered figures of fabulous birds with human bodies amidst other motifs: chrysanthemums, phoenixes and mostly dragons — all frequently found in the works of that period. The dragon appears in almost all constructions, a fabulous animal whose image is deeply engraved in the national tradition. According to legend, the Vietnamese are descendants of the Dragon; when monarchy was established,

it became the symbol of the king. The dragon made its appearance in China as early as the Han period, with a marked hieratic character, each detail — paw, nail, scale, mane — being distinctly drawn against a background of stylized clouds. The whole thing looked stiff, majestic, even awe-inspiring. The dragon in the works of the Ly period looks more natural, closer to the snake from which it springs, with a lithe undulating posture, a pointed tail and without complicated details. Its paws evoke birds' claws and its mane that of a horse. The head is small, with wide nostrils and on top, an S-shaped double curve, a characteristic feature of the bronze drums of the Dong Son period. With the Tran, as the monarchy consolidated its power, the dragon became stiffer and more hieratic-looking. Antagonism between two tendencies is clearly seen: one, "natural" and popular, looked upon the dragon as a synthesis of some very old beliefs; the other, royal, even imperial, considered it the majestic, awesome symbol of the monarch.

Statuary art also developed in two directions. On the one hand, we have Buddhas sitting on lotus flowers, lost in meditation, the folds of their gowns and the relaxed features of their gentle faces giving an impression of peace and silence. One could imagine behind their closed eyelids the inner light which enlightens them. On the other hand, there were statues of guardian-genii, with the martial bearing of energetic military men, ready for action.

While Buddhism was responsible for the building of countless pagodas, an item of Confucian art under the Ly was the *Temple of Literature*, with porticoes and temples arranged in a simple pattern amidst gardens. A kiosk with lace-like timber-work and moon-shaped windows stands in the midst of the central alley, at the end of which is the temple, a long building with phoenixes and dragons on its roofs.

Ceramics developed vigorously under the Ly. Important production centres like Bat Trang and Thanh Hoa are still active nowadays. There is a great variety of products, articles for both daily use and decoration, pottery and porcelain with refined enamels. Among the most beautiful enamels are the opalescent-green and brown-grey ones with a mat lustre and various shades. The decoration is most varied—flowers, dragons, lotus flowers, birds, and when the surface allows it, frescoes and landscapes with human figures. The drawings and bas-reliefs always have a natural character with graceful lines and a gay environment; the movements of birds, elephants, dancers, harmonize with blooming corollas or contrast with warriors' contortions. Remarkable are the richly decorated porcelain towers. Ceramics were sent as far as China to be sold, or presented to the Imperial Court. Under the Ly this art was brought to its apogee.

The art of the Tran period continued that of the Ly; palaces and royal mausoleums continued to be built. Let us mention in particular the Pho Minh tower, built in 1305, fourteen stories high, the two lower

ones built of stone and the rest of brick. The base had the shape of a gigantic lotus flower emerging from the water. The Binh Son tower, preserved to this day, is slightly leaning. There remain twelve stories, totalling 15 metres in height. The whole construction is of terra-cotta, and the surfaces are richly decorated with lotus and other flowers, dragons, lions, *bo* tree leaves. The dragons had lost their "natural" look and the S-shaped ornaments on their heads. Of the Tran period, there remain remarkable wood sculptures. Wood sculpture had appeared at a much earlier period, but the works heavily suffered from the climate and ravages by insects. Wood sculpture also used all the motifs and themes mentioned above.

Among the great constructions of the Tran period, let us mention the Tay Do citadel, which had been built by Ho Quy Ly in Thanh Hoa province in 1397 and had served as capital for a short time. Rectangular-shaped, 900m. long and 700m. wide, with six-metre-high ramparts, it was built of large stone blocks some of which were up to 6 metres long, 1.7m. wide and 1.2 m. high, weighing 16 tons. Of the ancient palaces, only a few vestiges are left — some stone dragons decorating the flights of steps. The ogival porticoes were built of huge stone blocks.

Architecture had thus reached a high level. Among the other techniques, let us mention the casting of cannon; Ho Nguyen Trung, taken prisoner by the Ming, was entrustred by the Chinese emperor with making cannon for the Chinese army. Astronomy also

developed to some extent. It is reported in the annals that the mandarin Dang Lo in charge of the calendar service under the Tran invented an instrument for the observation of celestial phenomena.

In the reign of Tran Zue Ton (1341-1369) lived the famous physician Tue Tinh who made a special study of the healing properties of local plants and herbs; in 1352, he was invited to China to attend the Chinese empress. He left several medical treatises, the most famous of which is *Nam Zuoc Than Hieu* (About the Marvellous Effects of National Medicines).

III — A NEW STAGE OF FEUDAL MONARCHY

The Le Dynasty

(15th-16th Centuries)

TOWARDS the end of the 14th century, a great crisis shook the country. The Ming Court, then reigning over China, took advantage of it to invade Dai Viet and impose on it a direct rule which was to last twenty years (1407-1427). However, the invaders ran into stiff resistance right from the beginning, and national independence was eventually wrested back in 1427 by LE LOI, the founder of the Le dynasty.

The Ming Occupation

AS early as July 1407, the Ming emperor incorporated Dai Viet in the Chinese empire under the name of Giao Chi province, set up a central administration, and divided the country into *phu* and *chau*, trying to get down to village level by 1419. The high-ranking officials were Chinese; only subaltern posts were given to "natives". A general census listed 3,129,500 inhabitants and 2,087,500 *man* (barbarians) from mountain-dwelling tribes, i. e. a total of more than 5.2 million. But many, doubtless, evaded the census. "Order" was maintained throughout the country by big military garrisons, joined by a tight network of relays. All opposition was severely repressed.

There was a very heavy system of taxation, which included land tax on ricefields and mulberry fields,

and poll-tax. The occupier held the monopoly of salt trade. All able-bodied people, aged 16 to 60, were subjected to military service and multiple corvées: road-building, mining, pearl-oyster fishing, hunting, etc. In 1419, family records were made obligatory, for controlling the population.

Thousands of skilled craftsmen and able intellectuals were taken to China, among them NGUYEN AN, who was to be the architect of the Imperial City in Peking. The Ming also took away personal property, animals (elephants, buffaloes, horses) and precious materials.

The people were forced to adopt the Chinese style of dress and Chinese ways and customs. Ming troops sought to destroy all vestiges of national culture; they burnt or took away books that were specifically national.

This oppressive occupation soon triggered off fierose resistance. As early as the end of 1407, many uprising took place. In particular, a descendant of the Tran dynasty proclaimed himself king in 1407 under the name of Gian Dinh and set up headquarters in Nghe An province. In late 1408, his army marched on the capital, drawing to it enthusiastic crowds. Gian Dinh defeated the Ming forces at Bo Co in Nam Dinh province, but the resistance was weakened by dissensions due to the murder by Gian Dinh of his able lieutenants DANG TAT and NGUYEN CANH CHAN, whose sons and partisans rallied around another Tran prince, QUY KHOANG, in 1409. Starting from Ha Tinh, the movement spread to other provinces.

Meanwhile, 47,000 reinforcement troops allowed the Ming general Truong Phu to launch a victorious offensive and roll the insurgents back to Nghe An. In 1410, hostilities between the Ming Court and the Mongols made it possible for Quy Khoang to re-occupy Thanh Hoa, but in 1411, having defeated the Mongols, the Ming counter-attacked and in 1413 drove the insurgents into the southern provinces. Early in 1411, the latter's leaders were captured. The Tran princes and aristocrats had proved themselves to be incapable of giving effective leadership to the resistance, which was to be led to victory by a commoner, LE LOI.

The LAM SON Insurrection and the War of Independence

LE LOI, a land-owner of Lam Son, Thanh Hoa province, was born in 1385. Before starting the insurrection against the Ming, he had about 1,000 followers. On February 7, 1418, in Lam Son, he proclaimed himself king under the name of BINH DINH VUONG, and began rallying to himself anyone who opposed the Ming domination. NGUYEN TRAI, a renowned scholar, became his closest adviser on strategy and politics. The two men working together brought the insurrection to victory after long years of struggle.

Le Loi at first launched guerilla operations in the mountain areas of Thanh Hoa. Although he inflicted losses on the Ming, he often found himself in critical, even desperate, situations. However, his forces held out thanks

to the courage of the men, the resolve of the leaders, and the devotion of the cadres. Other popular uprisings in various provinces helped loosen the Ming's grip on Le Loi. In 1420 his troops were able to camp on the banks of the river Ma and threaten the capital of Thanh Hoa province. A Ming counter-attack, however, drove them back to the mountain region in 1423. But the Ming troops were also worn out, and their command agreed to a truce proposed by Le Loi, who adamantly resisted all attempts to buy him off through promises of riches and honours. In 1424, the Ming again attacked, but the insurgents had had time to strengthen their positions.

On the advice of NGUYEN CHICH, Le Loi took his troops to Nghe An and turned it into a resistance base. The insurgents were enthusiastically welcomed by the local people. Enemy fortified positions fell one after another, and soon the whole province was in Le Loi's hands. Next came Thanh Hoa, then provinces south of Nghe An. By the end of 1425 the whole southern part of the country had been liberated, with the exception of the Nghe An and Tay Do (Thanh Hoa) citadels. A vast rear base had thus been created for the war of national liberation. In 1426, Le Loi was in a position to launch a counter-offensive.

The Ming sent from China 50,000 reinforcement troops under the command of VUONG THONG. Even before they arrived, Le Loi had started his offensive to wrest back the Red River delta. In September 1426, he despatched three armies northward: one was to intercept Ming reinforcements coming from Yunnan,

the second those coming through Lang Son, and the last was to march on the capital. Everywhere the people rallied round his banner with enthusiasm, while panic-stricken Ming troops withdrew within their citadels and tried to hold out until reinforcements came.

In November, Vuong Thong's troops joined the Ming troops who had shut themselves up behind the walls of the capital, bringing their strength to 100,000. They thought they were now in a position to counter-attack but suffered a crushing defeat at Tot Dong (west of the capital) and again had to withdraw within the citadel. The Vietnamese troops were masters of the ground. Le Loi left Thanh Hoa and concentrated his forces round the capital. Vuong Thong asked for a truce. In a letter to the Ming general, NGUYEN TRAI said that the Vietnamese command accepted the truce so that Vuong Thong could withdraw his troops from the country, thus *"sparing our people the ravages of war and the Chinese troops the sufferings of battle."*

But for Vuong Thong the truce was but a stratagem to gain time and obtain more reinforcements. While maintaining the siege and liquidating isolated outposts the Vietnamese command, on Nguyen Trai's recommendation, conducted a persevering work of political persuasion directed at the Ming troops, driving home to them the inevitability of their defeat, the strength of the Vietnamese national movement and the weaknesses of the Ming empire. This seriously demoralized them.

In October 1427, Ming reinforcements came in two columns: one, numbering 100,000 and led by Lieu Thang, through the Lang Son pass; the other, 50,000 strong and led by Moc Thanh, through the Red River valley. The Vietnamese command decided to destroy the more important army. Lieu Thang's troops, too cocksure of their strength, were ambushed and cut to pieces at the Chi Lang pass. Their commander was killed, and several generals captured together with 30,000 men. The other Ming column was struck with panic on hearing of this disaster and fled in disorder, pursued by Le Loi's troops.

After the destruction of those reinforcements, Vuong Thong, besieged in the capital, had to ask for peace. His request was granted by Le Loi, who gave the Ming troops the necessary food supplies and means of transport to go home: it was December 29, 1427.

The war of independence conducted by Le Loi and Nguyen Trai had lasted ten years. With but scanty means at the start, the movement had expanded, gradually creating powerful bases and forces, and eventually destroyed big enemy armies. The command had combined guerilla with mobile warfare and attacks on fortified positions, political struggle with military actions, had shown magnanimity toward the enemy and avoided useless massacres. Le Loi, sprung from the land-owning class opposed to the latifundia-holding aristocracy, and Nguyen Trai, a Confucian scholar with an encyclopedic mind, had succeeded in bringing about national union and arousing patriotism,

and had shown resolve and wisdom in critical or decisive moments. The war was both national and popular in character and conducted with appropriate strategy and tactics. Never again did the Ming try to reconquer Dai Viet.

The Great Epoch of the First LE Kings

THE glorious winning back of national independence and the great changes in the socio-economic structure, especially the disappearance of large aristocratic estates to the advantage of private land ownership, which resulted in the promotion of the land-owning class, gave strong bases to the new regime set up by Le Loi. The country made new progress and feudal monarchy was brought to a peak under King LE THANH TONG (1460-1497).

The Land Regime and Economic Evolution

After victory, Le Loi ordered the confiscation of all lands belonging to Ming functionaries, to traitors, and to Tran princes and dignitaries who had died or gone away. State lands were partly exploited by the administration itself, partly distributed to dignitaries and mandarins. Differently from the Tran latifundia-owners, the recipient mandarins could only collect land rent, but not do as they pleased with the persons of the peasants, who were subjected to the direct authority of

the State. Administrative centralization was thus promoted and the status of the peasants improved.

Le Loi in 1429, then LE THANH TONG in 1477 regulated and improved the distribution of communal ricefields on the basis of the following principles:

— All were entitled to distribution, according to their respective titles and ranks;

— Distribution was to take place every six years;

— Rent was paid to the State and was generally lower than that demanded by the landlords.

The distribution of communal lands had been practised since time immemorial, but it was the first time that the monarchic State intervened in communal affairs in such precise fashion. The area of such lands being important, those regulations resulted in boosted production.

The Le kings paid great attention to the development of agricultural production. Lands left fallow during the years of war were quickly put under cultivation, while the State diligently set up State farms on uncultivated lands so as, in the words of King Le Thanh Tong, to "concentrate our forces on agriculture and increase our potential." Individuals were also encouraged to break up virgin lands. New lands were thus cleared, either in the highlands or in silted-up coastal regions. Dykes were kept in good repair and, in case of emergency, students as well as armymen were mobilized to put them back in good shape. Soldiers and royal palace personnel were sent by turns to the fields to work. Harvests and cattle were especially protected.

This policy greatly encouraged agricultural production, and no serious famines broke out during the whole 15th century.

Handicrafts were still of a subsidiary character. However, they were widely practised, and many villages became specialized in certain trades: silk weaving, wine brewing, pottery or porcelain making, lime burning, etc. Leather processing was introduced from China. In the towns, especially in the capital Thang Long, craftsmen lived in separate quarters and were grouped into guilds with strict rules.

Silver, tin, iron, lead, gold, copper were mined.

Royal workshops were run by a special royal department and produced items needed at Court, which were not to be sold on the market. They also minted coins. The personnel was made up of craftsmen forcibly pressed into service and of slaves. This did not favour progress in handicrafts.

The development of trade was encouraged by the multiplication of regional markets. Le Loi abolished the paper currency issued by Ho Quy Ly; ordered copper coins used, had measurement units (length, weight, volume, area) and the sizes of certain goods (fabrics, paper) unified. Foreign trade was strictly controlled by the State: transactions could be conducted only with governmental authorization and in specified places. Many foreign trading vessels were kept off. This brake put on foreign trade remained one of the characteristics of feudal monarchy.

Administrative, Military and Judicial Organization

With the disappearance of the large estates, administrative centralization reached a peak. The Court was reorganized, with six ministries: the posts of Prime Minister and Generalissimo were suppressed, the functions being taken over by the king himself. Provincial and regional administration was taken in hand by the mandarin bureaucracy. Functionaries were appointed to the head of villages, in numbers which varied according to the populations. The creation of new villages and the elections of notables were subjected to minute rules. In 1467, Le Thanh Tong ordered maps made of all villages, and a map of the whole country, the first ever drawn up. The country was divided into regions (*dao*), provinces, districts, and villages.

The army, 250,000 strong towards the end of the war of liberation, was reduced to 100,000 and divided into five formations, which took turns in ensuring military service and agricultural work. The peasant-soldier formula inaugurated under the Ly was thus maintained. Besides called-up conscripts, there were the reservists.

The mandarin bureaucracy enjoyed special privileges: lands and houses, special garments, but they no longer were entitled to own large estates with serfs and to have their own armed forces as in the times of the Tran. Members of the royal family enjoyed still more important privileges, but not to the extent of being allowed to participate in the direction of the country or put at the head of important provinces, as under the Tran.

The legislative machinery was streamlined to serve that centralized administration and developing society. In 1483, the HONG DUC code was promulgated, grouping in a systematic way the rules and regulations in force: it was the most complete code of traditional Viet-nam and remained in force until the end of the 18th century. Completed under subsequent reigns, it included 721 articles and was divided into six books.

The Hong Duc code sought in particular to safeguard the land ownership of the State and the landlords, and ensure the authority of the father, the first wife, and the eldest son; it fixed the rites of marriage and mourning. The " ten capital crimes " were severely punished, especially rebellion and unfulfilment of filial duties. Feudal and Confucianist in inspiration, the Hong Duc code was however progressive in several respects. The rights of the woman were protected: she could have her own goods and chattels, and have an equal share with men in inheritance. When there was no male offspring, the daughters could inherit the whole family fortune. The wife could repudiate her husband if the latter had abandoned her for a certain time. All these points were to be suppressed in the 19th century, when feudal monarchy was restored in its most reactionary form. The Hong Duc code was specific to Vietnamese society of its time and showed no Chinese influence.

With the first Le kings, Le Thanh Tong in particular, Vietnamese feudal monarchy reached its peak: for some more time, the monarchic regime and mandarin bureaucracy were to play a positive role in the development of history.

The Nationality Policy

As is generally known, Viet-nam comprises many nationalities: the minority groups live in the mountain regions, while the majority group, the *Kinh*, are plain-dwellers.

During the insurrection against the Ming, the ethnic minorities living in the highlands allied themselves with the Kinh to fight the occupiers. But after liberation, the feudalists in the delta resumed their policy of exploitation and oppression vis-à-vis the minorities. The Le monarchy ruled over the highlands through tribal chieftains on whom it bestowed mandarin titles. Those chieftains collected taxes. Control over the mountain regions was tighter than under the Tran. The Kinh mandarins ruling over the midlands also sought to exploit the ethnic minorities.

This policy provoked frequent revolts among the mountain-dwelling minorities, and this was for centuries one of the weak points of feudal monarchy. The Thai of the Northwest rose up in Lai Chau in 1432, in Son La in 1439, in Thuan Chau in 1440; the Tay of Lang Son, Cao Bang, Tuyen Quang, also revolted on many occasions. In the western part of Nghe An, the heads of the Cam family succeeded in holding out from 1428 to 1437.

All those revolts were severely repressed by the Le troops. Besides, the secession advocated by the rebel chiefs was running counter to the historical trend, deltas and highlands being complementary economically.

But antagonisms among the nationalities are to disappear only with the setting up of socialism.

Cultural Evolution in the 15th-17th Centuries

While plastic arts and architecture made no important progress compared with the Ly-Tran period, literature advanced a great deal. Buddhism was relegated to the background, and Confucianism became the official ideology, inspiring the mandarin competitions and national literature.

Confucianism and the Scholars

Confucian works, as interpreted by Chu Hi (of the Sung period in China), made up a body of doctrines which had to be assimilated by candidates to mandarin competitions. In 1484, the names of laureates at the central competitions were inscribed on stone stelae erected in the Temple of Literature, in Hanoi. The doctrine was carefully studied by the kings. Le Thanh Tong was an outstanding scholar and wrote moral texts intended for the people.

Confucianism effectively served the regime, which was based on the absolute authority of the king and a carefully-graded hierarchy of mandarins. The people had been liberated from the bonds of serfdom but were still subjected to many corvees and taxes. Shoving aside all mysticism, Confucianism directed man towards the

fulfilment of his social duties, at the top of which were absolute fidelity to the king and respect for social hierarchy. To serve one's king, honour one's parents, remain faithful to one's husband and, after his death, to his memory, run one's household and participate in the administration of the country—such were the duties taught to all by the doctrine. Everyone was urged to perfect himself through study and the accomplishment of rites so as to be able to fulfil all duties.

In the adoption of Confucianism as the official doctrine in 15th-century Viet-nam there was a double component. On the one hand it served as an ideological tool in the hands of the monarchy and the mandarin bureaucracy; but on the other, since that regime represented a progress in regard to the aristocratic government of the Tran, Confucian rationalism was a progress in regard to the Buddhism of past centuries. And so two types of Confucian scholars took shape: one serving the king, often against the people, and bent on safeguarding his privileges; the other, with an ideal of social and individual morals, faithful to his country, anxious to fulfil his duties as a man, loving study and good manners, though often frozen in strict ritualism.

In the first period under the Le, when monarchy was still playing a positive role, and especially during the heroic period of struggle for independence, the two types merged into a single one, the scholar fulfilling his ideal by serving the king. When monarchy entered its decline, it became difficult for the scholar to serve his king without running counter to his ideal. Often the two

types co-existed within one and the same person, protagonists of an agonizing conscience drama. The more clear-sighted scholars were not blind to the vices of monarchy. But for them, to refuse to serve the king, and to withdraw from public life would mean to shirk their duties. Yet, to obey the king often meant to harm the people. It should be noted that one Confucian tendency gave the people the right to rebel whenever the king showed himself to be an unworthy one. But for all Confucians, to rebel against one's king remained the crime of crimes, for this involved the whole social, even cosmic, order.

NGUYEN TRAI

The first decades of the 15th century were dominated by the great figure of Nguyen Trai, a scholar of Confucian training, whose spirit and works went, however, much beyond the limits of that doctrine. Patriotism and love of the people instilled exceptional vigour into his Confucianism.

As we have seen above, he was the strategist and political adviser of the national insurrection which drove the Ming out of the country and won back national independence. He was also a poet, and besides left a book on geography; in short was a humanist in the most complete sense of the term.

His military strategy was inspired by this great principle *"Better conquer hearts than citadels,"* laid down in his message to Le Loi, offering the latter his services. In a series of writings during and after the

war of liberation, he set forth his conception of a policy based on love of the people. Here are a few quotations from them:

To ensure peace for the people is the basis of humanity and justice.

Think of those who till the land when enjoying your prebends.

To hold in high esteem those with the virtue of humanity is to ensure the approval of the people, who carry the throne just as the ocean does the boat but can also overturn it.

The role of the people was thus clearly defined. One may say that in Nguyen Trai the humanist tendency of the Confucian doctrine had fully developed. It was on the people that he relied to wage the war of independence, and he also thought of the sufferings of enemy soldiers, of the Chinese people. On this idea he insisted in every one of the messages he sent to the Ming generals. When victory came, the people and soldiers, burning with hatred for the aggressors, wanted to avenge themselves on the surrendering enemy garrisons. But on Nguyen Trai's advice, Le Loi authorized more than 100,000 men to return to China, thus saving them from massacre.

After victory, in the name of the king, he composed several texts of political morals intended for the crown prince. Let us quote from them:

"Don't seek pleasure, strive to follow the rules which make it possible for you to safeguard the national heritage and give command to the army, learn to discipline yourself and govern the country. Keep in harmony with your relatives, show them cordial feelings. Be generous with the people. Let rewards not be prompted by personal sympathy nor punishments by fits of anger. Don't pursue wealth, don't indulge in wasteful extravagance, avoid beautiful women and debauchery.

"Whether to promote a man of talent, receive a criticism, work out a policy, or even pronounce a word or make a gesture, follow the rules of the golden mean, and observe the classical principles: you will conform to the will of Heaven and the rites. To hold in high esteem those with the virtue of humanity is to ensure the approval of the people, who carry the throne just as the ocean does the boat but can overturn it. To help men of virtue is to attract the protection of Heaven, whose will is always so difficult to probe and predict."

With victory, tragedy began for Nguyen Trai. His integrity and righteousness prevented him from being a courtier. The king took umbrage at his prestige, the other mandarins envied him his authority. For many years he was kept away from public affairs and lived a hermit's life. In 1442, Court dignitaries plotted to incriminate him, and he was executed. His works were thus dispersed and only preserved in part.

Among his literary heritage are:

— Geography of the Country (*Zu Dia Chi*);

— Proclamation of Victory over the Ngo (*Binh Ngo Dai Cao*);

— Writings Composed while in the Army *(Quan Trung Tu Menh Tap)*

— The Lam Son Insurrection (*Lam Son Thuc Luc*);

— a collection of 254 poems in the national language (*Quoc Am Thi Tap*); and

— many poems in classical Chinese.

The Proclamation of Victory over the Ngo (Ming), full of national pride, is one of the finest texts of Vietnamese literature (see full translation, page 92) Nguyen Trai's poems in *nôm* are the first important works written in the national language handed down to us from the past. Besides being an indication of their author's poetic talents, those poems gave interesting information on 15th-century Vietnamese. Here are some verses which were written either in *nôm* or in classical Chinese:

Monkeys wail at the setting sun,
On the empty hillslopes the shadows of bamboos lengthen.
Is a heart beating in all these things ?
I could give an answer had I not forgotten it.

*

Happiness and misfortune don't come in a single day,
All along the centuries great men left us their tragedies.
Of the universe, of the past and present, where does the meaning lie ?
In that yonder mist over the trees at the edge of the water?

*

In the plain, on the deserted paths, not a shadow,
All day long a lonely boat lies sleeping on the strand.

Literary and Historical Evolution under the Le

Under the reign of LE THANH TONG a Confucian-inspired literature developed. The king himself liked to write and had gathered twenty-eight dignitaries who were great scholars into a kind of academy called *Tao Dan*, over which he presided. The Tao Dan left many poems written in a refined style which exalted the regime and the country. Many of its other writings were included in a collection called *Thien Nam Zu Ha Tap*. Le Thanh Tong himself left a collection of poems in *nôm*.

The period of the first Le kings also left many historical works, the most important of which being written in 1479 by NGO SI LIEN. It was the *Dai Viet Su Ky Toan Thu*, dealing with Vietnamese history from the beginning to the founding of the Le dynasty in 1428. An unknown author left *Linh Nam Chich Quai*, a collection of popular legends indispensable for finding one's way in the beliefs and customs of ancient Viet-nam. Early in the 16th century NGUYEN ZU wrote *Truyen Ky Man Luc*, a collection of marvel stories which, under cover of legends, contain many criticisms of the author against the society and the rulers of his time.

The figure of NGUYEN BINH KHIEM (1491-1585) towered over the 16th century. This Confucian scholar,

after being a mandarin for some time with the MAC, retired to his hermitage, *Bach Van Am*, founded a school and trained many disciples. Disgusted by the practices and morals at the Court and among the mandarins, he professed his love of nature and his attachment to "*nhan*", i.e. a life of retirement without either material or social preoccupation and inspired by the Taoist doctrine of "no-act". However, as Confucian, he could not fail to be deeply interested in the country's political life. It was a troubled period. The Le kings reigned, but then the throne was usurped by the Mac; when it was restored to the Le, the rising to power of the TRINH and NGUYEN families created a political imbroglio which confused even the best minds. Advice from the hermit of *Bach Van Am* was much sought after by all parties concerned.

Thus when in 1556 the general TRINH KIEM wanted to seize the Le throne, he sent an emissary to Nguyen Binh Khiem to consult him. The scholar turned to one of his servants and said, "The harvest has been lost because of bad seeds; for the next, you must pick an old strain." Then he visited a pagoda, lighted a few joss-sticks and told the bonze: "If one takes care of the pagoda and honours Buddha, one may have rice cakes to eat." The emissary reported these words to Trinh Kiem, who took the hint and contented himself with handing over the throne to a descendant of the Le.

A century separated Nguyen Binh Khiem from Nguyen Trai. The latter had fervently served the monarchy, but the former could no longer do so. The feudal regime was going through a deep crisis. In the

view of the scholars, Nguyen Trai had "gone out" to serve the king, and play his role in society; Nguyen Binh Khiem was "staying on" at his retreat, living close to nature and to the people for the sake of his conscience. To "go out" or "stay on"—this dilemma was to nag talented scholars for long centuries, in face of feudal monarchy. Nguyen Binh Khiem left more than one thousand poems in classical Chinese and in *nôm*, all impregnated with antique wisdom, singing the quiet life of a hermit and the beauty of nature, or joking about the vicissitudes of life. Here are two of his better-known poems:

A hoe, a pick and a fishing rod,
I wander about, leaving people to their pleasure.
Foolish as I am, I seek solitude,
More clever, they join the crowds.
Bamboo shoots in autumn, soya sprouts in winter:
such is my food,
In the spring I bathe in the lotus pond, in summer in the lake.
With my back against a tree, sipping a cup of wine,
I watch wealth and honours pass as in a dream.

*

Harrying others will bring you trouble,
Better abstain and sleep soundly.
The harder you clench your fist, the less easily you'll open it,
Whoever laughs too much one day may choke.
As a rule, cats hunt mice,
Let some misfortune happen, and oxen are eaten by ants.
Win or lose: either will bring repentance,
Having nothing to worry about is best.

PROCLAMATION OF VICTORY OVER THE NGO*
(*BINH NGO DAI CAO*) 1428

NGUYEN TRAI

It was said:
To ensure peace for the people, such is the essence of humanity and justice,
To eliminate violence, such is the primary aim of our soldiers.

Our country Dai Viet has long since been
Land of old culture,
With its own rivers and mountains, ways and customs,
Different from those of the North.
The Trieu, Dinh, Ly, Tran (1) built up our independence
And stood as equals of the Han, Tang, Sung, Yuan (2).
We had known both days of greatness and times of decline,

But never had we lacked heroes.
That was why we brought to naught Luu Cung's ambitions

*Written after victory over the Ming. *Ngo* is a generic term designating the invaders. Proper nouns designate historical personalities and battlefields.
(1) Vietnamese dynasties.
(2) Chinese dynasties.

And Trieu Tiet's dreams of conquest,
Killed Toa Do at Ham Tu,
And captured O Ma on the river Bach Dang (1).
Proofs remain of those exploits.

*

In the recent past the troublesome policy of the Ho
Provoked anger and resentment.
The truculent Ming took advantage of it to bring distress upon our land,
And the traitors sold the country for money and honours.
The people were burnt on the flames of barbarity,
Or buried in the tombs of disaster.
To deceive Heaven and men, the invaders resorted to a thousand machinations;

For twenty years they killed and oppressed.
Humanity and justice were contemned, the land trampled,
Rates and taxes drain forests and fields empty.
Men were sent to shark-infested seas to dive for pearls,
Others into fever-ridden jungle to sift gold from sand.
Everywhere nets and traps were set for pheasant and deer,

Neither plants nor insects were spared,
Wretched was the fate of widows and orphans.
The people were lean and hungry, but the blood-suckers were never satisfied;
Earth had to be moved, wood carved, houses and palaces built;
Endless corvées caused the looms to stay idle.

(1) Past victories over invaders.

To record the oppressors' crimes all the bamboos of the Southern Mountain would not suffice;
All the water of the Eastern Sea could not clean away the filth.

How could Heaven condone such felonies!
The people's anger had reached its peak.

*

In our retreat on Mount Lam,
We brooded over the wrongs done to our land,
Swearing not to live under the same vault of heaven as the oppressors.

For years we suffered in our heart and mind,
Tasting gall and lying on thorns.
We hardly touched our meals, devoting our time to studying strategies,
Pondering over the past and present, weighing the chances of success.
Even in our dreams plans for insurrection were hatched,
Our only thought day and night was national restoration.
When the banner of revolt was raised, enemy strength was at its peak;
On our side, talent was rare as stars at dawn and leaves in autumn,
Officers and advisers were lacking.
Burning with impatience to save the people, we longed to march eastward;
On our chariot, the best seat was left empty, waiting for a talented general
Alas, friends were late to come: it was like watching the fog at sea!

We had to rely on our own forces: a drowning man waited to be rescued!

The enemy was on the rampage, the nation in distress.
In Linh Son, for weeks we ran short of supplies;
At Khoi Huyen, not an intact brigade was left.
But Heaven entrusted us with a great responsibility,
And we had to surmount all obstacles.

With the people united like one single family, we held high the standard of revolt;

With officers and men like father and son, we shared the last drop of wine.

Relying on surprise, we opposed our weak forces to much stronger ones,

In skilful ambushes, our few troops destroyed large units.

Successfully we confronted barbarity with justice,
And fought truculence with humanity.
At Bo Dang, we struck them like lightning;
In Tra Lan, their troops were cut to pieces.
The higher our soldiers' spirit,
The more widespread their prestige.
Tran Tri, Son Tho were frightened out of their wits,
Ly An, Phuong Chinh showed a clean pair of heels.
We pressed them hard, soon Tay Kinh was ours;
Advancing again, we recovered Dong Do the old capital.

The streams of blood shed by the enemy at Ninh Kieu stank for a thousand miles,

The piles of corpses left by them at Tot Dong for a thousand years would be reminders of their shame.

The traitors Tran Hiep and Ly Luong were beheaded.

Vuong Thong tried to retrieve the disaster : the flames only rose higher !
Ma Anh rushed to the rescue : our troops struck even harder.
Running out of breath, the enemy was at the end of his tether :
Relying on intelligence and skill, aiming at men's hearts, we won without further fighting.
For a time we thought they would repent,
In fact they were only plotting more crimes.
One man's obduracy created miseries for thousands,
Thirsting for power and glory, he turned himself into a laughingstock.
And so that little tyrant Tuyen Duc sent troops after troops,
And the cowards Moc Thanh and Lieu Thang tried to put out the fire with oil.
In the 9th moon of the year of the Goat, Lieu Thang moved his army from Khau On,
In the 10th moon, Moc Thanh came with his troops from Yunnan.
First we stopped them at key spots and crushed their vanguards,
Then we cut off their communications and supplies.
On the 18th, we defeated Lieu Thang at Chi Lang,
On the 20th, at Ma An, he lost his life.
On the 25th, Count Luong Minh died,
On the 28th, Minister Ly Khanh committed suicide.
Fired by our victories, we rushed forward,
Confused by their defeats, they turned on each other.
On all sides we besieged their citadels,

Bent on annihilating them by the middle of the 10th moon.
Crack troops and officers were selected for the task ;
Drinking at rivers, our elephants dried the streams,
Whetted on rocks, our swords eroded mountains.
On our first onslaught, all the sharks were exterminated,
After the second assault, not a single vulture remained.
We were the hurricane which blew away the dry leaves,
And the stubborn ants which caused dykes to collapse.
On his knees, Thoi Tu begged for mercy,
Tying his hands, Hoang Phuc struck his flag.
Enemy corpses piled high on the road to Lang Giang and Lang Son,
At Xuong Giang and Binh Than, their blood tinged the river with red.
Winds and clouds changed colour,
Sun and moon waned.
Cornered at Lê Hoa, the Yunnan troops went mad with panic,
Defeated at Can Tram, Moc Thanh's soldiers trampled on each other in their flight.
The Lanh Cau stream was clogged with blood, the air filled with moans ;
Corpses formed knolls in Dan Xa, amidst clotted grass.
The two relief armies were shattered before they could escape,
All the garrisons took off their armour and surrendered.
Captured generals, tigers reduced to impotence, implored pardon ;
Generous victors, sensitive to the will of Heaven, we granted them quarter.

For Ma Ky and Phuong Chinh we provided five hundred junks;
Out at sea their faces were still green with fear.
To Vuong Thong and Ma Anh we gave several thousand horses;
Back in their country, their legs still shook with terror.
Fearing death, they asked for peace;
We preserved our forces and let our people have a rest:
Such was our wisdom.
From now on our land is safe,
Rivers and mountains will see a new era.
Calm comes after the storm,
Light has driven away darkness.
For ever we have cleansed ourselves of shame,
For ever we shall have peace.
Both Heaven and our ancestors helped us in battle:
We took up arms, fought, and won.
All the four seas are now serene, great changes are forthcoming:
Let everybody everywhere be so informed.

Translated by D.T.B

IV — THE TAY SON EPOCH

(18th Century)

THE feudal society built under the first Le kings in the 15th century flourished for about a hundred years ; but the structures set up ceased to play a positive role as early as the 16th century and decadence manifested itself more and more clearly in the 17th, culminating in a deep and irremediable crisis in the 18th.

The feudal structure rested on an agrarian system based on private land ownership coexisting with a millenary institution of communal lands which were subjected to periodic distribution. If, juridically, everyone had access to ownership and enjoyed the same civil rights, in practice, a minority of landowners had taken possession of the larger part of the land and appropriated the best communal lands, reducing to misery the majority of working peasants. In the villages, landowners and notables laid down the law, collected very heavy land rents, and exacted exorbitant interests for debts.

The feudal State administered the country by means of a bureaucracy of mandarins recruited through competitive examinations. One of its main functions consisted in building and maintaining an important network of dykes and irrigation canals to protect agriculture against natural calamities. The diligence of the State services or their negligence in water conservancy work led to far-reaching consequences.

The prestige of the monarchical State and the mandarin bureaucracy rested on the teaching of Confucianism, which was disseminated throughout the country and inculcated upon the people absolute respect for the king and strict observance of social hierarchy.

Handicrafts and trade were not much valued, and the mandarin bureaucracy tried to hinder the development of trade. Techniques did not advance, for the landowners, mandarins and notables got their incomes from direct exploitation of working peasants. Handicrafts and trade were only to meet the needs of the Court pomp or of luxury consumption. Nominally, the Le kings reigned over the whole country, but two families of seigneurs, the TRINH in the North and the NGUYEN in the South, had divided the country and were waging endless wars between themselves.

In the 18th century, factors of crisis and change had accumulated: the agrarian crisis, the development of handicrafts and trade, the political and administrative crisis, the ideological crisis, contact with the outside world, the corruption of the ruling circles. The country was shaken by great peasant uprisings which culminated in the TAY SON movement. A century of convulsions, the 18th century was also a century of renewal, or at least of great hopes. With the Tay Son, Viet-nam lived one of the most brilliant periods of her history. National culture, inspired by great peasant insurrections and more or less liberated from feudal fetters, flourished vigorously.

The Crisis of the Trinh Regime in the North

The Agrarian Crisis

The appropriation of land by landowners, notables and mandarins had deepened considerably, especially in the North, the domain of the Trinh, where arable lands were scarce. With population growth, the evil took on disastrous dimensions. In 1711, through an edict, the Trinh had to "*forbid great families, functionaries and notables to take advantage of the ruin of peasants to enlarge their estates under cover of buying.*" Indeed, sale and purchase contracts were used only to legalize appropriations effected to the detriment of small farmers. The communal lands did not escape the landowners' greed either. In 1739, the seigniorial Court had to admit that "*there remained nothing for the peasants to live on.*"

The situation had become so disturbing that in 1740, a Trinh lord planned to nationalize all lands to redistribute them to peasants who would pay land rents to the State. But all the mandarin bureaucracy and the class of landowners opposed the project, which was quickly buried.

One of the most obvious indications of this agrarian crisis was the increasing number of law-suits relative to appropriation of lands, but the expropriated peasant who appeared before mandarin courts was molested, had to pay bribes, and finally often lost his case. Complaints reached the seigniorial Court in such great numbers that in 1723 the Trinh had to set up a real

supreme court of appeal at the gate of the seigniorial palace. A report by censors in 1718 noted that

"In the villages, the notables, using thousands of tricks, ruling arbitrarily, grabbing other people's property to enrich themselves, oppressing the poor, despising the illiterate, avail themselves of the least opportunity to indict people and bring suits against them. If the judgement, though a just one, does not satisfy them, they appeal against it once, twice, three times. The poor are not able to carry on the suit and even well-off people are ruined."

The same report related the thousand ways used by notables to extort property from the poor, grab communal lands and create factions. The village administration was therefore thoroughly corrupt, but the State remained powerless. The State itself was no longer able to take proper care of the large irrigation works. Due to this state of things, the least natural calamity led to sometimes disastrous famines. The peasants were compelled to abandon their villages, wandering in search of food and dying by the thousands on the roads. The State could do little more than dole out quite inadequate supplies of food. The *Cuong muc* annals thus related the 1735 famine:

"Thieves and bandits multiplied, especially in Hai Duong. Peasants gave up all cultivation. All food reserves were exhausted in the villages, except in Son Nam. People roamed about, carrying their children, in search of some rice. The price of rice soared; 100 coins were no longer enough to pay for a meal. People lived on vegetables and herbs, ate rats and snakes. Dead bodies lay about the roads."

The number of ruined peasants who abandoned their villages to wander about the country increased so greatly that in 1730 the Trinh had to appoint twelve high dignitaries of the Court to try to bring them back to their homes, but in vain. A census showed that 1,730 villages were particularly affected. This ruined and wandering peasantry was to make up the bulk of insurgent groups in the 18th-century revolts.

The Political and Administrative Crisis

While the village administration showed itself to be rapacious and cruel, the mandarin bureaucracy and the seigniorial Court sank into corruption and debauchery. The building of palaces and pagodas burdened the budget, and so did the lavish rejoicings of the Court. In 1718, a censor submitted a report stressing the people's misery and proposing to

— forbid all squandering,

— stop all building and repairs of palaces,

— cut down the number of pleasure trips by the Court, and

— cut down the number of administrative inspection tours.

The censor was congratulated, but his advice remained unheeded. The Trinh lords ordered the building of many recreation sites, pagodas, mansions, requiring excessive contributions and labour from the population. Ceremonies were held in great pomp. To meet all these expenses, in the 18th century, the Trinh instituted,

with the help of a devoted mandarin, NGUYEN CONG HANG, a new system of taxes and duties which encompassed all spheres of production, leaving nothing out of State control. The principle of this fiscal reform was stated in 1721 as follows:

" Formerly, spendings were fixed on the basis of receipts; now we are going to fix receipts to be collected on the basis of spendings."

A fatal blow was dealt to the mandarin institution by the putting to sale of offices. Thus money began to corrode the feudal structure; anyone could buy mandarin titles, and promotion of mandarins was prompted by money. Bribery became so to speak legal, as the mandarin squeezed the common people to get back what he had had to pay for his office and to get rich. Edicts were promulgated to fight the evil, but they remained ineffective.

While the Trinh lords sank into debauchery and extravagance, factions multiplied at the Court. Palace intrigues in which eunuchs and favourites played an important part helped perpetuate a growing instability. Honest and upright mandarins were eliminated, and many a time, rebelling special units of the army made and broke laws, deposing mandarins and lords at will in a capital city beset by anarchy.

Peasant Revolts under the TRINH

Still sporadic in the 17th century, peasant revolts gained wider scope in the 18th. In the

mountain regions, ethnic minority groups rebelled under the leadership of local chiefs. As early as 1715, the annals indicated that the delta provinces were infested with bandits. In 1737, the Trinh had to set up watch-towers nearly everywhere so as to point out, by means of fire signals, the movements of insurgents who were multiplying in many regions. The agitation took on a political form with clandestine writings, slogans, false rumors designed to discredit the regime. Writings were disseminated in which the authors made attacks on the administration in the form of stories and fables. In 1718, the Trinh Court banned the printing and circulation of such writings and had them seized and burnt. Various security measures were taken, in particular the establishment of village guards made up of notables, and of military commands in the provinces. In 1721, and again in 1727, the army was reinforced. All those measures, however, could not stop the successive peasant revolts. Of these we shall cite only the most important.

In 1737, under the leadership of a bonze, NGUYEN ZUONG HUNG, thousands of peasants occupied the Tam Dao mountains, north-west of the capital, where the news sowed panic. The revolt was harshly put down but shortly after in the mountain region of Thanh Hoa province, a descendant of the Le, LE ZUY MAT, headed an uprising which involved both peasants from the delta and highlanders.

In 1739, insurgent centers were developing in all provinces, particularly in the Red River delta. The

Cuong Muc annals relate that poor people gathered there "*by hundreds, thousands, even tens of thousands, and besieged the towns, in an irresistible movement.*" Relations were established between insurgent organizations in various provinces to co-ordinate their actions, but the uprisings remained in most cases of local character.

The Trinh then created the village guards, choosing two out of every ten young men and armed them for the defence of rural communes. But the village guards often crossed over to the insurgents and the measure was soon cancelled. In 1740, the Trinh reinforced the army's special units. The Trinh army had to carry out mopping-up operations unceasingly, for hardly had an uprising been quelled when another broke out. In Hai Duong province, even after the death of rebel chiefs NGUYEN TUYEN and NGUYEN CU in 1741, their partisans again rallied, appearing and disappearing among villages and grass-covered swamps.

In the midlands and highlands, in Lang Son, Bac Giang, in the provinces of Tuyen Quang, Thai Nguyen, Cao Bang, in the mountain areas of Thanh Hoa, the ethnic minorities, sometimes allied with rebels in the delta, rose up against the Trinh. However, the main insurgent center remained the delta. Four of those peasant revolts gained particular scope and lasted many years.

Starting from Son Tay province, the movement led by NGUYEN ZANH PHUONG began in 1740 and died down only in 1751. The insurgents succeeded in controlling the provinces of Vinh Yen, Phu Tho, Tuyen Quang, part of Son Tay, collected taxes on forest produce

coming from the highlands, and during eleven years "*set up a real State in face of the Thang Long Court.*" After successive failures by the Trinh troops, Lord TRINH ZOANH himself had to take command of a strong army in 1751, but the insurrection was put down only after hard-fought battles.

In Hai Zuong province, after the defeat of the peasant leader Nguyen Cu, his lieutenant NGUYEN HUU CAU succeeded him in 1741 and fomented one of the greatest peasant revolts in the century. A talented scholar, disgusted with the system of mandarin competitions, Nguyen Huu Cau attacked the rich and dealt out their property to the poor, calling himself "Great General Protector of the People." He settled in the coastal region of Do Son, Van Don, occupied Kien An province, built a flotilla of combat junks. He was an excellent strategist and his troops, highly mobile and capable of fighting both on land and on river, inflicted a great defeat on Trinh troops in 1744, causing panic even in the capital. His influence spread to Kinh Bac province, and his name inspired enthusiasm among the peasant masses, while sowing terror among the mandarins and soldiers. The Trinh had to mobilize strong armies commanded by their best generals to fight him. Whenever he was beaten, he quickly reorganized his forces, rallying thousands of peasants under his flag, with the slogan: "Take from the rich to give to the poor", hence the legend of his invincibility. Overcome by sheer numbers, Nguyen Huu Cau was captured in 1751 and executed. During his captivity, he wrote a poem, "The Bird in Cage", in which he sang his aspirations to freedom.

The movement led by HOANG CONG CHAT, which developed in Son Nam, in the lower part of the delta, lasted from 1739 to 1769. Mainly practising guerilla warfare, building no fixed bases, concentrating and scattering his forces with rapidity, Hoang Cong Chat succeeded in holding at bay the Trinh armies during long years. In 1751, as a Trinh offensive was developing he went to the mountain region of Thanh Hoa, then to the north-west of Bac Bo, where in 1761 he set up positions on the river Da. In 1768, he died, and his son, beaten by the Trinh, took refuge in Yunnan.

The movement led by Le Zuy Mat also lasted long years, from 1738 to 1779. A descendant of the Le royal family, Le Zuy Mat took refuge in the mountain area of Thanh Hoa, where he created a starting base, relying on poor peasants and highlanders. In a proclamation to the people, he set forth the movement's objectives: restoration of the Le and ousting of the Trinh usurpers, whose rapacity and cruelty he denounced. By 1740 his forces controlled a large part of the mountain regions of Ninh Binh and Son Tay provinces and was expanding toward the delta of Thanh Hoa, then by 1752 to the mountain region of Nghe An. In those regions, he helped the peasants to reorganize farming by building irrigation works and developing workshops for farm tools. By 1763 his domain had extended as far as Tran Ninh. Only in 1769 were the Trinh able to launch a real counter-offensive. The operations lasted till 1770; Le Zuy Mat, betrayed by one of his lieutenants, killed himself.

With the death of Le Zuy Mat, the great peasant movements against the Trinh died down gradually, but they had dealt a fatal blow to the regime. Their major weakness lay mainly in their dispersion and the lack of organization in face of a centralized State having a professional army and a seasoned administrative organization. There was at times coordination between different movements, but never organization at national level. Revolts broke out spontaneously, and always had a local character. In the 18th century, the peasants were joined by ruined artisans, miners, discontented tradesmen; the development of handicrafts and trade and of exchanges with foreign countries had created an embryonic national market, but there was not a true bourgeoisie capable of taking the revolt in hand to overthrow feudalism and build a new society. In most cases the leadership of peasant movements was in the hands of elements sprung from feudalism: dissident scholars, petty mandarins, bonzes, who could not conceive a clear-cut program and a new organization.

The Trinh were compelled to make some concessions: they cut down taxes, duties and corvées, but at the same time reinforced their army, especially by special units. However, while these units helped them to put down peasant revolts ferociously, they were to become, after victory, a permanent danger for the regime,

The TRINH Regime towards the End of the 18th Century

Although the Trinh succeeded in putting down revolts, they could neither stop land grabbing nor

prevent a degradation of the regime. Edicts from the seigniorial Court, entreaties by censors, reform projects proposed by mandarins anxious for public welfare were all without effect. In the 70's and 80's of the century, famines occurred repeatedly.

With the advent in 1767 of TRINH SAM, a debauched and corrupt lord, power fell into the hands of the favourite DANG THI HUE and her family. The Court was divided into two rival factions, the partisans of the heir apparent and those of the favourite. It was the latter's son who came to power at the death of Trinh Sam in 1782. The invested lord was only six years old, and it was HOANG DINH BAO, Dang Thi Hue's paramour, who held real power. Late in 1782, the troops revolted, killed Hoang Dinh Bao, reestablished the heir apparent, but from that date the special units imposed their will on the seigniorial Court, plundering the population, deposing princes and dignitaries, assassinating those who opposed their doings.

Peasant revolts broke out again, without, however, reaching the scope of the previous movements. By the end of the 18th century, the Trinh regime was about to collapse.

The Tay Son : Reunification and Renewal

AS it happened with the Trinh, the Nguyen regime in the South was affected by the same crisis, deep and irremediable. Towards the end of the

18th century, an insurgent movement, that of the Tay Son, was to start from the Nguyen domain and to sweep away both the Trinh and the Nguyen, thus reunifying the country and creating the premises of national renewal. Unfortunately, for reasons which we will try to analyze, the Tay Son did not succeed in staying in power for long, and early in the 19th century, feudal reaction got the upper hand, restoring feudalism in its most reactionary forms.

The Crisis of the NGUYEN Regime

As in the North, in the Nguyen's domain, land grabbing by landowners, mandarins and notables drove many peasants into misery and ruin. For some time, the evil found an issue in the colonization of new lands in the Mekong delta ; the lands reclaimed by peasants, though grabbed by landowners later on, were large and fertile enough to make the crisis less acute. But in the provinces of Trung Bo, due to the shortage of arable land, any grabbing condemned the poor peasants to an impossible life. As early as 1613, the Nguyen seigniorial Court had to intervene by establishing a cadastral survey so as to limit the extension of landed property. This administrative intervention had only a temporary effect; in the villages, landowners and notables ignored it, with the complicity of mandarins. In 1669, faced with an acute crisis, the Court again ordered that communal estates should not be appropriated. And yet, for all that, in the 18th century, according to the historian LE QUY DON, many villages

no longer had any communal lands left for periodical distribution to the peasants. Rice production in those provinces suffered, and as early as the 18th century, the central regions had to buy rice from Gia Dinh (Saigon).

This poverty-stricken peasantry toiled under heavy and multiple burdens imposed by a seigniorial Court which, on the one hand, carried out a policy of nearly continous warfare — war against the Trinh, and territorial expansion at the expense of Cambodia — and on the other hand sank more and more deeply into pleasure and luxury. The Nguyen levied taxes on all agricultural, handicraft or trade activities, exacting from the population contributions in cash and in kind, such as precious wood, rattan, cloths, etc. The records of Cao Xa village, Thuan Hoa province (Hue region), for example, showed that of 53 registered adults, 9 were exempted, while the other 44 paid every year taxes and duties totalling 138 strings of coins (the price of a large buffalo was 40 strings in difficult periods). Not counting contributions in kind, the Nguyen Court collected every year

— from 338,000 to 423,000 strings of coins,
— from 840 to 890 ounces of gold, and
— many thousand ounces of silver.

The historian noted that "*for every amount the State collected, the mandarin-collectors took twice as much for themselves.*"

As early as the 17th century, their power having been consolidated, the Nguyen lords and their mandarins had indulged in extravagant luxury. The harems were

full; the lord Nguyen Phuc Chu had as many as 146 children. Lords and mandarins built many palaces and pagodas with precious wood, richly sculptured; they dressed in silk and brocade; the capital Phu Xuan (Hue) grew into a big metropolis. Le Quy Don noted:

"*Since the reign of Vo Vuong (1738) luxury prevailed, petty mandarins imitating higher officials. Houses were sculptured, walls built of stone, hangings and curtains made of silk, plates and dishes of bronze or porcelain, the furniture of precious wood, harnesses were ornamented with gold and silver... They regarded gold and silver as sand, rice as dirt.*"

From 1765 onward, real power fell into the hands of Regent TRUONG PHUC LOAN, who made a colossal fortune for himself by every means. Oppression and injustice prevailed, the feudal class became one of predatory and corrupt parasites. The bureaucracy of mandarins and subaltern officials was expanding beyond measure at all levels.

Famines occurred repeatedly in the provinces of Trung Bo; in 1751 a report by the mandarin NGUYEN CU TRINH noted that many inhabitants had failed to register, either to escape taxes or because they had been reduced to misery and vagrancy. Foreign trade was dwindling, one of the major causes being the bribes exacted by the mandarins in charge from foreign merchants.

Another factor of trouble was monetary depreciation. Unlike the Trinh domain, the Nguyen's did not have any copper mines, and the seigniorial Court was compelled to mint zinc coins (in fact an alloy of zinc

and tin), much less durable than copper coins. Even private citizens were allowed to make zinc coins. This resulted in a rapid depreciation of the currency, soaring prices and speculations by merchants.

The above-mentioned report by Nguyen Cu Trinh warned the Nguyen lords:

"I beg to observe most humbly that the people's misery has reached an extreme degree; if one continues to rule with indifference, without thinking of taking appropriate measures, even the administration of a village would become impossible, let alone that of a province, and the whole country... The people no longer have anything to live on, how can their hearts be at peace?"

Late in the 17th century, uprisings took place in various provinces, in which tradesmen and highlanders participated together with peasants.

The End of the NGUYEN Lords

In 1771, in Tay Son village, Binh Dinh province, three brothers named NGUYEN NHAC, NGUYEN HUE and NGUYEN LU began an insurgent movement which swiftly spread to neighbouring localities. Nhac was a petty functionary who had worked as a tax-collector; his brother Hue was soon to reveal himself as one of the most brilliant figures in Viet-nam's history.

The TAY SON brothers managed to give the movement a judicious political orientation right from the beginning. On the one hand, they presented

themselves as defenders of poor peasants, thus rallying the large masses of the peasantry; on the other hand they claimed that they only wanted to oppose the regent Truong Phuc Loan in order to restore the authority of the Nguyen lords, and this sowed division among the partisans of the regime.

"They began moving through villages", reported a Spanish missionary, *"announcing to the inhabitants that they were not bandits, but envoys from Heaven, that they wanted to see justice prevail and to liberate the people from the tyranny of the king and his mandarins. They preached equality in everything. And faithful to their doctrine, those forerunners of modern socialism robbed mandarins and the rich of their properties, which they distributed to the poor. The villages, crushed under exorbitant tributes, were willing to swear allegiance."*

(Quoted by Chesneaux in *Contribution to the History of the Vietnamese Nation*)

The rallying of the people and especially of the peasants instilled great strength into the movement, which also had the support of highlanders. In 1773, the Tay Son seized the city of Quy Nhon; rich merchants bullied by the mandarin bureaucracy of the Nguyen gave them support. Then they took the provinces of Quang Ngai and Quang Nam.

The Trinh lords took advantage of the Nguyen's difficulties to invade their territory. Late in 1774 a Trinh army seized the capital Phu Xuan, and the Nguyen, caught in a cross-fire, had to flee. The Trinh and Tay Son troops found themselves face to face with each other in Quang Nam in 1775. The Tay Son treated with the

Trinh so as to concentrate their efforts against the remainder of the Nguyen army.

After the conquest of the provinces of Trung Bo, in 1776 the Tay Son entered Gia Dinh. The Gia Dinh landlords organized themselves to resist, but in vain; thus the last bulwark of the Nguyen lords crumbled. Only one prince, NGUYEN ANH, managed to escape. He entrenched himself with his partisans in the west of the Mekong delta. In 1778, Nguyen Nhac proclaimed himself king, installing his capital at Do Ban, in Binh Dinh province.

After reorganizing his forces, Nguyen Anh counter-attacked, for a time successfully, reconquering Gia Dinh and the province of Binh Thuan; but in 1783 a counter-offensive led by Nguyen Hue utterly routed his forces, forcing him to take refuge on Phu Quoc island. Nguyen Anh then resorted to the classical arm of feudal lords in distress: calling in foreigners. He asked for help from the Siamese monarchy which sent to his rescue an army of 20,000 men (some documents say 50,000) with 300 vessels. In 1784 the Siamese army invaded the western part of the Mekong delta. Nguyen Hue set out to meet them, lured the Siamese fleet into an ambush on the river My Tho in the Rach Gam-Xoai Mut section. Of the Siamese army, there remained only 2,000 men, who fled westward by land (Jan. 25, 1785). It was one of the finest victories in Viet-nam's history, remarkable for the rapidity with which it was won. It cut short Siamese expansion towards Nam Bo. Nguyen Hue began to stand out as a brilliant strategist and a national hero in contrast to Nguyen Anh who tried to win back his throne by relying on foreign troops.

The End of the TRINH and National Reunification

Having got rid of the Nguyen, the Tay Son turned against the Trinh, whose army had occupied Phu Xuan. In June 1786, Nguyen Hue led his troops through the Pass of Clouds, captured Phu Xuan then Quang Tri and Quang Binh provinces. Everywhere the population gave effective help to the Tay Son troops. The Trinh Court was then in deep crisis, with different factions scrambling for power. The Tay Son swiftly advanced northward and reached the Red River delta as early as July 1786. Nguyen Hue cleverly presented himself as a defender of the Le royal dynasty whose authority had been usurped by the Trinh. The support of the population, the Tay Son troops' combativeness and the excellent command by Nguyen Hue rapidly got the better of the Trinh army. The Trinh-Nguyen secession was brought to an end and the country reunified. This was one of the great merits of the Tay Son.

Nguyen Hue paid homage to King Le who gave him his daughter NGOC HAN in marriage. The Le monarchy was solemnly restored. Shortly after, King Le Hien Tong died, leaving the throne to LE CHIEU THONG. Nguyen Hue went back to the South.

The new king, Le Chieu Thong, who understood nothing to the march of events, thought he could outwit the Tay Son with the help of adventurers; the latter were soon executed by Nguyen Hue, and King Chieu Thong had to flee the capital.

Great Victory over the Tsing

Defeated, King Chieu Thong resorted to treason: he appealed to the Mandchu Tsing dynasty then reigning over China. Tsing Emperor Kien-lung, nurturing ambitions of reconquest of Viet-nam, charged Governor Ton Si-nghi (Soun Che-y) with mustering200,000 men to invade Viet-nam. On the 20th day of the 10th moon of the year 1788, Tsing troops set out, proclaiming that they would "destroy the Tay Son and restore the Le." On the 21st day of the 11th moon, they entered Thang Long. A pontoon was built on the Red River, on both banks of which Tsing troops camped.

Le Chieu Thong was proclaimed "King of Annam" by the Peking Court; in fact it was Ton Si-nghi who held all power, and every morning people in the capital could see the king and his small suite call on the Tsing Governor for an audience. The Tsing troops' exactions ended by opening the eyes of those who had been mistaken over the real intentions of the invaders. Only Chieu Thong and the reactionary feudal lords who wanted to defend their privileges at any cost still clung to the coat-tails of the occupiers. Feeling ran high among the population; the prestige of the Le dynasty was utterly impaired.

At that time Nguyen Hue was in Phu Xuan. The Tay Son brothers had divided the country among themselves: the eldest, Nguyen Nhac, reigned in the centre, installed in Quy Nhon; Lu was charged with governing Gia Dinh and the Mekong delta; Hue took charge of the part north of the Pass of Clouds.

To deal with the Tsing invasion, Nguyen Hue acted in the name of the whole nation betrayed by the Le. In a solemn ceremony, he proclaimed himself king with the regnal name of QUANG TRUNG and immediately afterwards ordered his troops to march on Thang Long. It was Dec. 21, 1788. By the 26th, the Tay Son army was in Nghe An; 100,000 men were reviewed by Nguyen Hue, who addressed them in these words:

"The Tsing have invaded our country, occupied the capital city of Thang Long. In our history, the Trung sisters fought against the Han, Dinh Tien Hoang against the Sung, Tran Hung Dao against the Mongols, Le Loi against the Ming. Those heroes did not resign themselves to standing by and seeing the invaders plunder our country; they roused the people up to fight for the just cause and drive out the aggressors... The Tsing, forgetting what happened to the Sung, the Mongols and the Ming, have invaded our country. We are going to drive them out of our territory."

The year was drawing to a close. It was the 20th day of the 12th month of the lunar year. Arriving at Ninh Binh, Nguyen Hue ordered his troops to celebrate New Year's Day in advance and told them:

"On the seventh day of the first month of the New Year, we shall enter Thang Long and celebrate the spring festival there. Mark my words, that's what will happen."

The Tay Son army took a ten-day rest to recruit new troops, then on the 30th day of the 12th month began marching on Thang Long, in three different columns. The one commanded by Nguyen Hue rushed toward Thang Long, overran Tsing outposts and on the 3rd day

of the first month of the New Year encircled the post of Ha Hoi, 20 km south of the capital. The Ha Hoi garrison surrendered (Jan. 28, 1789). On Jan. 30, the Tay Son troops, with elephant-mounted troops acting as a spearhead, attacked the post of Ngoc Hoi, 15km south of Thang Long, and captured it swiftly. The road to Thang Long was open.

The two other Tay Son columns rapidly overran the posts which defended the capital in the west; the Dong Da post (now in Ha-noi itself) was carried after a day of fierce fighting. The post commander hanged himself on a tree. The Tay Son victories were so quickly won that Ton Si-nghi, the Tsing commander-in-chief, had no time to react before the Tay Son troops streamed into Thang Long. He did not even have time to have his horse harnessed and to put on his cuirass, and ran away with a group of cavalrymen. The flight of its commander-in-chief threw panic into the Tsing army. In the stampede over the pontoon many were drowned.

On the 5th day of the first moon of the year 1789, the Tay Son troops entered Thang Long. On the 7th, they celebrated victory there, exactly as Nguyen Hue had promised. In six days, the Tay Son troops had advanced 80km and defeated a 200,000-man army. This was the greatest victory in Viet-nam's history, won within a very short time. Carried by the popular movement, Nguyen Hue, who already had the merit of liquidating the Trinh-Nguyen secession, reunifying the country, and driving out the Siamese, had saved the country from Tsing domination. The Peking

Court reconciled itself to making peace and recognizing the Tay Son.

Quang Trung's Work

Nguyen Hue, now King Quang Trung, thought of transferring his capital to the province of Nghe An. He reorganized the army, the administration and education with the help of talented people. Partisans of the Le tried to incite uprisings, but in vain.

Right after his accession, Quang Trung promulgated an edict enjoining the village administrations to recall ruined peasants who were wandering about the country, and to reclaim fallow land. A year's time-limit was set for the villages to put in order the population and cadastral registers, after which fallow lands would be taxed doubly. The distribution of communal lands was regulated; the lands left fallow or belonging to traitors were confiscated for use by the villages or the State. Contrary to the Trinh who allotted communal lands chiefly to officials and soldiers, Quang Trung gave them mainly to peasants. *"The important thing for a king,"* proclaimed the edict on agriculture, *"is to attend to the roots and lop off the top, so that the people enjoy peace and have land to till, that nobody is jobless and the fields do not lie waste."*

As early as 1791, agriculture resumed its normal production. Quang Trung also strove to develop handicrafts and trade. In 1788 he had said to his adviser NGUYEN THIEP: "I wish we would not buy so many articles from abroad." He abolished the obstacles

imposed on trade by the Trinh. NGUYEN HUY LUONG, a poet of that time, thus celebrated the rebirth of trade in Thang Long:

Wreaths of smoke crown the kilns of Thach Khoi
Shuttles sing in the hands of brocade-weavers
From Yen Thai comes the sound of pestles pounding paper pulp
In Nghi Tam fishing nets fence up the waters
Markets are crowded with traders from east and west
Like butterflies, junk sails together were pressed.

King Quang Trung also sought to develop exchanges with China. Statements by Western merchants and missionaries tend to prove that the Tay Son practised an open-door policy. Fiscal laws were simplified as compared with those of the Trinh.

The great reform carried out by Quang Trung in the field of culture was the adoption of *nôm*, i.e. the national language, for official texts and in education, instead of classical Chinese which had been in use for long centuries. In 1791 Nguyen Thiep was charged with directing the translation of Confucian classics, intended for use in education. This was opposed by reactionary or backward-minded scholars. Quang Trung also sought to reform the contents of education which had degenerated into a repetition of empty formulas. Each village was to choose a scholar capable of founding a school; scholars of the old regime had to undergo new examinations. Adventurers and parasites who had taken refuge in pagodas and monasteries had to come back to secular life, and only genuine religious people were allowed to stay. Catholic missionaries were not persecuted.

The reign of Quang Trung was a great one on account of its military prestige and its economic and cultural reforms. Unfortunately, in 1792, Quang Trung died suddenly and neither his brothers nor his son QUANG TOAN proved capable of carrying on the work he had begun.

End of the TAY SON and NGUYEN Restoration

The vulnerable part of the Tay Son kingdom was Gia Dinh, in the south, where landlords were able to organize themselves and where the administration was entrusted to the youngest Tay Son brother, Nguyen Lu. We have seen how in 1784 a Nguyen prince, Nguyen Anh, had tried to restore the power of his family with the help of the Siamese, and how Nguyen Hue had driven out the invaders.

Sticking to his policy of national treason, Nguyen And did not content himself with asking for help from the Siamese; he also contacted a French missionary, Pigneau de Béhaine, bishop of Adran, who advised him to appeal to France. The French missionary took a son of Nguyen Anh to France where with the help of the Foreign Missions, he managed to get an audience with Louis XVI. On Nov. 28, 1787, a treaty was signed between a representative of France and Pigneau de Béhaine, representing Nguyen Anh. France promised military aid in exchange for the cession of Tourane port and the Poulo-Condore islands, the right to free trade inside Viet-nam to the exclusion of other European nations. Thus Nguyen Anh by opening

the way to French imperialism had "introduced a snake into the family hen-house." The French monarchy, soon overthrown by the 1789 Revolution, was not able to keep its promise of military aid to Nguyen And; Pigneau de Béhaine, with the help of French merchants and adventurers, supplied him with some equipment and military instructors. However, it was not this assistance, but the internal difficulties of the Tay Son regime that enabled Nguyen Anh to set foot again on Vietnamese territory.

Nguyen Hue's brothers had neither his military nor his political abilities. A dissension having arisen between the three brothers, and Nguyen Hue being occupied in the north, Nguyen Anh took advantage of this to seize Gia Dinh (1788). After some time, having strengthened his forces, he pushed his offensive northward. The deaths of Nguyen Hue in 1792, of Nguyen Nhac in 1793, and the accession to the throne of Nguyen Hue's son, Quang Toan, only ten years old, brought about a series of internal dissensions which weakened the Tay Son considerably. In the meantime Nguyen Anh carried out an artful policy which gradually strengthened his position. From 1790 to 1800 the two adversaries carried on an indecisive war, the main stake being the city of Quy Nhon, which changed hands several times.

After 1800, Nguyen Anh got the upper hand and pressed his attacks northward. In 1801, while the Tay Son forces were immobilized around Quy Nhon, those of the Nguyen captured Phu Xuan where Nguyen Anh established his headquarters. In 1802, his forces were

ready to march northward to conquer the Red River delta. On June 1, 1802, before undertaking this expedition, he proclaimed himself king, under the name of GIA LONG. The Tay Son offered only sporadic resistance. On July 20, Nguyen Anh entered Thang Long, inaugurating a new dynasty, that of the NGUYEN.

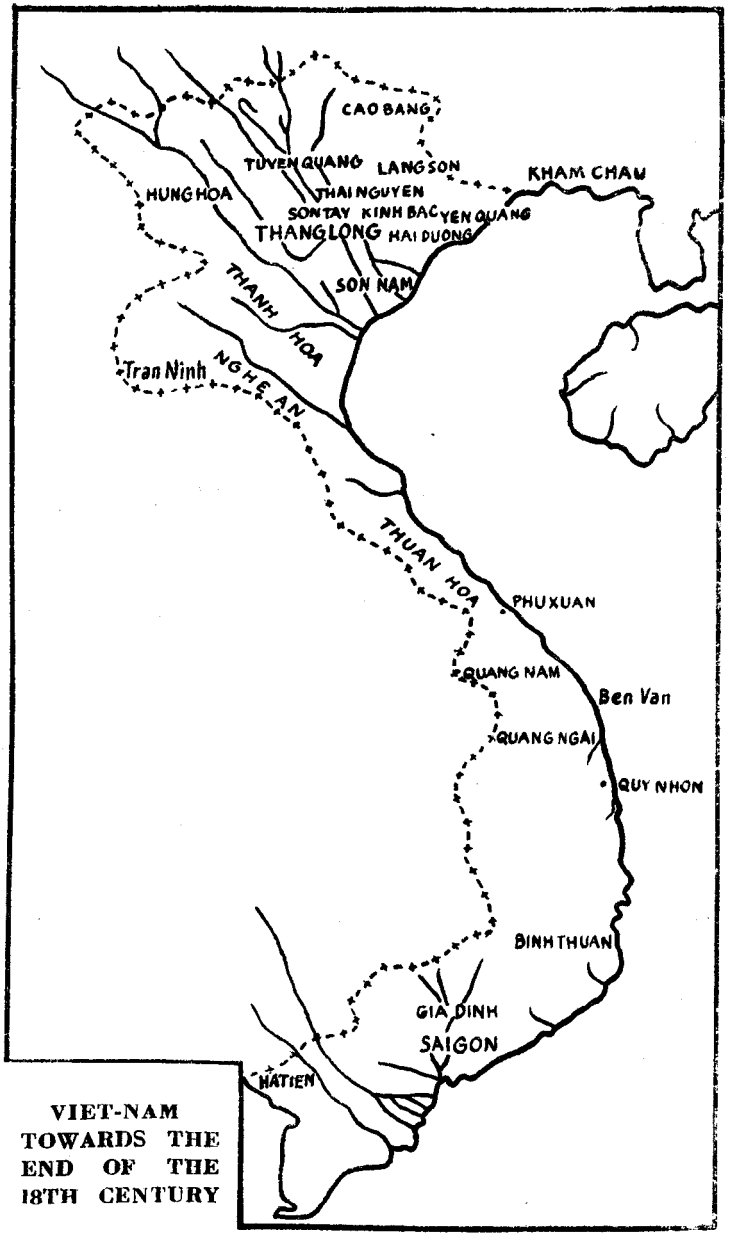
*

The Tay Son had been brought to power by the great movement of peasant insurrections in the 18th century; merchant elements had joined in without however playing a foremost role. Nguyen Hue's military and political genius, relying on this vast force of the revolted peasantry, had enabled the insurrection to win rapid, sometimes lightning, successes. One can never over-emphasize the importance of the Tay Son who had the merit of reunifying the country, long divided by the Trinh-Nguyen secession, and the glory of having twice saved the fatherland, from the Siamese then from the Tsing invasions. To the credit of the Tay Son, one must cite also economic and cultural reforms which had brought about peace and prosperity during a short period of time.

The Tay Son movement however presented weaknesses inherent in its very nature. The revolted peasantry, though constituting a great force, could not assume the tasks of renovating feudal society torn by insurmountable contradictions. The equal distribution of property could not constitute a basis for a revolutionary program or a new regime. In the 18th century, Vietnamese society still lacked a social class associated

with a new mode of production and a new ideology. The merchant class, certainly in progress in comparison with the previous centuries, remained however in an embryonic state incapable of providing leadership to the movement. Neither the development of handicrafts nor the starting of exchanges with the West in the 17th century could promote the development of a sufficiently strong bourgeoisie.

The result was that the leadership of the movement, after a seething period, could only return to feudal forms. The "rebels" established a new monarchy, promulgated some reforms, but did not touch the very basis of the feudal system, the system of land ownership. Feudal ideas continued to prevail in all spheres, social and ideological. The division of power among the three Tay Son brothers, and the internal dissensions that followed, also sprang from feudalism; the administrative machine of the Tay Son simply carried on the work of former dynasties with the same methods of government. Following Nguyen Hue's death, the first reforms soon tapered off and the new dynasty quickly lost its authority. The big landowners of Gia Dinh, then those of other provinces, supported Nguyen Anh and eventually succeeded in overthrowing the Tay Son and restoring feudalism in its most reactionary forms. With Gia Long, Viet-nam entered a dark period. When French troops began their conquest, in 1858, they found before them a most backward monarchy, more anxious to preserve its privileges than the national interests. Though the people valiantly resisted the aggression, the Hue Court was defeatist, and eventually surrendered. The colonial period began.



VIET-NAM TOWARDS THE END OF THE 18TH CENTURY

V — CULTURAL EVOLUTION

FROM THE 17th CENTURY TO THE BEGINNING OF THE 19th

THE degeneration of the feudal regime, which began in the 17th century and resulted in a profound and irremediable crisis in the 18th, had a deep repercussion in the cultural field. While Confucianism, the official ideology, fell into an unprecedented crisis, popular effervescence and certain elements of renewal instilled a new spirit into national culture. The literature in *nôm* (national and popular language) showed considerable development, taking a great lead over that written in classical Chinese. The Tay Son dynasty was overthrown in 1802, and a period of feudal restoration began. However, one may say that in the cultural field, many works which came into being in the beginning of the 19th century had in fact been conceived in the 18th and bore its hallmark and spirit. (For instance, KIEU and NGUYEN DU's work as a whole). This time-lag between political and cultural history is frequent. That is why we includes in this chapter the cultural history of the beginning of the 19th century.

The Crisis of Confucian Ideology

SINCE the 15th century, Confucianism had been the only one on the map, having become the official doctrine of the monarchical State and mandarin bureaucracy. While shoving aside all mysticism and

containing positive elements inspired by practical humanism, it relied on extreme social conservatism, and strict ritualism—two factors which kept man prisoner of an immutable social hierarchy, stereotyped deportment, and cut-and-dried moralism. As the feudal regime underwent a process of degeneration, the negative aspects of Confucianism finally prevailed. Confucianism taught absolute loyalty to the king, the cornerstone of the whole system. The king reigned by virtue of a mandate from Heaven: his high virtues not only held sway over the social order but also participated in the unfolding of the cosmic order. The whole social hierarchy rested upon that absolute faithfulness to the monarch, and rebellion was held to be not only a political crime, but a religious one as well. So long as monarchy played its centralizing role and was the symbol of national unity, its prestige was maintained. But what with the fading of the Le royalty before the Trinh and Nguyen seigniorial families during two centuries and a succession of debauched and incompetent kings, the idea of absolute respect for the monarch collapsed, and with it, a whole system of moral and spiritual values inherent in the regime. The Confucian scholar could no longer believe in the values he was teaching. After his capture, the scholar PHAM CONG THE, a participant in Le Zuy Mat's revolt, was asked reproachfully by the authorities, "How could a scholar have become a rebel, and lost all sense of hierarchy and social value?" He replied: "*For a long time already, all idea of hierarchy and value has disappeared. How can one distinguish between the rebel and those who are supposed to be on the right path?*"

The mandarin regime, the mainstay of feudal monarchy, drew its prestige from the competitions held in great pomp. Those who ruled in the name of the king were supposed to have been recruited from among the most virtuous and best educated. Candidates went through regional, then central competitions before being awarded the much-coveted title of *tien si* (doctor). The examination-papers included commentaries on classical texts, the writing of an administrative document (edict or proclamation by the king), the composition of a poem or a piece of rhythmical prose, a moral or philosophical dissertation. Out of several thousand candidates, only about a hundred passed the regional competitions and even less the central competitions. The latter received the greatest honours and enjoyed very high prestige. Between 1529 and 1787, 102 competitions were held and 1,136 candidates became *tien-si*.

With the decadence of the regime, the system of competitions also degenerated. The examination-papers became exercises of pure rhetoric on outworn scholastic themes. The candidates contented themselves with reproducing models and clichés and indulged in empty exercises of style. The historian Le Qui Don (18th century) wrote: "*Our elders had composed texts which read well; their successors simply copied them after trimming them of long-drawn parts.*" Frauds were frequent, which lowered the value of the competitions; and when mandarin offices were put up for sale, the prestige of the system suffered a severe blow. The result was the coming into being of an incompetent, unscrupulous and greedy mandarin bureaucracy, whose

members no longer possessed either the cultural or moral value of men of past centuries.

The decadence of Confucianism gave rise to a certain renascence of Buddhism. Kings and lords set about building pagodas ; frustrated scholars entered monastic life, while the people sought solace to their miseries in that religion. Those conditions oriented a few minds towards Taoism, which also showed some renewal. Many people adopted a syncretic attitude, uniting all three doctrines — Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism — into a more or less successful synthesis.

The moral and ideological crisis of the regime also allowed Catholic missionaries to win converts, particularly in the 17th century. The first nuclei of Vietnamese Catholicism date back to that period. With Catholicism, as we have seen above, the *quoc ngu* script was created, in which the Vietnamese language was transcribed into Latin characters.

The Development of *nôm* Literature

THE crisis of Confucianism had one positive aspect; it freed many minds from a sterilizing ideology. Liberated from dogmas and carried away by a popular movement of which the most outstanding manifestations were great peasant insurrections, many people, especially poets and writers, cast a critical glance at the old society and sought to express new aspirations. Fresh themes appeared, which required new forms, while the language became richer, more concise and

more flexible. Many historical works were also written, while medicine showed new progress.

Whereas historical and medical studies continued to be written in classical Chinese, *nôm* prevailed in literature. It was a veritable turning point which saw the coming into pre-eminence of *nôm*, although classical Chinese remained in use until the early 20th century.

Stories and Fables of the 17th Century

A characteristic feature of that period was the appearance of stories and fables written in *nôm*, a new genre in national literature. Criticisms of feudal society, love themes, and humanistic ideas began to come out in these works.

The Story of Vuong Tuong reflects the image of a corrupt court, a parasitic mandarin bureaucracy, and an unjust society which tramples on the lives of women. *The Story of the Toad and the Catfish* is a fable with animal characters which denounces the notables' and mandarins' habit of taking advantage of the least law-suit to extort money from the people. In another fable, *The Virtuous Mouse*, the author castigates the debauchery of important personages and praises the chastity of ordinary women.

Written in the form of a fairy tale, *The Story of Bach Vien and Ton Cac* sings the love between two young people freed from feudal shackles. Also noteworthy among the works of the 17th century is *Thien*

Nam Ngu Luc, a historical story in verse (8,136 lines) which recounts the history of the country from the beginnings to the fall of the Mac (1592).

Literary Development in the 18th Century

The stories and fables of the 17th century heralded the full bloom of the 18th. *Nôm* literature was to gain marked prominence, especially on account of the quality of the works. The influence of popular oral literature increased both as regards the language and the content of written works. The simple and flexible daily speech, the colourful expressions in proverbs and songs, and the satirical content of popular stories went into literary works. Great authors created a successful synthesis of popular speech and classical literary language, of popular wisdom and classical Chinese culture, in original works written in a lively and expressive language. It was a real turning point in the evolution of the Vietnamese tongue. Poetry showed fine progress.

The greatest development was displayed by stories and novels in verse, most of them written by anonymous authors. The 17th-century story had a rather simple plot. That of the 18th was to become more complicated, with more scope, multiple episodes, and vividly-depicted characters.

Also worthy of note was the appearance of satire in the form of poems and stories in which official personages of feudal society, even the king himself, were ridiculed. This criticism of feudal society was also found

in novels in verse, in which were depicted corrupt and cruel mandarins and tyrannical and debauched kings. Historical chronicles revealed life at the royal court as rotten with debauchery, intrigues, and plots between various factions.

We shall mention only the more important authors and works.

The Great Poets of the 18th Century

In poetry, stress should be laid on two great works: *Chinh Phu* (Laments of a Soldier's Wife) and *Cung Oan* (Laments of an Odalisque); and on the satirical poems of HO XUAN HUONG.

CHINH PHU, written in classical Chinese by DANG TRAN CON, is better known through its translation into *nôm* by the poetess DOAN THI DIEM. It is a long poem (408 lines) which depicts the sorrow and anguish, and also the hopes of a woman whose husband has gone to war. In classical feudal works, war is often represented as an occasion for subjects to prove their loyalty to the king and conquer glory; but here, it only brings sufferings, separation, misery. The endless wars waged by kings and feudal lords to consolidate their privileges or get rid of their rivals no longer evoked any enthusiasm. *Chinh Phu* echoed the anti-war popular songs. The *nôm* translation was made into a delicate but simple language, a very musical one which subtly describes the feelings of a warrior's wife. For the first time a literary work was centered on the inner sentiments of a woman; it was a truly romantic work.

CUNG OAN was written by NGUYEN GIA THIEU (1741- 1798). It portrays a beautiful and talented woman who is forced to lead a solitary life in the royal seraglio, forsaken by the king. The author was a descendant of a great mandarin family allied with the Trinh and a close witness of the decadence of feudal monarchy; his work denounced one of the most retrograde aspects of that regime.

Woman's fate, depicted in *Cung Oan* and *Chinh Phu*, was to become one of the main themes of the work of the poetess HO XUAN HUONG, who no longer was content to lament but resolutely attacked. Male supremacy was no longer recognized; it was society, not nature, which relegated woman to an inferior status.

If only I could change my destiny and be a man,
I wouldn't content myself with such feats of valour.

Though a learned scholar, she did not shrink from using a popular and very colourful language, rich in bold expressions, and handled risky words and spicy phrases in a masterly fashion without ever sliding into vulgarity. She pitilessly chastised hypocritical pharisees, unmasked social conventions, vehemently protested against polygamy. In an inimitable style fraught with allusions and *double entendre*, she castigated the most respected personages of feudal society. Thus her poem "The Fan", after suggestive allusions, ends with this line:

Kings and lords only love that little thing.

It was a direct attack on the debauchery of the Le kings and the Trinh lords. Buddhist bonzes were not spared either:

Before the reverends are big trays of delicacies,
Behind them lurk graceful nuns.

The poetess reserved her affection for unhappy women, and did not hesitate to take up the defence of unmarried mothers in that strait-laced society. A very popular author, Ho Xuan Huong holds a very special place in Vietnamese literature.

Satirical Stories

Satire against feudal society assumes a systematic form in the popular stories TRANG QUYNH (Doctor Quynh) and TRANG LON (Doctor Pig). *Trang Quynh* attacked the Trinh lords directly and in name. One of the characters is a Trinh lord, corrupt, mean, and debauched, who is hoodwinked at every turn by "Doctor" Quynh, in spite of all the power at his disposal.

Trang Lon tells the story of a poor down-and-out who, through a series of strokes of luck, reaches the top of the mandarin hierarchy, is appointed ambassador to China where he greatly impresses the Emperor, and eventually grabs all power in his hands, his "genius" being recognized by all the Court. The incompetence of kings and mandarins is exposed in a series of comical adventures.

Novels in Verse by Anonymous Authors

The blossoming of stories and novels in verse marked a new literary stage, with new themes. For the

first time in a feudal society in whose ideology no room was left for individual aspirations, new sentiments emerged, in particular the claim of the individual for free love, for a free development of his capabilities, and for a more just society in which he could find happiness; more especially, women courageously defended love based on free choice and opposed marriages imposed by their families. Formerly, woman had been so to speak absent from literature; a few verses or songs likened her to "a drop of rain, which cannot know where it will fall" or "a silk scarf destined for unknown hands." Now, the heroines of the 18th-century novels picked the men of their choice against opposition by their families and fought hard whenever their happiness was threatened. Their love was sung in romantic accents.

In another respect, the works were realistic by their critical description of feudal society: some positive characters were drawn in a vivid manner. Thus humanistic tendencies appeared in opposition to the sterilizing moralism of Confucianism. It was not yet a complete, coherent humanism, as in the European Renaissance, but the new ideas none the less instilled a breath of renewal into Vietnamese literature of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th. The great peasant insurrections and a certain development of the mercantile economy gave a new impulsion to literature.

It should be noted that many novels borrowed themes from Chinese stories, just as French classical works of the 17th century took over Greek or Roman themes.

The main works of this type were: *Phan Tran, Tong Tran Cuc Hoa, Pham Cong Cuc Hoa, Hoang Truu, Ly Cong*. A special place must be reserved for the story of THACH SANH, the woodcutter who gets the better of monsters and foreign invaders, a hero sprung from the toiling people, the saviour of the country, a man who is courageous, valiant and human. Thach Sanh's only possessions are a loincloth and an axe, but he defeats all enemies and surmounts all difficulties.

Nguyen Du and Kieu (1)

Although the works of NGUYEN DU (1765-1820) (pronounce ZU) appeared only in the early years of the 19th century, they belonged incontestably to the 18th by their content and style. They depicted social convulsions in the 18th century, expressed humanistic aspirations, criticized feudal society. A member of a great mandarin family in the service of the Le, Nguyen Du was forced to retire to his native village when the latter were overthrown by the Tay Son. Later he served under Gia Long. The upheavals he witnessed greatly impressed him, and so did the years he spent in the countryside close to the people. This was shown in his deep compassion for the latter's misery, his occasional outbursts of anger

(1) For a more detailed study of Nguyen Du and his work, read Vietnamese Studies N°4: "Nguyen Du and Kieu".

against kings and mandarins, and his profound sympathy for unhappy lives. It appeared also in his irremediable pessimism.

Nguyen Du left many poems in classical Chinese, a famous one in *nôm — Calling the Wandering Souls* — and a masterpiece, KIEU. In his poems in classical Chinese, he describes the fate of the poor in poignant terms. In *Calling the Wandering Souls*, he gives a sombre picture of society where people of all walks of life meet with unhappiness and misery. In contrast, he depicts greedy mandarins, who throw away food after stuffing themselves rather than give it to the poor, and "eat human flesh like barley-sugar".

With *Kieu*, Nguyen Du reached the peak of his art. This 3,254-line poem relates the story of a beautiful and talented young woman, doomed to fifteen years of tribulations by the cupidity of a mandarin. Hardly had it come out when it met with growing fame. Illiterate peasants knew long passages of it by heart, while learned scholars considered it an unsurpassable masterpiece. This extraordinary success was due as much to the beauty of the language as to the content of the poem.

Nguyen Du succeeded in making a remarkable synthesis of popular speech and classical literary language. *Kieu* marked an important stage in the history of the Vietnamese language, which it contributed to making richer and more flexible by giving it unequalled precision and conciseness. A romantic, Nguyen Du knows how to sing the beauty of a landscape, as well as to express the feelings contained in a

lover's heart, sorrow, melancholy, despair, or triumphant joy. A realist, he can in just a few words portray a character or describe a scene. The novel is written with a remarkable economy of means, without any long-drawn passages. At no time does the reader's interest slacken.

Kieu's great fame is due not only to the beauty of its form but also to its content. In this great realistic work, Nguyen Du denounces oppressive and corrupt feudalism: not a single mandarin character in *Kieu* is portrayed in sympathetic terms. Beautiful Kieu's misfortunes spring from the greediness of a mandarin who, for a bribe, does not hesitate to wreck the happiness of a whole family. A shiver runs down the reader's spine when he penetrates into the Prime Minister's palace; at the same time he finds the atmosphere stifling, for the First Marshall at the Court, in order to get the upper hand over his enemy, does not shrink from a felonious scheme. On the other hand, in face of the monarchy, the "rebel" Tu Hai cuts a fine figure, "moving heaven and earth, deporting himself proudly, recognizing only the star-dotted sky to be above his head." This glorification of a rebel in a Confucian society stamps the author as a truly bold spirit. Tu Hai reminds one of the great leaders of peasant insurrections, Nguyen Huu Cau and Nguyen Hue in particular, who left unforgettable memories.

It was no less courageous of the author to sing the love of two young people, who meet of their own free choice. What is more, it is the girl who in the absence of her parents decides to go and see her

sweetheart. What a scandal for a society in which the woman must show the most complete filial submission! The most passionate lines are devoted to describing the tender feelings and effusions of the lovers: love based on free choice, so much frowned upon by feudal society, found in Nguyen Du its poet. Shoved aside was the sacrosanct notion of faithfulness which obliged the woman to devote her life to only one man and to remain "loyal" to her husband even after his death. In her tribulations, Kieu is forced to sell herself several times: she knows her second passionate love when she meets a hero worthy of her. This second love, which a Confucian scholar would blame vehemently, is ardently defended by Nguyen Du. Confucian puritanism prohibited all allusion to carnal love; yet Nguyen Du dared to write about it, without ever sliding into vulgarity. Kieu, forced by a ferocious society to prostitute herself, is able to say to her loyal sweetheart that she has remained pure in spite of all trials, and that faithfulness in love must be conceived from a much more human angle than in the view of the pharisees. Amidst the convulsions and upheavals of the 18th century, love was part of the new aspirations and was sung by Nguyen Du.

However, Nguyen Du's work bears the mark of his century: The Tay Son's defeat tolled the knell of the high hopes raised by the peasant insurrections. With the coming to power of Gia Long, Viet-nam fell back into the darkness of feudalism. No prospect was opened before those who struggled and those who meditated on man's fate. Nguyen Du deeply sympathized with the sufferings

of the people, felt the aspirations seething in their hearts, but was lost in the blind alley of his reflections on human bondage. Confucianism no longer offered sufficient explanation to so much misery and injustice. He had to fall back on Buddhist theses, yet without much faith in them. But those ideological contradictions did not prevent Nguyen Du from being a very great poet, whose work is still deeply loved by all. (Through many translations, it is now widely known in the world.)

Historical Studies and Works

PARALLEL to that literary blossoming, many historical works were written: official annals, monographs, chronicles.

Dai Viet Su Ky Toan Thu (Complete History of Dai Viet), published in 1697, comprised 24 volumes and was compiled under the direction of NGO SI LIEN; it relates the history of the country from the beginnings to the 17th century. Among the other works, let us mention *Le Trieu Thong Su* (History of the Le Dynasty) by Le Quy Don, with a preface dated 1789; *Phu Bien Tap Luc*, by the same author, which includes six volumes and gives much information on geography, economics, the administration, ways and customs in the days of the Nguyen; also by Le Quy Don, *Kien Van Tieu Luc*, a collection of notes and documents on institutions, outstanding men, rules and regulations, beauty spots, mines, Buddhist sects, from the Tran to the Le periods.

LE QUY DON (1726-1783) was not only a historian but also a true encyclopaedist. While carrying out high civilian and military responsibilities at the Trinh Court, he collected documents and studied concrete realities for his works. His intellectual curiosity led him to study, among other things, rice strains, and Chinese translations of Western works on the rotundity of the earth — a view which he adopted. Besides his books on history, he left a kind of encyclopaedia, *Van Dai Loai Ngu*, in one chapter of which he expounded his conception of the universe. Contemporary philosophical debates were about the primacy of either *Ly* (logos) or *Khi* (breath, substance); of either *Vo Cuc* (nothingness) or *Thai Cuc* (the Prime Being). Le Quy Don wrote:

"Thai Cuc is one. It is a prime, undifferentiated substance which undergoes ceaseless transformation while subsisting eternally. One cannot say that being comes out of nothingness (...) Prime and undifferentiated khi *is the substance of all beings and exists before all beings.* Ly *has no form; it exists only thanks to* khi, *and is included in* khi *itself."*

He insisted on the constancy of natural phenomena: *"Heaven is tens of thousands of leagues from earth. Yet, with the help of a few figures, one may determine the positions and trajectories of celestial bodies. So, while the Being is immense and its manifestations limitless and marvellous, it follows none the less a constant rule."*

One easily understands that Le Quy Don's inquisitive mind was active in many fields: his was a pre-scientific mind born in the upheavals of the 18th century.

Among the historical chronicles, one must especially mention *Hoang Le Nhat Thong Chi* (Chronicles of the Le Dynasty) which gives a vivid description of the plots and intrigues which rent the Le and Trinh Courts. *Vu Trung Tuy But* (Essays Written in the Rain) by PHAM DINH HO (1768-1839) is a collection of notes and remarks on the institutions, ways and customs in the times of the last Le kings. The same author also wrote, in collaboration with NGUYEN AN 1770-1815, *Tang Thuong Ngau Luc*, a collection of stories mostly about the 18th century. *Thuong Kinh Ky Su* (Journey to the Capital) by the physician LE HUU TRAC also gives precious information about life at the Trinh Court.

Le Huu Trac and the Development of Medicine

WITH Le Huu Trac (1720-1791), better known under his pseudonym HAI THUONG LAN ONG, medical studies made much progress. A learned scholar, he shunned a mandarin career, retired to his village, and devoted his life to the study of medicine. Following decades of observation and study, he wrote a medical treatise in 28 volumes, 66 parts, which includes:

— a theoretical section;

— a section on pathology, with special studies on small-pox, measles, infantile diseases, women's diseases;

— a section on drugs;

— a section on pharmacology;

— a collection of clinical observations ;
— a section on hygiene.

Lan Ong's merit is to have laid the foundation of a medicine based on observation of clinical facts, climatic conditions, and the properties of local plants and products. His observations and formulas remain of great value even to the present day. He had a thorough grasp of classical Chinese medical theories, but relied mostly on observation. His medical data were collected with great care, being in his mind documents to be confronted with the experience of others. Another great principle of his was the importance of hygiene in disease prevention ; hygiene being taken in its extensive sense as organisation of daily life. Lan Ong did not forget to give advice to housewives on questions of food and clothing.

He also laid down the principles of a humanistic medical deontology. He wrote :

"Medicine is a human art, which must seek to preserve life, attend to man's illnesses and sorrows, and help him, without caring about wealth or honours.

" Rich men do not lack physicians, but the poor can hardly afford good ones. One must pay especial attention to them.

" Medicine is a noble art. We must strive to preserve our moral purity."

Scientific and humanist, Le Huu Trac was a typical precursor of the great figures of the 18th century.

NATIONAL TRADITIONS AND REVOLUTIONARY STRUGGLE IN VIET-NAM

CONCLUDING NOTES

THE Vietnamese land is no free gift from nature. For more than four thousand years men have conquered it, inch by inch, from a grudging nature. Floods, drought, typhoons — year after year, century after century, the men of Viet-nam have never ceased fighting them. Dykes containing the rivers, levees keeping the water in ricefields, canals, ditches, ponds, lakes, dams — the Vietnamese man never ceases working the soil, which is soaked with his blood and sweat. One easily understands why he is so deeply attached to his land.

This struggle, waged every day for centuries, calls for organization. Village and country remain the solid framework without which man could not face the elements. Neither could he confront other dangers, which are the doings of men. For two thousand years, the Vietnamese man has had to repel many foreign aggressions; each time, all energies have had to be mobilized.

In this twofold struggle against nature and foreign aggression, the men in the deltas and those in the mountains have had to make common cause. The products of the plains and the sea are indispensable to the mountaineers, just as wood and other forest products are to the plain-dwellers. Whereas the plains supply the bulk of manpower for defence, the mountains constitute a strategic barrier for the country, and a bastion in case of retreat.

Thus was gradually formed the Vietnamese country and nation, with its well-demarcated territory, its

own language, its specific culture, and especially a history whose main characteristic remains stubborn resistance to all aggressors, no matter how powerful.

*

This unified nation, however, did not have a homogeneous social body—like all nations where class struggle is going on. Deep contradictions took place within it and decided its historical course.

The most fundamental one opposed those who tilled the soil to those who owned it. This land tilled at the cost of so much effort, this land soaked with sweat and tears did not belong to those who had conquered it. At the centre of Vietnamese history stood the peasant, grim and heroic defender of the land bequeathed by his ancestors against foreign aggressors, but also periodically rising up against the home rulers, in an endless revolt.

The integration of mountain and plain-dwellers into a single nation was also hindered by the exploitation and oppression exerted by the feudalists in the delta against ethnic minorities living in the mountains. The latter's frequent revolts constituted a serious weakness of the former monarchy.

*

History is at the same time continuity and revolution.

The resolute and victorious resistance of the Vietnamese people to the French colonialists then to the American imperialists continues a tradition begun as

early as the first century by the TRUNG sisters. The present-day people's armed forces continue the tradition of the peasant-soldiers instituted by the Ly and Tran dynasties, which made it possible to defeat the Mongol invaders in the 13th century. The combination of guerilla and regular warfare and that of armed and political struggle were already practised by NGUYEN TRAI in the 15th century.

However, modern imperialism has at its disposal means that feudal invaders of yore did not: sophisticated techniques, policy and machinery for ideological warfare. Neither the traditional methods of combat nor the forms of struggle borrowed from the practice of Western bourgeoisie are adequate. In order to lead the national struggle to victory, it is necessary to wage, parallel to it, a radical, uninterrupted revolution. While continuing the past, one must break up the old structures, give land to the tillers, dismantle the old administrations and ideologies, inspire new ideas, mobilize all energies.

The peasantry has found in the working class and its party both an ally and a guide, and for the first time, has been able to put its immense strength in the service of a cause of the future. While coming onto the historical stage to defend its own interests, the working class has assumed a leading role in the national struggle.

*

Without leadership by a Marxist-Leninist party, there would have been in Viet-nam neither a people's army, nor a national front, nor a correct national and international policy. The national movement would have been mercilessly crushed by the Japanese, the French, then the Americans. It is not by accident

that HO CHI MINH the first Vietnamese Marxist, appears in the eyes of all as the most resolute and the most consistent patriot. Some would like to oppose Ho Chi Minh's patriotism to his Marxism. This simply means that they understand nothing to either.

National struggle leads to social revolution, which crowns it and gives it its true meaning; national liberation should be accompanied by the liberation of the labouring classes, otherwise it would be purely formal; on the other hand, social revolution could not be accomplished without doing away with all dependence, even covered, on imperialism. The country's feudal and reactionary forces could draw strength only from their ties with imperialism, American imperialism in the first place.

The building of socialism in North Viet-nam gives its full historical sense to the national and democratic struggle which is being victoriously waged by the South Vietnamese population against American imperialism; on the other hand, the South Vietnamese people's victorious fight gives effective protection to the revolutionary achievements in the North. In spite of a dephased social evolution, North and South having adopted different structures, this dephasing being essentially due to brutal intervention by imperialist forces, never has the unity of the Vietnamese people, of the Vietnamese nation, been expressed in such real and forceful manner as in the fierce common struggle against American aggression.

In Cu Chi, not far from Saigon, whole villages have been entirely razed by American artillery and aircraft, B.52s included. Yet, whenever American troops come, men rush out of underground galleries and decimate them. Cu Chi

remains a free land. When old folks of Cu Chi are asked why they should cling to a land where not a tree is left standing, they answer: "Here lie the tombs of our ancestors. We shall stay here at all costs." In Viet-nam one cannot violate the tombs of people's ancestors and get away with it.

Meanwhile in the North, in order to level ricefields and arrange new plots fit for scientific rice-growing, in many villages, tombs scattered among the ricefields are being grouped into cemeteries. Those who in the South are clinging to their ancestors' tombs and those in the North who are moving them to new sites belong to the same people. They are inspired by the same feeling. The land bequeathed by the ancestors is being defended by the ones, embellished by the others.

Those ignorant of history will fail to understand many a thing in present-day Viet-nam, but those who forget that a radical revolution is unfolding will be grossly mistaken if they wish to appeal to outdated historical notions.

The French command learnt it at its own expense in 1953-1954 *when in the Dien Bien Phu campaign it wanted to play upon the antagonism which historically opposed mountaineers to delta people and which French officers had skilfully used in the* 19th *century in order to weaken the Vietnamese resistance. In* 1953-1954, *in both North and South, mountain-dweeling people had become full-fledged citizens in the new Viet-nam, having acquired rights and advantages never known to their ancestors. And so they ardently participated in the common national struggle. The ethnic minorities of the Southern plateaux have turned their mountains into an inexpugnable bastion against the Americans and their valets. In the*

North, with new technical and economic means, economic and cultural integration has been quickly realized, the individuality of each nationality being fully respected, and the mountain regions receive substantial aid from the delta. The Vietnamese nation, while safeguarding the originality of each ethnic group, has achieved unity at a much higher level than formerly.

*

While guns are crashing, Vietnamese archaeologists are digging the soil in search of traces of men of former times, scientists are probing secrets of nature in laboratories, Party and State leaders are working out an orientation for technical and scientific development over the coming twenty years.

The past, the present and the future are inextricably linked together; never has the Vietnamese man lived such a fully historic period.

Historic not only in the national, but also in the international sense. The Vietnamese people know that they are supported by the forces of progress all over the world. They know that they are part and parcel of the irresistible movement carrying the world forward.

Running counter to the stream of history, American aggression against Viet-nam can only end in failure.

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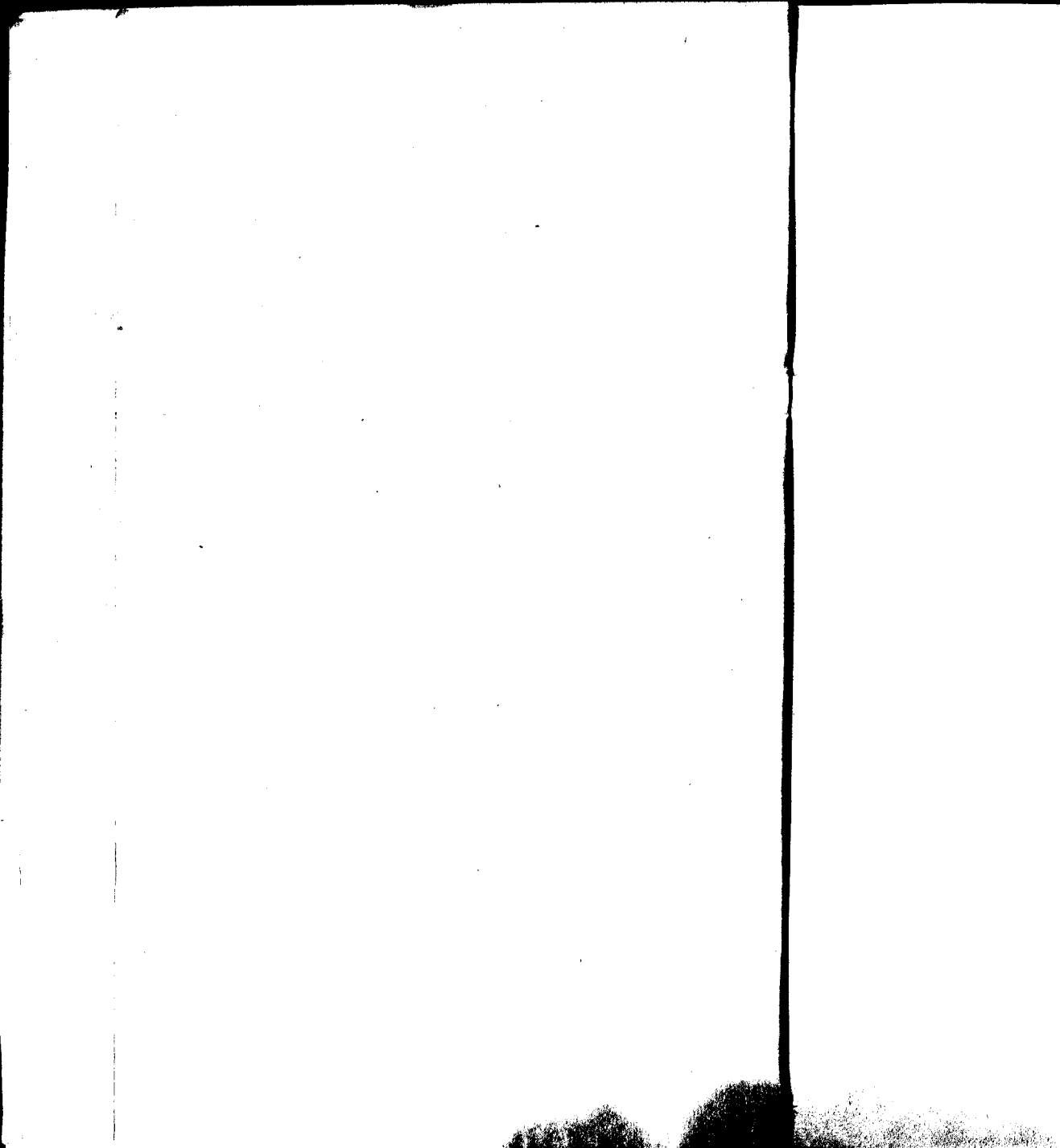

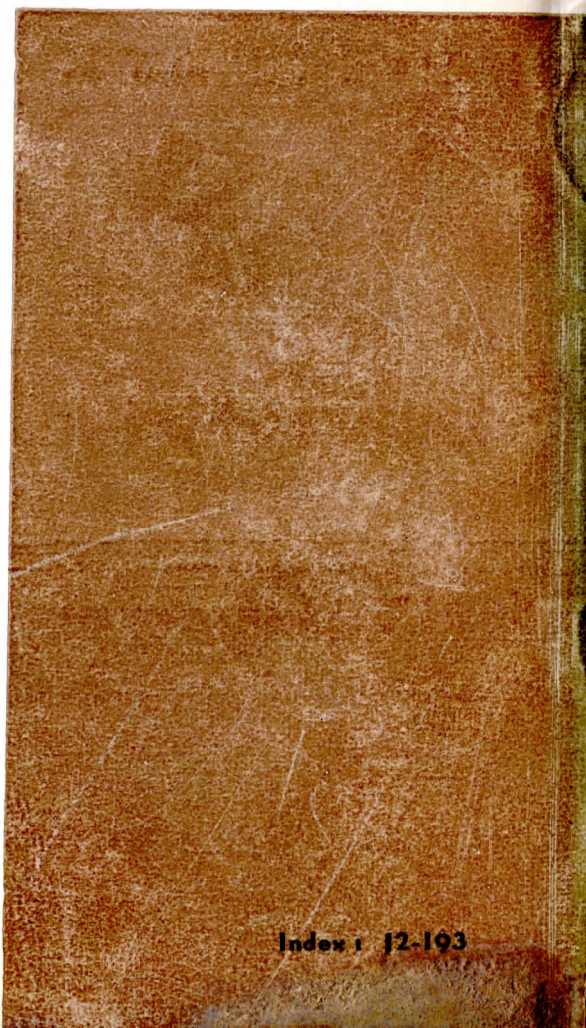

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