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Rebellion and Rule under Consular Optics: Changing Ways of Seeing the China-Vietnam Borderlands, 1874–1879

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Abstract

This article contributes to the continuing discussion concerning the changing relationships between China and its neighbors in the nineteenth century. Focusing on Vietnam, a country within the metaphorical framework of the “tribute system,” it analyzes the complex range of relationships in the borderlands during the 1870s. Following the establishment of French consular offices in northern Vietnam, rebellions, counterinsurgency, communities, and commerce in the borderlands fell under a new kind of official gaze, one that ultimately provided self-serving justification to advocates of French imperialism in Southeast Asia. As emblems of foreign influence, French consulates soon became elements in factional struggles that unfolded within the Vietnamese bureaucracy over the role of China in Vietnam, the employment of surrendered bandits as officials, and borderlands administration.

Keywords: borderlands, frontiers, French imperialism, rebellion, Nguyễn Vietnam, French Indochina, Qing Empire, Li Yangcai, Alexandre de Kergaradec, Black Flags, Liu Yongfu, Yellow Flags, Hoàng Kế Viêm

Introduction

In the final week of October 1879, Li Yangcai was decapitated in China. A former military officer who rebelled against his commanders, Li had proclaimed himself the previous year a direct descendant of the founder of the Vietnamese Lý dynasty (1009–1225). Beginning in the China-Vietnam borderlands, he launched a rebellion that spread as far south as Thái Nguyên and Bắc Ninh, just north of Hanoi (figure 1). Upon his arrest in 1879, Li Yangcai was brought back to southern China and executed. His severed head, however, was returned to northern Vietnam.

Authorities from the borderlands to Bắc Ninh put it on display as evidence of his rebellion's defeat.

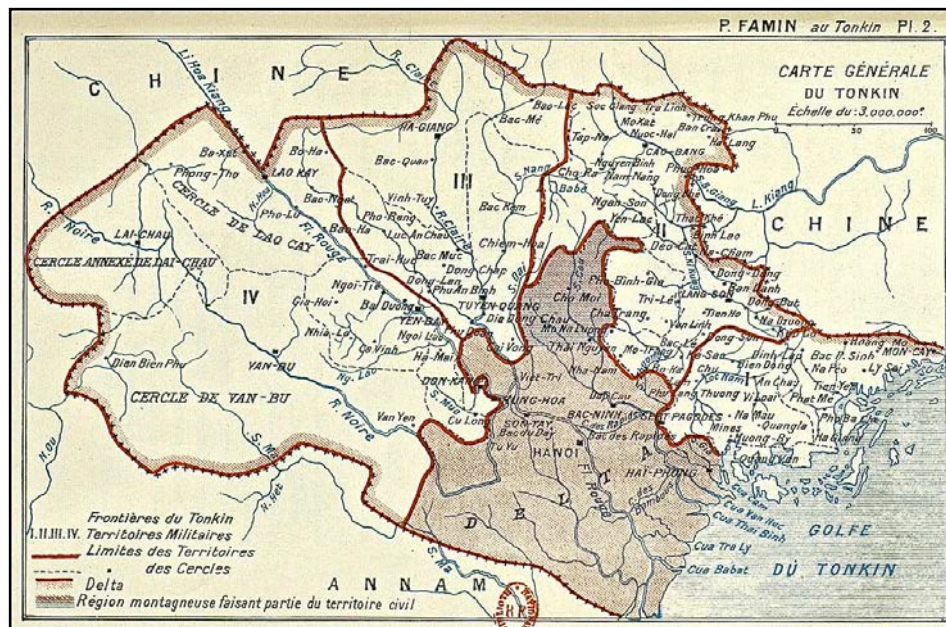


Figure 1. China-Vietnam borderlands. *Source*: Famin (1895, inserted between pp. 4 and 5).

The movement of people within the borderlands between China and Vietnam was nothing new; it involved ordinary workers and traders, refugees from war and rebellion, as well as rebels such as Li Yangcai. Since at least the first century C.E., this area had been a site of contested sovereignties. Although managed through the formal relationship of the states or, at times, *empires* of China and Vietnam, the space between these two countries was often a site for negotiation. Despite the institutional existence of the tribute system, whereby Vietnam (or other states, such as Korea or the Southeast Asian trading empire of Srivijaya) formally acknowledged the regional hegemony of China, events in the borderlands often defied notions of Vietnamese acceptance of Chinese civilizational supremacy. As the historian of Vietnam Keith Taylor has noted, “There is no such thing as the Sino-Vietnamese relationship as a single, definable model of engagement; dynasties and governments have through time entertained a succession of relationships that cover the full spectrum between war and amity” (1998, 971). During the

nineteenth century, the particular relationship between Nguyễn Vietnam and the Qing Empire provided a platform for both cooperative counterinsurgency and, to the frustration of the authorities, transborder rebellion. After the mid-nineteenth century, this relationship, as well as rebellions such as Li Yangcai's, transpired under the gaze of a new official institution: the French consulate at Hanoi. The French consular view of the official China-Vietnam relationship in general and the contested area of the China-Vietnam borderlands in particular supplied a new image, one that promoted the redemptive role of French colonial rule and the necessary end of the formal tributary relationship between China and Vietnam.

In a thought-provoking study of Qing views regarding British India, historian Matthew Mosca explains the complex nineteenth-century transition from “frontier policy,” typified by fragmentary and localized knowledge, to “foreign policy,” which addressed the concerns of a multipolar world (Mosca 2013). In the borderlands of China and Vietnam, officials from both the Qing Empire and Vietnam faced a changing political situation. As French consular offices gathered information about these borderlands, Qing and Vietnamese officials became the subjects of a new way of seeing the space between Vietnam and China, as did migration, commerce, rebellion, and cooperative counterinsurgency. The disciplining discourse of “French interests” enabled observers to cast borderland events in terms of the failure of the traditional relationship between China and Vietnam to provide a framework for governance. Mosca argues that a “regionally fragmented outlook” characterized the approach of Qing officials to British India throughout the 1830s (Mosca 2013, 164). Concerning Qing relations with the wider world, the case of Vietnam in the 1870s provides a picture of change at an intimate level and in a place traditionally defined through the flexible institution of “tribute.”

During the nineteenth century, the shifting international order, as in the case with Qing views of India, brought important changes to the China-Vietnam borderlands. Under the French consular gaze, the discursive metaphor of the China-Vietnam relationship provided a justification for French military intervention. The traditional trope of the ruling elite became an argument for European imperialism in Vietnam. The existence of consular offices, particularly in Hanoi, facilitated the production of intelligence about the borderlands. This intelligence not only served French commercial interests, the defense of which was a central trope of arguments for colonial

intervention in northern Vietnam, but also signaled a shift in the competing sovereignties of the borderlands themselves. Before the formal establishment of French protectorate rule over Tonkin (northern Vietnam) and Annam (central Vietnam), a consular way of seeing the borderlands set the frame for an extension of French colonial rule from the colony of Cochinchina to the entirety of Nguyễn Vietnam.

The French Consulates of Haiphong and Hanoi

Established in 1874, the French consulates in Vietnam housed diplomatic officials and military. Although technically concerned with the defense of French interests and intended as conduits for a commercial agenda, these consulates became intelligence-gathering posts, nodes for producing information about Vietnam and its northern borderlands. Through a network of contacts, as well as through firsthand investigation, consular officials, particularly in Hanoi, collected material for a series of published reports on the commercial possibilities awaiting investors and *colons-explorateurs* in northern Vietnam. They also attempted, through more clandestine efforts, to carve out a place for France in the China-Vietnam borderlands.

The consulates made possible a way of seeing the borderlands that supported French colonial intervention. Throughout their intelligence work, consular officials developed several core themes: French commercial interests in northern Vietnam were imperiled, Nguyễn authority was venal and weak, French interests could be advanced only once reliable allies were found, and maps and mineral surveys of northern Vietnam had to take place under the supervision of French experts.

The connection between China and Vietnam, refracted through the consular optics, became a justification for French military intervention, an intervention that would arrive in the 1880s in the form of war between China and France. In the 1870s, prior to the Sino-French War (1883–1885), French consulates, as emblems of foreign influence, became elements in factional struggles within the Nguyễn bureaucracy over the role of former Chinese rebels in the Vietnamese administration. These struggles often exposed rifts over the relationship between Nguyễn Vietnam and the Qing Empire.

By considering some events contemporary to the consulates, we can appreciate the refraction, the interested interpretation that separated the consular view of the borderlands from the shared political arrangements of the Chinese and Vietnamese states. While the borderlands may seem, through the consular optics, to be a setting for the realization of French commercial ambitions, the lively terrain between China and Vietnam contained a much more complex, alternatively ordered reality.

The Hanoi Consulate and the Defense of “French Interests”

The French consulates in Hanoi and Haiphong had histories of their own. Their establishment was the direct outcome of the “Garnier affair” of 1873. Francis Garnier, an advocate of colonial expansion, was attempting to overthrow Nguyễn authority in the Red River Delta when he died in battle at the hands of the Black Flags (C: Heiqijun, V: Quân Cờ Đen), then in alliance with the Nguyễn court.

An armed band led by former Chinese rebels, the Black Flags came to Vietnam from southern China in the 1860s. Starting in 1868, the Black Flags received recognition as official allies of the Vietnamese state.¹ When they defeated Garnier in 1873, they defended both the authority of a sovereign Vietnamese state and their own powerful position in northern Vietnam. In the aftermath of the Garnier affair, authorities in Paris demanded an expeditious end to hostilities with Nguyễn Vietnam (Cady 1954, 287–288; Munholland 1979; Taboulet 1955, 738–741; Vũ, Phạm, and Nguyễn 2003, 391–392). The 1874 Philastre (or Giáp Tuất) Treaty, signed by Paul Philastre, Lê Tuấn, and Nguyễn Văn Tường in Saigon, the capital of French Cochinchina, ended the state of hostilities provoked by Garnier. It also included a provision for the establishment of French consulates in Hanoi and Haiphong.

The vague wording of the treaty permitted the consulates to do two things: to sponsor commercial expeditions by French citizens in northern Vietnam (Tonkin) and to gather information about domestic political events (Lê 2005). The Comte de Kergaradec (Alexandre Camille Jules Lejumeau de Kergaradec, 1841–1894), the first head of the Hanoi consulate, carried out this double-themed mission (figure 2). A *lieutenant de vaisseau*, Kergaradec had a career in the French navy prior to assuming the head of the consulate (Masson 1933, 272). Upon

his appointment, he requested reports from merchants and visited with Paul Puginier, the vicar apostolic of Western Tonkin, thus connecting the work of the consulate with commercial and religious networks.² On October 10, 1875, Kergaradec reported to the French colonial government in Cochinchina about the precarious condition of French interests in northern Vietnam. He identified the ineffectuality of the Nguyễn state and the power of the Black Flags as the chief barriers to commerce and trade.³

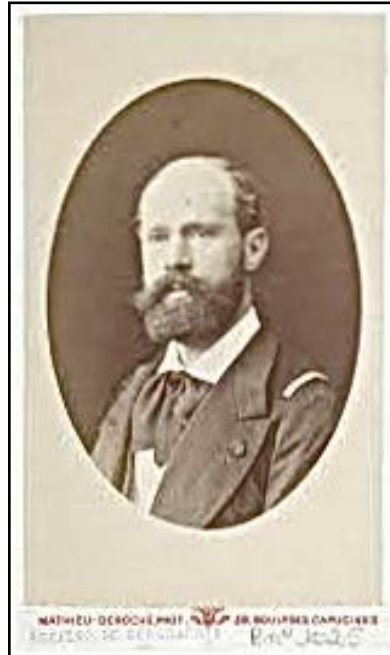


Figure 2. Alexandre Camille Jules Lejumeau, Count of Kergaradec. *Source:* Bibliothèque Nationale de France (<http://gallica.bnf.fr>).

From Hanoi, Kergaradec began to travel around the Red River Delta, making firsthand investigations of northern Vietnam. In January 1876, he visited Sơn Tây, a major market and political center outside Hanoi. In his reports, he produced a picture of a fractured and uneven Vietnamese state. For instance, he met the retired bandit hunter Vũ Trọng Bình, whom he described as a powerful senior official with a reputation for honesty and fairness.⁴ In the same report, he also lamented the condition of Lào Cai, a lucrative trade center on the Red River

between China and Vietnam (figure 3). The town, he complained, was dominated by the Black Flags, despite the fact that it remained, technically, under the rule of Nguyễn Vietnam.⁵



Figure 3. The Red River at Lào Cai, 1876–1877. Photograph by Émile Gsell. *Source*: Ghesquière (2001, 224).

Kergaradec's concern for Lào Cai led him to seek direct negotiations with the Black Flags. On March 22, 1876, in response to a request he made through an intermediary, three people claiming to represent Liu Yongfu, the leader of the Black Flags, paid a visit to Kergaradec at the Hanoi consulate.⁶ Although the Nguyễn authorities in Hanoi as well as the court in Huế would learn about this meeting after the fact, no one from the Black Flags sought permission from Vietnamese officials to enter into discussions with the consulate. The delegation itself consisted of a lieutenant identified as Hoàng Nhị, a relative of Liu, and a secretary (*ĐNTLCB* 1976, 34:113).⁷ According to Kergaradec, they posed three questions: (1) Does France seek revenge for the death of Francis Garnier? (2) Does France intend to take Lào Cai by force? and (3) Will France entertain an offer to purchase the river port from the Black Flags? The envoys presented financial compensation as the only way to induce the Black Flags to leave Lào Cai, thus dislodging what Kergaradec viewed as a significant obstacle to commerce along the Red River.⁸

During this meeting, Kergaradec placated the Black Flags' concerns over French military action while attempting to secure their assistance. No one, Kergaradec assured the delegation, would seek revenge for the death of Garnier. Nor would anyone, acting on behalf of France, attempt to take Lào Cai from the Black Flags by force or by purchase. However, Kergaradec requested a guarantee that French merchants be permitted to pass through the area in peace.⁹ In response, the Black Flag delegation advised him that any exploratory journeys up the Red River into their territory must include a small security force provided by the consulate, refusing to promise safety in the vicinity of Lào Cai.¹⁰

Kergaradec himself made such a journey soon after this clandestine meeting. In November 1876, he assembled a group of twenty, including a photographer named Émile Gsell, and led them from Hanoi to Sơn Tây to meet an official Nguyễn escort.¹¹ Although ostensibly surveying the commercial potential of the area, the consular expedition kept detailed records of the system of customs fees along the Red River, from Sơn Tây to Hưng Hóa town. Salt, for instance, a government monopoly good, attracted a 3 percent to 10 percent duty from Nguyễn authorities in Hưng Hóa. One hundred piculs of salt, valued at 320 *quan*, brought in 32 *quan* in fees for the local government, fees that contributed to the costs, broadly understood, of transporting the salt to market (Kergaradec 1877, 324). Kergaradec also observed that annual fees paid by customs posts to the provincial government placed an additional burden (valued by him at 150,000 francs) on the salt trade (1877, 328).

The expedition recorded that customs posts in Black Flag territory farther to the north demanded a much higher duty. In Bảo Hà, a market center along the Red River, Kergaradec learned that posts charged a 60 percent duty on salt, six times the government rate and payable either in silver, opium, tea, or tin. The post in Bảo Hà also assessed additional fees of seemingly arbitrary category, including transport fees, inspection fees, and permission to sell fees (Kergaradec 1877, 344). Although he only briefly visited Lào Cai, Kergaradec valued customs duties collected there by the Black Flags at over 90,000 francs per year (1877, 351).

Kergaradec also developed an understanding of the political situation in the borderlands that cast uplands populations as potential allies to French interests. According to the expedition's report, Vietnamese officials in Lào Cai relayed a message from the leader of the Black Flags that

outlined the proper conduct for foreign visitors (Kergaradec 1877, 345–346). With local officialdom working as couriers for the Black Flags, Kergaradec commented that their powerful leader, Liu Yongfu, was “an ignorant, unyielding, and mistrustful bandit who has lived by raping the mountains for these past twenty years” (1877, 345–346) (figure 4). He portrayed the Black Flags as the enemy of uplands populations (1877, 341–342). He also hoped to use his personal connection with the Black Flags, from their secret meeting in Hanoi, to create a fatal schism in Liu’s organization (1877, 341–342). For Kergaradec, a weakened Black Flag Army would remove a barrier to commercial development while ensuring a positive role for a French presence as defender of uplands communities.



Figure 4. Portrait of Liu Yongfu, Liu Yongfu Museum, Qinzhou, PRC. Photo taken by the author.

Flag Armies at War: Negotiating State Power in the Borderlands

As Kergaradec cast the Black Flags as enemies of commerce and exploration, Liu Yongfu took advantage of his army’s official connection to the Vietnamese state to wage war against his rivals. The Black Flags and the Yellow Flags, another group of failed rebels from southern China, fought violently for control of territory, populations, and resources throughout

the late 1860s and 1870s. This conflict raged in the uplands and valleys of the China-Vietnam borderlands as the two rebel groups competed for control of the opium trade as well as for a role in mining, a state monopoly activity in northern Vietnam. The war between the Black and Yellow Flags invited speculation about French intervention, providing, according to Kergardec, further evidence for the necessity of colonial rule.

Prior to their negotiations with Kergardec, the Black Flags' victory over Garnier in 1873 had earned them the respect of the Vietnamese state. Liu Yongfu received a promotion to "Vice Military Commander" and a significant monetary reward from the Nguyễn court in Huế (*ĐNTLCB* 1976, 33:27).¹² As they gained the support of powerful officials, the Black Flags sought to consolidate their power in northern Vietnam and openly fought against the Yellow Flags.¹³

After Liu Yongfu's official promotion, the Black Flags became allied with two Vietnamese officials who held considerable regional power. Hoàng Kế Viêm, who would remain closely associated with the Black Flags throughout the nineteenth century, served as governor-general of Sơn-Hung-Tuyên (a region that combined Sơn Tây, Hưng Hoá and Tuyên Quang provinces) in the northwest, which included the lucrative trading port of Lào Cai. The second official, Tôn Thất Thuyết, served as governor and counselor for military affairs in Sơn Tây, along the Red River northwest of Hanoi (*ĐNTLCB* 1976, 33:38).¹⁴ These two officials escalated the campaign against the Yellow Flags, aiding Liu Yongfu in the process. In early 1874, they chased the Yellow Flags from Tuyên Quang, a province that, at the time, bordered southern China to the north. In recognition of this accomplishment, the Privy Council, a central government office at the Nguyễn capital of Huế, emphasized the need to either gain the awed submission of the Yellow Flags or carry out their swift and thorough elimination (*ĐNTLCB* 1976, 33:40–41).

The urgency of the Privy Council stemmed from the relative resurgence of the Yellow Flags in the upheaval surrounding Garnier's coup and subsequent defeat. To subdue the Yellow Flags, the Privy Council briefly considered sending requests both to China and, strangely, the French military stationed in Hanoi (*ĐNTLCB* 1976, 33:40–41). The issue of Chinese assistance created controversy. While authorities in Huế deliberated, attacks by the Yellow Flags triggered

a minor rebellion in Cao Bằng province, as members of uplands populations blocked salt and rice shipments in borderland areas close to Guangxi.¹⁵ In response, the Cao Bằng administration requested permission from Huế to have Chinese cannons transferred to Cao Bằng from Guangxi, an action that would have involved the cooperation of the Qing Empire and provincial Guangxi officials. However, Huế denied their request, signaling a desire to defeat the Yellow Flags without the assistance of China.¹⁶

Allies in the Vietnamese state helped the Black Flags gain ground against their rivals. In August, Tôn Thất Thuyết, the Sơn Tây governor, reported to Huế that Nguyễn soldiers, who came from as far away as the central Vietnamese coast, had defeated the Yellow Flags as they raided villages in Sơn Tây (*ĐNTLCB* 1976, 33:53).¹⁷ The Nguyễn military pursued the Yellow Flags into the north, driving them into the Black Flag stronghold of Hưng Hóa, south of Lào Cai on the Red River (*ĐNTLCB* 1976, 33:81) (figure 5). In September, the Yellow Flags' leader, Pan Lungsi, offered his surrender.¹⁸ The court, unimpressed, ordered local authorities to work with Liu Yongfu and capture Pan Lungsi as quickly as possible.¹⁹



Figure 5. Red River in Hưng Hóa, Lào Cai Provincial Museum. Photo taken by the author.

During the campaign against Pan Linsi, tax funds in Tuyên Quang, formerly a reliable source of revenue, dwindled.²⁰ Faced with financial devastation, the government in Huế approved a drastic reorganization of northern Vietnam's political geography that benefitted the Black Flags and their allies. At the urging of Governor-General Hoàng Kế Viêm, the court approved the creation of four "routes" that would comprise jurisdictions of four separate military commanders. The reorganization put Liu Yongfu in charge of the route of Hưng Hóa (coterminous with Hưng Hóa province) and three other officials in charge of similarly delimited areas.²¹ The acceptance of this proposal expanded the official power of the Black Flags. It also resulted in the consolidation of military authority in the hands of four regional officials. After the Garnier coup, the Vietnamese state reacted to the Yellow Flags with a form of military rule that recalled the military protectorate system of the early nineteenth century.²²

While reliance on surrendered rebels and the co-optation of bandits might indicate the weakness of the Nguyễn state, the projection of state power through rebels and bandits, incorporated as power brokers, also meant something else. Since the 1830s, the Huế court had pursued the reorganization of Vietnamese territory into units called "provinces." Staffed by civil officials, these provinces replaced the larger, more military-oriented forms of administration that characterized Nguyễn power in the early nineteenth century, following the Nguyễn victory over the Tây Sơn (Woodside 1988, 112–168). In the 1870s, the ideal of provincial reform gave way to the endorsement of a more direct mode of power. Factions within the Nguyễn Vietnam state, divided between advocates for the provincial vision and supporters of the Black Flags, disagreed over the appropriateness of hiring former outlaws. The question of the political weakness and ineptitude of the Nguyễn state motivated factional divisions in Vietnam as well as the views of the French consular authorities. However, rather than being a sign of weakness, the co-optation of power brokers by the Vietnamese state demonstrated one approach to administration, an approach that sacrificed the ideals of administrative reform for the reality of borderlands pragmatism.

Although the reorganization of administrative responsibilities in northern Vietnam facilitated direct action against the Yellow Flags, officials in Huế offered a qualified dissent to Liu Yongfu's new status. In January 1875, the Privy Council observed that Liu's official position

came with responsibilities; the Black Flags' leader had to follow the mandates of the court as well as his immediate superiors. The Privy Council complained that Liu's primary objective, in defiance of orders to patrol Tuyên Quang and all of Hưng Hóa province, remained the Black Flags' dominance along the upper Red River. Concerned that French-sponsored merchants would encounter the Black Flags, the council ordered Liu Yongfu to concentrate on the extermination of Pan Linsi, an assignment that would take him far from the trading port of Lào Cai (*ĐNTLCB* 1976, 33:141).

In January 1875, as the Privy Council criticized Liu Yongfu, the Yellow Flags returned to attack Tuyên Quang, an event that drew China into the conflict. This time, uplands militia drove them out.²³ From Huế, the Ministry of Military responded to the news by authorizing anyone who captured Pan Linsi to summarily execute him.²⁴ Within months, the Qing Grand Council in Beijing identified the Yellow Flags as a grave threat to China; not only did Pan Linsi maintain contact with the French, he also threatened to disturb the volatile China-Vietnam borderlands.²⁵ In March, after the Yellow Flags humiliated the provincial administrations of Bắc Ninh and Thái Nguyên, Huế assigned Tôn Thất Thuyết to work with the Qing military to weed them out.²⁶ For Vietnam, assistance from China had become a necessity.

The defeat of Pan Linsi, and victory for the Black Flags, was a coordinated effort. Qing armies, led by the future rebel Li Yangcai, flushed most of the Yellow Flags from Thái Nguyên as the Black Flags and Nguyễn soldiers awaited them at Pan's old base area in Hà Dương, across the Red River from the Black Flag base at Lào Cai.²⁷ When the Yellow Flags sought refuge at Hà Dương, they were ambushed. The war with the Yellow Flags ended with Pan Linsi quartered and decapitated in the fields around his former stronghold (Huang 1936, 249).²⁸

However, the cooperative victory over the Yellow Flags exacted some severe costs in northern Vietnam. In December, Tôn Thất Thuyết reported that residents displaced by Chinese military operations resisted returning to their former villages.²⁹ The demographic consequences of cooperative counterinsurgency meant a lasting dislocation for local communities caught between the Yellow Flags and their enemies, who included the Chinese and Vietnamese militaries as well as the Black Flags. According to oral traditions in the area west of Hanoi, residents openly taunted the leader of the Black Flags: "The Black Flags call themselves 'a

righteous army,' yet take whatever they see for themselves. Liu Yongfu cares about wealth, and his underlings murder as they wish" (Nguyễn 1941, 17).

After the defeat of Pan Linsi, Hoàng Kế Viêm tried to mollify the Black Flags' detractors. He encouraged Liu and his lieutenants to lead their followers in cultivating land around Lào Cai, which would have bound them to one location.³⁰ Similar to policies enacted decades earlier, the court, with Hoàng Kế Viêm's assistance, hoped to bring sparsely populated regions under sedentary cultivation, thus ensuring a reliable tax base.³¹ In the context of Kergaradec's demands for free passage along the Red River, resettling the Black Flags to a location far from Hanoi would have also soothed tensions with France. However, this plan failed, because of both the lack of agricultural experience among certain Black Flags and the pervasive mistrust of Liu's army by the local population.³²

Lào Cai, the lucrative river port controlled by the Black Flags, continued to provide a point of conflict for the court, inspiring the opinion of an official with a personal history tied to France.³³ After Hoàng Kế Viêm informed Huế that Liu Yongfu refused to leave Lào Cai, officials in Huế became alarmed. In June 1877, Phạm Phú Thứ demanded that Hoàng Kế Viêm inform the Foreign Office, which handled correspondence between Nguyễn Vietnam and foreign governments (such as France's), of any contact between Liu and French merchants or consulate officials.³⁴ An official in the central bureaucracy, Phạm Phú Thứ had assisted Phan Thanh Giản in negotiating the Treaty of Saigon of 1862, which ceded the three eastern provinces (out of six) in southern Vietnam to France. In 1864, after accompanying Phan Thanh Giản to France in a fruitless attempt to regain partial control over the expanding French colony in the south, Phạm Phú Thứ returned to official life, advocating direct negotiation with France to avoid future conflicts (Ngô 1993, 802–803).³⁵ Phạm Phú Thứ's orders to Hoàng Kế Viêm about the Black Flags reflected his sense of cautious stewardship for the changing relationship between Vietnam and France.

While one faction at the court favored cultivating ties with France, the situation in the provinces increasingly demanded a pragmatic approach from Nguyễn officials. Agents of Vietnamese authority began to rely on the assistance of uplands communities in their campaigns against borderland bandits. In Cao Bằng province, to the east of Lào Cai, uplands militias

defeated a band led by Ông Thất, who then fled south and surrendered to the governor-general of Ninh-Thái in 1877.³⁶ However, just as the Ministry of Military in Huế responded to Ông Thất's surrender, the supposedly pliant bandit returned to Cao Bằng, where he raided villages in search of food.³⁷ According to Nguyễn Đình Nhuận, the Cao Bằng governor, militias in the uplands, mostly from Tai communities, again drove away Ông Thất, chasing him into hiding and defending their communities from pillage.³⁸ In October, he fled south once more, this time to Thái Nguyên, where he connected with followers of a Chinese bandit named Liu Zhiping.³⁹ Nguyễn officials lost track of Ông Thất for the next two years.⁴⁰ He reemerged in January 1880, when, together with Liu Zhiping, Ông Thất led a series of raids into uplands communities, including some reportedly containing Catholic converts in southern Guangxi.⁴¹ The complex personal networks that sustained armed groups, in the case of the uplands of Cao Bằng, often yielded more readily to the strength of Tai militias than to the authority of the Nguyễn state.

As militias defended the uplands, co-opted bandits and former rebels continued to prosper under a Nguyễn state increasingly concerned with projecting its authority through power brokers. For the Black Flags' leader, Liu Yongfu, victory over the Yellow Flags proved lucrative. In February 1878, he began receiving salary and supplies directly from Huế on a monthly basis. For the over fourteen hundred registered members of his personal militia, the Ministry of Revenue granted the following:

Table 1. Liu Yongfu's monthly allowance, circa 1878.

| Copper cash (<i>quan</i>) | Rice (<i>mỳ</i>) | Salt (<i>diêm</i>) |
|-----------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| 30,842 <i>tiền</i> | 19,021 <i>phương</i> | 570 <i>phương</i> |

Source: Hưng Hóa Provincial Governor Nguyễn Huy Kỳ to Ministry of Population (*Bộ Lễ*), 12/12/TĐ30. File No: 186:294, CBTN.

Later that year, the Grand Secretariat, another central office of the Vietnamese state, awarded Liu Yongfu a special dispensation on the occasion of the fiftieth year of the Tự Đức Emperor's reign. He received a Phi Long payment—issued by the court to mark special events and recognize meritorious service to the state (Lê and Nguyễn 2002)—of 30 *quan* gold,

recommended by Bùi Văn Dị and authorized by the emperor.⁴² The court now fully embraced Liu Yongfu, referred to as the “Vice Military Commander of Tam Tuyên.”⁴³

This embrace, however, came with certain obligations that the court struggled to impose. Attempts to control Liu Yongfu’s involvement with the trade in natural resources, particularly precious metals, exposed the frustrations of certain provincial officials. Soon after Liu’s Phi Long dispensation, Nguyễn Huy Kỳ, the Hung Hóa governor, informed the Ministry of Revenue, which managed issues of taxation from Huế, of Liu’s recent commercial activities. The Black Flags’ leader had purchased two state monopoly goods, copper and lead, from merchants in Lào Cai without seeking prior permission from the provincial authorities. The ministry responded that Liu should compensate the province for copper and lead according to the market rate, which Liu then refused to do.⁴⁴ Further evidence of the compelling ability of the Black Flags to ignore official discipline emerged in March 1878, when Liu’s army raided peaceable settlements in the mountains of northern Hung Hóa. Governor Nguyễn Huy Kỳ, who had earlier complained about mishandled mineral resources, now reassured the Privy Council that he could prevent future transgressions by Liu Yongfu.⁴⁵ The behavior of the Black Flags seemingly defied the control of central and provincial authorities alike.

Meanwhile, factions within the Nguyễn state began to develop a case against the Black Flags based on maintaining peaceful relations with France. Trần Đình Túc, one of the negotiators of the Philastre Treaty and, like Phạm Phú Thứ, an opponent of the Black Flags’ incorporation into the Vietnamese state, pressed Hoàng Kế Viêm, through appeals to the Privy Council, for a full report of Liu’s activities, citing heightened tensions between the Black Flags and Kergaradec. Liu Yongfu, Trần Đình Túc contended, had to understand that the lingering animosity between the French and the Black Flags could seriously damage the already tense situation in northern Vietnam.⁴⁶ Hoàng Kế Viêm assured the court that Liu would comply and said that, as the Black Flags’ liaison, he would personally complete the investigation.⁴⁷ Nonetheless, the division separating pro-Black Flags officials and opponents of Liu Yongfu began to deepen. At the end of the 1870s, with Pan Lunsì defeated, the Yellow Flags weakened, and Liu Yongfu fully integrated into the Vietnamese bureaucracy, the Vietnamese court maintained a delicate extension of Nguyễn authority in Hung Hoá through the Black Flags. As

Liu Yongfu kept a loose connection to the discipline of official life, Nguyễn officials formed factions around the Black Flags. Those supporting the incorporation of the Black Flags opposed others who advocated protecting Vietnamese relations with France.

In this disagreement over statecraft and alliances, the question of French interests became almost a secondary element for Nguyễn officials. For the French officials at the consulate, however, the projection of Nguyễn power into the borderlands through the Black Flags was a picture of chaos, inefficiency, and disorder, a situation that, in their view, demanded French intervention. According to Nguyễn documentation acquired by the Hanoi consulate (and forwarded to Saigon), as late as 1881 the local administration of Hưng Hóa had to remind transporters of food provisions to present their paperwork first to the Vietnamese authorities, even if those porters delivered to the Black Flags.⁴⁸ In areas under Liu Yongfu's control, the state seemed secondary to the borderland power brokers it employed.

The Li Yangcai Rebellion: A Consular View of Borderlands Counterinsurgency

As a case of cooperation across the borderlands, the involvement of Qing officials in the war against the Yellow Flags confirmed the durability of the relationship between China and Nguyễn Vietnam during the hectic decade of the 1870s. Despite its counterinsurgency intentions, Qing assistance in northern Vietnam also provided an opportunity for a translocal rebellion. When China helped the Black Flags, themselves once rebels against the Qing, to vanquish the Yellow Flags, borderlands counterinsurgency generated a fresh threat to Vietnam and, by extension, to China itself. When a veteran of the anti-Yellow Flags campaign returned to Vietnam to launch a rebellion against the Nguyễn, the second of the decade, the delicate arrangement that sustained Nguyễn authority in the borderlands survived. In French consular eyes, however, the ultimate defeat of this new rebellion merely evinced the necessity of a French military intervention.

In September 1878, Li Yangcai, who had recently commanded Qing armies against the Yellow Flags, rebelled against the Nguyễn (and, by extension, against China).⁴⁹ The previous summer, Li had made initial forays into Nguyễn territory to gather intelligence (*DNTLCB* 1976, 34:121). From his home in Qinzhou, on China's southern coast, Li recruited a few thousand

followers and announced his intention to overthrow the Nguyễn dynasty, which had ruled Vietnam since 1802. In its place, he planned to reestablish the Lý dynasty, which had vanished from political power six centuries earlier.⁵⁰ From the bordering Chinese province of Guangdong, Li crossed into Nguyễn territory in Lạng Sơn, seizing control of lucrative market centers in the province.⁵¹

Provincial authorities in Vietnam and China coordinated their response to Li Yangcai's insurgency. Within days of Li's attack on Lạng Sơn, the governor of Guangxi in China provided the governor of Lạng Sơn and Cao Bằng in Vietnam with information about the size of Li's personal army and his last known whereabouts.⁵² Vietnamese authorities then pushed the Lý pretender deep into the mountains of southern Lạng Sơn.⁵³ To assist in the hunt for Li Yangcai, the Guangxi governor recommended that Feng Zicai, who had recent experience hunting bandits in Vietnam, assist the Vietnamese military.⁵⁴ Over the next two months, Feng and several thousand soldiers from Guangxi helped drive Li Yangcai and his followers even further south into Bắc Ninh and Thái Nguyên (*ĐNTLCB* 1976, 34:171, 181). As he fled, Li commanded his followers to loot markets along the way, securing resources by force (*ĐNTLCB* 1976, 34:181–182).

Some of Li's victims began reporting his activities to the Vietnamese authorities. On December 16, 1878, the court in Huế received a communication from Xie Pangping, who identified himself as an “An Nam Đông Kinh Thương Khách” (trader in Annam's eastern capital, Hanoi) and an “An Nam Bắc Ninh Thương Khách” (trader in Annam's Bắc Ninh province). In his report, Xie claims that Li Yangcai's band had dwindled to half its original size as a result of defeat, starvation, and illness.⁵⁵ In this unusual piece of paperwork, Xie Pangping indicates that he knew details about Li Yangcai, including Li's home area of Qinzhou in southern China. Despite Xie's apparent familiarity with the needs of the Vietnamese court, however, his use of the term “Annam” (C: Annan) for Vietnam reveals a lack of rhetorical decorum. Information flowing from more informal channels illustrated a degree of terminological flexibility otherwise prevented by the norms of official discourse, according to which “Vietnam” (C: Yuenan) had become the official term for the country in Qing correspondence during the first decade of the nineteenth century.

As the Nguyễn authorities coordinated with Qing officials and relied on intelligence reports from foreign merchants, the campaign against Li Yangcai attracted the attention of France. On November 7, 1878, an official at the French Legation in Beijing, Gabriel Devéria, supplied Louis Lafont, the governor of French Cochinchina, with the transcript of a conversation between Devéria and a member of the Qing Grand Council.⁵⁶ In the transcript, Devéria initially asked about a “Guangxi insurrection,” to which the Qing official replied that he knew nothing about a rebellion in Guangxi province. Once Devéria mentioned Li Yangcai, the Qing official outlined the cooperative effort involving the Nguyễn government, even citing the campaigns against other Chinese bandits ten years earlier as a precedent.⁵⁷ When another French Legation official contacted a Qing official in Guangxi about the possibility of French assistance later that month, the reply clearly stated that any such proposals to send foreign soldiers to Vietnam must pass through the Huế court.⁵⁸

French officials in Saigon, in contrast to Devéria in Beijing, had another source for information about Li Yangcai: the Hanoi consulate. In December, the same month that Xie Pangping reported on the weakened state of Li Yangcai’s forces, a military officer attached to the Hanoi consulate filed a detailed account of their raids in Bắc Ninh and Thái Nguyên. This report told of Li’s claim to overthrow the Nguyễn and reestablish the Lý, providing a far more complete picture of the rebellion than reports from the French legation in China.⁵⁹

Into 1879, Li Yangcai and the campaign against him created a fertile atmosphere for the revival of unrelated and long-dormant rebellions. In the wake of Li’s uprising, the Yellow Flag lieutenant Gao Shi’er occupied villages in Hưng Hóa (*DNTLCB* 1976, 34:213). In Tuyên Quang, uplanders formerly tied to the White Flags, a rebellion from the 1860s connected to the borderland opium trade, renewed raids of lowland villages (*DNTLCB* 1976, 34:215).⁶⁰ In Thái Nguyên, Liu Zhiping, the former ally of Ông Thất who had submitted to Nguyễn authority, renounced his loyalty to the Nguyễn and joined Li’s rebellion.⁶¹ Also in Thái Nguyên, two unknown thieves identified as Lý Lục and Lý Thất ransacked lowland villages throughout the summer of 1879. After tracking Lý Lục and Lý Thất into the mountains, Nông Đức Đàng, a local Tai leader in northern Thái Nguyên, reported their arrest to the provincial authorities, noting that

they had declared loyalty to Li Yangcai.⁶² Li's rebellion was a mandala-like expression of power, attracting alliances throughout the northern borderlands of Vietnam.

As reports from the Qing and Nguyễn bureaucracies generated conflicting evidence about the strength and popularity of Li's rebellion, the French consulate in Hanoi continued to serve as a base for intelligence work. In April 1879, Kergaradec dispatched Giorgios Vlavianos, a former colleague of the French gun merchant Jean Dupuis and a consulate employee, to Thái Nguyên. Once there, Vlavianos claimed that he was graciously offered a meeting with Feng Zicai, the Qing official who was hunting Li Yangcai. In his report of this meeting, Vlavianos described the armaments used by the Qing and Nguyễn, which he judged to be in a dilapidated condition and of poor quality.⁶³ Feng's tactic to defeat Li by trapping him in the mountains was proving difficult to realize. Military rice convoys, which transported food to Feng's soldiers, became targets for uplanders who were, like the Lý brothers in Thái Nguyên, sympathetic to the rebellion. Li Yangcai, despite Feng's best efforts, was able to maintain a modest supply line for food.⁶⁴

Upon his return to Hanoi, Vlavianos supplied the consulate with a letter from Feng Zicai warning against future voyages by French travelers, merchants, or agents. In the letter, Feng cautioned the Hanoi consulate that Liu Yongfu and the Black Flags would kill anyone they did not recognize.⁶⁵ Heeding this ominous warning, Kergaradec commissioned no further expeditions, although he continued to update the governor of Cochinchina with news of Li's rebellion.⁶⁶

In his correspondence with Lafont, Kergaradec developed a depiction of the campaign against Li Yangcai that emphasized the long-term threat posed by China and the Black Flags to French interests.⁶⁷ He claimed, in all likelihood falsely, to have secured Feng Zicai's assistance with the gradual exit of the Black Flags from areas near the Red River, thus removing a barrier to French control of trade in northern Vietnam.⁶⁸ The Black Flags, once the object of diplomatic overtures, became a potentially lethal threat to French interests. Kergaradec noted that, with the assistance of sympathetic Nguyễn officials such as Hoàng Kế Viêm, the Black Flags were training civilian militia in Sơn Tây, just west of Hanoi. Besides the obvious military dangers they presented, Kergaradec argued, the Black Flags also interfered with the establishment of a

borderlands customs service, a key provision of the 1874 treaty and a personal priority of Kergaradec.⁶⁹

Advocates of French interests operated outside the consulate as well. Although Kergaradec envisioned an alliance between France and uplanders, an early ally of the consulate emerged from within the Nguyễn bureaucracy. Nguyễn Hữu Độ, the governor of Hanoi province, suggested that all Qing soldiers return to China as soon as possible. Li's rebellion, he argued, did not pose a significant threat to Vietnam. Moreover, a long-term Chinese military presence would irrevocably harm the population (*DNTLCB* 1976, 34:239–241). Although the court rejected Nguyễn Hữu Độ's proposal, his position placed him into a camp of Nguyễn officials opposed to the Black Flags.⁷⁰ Nguyễn Hữu Độ, who would become a powerful official under the French protectorate after 1883, also boasted about defeating bandits without Chinese assistance, which demonstrated, to his satisfaction, the nonessential quality of Qing involvement (Sogny 1924, 187). The symmetry between the agenda of this rather controversial official, recently described by the historian Đặng Phong as an “enthusiastic servant” of French interests in Vietnam, and that of the Hanoi consulate had a basis in their shared hostility toward Chinese military assistance (Đặng 2010, 89).

After leading a thirteen-month rebellion in northern Vietnam, Li Yangcai was finally captured in late October 1879. According to Feng Zicai, local militia in Thái Nguyên assisted in a simultaneous strike against Li and his followers. After he took Li alive, Feng reported that most of the rebel's followers either starved in the mountains or drowned in the surrounding lake as they fled.⁷¹ Kergaradec excitedly relayed news of Li's capture to Lafont in Saigon, speculating the eminent return of all Qing soldiers to China.⁷² After his return to Guangxi as a prisoner of China, Li Yangcai was decapitated. To prevent the continuance or reappearance of his rebellion, the Qing Grand Council, on the advice of authorities in Guangxi, allowed the Nguyễn officials in Thái Nguyên and Lạng Sơn to display Li's head as a graphic warning.⁷³ Li's head became a visceral reminder of Vietnamese sovereignty.

For Kergaradec, the execution of Li Yangcai did little to resolve the obstacles to French interests that he saw throughout northern Vietnam. Smaller groups of Chinese bandits that had forged connections with Li during his brief uprising remained.⁷⁴ Those that evaded capture

remained hidden in the mountains of Thái Nguyên and Tuyên Quang.⁷⁵ Viewed through the consular optic, the limited suppression of banditry by the Nguyễn and uplands militias established to defend communities were substantial threats. Not only did small groups of bandits threaten the safety of expeditions, Kergaradec also believed that the Vietnamese state would take the existence of these bands as a pretext for blocking the commercial development of northern Vietnam.⁷⁶ Furthermore, there was still the issue of the Black Flags. When the bulk of Liu Yongfu's army returned to Lào Cai in January 1880, Kergaradec reiterated his worries about their disruptive effects on commerce.⁷⁷ The following summer, when a French merchant ship encountered problems during a voyage from Hanoi to Lào Cai, Kergaradec blamed the Black Flags.⁷⁸ The increased level of observation afforded by the consulate in effect provided Kergaradec with numerous opportunities to discover the enduring threats to French interests in northern Vietnam.

Conclusion

The execution of Li Yangcai in October 1879 brought the last rebellion of the 1870s to a close. Li had used his military experience and knowledge of the China-Vietnam borderlands to launch a coup against the Nguyễn state in northern Vietnam. From the Hanoi consulate, representatives of France monitored Li's rebellion just as they had monitored other events in the borderlands since 1874. The consular optics—the particular way of seeing supported by the production of intelligence about Vietnam, its borderlands, and its relationship to the Qing Empire—enabled the development of a case for French intervention, for the extension of French colonial rule into northern Nguyễn Vietnam.

The identification and defense of French interests and the surveillance of Vietnamese counterinsurgency flowed from the establishment of consular offices. Kergaradec's reports endorsed a picture of disorder, a refracted vision of the borderlands composed to complement the interests of those advocating colonial rule. Kergaradec's charge of disorderliness cloaked what he was really thinking of—namely, the introduction of an ordering, commercially attuned, and development-inducing French colonial authority. For Kergaradec, the civilizing influence of future French rule would replace the weakened and venal Vietnamese state. However, his

portrayal of the political arrangements that extended Nguyễn power into remote areas of the country, albeit delicately, occluded the factions, actors, and competition over resources that characterized Vietnam in the 1870s.

With the arrival of the Black and Yellow Flags from southern China in the 1860s, sponsorship of old rebels as new power brokers became the dominant, yet divisive, strategy for the maintenance of Nguyễn rule in northern Vietnam. Although factions formed on either side of the issue, the employment of Black Flags as officials enabled the Vietnamese state to claim authority in areas otherwise beyond its administrative reach. For the Black Flags themselves, co-optation by the Nguyễn state brought sponsorship and a loose attachment to the rigors of official discipline. Their war with the Yellow Flags continued across the borderlands of China and Vietnam, eventually drawing the Qing Empire, former enemies of the Black Flags, into the conflict.

The establishment of French consular offices, which produced intelligence about the borderlands and facilitated a failed French attempt to broker a deal with the Black Flags for Lào Cai, further complicated the relationship between Nguyễn Vietnam and the Qing Empire. The formal relationship between these two countries became an object of suspicion and distrust not only for those defending French interests but for some officials within the Vietnamese state as well. In the decade before the Sino-French War, which formally ended the framework of the “tributary” relationship between Nguyễn Vietnam and the Qing Empire, deep rifts within the Nguyễn state over its employment of the Black Flags began to form against the backdrop of the changing French role in northern Vietnam.

In the 1980s, the historian Truong Buu Lam wrote:

Once past the admittedly unique act of invasion, foreign attackers typically become enmeshed in the intricacies of internal struggles that pit resisters against collaborators, and one breed of resisters against another. The role of the invaders subsequently begins to look very much like that of any other faction embroiled in a civil strife. (Lam 1984, vii–viii)

Although the establishment of consulate offices hardly resembled an “invasion,” the changing French diplomatic presence in Vietnam, a symptom of broader changes in the nineteenth century for both Vietnam and the Qing Empire, demonstrated the subtle power of “factions.” As

Kergaradec found allies in officials such as Phạm Phú Thứ, other Nguyễn officials, such as Nguyễn Hữu Độ (figure 6) began seeing the concerns of the French consulate as a useful tool for furthering their own factional interests.



Figure 6. Nguyễn Hữu Độ, between 1876 and 1879. Photograph by Émile Gsell. *Source:* Ghesquière (2001, 226).

Nguyễn Hữu Độ's concerns exemplified the usefulness of France to the anti-Black Flag faction in Vietnam. On October 19, 1880, in a report to the Privy Council and the Office of Foreign Affairs in Huế, he identified two chief problems that the court must resolve in order to secure good relations with France. First, the court must break the Black Flags' monopoly over commerce in Lào Cai. Second, tax administration, especially in the China-Vietnam borderlands, suffered from an endemic corruption that must be eliminated.⁷⁹ The first problem spoke directly to the failed attempt by Kergaradec to secure Lào Cai, the lucrative river port held by the Black Flags, through clandestine negotiations in Hanoi. In 1880, just two years after the beginning of

the Sino-French War, Nguyễn Hữu Độ made a case for dismissing the Black Flags from the official ranks of the Vietnamese state, thereby opening the Red River to commerce. His second concern, the endemic corruption of borderlands tax administration, obliquely criticized the Black Flags. As the 1870s gave way to the 1880s, factional struggles over the employment of the Black Flags began to correspond with the concerns of French consular officials. The changing French consular presence, and its particular way of seeing the borderlands, had become “embroiled” in a particular form of “civil strife.”

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Notes

- 1 For more on the Black Flags, see Laffey (1975) and McAleavy (1968). In Vietnamese, the emblematic work on the Black Flags remains Trần (1958). Works in Chinese include Li (1957) and the work of the Sino-French War Historical Research Group (Zhong Fa Zhanzheng Shi Yanjiuhui), which published a series of edited volumes with Guangxi People’s Press from 1986 to 1992. For a more recent perspective on the Black Flags, including a discussion of the work of the Sino-French War Group in Guangxi, see Davis (2008a). On the Black Flags in the borderlands during the late nineteenth century, see Davis (2011).
- 2 Kergaradec to Governor Duperré, “Rapports du consul de France à Hanoi, 14 Octobre 1875,” File Number: 12985, Record Group: Amiraux et Gouverneurs de la Cochinchine (AGC), Centre des Archives d’Outre-Mer (CAOM), Aix-en-Provence (France). On Puginier, see Michaud (2007, 112–114).
- 3 Kergaradec to Duperré, “Rapports du consul de France à Hanoi a.s. de l’ouverture du Haut du Fleuve Rouge, Renseignements sur les ressources minières au Tonkin, 10 Octobre 1875,” File Number: 12986, Record Group: AGC, CAOM.
- 4 Kergaradec to Duperré, October 10, 1875, AGC, CAOM; *DNTLCB* (1976, 33:255). The Huế court moved Vũ Trọng Bình to Sơn Tây to the concurrent posts of governor and temporary military commander for Sơn-Hung-Tuyên, from which he unsuccessfully tried to excuse himself because of his advanced age (*DNTLCB* 1976, 33:270; Cao 2004, 690).
- 5 Kergaradec to Duperré, “Rapports du Consul de France à Hanoi, a.s. de la publication de l’édit royal concernant des chrétiens, Puginier, Voyage à Son Tay, 5 Janvier 1876,” File No: 12990, Record Group: AGC, CAOM.
- 6 Kergaradec to Duperré, “Rapports du Consul de France à Hanoi a.s. du refus d’un passeport pour voyager dans le Haut du Fleuve, Visite au Consulat de 2 chefs des Drapeaux Noirs, etc., 22 Mars 1876,” File No: 12993, Record Group: AGC, CAOM.
- 7 Also identified as Hoàng Tài Gia. The Huế court’s knowledge of this meeting came from Hoàng Kế Viêm. Trần Đình Túc, the highest-ranking official in Hanoi province, did not

- attend. Fearing French grievances against Liu, the Nguyễn Foreign Office ordered the provincial government in Hanoi to notify Liu, through Hoàng Kế Viêm, that he must act carefully to not provoke the French consulate.
- 8 Kergaradec to Duperré, March 22, 1876, AGC, CAOM.
- 9 Kergaradec to Duperré, March 22, 1876, AGC, CAOM.
- 10 Kergaradec to Duperré, March 22, 1876, AGC, CAOM.
- 11 Kergaradec to Duperré, “Rapports du Consul de France à Hanoi a.s. de voyage dans le Haut de Fleuve Rouge, etc., 17 Novembre 1876,” File Number: 12997, Record Group: AGC, CAOM. Kergaradec included news of Gsell’s joining the expedition with his detailed description of the Nguyễn examinations taking place in Huế and Hanoi. Émile Gsell (1838–1879), a noted photographer, worked on the Lagrée expedition along the Mekong in the 1860s and maintained a studio in Saigon until his death in 1879 (Ghesquière 2001, 224–225). For Kergaradec’s own later publications, see Kergaradec (1877).
- 12 They each received 345 *lượng* silver and 3000 *tiền* copper cash.
- 13 Another armed group from southern China formerly linked to a rebellion against the Qing Empire, the Yellow Flags were led by Pan Lunsi. Also known as Huang Chongying (Hoàng Sùng Anh), Pan Lunsi assumed command of the Yellow Flags upon the death of the group’s founder, Wu Yazhong. Liu Yongfu, the leader of the Nguyễn-allied Black Flags, had a long association with Wu Yazhong and Pan Lunsi. All three had joined the rebellion of the Yanling Kingdom in southern Guangxi, a rebellion led by Wu Yazhong’s father from 1853 until the elder Wu’s death ten years later. In 1868, when Liu Yongfu led the Black Flags out of China and into Vietnam, Pan Lunsi and Wu Yazhong led the Yellow Flags in pursuit. After the defeat of Wu Yazhong in 1869, only Pan Lunsi remained, fighting a war against both the Black Flags and their Nguyễn allies. For more on these events, see Davis (2008b).
- 14 Tôn Thất Thuyết would later lead the Cần Vương royalist movement against the French protectorate in 1886. After the collapse of the Cần Vương in the late 1880s, Tôn Thất Thuyết fled to China, living in the Yunnan province city of Longzhou. My forthcoming monograph will elucidate the deep connection between anticolonial activists, such as Tôn Thất Thuyết, and the Black Flags.
- 15 Cao Bằng Provincial Governor Lương Tuấn Tú to Grand Secretariat (C: Neige, V: nội các), eighth day, fourth month, twenty-seventh year of the Tự Đức Reign (hereafter day/month/TĐ#), File No: 316:257, Châu Bản Triều Nguyễn (hereafter CBTN).
- 16 Cao Bằng Provincial Governor Lương Tuấn Tú to Grand Secretariat, 8/4/TĐ27, File No: 316:257, CBTN. The Grand Secretariat and the Ministry of Military (C: Bing Bu, V: Bộ Binh or Binh Bộ) endorsed the decision to deny this request. Under the Nguyễn system, central institutions such as the Grand Secretariat and the Privy Council handled policy matters that, in the Qing Empire during the nineteenth century, would have typically been the responsibility of the Grand Council (C: Junji Dachen) in Beijing.
- 17 Tôn Thất Thuyết to Privy Council, 18/7/TĐ27, File No: 212:262, CBTN. Tôn Thất Thuyết then insisted that the military from Nghệ An and Hà Tĩnh leave Sơn Tây.

- 18 Tôn Thất Thuyết to Privy Council, 18/7/TĐ27, File No: 212:107, CBTN.
- 19 Tôn Thất Thuyết to Privy Council, 18/7/TĐ27, File No: 212:109, CBTN. Hoàng Kế Viêm and Nguyễn Huy Kỳ both received a promotion of one *cấp*.
- 20 Tôn Thất Thuyết to Privy Council, 18/7/TĐ27, File No: 212:120, CBTN.
- 21 Tôn Thất Thuyết to Privy Council, 18/7/TĐ27, File No: 212:126, CBTN. The other *đạo* (C: *dao*) and their respective commanders were Lạng Sơn (Đình Quán Trinh), Cao Bằng (Lương Tuấn Tú), and Tuyên Quang (Nông Hùng Phúc). The assignation of a *đạo* as an administrative division had a precedent during the 1850s, when the *đạo* of Phú Yên was established (Đỗ 2001, 191).
- 22 This response essentially neutralized the ethos of administrative reform that emerged during the 1820s. To develop a more consistent, rationalized projection of state power throughout Vietnam, the Minh Mạng Emperor ordered the creation of a system of provinces. By the 1830s, this administrative reform had inspired rebellion and revolt, the most significant of which occurred in Cao Bằng under the leadership of Nông Văn Vân in 1832. See Vũ Đường Luân's article in this issue of *Cross-Currents: East Asian History and Culture Review*.
- 23 Tuyên Quang Provincial Governor Mai Quý to Ministry of Military, 15/12/TĐ27, File No: 58:268, CBTN.
- 24 Rescript to Mai Quý, 17/12/TĐ27, File No: 58:268, CBTN.
- 25 Grand Council, June 15, 1875, in Zhongyang Yanjiuyuan Jindaishi Yanjiuhui (Academica Sinica Modern History Research Group, hereafter Academia Sinica), document 8, p. 18; Cen Yuying to Grand Council, August 8, 1875, in Academia Sinica, document 20, p. 27.
- 26 Grand Secretariat (Bùi Văn Di, Lê Tiến Thông, Nguyễn Thuật) to Court, 13/2/TĐ28. File No: 52:271, CBTN. Nguyễn Uỷ, the previous Ninh-Thái commander, had failed to put down the Yellow Flag loyalists, who thrived due to official ineptitude and, in the estimation of the Grand Secretariat, storms and floods.
- 27 Guangxi Governor Liu Zhangyi to Guangxi-Guangdong Governor General, October 29, 1875, in Academia Sinica, document 29, pp. 44a–52a.
- 28 Huang Hai'an recorded Liu's personal oral history in a series of conversations at the end of the Black Flag leader's life.
- 29 Tôn Thất Thuyết, Lê Hưu Tạ, and Hà Văn Quân to Trần Tiễn Thành, with reports to Tuyên Quang Tỉnh Thần Mai Quý and Lã Xuân Oai, 9/11/TĐ28, File No: 203:271, CBTN.
- 30 Ministry of Military to Hoàng Kế Viêm, 5/1/TĐ30, File No: 2:274, CBTN, which cites the 3/12/TĐ29 report from Mai (Thế) Quý to Ministry of Military.
- 31 Ministry of Military to Hoàng Kế Viêm, 5/1/TĐ30, File No: 2:274, CBTN. Tạ Di Đình, Hoàng Kế Viêm's assistant, noted that no one in any of these areas believed that the Black Flags intended to establish a permanent settlement (C: *liyi*, V: *lập ấp*).
- 32 Hoàng Kế Viêm to Court, 8/3/TĐ30, File No: 303:275, CBTN. The Huế court issued the directive during the tenth month of TĐ29.
- 33 Hoàng Kế Viêm to Court, 8/3/TĐ30, File No: 303:275, CBTN.

- 34 Hoàng Kế Viêm to Court, 7/5/TĐ30, with citation of Phạm Phú Thứ to Privy Council, 24/4/TĐ30, File No: 303:275, CBTN.
- 35 For more on Phan Thanh Giản, see Delvaux (1926) and Osborne (1970).
- 36 Military Commander of Ninh-Thái Lê Hữu Tạ to Secretariat and Ministry of Military, 12/8/TĐ30, File No: 35:286, CBTN.
- 37 Hoàng Kế Viêm to Ministry of Military, 18/8/TĐ30, File No: 89:286, CBTN.
- 38 Cao Bằng Provincial Official Nguyễn Đình Nhuận to Ministry of Military, 21/8/TĐ30, File No: 115:286, CBTN.
- 39 Hoàng Kế Viêm to Ministry of Military, 20/8/TĐ30, and reply dated 27/8/TĐ30, File No: 134:286, CBTN.
- 40 Lê Hữu Tạ to Hoàng Kế Viêm, 25/8/TĐ30, File No: 112:289, CBTN.
- 41 Ministry of Rites edict, 14/12/TĐ32, File No: 283:328, CBTN.
- 42 Bùi Văn Dị to Court, 25/9/TĐ31, File No: 86:298, CBTN.
- 43 Bùi Văn Dị to Court, 25/9/TĐ31, File No: 86:298, CBTN. Liu was identified as the Vice-Military Commander of Tam Tuyên (C: Futidu Junshi Sanxuan, V: Phó Đề Đốc Quân Thứ Tam Tuyên). Ngô Thất Ninh, the Military Commander of Bắc Ninh, also received a "Phi Long" bonus (File No: 86:298, CBTN).
- 44 Nguyễn Huy Kỳ to Ministry of Population (C: Hu Bu, V: Bộ Hộ or Hộ Bộ), 16/1/TĐ31, File No: 76:294, CBTN.
- 45 Hoàng Kế Viêm to Court, 28/2/TĐ31, File No: 132:296, CBTN, which cites Privy Council to Hoàng Kế Viêm, 21/2/TĐ31.
- 46 Provincial Governor Trần Đình Túc to Privy Council (*Viện Cơ Mật*) and Foreign Affairs Council, 5/3/TĐ31, File No: 222:295, CBTN.
- 47 Privy Council to Hoàng Kế Viêm, 6/3/TĐ31, File No: 222:295, CBTN.
- 48 “Quelques documents relatifs aux correspondances officielles du huyện de Văn Chân [*sic*] avec les populations” (undated), File No: 22319, Record Group: CAOM, filed as AGC. Communication from Tân Hóa Circuit Intendant to Văn Chân District Supervisor dated 12/12/TĐ30.
- 49 The precise date remains unclear.
- 50 Du Qimo (1988, 8:3a-4b); Yunnan Historical Research Department, citation of *Dechong Shilu* (hereafter *DCSL*) (1985, 79:10–11).
- 51 Privy Council to Ministry of Rites and Ministry of Military, 14/9/TĐ31, File No: 188:305, CBTN; *ĐNTLCB* (1976, 34:163).
- 52 Nguyễn Đình Nhuận to Court, 19/9/TĐ31, File No: 133:306, CBTN. The Secretariat was later notified. These reports came from the Governor of Guangxi, Yang Zhongya, and the officer in charge of the Zuojiang River area.
- 53 *ĐNTLCB* (1976, 34:164); Yunnan Historical Research Department (*DCSL* 81:18–19). Liu Kunyi to Grand Council, 1878/12/7, Du Qimo. 1988. *Feng Gongbao (Zicai) Jundu Jiyao* [Selected military correspondence of Feng Zicai]. Taipei: Wenhai Chubanshe. 8:13a–15a.
- 54 Yunnan Historical Research Department, *DCSL* 79:7–8, which cites a report by Yang Zhongya to Grand Council dated October 31, 1878.

- 55 Privy Council, 23/11/TĐ31, File No: 78:312, CBTN.
- 56 Also a scholar, Devéria published *La Frontière Sino-Annamite: Description géographique et ethnographique* (1886).
- 57 Report titled “Révolte du Kouang Si et envahissement du Nord du Tonkin par les rebelles chinois commandés par Ly-Yung-Choi, 1878 à 1879,” Légation de France en Chine to Lafont, November 7, 1878, File No: 11932, Record Group: AGC, CAOM.
- 58 “Révolte du Kouang Si et envahissement du Nord du Tonkin par les rebelles chinois commandés par Ly-Yung-Choi, 1878 à 1879,” November 7, 1878, File No: 11932 Record Group: AGC, CAOM; Governor-General of Liang-Guang to M. E. de Lagrené, November 12, 1878, File No: 11932, Record Group: AGC, CAOM.
- 59 “Rapports du Consul de France à Hanoi au sujet des bandes de Li Yung Choi,” Chef de Bataillon de Larson to Lafont, December 11, 1878, File No: 13006, Record Group: AGC, CAOM.
- 60 This uplander, identified as Bùì ðình Tàn, was defeated by a local “Mán Mùc” (C: Manmu).
- 61 *DNTLCB* 1976, 34:220; Yunnan Historical Research Department, *DCSL* 95:8–9, citation of Yang Zhongya to Grand Council, July 15, 1879.
- 62 Thái Nguyên Provincial Governor Bùì Phác to Ministry of Military, 22/4/TĐ32, File No: 222:314, CBTN. Hoàng Kế Viêm also received a copy of this report, which included a memorial (paperwork dated 30/4/TĐ32) about the capture of the Lý brothers by Nông Đức ðàng.
- 63 Kergaradec to Lafont, “Rapports du consul de France à Hanoi, Pilot Georges,” April 10, 1879, File No: 13007, Record Group: AGC, CAOM.
- 64 Kergaradec to Lafont, April 10, 1879, File No: 13007, Record Group: AGC, CAOM.
- 65 Kergaradec to Lafont, April 10, 1879, File No: 13007, Record Group: AGC, CAOM.
- 66 Kergaradec to Lafont, “Rapports du consul de France à Hanoi, renseignements sur les bandes de Ly Yong Choi,” May 16, 1879, File No: 13001, Record Group: AGC, CAOM.
- 67 Kergaradec to Lafont, “Rapports du consul de France à Hanoi, défaite de Li Yung Choi,” June 9, 1879, File No: 13010, Record Group: AGC, CAOM.
- 68 Kergaradec to Lafont, “Rapports du consul de France à Hanoi, retrait des troupes Chinoises, etc.,” July 4, 1879, File No: 13011, Record Group: AGC, CAOM. Kergaradec claimed to have secured the help of Feng Zicai in guaranteeing the orderly return of the Black Flags to Lào Cai. I have found no record of this promise in Nguyễn or Qing materials, which may indicate a certain degree of disingenuousness in the statements by the head of the French consulate.
- 69 Kergaradec to Lafont, “Rapports du consul de France à Hanoi, Départ de Phong Ti Tai de Tuyen Quang,” July 23, 1879, and August 7, 1879, File No: 13012, Record Group: AGC, CAOM.
- 70 Nguyễn Hữu ðộ’s personal history and official career have a great deal of relevance for the history of the Tonkin protectorate. For more on Nguyễn Hữu ðộ, see Sogny (1924), ðặng (2010, 89–91), and Davis 2008a, 176 and 319).

- 71 Feng Zicai to Zhang Shusheng, as cited in Zhang Shusheng to Grand Council, 6/10/GX4, Du Qimo (1988, 8:75a). Li was captured on the twenty-first day of the ninth month in the fourth year of the Guangxu reign, according to Feng, although Nguyễn paperwork dates the event ten days earlier. Hoàng Kế Viêm to Chự Bộ Nha, 11/9/TĐ32, File No: 38:324, CBTN; *ĐNTLCB*, 1976, 34: 271–272).
- 72 Kergaradec to Lafont, “Rapports du consul de France à Hanoi, Prise du chef rebelle chinois Li Yung Choi,” October 15, 1879, File No: 13018, Record Group: AGC, CAOM.
- 73 Kergaradec to Lafont, “Rapports du Consul de France à Hanoi, Départ des dernières troupes chinoises, etc.,” February 15, 1880, File No: 13028, Record Group: AGC, CAOM; Liu Kunyi to Grand Council, 24/7/GX5, in Ouyang (1968, 15:20a–24a).
- 74 Zhang Shusheng to Grand Council, October 23, 1879. Yunnan Historical Research Department, *DCSL* 100:5–6; Thái Nguyên Provincial Judge Đỗ Trọng Vi to Chự Bộ Nha, 27/9/TĐ32, File No: 213:317, CBTN.
- 75 Grand Council response to Zhang Shusheng, November 19, 1879, Yunnan Historical Research Department, *DCSL* 101:7.
- 76 Kergaradec to Lafont, “Rapports du consul de France à Hanoi, Soulèvement de Chinois dans la province de Thai Nguyen sous le commandement de Luc Chi Binh,” April 14, 1880, File No: 13032, Record Group: AGC, CAOM.
- 77 Kergaradec to Lafont, “Rapports du consul de France à Hanoi. Départ de Phong Ti Tai de Tuyen Quang,” January 3, 1880, File No: 13027, Record Group: AGC, CAOM.
- 78 Kergaradec to Lafont “Rapports du consul de France à Hanoi, au sujet d’un voyage fait dans le Haut du Fleuve Rouge par la canonière ‘La Massue,’” July 22, 1880, File No: 13037, Record Group: AGC, CAOM.
- 79 Nguyễn Hữu Độ to Privy Council and Foreign Affairs Council, 16/9/TĐ32, File No: 208:317, CBTN.

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