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Publication Date

2019

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Confucian Terrorism: Phan Bội Châu and the Imagining of Modern Vietnam

By

Matthew A Berry

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

History

in the

Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor Wen-hsin Yeh, Chair
Professor Peter Zinoman
Professor Emeritus Lowell Dittmer

Fall 2019

Abstract

Confucian Terrorism: Phan Bội Châu and the Imagining of Modern Vietnam

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Professor Wen-hsin Yeh, Chair

This study considers the life and writings of Phan Bội Châu (1867-1940), a prominent Vietnamese revolutionary and nationalist. Most research on Phan Bội Châu is over forty years old and is contaminated by historiographical prejudices of the Vietnam War period. I seek to re-engage Phan Bội Châu's writings, activities, and connections by closely analyzing and comparing his texts, using statistical and geographical systems techniques (GIS), and reconsidering previous juridical and historiographical judgments. My dissertation explores nationalism, modernity, comparative religion, literature, history, and law through the life and work of a single individual. The theoretical scope of this dissertation is intentionally broad for two reasons. First, to improve upon work already done on Phan Bội Châu it is necessary to draw on a wider array of resources and insights. Second, I hope to challenge Vietnam's status as a historiographical peculiarity by rendering Phan Bội Châu's case comparable with other regional and global examples.

The dissertation contains five chapters. The first is a critical analysis of Democratic Republic of Vietnam and Western research on Phan Bội Châu. I challenge claims that Phan Bội Châu should be interpreted solely as a 'transitional figure.' The second chapter investigates Phan Bội Châu's near-obsession with martyrdom. In it, I explore how Phan weaves together narrative and symbolic strands from Confucian and Catholic repertoires to justify martyrdom on behalf of the Vietnamese nation. The third and fourth chapters provide a detailed account of the famous trial of Phan Bội Châu by the Criminal Commission of Hanoi in 1925. By evaluating the case against Phan Bội Châu in comparison with the research agendas presented in chapter one, I show that both history and law offer flawed ways of interpreting the legacy of a national hero. The fifth chapter presents Phan Bội Châu's 760-page commentary to the *Book of Changes*, a classical Confucian text that Phan Bội Châu re-interprets as a structural framework for understanding time, morality, and the inevitability of revolution.

For Donna, Sophia, and Michele

With Love

Confucian Terrorism: Phan Bội Châu and the Imagining of Modern Vietnam

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Introduction

Kim Liên village lies 15 kilometers due west from the center of Vinh, the capital of Nghệ An province, Vietnam. The central (and really only) attraction of Kim Liên village is a lively mix of rustic, thatched-roof dwellings and imposing red-brick pagodas set apart by several large, square lotus ponds. Hundreds, if not thousands, of Vietnamese arrive daily to pay homage to “Bác Hồ,” for this is the hometown of Nguyễn The Patriot, better known to the occasional international visitor as Hồ Chí Minh. A military jeep, which Uncle Hồ rode back to his village on June 16, 1957, sits in what would otherwise be mistaken for a Buddhist temple. The meticulously arranged traditionalistic decor and relentlessly earnest staff of this nationalist theme park leave little doubt it is a site of significance for Vietnamese visitors.

Drive eight kilometers further west to where national route 46 meets the Cả river, and you will find, with a little difficulty, another anachronistic national historical site. Here, overlooking the river some two hundred yards away, stands a statue of a Vietnamese mandarin that bears a striking resemblance to Vladimir Lenin. At his right lies a small, clean museum with a rather bored staff of one. This is the site of the “Phan Bội Châu Memorial House” and where Mr. Phan Văn San, later to become the namesake of the memorial house, lived from the age of two until the age of five (1869-1872). Visitors, Vietnamese or otherwise, are rare. Quite unlike Kim Liên village, this site is not on tour bus routes.

Any literate Vietnamese living in or near a major city in 1925 would have been shocked to learn how little attention is now paid to the great patriot Phan Bội Châu. For a brief but momentous period in French Indochina, Phan Bội Châu's name was on the lips of anyone able to read a newspaper. If the reader was French, that name would likely have been uttered with no small degree of trepidation, if not anger, for Phan Bội Châu was known to be a most dangerous terrorist. However, if the reader was Vietnamese, the name Phan Bội Châu conveyed a different meaning entirely: this was the Vietnamese revolutionary who stood up to the colonial administration and won. As a symbol of dignified resistance, Phan Bội Châu had brought Vietnamese students, scholars, and secretaries into the streets for the first time, thus forcing the French governor general to grant clemency for the old patriot in the wake of a guilty verdict handed down by the Criminal Commission of 1925.

A close contemporary of Sun Yatsen and Mahatma Gandhi, Phan Bội Châu had earned his reputation as Vietnam's foremost nationalist revolutionary by escaping French Indochina disguised as a Chinese merchant in 1905. Setting up shop in Japan with the help of the famous Chinese journalist Liang Qichao, Phan Bội Châu quickly became a major nuisance for the French colonial administration by sending thousands of printed pamphlets back to Indochina encouraging young men to come join him abroad. By 1908, over two hundred, including the cadet-branch royal Prince Cường Để, had done so in what later become known as the Đông Du (Eastern Travel) movement. Thousands of other Vietnamese took part in clandestine organizations, such as the Duy Tân hội (Modernization Association), which provided financial and logistical support for those heading abroad. Money and youth left Indochina, while Phan Bội Châu's pamphlets flooded in, contributing to growing domestic activism in Hanoi, Saigon, and the protectorate of Annam.

While many degree-holding members of the Modernization Association encouraged a revitalization of Vietnamese education, other members who had fought against the French protectorate forces during the Cần Vương (Save the King) period (1885-1895) took a more aggressive stance. A series of tax protests throughout Annam and parts of Tonkin in 1908 encouraged members of the “militant-action group” such as Nguyễn Thành, Đặng Thái Thân,

and Đội Quyên to link up with the guerilla leader Đê Thám in preparation for attacks on French military targets. When plotters very nearly succeeded in poisoning French troops stationed at the citadel of Hanoi in June 1908, colonial security forces were obliged to respond with extreme prejudice. The 1908 Criminal Commission of Tonkin sentenced thirteen of the Hanoi plotters to death, in whose possession Phan Bội Châu's pamphlets had been found. Moreover, certain pamphlets, such as *Việt Nam vong quốc sử* (History of the Loss of Vietnam) and *Hải ngoại huyết thư* (A Letter from Overseas Written in Blood), took particular issue with the French taxation policies now targeted by angry protesters as far south as Bình Định province. Recognizing a colony-wide conspiracy at work, the security officers of the Bureau of Political Affairs identified Phan Bội Châu as public enemy number one, and took steps to dismantle the Modernization Association and arrest its membership.

French security services did not distinguish between the “militant-action” and “peaceful action” wings of the Modernization Association. For that matter, neither did their collaborators, the mandarins who still administered the provinces and districts of Annam and Tonkin on behalf of the Nguyễn court in Huế. Degree-holders primarily interested in educational and political reform, such as Phan Châu Trinh, Lương Văn Cần, and Trần Quý Cáp faced arrest, imprisonment, and even execution. Dynastic tribunals in Hà Tĩnh and Vinh sentenced Phan Bội Châu to death *in absentia*. Meanwhile, diplomatic overtures to the Japanese government, brought an end to the Đông Du movement and to Phan Bội Châu's residency. Many of the Cochinchinese students, whose parents had bankrolled the movement, were forced to testify upon their return.

In disarray, the Vietnamese revolutionary movement shifted decisively toward militancy. While much of the older Cần Vương generation inside Indochina had been destroyed, a small cohort of militant northern students who remained close to Phan Bội Châu moved their operations to Hong Kong, Canton, and Siam. Many in this northern cohort, including Hoàng Trọng Mậu, Phan Bá Ngọc and the brothers Trần Hữu Lực and Trần Hữu Công, hailed from the the same hardscrabble Nghệ Tĩnh region as Phan Bội Châu. Others, such as Đặng Tử Mão, Đặng Đoàn Bằng, and Nguyễn Hải Thân, hailed from the provinces surrounding Hanoi in Tonkin. Now being pursued by French intelligence services across East Asia, these young men learned the arts of subterfuge, bomb-making, and assassination, especially for application to real or suspected informers. Phan Bội Châu did his best to offer these young men moral, and, when possible, financial support.

The Xinhai Revolution of 1911 opened up a wide new range of options for Phan Bội Châu and his network of young revolutionaries. Chinese contacts who Phan Bội Châu had met previously in Japan, Hong Kong, Canton, or Shanghai now rose to positions of political and military power. Some, such as Hu Hanmin, Huang Xing, and Chen Qimei, held out the possibility of significant assistance for the Vietnamese revolutionary movement, which was now reconstituted as the Việt Nam Quang Phục hội (Vietnam Restoration Society). Whereas Phan Bội Châu and his partisans had previously tolerated Prince Cường Đê as their “useful idiot,” the depletion of most of the movement's Cochinchinese meant a political shift from monarchism to republicanism was in order. Though Cường Đê was “elected” president of the Quang Phục hội, he began to detach himself from Phan Bội Châu's increasingly radical organization, first leaving Canton for Saigon, then leaving Asia for Europe.

In 1913, the conflict between Phan Bội Châu's partisans and French intelligence services reached a fever pitch. Phan Bội Châu's proteges murdered several informers, complicating French efforts to keep tabs on the movement. Others picked up new skills in Chinese military

schools. Đặng Tử Mão lost three fingers in an accidental bomb explosion in Kowloon. In April 1913, a pair of high-profile assassinations rocked French colonial society. Having received funds and grenades from Chen Qimei, the governor of Shanghai, Phan Bội Châu sent operatives into French Indochina with a plan to assassinate Governor General Sarraut during the triennial examinations in Nam Định. The intended assassin Nguyễn Hải Thân lost his nerve, but others were successful at killing the *tuần phủ* (governor) of Thái Bình and two French military officers. The second attack took place in broad daylight on the terrace of the Hanoi Hotel, sending French living in Hanoi into a state of panic.

French intelligence and diplomatic services redoubled their efforts to capture Phan Bội Châu and his lieutenants. In January 1914, it seemed they had succeeded when Phan Bội Châu was placed under arrest by the incoming military governor of Canton, Long Jiguang. However, a combination of intelligence failures and pressure from Beijing meant Phan Bội Châu remained in the custody of Long Jiguang for the next three years. Released by his captor on Hainan island in 1917, Phan Bội Châu reconnected with several of his compatriots, discovering that during his time in prison, the French had managed to dismantle the Quang Phục hội and kill a number of his followers.

Phan Bội Châu entered a period of relative quiescence, moving his base of operations to Hangzhou, where he joined the editorial staff of the Chinese-language *Military Affairs* magazine where another of his former students Hồ Học Lãm worked. Over the following two years, Phan Bội Châu took a number of long trips to Yunnan, Japan, Peking, and even Harbin. During this period of reflection and reassessment, Phan Bội Châu undertook a pair of seemingly contradictory projects. First, with Đặng Đoàn Bằng, he contributed to and edited *Việt Nam nghĩa liệt sử* (The History of Vietnam's Martyrs), a series of patriotic hagiographies recounting the lives and deaths of many of the young men who had flocked to his banner. Second, with his dear companion Phan Bá Ngọc, son of the Cần Vương resistance leader Phan Đình Phùng, Phan Bội Châu composed a brochure entitled *Pháp Việt đề huề chính kiến thư* (A Proposal for a Franco-Vietnamese Collaboration Policy). This brochure, later published in the journal *Nam Phong*, resulted in a July 1919 visit from Sûreté officer Victor Néron, who offered Phan Bội Châu a pardon for his crimes and the possibility of a position and pension, provided he agree to submit to the French protectorate. Although Phan Bội Châu rejected Néron's proposal, made on behalf of Governor General Sarraut, Phan Bội Châu, Phan Bá Ngọc, and Hồ Học Lãm continued to occasionally correspond with Néron.

While living in Hangzhou, Phan Bội Châu published a number of serial novels in the *Military Affairs* magazine under Chinese pseudonyms. These Chinese novels are decidedly Phan Bội Châu's most creative, thematically complex, and conceptually rich works. Many, such as *Ape Land*, *The Righteous Cat*, and *The Chronicle of the Pig King* use animals to explore and critique human weaknesses. Others grappled with the unintended effects of dehumanizing ideologies. After the assassination in Hangzhou of his friend and fellow editor Phan Bá Ngọc at the hand of Cường Đê's hired gun Lê Hồng Sơn in 1922, Phan Bội Châu wrote deeply reflective stories questioning racism, the desire for violence, and nationalist warfare.

The reflectiveness of this period gave way to renewed glorification of revolutionary terrorism in the wake of Phạm Hồng Thái's attempted assassination of Governor General Martial Merlin on Shameen island in Canton in 1924. This event also renewed French interest in capturing Phan Bội Châu, who demonstrated his renewed commitment to revolutionary violence by taking a photograph with Phan Bá Ngọc's killer Lê Hồng Sơn. In late 1924 and 1925, Phan Bội Châu also began communicating with Nguyễn The Patriot (later Hồ Chí Minh), whose father

had been Phan Bội Châu's neighbor and friend.

French efforts to monitor, track, and capture Phan Bội Châu finally paid off on June 30, 1925. The capture of Phan Bội Châu, which was still rather haphazardly arranged and carried out, presented the French colonial administration with a number of serious legal and diplomatic issues. One of these was already quite obvious: the May 30 Movement had unleashed a wave of Chinese indignation against foreign concessions and foreign colonial actions on Chinese territory. Since Phan Bội Châu's capture had taken place on Chinese sovereign territory without an accompanying arrest warrant, the French consul simply placed Phan Bội Châu on a ship headed to Indochina. Thus Phan Bội Châu became the problem of *les grand commis* Maurice Monguillot, Rene Robin, and Émile Jeanbrau. A cascading series of security errors, legal interventions, and information leaks revealed how utterly unprepared the French administration was for the one thing it had sought most.

As Phan Bội Châu sat in Hỏa Lò Central Prison in Hanoi during the hot month of July, the news of his capture and detention sent shockwaves throughout and beyond French Indochina. The colonial and foreign press coverage elicited growing support for the old revolutionary, who now took on the guise of an anodyne patriot. In the face of this and the recent nomination of radical socialist Alexander Varenne as governor general of Indochina, the security services and administrators of French Indochina resolved to have justice done. Phan Bội Châu was to go on trial for having inspired and ordered the 1913 attacks. The responsibility for carrying out this trial was assigned to Jules-Joseph Bride, now president of the Criminal Commission of 1925. Bride was a uniquely appropriate adversary for Phan Bội Châu, who decided to fight the charges by every means he could think of. Bride, intent on proving Phan Bội Châu's guilt well beyond a reasonable doubt, assembled a massive archive of documents, including testimonies, letters, reports, and printed works. Bride's zealousness even got him into trouble with his superiors Robin and Monguillot who, while they did want Phan Bội Châu brought to justice, were also keenly aware that events outside of the courtroom might well play a role in the ultimate outcome.

The trial of Phan Bội Châu, which began August 29 and culminated in a dramatic day of sentencing on November 23, proved to be a maddening affair. Phan Bội Châu developed increasingly creative methods of denying the facts presented against him, driving Bride to expand his document collection, thereby extending the length of the trial. The results of the trial were as conclusive as they were contradictory. Bride's court proved Phan Bội Châu guilty, but Phan Bội Châu's epic defiance at the day of sentencing won him the support of the press and the Vietnamese public. Meanwhile, the sheer amount of time Bride had taken to reach a verdict, meant that Governor General Varenne arrived in time to reverse the verdict with an order of clemency. Thus it was that a revolutionary terrorist was absolved of his crimes and made into a national hero.

In the 15 years that followed, Phan Bội Châu grappled with the consequences of his choices and the story of his life. His years living in Huế were not easy, but they did afford him a steady stream of visitors, correspondence, and living companions. Among those who came to share ideas and partake of the old man's wisdom were Trần Huy Liệu, Ngô Đình Diệm, Đào Duy Anh, and, in 1937, former Governor General Alexander Varenne. His days were often spent with his friend and publisher Huỳnh Thúc Kháng.

Phan Bội Châu managed to keep up a very active writing schedule, producing three-quarters of his entire corpus during the final fifteen years of his life. Much of this work involved writing and publishing poetry offering sly criticism of the French colonial administration. He also addressed issues of social and cultural concern, thereby burnishing his reputation as a

scholar and dignified politician. After writing his second autobiography, the *Phan Bội Châu Niên Biểu*, the old scholar-patriot undertook two extended reflections on the classical Chinese texts the *Analects* and the *Book of Changes*. These works demonstrated that despite his age, Phan Bội Châu remained a brilliant thinker capable of expressing deep philosophical insights.

Phan Bội Châu died on October 29, 1940, after constructing his own tomb of concrete in the courtyard of his home. In the decades that followed, Phan Bội Châu's home in Huế would see solemn memorial services, the light of a postcolonial sun, and finally the terrible thunderings of violent conflict he had come to abhor in conflicted ways. These decades saw Phan Bội Châu's reputation as Vietnam's most dangerous man eclipsed by others far more deserving of the title. Phan Bội Châu's revolutionary legacy was also convincingly overshadowed by that of Hồ Chí Minh, who represented revolutionary Marxism, an ideology Phan Bội Châu came to view with a certain degree of unease.

The Contents of this Study

In composing this study of Phan Bội Châu's life, writings, and legacy, I have sought to explore how competing narratives are resolved into history writ large. Historical resolution is often similar to the kind of resolution that takes place in literature. An author must make choices, and therefore so must an historian. However, the historian is granted the one advantage of allowing conflicting viewpoints to sit uncomfortably alongside one another, without resolution. That much I have attempted to do here.

In chapter one, I review North Vietnamese and Western historical treatments of Phan Bội Châu, with the aim of pointing those histories back toward the conditions under which they were created. The argument is simple: most historians have seen what they wish to see in Phan Bội Châu's life and work. For historians such as Tôn Quang Phiệt, Trần Huy Liệu, and Chương Thâu, this means establishing Phan Bội Châu's character as unimpeachably good, while accepting that his worldview was deeply affected by his Confucian and even “feudal” upbringing. These historians are thus able to explain away contradictions in Phan Bội Châu's actions and writing as the lasting negative effects of ideology.

Western anti-war historians Georges Boudarel, William Duiker, and David Marr find the historiographical perspective of their North Vietnamese predecessors and colleagues an attractive means of explaining Vietnamese resilience in the face of French and American aggression. For these historians, Phan Bội Châu represents a millenia-long tradition of violent resistance to outside rule. The fact that Phan Bội Châu consistently drew on the Confucian repertoire throughout his life and neglected to ever identify “China” as a permanent existential threat to Vietnam in his histories is just one of the problems with this historiographical conceit. I end this chapter with a critique of those historians who would see contradictions as the result of ideological failures. To be understood, contradictions need to be embraced and explored, not resolved. I argue that in this way, it becomes possible to conceptualize the complexity and nuance of thinking and acting during uncertain, dangerous, and changing times.

The second chapter offers a deep reading of the 1917 hagiographic compendium *Việt Nam nghĩa liệt sử* (*The History of Vietnam's Martyr's*). Using digital and analog techniques of textual analysis, this chapter explores the contradictions inherent in a work that claims to be nationally representative in scope, yet in practice valorizes the sacrifices of a distinct minority at the expense of Cochinchinese. I also explore the manifold ways Phan Bội Châu and his fellow author Đặng Đoàn Bằng draw upon elements of the Confucian repertoire to establish the significance of deaths on behalf of the nation. This chapter finally considers how the biographies and actions of individuals can be appropriated, recontextualized, or claimed by nationalist

histories - something that, ironically or not, happened to the author himself.

The third and fourth chapters, intended to be read as a pair, provide a detailed narrative of the personally and nationally significant events of Phan Bội Châu's life from June until December 1925. For these chapters, I rely on the wide variety of documents contained in the six dossiers pertaining to Phan Bội Châu available in the Centre nationale d'outre-mer. In particular, I use telegrams, notes, reports, and press clippings to reconstruct a week-by-week account of the individuals responsible for capturing, prosecuting, and ultimately granting clemency to Phan Bội Châu. I seek to explain how and why the trial ended up immortalizing Phan Bội Châu's courageous defense, despite herculean efforts to ensure Phan Bội Châu would be revealed as a duplicitous, manipulative, and power-hungry political operator. These chapters also provide evidence showing how Vietnamese people and their allies were able to thwart the goals and actions of French colonial officials, and how those colonial officials worked at cross-purposes, despite having similar goals. Finally, in chapter four, I consider the legacy of the trial, which did achieve a form of justice, only to have the verdict overturned for entirely political reasons.

The fifth and final chapter presents a close reading of Phan Bội Châu's nearly 700-page exegesis on the *Book of Changes*, a classical Chinese cosmological divination text. In this chapter, I consider the uniquely modern and revolutionary approach taken by Phan Bội Châu, based on his conception of ethical temporality. By comprehending and harnessing the ethics of time, Phan Bội Châu valorizes the work of the individual, something quite unusual to find in a commentary on a Confucian text. Because the work addresses aspects of philosophy and ideology, I argue that Phan Bội Châu's efforts represent his discursive resolution of his overlapping personal contradictions.

Chapter One

Phan Bội Châu and National Historiography in Vietnam

It is difficult to imagine a twentieth-century non-communist patriot who is thought of more fondly in a communist country than Phan Bội Châu. His name adorns major boulevards and important streets in the centers of nearly every Vietnamese city. Numerous articles and books have been written about him and his twenty-year career as an overseas revolutionary.¹ In the roster of ardent Vietnamese patriots, his name comes second only to Hồ Chí Minh.² Yet, strangely, it is commonly acknowledged that he *failed* in nearly every endeavor he undertook during his lifetime.³ Why should a traditional Confucian scholar with little to show in the way of success receive such acclaim, admiration, and praise from all levels of Vietnamese society? Furthermore, why should he prove to be such a popular subject in radical antiwar scholarship in the United States?

To be sure, Phan sought and created a reputation for himself as being a fiery, outspoken opponent of the French colonial regime. He wrote scathing tracts and volumes exposing the brutality and illegitimacy of the French regime. These critical writings began prior to his initial escape to Japan in 1904 at the age of 37, and continued in secret even while he was under house arrest after his capture in 1925. Phan's writings circulated covertly and aroused widespread enthusiasm throughout Tonkin, Annam, and Cochinchina, the three protectorates comprising the "Vietnamese" portion of French Indochina.⁴ Word of bombing attempts and uprisings orchestrated by Phan further enlivened his image among his contemporaries in the colony even more. Nevertheless, Phan's highly respected place in both North Vietnamese communist and Western antiwar historiography is only partially explained by these activities.

In the 1960s and 1970s, parallel projects with clear political goals were proceeding in Hanoi, the capital of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (henceforth DRV) and on college

¹ A bibliography in a recent collection of essays concerning Phan Bội Châu lists no fewer than 50 Vietnamese language volumes analyzing and interpreting Phan's life story, activities, ideology, philosophy, and connections with contemporary individuals and groups. Another 92 articles are mentioned as well.. Chương Thái, ed., *Nghiên Cứu Phan Bội Châu (Researching Phan Bội Châu)* (Hanoi, VN: Nhà Xuất Bản Chính Trị Quốc Gia, 2004), 759-773. An older edited collection of essays about Phan and the Đông Du (Go East) Movement lists 22 Western language, 161 Vietnamese language, and 33 Japanese language books and articles written about Phan and his activities. Vĩnh Sinh, ed., *Phan Bội Châu and the Đông-Du Movement* (New Haven, CT: Yale Southeast Asia Studies, 1988), 193-213. These bibliographies are but the tip of the iceberg. I have discovered numerous additional independent essays, articles, books, commemorations, and poems written about Phan.

² William Duiker points out that, "it is significant that even communist historians today give Phan high marks as the greatest Vietnamese patriot for the first quarter of the present century." Later he states, "If Hồ Chí Minh is the paragon of all revolutionary virtues, Phan Bội Châu was his flawed but still revered predecessor." William Duiker *The Rise of Nationalism in Vietnam 1900-1941* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1976), 97, 100.

³ Phan himself readily admits this fact. In his second autobiography Phan writes, "Alas! My history is a history of countless failures without one single success." Phan Bội Châu, *The Autobiography of Phan Bội Châu*. Trans. Vĩnh Sinh and Nicholas Wickenden (HI: University of Hawai'i Press, 1999) 43.

⁴ Christopher Goscha points out that the term "Vietnam" is relatively recent. Even up until the Geneva accords many communists still thought in terms of "Indochina" or "Annam (Pacified South)." Goscha points to the rise of the Việt Nam Quốc Dân Đảng (Vietnamese Nationalist Party) leading up to its violent insurrection at Yên Bái in 1930 as the most important event propelling the popularity of "Vietnam" as opposed to alternatives. Christopher Goscha, *Vietnam Or Indochina?: Contesting Concepts of Space in Vietnamese Nationalism, 1887-1954* (Copenhagen, Denmark: Nordic Institute of Asian Studies, 1995), 65-66.

campuses in the United States, notably the University of California, Berkeley. In 1971, DRV “historian cadres” led by Trần Huy Liệu, a high-ranking member of the Communist Party, finally published the first volume of *Lịch Sử Việt Nam (The History of Vietnam)*.⁵ It was the capstone of a long and contested effort to establish a national narrative that would both employ Marxist dialectics and symbolize the Vietnamese people’s deep-rooted and enduring spirit of resistance. At the same time, across the Pacific Ocean, David Marr published *Vietnamese Anticolonialism 1885-1925*, a history of patriotic Vietnamese resistance to foreign rule intended to dissuade the US government from continuing to prosecute what had become the Vietnam War.⁶ Marr, like many of his fellow antiwar scholars at the time, relied upon communist scholarship for much of his evidence and theories.

In both narratives, Phan Bội Châu receives pride of place as the transitional figure bestriding the gap between a traditionalist, feudal, Confucian society dominated by elites, and a modern, socialist nation led by the Communist Party. It is my contention that the distinct political and ideological imperatives driving these narratives cause their authors to willfully overlook the complexity and subtlety of Phan’s life and thought. Rather than seriously considering Phan’s distinct and compelling vision of a Vietnamese nation, Vietnamese communists as well as the American antiwar scholars claimed him to be yet another a standard bearer for a primordial Vietnamese identity perpetually deployed in opposition to foreign aggressors.

In this paper I will briefly describe the construction of a Vietnamese national narrative by the DRV during the 1950s, and show why it proved so seductive for radical US historians writing in the 1960s and 1970s. By then analyzing Vietnamese communist writings about Phan Bội Châu and comparing them to Western historiography, I seek to demonstrate why Phan came to function as the fulcrum between two time periods. I do not intend to downplay Phan’s importance as a nationalist, but rather to suggest that current articulations of his importance are inadequate.

Wartime Political Ideology and the Writing of History

Serious conflict between states is likely to produce hardline interpretations within them of history, culture, and the relationship with their enemies. In order to support its own war effort, North Vietnam needed to produce a coherent, uncomplicated framework within which enemies could be clearly identified and positions clearly staked out. Kim Ninh has already demonstrated the chilling effect such an imperative had on the culture and intellectual stratum of the DRV.⁷ However, it proved more difficult to create a clear and consistent historical

⁵ Trần Huy Liệu *Lịch Sử Việt Nam (The History of Vietnam)*, vol. 1. (Hà Nội, VN: Khoa Học Xã Hội, 1971). The first volume, “begins with the prehistoric kingdom of Văn Lang and concludes in 1854 with the Locust Revolt led by Cao Bá Quát against the Nguyễn Emperor Tự Đức.” Patricia Pelley, *Postcolonial Vietnam: New Histories of the National Past* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002), 40. Volume 2, which actually includes information about Phan Bội Châu, was not published until 1985. Nevertheless, as indicated above, numerous monographs, articles, and books had already determined his place in the national narrative.

⁶ David G. Marr, *Vietnamese Anticolonialism 1885-1925* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1971).

⁷ In *A World Transformed*, Ninh describes the effects of the communist party’s decision that all culture was in fact political. Working from Trường Chinh’s 1943 “Theses on Culture,” communist ideologues attacked the notion of “art for art’s sake.” Dissent against doctrinaire communist policies culminated in the Nhân Văn Giai Phẩm period during which intellectuals protested on behalf of intellectual freedom. By 1958, the party had subdued such dissent and reasserted control over cultural expression. See especially Ninh, 121-163.

narrative for Vietnam. As Patricia Pelley shows in *Postcolonial Vietnam*, efforts to determine the “truth” of such important “facts” as the foundation of the nation, the mechanisms of socio-economic progress, and the role of the communist party within history gave rise to years of fractious debate and infighting. The final result was a peculiar jumble of Marxist dialectics and descriptions of a timeless multi-ethnic national polity arranged unmistakably around a historical vision of a recurrent spirit of resistance against foreign invasions.

US servicemen turned scholars likewise felt it was necessary to define and explain their enemy, even if only to suggest that this particular enemy should not be fought. In a concise and informative state of the field essay, Tuong Vu evaluates the “adolescent” period of English-language scholarship on Vietnam.⁸ Whereas earlier scholarship had doubted the strength or even the existence of a Vietnamese national identity and claimed that communism was an aberrant development, Tuong Vu finds that in the late 1960s “radicalized academia,” which had been influenced by social science paradigms, began to generate an entirely new perspective on Vietnam and its history.⁹ Although they had been funded or otherwise assisted by the US government, quite ironically, many of these new studies were “sympathetic to communist movements,” and sought to portray the NLF (National Liberation Front)/DRV as the inheritors of a “national tradition of resistance.”¹⁰

Creating a National Narrative – Vietnamese Communist Scholarship during the Wars against Imperialism

In the 1960s, the DRV faced the most powerful nation on earth in a battle for its survival. For North Vietnam this was total war, and total war necessitated the marshaling of all available forces to rally and sustain the national will, including Vietnam’s own history. As Pelley writes, “To dispel the fear (and the realization) that they were embroiled in a situation they did not control...they concocted narratives of unassailable coherence.”¹¹ Initially, this meant producing substantive reactions against colonial scholarship, which had emphasized Vietnam’s inability to govern itself, and thus its need for a guiding hand.¹² Pelley states, “Postcolonial narratives shifted the emphasis so that the history of Vietnam was structured not by defeat and submission but by resistance and opposition...Postcolonial productions stressed the strength and vitality of Vietnam and its history of unity.”¹³

The creators of Vietnam’s new national narratives were not faceless communist bureaucrats. Many had previously been activists and most had been pressured out of positions within the party’s political leadership. The following section includes short biographies of those who played important roles in situating Phan Bội Châu within the history of national

⁸ Tuong Vu, “Vietnamese Political Studies and Debates on Vietnamese Nationalism,” *Journal of Vietnamese Studies*, Vol. 2, Issue 1 (2007): 175-230.

⁹ Tuong Vu in particular mentions the work of Bernard Fall, Hoàng Văn Chí, and Joseph Buttinger. For Fall, “the territorial basis of the modern Vietnamese nation [was] shaky,” and, “the Vietnamese also lack[ed] a political basis.” Hoàng Văn Chí did see “recurrent patterns of resistance to foreign invasion in Vietnamese history,” yet he nonetheless felt that the communists had betrayed the national cause and thus did not represent or embody a putative tradition of resistance. Buttinger argued that Vietnam’s identity as a nation was based not on ethnic ties but on communal ones. Buttinger suggested that South Vietnam best “represented the national aspirations of Vietnam,” and as such required and deserved US support. *ibid.*, 177-187.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 188-189.

¹¹ Pelley, 5.

¹² *Ibid.*, 7.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 8.

resistance. Trần Huy Liệu (1901-1969) was the historian par excellence of North Vietnam.¹⁴ He was born in the north of Nam Định province, but travelled to Saigon in 1924 to work as a reporter for the Vietnamese language newspaper *Đông Pháp Thời Báo* (*The French Indochina Times*).¹⁵ In this capacity, Trần Huy Liệu covered Phan Bội Châu's 1925 trial in Hanoi. Later, while in Saigon, he compiled and published a pamphlet entitled "Việc Phan Bội Châu" ("The Phan Bội Châu Affair").¹⁶ In 1926, he joined Đảng Thanh Niên (Jeune Annam), one of many organizations formed in impromptu fashion to demand amnesty for Phan Bội Châu after Phan had been sentenced to life imprisonment with hard labor.¹⁷

Trần Huy Liệu joined the Việt Nam Quốc Dân Đảng (Vietnamese Nationalist Party) in 1928 and served as the chairman of the party's southern regional committee.¹⁸ In 1930, following the failed Yên Bái uprising, the French completely destroyed the organizational capacity of the VNQDD. By this time, Trần Huy Liệu had already been arrested, having been sent to the Poulo Condore Penitentiary in 1929.¹⁹ He converted to communism while in prison, and continued to work clandestinely for the Indochinese Communist Party (ICP) while officially employed as a journalist through the 1930s.²⁰ During the August Revolution of 1945, Trần Huy Liệu made history himself by going to Huế to claim the imperial seal and imperial regalia from the former emperor of the Nguyễn dynasty, Bảo Đại.²¹ From 1953, Trần Huy Liệu served as chairman for the Research Committee on Literature, History, and Geography. From 1959, he served in top positions in the Institute of History.²² He was incredibly prodigious, writing articles on numerous historical matters, organizing conferences, and playing a key role in determining both the national origins and the broader national narrative that would include Phan Bội Châu as its penultimate capstone.

Tôn Quang Phiệt (1900-1973) was born in Phan Bội Châu's home province of Nghệ An. In 1924, while studying at the Normal School in Hanoi, he was inducted into the Phục Việt (Vietnamese Restoration) Party during a reorganization drive.²³ Previously, members of the Phục Việt Party had sought to forge an alliance with Phan's Quang Phục Hội (Restoration League), but this effort failed in 1917 when the main leaders were arrested. Tôn Quang Phiệt himself was arrested in 1926, and was shuffled through ten separate prisons, finally ending up in Buon Ma Thuot.²⁴ In 1930, the Phục Việt Party, and Tôn Quang Phiệt along with it, were absorbed into the ICP.²⁵ In the mid 1930s, Tôn Quang Phiệt was invited to become the principal of the private

¹⁴ Pelley calls him "The leading figure in the postcolonial historiographical project." Pelley, 21.

¹⁵ Hue-Tam Ho Tai. *Radicalism and the Origins of the Vietnamese Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), 122.

¹⁶ David Marr, *Vietnamese Tradition on Trial, 1920-1945* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1981), 16.

¹⁷ Huynh Kim Khanh, *Vietnamese Communism 1925-1945* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1982), 46.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 91.

¹⁹ Peter Zinoman, *The Colonial Bastille: A History of Imprisonment in Vietnam, 1862-1940*. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2001), 248.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 248-249.

²¹ Pelley, 237.

²² *Ibid.*, 20-21.

²³ Tai, 84-85.

²⁴ Zinoman, 68.

²⁵ Tai, 148. Huynh Kim Khanh notes that Tôn Quang Phiệt had belonged, perhaps in addition, to the Tân Việt (New Vietnam) Party, which was also absorbed into the ICP in 1930. Huynh Kim Khanh furthermore cites

Thuan Hoa school in Huế.²⁶ In that capacity, he pushed a leftist education platform while continuing to act as a clandestine ICP member.²⁷ In 1946 he served as a representative to the first Vietnamese National Congress, while also holding other important party positions. Beginning in 1954, Tôn Quang Phiệt joined the Research Committee on Literature, History, and Geography and became a full-time academic. In 1954 he published, “Phan Bội Châu trong lịch sử chống thực dân Pháp của dân tộc Việt Nam” (Phan Bội Châu in the Vietnamese People’s History of Resistance to French Colonialism), a key statement on Phan’s significance in the Vietnamese national narrative.²⁸

Chương Thâu, about whom there is comparatively little available information, was born in 1935 and thus belongs to an entirely different generation of scholars. Chương Thâu nevertheless established his reputation as the foremost scholar writing on Phan Bội Châu, his life, his ideas, and his importance. A limited collection of Chương Thâu’s essays on Phan was published in 2004, and is 777 pages in length.²⁹ In the foreword, his contemporary Vũ Ngọc Khánh remarks upon Chương Thâu’s enthusiasm for his subject, depth of understanding, and professionalism.³⁰ Chương Thâu’s numerous articles and books have played a significant role in thoroughly defining Phan’s place in Vietnamese history.

In 1956, Trần Huy Liệu published an article on the Hùng kings, claiming that “if there had been no Hùng kings, then there would be no Đinh, Lê, Lý, Trần, Hồ, Lê, or Nguyễn [dynasties], and also no Democratic Republic of Vietnam.”³¹ This statement perfectly captures the North Vietnamese communist interest in establishing a coherent national narrative in which the Party itself is the end result. Nevertheless, in order to firmly ground this supposedly historical tradition, Trần Huy Liệu and his colleagues first needed to prove that the Hùng kings had actually existed, and then to establish a logical chronology within which to situate them. To do this, they relied on the DRV’s small but growing collection of archaeologists.

In a fascinating analysis of North Vietnamese communist archaeological efforts and scholarship on prehistory, Haydon Cherry explains how internationally accepted theories on the Bronze Age in Vietnam were thoroughly conflated with the mythic tradition of the Hùng kings and their kingdom of Văn Lang. Communist archaeologists and historians had described the Vietnamese Bronze Age as consisting of a sequence of four periods: (1) The Phùng Nguyên, (2) Đông Đậu, (3) Gò Mun, and (4) Đông Sơn cultures. By doing so, they provided a material anchor for what was essentially a totally legendary period. As Cherry states, “The only true sources for this period are prehistoric relics: bronze drums, weapons, tools, ornaments, and household items, among others. They tell us much about the technological sophistication and economy of the early inhabitants of northern Vietnam. They tell us nothing about the Hùng kings and the kingdom of

Nhuong Tong’s contention that Tôn Quang Phiệt provided the VNQDD with ideas for regulations and an action program. Huynh, 92.

²⁶ Marr, *Vietnamese Tradition on Trial*, 41.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 180.

²⁸ In 1958, Tôn Quang Phiệt expanded on his statements in a book entitled *Phan Bội Châu và một giai đoạn lịch sử chống Pháp của nhân dân Việt Nam* (Phan Bội Châu and a Period of the Vietnamese People’s History of Resistance to French Colonialism) (Hanoi, VN: Nhà Xuất Bản Văn Hóa, 1958).

²⁹ Chương Thâu, ed. *Nghiên Cứu Phan Bội Châu*. See above.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 9-13. Vũ Ngọc Khánh states, “the rays of [Chương Thâu’s] accumulated research make Phan Bội Châu’s image glisten more brightly every day.”

³¹ Trần Huy Liệu, “Giỗ tổ Hùng Vương” (The Commemoration of Our Ancestors the Hùng Kings). *Tạp san Nghiên cứu Văn Sử Địa* (*Journal of Literary, Historical, and Geographical Research*) 17, 1 (May 1956): 3.

Văn Lang.”³²

Furthermore, dynastic histories that had previously dismissed as “feudal” were later readmitted into the national canon of statist histories. This was part of a larger attempt to “establish a new chain of succession” that seemed to stretch ever farther back into time.³³ This revived statist historical tradition shifted toward the Northern perspective, as opposed to the Southern viewpoint, which was closely associated with the former Nguyễn dynasty that had been based in Huế and drew support from the Mekong delta region.³⁴ This narrative also sought to redefine all rebellions as essentially directed against foreigners or their internal collaborators.³⁵ All rebels and resistance leaders that could be consolidated into a national narrative of resistance were stripped of any extraneous elements and brought into the fold.

Those that were either too difficult or too strange to co-opt were either labeled “feudal” or “reactionary” - or else ignored altogether.³⁶ For instance, Phan Đình Phùng was declared to be “patriotic,” while religious sects such as the Cao Đài and Hòa Hảo were conveniently whitewashed or ignored entirely.

In 1955, Trần Huy Liệu broached the question of the date of the origin of the Vietnamese nation.³⁷ Using dynastic histories, myths, legends, Engels, and Stalin, DRV historians postulated various dates for Vietnam’s national origins. These ranged from 1945 (the August Revolution, during which Hồ Chí Minh claimed independence from France), to 939 CE (the year the Ngô dynasty broke away from China), to 2879 BCE (the legendary beginning of the reign of the Hùng kings). Despite many carefully argued Marxist analyses that refused to extend Vietnam’s national origins beyond the historical era, the appeal of exceeding even the antiquity of China’s Xia dynasty (2070-1600s BCE) won out.

This unjustified projecting of Vietnam’s national origins more than four millennia into the past reveals what was in fact a deeper historiographical issue. Pelley points out, “Historical materialism...is famously opaque; even though official historians were eager to innovate, they were often uncertain about how to read the national past according to Marxist structures and categories.”³⁸ As a result, they either developed bizarre mixtures of Marxist dialectical theory and narratives of timeless resistance, or simply “refused to see class conflict or other forms of internal division as the motor of history.”³⁹ Many national histories written by Vietnamese communists were thus not authentically Marxist at all. Nonetheless, the word “Marxism” carried

³² Cherry, 131. Cherry’s revelations make reading Keith Weller Taylor’s *The Birth of Vietnam* a real treat. Taylor, liberally citing Trần Quốc Vượng and other North Vietnamese archaeologists, tells the story of the Hùng kings and their society. Although he is careful to point out that Đông Sơn culture and the Hùng legends are distinct, his narrative suggests that parts of the myths originated from an actual historical polity. For instance, Taylor writes, “A modern Vietnamese linguist has associated *Van-lang*, the traditional name of the Hung kingdom, with phonetically similar words in the languages of minority peoples throughout the region bounded by the Yangtze and Mekong rivers that mean ‘people’ and, by extension, ‘nation.’” Keith W. Taylor, *The Birth of Vietnam* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1983), 3.

³³ *Ibid.*, 29.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 31.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 38.

³⁶ George Dutton explains this historiographical conceit in an unpublished paper.

³⁷ Haydon Cherry, “Digging Up the Past: Prehistory and the Weight of the Present in Vietnam.” *Journal of Vietnamese Studies*, Vol. 4, Issue 1 (2009): 84-144. 107.

³⁸ Pelley, 10.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

with it the suggestion that a work was “scientific.”⁴⁰ This made it possible, “to codify the ‘laws of historical development,’” and in turn appear, ‘disinterested, objective, and impartial.’⁴¹ By labeling works as “Marxist” or “historical materialist” that clearly were not, Pelley argues that Vietnamese historian cadres deprived these terms of “of any precise conceptual content.”⁴²

Pelley describes how DRV historian cadres engaged in long running debates about how to apply Stalin’s *Marxism and the National Question* to Vietnamese history. Interestingly, none of them seemed to have registered the fact that Stalin was expressly *opposed* to the ideas of nations or nationalism, and had written this text so as to better critique such concepts. Rather, they struggled for over a decade to determine if and when Vietnam had gone through periods of primitive communism, slavery, feudalism, capitalism, and communism. They also considered and rejected the possibility of applying the concept of the Asiatic Mode of Production to Vietnamese history.⁴³ Nevertheless, when the *History of Vietnam* was finally published in 1971, “the models had simply vanished.”⁴⁴ In other words, once Marxist analyses had proven too cumbersome for the Vietnamese national narrative, they were abandoned. Faced with a choice of internally driven change motivated by internal tensions or an original and authentic essence based on demonstrable examples of courageous resistance, DRV historians usually opted for a qualified version of the latter.⁴⁵

Another term, “*quốc túy*” (national essence), received a whole new set of meanings. Pelley describes how Vietnamese borrowed the concept of national essence from Japan.⁴⁶ DRV historians and cultural cadres rejected attempts made in the 1920s and 1930s to link national essence to language and literature, and instead aligned the notion with “the fighting spirit of the Vietnamese.”⁴⁷ Having thus defined national essence, “official historians discerned the ‘spirit of resistance against foreign aggression’ all around them in the present and throughout the past.”⁴⁸ This concept of national essence, which linked the present with the past, offered a powerful way to justify the suffering of the Vietnamese people during the war with the United States.⁴⁹ Furthermore, it brushed notions of internal conflict under the rug and refocused attention on the underlying unity of the Vietnamese people.

Coming to Terms with the Enemy: American Scholarship during the Vietnam War

US scholarship on Vietnam in the late 1960s and 1970s is widely considered to have been of a substantially higher quality than that of previous generations. More scholars entered the field than ever before, and brought with them new techniques of analysis, interpretation, and

⁴⁰ Ibid., 43.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid., 44.

⁴³ Ibid., 54-58.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 61.

⁴⁵ As Pelley explains: “Official historians sometimes presented the Vietnamese past as transcendent and essential, as having escaped the surface contingencies of social life and as standing outside the world of mere events. When they translated the past into pure essence, official historians tended to dwell on what they regarded as the distinctly Vietnamese tradition of resistance to foreign aggression. Or, still rejecting the linear view of history, they conceived of history as a process – but a process of repetition, not development, in which exemplary moments from the past were periodically restaged.”

⁴⁶ Ibid., 141.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 143.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 146.

conceptualization.⁵⁰ Where scholars had previously doubted the resilience and durability of the Vietnamese national polity, largely because of the Republic of Vietnam (RVN)'s increasing dysfunction and authoritarian tendencies, American and European academics now believed that "the Vietnam[ese] nation has been able to act as a political community with a distinct independent identity at countless times in history and has survived at great odds."⁵¹ Legitimacy shifted from the ailing South Vietnamese regimes to the DRV and its tenacious, dedicated leaders who seemed to enjoy popular support.

Among those leading this new charge were David Marr, William Duiker, Trương Bửu Lâm, and Huỳnh Kim Khánh. David Marr, currently professor emeritus at Australian National University, served as, "a US Marine Corps intelligence officer in Vietnam in 1962-63."⁵² After his tour, during which he been "struck by the ability of the National Liberation Front to conduct complex political and military operations amidst some of the most difficult conditions imaginable," Marr entered graduate school at UC Berkeley.⁵³ As a result of his research, he became "convinced that the communists were going to win, largely because they were heirs to a strong national and anticolonial tradition."⁵⁴ He thus felt it was imperative to "convince fellow Americans that our actions in Southeast Asia were both disastrous and inhumane."⁵⁵ In order to do so, Marr examined the revolutionary career of Phan Bội Châu and other anticolonial activists, all the while assuming "a linear and uninterrupted relationship between history and current events in the idea of a unified, ultimately unstoppable force sweeping through Vietnamese history over two thousand years."⁵⁶ As Tuong Vu puts it, Marr's research and arguments thus played a powerful role in "*nationalizing* Vietnamese history."⁵⁷

Marr fought his battle on several fronts. First, in *Vietnamese Anticolonialism*, Marr introduced the concept of "anticolonialism," as opposed to "nationalism." This allowed him to evade the issue of tradition versus modernity. According to Tuong Vu, "anticolonialism," as a discursive device, allowed "the Cần Vương, Đông Du and Việt Minh (the front organization for the Indochinese Communist Party during the war years) to be lumped together and a straight line be drawn from Phan Đình Phùng, a Cần Vương leader, to Hồ Chí Minh, the modern communist."⁵⁸ Such a line connecting the two necessarily included Phan Bội Châu.

In addition, Marr introduced the English-speaking world to Nguyễn Khắc Viện, a communist intellectual with ties to France and the DRV.⁵⁹ Nguyễn Khắc Viện stressed "the similarities between Confucianism and Marxism (e.g. a secular frame of reference and high moral standards)."⁶⁰ According the Nihn, Nguyễn Khắc Viện's views, , "were often quoted as exemplifying the uniqueness of Vietnamese Marxism's seemingly comfortable connection with

⁵⁰ Tuong Vu writes, "The approaches and techniques employed in these studies were extremely diverse, ranging from statistical analyses to mathematical modeling to historical and literary studies. Theory was no longer marginalized; instead, most works now contained some theory, at least implicitly." Tuong Vu, 188.

⁵¹ Ibid., 189.

⁵² Marr, *Vietnamese Tradition on Trial*, vii.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid., viii.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Tuong Vu, 190.

⁵⁷ Ibid. Italics in original.

⁵⁸ Tuong Vu, 191-192.

⁵⁹ See Nguyễn Khắc Viện, *Tradition and Revolution in Vietnam*. Ed. David Marr and Jayne Werner. Trans. Linda Yarr, Jayne Werner, and Tran Tuong Nhu. (Berkeley, CA: Indochina Resource Center, 1974).

⁶⁰ Ninh, 4.

the country's past."⁶¹ Nguyễn Khắc Viện's conceptual contention was reinforced by the French colonial scholar Paul Mus's emphasis on the "mandate of heaven." Mus had suggested that Vietnamese peasants would be more likely to accept communists because they would be seen simply as the next dynasty, having provided for the material needs of the people.⁶²

Theoretical explanations such as these that glossed over distinctions between Confucianism and communism in favor of an almost functional transition from one to the other served the interests of politically inspired scholars on both sides of the Pacific. William Duiker, professor emeritus at Pennsylvania State University, served as a Foreign Service officer in South Vietnam in the mid 1960s.⁶³ Like his colleague Marr, Duiker was intrigued by the communists' "ability to maintain their determination, sometimes in the face of great odds."⁶⁴ However, in contrast to Marr, Duiker saw the communists as something new, a modern force that owed as much to the changes wrought by French colonialism as it did to a legacy of anticolonial resistance.⁶⁵ Nevertheless, Duiker did see a "primitive" consciousness prior to the twentieth century, "based on cultural and ethnic distinctiveness."⁶⁶ Drawing upon many of the same North Vietnamese communist sources as had Marr (including articles and books by Trần Huy Liệu, Tôn Quang Phiệt, and Chương Thâu), Duiker emphasized arguments more akin to "Marxist" ones published in the DRV, which focused upon the theoretical value of class-based analysis and the strategic importance of creating a cohesive, disciplined vanguard party. Duiker's discussion of Phan thus targets his theoretical immaturity and inherent gullibility, yet nonetheless reinforces the idea of Phan as, "the hero, the apostle, and the martyr of independence, venerated by 20 million slaves."⁶⁷

Two Vietnamese scholars who studied and wrote in the United States, Trương Bửu Lâm, and Huỳnh Kim Khánh, made further contributions to the notion of a pattern or tradition of national resistance.⁶⁸ Trương Bửu Lâm translated a great number of Vietnamese works into English "that appeared to assert an independent Vietnamese identity... dating back to the eleventh century."⁶⁹ Trương Bửu Lâm went so far as to claim that all traditional resistance movements were in fact "nationalist."⁷⁰ Taking perhaps a slightly more tactful approach, Huỳnh Kim Khánh claimed, "what has motivated the masses throughout history is patriotism, the social and institutional bases of which include ancestor worship and the 'communal cult.'"⁷¹ Huỳnh Kim Khánh noted the effect of Chinese aggression over centuries, indicating that Vietnam had developed under the rather unique condition of perpetually facing an aggressive and immensely powerful neighbor.

All of these scholars were responding intellectually and creatively to events on the ground. They were seeking to determine why the United States was losing to a small and

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² See Ninh 4-5.

⁶³ William Duiker, *Ho Chi Minh: A Life*, (New York, NY: Hyperion, 2000). ix.

⁶⁴ William Duiker, *The Rise of Vietnamese Nationalism*, 9.

⁶⁵ Tuong Vu, 195.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ William Duiker, *The Rise of Vietnamese Nationalism*, 100. The statement is quoted from Hồ Chí Minh.

⁶⁸ The relevant text for Trương Bửu Lâm is *Patterns of Vietnamese Response to Foreign Intervention: 1858-1900* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Southeast Asia Studies, 1967). For Huỳnh Kim Khánh, see *Vietnamese Communism* above.

⁶⁹ Tuong Vu, 190.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid., 192.

undeveloped country. With so much money, men, and weaponry being mobilized against the DRV, satisfying reasons for a lack of success were needed. As Ninh writes, “A number of influential academic works were authored by those who came to believe that the U.S. involvement in Vietnam could not succeed because it took into account so little of the political, historical, and social impulses driving the Vietnamese.”⁷² Resolving to redress this critical oversight, American antiwar scholars turned to those who now seemed most knowledgeable about revolutionary Vietnam: Revolutionary Vietnamese. In his preface to *Vietnamese Anticolonialism*, Marr states:

Some readers may feel that I have relied too heavily on publications from Hanoi. This is mainly because scholars in North Vietnam have moved far ahead of their contemporaries in the South in the patient collection, annotation, and publication of primary data on anticolonial activities...In secondary and interpretive works, historians in Hanoi appear to have been somewhat more attentive to modern scholastic practices.⁷³

Marr’s statements suggest that communist scholarship was indeed succeeding in its goal of being scientific, meticulous, and most importantly credible. This nevertheless begs the question of the degree to which Marr and his cohort drew on Vietnamese communist theories in addition to evidence.

Communist adulation of an enduring four-millennia old national spirit corresponded uncannily well with the theoretical needs of US antiwar scholars. If they could prove that an ethnic Vietnamese consciousness had existed throughout history and, even more importantly, that it had naturally culminated in the leadership of the communist party, then arguments for retaining a military presence in Vietnam would lose legitimacy. The “scientific” scholarship of the DRV thus offered an apparently credible body of knowledge that confirmed for Marr, Duiker, and their colleagues all of their hypotheses regarding the strength of communism in Vietnam.

Although the efforts of antiwar scholars indeed revealed a legacy of resistance to foreign invasion, it has subsequently been demonstrated that they overstated their case to no small degree. As Marr admits in a later book, one byproduct of their project, “has been to downgrade the historical significance of major transformations occurring during the colonial period in Vietnam (1859-1945).”⁷⁴ Once a tradition of resistance had been isolated and defined, continuity took precedence over change. Great intellectual shifts and significant socioeconomic changes were condensed into the phrase “transitional period.” Tuong Vu furthermore blames a tendency toward “historical reductionism [in which] complex historical relationships were reduced to the ‘patterns of Vietnamese resistance’ to foreign powers, and complex historical actors were simplified to two kinds, ‘resisters’ (or ‘patriots’) and ‘collaborators.’”⁷⁵ Among the things shared by Vietnamese communist historians and US antiwar scholars was a desire to explain that which was essentially complicated in easy, clear terms. What had been gained in immediate

⁷² Ninh, Kim N.B, *A World Transformed: The Politics of Culture in Revolutionary Vietnam, 1945-1965* (Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 2002), 2.

⁷³ Marr qualifies these statements by offering that, “those in Saigon often have proved to be superior in capturing the ‘sense’ of the period, emphasizing more perhaps with traditionalist attitudes and values.” Marr, xvi. Nonetheless, Marr draws comparatively little from Southern scholars for his book. That which he does mostly concerns events that took place in the South.

⁷⁴ David G. Marr, *Vietnamese Tradition on Trial*, x.

⁷⁵ Tuong Vu, 192.

intelligibility ultimately came at the cost of subtlety, circumspection, and true comprehension.

The Many Faces and the One Face of Phan Bội Châu

Vietnamese communist historian cadres faced one other difficult problem. How could the timeless, essentialized spirit of Vietnamese patriotic resistance transcend the divide between traditional feudal society, where it had supposedly originated, and the modern communist party state, which now, it seems, embodied it? The existence of a codified lineage of national protectors and heroes frustrated efforts to establish a sequence of transformations informed by Marxist dialectics. Dedicated efforts to make theory apply even where it had no logical basis created a seemingly unique combination of historically productive socioeconomic revolutions alongside a Carlylean series of patriotic heroes stretching back into antiquity.⁷⁶

For Vietnamese communists in need of a hero capable of fulfilling the requirements of this bizarre schema, Phan Bội Châu offered almost everything. He embodied the best aspects of the Confucian tradition: Courage, loyalty, dedication, tenacity, and acuity. In addition, as an individual Phan was quite likeable. He made friends easily and made a significant effort to provide for those who followed him. At the same time, it was easy to claim Phan to be a product of his times and thus not responsible for various negative attributes: Gullibility, unsystematic thinking, political opportunism, and elite detachment. It was both possible and necessary to explain such unwanted elements away using selectively applied Marxist analyses.

In contrast, US historians could afford far more leeway with regard Phan, and therefore engaged in critical analysis, interpretation, and evaluation of sources. Once they had demonstrated Phan's transitional role in carrying the Vietnamese resistance movement from traditional royalism to modern nationalism, they could take whatever tact they wanted concerning his activities, connections, and intellectual development. Nevertheless, although antiwar scholars did take up some unorthodox issues, their reliance on North Vietnamese scholarship seems to have skewed their presentations of Phan toward the, "great man" style of analysis. Indeed, Marr and Duiker's accounts of Phan often seem like DRV accounts with the awkward Marxist frameworks removed.

One critical question that DRV historian cadres needed to answer concerned Phan's class background and ideological position. As elsewhere, opinions differed. The theoretical analyses produced by Tôn Quang Phiệt and Chương Thân provide examples of the types of Marxist analysis employed. In 1954, Tôn Quang Phiệt wrote an essay entitled "Phan Bội Châu Trong Lịch Sử Chống Thực Dân Pháp Của Dân Tộc Việt Nam" (Phan Bội Châu in the Vietnamese People's History of Resistance to French Colonialism). Throughout this essay, he emphasizes the importance of economic and historical conditions when explaining Phan's thoughts and actions. Tôn Quang Phiệt writes that Phan was, after all, "a product of his times."⁷⁷

⁷⁶ The Chinese revolution makes for an interesting comparative case. On this subject, David Elliot has written, "China's revolution was, in essence, a search for a political formula that could integrate its wide diversity while simultaneously pursuing a policy of social transformation that would increase its 'wealth and power' and restore a position of international respect and prestige. Vietnam's goals were more modest, and its revolution aimed at re-integrating a society that had been disrupted by colonial occupation, and re-affirming the traditional ideals of the scholar patriots who fought to maintain Vietnam's independence." David Elliot, "Revolutionary Re-integration: A Comparison of the Foundation of Post-liberation Political Systems in North Vietnam and China." Ph.D. Dissertation, Cornell University, 1976), 8.

⁷⁷ Tôn Quang Phiệt, "Phan Bội Châu Trong Lịch Sử Chống Thực Dân Pháp Của Dân Tộc Việt Nam" (Phan Bội Châu in the Vietnamese People's History of Resistance to French Colonialism). In Phan Bội Châu. *Tự Phê*

Tôn Quang Phiệt claims that following the French invasion, the feudal class, to which Phan belonged, split into collaborationist and resistance sections.⁷⁸ The French hold on the economy undermined the feudal class and gave rise to both a collaborationist bourgeoisie and an independent bourgeoisie. Although the former had not the inclination, nor the latter the power to eject the French, together they produced an equally weakened proletariat class that toiled in their factories. Tôn Quang Phiệt argues that Phan's family came from the very lowest echelon of the feudal class, which was closest to the people. As such, Phan attempted first to rally the feudal class to oppose the French and then to call upon the entire country to rise up.

Phan conceived of the country as composed of ten classes.⁷⁹ Tôn Quang Phiệt points out that Phan nevertheless failed to determine which class was the most revolutionary, or which class actually had the capacity to eject the French. Tôn Quang Phiệt thus argues that Phan only saw individuals driven to hate the French for *emotional* reasons and failed to conceive of classes that might resist the French because of their *interests*. In Tôn Quang Phiệt's estimation, Phan simply could neither figure out which class he represented, nor which class he *should* have represented.

Chương Thâu's treatment of Phan's class background is far more thorough. In "Thời Đại và Nhà Tư Tưởng Phan Bội Châu" (The Era of the Thinker, Phan Bội Châu), written in 1967, Chương Thâu claims that colonialism spurred capitalism while restraining agriculture.⁸⁰ Vietnam thus became "half colonized and half feudal," which led to the general impoverishment of all. French policies and excessive taxation precipitated a social catastrophe in the countryside. French political, social, cultural, and economic policies created even greater divisions and contradictions within the Vietnamese body politic, leading to what Chương Thâu calls the, "revolutionization" of the people.⁸¹ By this, he means, history impressed upon the people the mission of national liberation. By using categories and theories of historical change drawn from *Marxism and the National Question* in such a haphazard way, Chương Thâu produces a productive theory of nationalism utterly at odds with Stalin's original intent.

Chương Thâu then evaluates the various classes to determine which would be able to take on this mission of national liberation. He feels that the peasantry, although imbued with revolutionary capability, lacked consciousness. The proletariat was of insufficient size and strength. The feudal class had been neutralized following the failure of the Cần Vương movement. Both the capitalists and the collaborators had risen under the wing of colonialism and had weak spirits. The petty bourgeoisie and urbanites were dependent on the colonial regime – and both groups were feeble and ineffective. Furthermore, all of these groups lacked ways to represent their implicit ideologies.

This left only the progressive patriotic scholars. According to Chương Thâu, scholar patriots were in essence, using capitalist ideology borrowed from Europe via Chinese

Phán (Self Criticism). Phạm Khang. Thanh Hóa, VN: Nhà Xuất Bản Thanh Hóa, 2008. 12. This is a typically Marxist method of historical analysis. Individuals are understood to be created by their social and historical conditions. This works both to absolve certain individuals of failures and mistakes and also to deny historical actors of agency unless, paradoxically, they are in line with the progressive forces of history.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 15.

⁷⁹ These included local notables, students, children of officials, Catholics, indigenous troops under the French, materialists (*hội đảng dụ đồ*), secretaries and servants, women, the children of families with a grievance against the enemy, and overseas students. *ibid.*, 21.

⁸⁰ Chương Thâu, "Thời Đại và Nhà Tư Tưởng Phan Bội Châu" (The Era of the Thinker, Phan Bội Châu). Chương Thâu. *Nghiên Cứu Phan Bội Châu* (Hà Nội, VN: Nhà Xuất Bản Chính Trị Quốc Gia, 2004), 24-25.

⁸¹ Ibid., 24.

reformers and revolutionaries based in Japan as a weapon. However, Phan mixed their ideas with his revitalized version of Confucianism. Phan rejected the old teaching methods and sought a Confucianism imbued with notions of “transformation.”⁸² Chương Thâu calls this a semi-bourgeois viewpoint, and claims it had been determined wholly by Phan’s economic position in society.

Chương Thâu goes on to claim that Phan’s theoretical standpoint was “immature.”⁸³ Furthermore, his actions were “out of season.”⁸⁴ This was because the bourgeois ideology that Phan relied upon emanated from Europe and was informed by Social Darwinism, and had become a weapon in the hands of the “executioners of nationalities” (i.e. colonialists and imperialists).⁸⁵ Chương Thâu claims that all around the world, bourgeois nationalism was growing stale and becoming incapable of effectively opposing colonialism. Meanwhile, within Vietnam, contradictions were developing between socio-economic relations and the means of production. However, these contradictions went unnoticed and were thus invisibly generating a national revolutionary consciousness. Thus, Chương Thâu asserts, Phan’s ideology was reflective of the indomitable and unyielding spirit of the people at that time. Almost by default, Phan came to represent the national will that transcended particular interests. Furthermore, his revolutionary ideology *represented the traditions of the people*. According to Chương Thâu’s description, Phan was modern, traditional, bourgeois, Confucian, and patriotic - all at the same time. This bizarre use of Marxist theory to explain the development of a symbolic national will reflects the inventiveness and unorthodox character of Vietnamese communist historiography.

Another example of Chương Thâu’s fanciful use of Marxist theory occurs in his essay written in 1962 entitled “Ảnh Hưởng của Cách Mạng Trung Quốc đối với Sự Biến Chuyển Tư Tưởng Phan Bội Châu” (The Influence of the Chinese Revolution on Changes in the Ideology of Phan Bội Châu).⁸⁶ This essay explores connections between Phan and Chinese intellectuals such as Kang Youwei, Liang Qichao, and Sun Yatsen. Chương Thâu. It begins by tracing the path of bourgeois revolution from the West to Meiji Japan, and from there on to Chinese revolutionaries and reformers in exile in Japan during the first decade of the twentieth century. Their writings served to transport the ideas of the revolution to Vietnam and to Phan.

Chương Thâu claims that a new social class arose in scattered patches at the end of the nineteenth century in the form of patriotic scholars who founded trading companies. He refers to such people as the nationalist bourgeoisie. Their ideology had just begun to develop and was taken directly from Japan via the writings of Kang and Liang.. Chương Thâu argues that Kang’s ideology “Reflected and represented the intentions and policies of the upper advanced section within contemporary feudal society and mainly the liberal faction of the bourgeoisie landlord class then rising, along with the demands and realistic political-economic interests of that class.”⁸⁷ At the same time, along with these typical and stereotyped class labels:

⁸² Ibid., 28.

⁸³ Ibid., 28.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 29.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 29.

⁸⁶ Chương Thâu, “Ảnh Hưởng của Cách Mạng Trung Quốc đối với Sự Biến Chuyển Tư Tưởng Phan Bội Châu” (The Influence of the Chinese Revolution on Changes in the Ideology of Phan Bội Châu). Chương Thâu. *Nghiên Cứu Phan Bội Châu*, (Hà Nội, VN: Nhà Xuất Bản Chính Trị Quốc Gia, 2004), 584-625.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 586. Both this and the subsequent citation are quoted from Lý Trạch Hậu. “Tư Tưởng Triết Học: Khang Hữu Vi.” *Triết Học Nghiên Cứu*, (Beijing, 1957).

Kang Youwei's ideology was also the manifestation of the thousand-year old feudal ideological system that finally dissipated into the scholar intellectual class and melded with the bourgeoisie ideological line arising in that generation. This was an example reflecting clearly the class nature and incomplete ideology of people in the 'new-old party' during a moment when old and new were mixed together at the end of the Qing dynasty.⁸⁸

Through this uncritical forceful merging together of classes, traditions, and ideological directions, Chương Thâu is able to claim Kang, like Phan after him, to be both modern and traditional, bourgeois and feudal, as well as progressively idealistic and the product of socio-economic conditions - all at the same time. In trying to make his Marxist framework cover everything, Chương Thâu depletes it of any theoretical value.

It is possible to see a progression from Tôn Quang Phiệt's staid analysis that essentially admits Phan had no class identity or ideological position to Chương Thâu's creative assertion that Phan somehow embodied the national will. It makes much more sense if we recognize that Chương Thâu is in fact abandoning Marxist class analysis at the last possible moment by collapsing it into a patriotic populist tradition dependent on an entirely different set of imperatives unique to the Vietnamese circumstance. Where Tôn Quang Phiệt is stymied by his own Marxist logic, Chương Thâu simply leaps beyond it.

For Western scholars, Phan's class background was decidedly less important. Unencumbered by the necessities of a Marxist framework, Marr simply notes that Phan was born to, "relatively poor scholar-gentry parents...[who were] careful to instill in him the Confucian virtues."⁸⁹ Duiker provides somewhat more information along the same lines. He notes that Phan's father, "had little money, [but] he was determined to give Phan a traditional education."⁹⁰ Duiker goes on to recite standard biographical information for Phan, including playing *bình Tây* (suppress the Westerners) with bamboo rods as a child and his organization of a "candidates army" in 1885 as a response to the Cần Vương edict.⁹¹ Marr and Duiker's discussions of Phan's early years follow his two autobiographies, and thus have a Confucian flavor.⁹²

By 1982 Chương Thâu was writing along the same lines as Marr and Duiker. Chương Thâu's "Thân Thế và Sự Nghiệp Cứu Nước của Phan Bội Châu" (The Life and Patriotic Career of Phan Bội Châu) covers Phan's early life in 38 pages, yet scarcely mentions "class" or "ideology."⁹³ Rather, Chương Thâu's focus has shifted to another important question: Phan's connections. Chương Thâu begins by describing the character of the Nghệ Tĩnh region (Nghệ An and Hà Tĩnh provinces). Its people are "poor," "generous," and fiercely patriotic.⁹⁴ Phan absorbs this character himself and in addition takes inspiration from the righteous uprisings of Phan Đình Phùng and the Cần Vương movement.⁹⁵ Chương Thâu emphasizes Phan's connections to former

⁸⁸ Ibid., 587.

⁸⁹ Marr, *Vietnamese Anticolonialism*, 83.

⁹⁰ Duiker, *The Rise of Vietnamese Nationalism*, 32.

⁹¹ Ibid., 33.

⁹² These are available in English as *The Autobiography of Phan Bội Châu*, mentioned above, and Phan Bội Châu. "Prison Notes" In *Reflections from Captivity*. Trans. Christopher Jenkins, Tran Khanh Tuyet, and Huynh Sanh Thong. Ed. David Marr. (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1978). In particular 10-13.

⁹³ Chương Thâu., "Thân Thế và Sự Nghiệp Cứu Nước của Phan Bội Châu" (The Life and Patriotic Career of Phan Bội Châu). (Hà Nội, VN: Nhà Xuất Bản Chính Trị Quốc Gia, 2004), 34-72.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 34-37.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 48.

Cần Vương participants and his ability organize them and obtain their support for his own activities at home and abroad.⁹⁶ Doing so helps Chương Thâu solidify Phan's association with the prior resistance tradition that was completely royalist in character.

Another connection Chương Thâu establishes is between Phan and the common people of Nghệ Tĩnh. Chương Thâu writes, "Phan Bội Châu also had 'empathetic' friends amongst the ragged common people all over in poor villages and hamlets."⁹⁷ Chương Thâu furthermore describes Phan's participation in local "opera singing" events during which he would sing patriotic songs and the common people would reciprocate.⁹⁸ Chương Thâu thus not only reaffirms Phan's reputation in popular culture, but also demonstrates his deep understanding and complex linkages with the peasantry of Vietnam. Marr picks up on this as well, noting, "Phan Bội Châu loved folk singing, especially the form of semi-competitive, extemporaneous rounds that were exchanged between groups of men and women."⁹⁹

Even so, this is not the extent of it. Chương Thâu identifies Phan as one of the "Four Tigers of Nam Đàn."¹⁰⁰ Nam Đàn was the locality where Phan grew up, and the four tigers were all authors distinguished in their literary capabilities. One of the other tigers was none other than Nguyễn Sinh Sắc, the father of Nguyễn Ái Quốc, better known as Hồ Chí Minh.¹⁰¹ Chương Thâu writes, "The friendship between Phan Bội Châu and Nguyễn Sinh Sắc was of the utmost loyalty."¹⁰² This connection is part of a larger historiographical attempt to link Phan with directly with Hồ Chí Minh. Tôn Quang Phiệt claims that prior to his capture in 1925, "Phan Bội Châu was on his way to Guangdong to meet some revolutionaries, amongst whom was [Hồ Chí Minh]. Thus Phan would definitely have become a revolutionary."¹⁰³ The demonstration of a clear link between Phan and Hồ Chí Minh would make it much easier to claim that continuity existed between traditional scholar patriots and the communists. By 1982, it was this sort of connection, and not Phan's class background or particular ideological motivations, that communist historians sought to prove.

Westerners were also intrigued by possible connections between the two men. Marr, for instance, notes that "nine-year old Nguyen Ai Quoc had listened to [Phan] quoting lines of poetry which Nguyen never forgot."¹⁰⁴ Duiker, on the other hand, introduces another possible connection: That it was Hồ Chí Minh who betrayed Phan to the French in 1925.¹⁰⁵ Duiker rejects this hypothesis, writing, "[Phan] was an ideal figure from the communist point of view...He would in all probability have posed little obstacle to communist control of the movement."¹⁰⁶ Antiwar scholars cared less about the necessity of a direct connection. It was enough to prove that Phan served as an inspiration to communists and that he approved of their

⁹⁶ Ibid., 52.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 44.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 43, 51.

⁹⁹ Marr, *Vietnamese Anticolonialism*, 85.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 42.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 43.

¹⁰² Ibid., 44.

¹⁰³ Tôn Quang Phiệt, 29. Tôn Quang Phiệt also makes note of Phan's discussions with representatives of the Soviet Union. Tôn Quang Phiệt writes, "Phan was one of the first Vietnamese that introduced [a relationship of] love and friendship between Vietnam and the Soviet Union." Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Marr, *Vietnamese Anticolonialism*, 209. Marr recounts further connections between the two men on 253-255.

¹⁰⁵ Duiker, *The Rise of Vietnamese Nationalism*, 86.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 87.

activities. Nguyễn Khắc Viện, the elder communist voice speaking directly to American scholars, was happy to promote such an understanding. He wrote, “The great patriotic scholars Phan Bội Châu and Huỳnh Thúc Kháng were attracted to the new doctrine (communism) as soon as it appeared in Vietnam. Unswerving enemies of the colonial regime, they felt a deep affinity with the new revolutionary cadres who were devoted body and soul to the national cause, as the scholars had been.”¹⁰⁷

As a final note on connections, we should consider a short article written by Trần Huy Liệu in 1962 entitled, “Nhớ Lại Ông Già Bến Ngự” (Remembering the Old Man of the Imperial Quay [indicating Phan]).¹⁰⁸ In this oft-cited article, Trần Huy Liệu acknowledges Chương Thâu’s numerous scholarly contributions and offers a more off-the-cuff remembrance of Phan based on an actual meeting Trần Huy Liệu had with him in 1935. Trần Huy Liệu compares Phan favorably to Phan Chu Trinh, who he also met, claiming that Phan was far more congenial and worthy of admiration. However, Trần Huy Liệu pointed out that Phan was far too trusting and easily duped. Whereas he had a sense of nationalism, his understanding of socialism was “utopian” and verged on “familism,” Trần Huy Liệu writes that he advised Phan not to write anything about socialism as he had no training in scientific Marxism, and instead to concentrate on writing an autobiography.¹⁰⁹ Trần Huy Liệu concludes that Phan could not have succeeded because he lacked a, “scientific foundation that would allow [him] to believe that his actions followed historical laws.”¹¹⁰

Marr specifically compares Phan with Trần Huy Liệu, claiming the difference between them lay in Trần Huy Liệu’s ability to, “turn vague impressions into organized knowledge.”¹¹¹ Marr thus concurs with communist assertions that Phan’s thinking lacked a certain theoretical undergirding necessary for success. Hue-Tam Ho Tai likewise compares Phan to Tôn Quang Phiệt, noting that both, “cared more about group rights than individual liberty and thought of liberation as a predominantly political process.”¹¹² Tai’s observation is largely confirmed in Tôn Quang Phiệt’s analysis of Phan, in which again the key difference is suggested to be in the application of theory to practice.

The Issue of Franco-Vietnamese Collaboration

In 1918, Phan wrote an article addressed to the Governor General of Indochina, Albert Sarraut, offering the possibility of Franco-Vietnamese collaboration (*đề huề*).¹¹³ In it Phan suggested that he might cease violent activities if the French would help to develop Vietnam’s economy and cultural level. The article was translated from Chinese into Vietnamese and subsequently published in *Tạp Chí Nam Phong* (*Southern Wind*).¹¹⁴ Although Phan quickly retracted his statements, claiming that he had been duped by French agents¹¹⁷ and that the

¹⁰⁷ Nguyễn Khắc Viện, 46.

¹⁰⁸ Trần Huy Liệu. “Nhớ Lại Ông Già Bến Ngự” (Remembering the Old Man of the Imperial Quay). *Nghiên cứu Lịch sử* (*Historical Research*) 47 (1962): 40-44.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 43.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 44.

¹¹¹ Marr, *Vietnamese Tradition on Trial*, 53.

¹¹² Tai, 86.

¹¹³ The article was titled either “Pháp Việt đề huề chính kiến thư” (A Political Opinion Concerning Franco-Vietnamese Collaboration) or “Pháp Việt đề huề luận” (Essay on Franco-Vietnamese Collaboration). For a relatively complete account see *The Autobiography of Phan Bội Châu*, 242-245.

¹¹⁴ Chương Thâu, “Phan Bội Châu qua một số sách báo miền Nam hiện nay” (Phan Bội Châu [as seen] through some current publications in South [Vietnam]). *Nghiên Cứu Lịch Sử* (*Historical Research*) 67 (1964): 14.

translation of his article into Vietnamese contained serious misrepresentations of his ideas,¹¹⁸ the damage had been done.¹¹⁵ The article understandably caused communist historians and, to a lesser extent, their American counterparts, no small amount of grief. How was such an article that so obviously contradicted Phan's image as a die-hard revolutionary to be explained?

The representative communist response is given by Chương Thâu. In an article attacking, "so-called 'researchers' and 'theorists' using misinterpretations of Phan Bội Châu in order to serve vile political goals (here indicating researchers in South Vietnam)," Chương Thâu brings up the collaboration article.¹¹⁶ In particular, Chương Thâu mocks one Phan Xuân Hòa for claiming both that the article was written in 1912 (instead of 1918) and that, "the Franco-Vietnamese collaboration [article] was like a wind blowing onto a pile of revolutionary coal and thus lighting once again the flame."¹¹⁷ In Chương Thâu's mind, collaboration and revolution are absolutely incompatible.¹¹⁸ By suggesting that they might be in some way complementary, Phan Xuân Hòa was proving himself to be a "lackey of the American imperialists."¹¹⁹

Instead, Chương Thâu claims that the article was a "lamentable mistake" and a "misstep in the revolutionary journey of Phan Bội Châu."¹²⁰ Quoting Phan's own retraction, Chương Thâu claims that Phan Bá Ngọc, the individual responsible for convincing Phan to write the article, had plotted from the beginning to trick Phan. Phan Bá Ngọc and his companion Lê Dư deceived Phan by claiming, "The policies of Governor General Sarraut are different from the policies of previous Governor Generals. Sarraut is a socialist and socialism greatly contradicts the policies of French colonialism."¹²¹ Furthermore, Phan Bá Ngọc intimated to Phan that a friendly French administration would allow the revolutionary movement to engage in espionage within the colony. Four or five months after having left with the article, Phan writes of Phan Bá Ngọc, "The beloved son of Phan Đình Phùng [Phan Bá Ngọc] brazenly came out as an obedient running dog of the bushy haired gang [the French]."¹²²

If Phan Bá Ngọc's perfidy was not explanation enough, Chương Thâu continues. He reminds readers that Phan had just been released from prison in Guangdong after four years of captivity, and thus had little understanding of contemporary geopolitical or intra-colony events. As such, Chương Thâu concludes, "The event was a blemish on the glorious history of a courageous warrior."¹²³ Chương Thâu's argument lacks any distinguishable Marxist features. Rather, his biting attacks on Phan Xuân Hòa for "misrepresentation" and Phan Bá Ngọc for treachery reveal Chương Thâu's interest in defending a particular conception of Phan as a paragon of national revolution and honest patriotism.

Marr handles the issue of Phan's support for Franco-Vietnamese collaboration by

¹¹⁵ Phan was convinced to write the article by one Phan Bá Ngọc, the son of none other than the famous *Cần Vương*, the leader Phan Đình Phùng, and a man named Lê Dư. Both were later discovered to be working for the French *Sûreté*. *The Autobiography of Phan Bội Châu*, 242-245. Chương Thâu. "Phan Bội Châu qua một số sách báo miền Nam hiện nay," 14.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 10, 14-15.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁸ Chương Thâu calls Phan Xuân Hòa's suggestion "painfully ridiculous." *Ibid.*

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 15.

¹²² *Ibid.*

¹²³ *Ibid.*

refusing to pass judgment on it. He characterizes it in a pair of short paragraphs as “something that has puzzled many Vietnamese ever since.”¹²⁴ In his footnotes, Marr offers the communist and national arguments that present the episode as, “a bad mistake or else [they] explain it away with elaborate, rather unconvincing theoretical discussions.”¹²⁵ Marr also presents a Trotskyite alternative.¹²⁶ However, by declining to explain the implications of the article for either group, Marr effectively renders it a non-issue. Marr offers his own lackluster explanation that more or less follows Chương Thâu’s: “We may surmise that Phan Bội Châu’s deep depression, his feeling of having accomplished absolutely nothing in more than once decade, left him open to such personal entreaties.”¹²⁷ Quickly returning to his narrative of anticolonial resistance, Marr then describes how other leaders of Phan’s Quang Phục Hội (Restoration League) grew outraged by Phan Bá Ngọc, and conspired to have him assassinated in 1922.¹²⁸ Marr thus manages to gloss over the article’s importance while simultaneously reemphasizing the anticolonial movement’s preference for violence.

Duiker seems more aware of the significance of the Article. He writes, “Not surprisingly, there has been considerable controversy over the meaning and implications of the entire incident.”¹²⁹ In addition to the arguments of Trần Huy Liệu and Chương Thâu, Duiker also presents the “pro-French” position.¹³⁰ For his own part, Duiker attempts to explain Phan’s actions in light of the increasingly “passive role” that Phan played in the nationalist movement.¹³¹ This explanation parallels that of Tôn Quang Phiệt, who also sees a shift in Phan’s attitude in his later years toward “civilized revolution.”¹³² Both Duiker and Tôn Quang Phiệt make note of two other works by Phan written in 1920. The first of these was entitled “Y Hồn đơn tán dương chính sách bất động của Găng-đi” (A Medical Prescription for the Soul – In Praise of Gandhi’s Nonviolence Policy), and the second was entitled “Đur cứu niên lai sở tri chi chủ nghĩa” (My Contentions for the Last Nine Years). Both of these articles advocate reform as opposed to revolution.¹³³

Duiker blames this amelioration of political ferocity on depression, while Tôn Quang Phiệt claims it is necessary to investigate the historical conditions before coming to a conclusion. Both scholars feel that Phan somehow betrayed his true cause by demonstrating openness to possible peaceful solutions, and are eager to explain away any such apparent shift. Upon asking rhetorically whether Phan’s postwar writings indicate significant changes in his ideas, Duiker answers, “For the most part, they appear to reflect ideas current in China at that time and give little indication of any real intellectual growth. Most provocative of the new ideas to affect his own thought was Marxism.”¹³⁴ Duiker finds Phan to be essentially a patriotic

¹²⁴ Marr, *Vietnamese Anticolonialism 1885-1925*, 239.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Ibid. Marr interviewed Nguyen Duc Quynh, who claims the article was a “painfully honest recognition of the error of his early attempts to get help from Japan, China, and Germany – all of them, countries which would prove to be as dangerous to Vietnam as France itself.” Marr’s interview with Nguyen Duc Quynh in Saigon, April 24, 1967.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 240.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Duiker, *The Rise of Nationalism*, 80.

¹³⁰ This view contends that Phan, “had been converted to a policy of cooperation with France.” Duiker offers Nguyen Khac Hanh as holding a representative opinion. Ibid.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Tôn Quang Phiệt, “Phan Bội Châu trong lịch sử chống thực dân Pháp,” 12.

¹³³ See Ibid and Duiker, *The Rise of Nationalism*, 81.

¹³⁴ Duiker, *The Rise of Nationalism*, 82.

simpleton blundering from ideology to ideology until he might happen upon the correct one.¹³⁸

Likewise, Tôn Quang Phiệt claims Phan's intellectual foundations to be a hodgepodge of Confucianism, idealism, knight-errantry, and Daoism, all of which are the product of his class background and times. Tôn Quang Phiệt notes that Phan shifted in his political opinions and ideology quite often, and asserts that emotions played a far more powerful role in Phan's decision-making than did reason.¹³⁵ He furthermore points out that Phan eventually saw the evil intentions of the French clearly and reasserted his strong patriotic will. Interestingly, Tôn Quang Phiệt never mentions the duplicity of Phan Bá Ngọc as a means of explaining Phan's actions. Tôn Quang Phiệt writes that Phan's "collaboration" and "civilized revolution" theories "were nothing more than groping about, and Phan did not believe in them."¹³⁶ Duiker and Tôn Quang Phiệt thus both denigrate Phan's intellectual ability while simultaneously emphasizing his patriotism. In doing so, they resolve the conundrum of the collaboration letter by dismissing it as a thoughtless mistake by a well-meaning and dedicated but easily misguided revolutionary patriot.

Summations: Communist and Western Appraisals of Phan Bội Châu

In his final analysis, Tôn Quang Phiệt finds Phan to be a patriot who contributed significantly to the national liberation movement. Tôn Quang Phiệt claims that Phan had a strong will to resist the enemy and, although restrained by Confucian ethics and traditional ritualism, he had a great and positive influence on the Vietnamese revolutionary movement. Tôn Quang Phiệt writes that although he failed to achieve success, "As a result of his enduring search Phan grasped the revolutionary path toward a promising future."¹³⁷ According to Phiệt, Phan's value lies in the legacy he left that encouraged people to follow the path of revolution, and as a leader who connected the two revolutionary periods of Vietnamese history.

Nevertheless, Tôn Quang Phiệt is quick to point out Phan's many errors. Tôn Quang Phiệt argues that Phan's lack of a solid class viewpoint led him to waste effort on "ineffective actions" that had "little effect" and that could almost unanimously be considered "failures."¹³⁸ Phan was furthermore too "trusting," and when faced with stalemates and failures, easily gravitated toward fatalism and foolhardiness.¹³⁹ Tôn Quang Phiệt suggests that Phan's emphasis on emotion, rather than logic, led him to foolishly consider Franco-Vietnamese collaboration, but then also later led him to reject it. The implication is that Phan's heartfelt devotion to the cause of resistance must be wedded to a logical, scientific understanding of class, economic conditions, and the laws of history in order for success to be achieved.

Many of the themes and conclusions in Tôn Quang Phiệt's article served as guidelines for later communist historiographical interpretations of Phan. An attempt to align and compare Phan's actions and ideas with a putatively correct "revolutionary path" or "movement" is visible throughout the entire article. The supposition that such a "movement" existed apart from the Duy Tân Hội or Quang Phục Hội, or that there was a single "path" weaving its way through loosely connected narratives of various individuals or groups indicates the contemporary

¹³⁵ Tôn Quang Phiệt, "Phan Bội Châu trong lịch sử chống thực dân Pháp," 23.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Ibid., 29.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 21.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 22-23.

political objectives Tôn Quang Phiệt and others hoped to fulfill. In order to make the DRV appear to be the “natural” product of both the scientific process of historical materialism *and* the much lauded revolutionary tradition of Vietnam, Phan needed to serve both as a link backward to a heroic Confucian history of resistance and forward to a modern class-based spirit of revolution.

Chương Thâu, having devoted his life to studying Phan, offers a slightly more sentimental portrait. Chương Thâu is obviously enamored with Phan’s personal characteristics, and routinely comments positively on Phan’s willingness to endure hardship, his ardent tenacity in the face of the enemy, and even his expressions of filial piety towards his father.¹⁴⁰ It is to Chương Thâu’s credit that he manages never to address the contradiction between material determinism and Phan’s voluntaristic patriotism. Nevertheless, it is obvious that Chương Thâu is attached to the former theoretically and the latter emotionally. The notion that Phan can serve as a national symbol who represents the collective consciousness of the people is similarly placed directly alongside a complex analysis of various class- consciousnesses. We are left to assume that nationalism somehow transcends both class and

Trần Huy Liệu, a well-respected intellectual and revolutionary in his own right, takes a broader view in his remembrance of Phan.¹⁴¹ Trần Huy Liệu praises Phan for his friendly character, his willingness to provide for those around him (while living under house arrest Phan took in many older revolutionaries after they were released from prison), and his cheerfully optimistic nature. However, these traits were to be contrasted with Phan’s uncritical, almost superficial attitude toward people and ideas. Trần Huy Liệu notes that Phan did not even “see the evil” of the Constitutionalists, a quasi-collaborator party of capitalists and landlords based in the south.¹⁴² According to Trần Huy Liệu, his understanding of socialism was uninformed and highly idealistic.¹⁴³

As such, Trần Huy Liệu seems to thank Phan for his contributions to the resistance movement, yet also suggests that it is time for Phan to retire and allow more competent activists handle the business of real revolution. Commenting on Phan’s passing, Trần Huy Liệu quotes Phan himself, “The sea is not yet filled, Jingwei still carries a pebble in her mouth.”¹⁴⁴ Phan had written this as an epitaph for Phan Chu Trinh; but Trần Huy Liệu finds that it applies better to Phan himself. Trần Huy Liệu furthermore suggests that Phan might have been better off dying in 1926 along with Phan Chu Trinh, so that he would not have had to live out his last years in captivity at a time when the prospects for liberation seemed weakest.

For Marr, Phan was truly a transitional figure. He was the last of a generation of Confucian scholars propelled by an enduring tradition of resistance and loyalty to one’s king and country. Yet he was also one of the first Vietnamese to look out across the seas in search of new techniques, symbols, and values with which to bolster their fight against a formidable enemy. It is Phan’s ability to meld these two worlds that gives him such significance in Vietnam’s history of resistance. Marr asserts, “Most important, [Phan and his compatriots] succeeded in creating

¹⁴⁰ Chương Thâu, “Thân Thế và Sự Nghiệp Cứu Nước của Phan Bội Châu,” 48.

¹⁴¹ Zinoman, who is no communist sycophant, calls Trần Huy Liệu a “brilliant journalist, revolutionary activist, and historian.” Zinoman, 10.

¹⁴² Trần Huy Liệu, “Nhớ Lại Ông Già Bến Ngự,” 43.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ This reference is to an ancient legend. After the mythical emperor Yan’s daughter drowned in the ocean, she turned into the Jingwei bird who flew back and forth dropping pebbles into the sea in an effort to fill it up. The phrase indicates a person absolutely determined to achieve a task especially against seemingly insurmountable odds.

and re-creating resistance symbols and ideals for subsequent generations. Without this, who can say that the men who came after them would have had the sense of continuity and historical purpose to act as they did?”¹⁴⁵ Nevertheless, Marr faults Phan for failing to “define himself and his movement.”¹⁴⁶ Phan, according to Marr, was simply reacting rather than offering a distinct alternative to colonial rule. To overcome the French, the Vietnamese would have to fashion for themselves a new identity and a new way of defining themselves in the world. Marr’s assertion actually prefigures aggressive attempts by Vietnamese communists in the 1950s to refashion the culture, history, and national essence of Vietnam.

Duiker’s critique of Phan copies those of communist historiographers almost point for point. Duiker argues that Phan’s ideas were “old-fashioned” and his actions “adventurous.”¹⁴⁷ Furthermore, Duiker points out, “[Phan] had little comprehension of how to go about organizing and building a highly disciplined revolutionary movement.”¹⁴⁸ As such he “squandered” his strength and that of his compatriots on ineffective and counterproductive actions. Duiker writes, “Lacking the sense of certainty that the materialist dialectic provides the Marxist, the scholar-patriots under Phan Bội Châu could not rely on historic inevitability.”¹⁴⁹ Duiker also claims, “A relative weakness in Phan’s approach was his failure to utilize the potential force of the peasantry.”¹⁵⁰ Though Duiker does not cite communist historians for any of these assertions, their influence is clear. Duiker assumes, as they do, that the preconditions for success would necessarily take the form of a dedicated, well organized revolutionary party with a firm grasp of the Marxist dialectic and deep connections with the lower classes. Duiker sums up his critique of Phan like this: “Phan’s gallants were more in the image of the knight-errants of old, slashing like Vietnamese Don Quixotes at colonial windmills, and spending more time glorying in their dashing image of sacrifice and revolutionary heroism than in the tough, day-to-day work of educating the populace and winning support at the village level.”¹⁵¹ In other words, Phan was not a member of the NLF in Southern Vietnam in 1965.

However, like Tôn Quang Phiệt, Duiker finds much to value in Phan’s legacy. Duiker states that Phan “managed to grasp some important truths which served to move the Vietnamese resistance movement a significant step toward its final goal – a Vietnam strong and prosperous, its citizenry united and stubbornly determined to protect its identity as Vietnamese.”¹⁵² We have already noted the problems with imputing a “final goal” to a trans-historical resistance movement. What is most important is the incredibly close alignment of Duiker’s final appraisal with those of the communist historians. Duiker states, “Phan Bội Châu and his colleagues...left behind a spirit of indomitability, a consciousness of the greater duty of the Vietnamese people to unite behind the great idea of national independence, and this image is sufficiently vital even today for the communists of North Vietnam to call upon the old scholar-patriot as a model for young Vietnamese to emulate.”¹⁵³ In Duiker’s mind, Phan was nothing less than the spiritual godfather of Vietnamese communism.

¹⁴⁵ Marr, *Vietnamese Anticolonialism*, 275.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 276.

¹⁴⁷ Duiker, *The Rise of Nationalism*, 97.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 98.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 99.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 100.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*

Conclusion: A Symbol or a Patriot?

US scholars who were amazed by the tenacity, organizational capability, and effectiveness of the NLF and DRV came not unreasonably to the conclusion that their opponents represented something much stronger and more durable than simply another wing of international communism. Drawing on the very same communists for evidence and ideas, antiwar academics developed a parallel narrative of enduring, even timeless, Vietnamese resistance. Phan Bội Châu stood out as an exemplar of this tradition, but also an exemplar of Vietnam's turn toward modernity. Conveniently, he knew Hồ Chí Minh's father, and had written about socialism. It thus became easy to see him as a stepping-stone on the path to a communist future.

A decade or so after the war, the idea of a primordial Vietnamese spirit of resistance began to receive serious re-examination. Communism no longer appeared heroic or natural, and many of the assumptions made by the historian cadres no longer appeared credible. However, Phan's reputation remains largely untouched. He is still presented as the simple, emotional patriot and the unsystematic revolutionary. Indeed, this is how he is still presented in most literature published in Vietnam. Nevertheless, more separates Phan from Hồ Chí Minh than the ideological certainty provided by Marxist dialectical theory. Phan inhabited a different world than did Trần Huy Liệu, Tôn Quang Phiệt, and Chương Thân. Phan saw himself as part of a tradition of resistance, but one that had only come into existence *after* the French invasion.

Phan's vision for the Vietnamese nation also differed considerably from that of the communists. Rather being a simple or confused theorist, Phan's developing concept of the nation, like that of Liang Qichao, was derived from a Confucian worldview within which hierarchy and morality played important and meaningful roles. Yet nonetheless, this vision was that of a modern nation.¹⁵⁴ By carefully working through the Confucian tradition to determine what needed to be preserved and what should be rejected, Phan demonstrated a capacity for complex and nuanced thinking.¹⁵⁵ Phan's own ideas were easily as sophisticated as were the attempts to portray him as the enthusiastic predecessor of the communist party in Vietnam.

¹⁵⁴ Marr discusses one of many books written by Phan concerning his vision of a modern Vietnamese nation entitled *Tân Việt Nam (New Vietnam)*. In it, Phan set out in detail "ten great joys" that would characterize an advanced, civilized Vietnam: Independence, no exploiting class, social welfare, veteran's services, equitable taxation, justice, progressive education, full exploitation of resources, a well-developed industrial base, and a flourishing economy. In addition, he advocated six personal characteristics that all citizens ought to cultivate: A progressive spirit, brotherly love, a desire for modern civilization, patriotism, public virtue, and a sense of the commonweal. Marr, *Vietnamese Anticolonialism*, 137-139. While these ideas may have seemed utopian at the time, it is worth noting that such a vision is fully in line with both those of Phan's contemporaries around the globe and also that of the DRV's leaders themselves since *đổi mới* (renovation) in the 1980s.

¹⁵⁵ In his later years, during which Trần Huy Liệu had visited him, Phan wrote two exceedingly long and complex analyses (700 pages each). One of these dealt with one the *Analects*, entitled *Khổng Học Đăng (The Light of Confucianism)*, and the other dealt with the *Book of Changes*, and was entitled *Chu Dịch (The Changes of Zhou)*.

Chapter Two

Phan Bội Châu's Martyrs: Vietnamese Revolutionary Martyrdom and Nationalist Hagiography

Shortly after being freed from nearly four years of imprisonment in Guangdong province in 1917, Phan Bội Châu rejoined some of his former proteges in Hangzhou. Together they published two editions of *A History of Vietnam's Martyrs (HVM)* in 1918. Phan served as the overall compiler and editor of the project. The principal author was one Đặng Đoàn Bằng.¹⁵⁶ Other contributors included several of Phan's most ardent supporters: (1) His second-in-command Nguyễn Thượng Hiền (pseudonym Đinh Nam); (2) a Catholic monk named Lư Song Tử; and (3) a mysterious figure by the name of Trần Quốc Duy, who wrote 25 of the 100 poems included in the volume.

Originally published as a short 91-page booklet in classical Chinese, *HVM* includes one preface, four introductions, fifty biographies of martyrs, and three "collective biographies" dedicated to all those who perished in three key events. The fifty biographies range from terse one-line statements indicating the places of birth and death to elaborate stories accompanied by poems and remembrances. The shortest biography is 13 characters long, and the longest is 2909 characters long.

In compiling *A History of Vietnam's Martyrs*, Đặng Đoàn Bằng and Phan Bội Châu sought to present an idealized picture of the Vietnamese nation. Borrowing from Vietnamese patriotic and Confucian traditions, they told the stories of unimpeachable patriots: men (and one woman) who had given their lives for Vietnam. Though the scholarly elite and their children dominate the volume, other social groups are represented as well, including farmers, ethnic Chinese, and even "traitors" who converted to the cause of the revolution. Most of the biographies are of Northerners, which is not a surprising since most of Phan Bội Châu's social circle came from the North, but individuals from the Center and South are included as well.

The message articulated in various forms throughout the text is clear: Vietnamese of all stripes can find a common purpose through self-sacrifice. Many of the stories contained in the text follow similar plot lines and repeat certain formal choices. This is because the retelling itself is intended to serve as a crucial means of linking those stories to a larger history of resistance. The construction of an eternal Vietnamese spirit of resistance was essential to the evangelizing mission that lay behind the publication of *A History of Vietnam's Martyrs*. However, in order to determine the success of this mission, we must evaluate the content of the text in reference to its own claims.

Success is not defined solely by the overarching message a text delivers, but also by the aggregate character of its content. While the overall message of *A History of Vietnam's Martyrs* is unambiguous, the structure and content of the biographies betray a much more complicated picture of the Vietnamese revolutionary movement from 1906 to 1918. Rather than depicting a unified group with a single goal, the text resembles a patchwork quilt of different groups, each of

¹⁵⁶ There are few references to Đặng Đoàn Bằng independent of *A History of Vietnam's Martyrs* and Phan Bội Châu's *Autobiography*. Chương Thâu devotes a fair portion of his introduction to *A History of Vietnam's Martyrs* to determining Đặng Đoàn Bằng's identity and backstory. Chương Thâu asserts that Đặng Đoàn Bằng, who also went by the names Đặng Xung Hồng and Đặng Hữu Bằng, was a nephew of revolutionary Đặng Tử Mão and son of Đặng Hữu Dương, a doctoral graduate of the 1889 exams. Đặng Đoàn Bằng came from Hành Thiện village in Xuân Trường county, Nam Định province. He studied at the school of veteran revolutionary Nguyễn Thượng Hiền, who arranged for him to join the Đông Du movement. *Phan Bội Châu Toàn Tập 5* "Việt Nam Nghĩa Liệt Sĩ". 11-17.

which seems to have been included for different reasons and treated in different ways. In order to compare the content of the text with its ideological message, I employ digital methods to evaluate both data concerning the lives of the martyrs and the language used in different portions of the text. This digital methodology produced results which contradicts those derived from an “analog” reading of the *A History of Vietnam’s Martyrs*, to which I now turn.

Four Introductions: The Discursive Orientations of *A History of Vietnam’s Martyrs*

The four Introductions to the text provide a solid foundation for understanding the political intentions and the historiographical stances of those who created *A History of Vietnam’s Martyrs*. The two “original” introductions to the first 1918 edition were written by Đặng Đoàn Bằng and Trần Quốc Duy, both of whom were junior members of Phan Bội Châu’s retinue and principal authors of the text. These introductions place the martyred individuals represented in the text firmly within a national history of resistance, make strong claims as to the objectives of those individuals and the political significance of each. Two additional introductions, written for the second 1918 edition by the former titular head of the Vietnamese Modernization Society and royalist Marquis Cường Để and veteran revolutionary Nguyễn Thượng Hiền, broaden and reaffirm these claims.

Đặng Đoàn Bằng’s introduction opens with a phantasmagorical depiction of ghosts appearing as furious natural forces. He writes, “I can hear nothing but the chanting of spirits and the crying of ghosts. The shrieking wind and howling rain tears into my ears. I see the flash of lightning amidst the rumbling thunder. The running mountain and the walking sea whirl into my eyes.”¹⁵⁷ These furious natural forces convey the unresolved anger of Đặng Đoàn Bằng’s fallen comrades.¹⁵⁸ Furthermore, he claims these spirits have “forced” him to write *A History of Vietnam’s Martyrs*.¹⁵⁹ Đặng Đoàn Bằng thus presents himself as the conduit for ghostly grief as well as a chronicler of martyred lives. Đặng Đoàn Bằng’s introduction emphasizes the emotional significance of the *History*. It is a text written to commemorate individuals whom the author knew personally and cared for intimately.

However, this text is not simply a historical record of fallen comrades. Đặng Đoàn Bằng’s introduction reveals another purpose of text: to serve as a political validation of collective sacrifice. Đặng Đoàn Bằng’s ghosts do not appear as individuals in the introduction, but rather as a spiritual force embodying a corporate will. He writes, “Though they had taken different paths, they all came together to achieve the same goal... Though the ways they died were many, their objective was singular.”¹⁶⁰ Đặng Đoàn Bằng informs his readers that this objective was none other than “to die on behalf of the nation.”¹⁶¹ The image Đặng Đoàn Bằng presents is one of young diehard revolutionaries encouraging each other to die heroic deaths to demonstrate their commitment to one another and to their nation. This image is furthermore intended to inspire and pressure those still living, and presumably the readers of the text, into dedicating themselves

¹⁵⁷ *VNLS*, 25

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁹ Later in the introduction, Đặng Đoàn Bằng writes, “Deep in the night it is still. The rain patters and the wind whispers sadly. Suddenly I see my comrades under the light next to the sword. They pace back and forth fretfully, unable to leave. I cannot stop my tears from pouring down. I cannot but take up my brush and write my tears into words.” *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁶¹ Complete citation: “They knew that the spilling of blood is what gives value to civilization. They knew that death is the measure of life. The cock crows every time it storms. They sat close and shared their feelings, encouraging each other while waiting for a chance to die on behalf of the nation.” *Ibid.*

to the cause of national liberation.¹⁶²

While Đặng Đoàn Bằng frames the text primarily in spiritual and emotional terms, Trần Quốc Duy's introduction seeks to connect it to a larger national history of anti-foreign resistance. Trần Quốc Duy begins by criticizing the inability of the Vietnamese people to successfully resist French colonization. He writes, "In these past few years, the war in Europe broke out and waves of bullets swept across the continent. The French, finding themselves on the defense, had to take care of their motherland; they had no time to worry about their colonies. Still, the five sections and three regions of our country heard nary a shot. The world believes that our people are unfit for independence. How terrible!"¹⁶³ Trần Quốc Duy argues that this deplorable failure stood in sharp contrast to the historical victories of the Trần and Lê dynasties.¹⁶⁴

In the next section, Trần Quốc Duy complicates this contrast by introducing famous figures of the early anti-French resistance period. He writes,

In the fifteenth year of Tự Đức's reign, the French captured the South. Nguyễn Huân, Trương Định, and our brothers in the South and center fought fiercely with the enemy, but they were killed defending the country and many names had to be recorded as lost. In the thirty-fifth year of Tự Đức's reign, the enemy took the North. Nguyễn Quang Bích, Vũ Hữu Lợi, and Nguyễn Thiện Thuật raised the army to protect the King and attacked the enemy across fourteen provinces. Most glorious was General Hoàng Hoa Thám, who fought the enemy for close to twelve years.¹⁶⁵

The figures Trần Quốc Duy mentions represent the perennial spirit of Vietnamese patriotic resistance to foreign occupation and the indefatigable vitality of the Vietnamese national spirit. However, immediately after saying this, Trần Quốc Duy reaffirms that "For around fifty years the French have propped up their pillow and slept soundly. If we examine this situation, how can we claim the Vietnamese people are fit for independence?"¹⁶⁶ This juxtaposition of ongoing resistance and demonstrated failure to thwart French colonial designs points to a seemingly irreconcilable contradiction: Vietnamese resistance is both inevitable and ineffectual. It is obligatory yet inadequate.

In the final section, Trần Quốc Duy resolves this contradiction by addressing the text directly. After reading *A History of Vietnam's Martyrs*, he claims:

Tears began pouring down my face. I felt great anguish watching so many men ready for independence struggle hard yet achieve nothing at all. How could this be? Alas! The answer I already know. When the heads of our valiant scholars roll uselessly onto hundreds of battlefields, our gallant actions provoke the enemy's running dogs. This increases French oppression and *brings our people closer together*.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶² Đặng Đoàn Bằng indicates that the mutual obligations of the living and dead are difficult to balance. He writes, "The dead have died, but what of the living? To follow the path of those who have died who be to die as well - how could the dead want that? To betray the dead by living uselessly - how could the living bear to do that?" Ibid.

¹⁶³ *VNLS*, 26.

¹⁶⁴ Trần Quốc Duy writes, "Long ago our country was invaded by the Yuan dynasty; thanks to the Trần kings our country was twice regained in bloody battle. Later we were invaded by the Ming dynasty; thanks to the Lê king's fifteen years of waging war our country again achieved independence." Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Trần Quốc Duy continues, "In the first year of Hàm Nghi's reign, the French invaded the capital Thuận Hóa and occupied the center. Phan Đình Phùng and Nguyễn Hiệu called on the people of Nghệ An, Hà Tĩnh, Quảng Nam, and Quảng Ngãi to rise up, and they did for over ten years." Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ *VNLS*, 27.

¹⁶⁷ My emphasis. Ibid.

Trần Quốc Duy thus reveals a dialectical process at work: revolutionary actions provoke repression, repression stimulates Vietnamese indignation, and the entire country moves closer to violent insurrection. Trần Quốc Duy ends his introduction with the following powerful statement:

I am anguished for the martyrs, but I feel hope for the future of our country. My pain is endless, but my hopes will one day be realized. From Côn Đảo up to the North, from the Mekong over to the East, from Lạng Sơn down to the South, the Five-Star Flag will fly in the wind. The ochre blood of our valiant scholars, our righteous warriors, and our gallant martyrs will coagulate and form a foundation [for our independence].¹⁶⁸

A History of Vietnam's Martyrs, then, is a political testament that claims the martyred dead as the embodiment of total national revolution.

The second pair of introductions follow the same discursive contours as the first pair, but deepen and solidify the national claims of the text as they go. Marquis Cường Để opens with a brief history lesson emphasizing a thousand years of Vietnamese independence and imperial legacy of expansion.¹⁶⁹ However, despite its geographical size and substantial population, Vietnam was unable to prevent French colonization. The thought that the hard-won territorial gains of his ancestors have been completely overtaken by another race distresses the Marquis, and forces him to consider the causes. Regrettably, he writes, "I can only blame our poor talent, weak thinking, and inadequate strength."¹⁷⁰ Remarking sadly that many have died, Cường Để nevertheless points out that Vietnam's revolutionaries have fought and died proudly and without complaint. This legacy of determined, (even if unsuccessful) resistance is for Cường Để a source of strength and national hope. He then echoes Trần Quốc Duy's patriotic declaration in a more sanguinary tone: "[We await] a day when purple clouds float over Thăng Long, when red waves flow through Cần Giờ. [We await a day] when we can turn our heads toward the spirits on the horizon and pour the blood of our enemies onto the ground. I dream of such a day. Not for moment will I ever forget this ambition."¹⁷¹ Cường Để thus blends Đặng Đoàn Bằng's haunting appeal to the spirits of the dead with Trần Quốc Duy's political dream of independence into a violent revolutionary vision of spiritually empowered anti-colonial vengeance.

Nguyễn Thượng Hiền, who was the committed and experienced second-in-command of Phan Bội Châu's, contributes the final Introduction. It is a piece of higher literary quality and greater conceptual sophistication than the other three introductions, and serves as a guiding manifesto for the entire text. Opening with poetic hyperbole, Nguyễn Thượng Hiền states:

Upon the crests of waves, from seventy-thousand leagues over the sea, a great whale and a huge crocodile speed toward the East. After four-thousand years of silk and satin, we children of the dragon have sunk to serving as buffalo and horses. We are filled with

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ Cường Để writes, "Since the time of Đinh Tiên Hoàng, our country has consisted of the regions of Rinan, Jiuzhen, Xiangjun, and Jiaozhi, which combined to form Đại Cồ Việt. It is clearly recorded that this state was established after breaking away from the Northern Song, which means our country has been independent for a long time. After the Lý dynasty and the Trần dynasty came the Lê dynasty, which attacked Champa numerous times and occupied all of Lin-yi. Our saintly forebears expanded our territory, taking Quảng Nam, Quảng Ngãi, Bình Định, Phú Yên, and areas further south, including the six provinces of Zhenla and some Ai-Lao territory, to reach the borders of our frontier today." *VNNLS*, 22.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ Thăng Long is another name for Hanoi. Cần Giờ refers to the area surrounding Saigon - the area with the largest population of French colonists. *VNNLS*, 23.

righteous indignation upon realizing our plight! How could we suffer knitting our brows and doffing our hats in order to live a single day alongside these bloodthirsty bandits?¹⁷² Nguyễn Thượng Hiền incorporates Cường Đê's thousand years of independence and expands his historical scope into hoary antiquity, claiming continuity with a Vietnamese national legacy that predated the Chinese occupation (111 BCE-938 CE). In doing so Nguyễn Thượng Hiền implicitly attributes the sacrifices of the martyred dead not just to a lengthy tradition of patriotic resistance, but also to a timeless national spirit embodied in all ethnic Vietnamese.

Nguyễn Thượng Hiền's next move is to historiographically separate the fifty-year anti-French resistance era into two periods. The first of these periods dates from the fall of Saigon up to the complete French colonization of Vietnam. Nguyễn Thượng Hiền likens this to, "the sun's last rays fading into darkness of dusk," and claims it brought the Vietnamese race to the brink of extinction.¹⁷³ The second period dates from the inception of the Eastern Travel (Đông Du) movement in 1905, whereupon "the people's rage has begun to seethe for revenge."¹⁷⁴ Nguyễn Thượng Hiền claims this period is like, "the light of dawn rising out of the inky blackness of night."¹⁷⁵ By associating the anti-colonial movement as a whole with the natural rhythms of time and space, Nguyễn Thượng Hiền imputes a sense of inevitability and naturalness to Vietnam's national revolution.

The periodization serves another purpose as well. Whereas the first wave of resistance, led by such famous individuals as, "Nguyễn Tri Phương, Hoàng Diệu, Phan Đình Phùng, Tống Duy Tân, Võ Hữu Lợi, and Trương Định...has already been carefully recorded," those who died in the second period remain largely unacknowledged.¹⁷⁶

Nguyễn Thượng Hiền claims it is precisely for this reason that *A History of Vietnam's Martyrs* was written and published. After all, he writes, "If we do not do everything we can to find out and relate what happened, how will we be able to inspire future generations with the names and true stories of those we have lost?"¹⁷⁷ Here, then, Nguyễn Thượng Hiền makes clear the practical objective of the text's producers: To employ the life stories of martyrs as pedagogical tools for inspiring Vietnam's youth to fight and die as part of a collective campaign seeking independence through revolution.

Returning to grand national history, Nguyễn Thượng Hiền brings together all of the themes raised in the four introductions. Evoking a spirit of resistance both timely and timeless, Nguyễn Thượng Hiền writes:

For eons our predecessors have died for our country and our comrades now continue to rise, spear in hand. Though they die for the country in great numbers, our patriots within the country and abroad continue to tread in their footsteps, ever forward. They rise up throughout the countryside. Wherever they are stamped out, they rise up once again. Though the French are fiendish, they truly fear the invincible spirit of our country. Our country will not stay lost forever.¹⁷⁸

Thus, through sacrifice eventually comes salvation.

¹⁷² The great whale and huge crocodile likely refer to Britain and France. Nguyễn Thượng Hiền claims Vietnamese to be descendants of Lạc Long Quân, the "Dragon Lord of Lạc," himself a descendant of dragons. Ibid.

¹⁷³ Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

Bringing his introduction to a resounding conclusion, Nguyễn Thượng Hiền then writes: We must try hard, making use of our wits and our courage near and far to recover our country, to exterminate the enemy, and to purge the shame of those who died. Shall we only lament and shed tears on behalf of the country? Shall we only take up the pen and record these rays of light cast over the earth? This history of Vietnam's martyrs that we write now is the history of Vietnam's independence that will be written in the future!

Only when this dream is fulfilled will our task be complete.

According to this perspective, *A History of Vietnam's Martyrs* is a blueprint for revolution - a collective guidebook for sacrifice on behalf of the nation. It is both a commemoration of righteous deaths and a call to the living to emulate the spirit of patriotic martyrdom.

It is difficult to miss a naive sense of political utopianism enfolded with the discourse of these four introductions. All four authors admit that the sacrifices of the martyrs failed to yield any notable successes, yet they all nevertheless contend that the stories of the lives of the martyrs - and their deaths - are worth retelling. None of the introductions offered an idea of *when* a reader and prospective revolutionary might expect to enjoy the fruits of their efforts and the sacrifices of the martyrs. The liberation lies somewhere in the hazy future - a patriotic lodestar rather than a graspable reality.

The distance found in the pages of *A History of Vietnam's Martyrs* between the actuality of death and the illusory promise of salvation lends the text a sense of inescapable anguish. That pain appears in the introductions embodied as apparitions, ghosts still wracked with shame and guilt for having failed to bring about revolutionary progress. The ghosts serve as the spectral counterpart of the martyrs - still present -but no longer recognizable as individuals. Instead, they mass together as an eidolic collectivity able to register its anger through harsh weather and irruptive landscapes. In death, the martyrs come to represent the national soul, serving as an object of patriotic commemoration while also challenging the living to continue fighting a war without end.

Biographical Narratives

A History of Vietnam's Martyrs is neither triumphalist, nor especially bloodthirsty. Rather, the martyrs are celebrated and revered for their traits and intentions. Most of these biographies begin with a series of clichés which established that the martyr was intensely serious, loyal to a fault, and perspicacious. The authors often recall the classic trope of the fledgling genius who is so intent upon reading books that he, "forgets to eat or sleep." Of course, from there, the subject of the biography has no need to grow or come to terms with themselves in any way. Indeed, they do not.

Instead, their determination and capability encounters colonial reality. The biographies have plenty of unpleasant things to say about the French and their Nguyen quislings. The French are devious, cruel, and relentless. Their Vietnamese collaborators are venal, small-minded, and utterly untrustworthy. Standing against such enemies, the qualities of the revolutionaries appear all the more praiseworthy. *A History of Vietnam's Martyrs* thus paints a dichotomous picture of virtue and vice, the just and the cruel. Then, using one emotionally compelling story after another, the authors define the Vietnamese nation through its paragons of virtue: the martyrs.

In order for this narrative to work, each selected individual *must* be pure and they *must* die. They must appear as a series of waves, each unique in their moment, but ultimately indistinguishable from the tide. A variety of deaths are acceptable: execution is a favorite, but starvation, exhaustion, illness, and an assortment of creative suicides work just as well. The

deaths are moments of intensity in which their blood mixes with that of their spiritual fellows. Separated by time and space, the martyrs' deaths are brought together textually within the volume. The authors thus make the deaths and the martyrs meaningful by placing them alongside one another. What would otherwise be isolated and unfortunate events become glittering waves in a sea of national revival.

The many poems appended to the biographies offer another kind of national representation. Each poem begins with two to four lines depicting the landscape of Vietnam, either geographically or topographically. Specific mountains, rivers, or liminal boundaries are indicated, as if the poet sought to demarcate the body of the nation. The remainder of the poem then describes how the body of the martyr was destroyed. The parallelism is clear: in sacrificing one's individual body, one reconstitutes the national body. In his introduction, Nguyễn Thượng Hiền explicitly draws a connection between the two: "A country is like a person; the character of a country cannot be destroyed just as the spirit of a person cannot. Although both can be submerged in peril up to their necks, they can also hope to rise again."¹⁷⁹ The poems often draw parallels between the vibrant blood of the martyr smeared across the battlefield and the persistent waterways of Vietnam. As long as both flow, the spirit of resistance can remain strong and the nation will live on.

An Example Biography: Tăng Bạt Hổ

Tăng Bạt Hổ (1858-1906) was the sort of intrepid adventurer one might expect to encounter in a Joseph Conrad novel. By the time Phan Bội Châu met him in 1904, he had already fought with the Cần Vương movement, travelled to Port Arthur via Guangdong, and joined Liu Yongfu to battle the Japanese on Taiwan. He was knowledgeable about the world. He could speak Cantonese, and had worked as a merchant seaman all over East Asia. For these reasons, Tăng Bạt Hổ was selected to guide Phan Bội Châu on his first trip abroad, which took him first to Hong Kong and then to Japan.¹⁸⁰ He served as the interpreter between Phan Bội Châu and Liang Qichao in Yokohama. In the summer of 1906, Cường Để arrived in Japan, so Phan Bội Châu sent Tăng Bạt Hổ back to Vietnam to conduct party business there. The journey was strenuous and, suffering from exhaustion, Tăng Bạt Hổ contracted dysentery and died in Huế.

The biography on Tăng Bạt Hổ provides an excellent model for understanding *A History of Vietnam's Martyrs* as a whole: nearly every characteristic in the other biographies can be found in this one. Tăng Bạt Hổ's biography nevertheless exceeds all others in the text in terms of character count, number of poems, and hyperbole.

In many ways, Tăng Bạt Hổ's biography sets the tone for the entirety of *A History of Vietnam's Martyrs*. The authors use powerful, vivid language to immediately convey the story of a great hero and evoke the larger collective will he is subsumed within. Đặng Đoàn Bằng describes Tăng Bạt Hổ as, "the crest of the first wave in a now growing tide, the first spark within a bomb now exploding outwards."¹⁸¹ The choice of imagery is deliberate and consequential. The "revolutionary tide" is referred to again and again throughout the text. It is the ordering principle for the anti-colonial movement: enough individuals moving together can sweep away any manmade structures that stand in their path. However, the movement is also a "bomb" insofar as it is modern, it is unstoppable, and it is potentially deadly. As the crest of the

¹⁷⁹ *VNNLS*, 24.

¹⁸⁰ Phan Bội Châu, *Overturned Chariot*, 74-75.

¹⁸¹ *VNNLS*, 29.

first wave, TẶNG BÁT HỔ literally led the movement overseas. As the first spark within a bomb, he burned as a bright model for all those who come after.

Using the same format that nearly all of the subsequent biographies would follow, ĐẶNG ĐOÀN BẰNG next introduces TẶNG BÁT HỔ's character traits. He was, "magnanimous, thoroughly knowledgeable, and resolute in his sense of purpose." Furthermore, he was, "affable and easygoing to talk to."¹⁸² Many of the same adjectives would later be used for other martyrs, but this kindly persona is most representative of the Annamese. By contrast, the NGHỆ TĨNH martyrs are often described as fierce and indomitable. This distinction likely draws on regional stereotypes even while reproducing them. Despite his apparent kindness, the next two things ĐẶNG ĐOÀN BẰNG describes TẶNG BÁT HỔ doing are rejecting marriage (he would remain a bachelor who was too concerned with the woes of his nation to marry), and served as a substitute for his older brother as a military recruit. These actions demonstrate two key characteristics every martyr should have: patriotic fidelity and courageous voluntarism. Such traits led TẶNG BÁT HỔ to quickly become a local commander of CẦN VƯƠNG forces in BÌNH ĐỊNH, and thereafter to leave the country in search of foreign assistance.

By presenting the list of each martyr's character traits first, then describing what they did, ĐẶNG ĐOÀN BẰNG and PHAN BỘI CHÂU implicitly make the claim that heroes are born, not made. Almost all of the individuals are described as thinking and acting the way they do from an early age. Their later lives are simply a playing out of their innate senses of righteousness and justice. Indeed, PHAN BỘI CHÂU's own *Autobiography* follows this same format. On this point, the biographies presented in *A History of Vietnam's Martyrs* differ considerably from the European *bildungsroman* style of biography, in which an individual is described as slowly but surely becoming an autonomous adult through a series of challenging life experiences and difficult moral decisions. In *A History of Vietnam's Martyrs*, there is no such thing as character development. The individuals it describes *already* fully understood the moral exigencies of the situation from the beginning - colonialism offers little ambiguity. Instead, the question is simply what could - and should - be done about it. Relating the lives of martyrs both confirms the validity of a righteous moral stance and offers a measure by which to gauge one's own patriotic contributions. Just as PHAN BỘI CHÂU writes in his *Autobiography*, it is apparent that ĐẶNG ĐOÀN BẰNG writes for pedagogical purposes: each biography is simultaneously a testament to the martyrs personal moral integrity *and* a record of failure that the reader is expected to study so that they might do better.

In the section that follows, ĐẶNG ĐOÀN BẰNG narrates TẶNG BÁT HỔ's return to Vietnam from abroad and his participation in the nascent revolutionary movement. He travelled to QUẢNG NAM and met with NGUYỄN HÀM, who introduced him to PHAN BỘI CHÂU, ĐẶNG THÁI THÂN, and LÊ VÕ. TẶNG BÁT HỔ then met CƯỜNG ĐỂ, who is described in a long aside. ĐẶNG ĐOÀN BẰNG thereafter describes the great meeting in November 1904, at which representatives from all over Vietnam selected TẶNG BÁT HỔ to officially serve as the "guide" responsible for taking PHAN BỘI CHÂU and ĐẶNG THÁI THÂN's nephew ĐẶNG TỬ KÍNH to Japan. ĐẶNG ĐOÀN BẰNG describes how TẶNG BÁT HỔ smuggled all three men across the border at QUẢNG YÊN by masquerading as Chinese merchants, and how he then took them to HONG KONG in search of the CẦN VƯƠNG leaders NGUYỄN THIỆN THUẬT and TÔN THẬT THUYẾT. Failing to find these leaders, ĐẶNG ĐOÀN BẰNG relates how TẶNG BÁT HỔ escorted PHAN BỘI CHÂU to YOKOHAMA and served as his translator for a momentous conversation with the Chinese reformer LIANG QICHAO.

¹⁸² Ibid.

Tặng Bát Hồ's death comes suddenly in the very last section of the biography. After describing how Đặng Tử Kính returned to Vietnam and how Cường Để made it to Japan, Đặng Đoàn Bằng relates that Tặng Bát Hồ contracted dysentery upon returning to Vietnam, traveled to Huế, and died there. He laments the death of Tặng Bát Hồ:

Alas! What a tragedy! Heavens! How terrible! After making it over so many treacherous peaks and through so many poisonous mists, making the jungle and mountains his home, making the waves and rivers his friends, he lost his life to an illness on a small boat floating on the Perfume River. Has heaven no respect for his great will? Alas! In his youth he left home, never married, risked his life for our country for twenty years, and roamed East, West, North, and South. His hair went grey and his eyes became dim, but his great will remained as strong as ever. Gold can go through the fire a hundred times - if this does not describe Tặng Bát Hồ, then who? He died at the age of forty-nine.¹⁸³

The abruptness shown in this ending is repeated in almost every biography which follows. That is to say, the narrative focus of the biographies is the story of each individual's *life*, rather than their death. Indeed, there is little actual heroism on display throughout the text (there are only about three notable exceptions). Much more textual space is devoted to efforts to demonstrate how an individual participated in the revolutionary movement. Indeed, to a large extent, Tặng Bát Hồ's biography reads like recounting of party history. In each biography, when it comes time for the martyr to die, the ending is often brief and perfunctory, with the age of death typically being the last statement. This disjuncture between life and death mirrors the distance between the repeated performance of patriotic will and the utter failure of that performance to have any significant effect on the colonial state. There is a sense, then, that *A History of Vietnam's Martyrs* registers deaths more than it commemorates them. What is truly commemorated in this text are traits and the actions taken as a result of those traits.

In an appended narrative section, Nguyễn Thượng Hiền repeats the biography from the author's personal perspective, and describes his anguish upon discovering Tặng Bát Hồ was sick and possibly dying. Desperate to save him, Nguyễn Thượng Hiền describes his efforts to procure cassia (a medicine) and sending it to Tặng Bát Hồ via the post, only to discover afterwards that Tặng Bát Hồ had rented a small boat, gotten in, and passed away while floating on the Perfume River. At the end of the remembrance, Nguyễn Thượng Hiền writes, "Examining his actions and demeanor, I can see there was never a time that the words 'destroy the enemy and save the country' weren't imprinted in his mind. Sư Triệu [Tặng Bát Hồ]'s accomplishments represented the end of an old group of righteous warriors and the inauguration of a new one. With these words I praise a man who truly deserves it."¹⁸⁴ Again we see a celebration of the unshakable will visible in Tặng Bát Hồ's personal characteristics and mannerisms, and an attempt to embed his story into that of the larger revolutionary movement.

Uncovering Mixed Messages: Digital Approaches to *A History of Vietnam's Martyrs*

Whereas the introductions, the poetry, and especially the style and tone of the biographies communicate a powerful and cohesive message, close examination of the content and language of the text reveals a rather different picture. Contrary to the model of perennial patriotic sacrifice put forth in the introductions and alluded to throughout the text, while conducting a prosopographical analysis, I discovered that the martyrs presented in the text belong to two distinct and quite different generations. While the older generation fits the patriotic martyr

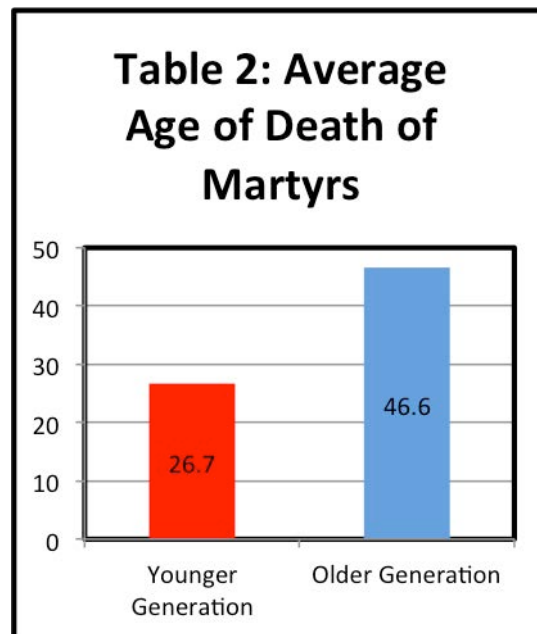
¹⁸³ Ibid, 32.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 39.

model quite well, the younger generation diverges from it enough to call into question the usage of “martyrdom” itself as a term with which to understand the lives and deaths of those who participated as students in the Eastern Travel movement.

Two complementary digital techniques were used to investigate the text. First, I conducted a prosopographical analysis using statistical techniques in which multiple factors were selected from all fifty biographies and, where possible, converted to quantifiable data. This allowed me to determine which factors were most commonly co-associated, thereby revealing blocks of individuals with similar traits. Second, I applied textual analysis software to a corpus composed of the fifty biographies to reveal the frequency and relative appearance of specific topics over the range of the text.¹⁸⁵ This data was then cross-referenced with my prosopographical results to generate additional data and conclusions.¹⁸⁶

| Table 1 | Birthdates |
|---------------------------|-------------------|
| Older Generation | 1850-1878 |
| Younger Generation | 1880-1894 |



¹⁸⁵ The text analysis software I used is called Voyant. Voyant allows for word count, frequency analysis and comparison, and multiple modes of data export. I intend to use text mining and topic modeling libraries in R to yield further results as I continue to explore this text.

¹⁸⁶ All prosopographical data was entered into and manipulated within an Excel spreadsheet.

Table 3: Birthplace of Martyrs

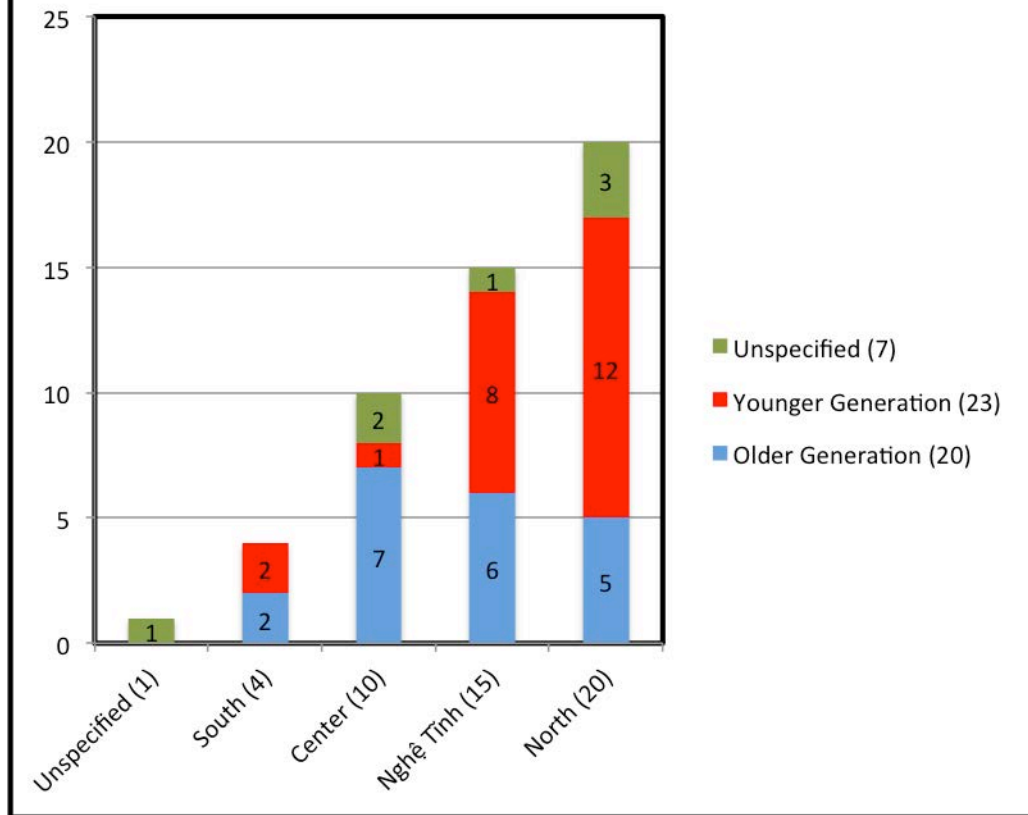


Table 4: Location of Death of Martyrs

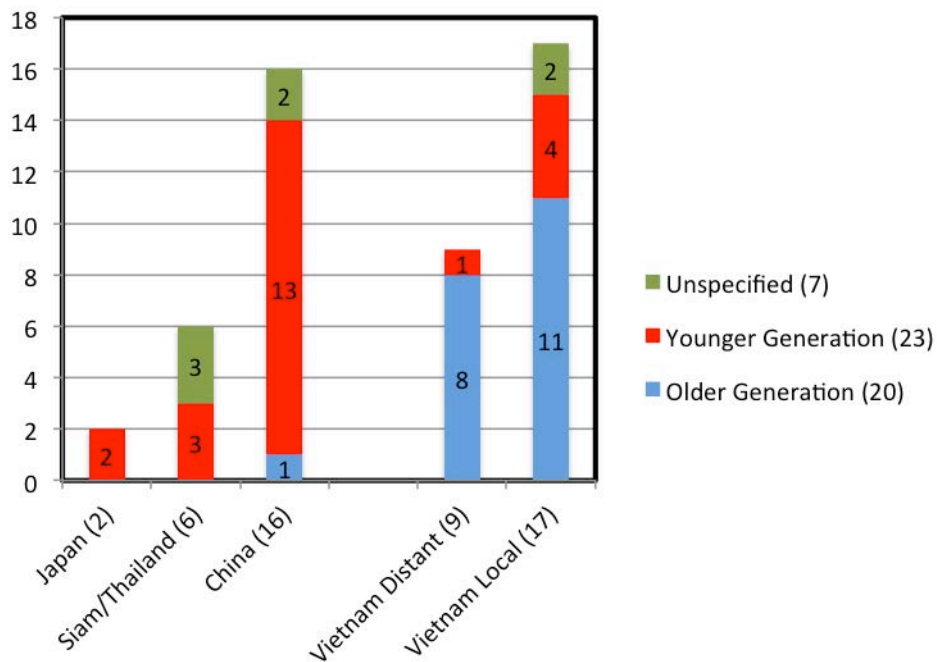


Table 5: Percentage of Martyrs Imprisoned

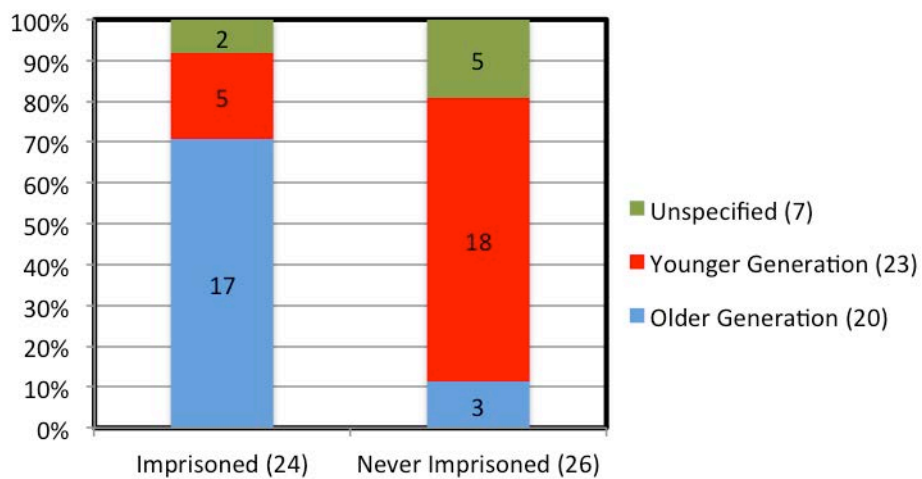


Table 6: Manner of Death of Martyrs

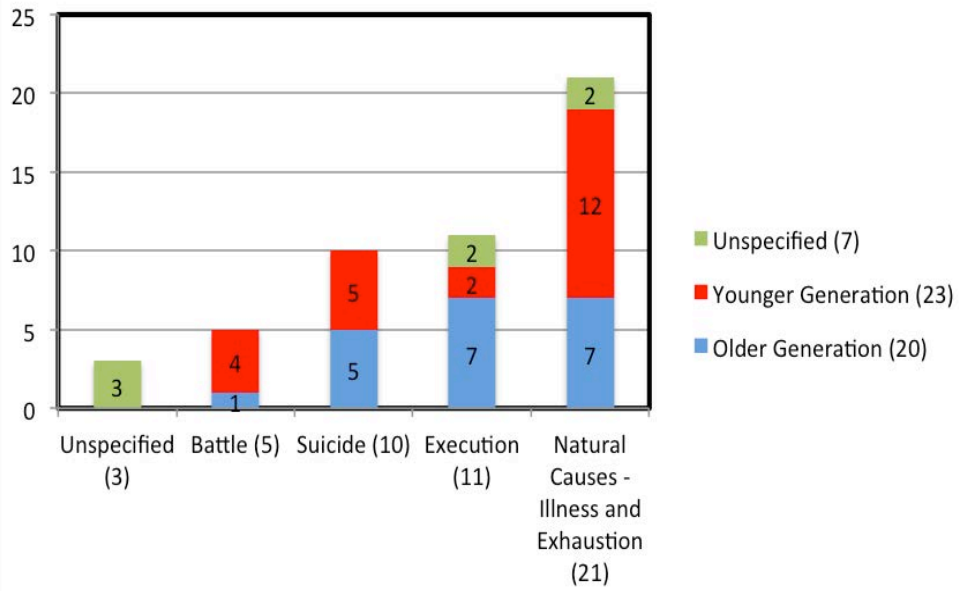


Table 7, Part One: Total Number of Characters

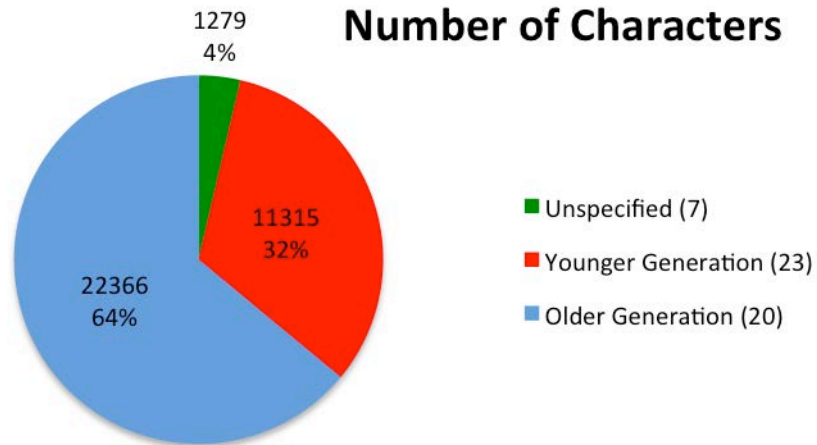


Table 7, Part Two: Average Number of Characters

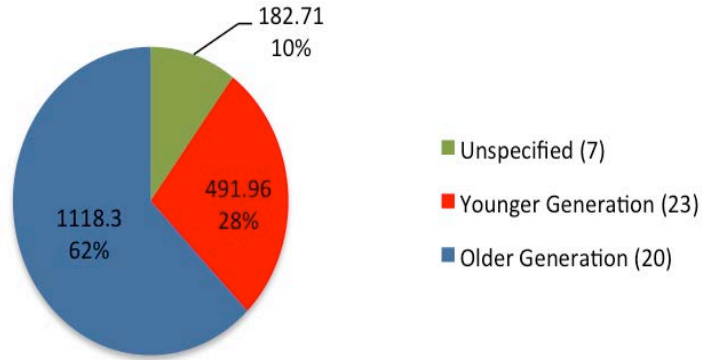
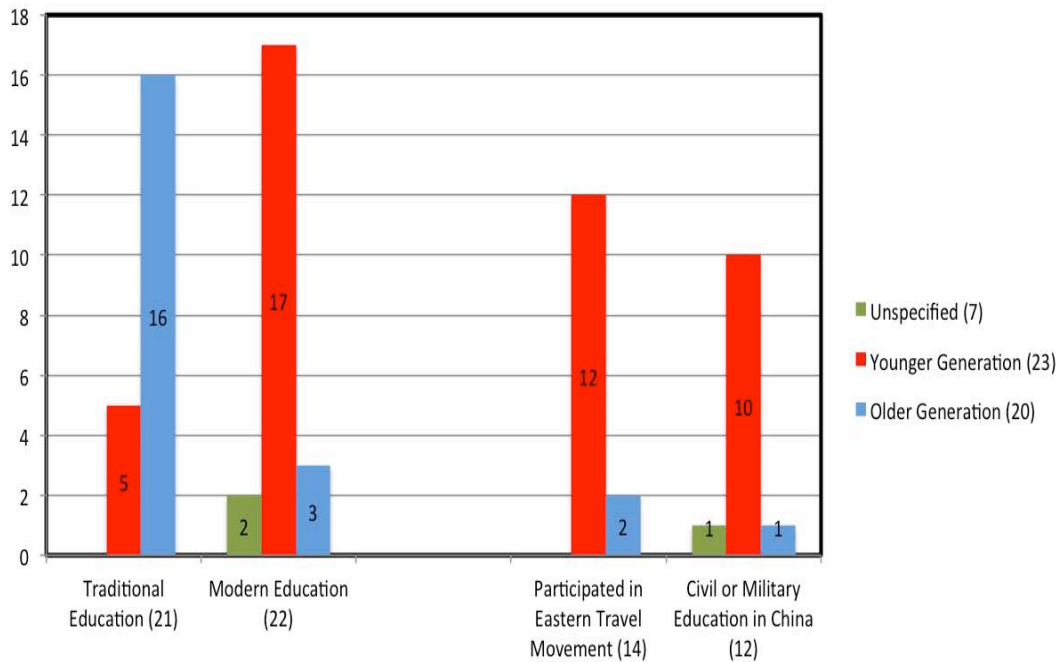
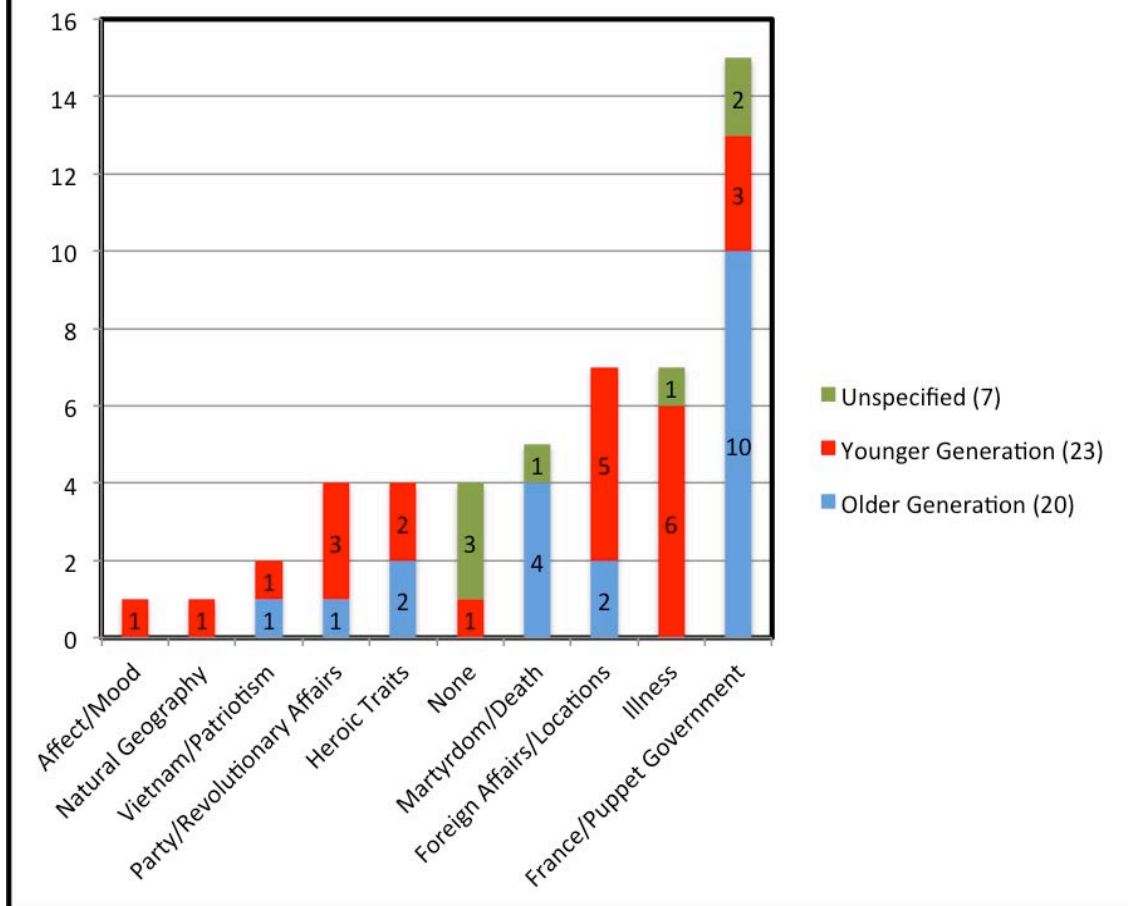


Table 8: Education of Martyrs



Note: Categories in this table are not mutually exclusive

Table 9: Most Frequent Topic Occurring in Text of Each Biography



The most significant finding was the text depicted a distinct set of two generations, each defined by a common set of characteristics (see Tables 1 and 2). The older generation, composed of twenty individuals born between 1850 and 1878, were more likely to be degree holders competent in Chinese with connections to the *Cần Vương* movement.¹⁸⁷ They were far less likely to have left Indochina, though many travelled in and amongst the three regions comprising Vietnam (Tonkin, Annam, and Cochinchina). A far greater proportion of the older generation came from the central region of Annam (see Table 3), and those who did included some of the most famous martyrs of the revolutionary cause, such as *Tăng Bạt Hổ*, *Trần Quý Cáp*, and *Nguyễn Hàm*.¹⁸⁸ Of the older generation, 85% were imprisoned and many died in prison or

¹⁸⁷ The dividing line between generations was, in part, arbitrarily drawn at the median age of death for all individuals included in *A History of Vietnam's Martyrs*: 36 years old. However, as my data will show, there is good cause for treating 1879 as a watershed between the two groups. Those born after 1879 grew up almost entirely under colonial conditions. They came from different areas of the country, and had different life experiences and revolutionary careers.

¹⁸⁸ *Tăng Bạt Hổ*, *Trần Quý Cáp*, and *Nguyễn Hàm* also figure prominently in Phan Bội Châu's

exile, either of illness or by execution (see Tables 5 and 6). Overall, the older generation was considerably more involved in events on the ground in Vietnam and suffered considerably more negative consequences as a result. Most of them fit the classic definition of “martyrs.”

The younger generation differed in numerous significant ways from the older. Composed of 23 individuals born between 1880 and 1894, the younger generation was far more likely to have attended a modern educational institution, whether civil or military (see Table 8). Nearly all came from the North or Nghệ Tĩnh regions, and a majority died abroad (see Table 4). In contrast to the older generation, most died of illness or suicide, while only two were executed (see Table 6). Overall, the younger generation was far less engaged in actual conflict with the French and Nguyễn dynasty authorities, but much more widely travelled than the older generation.

By cross-referencing multiple factors, it is possible to sketch a more complete picture of the life stories contained in *A History of Vietnam's Martyrs*. First, we analyze the generational split in greater depth. One difference that is immediately noticeable is the average age of death for members of each generation: 26.7 years of age for the younger group compared to a 46.6 years of age for the older (see Table 2). Simply stated, the older generation were old men when they died. The younger generation, being, on average, almost twenty years younger, were youth and young adults.

The individual biographies reveal the kind psychological and cultural differences that this age gap engendered. For example, consider the *types* of suicide committed by each group (a meaningful comparison, for each group included five suicides). Four out of five members of the older generation committed suicide *under conditions of immediate imprisonment* and duress. Two of them did so by undergoing hunger strikes, one by poisoning, and one by biting her tongue and bleeding to death. In contrast, only one out of five members of the younger generation committed suicide while in captivity - by poisoning. Three of the others committed suicide because they were ill, and the last one doing so because his father refused to send money to him in Japan. Overall, the text presents the suicides of the older generation as powerful moral stands worthy of emulation. By contrast, the suicides of the younger generation are simply referred to as “unlucky” and “unfortunate.”¹⁸⁹

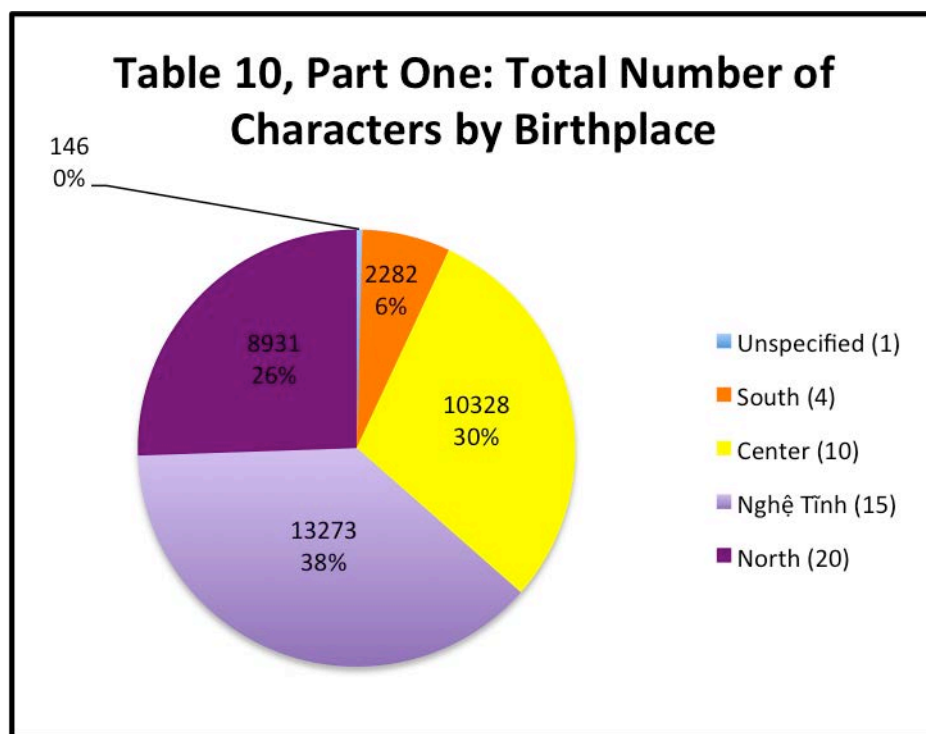
A comparison of the two generations also reveals a significant geographical shift in revolutionary participation and activity. First, the older generation included a much higher proportion (35%) of individuals from the central region of Annam than did the younger generation (4.3%). Conversely, the younger generation was far more likely (52%) to be from the North than the older generation (25%). Both generations contained a significant number of individuals from the two provinces of Nghệ An and Hà Tĩnh (the birthplace of Phan Bội Châu and later Hồ Chí Minh). Second, as already noted, the older generation almost completely died

Autobiography, and it is not surprising that they would be included in a collection surveying the lives of significant martyrs. Đặng Thái Thân, from Nghệ An, is another unsurprising addition who also appears in the *Autobiography*. Together, these four men constitute a revolutionary “old guard:” individuals with compelling personal narratives who could be turned into models for future generations of revolutionaries. It is nevertheless interesting to find that these four men, while sharing certain traits in common, led considerably different lives and participated in “the revolution” in substantially different ways.

¹⁸⁹ *VNLS*, 150. The suicide of Phan Lại Lương is described as particularly pathetic. Having refused to obtain medical treatment after becoming ill while abroad a ship bound for Guangdong in 1910, Phan Lại Lương jumped overboard. He was pulled out of the water, but died soon afterwards at the hospital from his injuries and the damage to his already weakened constitution. *Ibid.*, 144.

within the borders of Vietnam (95%), whereas most of the younger died abroad (72%).¹⁹⁰ Taken together, these proportionately significant differences indicate a transition from an older Annamese-led movement of active domestic resistance to a much younger Tonkinese-dominated expatriate community of political exiles and agitators.

The older and younger generations underwent two very different kinds of institutional experiences. The older group largely received a traditional Chinese-language education (80%), whereas only a few of the younger generation did so (22%). By contrast, the younger generation was more likely (74%) to attend a modern institution. Such institutions included the two schools serving the Eastern Travel movement - the Dobun Shoin (Đông Văn Thư Viện, Common Culture Academy) and the Shimbu Gakko (Military Preparatory Academy), as well as several institutions in Guangdong and Beijing, including the famous Baoding Military Academy. Five individuals attended some form of French educational institution. Overall, thirteen of the younger generation took part in the Eastern Travel movement, while ten went to school or trained in China.¹⁹¹ Meanwhile, the older generation was conspicuous for having attended a quite different sort of institution: the colonial prison or work camp. Seventeen of the older group were imprisoned, fifteen of whom died while in custody. These clear-cut institutional distinctions reinforce the social and cultural differences between generations and indicate just how much of a sociological transition had taken place between 1905 and 1915.¹⁹²



¹⁹⁰ In addition, the one older individual who died abroad, Lê Văn Tập, did so in Long Châu, just across the border with China. Ibid., 108.

¹⁹¹ Note that these groupings are not mutually exclusive, for six individuals attended institutions in both Japan and then China.

¹⁹² 1915 was the year the last member of the older generation (Nguyễn Đức Công) died. Ibid., 126.

Table 10, Part Two: Average Number of Characters by Birthplace

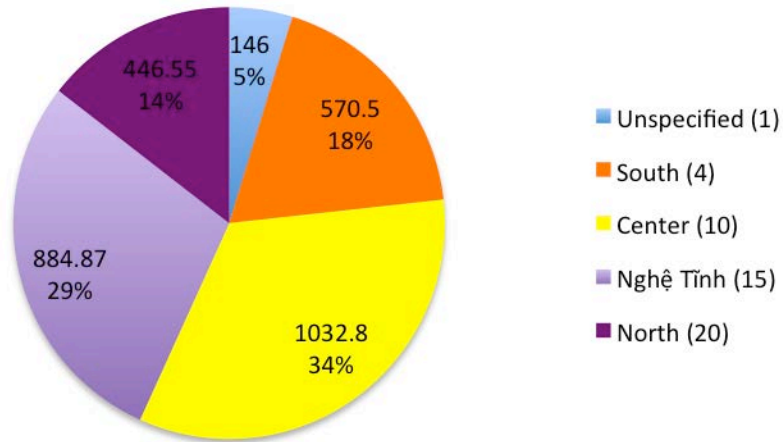
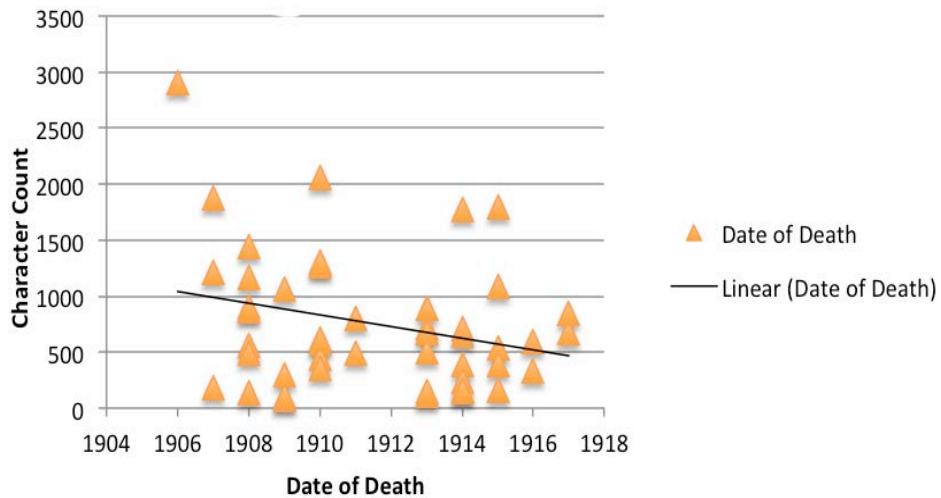


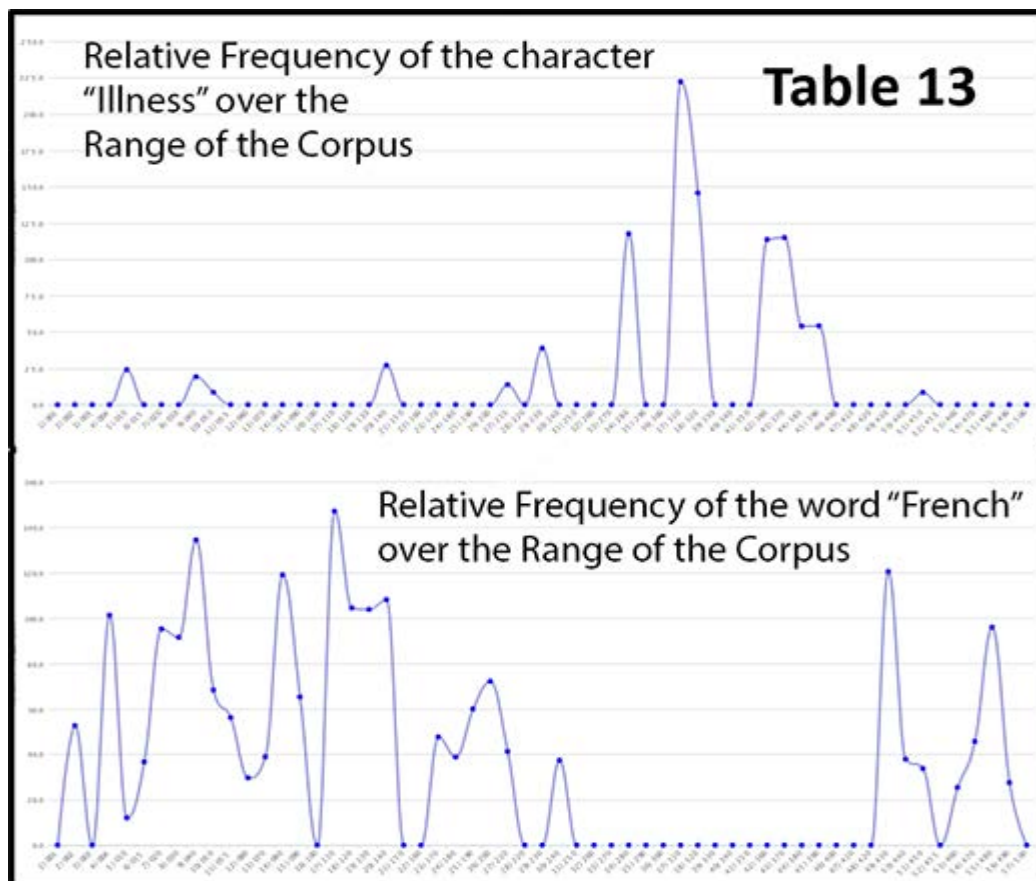
Table 11: Character Count by Date of Death



A final important distinction between the generations can be found in the very language used to tell their stories. The differences in textual treatment of the generations begins simply with the amount of space allocated to each martyr. Whereas the authors wrote a total of 22,366 characters about the older generation, an average of 1,118 characters per individual, they only wrote 11,315 characters about the younger generation, an average of only 492 characters per individual, which is less than half (see Table 7, Parts One and Two). The number of characters

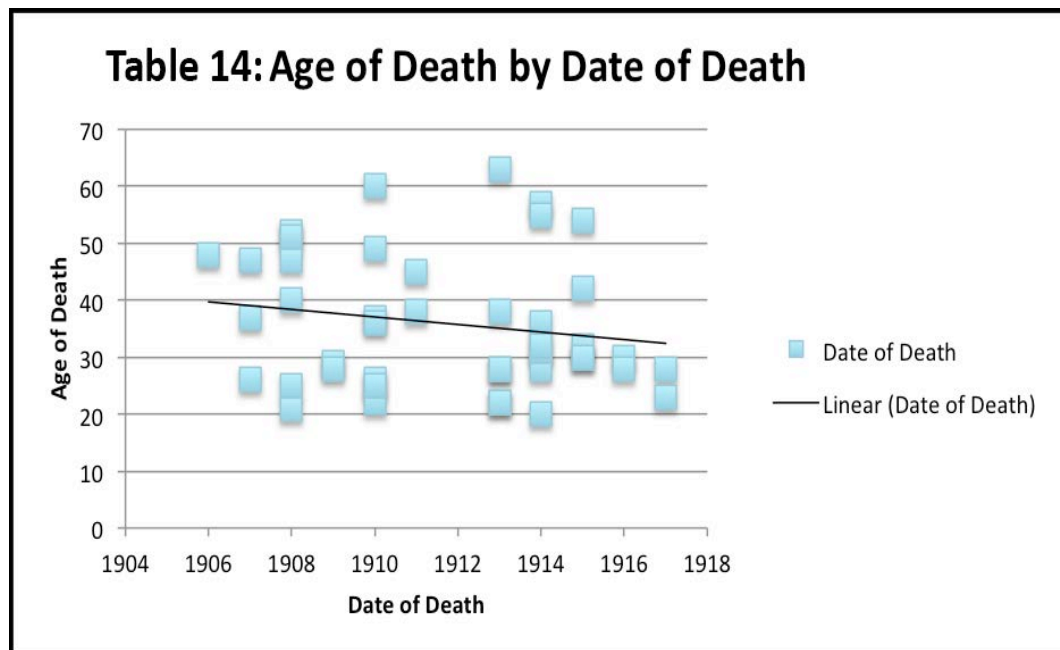
written about each individual declined over time: on average, the later an individual died, the less lengthy biography they received. Likewise, the younger an individual was, the less attention they received (see Tables 11 and 15). Members of the older generation were also more likely to have poems appended to their biographies (an average of 2.45 poems per individual compared to 1.52 for the younger generation, see Table 19). No doubt this was at least partially the result of the older generation simply living longer lives, and thus having more biographical information available. Another explanation may be that the authors simply knew less about the younger revolutionaries. However, this explanation is not entirely convincing, for both Đặng Đoàn Bằng and Trần Quốc Duy were members of the younger generation and claimed to be close personal friends with many of the deceased.

There were significant spatial differences as well. Textually speaking, the Tonkin lost out to the regions. Though Northern individuals accounted for 40% of the entire collection, they received only 26% of the collection's total character count. In contrast, individuals from the Annam, despite accounting for only 20% of the martyrs in the collection, received 30% of the text's total character count. Annam, with only seven biographies, punched well above its weight in numbers. Meanwhile, individuals from Nghệ Tĩnh took the lion's share of authorial attention: on average, they received biographies nearly twice as long as individuals from the North. Thus, an important distinction can be drawn between Nghệ Tĩnh and Tonkin. This indicates that while Tonkin was emerging as a new source of revolutionaries, the authors were not nearly as familiar with them as they were with the more famous activities of the older Annamese revolutionaries and at least a portion of the Nghệ Tĩnh martyrs.



An analysis of the topics dealt with in each biography reveals even more divergence. In order of frequency, the top five topics for the entire corpus were: (1) France/Puppet Government, (2) Martyrdom/Death, (3) Heroic Traits, (4) Party Affairs/Organization, and (5) Foreign Affairs/Locations. This list overlaps with but does not correspond completely with the most common topics across all fifty biographies. The most common topics for the older generation were France/Puppet Government (50%) and Martyrdom/Death (20%).¹⁹³ In contrast, Illness (26%), followed by Foreign Affairs/Locations (22%) proved to be the most common topics in the biographies of the younger generation.¹⁹⁴ This distinction is even more significant due to the fact that, throughout the corpus, the occurrences of words related to France/Puppet Government (259 instances) and Martyrdom/Death (215 instances) far outweighed words related to Illness (71 instances) and Foreign Affairs/Locations (144 instances).¹⁹⁵

That illness figures so prominently as a top-ranked topic despite its overall paucity in the corpus at large reveals that a large subsection of the younger generation both led significantly different lives and were treated textually in significantly different ways. Indeed, many of the biographies of the younger generations contained little else besides a description of their foreign travels and their death from illness. In contrast, the biographies of the older generation included many topics, and were often much richer in literary and emotional content as well. Two charts comparing the raw frequency of the term “France” and the term “Illness” over the range of the corpus further demonstrate this divergence (see Table 13).



¹⁹³ Only three of the biographies of younger individuals ranked France/Puppet Government first. None ranked Martyrdom/Death first.

¹⁹⁴ Only two biographies of older individuals ranked Foreign Affairs/Locations first. None ranked Illness first.

¹⁹⁵ The high number of characters/words pertaining to France/Puppet Government is noteworthy, and I will address this issue separately below.

Table 15: Age of Death/Character Count

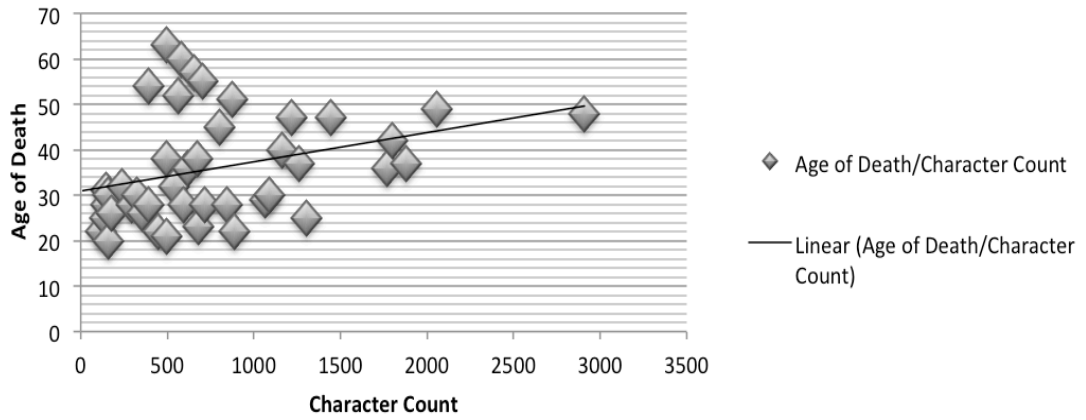
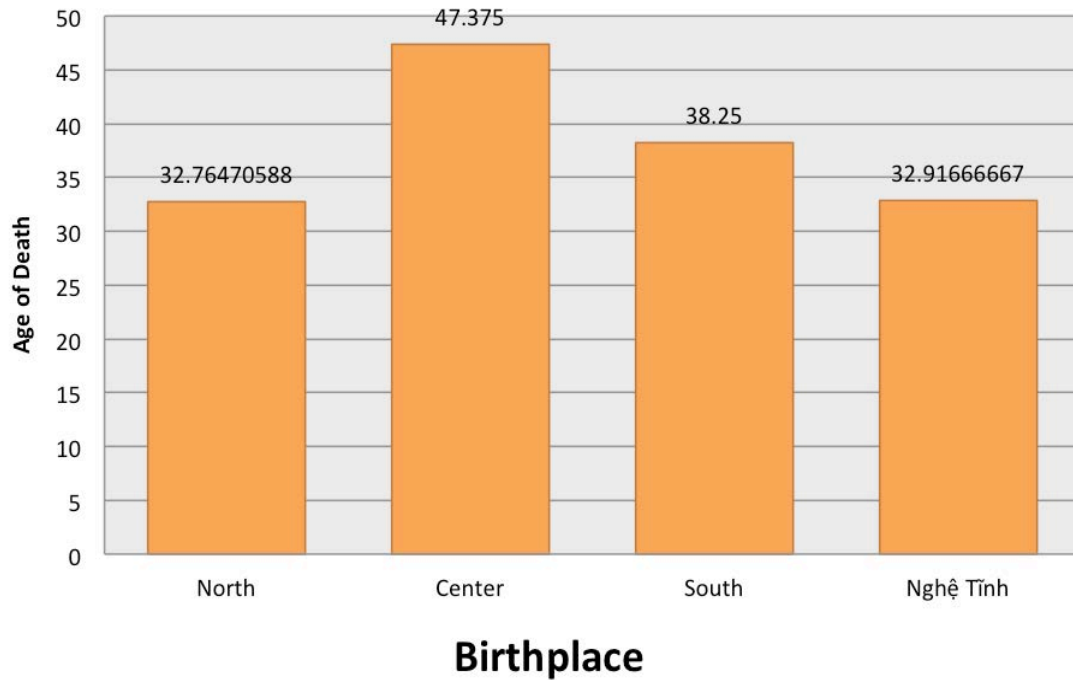
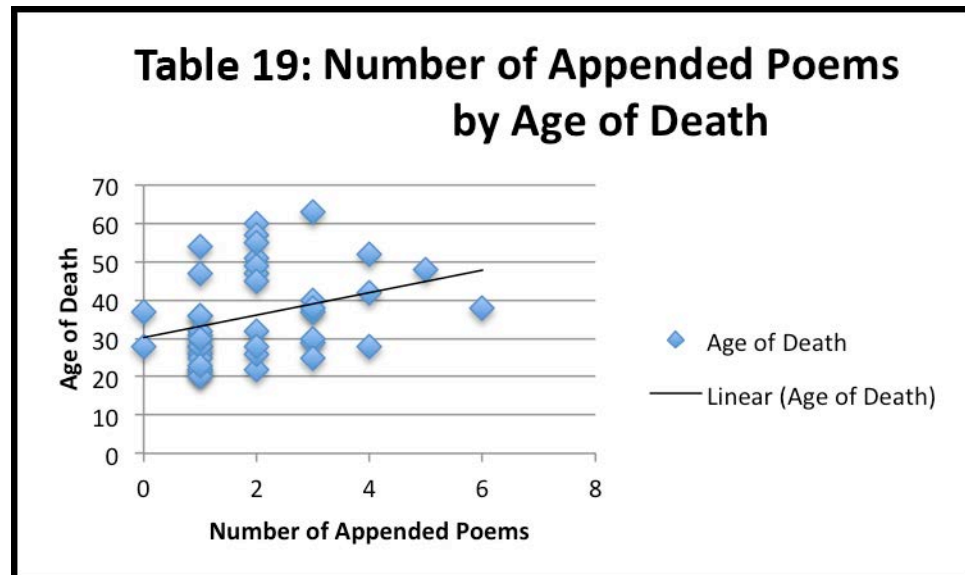
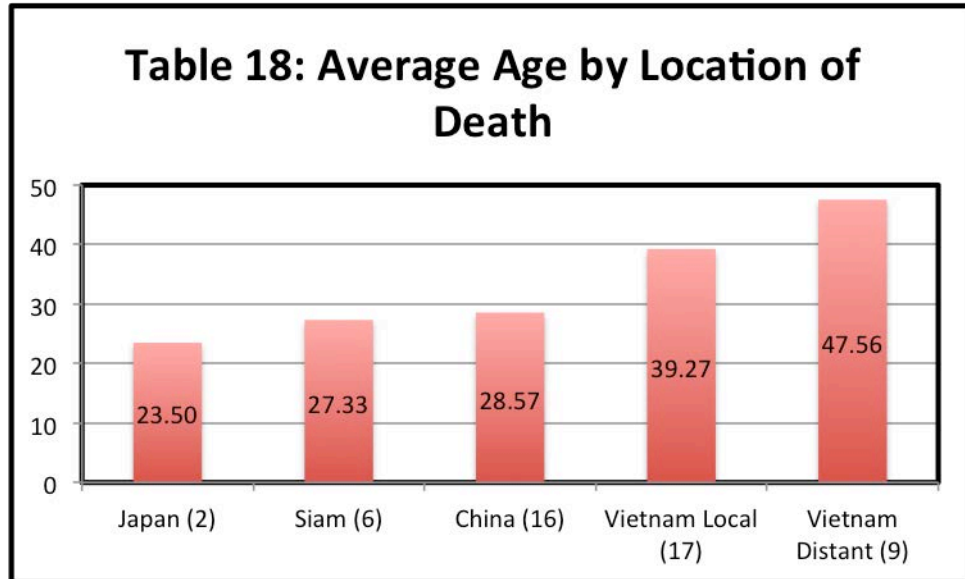


Table 17: Average Age of Death





The next factor I considered is age at death. While the following results largely reinforce my previous argument concerning the existence of two distinct generations, they do not take the date of birth into consideration as a primary metric. Nevertheless, since all of those born before 1879 died at an age of 36 years old or more and all those born after 1879 died at an age of 32 years old or less, this metric implicitly reproduces an identical generational split. The purpose of using it is to evaluate *other* metrics without considering generation per se (see Table 14). One of the results is that this reveals certain patterns of overlap between generations as well as other important distinctions between martyred individuals.

Several useful alternative metrics also affirm the existence of two generations. First, comparing the average age of death to birthplace reveals Annam to be the source of considerably older martyrs (47.4 years old) than both the Tonkin and Nghệ Tĩnh regions (32.8 and 32.9 years old respectively, see Table 17). The four martyrs from Cochinchina display a slightly higher

average age of death: 38.3 years. This confirms the conclusion drawn previously about Annam having been a primary source of the older generation. It also reveals that despite producing a number of members of the older generation, Nghệ Tĩnh, was still quite youthful in character. Judging exclusively from this data, one would predict that Nghệ Tĩnh and Tonkin would be the source of the next generation of revolutionaries.

Second, an analysis of the average age of death by location of death confirms that those dying within the country tended to be much older (see Table 18). Interestingly, the average age of those dying in a different region from where they were born (domestic distant) was quite high (46.6 years old), while the average age of those dying in their home region (domestic local, 39.3 years old) was closer to the median of 36 years old. I interpret this to be an indication that the older an individual was, the greater was the probability of them participating in national as opposed to purely regional resistance activities. By comparison, the average age of those dying in Japan (23.5 years old), Siam (27.3 years old), and China (28.6 years old) was considerably younger. This metric confirms the generational argument.

A Complication: Time or Space?

I will now consider several metrics that complicate the concept of two distinct generations – at least to some degree. First, an analysis of age of death by date of death presents a muddled picture (see Table 14). The younger generation began dying early (two in 1908), whereas the older generation continue to live for some time (the last died in 1915). This means that no clear dividing line can be drawn according to when individuals died. Rather, it seems that the most useful means for making a *social* distinction between networks or groups is not a temporal analysis, but a spatial analysis. In other words, even though the generations overlapped temporally, this does not necessarily mean that they had significant communication or intercourse with each other.

Second, while analysis of character count and number of appended poems by age of death confirms the contention that older individuals received significantly more authorial attention, it also reveals some interesting outliers within the younger generation. Another chart detailing character count by date of death also suggests an overall trend which nevertheless contains several exceptions and outliers (see Table 19). Certain younger individuals *did* receive longer biographies and a greater number of poems. This complicates the picture for the younger generation, and demands an explanation: what was distinctive about the particular members of the younger generation who received longer biographies?

Table 20: Manner of Death by Birthplace

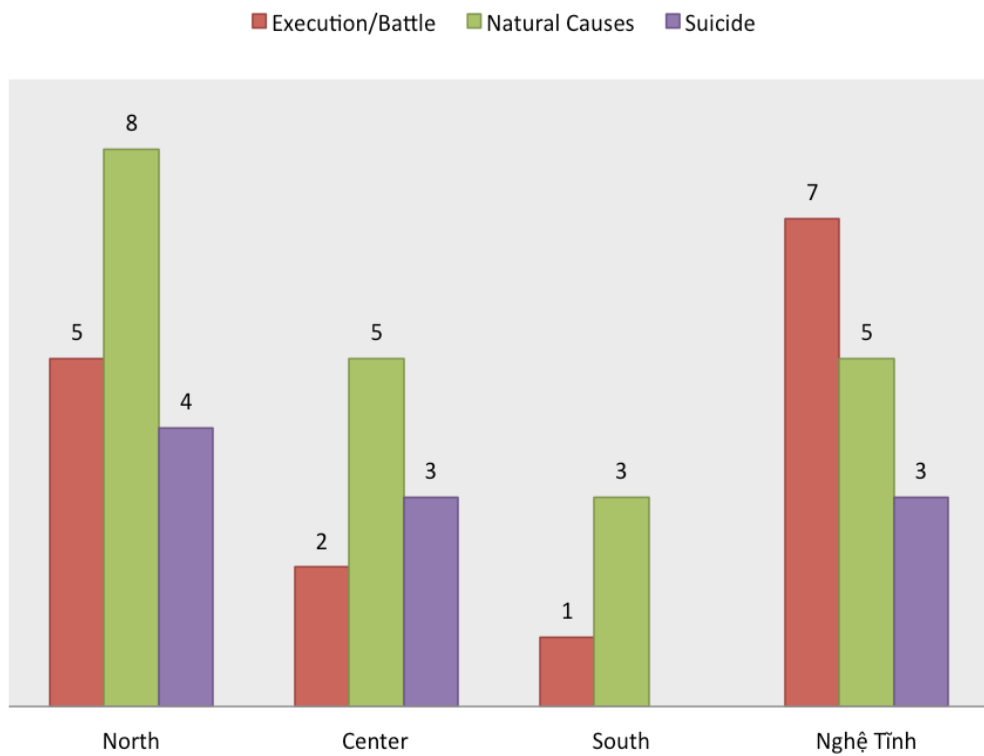


Table 21: Character Count by Manner of Death

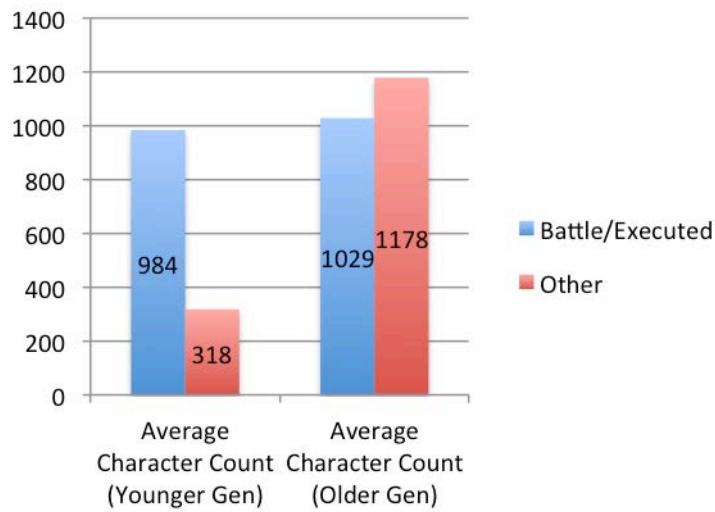


Table 22: Manner of Death by Location of Death

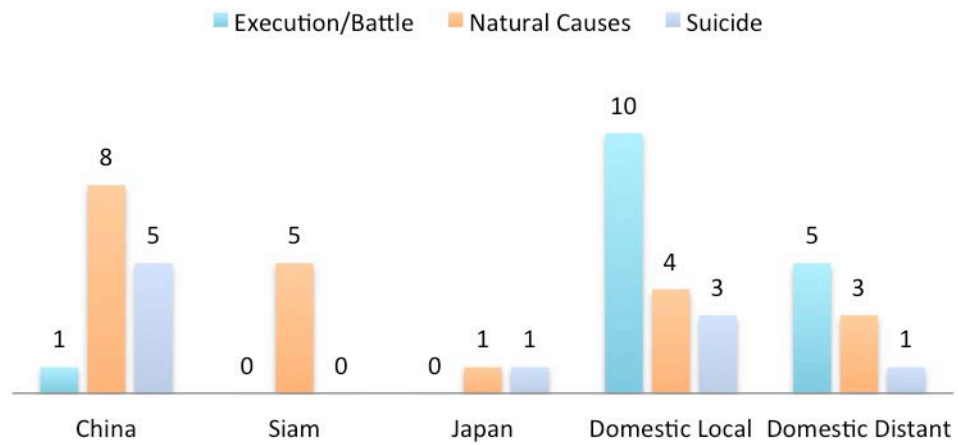


Table 23: Manner of Death by Average Age of Death

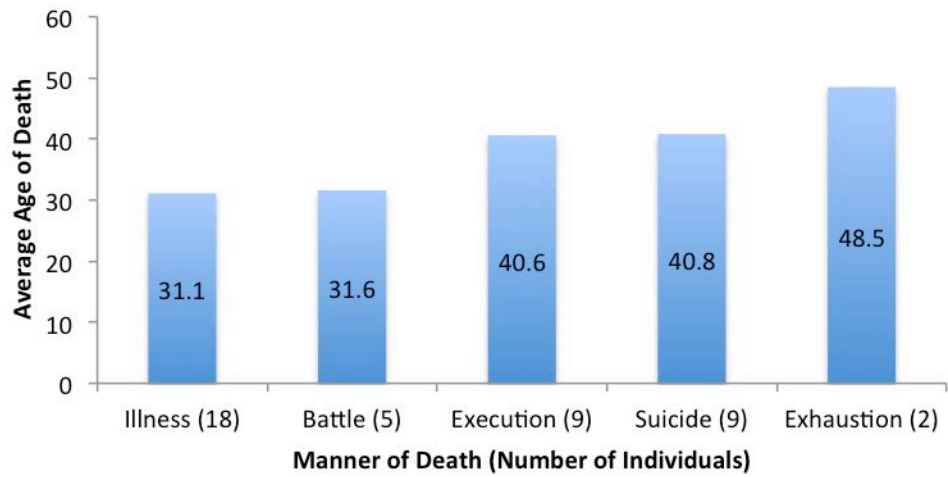
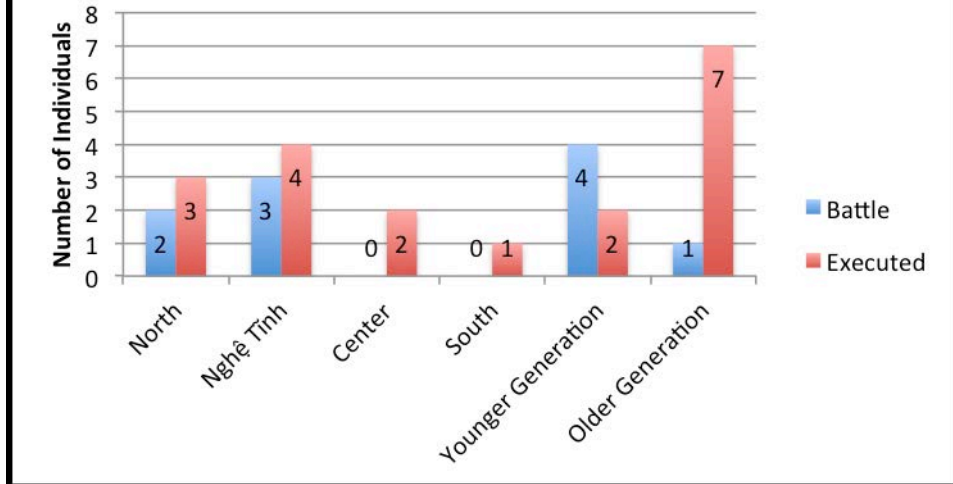


Table 24: Battle/Execution Counts by Birthplace and Generation



In order to answer this question, we will turn to the final metric to be considered: the manner of death. *A History of Vietnam's Martyrs* presents five categories of death: (a) illness (19), (b) suicide (9), (c) execution (9), (d) battle (5), and (e) exhaustion (2). For ease of reference, I have combined illness with exhaustion (natural causes), and combined execution with battle (execution/battle). Examining this metric by birthplace reveals Tonkin and Nghệ Tĩnh to be the primary sources of those killed by the French and their allies (executions/battle, see). Conversely, those who died of natural causes were split almost evenly between regions (see Table 20). Suicide displayed similar spatial diversification, though none of the four Cochinese committed suicide. Initially, this finding struck me as quite strange, for I had come to assume that the Annamese were primarily responsible for actually fighting with the French. In fact, only two of the ten Annamese were executed, while five died of natural causes. Does this indicate the generational argument is flawed?

In a word, no. Contrasting the manner of death with the average age of death confirms. The average age of death from illness was 31.1, consistent with earlier findings about the younger generation. In contrast, the average age of death by execution and suicide was 40.6 and 40.8, respectively (see Table 23). This indicates the generational argument was accurate, although it points to a greater willingness on the part of the older generation to take their own lives. The reader will remember that four out of five older suicides were committed while in prison or in custody. An analysis of the manner of death by location of death further reinforces the generational argument (see Table 22). Most deaths from illness (74%) took place abroad, whereas nearly all (94%) deaths resulting from execution or combat happened within Vietnam. If the older Annamese did not account for more than two of these deaths, then who *was* dying at the hands of the enemy?

It turns out the answer is different for executions and deaths in battle (see Table 24). , Excluding the problematic Annamese, those executed were most likely to be from the older generation, and hailed from either Nghệ Tĩnh or Tonkin (78%). However, those who died in battle, while also split between Nghệ Tĩnh or Tonkin, were almost all younger (80%). This small

group of four young men was responsible for skewing the scatter plots and frustrating the previously outlined “sick student” model. However, the most interesting metric of all concerns the relative proportion of text dedicated to them.

The four younger martyrs who died in battle, along with the two who were executed, receive considerably more attention than their peers who died of illness or suicide. The individuals who suffered “violent deaths” averaged 984 characters per biography, compared to only 318 for their contemporaries. A quick check of the older generation reveals no such gap: the average character count for deaths in battle or by execution was 1029, in contrast to 1178 characters per biography for those dying of natural causes or taking their own lives (see Table 21). This indicates that for the younger generation “violent deaths” came at an editorial premium – such a violent death was almost a sufficient qualification for those six individuals to achieve parity with their elders. They constitute an important subgroup within the younger generation - one I will examine in greater detail below. Of course, It is also highly significant that their peers hardly merited attention at all. Indeed, the next question is why were they included in a compendium of “martyrs” in the first place?

Conclusion

This statistically informed prosopographical analysis reveals that the individuals included in *A History of Vietnam's Martyrs* can be usefully divided along several important metrics. Drawing together the results of these metrics, we find the text contains four distinct subgroups. First came an older generation of Annamese scholar-patriots with considerable name recognition. This group travelled significantly within the country and nearly all spent time in colonial prisons. They were classically educated and had many personal connections to the Cần Vương movement. For the most part, they are described as dedicated yet reserved individuals. The authors of the text hold them in high regard and use their stories to create archetypes for model patriots.

The second group consisted of older patriots from Tonkin and Nghệ Tĩnh. This group enjoyed slightly less fame than the Annam group, but was far more likely to have been captured and killed or executed by the French. They were classically educated and many had close connections with Phan Bội Châu. The life stories of this group are the most interesting of the entire text, and their stories often suggest these individuals were strong-willed loners driven to revolutionary activity by their conscience and sense of righteous indignation. Where the Annamese are presented as purposeful and prudent patriotic models, this older generation of northerners are depicted as ardent revolutionaries - angry men willing to die in defense of their principles.

The third group is that of the “sick students.” This group was mostly from Tonkin and Nghệ Tĩnh. They spent considerable time abroad, and many of them were trained at modern educational or military institutions. Many participated in the Eastern Travel movement, and several of them served in a junior capacity in Phan Bội Châu’s various political organizations. The principal authors of the text, Đặng Đoàn Bằng and Trần Quốc Duy, belonged to this third group. yet strangely, these authors have far less to contribute about this group than they do about the other groups. For this group, their editorial comments are often wistful, complaining about wasted talent and a general unluckiness. Most of this group died of illness or suicide while abroad.

This group of “sick students” presents a challenge to the very concept of martyrdom. In both the Catholic and Confucian traditions, martyrdom is specifically associated with violent

death at the hand of an enemy. The Confucian tradition admits suicide in particular cases, especially if an individual is under duress or captured and commits suicide strategically to deny an advantage to the enemy. However, in cases in which suicide was unprovoked, the application of the term “martyr” seems doubtful. Its use for cases of death by illness stretches the meaning of the term considerably. This may be a function of translation. For such cases, perhaps it is more appropriate to employ the phrase “righteous dead,” which lacks the sanguinary connotations of “martyr” but still maintains the (fictive) notion that the individual died on behalf of a cause.

The fourth group consists of those members of the younger generation who died a “violent death.” These individuals received comparatively more of the authors’ attention than their peers. They were less likely to have travelled abroad. Only three of six participated in the Eastern Travel movement. However, they represented, the nucleus of a new generation of radicalized martyrs. It was this group - and not the “sick students” - who could and were legitimately presented as the inheritors of a violent anti-colonial legacy perpetuated by the second group.

A final group to consider, mostly for its relative absence throughout the text, are the Cochinchinese. Despite the fact, noted in the text itself, that two-thirds of participants in the Eastern Travel movement came from the south, only four southerners are included in this compilation. Of those who are, two belong to the older generation and two to the younger. Their biographies are comparatively short compared to those of the other three regions as well. Overall the treatment of Cochinchinese fails to substantiate the text’s claim to national representativeness. However, what this absence does point to is a social disconnect between northern and southern revolutionaries. Either the overweighted proportion of southern Eastern Travel movement participants simply did not become martyrs to the same degree that the northerners did (unlikely), or the authors and editors of the text failed to develop many meaningful relationships with southern activists, and likewise failed to maintain the relationships they did cultivate.

Having evaluated *A History of Vietnam’s Martyrs* as an aggregated collection of biographies and as a corpus of texts, I will now reconsider the overall message and discursive function of the text. The text purports to present recent significant moments in national history. The four Introductions claim the text to be both a commemoration of the dead and a political testament to the perennial potency of Vietnamese patriotic resistance. The text bears these claims out, but only to a certain extent. The authors provide moving accounts of selected individuals which certainly qualify as commemorations of the dead. However, they fail to successfully integrate these accounts into a larger national narrative. Instead, the accounts fall haphazardly into four groups defined by their common attributes.

The text is regionally fragmented and historiographically discontinuous. Instead of a national history, we have here several loose historical narrative clusters which correspond to generationally and regionally defined groups. Some of these biographical clusters are much closer to the language and intent of the introductions, specifically those of individuals of both generations from Tonkin and Nghệ Tĩnh who died “violent deaths.” The Tonkinese and Nghệ Tĩnh fighters exhibit the characteristics of patriotic martyrs alluded to in the introductions: determination, selflessness, and righteous anger.

In contrast, the “sick students” are conspicuous for their lack of these traits. This large group, comprising almost half of the individuals contained in *A History of Vietnam’s Martyrs*,

confusingly muddles the message the text hopes to deliver. It is not clear whether many of these individuals were in fact acting on behalf of the national cause while they trained in educational and military institutions abroad. The biographies of these individuals fail to adequately explain their motivations or how their deaths fit into a larger national narrative.

Meanwhile, the Annamese appear as important agents of national communication and integration. More than those of the Tonkinese, their efforts served to bring the northern region into dialogue with the south. They were instrumental in developing the first nationwide organizational infrastructure, and suffered considerably as a result. Meanwhile, in terms of national integration, it seems their efforts were only partially successful. Cochinchinese barely appear in this volume, and the younger generation contains only one individual from Annam.

Overall, *A History of Vietnam's Martyrs* presents a series of snapshots of a national movement still in its formative stages. Although its language might differ from its content, it is decidedly nationalist in intent and scope. The text positions its authors, martyrs, and readers against the French colonial state, and uses "the loss of the country" as a foil for constituting exactly that country. Through sacrifice the nation is realized. This utilitarian approach to death may partly explain the inclusion of so many "sick students." If every death reinforces the life of the nation, then the manner, location, and specific circumstances of each death do not matter. What *does* matter is that each deceased individual can be claimed on behalf of the nation. To at least a certain extent, quantity eclipses quality.

At a certain point, the calculus between commemoration of the dead and the creation of a model for patriotic emulation would shift in favor of the latter. The greater the quantity of deaths, the more likely this shift was to take place. Whether he intended to or not, Phan Bội Châu had produced an especially somber and bloody national legacy. By commemorating deaths on behalf of the nation, no matter their provenance, he set a dangerous precedent. Of course, it was exactly this precedent that would later be invoked by the Democratic Republic of Vietnam when it encouraged hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of young Vietnamese to go to their deaths in 33 years of war against France, the United States, Cambodia, and China.

Chapter Three Security, Legality, and Secrets:

The Capture, Transport, and Incarceration of Phan Bội Châu, June-August, 1925

The morning train from Hangzhou pulled into Shanghai's North Railway Station at noon on June 30, 1925. Phan Bội Châu exited the train and caught a tram that would take him to the center of the International Concession. Once there, Phan Bội Châu intended to mail four hundred yuan and a letter to Trần Hữu Công in Germany. After their exhausting journey together through the Chinese interior to Yunnan and back in 1918, Trần Hữu Công had wearied of the revolutionary cause. After winning a scholarship from the Peking government in 1922, he left to study medicine in Berlin. Phan Bội Châu dutifully collected the award when it arrived each month and, after depositing a portion of it into a savings account, sent the balance on to the young man. Once this was done, Phan Bội Châu planned to board a ship bound for Canton, where Nguyễn Ai Quốc and the grave of Phạm Hồng Thái awaited him.

Although Phan Bội Châu did not know it, a woman by the name of Zao-Wang-Ze had followed him on the train from Hangzhou. Her husband, Zao-Zeng-Gning, worked in Shanghai at the Grand Monde casino, but he was also an informer in the payroll of Brigadier-Detective Sou-Zah-Seu of the French Police's Bureau of Political Affairs. The informer Zao-Zeng-Gning was originally from Hangzhou and still had family living there. Brigadier-Detective Sou-Zah-Seu was determined to succeed where many French agents had failed, and thus had organized a sophisticated surveillance operation to keep track of Phan Bội Châu's movements and activities.¹⁹⁶

This surveillance team consisted of eight individuals. In Hangzhou, Zao-Zeng-Gning's wife Zao-Wang-Ze obtained messages from an unnamed "boy" living with Phan Bội Châu. She then communicated the information she obtained from him to her husband's two brothers Zao-Ching-Tching and Zao-Keng-Ling. Zao-Ching-Tching transmitted information to Sergeant Wou and an agent named Wang, who were both employed at the Shanghai South Railway Station police, who then passed it on to Zao-Zeng-Gning in the French Concession. A final police agent named Zao-Ki-Ziang, likely another family member, worked at the Songjiang station between Hangzhou and Shanghai.¹⁹⁷

As a result of the coordinated efforts of this team, by nine o'clock on the morning of June 30, Brigadier-Detective Sou-Zah-Seu and Sergeant J. Giamarchi knew Phan Bội Châu was coming to Shanghai's North Railway Station. Accompanied by Brigadier-Detectives Emilianoff and Dulinatz of the French Police and Inspector Conduit of the International Concession Police Force, Sou-Zah-Seu and Giamarchi arrived by automobile at the North Railway Station at approximately 11:30 AM. Sou-Zah-Seu and Giamarchi entered the station and waited until the train from Hangzhou arrived and its passengers had disembarked. As Phan Bội Châu now moved through the station, Zao-Wang-Ze followed and signaled his identity to the two officers, who then moved in on their target. Just as Phan Bội Châu was about to get on to a tram, Giamarchi approached Phan Bội Châu and asked him to follow. The stunned old man attempt to escape, but Giamarchi motioned him toward the waiting vehicle and pushed him inside. The ensemble departed immediately for the Jules Ferry, which was waiting at the wharf.¹⁹⁸

The Security State Takes Action

¹⁹⁶ SPCE 355, *Le Sergent Giamarchi à M. le Chef de la Garde, 19 juillet 1925.*

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

Tensions had been building throughout the entire month of June, following the shooting of a Chinese demonstrator by Japanese police in Shanghai on May 30, 1925. This incident triggered protests across Shanghai and Canton. On June 23, 1925 the tiny French concession located on Shameen Island in Canton came under fire, leading to the death of a French citizen and an atmosphere thick with fear that more attacks were imminent. The consulate manager, Madame Leurquin, indicated that the attacks, “oblige us to use all the means of repression at our disposal.”¹⁹⁹ Shameen Island was under siege and cut off from cable service. Acting Governor General Monguillot later indicated the attack was carried out by Whampoa cadets, led by Russian officers.²⁰⁰

Several Vietnamese revolutionaries were known to be cadets at Whampoa, including Lê Hồng Phong, Lê Quang Đạt, and Lê Hồng Sơn (aka Lê Tấn Anh, aka Lê Văn Phan). Phan Bội Châu and the veteran revolutionary operative Nguyễn Hải Thần had arranged for their admission to Whampoa during his stay in Canton the previous year (August-October 1924).²⁰¹ Since returning to Hangzhou in December 1924, Phan Bội Châu continued to correspond with his contacts in Canton, especially Hồ Tùng Mậu.²⁰² Thanks to their network of spies, the Indochinese security services of the Sûreté Générale were privy to much of Phan Bội Châu’s correspondence. As of April 22, 1925, Georges Nadaud, head of the third bureau of the Sûreté Générale, knew Phan Bội Châu planned to return to Canton for the anniversary of Phạm Hồng Thái’s June 19, 1924 assassination attempt on Governor General Martial Merlin on Shameen Island, Canton.²⁰³ The Sûreté intelligence services had an even better source, however, namely the “boy” living with Phan Bội Châu in Hangzhou, who would be able to specify the precise date Phan Bội Châu would be travelling.²⁰⁴ Nadaud coordinated with Captain Fiori of the French

¹⁹⁹ Mdm. Leurquin - “Are you informed yesterday by Admiralty of serious incidents in which Mr. Eugene Pasquier was found died. It is absolutely proved that the fire was opened by Chinese troops and an ensemble of irrefutable facts establish that this attack on Shameen was premeditated. Machine guns were used, but not cannons. The Chinese were students. While claiming the English, Portuguese, and French were responsible for this “buchery,” the civil governor called on the American consul to negotiate. I tell you, repeating myself, that yesterday’s attacks oblige us to use all the means of repression at our disposal. The French concession is defended by marines, volunteers, Annamese police, and the guard of the Portuguese consulate general (composed of Russians) and all valiantly did their duty. The majority of women have evacuated to HK.” - Leurquin. SPCE 355, *Telegramme Officiel, Altair (Leurquin, Hong Kong) to GGI Hanoi (Monguillot), No. 12, 24 juin 1925.*

²⁰⁰ Monguillot reported by cable to the Minister of Colonies, André Hesse: “June 28, Shameen completely isolated. Consul Canton confirmed that responsibility for the serious incident, wherein Eugene Pasquier was found dead, lies with the Cantonese alone. Attack on Shameen by Whampoa cadets led by Russian officers.” SPCE 355, *GGI à Colonies, 30 juin 1925.*

²⁰¹ Phan Bội Châu. *Overtaken Chariot*, translated by Vinh Sinh and Nicholas Wickenden (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1999), 259.

²⁰² Agent Emile indicates Phan Bội Châu returned to Hangzhou on December 4, 1924. SPCE 355, *Agent Emile, Lettre adressée probablement de Canton, peut-être par Ho Tung Mau, à Phan Bội Châu, à Hangtchéou, 26 décembre 1925* [?].

²⁰³ This information was provided by Agent Pinot (aka Lâm Đức Thụ, aka Nguyễn Công Viễn, aka Hoàng Chấn Đông). SPCE 355, *Note Noel No. 154 du 23 Mai 1925 (Annexe No. 1), Traduction d’un rapport de Pinot à Noel du 22 avril 1925.*

²⁰⁴ Yves Le Jariel presents evidence that the traitor who provided the Sûreté with Phan Bội Châu’s travel information was Lưu Trọng Quế (aka Lưu Yên Đơn, aka Lý Trọng Bá), a Catholic student from Hà Tĩnh who had participated in the Đông Du movement and who Agent Pinot confirmed was living with Phan Bội Châu in Hangzhou in June 1925. Based on archival documents, Le Jariel suggests Lưu Yên Đơn was in fact Agent Emile. Le Jariel argues that Nguyễn Thượng Huyền, who Phan Bội Châu later suspected to be the traitor, and who was suspected for the rest of his life as a result, was very likely innocent. Le Jariel’s claim that Lưu Trọng Quế was a

concession police in Shanghai, linking up the Sûreté's spy in Hangzhou with Brigadier-Detective Sou-Zah-Seu and Sergeant J. Giamarchi's team.²⁰⁵ With their pieces in place, Nadaud and Fiori had only to wait for Phan Bội Châu to make his move.

On June 24, the French Consul Meyrier at Shanghai anxiously cabled the governor general's office in Hanoi to share a rumor obtained by local intelligence: Annamese revolutionaries in Hangzhou intended to commit attacks against the French concession in Canton, in order to support the revolutionary movement in Indochina.²⁰⁶ Maurice Monguillot, recognizing that the French in Canton were isolated, reached out to French Consul Yves du Courthial in Hong Kong, to alert him to the possibility of another attack.²⁰⁷ The next day, June 25, Etienne Fiori, captain of police for the French concession at Shanghai sent a coded telegram to Nadaud at Hong Kong suggesting Phan Bội Châu himself, on the orders of the "Revolutionary Committee of Hangzhou," planned to "attack all French subjects in Canton and to prepare a movement against Indochina."²⁰⁸

Alarmed, Consul Courthial at Hong Kong cabled Louis Paul Jeanbrau, the head of the Sûreté Générale. Courthial indicated that, while he was unable to decipher the telegram from Shanghai (namely, Fiori's telegram from earlier that day), he assumed it pertained to the arrest of Phan Bội Châu in Shanghai. Courthial therefore asked Jeanbrau to contact Consul Meyrier in Shanghai with (1) an arrest warrant for Phan Bội Châu, (2) a warning to be careful and identify any people arrested with Phan Bội Châu, and (3) confirmation that 5,000 piastres would be paid for the arrest of Phan Bội Châu.²⁰⁹ Jeanbrau responded the next day (June 26), indicating Courthial's assumption was unlikely.²¹⁰ He further advised Courthial to contact Meyrier directly, should the telegram actually pertain to the arrest of Phan Bội Châu. This strongly suggests that Jeanbrau was not entirely up to date on Nadaud's intelligence mission. Monguillot, it appears, knew even less, because he sent a cable of his own to Shanghai in which he asked if Nadaud had returned Japan yet.²¹¹

spy, like his claim that Nguyễn Thượng Huyền was innocent are both supportable by available evidence. However, as I indicate below, I believe the source of Phan Bội Châu's travel information was neither of these individuals. Le Jariel, Yves. *Phan Bội Châu (1867-1940): Le Nationalisme Vietnamien Avant Ho Chi Minh* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2008), 264-269, 308, 313.

²⁰⁵ SPCE 355, *Chang Hai (Fiori) à Fransulat [sic] (Hong Kong, Nadaud), 30 juin 1925.*

²⁰⁶ SPCE 355, *Consul française Shanghai Meyrier à GGI Monguillot 24 juin 1925.* Meyrier followed up his report on Phan Bội Châu's intentions on the morning of June 30, indicating that "Phan Bội Châu came to Shanghai with two goals: 1) to direct Chinese protests toward the French concession and 2) to spread propaganda amongst the Annamese officers in the French concession." The provenance of this information is unclear. *Meyrier à GGI Monguillot 30 juin 1925.*

²⁰⁷ Monguillot asked Courthial to contact Canton by "voice" (likely meaning telephone or radio) "as rapidly as possible." SPCE 355, *Hanoi (Monguillot) à Fransulat Hong Kong (Courthial), 25 juin 1925.*

²⁰⁸ SPCE 355, *Fiori à Nadaud 25 juin, 1925.* Fiori cabled, "Spy indicates Annamese, probably Phan Bội Châu, [will depart] July 7 with instructions received from revolutionary committee of Hangzhou to commit attacks on French subjects in Canton to prepare movement against Indochina - redouble surveillance after verifying information."

²⁰⁹ Courthial gave the name of the mission as "CUONG DE NADAUD," suggesting that intelligence service hoped to capture Prince Cường Để, still based in Japan, after Phan Bội Châu had been successfully brought in. SPCE 355, *Telegramme Officiel, Fransulat (Courthial, Hong Kong) à Gougat, Hanoi, Pour Directeur Sûreté Generale, No. 84, 25 juin 1925.*

²¹⁰ SPCE 355, *Telegramme Officiel, Hanoi (Jeanbrau) à Fransulat Honkong [sic], No. 1263-SG, 26 juin 1925.*

²¹¹ SPCE 355, *Hanoi (Monguillot) à Fransulat Changhai, No. 1888-SG, 26 juin 1925.*

On June 29, Consul Meyrier cabled Monguillot with far more precise details concerning what was taking place in Hangzhou. According to Meyrier, the information concerning Phan Bội Châu's plan to attack French in Canton came from a Chinese domestic working for Phan Bội Châu. The informer had listened to Phan Bội Châu's conversations and had read his letters addressed to Canton. Meyrier further indicated that Phan Bội Châu intended to return to Canton on July 5, passing through Shanghai on his way. Though Nadaud had asked Meyrier to arrest Phan Bội Châu as he passed through, Nadaud never sent the arrest warrant as he had promised. Thus, Meyrier asked Monguillot to confirm the arrest by sending a warrant by cable.²¹²

It was too late for that. Phan Bội Châu was not returning to Canton on July 5; he was leaving the very next day! At 5:20 AM on June 30, Meyrier frantically cabled Monguillot to relay the news. Not only would Phan Bội Châu be coming to Shanghai that very morning, he apparently planned to (1) attend the Chinese May 30th protests and attempt to direct them against the French concession, (2) spread propaganda amongst the Vietnamese guards policing the French concession. In the light of the ongoing unrest in Shanghai, Meyrier considered Phan Bội Châu's presence "a grave danger to the concession." Thus, he planned to arrest him in secret, put him on board the *Jules Ferry*, and put him on the *Angkor* under a false name on July 4, bound for Saigon.²¹³

The foregoing telegrams indicate that the top administrative and security officials of French Indochina had little idea Phan Bội Châu was about to be arrested. Jeanbrau seemed generally unaware of Nadaud's mission, or his coordination with Fiori in Shanghai. Monguillot did not even know where Nadaud was. In any case, Monguillot's attention was centered on Canton, where another attack by Whampoa cadets on Shameen Island appeared imminent.²¹⁴ Neither Nadaud nor Fiori were themselves in Shanghai at the time.²¹⁵ The decision to arrest Phan Bội Châu thus fell to Consul Meyrier, who, lacking an arrest warrant, elected to have Phan Bội Châu "secretly arrested" due to security concerns. Since there was little chance Phan Bội Châu would enter the French concession, it fell to Sergeant Giamarchi and Brigadier-Detective Sou-Zah-Seu to stage what looked an awful lot like a kidnapping of a Vietnamese resident of China in broad daylight within Chinese sovereign territory.

The news of the arrest of Phan Bội Châu in Shanghai spread quickly within the French Far East cable network. It quickly became apparent that there was no clear plan about what to do with Phan Bội Châu now that he had been captured. In fact, even as the French security forces

²¹² Meyrier also indicated that the assassin of Phan Bá Ngọc was now a cadet at Whampoa. This was correct: Lê Hồng Sơn (whose name Meyrier does not mention) was indeed a cadet at Whampoa since September 1924. SPCE 355, *Shanghai (Meyrier) à GGI Hanoi (Monguillot), Personnel et Confidentiel, No. 38, 29 juin 1925*. Meyrier's cable suggests that the unnamed "boy" may not have been Luu Trọng Quế, as proposed by Yves Le Jariel. In a September 3 letter to comrades in Hangzhou, Trần Hữu Công pointed to one Ngô Mậu Lâm (吳茂林), as the prime suspect (see note below). There are other reasons to doubt Luu Trọng Quế was the informer responsible for Phan Bội Châu's arrest. Le Jariel reasonably discounts the possibility that Lâm Đức Thư could have been considered Phan Bội Châu's "boy" on account of his age (born 1894, 31 years old in 1925). By this reasoning, Luu Trọng Quế is an even less likely candidate (born 1883, 42 years old in 1925). This does not mean, of course, that Luu Trọng Quế may not have also been an informer for the French. Le Jariel, *Phan Bội Châu*, 264, 308.

²¹³ SPCE 355, *Telegramme Officiel, Francsulat Shanghai (Meyrier) à GGI Hanoi (Monguillot), No. 39, 5h20, 30 juin 1925*.

²¹⁴ Monguillot's two-page telegram to the Ministry of Colonies on June 30 addressed events in Canton, Yunnan, and Langson. Phan Bội Châu's name does not appear at all. SPCE 355, *Telegramme Officiel, Gougal (Monguillot) à Colonies Paris, No. 889, Réponse à 533, 30 juin 1925*.

²¹⁵ Le Jariel, *Phan Bội Châu*, 262.

congratulated one another, their diplomatic and administrative counterparts pointed out the distinct dangers presented by the capture. Anxious to avoid public recriminations, Meyrier had Phan Bội Châu taken directly from the North Railway Station to the waiting warship the *Jules Ferry*. There he would wait for the next ship, the *Angkor*, which was due to depart for Saigon on July 4. Meanwhile, top officials sought to make the arrest at least appear legal. On June 30, Meyrier signed a Consular Ordinance citing Articles 16 and 17 of the Law of July 8, 1852, along with Articles 82 and 83 of the Edict of June 1778.²¹⁶ The ordinance simply stated that Phan Bội Châu was arrested and sent to Saigon, and that the Municipal Guard was charged with carrying out the arrest. This was the best that could be done on such short notice. On July 1, Acting Governor General Monguillot, hoping to offer a shinier veneer of legality should Phan Bội Châu's presence aboard the *Jules Ferry* become known to the Chinese authorities, offered to send Meyrier a copy by post of the original 1913 Criminal Commission's verdict of death in absentia.²¹⁷

As Phan Bội Châu lay chained in the *Jules Ferry*, the magnitude of the arrest began to dawn on French security officials. On July 3, the Sûreté Chief Louis Paul Jeanbrau and Agent Georges Nadaud first emphasized the need for secrecy.²¹⁸ A day later (July 4), Jeanbrau sent multiple cables to the Sûreté offices in Huế and Saigon requesting agents there "keep this matter secret as long as possible."²¹⁹ Jeanbrau's caution bordered on paranoia. Concerns about the diplomatic implications of the arrest seemed to have played a large role. In a letter to the consulate in Hong Kong, where the *Angkor* was to dock later that day, Jeanbrau warned of the possibility the British authorities there might not consent to guard Phan Bội Châu.²²⁰ The same day, Martel, the plenipotentiary minister of France in Peking, signaled his awareness of the matter and demanded the news of Phan Bội Châu's capture not be publicly announced "to avoid provoking the Chinese."²²¹

It soon became clear that Meyrier's off-the-cuff plan to send Phan Bội Châu to Saigon was not going to work.²²² Deciding that Saigon, the eventual destination of the *Angkor* was too dangerous, on July 4, Jeanbrau had Gilles, the head of the Sûreté in Tonkin, instead dispatch two Sûreté inspectors and two additional Annamese agents aboard the *Amakusa Maru*. Their orders were to take hold of Phan Bội Châu in Hong Kong and return him directly to Hanoi.²²³ The next day, July 5, Jeanbrau explained to the French consul in Hong Kong that he preferred Phan Bội Châu be transferred directly to Hanoi "to avoid probable Cochinchinese indiscretions."²²⁴ Jeanbrau briefly floated the idea of having Phan Bội Châu first tried in Huế, but Sogny, the head

²¹⁶ SPCE 355, *Correspondance relative a son arrestation et documents saisis sur lui, Ordonnance Consulaire, 30 juin 1925.*

²¹⁷ SPCE 355, *Monguillot à Meyrier 1 juillet 1925.*

²¹⁸ Captain Louis Paul Jeanbrau (1879-1946) was the son-in-law of Albert Sarraut. While serving as governor general of Indochina in 1917, Sarraut appointed Jeanbrau head of the Information Service of the Sûreté Générale of Indochina. Patrice Morlat, , *Les Affaires Politiques de L'Indochine (1895-1923)*. (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1995), 247.

²¹⁹ SPCE 355, *Dirsurge (Jeanbrau, Hanoi) à Sûreté Hue (Sogny), No. 1323-SG, 4 juillet 1925. Dirsurge (Jeanbrau, Hanoi) à Sûreté Saigon (Arnoux), No. 1324-SG, 4 juillet 1925.*

²²⁰ SPCE 355, *Hanoi (Jeanbrau) à Francsulat Hongkong, No. 1326/SG, Poste, 4 juillet 1925.*

²²¹ SPCE 355, *Telegramme Officiel, Pékin (Martel) à Gouverneur General Hanoi, No. 26, 4 juillet 1925.*

²²² SPCE 355, *Hanoi (Jeanbrau) à Francsulat Hongkong, No. 1326/SG, Poste, 4 juillet 1925.*

²²³ SPCE 355, *Hanoi à Francsulat Hongkong, No. 1332-SG, 4 juillet 1925. See also Note Confidentielle No. 3772, Hanoi (Gilles) à M. le Chef du S.C.R. et S.G. (Jeanbrau), 6 juillet 1925.*

²²⁴ SPCE 355, *Gougal (Jeanbrau) à Francsulat Hongkong, No. 1334-SG, 5 juillet 1925.*

of the Sûreté in Annam, flatly dismissed the idea on July 7.

While security officials worked out a plan, French diplomats and administrators curiously occupied themselves with determining whether to pay (and if so how) Nadaud and Fiori's informer the \$5,000 Indochinese piastres promised for the capture of Phan Bội Châu. Meyrier, Monguillot, and Courthial, the French consul at Hong Kong, discussed this issue over several cables beginning on June 25, five days before the capture.²²⁵ Apparently not content with just one arrest, Courthial raised the possibility of paying an informant in Canton 10,000 piastres, presumably for the capture of Lý Thụy (aka Nguyễn Ái Quốc) or possibly Lê Hồng Sơn. Paradoxically, the Governor General and French consular officials focused on playing intelligence officers, while French security officials made choices about to do with their famous prisoner - choices that had real diplomatic and political significance.

Phan Bội Châu, Prisoner of the French

Phan Bội Châu had exited his train from Hangzhou expecting to send a letter along with funds to his dear friend and former traveling companion Trần Hữu Công (aka Nguyễn Thứ Canh, aka Trần Trọng Khắc), who was studying in Berlin.²²⁶ Instead, Phan Bội Châu found himself brusquely thrust into a coach, which sped off to the Shanghai docks where the *Jules Ferry* waited. According to Phan Bội Châu's later account, the police of the French concession in Shanghai placed him in irons and hid him in the lowest deck of the ship. The concession police took an inventory of Phan Bội Châu's belongings. Phan Bội Châu's suitcase contained brochures, letters, enveloppes, receipts, a daily planner covering the first half of 1925, and much else besides. In his carrying tote were enough clothes for a trip to Canton.²²⁷

At 4:00 PM the following day (July 1), Phan Bội Châu was interrogated by three individuals from the French concession: Pierre Crépin, chief interpreter for the Consulate Général of France in Shanghai, Barthélémy Tchang, Chinese-language interpreter, and J. Yvonnou, clerk.²²⁸ Phan Bội Châu told them that his name was P'an Che Han (潘是漢), aka [Phan] Boi Chau (潘佩珠), and he was 59 years of age, originally from [Nghệ An], Indochina. He stated further that he was a journalist, he lived in Hangzhou in the hotel Si-Ou on Tchai-

²²⁵ SPCE 355, *Hanoi (Monguillot) à Francsulat Changhai No. 1972, 3 juillet 1925.*

²²⁶ In his autobiography, Trần Hữu Công expresses his great distress at learning of Phan Bội Châu's capture from their mutual friend Hồ Học Lãm. Trần Trọng Khắc. *Năm mươi bốn năm hải ngoại [Fifty-four years overseas]* (Saigon: Cơ sở Ấn loát Xây Dựng, 1971), 71. In a letter written to comrades in Hangzhou on September 3, Trần Hữu Công offers a new possibility for who might have sold out Phan Bội Châu: "I remember that at the moment of the [Phan] Bá Ngọc affair, an inspecteur from the French police in Shanghai came to Hangzhou and was invited to lunch by Ngô Mậu Lâm (吳茂林), who knew the Sûreté personnel in Shanghai. Hạng Tôn Vũ (項宗宇) is current on this fact: Ngô Mậu Lâm had instructed, out of vanity, to give me the policeman's business card and to let me know that he had invited him to lunch. When I saw this card, I cried to myself: 'How this individual must be valued by the French!' ...Ngô incontestably played a villainous role in what happened to Mr. Phan. Here is the proof: Mr. Phan was arrested before he sent the money [to me]. This proves he was taken upon his descent from the train. If the person was not following him, they warned the French of his arrival time in Shanghai. Otherwise they never would have been able to arrest him." I have not yet found an furthermore information on Ngô Mậu Lâm (most likely a Chinese individual, given his name). It is quite possible this individual is the "Chinese domestic" mentioned by Meyrier. SPCE 355, *Mission Noel, Envoi 230, Annexe No. 7, 3 septembre 1925.*

²²⁷ SPCE 355, *Correspondance relative a son arrestation et documents saisis sur lui, Garde Municipale Francaise, Bordereau des pieces adressées à M. le Consul Général de France à Shanghai, 3 juillet 1925.*

²²⁸ SPCE 355, *Correspondance relative a son arrestation et documents saisis sur lui, "L'an mil neuf cent vingt cinq et le premier Juillet à seize heures."*

Kouan Hang (?官巷) street, and he worked at the bureau of the *Military Affairs* magazine (軍事雜誌). Phan Bội Châu explained that he had come to Shanghai to send \$400 to his friend Tch'en Tchong-Ko (陳仲克) [aka Trần Trọng Khắc], who was studying medicine in Germany. He had intended to go to Canton on the invitation of his friend Lin Te-Chou 林德樹 (Lâm Đức Thọ), but after failing to hear from his friend, he'd given up on this idea. Phan Bội Châu stated that he knew Prince Cường Để very well. In his suitcase they could find brochures he intended to send to a friend in Guangxi named Teng Tzeu-Min 鄧子敏 (aka Đặng Tử Mẫn), who is missing a hand. Phan Bội Châu then signed the deposition form.²²⁹ This deposition is remarkable as in it Phan Bội Châu freely admits to many facts he would later vehemently deny.

This was not the only revealing act Phan Bội Châu took. On the same day (July 1), Phan Bội Châu wrote a letter addressed to the government of Tonkin.²³⁰ In this letter, seven pages long in translation, Phan Bội Châu admitted to having written revolutionary works, but claimed to have switched to “peaceful revolution” beginning in 1915. After this point, he claimed to have supported Franco-Vietnamese collaboration in cooperation with Governor General Albert Sarraut and his bureau chief Mr. Néron, who came to Hangzhou. Unfortunately, Phan Bội Châu explains, Mr. Phan Bá Ngọc died and it was no longer possible to engage in the politics of cooperation.

In a striking passage, Phan Bội Châu then addressed how the “fad of Russian communism” has quickly taken over the Vietnamese nationalist movement.²³¹ He continued:

Examining the intellectual level of the Vietnamese people and their way of life, I finally understand that if we use the murderous cannons of such a revolution to bombard Vietnam, we would only destroy the harmony and the order which reign, without bringing about the political reform desired. I speak here sincerely and seriously, without having any idea of deception. The greatest trouble is, that by living abroad, my supporters and I must necessarily rely on strangers. Among the foreigners on whom we can rely, there are only the Chinese and Soviet communist parties. By sheltering behind them to live, we cannot help but associate ourselves with their policies and allow them to employ us as their avant-garde soldiers.

In an incredibly fatalistic turn, Phan Bội Châu then explained that his shame at having allowed communism to “poison my county” led him to “return to my country to seek death there, in order to atone for my faults and deliver myself at the same time from a parasitic life that always obliges me to lean on others for survival.”²³² By seeking death, Phan Bội Châu argued,

²²⁹ The copy was certified on July 3 1925. SPCE 355, *Correspondance relative a son arrestation et documents saisis sur lui, “L’an mil neuf cent vingt cinq et le premier Juillet à seize heures.”*

²³⁰ SPCE 355, *Traduction (Traduction des caractères souscrits sur l’enveloppe: “Lettre adressée au Gouvernement du Tonkin - écrite par Phan Bội Châu, lors du premier jour de son arrestation - le 1er Juillet!!).*

²³¹ Phan Bội Châu writes, “For four to five years, the wave of communism in Russia has spread very quickly. The young ardent Annamites associated themselves with the Chinese students, who allowed themselves to be swept away by the current of communism in Russia.” Ibid.

²³² Phan Bội Châu continued: “As I said earlier, I no longer want to rely on the communists to live. By ceasing to rely on them, the work of revolution will necessarily stop and will no longer be able to advance; because all the strength of our party lies entirely in their hands, Now, wanting to deliver me from their support, I will

he could demonstrate his sincerity and pay back the debt he owed to his comrades who had died before him.²³³ Therefore, he wrote: “By coming to seek death. I find it now. I therefore ask the French Government to do me a courtesy: carry out [my death] to the last. I will not complain.”²³⁴

Phan Bội Châu’s fatalistic attitude lasted for several days, causing Jeanbrau to suggest special surveillance to ensure against a possible suicide.²³⁵ On July 4, Phan Bội Châu was moved from the *Jules Ferry* to the *Angkor*, which would stop at Hong Kong so that Phan Bội Châu could be handed over to the two agents coming from Tonkin. On this trip, Phan attempted to pass a note to his assigned guard, Agent Bardy, who promptly turned the note over to the Sûreté agents when they arrived in Hong Kong on July 7. At Hong Kong, Phan Bội Châu was transferred to the *Altair* and placed in the custody of Agent François, who had also arrived from Indochina on July 7 with his partner Christiani and two Vietnamese agents. Phan remained sequestered aboard the *Altair* for two days, cursing loudly at anyone who attempted to interact with him. On July 9, Phan Bội Châu was transferred to the *Tonkin* under the name Nguyen Ngoc Dong. The *Tonkin* departed at 2:00 PM, heading for Haiphong. Agents François and Christiani stayed in the same cabin with Phan Bội Châu. Agent Bardy from Shanghai and Agent Le Roy from Shameen were also aboard.²³⁶

Phan Bội Châu seems to have warmed to Inspector François (aka Trần Tú Quý), who was a naturalized French citizen, but ethnically Vietnamese.²³⁷ According to Inspector François’s report, Phan Bội Châu revealed a considerable amount of incriminating information in a single extended conversation, although in an incoherent, rambling manner. Phan Bội Châu began by explaining to Inspector François that he had left Nghệ An in 1903 and travelled to Moncay, whereupon he took a boat to Hong Kong. Upon arriving, he discovered fifty Vietnamese building “anarchistic devices” to be used in Indochina to create a Republic. One of these bombs blew up, mutilating his friend Đặng Tử Mão’s hand, whereupon everyone split up, going either to Canton, Shanghai, Japan, England, or America. Phan Bội Châu continued mixing up events and meetings with individuals, jumping back and forth in time in a narrative that depended more on his stream of consciousness than on anything resembling an accurate chronology. Finally, the stream of consciousness led Phan Bội Châu up to his very conversation with Inspector François. Phan Bội Châu then told François, “I tell you, I have been mistreated. I haven’t eaten for six days. I await my death. I will be avenged by my friends...”

François, perhaps realizing that his prisoner was badly malnourished and mentally ill,

necessarily have to strive to find the means to provide for my individual life, by ceasing to continue the work of the revolution. By doing this, my conscience no longer allows me to live quietly. Why that ? Because I have nothing to pay my debt to my colleagues who died.” Ibid.

²³³ Phan Bội Châu then described the arc of his revolutionary career: “I was, in Vietnam, the first person who proclaimed the idea of the revolution. Later, many people joined, and over the past twenty years, thousands of followers have sacrificed their lives for the sake of their revolutionary faith. If now, regretting my life, I drag on my old days needlessly, renouncing the labors of the revolution, I will be ashamed before those who died, having nothing to discharge my debt to them.” Ibid.

²³⁴ Ibid.

²³⁵ SPCE 355, *Dirsurge (Jeanbrau, Hanoi) à Sûreté Saigon, No. 1324-SG, 4 juillet 1925.*

²³⁶ SPCE 355, *L’Inspecteur François de la Sûreté à M. le Commissaire Spécial Chef de Service à Haiphong, 13 juillet 1925.*

²³⁷ The documents contained in SPCE 355 offer no indication that Inspector François was in fact ethnically Vietnamese, but born in Cambodia. François (aka Trần Tú Quý) became a naturalized French citizen in 1905. His personnel file clarifies this. See FR ANOM RM 102, *Tran Tu Qui Dit François.*

removed Phan Bội Châu's manacles and convinced him to eat, drink, and sleep.²³⁸ François gave Phan Bội Châu Cinchona and red wine for his colic. Even after this, Phan Bội Châu continued rambling, relating additional incriminating information to François. For example, Phan Bội Châu claimed:

If I am sentenced to death, my friends, namely Cường Để...he's an officer in Japan... Nguyễn Thượng Hiền can be found in "An Se." The third is Tú Đại Từ [Nguyễn Hải Thân] can be found in Canton...he was the organizer of the Shameen Affair. Sadly, it failed. The fourth, I forgot his name... Another group of my friends can be found in Canton, in a society called Công Hóa, under a Russian president. They are ready to march against the French and massacre them...²³⁹

Though Phan Bội Châu had been in a furious mood while held aboard the *Altair*, François claimed that he calmed down considerably on the *Tonkin*. Though Phan Bội Châu continued to curse the French, by the end of the trip he agreed to sign the fans of Agents François and Le Roy. For Le Roy, he wrote, "French and Vietnamese, are of the same house." And for François, "Two family names form the same heart."²⁴⁰ François ended his report by noting that as the ship sailed from Hòn Dấu island along the coast to Haiphong, he had pointed a number of economic improvements to Phan Bội Châu, including the zinc factory at Quảng Yên, a cup workshop managed by a Vietnamese, and the maritime production facilities of Bạch Thái Bưởi. François also told Phan Bội Châu that many professional schools now existed in Haiphong for boys and girls. Phan Bội Châu responded that none of this had existed when he left.²⁴¹ The *Tonkin* arrived in Haiphong on July 11, whereupon Phan was transported to Hanoi by automobile and placed in the European section of the Central Prison of Hanoi.

Having resolved how to get Phan Bội Châu to Hanoi, the attention of security officials now turned to legal questions. On July 8, Paul-Louis Arnoux, the head of the Sûreté in Saigon, shared with Jeanbrau the details of his meeting with an unnamed prosecutor general (probably Jean Colonna) concerning the proper juridical procedure for dealing with Phan Bội Châu, who he referred to as "Revolutionary X."²⁴² Arnoux advised that, in order to ensure the incarceration was legal, a prosecutor of the republic would need to interrogate Phan Bội Châu within forty-eight hours of the prisoner's arrival. In other words, once he entered the jurisdiction of Indochina, Phan Bội Châu could not legally be held longer than forty-eight hours unless a crime had been specified. However, depending on the result of the interrogation, the prosecutor of the republic could produce a new order legitimizing the incarceration. This meant "we would therefore be obliged to make known the nature of the offense or attributable crime."²⁴³ Arnoux

²³⁸ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu, Interrogatoires*, 279-282.

²³⁹ SPCE 355, *L'Inspecteur François de la Sûreté à M. le Commissaire Spécial Chef de Service à Haiphong, 13 juillet 1925*.

²⁴⁰ Ibid.

²⁴¹ Ibid.

²⁴² 8. SPCE 355, *SSG à Dirsurge, 8 juillet 1925*. We know Toussaint was absent from Hanoi at the time because of the legal debacle his attaché Albert-François-Raymond Roche would create shortly. For information on the officials and the positions they occupied at the time, see *Annuaire général de l'Indo-Chine française 1925*. (Hanoi: Imprimerie d'Extrême-Orient, 1925), 29. A Governor General's Note typed the following day (July 9) indicates that Toussaint had provided advice, though it is not clear where Toussaint was at the time or why he was unable to write a new order himself. SPCE 355, *Note de GGI, 9 juillet 1925*.

²⁴³ SPCE 355, *SSG à Dirsurge, 8 juillet 1925*.

relayed the prosecutor general's recommendation: Phan Bội Châu should be arrested upon disembarking in Haiphong and the nature of the crime should be specified at that time so that the prosecutor of the republic would know how to complete the new order.

There were two rather serious problems with the prosecutor general's advice. First, Gustave-Frédéric-Charles Toussaint, the prosecutor general attached to the Court of Appeals in Hanoi, a member of the Protectorate Council of Tonkin, and a legal authority upon whom the Sûreté could rely, was out of town.²⁴⁴ His immediate subordinate, Louis-Emile Bourayne, was, for unknown reasons, also unavailable. Some temporary legal expedient would thus need to be devised to justify holding Phan Bội Châu in detention. The solution ended being expedient indeed: Dupuy, the resident-mayor of Hanoi, would be tasked with signing Phan Bội Châu's incarceration order using a false name for the new inmate.

The second serious problem was the nature of the charge itself. Surely Phan Bội Châu was guilty. But of what? Phan Bội Châu certainly opposed the French colonial government, but he was also technically a subject of the Annamese emperor. Allowing the Nguyễn court to try Phan Bội Châu for treason might seem an easy solution. However, the Nguyễn dynastic administration, which the French colonial state continued to tolerate because it retained some symbolic authority, was, in eyes of the French, a fickle instrument. There was no guarantee a dynastic court would produce the right verdict in a manner that the swiftly modernizing Vietnamese intellectual class would accept. Moreover, the Nguyễn courts still relied in some cases on the outdated Gia Long Emperor's legal code, which had been largely borrowed from the Qing legal code. A Nguyễn court might well be viewed internationally as a "kangaroo court" created to produce a forgone conclusion on the basis of little or no evidence. Phan Bội Châu had, after all, already been convicted by two different Nguyễn courts for different offenses, both *in absentia*. First came Phan Bội Châu's trial held on May 27, 1908, in Hà Tĩnh under the authority of the Nguyễn court. Nguyễn officials, including the lieutenant governor of Hà Tĩnh, found Phan Bội Châu and a number of his close friends guilty of violating Article 204 of the Gia Long Code for "having consorted with foreigners or hid out on the border in order to cause trouble."²⁴⁵ Second came the trial held on February 7, 1910, in Vinh, the capital of Nghệ An province. At this trial, led by the governor of Nghệ An and Hà Tĩnh, Phan Bội Châu and several others were found guilty under an 1813 Nguyễn law (Article 224), which prohibited "conspiracy to commit sedition."²⁴⁶ In both cases, Phan Bội Châu was sentenced to death *in absentia*.

Phan Bội Châu's third guilty sentence came following the trials on September 5, 1913, of the terrorist bombers Phạm Văn Tráng and Nguyễn Văn Túy. Unlike the previous two trials, this trial was conducted by a colonial Criminal Commission set up in Hanoi expressly for the purpose of trying the 84 individuals captured following Phạm Văn Tráng and Nguyễn Văn Túy's attacks in April of 1913. In addition to the 84 suspects who were tried and received sentences ranging from one year imprisonment to death, 13 other individuals, including Phan Bội Châu, were tried, found guilty, and sentenced to death or life imprisonment *in absentia*. All were convicted based on the Criminal Commission's belief they had participated in planning or carrying out the April

²⁴⁴ On April 8th, 1925, Toussaint had been temporarily appointed Director of the Administration of Justice in Indochina, replacing M. Habert. It is not clear whether or not Toussaint's absence was related to this temporary appointment. "Principaux changements pendant la impression." *Annuaire général de l'Indo-Chine française 1925*. Hanoi: Imprimerie d'Extrême-Orient, 1925. P. IV-V.

²⁴⁵ Chuong Thâu, Ed. *Hồ sơ vụ án Phan Bội Châu (Documents Related to the Trials of Phan Bội Châu)* (Hanoi: Nhà xuất bản Văn hóa - Thông tin, 2002), 25.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid*, 27.

1913 bombings. To prove the various charges, the 1913 Criminal Commission relied on a staggering number of documents, primarily testimonies given by prisoners on trial themselves. Testimonies of one suspect were used to incriminate other suspects, and were often used to advance intelligence operations domestically and abroad. If the French colonial state hoped to convict Phan Bội Châu yet again in 1925, surely this was most easily accomplished by relying on the sentence and body of evidence already produced in 1913. Or would it?

A “Governor General’s Note,” dated July 9, 1925, offers a window into what Monguillot and Robin were thinking, both regarding how to handle Phan Bội Châu’s legal situation and about how to convey their decision to the Ministry of Colonies.²⁴⁷ This note is significant for several reasons. First, it indicates that the Ministry of Colonies may not yet have known of the capture. Monguillot and Robin simply had not conveyed this crucial information to the metropole. Since the departure of Governor General Martial Merlin in April 1925, Monguillot and Robin had effectively overseen the administration of French Indochina independent of Paris. The Cartel of the Left, a parliamentary alliance of radical socialists and republicans, had come into power in June 1924. The Cartel was now on its second cabinet, the first having fallen in April 1925 as a result of a fiscal crisis. No new governor general had yet been appointed (this would come only at the end of July 1925), so Monguillot and Robin would important handle matters themselves, such as what to do about Phan Bội Châu. Second, the note suggests its authors had agreed upon a legal strategy through discussions with Toussaint, the absent prosecutor general. Finally, the note weighs the pros and cons of several “solutions” before selecting one, providing a rare window into French considerations of Phan Bội Châu’s legal fate.

Of the note’s three potential solutions, “A” would be to void the 1913 sentence of death *in absentia*, then retry Phan Bội Châu for the same crimes. Monguillot and Robin worried this path would lead to a great deal of publicity and internal and external agitation, even if the proceedings were “conducted behind closed doors.”²⁴⁸ Solution “B” would be to commute a sentence of death (whether old or new), and send Phan Bội Châu to prison on Poulo Condore. Monguillot and Robin worried this solution would “appear weak to some and frightening to others.”²⁴⁹ Either of these solutions, they added, could lead to retaliatory violence from Annamese revolutionaries abroad. Solution “C,” which the authors preferred, would be to abandon the 1913 case entirely and instead try Phan Bội Châu only for acts committed *since* that time. Monguillot and Robin tempered this proposal by recognizing that it could invite polemic attacks in the press, “for arresting someone who was convicted in absentia, but not then trying them [for those same crimes].”²⁵⁰ Ironically, these two disliked solutions proved better guides for Phan Bội Châu’s trial, and these led to precisely the reactions Monguillot and Robin had feared.

Monguillot’s direct subordinate, Rene Robin, was a career civil service agent with considerable experience in intelligence and security work, and since 1920 had served as the

²⁴⁷ SPCE 355, *Note de GGI, 9 juillet 1925*. This document contains no clear indication of its author, which was likely either Monguillot or Robin. Monguillot’s final signed telegram appears on July 3rd, 1925. It is rather a mystery why Monguillot did not participate in inter-government communication after this date. Robin decisively stepped in on July 16th, 1925 and remained the final authority over the Trial of Phan Bội Châu until the arrival of Governor General Alexander Varenne on November 24, 1925. For the sake of narrative cohesion, I take the note to be the result of acting Governor General Monguillot’s conversations with his secretary general, Robin.

²⁴⁸ SPCE 355, *Note de GGI, 9 juillet 1925*.

²⁴⁹ SPCE 355, *Note de GGI, 9 juillet 1925*.

²⁵⁰ SPCE 355, *Note de GGI, 9 juillet 1925*.

secretary general of Indochina in the capacity of a Resident Superior (of Tonkin). Robin was a formidable administrator whose interests in the matter of Phan Bội Châu aligned with those of Sûreté Chief Jeanbrau. Robin understood that if the dangerous terrorist Phan Bội Châu was to be prosecuted, it needed to take place quickly, quietly, and in a manner that demonstrated the juridical efficacy of the French colonial state.

Colonial Clumsiness: Indiscrete Agents and the Roche Incident

Despite the best efforts of Jeanbrau and Robin, the incarceration of Phan Bội Châu was a difficult matter to keep secret. On July 11, the *Tonkin* arrived at Haiphong. Inspectors François and Cristiani, who had closely guarded Phan Bội Châu from Hong Kong, now took him to Hanoi by automobile. With them was Agent Bardy from Shanghai who, thanks to Nadaud's extreme caution, was instructed to continue on from Hong Kong to Hanoi as well as for extra security. This may well have been a mistake on Nadaud's part. After depositing Phan Bội Châu at the central prison in Hanoi (in the section reserved for Europeans), Bardy, Cristiani, and a man named Versini decided to blow off steam at a restaurant called the Golden Cock. According to a report filed July 17 by Edgard Gilles, the head of the Sûreté in Tonkin, the agents became drunk and began boasting to other patrons that they had just brought Phan Bội Châu back from abroad, and that he was now in the central prison of Hanoi.

As it turns out, drunken agents were the least of Jeanbrau and Robin's problems. Seeking to accomplish the twin goals of keeping Phan Bội Châu's identity secret and meeting the forty-eight hour deadline identified by Arnoux, on July 12 Robin sent Resident-Mayor of Hanoi Dupuy to the prison to ensure the prisoner was properly registered under the name "Ngoc,"²⁵¹ and to notify the prisoner of the standing September 5, 1913 verdict against him, thereby legally confirming the arrest and incarceration. Dupuy's efforts apparently did more harm than good, because on July 13 the prison clerk, perplexed by Dupuy's registration attempt, brought the prisoner from his cell to the registration desk and asked his name. Phan Bội Châu announced that he was known by two names, neither of which was "Ngoc," as Dupuy had claimed. Phan then signed using his Chinese pseudonym "Truong Van Duc," but verbally provided his other name: "Phan Bội Châu." This was overheard by the Vietnamese secretary of the prison clerk, a man named Hung.²⁵² Later that evening, secretary Hung met a Vietnamese Sûreté agent named Nha at a party and told him, "Phan Bội Châu has been arrested; he is now at the prison." If we counting Agent François, Secretary Hung, and Agent Nha, this means at least three Vietnamese working for the French colonial state were now aware that the Sûreté's secret prisoner was Phan Bội Châu.

Agent Nha, Robin later surmised, and must have informed the acting prosecutor general Albert Roche that the mysterious Vietnamese individual being held at the central prison in Hanoi under the name of "Ngoc" was none other than Phan Bội Châu. Roche was standing in for Prosecutor General Toussaint, who was in Saigon on business. It is unclear whether Roche was

²⁵¹ Inspector François's report indicated that Phan Bội Châu had been transported under the name "Nguyen Ngoc Dong," which partially matches the name Dupuy provided: "Ngoc."

²⁵² According to an account entitled "Tôi ghi tên Trần Văn Đức vào sổ (I recorded Trần Văn Đức's name in the register)" published in the literary journal *Cái Tào* in 1950, the author, who used the name Hy Lạp, had been the secretary responsible for recording Phan Bội Châu's false name when he entered Hỏa Lò Central Prison in Hanoi. It is possible, though unlikely that Hy Lạp is a pseudonym used by this same secretary Hung, as Hy Lạp claims to have been a convict himself. If so, "Hy Lạp" likely means "the Greek," which would make sense as Phan Bội Châu was held in the European section of the prison. This account was republished in Bùi Đình, *Vụ Án Phan Bội Châu* (Hanoi: Nhà xuất bản tiếng Việt, 1950), 27.

simply uninformed about Robin and Jeanbrau's plans or had decided to make the most of his temporary authority by thwarting what he saw as a perversion of justice. In either case, Roche angered the security officials by sending Agent Nha to extricate Phan Bội Châu from prison on the morning of July 14. In a rather astonishing breach of security, Agent Nha alone walked Phan Bội Châu down the street to Roche's office, arriving at 9:30 AM. Roche then questioned Phan Bội Châu for forty-five minutes with the help of a Vietnamese translator, and in the presence of even more Vietnamese clerks. At 10:15 AM, Roche instructed Agent Nha to walk Phan Bội Châu back to the Central Prison and re-incarcerate him.

Alarmed by what Phan Bội Châu related to him, Roche spun into action. By 10:30 AM, Roche sent for the chief warden of Central Prison, Mr. Bareteau, before telephoning Resident-Mayor Dupuy to demand an explanation for why "a Mr. Ngoc, arrested in Shanghai for a plot against state security was imprisoned in a central prison by an order delivered by the Resident-Mayor of Hanoi when there is already here a French Justice and the prison lies under the control of the Prosecutor of the Republic." Dupuy attempted to forestall Roche by claiming arrangements were underway, that the detention was of a political nature, and had in any case been ordered in agreement with the Prosecutor General. Roche was not to be deterred. At 10:50 AM, Roche telephoned the office of Gilles, the head of the Sûreté in Tonkin, and berated his secretary, Mr. Levilain, with the same questions Roche had asked Dupuy twenty minutes previously. This time, Roche upped the ante by asserting that Phan Bội Châu's detention was arbitrary and demanding a response by noon, lest he be forced to "pose the question in writing." Apparently, the fear of documentation was enough to send Mr. Levilain immediately over to Sûreté Chief Gilles's home in person.

Meanwhile, Chief Warden Bareteau, responding immediately to Roche's summons, found himself berated by Roche for allowing the irregular incarceration of a political detainee on July 12 by the order of the resident-mayor (Dupuy). Bareteau defended himself by claiming Phan Bội Châu had been appropriately detained by the orders of the 1913 Criminal Commission, and that the prosecutor general was first to be informed. Roche pushed back, telling Bareteau that he should not have received the prisoner without an expressed order from the Prosecutor of the Republic, who, as a member of the Criminal Commission, had sole authority to deliver such an order. Roche then informed Bareteau that his actions were irregular, the arrest was arbitrary, and the detention of Phan Bội Châu was therefore illegal.

Bareteau realized he had no choice but to invoke the authority of the Governor General, under whose authority, he claimed, both he and the Criminal Commission had acted. Even this did nothing to dissuade Roche, who now saw the issue as one not only of jurisdiction, but of the upholding the law of the French Republic by thwarting what he saw as an extralegal rendition of a political prisoner. Roche demanded Bareteau hand over two documents. These documents were the order of confidentiality, which had been written up by Dupuy, and the provisional incarceration request, which had been verified by the Prosecutor General. Finally, Roche advised Bareteau that it was his responsibility to release Phan Bội Châu without delay.

Bareteau hurried back to the Central Prison, where he discovered to his horror that Roche had extracted Phan Bội Châu for questioning earlier that morning. Meanwhile, Gilles, the head of the Sûreté in Tonkin, received his flustered secretary Levilain at his home. Levilain conveyed Roche's demand that Gilles respond by noon that day with an explanation for the "arbitrary detention." Gilles quickly realized the incredible danger Roche posed not only to the secrecy of Phan Bội Châu's incarceration, but also to the very ability of the security services to keep him

incarcerated at all.

In his confidential report sent two days later (July 16) to Jeanbrau, head of the Sûreté General of Indochina, Gilles wrote, "I thought it useless to answer the summons of Mr. Roche, and reserved for myself [the option of] immediately making the Prosecutor General aware of the incident which violated his instructions [to keep the affair secret]." However, Gilles did not go to the office of the Prosecutor General on July 14. Instead, he contacted Dupuy, thereby learning that Roche had contacted him as well. Dupuy too had clearly been flummoxed by Roche's sudden intervention, and conveyed to Gilles, "his great surprise at the intrusion of Mr. Roche and the tone with which his observations were formulated." Gilles and Dupuy, representing, respectively, the security forces and Hanoi's civic administration, realized they had a meddling Young Turk on their hands. Left unchecked, Roche might well undermine the authority of the Governor General and the whole colonial edifice.

Alarmed by this possibility, Gilles resolved to shore up the juridical justification for Phan Bội Châu's incarceration. Apparently unable to contact Roche's superiors, Toussaint and Bourayne, Gilles may have made an effort to locate the administrative director of the Sûreté General (it is unclear who Gilles is referring to). Together, they went immediately to meet with the Governor General's Chief of Staff (likely Le Fol) to "discover whether the order designating a new president of the Criminal Commission had yet been signed, which would have allowed us to replace the existing detention order with one bearing the signature of the new president." Gilles's plan was straightforward: if a new Criminal Commission could be quickly created, then the newly appointed president of that Criminal Commission could sign a fresh, unquestionably legal order, thereby replacing Dupuy's order and ending the threat from Roche for good.

The next morning, at 8:00 AM on July 15, Chief Warden Bareteau showed up at Gilles's office to relate the story of his encounter with Roche the previous day. In no uncertain terms, Bareteau complained to Gilles about, "the [terrible] manner in which [he] had been treated by Mr. Roche." Not only had the upstart Roche reproached Bareteau, he had done so in the presence of his Indian clerk, who Roche had allowed to attend the entire interview. For Gilles, Roche's shameful treatment of Bareteau was the final straw. Gilles immediately went to see Prosecutor General Bourayne, who returned to Hanoi that afternoon, and explained to him the legal mess Bourayne's subordinate Roche had caused in his absence. Horrified, Bourayne called Roche into his office and dressed him down in front of Gilles. Bourayne demanded Roche return the copy of the incarceration order he had taken from Chief Warden Bareteau. By the end of the day, a new Criminal Commission would be authorized by the office of the governor general, thereby legalizing Phan Bội Châu's detention. Roche's impromptu uprising was over.

The "Roche Incident," as Gilles referred to it, reveals just how unprepared the French colonial security services were to handle the aftermath of Phan Bội Châu's capture. No one had bothered to sort out the seemingly simple decision about where Phan Bội Châu could be held, so the heads of the Sûreté ended up playing a game of hot potato while their prisoner was enroute to Indochina. Arnoux feared Phan Bội Châu's presence in Saigon would upset anti-colonial elements there. Sogny, surely uninterested in acting as referee between the Governor General, the Vietnamese court, and Phan Bội Châu's supporters, flatly refused to allow Phan Bội Châu to pass through Huế. Thus it came to be that Phan Bội Châu was placed on a ship bound for Haiphong, brought in the middle of the night by hired automobile to Hanoi, and held under a secret identity in the European section of the Central Prison.

Gilles, the head of the Sûreté Tonkin, who played almost no role in the correspondence

concerning the arrest and transport of Phan Bội Châu until he was unexpectedly dragged into the affair by Roche, had made little effort to prevent security breaches. This is clearly demonstrated by the sequence of events that took place after Phan Bội Châu's incarceration. The indiscretions of agents Cristiani, Versini, and Bardy on the night of July 11, in which the identity and details concerning the capture of Phan Bội Châu were drunkenly revealed to patrons of the Golden Cock, could perhaps be excused as an aberrant breach of secrecy. More likely, the agents were never given specific instructions that the identity of their prisoner needed to remain secret for security reasons. Gilles's report on their misadventure would almost certainly have noted if the three men had violated orders, yet it does not.²⁵³

The Sûreté's poor planning is further demonstrated by the events precipitating the Roche Incident. Though Gilles and Dupuy had the foresight to place Phan Bội Châu in the European section, they failed to consider the presence of Vietnamese staff there, such as Secretary Hung. Hung, whether under orders to keep quiet or not, saw fit to share the information about Phan Bội Châu's incarceration with Agent Nha. It is not difficult to read between the lines of Gilles's reports on the matter to figure out that Agent Nha was likely the person who informed Roche, then moonlighting as prosecutor of the republic, that a travesty of justice was taking place. The most astonishing evidence of Sûreté incompetence lies in the fact that Agent Nha, under Roche's orders, was able to, extract Phan Bội Châu by himself, and walk him two blocks to the Palace of Justice. Had strict secrecy and control procedures been in place, this surely could not have happened. Even more embarrassing for Gilles was the fact that Nha was one of his own Sûreté agents, a fact he admitted in passing. The confidential reports Gilles sent to Jeanbrau on July 16 and 17 reveal a colonial security administrator scrambling to keep up with events and desperate to retain a semblance of his own authority.

However, Roche's mini-revolt in the name of justice had done more than damage Gilles's reputation. By directing Agent Nha to extract Phan Bội Châu from prison and march him to the Palace of Justice, Roche had compromised the secrecy and security of the colonial state. As Gilles put it, "this incident is especially regrettable, in my opinion, because it has considerably reduced our efforts and plans to keep the arrest as secret as possible." Soon, Gilles feared, the native elites would know Phan Bội Châu was being held prisoner.²⁵⁴ Gilles did not feel the need to explain the potential consequences of Phan Bội Châu's arrest and detention becoming common knowledge, and thus becoming a potential rallying point for disaffected Vietnamese in Hanoi and beyond. The state needed to take action. Bringing his report to Jeanbrau to a close, Gilles made it clear what he thought the state needed to do and why: "It is very necessary for the Criminal Commission to meet and render its definitive sentence with the briefest possible delay. Under the present circumstances, any interruption, any delay will only make the personality of Phan Bội Châu become the cause of unnecessary and dangerous agitation." Were the news of Phan Bội Châu's detention to get out - and this was less a question of "if" than "when" - a new Criminal Commission would be needed to legitimize French juridical authority. It was not long

²⁵³ The report, pertaining to events that took place on the night of July 11, was not written until July 17, the day *after* Gilles delivered his report on the Roche Incident. This suggests Gilles was eager to produce scapegoats, should his poor planning and questionable decision-making fall under scrutiny. SPCE 355, *Note Confidentielle 3991, 17 juillet 1925*. Head of Sûreté Tonkin (Gilles) to RST, DirAffPol, and Dirsurge.

²⁵⁴ Gilles writes, "I am, under these conditions, obliged to note the consequences of this untimely intervention from the point of view of keeping the secret character of this affair from the native circles of the city." SPCE 355, *Note Confidentielle 3983, 16 juillet 1925*. Head of Sûreté Tonkin (Gilles) to RST, DirAffPol, and Dirsurge.

in coming.

The Criminal Commission of 1925

At this point, Rene Robin, the resident superior of Tonkin and secretary general of the government general of Indochina, stepped in to decisively take charge. On July 16, Robin cabled the Ministry of Colonies, finally relaying the news of Phan Bội Châu's capture and detention. Robin went on to state that Phan Bội Châu had been imprisoned in Hanoi since 13 of July, and now awaited, "his next appearance before the new criminal commission."²⁵⁵ As far as charges went, Robin stated only that Phan Bội Châu had been arrested for "the intention of orienting Chinese xenophobia against our concession [in Shanghai] and spreading revolutionary propaganda amongst the Annamese guards in the concession's police force."²⁵⁶ The minister of colonies might be forgiven for assuming that the new Criminal Commission would investigate and charge Phan Bội Châu for these recent activities. However, Robin almost certainly knew that little proof existed for these charges, and that the new Criminal Commission would perforce reprise the work of the previous 1913 Criminal Commission. Robin finished his short telegram by indicating that he would keep the Ministry of Colonies apprised by cable of any new developments and, if applicable, any news regarding indigenous public opinion concerning the arrest, "which has not yet been revealed within the colony."²⁵⁷ The tone of Robin's telegram was clear: he was not going to ask the Ministry of Colonies for permission to do anything.

Robin indeed seems to have been pulling wool over the eyes of the Ministry of Colonies. Immediately after Robin sent his telegram to Paris, Jeanbrau cabled Sogny in Hué. In his "very urgent," coded telegram, Jeanbrau provided Sogny with the full text of Robin's telegram to Paris. Jeanbrau followed this with two rather telling sentences:

As a result of successive blunders due to the somewhat inopportune zeal of Mr Roche, who substituted by visiting the prison in the absence of the prosecutor of the republic, the incarceration of PBC is now known in Hanoi. Given the procedure for creating a Criminal Commission, however, there does not seem to be much disadvantage in Indochina knowing of the arrest.²⁵⁸

Jeanbrau's cable reveals three important things. First, Robin and Jeanbrau were working together closely, and Sogny was clearly considered part of the "in-crowd." The French Indochinese administration was effectively being run by "les grand commis."²⁵⁹ Second, Jeanbrau blamed Roche for revealing Phan Bội Châu's arrest and detention. This directly contradicted Robin's claim to the Ministry of Colonies that the news of the arrest had not yet leaked. The Sûreté's leaders had no interest in sharing such pertinent information with Paris. Third, Jeanbrau, and probably Robin as well, saw the new Criminal Commission as a means of neutralizing any public relations problems that might come from further leaks about the arrest.

If a new Criminal Commission had the power to forestall unrest, its assistance could not

²⁵⁵ SPCE 355, *Télégramme Officiel*, No. 971, Gougal à Colonies, 16 juillet 1925.

²⁵⁶ SPCE 355, *Télégramme Officiel*, No. 971, Gougal à Colonies, 16 juillet 1925.

²⁵⁷ SPCE 355, *Télégramme Officiel*, No. 971, Gougal à Colonies, 16 juillet 1925.

²⁵⁸ SPCE 355, *Télégramme Officiel*, No. 1422, Dirsurge à Sûreté Hue, 16 juillet 1925.

²⁵⁹ This term, meaning "the great clerks" is used by Patrice Morlat to describe the men in charge of the Indochinese security state. Rene Robin, who later became governor general of Indochina himself, plays a large role in Morlat's book. Patrice Morlat, *Les affaires politiques de l'Indochine (1895-1923) - Les grand commis: du savoir au pouvoir* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1995).

come soon enough, because the news of Phan Bội Châu's arrest, transportation, and incarceration in the Central Prison of Hanoi *had* indeed begun to spread. Interestingly, the big news break came not in Hanoi, but from the port city of Haiphong. On July 16, the same day Gilles submitted his first report and Robin sent his telegram, the *Courrier d'Haiphong* carried an article announcing a "Sensational Arrest!" This article was followed by several reports sent to Gilles by Special Commissar Xavier Leandri of the Sûreté Tonkin, based in Haiphong. On the basis of information provided to him by "trustworthy informers," Leandri offers several clues as to how the press in Haiphong beat Hanoi to the punch. First, rumors began circulating among the Chinese community in Haiphong to the effect that an Annamese man disguised as a Chinese man had been brought by the Sûreté aboard the "Tonkin" on the night of July 11.²⁶⁰ Second, one of two drivers hired by the Sûreté to convey their agents and prisoner from Haiphong to Hanoi, upon reflection, realized that the prisoner in their car was an Annamese revolutionary who had lived in China for many years. Third, a man named Mai Huu Van claimed to have known about the arrest of Phan Bội Châu prior to the publication of this news in the *Courrier d'Haiphong*. Leandri's reports also describe the reaction of several Vietnamese and Chinese residents of Haiphong to the July 16 article.

Gilles would not have found these reports encouraging. One of Leandri's informers reported a conversation he had with a tailor on Paul Bert Street in Haiphong in which the tailor had asked the informer to read to him the article in the *Courrier d'Haiphong*. Upon learning the news of Phan Bội Châu's capture, the tailor exclaimed, "It's the end for him! He will be killed! But he will not have died without first having accomplished some things in China." When the informer read the final sentence of the article indicating that "the arrest would be to the satisfaction of the majority of Annamese," the tailor simply retorted, "That's a joke." Others praised Phan Bội Châu as a "great hero," and despaired of his certain death. The streetside reactions of a public schoolteacher and a bank secretary were even more sobering:

He may be shot, but not publicly, no doubt, because, you know, the punishment executed in public, such a man will not fail to provoke a painful sensation in our compatriots. But in any case, we will not let our old man go free. His death is certain. To hope that it will not be tortured before killing by any means whatsoever. Its end is a dungeon for our country. The more he is tortured, the more he will die a martyr. Let's wait and see the decision of the meeting that will decide on him...

Such reports underscored the problems that Phan Bội Châu's arrest and detention posed for the French colonial administration. Not only were the security forces clearly unable to keep the matter secret, the French administration now faced an uphill battle to convince the Indochinese public that Phan Bội Châu was indeed a dangerous criminal.

Assembling an Archive: The Inquiries of President Bride

The man chosen to lead the new Criminal Commission was another career civil servant who had previously worked in the Sûreté's Directorate of Political Affairs: Jules-Joseph Bride.²⁶¹ To build the Criminal Commission's case against Phan Bội Châu, Bride soon began to marshal the archival resources at the Sûreté's disposal. Beginning on July 22, Bride initiated a search for

²⁶⁰ SPCE 355, *Note Confidentielle No. 155-P, juillet 18 1925*, Special Commissar Leandri to Head of Sûreté Tonkin Gilles. Contains reports from several unnamed informers.

²⁶¹ Bride had previously been serving as an administrator for the office of the resident superior of Tonkin.

and collection of documents that lasted well into the trial period itself. Bride's first letter is to the governor general requesting 64 of a total of 297 documents related to the Hoang Trong Mau affair of 1916.²⁶² Marked "very urgent," the missive offers a vivid picture of the eventual scope and refinement of Bride's archival effort. Rather than request the entire dossier, Bride took care to enumerate and list individual files he needed. Bride's language offers a glimpse of his officious personality: "As this file is to be submitted to the discussions of the Criminal Commission, to be communicated to the defense, it is indispensable to complete it."²⁶³ With the attitude of a punctilious librarian, Bride intended to track down exactly what he needed to prove beyond any doubt that Phan Bội Châu was guilty.

A week into the project, Bride seemed quite taken with his new powers of documentary request. Writing to Monguillot on July 29, who was concurrently serving as acting governor general and as the resident superior of Tonkin, Bride pointedly emphasized that the archives of the 1913 Criminal Commission, which he had sent to Sûreté, were incomplete.²⁶⁴ This, Bride made quite clear, simply would not do:

After having first conducted the job of reclassifying the documents, I realized that many pieces of form, information and information have been removed since 1914. The absence of slips and inventories of certain files does not allow to give details of documents which have been removed but annotations leave no doubt on this point. As a result of the research carried out, the information files of PBC and CD were removed from the archives and handed over to the Secretary General in 1914. I will be very grateful to you for making the two files available to me.²⁶⁵

Apparently unafraid of offending anyone, Bride soon had the heads of each Sûreté branch and bureau scrambling to fulfill his document requests. Gilles, Nadaud, and especially Néron went to work throughout August 1925 tracking down letters, testimonies, photos, subscription lists, original writings, translations, and various other documentary proofs, all to "satisfy the demands of the President of the Criminal Commission."²⁶⁶ Bride's punctilious pursuit of a perfectly ordered archive seemed to be infectious. On July 30, Jean-Félix Krautheimer, the acting resident superior of Tonkin, warned the office of the governor general:

The President of the Criminal Commission has indicated the dossiers you sent are incomplete...It is of paramount importance that all of the aforementioned dossiers concerning the affairs of Phan Bội Châu and his collaborators be delivered fully intact and in their originals...Please kindly provide useful instructions to this effect so that the Criminal Commission can continue its work with all the documents necessary to bring forth the truth. I ask furthermore that the translations of documents written in [Chinese]

²⁶² SPCE 355, *L'Inspecteur des Affaires politiques et administratives, Président de la Commission Criminelle à le Gouverneur General de l'Indochine, 22 juillet 1925.*

²⁶³ SPCE 355, *L'Inspecteur des Affaires politiques et administratives, Président de la Commission Criminelle à le Gouverneur General de l'Indochine, 22 juillet 1925.*

²⁶⁴ SPCE 355, *L'Inspecteur des Affaires politiques et administratives, Président de la Commission Criminelle à Monsieur le Résident Supérieur au Tonkin, 29 juillet 1925.*

²⁶⁵ SPCE 355, *L'Inspecteur des Affaires politiques et administratives, Président de la Commission Criminelle à Monsieur le Résident Supérieur au Tonkin, 29 juillet 1925.*

²⁶⁶ This phrase appears in many communications. An example can be found in SPCE 355, *Résident Supérieur au Tonkin à Monsieur le Gouverneur Général de l'Indochine, 13 août 1925.*

characters or *quoc-ngu*...be attached to avoid lengthy work which would unhelpfully delay the process of justice.²⁶⁷

Krautheimer's letter illustrates the diligence and determination guiding Bride and those assisting him. It also indicates two of the most serious challenges they faced: bureaucratic inefficiency and an extremely compressed timetable. The sheer number of documents required meant hours of searching for, collating, notating, copying, transcribing, translating, and transporting files. Misplaced or damaged files only further complicated this effort, as did the requirement that all files appear in French translation as well as their originals. It was a tall order.

Despite these challenges, Bride valiantly pressed ahead. On August 12, a busy day, Bride simultaneously reached out to the Resident Superior of Tonkin for files pertaining to the events of 1908,²⁶⁸ to the French Consul at Longzhou for any documents related to Phan Bội Châu from 1906 through 1913,²⁶⁹ and finally to Saigon for the dossiers on Gilbert Chieu and a number of other individuals.²⁷⁰ By August 14, Bride was able to report that his inventory of the 1913 Criminal Commission's archives, containing 5333 files, was complete. In the same message, however, Bride made it quite clear that he refused to be limited in his purview to what the previous commission's archive contained.²⁷¹ By the end of the day, Bride had sent out at least seven additional requests.²⁷²

Unfortunately, the demands of the President of the Criminal Commission were often

²⁶⁷ SPCE 355, *Résident Supérieur au Tonkin à Monsieur le Gouverneur Général de l'Indochine*, 30 juillet 1925.

²⁶⁸ The list of dossiers in this request further illustrates Bride's zealous collection efforts: "The Attack on Dai Loc," "The Revolt of Thanh Binh," "The Siege of Tam Ky District," "The Troubles in Quang Ngai and Thua Thien," "The Troubles in Binh Dinh" and "The Attack on the Citadel [of Binh Dinh]," and "Seditious Manifestations in Phu Yen, Nha Trang, Quang Tri, and Quang Binh." SPCE 355, *L'Inspecteur des Affaires politiques et administratives, Président de la Commission Criminelle à Monsieur le Résident Supérieur au Tonkin*, No. 37, 12 août 1925.

²⁶⁹ For this request, which Bride asked the Resident Superior of Tonkin to facilitate, Bride specified, "To facilitate the task of the Criminal Commission, I would be very grateful to you to ask our French Consul in Long-Tcheou to send me all documents to establish the presence of PBC in Long-Tcheou from 1906 to 1913: dates of his stays, the houses he lived in, all the information about his guests, the relations he had with the Chinese reformists, and anything else that might surround this rebel such as stamps, leaflets, bank notes, photographs, patents, etc ... /." SPCE 355, *L'Inspecteur des Affaires politiques et administratives, Président de la Commission Criminelle à Monsieur le Résident Supérieur au Tonkin*, No. 36, 12 août 1925.

²⁷⁰ This request was facilitated by the Resident Superior of Tonkin, who advised the Governor of Saigon that Bride sought records for Gilbert Chieu's 1907-1908 Tribunal in My Tho, as well as individual dossiers for Phan Bội Châu, Cuong De, [Nguyen] Tan Thuat, Hoang Trong Mau, Nguyen Thuong Hien, Nguyen Cam Giang, and Dang Huu Bang. SPCE 354 BIS, *Résident Supérieur à Goucoch Saigon*, No. 30, 17h35, 12 août 1925.

²⁷¹ Bride thereafter identified the individual dossiers he required from the Information Service of the Gougal: "Cuong De, Phan Bội Châu, Gnuyen Hao Vinh, Bui Chi Nhuan, Nguyen Ngoc (aka Tran Van Ngo), Dinh Huu Thuat (aka Dang Huu Thanh), Nguyen Quang Dien, Nguyen Thanh Hien, Nguyen Van Truyen, Nguyen Thuong Hien, [Nguyen] Tan Thuat, Hoang Trong Mau, Nguyen Cam Giang, Dang Huu Bang, Nguyen Quynh Chi (aka Hai Thac), [and] Gilbert Chieu." SPCE 355, *L'Inspecteur des Affaires politiques et administratives, Président de la Commission Criminelle à Monsieur le Résident Supérieur au Tonkin*, No. 42, 14 août 1925.

²⁷² The dossier does not include copies of all seven requests, but Bride's sequential numbering system and repeated references to earlier requests allow a basic reconstruction. On August 14, Bride sent out requests No. 42 through No. 49. SPCE 355, *L'Inspecteur des Affaires politiques et administratives, Président de la Commission Criminelle à Monsieur le Résident Supérieur au Tonkin*, No. 49, 14 août 1925.

difficult to satisfy. A letter sent on August 18 from Bride to Monguillot could not have pleased its recipient:

You have kindly sent me, thanks to the head of the Sûreté, the documents which are the subject of request I680-SG of August 14, 1925. These documents are, for the most part, copies or extracts of letters, but they are not certified (identical) copies. You will certainly agree with me that they can not be added as they are on the Criminal Commission's file and that their authenticity must be affirmed by the signature of the Director of Political Affairs and General Security. It seems that this official could not delegate his signature for that purpose. In the event that this formality does not appear to him as necessary for him to do, I should be grateful if you would ask the opinion of the Director of the Judicial Administration. It is important to prevent the work of the Criminal Commission from being vitiated by vices that could lead to their invalidity.²⁷³

While this letter is an amusing indication of Bride's overzealousness, it also demonstrates the intense seriousness with which the leaders of the French Indochinese security state had committed themselves to preparing for Phan Bội Châu's trial.

However, this seriousness did have its limits. When Bride's obsessive drive to marshal the resources of the French Indochinese security state began to infringe on the state's ability to safeguard its day-to-day operations, Bride's colleagues finally stood up to him. Néron, who had worked harder than any other Sûreté official to fulfill Bride's documentary requests, left a handwritten note on an August 3 transmission indicating, "In the absence of any indication of the nature of documents pertaining to PBC...the Central Information Service will extract from individual dossiers only the pieces which would interest the Criminal Commission."²⁷⁴ Bride, furious that anyone might try to arbitrarily reduce the scope of his requests, retorted:

Allow me to point out that Mr. Néron, whom I recognize for his professional valor and competence with regard to all questions within his purview, may very well consider to be uninteresting documents which are, on the contrary, of a great importance that the President of the Criminal Commission is alone in a position to appreciate.²⁷⁵

Néron knew that two could play at this game. In an undated note to Robin, Néron complained that while "the Central Information Service and the Sûreté General will send to this Commission everything that might be useful for the administration of Justice," Bride's never-ending demands were nevertheless taxing the security state and causing "huge inconveniences."²⁷⁶ Néron pointed out that Bride was requesting files that could not possibly interest the Criminal Commission and that, if circulated, could present a real danger to "certain individuals under surveillance" - undoubtedly a reference to Vietnamese informers working for

²⁷³ SPCE 355, *L'Inspecteur des Affaires politiques et administratives, Président de la Commission Criminelle à Monsieur le Résident Supérieur au Tonkin, 18 août 1925.*

²⁷⁴ SPCE 355, *L'Inspecteur des Affaires politiques et administratives, Président de la Commission Criminelle à Monsieur le Résident Supérieur au Tonkin, 14 août 1925.*

²⁷⁵ SPCE 355, *L'Inspecteur des Affaires politiques et administratives, Président de la Commission Criminelle à Monsieur le Résident Supérieur au Tonkin, 14 août 1925.*

²⁷⁶ SPCE 355, *Service Central de Renseignements et de Sûreté Generale Note pour Monsieur le Secrétaire General, undated.*

the Sûreté. Néron therefore demanded that Robin curtail Bride's document requests for dossiers examined during the 1913 Criminal Commission. If, during the trial of Phan Bội Châu, Bride began delving into files dated after 1914, Néron was concerned the safety of ongoing intelligence and security operations might well be compromised.

Rene Robin was beginning to get anxious. On one hand, he was reading Néron's concerns about Bride's overzealousness compromising state security. On the other, Robin was all too aware that the window of opportunity to successfully prosecute Phan Bội Châu quickly closing. On August 28, Robin himself intervened to ensure Néron's request to limit the Criminal Commission's purview was in fact carried out. In this letter, Robin's parallels that of Néron's undated note, demonstrating a similar annoyance with Bride's administrative overreach:

It would be improper to submit for examination reports and other documents from the files of the PBC and his accomplices produced after 1913. In addition, releasing certain documents from the archives of SCR & SG would be a reckless act that could have serious consequences.²⁷⁷

Robin's letter accepted the logic of Néron's request, thereby officially limiting the 1925 Criminal Commission to documents related to the 1913 Criminal Commission. In practice, the 1925 Criminal Commission could look at anything prior to 1913, but hardly anything after that date. Néron and Robin were worried Bride's legalistic officiousness would threaten the day-to-day functioning of the Sûreté's intelligence gathering and security enforcement operations. The imperatives of running the security state thus placed a hard limit on the ability of the state to pursue a legal case, even against its number one enemy.

Despite the curbs placed on his requests, by the start of the trial on August 29, Bride's efforts resulted in a truly massive collection of documents. As of August 22, shortly before the trial began, Bride had sent a total of 57 official letters of request, each detailing the need for multiple dossiers, files, and telegrams.²⁷⁸ In addition to the 5,333 files associated with the Criminal Commission of 1913, Bride had called up individual dossiers on hundreds of individuals and events, the originals and translations of all of Phan Bội Châu's writings then available, and numerous diplomatic telegrams sent by French consular officials from posts throughout East Asia.²⁷⁹ Bride continued to request documents throughout the trial. By the time the trial ended on November 23, Bride had sent out over 125 letters of request, bringing in 5476 files related to the 1913 Criminal Commission, 1898 files related to the 1915-1916 Council of War, and an additional 6201 files unique to the 1925 Criminal Commission, for a staggering total of 13,575 files arranged into 53 distinct dossiers.²⁸⁰

For Bride, who had not been a member of the 1913 Criminal Commission, making use of this documentary haul must have been a monumental undertaking. Bride's fellow commission

²⁷⁷ SPCE 355, *Robin à Commandeur de la Légion d'Honneur, Monsieur le Résident Supérieur au Tonkin*, 28 août 1925.

²⁷⁸ SPCE 355, *Le Résident Supérieur au Tonkin à Monsieur le Gouverneur Général de l'Indochine*, No. 358 CCB, 24 août 1925.

²⁷⁹ For Bride's consular document requests, see SPCE 355, *L'Inspecteur des Affaires politiques et administratives, Président de la Commission Criminelle à Monsieur le Résident Supérieur au Tonkin*, No. 54, 55, 22 août 1925.

²⁸⁰ SPCE 355, *RST, Commission Criminelle de 1925, Bordereau des pièces adressées le 26 novembre 1925 à M. le Gouverneur Général de l'Indochine, Dossier de Phan Bội Châu*.

members included Dupuy, the resident-mayor of Hanoi, Bellier, a captain of the colonial infantry, and Boyer, a prosecutor of the republic for the Court of First Instance in Hanoi. Arnoux served as the commission's clerk and Gombaudo Saintonge as its interpreter. Saintonge was the only individual who had previously served the 1913 Criminal Commission. Just how much these individuals assisted Bride in preparing for the trial is not clear.²⁸¹ However, regardless of how much time would be needed to properly review and prepare such a large amount of documentary evidence, by the end of August 1925, Bride knew that the clock was ticking. Events outside the courtroom were looking increasingly problematic. Each passing day tipped the scales farther from the need for completeness and closer to an expedient start for the trial.

The View from Outside the Courtroom

Before the month of August even began, three important shifts started to take place relative to Indochina's political climate. First, the news of Phan Bội Châu's arrest spread domestically, awakening a new political consciousness amongst the urban Vietnamese population. Second, the same news quickly spread internationally, making the French colonial state the unwelcome target of critical foreign journalists and revolutionary Vietnamese groups based abroad. Third, and perhaps most worrisome, the appointment of the radical socialist politician Alexander Varenne as governor general of Indochina threw the future of the security state into question. The combination of these three shifts hastened the need to prosecute Phan Bội Châu in as expedient (but also juridically defensible) manner as possible.

The news of the arrest and detention of Phan Bội Châu spread through the urban spaces of Indochina at an incredible pace. An account by a Mr. "N.V.H." entitled "Tôi vào tận trong Hỏa Lò Hà Nội dò xem Trần Văn Đức là ai? (I entered Hỏa Lò [Prison] in Hanoi to see who Trần Văn Đức was)," published in the literary journal *Cải Tạo* in 1950, demonstrates the lengths to which some Vietnamese went to acquire information about Phan Bội Châu's situation.²⁸² Mr. N.V.H. tells a lively tale of derry-do involving the bribing of guards and secretaries and a very near-miss with none other than Bride himself. The story of Mr. N.V.H. begins on a Saturday at the house of Quang Minh on Hàng Bông street in Hanoi, where the author was informed of a rumor that none other than Phan Bội Châu was being held in Hỏa Lò Central Prison in Hanoi. Quang Minh was a member of the Phục Việt party and had many connections to revolutionaries throughout Hanoi. On Quang Minh's introduction, Mr. N.V.H. received a mission from "the manager of *Trung Bắc tân văn*" to infiltrate the prison and determine whether the rumor was true.²⁸³ Once inside the prison, Mr. N.V.H. was assisted by two secretaries, Mr. X and Old B., both who allowed him to see the register containing Phan Bội Châu's actual information. Rather amusingly, Mr. X recounted to Mr. N.V.H. the moment Phan Bội Châu stated clearly for all to hear exactly who he was.

The sudden and unexpected arrival of Bride marks a moment of genuine terror for the author, who writes, "I confess to you, my body was like a sack without rice, unsteady and ready

²⁸¹ The interrogatories that constitute a transcript of the Criminal Commission's work do not identify who asked Phan Bội Châu particular questions, except in a very limited number of instances. However, it is clear, that Bride alone represented the Criminal Commission in all of its external communications with the rest of the French Indochinese government, and the names of the other commission members rarely appear in this external correspondence.

²⁸² This account was republished in Bùi Đình, *Vụ Án Phan Bội Châu* (Hanoi: Nhà xuất bản tiếng Việt, 1950), 29-42.

²⁸³ *Ibid.*, 30. This most likely was Dương Bá Trạc.

to collapse!”²⁸⁴ The author identifies Bride as one of the “Four Red Hairs,” the others being Darles, Eckert, and Delamarre. Holding back an urge to sneeze, an act that would surely draw the wrong kind of attention, Mr. N.V.H. finally escaped the presence of Bride, to hide in the rafters with Mr. X. There, he overheard Bride angrily admonish another clerk, stating, “We must keep this information confidential, so no one will know!”²⁸⁵ Mr. N.V.H. also learned that Old B, who hailed from Reunion Island, took pity on Phan Bội Châu and brought him eyeglasses. After making it out of the prison, Mr. N.V.H. returned to the house of Quang Minh to make his report: Phan Bội Châu was in Hỏa Lò Central Prison and the French wanted to keep the information secret. According to Mr. N.V.H., the revolutionaries began to spread this information around right away via secret transmissions throughout Hanoi, to Haiphong, Hải Dương, and Nam Định. However, Mr. N.V.H. stated, bringing his story to a close, “because the telegram was accidentally sent in black envelopes, it went to clerical workers throughout the southern part of Indochina.”²⁸⁶

Though the story as a whole reads like an tale of adventure, several aspects align well with other available evidence. Phan Bội Châu’s declaration of his own identity matches Gilles’s report, as does the fact that prison secretaries played a major role in revealing Phan Bội Châu’s incarceration. Mr. N.V.H.’S description of Bride as a fearsome, self-assured individual matches the tone of Bride’s communications with other French officials. The utter inability of French security officials to keep Phan Bội Châu’s identity and presence from quickly leaking out rings true. One interesting discrepancy concerns the fake name attributed to Phan Bội Châu: “Trần Văn Đức,” which appears to be a misreading of the Chinese name Phan Bội Châu had entered into the register: “Truong Van Duc.” The false name Resident-Mayor Dupuy had incarcerated Phan Bội Châu under was entirely different (“Ngoc,” possibly an abbreviation of “Nguyen Ngoc Dong”). Taken altogether, however, Mr. N.V.H.’s story fits well with archival evidence, as we shall see. Finally, the presence in the story of a newspaper manager is quite telling.

The press of French Indochina played a crucial role in disseminating the news of Phan Bội Châu’s capture, transportation, and incarceration. The French-language trade journal *Courrier d’Haiphong* first broke the news on July 16, to the dismay of security officials.²⁸⁷ The news was by no means restricted to readers of French, however. On July 18, Special Commissar Léandri reported that the Chinese and Vietnamese communities of Haiphong were already aware a Vietnamese revolutionary of repute had landed the night of July 10.²⁸⁸ On July 24, Léandri shared his informer’s report stating that Dương Tử Nguyên, brother of the former revolutionary Dương Bá Trạc, had read the *Courrier d’Haiphong* article, which had been translated into *quốc ngữ* (romanized Vietnamese script), and republished in both the *Trung Bắc tân văn* and the *Đông Pháp Báo*.²⁸⁹ According to the informer, Dương Tử Nguyên regretted the incident had taken place. Now that the news had been translated into vernacular Vietnamese, it was only a matter of

²⁸⁴ Ibid, 38.

²⁸⁵ Ibid, 40.

²⁸⁶ Ibid, 42.

²⁸⁷ SPCE 355, *Note Confidentielle No. 155-P, (Le Commissaire Spécial Leandri) à M. le Chef de la Sûreté au Tonkin, 18 juillet 1925*. Philippe Peycam writes, without indicating his source, that an announcement came on June 18 stating Phan Bội Châu had been arrested and would be transported to Hanoi. Peycam further states that the trial of Phan Bội Châu began on June 30. Both dates are inaccurate. Phan Bội Châu was arrested on June 30, while the trial did not begin until August 29. Peycam, Philippe, *The Birth of Vietnamese Political Journalism: Saigon 1916-1930* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 133.

²⁸⁸ SPCE 355, *Note Confidentielle No. 154-P, (Le Commissaire Spécial Leandri) à M. le Chef de la Sûreté au Tonkin, 18 juillet 1925*.

²⁸⁹ SPCE 355, *Note Confidentielle No. 164-S, Léandri à Chef de la Sûreté au Tonkin, 24 juillet 1925*.

time before news of the detention of Phan Bội Châu would become common knowledge throughout Indochina. Dương Tử Nguyên's reaction to the news was possibly even more alarming. His brother, Dương Bá Trạc (and the editor of *Trung Bắc tân văn!*), had come over to join collaborationist intellectuals such as Phạm Quỳnh in supporting the French government, and the family was seen as being reliably moderate. If an anodyne member of the elite such as Dương Tử Nguyên took issue with Phan Bội Châu's imprisonment, the Sûreté could expect far worse from a rabble-rousing radical such as Nguyễn An Ninh, editor of *La Cloche Fêlée*, or A. Clementi, editor of *L'Argus Indochinois*.

The next day, July 25, Léandri telephoned Gilles with even more disturbing news: around 8:00 PM the previous evening (July 24), a Vietnamese man had been spotted distributing photocopied tracts on the streets of Haiphong. These tracts, printed in *quốc ngữ*, extolled the virtues of Phan Bội Châu and deplored his current situation. Even more alarming, that morning the director of financial control brought a \$0.04 cent envelope to Léandri, which had been sent from Haiphong, and addressed to "Mr. Indigenous Personnel of the Financial Control, Hanoi." The envelope contained five tracts, which Léandri assumed to be of the same origin.²⁹⁰ Each tract, printed on a half sheet of cheap brown paper in purple ink, began by addressing its reader as "Fellow Countryman!" It went on to relate that Phan Bội Châu, the great hero, had been captured by the French government and thrown into the Hỏa-lò Prison in Hanoi. This, the tract announced, "was a great hardship for Mr. Phan Bội Châu, who had left twenty years previous in order to find a way to retake the country."²⁹¹ The tract suggested that since Phan Bội Châu had fought so hard for the country, "we countrymen owe him a great deal." Gilles and Léandri immediately began parallel investigations in Hanoi and Haiphong to determine the source of these tracts.

Meanwhile, around 4:20 PM on the same day (July 25), Sogny, the head of the Sûreté in Annam, telegraphed with disturbing news of his own. One of his spies, a former political prisoner on a mission in Vinh, the capital of Nghệ An province, informed the French Resident that an armed band led by Ngô Quang and "Cam" had been spotted in the mountainous Hương Sơn region of Hà Tĩnh province. The spy warned that the band were in possession of four bombs sent to them from Siam by the Phan Bội Châu's partisan [Đặng] Tú Hứa (aka Tú Ngô, aka Đặng Thúc Hứa). The band had heard of Phan Bội Châu's arrest and wanted to send someone to Haiphong to demand the latest news from China concerning the arrest.²⁹² Three days later, on July 28, Joseph Alberti, the governor general's chief of staff, relayed Sogny's message to Saigon, further advising that all services exercise high alertness in light of the information.²⁹³ If the report were true, security officials had good cause to fear potential reprisals for Phan Bội Châu's arrest and ongoing detention.

On July 29, Gilles reported on the progress of his search for the origins of the photocopied tracts in Hanoi.²⁹⁴ His informers suggested that the source might be located in Hanoi,

²⁹⁰ SPCE 355, *Note Confidentielle No. 4233, Le Chef de la Sûreté au Tonkin à RST et S.C.R. et S.G., 25 juillet 1925.*

²⁹¹ SPCE 355 (Retentissement dans les milieux indigènes), *Quốc-dân ta đi!* The dossier contains multiple copies of this photocopied tract, suggesting it was indeed widely distributed.

²⁹² Sogny indicated that the band's contact in Haiphong was located at a restaurant called Duyệt Lai Khách. SPCE 355, *Chef Sûreté Annam à Dirsurge Hanoi, No. 798, 16h20, 25 juillet 1925.*

²⁹³ SCPE 355, *Alberti (Hanoi) à Gougal Saigon, 28 juillet 1925, No. 87H.*

²⁹⁴ SPCE 355, *Note Confidentielle No. 4303, Le Chef de la Sûreté au Tonkin à S.C.R. et S.G., 29 juillet 1925.*

though the word on the street was that the Sûreté police themselves were responsible. Some of the individuals his informers had spoken to felt the tracts were an underhanded police strategy intended to gauge public support for Phan Bội Châu. This rumor was not the only one going around. The same day, Gilles also reported that a persistent rumor was now circulating among Vietnamese nationalists that the individual being held in the Central Prison was *not* Phan Bội Châu at all, but rather an impostor *pretending* to be Phan Bội Châu as part of a government plot to make trouble amongst the nationalists.²⁹⁵ It seemed that Hanoi was a cauldron of gossip.

However, something altogether different was taking place in Haiphong. On August 3, Léandri reported that one of his agents, named Vu Dinh Mau, had discovered a 16-year-old domestic servant in possession of a Phan Bội Châu tract. Vu Dinh Mau took the teenager to the Sûreté office for interrogation, whereupon it was revealed that a slightly older teenager who looked to be from outside the city of Haiphong had handed him the tract while he was standing in front of the home of his employer.²⁹⁶ Léandri sent another report on August 21 indicating two additional distribution operations pertaining to the same poly-copied tracts advocating on behalf of Phan Bội Châu.²⁹⁷ On this occasion,, Vietnamese employees of the Treasury in Haiphong had

²⁹⁵ Gilles further suggested that some nationalists would continue to reject the identity of the prisoner as Phan Bội Châu, even if the prisoner were put to death. SPCE 355, *Note Confidentielle No. 4302, Chef de la Sûreté au Tonkin à Chef du S.C.R. et de S.G., 29 juillet 1925.*

²⁹⁶ Léandri's report continues in full: "That day, around 11 AM, Agent Vu-Dinh-Mau, passing Bd Chavassieux, and seeing a young native who seemed suspicious and who put a paper in the pocket, went and searched him. The agent found a bag in which, among other papers, was a pamphlet concerning Phan-Boi-Chau. The agent brought him to the Sûreté office where he was questioned and made the following statements: "I am Le VAN MON, 16 years old. I've worked as a domestic for about four years, at the home of M. Tran-Van-Tu, an entrepreneur, located at 103 Bd Chavassieux. I am originally from the village of Hoanh-Nha, Hai-Hau district, (Nam-Dinh province).

"About ten days ago, without my being able to specify, at nightfall, I was on the pavement, in front of my boss's house, when a native came to pass who had many papers in his hand, and who gave me one, I folded it and put it in one of the pockets of my *cai-ao*, returned to the house, and knowing how to read the *quoc-ngu*, I became acquainted with it, having never heard of the person mentioned in this paper, I did not pay attention to this reading and put the paper back in my pocket, where I always kept it and where it was with other papers, when your agent stopped and searched me."

Upon questioning: "I did not show anyone the paper in question, just as I did not give it to anyone".

Upon questioning: "The person who gave me this paper appeared to be between 16 and 18 years old, he is of medium height, wore canvas clothes (his *cai - ao* was very short), he was wearing a hat made of latanier leaf, like those worn by the young people of the countryside and not used by the inhabitants of the city, which makes me think that the distributor is a stranger to Haiphong. I cannot report any more about him as he passed quickly, I could not stare, and it was around dusk.

Mr. Tran-Van-Tu, Le-Van-Mon's employer, told me that he did not know about the existence of this leaflet and that he was satisfied with the conduct of his servant, who surely did not understand the contents of the incriminating tract, because of his young age, first, and the inadequacy of his education, second.

[Léandri]: I thought it necessary to carry out my investigations further and, with the consent of Tran Van Tu and his servant, I went with Mr. PHUONG, in the capacity of an interpreter, to their home, at No. 103 Boulevard Chavassieux, where we did not find anything suspicious.

I will add that the tract seized is absolutely the same as those we already know and that the other papers which the young MON was carrying were of no consequences and have been returned to him.

SPCE 355, *Note Confidentielle 183-S, Commissaire Spécial Léandri à Le Procureur de la République et Chef de la Sûreté au Tonkin, 3 août 1925.*

²⁹⁷ Léandri's report read: "Continuing my investigations concerning the distribution of leaflets relating to Phan-Boi-Châu, I was led to question:

1. The two cashiers, one of whom also provides postal services, and the 5 secretaries of the treasury, each of whom had received by mail an envelope bearing the following address: "Mr. Indigenous Treasury Personnel of

been targeted by mail. In addition, two youth were discovered handing out tracts downtown on Strasbourg Street. Both claimed to have been paid 10 cents to distribute packets of thirty tracts apiece. Clearly a relatively large-scale and well-organized publicizing effort was taking place on the streets of Indochinese cities. The Sûreté could not help taking notice.

As concern over the tracts was reaching a fever-pitch, Gilles broke the news that the perpetrator had been uncovered. On August 20, Gilles sent a report to Néron indicating that information obtained in Hanoi had revealed the tracts had in fact been produced in Haiphong by a courier who had previously worked for the Resident of Nam Dinh, but had since moved to Haiphong. The courier, named Ca-Tieu, had hired a sampan and had printed the tracts out on the river. When he was finished, Ca-Tieu had thrown the gelatin paste used during the polycopying process into the river.²⁹⁸ If this information is accurate, Ca-Tieu was able to make a dramatic impact, at the very least on the Sûreté, with a very modest investment in basic copying tools. The fact that Ca-Tieu was a former employee of the French government and he or his associates were targeting secretaries and clerks then working in government offices suggests that the Sûreté now had good reason to suspect the loyalties of the very class of Vietnamese on whom French relied on a daily basis. If the Phan Bội Châu affair provoked the ire of government clerical staff, then French Indochina might quickly become ungovernable.

While unrest inside Indochina was rattling the nerves of Gilles and his colleagues, their counterparts abroad had their own share of concerns. Nguyễn Thế Truyên, head of the Vietnamese section of the l'Union Intercoloniale, received a petition dated July 23, 1925, from a group calling itself Jeune Annam (Young Annam). This petition, which Nguyễn Thế Truyên later published on September 4 and distributed widely thereafter, accused the colonial administration and the Sûreté specifically of an attempt to carry out a "scandalous death sentence!"²⁹⁹ The

Haiphong." [The envelopes] contained several copies of said leaflet. Nothing of interest has been collected from their statements; both groups confined themselves to saying that they had taken note of the libel, to which they had attached no importance, and that they had destroyed these papers, with the exception of the named Nguyen-Van-Ngan, a 62-year-old cashier. This cashier, who had set aside the envelope with two of the leaflets it contained, and, on the 18th of this month, on hearing that the native Treasury employees were summoned to the local Sûreté [office], had been taken with fear and handed them over to his boss.

Mr. Bayeur has indeed given me this envelope and the two leaflets, which are exactly similar to those distributed on public roads and which we have already seen.

2- Two young natives who were reported to me as having distributed flyers on public roads.

Respectively 15 and 17 years old, they told me that they were on Strasbourg street one evening around 8 o'clock (they could not remember the date) when an Annamese appearing to be about thirty years, wearing a white cloth shirt with a "Danton" collar and cut in the European style and no hat (who they only saw this one time), gave them 'each to 10 cents and a small packet of papers (about thirty in each package). He told them to distribute the papers to passers-by, adding that these papers were leaflets. The two youth immediately separated to make their distribution. They later met in front of the booth installed in the vacant lot along the Boulevard Amiral Courbet, where one of them passed the remainder of his papers to the other. The latter was admonished by another Annamese who, having read the leaflet's contents, suggested the lad go to the Canal Bonnal to throw away the remaining copies.

It has not been possible to learn anything more about these two young natives, whose good faith can be assumed because of their age and lack of education.

SPCE 355, *Note Confidentielle No. 197-S, Commissaire Spécial Léandri à M.M. le Procureur de la République à Haiphong et le Chef de la Sûreté au Tonkin à Hanoi, 21 août 1925.*

²⁹⁸ SPCE 355, *Note Confidentielle 5029, Chef de la Sûreté à le Chef du S.C.R. et de S.G. Hanoi, 20 août 1925.*

²⁹⁹ SPCE 355, *Union Intercoloniale, Association des originaires de toutes les colonies, Nguyen The Truyen à le Directeur de "France Indochine," 4 septembre 1925.* The dossier contains many copies of this letter and the

“Criminal Commission,” the petition continued, would base its judgments solely on police reports. This is exactly what people in Indochina could expect from “French justice,” backed by those “creatures of the French administration,” namely the mandarins of the Court in Hué. The petition ended by appealing to the solidarity of French and Indochinese people to “save Phan Bội Châu.”³⁰⁰ Though Nguyễn Thế Truyền’s propaganda campaign in support of Phan Bội Châu would take longer to reach Indochina, when it did in October 1925, the heads of all five Sûreté branches in French Indochina began to report copies of the letter and its attached petition.

Meanwhile, journalists and activists closer to Indochina began to take action. By July 27, Courthial, the French Consul in Hong Kong, telegraphed on behalf of Nadaud to complain that the *Hongkong Telegraph*, a journal affiliated with the government of Canton, had reproduced the *Courrier d’Haiphong* article. By divulging precise details of the Indochinese political service’s yearlong investigation, as well as information about Phan Bội Châu’s arrest and transportation to Indochina, Nadaud griped, “this useless publicity has drawn unwanted attention to me in Hong Kong and has disturbed those who aid me or who might have aided me in Canton.” Nadaud demanded measures be taken to ensure no further news leak, lest it “definitively compromise the success of my mission.”³⁰¹ The news of Phan Bội Châu’s capture was not only deeply embarrassing for the Sûreté, it also negatively affected ongoing intelligence operations and put the lives of agents and informers at greater risk.

The news from China would only worsen. On July 31, the Canton-based bulletin *Gongren zhi lu* (*The Worker’s Path*, 工人之路) forcefully protested Phan Bội Châu’s arrest by publishing a telegram sent the previous day by the League of Oppressed People and an article excoriating French actions. *Gongren zhi lu* was started in June 1925 by the Strike Commission of the General Union of Workers, anti-imperialist labor movement closely affiliated with the Chinese Communist Party.³⁰² The League of Oppressed People (in Vietnamese: Bị áp bức dân tộc Liên hiệp Hội, in Chinese: 被壓迫民族聯合會) had also been founded one month prior, on June 30, 1925, as a pan-Asian anti-colonial organization. Led by Canton’s governor Liao Zhongkai, the League included Vietnamese, Korean, and Indian activists, notably Nguyễn Ái Quốc (aka Lý Thụ, aka Hồ Chí Minh).³⁰³ The League’s telegram explained the conditions of Phan Bội Châu’s arrest, suggesting that the French must have obtained the tacit approval of Zhang Zuolin prior to the capture. The telegram took particular issue with French violations of Chinese territorial sovereignty, as the North Railway Station was decidedly outside of the French Concession. The League called on Chinese and other Asians to unite against French imperialism.³⁰⁴ An accompanying article provided further details on Phan Bội Châu’s capture,

attached July 23 petition.

³⁰⁰ Ibid.

³⁰¹ SPCE 355, *Francsulat HK (Courthial) à Gougal Hanoi, No. 92, 27 juillet 1925*.

³⁰² See Horrocks, Robert James. *The Guangzhou-Hongkong Strike, 1925-1926* (PhD Dissertation, University of Leeds, 1994), 162-165.

³⁰³ See Quinn Judge, Sophie. *Ho Chi Minh: the Missing Years (1919-1941)* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002), 83.

³⁰⁴ SPCE 355, “*Télégramme du Congrès des Peuples Opprimés objet de l’arrestation de Phan Sao Nam, 被壓迫民族聯合會為法領事在華境內逮捕潘巢南君之通 (Telegram from League of Oppressed Peoples regarding French Consul’s Arrest of Mr. Phan Sao Nam inside Chinese territory),*” 工人之路 (*The Worker’s Path*), No. 37, 31 juillet 1925.

including the names of the ships on which he had been transported. The most shocking part, however, was a poem the *Gongren zhi Lu* claimed Phan Bội Châu had composed aboard the Angkor and thrown onto an adjacent boat, whereupon it was successfully retrieved by a Chinese student. The *Gongren zhi Lu* raised the issue again in another article the following day (August 1).³⁰⁵

An informer's report arriving August 3 confirmed the Vietnamese revolutionaries in Canton had played a key role in supplying the Congress of Oppressed Peoples with information and documents. The agent, code-named "Pinot" (aka Lâm Đức Thụ), reported that since his previous report on July 15, the revolutionaries based in Canton had learned of Phan Bội Châu's capture and were actively searching for the "traitor" who had made the arrest possible. Agent Pinot explained that thanks to "an intermediary," Phan Bội Châu had managed to write letters to Hồ Tùng Mậu in Canton and Hồ Học Lãm in Hangzhou.³⁰⁶ This was likely a reference to the poems Phan Bội Châu managed to throw off of the Angkor to an adjacent boat. The next day, on August 4, Martel, the French Minister in Peking, wrote to alert the governor general's office that the account published in the *Courrier d'Haiphong* was now being republished in the Chinese and foreign press there. Martel expressed his deep regret at the publicity the Phan Bội Châu affair was causing, and the difficulties it created for him in his dealings with the Chinese government.³⁰⁷

As the news stirred up anger in China, it also began to spread elsewhere. In Bangkok, on August 10, at a meeting at the Pagoda of Que Duong, the Buddhist monk Thien Hoi read a letter written in Chinese from [Đặng] Tú Ngọ (aka Đặng Thúc Hứa) and Co Khon announcing the arrest of Phan Bội Châu. The letter called on all Vietnamese compatriots to contribute 50 Tx each, to be given to Cu Nhon (another name for Thien Hoi), who was the representative of Tú Ngọ and Co Khon in Bangkok. Other attendees suggested that subscription lists be drawn up and that collectors be sent to other Vietnamese colonies in Siam.³⁰⁸

The news continued to roil stakeholders in China. On August 12, a report from agent "Pipo" warned that Vietnamese rebels located in Guangxi and affiliated with the Black Flags were enraged at the news of Phan Bội Châu's capture and now claimed to be planning simultaneous attacks on Dong-Trieu and Langson with 10,000 men. They also claimed to have drawn in subscriptions worth two million [yuan?] and that Germany stood by to assist their attacks. Though Pipo stressed that this news was quite exaggerated, it contributed to a sense that French Indochina was under siege, with more attacks possible at any time.³⁰⁹ On August 13, the *Gongren zhi lu* published yet another letter from the League of Oppressed Peoples addressing the arrest of Mr. Phan Thi Han (aka Phan Bội Châu). The letter claimed that though "the mission of Mr. Phan is over," "the republican partisans of Annam must carry out the struggle without being discouraged by the death of Mr. Phan." Raising the spectre of a global anti-imperialist backlash, the letter pointedly noted that "3 million Moroccans had managed to defeat the Spanish and

³⁰⁵ SPCE 355, "La Chine et l'Annam," 工人之路 (*The Worker's Path*), No. 38, 1 août 1925.

³⁰⁶ SPCE 355, *Envoi No. 209 - Activité de l'agent PINOT, Annexe - Rapport du 3 août 1925*. Yves Le Jariel covers the activities of agent Pinot (aka Lâm Đức Thụ), especially those related to Phan Bội Châu. See especially Yves Le Jariel. *Phan Bội Châu (1867-1940): Le Nationalisme Vietnamien avant Ho Chi Minh* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2008), 191, 198-200, 203, 208, 231, 281, 338. Sophie Quinn-Judge covers Lâm Đức Thụ's actions more generally in *Ho Chi Minh: the Missing Years (1919-1941)*.

³⁰⁷ SPCE 355, *Telegramme Officiel, Legatfrance à Gougal, Peking 4 août 1925*.

³⁰⁸ SPCE 355, *Report of Agent Kok, Une Reunion dans la pagode de Que Duong, Bangkok, 10 août 1925*.

³⁰⁹ SPCE 355, *Rapport Pipo, 12 août 1925*.

would soon defeat the French as well. Would 20 million Vietnamese remain ever fearful as the eternal slaves of the French?”³¹⁰ While the communists and anti-imperialists in Canton presented a serious threat, at least they were a known quantity. Concerns about Phan Bội Châu’s capture, however, came from farther to the right in the Chinese political spectrum. An August 29 letter to Commander Lemoigne from Captain Sabatier, the commander of Tonkin Riflemen in Shanghai, reported that none other than “the Chinese Christian general Feng Hong Siang [Sic: Feng Yuxiang]...is in Shanghai to inquire about the conditions under which the Annamese reformer Phan was arrested.”³¹¹ The involvement of top-ranking Chinese officials on the eve of Phan Bội Châu’s trial demonstrated that the actions of the Criminal Commission could easily pose geopolitical and well as internal political challenges.

While domestic unrest and foreign agitation were certainly on the minds of Robin and Monguillot, these issues may well have taken a back seat to an even more pressing issue: the arrival of newly appointed Governor General Alexander Varenne. The selection of Varenne had elicited praise from the radical left and a storm of indignation from the conservatives on the right. The rightist periodicals *La Victoire*, *Le Figaro*, and *L’Éclair* voiced their strident opposition to the choice.³¹² Conservative publications in Indochina, such as *France Indochine* agreed, while expressing their regret that Monguillot, a dedicated career civil servant, had not been given the post.³¹³ By contrast, radical papers such as Malraux and Monin’s *L’Indochine enchaînée*, expressed their “real pleasure” at the decision.³¹⁴ However, the truth was that no one really knew what Varenne would do once he arrived in Saigon come November 1925. As the weeks passed, both sides of the Indochinese political spectrum noticed aspects of Varenne that unnerved them. The left discovered that Varenne was perhaps less of a socialist and more of a rehabilitated conservative.³¹⁵ Conservatives saw not another conservative, but a progressive reformer in the mold of Albert Sarraut, whose legacy in French Indochina was mixed at best. Varenne himself recapitulated Sarraut’s reform agenda. At a dinner in on October 14, prior to leaving France for Indochina, Varenne declared that fixing the problems between the French and the Vietnamese required the development of “public education, hygiene, public assistance, learning the ‘native’s’ belief, respecting his habits, and building up his milieu.”³¹⁶ What this meant for the outcome of Phan Bội Châu’s trial was anyone’s guess, but Robin and Monguillot had good reason to be concerned. It was therefore imperative that the trial begin soon, and that the result be juridically unimpeachable.

³¹⁰ SPCE 355, “被壓迫民族聯合會敬告越南國民書 (*A Letter from the League of Oppressed People’s to the Vietnamese People*),” 工人之路 (*The Worker’s Path*), No. 50, 13 août 1925.

³¹¹ SPCE 355, *Extrait d’une lettre adressée au Commandant Lemoigne par le Capitaine Sabatier Commandant le Detachement autonome Tirailleurs Tonkinois a Shanghai, 29 août 1925.*

³¹² Morlat, Patrice. *Indochine années vingt: Le Proconsulat “Socialiste” d’Alexander Varenne* (Paris: Les Indes savantes, 2018), 52-53.

³¹³ Patrice Morlat, *Indochine années vingt: Le Proconsulat “Socialiste” d’Alexander Varenne* (Paris: Les Indes savantes, 2018), 104-105.

³¹⁴ Patrice Morlat, *Indochine années vingt: Le Proconsulat “Socialiste” d’Alexander Varenne* (Paris: Les Indes savantes, 2018), 105.

³¹⁵ Patrice Morlat, *Indochine années vingt: Le Proconsulat “Socialiste” d’Alexander Varenne* (Paris: Les Indes savantes, 2018), 122.

³¹⁶ Patrice Morlat, *Indochine années vingt: Le Proconsulat “Socialiste” d’Alexander Varenne* (Paris: Les Indes savantes, 2018), 70.

Chapter Four:
Competing Legitimacies and Courtroom Drama:
The Trial of Phan Bội Châu in Hanoi, August-December, 1925

Over a six-month period from the end of June through the end of December 1925, Phan Bội Châu was hurtled from a life of relative obscurity as the editor of the *Military Affairs Review* in Hangzhou to the center of attention for all of Indochina. Between his arrest at the hands of French Concession police in Shanghai on June 30 and the pardon granted by incoming Governor General Alexander Varenne on December 24, Phan Bội Châu found himself confronted by the full force of the French colonial security apparatus, whose leaders were determined to demonstrate the power of French security and legal institutions by proving him guilty of murder, incitement to violence, and sedition. The interrogation and trial of Phan Bội Châu, which began on August 29 and ended in a dramatic and very public courtroom showdown on November 23 ironically demonstrated that in French Indochina, politics counted for more than facts.

This chapter will show how the leaders of the French colonial security state instigated Herculean efforts to quickly build an airtight criminal case against Phan Bội Châu in the face of metropolitan disquiet, foreign protest, and domestic political agitation. It will further argue that the Criminal Commission of 1925, the juridical body responsible for prosecuting Phan Bội Châu, despite the defiant intransigence of the accused and an astounding self-imposed clerical burden, was ultimately successful in proving the charges inherited from its predecessor. The Commission's legal victory, a testament to the power of the colonial archive, soon turned sour as Phan Bội Châu recognized and took advantage of something new and even stronger that had risen suddenly in the wake of press reports concerning his capture and trial: Indochinese public opinion.³¹⁷

The Trial Begins

The Criminal Commission of 1925 began its proceedings on Saturday, August 29, 1925. The Commission was headed by President Bride, a first-class civil service administrator and inspector for the Tonkin Bureau of Political and Administrative Affairs. The Commission also included the resident-mayor of Hanoi (Paul Justin Hippolyte) Dupuy, Captain of the First Regiment of Tonkinese Riflemen Bellier, and the Attorney General of the Republic at the Court of First Instance of Hanoi Boyer. Also present were (Edouard Auguste) Arnoux, the Criminal Commission's clerk,³¹⁸ and Gombaudo Saintonge, its interpreter. An additional Vietnamese interpreter named Bùi Bằng Đoàn was brought in later to assist.

Between the beginning of the Commission's inquiry on August 29 and its completion on November 9, Phan Bội Châu faced off against Commission members in sixty-four interrogation sessions held on thirty-six separate days. Only the testimony from one additional witness appears in the *Interrogatoires*: that of Inspector François (aka Trần Tú Quý) of the Sûreté, who had guarded Phan Bội Châu on the *Altaïr* in Hong Kong and aboard the *Tonkin* during the trip to Haiphong. A handful of times, the Commission also called on the interpreters Gombaudo Saintonge and Bùi Bằng Đoàn to repeat testimony. Bùi Bằng Đoàn was also called upon twice called to verify the authenticity of Phan Bội Châu's handwriting.

³¹⁷ For this chapter, I have drawn primarily on files, intelligence and press surveillance reports, and internal security and administrative communications found in ANOM, SPCE 351-355. The transcript of the trial's lengthy interrogation sessions, on which my discussion of the trial's internal workings is based, may be found here: SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu Interrogatoires*.

³¹⁸ Note - This is not the same individual as Paul Louis Marius Arnoux, head of the Sûreté in Cochinchina.

Aside from these brief, infrequent interruptions, the 440-page *Interrogatoires* constitutes a two-month dialogue between Commission members and Phan Bội Châu that was often combative. Over the course of the inquiry, Criminal Commission members, who are not identified by name, asked 1,896 questions, nearly all of which Phan Bội Châu answered. For the vast majority of their questions, the Commission members cited documents, typically testimonies and texts attributed to Phan Bội Châu. They then challenged Phan Bội Châu to account for the contents of those documents. Lacking any legal representation or any documents of his own to present, Phan Bội Châu had no choice but to devise strategies to counter the Criminal Commission's unrelenting deluge of documents. In a very real sense, the trial of Phan Bội Châu was a trial by archive.

Despite a sincere desire to conduct the trial in the most rapid possible manner, the Criminal Commission members found themselves flummoxed by Phan Bội Châu's initial defense strategy: deny or mislead whenever possible. This strategy began immediately, even before the first question was asked.

Day One (8/29/1925): Testing Strategies

Presenting himself before the court on the morning of August 29, Phan Bội Châu stated simply: "I forget the name of my second wife. I had one child by each of my wives."³¹⁹ The first part of this comment, ridiculous on its face, served two purposes. First, it allowed Phan Bội Châu to protect the identity of his second wife Nguyen Thi Em. Second, it revealed Phan Bội Châu's central defense strategy of claiming complete ignorance of any potentially incriminating facts. The latter part of comment, also blatantly untrue, was probably intended to protect the identity of Phan Bội Châu's daughter Phan Thi Cuong. To the members of the Criminal Commission, the message was clear: Phan Bội Châu was ready to play games with the truth.

Asking for Phan Bội Châu to be handed a copy of his sentencing by the 1913 Criminal Commission, the prosecutor fired his opening salvo: "Do you have any comments on this order?" Undeterred, Phan Bội Châu responded, "I have been aware, while abroad, that a judgment was rendered against me, but I do not know what grievances I am reproached for. I am very happy that the investigation has resumed and I will answer frankly and clearly all the questions that will be asked."

The first day was largely spent arguing over dates. Members of the Criminal Commission were hoping to confirm certain biographical details pertaining to the period before Phan Bội Châu first left Indochina (1905), and found Phan Bội Châu quite willing to supply dates. Unfortunately for them, many of the dates Phan Bội Châu provided did not match their files. In many cases, neither did Phan's dates correspond to each other! Asked when he had passed the triennial regional examination in Nghệ An, Phan Bội Châu claimed it was the thirteenth year of Thành-Thai, in other words, "1901, I believe."³²⁰ This intentional inaccuracy marked a crucial component in Phan Bội Châu's evolving defense strategy: a deliberate

³¹⁹ Although the *Interrogatory* does not specify who spoke first, the content suggests it could only have been Phan Bội Châu. The declaratory statements about his wives both begin with the first person pronoun. In addition, whereas in Phan Bội Châu's administrative files, his profession is always indicated to be "professor of [Chinese] characters," in the *Interrogatory* Phan Bội Châu's profession is declared to be "student." This claim corresponds to Phan Bội Châu's initial defense strategy of minimizing responsibility by claiming to lack significant authority.

³²⁰ 61. Phan Bội Châu actually passed the Nghe An regional examination in the *twelfth* year of Thanh Thai, 1900. Phan Bội Châu provides the correct date in his *Autobiography*, and, in any event, could hardly have forgotten the year he had achieved first rank, thereby receiving accolades within his district and from friends in the capital.

confusion of dates. Asked at which examination he had been banned for life, Phan continued to obfuscate, claiming “It was in the year 1900 (the tenth year of Thành-Thai).” Not only had Phan actually been banned in 1897, the *eighth* year of Thành-Thai, but the year 1900 was the year Phan Bội Châu had famously taken first place in the regional exams. Phan himself stated this fact only two months previous upon his arrest. Moreover, with this response, Phan Bội Châu had just effectively made two consecutive years by the Western calendar (1900 and 1901) the equivalent of three full years apart by the Vietnamese regnal calendar (the tenth and thirteenth years of Thành-Thai, which would actually correspond to 1899 and 1902). Asked again to state the year he had passed the triennial regional exams, Phan Bội Châu again confirmed, “I received my ban in the tenth year of Thành-Thai and my *cử-nhân* degree in the thirteenth year.”

The chronological confusion had only just begun. Later that same morning, the prosecutor asked Phan Bội Châu when Mr. Trần Đình Phát had served as *tổng đốc* (provincial governor) of Nghệ An. Phan Bội Châu demurred, “I cannot answer you because Trần Đình Phát was not nominated *tổng đốc* until after I left the country.” The prosecutor then asked Phan to confirm when he had left Nghệ An. He replied, “1905.” The prosecutor, apparently having caught Phan lying, challenged him, “In 1903, Mr. Trần Đình Phát was the *tổng đốc* of Nghệ An.” Phan Bội Châu pushed right back, insisting instead that Tôn Thất Hân had been the *tổng đốc* in 1903. However, he continued, “I prefer not to specify because I no longer remember.” Appearing to move on to another topic, the prosecutor then asked Phan Bội Châu when he had published *Lamentations sur Formose (Letter from the Ryukyus Written in Tears of Blood)*³²¹. When Phan Bội Châu replied “1903,” the prosecutor sprang his trap: “In 1903, were you not summoned before a *tổng đốc* who agreed to ‘forget’ about you because your actions had become known to the [French] Resident?” The prosecutor then launched into a long series of accusations, alleging that the Resident of Nghệ-an, whose name was Trần Đình Phát, had covered up Phan Bội Châu’s partisan activities and asked him to leave the province in 1903, whereupon Phan Bội Châu then travelled to Huế, composed *Lamentations sur Formose*, and was inducted as a rebel alongside his former students, such as Võ Bá Hợp, who was sentenced in 1908 by the Criminal Commission.³²²

Phan Bội Châu heatedly denied all of this. Directly addressing the prosecutor’s claims, Phan Bội Châu objected:

That’s a completely erroneous account! I never knew Mr. Trần Đình Phát as the *tổng đốc* of Nghệ-An, because I was no longer in the province [when he assumed the position]. I never met this mandarin, so he could not have summoned me. It is also wrong that this mandarin told me to leave the country. The only fact that is correct concerns the pamphlet I wrote entitled *Lamentations sur Formose*. I distributed it amongst the ministers of the court, knowing full well that they would inform the Resident Superior. But this work was not a revolutionary writing! As for me being inducted as a rebel, it may have happened, but without my knowledge. As for Bá Hợp, he was my student, but he was never sentenced. There is an error in his name. I affirm that I have never been summoned by

³²¹ In Vietnamese: *Lưu Cầu Huyết Lệ Tân Thư*. In Chinese: 琉球血淚新書.

³²² Presumably the “Criminal Commission” the prosecutor refers to here is actually one of the Nguyễn court tribunals held in 1908. The first French Criminal Commission to address the actions of Phan Bội Châu’s partisans was the 1913 Criminal Commission in Hanoi.

any native authority to receive observations on anti-French conduct.³²³

So ended the first interrogatory session on the morning of August 29. If Bride had any illusions that Phan Bội Châu would bend easily to the apparently well-substantiated charges put forward by the Criminal Commission, the first day's combative confrontation surely dispelled them.

The second session began later in the evening of the same day, August 29, with both sides seeming to have calmed down. The prosecutor continued to ask Phan Bội Châu about his activities prior to going abroad for the first time in 1905. Phan Bội Châu continued to exercise selective memory of events. Phan Bội Châu was forthcoming with many details about his journey to Tonkin, which he claimed coincided with the opening in 1903 of the Paul Doumer Bridge in Hanoi. He also freely reported having briefly met the collaborationist official Hoàng Trọng Phu (the son of Phan Đình Phùng's nemesis Hoàng Cao Khải). However, Phan Bội Châu claimed to have forgotten the names of the "twenty or thirty people" who travelled with him on this trip.

After describing his trip, Phan Bội Châu suddenly offered a rather surprising admission: in 1898, he had sold a fraudulent composition to a student taking the examinations in Nam Dinh. The prosecutor asked if this was the only time. It was not. Phan Bội Châu stated that he had sold fraudulent exam compositions many times in Annam and Huế, earning twenty or thirty piastres for each. However, because the students buying these exams were unable to understand the themes Phan Bội Châu wrote about, so they did not pass. The prosecutor immediately took advantage of this unexpected opening: "Do you have some special conception of the honesty required during the examinations?" Phan Bội Châu blithely replied that the payoffs that routinely took place during the examinations were even worse. "All the examiners," he quipped, "touch the money." Still sizing his adversary up, Phan Bội Châu was freely offering what he thought to be useless information.

Taking advantage of Phan Bội Châu's willingness to talk, the prosecutor began to question Phan Bội Châu about his connections with the bandit leader ĐỂ THÁM, the rebellious mandarin Nguyễn Thượng Hiền. Phan Bội Châu denied having had any relations with ĐỂ THÁM, while he admitted having met Nguyễn Thượng Hiền "completely by accident." As the prosecutor continued to press ahead, clearly hoping to catch him in a lie, Phan Bội Châu began to dissimulate and dodge. Asked about the peripatetic warrior Tăng Bạt Hổ, Phan Bội Châu claimed only to know him as an Cantonese-speaking medical practitioner, but not by name. However, Phan Bội Châu at first flatly denied knowing Nam Thịnh and Sơn Tẩu (aka ĐỖ TUYẾN), both prominent resistance leaders from Quảng Nam. The prosecutor, incredulous, asked again,

³²³ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 5. Interestingly, French records for 1903 list neither Trần Đình Phát nor Tôn Thất Hân as *tổng đốc* of Nghệ-An. Rather, French administrative records and *Phan Bội Châu Niên Biểu (NB)* both indicate the *tổng đốc* of Nghệ-An at the time was Đào Tấn. In *NB*, Phan Bội Châu indeed claims Đào Tấn helped to protect him. Trần Đình Phát does appear in French administrative records, but only in 1911 and 1912 as the minister of finances for the court in Huế. Tôn Thất Hân, on the other hand, is listed as the *tổng đốc* of Faifoo in 1903, but he did indeed become the *tổng đốc* of Nghệ-An in 1904. Based on French administrative records, therefore, Phan Bội Châu's statement was closer to the truth than that of the prosecutor, though Phan Bội Châu wisely did not volunteer the name of his actual protector, Đào Tấn. Phan Bội Châu, *Overtaken Chariot: The Autobiography of Phan Bội Châu* (Honolulu: SHAPS Library of Translations, University of Hawai'i Press, 1999), 61. See also *Annuaire général de l'Indo-Chine française 1903, 1904, 1911, 1912* (Hanoi: Imprimerie Typo-Lithographique F.H. Schneider, 1903, 1904, 1911, 1912).

this time indicating that Nam Thịnh was also called Nguyễn Hàm (aka Tiểu La) and that Sơn Tàu (aka Đỗ Tuyên) had held the position of *chủ sự* (secretary). Backtracking, Phan Bội Châu admitted to knowing Nguyễn Hàm and to knowing a *chủ sự* by the name of Trình Hiền (another of Đỗ Tuyên's names). However, Phan Bội Châu claimed Nam Thịnh was a lieutenant of the arch-collaborationist Nguyễn Thân, while Trình Hiền was little more than “a former mandarin who retired to his home to work the fields.”

At this statement, the prosecutor pounced: “The information given to the Criminal Commission does not agree with what you just said to us.” The prosecutor went on to specify that Nam Thịnh had worked under the resistance leader Nguyễn Huệ as early as 1885, while Sơn Tàu, aka Đỗ Tuyên, had also followed Nguyễn Huệ and remained a virulently anti-French partisan. Both men had hid in the mountains waiting for their chance to revolt, but were both captured. Nam Thịnh had died on Poulo Condore island and Sơn Tàu had died at Lao Bảo prison. Recognizing that the prosecutor clearly knew the stories of both men, Phan Bội Châu simply responded that he had known nothing of either man's fate after having met them in Huế and, as far as he knew, Nam Thịnh had submitted to Nguyễn Thân and obeyed him thereafter. In an effort to distance himself from such an incriminating figure, Phan Bội Châu claimed that he had known Nam Thịnh only because of the examinations. But, he hastened to add, that because Nam Thịnh had often needed his help to study for the examinations, the two of them could have been found together quite often during that period. Such a remarkably quick series of self-corrections revealed just how badly the prosecutor had rattled Phan Bội Châu.

This testy exchange brought the first day of interrogatories to an end. Each side had played their hand and revealed their primary strategies for trial. Bride would rely on his voluminous records to challenge Phan Bội Châu's claims. In response, the accused would feign ignorance, deliberately confuse facts, and outright deny anything incriminating, all the while providing information he considered to be inconsequential. Each side also got the measure of their adversary. Bride saw in Phan Bội Châu yet more proof of the French stereotype that all Annamese were inveterate liars. With a vast archive of messages, reports, and translations at hand, Bride felt sure he could not just prove Phan Bội Châu lied, but also force him to admit it. Phan Bội Châu, meanwhile, realized that Bride meant serious business. If he wanted to survive the trial, Phan Bội Châu needed to take much more care with his words. Henceforth, every answer would require tactical consideration and verbal talent. It would be a duel of wits and words between the bureaucratic and the revolutionary.

Day Two (8/31/1925): Establishing Positions

When they met again two days later, on the morning of August 31, Phan Bội Châu came ready to make the first move. Before any questions had been asked, he declared spontaneously:

During my last interrogation, it is possible I was inaccurate in my designation of the years. I was counting them according to the Chinese calendar, which is possibly different by one year from the Annamese calendar. I received my *cử-nhân* degree in the Chinese year *Ti* [*Ti*, 子, the Year of the Rat, 1900]. I went to the exposition in Hanoi in the Chinese year *Dân* [*Dân*, 寅, the Year of the Tiger, 1902]. I went to Saigon in the year *Mao* [*Mão*, 卯, the Year of the Cat, 1903], and I left Indochina in the year *Ti* [*Ti*, 巳, the Year of the Snake, 1905].

If I did not respond to you immediately when, at the end of my last interrogation, you mentioned the names of Nam Thịnh and Sơn Tẩu, it was because these two individuals took those names after I departed Indochina. While I was in Annam, I know those individuals by the names Âm Hàm and Ông Chủ Ô Gia (Sơn Tẩu).

In this prepared statement, Phan Bội Châu managed not only to explain his chronological discrepancies and apparent ignorance of his good friends' names, but he also introduced preliminary justifications for any future obfuscations. If the prosecutor wanted to catch him providing the wrong dates for events, Phan Bội Châu could simply he was using one of four different chronological systems: the Chinese calendar, the Vietnamese calendar, the Western calendar, or the Vietnamese regnal year. If the prosecutor wanted to catch him lying about his relations with a particular person, Phan Bội Châu could simply claim to know that person by a different name or pseudonym.

The second full day of interrogation witnessed Phan Bội Châu energized, confident, and ready to parry any of Bride's thrusts. The prosecutor jabbed at Phan Bội Châu with questions about Nam Thịnh and Sơn Tẩu; Phan Bội Châu blocked these by maintaining that his relationship with both men was purely academic. The prosecutor lobbed other names at Phan Bội Châu, who skillfully dodged each one, refusing to incriminate himself. Phan Bội Châu denied knowing or ever meeting the one-time revolutionary Tôn Thất Toại.³²⁴ More improbably, he claimed to have made friends with Prince Cường Để solely because, "I was curious about the items his ancestor Đông Cung [Prince Nguyễn Phúc Cảnh] had brought back from France and Cường Để kept at his house."³²⁵ Phan Bội Châu even described his May 1904 encounter with Auvergne, the Resident Superior of Annam, in such a way that made the French official seem an easy mark: "I told him I went to Cochinchina to see the Statue of Monseigneur Adran and the Botanical Garden. The Resident Superior told me 'that's all fine.' But he never asked me anything about anti-French activities."³²⁶ Phan Bội Châu was effectively telling Bride that his fellow countryman Auvergne was incompetent, while at the same time refusing to incriminate himself by admitting that he was in fact participating in anti-French activities.

Unable to pin Phan Bội Châu down on any of his domestic activities, the prosecutor turned to the one event not in question: Phan Bội Châu's first trip abroad in February 1905. Here again, Phan Bội Châu carried on with his verbal trickery. First, he described returning to his hometown of Đan Nhiễm to "arrange my family affairs." Phan Bội Châu revealed that he had entrusted his domestic duties to an adopted son named Am and also that he had a daughter by his second wife. He had not mentioned his daughter previously because, he explained, "according to Vietnamese custom, girls are not entitled to property." The only people in the entire village who knew of his plan to leave the country, Phan Bội Châu explained, were his first wife Nguyễn Thị Huyền and his adopted son, Am. While Phan Bội Châu's daughter certainly existed, "Am" may well have been an on-the-spot invention to deflect any further interest on the part of French intelligence in his actual family members or fellow villagers.

Phan Bội Châu then related the story of his secret departure from Đan Nhiễm village northward to Nam Định province. With him, he claimed, were just two individuals: his guide

³²⁴ In NB, Phan Bội Châu indicates that Tiểu La introduced him to Tôn Thất Toại in 1903, though Phan Bội Châu was unimpressed by the man. *Overtaken Chariot*, 63.

³²⁵ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 13.

³²⁶ *Ibid.*

Tăng Bạt Hồ and his temporary porter Nguyễn Diễm. By mentioning Nguyễn Diễm's name, Phan Bội Châu attempted to pull off two dazzling tricks at the same time. The first was to capture the attention of Bride, who certainly would have known Nguyễn Diễm as the earliest informer the French had within Phan Bội Châu's revolutionary organization. Nguyễn Diễm came from Xuân Liễu village, very close to Đan Nhiễm, and had in fact passed fifth in the very same examination Phan Bội Châu came in first, in 1900. Nguyễn Diễm, who may have turned informant as earlier as 1902, was later murdered by Phan Bội Châu's close collaborators Trần Hữu Lực and Hoàng Trọng Mậu in Canton in December 1912. Perhaps anticipating that Bride would eventually ask about the murder, Phan Bội Châu teased the Criminal Commission, stating: "Nguyễn Diễm was very dedicated and he proved that dedication to the French government. It was he who arrived in Canton alongside French functionaries in an attempt to get Cường Để to give himself up. I believe that Cường Để had Nguyễn Diễm assassinated in Canton. I did not have a chance to see him in China because Cường Để, I think, had him killed shortly after his arrival."³²⁷ Not only was Phan Bội Châu mocking the French security services for the death of their agent, he had done so quite out of context *and* conveniently pinned the blame for the murder on Cường Để. As galling to Bride as this statement likely was, it was doubly false. Not only had he enthusiastically endorsed the assassination of his former student Nguyễn Diễm in 1912, Nguyễn Diễm also had not served as Phan Bội Châu's porter in 1905. Rather, this was Phan Bội Châu's second trick: a lie designed to obscure the identity of his actual travel companions Đặng Tử Kính and Trần Bình.³²⁸ Bride's reaction is not indicated in the transcript. The members of the Criminal Commission seemed willing to allow Phan Bội Châu to talk unchallenged, perhaps hoping he would contradict himself, or one of their many documents. In any case, the morning interrogatory session ended after Phan Bội Châu finished his story.³²⁹

For the evening session of August 31, the prosecutor asked Phan Bội Châu why he had left Indochina, then allowed him to address the topic at length. Phan Bội Châu took the opportunity to recast his early motives as reformist, and even potentially collaborationist. Phan Bội Châu explained that he had planned to become a *tri huyện* (district magistrate) after

³²⁷ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 15, 96. The name "Nguyễn Diễm is the source of no small amount of confusion because it is very similar to three other named individuals: Nguyễn Diễm of Hà Đông, Nguyễn Diễm of Cao Điền, a village in Thanh Chương district, adjacent to Nam Đàn district, where Nguyễn Diễm's home village of Xuân Liễu lies, and finally Nguyễn Huy Diễm (aka Bat Bieu), who also served as a spy for the French.. In a footnote to *NB*, Chương Thâu incorrectly identifies the Nguyễn Diễm (阮恬) as Nguyễn Diễm (阮典) of Cao Điền. Chương Thâu, ed., "Phan Bội Châu Niên Biểu," *Phan Bội Châu Toàn Tập*, Vol. 6, 268-269. See also Le Jariel, Yves, *Phan Bội Châu*, 42, 115, 258, 302, 318. Vinh Sinh confuses Nguyễn Diễm with Nguyễn Huy Diễm, who were definitely two different individuals, and who were both spies killed by Trần Hữu Lực, the former inside Indochina in 1908, the latter in Canton in 1912. This is the only way to resolve an apparent contradiction: in *NB*, Phan Bội Châu claims Trần Hữu Lực "stabbed the *cử nhân* Nguyễn Diễm...after he killed Nguyễn Diễm, Ngu Hải was concerned for his future and therefore pressed him to go abroad." Ngu Hải (aka Đặng Thái Thân) died in 1910, therefore he could not have given instruction to Trần Hữu Lực to flee Indochina for a murder committed in Canton in 1912. It is possible that Nguyễn Diễm of Cao Điền is the same person as Nguyễn Huy Diễm (aka Bat Bieu). See Phan Bội Châu, *Overtaken Chariot*, 60, 93, 96, 108, 138, 144, 153 (for reference to murder of Nguyễn Diễm), 180 (for reference to murder of Nguyễn Huy Diễm).

³²⁸ These are, at least, the two companions Phan Bội Châu identifies in *NB*. Phan Bội Châu claims Tăng Bạt Hồ went to Tonkin earlier and met them there. *Overtaken Chariot*, 78. In *NTT*, Phan Bội Châu mentions only Tăng Bạt Hồ and Đặng Tử Kính. Phan Bội Châu, "Prison Notes," *Reflections from Captivity*, translated by Christopher Jenkins, Tran Khanh Tuyet, and Huynh Sanh Thong (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1978), 26.

³²⁹ While there is no clear way to determine if a particular session ended early, it can be inferred from the number of pages

receiving his *cử nhân* degree in 1900, but became increasingly aware of “an incommensurable difference between the intellectual levels of French and Vietnamese.”³³⁰ This awareness, Phan Bội Châu claimed, propelled him to compose the short work *Lưu Cầu Huyét Lệ Tân Thư* (*Letter from the Ryukyus Written in Tears of Blood*) in which he “specifically called for the abolition of the traditional education and examination systems...and the creation of modern schools along Western lines.”³³¹ However, Phan Bội Châu continued, the mandarins to whom he showed his work dissuaded him from approaching French authorities. Furthermore, Phan Bội Châu learned that a Frenchman observing successful candidates had counted them off: “un cochon, deux cochon...neuf cochons (one piggy, two piggies...nine piggies).” Deciding there was no point trying to work with the French if that was their attitude, Phan Bội Châu stated, “I therefore came up with the idea of leaving the country.”³³² Whether he intended to or not, Phan Bội Châu had just played a sour note.

At this point, the tone of the encounter shifted toward acrimony. Perhaps recognizing he had offended the members of the Criminal Commission, Phan Bội Châu quickly added, “Had I ever seen with my own eyes examples of Frenchmen such as those who make up this Criminal Commission, I would never have left.”³³³ The prosecutor was neither mollified, nor amused by this naked flattery. He angrily challenged Phan Bội Châu, “We cannot accept that you left your native country, your wife, your children, the grave of your father, and those of your ancestors because you learned of a Frenchman counting pigs while watching Annamese! Tell us the real reason you left!”³³⁴ Phan Bội Châu responded that the ‘piggy story’ was just an example; the real reason he had left was the obvious contempt French held for Vietnamese. Becoming angry himself, Phan Bội Châu continued, “The Vietnamese people are like an abandoned child adopted by benevolent strangers. But after twenty years, the French seemed to have abandoned their adopted child to pursue their own interests.”³³⁵ Clearly riled by Phan Bội Châu’s words, the prosecutor interjected, “We hear that the Vietnamese say mean or injurious things about Frenchmen every day, but we do not think that because of this all Vietnamese hate the French!” Phan Bội Châu snapped back, “I did not think all French hated the Vietnamese either! I was exasperated by the terrible situation in my country and saw the French government doing nothing whatsoever to fix it. The ‘piggy story’ was simply the drop of water that made the vase overflow.”³³⁶ Still rankled by Phan Bội Châu’s suggestion that the French were bigots, the prosecutor pointed out, “We have seen in a poem authored by a Vietnamese the phrase ‘the fattened pig must be slaughtered.’ Though this phrase targets us French, we hold no hatred for the author, nor do we hate all Vietnamese because of something one of them wrote.”³³⁷

The argument was highly revealing: both sides abandoned their strategies and resorted to yelling as the racial animosities engendered by colonialism were laid bare. For Bride and his fellow commission members, there could be no questioning French motives. As far as Bride was concerned, the French colonial administration represented the epitome of justice, humaneness, and reason. If any French did denigrate the Vietnamese, they were outliers. For Phan Bội Châu,

³³⁰ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 15.

³³¹ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 15-16.

³³² SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 16.

³³³ Ibid.

³³⁴ Ibid.

³³⁵ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 17.

³³⁶ Ibid. A Vietnamese phrase with entirely the same meaning as ‘the straw that broke the camel’s back.’

³³⁷ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 18.

who had written exhaustively to analyze and critique the exploitative actions of the colonial administration and degrading way French treated Vietnamese, the ‘piggy story’ was simply a fact of life. This argument, which set a divisive tone for the rest of the trial, revealed something very important to Phan Bội Châu about the mindset of his adversaries: although French colonial officials were perfectly willing to use their administrative and military power to oppress the Vietnamese, appearances mattered. The Criminal Commission could embody the republican principles of justice, equality, and bureaucratic rationality, but never racial prejudice. The prosecutor’s evident sensitivity about this topic had provided Phan Bội Châu another arrow for his quiver.

The day’s session sped to a close as the prosecutor delivered a long, chastising rant. Calling Phan Bội Châu’s purported reasons for leaving Indochina “puerile and futile,” the prosecutor went on to establish Phan Bội Châu’s true motives: the exploitation of nationalist sentiments, the establishment of an insurrectionary movement to overthrow French domination, and the realization of political independence for Vietnam. All of these were just means to an even greater end, however. According to the prosecutor, Phan Bội Châu’s true personal goal was to become the premier of Vietnam. Everything Phan Bội Châu had done, from rallying former Cần Vương partisans, to placing Cường Để at the head of the movement, and finally to obtaining Japanese military and financial support, were steps in his secret master plan to achieve political power for himself.

Phan Bội Châu vigorously protested against the prosecutor’s claims. Not only was the suggestion that he personally wanted power untrue, it was ridiculous! He had never sought to profit personally; he sought only to better his country. “The real reason I left,” Phan Bội Châu affirmed, “is the one I already exposed to you, namely to contribute to the intellectual development of my country by writing. But there is one point on which you are absolutely correct: I wanted independence for my country.”³³⁸ As for inciting an insurrection, Phan Bội Châu continued, this was quite impossible because once abroad he had had no further contact with his countrymen. The prosecutor’s information about Cường Để was also incorrect. There had been no coordination; Cường Để came abroad on his own, a year after Phan Bội Châu himself. Moreover, Cường Để was the one who sought Japan’s support to retake the throne of Vietnam. Finally, Phan Bội Châu concluded emphatically, “I never thought about appealing [to Japan] for military assistance to fight France; as at that time I felt France was unbeatable.”³³⁹

The competing speeches brought the second day of interrogation to a close. The discursive positions of each side were now clear. Bride intended to prove Phan Bội Châu was a manipulative, scheming, and unscrupulous politician, happy to dupe, use, or even sacrifice his countrymen for personal gain. Phan Bội Châu sought to present himself as a nothing more than an earnest, patriotic writer, uninterested in political power or military affairs. Interestingly, at no point during the entire two days had either side addressed the specific charges Phan Bội Châu was being tried, or rather re-tried, for: the 1913 assassinations of Nguyễn Duy Hàn, Montgrand, and Chapuis. Having worked hard to collect and organize his documents, Bride intended to proceed methodically and chronologically. Phan Bội Châu saw no reason to hurry the process.

Day Three (September 3) and Day Four (September 4): Into the Weeds

Three days passed before Phan Bội Châu met the Criminal Commission again. Bride had ceased the interrogatory sessions temporarily while he awaited four additional cases of

³³⁸ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 20.

³³⁹ *Ibid.*

documents he had requested that finally arrived from Huế on September 2.³⁴⁰ This fresh archival collection, 1307 new files contained in 88 dossiers, had been sent by the managing director of justice attached to the Nguyễn Court in Huế. It offered Bride far greater access to information pertaining to the administration of Annam, including names, dates, and tribunal outcomes. Most of these files covered events from 1913 or earlier. This shot in the arm increased Bride's ability to challenge Phan Bội Châu's accounts of events from that period.

Beginning September 3, the prosecutor started using a new tactic: citing testimonies and depositions from other individuals in order to challenge Phan Bội Châu. For the first question of the morning, the prosecutor addressed Phan Bội Châu's August 31 claim that the 1,300 piastres he had carried with him abroad came entirely from selling fraudulent exams:

You told us that the 1,300 piastres you took with you came from fraudulent exams [sales] and lessons given to students. However, according to the declaration of a Mr. Lê-Văn-Hà, originating from Cam-Trang in the district of Duc-Tho (Hà Tĩnh province), who was the object of Judgment No. 11, dated January 11, 1911, which was rendered by the Hà Tĩnh provincial authorities and which we will read to you now, this money came from thefts and piracy. What do you have to say about Lê-Văn-Hà's statement?³⁴¹

Phan Bội Châu, obviously startled by this new line of questioning, struck back immediately, declaring the statement to be "absolutely false!" Phan Bội Châu then said he knew Lê Văn Hà by his reputation as a pirate. Finally, he announced to the prosecutor, "I am not afraid to confront him if he appears before the Criminal Commission!"³⁴² Bride, of course, had no intention of bringing any other Vietnamese to testify before the Criminal Commission. Why should he risk state and personal security by paying to have individuals, many of them criminals, brought to the Central Prison in Hanoi when he already had their testimony on file? A trial by archive was much safer, cheaper, and more efficient.

The prosecutor busied himself for the remainder of the morning clarifying Phan Bội Châu's statements. He demanded Phan Bội Châu provide accurate dates and locations and asked him many times if he knew particular individuals. Phan Bội Châu, clearly put off by the prosecutor's newfound cockiness, grew increasingly frustrated. After the prosecutor accused him of always using the same "fraudulent, concealed, crafty, [and] cunning" tricks and maneuvers, Phan Bội Châu shot back, "I don't understand the deductions you've drawn from my declarations!"³⁴³ Nevertheless, when the prosecutor demanded he provide complete details of his entire first voyage abroad, Phan Bội Châu did his best to offer a comprehensive (though not entirely accurate) account, including his now famous meeting with the Chinese reformer and journalist Liang Qichao.

In the evening session of September 3, Phan Bội Châu struck on a new strategy of his own: making other people responsible for anything the prosecutor hoped to accuse him of. Phan

³⁴⁰ Sent by the managing director of justice in Huế, the set of 88 dossiers comprised 1307 separate files. SPCE 355, *Le Résident Supérieur au Tonkin à M le Président de la Commission Criminelle, Bordereau No. 600, 2 septembre 1925.*

³⁴¹ I am unable to confirm at this time that this testimony was contained in the four cases delivered to Bride the previous day, but this seems likely given it took place during a Nguyễn provincial tribunal. SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 20.

³⁴² Ibid.

³⁴³ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 22.

Bội Châu began by claiming that the work attributed to him *Việt Nam Vong Quốc Sử* (*The History of the Loss of Vietnam*) was in reality the work of Liang Qichao. “I gave [Liang Qichao] the theme of the work, and he developed it with his own personal ideas,” Phan Bội Châu told the prosecutor. Not content to stop there, Phan Bội Châu continued, “the advice Liang Qichao claims to have given me in his preface is really exaggerated. I cannot specify which points are exaggerated, but I was left with the impression that it was really exaggerated.” Phan Bội Châu did suggest one part of the preface that was simply untrue: “Liang Qichao represents us as overwhelmed by afflictions with our faces bathed in tears, while actually we were cheerful and smiling.”³⁴⁴ The prosecutor, apparently dumbfounded by this new strategy, did not challenge Phan Bội Châu. Instead, the prosecutor then asked when Phan Bội Châu had published his biography of Tăng Bạt Hổ. This work too, Phan Bội Châu claimed, was not his, but that of Nguyễn Thượng Hiền. Yes, he had written a work called Hải Ngoại Huyết Thư (Letter From Abroad Written in Blood), but it was “very short, only two or three pages long.”³⁴⁵ Phan Bội Châu’s strategy was clear: if he did write whatever portion of the works attributed to him that the French found objectionable, then he could not be held responsible.

By this point, Phan Bội Châu had realized just how powerful the strategy of denial could be, especially for events for which the French administration had few reliable files. In short order, Phan Bội Châu denied having ever met Count Okuma Shigenobu, denied ever living in Tokyo (he “always stayed in Yokohama”), and denied ever leaving Japan from 1905 through 1909.³⁴⁶ It was a stunning series of blatant lies, but ones that Phan Bội Châu clearly felt it would be possible to pull off.

The strategy of denial hit its first snag before the day was out. After Phan Bội Châu declared having met the former resistance leader [Nguyễn] Tân Thuật in Canton for the first time in 1918, the prosecutor produced a photograph. He asked Phan Bội Châu to identify the individuals in the photograph, which included [Nguyễn] Tân Thuật and Phan Bội Châu himself, then asked Phan Bội Châu what year the photograph had been taken. According to the transcript, which contains the equivalent of stage directions, this did not go well:

Phan Bội Châu: “It was long ago, either in the year Thi (1917) or in the year Ngo (1918) in Canton. [He pauses then says]: It was perhaps before 1915. [Another pause, then he resumes]: It was at the end of 1913, or the beginning of 1914 that this photograph was taken.”³⁴⁷

The prosecutor immediately pounced, “We catch you once again in the flagrant act of lying!” To this, Phan Bội Châu lamely responded, “I did not want to lie either time...I responded without thinking precisely about the date.” Claiming that his memory was no longer good enough to answer such questions, Phan Bội Châu asked for relief from the requirement of specifying dates with precision. Perhaps realizing he was not ready to commit to senility, Phan Bội Châu quickly offered a possible aid for his “poor” memory: while abroad he had recorded his meetings in a small notebook, which he no longer had. This small notebook, he explained, “which contains notes of all my comings and goings since 1905...is in the magazine office in

³⁴⁴ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 25-26

³⁴⁵ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 26, 28.

³⁴⁶ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 27-28.

³⁴⁷ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 28.

Hangzhou.”³⁴⁸

It had been quite the day for new strategies and dramatic reversals. Bride upped the ante by introducing documented testimony and a photograph. Phan Bội Châu responded by doubling down on his initial strategy of obfuscation, turning it into a strategy of outright denial and lying. This is also the moment the transcript itself reveals itself as a highly biased text. Specifically, the “stage directions” that indicate when Phan Bội Châu paused appear in this transcript only when he is caught lying. These rare notes constitute a metatext - they demonstrate the slow yet inevitable process of a liar coming to justice.

Despite having been “caught” lying the evening prior, Phan Bội Châu continued to rely on his strategy of denial for the fourth day of interrogation. If anything, he took it even farther. Cường Đễ had gone to Tokyo, while he had remained in Yokohama. As such, Cường Đễ had been entirely responsible for the students of the Đông Du movement, while Phan Bội Châu simply worked as a freelance writer for Liang Qichao.³⁴⁹ Phan Bội Châu admitted some knowledge of Cường Đễ meetings with Japanese authorities and to having met some of the students, but essentially described himself as a loosely associated figure who a handful of students came to visit in Yokohama on occasion. After struggling to combat Phan Bội Châu’s new account of his time in Japan, Bride ended the interrogatory sessions on the morning of September 4. They would not resume again until September 16.

A Hiatus (September 4-September 15): Reassessing and Rearming

For nearly two weeks, both sides attempted to consolidate their positions. On September 7, Phan Bội Châu wrote a pair of letters in Chinese, which were duly translated. In the first letter, sent to the president of the Criminal Commission, Phan Bội Châu formally requested Bride write to the French Consul in Shanghai so that he might obtain and return Phan Bội Châu’s small notebook, which remained at the bureau of the *Military Affairs* journal.³⁵⁰ In the second letter, addressed to Hồ Học Lãm who still worked at the journal, Phan Bội Châu asked that he assist the Shanghai Consulate by finding and conveying the small notebook.³⁵¹ I was unable to find any further reference to this small notebook, though a daily planner found on Phan Bội Châu’s person at the time of his arrest suggests he did indeed keep a journal of his activities.³⁵²

Bride, meanwhile, was busy requesting yet more documents to bolster his case against Phan Bội Châu. He now focused on two categories of documents: intelligence files and Phan Bội Châu’s writings. First, to refute Phan Bội Châu’s falsified account of events from 1903 through 1907, on September 7 Bride requested of the resident superior of Tonkin documents allowing him to resolve a list of nineteen questions, all of which pertained to topics covered during the first set of interrogatory sessions.³⁵³ As a later response from Sogny reveals, Bride’s questions were handed off to the Sûreté of Annam, the Resident of Vinh, and the Nguyễn provincial authorities in Nghệ An.³⁵⁴ The same day, Bride separately requested an report

³⁴⁸ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 29.

³⁴⁹ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 30-31.

³⁵⁰ Dossier contains both original in Chinese and a translation in French. SPCE 355, *Phan Bội Châu à M. le Président de Commission Criminelle, 7 septembre 1925*.

³⁵¹ Dossier contains both original in Chinese and a translation in French. SPCE 355, *Phan Bội Châu à M. Ho-Hoc Lam, 7 septembre 1925*.

³⁵² SPCE 355, *Bordereau des pièces adressées à Monsieur le Consul Général de France à Shanghai, Effets et objets dont était en possession Phang-Boi-Chau [sic] au moment de son arrestation, 3 juillet 1925*.

³⁵³ SPCE 355, *Note Résidence Supérieure au Tonkin, 7 septembre 1925*.

³⁵⁴ Rather amusingly, the resident of Vinh confirmed that Phan Bội Châu was correct in claiming that Trần

entitled “L’agitation antifrançaise dans les Pays Annamites de 1905 à 1918,” which Louis Marty had produced for Governor General Albert Sarraut.³⁵⁵ On September 8, Bride requested copies of several works attributed to Phan Bội Châu in various reports and legal judgments.³⁵⁶ Perhaps feeling the need to justify his fresh round of document requests, Bride explained to Robin:

I have the opportunity to report how difficult the task of the Criminal Commission has been made by the attitude of the accused who, to each charge raised against him, systematically opposes a formal denial, unless evidence is provided to him. Furthermore, he pretends to ignore the names of the most exiles and important members of his party until the [Chinese] characters of the names are put before his eyes. Often, he even quibbles with Annamese pronunciations of surnames and only recognizes them when given the Chinese translation.

Concerning his works, [the accused] claims that they were only a means of earning a living. He claims to have had no thought of putting revolutionary propaganda into them and he refuses to admit ever having called for murders, banditry, or revolts. It cannot escape you what importance I attach to being able to present him with the aforementioned works. He will deny their existence if they do not appear in the file, and I will be very grateful to you for agreeing to order the research been done so that they can be sent to me.³⁵⁷

Bride’s plaintive request to Robin is triply revealing. First, it was not enough to know Phan Bội Châu was lying; Bride needed him to admit to facts. This demonstrates the seriousness with which Bride and the Criminal Commission approached the administration of justice. Second, Bride was aware of Robin’s impatience and no doubt understood that his superior needed the trial completed quickly, just as much as he needed it completed lawfully. Third, Phan Bội Châu’s strategies of obfuscation and denial were indeed highly successful at delaying the trial, thus forcing the Criminal Commission’s dual imperatives of justice and efficiency into mutual competition.

For a week, surprisingly little happened. Robin did not respond to Bride’s request, Bride neglected to restart the interrogation sessions, and Phan Bội Châu sat in his cell. Outside the Central Prison, however, the case was beginning to draw more and more attention. On August 29, the same day the trial began, the Hanoi anti-colonial magazine *L’Argus Indochinois* managed by Amédée Clementi published an article titled “Une grave question: L’arrestation de Phan Bội Châu et sa mise en jugement.”³⁵⁸ Clementi, who wrote the article himself, called into question

Đình Phát arrived in Vinh after Phan Bội Châu had left the country. SPCE 355, *Note Confidentielle No. 1073, Chef de la Sûreté en Annam (Sogny) à le Directeur des Affaires Politiques et de la Sûreté Générale au Gouvernement Général Hanoi, 1 octobre 1925.*

³⁵⁵ SPCE 355, *L’Inspecteur des Affaires politiques et administratives, Président de al Commission Criminelle, à M. le Résident Supérieur au Tonkin, No. 82, 7 septembre 1925.* For the report Bride requested, see GGI 65514, “L’agitation anti-française dans les Pays Annamites de 1905 à 1918”

³⁵⁶ SPCE 355, *L’Inspecteur des Affaires politiques et administratives, Président de al Commission Criminelle, à M. le Résident Supérieur au Tonkin, No. 86, 8 septembre 1925.* The works requested were: “Hoang Phan Tai,” “Ky Niem Luc,” and “Sung Bai Giai Nhon.”

³⁵⁷ Ibid.

³⁵⁸ SPCE 355, *L’Argus Indochinois, “Une grave question: L’arrestation de Phan Bội Châu et sa mise en*

the French colonial government's actions and warned that should Phan Bội Châu die in prison, the entirety of north-central Vietnam could see a firestorm of bloodletting. Clementi also noted that Phan Bội Châu had been illegally captured on Chinese territory, provided the fake name Tran Van Duc, under which Dupuy and Jeanbrau had registered Phan Bội Châu in the Central Prison, and lambasted the authorities for attempting to conceal Phan Bội Châu's identity. Finally, Clementi pointed out the hypocrisy of a such measures being taken by a state that professed to represent the ideals of the French Revolution. It was a damning critique that soon found a receptive native audience. On September 5, the progressive Vietnamese journalist Nguyễn Phan Long re-printed a portion of the *L'Argus Indochinois* article³⁵⁹ in *L'Écho Annamite*, a French-language daily he managed in Saigon with a circulation of 3,500. This marked the beginning of active Saigonese interest in Phan Bội Châu's fate.

Meanwhile, in Paris, the anti-colonial bimonthly magazine *le Paria* made the subject into the front-page headline for its September-October 1925 edition: "Vive Pham-Boï-Chau!"³⁶⁰ The metropole had come alive to Phan Bội Châu's arrest and fate. On September 4, the Paris-based journalist and activist Nguyễn Thế Truyền penned a letter to accompany the July 23 petition sent to him by Jeune Annam. He then carefully formatted both documents, added the Union Intercoloniale letterhead, and printed massive numbers of both. Within weeks, this aesthetically stunning document, often accompanied by copies of *le Paria*, would begin to appear by post throughout Indochina and other French colonies.³⁶¹ If the French colonial authorities wanted to bring Phan Bội Châu to justice, their time was running out.

What was holding up the trial? Bride and Robin had reached an impasse. Bride wanted to adequately prepare for his next encounter with the slippery Phan Bội Châu. This meant Bride needed more documents, and time to review those he already had. His superior René Robin, however, was furious with Bride's delays and decided to put a lid on Bride's endless document requests. On September 18, Robin categorically denied Bride's request for Louis Marty's report "L'agitation antifranaise dans les Pays Annamites de 1905 à 1918." According to Robin, the report had been prepared for security officials' eyes only and contained nothing of judicial value.³⁶² The fact that Bride was a first-class inspector of political and administrative affairs himself did not matter as he had requested the document in his capacity as an officer of the court.

jugement," 29 août 1925.

³⁵⁹ SPCE 354BIS, *Revue de la presse d'Indochine*, "'Une grave question: L'arrestation de Phan Bội Châu et sa mise en jugement.'" *L'Écho Annamite*, 5 Septembre 1925. For a description of the politics and journalist practices of *L'Écho Annamite*, see Peycam, Philippe M. *The Birth of Vietnamese Political Journalism: Saigon 1916-1930* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 92-100, 159-164.

³⁶⁰ SPCE 354BIS, *Le Paria*, Nos. 36 et 37, *Septembre-Octobre 1925*.

³⁶¹ SPCE 355 contains dozens of copies of Nguyễn Thế Truyền's letter with the Jeune Annam petition attached. An example of many indicating just how widespread Nguyễn Thế Truyền's mailing campaign was comes from the head of the Sûreté in Cambodia, who reported on October 13, "Many printed copies of Union Intercoloniale petitioning in favor of Phan Bội Châu addressed to journal *Echo du Cambodge*." SPCE 355, *Chef Sûreté à Chef Sûreté Tonkin en Communication à Chef Sûreté Saigon et Dirsurgé Hanoi*, 13 octobre 1925. See also SPCE 354BIS, *M. le Directeur des Affaires Politiques et de la Sûreté Générale du Gouvernement Général, Suite à mes notes No.s 655-SB, 458-S, 474-S, et 478-S des 20, 28 octobre et 8 novembre 1924, 24 octobre 1925*. See also SPCE 354BIS, *Chef Sûreté Annam à M. le Chef du S.C.R. et S.G. Hanoi, Suite à votre note confidentielle 755-SB du 9 courant, 14 octobre 1925*. See also SPCE 354BIS, *Chef Sûreté Tonkin à Chefs Sûreté Pnom Pneh, Saigon etc., No. 6437, 12h10, 12 octobre 1925*.

³⁶² SPCE 355, *Le Gougal p.i., Commandeur de la Légion d'Honneur à M. le Resident Supérieur p.i. au Tonkin*, 18 septembre 1925.

Concerned that Bride was spending more time requesting documents than using them, Robin used the only lever available to him: exercising administrative privilege to force Bride back to work.

The Trial, Phase 2: (September 16-September 26)

When Phan Bội Châu and the Criminal Commission met again on September 16, both sides immediately reprised their strategies. The prosecutor began by challenging Phan Bội Châu on his date of departure from Nghệ An by citing his wife Nguyen Thi Thuyet's testimony from the Tribunal of Vinh held in February 1910.³⁶³ Phan Bội Châu admitted he had committed an error regarding the date of departure. Not long passed, however, before Phan Bội Châu claimed that Liang Qichao had written nine-tenths of *Việt Nam vong quốc sử*.³⁶⁴ Bride questioned Phan Bội Châu on his employment history and how much money he had received from Cường ĐỂ. Phan Bội Châu provided perfunctory answers, but generally remained noncommittal until offering the utterly implausible claim that he had worked for a journal in Shanghai from 1909 uninterrupted through to 1913. "It is exactly correct," Phan Bội Châu affirmed, "that I was nothing more than a journalist and that my only source of income came from my work as a journalist."³⁶⁵

Unable to make headway concerning Phan Bội Châu's source of funds, in the evening the prosecutor questioned him about reputation he had acquired as a fiery writer. To this, Phan Bội Châu suggested that Liang Qichao had manufactured a reputation for by publishing *Việt Nam vong quốc sử* in his name. After this, readers may simply have assumed writings were by him, but that did not mean he was the true author. When the prosecutor returned to the Đông Du movement, Phan Bội Châu again made every effort to portray himself as a distant, barely connected literary figure. He lived in Yokohama, while the Đông Văn Thư Viện school was located in Tokyo. He visited it, Phan Bội Châu claimed, just two times during his five years in Japan.³⁶⁶

On September 17, Phan Bội Châu softened his position slightly. He was now willing to admit to knowing some of the Đông Du students, especially those from Annam. He would admit to knowing specific names, but entirely reject others. The same applied to pseudonyms attributed to him. The flabbergasted prosecutor finally addressed Phan Bội Châu's system of responses:

How is it that after nearly twenty years away you can give us precise names of the students from Annam and Tonkin, who you saw only five or six times during your stay in Japan, and [also] those of Cochinchinese students who [you claim] never came to see you? Your memory on these points is very faithful, while on the others it is uncertain and your answers almost always contradictory?³⁶⁷

Yet Phan Bội Châu had an answer for this: he only remembered the names of students for which he had seen the Chinese characters. The prosecutor, feeling lucky, pointed out that the Cochinchinese did not know Chinese and thus could not have written their names. Phan Bội Châu would not be outdone: "When the students from Annam came to visit me, they gave me the

³⁶³ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 33.

³⁶⁴ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 35.

³⁶⁵ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 38.

³⁶⁶ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 41.

³⁶⁷ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 44.

names of Cochinchinese and Tonkinese for whom they knew the characters.”³⁶⁸

The prosecutor decided to switch back to the technique that had garnered the best results so far: citing testimony. In quick succession, the prosecutor cited testimony from Nguyễn Cẩm Giang, Am-Voa, and Ngô Văn Chanh. This time, Phan Bội Châu was ready. To each man’s testimony Phan Bội Châu now replied “I do not know this person...that is a lie.”³⁶⁹ This was, essentially, an way of adapting of his strategy of denial to apply to the prosecutor’s strategy of citing testimony. For the entire evening session, the prosecutor tried in vain to rattle Phan Bội Châu using testimonies. However, Phan Bội Châu now seemed harder to hit than before. To ensure the consistency of his story about being a simple journalist, Phan Bội Châu flatly denied the testimonies of anyone and everyone who stated otherwise. Even a photograph of him and Cường Đễ together failed to constitute evidence of their collaboration. “That proves nothing at all,” stated Phan Bội Châu, “when fellow countrymen meet one another abroad, they take a photograph!” By the end of the day on September 17, it began to look as though Bride’s massive archive of documents amounted to little more than a heap of paper.

Alternative Realities: Proofs and Denials

The back-and-forth game of cat and mouse continued for weeks on end as both sides settled into their routines. When the prosecutor caught Phan Bội Châu inadvertently admitting to having left Japan for Shanghai,³⁷⁰ Phan Bội Châu nonchalantly dodged: “I thought you meant long trips! My trip to Shanghai was only for a couple of days.”³⁷¹ Flustered, the prosecutor snapped, “Our questions are very precise and contain no ambiguity whatsoever...It is useless to continue this comedy!”³⁷² A similar exchange took place when the prosecutor attempted to work out how many times and in which years Phan Bội Châu had met Phan Châu Trinh.³⁷³ Frequently, the exasperated prosecutor incredulously blurted out something on the order of, “How can you, before such categorical affirmations, always continue to deny [the truth]?”³⁷⁴ Deny he could and

³⁶⁸ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 45.

³⁶⁹ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 46-47.

³⁷⁰ To emphasize the prosecutor’s achievement, the transcript includes stage directions: “(thinking for a long time, looking embarrassed, then declaring).” SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 45.

³⁷¹ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 46.

³⁷² Ibid.

³⁷³ Example: Prosecutor: “Which letter did your interview with PCT cover?”

Phan Bội Châu: “It was concerning my brochure *Lamentations for Formosa Under Japanese Rule* and not my letter “Advice for Young Men to go Study Abroad.”

Prosecutor: “It is you who are now creating the confusion! Our question concerned the letter written by you from Japan to your compatriots to engage them to go to school. You replied that you had an interview in Hue with Phan Chau Trinh regarding this letter. As you have always claimed that you did not return to Annam subsequent to your departure for Japan, you locate this interview in 1903 and you now say that it was on your pamphlet *Lamentations for Formosa*. You are looking for an escape. We understood you very well and your answer concerned only the teaching, but you immediately realized that it was possible to deduce from this interview with Phan Chau Trinh in Hue regarding a letter you wrote in Japan and handed over to Tang Bat Ho when he returned from Japan to Annam in the middle of 1905, that you returned to Annam and especially to Hue in the course of 1905 after having left at the beginning of the first month of 1905.

Phan Bội Châu: “I maintain that this was my work *Lamentation for Formosa* that occasioned my interview with PCT. The confusion that has arisen is due to the fact that I did not sufficiently elaborate on this book that I wanted to discuss in my previous answer.” SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 79.

³⁷⁴ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 81. Later on, the prosecutor even attempted to list Phan Bội Châu’s standard reactions: “You have been kept informed, while abroad, of the declarations and confessions of individuals arrested and brought before the courts, if not completely, at least sufficiently to prepare your defense. And when the questions embarrass you, you answer: ‘That’s false.’ ‘This information is pure

deny he did. When the prosecutor pointedly noted that all of the statements Phan Bội Châu had denied corresponded with one another, despite having been made before different courts on different dates, Phan Bội Châu flippantly retorted, “These are all hearsay. One could well say that I was the Emperor of China.”³⁷⁵

Phan Bội Châu was quick to point out any inconsistencies or errors in the testimonies cited by the prosecutor. After the prosecutor cited one Dang Trung Ngo’s 1915 declaration before a judge in Phú Thọ that a person named “Dan” had reported receiving orders from “[Li] Yuanhong and Phan Bội Châu,” Phan Bội Châu immediately fired back, “This declaration is ridiculous! Li Yuanhong is a great leader of the Chinese Republic. It would be very difficult for me to approach him. This statement proves that the people playing games with me simply built stories upon words they heard from here.”³⁷⁶ Having put with the prosecutor repeatedly accusing him of contradictions, Phan Bội Châu began to do the same back. When the prosecutor cited Le Duc Nhuan (aka Le Ba Chiet)’s statement that Hoàng Trọng Mậu had served as Phan Bội Châu’s secretary, Phan Bội Châu gleefully pointed out, “Previously someone had said that I had Phan Bá Ngọc as a secretary. Now they just said it was Hoàng Trọng Mậu. This is a contradiction.”³⁷⁷ The prosecutor’s attempt to explain that a person could have more than one secretary only underscored the danger of the trial becoming a farce.

Because Bride’s case was largely dependent upon testimonies, the prosecutor introduced several names repeatedly over the course of the trial. If only Phan Bội Châu’s relentless denials could be somehow dealt with, the testimony of these individuals would be damning. One individual the prosecutor cited frequently was the Âm Võ (aka Lê Võ), a native of Hà Tĩnh born 1871 who played a major role in the domestic operations of Phan Bội Châu’s Modernization Association. Âm Võ was arrested January 16, 1912 in Hanoi and subsequently revealed a considerable amount of information about the organization’s infrastructure and personnel.³⁷⁸ The prosecutor used Âm Võ’s testimony to assert, for example, that Phan Bội Châu and Cường Để had collaborated to construct an elaborate system of correspondence and subscription-based funding for the Đông Du movement.³⁷⁹ The prosecutor also drew on Âm Võ’s words as evidence for Phan Bội Châu’s secretive dealings with the Chinese leaders Sun Yatsen and Zhang Binglin.³⁸⁰ Âm Võ’s statements often elicited furious denunciations from Phan Bội Châu, who

invention.’ ‘It’s a pure lie.’ ‘It’s a statement to harm me.’ ‘I do not know where such has taken such inventions.’ ‘This information is incorrect.’ ‘It’s revenge.’ ‘CD said that to my accuser.’ ‘This deposition is meant to cover for CD.’ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 88. Still later, the prosecutor argued, “We cannot catch you on the important points because you only offer denials, but on the whole your lies prove that you do not tell the truth.” SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 234.

³⁷⁵ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 84.

³⁷⁶ Li Yuanhong (黎元洪) served as vice-president of the Republic of China 1912-1916 and as president of the Republic of China 1916-1917 and 1922-1923. Phan Bội Châu may have received some support from Li Yuanhong, but there is nothing to support Dan’s claim that Li Yuanhong was directing rebel activities inside French Indochina.

SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 85.

³⁷⁷ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 84.

³⁷⁸ Despite how forthcoming he had been, Âm Võ was sentenced to life imprisonment and served 15 years on Pulo Condore island. Morlat, Patrice, *Les Affaires politiques de l’Indochine (1895-1923): Les grands commis: du savoir au pouvoir* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1995), 135.

³⁷⁹ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 54.

³⁸⁰ Example: “This is what Am Vo said on the 11th of the 3rd month of the 6th year of Duy Tan during his interrogation (Piece 31, Dossier 1925 B): ‘During my stay in HK, I met PBC at commercial house Ich Sanh. [Phan

called them “completely false,” “a pure invention on his part,” and “something he made up in his own defense.”³⁸¹

Other figures whose testimonies appear frequently throughout the trial transcript include Nguyễn Bá Trác, Nguyễn Cẩm Giang, and Phan Bá Ngọc. Nguyễn Bá Trác was arrested in 1914³⁸² and gave testimony in November of that year. He went on to become a collaborator of the French regime known for his work Louis Marty and Phạm Quỳnh on the conservative journal *Nam Phong*.³⁸³ Nguyễn Cẩm Giang (aka Nguyễn Hải Thần, aka Võ Hải Thu) made statements to the French resident of Hà Đông in September 1908, but apparently avoided detention and who went on to become a key figure in the nationalist movement.³⁸⁴ Phan Bá Ngọc, the son of Phan Đình Phùng and Phan Bội Châu’s close confidante during much of his time in Japan and China, offered information to the Sûreté of Tonkin after his arrest in April 1918.³⁸⁵ Phan Bá Ngọc was murdered in 1922 by Lê Hồng Sơn, at the order of Cường Đê.³⁸⁶ Several Cochinchinese partisans affiliated with Cường Đê make numerous appearances, including Bùi Chí Nhuận (interrogated May 1913)³⁸⁷ and Đặng Bình Thành (interrogated December 1915).³⁸⁸

As Phan Bội Châu continued to deny most of the testimonies produced by the prosecutor, he nevertheless found it necessary to elaborate an alternative explanation for the preponderance of evidence. This meant laying the blame at the feet of Cường Đê, who Phan Bội Châu increasingly began to depict as a strategic mastermind. During the evening session of September 18, Phan Bội Châu claimed “Since the majority of the money that Cường Đê received in Japan came from Cochinchina, he had to say to the students from that country who were returning

Bội Châu] told me that he had just made a trip with Sun Yatsen from the Siamese capital to Hong Kong on an American boat.’ ‘Do you know,’ Sun Yatsen told him while passing by Haiphong and pointing at it, ‘that this place will later become the subject of the argument?’ ‘Would you also [consider taking],’ [Phan Bội Châu] asked Sun Yatsen, laughing, ‘Tonkin, where there are many fertile plains and a lot of resources?’ ‘No,’ replied SYS, ‘I do not want the land interests, rather [I want] the maritime interests. Haiphong is a port of the French Protectorate but it is the throat of the provinces of Guangdong and Guangxi. To have troops ready to embark later on, it will be necessary to station them in Haiphong and Guangzhouwan. A base will be established in Guangzhouwan, the warships will be stationed in Haiphong, then even the European torpedoers will not be able to pass. Haiphong is a place that will be needed to form up armies.’ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 86-87. This is the only reference I have found to such a journey and conversation. This may have been an invention of Phan Bội Châu, or of Âm Võ himself. For additional testimony from Âm Võ regarding Phan Bội Châu’s interactions with Sun Yatsen and Zhang Binglin, see *Ibid*, 55-56.

³⁸¹ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 55, 77. Âm Võ’s testimony suggests he played a much larger role in the Modernization Association than Phan Bội Châu was later willing to admit in his Autobiography. Âm Võ’s name appears only twice in *NB*, though three times in *NTT*. Phan Bội Châu, *Overtured Chariot*, 71, 78. Phan Bội Châu, “Prison Notes,” *Reflections from Captivity*, 16, 43, 48.

³⁸² In 1917, Nguyễn Bá Trác worked with Louis Marty and Phạm Quỳnh on the conservative journal *Nam Phong*.

³⁸³ Le Jariel, Yves, *Phan Bội Châu*, 188-189. After Phan Bội Châu was granted amnesty and the ability to live in Huế, he was initially placed in Nguyễn Bá Trác’s residence. Disgusted by Nguyễn Bá Trác and unhappy with these living arrangements, Phan Bội Châu and supporters moved quickly to buy a separate property to move into in 1926.

³⁸⁴ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 57, 60.

³⁸⁵ On September 26, for example, the prosecutor cited a statement made by Phan Bá Ngọc over 1000 words long covering his activities in Japan during the Đông Du movement. SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 91-93.

³⁸⁶ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 51, 57. See Phan Bội Châu, *Overtured Chariot*, 251. Phan Bội Châu uses an alternative name for Lê Hồng Sơn: Lê Tân Anh.

³⁸⁷ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 48, 78.

³⁸⁸ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 49.

home that, ‘If ever you are asked about what I do in Japan, you put it all on Phan Bội Châu.’ Voila! This is the origin of all the accusations against me.’³⁸⁹ Phan Bội Châu further alleged that students had left Indochina for Japan with the intention of joining Cường Để to obtain positions in the government the prince would create when he became emperor.³⁹⁰ Phan Bội Châu also made Cường Để responsible for claiming Phan Bội Châu as his secretary, for using Phan Bội Châu’s name to publish incendiary literature, and for orchestrating the myriad testimonies which he was now being called upon to account for.³⁹¹ As the interrogations proceeded, it became clear that Phan Bội Châu was either the target of an absolutely colossal conspiracy organized by Cường Để, or simply lying through his teeth.

It is not hard to see why Phan Bội Châu wanted to deny the mounting testimonies. The story woven by the prosecutor out of many threads of testimony was decidedly unfavorable to Phan Bội Châu. The prosecutor cited testimony from former students who claimed Phan Bội Châu had taken from them their parents’ money, supposedly to pay for living and educational expenses, but later refused to give it back when the director of the Đông Văn school expelled them for failure to pay tuition.³⁹² After taking the students’ money, the prosecutor affirmed, “All declare that you [Phan Bội Châu] then completely lost interest in them.”³⁹³ Many former students testified they either never met Cường Để, or encountered him only once or twice.³⁹⁴ In contrast, many former students emphasized the role of Võ Mẫn Kiến, who facilitated the movement of students, money, and pamphlets through a boarding house he managed in Hong Kong.³⁹⁵ Cochinchinese also pointed to Gilbert Chieu’s efforts to send them abroad.³⁹⁶ The

³⁸⁹ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 62.

³⁹⁰ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 66.

³⁹¹ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 85.

³⁹² Examples include the testimonies of Phạm Dat Tam, Trần Tiên Dong, Nguyễn Văn Nghiê, Nguyễn Văn Tai, and Nguyễn Thanh Liêm. The transcript indicates all of these testimonies were found in the Gilbert Chieu dossier (Nos. 1288-1296). SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 64-65. After numerous testimonies of this sort, the prosecutor recapped: “From this statement and those preceding, we know that young people who wanted to go to Japan stole their parent’s money, but they were then driven away from school in Tokyo because their tuition was not paid. Pham Van Yen (File 1283), Luu Quan Bac (File 1282), Nguyen Van De (File 1281), Truong Van Chi (File 1281) made identical declarations before the Investigating Judge of Mytho (File MPc / Gilbert Chieu). They were taken to the Dong Van School in Tokyo. PBC took their money from them: 250 piastres for Pham Van Yen, 70 piastres for [Luu Quan] Bac, 150 piastres for [Nguyen Van] De, which his parents gave him, 200 piastres for [Truong Van] Chi, which he stole from his father.” Ibid, 71.

³⁹³ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 71.

³⁹⁴ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 61-62, 72.

³⁹⁵ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 64. Phan Bội Châu alludes to Võ Mẫn Kiến’s role as a “local agent” in NB, but provides no indication of just how significant he was for the Modernization Association and Đông Du movement. Phan Bội Châu, *Overtured Chariot*, 116.

³⁹⁶ Example: “In his interrogation of October 29, 1908 (Cote 1314, File MPc / Gilbert Chieu) one named Chau Van Qui declared the following concerning the house in HK where the emigres gathered. ‘Arriving at HK, I handed this letter to a Tonkinese by the name Vo Man Kien. This Tonkinese runs a kind of halfway house in HK (Kowloon) under the sign of the nine dragons. It is to the home of this Tonkinese fellow that the Annamites come to change their clothes and hairstyles for their journey to Japan. To get there you have to show a letter signed by Chieu, and when you go to Japan the proprietor also stamps your letter. If I had not done so, they’d have kicked me out. Moreover, Vo Man Kien received formal orders from Chieu. He must confiscate money and the letters of those who would turn back without going to Japan. It would indeed be too easy to ask Chieu for money for the restoration of the throne of Annam and to take advantage of it to simply pay for a leisure trip to HK with funds for the education and recruitment of Annamites of good will. It was to avoid this that Chieu had this measure taken. SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 68.

leader of the Đông Du movement, the students all agreed, was Phan Bội Châu.

Not only had Phan Bội Châu been responsible for the Đông Du movement, the prosecutor alleged, he had been a poor leader in every sense. On September 21, the prosecutor addressed Phan Bội Châu's failure to act morally responsible as a leader:

You would receive the money and leave the students who had been attracted by the beautiful promises made to them before they left. All those who came to Japan in 1908 are unanimous in saying that they knew only you who received them, took them to school, and took and kept their money. At that time you were 40 to 42 years old. These young people were on average 20 years of age, one of them, Nguyen Van Truyen, was even a child. They were abandoned on the Tokyo pavement. It even happened that some who immediately expressed the intention of returning to Indochina were prevented from doing so by all sorts of means, including threats.³⁹⁷

The prosecutor went on to cite testimony from students claiming to have been threatened with death should they attempt to leave Japan or extorted for more money before being allowed to return.³⁹⁸ Phan Bội Châu responded by alleging that all of the former students' testimonies had been coerced, prepared, or inspired by Cường Để.³⁹⁹

When it came to Phan Bội Châu's ulterior motives for pursuing the Đông Du movement, the prosecutor's picture of Phan Bội Châu darkened even more. The educational goals of the Đông Du movement were nothing but a smokescreen, the prosecutor alleged. Phan Bội Châu's real intention was to train up an army of Vietnamese youth, indoctrinate them with violent, racist, and revolutionary rhetoric, and send them back to massacre all of the French in Indochina.⁴⁰⁰ To

³⁹⁷ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 71.

³⁹⁸ Example 1: "Ngo Van Phai, in his declaration of October 13, 1908 (File 1521.18 of the Dossier MPC / Gilbert Chieu), a statement which you will be able to read and which we will quote you entirely, describes his travels in Japan. We extract only the following passage : 'When we arrived, we were asked to hand over all the money we had in our possession before we started our studies, to prove that we were planning to stay in. I did not want to consent to being treated that way and I refused to hand over my money. Neither Huynh nor But received theirs back. Two or three days later I saw the young royal prince of Annam who told me that he intended to replace the child who had been placed on Annam's throne and was going to reconquer Indochina. Frightened, I consulted with Huynh and But leaving as soon as possible. When they learned about it, they threatened to assassinate us. Huynh said we were too old to still be students. Huynh and But left with young Tan, but without me. I was forced to give them a hundred piastres to let me go. The prince gave me his photograph with a dedication. This photograph is still at home in a hiding place. I could give it to you.'"

Example 2: "To Van Huynh, November 8, 1908 (File 1114, MPC / Gilbert Chieu) declared, '12 days later, having shown the intention to go back to Saigon, my comrades did everything they could to prevent me and to keep me in Tokyo. They even went so far as to lock my luggage in a room in the Hotel we lived in and which served as a store. They charged two of them with watching and following me wherever I went, etc. On the 14th day after my arrival in Tokyo, I succeeded in taking the first train to Kobe.'

The same To Van Huynh, in the same declaration: "At that time I was convinced that I had been dealing in Japan with members of a secret society and I was convinced that one day or another, we would would try to kill me."

SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 71-72.

³⁹⁹ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 72.

⁴⁰⁰ Example 1: "The truth is that to succeed in your projects you needed a name sufficiently well-known in Indochina to entice both the Annamese of North and South. You alone would have been unable to draw in the money you needed. That's why you put forth Cuong De, who, in your mind, would only be an instrument in your hands to attract young people to you. The [ostensible] goal was to have study them in Japan. However, the secret design, unveiled only to the most diehard, was to inspire in them a hatred of the Protectorate and the Royal

support this allegation, the prosecutor cited the testimony of Bùi Chí Nhuận, Lê Văn Hà, and Âm Võ, all of whom claimed to have heard Phan Bội Châu explain this secret plan firsthand.⁴⁰¹ Phan Bội Châu denied having taken part in such conversations.

The prosecutor next turned to the Modernization Association's activities inside Indochina to further substantiate his representation of Phan Bội Châu as an "unscrupulous megalomaniac."⁴⁰² As he had done for the Đông Du movement, the prosecutor now sought to prove Phan Bội Châu was the real leader of the Modernization Association. He cited the testimonies of individuals who claimed Phan Bội Châu, and not Cường ĐỂ or any other person, had called the shots.⁴⁰³ The prosecutor used testimony to connect Phan Bội Châu to both the Đông Kinh Nghĩa Thục (Dong Kinh Free School) in Hanoi and Gilbert Chieu's Hotel Minh Tân in Mỹ Tho.⁴⁰⁴ To bolster his revolutionary movement, the prosecutor argued, Phan Bội Châu had also connected with existing secret societies, or else ordered that ones be created.⁴⁰⁵ Drawing on testimonies obtained in the aftermath of the 1908 tax protests, the prosecutor alleged Phan Bội Châu had sought to obtain funding from Tonkin, Annam, and Cochinchina by any means necessary. This included encouraging his subordinates and followers to create subscription lists,

Government in Hue by promising them a privileged appointment in the future government once the French were expelled from Indochina and a new dynasty established on the throne of Annam."

Example 2: "We have plenty of evidence that the instruction of the emigres focused in particular on their military training. We have already given you a lot of evidence. We will add the statements of Nguyen Van Chung of November 16, 1908 before the Investigating Judge of Mytho (Piece 1388, File MPc / Gilbert Chieu). We will quote that of Duong Minh Thanh of November 17, 1908 before the Investigating Judge of Mytho (Piece 1391, File MPc / Gilbert Chieu). [Duong Minh Thanh] declares that Bui Chi Nhuan said to him: "This is the instruction that we will give to the young Annamese in Japan. Sao Nam Tu is there. He is a very capable man and, thanks to him, when the Annamites have been sufficiently educated, they will come back to Cochinchina to drive out the French." On the occasion of this interrogation, the Judge in Mytho learned that the word 'work' is a conventional term which means "studies of military art."

SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 66, 77.

⁴⁰¹ Example: "Am-Vo declared in March 1912 to the Resident of Hatinh (Piece 26, File B 1925) that the revolutionary program involved the work of the present, the future and the 'given moment.' The task for the present is to send young people to Japan to learn the military arts, the diplomatic arts, and administration, as well as 'all the necessary trades, and finally the language of England.' The work of the future will be the success of the efforts that stimulate the present labor. The work of the 'given moment' is the publication of books and their distribution in Annam. Thanks to the Chinese newspapers, this is the reasoning most clearly visible to readers. It is the alliance with Japan and friendly relations with big and powerful nations. It is the formal notice of the regency council to ask the Protectorate for the independence of the country. This is why, adds Am-Vo, that PBC wrote to his classmates, Dang Thai Than, Pham Tinh (aka Cu Tinh), Tu Ngon, Tu Kien, and others, inviting them to form societies/companies."

SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 77. See also Ibid, 58-59.

⁴⁰² SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 76.

⁴⁰³ Example 1: "Nguyen Quang Hao, on July 5, 1913 in front of the CC of 1913, Cote 345, File F, said: "The leader of the revolutionary party is indisputably PBC, who has the upper hand over everything. It is he who gives instructions to the different groups in China. Then comes CD, etc."

Example 2: "You were the real acting leader, with lieutenants to execute your orders. We see this from the declaration of Nguyen Khac Can made on May 17, 1913 before the CC (Cote 29, Dossier D). He said: "The one who pushed me to act is PBC, who is the leader. Having arrived in Canton, I was not in direct contact with PBC, but rather with one of his lieutenants whom I do not know."

SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 81-82.

⁴⁰⁴ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 100-102 (DKNT), 109-111 (Gilbert Chieu).

⁴⁰⁵ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 99.

commit theft, and even engage in outright banditry and extortion.⁴⁰⁶ To maintain secrecy, the prosecutor explained, Phan Bội Châu enforced a code of silence for all members of the Modernization Association.⁴⁰⁷ Anyone who violated the code of silence or acted without having first received orders from Phan Bội Châu, would be marked for death.⁴⁰⁸ The secret societies, under Phan Bội Châu's orders, had disseminated propaganda, created fake businesses to obtain money, and murdered anyone who resisted or was suspected of spying on the movement.⁴⁰⁹ As usual, Phan Bội Châu denied all of this.

Though Phan Bội Châu's strategy of denying everything was clearly frustrating Bride to no end, by the end of September 1925 the Criminal Commission was finally beginning to find ways to rattle the old patriot. First, by citing so many testimonies from former friends and compatriots, the prosecutor revealed to Phan Bội Châu the information-gathering capacity of the French colonial security state. For every denial, there was yet another testimony. Second, Phan Bội Châu was very likely unnerved by just how much information his former students, companions, and operatives had given up to the French. The most alarming revelation in this regard were the long, detailed statements made by Phan Bá Ngọc in 1918, which demonstrated to Phan Bội Châu that his former protege had indeed been working closely with the Sûreté, as Cường Để had suspected. Though it was taking far longer than Bride expected, the sheer quantity of documents would eventually begin to weigh on Phan Bội Châu's mind.

Third, in addition to the quantity of documents, Bride could not have helped but notice that Phan Bội Châu's reactions depended significantly on the quality of information. Certain types of information provoked sincere responses from Phan Bội Châu. In particular, Phan Bội Châu reacted with horrified repulsion to testimony directly tying him to violence. Phan Bội Châu's first reaction of this kind came in response to the prosecutor citing the testimony of Nguyễn Khắc Cần, one of the bombers responsible for the 1913 attacks for which Phan Bội Châu

⁴⁰⁶ Example: "In his interrogation of January 18, 1910 conducted by the Resident of Hatinh (Piece No. 68, File H 1925) the one named Que said that Cu Luong declares that while they were in Japan, CD and PBC often sent letters to the rebels (of Hatinh). To this day, all the inhabitants of Nghe An send Tu Ngon the money which he then hands over to Duoc No in HK, who hands it over to PBC. Just recently, PBC sent a letter complaining that so far he has not received much of the money sent and he announces that many of the students who have finished their studies can not go home [due to] lack of funds. Que adds that PBC demanded 40,000 piastres to meet the expenses of weapons manufacture and that he heard from Am-Vo and Long Son that the moneybags in Nghe An have already offered a lot of money and that it is necessary to open subscriptions in Hatinh." SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 75.

⁴⁰⁷ Example: "This code of silence must have been followed by the party members. When Nguyen Dao Nam and Tuong Long met in the Hanoi prison in June 1913 to be heard by the Criminal Commission, the latter [Tuong Long] made a gesture to his comrade and indicated to him that he had just written in the gravel with his foot. Nam approached and saw the characters that in *quoc ngu* translate as 'nhat tu bat ngon' [一字不言], meaning 'say absolutely nothing, or we die' (letter of June 23, 1913 Nguyen Dao Nam - Piece No. 81 and 82, File J 1913)." SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 77.

⁴⁰⁸ Example: "Nguyen Van Thong (aka Nguyen Van Dao) in his interrogation of November 19, 1915 before the Investigating Judge of Phu Tho (Exhibit 78 of the Phutho file) declared "Following the orders of Phan Bội Châu, we formed a secret society called 'Dong Bao' (Blood Brothers) [with the goal of] helping each other to reconquer the Annam empire and drive out the French. Anyone who independently attacks a place, a [district], or a province before being ordered to do so by Phan Bội Châu will be punished with death by the spirits of Heaven and Earth. Anyone who does not obey the chiefs and betray his oaths will also be punished with the same penalty and will not have posterity. We will be supported by China and we will receive guns when necessary." SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 98.

⁴⁰⁹ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 99-100.

was now on trial. Phan Bội Châu emphatically denied knowing the name Nguyễn Khắc Cần and stated:

I have told you many times that I never wanted to revolt against the Protectorate government. If that had been my intention, I would have acted frankly without resorting to these criminal means employed in part by this individual...I would say that [Nguyễn Khắc Cần] obeys a group of evildoers who can be found inside the country, who want to stir up trouble for personal reasons...By criminal means, I mean the savage methods unworthy of a civilized man, which result in striking blindly. To these means I oppose those of sound reason, which consist of a combination of efforts both on the Annamese side and on the French side for the development of the country.⁴¹⁰

Phan Bội Châu's distinction between savage and civilized methods was both unprompted and highly revealing. This statement amounted to a categorical rejection of the revolutionary terrorism Phan Bội Châu had enthusiastically endorsed in his preface to *Việt Nam nghĩa liệt sử* (*A History of Vietnam's Martyrs*), in favor of the Franco-Vietnamese collaborationism he had proposed in *Pháp Việt đề huề* (*A Proposal for a Franco-Vietnamese Collaboration Policy*).⁴¹¹ Not only did Phan Bội Châu now claim to disapprove of "savage methods," he even appeared willing to support a harsh government response. When the prosecutor described murders carried out by the "Dong Bao" secret society in Binh Dinh, Phan Bội Châu protested, "If it was up to me, all the members of these societies would be put to death."⁴¹² For Bride, Phan Bội Châu's responses indicated that the revolutionary leader was happy to inspire or even order others to undertake violence acts, but could not stomach the results when forced to confront them.⁴¹³

Finally, Bride had one more trick up his sleeve. On September 26, he revealed for the first time a new type of document: one of Phan Bội Châu's own handwritten letters. Rejecting the testimony of absent individuals was one thing, denying one's own writing would require another level of chutzpah entirely. According to the prosecutor, the letter in question, dated November 1909, was written to Đội Quyên (battalion commander Quyên), and discussed correspondence and money, Japan's military strength, and "public vengeance."⁴¹⁴ The letter was

⁴¹⁰ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 82.

⁴¹¹ *Việt Nam nghĩa liệt sử* included hagiographic accounts of two of the 1913 assassins Nguyễn Khắc Cần and Nguyễn Thế Trung (aka Nguyễn Duy Hàn). See Chapter Two. *Việt Nam nghĩa liệt sử* and *Pháp Việt đề huề chính kiến thư* are available in *Phan Bội Châu Toàn Tập*, Vol. 5 (Hue: Nhà xuất bản Thuận Hóa, 1999), 11-196, 197-206.

⁴¹² SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 100. Phan Bội Châu: "I absolutely deny connection to acts of murder and pillage." SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 256.

⁴¹³ In subsequent sessions, the prosecutor continued to provide evidence of terrible violence committed by some 200 secret society members based in Binh Dinh and Quang Ngai, describing the burning of houses and pagodas, forced hair-cutting, and murders, all with the intention of causing fear to encourage donations to the revolutionary cause. SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 102-108, 254 The prosecutor: "The Commission has determined it necessary for you to hear these facts and includes them in your interrogatory because it is necessary for you to know why the native tribunals sentenced you." SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 258.

⁴¹⁴ Example: "From all these statements, whatever you may say, it turns out that you were actively engaged in creating and organizing the rebel party and that you were directing it with passion. Letters from you have been seized, here is one. We read: '25th day of the 10th month of the year Ky Dau (November 1909) (Piece 67, File H 1925): "Dear friend Mr. Dai Dan [aka Đội Quyên] and my dear collaborators. For more than two months, I left the East to arrange a very important affair. It is with great joy that I have received letters from inside the country

signed with a personal stamp of the characters “Sào Nam Châu (巢南珠),” a combination of “Phan Bội Châu (潘佩珠)” and his frequent pseudonym “Sào Nam Tử (巢南子).” Phan Bội Châu nevertheless denied the letter was his, claiming that he never had a personal stamp and that someone else must have made a personal stamp with his name.⁴¹⁵ If Bride was going to force Phan Bội Châu to admit to organizing a revolution, he still needed to provide better evidence.

Trial Phase 3: October 2-October 19

The Criminal Commission paused again briefly between the sessions on September 26 and October 2. If Bride wanted more time, he was due for disappointment. Security officials privy to intelligence and press reports could see that the Criminal Commission was racing against a clock. On September 29, The Saigonese journalist Nguyễn Phan Long began to address Phan Bội Châu’s captivity in his own editorials published in *L’Écho Annamite*.⁴¹⁶ On October 8, Nguyễn Phan Long followed this up by publishing the Jeune Annam petition which Nguyễn Thế Truyền had mailed to the offices of periodicals throughout French Indochina, including *L’Écho Annamite*.⁴¹⁷ On October 12, correspondence began pouring in from all five Indochinese Sûreté offices indicating that Nguyễn Thế Truyền’s letter had arrived at multiple locations.⁴¹⁸ The Jeune Annam petition had come full circle from Indochina to the metropole and now back again.⁴¹⁹

Nguyễn Thế Truyền himself, meanwhile, had been very busy in Paris organizing a meeting of the l’Union Intercoloniale to discuss the situation in Indochina and China. This meeting, which took place on October 9, brought together 200 anti-colonial activists, including 150 Vietnamese, along with French, Chinese, and North Africans. Nguyễn Thế Truyền had even invited Governor-General elect Varenne, who did not respond. Phan Bội Châu was named honorary president of the Union, which voted to send two telegrams. One went to the Chinese Nationalist Party in Canton addressing Phan Bội Châu’s arrest on sovereign Chinese territory and calling on the Chinese and Indochinese peoples to unite against imperialism. The other was to be

informing me that you are all loyal, devoted, and striving together to raise money. It is also a pleasure to learn that your courage is growing in vigor. Thanks to the strength of the war hawks, Japan is very powerful and, as I am energetic, I asked our "boss" to send you letters of compliments. I beg you to kindly gather more courageous people to increase our strength, all counsels must be cautious, courage must be constant, and the heart must always be just and persevering. This is for public vengeance. Our country can be equal to Japan. All yours - signed Sao Nam Chau (with the personal stamp).” SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 89-90. At the trial, Phan Bội Châu claimed not to know Đội Quyên. Phan Bội Châu mentions Đội Quyên twice in *NB*, though does not indicate the large role this individual apparently played in domestic military affairs. Phan Bội Châu, *Overturned Chariot*, 56, 78.

⁴¹⁵ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 90.

⁴¹⁶ SPCE 354BIS, *Extrait, L’Écho Annamite, No. 391, “Du Communisme au Maboulisme,” 29 septembre 1925.*

⁴¹⁷ SPCE 354BIS, *L’Écho Annamite, No. 492, “En Faveur de M. Phan-Boi-Chau,” 8 octobre 1925.*

⁴¹⁸ The editor of *France-Indochine* in Hanoi reported receiving a copy on October 12, along with another copy addressed to Báo Đông Pháp. SPCE 355, *Hand-written note addressed to Director of Cabinet M. Alberti, on France-Indochine letterhead, 12 octobre 1925.* See also SPCE 355, *Chef Sûreté Tonkin a Chefs Sûreté Hue, Saigon, Phnom-Penh, Vientiane, communication Sûreté Haiphong, No. 6432, 12 octobre 1925.*

⁴¹⁹ A secret cable from the Ministry of Colonies dated December 21, 1925 indicates that colonial security officials were still trying to figure out the origins of the “Jeune Annam” petition, which purported to come from a group of that name based in Hanoi. Monguillot had proposed that the petition was actual produced and sent by the League of Oppressed Peoples, based in Canton. SPCE 355, *Le Ministre des Colonies à M. le Gouverneur General de l’Indochina Hanoi, “Envoi en Indochine par l’Union Intercoloniale d’une petition en faveur de Pham-Boi-Chau,” 21 décembre 1925.*

sent to Phan Bội Châu himself at his current address (Central Prison, Hanoi), declaring: “A large number of your compatriots, together with their brothers from China, France, and different colonies, having suffered the crimes of colonialism, send you the expression of their sympathy and promise to do their utmost to tear you away from torture and death. Sino-Indochinese Meeting, Paris.”⁴²⁰ The spectre of international and especially Chinese interest in Phan Bội Châu’s detention cast a pall over the trial’s proceedings. Bride had to get moving, and fast.

Bride unfortunately was of precisely the wrong temperament and would not be rushed. Bride was determined to prosecute the trial the right way: by forcing Phan Bội Châu to confess. To do this, Bride knew he needed to prove Phan Bội Châu had written letters to known violent offenders, making him ultimately responsible for their actions. Thus Bride continued to send out document requests, though the nature of these changed: now he wanted original copies of Phan Bội Châu’s works, both handwritten and in print. On September 26, Bride reminded Robin and Monguillot of his request for three letters. While Bride had received two, the third, written by Phan Bội Châu for Néron on August 4 while in detention, was missing.⁴²¹ Bride had originally conveyed this letter to Néron, but he now wanted it back so the handwriting could be compared with other letters purportedly written by Phan Bội Châu. Here again, the security services fought against Bride’s request in an undated Sûreté note that claimed the letter was of a personal nature and now constituted a restricted police document.⁴²²

Demonstrating the level of official anxiety over the trial’s management, on October 2 Interim Governor General Monguillot himself intervened to quash the rivalry between the judiciary, represented by Bride, and the security services, represented by Robin, Jeanbrau, Gilles, and Néron.⁴²³ Bride could have the letter, but he was not to include any of its contents in the trial transcript, and he was required to return it to the archives of the Sûreté immediately after he was finished with it. The subtext of Monguillot’s letter to Bride was clear: concentrate on the charges related to 1913 attacks and prosecute the case! Though Bride agreed to return the letter, he pointedly emphasized the importance of the letters for confirming Phan Bội Châu’s handwriting.⁴²⁴ Not even Monguillot would be able to rush Bride, who was far from finished with his requests.

The same day (October 5), Bride sent Monguillot an bigger demand: he needed another interpreter. The interrogation of Phan Bội Châu, Bride explained, “has been rendered particularly because of the continual denials which oblige the Commission to read and translate numerous depositions, documents, and exhibits written in [Chinese] characters.”⁴²⁵ The court’s

⁴²⁰ SPCE 354BIS, *Bordereau No. 177-SG du 21 janvier 1926 du S.C.R. & S.G. Hanoi, Note sur la propagande révolutionnaire intéressant les pays d’outre-mer, “Les milieux coloniaux communistes de Paris. L’Union Intercoloniale et le Paria.”*

⁴²¹ SPCE 355, *L’Inspecteur des Affaires politiques et administratives, Président de la Commission Criminelle à M. le Gouverneur Général de l’Indochine, No. 121, A.s.de 3 lettres de P.B.C. communiquées confidentiellement & à titre personnel à M. le Gouverneur Général & à M. le Secrétaire Général, 26 septembre 1925.*

⁴²² SPCE 355, *Service Central de Renseignements et de Sûreté Générale, Note, “Le Président de la Commission Criminelle...,” undated.*

⁴²³ SPCE 355, *Le GGI de l’IC, Commandeur de la Légion d’Honneur, à M. le Président de la Commission Criminelle, No. 2573-SG, 2 octobre 1925.*

⁴²⁴ SPCE 355, *L’Inspecteur des Affaires politiques et administratives, Président de la Commission Criminelle à M. le Gouverneur Général de l’Indochine, No. 124, 5 octobre 1925.*

⁴²⁵ SPCE 355, *L’Inspecteur des Affaires politiques et administratives, Président de la Commission Criminelle à M. le Gouverneur Général de l’Indochine (Sous le couvert de M. le Résident Supérieur au Tonkin), No.*

interpreter Gombaudo Saintonge simply could not keep up with the workload, so Bride asked for an Vietnamese interpreter. He already knew who he wanted as well: District Magistrate Bùi Bằng Đoàn, known for his probity and discretion.⁴²⁶ Willing at this point to do anything that would move the trial forward, Monguillot agreed and appointed Bùi Bằng Đoàn as the court's second interpreter on October 9.⁴²⁷

The request to hire Bùi Bằng Đoàn demonstrated the lengths Bride was willing to go to in his pursuit of justice. It was also a strong indicator of the clerical problems facing the Criminal Commission as it struggled to prosecute a case dependent on evidence in at least three different languages. In addition to another interpreter, Bride needed additional institutional support. On October 7, Bride requested original copies of *Việt Nam vong quốc sử* (History of the Loss of Vietnam) and *Hải ngoại huyết thư* (A Letter from Overseas Written in Blood), as well as certified copies of translations by Mr. Maybon of the l'Ecole Française d'Extrême-Orient (EFEO). To ensure there was no confusion, Bride cited long portions of each work in his eight-page request.⁴²⁸ This request too, was granted.

As the trial entered October 1925, Bride's strategy of relentlessly throwing documents and testimonies in Phan Bội Châu's face began to produce at least one result: Phan Bội Châu now talked less than before. The prosecutor, meanwhile, began to cite longer and longer documents, often reading aloud several pages at a time. Phan Bội Châu continued to deny the prosecutor's accusations, but his denials now grew more bitter and, increasingly, more legally adroit. For example, at the end of a very long day on October 2, Phan Bội Châu stated:

You accuse me of lacking courage because I blame Cường Để. I accept this reproach, but wouldn't I be more courageous in lying to the Commission? I will tell you things as I know them. If, after my arrest, the Government had used its authority to execute me according to the judgment delivered by the Criminal Commission of 1913, I would have suffered my sentence without protesting. Since you give me the means to defend myself, I will use them.⁴²⁹

Having recognized that Bride needed to conduct the trial according to rules of evidence and testimony, Phan Bội Châu began to adapt his arguments into something approximating a legal defense. This complicated Bride's approach considerably. Just as the prosecutor was now getting to the most damning evidence, Phan Bội Châu was refining his defense and becoming much more careful with his answers. Since Phan Bội Châu refused to simply admit to inciting revolution or violence, Bride had little choice but to prove his case to the Criminal Commission itself by citing his way through the archive he had amassed.

The prosecutor began the month with an incredibly long interrogation session on October

125, 5 octobre 1925.

⁴²⁶ According to his son, Bùi Tín, Bùi Bằng Đoàn had previously served as a judge in Ninh Bình and as governor of Cao Bằng and Bắc Ninh. In 1933, he became Minister of Justice for Emperor Bảo Đại and helped draft the Criminal and Civil codes of law for Annam. Bùi Tín, *Following Ho Chi Minh: Memoirs of a North Vietnamese Colonel* (Honolulu, University of Hawaii Press, 1995), 7.

⁴²⁷ SPCE 355, *Le Gouverneur Général P.I. de L'Indochine, Commandeur de la Légion d'Honneur (Monguillot), Arrête, No. 3797, 9 octobre 1925.*

⁴²⁸ SPCE 355, *L'Inspecteur des Affaires politiques et administratives, Président de la Commission Criminelle à M. le Gouverneur Général de l'Indochine (Service Central des Renseignements et de la Sûreté Générale au Gouvernement Général), Object: demandes communication des brochures de P.B.C., 7 octobre 1925.*

⁴²⁹ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 120.

2.⁴³⁰ Wrapping up the events of 1908 inside Indochina, the prosecutor addressed the violence associated with tax revolts in Annam, the 1908 Hanoi Poison plot, and a variety of other conspiracies.⁴³¹ On October 3, the prosecutor moved on to address the activities of the Việt Nam Quang Phục Hội (Vietnam Restoration Society) and several supposedly affiliated organizations in 1912-1913.⁴³² After this, the prosecutor doubled back to address how and why Phan Bội Châu had been deported from Japan in 1909.⁴³³

After October 5, however, the prosecutor shifted his focus to Phan Bội Châu's works written and published during the period he was in Japan (1905-1909).⁴³⁴ These included *Khuyến quốc dân tư trợ du học văn* (An Appeal to My Fellow Countrymen to Provide Financial Support for Overseas Studies),⁴³⁵ *Hải ngoại huyết thư* (A Letter from Overseas Written in Blood),⁴³⁶ *Việt Nam vong quốc sử* (History of the Loss of Vietnam),⁴³⁷ *Tân Việt Nam* (The New Vietnam),⁴³⁸ *Kỷ niệm lục* (A Record of Memories),⁴³⁹ *Việt Nam quốc sử khảo* (A Study of Vietnamese History),⁴⁴⁰ *Sùng bái giai nhân* (A Tribute to Shining Lives)⁴⁴¹, *Ai cáo Nam Kỳ phụ lão văn* (A Sorrowful Appeal to the Elders of Cochinchina),⁴⁴² *Trần Đông Phong truyện* (The Life of Trần Đông

⁴³⁰ The majority of sessions produced between five and eight pages of transcript. The session on October 2 produced twenty-three pages. SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 100-122.

⁴³¹ These included secret support provided by seditious mandarins, propaganda encouraging domestic workers to kill their (French) employers, and a planned massacre of all Europeans in Hanoi. According to the prosecutor, the organizations involved were the Đông Kinh Nghĩa Thục, the Đông Tân Hưng, the Đông Lợi Tế, and the Đông Thành Xương. SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 114-115.

⁴³² These included the Tam Thánh (Three Saints [Society]) and the Thiên Địa Hội (Heaven and Earth Society). SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 123-127.

⁴³³ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 132-138.

⁴³⁴ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 138-243.

⁴³⁵ In *NB*, Phan Bội Châu indicates that he gave several thousand copies of this letter to Tăng Bạt Hổ for distribution inside Indochina. Phan Bội Châu, *Overturned Chariot*, 96. A French translation entitled *Conseil aux jeunes gens d'aller s'instruire à l'étranger* is included in the *Interrogatoires*. SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 134-138. For the Vietnamese version, see Phan Bội Châu "Khuyến quốc dân tư trợ du học văn," *Phan Bội Châu Toàn Tập, Vol 2* (Hue: Nhà xuất bản Thuận hóa, 1999), 253-258.

⁴³⁶ In French *Lettre d'outre mer écrite avec du sang*. SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 145-151, 194, 199-206 (partial French translation). For the Vietnamese version, see Phan Bội Châu "Hải ngoại huyết thư," *Phan Bội Châu Toàn Tập, Vol 2* (Hue: Nhà xuất bản Thuận hóa, 1999), 95-168.

⁴³⁷ Already introduced in this chapter. In French *Asservissement de l'Annam*. SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 153-154, 158-163 (French translation of Liang Qichao's preface). For the Vietnamese version, see Phan Bội Châu "Việt Nam vong quốc sử," *Phan Bội Châu Toàn Tập, Vol 2* (Hue: Nhà xuất bản Thuận hóa, 1999), 11-92..

⁴³⁸ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 167-170, 171-180 (French translation). For the Vietnamese version, see Phan Bội Châu "Tân Việt Nam," *Phan Bội Châu Toàn Tập, Vol 2* (Hue: Nhà xuất bản Thuận hóa, 1999), 171-195.

⁴³⁹ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 183, 186, 188.

⁴⁴⁰ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 183, 212-221 (French translation).

⁴⁴¹ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 186, 188, 195-199, 206-212 (partial French translation). For the Vietnamese version, see Phan Bội Châu "Sùng bái giai nhân," *Phan Bội Châu Toàn Tập, Vol 2* (Hue: Nhà xuất bản Thuận hóa, 1999), 199-237.

⁴⁴² In French *Aux habitants de la Cochinchine*. SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 222-223 (French translation). In *NB*, Phan Bội Châu indicates that he wrote this work at the request of Cường Đê. Phan Bội Châu, *Overturned Chariot*, 126.

Phong),⁴⁴³ and *Hà thành liệt sĩ truyện* (The History of the Martyrs of Hanoi).⁴⁴⁴ The prosecutor included another work that appears not to be written by Phan Bội Châu entitled *Sào Nam Tử khuyến chư tăng thư* (Letter from Sao Nam Tu to the bonzes).⁴⁴⁵ For several of these works, the prosecutor included in the transcript partial or complete French translations.

For the next week's worth of sessions (including October 6, 7, 9, 10, 12, and part of October 13), the prosecutor and Phan Bội Châu repeatedly clashed over the question of authorship.⁴⁴⁶ This debate had started on October 2 when the prosecutor sought to explain Phan Bội Châu's responsibility for the events of 1908. Lacking sufficient hard evidence to prove that Phan Bội Châu had indeed ordered many of the violent acts described in cited testimonies, the prosecutor argued instead that the rebels and bandits had been inspired by Phan Bội Châu's propaganda. Phan Bội Châu vehemently rejected the suggestion, drawing a line between his supposedly lofty discourse and the crude propaganda attributed to him.⁴⁴⁷ Phan Bội Châu's comments foreshadowed the most refined and most unbelievable iteration of his strategy of denial. The stakes were clear: if Phan Bội Châu could successfully deny authorship of the propaganda the former rebels claimed to be inspired by, then he could claim innocence of the acts the French were charging him with. As the prosecutor began to introduce Phan Bội Châu's writings one after the other, the old patriot manufactured an incredible defense strategy: he simply was not the author.

Phan Bội Châu continued to develop his "scapegoat" theory in subsequent sessions into a remarkably flexible defense mechanism. For works he had already admitted authorship of Phan Bội Châu would claim that portions had been added or replaced by other people. On October 3, Phan Bội Châu claimed that three-tenths of the version of *Khuyến quốc dân tư trợ du học văn* brought before him by the prosecutor had been "added by other people."⁴⁴⁸ He added, "I remind the Criminal Commission that I gave my letter to Tăng Bạt Hồ in the tenth month, whereas this piece is dated the eleventh month."⁴⁴⁹ Obviously, following Phan Bội Châu's logic, someone had taken his version, added several sections (which conveniently contained the language the Criminal Commission found offensive), and published that copy one month later.

The same logic applied to *Việt Nam vong quốc sử*. According to Phan Bội Châu, "the Chinese printers" had added sections on "public education, public works, the native army" and the phrase "the French are dogs."⁴⁵⁰ The printers in Japan had also been responsible for printing a second edition of *Khuyến quốc dân tư trợ du học văn* at the end of 1908. Phan Bội Châu,

⁴⁴³ In French *Histoire d'un homme de haut caractère du nom de Trần*. SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 235-240 (French translation), 241-243.

⁴⁴⁴ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 225. For the Vietnamese version, see Phan Bội Châu "Truyện các liệt sĩ Hà thành," *Phan Bội Châu Toàn Tập, Vol 3* (Hue: Nhà xuất bản Thuận hóa, 1999), 147-163, 289-291 (partial French translation).

⁴⁴⁵ In French *Lettre adressée par Sào Nam Tu aux bonzes du royaume*. SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 224.

⁴⁴⁶ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 138-151.

⁴⁴⁷ Phan Bội Châu: "These libels are the product of a gross mind. If it was my work, I would have written with more deference to the French. I would not have called the French 'dogs.' Besides, the influence of [this propaganda] had to have been limited to ordinary people. Cultivated minds would have ignored such things." SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 115.

⁴⁴⁸ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 134.

⁴⁴⁹ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 138.

⁴⁵⁰ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 155.

however, had "left the country in November 1908" and thus never saw the edition.⁴⁵¹ Another anonymous malfeasance was "the amplifier," who Phan Bội Châu held responsible for adding disagreeable or inconvenient phrases or sections to his work.⁴⁵² Some common themes added by "Chinese printers" and "the amplifier" were: the French desire to annihilate the Vietnamese, the concept of racial extinction, Catholicism, and Nguyễn collaborators.⁴⁵³

When the prosecutor moved on to address *Hải ngoại huyết thư*, Phan Bội Châu came up with a procedural version of this same explanation. While he was working at Liang Qichao's journal, Phan Bội Châu claimed, he would place his works on a manuscript table alongside the newspapers.⁴⁵⁴ In 1906, he claimed, he had placed *Khuyến quốc dân tư trợ du học văn*, *Hải ngoại huyết thư*, and *Việt Nam vong quốc sử* on this manuscript table. Since these works were all lying out in public, Phan Bội Châu suggested, anybody could copy them and do whatever they wished with them, including adding material and printing them.

At times, the patience of the prosecutor was incredible.

Prosecutor: "Who could have printed the copies you put out [on the table]?"

Phan Bội Châu: "A student or someone working for Cường Đê."

Prosecutor: "How did copies end up in Annam at the beginning of 1906?"

Phan Bội Châu: "I don't know."

Prosecutor: "By depositing a writing of this importance on the manuscript table of the journal, did you not take responsibility for the work even if it was printed with modifications?"

Phan Bội Châu: "What I write is not my responsibility, provided that it is not subversive."⁴⁵⁵

The logic of Phan Bội Châu's comment was, strictly speaking, unassailable. Phan Bội Châu was sketching an image of himself as a writer who cared absolutely nothing for what people did with, or because of, his own writings.

Another option, of course, was to deny the entirety of a work.⁴⁵⁶ After the prosecutor entered ten pages of *Tân Việt Nam* into the trial record, Phan Bội Châu simply responded, "There is nothing of mine in there."⁴⁵⁷ The same was true for *Sùng bái giai nhân*. All Phan Bội Châu had to say of the work was, "I've never written a work with that title and I've never heard of it either."⁴⁵⁸ Why did both *Sùng bái giai nhân* and *Kỷ niệm lực* (which he also denied authorship of) bear Phan Bội Châu's name? Phan Bội Châu has his old standby ready: "It's clearly all Cường Đê's doing." In fact, he was ready to push it farther, "The fact that my name was on them imputes the blame to Cường Đê."⁴⁵⁹ With this, Phan Bội Châu took the logic of his scapegoat theory into the realm of conspiracy theory: any appearance of Phan Bội Châu's name simply

⁴⁵¹ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 165.

⁴⁵² SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 155.

⁴⁵³ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 156-157.

⁴⁵⁴ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 146.

⁴⁵⁵ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 147.

⁴⁵⁶ There was one logical drawback to Phan Bội Châu's tactic of total denial: if he actually had *not* composed a work, as seems to be the case with *Sào Nam Từ khuyến chư tăng thư*, then any member of the Criminal Commission unconvinced by his blanket denials would simply assume he had. Once Phan Bội Châu had committed to denying entire works, however, this point became at best trivial. SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 224.

⁴⁵⁷ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 180.

⁴⁵⁸ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 186.

⁴⁵⁹ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 187.

confirmed that Cường Đê, not Phan Bội Châu, was responsible.⁴⁶⁰

With the prosecutor seemingly willing to follow Phan Bội Châu down any logical path he wished to tread, the two sides often drifted into pettifoggery. Phan Bội Châu and the prosecutor had a semantic argument parsing the differences between "a writing (un écrit)," "a work (un ouvrage)," and "a book (une livre)."⁴⁶¹ After this, they had a debate about printing errors.⁴⁶² Then it was on to the subtle differences in national copyright laws.⁴⁶³ Phan Bội Châu even devised a way to explain handwritten copies of works that were later printed. Challenged by the prosecutor with a handwritten copy of *Khuyến quốc dân tư trợ du học văn* that included all of the sections Phan Bội Châu claimed other people had added, Phan Bội Châu explained that Tăng Bạt Hổ had not printed enough copies, so he handcopied more.⁴⁶⁴

The debate over handwriting samples took Phan Bội Châu's battle with the Criminal Commission to hilarious new levels.⁴⁶⁵ After presenting Phan Bội Châu with three letters, all signed "Phan Bội Châu," the prosecutor asked if Phan Bội Châu had written them. This went about as well as could be expected.

Phan Bội Châu: "I did not write that. Someone was imitating my handwriting."

Prosecutor: "Who would know your handwriting well enough to imitate you?"

Phan Bội Châu: "I taught my writing style to many students."⁴⁶⁶

The prosecutor, hoping to make some headway, brought in a "scholar with the rank of *cử nhân*" to serve as a handwriting analysis expert.⁴⁶⁷ The expert confirmed that lettres No. 155, 157, and 158 were written using the same brush by the same individual, which the Criminal Commission deemed to be Phan Bội Châu. Phan Bội Châu promptly challenging the credibility of the handwriting expert.

Phan Bội Châu: "The opinion of this *cử nhân* is not as good as mine. I tell you that is was not me who wrote those letters. It was not me."

Prosecutor: "On what basis can you affirm that the handwriting in these three letters is an imitation of your own?"

Phan Bội Châu: "I examined each character singularly. The characters are different than mine, but all together they resemble my handwriting."⁴⁶⁸

⁴⁶⁰ The prosecutor: "Why would Cường Đê undertake such a giant conspiracy?"

Phan Bội Châu: "That's easy to explain. The Vietnamese students were obligated to Cường Đê for their studies." SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 188.

Phan Bội Châu: "It was 'ton,' not 'tu!'" SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 255.

⁴⁶¹ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 181.

⁴⁶² Phan Bội Châu: "There must have been a printing error. This copy claims 'the year ất mùi,' a year which does not exist. It must have been 'đinh mùi,' they just read it wrong." SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 182.

⁴⁶³ Prosecutor: "You really know precise details about the legislation of the press!" Phan Bội Châu: "Before writing in both China and Japan, I studied their press laws. Japanese press laws are much more precise than Chinese press laws." SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 185.

⁴⁶⁴ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 145.

⁴⁶⁵ For example, Phan Bội Châu denied having written a text that included *chữ nôm* (Vietnamese demotic characters) on the basis that "I can read *nôm*, but I cannot write it." SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 225.

⁴⁶⁶ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 127.

⁴⁶⁷ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 130. After October 10, the Criminal Commission exclusively relied on its new native interpreter Bùi Bằng Đoàn for handwriting analysis. SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 225.

⁴⁶⁸ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 130.

A major component of Phan Bội Châu's scapegoat theory concerned the supposed misuse of his reputation. After all, Phan Bội Châu needed to explain why a veritable army of anonymous copyists would want to use his name. Phan tried several novel explanations. First, like the “old legendary Vietnamese humorist called ‘Trạng Quỳnh,’” whose name posthumously served to designate all humorists in the country, Phan Bội Châu declared that “Phan Bội Châu” had become the name used by all overseas Vietnamese individuals publishing works abroad.⁴⁶⁹ Later, Phan Bội Châu argued that Liang Qichao had been responsible for making him “universally famous.”⁴⁷⁰

Phan Bội Châu identified Liang Qichao's preface to *Việt Nam vong quốc sử* as a particularly egregious source of unwanted reputational inflation.⁴⁷¹ Liang Qichao had written it for Chinese, especially for the reigning Manchus, Phan Bội Châu argued, “he was using a Vietnamese voice to attract the attention of his readers.”⁴⁷² The dastardly Liang Qichao had added many details that never took place. Phan Bội Châu had never compared Emperor Thành Thái to a marionette. Phan Bội Châu had never claimed one-tenth of the population were “running dogs.” Phan Bội Châu had never told Liang Qichao about an internal passport system. All of these were, of course, Liang Qichao's additions. Finally (just in case), Phan Bội Châu stated, “Tăng Bạt Hổ spoke Cantonese, so I don't know what was actually said to Liang Qichao.”⁴⁷³

Who was responsible for editing and printing Phan Bội Châu's works, thus continuing to inflate his reputation as a racist revolutionary? In addition to Liang Qichao, Phan Bội Châu came up with a hit list of possible suspects. Cường ĐỂ stood at the top of the list, of course. However, Bùi Chí Nhuận, Đặng Bình Thành, Phan Bá Ngọc, Lê Cầu Tinh, Đinh Doãn Tế, and even Trần Hữu Công were on the suspect list too.⁴⁷⁴ Later, Phan Bội Châu added Nguyễn Thượng Hiền to the list as well.⁴⁷⁵ If none of these worked, Phan Bội Châu was happy to blame “Chinese students,” who seemed to be lurking every eager to grab, pervert, and print anything he wrote.⁴⁷⁶

Flabbergasted after six sessions spent on publications, the prosecutor assessed Phan Bội Châu's defense strategy:

Your system is always the same: you create a scheme where you expose only general ideas of a philosophical scope; you put it on a newspaper table; it is copied and the person attaches to your part something different for each of your works; they denature your manuscript, amplify it, and have it printed without your knowledge by signing it annoyingly with your name or one of your pseudonyms?

⁴⁶⁹ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 117.

⁴⁷⁰ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 154.

⁴⁷¹ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 164.

⁴⁷² SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 164.

⁴⁷³ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 164.

⁴⁷⁴ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 169, 226. For well-written, but still incriminating works, Phan Bội Châu did have a problem, however: the only two individuals Phan Bội Châu felt capable of writing nearly as well as him were Bùi Chí Nhuận and Nguyễn Thượng Hiền. SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 188.

⁴⁷⁵ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 228-229, 235.

⁴⁷⁶ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 184, 223.

Phan Bội Châu: "That is exactly right! The parts which I indicate as not being mine, I do not choose them; I just notice that they are not mine."⁴⁷⁷

In the battle over his writings, Phan Bội Châu had effectively fought the prosecutor to a draw. However, because the prosecutor had been unable to land a solid hit on Phan Bội Châu, despite having expended over a week of the court's time, it was a win for Phan Bội Châu. On October 13, the prosecutor finally finished his review of Phan Bội Châu's works. He managed to make one significant point before finishing up this portion of the trial, however. It was this: Phan Bội Châu's greatest strength was his masterful ability to adapt his writing to different audiences.⁴⁷⁸ Despite Phan Bội Châu's unwillingness to admit to having written the works covered by the Criminal Commission, the works themselves had received their day in court.

Bride Strikes Back: A Return to Testimonials

Beginning on October 13, the prosecutor shifted from Phan Bội Châu's writings back to an examination of their concrete effects.⁴⁷⁹ The prosecutor returned to his previous practice of citing individual testimonies. This was a more successful strategy insofar as the prosecutor no longer needed to weight his word against Phan Bội Châu's. Many of the testimonies introduced offer fascinating glimpses into how the Modernization Association and later the Restoration Society actually worked.⁴⁸⁰ Using document after document, the prosecutor linked Phan Bội Châu to a variety of events and individuals.⁴⁸¹ These included Phan Châu Trinh, Đê Thám,⁴⁸² Trần Quý Cáp, Cường Đê, Đội Quyên,⁴⁸³ Lương Tam Kỳ, Jules Tiet, and Trần Hữu Công. More than before, the tone often grew dark. The prosecutor delivered testimonies pertaining to violent attacks on villages and assassinations of informers and even loyal society members who fell under suspicion.

Then, on October 16, Bride played a winning card: Inspector François's report written after François had travelled with Phan Bội Châu from Hong Kong to Haiphong. This testimony Phan Bội Châu was not ready for. Inspector François report not only contradicted many of Phan Bội Châu's denials, it made Phan Bội Châu sound delirious, if not unhinged. Phan Bội Châu tried to explain: "I never thought I would stand before a commission. I thought I would be executed. I was not cheerful."⁴⁸⁴ The prosecutor pressed: "In this state of depression, could you not but tell the truth?"⁴⁸⁵ For the first time in the trial, it seemed as though Phan Bội Châu was genuinely unsure of how to proceed.

The prosecutor offered his estimation of Phan Bội Châu's thought process: "You declared declared to the president of the Criminal Commission that you at first intended not to answer

⁴⁷⁷ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 185.

⁴⁷⁸ The prosecutor: "When writing to mandarins, your writing is quite literary. When convincing Catholics, you preach as a priest. When glorifying those condemned for the 1908 Hanoi Poison plot, you valorized bravery." SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 227.

⁴⁷⁹ The prosecutor: "Your propaganda penetrated all of society." SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 259.

⁴⁸⁰ For example, Châu Văn Qui's testimony on October 29, 1908 before the Mytho Tribunal (File 1313, dossier Gilbert Chieu) indicated how Phan Bội Châu's books were distributed within Cochinchina. SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 197.

⁴⁸¹ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 266-267.

⁴⁸² SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 269, 275.

⁴⁸³ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 268.

⁴⁸⁴ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 277.

⁴⁸⁵ Ibid.

questions, but having realized you could escape the death penalty, you prepared your defense." Phan Bội Châu agreed with this statement, but he was still looking for a way out. All of the testimonies he had previously denied had taken place elsewhere. The only real difference with this one was that Francois had shown Phan Bội Châu kindness in a moment of true despair. To find Francois was indeed every bit the Sûreté officer any of his French colleagues were, must have been a bitter blow for Phan Bội Châu. Francois had abused the trust Phan Bội Châu had granted him in his weakest moment. Phan Bội Châu became quite sullen, stating simply, "Francois is a man skilled at disguising the truth."⁴⁸⁶ Then: "He satisfied all my desires. That is why I talked to him." Phan Bội Châu went on to claim that Francois had asked him questions, but Phan Bội Châu was so tired and hungry at the time that he offered only onomatopoeic and monosyllabic responses. Francois, Phan Bội Châu claimed, had reconstructed these into the claims contained in his report. Here, then, was the answer: Francois, not Phan Bội Châu, was the truly dishonest one!

On October 17, the prosecutor called his first and only witness: Mr. François (aka Trần Tú Quý), inspector of the Sûreté. Inspector François delivered aloud the contents of his report, then answered the prosecutor's questions. Did Francois speak Vietnamese well? "Very well." Did Phan Bội Châu offer his statements spontaneously? "Yes." Had Francois been assigned a mission to interrogate Phan Bội Châu? "No." Was Phan Bội Châu being truthful? Francois was unequivocal: "In my job I often deal with prisoners. I am persuaded that he spoke the truth based on his attitude and tone."⁴⁸⁷ The prosecutor could not have asked for a more perfect witness.

Given the opportunity to cross-examine the witness, Phan Bội Châu threw together what defense he could: "I never asked Mr. Francois for wine! He interrogated me while I only spoke in monosyllables!"⁴⁸⁸ Perhaps realizing that denying the testimony of an individual in person was quite different than denying the testimony written on paper, Phan Bội Châu backed off a bit. Phan Bội Châu thanked Francois for showing him kindness, for removing his fetters, and for helping him to eat. Perhaps Phan Bội Châu could muddle through Francois's testimony with a few tactful words.

The prosecutor quickly ended any such notions: "It is sad for you that the facts reported by Inspector Francois are confirmed by many witnesses."⁴⁸⁹ Recognizing tact was getting him nowhere, Phan Bội Châu reverted to his scapegoat strategy: "[Francois's] declaration's are the result of his having knowledge of these declarations prior to testifying!" The prosecutor was incredulous: "Inspector Francois flipped through all of the files in the prosecutor's office in Saigon and Hanoi, and those of the military tribunals, and the archives of the residences superior of Annam and Tonkin and of the Court of Hue all before coming to testify at your interrogatory??"⁴⁹⁰ Phan Bội Châu mustered a few more perfunctory challenges, but Inspector Francois's testimony had taken the wind out of the old patriot's sails.

In the following days, Phan Bội Châu's denials grew shorter and less emphatic. The prosecutor, meanwhile, was emboldened. Phan Bội Châu was now faced with questions such as the following:

⁴⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁷ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 283.

⁴⁸⁸ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 284-285

⁴⁸⁹ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 286.

⁴⁹⁰ Ibid.

We find a correspondence from the French ambassador to Tokyo n. 20 of November 7, 1909 (Exhibit 227 file I-1925), in another of June 7, 1909 (Exhibit 189 in file A-1925), in another of July 12, 1909, from the governor general to the minister of colonies (Exhibit 203 file I-1925), in a letter of November 7, 1909 from the ambassador in Tokyo to the Governor General (Exhibit 56 file H-1925), in letter n. 7 of the resident superior of Annam of January 28, 1910 (Exhibit 90 file C-1925), in letter n. 25, the ambassador from France to Tokyo to the governor general of November 26, 1909. Does this information does prevent us from having faith in your statement?⁴⁹¹

Phan Bội Châu's response was decidedly muted, compared with the previous month of interrogations. Bride's archive was finally paying dividends.

At 8:00 AM on the morning of October 19, in following a "very urgent" notice from President Bride, Victor Néron presented testimony to the Criminal Commission.⁴⁹² Unlike that of Inspector Francois, Néron's testimony is not included in the *Interrogatoires*. However, an accompanying handwritten note to Jeanbrau from Néron dated the same day indicates that Bride requested the exterior testimony of Phan Châu Trinh. However, before establishing a Rogatory Commission for that purpose, Bride wanted first to be sure the governor general (Monguillot) could look into the "the political drawbacks of this procedure."⁴⁹³ Bride asked Néron to orally convey this request.

This note indicates that Bride recognized the limits to his requisitional authority, but sought to expand those limits regardless. Phan Châu Trinh, who had himself returned to Indochina in June 1925, was staying at a guesthouse on Pellerin street in Saigon.⁴⁹⁴ Bringing Phan Châu Trinh before a Rogatory Commission would indeed have posed serious political problems for Monguillot and Phan Châu Trinh was busy advocating for Phan Bội Châu's release, despite suffering from worsening tuberculosis. Phan Châu Trinh died March 24, 1926, unable to reconnect with his old friend and debating partner before the end as he had hoped to do.⁴⁹⁵

Beginning that same day (October 19), the prosecutor also began to cite a new set of testimonies from an individual whose statements would henceforth make common appearances during interrogation sessions: Trần Văn Tuấn (aka Hồng Lục, aka Tu Dich). Trần Văn Tuấn had testified before the head of the Sûreté in 1918. The sheer amount of precise information provided by this individual strongly suggests he was an informer. Trần Văn Tuấn seemed to know information about nearly every aspect of the Restoration society's activities in China, Siam, and Indochina. Even worse, he knew where Phan Bội Châu had been and when. To Trần Văn Tuấn's testimony, the prosecutor added that of Néron, to whom Phan Bội Châu had sent a letter on August 4. The cornerstone to the prosecutor's case, however, was letters, hundreds of letters to and from Phan Bội Châu. It seemed there would be no escaping the trial by archive.

Admission and Acceptance (October 20)

⁴⁹¹ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 291.

⁴⁹² SPCE 355, *L'Inspecteur des Affaires politiques et administratives, Président de la Commission Criminelle à M. Néron, Chef de Bureau au Service Central des Renseignements du Bureau Politique du Gouvernement Général, RST Cabinet, No. 143*.

⁴⁹³ SPCE 355, *Note pour M. le Directeur de A.P. et S.G. (Jeanbrau), 19 octobre 1925*.

⁴⁹⁴ Huỳnh Thúc Kháng. *Phan Tây Hồ tiên sinh lịch sử* (A Biography of Mr. Phan Châu Trinh [Tây Hồ]) (Huế: Anh Minh xuất bản, 1959), 33.

⁴⁹⁵ Phan Châu Trinh. *Phan Châu Trinh and his Political Writings*, edited and translated by Vinh Sinh (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Southeast Asia Program Publications, 2009), 36-37.

By October 20, Phan Bội Châu's ability to continue denying his involvement, his knowledge, and his own handwriting was waning. The old patriot nevertheless made a final attempt to deny it all. Admittedly, this was clever, if not entirely surprising: Phan Bội Châu had a double. Desperate to find a logical explanation for the Criminal Commission's endless parade of testimonies and signed letters, Phan Bội Châu claimed that there had been another Phan Bội Châu, who went by the name Phan Thị Hán (Phan Bội Châu's pen name).

The prosecutor had good reason for focusing on the name Phan Thị Hán in particular. In a letter from Cường Đễ to Ta Anh Ba [Xie Yingbo 謝英伯], written January 22, 1913, stated that he [Cường Đễ] was leaving for Europe aboard a ship that very day. Furthermore, Cường Đễ wrote, "In my absence, Mr. Phan Thị Hán will be in charge."⁴⁹⁶ Xie Yingbo was one of several Chinese individuals Phan Bội Châu and Cường Đễ had been working with to obtain funds and weapons for the Việt Nam Quang Phục hội (Vietnam Restoration Society).⁴⁹⁷ It was all well and good for Phan Bội Châu to claim that Cường Đễ had abused his name for the sake of publishing incendiary texts. But it made no sense for Cường Đễ to put Phan Thị Hán in charge of anything important, unless there actually was a Phan Thị Hán. Therefore logic required Phan Bội Châu either give up, or invent another Phan Thị Hán.

Who was the other Phan Thị Hán? One of Cường Đễ's secretaries, obviously.⁴⁹⁸ Phan Bội Châu claimed that when meeting with Chinese or Japanese who did not know what he [Phan Bội Châu] looked like, Cường Đễ would one of his secretaries pretend to be Phan Bội Châu.⁴⁹⁹ Phan Bội Châu tried to explain:

Cường-Đễ must have had the following conversation with Ta-Anh-Ba [aka Xie Yingbo]: 'During a trip I made in Indochina, I heard that a certain Phan-Boi-Chau had left his country. Who was this man, do you know him, can you inform me about his character and his ideas?' Cường-Đễ pointed to his the secretary Phan-Thị-Hán, who had accompanied him, and said, 'Here he is! his name is Phan Bội Châu!'⁵⁰⁰

For a trial already full of tall tales, obfuscations, and denials, this explanation took first prize. Nevertheless, the prosecutor spent an incredible six pages worth of testimony addressing Phan Bội Châu's "double," while winking occasionally at how utterly preposterous the

⁴⁹⁶ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 309. The prosecutor later presented another letter dated April 5, 1913 letter from Cường Đễ to one of his "secretaries," the Cochinchinese Đặng Bình Thành. In this letter Cường Đễ stated his desire to "offer the French a bomb" as a signal to his compatriotes. Cường Đễ furthermore enclosed his January 22, 1913 letter to Xie Yingbo, telling Đặng Bình Thành to "find an explanation" for why the letter was being delivered three months after he had signed it. Cường Đễ had not actually left for Europe (as the January 22, 1913 letter suggested), but instead travelled to the Mekong Delta near Saigon, where he hid on a boat for a roughly three months period. In April 1913, Cường Đễ decided to actually head for Europe, though he was briefly arrested in Hong Kong in May 1913, whereupon the British police found both letters and turned them over to French intelligence services. See Tran My-Van. *A Vietnamese Royal Exile in Japan: Prince Cường Đễ (1882-1951)* (London, Routledge, 2005), 78-82. Yves Le Jariel identifies Đặng Bình Thành as the "mysterious Joseph Thanh" who accompanied Cường Đễ to Europe in 1913. He may also have been in Paris from 1919 assisting Nguyễn Thế Truyền in editing *le Paria*. Le Jariel, 165-168.

⁴⁹⁷ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 316-317.

⁴⁹⁸ Phan Bội Châu suggested Bùi Chí Nhuận. SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 315.

⁴⁹⁹ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 311.

⁵⁰⁰ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 314.

proposition was.⁵⁰¹

Finally, the prosecutor stopped considering the matter of the "double" and barrelled forward, introducing a letter written to Mr. Chuong-Chu [Nguyễn Thành Hiến] on April 7, 1912.⁵⁰² The author indicated he had travelled to Nanjing in February 1912 to discuss plans with "the Chinese revolutionary chiefs" who offered "a good opportunity" for the Vietnamese revolutionary movement. The author stated that weapons were ready at hand, though funds remained lacking. A postscript warned Chuong-Chu to show the letter only to trusted individuals. The letter was signed by by "Phan Bội Châu."⁵⁰³

The prosecutor noted the similarities between this letter and a previously introduced letter (letter no. 5, dossier E, also sent to "Chuong-Chu," aka Nguyễn Thành Hiến) signed "Châu." He asked Phan Bội Châu to account for this, which he did in his customary fashion, "Châu could have been anyone named 'Châu.' This letter, signed 'Bội Châu,' I can now confirm is false." Phan Bội Châu agreed that both letters, along with a third, had all been written by the same person. However, Phan Bội Châu denied that person had been him. Clearly, the "double" had been busy.

The prosecutor, however, had more letters. He introduced a copy of a July 21, 1912 letter from "Mê Diên" mentioning the transfer of monies, various commercial matters, communication difficulties, and the location of various agents.⁵⁰⁴ Was "Mê Diên" a pseudonym for Phan Bội Châu? Phan Bội Châu confidently replied that he couldn't be sure, because he did not recognize the copy; he would need the original. The prosecutor had anticipated this: "here is the original." Now Phan Bội Châu denied the letter entirely. The prosecutor introduced two more letters sent to Mr. Hoàng Triều Ha, signed by "Mê Diên." Then another sent to Mr. Chuc Dinh, also signed by "Mê Diên." The prosecutor asked again, was "Mê Diên" a pseudonym for Phan Bội Châu? Phan Bội Châu replied that he had never signed a letter "Mê Diên," but confirmed that the name was indeed one given to him by his students. It meant "the rice paddy which allows the rice to grow [米田]."⁵⁰⁵

The prosecutor continued, presenting letters No. 1, 5, 16, and 32 from dossier E, and Nos. 155bis, 156bis, 157bis, and 158bis from dossier C. All eight had been written by the same person. Finally, he added No. 37 from dossier E. Bride's puzzle pieces were falling into place.

Prosecutor: "Is it not the same individual who, in these nine letters, has signed "Châu," "Sào Tu," "Phan Bội Châu," "Sào Nam," "Bội Châu," and "Mê Diên?"

Phan Bội Châu: "Yes, I recognize this."

Prosecutor: "Let us continue to play the comedy. Do you recognize that it is you who wrote all of these letters?"

Phan Bội Châu: "It is my name that is written on these letters. It was not me who wrote these letters, but I recognize that the letters have been signed using my names."

[After a long reflection]

⁵⁰¹ The prosecutor: "You are well informed about an individual you pretend to have never seen!" SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 314.

⁵⁰² Nguyễn Thành Hiến (1856-1914) was a well-educated half-French Cochinchinese supporter of the Đông Du movement who died in Hỏa Lò prison on November 26, 1914. Phan Bội Châu, *Overtured Chariot*, 68. Phan Bội Châu included him in *Việt Nam nghĩa liệt sử*. Phan Bội Châu, "Việt Nam nghĩa liệt sử," *Phan Bội Châu Toàn Tập*, Vol. 5 (Huế: Nhà xuất bản Thuận hóa, 1999), 100-103.

⁵⁰³ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 318.

⁵⁰⁴ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 322.

⁵⁰⁵ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 323.

Phan Bội Châu: "Since you tell me that all these letters are signed with my name, I accept them as being from me."

[After a pause, the accused thinks]

Phan Bội Châu: "You tell me the letters are signed by me. Truly, it was not me who wrote them, moreover I do not know the names of the commercial houses to which they were sent, but since you are certain they are mine, I recognize them as mine."

[The accused thinks once again]

Phan Bội Châu: "I accept all the names as mine."

.....

[After the accused reflects for a long time and examines all of the letters]

Phan Bội Châu: "Yes, it was indeed me you wrote these letters...[thinks]...I recognize all of the names on the letters."

.....

[After the accused reflects for a long time over the various letters presented]

Phan Bội Châu: "BECAUSE YOU ARE CONVINCED THAT THESE LETTERS ARE MINE, I RECOGNIZE THEM AS MINE. IF I AM HESITANT TO RECOGNIZE HAVING WRITTEN THEM, IT IS BECAUSE THEY ARE VERY COMPROMISING."⁵⁰⁶

The prosecutor then presented a long series of additional letters, asking if Phan Bội Châu recognized each one. He replied no to all of them, save one.

Finally, the prosecutor asked, "Will you declare to us that it was indeed you who wrote all of these letters?"

[The accused reflects for a long time, before examining one by one the members of the Criminal Commission. He then also examines the various letters presented to him. The accused hesitates, begins phrases that he does not complete, then hangs his head and says]

Phan Bội Châu: "Yes, I admit having written the first letter. If I now admit having written the others, then I cannot admit to having written even that one, because the other letters are all very compromising. I recognize having written the letters while I was overseas to people abroad. I never wrote to people in Indochina."

Prosecutor: "We give the accused the deposition dated this day, by the testimony of Bùi Bằng Đoàn."

Phan Bội Châu: "You are certain that all of the letters were written by me. I have nothing more to say on the subject and I remit myself to your kindness for the rest."⁵⁰⁷

Thereupon, the day's session ended with Phan Bội Châu dramatically abandoning the line of defense he had clung to with astonishing resilience for over a month. The trial transcript had captured in minute detail each moment of Phan Bội Châu's acceptance of responsibility for his own writing and, thereby, for his own actions. Phan Bội Châu's confession came in the face of the overwhelming documentary evidence presented by the prosecutor. These documents had been painstakingly assembled, certified, organized, translated, interpreted, and made available as evidence by President Bride. The trial by archive had been successful.

Trial Phase 4: (October 23-November 9)

Despite the fact that Phan Bội Châu had admitted to writing the letters presented to him by the Criminal Commission, the interrogatory portion of the trial continued for an additional

⁵⁰⁶ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 324-325. The interpellated notes and capitalization has been retained as they appear in the original.

⁵⁰⁷ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 326.

two and a half weeks. After all, Phan Bội Châu had only admitted to writing letters. He had not admitted to planning or aiding the 1913 attacks, for which he was being prosecuted. This meant the Criminal Commission still had plenty of work ahead of it. It also meant Phan Bội Châu had time and opportunity to reconsider his entire approach to the trial. As the final phase of the trial got underway, Phan Bội Châu did exactly that, fashioning new lines of defense that exchanged outright denials for a more subtle distinction between patriotic rhetoric, which he now proudly admitted having written, and acts of violence, which he continued to deny having been involved in.

Outside the courtroom, security officials began to realize the scope of Nguyễn Thế Truyền's mailing campaign. On October 19, Acting Governor General Monguillot wrote to the Ministry of Colonies to address the Union Intercoloniale packets, including the Jeune Annam petition, which he traced back to Nguyễn Ái Quốc and the revolutionaries based in Canton. The security services had seized a great many envelopes by interdicting the mail, though multiple reports of journal editors and citizens having turned over Union<<!KMB_CMMT_AUTHOR::AGL>> Intercoloniale packets to the Sûreté suggests the interdiction was only partially successful. From⁵⁰⁸ such information as was available, Monguillot was able to report, "a few dispatches, with the petition inserted, were journals in the colony, however the majority of petitions were addressed to Vietnamese, many of whom are known for their hostility toward the French administration."⁵⁰⁹

Toward the end of October, some disturbing reports surfaced. On October 21, a special commissar in Nam Định reported several rumors pertaining to the arrest of Phan Bội Châu. Residents in the Hanh Thien district believed the person arrested in Shanghai was not Phan Bội Châu, but rather a Chinese individual. According to this local rumor, the Chinese government was seeking the repatriation of their citizen. Another source reported the Chinese of Nam Định were under the impression a long-time resident who had become a naturalized Chinese citizen had been arrested in error. This rumor held that the Chinese authorities were seeking redress for the arrest and had demanded the French government rectify its mistake. Thus, a person by the name of Phan Bội Châu had been sent from Haiphong to Hongkong and the French government had paid the Chinese government 100,000 piastres in compensation.⁵¹⁰ These wildly inaccurate rumors demonstrate two important features of news communications in French Indochina during this period. First, outside of the major cities, the likelihood of receiving accurate news declined considerably. Second, residents of peripheral districts nevertheless shared information related to matters of significance for the colony at large. Whether rural residents believed Phan Bội Châu was actually being held or not, the report does indicate that his name and reputation were known and drew interest beyond urban areas.

Since Vietnamese revolutionaries had already attempted to assassinate two governor generals of Indochina, Néron's report on October 29 would have definitely raised alarm bells. Néron conveyed to Sûreté offices throughout Indochina a cable from the Ministry of Colonies suggesting a Vietnamese by the name of Le Trinh Vuong planned to return to Indochina to take the life of the new governor general should he fail to release Phan Bội Châu.⁵¹¹ Le Trinh Vuong

⁵⁰⁸ SPCE 354BIS, *Saigon (André) à M. le Dir.AffPol et S.G.*, 24, octobre 1925.

⁵⁰⁹ SPCE 355, *Le Gougal, p.i. à M. le Ministre des Colonies, Paris, Objet: envoi en Indochine par l'Union Intercoloniale d'une petition en faveur de Phan Bội Châu*, 19 octobre 1925.

⁵¹⁰ SPCE 355, *Note Confidentielle No. 6707. Chef de la Sûreté (Gilles) à le Résident Supérieur au Tonkin et le Chef du S.C.R. et de S.G. Hanoi*, 22 octobre 1925. Refers to *Note Confidentielle No. 218-C*, 21 octobre 1925.

⁵¹¹ SPCE 355, *Telegramme Officiel, Gouverneur General à Adchef, Fort-Bayard, Dirsurgé a Sûreté*

claimed to be a long-time Hanoi resident born in Guangzhouwan who had participated in an assassination in Canton. He had shared his story and intentions with an informer in Paris. Most concerning, the Sûreté lacked any information on Le Trinh Vuong, which made it far more difficult to prevent an attack.⁵¹² after another brief

After another brief pause, the Criminal Commission marched on. They followed up on Phan Bội Châu's riveting confession on October 23. Having had several days to reflect, Phan Bội Châu provided the Commission members with an explanation for his previous dissimulations: "I thought it was a matter of rhetoric and a parody of justice. I thought I would be executed regardless, so I exaggerated my lies."⁵¹³ The French administration had been responsible for executing enough of Phan Bội Châu's comrades that this claim was certainly plausible. However, it does not explain why Phan Bội Châu freely admitted to incriminating facts and made compromising statements immediately after his arrest. Presumably, if Phan Bội Châu believed he would be killed regardless, he would have withheld information so as to protect his compatriots. In fact, the one thing Phan Bội Châu *had* done consistently since his arrest was to incriminate his former comrades (especially Cường Đê).

Now that Phan Bội Châu was willing to be more honest, the prosecutor addressed Phan Bội Châu's activities and movements between 1908 and 1913. The prosecutor addressed various issues related to how Phan Bội Châu had funded his numerous operations.⁵¹⁴ Phan Bội Châu admitted to receiving some 2,000 piastres from Đặng Thái Thân through emigrating students, but claimed he did not know the money's provenance.⁵¹⁵ He admitted that it was possible Đặng Thái Thân had relied on violent actors such as Đội Quyên's "band."⁵¹⁶ Phan Bội Châu admitted to taking approximately 20% of the money Đông Du students brought to Japan, but claimed he had done so to subsidize poorer students.⁵¹⁷ Phan Bội Châu maintained that he had played no direct role in the violent events of 1908, and had not ordered anyone to pillage or extort money.⁵¹⁸ The prosecutor addressed Phan Bội Châu's writings once again. He admitted that most of the works previously discussed were indeed his. However, he still insisted that *Hà Thành liệt sĩ truyền* had been written by Nguyễn Thành Hiến, and that he did not know who was responsible for *Sùng bài giai nhân*.⁵¹⁹

In the evening, Phan Bội Châu admitted to the truth of his relationships with Japanese and Chinese people such as Inukai Tsuyoshi, Okuma Shigenobu, and Liang Qichao.⁵²⁰ Phan Bội Châu admitted to meeting Đê Thám and to working with Cường Đê. However, Phan Bội Châu offered his opinion of Cường Đê, which remained unflattering: "I found him of ordinary intelligence and too inferior to have any influence on me. I directed everything; he only wanted to be king. He would never have revolted against the Protectorate if he had been given the

Saigon, Hanoi, Hué, Vientiane, Phnom-Penh, No. 3200/SG, 29 octobre 1925.

⁵¹² SPCE 354BIS, *Telegramme Officiel, Dirsurgé a Sûreté Saigon, Hanoi, Hué, Vientiane, Phnom-Penh, No. 3200/SG, 29 octobre 1925*. This cable provides additional information not contained in Néron's cable.

⁵¹³ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 326.

⁵¹⁴ Example: Nguyễn Hải Thân had been responsible for collecting money in Annam. SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 326.

⁵¹⁵ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 325.

⁵¹⁶ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 331

⁵¹⁷ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 331

⁵¹⁸ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 332.

⁵¹⁹ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 333.

⁵²⁰ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 335.

throne."⁵²¹ Phan Bội Châu essentially confirmed that he had seen Cường ĐỂ as little more than a temporarily convenient figurehead. He ended his first day of "honesty" by stating "If the Vietnamese people were clear-eyed about the French, I would pass on Cường ĐỂ's support and act on my own accord."⁵²² Phan Bội Châu was suggesting that, more than any other Vietnamese leader, he was the most intelligent and therefore the best to work directly with the French Protectorate administration. It was an unsubtle shift back toward the possibility of Franco-Vietnamese collaboration.

The next day (October 24), the newfound friendliness between Phan Bội Châu and the Criminal Commission began to fray. Phan Bội Châu claimed that he had only developed the idea of opposing the French government in 1909-1910, after the French had targeted his movement.⁵²³ The prosecutor's attempt to remind Phan Bội Châu of some of the very unpleasant things he had written about Frenchmen did not have the intended effect. Phan Bội Châu claimed that his compatriots had simply misinterpreted his writings. When the prosecutor reprised the accusation that Phan Bội Châu had written "passionate, violent, and vulgar diatribes against the French," Phan Bội Châu again claimed that Cường ĐỂ was the one responsible: "Cường ĐỂ wrote his own compositions, but he signed my name."⁵²⁴ Why on earth did he let Cường ĐỂ do this? Phan Bội Châu claimed he had allowed it to happen so that money would continue to flow from Cochinchina to support the Đông Du students.⁵²⁵ Phan Bội Châu's wiliness, temporarily eclipsed by his contrition, now reappeared.

On October 26, Phan Bội Châu refined his new line of defense. Every answer seemed honest, but always involved a large measure of plausible deniability. Yes, he had opposed the government, "but I never arrived at taking action."⁵²⁶ When violent actions such as the murder of Nguyễn Huy Điển in Canton in July 1912 had taken place, Phan Bội Châu was conveniently out of town.⁵²⁷ Had a "batallion of death" existed? Phan Bội Châu had heard that Nguyễn Hải Thân and Nguyễn Thành Hiến had created such an organization, but he was not sure whether it actually existed.⁵²⁸ Phan Bội Châu admitted to being "responsible for the education of [students] in Japan," but he refused to take any responsibility for the actions of those students.⁵²⁹ Even if he had written unpleasant things about the French government, Phan Bội Châu's only "weapon" was his brush.⁵³⁰ Most importantly, Phan Bội Châu stressed, "I was not responsible for the 1912-1913 terrorist campaign."⁵³¹

The prosecutor was clearly frustrated. The accused had displayed a moment of honesty, but that had now passed. Phan Bội Châu was ready to play games again and this time around he had a much better idea of the rules. Yes, he had accepted money, but it was used to pay for education, not weapons and munitions.⁵³² The Quang Phục hội had existed, but only briefly. Chinese revolutionaries had hoped their Vietnamese counterparts would strike at the French

⁵²¹ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 337.

⁵²² SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 338.

⁵²³ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 340.

⁵²⁴ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 341.

⁵²⁵ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 342.

⁵²⁶ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 345.

⁵²⁷ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 347.

⁵²⁸ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 348, 374.

⁵²⁹ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 349, 371.

⁵³⁰ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 377.

⁵³¹ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 349.

⁵³² SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 349.

Protectorate, but a lack of funds prevented anyone from doing anything.⁵³³ Other Vietnamese may have purchased or built bombs, but Phan Bội Châu had never done so.⁵³⁴ Phan Bội Châu claimed never to have personally known any of the bombers.⁵³⁵ Anyone, such as Âm Võ, Nguyễn Văn Tuấn, or Lương Ngọc Quyên, who testified that Phan Bội Châu had played a material role in planning or carrying out terrorist acts was lying.⁵³⁶

Sometimes Phan Bội Châu botched his own defense by making claims the prosecutor could all too easily disprove. Phan Bội Châu initially claimed he had been arrested by warlord Long Jiguang "at the end of 1912," which would have absolved him of responsibility for the 1913 attacks.⁵³⁷ There were far too many witnesses and documents for this to work.⁵³⁸ He then attempted to claim that he had changed his opinion of the French administration in 1913 in response to Governor General Sarraut's educational reforms.⁵³⁹ This line of defense included a bold line, "Once I was overseas, I realized many whites had enlightened ideas and that my ideas were wrong."⁵⁴⁰

On October 28, the prosecutor returned to using a previously successful strategy: describing the violence Phan Bội Châu had provoked with his writings. This time, the prosecutor presented detailed testimonies describing murders and assassinations carried out against real and suspected informers.⁵⁴¹ Đỗ Hữu Tiên had been stabbed and his body was dumped on the side of the road.⁵⁴² Thiên Nhi was chopped in the ribs and neck with a machete, and his body was thrown into the water and disappeared.⁵⁴³ Nguyễn Huy Điển was murdered in 1912 for spying on Phan Bội Châu, Âm Tran was murdered in 1913 for failing to carry out an attack on Pac Hin Bom.⁵⁴⁴ In Siam, Ma Kheng had informed Đặng Tử Kính and Đặng Tử Hứa that Co Bac was a spy, so they had her trapped and murdered in Korat forest.⁵⁴⁵ In 1911, Đặng Tử Kính had taken Ba-Ben to a spinnery and threw a brick at him, causing severe injury.⁵⁴⁶ Đặng Tử Kính was also responsible for the death of a Tonkinese named Quan and Ba-Nho.⁵⁴⁷ In 1912, Hoàng Trọng Mậu, Âm Giên, and Trần Hữu Lực had stabbed a spy in their house in Canton. They chopped up the body, rolled the parts up in a carpet, and dumped it in the river.⁵⁴⁸ Trần Thị Chuyên testified that her husband was paid to bring back severed ears.⁵⁴⁹ Phan Bội Châu denounced these grisly events and denied all knowledge and responsibility. Regarding the

⁵³³ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 352.

⁵³⁴ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 354.

⁵³⁵ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 367.

⁵³⁶ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 356. At times, Phan Bội Châu really **let loose** after hearing particular individuals' statements: "Ba Nho [Nguyễn Văn Tuấn] only speaks lies. He was just some Italian's servant." SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 361.

⁵³⁷ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 362.

⁵³⁸ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 373, 397.

⁵³⁹ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 369.

⁵⁴⁰ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 370.

⁵⁴¹ The prosecutor: "you inspired these acts and dictated the regulations under which they were required to take place." SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 385.

⁵⁴² SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 385.

⁵⁴³ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 386.

⁵⁴⁴ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 386.

⁵⁴⁵ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 386.

⁵⁴⁶ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 386.

⁵⁴⁷ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 387.

⁵⁴⁸ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 387.

⁵⁴⁹ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 388.

murder of Bat-Biên (aka Nguyễn Huy Điền), which Hoàng Trọng Mậu had testified took place on Phan Bội Châu's orders, Phan Bội Châu protested, "I deplore the assassination of Nguyễn Huy Điền. He was one of my most loyal servants. He was assassinated in my absence!"⁵⁵⁰

Recognizing he had hit a nerve, the prosecutor then portrayed Phan Bội Châu as a corrupt beneficiary of all this bloodshed. He claimed that the first assassinations "were meant to inspire confidence in the Chinese officials so you could obtain 300,000 piastres which they offered you."⁵⁵¹ The prosecutor argued that because Phan Bội Châu had admitted to being the one to meet with the Chinese officials who were making these offers, such as Chen Qimei, he was ultimately responsible for triggering the wave of bloodshed that took place 1912-1913. The prosecutor excoriated Phan Bội Châu, "In 1913, you were a vulgar crook who promised things you knew were impossible, yet you asked anyway. You lived off the money that you duped and threatened your countrymen to obtain."⁵⁵² Phan Bội Châu's need for money, the prosecutor continued, was what prompted the printing and sale in 1912 of "200,000 piastres" in worthless banknotes carrying Phan Bội Châu's name and signature.⁵⁵³ Bombs were used to threaten villagers in Indochina to hand over money to the Vietnamese revolutionaries, which Phan Bội Châu then used to support his lifestyle in Canton.⁵⁵⁴ According to Hoàng Trọng Mậu's testimony, "you organized, through intermediaries, a veritable enterprise based on pillaging entire regions...to support your wasteful appetites."⁵⁵⁵

This series of moral condemnations and ad hominem attacks again put Phan Bội Châu on the defensive. Yes, he had printed banknotes, but so had Cường Đễ, and Cường Đễ's print-run was larger.⁵⁵⁶ Yes, he'd been in charge, but he allowed both Cường Đễ and Hoàng Trọng Mậu to do what they wanted.⁵⁵⁷ The claims he was profiting off of violence were absolutely untrue, Phan Bội Châu protested, "I had no influence. I had no money."⁵⁵⁸

On October 30, the prosecutor ratcheted up his accusations. Phan Bội Châu was planning massive attacks on Tonkin to obtain the 100,000 piastres promised by Germany.⁵⁵⁹ Phan Bội Châu played both the Germans and the Chinese for funds, while personally coordinating the attacks that would have released more funding from his benefactors.⁵⁶⁰ Cường Đễ had left Phan Bội Châu in charge and fled to Europe after Phan Bội Châu's partisans threatened him in Canton.⁵⁶¹ According to Nguyễn Bá Trác, "Phan Bội Châu is the most fervent of the violent terrorists. Phan Bội Châu is determined, perseverant, and fanatical. He is trapped by his own promises to the Chinese."⁵⁶² The prosecutor's accusations were reaching a fever pitch.

Building on his relentless charges, on October 31, the prosecutor introduced testimony and documentation demonstrating Phan Bội Châu's involvement in bomb-making. Bùi Ngọc Nhuận was arrested in Bangkok in 1913 with pieces of an encoded letter to Phan Bội Châu that

⁵⁵⁰ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 386-387.

⁵⁵¹ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 389.

⁵⁵² SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 387.

⁵⁵³ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 391-392.

⁵⁵⁴ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 396.

⁵⁵⁵ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 396-97.

⁵⁵⁶ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 392.

⁵⁵⁷ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 397-398.

⁵⁵⁸ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 401-402.

⁵⁵⁹ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 399.

⁵⁶⁰ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 400.

⁵⁶¹ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 401.

⁵⁶² SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 403.

intelligence services were able to reconstruct and decode. The letter testified to the fabrication and transportation of bombs to Saigon and Hà Tiên.⁵⁶³ Another letter from Lý Định used code to discuss bombs and bombing.⁵⁶⁴ The prosecutor went on to introduce four more similar letters. Then eight more. Then testimony from individuals on bomb-making. Nguyễn Huy Nhuận testified, "The bombs can kill 1,000 people. The small ones cost 100 piastres. The big ones cost 600 piastres."⁵⁶⁵ Đặng Kiên called the bombs "egg-shaped people killers."⁵⁶⁶ And Vũ Văn Thụy declared, "the revolutionaries started to talk about bombs as an easy way of provoking a revolution."⁵⁶⁷

Certain students, such as Đặng Tử Mão, became Phan Bội Châu's expert bomb-makers, capable of creating a variety of deadly explosive devices.⁵⁶⁸ One type, called a "goose egg" was equipped with a striker and packed with 500 grams of iron pellets. This was the kind used to eviscerate the *tuần phủ* of Thái Bình.⁵⁶⁹ Another kind was the "pig tail grenades" that used a wick. Yet another were the "money grenades" that included two internal chambers.⁵⁷⁰ A bomb expert examined some of the bombs created by Phan Bội Châu's revolutionaries in China, and declared them to be of professional quality, made using machines obtained in Japan.⁵⁷¹

Rapidly, the prosecutor strung together a long list of documents that, he claimed, illustrated Phan Bội Châu's vast terrorist network in action.⁵⁷² The notebook seized from Cường Đê's belongings indicated that Phan Bội Châu was sending money to workshop sites provided by Kang Youwei where Phan Bội Châu's young men produced the explosives.⁵⁷³ After the accidental explosion in Kowloon that resulted in the loss of several of Đặng Tử Mão's fingers, the bomb-makers split up. Some went to Longzhou, others to Yunnan, and still others to Siam.⁵⁷⁴ In Yunnan, Vietnamese revolutionaries were supported by the Chinese warlord Lu Rongting. Nguyễn Hải Thân (aka Nguyễn Cẩm Giàng) led the Vietnamese in Yunnan.⁵⁷⁵ Another contingent made bombs in Nanning in a tailor shop.⁵⁷⁶

In 1914, the executive committee of the Quang Phục hội moved to demonstrate the group's potential to Chinese officials. According to the testimony of Nguyễn Quang Hào, bomb-makers were assigned to each province to carry out attacks.⁵⁷⁷ The Chinese revolutionary-turned-official Huang Xing was treated to a banquet where Vietnamese promised to "show the Chinese their bomb-throwing prowess."⁵⁷⁸ Nguyễn Hải Thân then undertook a mission to kill Governor General Albert Sarraut in Nam Định. He returned claiming success, greatly pleasing the Chinese, until the Chinese learned that this was a lie. Nguyễn Văn Tuấn testified that the

⁵⁶³ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 403.

⁵⁶⁴ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 403-404.

⁵⁶⁵ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 416.

⁵⁶⁶ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 417.

⁵⁶⁷ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 417.

⁵⁶⁸ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 412.

⁵⁶⁹ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 412.

⁵⁷⁰ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 413.

⁵⁷¹ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 412.

⁵⁷² SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 405-409, 410.

⁵⁷³ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 413.

⁵⁷⁴ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 414.

⁵⁷⁵ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 415.

⁵⁷⁶ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 417.

⁵⁷⁷ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 422.

⁵⁷⁸ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 421.

Executive Committee of the Quang Phục hội then replaced Nguyễn Hải Thân with Nguyễn Trọng Thượng. It was on Nguyễn Trọng Thượng's orders that Tài Xé (aka Nguyễn Văn Thụy) carried out his attack on the terrace of the Hanoi Hotel on April 26, 1913.

The prosecutor began to tie together his case. Nguyễn Hải Thân, Nguyễn Trọng Thượng, and the others were all following Phan Bội Châu's direct orders. The prosecutor rattled off testimonies to build his case. Nguyễn Đạo Nam had declared to the 1913 Criminal Commission, which had originally sentenced Phan Bội Châu to death, "The revolution is coming. We will trouble the country and blow up the loyal officials of the French. We intend to frighten the officials associated with the administration."⁵⁷⁹ Phạm Hoàng Triệt testified, "The exact date of the attacks was fixed in advance by Phan Bội Châu himself." Nguyễn Đại testified, "Phan Bội Châu...recruited partisans from northern Tonkin because they get along with the Chinese pirates."

Phan Bội Châu could offer only weak excuses to wave after wave of evidence. He claimed, "The only order I gave was to study. If you are claiming my ideas are the cause of the 1913 terrorist campaign, I cannot protest, but they did not act on my orders."⁵⁸⁰ Continuing, Phan Bội Châu offered a highly revealing statement: "In my writings, I said bad things about the French. I exhorted my compatriots to unite against the French. But I never thought they would actually do it."⁵⁸¹ Other statements represented desperate half-measures that only hurt his case further. Phan Bội Châu disavowed Nguyễn Hải Thân, but then admitted he had been in charge of bomb production in Longzhou.⁵⁸² Phan Bội Châu offered desperate, evasive explanations: "Đặng Tử Mẫn only made powder...Đặng Bình Thành had bought bombs on Cường Đê's orders...I only gave 5 piastres to contribute to the opening of that tailor shop."⁵⁸³ Even worse, Phan Bội Châu's statements increasingly compromised his own defense: "Our party was against the French government, not the [native] functionaries...Nguyễn Trọng Thượng was part of my group, but he did not follow my orders."⁵⁸⁴ November 4 culminated in descriptions of the April 1913 assassinations.⁵⁸⁵

Finally, the prosecutor read off multiple pages of Phan Bội Châu's previous incriminating statements, asking the old man if he stood by his own words.⁵⁸⁶ The prosecutor then pointed out contradictions between Phan Bội Châu's statements. Losing ground with each passing day, Phan Bội Châu grew quieter and less combative. There would be no victory against such well-substantiated prosecution. Phan Bội Châu weakly clung to the last remaining defense he could muster: it was all Cường Đê's doing. In the evening of November 6, the prosecutor unleashed his final salvo: a hitherto unmentioned letter written by Phan Bội Châu to Cường Đê that proved Phan Bội Châu had been the sole authority leading the Quang Phục hội at the time the April 1913 attacks were carried out.⁵⁸⁷

The letter was found in Cường Đê's possession upon his capture in Hong Kong on July 8, 1913. In this letter, dated March 26, 1913, Phan Bội Châu is clearly shown to have given instructions to Cường Đê, not the other way around. Phan Bội Châu indicated that he had

⁵⁷⁹ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 424.

⁵⁸⁰ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 409.

⁵⁸¹ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 410.

⁵⁸² SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 415.

⁵⁸³ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 416-417.

⁵⁸⁴ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 425.

⁵⁸⁵ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 430.

⁵⁸⁶ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 427.

⁵⁸⁷ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 435.

received a letter from Nguyễn Trọng Thượng in Indochina assuring him the population was ready to support him and the Quang Phục hội. The prosecutor explained that the letter proved Phan Bội Châu was marshaling his forces for an imminent campaign of terrorism against the French Protectorate. Nguyễn Trọng Thượng, son of Nguyễn Tân Thuật was to lead the attack in Tonkin. Phan Bội Châu needed Cường Để to return so he could exercise his influence over the Cochinchinese. Cường Để's sudden departure in March 1913, apparently for Europe thought actually for the Mekong Delta, had thrown Phan Bội Châu's plans for a violent takeover into disarray by threatening to fragment the movement. Thus Phan Bội Châu demanded Cường Để return to assist with the "great enterprise," including the "organization of a provisional government." Phan Bội Châu was clearly the one in charge.

Realizing that everything now rested on this letter, which he was clearly shocked to see, Phan Bội Châu resurrected his old defense strategy:

Phan Bội Châu: "Someone imitated my signature."

Prosecutor: "Are you recommencing the comedy of October 20? If the letter is bogus, why would Cường Để keep it? He knew your writing well. He would not have interrupted his voyage on your orders unless it was really you."

Phan Bội Châu: "The person who wrote this letter is very good at imitating my signature."

Prosecutor: "You continue to mock the Criminal Commission. Why not ask for an expert as you did for the copy?"

Phan Bội Châu: "It is such a good imitation that an expert would be fooled.

[The letter is presented to interpreter Bùi Bằng Đoàn, who confirms it]

Phan Bội Châu: "The interpreter is wrong."

Prosecutor: "This is proof you organized the 1913 terrorist campaign. You were indeed the leader because your order made Cường Để interrupt his voyage."⁵⁸⁸

The interrogatory sessions were over. For the Criminal Commission, there was absolutely no question: Phan Bội Châu had led the Quang Phục hội at the time that organization's operatives carried out bombing attacks on government targets inside French Indochina. Phan Bội Châu was the insidious master of puppets, who used violent rhetoric, ruthless tactics, sophisticated explosives, and radicalized young men to bring to fruition his plan to eradicate the French colonial administration, terrify the Indochinese population into submission, and become the president and ruler of Vietnam.

On November 9, the Criminal Commission met solely to read the charges. Phan Bội Châu said only that he had nothing to add and that he protested his innocence. The prosecutor gave Phan Bội Châu three days in which to prepare his defense and asked if he wanted to choose an attorney. Phan Bội Châu asked that the Commission designate him one. Bride, as president of the Criminal Commission, then designated Raymond Bona, defense advocate for the Court of Appeals in Hanoi, and ended the meeting at 4:00 PM.

The Approaching Storm (November 10-November 22)

After 36 days of interrogation, Phan Bội Châu and his designated attorney Raymond Bona were to be given just three days to prepare a defense. Fortunately for Phan Bội Châu, and quite unfortunately for administration officials who were anxious have the verdict rendered in advance of Governor General Varenne's imminent arrival to the colony, the gears of colonial bureaucray simply could not grind that quickly. On November 15, Jean-Félix Krautheimer,

⁵⁸⁸ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu: Interrogatoires*, 438.

acting resident superior of Tonkin, wrote Monguillot to report that the preparation of Phan Bội Châu's defense has been delayed due to difficulties with the designation of Phan Bội Châu's attorney.⁵⁸⁹ It had taken until that day (November 15) to hold the new meeting required to allow a proper designation. Krautheimer estimated that the day of judgment would take place on November 21.

As it turned out, Phan Bội Châu received not one defense attorney, but two: Raymond Bona and Joseph Larre, of Haiphong. On November 17, Larre and Bona asked Bride for a supplementary delay on account of the number of files it was necessary for them to review.⁵⁹⁰ President Bride granted this, although the extension was still not to exceed three days.⁵⁹¹

On November 16, Bride had provided the office of the resident superior of Tonkin a press release he hoped to have distributed. In the press release, Bride declared the day of judgment would take place in the hall of the First Chamber of the Court of Appeals, located in the Palace of Justice, and that it was scheduled for 8:00 AM, Monday November 23.⁵⁹² Bride followed this with a self-congratulatory statement:

On this occasion, I would like to recall that the investigation of Phan Bội Châu, during which nearly 1950 questions were put to the accused, was particularly long because of the numerous documents it was necessary to gather, sometimes from Cochinchina and Annam, analyze, translate, classify and inventory. The Criminal Commission with its auxiliaries, under the direction of its President, has done considerable work which required two long sessions each day, which were often extended very late in the evening. This being the circumstance, I wish to pay tribute to the zeal everyone has thrown into this case so that all the necessary clarifications might be made in the interest of justice.⁵⁹³

Bride requested the press release be sent out on November 21. Robin was not interested.⁵⁹⁴ Neither was the Sûreté, which responded in a one-line cable on November 19: "No press release should be made to the press."⁵⁹⁵ The security state had thwarted Bride's desire to pursue his version of French colonial justice a final time. Bride had been so single-mindedly focused on proving Phan Bội Châu's guilt that he had little conception of how such a verdict would be received by Vietnamese in the colony. Robin and Jeanbrau, who had been watching a stream of ever more worrisome cables, recognized that Phan Bội Châu's arrest and trial had excited public opinion in unprecedented and dangerous ways. Bride needed to bring the trial of Phan Bội Châu to a close with the less fanfare, the better.

A Titanic Duel: The Day of Sentencing (November 23)

⁵⁸⁹ SPCE 355, *Le Résident Supérieur p.i. au Tonkin à M. le Gouverneur Général de l'Indochine (Cabinet), No. 501.CCB, 15 novembre 1925.*

⁵⁹⁰ SPCE 355, *Telegramme Officiel, Gougal (Alberti, Hanoi) à Gougal Saigon, No. 2976, 17 novembre 1925.*

⁵⁹¹ SPCE 355, *Telegramme Officiel, Gougal à Gougal Saigon, November (date missing) 1925.*

⁵⁹² SPCE 355, *Le Résident Supérieur p.i. au Tonkin à M. le Gouverneur Général de l'Indochine (Cabinet), No. 503.CCB, 16 novembre 1925.*

⁵⁹³ SPCE 355, *Le Résident Supérieur p.i. au Tonkin à M. le Gouverneur Général de l'Indochine (Cabinet), No. 504.CCB, 16 novembre 1925.*

⁵⁹⁴ According to Alberti, Robin had called Bride's press release, "not very useful." SPCE 355, *Telegramme Officiel, Gougal (Alberti, Hanoi) à Gougal Saigon, No. 2976, 17 novembre 1925.*

⁵⁹⁵ SPCE 355, *Telegramme Officiel, Gougal (Saigon) à Gougal Hanoi, No. 16-S, 19 Novembre 1925.*

By 7:00 AM, it was standing room only outside the gates the Palace of Justice.⁵⁹⁶ Despite the lack of a press release, the colonial press turned out in force. The major Vietnamese language newspapers covering the trial were *Thực nghiệp dân báo*, *Trung Bắc tân văn*, both based in Hanoi, and *Đông Pháp thời báo*, based in Saigon.⁵⁹⁷ French-language coverage appeared in *L'Argus Indochinois*, *Indochine Républicain*, and *L'Écho Annamite*.

Stern-looking guards holding bayonets watched as the crowd continued to grow.⁵⁹⁸ After filling the walk-in rooms on the ground floor, the crowd filled out the first floor as well, then proceeded to fill the corridors as well. It was a scene quite unlike any that had taken place in the colony. This was the first time a Criminal Commission had been open to the public. The reporter for *Trung Bắc tân văn* later mused if this was Bride's idea of "equality."⁵⁹⁹ The Sûreté

⁵⁹⁶ My account of the day's events draws on several published accounts. The most commonly cited account in Vietnamese is *Tập án Phan Bội Châu* (The Trial of Phan Bội Châu), which draws on coverage published in *Thực Nghiệp dân báo* on November 25-27, 1925. There are several versions of this pamphlet. The fourth printing of *Tập Án Phan Bội Châu*, printed in *quốc ngữ*, is available in ANOM. SPCE 354, *Tập án Phan Bội Châu*, (Hanoi: Imprimerie Thực Nghiệp, 1925). In 1950, Bùi Đình re-published the *quốc ngữ* version of *Tập án Phan Bội Châu* in his longer account of the trial. See Bùi Đình, *Vụ án Phan Bội Châu* (The Case of Phan Bội Châu) (Hanoi: Nhà xuất bản Tiếng Việt, 1950), 45-79. In 1980, Professor Trần Văn Quý of the Hán Nôm institute discovered a version entitled *Tập án ông Phan* (*The Trial of Mr. Phan*) printed in *chữ nôm* in November 1925, just after the trial ended. Trần Văn Quý apparently retains this copy, but his edited version transliterated into *quốc ngữ* is published in Chương Thâu, ed. *Hồ sơ vụ án Phan Bội Châu* (Hanoi: Nhà xuất bản Văn hóa - Thông tin, 2002), 75-114. Trần Văn Quý's *chữ nôm* copy contains editorial criticisms of the French judicial administration as well as Nghệ Tĩnh terms used by Phan Bội Châu during the trial. These features do not appear in the *quốc ngữ* versions. Several other *nôm* versions are available at the Hán Nôm Institute in Hanoi, including: *Phan Bội Châu tiểu sử* (printed by Liễu Văn Đường, 1926), 60 tr. 19,5x14-VNb. 73; *Tập án Phan Bội Châu* (handwritten copy found with eight other documents), 138 tr., 17x15, -VHv.224; *Tập án cụ Phan* (handwritten copy) 37 tr. - VHv.224. In 1925-1926, the Thực Nghiệp publishing house published selections from *Thực Nghiệp dân báo*'s November and December coverage in *Những tin tức và dư luận về Ông Phan Bội Châu* (News and Opinion about Mr. Phan Bội Châu), which included a photograph of the old patriot on the cover and sold for 10 cents in Tonkin and Annam, 15 cents in Cochinchina, Laos, and Cambodia. Đông Hải, *Những tin tức và dư luận về Ông Phan Bội Châu trong hai tháng Novembre và Decembre 1925* (Hanoi: Thực Nghiệp, 1926). A copy is available at Bibliothèque Nationale. A copy is also available in ANOM. SPCE 353, *Những tin tức và dư luận về Ông Phan Bội Châu* (Hanoi: Imprimerie Thực Nghiệp, 1925). A microform copy is available at the National Library in Hanoi (Pièce 163, S 87/3119). ANOM also holds handwritten French translations of *Thực nghiệp dân báo* coverage on November 23 and 24, and (separately) November 27. SPCE 354, *Traduction du Thực nghiệp dân báo No. 1529 des 23 et 24 Nov. 1925* and *Extrait du Thực nghiệp dân báo no. 1532 des 27 Nov. 1925*. Another useful account draws on coverage published in *Trung Bắc tân văn*. *Việc Phan Bội Châu tại Hồng đồng để hình phiên ngày 23 Novembre 1925* (Hanoi: Trung Bắc tân văn, 1925). A microform copy is available at the National Library in Hanoi (Pièce 326, S 87/3273). A third account, by Trần Huy Liệu, the editor of *Đông Pháp thời báo*, appeared in January 1926. Trần Huy Liệu, *Việc Ông Phan Bội Châu* (The Matter of Phan Bội Châu) (Saigon: Nhà in Xưa nay, 1926). A microform copy is available at the National Library in Hanoi (Pièce 294, S 87/3242). ANOM also holds a copy in SPCE 352, *Phan Bội Châu, Dossier trasmis par Sûreté Annam, Việc ông Phan Bội Châu, Saigon 1926*. The order sentencing Phan Bội Châu, including a brief description of the day's events is available in SPCE 352, *Arret de la Commission Criminelle, 23 novembre 1925*. Finally, Gilles, head of the Sûreté in Tonkin, provided a three-page report on the day's events which is useful for comparing with Vietnamese journalistic accounts. SPCE 355, *Note Confidentielle, No. 7468, Chef de la Sûreté du Tonkin (Gilles) à M. le Résident Supérieur, le DirAffPol et de la S.G., le Procureur Général, 24 novembre 1925*.

⁵⁹⁷ Trần Huy Liệu served as the correspondent for *Xưa nay*. Trần Huy Liệu, *Việc Ông Phan Bội Châu* (The Matter of Phan Bội Châu) (Saigon: Nhà in Xưa nay, 1926).

⁵⁹⁸ Gilles reported that the crowd was "very easily contained by the Order Service, who did not demonstrate, at least apparently, any feeling." SPCE 355, *Note Confidentielle, No. 7468, Chef de la Sûreté du Tonkin (Gilles) à M. le Résident Supérieur, le DirAffPol et de la S.G., le Procureur Général, 24 novembre 1925*.

⁵⁹⁹ *Việc Phan Bội Châu tại Hồng đồng để hình phiên ngày 23 Novembre 1925* (Hanoi: Trung Bắc tân văn, 1925).

commented that the trial had provoked considerable curiosity, "which resulted in an influx of a very mixed indigenous public."⁶⁰⁰ Altogether, including a fair number of Europeans, the crowd had reached around 2,000 people.

At 7:45 AM, Phan Bội Châu exited Hỏa Lò Central Prison between two French soldiers. He wore a five-paneled aristocratic gown that extended to his heels. His bald forehead lay under a tangle of hair. The guards sat him in a chair and, as he waited for the court to open, Phan Bội Châu stroked his beard, looking very deliberate in each action. The journalist from *Thực nghiệp dân báo* commented that the old patriot looked like a Chinese gentleman.⁶⁰¹

At 8:25 AM, President Bride convened the final meeting of the Criminal Commission, with members Resident-Mayor Dupuy, Prosecutor General Boyer, and Captain Bellier present. Alongside, there was the court's clerk Patrick Arnoux and the court's two interpreters Gombaud Saintonge and Bùi Bằng Đoàn. Saintonge would translate the statements of the Commission into Vietnamese, while Bùi Bằng Đoàn would translate Phan Bội Châu's words into French. Finally, appearing before the court were Raymond Bona, Joseph Larre, and Phan Boi Châu.

Bride began by asking Phan Bội Châu to state his name, place of birth, profession, and parentage. In a loud and nimble voice, Phan Bội Châu answered, stating he was from Đan Nhiễm village, Nam Đàn district in the province of Nghệ An and that he was formerly a teacher. Bride then read the eight charges against Phan Bội Châu:

1. To have, in Siamese or Chinese territory at an unspecified time, by donations, promises, threats, abuse of authority or power, machinations or guilty artifices, been complicit in the crime of murder with premeditation committed by the convicted Phạm Văn Tráng (known as Cháng) on April 12, 1913 in Thái Bình, Tonkin on the person of *tuần phủ* Nguyễn Duy Hàn. To have provoked this crime and provided instructions for how to commit it.

2. To have been, in the same circumstances of time and place, made complicit in the crime of murder with premeditation committed by the convicted Phạm Văn Tráng (known as Cháng), on April 12, 1913 in Thái Bình, Tonkin on the person of *tuần phủ* Nguyễn Duy Hàn, by procuring instruments, in this case bombs, which served for the action, knowing well what they would do.

3. To have, in the same circumstances of time and place, by donations, promises, threats, abuse of authority or power, machinations or guilty artifices, been complicit in the crime of murder with premeditation committed by Nguyễn Văn Túy (known as Tài Xế) and the convicted Nguyễn Khắc Cần on April 26, 1913 on the terrace of the Hanoi Hotel in Hanoi, Tonkin on the persons of Captains Montgrand and Chapuis. To have provoked this crime and provided instructions for how to commit it.

4. To have, in the same circumstances of time and place, been complicit in the crime of murder with premeditation committed by Nguyễn Văn Túy (known as Tài Xế) and the

⁶⁰⁰ SPCE 355, *Note Confidentielle, No. 7468, Chef de la Sûreté du Tonkin (Gilles) à M. le Résident Supérieur, le DirAffPol et de la S.G., le Procureur Général, 24 novembre 1925.*

⁶⁰¹ Another version appeared as *Đồng Hải, Những tin tức và dư luận về Ông Phan Bội Châu trong hai tháng Noviembre và Decembre 1925* (Hanoi: Thực Nghiệp, 1926). Yet another appeared as Finally, Chương Thâu a copy was printed in *chữ nôm* in 1925 the day after the trial.

convicted Nguyễn Khắc Cần on April 26, 1913 on the terrace of the Hanoi Hotel in Hanoi, Tonkin on the persons of Captains Montgrand and Chapuis, by procuring instruments, in this case bombs, which served for the action, knowing well what they would do.

5. To have, in the same circumstances of time and place, taken part in a conspiracy to either destroy the Government or to excite citizens or inhabitants to arm themselves against the authorities within the territories of Annam and Tonkin, with the aggravating circumstance that said conspiracy was followed by its execution or preparation thereof.
6. To have, in the same circumstances of time and place, taken part in a conspiracy to either destroy the Government or to encourage citizens or inhabitants to arm themselves against the authorities within the territories of Annam and Tonkin.
7. To have, in the same circumstances of time and place, taken actions likely to compromise public security or to cause serious political disturbances.
8. To have, in the same circumstances of time and place, taken part in an association formed for the purpose of preparing or committing crimes against persons or property.⁶⁰²

Having read the charges, Bride ceded the floor to Phan Bội Châu. It is difficult to guess exactly what Bride and the other members of the Criminal Commission expected to happen next. However, little in the previous two months of interrogatory sessions could have prepared them for what *did* happen next. In a strong yet genuine voice,⁶⁰³ Phan Bội Châu addressed President Bride and packed audience of thousands:

Vietnam is a nation, but in days past it fell under harsh rule. The people have long suffered. The kings kept themselves far from the people and heaped on restrictions, so the people had no way to move forward. Because the Protectorate also represents a civilized nation that speaks of progress, I had believed that after thousands of years it was time for the people of Giao Chi [Vietnam] to open their eyes. Little could I have known that twenty years ago the government would simply stop reforms and not change so much as a single policy.

Bride's observation that Phan Bội Châu's greatest weapon was his ability to adapt his message perfectly to his audience must have come back to haunt him at this moment.⁶⁰⁴ This was simply not the same Phan Bội Châu Bride had worked so hard to bring to justice. Phan Bội Châu was ready to deliver a speech and Bride in his desire to demonstrate the grandeur of French justice had unwittingly given him the perfect audience.

Bride occasionally interrupted Phan Bội Châu to allow Gombaudo Saintonge to translate

⁶⁰² The various Vietnamese accounts provide rough approximations of each charge. For a complete version in French, see SPCE 354, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu, Rapport du Président de la Commission Criminelle*, 31-32.

⁶⁰³ Even Sûreté Chief Gilles describes Phan Bội Châu's voice as "un voix forte mais sans jactance." SPCE 355, *Note Confidentielle, No. 7468, Chef de la Sûreté du Tonkin (Gilles) à M. le Résident Supérieur, le DirAffPol et de la S.G., le Procureur Général, 24 novembre 1925*.

⁶⁰⁴ SPCE 352, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu, Interrogatoires*, 227.

on his behalf, but Phan Bội Châu did not need a translator for the audience that mattered. He was now a teacher once again and he had been preparing this lesson his whole life:

Since 1904, Annam and Tonkin have had only two colleges: the University of Hanoi and the University of Thuận Hóa, but they only teach translation. The people are not allowed to study abroad. The examination system has remained in place. Penals laws have not been adapted to match the laws of France. The mandarins are corrupt. You can bribe them in public.

I am from Vietnam. I love the nation of Vietnam. I want to wake up the people of Vietnam. Seeing what was happening, I came up with a plan to oppose the government. If I had at hand a 10,000 man navy and many tens of thousands of troops, guns, and bullets, along with warships and airplanes, then I would declare war and take down this government piece by piece.

But I am just a scholar. I have not a single coin in my pocket. Without iron in my hand, I have no way to acquire weapons to fight back. Thus I use only my words. I use my voice to encourage the people and to demand the government reform its politics. But the government was suspicious of me and attacked, so I had to flee overseas to work toward my goals. I called out to my comrades to give money and send people abroad. I wrote books and sent them back to stir the people up. What I have done is use my tongue and my brush. My goal was only to reform the government. What I wanted was only to love the people and my country. My actions truly were principled.

If I have committed crimes, they are these: First, the government was given over to the Protectorate. Nobody opposed this except me, because I wanted independence for Vietnam. Second, before when Vietnam was truly an autocracy, I wanted the country to become a nation. Third, the state would not allow travel abroad, but I escaped and encouraged others to follow. Fourth, I wrote and gave speeches to wake up the people, to demand government reform, and to bring about civilization.⁶⁰⁵

Phan Bội Châu's speech lasted for over an hour. He had clearly taken careful observations of the Criminal Commission during the long interrogatory sessions, because his speech anticipated the main arguments in Bride's report. One by one, Phan Bội Châu employed refined versions of the counter arguments he had practiced the previous two and a half months. He was a scholar, not a warrior. He was guilty only of writing to inspire patriotism. He had not thrown any bombs personally. If Phan Bội Châu had wanted to be a thug, he could have stayed and joined *Đề Thám* or a group of bandits. He had never killed any Westerners. In fact, his books encouraged Westerners and Vietnamese to love each other like brothers, like family.⁶⁰⁶ The crimes he was being charged with were savage and uncivilized. If Vietnam were to achieve independence, Phan Bội Châu stated as he brought his speech to a conclusion, "The first thing I would do would be to sentence to death those murderers, because murdering people like those officials is not a humane act. People who have lost their country are like children who lose their

⁶⁰⁵ This version of Phan Bội Châu's speech relies on *Tập án Phan Bội Châu*, which draws on the reporting of *Thực Nghiệp dân báo*.

⁶⁰⁶ Many of these statements appear in the three main Vietnamese accounts, though in different order.

parents. If children can't follow their parents, who will they follow?"⁶⁰⁷

Having finished this speech, Phan Bội Châu said no more. Bride asked if he anything more to say. Phan Bội Châu told Bride he would answer any questions the Commission had, whereupon Bride replied, "The Council has no more questions, because we asked them all during the inquiry. This time is only for the accused to say what they will."⁶⁰⁸ Phan Bội Châu sat down. It was clear to everyone in the room that something momentous had taken place. Gilles, the chief of the Sûreté in Tonkin, wrote the next day, "It must be recognized that...the impression this produced on the native audience, who observed listening with a religious silence, seemed entirely in his favor."⁶⁰⁹ Phan Bội Châu had won the room.

At 10:15 AM, Larre and Bona requested a break until 3:00 PM.⁶¹⁰ Satisfied with this, Bride ended the meeting immediately. Phan Bội Châu stayed in the Palace of Justice as Gilles cleared the corridor and held back the throng of desperately curious Vietnamese hoping to get another look at the old patriot.⁶¹¹ Guards brought Phan Bội Châu back to Hỏa Lò Central Prison without incident. The streets were silent.

Vietnamese agents of the Sûreté mixed in with the crowd reported people saying that the "great patriot Phan Bội Châu" would almost certainly be sentenced to life imprisonment or deportation by the Criminal Commission.⁶¹² In the afternoon, the crowd returned in even greater numbers than the morning. The corridor needed to be slightly cleared so that Phan Bội Châu, his attorneys, and the Criminal Commission could get back into the courtroom. The Criminal Commission then reconvened at 3:00 PM sharp.

President Bride attempted to steal back Phan Bội Châu's thunder. He opened by stating, "This morning Mr. Phan Bội Châu failed to answer several questions correctly, so the Commission will give an account of the things Mr. Phan Bội Châu did during the period 1904-1913 so they can be included in the court's record."⁶¹³ Bride proceeded to present a concise and relatively straightforward account of Phan Bội Châu's life as a revolutionary. However, nothing he had to say was particularly incriminating. Without the benefit of his vast archive of documents ready for citation, Bride indictment of Phan Bội Châu had lost a great deal of its punch.

Bride did attempt to reprise some of his greatest hits from the interrogatory sessions. To show how dishonest Phan Bội Châu had been, Bride cited Phan Bội Châu's own statements. Taken out of context, however, the statements Bride cited were hardly incriminating. Bride noted, for example, that "Phan Bội Châu claimed Liang Qichao's introduction was incorrect. But

⁶⁰⁷ *Việc Phan Bội Châu tại Hồng đồng để hình phiên ngày 23 Novembre 1925* (Hanoi: Trung Bắc tân văn, 1925).

⁶⁰⁸ *Việc Phan Bội Châu tại Hồng đồng để hình phiên ngày 23 Novembre 1925* (Hanoi: Trung Bắc tân văn, 1925).

⁶⁰⁹ SPCE 355, *Note Confidentielle, No. 7468, Chef de la Sûreté du Tonkin (Gilles) à M. le Résident Supérieur, le DirAffPol et de la S.G., le Procureur Général, 24 novembre 1925.*

⁶¹⁰ SPCE 355, *Note Confidentielle, No. 7468, Chef de la Sûreté du Tonkin (Gilles) à M. le Résident Supérieur, le DirAffPol et de la S.G., le Procureur Général, 24 novembre 1925.*

⁶¹¹ SPCE 355, *Note Confidentielle, No. 7468, Chef de la Sûreté du Tonkin (Gilles) à M. le Résident Supérieur, le DirAffPol et de la S.G., le Procureur Général, 24 novembre 1925.*

⁶¹² SPCE 355, *Note Confidentielle, No. 7468, Chef de la Sûreté du Tonkin (Gilles) à M. le Résident Supérieur, le DirAffPol et de la S.G., le Procureur Général, 24 novembre 1925.*

⁶¹³ *Việc Phan Bội Châu tại Hồng đồng để hình phiên ngày 23 Novembre 1925* (Hanoi: Trung Bắc tân văn, 1925).

Liang Qichao had no reason to make anything up."⁶¹⁴ Just what the Vietnamese in the room were supposed to make of this was unclear. But Bride did not explain. He moved on to another example. Bride pointed out Phan Bội Châu's fiery rhetoric. He compared Phan Châu Trinh's writings favorably with Phan Bội Châu's: "The words you've let loose include insults for Frenchmen. Mr. Phan Châu Trinh opposes us but does not insult anyone."⁶¹⁵ No doubt some of the Vietnamese in the audience felt the French, and probably Bride himself, could stand to put up with a few insults.

The overall impression of Bride's statement was mixed at best. Gilles claimed that Bride had left a "deep impression on the audience." Gilles noted in his report, for example, how when Bride cited Phan Bội Châu's claim that "All the Annamites are liars," "Phan Bội Châu could not but bow his head without answering."⁶¹⁶ None of the Vietnamese accounts mention this interaction. In fact, Bride appears either as a bit player, in the case of *Thực Nghiệp dân báo's* reporting, or as a foil for Phan Bội Châu to debate, in the case of *Trung Bắc tân văn's* reporting. And debate Phan Bội Châu did, countering Bride's claims with every bit of confidence he had shown in the early interrogatory sessions. The only difference was instead of simply denying claims, Phan Bội Châu was now also supplying a counternarrative: he was a patriot and not a criminal. Phan Bội Châu had even picked up some new arguments during the interrogation sessions, to amusing effect: "You all claim I was the leader who ordered the bombing, but who caught me handing a bomb to anyone? Or took a picture of me giving one to anyone?"⁶¹⁷

Indeed, Bride did not have a picture of Phan Bội Châu handing someone a bomb. Bride did have reams of letters and testimonies, of course, but those could not be revealed in open court. The strategy of trial by archive, which the Criminal Commission had been able to use with such success during the interrogatory sessions, worked against Bride now. He could only make claims; he could not show the evidence necessary to convince the audience those claims were true. Even Bride's attempt to address the bombing incidents failed to leave an impression on the journalists in the room. The story they were interested in was not a pair of bombings that someone other than the accused had committed twelve years prior. There was a far better story to cover: a Vietnamese patriot who perfectly willing to tell a French official he was wrong.

At 7:00 PM, Bride stopped. It was Larre and Bona's turn to make strong statements on Phan Bội Châu's behalf. Larre stressed that Phan Bội Châu was "simply an ardent patriot, a philosopher, a jewel amongst jewels."⁶¹⁸ Bona, meanwhile, questioned Bride's evidence as a whole:

The charges are based on wastepaper and the words of complete criminals. Those papers are the papers of consuls and emissaries, but everything in them is from the mouths of spies. What kind of people are spies? Spies are people who are paid to find stuff. If they

⁶¹⁴ *Việc Phan Bội Châu tại Hồng đồng đề hình phiên ngày 23 Novembre 1925* (Hanoi: Trung Bắc tân văn, 1925).

⁶¹⁵ *Việc Phan Bội Châu tại Hồng đồng đề hình phiên ngày 23 Novembre 1925* (Hanoi: Trung Bắc tân văn, 1925).

⁶¹⁶ SPCE 355, *Note Confidentielle, No. 7468, Chef de la Sûreté du Tonkin (Gilles) à M. le Résident Supérieur, le DirAffPol et de la S.G., le Procureur Général, 24 novembre 1925.*

⁶¹⁷ *Việc Phan Bội Châu tại Hồng đồng đề hình phiên ngày 23 Novembre 1925* (Hanoi: Trung Bắc tân văn, 1925).

⁶¹⁸ *Việc Phan Bội Châu tại Hồng đồng đề hình phiên ngày 23 Novembre 1925* (Hanoi: Trung Bắc tân văn, 1925).

can't find stuff they make accusations anyway, so very often there is no story, yet there are reports. As for the depositions of criminals, these are all accusations that put everything on PBC while he is not there to refute them."⁶¹⁹

Phan Bội Châu was a good man, Bona stressed. Bride had simply misunderstood him. Bona then turned the tables by citing from a number of Phan Bội Châu's more recent writings. According to the reporter from *Trung Bắc tân văn*, the audience seemed to be very moved.⁶²⁰ Bona finished his statements at 8:00 PM. After a brief pause, Bride gave Phan Bội Châu the opportunity to make a final statement. Phan Bội Châu simply said:

I have nothing more to complain about. I believe I have said everything. My resistance is like that of times past, like ancient times [he pointed his hand into the past], but it is no longer on my shoulders. Where can I stand now to present everything? Thus I beg to say one more thing: "If the state will take up the sword and gun to civilize the Vietnamese people, then I ask to be killed. If the state will take up culture and morals to civilize the Vietnamese people, then I am without any guilt."⁶²¹

Bride then called on the Criminal Commission to review the charges and determine their verdict. Bride read each charge, and to each the Criminal Commission replied in the affirmative. Phan Bội Châu was guilty of all of the charges. Bride then asked a ninth question: "do there exist attentuating circumstances in favor of Phan Bội Châu?" To this the majority agreed again. The Criminal Commission then adjourned briefly to deliberate. Upon return, Bride stated for the court: "Phan Bội Châu is found culpable of the facts specified. He is sentenced to the punishment of Forced Labor for Life."⁶²² Phan Bội Châu sat back slightly, but the color of his face did not seem to change. Bride asked whether Phan Bội Châu wished to appeal the sentence. He did. At 8:30 PM, the trial of Phan Bội Châu ended.

Colonial Firestorm: Indochina Reacts to the Verdict (November 24-December 9)

The news of Phan Bội Châu's dramatic day of sentencing quickly exploded throughout the colony's major cities. The Sûreté could barely keep up. One of the larger newspaper operations reporting on the trial, *Thực nghiệp dân báo* came out with five days of back-to-back coverage on November 23, 24, 25, 26, and 27.⁶²³ Recognizing the incredible demand for its coverage, the newspaper later republished selections from November 25, 26, and 27 in the form of a news pamphlet entitled *Tập án Phan Bội Châu* (The Trial of Phan Bội Châu), which sold for 10 cents.⁶²⁴ This rather conveniently left out most of Bride's statements, which had appeared on November 23 and 24, concentrating instead on Phan Bội Châu, Larre, and Bona's statements.

The news triggered quick responses aboard and at home. At 11:05 AM on November 25,

⁶¹⁹ *Việc Phan Bội Châu tại Hồng đồng đề hình phiên ngày 23 Novembre 1925* (Hanoi: Trung Bắc tân văn, 1925).

⁶²⁰ *Việc Phan Bội Châu tại Hồng đồng đề hình phiên ngày 23 Novembre 1925* (Hanoi: Trung Bắc tân văn, 1925).

⁶²¹ *Việc Phan Bội Châu tại Hồng đồng đề hình phiên ngày 23 Novembre 1925* (Hanoi: Trung Bắc tân văn, 1925).

⁶²² SPCE 354, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu, Rapport du Président de la Commission Criminelle*, 32.

⁶²³ SPCE 354, *Traduction du Thực nghiệp dân báo No. 1529 des 23 et 24 Nov. 1925 and Extrait du Thực nghiệp dân báo no. 1532 des 27 Nov. 1925*.

⁶²⁴ The cover indicates that the first print run included 5,000 copies while the fourth included 1,000 copies. SPCE 354, *Tập án Phan Bội Châu, (Hanoi: Imprimerie Thực Nghiệp, 1925)*.

an individual named Nguyễn Pho claiming to represent “Groupe de Jeune Annam” sent a telegram to the Chamber of Deputies in Paris demanding the French Parliament intervene to either affirm French sovereignty in Indochina by confirming Phan Bội Châu’s death sentence, or else give up France’s unique claims [to Indochina], thereby providing Vietnamese an example of France’s moral grandeur.⁶²⁵ This set off further alarm bells as Nguyễn Pho was known to be a dangerous operative with many contacts and bomb-making expertise.⁶²⁶

Léandri cabled from Haiphong on November 26 to provide three sample reactions, all of which expressed unease with the sentence. Better, one respondent stated, that Phan Bội Châu be given either “liberty or death.”⁶²⁷ Two days later, Léandri cabled again to report that all of the journals, including *Trung Bắc tân văn*, *Thực nghiệp dân báo*, and *Khai-hóa* had sold out between 10:30 AM and 2:00 PM that day.⁶²⁸ Léandri’s informer had then gone around to different groups of to discover the same thing taking place all over: the articles were being read aloud all over Haiphong. At each location, Vietnamese listened with rapt attention to the journalistic descriptions of “the person of interest, his good looks, and his courageous attitude.”⁶²⁹ The informer noted that while Vietnamese intellectuals seemed unhappy with the sentence, they were not provoked to protest, but rather either “awaited the arrival of a new governor general who they hoped would grant clemency,” or believed that in light of the “Phan Bội Châu’s energetic defense and his attorneys’ clever arguments, the Superior Council [the Protectorate Council] would change the nature of the sentence.”⁶³⁰

Hanoi quickly grew restive as well. On November 26 at 8:20 AM, Governor General Varenne, now in Saigon, received a private telegram from “Vietnamese Students” in Hanoi expressing their “stupifying sadness” at the verdict against Phan Bội Châu.⁶³¹ Alarmed by the possibility that Vietnamese could directly express their feelings electronically to Varenne, the Sûreté scrambled to find out who was responsible.⁶³² The offending party, a third-year student at the School of Agriculture by the name of Trần Tiên Ngũ from Nha Trang, claimed he had acted

⁶²⁵ SPCE 354BIS, *LCO. Président député Paris, Transmis le 25/11/25 à 11h5, Expédié par NGUYỄN-PHO.*

⁶²⁶ French translation of unnamed informer’s report on Nguyen Pho: “Nguyen Pho is in charge of bombing plots. He has just hired a new member, Tu-Nho from Tam kỳ (Quảng Nam). [Tu Nho is] a handsome man with a white complexion, a trimmed beard, short, and over 40 years old. Tu-Nho has been in the service of Europeans. He has accompanied his bosses to Japan, China, Siam, France, and America. He is thoroughly aware of the actions of Phan Bội Châu. During his stay in Paris, he often helped Phan Châu Trinh and Nguyễn Ái Quốc. He is a member of the League for Human Rights and founded the Amicale des Travailleurs manuels in Paris. Nguyen Pho intends to employ Tu-Nho as the leader of bombing plots so he may hire thugs familiar with the military arts. Tu-Nho knows many Chinese. During his stay in Paris, he entrusted to his Chinese friends Annamese travelling either to the United States, the interior of France, or to other foreign countries, without being obliged to pay for their trip. The Party of Nguyen Pho uses the services of a *tu tài* from Nghệ An named Tu Con who is a fortune teller and who is able to render predictions about everything that interests the party. There are still other new members and many secret projects not yet discovered.” SPCE 354BIS, *Traduction, Saigon (illegible), Re: Nguyen Pho.*

⁶²⁷ SPCE 355, *Note Confidentielle No. 311-S, (Leandri) à M. le Chef de la Sûreté au Tonkin, 26 novembre 1925.*

⁶²⁸ SPCE 355, *Note Confidentielle No. 314-S, (Leandri) à M. le Chef de la Sûreté au Tonkin, 28 novembre 1925.*

⁶²⁹ Ibid.

⁶³⁰ Ibid.

⁶³¹ SPCE 355, *Telegramme Prive, À Varenne, Gouverneur Général, Saigon, 8h20, 26 novembre 1925.*

⁶³² SPCE 355, *Dirsurge (Saigon) à Dirsurge Hanoi, No. 97/S.*

alone and apologized for abusing the telegram privileges he enjoyed as a student.⁶³³ The Sûreté soon found out that many more Vietnamese knew how to “abuse” the colonial communication services. A letter written in French, dated November 27, and signed by “a group of students at the University of Hanoi affiliated with Jeune Annam” arrived addressed to Jeanbrau, the director of political affairs and head of the Sûreté Générale. The letter called Phan Bội Châu a “national hero” and warned that the Vietnamese people were indignant at the “abominable” verdict delivered by a “despotic” and “tyrannical” government.⁶³⁴

The news from Saigon was offered no comfort for security officials. On November 27, Arnoux, the head of the Sûreté in Saigon, advised by telegram that the journal *La Cloche Fêlée* (The Broken Bell) had reappeared under the leadership of veteran radical journalists Phan Văn Trường, Eugene De La Batie, and Nguyễn An Ninh. *La Cloche Fêlée* put out a manifesto calling on citizens to protest against the conviction of Phan Bội Châu by refraining from joining Nguyễn Phan Long’s one-hundred strong Vietnamese delegation to meet with Governor General Varenne. Arnoux further advised that Phan Châu Trinh was taking advantage of the delegation’s presence to hold a talk entitled “The Republic and the Monarchy.”⁶³⁵ Not only were parallel manifestations taking shape in both Hanoi and Saigon, there was considerable evidence that these manifestations were inextricably linked. That same day, a cable from Saigon to Hanoi was intercepted: an individual named Nguyen Hao Dang messaged Cao Van Hai of the School of Commerce in Hanoi to let him know *La Cloche Fêlée* had reappeared and published a manifesto.⁶³⁶ Arnoux reported again on December 1 that a group of Tonkinese living in Saigon had planned to meet that day met to discuss the sentence against Phan Bội Châu.⁶³⁷ Other parts of the country began to take action as well. On December 5, Sogny, head of the Sûreté in Annam, advised that a number of residents of Annam had sent an appeal to Hanoi on December 3 drafted in *quốc ngữ* demanding amnesty for Phan Bội Châu.⁶³⁸

Soon Hanoi was abuzz with fervent interest in Phan Bội Châu’s fate. Special Commissar Bertrand of the Sûreté in Tonkin reported on November 28 that while the Vietnamese masses of Hanoi had absolutely no interest in Phan Bội Châu, amongst the politicians and intellectuals, “Phan Bội Châu was the subject of every conversation.” Furthermore, “in the theaters, in the restaurants, on the trams, and in the street, the interpreters, secretaries, students, and scholars talked incessantly about the great revolutionary. They all found the sentence too severe.”⁶³⁹ Evidence began to surface suggesting well-organized groups were taking advantage of the trial’s outcome to drum up support for national independence. On December 3, another round of poly-copied tracts similar to the purple-inked ones that had circulated in July began to arrive for Vietnamese clerical workers.⁶⁴⁰ Signed by the “Phục Việt hội (Society for the Independence of Vietnam,” the tone of this new set of tracts was considerably more alarmed, and therefore

⁶³³ SPCE 355, *Telegramme officiel, Dirsurge (Hanoi) à Dirsurge Saigon, 28 novembre 1925.*

⁶³⁴ SPCE 355, *Le Chef du Service de la Sûreté au Tonkin à M. le Directeur des Affaires Politiques et de la Sûreté Générale, 30 novembre 1925* (letter enclosed).

⁶³⁵ SPCE 354BIS, *Telegramme officiel, Chef Sûreté (Arnoux) à Dirsurge Hanoi, 27 novembre 1925.*

⁶³⁶ SPCE 355, *Hanoi de Saigon N20W25, le 27-11-15 à 10h45.*

⁶³⁷ SPCE 354BIS, *Note Confidentielle, Service de la Sûreté à M. le Directeur des Affaires Politiques et de la Sûreté Générale au Gouvernement Général Hanoi en communication [avec] le Chef du Service de la Sûreté en Tonkin Hanoi [et] Chef du Service de la Sûreté an Annam Hue, 1 décembre 1925.*

⁶³⁸ SPCE 354BIS, *Telegramme officiel chiffre, Sûreté Annam à Dirsurgé et Sûreté Tonkin en communication à Sûreté Saigon, No. 2292, 5 décembre 1925.*

⁶³⁹ SPCE 355, *Rapport de renseignements (Bertrand), Hanoi, 28 novembre 1925.*

⁶⁴⁰ SPCE 355, *(Néron à) M. le Chef de la Sûreté au Tonkin, 4 décembre 1925.*

alarming for security officials.⁶⁴¹

More than any other source, newspapers and magazines were responsible for spurring interest in the case and driving Vietnamese to take action. Amedée Clementi, owner of *L'Argus Indochinois*, led the charge in this regard, publishing numerous articles offering sharp criticism of the colonial administration, and the security services in particular.⁶⁴² Clementi understood that Phan Bội Châu's best hope was convincing Governor General Varenne that the peace and security of French Indochina depended upon a clemency order.⁶⁴³ Clearly aware of the colonial political situation, Clementi argued in *L'Argus Indochinois* that the Sûreté services wanted to stop demonstrations by Vietnamese in favor of Governor General Varenne for exactly this reason. As such, Clementi worked with students affiliated with Jeune Annam to stage a large public protest to greet Varenne's arrival on December 7. According to Special Commissar Bertrand's report:

The young people who had prepared their flags and banners stood in front of the Hommel house, Boulevard Gia-Long, as prescribed in the leaflets of Ngac Van Don, having been dislodged by the music that settled in the same place. Mr. Clementi then took the demonstrators to the corner of Boulevards Carreau and Gia-Long where he had them set up again. Because there were Security Service officials around them, some expressed the desire to leave so as not to be subjected to violence by the police, but Mr. Clementi, who was accompanied by Mr. Martin, dissuaded them. A few days later, Mr. Clementi wrote in *L'Argus [Indochinois]* that he had stood near the demonstrators to protect them against a police intervention, and that he was carrying photographic equipment and had intended to take pictures of scenes that might take place between the police and the demonstrators.⁶⁴⁴

Clementi's plan to shield demonstrators with his camera demonstrates the newfound power of the colonial press to expose human rights violations. Like Roche, Clementi represented a member of the colonial elite willing to put his career on the line to defend his values. Bertrand went on to indicate Clementi had organized protests in Haiphong as well and had collected large sums of money by calling for donations for Phan Bội Châu's defense.⁶⁴⁵ The actions of Clementi and Jeune Annam in Tonkin, Nguyễn Phan Long and the Cloche Fêlée group in Cochinchina, and Nguyễn Thế Truyền and L'Union Intercoloniale in France were signs of a rising tide. If Varenne was unable or unwilling to somehow overturn Phan Bội Châu's verdict, French Indochina might well be flooded with urban unrest.

Governor General Varenne vs. the Colonial Deep State

Varenne did not need to be convinced to consider clemency. It was on his mind as soon

⁶⁴¹ Example: "Compatriots, whoever you are - civil servants, craftsmen, traders, students, scholars, farmers, employees all, get together, make requests to the Government and it will have no choice but to free this patriot without reproach, who is: PHAN BỘI CHÂU. Oh brothers join forces!!! Phục Việt hội (Society for the Independence of Vietnam). SPCE 355, (*Néron à*) M. le Chef de la Sûreté au Tonkin, 4 décembre 1925.

⁶⁴² Clementi, Amedée. "Lettre ouverte d'un Annamite à MM. Clementi, Bona & Larre, et à tous ceux connus ou inconnus qui ont pris la défense de M. Phan Bội Châu," *L'Argus Indochinois*, December 5, 1925.

⁶⁴³ Clementi, Amedée. "L'arrivée de M. Varenne à Hanoi: Nombreuses manifestations annamites en faveur de Phan Bội Châu," *L'Argus Indochinois*, December 12, 1925.

⁶⁴⁴ SPCE 355, *Rapport de renseignements (Bertrand), Hanoi, 30 décembre 1925.*

⁶⁴⁵ Ibid.

as he heard the verdict. On November 24, the day after sentencing, Varenne cabled from Phnom Penh to his subordinates in Saigon and Hanoi, “I intend to consider the possibility of clemency for the purpose of political conciliation.”⁶⁴⁶ This much Robin, Jeanbrau, and Bride already assumed and feared. The real question was whether Varenne would even be given the opportunity to grant clemency.

Varenne had good reason to send his morning-after cable: his subordinates had tried to pre-empt him. Earlier that morning, Alberti, the director of cabinet for the office of the governor general, had already begun sending out telegrams announcing the verdict. One went to Varenne in Phnom Penh, one went to Rene Robin in Tourane, and one went to the Ministry of Colonies.⁶⁴⁷ The cable sent to the Ministry of Colonies indicated it was from “Varenne,” but it bore Alberti’s signature “P.O. (Par ordre, meaning by order).” Before Varenne’s arrival, Robin, Alberti, and other officials regularly signed telegrams on behalf of one another, so this in itself was not surprising. The problem was Varenne had *not* ordered Alberti to send the telegram.

Alberti’s telegram stated simply, “Verdict rendered November 23 by Criminal Commission Hanoi sentencing Phan Bội Châu [to] forced labor for life. Large calm crowd regularly followed audience. No demonstration or incident.”⁶⁴⁸ Alberti’s cable to Varenne was nearly identical, except he added, “Department advised.”⁶⁴⁹ Varenne immediately recognized Alberti was attempting to present him with a *fait accompli*. He was not going to play allow this. Varenne cabled Alberti:

ABSOLUTE PRIORITY. In response to your [cable No.] 3051 - Desiring to write myself cable to Department concerning PBC conviction. Ignoring the number you sent on this subject. Have prescribed Postal Service to stop all transmissions. Cables priority number and text sent to allow cable pass all other transmissions.⁶⁵⁰

Varenne then cabled Saigon, Hue, and Hanoi again for good measure, letting them all know in no uncertain terms that he was to be the first one informed of any developments related to Phan Bội Châu and that they were not to take any further actions until he arrived in Hanoi.⁶⁵¹ Finally, Varenne replaced Alberti’s cable No. 1545 with two of his own cable No. 1545s.⁶⁵² The

⁶⁴⁶ SPCE 355, *Télégramme Officiel, Gougal (Varenne, Pnompenh) à Gougal Saigon & Hanoi, 24 novembre 1925.*

⁶⁴⁷ SPCE 355, *Télégramme Officiel, Gougal (Alberti, Hanoi) à Gougal Phnompenh (Varenne) (En communication à Gougal Saigon), No. 3051, 24 novembre 1925. Télégramme Officiel, Gougal (Alberti, Hanoi) à Secregal et Resuper Tonkin (Tourane, Robin), No. 3052, 24 novembre 1925. Télégramme Officiel, Gougal (Alberti, Hanoi) à Colonies Paris, No. 1545, 24 novembre 1925.*

⁶⁴⁸ SPCE 355, *Télégramme Officiel, Gougal (Alberti, Hanoi) à Colonies Paris, No. 1545, 24 novembre 1925.*

⁶⁴⁹ SPCE 355, *Télégramme Officiel, Gougal (Alberti, Hanoi) à Gougal Phnompenh (Varenne) (En communication à Gougal Saigon), No. 3051, 24 novembre 1925.*

⁶⁵⁰ SPCE 355, *Télégramme Officiel, Gougal (Varenne, Pnompenh) à Gougal Hanoi (Alberti), No. 803, 24 novembre 1925.*

⁶⁵¹ SPCE 355, *Télégramme Officiel, Gougal (Varenne, Pnompenh) à Gougal Hanoi (Alberti), En cion Gougal Saigon, Secregal et Résuper Tonkin de passage Hué, 11h30, 24 novembre 1925.*

⁶⁵² Alberti’s cable No. 1545 has “Annulé” written in very large blue crayon across the page. SPCE 355, *Télégramme Officiel, Gougal (Alberti, Hanoi) à Colonies Paris, No. 1545, 24 novembre 1925.* Varenne let Alberti know his version had been cancelled and replaced by two of Varenne’s own in another cable sent November 25. SPCE 355, SPCE 355, *Télégramme Officiel, Gougal (Varenne, Pnompenh) à Gougal Saigon & Hanoi, 25 novembre 1925.*

first, which Varenne also sent to his subordinates within Indochina, stated that he “regretted not arriving in Tonkin in time to participate in the debate, that he reserved the right to approve the Criminal Commission’s decision after personally reviewing all of the dossier’s files,” and, finally, that he was considering granting clemency.⁶⁵³ The second version of cable No. 1545 went out the following day, letting the Ministry of Colonies know that Phan Bội Châu’s appeal would be heard by the Protectorate Council of Tonkin, which would serve as a Court of Cassation in accordance with the Order of September 15, 1896.⁶⁵⁴ On December 4, Minister of Colonies Léon Perrier responded, informing Varenne, “it is up to you, after advice from the Protectorate Council, to rule by decree on a PBC appeal.”⁶⁵⁵ By his flurry of telegraphic activity, Varenne had preserved his ability to act in concerning Phan Bội Châu’s case. Varenne had also put the deep state of French Indochina on notice that this governor general knew how to play their games.

The deep state was far from finished, however. Secretary-General and Acting Resident Superior of Tonkin Rene Robin recognized that Varenne could quite possibly cause the Sûreté’s hard work, not to mention that of the Criminal Commission, to evaporate into thin air. Robin determined this should not happen. But how could he thwart Varenne if the new governor general was intent to granting clemency to a state terrorist? For this, Robin had an unexpected ally: Bride. Varenne had stated in his cable that he “reserved the right to approve the Criminal Commission’s decision *after personally reviewing all of the dossier’s files.*” Aside from the fact that Varenne obviously had no idea what that meant, Robin now realized that Bride’s meticulous diligence might be the verdict’s saving grace.

Fortunately for Robin, on November 26 Bride delivered a distillation of the Criminal Commission’s laborious efforts in *Rapport du Président de la Commission Criminelle*.⁶⁵⁶ In his letter accompanying the report, Bride offered a compelling justification for the length of the trial and complexity of the report:

I have the honor to submit to you in this envelope the report on the operations of the Crime Commission of 1925. Phan Bội Châu had been condemned to death by the decree of September 5, 1913. The 1925 Commission had to collect all the files kept concerning the authors of the various anti-French movements or of plots against the safety of the Protectorate since 1905, to study all the documents one by one and to collect all useful extracts that would allow its members to render a judgment with full knowledge of the facts; their conscience would indeed have refused to pronounce any verdict which had not been motivated by certain and irrefutable evidence. On the other hand, there is no doubt that this case went beyond the usual framework; it must have had repercussions in the Annamese community, which cannot leave unmoved any Frenchman concerned with preserving the justice of his country, his reputation for impartiality, for independence, and

⁶⁵³ SPCE 355, *Télégramme Officiel, Gougal (Varenne, Pnompenh) à Gougal Saigon & Hanoi, 24 novembre 1925. Télégramme Officiel, Gougal (Varenne, Pnompenh) à Colonies Paris, No. 1545, 24 novembre 1925.* The text of these cables is identical.

⁶⁵⁴ SPCE 355, *Télégramme Officiel, Gougal (Varenne, Pnompenh) à Colonies Paris, No. 1545, 25 novembre 1925.*

⁶⁵⁵ SPCE 355, *Télégramme Officiel, Colonies (Perrier, Paris) à Gougal (Varenne, Hanoi), No. 981, 4 décembre 1925.*

⁶⁵⁶ SPCE 354, *Affaire Phan Bội Châu, Rapport du Président de la Commission Criminelle.*

above all for safeguarding the interests of the accused.

In order to protect the rights of the defense, the Commission considered it necessary also to allow the accused to present his defense by refuting point by point all the charges raised against him and [therefore the Commission] decided that a proceeding should be carried out to allow for additional information. Thus it can be affirmed that the one who was tried and condemned is indeed the creator, the organizer, and the director of the Revolutionary Party which has troubled Indochina since 1907. The verdict was greeted with significant calm and it seems to have satisfied all those who, with various feelings, impatiently awaited the solution of this affair.⁶⁵⁷

As far as Bride was concerned, the trial of Phan Bội Châu had been a marvelous demonstration of French justice at work. The Criminal Commission had proven its case against the accused by presenting a staggering amount of documentary and testimonial evidence. It had given Phan Bội Châu opportunities to respond to all of it. Bride and the other Commission members had shown remarkable forbearance as Phan Bội Châu spun lie after lie for weeks on end. They had even graciously commuted the old patriot's sentence in light of his age and infirmity. Finally, there remained the most significant result of the trial: *the accused had confessed*. For Bride, there could be no denying that justice had been properly served.

As President of the Protectorate Council of Tonkin, Robin's job now was to address Phan Bội Châu's appeal, which his attorneys Bona and Larre had indicated would be forthcoming. Robin formally initiated this process on December 1 by sending a telegram in his capacity as Acting Governor General Monguillot's delegate to himself in his capacity as President of the Protectorate Council.⁶⁵⁸

Phan Bội Châu delivered his appeal on December 3 via a handwritten note in Chinese. The appeal read:

The Annamese convict Phan Bội Châu respectfully requests the noble government [貴政] in Tonkin to listen to his pleas. I'm old today; I will soon be 60 years old. In my cell, I have reflected a long time. The benevolent manner in which I have been treated deeply touched me. Having seen the functioning of the Criminal Commission and listened to the pleadings of my two excellent lawyers, I understand that the noble government has instituted justice in this country, which [before had employed] barbaric methods of criminal investigation using torture, the cangue, and the rattan. If I had been brought before a native court in my country, I would have already lost my head. I also understand my errors with regard to teaching, because I now know that the noble French government has opened throughout the country many schools where my compatriots can be educated in the Western sciences. I also acknowledge all of my past mistakes [愚已醒]

⁶⁵⁷ SPCE 355, *L'Inspecteur des Affaires politiques et administratives, Président de la Commission Criminelle à M. le Gouverneur Général de l'Indochine (Sous le couvert de M. le Résident Supérieur au Tonkin)*, *Objet: Affaire Phan Bội Châu*, 26 novembre 1925.

⁶⁵⁸ SPCE 355, *Le Gougal (PIC) à M. le Résident Supérieur, Président du Conseil du Protectorat du Tonkin*, *Objet: Pourvoi Phan Bội Châu devant le Conseil du Protectorat*, 1er décembre 1925.

悟昔日一切之所錯誤].

With all my strength, I implore the kindness and leniency of the noble government for all of my crimes. In this letter, I make a solemn commitment to dedicate the rest of my life to endeavoring to persuade my compatriots that their happiness, their ease, and their security will really be assured if they collaborate, completely, confidently, and loyally with the noble government. I have publicly made the same statements before my judges. I declare in the same way solemn (that I want) to break all relations with the Vietnamese who would enter into struggle against the noble government and to separate myself from them forever and ever. I therefore have no complaints against the judges who have pronounced their decision on the nature of my faults. Their sentence is fair because they only had to judge me for the crimes that were committed before the end of 1913. As the Criminal Commission has inflicted a just punishment on me, I can only implore the pity and forgiveness of the noble government. I will respectfully receive its just decision with infinite gratitude. Hanoi, December 3, 1925. The humble supplication of Phan Boi Châu.⁶⁵⁹

These were surely difficult words for the old patriot to write. In a textual display of self-abnegation, Phan Bội Châu outdented each instance of “noble government (貴政),” while he referred to himself as “this fool (愚).” This was likely the lowest point Phan Bội Châu had yet experienced in his life. Nevertheless, Phan Bội Châu’s willingness to work with the French Protectorate government, even playing a role as a collaborator, bore strong similarities to the proposals he previously made in letters to Néron and Sarraut, and in *Pháp Việt đề huề chính kiến thư* (A Proposal for a Franco-Vietnamese Collaboration Policy).⁶⁶⁰ It cannot be argued that he was any more sincere in writing this appeal than he had been in those earlier writings.

Phan Bội Châu’s appeal made Varenne’s job slightly easier and Robin’s slightly harder. Varenne could use it to justify a pardon as the accused had demonstrated contrition and promised to work faithfully with the government. Robin could use the appeal too, as proof of Phan Bội Châu’s guilt. Guilt would only allow Robin to confirm the judicial sentence, but it would not help him convince Varenne that Phan Bội Châu still represented a danger to the colony. Part of the problem lay in the nature of Phan Bội Châu’s appeal. Instead of challenging the verdict (guilty) or even the sentence (forced labor for life), Phan Bội Châu simply asked for what clemency the government could provide.

On December 7, Bride sent Varenne his two final notes as president of the Criminal Commission.⁶⁶¹ Both notes offered Bride’s opinion on Phan Bội Châu’s appeal (which he

⁶⁵⁹ SPCE 354, 安南罪人潘佩珠敬請 (*The Annamese convict Phan Bội Châu respectfully requests*), December 3, 1925. French translation available in SPCE 354, *GGI 1955-SG, Bordereau des pièces adresses le Juin 1927 à M. le Directeur du Cabinet et des Affaires Politiques*.

⁶⁶⁰ For Chinese original and French translation of Phan Bội Châu’s July 26, 1919 letter to Albert Sarraut, see SPCE 354, *Lettre de Phan Bội Châu à A. Sarraut, Juillet (et Août) 1919*. For Chinese original of Phan Bội Châu’s 1919 letter to Néron, see SPCE 354, *Lettre de PBC à Néron*. For French translations of Phan Bội Châu’s two 1919 letters to Albert Sarraut, see SPCE 353, *Lettres de Phan Bội Châu à M. Albert Sarraut, 26 juillet 1919, 25 août 1919*. See also SPCE 355, *Lettre de P.B.C. à M. Néron, 4 août 1925*.

⁶⁶¹ SPCE 354, *Note, Pour M. le Gouverneur General de l’Indochine transmissive d’une supplique du*

enclosed) and the possibility or nature of a pardon. To assist Varenne in making a decision, Bride sought to clearly define the roles and responsibilities. The role of the Criminal Commission, Bride stressed, had been to determine if Phan Bội Châu was responsible for the crimes committed in 1913. The Commission members were absolutely certain of Phan Bội Châu's guilt. The Commission had considered attenuating circumstances not because it had any doubt about the guilt of the accused, but rather because of his age. By considering attenuating circumstances, Bride argued, the Criminal Commission had already provided a pardon, if only a limited one. Whether Phan Bội Châu deserved a broader pardon or not, was now entirely a political question for the Protectorate government.⁶⁶²

On the political question of a broader pardon, Bride offered Varenne some legal advice, though he stressed it was entirely supplementary to his role as president of the Criminal Commission. If a pardon were politically necessary, according to Bride the best choice would be partial pardon commuting the sentence of hard labor to "obligatory transport to a specific locality." In other words, Bride suggested Varenne exile Phan Bội Châu overseas, in a manner similar to the rogue Emperors Hàm Nghi, Thành Thái, and Duy Tân. Bride suggested Algeria, New Caledonia, or the Antilles. The one thing Varenne should absolutely avoid, according to Bride, would be to offer a full pardon. A conditional pardon would "retain a sanction for the [criminal] acts for which PBC recognizes himself as the author because he confesses in his plea of December 3 to have committed the crimes that are imputed to him by the verdict of the Criminal Commission."⁶⁶³ Bride's note was an elegant way of trying to salvage all of his work as president of the Criminal Commission. If Varenne pardoned Phan Bội Châu, it would send a message that politics mattered more than justice.

The Protectorate Council met at 9:00 AM on December 9, 1925 to consider Phan Bội Châu's appeal.⁶⁶⁴ Robin read Acting Prosecutor General Bourayne's letter of December 3 arguing the appeal was without merit and should be rejected. As Phan Bội Châu had not presented any new evidence, the Protectorate Council, in its capacity as a Court of Cassation, simply reviewed whether the Criminal Commission had properly observed procedure (it had). According to Bourayne, "The accused presented his defense and was defended by his co-counsellors. He had the last word." Bourayne noted that Phan Bội Châu had been given three days to prepare his defense, but in the event had enjoyed thirteen days. Having finished reading Bourayne's letter, Robin reviewed the facts of Phan Bội Châu's case, noting that all procedures had been followed to the letter. Having therefore taken all circumstance into consideration, the Protectorate Council advised Governor General Varenne that the appeal should be rejected, and

condamné Phan Bi Chau, No. 180, 7 décembre 1925. Note, Pour M. le Gouverneur General de l'Indochine, Au sujet de l'application de l'article 97 du C.P. aux faits reprochés à Phan Bội Châu, No. 181, 7 décembre 1925.

⁶⁶² SPCE 354, *Note, Pour M. le Gouverneur General de l'Indochine transmissive d'une supplique du condamné Phan Bi Chau, No. 180, 7 décembre 1925.*

⁶⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁶⁴ The council members were: Robin, resident superior of Tonkin, Graffeuil, Director of Bureaus for the Residence Superior, Benoit, division general and commander of the Annam-Tonkin division, Bourayne, acting prosecutor general for the Court of Appeals of Hanoi, Normandin, chief engineer of public works for the territorial district of Tonkin, Hilaire, director of operations for the French Company of Railroads, Indochina and Yunnan, Hoàng Trọng Phu, *tổng đốc* of Hà Đông, Nguyen Dinh Quy, acting *tổng đốc*, member of the Court of Appeals of Hanoi, substitute member sitting in replacement of Tran Van Thong, Delsalle, head administrator of the cabinet of the resident superior. SPCE 352, *Conseil du Protectorat du Tonkin, Procès-Verbal de la Seance du 9 decembre 1925.*

ended the meeting at 10:00 AM.⁶⁶⁵

Whether or not Robin knew of Bride's advice to Varenne concerning conditional pardons, Robin had no interest in allowing any clemency for Phan Bội Châu. He also did not trust Varenne to recognize the danger the security officials (and Robin himself) saw in Phan Bội Châu. As such, Robin now attempted to present Varenne with another *fait accompli*. On December 11, the head of the Legislation and Administration Service of the Government General presented a note to Governor General Varenne.⁶⁶⁶ The note explained that the Protectorate Council had met under the leadership of the resident superior of Tonkin (Robin) and advised Phan Bội Châu's appeal be rejected. The note then laid out the terms of Article 31 of the Decree of September 15, 1896: "The Governor General, on the assent of the Protectorate Council, rules on the appeal, by a simple decree which, in the event of rejection, may order immediate execution."⁶⁶⁷ Pursuant to these regulations, the head of the Legislation and Administration Service had prepared for Varenne a formal rejection of the appeal ready to be signed.⁶⁶⁸ The envelope containing both documents further demanded the attached documents "be submitted, without delay, for signature by the Governor General."⁶⁶⁹

Though he had quite easily steamrolled his way through the deep state's previous attempt to force his hand, Varenne now seemed to lose his nerve. On December 11, Varenne sent an urgent plea to Perrier, the minister of colonies:

Please urgently propose to President of Republic immediate and complete grace for Phan Bội Châu, sentenced to forced labor for life by Criminal Commission Hanoi. Sentenced confirmed yesterday by Protectorate Council of Tonkin which provided advice to reject appeal. Cases dating back to 1913, capital conviction by default. Moral complicity presumed in various assassinations with no proof of effective participation. The condemned is an old patriot agitator. Long time unrepentant enemy now older and claims to recognize errors. Almost entire indigenous population requests pardon on occasion of new GGI and French liberal political pledge in Indochina. Certain precedents authorize pardon.⁶⁷⁰

Varenne, who had only arrived in Hanoi four days prior, was not in a good position to claim a capital conviction was reached "by default." Nor was he in a good position to claim there was "no proof of effective participation."⁶⁷¹ Nevertheless, he made this representation and hoped President Gaston Doumergue would carry his water for him.

Perrier was content to let Varenne sweat a bit. On December 15, Varenne cabled Perrier again, expressing his surprise at a lack of response and re-emphasizing the urgency of the

⁶⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶⁶ The signature suggests this was Lucien Giudicelli. SPCE 352, *GGI, Note pour M. le Gouverneur Général, No. 187B, 11 décembre 1925.*

⁶⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁶⁸ SPCE 352, *Le Gouverneur General de l'Indochina, No. 4830, 22 décembre 1925.*

⁶⁶⁹ SPCE 352, *Bordereau des pièces adressées à M. le Directeur des Affaires Politiques au Gouvernement Général Hanoi, 11 décembre 1925.*

⁶⁷⁰ SPCE 352, *Télégramme Officiel, Gougal (Varenne, Hanoi) à Colonies Paris, No. 1625, 11 décembre 1925.*

⁶⁷¹ SPCE 352, *Bordereau des pièces adressées à M. le Resident Supérieur au Tonkin, President du Conseil du Protectorat Hanoi, 11 décembre 1925.*

request, which, he claimed, “will lose its useful effect if delayed too long.”⁶⁷² Despairing of a response from Perrier, Varenne then cabled AGINDO to ask Cordonnier to obtain a response from President Doumergue.⁶⁷³ Perrier finally responded on December 20 informing Varenne that he and the president of the Council of Ministers had no objection to Varenne offering amnesty to Phan Bội Châu, as long as there was *absolutely no proof of effective participation in the 1913 attacks*.⁶⁷⁴ Perrier added, “this is a decision that belongs to you.”⁶⁷⁵ Neither the Ministry of Colonies nor President Doumergue were willing to take responsibility for Phan Bội Châu.

Governor General Varenne signed the order granting clemency on December 23, 1925.⁶⁷⁶ The previous day Varenne had signed the form rejecting Phan Bội Châu’s appeal, which meant the clemency order now pardoned Phan Bội Châu for all of the crimes he had been found guilty of by the 1925 Criminal Commission.⁶⁷⁷ Notably, however, the pardon did not include the words “immediate and complete grace” that Varenne had included in his cable to Perrier. Phan Bội Châu was allowed to move to Huế, however, “The resident superiors of Tonkin and Annam, and the director of the Judicial Administration of Indochina” were charged with the execution of Varenne’s order. The pardon did not mean Phan Bội Châu was free to do as he wished.

For Robin, Bride, and the civil servants of Indochina, Varenne’s act was a bitter pill to swallow, but it did mean the mood in the streets turned from anger to joy. Members of the Vietnamese educated classes could and did claim the amnesty for Phan Bội Châu as a major victory. For a moment, lines of communication had connected up and down the country. Vietnamese had a national hero, he had stood up to a French prosecutor in court and defended himself. Newspapers and journals revealed the history and demeanor of a Vietnamese patriot who refused to bow to Indochina’s colonizers.⁶⁷⁸ Vietnamese had entered city streets united in a single goal, for what seemed like the first time. December 1925 marked a watershed for Vietnamese nationalism. Henceforth it would be visible, it would be loud, and it would have a hero.

Varenne’s pardon turned a potential national martyr into a national hero, but in so doing Varenne had cleared Phan Bội Châu’s legacy of many complicating features. Varenne’s pardon retroactively turned the Criminal Commission into a colonial show trial. Phan Bội Châu could simply walk away from his admissions of guilt. All of the allegations so painstakingly proven by

⁶⁷² SPCE 352, *Télégramme Officiel, Gougal (Varenne, Hanoi) à Colonies Paris, No. 1640, 15 décembre 1925.*

⁶⁷³ SPCE 352, *Télégramme Officiel, Gougal (Varenne, Hanoi) à AGINDO Paris, No. 5381, 15 décembre 1925.*

⁶⁷⁴ SPCE 352, *Télégramme Officiel, Colonies Paris (Perrier) à Gougal (Varenne, Hanoi), No. 1035, 20 décembre 1925.*

⁶⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁷⁶ SPCE 352, *Le Gouverneur General de l’Indochine, No. 4834, 23 décembre 1925.*

⁶⁷⁷ SPCE 352, *Le Gouverneur General de l’Indochine, No. 4830, 22 décembre 1925.*

⁶⁷⁸ A number of pamphlets reflecting on Phan Bội Châu’s place in Vietnamese society and history appeared in 1926. Mai Du Lân of the Thực Nghiệp publishing house in Hanoi published a collection of essays as Mai Du Lan, ed. *Thanh khí nhé hằng: Mấy bài luận thuyết về những vấn đề có quan hệ đến danh dự và quyền lợi của nhân dân* (The Sound of Common Sense: Several essays about the problems related to reputation and rights of our people) (Imprimerie Thuc-Nghiệp An Quan, 1926). See also Ngô Khâm Trai, *Địa vị cụ Phan ở quốc dân ta* (Mr. Phan’s Place Amongst Our People) (Hanoi: Imprimerie Nghiêm Hàm, 1926), available at the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris. Also available in microform at the National Library in Hanoi (Pièce 115, S 87/3075). See also Lê Cương Phụng (aka Tùng Lâm), *Phan Bội Châu ngày nay* (Phan Bội Châu today) (Saigon: Imprimerie Xưa Nay, 1926), available at the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris. Also available in microform at the National Library in Hanoi (Pièce 185, S 87/3139).

Bride and the Criminal Commission could now be easily written off. Politics had triumphed over justice.

Chapter Five

Time, Morality, and Revolution: Phan Bội Châu and the *Book of Changes*

If Phan Bội Châu had been executed in 1925, he would have earned the title of Vietnam's "greatest patriotic martyr." Perhaps recognizing the dangers of such a posthumous moniker, on December 23, 1925, the governor-general of French Indochina Alexander Varenne acceded to the demands of thousands of Vietnamese protesters by commuting Phan's sentence to house arrest in Huế.⁶⁷⁹ The ardent patriot with a reputation for advocating violent resistance was forced to spend the next fifteen years of his life under the watchful eyes of the French colonial administration and its secret police, the *Sûreté*.

For decades, Phan had sent tracts back to Vietnam from distant Japan and China, solidifying his reputation as a nationalist. In works such as *A History of the Loss of Vietnam* (1905), *New Vietnam* (1907), and *A Letter from Abroad Written in Blood* (1907), Phan laid out his interpretation of Vietnam's recent past and offered a vision of its future. These were political works, designed to arouse strong patriotic and anti-French sentiments. In them, Phan focused on the oppressive French colonial state with its taxation and punitive policies, and the corrupt local administration it kept alive to ensure its own legitimacy.⁶⁸⁰ Phan argued that a Vietnam free of these illegitimate villains would be able to rise to the heights of modernity. The Vietnamese people would enjoy trains, airplanes, and skyscrapers - the rewards of living in a civilized modern society dedicated to science, patriotism, and virtue.⁶⁸¹

In a later book, *A Study of Vietnamese History* (1909), Phan abandoned vitriol for a more sober presentation of the "objective facts." Phan's conception of Vietnam now took on historical depth. Phan recounted how the nation originated in the near mythical time of the Hung Kings, then suffered under almost a millennium of Chinese domination despite the efforts of a long line of national heroes. Phan glossed over a fair portion of Vietnam's medieval history, only to refocus his attentions on Lê Lợi, the fifteenth-century general who led a successful rebellion against Chinese Ming Dynasty invaders. After saving the country of Đại Việt, Lê Lợi founded the Lê Dynasty (1428-1788).⁶⁸² Phan held up Lê Lợi as a quintessential patriot laudable for his ability to rally the Vietnamese people and drive off a mighty invader.⁶⁸³

Educated Vietnamese people who read these texts, which had been printed in Japan and

⁶⁷⁹ Phan's "house arrest" actually allowed him to take day trips on the Perfume River in a sampan. This practice earned him the sobriquet "Old Man of the Imperial Quay (*Ông già Bến Ngự*)."

⁶⁸⁰ French Colonial Indochina was composed of five distinct and separately-administered regions: Tonkin, Annam, Cochinchina, Laos, and Cambodia. In Tonkin and Annam, the French rulers delegated limited authority to the Nguyễn dynastic state. The Nguyễn state was responsible for the systems of justice, taxation, and local administration, and carried out these functions by appointing mandarins selected through the examination system. Phan had obtained a *cử nhân* bachelor's degree in the Nghệ An regional examinations of 1900, but chose not to become a mandarin. David Marr argues this was because Phan denounced those who joined the native administration as collaborators, and wished only to demonstrate his academic qualifications for revolutionary purposes.

⁶⁸¹ Phan Bội Châu, *The New Vietnam*, in *Colonialism Experienced: Vietnamese Writings on Colonialism, 1900-1931*, trans. Truong Buu Lam (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan, 2000), 105-124.

⁶⁸² The state of Đại Việt encompassed the Red River valley and provinces to the south. This name was used from 1054, during the Lý Dynasty (1009-1225) until 1804, when Emperor Gia Long of the Nguyễn Dynasty (1802-1954) renamed the country Việt Nam.

⁶⁸³ Phan Bội Châu, "Việt Nam Quốc Sử Khảo." *The Collected Works of Phan Bội Châu (Phan Bội Châu Toàn tập, Tập 3: Văn Thơ Những Năm ở Nước Ngoài)*. ed. Chương Thâu. (Hà Nội: Thuận Hóa Publishers, 2000), 9-146.

smuggled back into the country, were impressed by the erudition of Phan's writings and the comprehensiveness of his vision. Though literati had taken up their brushes in patriotic defense of king and country before, Phan wrote in a vibrant and approachable style that conveyed his intuitive statesmanship and addressed Vietnamese of all social classes. His impact became evident in 1925, when mass protests against a sentence of hard labor for fifty-eight-year-old Phan brought rickshaw pullers and female stall-owners from the market into the streets alongside students and scholars.⁶⁸⁴ The French hand was forced.

This was a clear and dramatic victory, but what could Phan do while under house arrest? Phan had lost his opportunity for martyrdom and was now restrained from engaging in any kind of surreptitious revolutionary activities by vigilant guards. Though this must have rankled the elderly partisan, he kept busy by meeting with visitors, making occasional speeches, and writing prodigiously. Just as he had done while in the Cantonese prison eleven years before, Phan began to write. With more comfortable surroundings⁶⁸⁵ and plenty of free time, Phan's annual literary production skyrocketed. According to Trần Anh Vinh, Phan wrote nearly four times as much during the Huế years as he had in the forty-three years previously.⁶⁸⁶ Furthermore, he could now contemplate and carefully consider exactly what and how to write. Soon after his arrest Phan, composed a considerable number of poems. He later wrote articles that were published by his friend Huỳnh Thúc Kháng in the journal *Tiếng Dân* (*The Voice of the People*).

Perhaps thinking of his legacy, Phan decided to draft his life's story for the second time. In 1929, through a network of friends and supporters, Phan was able to secretly print *The Autobiography of Phan Bội Châu* by using underground presses.⁶⁸⁷ He had written it at night using double-ply reversible paper. This allowed him to secretly compose a work that otherwise would surely have been confiscated by the French authorities.⁶⁸⁸ This work recounted Phan's public career as a revolutionary and nationalist. In it, Phan hoped to impart three lessons to the youth of Vietnam: (1) Self-conceit leads to disaster; (2) blind trust in people is foolish; (3) lack of attention to detail causes all ventures to fail. These three lessons represented a shift away from Phan's fiery condemnations of colonialism and exuberant glorifications of martyrs. It was a shift toward thoughtful reflection on his life and on history.

Phan Bội Châu's later work was that of a man who still held strong patriotic beliefs, but who now saw that a more thorough understanding of the world and its underlying principles would be needed for Vietnam to achieve its independence. Feeling he still could offer the next generation some valuable insight, Phan worked hard to develop a new vision of personal conduct and political action. The crux of that vision was a technique of personal cultivation that, if used effectively, would produce revolutionaries armed with perspicacity, determination, and charisma

⁶⁸⁴ David Marr, *Vietnamese Tradition on Trial, 1920-1945* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1981), 18-19.

⁶⁸⁵ Many Vietnamese sent money to support Phan and the group of elderly patriotic scholars who came to live with him, ensuring he did not want for his simple material needs.

⁶⁸⁶ Trần Anh Vinh, *Thơ Văn Phan Bội Châu thời kỳ ở Huế (1926-1940)*. (Hà Nội: Thuận Hóa Publishers, 1987), 16.

⁶⁸⁷ David Marr, following Chương Thâu, claims the text was written in 1937. Marr, *Vietnamese Anticolonialism*, 267. After a more thorough review of sources, Vinh Sinh and Nicholas Wickenden, determined that Phan wrote the work between 1928 and 1929. Vinh Sinh and Nicholas Wickenden. "Introduction." *Overturned Chariot: The Autobiography of Phan-Bôi-Châu*, (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press, SHAPS Library of Translations, 1999), 24.

⁶⁸⁸ Vinh Sinh and Wickenden, 24.

sufficient to succeed where Phan had failed. This vision unfolded most profoundly in Phan's two longest and most philosophically engaged works: *The Light of Confucian Studies* and his unassuming and extensive commentary on *The Book of Changes*.

At first glance, Phan's commentary on *The Book of Changes* is a long and rather mundane antiquarian musing. It has been duly dismissed as such by numerous historians, both foreign and Vietnamese. However, upon closer examination, Phan's commentary on *The Book of Changes* reveals a perceptive and motivated mind at work. We find Phan offering to Vietnamese intellectuals a unique and powerful framework for understanding the very nature of time and how to harness change itself. In this chapter, I will show how Phan employs *The Book of Changes* as a refractive device for ordering the modern world. It is a tool through which he articulates a coherent Confucian revolutionary ideology that patriotic Vietnamese could use to overthrow French colonialism and build a modern Vietnamese nation.

Phan Bội Châu's Commentary on *The Book of Changes*

The *Changes of Zhou (Chu Dịch)* by Phan Bội Châu is a 760-page commentary on the Confucian classic, *The Book of Changes*. The commentary is a hefty volume that is prefaced by a two-page foreword, a thirteen-page introduction, and a two-page introduction to the Hexagrams. All of this is followed by the main body of the work, which consists of 676 pages, which constitute sixty-four individual chapters covering the hexagrams. All of this is then followed by an Appendix containing portions of the Great Commentary. This document accounts for the entirety of Volume Nine of *Phan Bội Châu Toàn Tập (The Collected Works of Phan Bội Châu)*, edited by Chương Thâu, the preeminent scholar of Phan's life and work. In a foreword to the volume, Chương Thâu informs us that Phan completed an original manuscript exceeding 1,000 pages, which was entitled *An Explanation of the Changes of Zhou in Vietnamese (Quốc Văn Chu Dịch Diễn Giải)*. This text was hand copied three times in romanized Vietnamese (*quốc ngữ*) sometime before the end of 1937, when a publication notice went out in Huỳnh Thúc Kháng's periodical entitled *The Voice of the People (Tiếng Dân)*. The original copies were given to Phan's close confidantes, including his student Nguyễn Văn Yêm,⁶⁸⁹ for safekeeping. This was done because the work could not be published immediately due to heightened French surveillance of Phan's house.

In 1943, a short excerpt from Phan's commentary on *The Book of Changes* on the topic of "Wang Yangming studies in Japan" appeared in *Wang Yangming (Vương Dương Minh)* by Phan Văn Hùm. According to Chương Thâu, it is not clear whether Phan Văn Hùm held one of the original copies of Phan's commentary. After 1945, Nguyễn Văn Yêm provided a number of Phan's writings, including the commentary, to the Cultural Office of Nghệ An province. Chương Thâu claims that he "discovered" these papers in 1967. Unfortunately, sixteen out of thirty sections had been misplaced.

Serendipitously, the family of Tống Châu Phu (of the Astronomical Service in Huế) sent a painstakingly-transcribed copy of one of the originals (now lost), which had been borrowed from the family of Phan Nghi Đệ, Phan Bội Châu's son, to an exhibition of Phan Bội Châu's belongings and works. This exhibition had been organized at the University of Huế in 1967 for Phan's birthday centennial. Finally, in 1969, the Khai Trí publishing house in Saigon published the Tống Châu Phu version in two volumes, which were together entitled *Chu Dịch*. However,

⁶⁸⁹ Chương Thâu relates that Nguyễn Văn Yêm was Phan Bội Châu's student in Huế from 1934 to 1938. Phan Bội Châu, *Chu Dịch*, 10.

this version was still missing four chapters.⁶⁹⁰ Chương Thâu claims that *The Collected Works of Phan Bội Châu* contains the most complete version.⁶⁹¹

It seems Phan wanted the text published in romanized Vietnamese because he felt this would more effectively connect with his intended audience - younger Vietnamese who could not read Chinese. By doing so, Phan was implicitly recognizing that Chinese had fallen out of favor and indeed out of use.⁶⁹² However, the use of romanized Vietnamese, presents complications for anyone reading the text. Phan transliterated the original text of the *Book of Changes*, which is written in a terse form of ancient Chinese that included many rare characters. Once transliterated into romanized Vietnamese, however, these characters became indistinguishable from one another. A Vietnamese reader with no knowledge of classical Chinese would find the result nearly indecipherable.

To make up for this, Phan provides careful explanations in colloquial Vietnamese for nearly every word of the original text, and this exercise comprises the bulk of the commentary. The result is a hybrid text - primarily Chinese in content, but Vietnamese in form and script. Like Phan Bội Châu himself, the commentary straddles two languages and two historical repertoires, drawing freely from both to better reveal the secrets of the *Book of Changes* to the untrained but eager Vietnamese reader. Phan's explanations are colloquial and easy-to-understand. They demonstrate clearly Phan's abilities as a communicator, for the *Book of Changes* is not a simple or easily-understood text.

The Book of Changes was not a frivolous choice. *The Book of Changes* is held by many, including, (it is said), Confucius himself, to be the preeminent classic. *The Book of Changes* has enjoyed a level of scholarly and, at times, popular attention, on par with great religious texts such as the Bible or Quran. *The Book of Changes* (*Yijing* 易經) is a complex text with multiple layers representing separate yet interrelated discourses. The first layer, the *Changes of Zhou* (*Zhouyi* 周易), is a divinatory text from the early Zhou period. The language is cryptic, terse, and often quite brutal. Richard Rutt calls it, “a royal book of oracles mainly related to warfare, especially warfare as a means of obtaining captives to be killed in sacrifices.”⁶⁹³ Comprised of sixty four hexagram sections, which have been variously organized,⁶⁹⁴ *The Changes of Zhou* contains hexagrams (*gua* 卦), hexagram names (*guaming* 卦名), hexagram statements (*guaci* 卦辭), and line statements (*yaoci* 爻辭). This primary layer is neither moralizing in content nor does it provide an explicit holistic cosmological understanding of the world. Instead, it offers a series of mantic pronouncements on fluid instances or moments in time, alternatively quotidian, historical,

⁶⁹⁰ It is worth noting that Ngô An and Huế were on opposite sides of the Vietnam War. Chương Thâu makes no mention of the fact that the text was first published in the southern Republic of Vietnam.

⁶⁹¹ Chương Thâu, “Concerning the Work An Explanation of the Changes of Zhou in Vietnamese” (“Về Văn Bản Tác Phẩm Quốc Văn Chu Dịch Diên Giã”). *The Collected Works of Phan Bội Châu* (*Phan Bội Châu Toàn tập, Tập 9: Chu Dịch*), (Hanoi, VN: Nhà Xuất Thuận Hóa, 2000), 9-10.

⁶⁹² See Woodside, *Community*, 75-76.

⁶⁹³ Richard Rutt, *Zhouyi: The Book of Changes* (Surrey, UK: Curzon, 1996). 135.

⁶⁹⁴ Phan Bội Châu's commentary abides, as do most commentaries, by the “received order” or the “King Wen” sequence. Variations include the Mawangdui version and, later, the Shao Yong sequence or the “Fu Xi” arrangement. For more information, see Richard Smith, *Fathoming the Cosmos and Ordering the World: The Yijing (I-Ching, or Classic of Changes) and Its Evolution in China* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2008), 50-56, 122-124.

or archetypal. The content ranges from the natural changing of the seasons to significant points of transition in the cultural or social life of individuals or communities.⁶⁹⁵

Philosophers in the later Zhou and Han periods chose *The Changes of Zhou* as a foundational text upon which to build a thoroughgoing cosmological explanation for the universe and the development of human society. These philosophers added a set of conceptual definitions and practices that thoroughly changed the meaning of *The Changes of Zhou*, and provided the basis for a wide variety of theoretical, philosophical, and commentarial discourses from the Han dynasty forward.⁶⁹⁶ This second layer was *The Ten Wings* (*Shiyi* 十翼), a heterogenous set of texts purportedly compiled by Confucius. Han dynasty academicians combined the *Changes of Zhou* and *The Ten Wings*, and thereby created the one of the five Chinese classics: *The Book of Changes*.

With the addition of the *Ten Wings*, the text became, as Richard Smith puts it, “a microcosm of the universe.”⁶⁹⁷ For example, *The Great Commentary* (*Dazhuan* 大傳, one of the *Ten Wings*), states “In [*The Book of Changes*] are included the forms and the scope of everything in the heavens and on earth, so that nothing escapes it.”⁶⁹⁸ The text itself thus claims to represent all varieties of phenomena and change, offering to the dedicated reader a typology of the universe and its permutations - a prism through which the cosmos might be conceptualized, understood, and ordered.

The typology presented is best explained as an example of “correlative cosmology.” *The Ten Wings* describes a universe composed of interrelated and mutually productive properties: light and dark, the firm and the yielding, motion and rest, the creative and the receptive. This list is theoretically unlimited, but indicates an essential dualism that permeates the cosmology of *The Book of Changes*: that of *yin* and *yang* (陰陽). *Yinyang* cosmology and an affiliated system known as the five agents, or *wuxing* 五行, are at the heart of an, “elaborate system of correspondence and resonance, often described as ‘correlative thinking.’”⁶⁹⁹ Where Western style positivistic logic emphasizes logical subordination and external causality, correlative cosmology emphasizes instead complex patterning, relativistic associations, and analogical reasoning. Correlative cosmological principles underlie much of East Asian philosophy and aesthetic theory. A familiarity with this system and how it can be used and repurposed is essential for understanding Phan’s commentary and his broader political project.

In correlative cosmology, time is not as an abstract substance or theoretical category. Rather, time is an immanent and continuous flow punctuated by successive moments of change or

⁶⁹⁵ For an interesting exploration of the content of the *Zhouyi*, see Smith, *Fathoming*, 18-24.

⁶⁹⁶ There are many examples of a Han moral meaning overlaying an earlier connotation. Benjamin Schwartz describes how the graphic for “correct” or *zheng* 正 originally involved a cluster of ideas including “governing,” “punitive action,” and “attacking a settlement with foot-soldiers.” Benjamin Schwartz, *The World of Thought in Ancient China* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1985), 103.

⁶⁹⁷ Smith *Fathoming*, 38.

⁶⁹⁸ Richard Wilhelm, *The I Ching or Book of Changes* (New York, NY: Bollingen Foundation, Inc., 1950) 296

⁶⁹⁹ Smith, *Fathoming*, 32. Benjamin Schwartz provides a helpful explanation: “The essential preoccupation lying behind the correlative cosmology seems to be that of finding in the homologies between human and natural phenomena a means of controlling human civilization as well as human individual life by ‘aligning’ them with the cycles, rhythms, and patterns of the natural realm.” Benjamin Schwartz, *The World of Thought in Ancient China* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1985). 355.

alteration. This notion of time differs significantly from Western notions of time, as presented in Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities*. Correlative cosmological time differs from "messianic time" insofar as no divine figure or other external force is understood to be ordering a simultaneous, eternal time. Rather, correlative cosmology holds that time is continuous change without beginning or end. Nothing is eternal except change itself and no thing, divine or otherwise, exists outside of change. Correlative cosmological time is also different from linear time or "homogenous, empty time" because it is not an abstract quantity.⁷⁰⁰ In correlative cosmology, time is the fundamental texture in which events take place. Time is immanent and suffused with moral force. Ethical precepts derived from correlative cosmology place a much greater emphasis on *when* and *how* to act correctly than it does on *what* the correct action is - a perennial concern of Greek and Christian philosophers.

This moral force associated with correlative cosmological time is complemented by a notion of resonance between things within space. In contrast to the idea, common to Western philosophy, that objects are discrete phenomena upon which outside forces can act (Newtonian physics), correlative cosmology contends that "like-things could influence like-things on a cosmic as well as microcosmic scale."⁷⁰¹ Thus, the most important task for philosophy is to properly categorize things such that an adept could understand how achieve harmony by the correct ordering of relationships between objects, people, and social institutions. Thus, correlative cosmology is inherently a political as well as philosophical mode of thought. Because *The Book of Changes* reveals how to bring about cosmological order, it could thus become, in the hands of the right individual, a device of great political power.

Commentaries on *The Book of Changes* constitute an important part of the text's legacy. From the late Han dynasty onward, additional layers of interpretation accumulated and expanded the applicable scope of the text dramatically. Commentators approached *The Book of Changes* from a wide variety of philosophical, political, and literary points of view. Richard Smith writes, "not surprisingly, Confucians found Confucian meanings in *The Book of Changes*, Daoists found Daoist meanings in it, and Buddhists found Buddhist meanings in it. And, as indicated above, people in different periods of Chinese history - not to mention at different points in their own lives - quite naturally used the [*Book of Changes*] for different purposes and in different ways, in accordance with the times."⁷⁰² The enigmatic character of the original text, the sociopolitically significant moral layer, and a dazzlingly creative variety of commentarial traditions, ensured *The Book of Changes* would have a long-standing and widespread popularity - one that has persisted into the modern era.⁷⁰³

⁷⁰⁰ This raises the question of whether Phan's interpretation of modern nationalism may fall outside of Anderson's considerations, but this is a question that will have to wait for future examination. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London, UK: Verso, 1983). 24.

⁷⁰¹ Richard Smith, *The I Ching: A Biography* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012), 54.

⁷⁰² Smith, *Fathoming*, 3.

⁷⁰³ The *Book of Changes* gained prominence among Vietnamese scholars during the Lê dynasty (1428-1789), though it was rarely considered a text worthy of specialized study. There were two important exceptions. The first was Nguyễn Bình Khiêm 阮秉謙 (1491-1585), the "Vietnamese Nostradamus" and an exponent of Shao Yong's numerological approach. The second was Lê Quý Đôn (黎貴惇, 1726-1784), who propounded in his *An Explanation of the Classic of Changes for Different Levels* on the applications of the *Changes* to practical statecraft. Smith, *The I Ching*, 152-3. Lê Quý Đôn was the sort of prolific scholar whose encyclopedic writings remained influential into the twentieth century. He argued that "the universe was ruled by an unchanging, immanent sense of moral organization." All changes that might take place needed to "affirm and reinforce the greater unchanging

The two main schools of interpretation were the “Meanings and Principles School (*yili jia* 義理家),” which focused on the moral content of the *Book of Changes*, and the “Images and Numbers School (*xiangshu jia* 象數家),” which explored mathematical and cosmological correspondences between the text and the wider world. These schools found their most significant expressions during the Song dynasty in the work of the Cheng brothers, whose approach to *The Book of Changes* Smith calls “relentlessly moral,” and Shao Yong 紹雍 (1011-1077), who devised influential numerological correspondences and created the “Fuxi Arrangement of the Sixty-four Hexagrams (*Fuxi liushisi gu tu* 伏羲六十四掛圖).”⁷⁰⁴ The famous Neo-Confucian Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130-1200) drew from both schools, contending that “the ultimate purpose of the *Changes* was to contribute to self-cultivation.”⁷⁰⁵ As we will see that Zhu Xi’s viewpoint was to prove significant for Phan Bội Châu’s interpretation of *The Book of Changes*.

Phan’s foreword and introduction, presented in a simple and direct manner, lay out his reasons for writing the commentary and explain what he considers the most important principles of *The Book of Changes*. Phan makes three points. First, *The Changes* is a text relevant to the modern global age. Second, the notion of change found in *The Changes* is coherent, all-inclusive, and undergirds a cosmological system built on immanence and correlation, rather than external causality. Third, the most important concept introduced in *The Changes* is the human capacity to accord with time itself - what we might call punctuality. These three insights form the foundation upon which Phan erects his grand vision of *The Book of Changes* and its instrumental role in Vietnamese politics. Phan opens in the foreword by separating Eastern philosophy into three categories: Buddhism, Daoism, and the study of *The Book of Changes*.⁷⁰⁶ Buddhism, he contends, is highly idealistic, but pushes an adherent toward an eremitic life. Meanwhile, Daoism is overly mystical and impractical. Buddhism and Daoism will not suit the modern world, which demands perception and engagement. By contrast, the study of *The Book of Changes* is the most refined, realistic, perceptive, and suitable philosophy for grasping and contending with modernity, colonialism, and ultimately nation-building.

Phan then injects his commentary into a global discourse by deploring how Westerners and Japanese busy themselves with *The Changes* while the Vietnamese, “go begging with a jewel in [their] pocket.”⁷⁰⁷ In other words, the “modern” nations of east and west have discovered the power of *The Changes* while the Vietnamese ignore it. With these opening lines, Phan makes

moral sense, in order to escape disaster.” Thus it fell upon enlightened individuals to maintain “high standards of moral stewardship and self-stewardship” so as to ensure that any changes that did happen occurred within proper bounds.²⁷ As we shall see, Phan took the notion of personal responsibility for change very seriously, while straying significantly from Lê Quý Đôn’s overall political conservatism. Alexander Woodside, “Conceptions of Change and of Human Responsibility for Change in Late Traditional Vietnam.” in *Moral Order and the Question of Change: Essays on Southeast Asian Thought*, ed. by David K. Wyatt and Alexander Woodside, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Southeast Asia Studies, 1982), 120-1.

⁷⁰⁴ Smith, *Fathoming*, 120-130.

⁷⁰⁵ Smith, *Fathoming*, 134.

⁷⁰⁶ Phan’s study presents the three in this order: Buddhism, “*yi-ology*” (the study of *The Book of Changes*), then Daoism.

⁷⁰⁷ Phan Bội Châu, *Chu Dịch*, 14.

clear who his intended audience is: young Vietnamese intellectuals seeking to understand the nature of the world and how they might best take their place in it. For Phan, the point of writing the commentary is to convince the Vietnamese people they have an incredible tool at their disposal, one that, if grasped effectively, could change everything.

Phan grumbles that in Vietnam, *The Book of Changes* has been taken for a prop by blind soothsayers or as simple exam material by careerist scholars-officials. Phan accuses the Vietnamese of simply sitting around in their houses and staring at their diplomas while the sophisticated and abstruse insights of Fu Xi, King Wen, the Duke of Zhou, and Confucius lay waiting. This statement fits well with the classical trope of a valuable thing lying unused. The trope usually symbolizes an official ignored or exiled by a thoughtless emperor. In Phan's analogy, *The Book of Changes* takes the place of the official while the Vietnamese people play the ignorant sovereign. Phan claims that his own lowly contribution is the equivalent of fathoming the depths of the ocean with a clamshell or peeping at the heavens through a pipe. Even so, Phan writes, he dare not keep this tasty morsel of food or delicious drink to himself.⁷⁰⁸ Phan feels he must do what he can to reveal the wisdom contained within the *Book of Changes* so that the Vietnamese people may benefit from its epistemological power.

Phan's introduction provides a basic overview of *The Book of Changes*, and is broken into seven sections. The first section concerns the history of *The Book of Changes*. Here Phan makes it clear that he values *The Book of Changes* for its philosophical profundity and not for its original mantic properties. Phan reaffirms the traditional genealogy of authors (Fu Xi, King Wen, the Duke of Zhou, and Confucius), but reserves special emphasis for the role of Confucius in compiling *The Ten Wings*. Phan writes that before Confucius added this collection, "the words were too abstruse, the meaning was too profound, and scholars rarely understood its import." Phan thus affirms that the moralizing layer of the *Ten Wings* is a valid representation of the deeper meaning of *The Changes of Zhou*. There is no mention of divination methods in the introduction. Even more telling, the sections of the Great Commentary left out of the Appendix are precisely those having to do with mantic practices.⁷⁰⁹ From the start, Phan's commentary treats *The Book of Changes* as a text imbued with a moral force derived from its intuitive and profound expression of correlative cosmological principles.

The second section discusses the concept and reality of change. Phan explains that change (*dịch*) has three meanings: non-change (*bất dịch*), exchange (*giao dịch*), and ceaseless change (*biến dịch*).⁷¹⁰ Phan says that ceaseless change is most important for understanding the *Changes*, but that all three meanings are mutually constitutive and generative. Phan explains by way of an analogy: "Take for example the original substance of a male or a female. For a male this [substance] is definitely *yang* while for a female it is definitely *yin*. This [certainty] is the meaning of 'non-change.' When males and females exchange [fluids] with one another they create a male or a female. This is using 'exchange' to create 'ceaseless change.' However after [entering into] 'ceaseless change,' a male is still male and a female is still a female. Thus

⁷⁰⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁰⁹ In "The Appendix" presenting *The Great Commentary*, Phan leaves out sections six and nine and portions of sections eight, ten, eleven, and twelve from "Part One" and portions of all sections, except section seven, from "Part Two."

⁷¹⁰ This tripartite definition was originally explained in the anonymous work *Zhouyi Qianzuodu* 周易乾鑿度. Smith, *Fathoming*, 78-79. Bent Nielsen notes that the work is attributed to Zheng Xuan 鄭玄 (127-200). Bent Nielsen, *A Companion to Yi Jing Numerology and Cosmology* (London, UK: Routledge Curzon, 2003), 304.

‘ceaseless change’ returns to ‘non-change.’”⁷¹¹ Phan thus presents change as endless yet dynamic.⁷¹²

According to Phan, the ordering principle of any given thing (that which is “non-changing”) does not exist independently; it is always already a constituent part of that which it orders. Such “non-changing” ordering principles are inherent within the nature of everything in the universe, but they are not in any way separate from it. All things can and will interact (or “exchange”) with other things endlessly. This is what Phan calls “ceaseless change.” Phan provides examples to help readers understand. Iron melts in fire and presumably hardens again afterwards. The nature of iron does not change, despite the fact that the iron itself interacts with fire and changes its form. Likewise, a silkworm transforms into a butterfly, which lays eggs which then become silkworms. The nature of the silkworm/butterfly remains the same despite the fact that its form changes over time. Thus, Phan suggests that change is a part of the nature of all things. Phan says this is still true, even though the exact way things change differs depending on the circumstances and the nature of the thing in question. All processes of change are thus potential representations of what Phan calls “invisible principles.”⁷¹³

Phan’s epistemology is quite clearly a version of correlative cosmology. It is predicated on a productive dialectic, but not one that assumes the inevitability or even the possibility of transcendence to a higher level of being or understanding.⁷¹⁴ Rather than assuming a unitary or complete cosmos, Phan presents an infinite universe with infinite variety, in which *all* things are potentially related to one another. Phan⁷¹⁵ emphasizes this point: “Within the way of all under heaven, there is only relativity, there are no absolutes. Whenever things have a way to coalesce, there will be a way for them to disperse. When there is a way for things to disperse, there will then be a way for them to come together. The only competition is between those two ways.”⁷¹⁶ This is a cosmos unlimited in scope, but fundamentally guided by principles of change and analogical resonance.

In section four of the introduction, Phan introduces the eight trigrams, their characteristics, and their significance. Phan starts by explaining that *The Book of Changes* is a mathematical text.⁷¹⁷ Phan claims that by understanding the mathematics of the text and then carefully

⁷¹¹ Phan Bội Châu, *Chu Dịch*, 18.

⁷¹² This description is consonant with what Chenshan Tian calls “a process of becoming,” in which continuity is achieved through change. Chenshan Tian, *Chinese Dialectics: From Yijing to Marxism* (Lanham, MA: Lexington Books, 2005). 22-23.

⁷¹³ Phan Bội Châu, *Chu Dịch*, 22.

⁷¹⁴ Contrast this with Hegelian or Marxian dialectical theory, in which dialectical transformations entail a movement to a higher level of contradiction.

⁷¹⁵ The logic here is of analogy and correlation. Unlike Western philosophy, which since Parmenides and Zeno, has accepted a split between reason and sense experience and the notion that rest or stasis as the ontological basis for all further speculations, correlative thinking, as David Hall and Roger Ames contend, “depends upon the acceptance of ‘images’ and ‘metaphors’ as the primary means of expressing the becoming of things.” David Hall and Roger Ames, *Anticipating China: Thinking Through the Narratives of Chinese and Western Culture* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1995), 32, 40. In the three capacities Phan describes, change can be found in all things. Phan claims that those things with similar qualities will resonate with one another. He provides as examples a baby with its mother, cocks crowing together, the tendency of moist things to attract water, the tendency of dry things to attract fire, and the properties of magnets. Phan Bội Châu, *Chu Dịch*, 62.

⁷¹⁶ Phan Bội Châu, *Chu Dịch*, 645.

⁷¹⁷ Phan Bội Châu, *Chu Dịch*, 17.

reflecting upon the images, “We can understand the fundamental principle of the universe.”⁷¹⁸ The eight trigrams are composed of three broken or unbroken lines. The broken lines correspond to *yin*, the principle of dispersion and declination, and the unbroken lines correspond to *yang*, the principle of coalescence and coming together. As an interim step, two lines can be placed together to create old *yin*, which will become young *yang*, and old *yang*, which will become young *yin*. Therefore, by doubling the lines, we begin to see how change can be represented temporally.

By placing *yin* and *yang* lines in their eight possible combinations ($2^3 = 8$), the trigrams come to represent the eight basic elemental positions of the universe: Heaven (*qian* 乾, *thiên* [vt] ☰), Lake (*dui* 兌, *đoài* [vt], ☱), Fire (*li* 離, *ly* [vt], ☲), Thunder (*zhen* 震, *chân* [vt], ☳), Wind (*xun* 巽, *tôn* [vt], ☴), Water (*kan* 坎, *khàm* [vt], ☵), Mountain (*gen* 艮, *cán* [vt], ☶), and Earth (*kun* 坤, *khôn* [vt], ☷). These trigrams are collectively known as the eight symbols (*bagua* 八卦). The trigrams could be seen as stand-alone ideal types, but Phan quickly identifies them as part of ordered sequences. As Phan explains it, *qian* through *zhen* are progressive insofar as they constitute a process of rising *yang*, while *xun* through *kun* are regressive insofar as they constitute a process of declining *yang*.⁷¹⁹ The fundamental dialectic between *yin* and *yang* is thus maintained as the lines expand into trigrams to comprise the basic elements and directions.

To help explain the characteristics and order of the trigrams, Phan provides several well-known pictorial representations of these eight symbols, including the “Fifty-Five Point Yellow River Chart,” the “Chart of Fu Xi’s Positions of the Eight Trigrams [the “Fu Xi Chart],” and the “Diagram of the King Wen Arrangement of the Eight Trigrams [the “King Wen Chart].” Each figure presents and orders the trigrams in different ways. The “Fifty-Five Point Yellow River Chart,” which Phan presents in section four, associates the trigrams with the four cardinal directions and sets of numbers (which add up to fifty-five, hence the name of the Chart). Phan explains why each trigram occupies the direction it does and why it is associated with a particular set of numbers, effectively providing a simultaneously spatial and numerological conceptualization of the trigrams.

⁷¹⁸ Phan Bội Châu, *Chu Dịch*, 17.

⁷¹⁹ Phan Bội Châu, *Chu Dịch*, 22.

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Following this in section six, Phan describes two other ways of arranging and understanding the trigrams in the Fu Xi and King Wen Charts. The “Fu Xi Chart” provides an alternative set of directional associations, which Phan claims are “ordained by Heaven.”⁷²⁰ Phan explains that the “King Wen Chart” arranges the trigrams as a family, with *qian* the father ruling over his sons called *zhen*, *kan*, and *gen*, and the *kun* being the mother ruling over her daughters called *xun*, *li*, and *dui*. Phan draws upon these classical diagrams and charts to demonstrate the vast associational capacity of these basic building blocks of *The Changes*, and thus reveals for us the functional utility of correlative cosmology as a system for organizing knowledge.

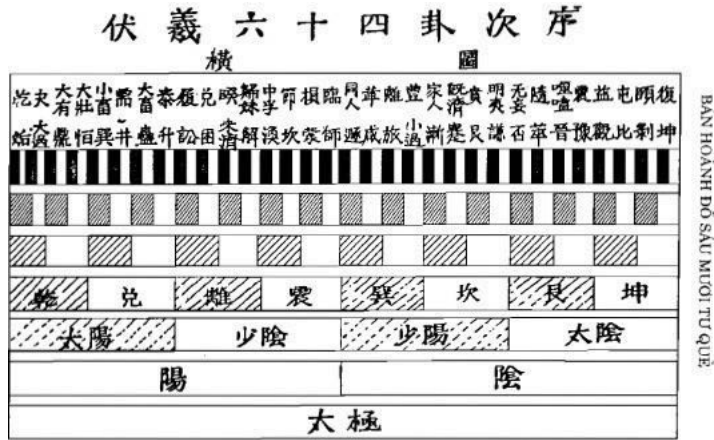
BẢN ĐỒ THỨ TỰ BÁT QUÁI CỦA VÂN VƯƠNG

文王八卦次序



By combining two trigrams together, a hexagram (six-line figure) is created. All the possible combinations of trigrams (8^2) thus comprise the sixty-four hexagrams of *The Book of Changes*. Recapitulating the entire process, Phan explains that *thái cực* or the Supreme Ultimate produces *yin* and *yang*, which in turn produce the four images (mature *yang*, young *yin*, young *yang*, mature *yin*), which thereupon produce the eight trigrams. Each trigram has eight children, producing the sixty four hexagrams. To depict the entire process visually, Phan presents the “Diagram of the Fuxi Arrangement of the Sixty Four Hexagrams.” This diagram makes the binary nature of the *Book of Changes* clear: each level doubles to accommodate more associations and ways of more precisely defining the nature of things and the possibilities of change. Finally, as each line of each hexagram can change independently of all the other lines, we can see the outer limits of possible types of change in the number 4096 (64^2).

⁷²⁰ Phan Bội Châu, *Chu Dịch*, 22.



Phan thus presents the hexagrammatic system as a totalistic representation of all possible forms of change, a typology of universal possibility. Significantly, Phan is implicitly claiming that nothing *categorically* new can take place that *The Book of Changes* would not apply to or be able to explain. If a new challenge were to arise, for instance the colonization of Vietnam by France, Phan is confident that *The Book of Changes* contains hexagrams and lines through which the challenge could be understood and dealt with. A thorough understanding of all sixty-four hexagrams would allow an individual to immediately understand any given situation and, if they were perceptive enough, determine the most ethical and timely action to take in response. As any “new” situation can be properly associated with a particular hexagram or set of hexagrams, it is more appropriate to think of responses in terms of “creative applications” of hexagrams and lines than of “innovation.” That is, even the most radical of responses can and should still be conceived of *within* the framework of the text.

Since the hexagrams and their lines can be creatively applied to any situation, there are undoubtedly historical and textual precedents for any given situation or instance of change. It should therefore be no surprise that Phan fills his Commentary with historical and textual allusions. For a thoroughgoing examination of the references and citations found in the Commentary, refer to the Appendix to this chapter. I mention here only the highlights. Phan provides 551 citations of works and references to historical persons or events. A total of 504 of these are presented in the hexagram chapters. This works out to an average of 7.875 per hexagram, though *Qian* 乾 predominates, with forty-nine citations and references. Most of the references are to Chinese texts or historical events, though Phan provides Vietnamese, Western, and other examples as well. Of the citations, the majority are from classical Confucian texts, especially from the *Analects*. Most of these citations deal with the ethical requirements for becoming a virtuous and effective Confucian gentleman, although, as we shall see, Phan uses these citations to explain hexagrams in a way specific to the process of creating an ideal Confucian knight-errant.

Phan’s synopsis of *The Book of Changes* offers a coherent epistemological and ontological framework for understanding the world. For Phan, *The Book of Changes* is a guide to ethical action within a world of ceaseless change, and a prism through which it is possible to understand all events and processes. As the hexagrams and principles described within *The Changes* are “non-changing,” one can apply insights gleaned from a reading of the text to any time period or situation, including the modern colonial situation in Vietnam. Finally, it is through an “exchange” or interaction with the book that a reader will gain the perception and ethical

intuition necessary to master time and change. Having mastered time and change, a person could rally the people and save the nation.

Ethical Temporality

Phan asserts that time is at the core of *The Changes* - it is the single necessary factor for the movements of all of the hexagrams - and thus for all changes, notional or real. For Phan, time takes precedence over all persons, events, and concepts. It is ontological prior to all other forms of ethics or political organization, and thus must serve as the central focus of any individual seeking to order the world. Time is furthermore directly related to the ethical foundations of human social organization. According to Phan, time is the medium through which all change must take place, and thus takes ontological precedence over space and all material and phenomenon within it. To realize the knowledge-power afforded by a reading of *The Changes*, an individual must fundamentally grasp the notion of time this book presupposes.

In section three of his introduction, Phan first quotes and then translates Shao Yong, “There is only one word that covers the entirety of *The Book of Changes* and that word is ‘time.’”⁷²¹ Phan goes on to explain that time has three principal meanings: “First, time means period, as in the time one eats and the time one goes to sleep. Second, time means season, as in the summertime when one must wear lighter clothes and wintertime when one must wear heavier clothes. Third, time means moment, as in the time you open the door and the time you turn out the light.” These three definitions of time correspond both to lived reality and to the variable temporal scales associated with *The Book of Changes*. Changes can occur quickly or slowly, but they always occur within time.

Because all things unfold and change in time, every instance is potentially imbued with ethical meaning. We can see this theme clearly in Phan’s explanation of the *Huan* 渙 hexagram (No. 59, Dispersion): “That which is in accordance with time suits the sentiment of man, it is right for the way of man. When it gathers, it brings prosperity to mankind. That which contravenes time opposes the sentiment of man, it does not accord with the way of man. When it disperses this also brings prosperity to mankind.”⁷²² Herein we find an explicit association drawn between “accordance with time” and “rightness for man.”

Time orients the ethical properties of human existence, making it the necessary focus of Phan’s epistemological and ontological theorization. Here, morality is relative, but it is universally relative insofar as nothing stands outside time. To put it another way, in Phan’s metaphysical conceptualization of the universe, there exists no absolute moral principle or force outside of time. If spiritual forces exist, they work through time, but not beyond it. To understand the nature of time is to grasp the central message of *The Changes*, captured most effectively in the phrase: “Change accords with time [隨時變易].”⁷²³

Phan’s explanation is explicitly *this-worldly*. He offers no suggestion of a transcendental realm from which external forces might influence or affect the process or existence of change.⁷²⁴ Instead, all phenomenon are ontologically horizontal, or infinitely relatable to all other phenomenon. However, they are *not* ethically equal. Herein the vertical nature of time enters to

⁷²¹ Phan Bội Châu, *Chu Dịch*, 17.

⁷²² Phan Bội Châu. *Chu Dịch*, 645.

⁷²³ Phan Bội Châu. *Chu Dịch*, 19.

⁷²⁴ Chenshan Tian explains, “Instead of being moved by any transcendental Being, the Chinese world is *ziran* or *self-so-being*, and *ziwei* or *self-so-going* or *self-so-doing*.” Tian, 34.

provide the basis for ethics. Since all things could potentially interact with all other things, the issue of proper hierarchical ordering arises. Timing determines that which is “appropriate” or ethical and that which is “out of time.” In the world of cosmological correlation “immoral” is not a fixed or permanent category as in one of Plato’s forms. Rather “unethicalness” is an attribute that arises from the *misalignment* of a thing with time itself.

The theoretical implications of such a philosophical perspective are immense. In Phan’s correlative cosmology, ethics are a function of time. Ethics are not abstract categories. Rather, the ethical individual or society perceives the nature of change and takes timely action to ensure they do not end up on the wrong side of time. Clearly, Vietnam, had fallen behind the times. Thus, to explain history would be to show how the country and its rulers misperceived the changes in the world and failed to take proper action when it was required. Rather than being a categorical evil, French colonialism was the inevitable result of a failure to perceive and accord with changes in the world.

The temporal pressures of modernity - the need to “catch up” to Europe - made finding a philosophically coherent way to describe and effectively use time a critical part of East Asian intellectual discourse in the first half of the 20th century. Phan, like other Chinese and Vietnamese thinkers, developed an acute awareness of the velocity of modernity.⁷²⁵ Phan himself describes his amazement at the modern transportation and communications systems of Japan when he first arrived there by steamship in late May of 1905.⁷²⁶ Ships, trains, and automobiles moved much faster than previous forms of transportation, and the rationalized bureaucracies employed by modern states and corporations emphasized efficiency as their primary goal. Vietnamese intellectuals watched these processes unfold and took note.⁷²⁷ Writing what could easily have been an epigraph to Phan’s Commentary, Alexander Woodside observes, “The command of time, and of the definition of time, [could] be as significant a part of the development of power as the command of space or money; in Eastern Asia, historical modernization timetables, as manipulated by elite figures, practically [became] the substitutes for religious prophecies.”⁷²⁸

According to Phan, the hexagrams are tools with which to perceive change and ascertain one’s “place” within time. The hexagrams reveal, line by line, the variety of situations possible in an infinite world of ceaseless change. That is to say, the hexagrams show what is “non-changing” within change, or the archetypal moments in time that recur endlessly, though not in any particular order. Particular hexagrams and particular lines present different alignments or misalignments between space and time. Phan explains, “A nation or a society can become ‘caught’ in a hexagram or a line - this refers to the timing of that situation.”⁷²⁹ Phan intimates that Vietnam is indeed caught in a poor position within time. Fortunately, hexagrams eventually

⁷²⁵ However, it would be a mistake to assume that an understanding of the importance of time in the modern era meant that time itself was understood in the same way as in the West. Modern temporality, that is, could be conceived in many ways, Anderson’s “empty, homogenous time” being just one. Given the importance of temporality to conceptions of modernity, it is clear that alternative notions of time that account for and seek to respond to the velocity of the modern could offer a way of perceiving multiple formulations of “modernity” itself. That is, in addition to there being multiple characteristics that make up possible “modernities,” the very perceptions of those modernities can be multiple as well.

⁷²⁶ Phan, *Overtuned*, 84-85.

⁷²⁷ Phan Khoi, for example, agonized over the fact that, as he believed, Vietnamese “lacked flexible variety in describing time,” Woodside, *Community*, 76.

⁷²⁸ Woodside, “Territorial,” 191.

⁷²⁹ Phan Bội Châu, *Chu Dịch*, 96.

change their lines from broken to non-broken or vice-versa, and thus situations can change. However, whether it changes from bad to good depends on whether or not the individuals involved are perceptive enough to grasp the seeds of change before they sprout.

A proper reading or use of the hexagrams will allow the perceptive individual to cultivate their sense of ethical timing and determine right action. Phan writes, “If one understands the nature of the hexagrams, one will see that the improvement or deterioration of life, the goodness or evil of people, the small matter of composing oneself and one’s family, and the great matters of uniting a country and unifying the world, [hinge upon] only one principle.”⁷³⁰ A sensitivity to the timing of change is what allows an individual choice. Thus, perception is the locus of all power-knowledge. Phan’s message to his readers is thus: cultivate your perception of time, as it alone allows you to foresee change and take effective actions.⁷³¹

By properly perceiving and according with time, one may achieve success. Success here is simply modernization or “keeping up with the times.” However, it is not the achievement of a specific goal. Even the achievement of independence is seen here as a functional product of the mastery of time. This is not ideology so much as it is ideo-praxy - knowing the correct means of acting in the world. Phan is much more interested in tactics than in strategy. That is to say, he sees tactics *as* strategy.

Of course, there is the question of which hexagram is most appropriate to a given situation or time. Rather than counsel the use of divination, Phan advises that readers focus on the “complete and perfect numerological system” found in the *Changes*.⁷³² Phan’s exegesis of the Great Commentary, which otherwise presents in longer form the same points he makes in the introduction, omits the sections dealing with mantic practices and divination (section nine and paragraphs one through four of section ten of part one). In addition, in my review of the body of the text I found no mentions of divination or any mantic formulas. Although it is possible the omission is the result of a misplacement of parts of the text, I believe Phan purposefully excised these portions. This would constitute a decisive break with traditional scholarly and folkloric conceptions of *The Changes* and their significance. Phan’s focus is clearly on the hexagrammatic system as a whole and not the results obtained for any specific hexagram by divination or any other method.⁷³³

An Example: *Qian* (乾)

Phan’s argument concerning the primacy of time is made forcefully in his explanation of the *Qian* 乾 hexagram (No. 1, The Creative). Phan uses the entire *Qian* hexagram as an archetype for understanding the relationship between man and time. Unlike many others, the *Qian*

⁷³⁰ Phan Bội Châu, *Chu Dịch*, 25.

⁷³¹ Phan’s emphasis is similar to Michael Nylan’s here: “*The Changes* can teach readers to distinguish significant from insignificant change, thereby enabling them to prioritize their concerns and pursuits. (Without the *Changes*, ordinary humans find it difficult to ignore the white noise generated by the ceaseless interaction of tendencies.) By focusing attention on the limited field of significant change, devotees of the *Changes* can achieve mastery over the changes that most affect their quality of life, since, by definition, such mastery is predicated on an exquisite sensitivity to the ethical implications of each evolving situation.”, Michael Nylan, *The Five Confucian Classics* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001), 232.

⁷³² Phan Bội Châu. *Chu Dịch*, 19.

⁷³³ Phan discusses some basic ways of reading hexagrams, including analyzing upper and lower trigrams and evaluating correspondences whereby certain lines were *yang* lines (1, 3, 5) and others were *yin* (2, 4, 6). These are standard methods of evaluating hexagrams developed by the Images and Numbers School.

hexagram is thematically cohesive. It describes, line by line, a dragon rising from a position of anonymity to a position of power and influence.

The first line is the crouching dragon (潛龍). This represents a man waiting for an opportunity. Phan argues that a man in this position must cultivate his virtue and expand his knowledge. Premature action at this time would fail because the conditions are not yet right. Phan compares this situation to that of a seed still within the earth.⁷³⁴

The second line is the dragon appearing in the field (見龍在田). This is the time to take action and make one's virtue visible. Here Phan stresses the importance of "hitting the time" just right (*chính trung*, 正中). Acting too early or too late both lead to failure. Phan's analogy here is to cooking rice: "If cooked for thirty minutes the rice will be just right. If cooked for thirty five minutes, however, the rice will be burnt. If cooked for only twenty minutes, the rice will be raw."⁷³⁵ He also brings up the example of a sharpshooter: only a hit dead-center matters.⁷³⁶ Phan's correlative metaphors are telling. He suggests the import of *The Book of Changes* applies equally to quotidian peasant life, basic military matters, and grand cosmological movements.

These are not abstractions, but clear and concise elucidations of how we relate to time in daily life. Phan suggests the value of *The Book of Changes* is in allowing an individual to see how time functions in the same way regardless of circumstance. In correlative cosmology, scale is not important. One could apply the principle of proper timing to cooking one's rice or to the planning of a revolution. This then is an example of analogical enlargement, a principal feature of correlative cosmology.

In the third line, the superior man works tirelessly day and night (終日乾乾). This is an unsteady and dangerous position for the superior man. It is critically important to recognize when one is in such a middle position and to stick to the Way (反復道也). Here, sincerity and consistency count for everything. It is while explaining this line that Phan introduces the curious yet perfectly appropriate analogy of planning a train trip from Huế to Hà Nội. To ensure a man reaches his destination, all manner of things need to be taken into account: purchasing tickets, handling luggage, checking the schedule, preparing adequate food and water, and having someone to pick him up at the right time once he arrives. Immediately after, Phan explains the temporal significance of this analogy:

To reiterate, "knowing the goal and thus reaching it [知至至之]" is related to space.

"Knowing the end and thus completing it 知終終之" is related to time. "According with the sprouts [可與幾]" means taking advantage of things already revealed in order to consider those which have not yet been revealed. "According with the preservation of righteousness [可與存義]" means maintaining secrecy on the outside to preserve that which is on the inside. The way of the sages is knowing the journey and planning for the goal with consistency from beginning to end. Because the learning of the sages is this way we must approach things in accord with the times and circumstances. There is no place this does not apply.⁷³⁷

⁷³⁴ Phan Bội Châu, *Chu Dịch*, 53.

⁷³⁵ Phan Bội Châu, *Chu Dịch*, 54.

⁷³⁶ Phan Bội Châu, *Chu Dịch*, 54.

⁷³⁷ Phan Bội Châu, *Chu Dịch*, 59.

This example demonstrates a willingness, even a need, to understand modern life through the lens offered by *The Changes*. Phan had lived the life of a revolutionary faced by a modern colonial state armed with a vast security apparatus, and thus he knew full well the importance of correctly perceiving and acting in time. Only an individual attentive to dangers and cognizant of the nature of time could survive in a period when enemies maintained overwhelming force. Only an individual capable of understanding the ethical principles inherent in time itself could eventually hope to succeed in achieving their political goals.

The fourth line shows the superior man considering whether to leap over an abyss (或躍在淵). This is still a dangerous time, like the time of line three, but it offers the possibility of advancing. However, any advance must be made carefully and gradually. The crux of the line is the character *huo* (或), meaning “perhaps.” This, then, is a time of decision. Here Phan introduces the examples of Zhuge Liang and Yi Yin, both men who considered situations very carefully before deciding to act.⁷³⁸ Phan is particularly concerned with the historical possibilities of this line - Phan’s hasty actions while in this type of situation led to disaster in the past. Phan suggests that a revolutionary who deliberates carefully would be able to succeed where Phan himself had failed.

The fifth line is the flying dragon (飛龍). Here an individual finally has an opportunity to rise righteously and achieve great success. Phan explains that this line embodies the central message of the entire *Book of Changes*. He thus implores the reader to pay careful attention. The sage acting with perfect virtue will draw the support of all of the people. Provided the sage is pure of intent, he becomes an unstoppable force, capable in this moment of achieving anything. To explain, Phan provides the example of Lê Lợi: “Lê Thái Tổ [The imperial title taken by Lê Lợi] was farming in Lam Son when the rebellion against Ngô⁷³⁹ began. The entire country responded to him. Truly a sage had appeared and all of the ten thousand things craned their necks to look upon him.”⁷⁴⁰

Phan’s rhetorical exuberance makes clear that this line represents the culmination of his political dreams. Phan’s greatest ideal, then, is not a state of being or a sociopolitical form of any sort. Rather, it is a moment of dynamic crescendo, a time when the ethical power embodied in a great man comes shining forth, radiating goodness and eliciting resonant responses in all virtuous people and things. It is not difficult to imagine Phan identifying Hồ Chí Minh’s triumphant proclamation of the independence of Vietnam on September 2, 1945, as the perfect realization of this line.⁷⁴¹

The sixth line is the arrogant dragon (亢龍). Here Phan notes that the time of victory

⁷³⁸ Phan Bội Châu. *Chu Dịch*, 60.

⁷³⁹ The character 吳, here referring to the ancestral homeland of Zhu Yuanzhang 朱元璋 1328-1398, the founder of the Ming dynasty (1368-1644), which had occupied Đại Việt.

⁷⁴⁰ Phan Bội Châu, *Chu Dịch*, 62.

⁷⁴¹ Whether Phan would have had ideological differences with Hồ Chí Minh is without consequence in this frame of reference. Regardless of Hồ Chí Minh’s intentions after victory, Phan would have likely considered the act of standing up and for a moment representing the dreams of the Vietnamese nation of paramount significance. Phan’s doctrine is similar in some ways to that of ‘might makes right’ - the strong are respected for their strength - but Phan’s argument fundamentally holds that only ethical individuals will truly win the hearts and minds of the people. Ethics and efficiency are not competing concepts in Phan’s worldview. Rather, they are mutually productive analogues of one another.

inevitably passes. Should one continue to advance beyond the point of victory, time itself will turn against even the most powerful of men. The key is knowing when to stop. In addition to providing the negative examples of Napoleon and Yuan Shikai, Phan offers exemplars who did not attempt to exceed their position: Trần Thái Tông (1218-1277), who abdicated the throne in favor of his son Trần Thánh Tông (1240-1290), and the husband of Queen Victoria of England (1819-1901).⁷⁴² Phan's choice of a Chinese, a Vietnamese, and two European examples to explain this line shows his ability and willingness to see all historical events anywhere on the globe as essentially analogous to one another.

The most important point of the sixth line is that all situations eventually transform into different situations. To underscore this point Phan, when glossing the *Dun* 遯 hexagram (No. 33, Retreat), quotes a Chinese proverb: "There is no never-ending feast."⁷⁴³ Temporal limits such as this ultimately contain Phan's radicalism. While the revolutionary wave is inevitable, so is its recession. On the other hand, the knowledge that all situations must come to an end would surely have been a source of comfort to Phan as he daily faced the unpleasant reality of French colonial power.⁷⁴⁴

⁷⁴² Phan here refers to but does not mention the name of Prince Albert of Sax-Coburg and Gotha (1819-1861) who, without an official power, invested his time in humanitarian ventures such as education and the global abolition of slavery. Phan Bội Châu, *Chu Dịch*, 64.

⁷⁴³ “下没有不散的宴席” Phan Bội Châu. *Chu Dịch*, 388.

⁷⁴⁴ Phan reiterates and expands upon his conception of time in other hexagrams. Through the framework of *The Changes*, Phan presents change as inevitable and time itself as irremediably contextual. Explaining the nature of the *Sui* 隨 hexagram (No. 17, Following), Phan writes, “Throughout history the world has had ideologues come forward touting some ideology or doctrine. Only when the times fit the situation do heaven and earth follow these [men]. Whether under a constitutional monarchy or a republic, whether statism or socialism, there is often a promoter. The multitudes of people only follow, however, when the time is right. If you didn't have an autocratic monarchy, such as in the time of Lê Dịch, and promoted democracy or if you did not have capitalist war such as took place at the end of the 19th century and promoted socialism, who would follow you? Thus it pays to know the phrase “all under heaven follow in accordance with the time 天下隨時.” Phan Bội Châu, *Chu Dịch*, 237. “Lê Dịch” refers to a play written by Ứng Bình Thúc Giạ Thị (1877-1961) based on Chinese history and “Le Cid” by Pierre Corneille (1606-1684). Here time, not political ideology nor the capacity of a particular individual, determines whether one will be successful in obtaining followers. This sense of the relativity of sociopolitical forms shows up again his Phan's discussion of the fifth line of the *Heng* 恆 hexagram (No. 32, Duration): “In the time of monarchy, one should worship the king. In the time of democracy, one should worship the people. In the time of nationalism, one should worship the nation. In the time of socialism, one should worship society.” Phan Bội Châu. *Chu Dịch*, 386. This clearly indicates that Phan's ideological employment of the Confucian repertoire is utterly divorced from any attachment to institutions, past, present, or future.

It is important to note here just how distinctive Phan's focus on temporality and timeliness is. To be sure, the *Analects* and the *Mencius* discuss the importance of time and the importance of according with it. Nevertheless, for Confucius in the *Analects* it is accordance with *li* 禮 that takes precedence. Schwartz, *World of Thought*, 81. For Mencius, the focus is on moral intentionality, by which one can bring out one's inner goodness. *Ibid.*, 262. For Phan, there is a sense that time itself constantly looms and inevitably rushes ahead. Here we can most clearly see the reason choosing *The Book of Changes* as an ideological organizing framework. Facing the harsh truths of colonial statehood, social fragmentation, and economic exploitation, Phan felt strongly that time was not on his side. In order to escape the fate augured by Social Darwinists, Phan needed an ideological framework that both took temporality seriously and provided some means of bringing time itself back under control. *The Book of Changes* offered this possibility, but taking advantage of it required that Phan reinterpret and rearticulate elements of the Confucian repertoire so that Phan's modern notion of ethical time could take center stage in his commentary.

Personal Cultivation

According to Phan, although a grasp of time is essential to success, cultivating the right personal attributes is necessary as well.⁷⁴⁵ To perceive time and act appropriately, one must develop moral character. Through his careful explanation of the hexagrams, Phan reveals the individual characteristics required of the superior man (*quân tử* 君子). In Phan's presentation, this term, is ethical, not social, in quality. That is, anyone proving themselves capable of embodying virtue and righteousness could become a superior man. Money and power are not prerequisites, but determination and education are. Of course, the foresight of the superior man is directly tied to his timeliness. Phan argues that a superior man also embodies the virtues of selflessness, perspicacity, and consistently correct conduct. He constantly works to refine his knowledge through learning and strengthen his will through patience and the exercise of prudent judgment in times of struggle.

Phan has obvious debts to the Confucian classics in his conceptualization of the ideal superior man. To elucidate his points, Phan often cites or refers to Confucian moral aphorisms and statements, mostly from the *Analects* and the *Doctrine of the Mean*. However, his presentation differs from standard Confucian tropes in three important ways. First, the context of the individual's actions is entirely different. Throughout his Commentary, Phan presents the superior man as faced with awesome challenges that he can meet only by cultivating within himself the ethical properties of fortitude, awareness, and perfect precision under fire. Phan's superior man is not a widened scholar or deferent bureaucrat. He is an action hero.

However, to become a modern day knight errant, one must still rely on aspects of tradition. For example, Phan lays a heavy emphasis on the importance of learning. Phan advises that students should ask questions in order to better understand the principles of the Sages. Studying should thus help one "bring everything together 學以聚之."⁷⁴⁶ However, the purpose of studying is not simply to amass knowledge from books. It is to cultivate one's character. To do so requires a new type of learning: experiential and reflective study. In an indication of how to

Throughout Phan's commentary, the necessity of awareness of and proper accordance with time recurs again and again. When the time is not right, Phan routinely counsels restraint and patience. When factors align and one is able to see the opportunity to act, one must take action or face the imminent danger of falling behind time. For Phan, this is best expressed in the "Commentary on the Image" of the *Qian* 乾 hexagram (No. 1, The Creative): "The superior man strengthens himself without rest 君子以自強不息." Commenting on this phrase, Phan writes, "Never rest. One must strengthen oneself from youth until old age, then from old age until death. There can never be an interruption. If there is an interruption, one has already lost the ability to strengthen oneself." Phan Bội Châu, *Chu Dịch*, 39. Phan thus seeks to answer Herbert Spencer (1820-1903)'s existential threat through ceaseless self-reform. It is clear here that time is of the essence: in the modern world, only the timely will survive.

⁷⁴⁵ For example, when discussing the *Daguo* 大過 hexagram (No. 28, Great Reward), Phan suggests that time by itself will not produce victories. He writes:

"After the period of village settlements [primitive accumulation], [history] entered the period of autocratic rule, represented by Shang and Wu [the Tang and Zhou Dynasties]. After the period of monarchy, [history] entered the period of people's rule [democracy], represented by the French Revolution. Within the country of Hinduism, Buddhism was set up, as represented by Shakyamuni Buddha. Within imperialist countries, there was nationalism, and a socialist state was set up, as represented by Lenin (Vladimir Ilych Ulyanov). These were great events and only through the efforts of great men could they have happened. But also the time has to be just right. If there are great men, but the time is not right for great rewards, then there will be no success. Only when the time is right for great rewards and there are great men will great events take place." Phan Bội Châu, *Chu Dịch*, 341.

⁷⁴⁶ Phan Bội Châu, *Chu Dịch*, 55.

use history as a pedagogical tool, Phan argues that, “The successes and failures of former times...should serve as our teachers for the future. This is what it means to study.”⁷⁴⁷ Books are useful, but only as tools for accessing and understanding the lessons of the past.

This line of thinking is similar to that of the eighteenth-century literatus Lê Quý Đôn (1726-1784), who argued that “one had to first cultivate one’s moral being, for only morally upright individuals could actually perceive the natural patterns manifest in the heavens and on earth.”⁷⁴⁸ Personal cultivation is the means by which a superior man could develop the perceptive capacity to grasp the nature of time and change. This perceptiveness goes beyond empirical observation. Rather, it is defined by the attempt to holistically and intuitively apprehend the nature of time and space. It means grasping of the fundamental unity underlying reality and orienting oneself according to the ethical properties of time.⁷⁴⁹ By do so, one might then be able to apply that knowledge to any number of specific contexts.

Cultivation requires consistent dedication to honing one’s sense of rectitude. Learning and contemplation are worth nothing if the course of study is not oriented according to righteousness (*nghĩa* [vt], *yi* 義). This is a concept that Benjamin Schwartz claims refers to “right behavior in the vast sea of unique life situations where more often than not there is no simple ‘covering’ rule of *li* 禮.”⁷⁵⁰ In explaining the *Yi* 頤 hexagram (No. 27, Nourishment), Phan writes,

Religious people, scholars, artists all focus on nourishing the spirit, but they cannot forget to nourish the body. Laborers, farmers, and workers all focus on nourishing the body, but they must also nourish the spirit. The use of the term ‘providing nourishment [頤]’ encompasses both of these.

When nourishing the spirit, going the way of superstition and the occult is not correct. When nourishing the body, going the way of slavery and servile labor ruins the conscience and is thus not correct.

Thus the sage taught, “perseverance in nourishing brings success.” This means that the task of nourishment, no matter in what sense, must be done correctly. Whenever one nourishes correctly, one has character. When one does not nourish correctly, one does not have character.⁷⁵¹

Once the superior man has accumulated a certain degree of character, he can begin to influence those around him. However, this can also be dangerous if selfish thoughts remain or begin to creep in.⁷⁵² To properly cultivate one’s character, one must be determined and

⁷⁴⁷ Phan Bội Châu, *Chu Dịch*, 55.

⁷⁴⁸ Kelley, “Vietnam,” 71.

⁷⁴⁹ Hall and Ames, reading the *Analects*, describe “actualizing or realizing the meaningfulness of the world” as the prime focus of thinking. Hall and Ames identify one of the main operative ways of thinking of Confucius as the act of realization or *zhi* 知, which they claim “refers to a propensity for forecasting or predicting the outcome of a coherent set of circumstances.” David Hall and Roger Ames, *Thinking Through Confucius*. (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1987) 44, 51.

⁷⁵⁰ Schwartz, *World of Thought*, 79.

⁷⁵¹ Phan Bội Châu. *Chu Dịch*, 327.

⁷⁵² This is because virtue radiates outward from one’s person, causing correlative resonances in other people. Phan writes: “Not only must we nourish ourselves, when we nourish others we must do it correctly. If we fail to nourish ourselves correctly, we fall into the way of the small man. If we fail to nourish others correctly, we bring them into the ambit of the small man. Thus the sage said, “We must look at how we nourish others and first

sincere.⁷⁵³

Second, Phan's conception of personal cultivation is decidedly focused on the individual. This is consistent with the Neo-Confucian turn towards the self noted by Peter Bol and William De Bary. As Bol explains, "the subject of learning was learning itself, and the goal of learning was transforming oneself into a responsible actor in the world."⁷⁵⁴ Like Song and Ming, who were Neo-Confucians who "turned inward" after finding it increasingly difficult to influence policies at court, Phan created a non-institutional ideology embodying a theory of learning that "gave those who internalized it a ready means of making sense out of the everyday human experiences of acquiring knowledge, thinking, feeling, and making choices. It not only told them how to divide up and organize into a coherent whole the various aspects of human experience, but also justified respect for historical models."⁷⁵⁵

decide for ourselves if it is good or bad, successful or disastrous." Phan Bội Châu, *Chu Dịch*, 327. Phan suggests the cultivation of character begins with one's person and radiates outwards.

⁷⁵³ For example, Phan explains the *Xian* 咸 hexagram (No. 31, Influence) thusly, "In matters of the heart, one must follow the essence earnestly. Earnestness means to amass sincerity within one's heart. In order to meet the time, one must have an empty heart. An empty heart means there is nothing within one's heart. There are no selfish or sexual desires occupying a portion of one's heart. If a selfish or sexual desire should enter our heart then we will have a full heart. Once a man's heart is full, he cannot receive the timeless way of heaven and must thus empty his heart. If we study psychology we must consider both of these aspects. Thus studying the *Changes*, we must look at the *Daxu* 大畜 hexagram (No. 26, The Taming Power of the Great), which contains the word "Sincerity 誠" and at *Xian* hexagram, Influence, which contains the word "Empty 虛" as the meanings help to explain one another." Phan Bội Châu, *Chu Dịch*, 371.

⁷⁵⁴ Bol, *Neo-Confucianism*, 192.

⁷⁵⁵ Bol, *Neo-Confucianism*, 158. However, unlike the Song and Ming Neo-Confucians, Phan's vision was oriented around the necessity of creating heroes capable of acting with alacrity and complete dedication of purpose. Phan took exception to Vietnamese scholars willing to serve in the Nguyễn civil administration, which, because it was dominated by the French colonial state, he considered an "empty" institution. Alexander Woodside, for instance, notes how Phan, "was obsessed by the need to launch a war against the fatally distracting upper-class appetite for the 'honors of office' (*cong danh*), which he called 'empty names' (*hu danh*)." Woodside, *Community*, 42. Simply put, there were no legitimate institutions in Vietnam. As such, Phan's formulation of Confucianism concentrated wholly on the individual and what he might be able to accomplish. There is also little consideration of the individual's familial role or social class. Given that Phan was not one to speak candidly about his own family, it might be assumed that the lack of attention to kinship or social relations simply reflects modesty on his part. However, the effect is to focus considerable attention on the virtuous individual to the exclusion of that individual's social context."

This line of 'individual-centric' thinking can be found in the *Analects*, although there is profound disagreement over exactly what constitutes an individual. Herbert Fingarette, on one side, claims that "the entire notion [of an inner psyche] never entered [Confucius's] head." Herbert Fingarette, *Confucius - The Secular as Sacred* (New York, NY: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1972). 45. Thus, any emotional or ethical emphases could only be found within the context of specific performances of ritual or proper behavior, but never as a part of the inner world of the individual. This would mean Phan was making a considerable leap by constructing an ideology around the individual that stressed the psychological aspects of "amassing sincerity within one's heart." It would also mean that Phan was developing through his reading of *The Book of Changes* a modern form of Confucian psychology, a supposition supported by the fact that Phan was one of the first Vietnamese intellectuals to write an autobiography (indeed, two!).

On the other side, Benjamin Schwartz counters by writing, "Confucius is, in fact, enormously interested in the inner state of the person even when he is not operating in the public space and regards these sustained inner states as of the utmost relevance to public behavior." Benjamin Schwartz, *The World of Thought in Ancient China* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1985), 75. If Schwartz is correct, then Phan's

Third, there is a radical emotional quality to Phan's prescriptions that sets it apart from standard Confucian interpretations. In a gloss to the *Kun* 困 hexagram (No. 47, Oppression), Phan offers a glimpse of how far he expected his adherents to go in their dedication to righteousness: "There is a line in the *Analects*: 'The scholar, seeing threatening danger, is prepared to sacrifice his life.' To give one's life in tribute to the nation and society is what it means to 'sacrifice one's life 致命.'" ⁷⁵⁶ Phan's interpretation of this line (*Analects* 19:1) is rather extraordinary. In contrast, Edward Slingerland provides the following translation and comment: "19.1 Zizhang said, 'To submit to fate when confronted with danger...'" Most commentators understand this to be a summary of the minimum qualities that are necessary to make one an acceptable scholar-official. ⁷⁵⁷ Phan's version thus converts "submitting to fate" as a scholar official into "sacrificing one's life in tribute to the nation and society," indicating that the stakes of personal cultivation had increased dramatically in the context of modern colonialism. ⁷⁵⁸

Leadership and Grouping

Once an individual attains an appropriate level of personal cultivation, they will begin attracting followers. Here we encounter Phan's theory of the formation of groups (*qun* 群). Entirely irrespective of what political or religious ideology they profess, Phan contends that people will gravitate toward leaders based on the principles of correlative resonance. However, for the nascent leaders several problems then emerge. First, one must consider how to select and foster good, loyal subordinates. Second, one must decide how to conceive of and create larger sociopolitical units.

Phan subscribed to a Confucian version of Carlyle's "Great Man Theory of History," wherein the decisions of "heroes" are held responsible for the progression of history. ⁷⁵⁹ Phan's version differed significantly from Carlyle, for Phan's heroes do not *determine* the path of history, rather they perceive the opportunities afforded by the changing of time and, by virtue of their cultivation, are able to guide their followers in accordance with the times. Significantly, heroic or virtuous qualities ensured precisely nothing if their timing was not right.

Leaders were necessary for revolutions to take place. ⁷⁶⁰ When explaining the *Cui* 萃

notion of a self-aware individual who cultivates sincerity and virtue does have meaningful roots in the *Analects*, though the goal to which Phan directs this cultivation may indeed be novel.

⁷⁵⁶ Phan Bội Châu, *Chu Dịch*, 531.

⁷⁵⁷ *Confucius: Analects. With Selections from Traditional Commentaries*, trans. by Edward Slingerland, (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc.), 221.

⁷⁵⁸ In contrast, Alexander Woodside describes how "Pham Quynh unhesitatingly identified the ideal Vietnamese national character, in 1925, as that of the 'wind-and-stream' man, the imperturbable intellectual who tranquilly offered wine to his friends." Woodside, *Community*, 91.

⁷⁵⁹ See Thomas Carlyle, *On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History* (New York, NY: Frederick A. Stokes & Brother, 1888).

⁷⁶⁰ Explaining the second line of the *Jing* 井 hexagram (No. 48, The Well), Phan makes the claim "There needed to be a King Tang in the time of Yi Yin to cut down Jie and save the populace. There was [Kaiser] Wilhelm in the time of Bismarck who was able to make strong the country of Germany. Without intelligent kings such as those two men, who would be able to draw from the well?" Phan did not apparently see any categorical differences between ancient Shang and modern German rulers, though the ability of each to accord with their particular time periods ensured their success. No matter the time period, Phan maintains that an elite vanguard of ethically trained and knowledgeable individuals must be available and willing to guide a polity to success. Phan Bội Châu, *Chu Dịch*, 547.

hexagram (No. 45, Gathering Together), Phan makes it clear that “When men collect as a group, there must be a great man to serve as leader. When men collect as a nation, there must be a great man to serve as president.”⁷⁶¹ Accordingly, a time with all small men and no great men (the situation of line four of the *Kun* 坤 hexagram, No. 2, the Receptive) is a great disaster for a nation or a society.⁷⁶² Leadership and the formation of groups are thus presented as mutually productive phenomenon. Having one without the other is an indication of a misalignment within time.

To become a leader, one needed a following. Phan raises this issue many times over the course of his commentary. He offers little idea of how exactly a leader is to attract followers. The implicit suggestion is that a virtuous individual will inevitably draw people to him by the power of his charismatic moral persona. Should this fail to take place, the virtuous individual would simply bide his time, waiting patiently for recognition. Phan seems to suggest that personal cultivation will simply guide the superior man toward taking whatever steps will be necessary to attract a following. In his *Autobiography*, Phan spends little time reflecting on exactly why people chose to follow him. Charisma is not something to be explained in a Machiavellian fashion, it is simply something the virtuous leader will have as a result of his personal moral cultivation.

Conversely, Phan’s emphasis is on the proper selection of followers. Discussing the *Zhun* 屯 hexagram (No. 3, A Difficult Beginning), Phan writes, “When national or social affairs are at stake, one should find and rely upon talented subjects.”⁷⁶³ That those followers be suitable individuals is, of course, crucial, as Phan points out in an explanation of the third line of the *Bi* 比 hexagram (No. 8, Union):

In a village there are neighbors, when studying there are friends, when getting along there are colleagues, when working there are parties, wives choose husbands, husbands choose wives, servants choose masters, masters choose servants, all of this is [part of finding] Union. No matter what group, anytime you employ a crook things will be ruined. Thus you should choose a person who balances you well. This is really worth paying attention to.”⁷⁶⁴

Here we see the principles of resonance and good judgment at work. A superior man is one who can discern which people will *in time* prove suitable for particular tasks. Phan himself was forced to rely on many individuals and, as such, points out the necessity of compromise in choosing subordinates. However, as he admits in his *Autobiography*, he was often too gullible when trusting people.⁷⁶⁵ Thus, in an explanation of the top line of the *Shi* 師 hexagram (No. 7, The Army), he claims: “Stupid, corrupt, and deceitful people are useful, but only for military purposes. Once you turn to running a country you need to get rid of these people!”⁷⁶⁶

Phan’s prescription for the creation and expansion of sociopolitical units is an interesting blend of Mencian populism and socialist democracy. Phan’s Commentary includes a rather

⁷⁶¹ Phan Bội Châu, *Chu Dịch*, 512.

⁷⁶² Phan Bội Châu, *Chu Dịch*, 84.

⁷⁶³ Phan Bội Châu, *Chu Dịch*, 87.

⁷⁶⁴ Phan Bội Châu, *Chu Dịch*, 149.

⁷⁶⁵ Phan Bội Châu, *Overtaken*, 45.

⁷⁶⁶ Phan Bội Châu, *Chu Dịch*, 142.

vague conception of politics based on analogous amplification of the same principles that apply to personal cultivation. When discussing the concept of self-strengthening 自強, for example, Phan claims that the same methods of making oneself self-reliant would work equally well for “a family, a nation, a society, or the world.”⁷⁶⁷ Similarly, when explaining the fifth line of the *Jiaren* 家人 hexagram (No. 37, The Family), Phan considers the following question:

Why does [the hexagram] not state “extends to the country” and only states “extends to the family”? Is not a king who extends only to his family particularistic? We must understand that a nation is only a root, a country is really a large family. A family is really a small country. “Extends to the family” is stated because it is part of the *Jiaren* hexagram, so the word “Country” could not be stated. The intention of the sage is, however, that “country” means “family” and “family” means “country.”

This is an excellent example of correlative cosmological thinking. Though it would be easy to point to a regression in the sophistication of Phan’s political philosophy here to an almost absurd reductionism, it is equally important to recognize the analytical utility of this sort of analogical explication. Discourses that describe nations as “fatherlands” and “motherlands” abound in the West, as do leaders calling themselves “fathers of the nation.” By shifting “family” to “country,” Phan is acknowledging the reorientation of political affiliation around national groupings, but without claiming the nation to be a fundamentally new category. Rather, “country” and “nation” have taken the analogical place, not the formal place, of “family.” As such, “family” can still exist within “country” without a formal contradiction. Thus, what seems at first glance to be a simplistic reversion to tradition is in fact a subtle reorientation of archetypal categories to account for changes in the modern world.

Another of Phan’s analogies for leadership deserves similar attention. Explaining the *Zhun* 屯 hexagram (No. 3, A Difficult Beginning), Phan writes, “Weave the threads together to create fiber lengths. Constructing an organization and building a nation or society, large or small, requires this act.”⁷⁶⁸ The Image line reads: “Clouds and Thunder. A Difficult Beginning. The superior man weaves thread 經綸.” The characters in question also mean “statecraft.” Here we can see again the power of analogical reasoning. Forming a strong sociopolitical unit is akin to weaving together threads that by themselves are weak. Phan and other Vietnamese intellectuals long deplored the “sandlike” nature of the Vietnamese people. An effective leader would be one who could not just attract people to him by the power of his charisma, but one who could bind them together by careful and consistent interweaving of individuals and families.

With regard to political policy, Phan had a few suggestions of a Mencian bent. Phan considered the people’s livelihood important. This is made evident in a long passage taken from Phan’s discussion of the *Yi* 益 hexagram (No. 42, Increase), concerning Lord Mengchang of Qi (See Appendix D). This story contains many themes we have previously reviewed. First, we see the importance of having a trustworthy servant, even one who may at first seem disobedient. Second, we see how the accrual of personal virtue, here in the form of “righteousness,” garners the support of the people. Third, we can see a political philosophy in which the elite are expected to provide for the people’s material needs. Finally, there is an embryonic impulse

⁷⁶⁷ Phan Bội Châu, *Chu Dịch*, 39.

⁷⁶⁸ Phan Bội Châu, *Chu Dịch*, 90.

towards economic though not social equalization.

The message is essentially one of Mencian populism - rulers need to take the people's interests into account before their own. The unstated corollary is the practical consideration that by doing so, rulers would be ultimately benefitting themselves. Phan himself suggests as much in a gloss to the *Tai* 泰 hexagram (No. 11, Peace):

Heaven increases the number of people and earth provides this with advantages. If there is not a method of dividing and developing or [a method of] assisting and regulating so that the common people can be satisfied, there will be excesses and shortages. This will produce innumerable inequities in society. The rich will become richer, the hungry will become hungrier, the happy will become happier, and the destitute will become more destitute. The people above will oppress the people below and the people below will grow to hate the people above. All this will occur because of the lack of a means of dividing, developing, assisting and regulating on behalf of the people.⁷⁶⁹

It might be said that before there is policy, there must be principle. Phan's observations of the French colonial state led him to believe that policy came first and principle failed to come at all. The veiled threat of the "people below growing to hate the people above" is thus significant.

Phan's populism only went as far as economic equality and did not include political equality along the lines of socialism.⁷⁷⁰ Phan argues that hierarchy should be meritocratic. It is precisely those who have cultivated their perception of time and sense of discernment who should be in charge of political affairs. In essence, Phan argues here for a meritocratic ideal independent of the institution of the examination system. There is a strong appeal to common sense here. Phan feels that if those on top can rectify the national or global situation, then it will be possible for everyone to find their proper place. Though this may seem like the most undeveloped aspect of Phan's modern Confucian worldview, it is worth noting how similar it is to the pragmatism of John Dewey or the meritocratic ethos of global capitalism.

An Example: *Ge* 革 Revolution

I will now focus on a single hexagram: *Ge* 革 (No. 49, Revolution). This is the hexagram Phan considers to be the most important for Vietnamese intellectuals to grasp and put into action. Phan's exegesis of Revolution is impassioned, forceful, and innovative. Phan argues for an overdue overturning of the French colonial state and the Vietnamese monarchical administration as part of a global wave of modern revolution. This revolution would be ethical, for it would fit the time and the needs of the people. It would also represent the culmination of all of Phan's other themes: individuals would cultivate their personal virtue, become charismatic leaders, rally the people and effectively organize them into a powerful collective political force and, when the time was just right, drive out everything that failed to resonate with the ethical power of the

⁷⁶⁹ Phan Bội Châu, *Chu Dịch*, 176.

⁷⁷⁰ Phan makes this clear in a frank discussion of the matter found his explanation of the *Lü* 履 hexagram (No. 10, Treading): Distinguishing between above and below does not mean distinguishing between social classes. Long ago everyone was quite equal, but this only meant equal in social class. Sometimes you have to distinguish between talent and position. Observe a village. Could anyone be village leader and could anyone be the village herald? If anybody was leader and anybody was herald, could village matters be properly handled? If roles are properly doled out, then people don't bicker and things get done. Not only does everyone have a duty, everyone also has some authority. This is really equality. Up and down are only sorted according to talent while equality is achieved through balanced authority and responsibility. These two methods seem contradictory but are really complementary." Phan Bội Châu, *Chu Dịch*, 163.

revolutionary moment.

Phan foreshadows his discussion in a short passage appearing under the fifth line of the *Tongren* 同仁 hexagram (No. 13, Fellowship with Men):

If you consider all of the options, going back and forth over it, you will come to revolution. The racial revolution isn't over, the national revolution isn't over. We must bring up the social revolution and the world revolution. Though there will be crying and shouting all over the world, we will be smiling. To summarize, there is only the great master sculptor. What is the great master sculptor? It is Revolution, Revolution!

Phan here sounds like a student on the streets of Beijing on May 4, 1919 (or perhaps August 18, 1966?).⁷⁷¹ There is an exuberance in this passage, as there is in the following passages, not found elsewhere in the commentary. This is one of the most unique aspects of Phan's formulation of Confucianism: it is a Confucianism that features moral revolution as its primary purpose, the goal toward which all other descriptions of value and utility are directed.

Phan's sense of excitement in his essay on Revolution is palpable (See Appendix E). Phan's initial two-part justification for revolution reveals that revolution is a sort of cosmological "cleansing device." If humans fail to keep up with time for long enough, Phan seems to argue that revolution is an inevitable result. On the other hand, Phan makes a strong case for individuals to "absorb the spirit of revolution," indicating that he was not confident revolution would take place on its own. For example, at the end of his explication of the "Commentary on the Appended Statements," Phan emphasizes that the Way relies on people to carry it out.⁷⁷² The essay is thus both a justification and a prescription.

The second part of the justification indicates that Phan anticipates that Revolution will bring Vietnam into the modern era. There is a whisper of total revolution here, but it is conditioned by Phan's choice of metaphors. A modern revolution is akin to buying new clothing or building a new house. It does not necessarily involve a thoroughgoing change to one's identity or way of thinking. The line, "revolution has been happening for a long time" indicates that Phan understands revolution to have both gradual and sudden aspects. He also notes that revolutions can be dangerous, though this fact does little to dampen his enthusiasm.

Phan identifies several paradoxes of revolution. First, it is both what people desire and something that bewilders and terrifies them. There is the suggestion here that the ethical properties of time are intimately linked to the sentiment of the majority of the people. Phan's advice for the would-be-revolutionary is ambivalent on this issue - he can only wait patiently and accumulate virtue and followers until the time of revolution comes. This pessimism is perhaps a result of Phan's failure to arouse sufficient popular sentiment for revolution despite years of writing harsh tracts denouncing French colonialism.

A second paradox concerns the ubiquity and proper use of the word "revolution." Despite the lack of willingness on the part of the people to undertake or at least condone revolution, Phan notes that they bandy the word about with annoying frequency. Phan feels obliged in light of the discursive spread of "revolution" to distinguish between "real" revolutions and simply instances of "change." Where there is an actual change of "mandate," Phan argues, then it is suitable to refer to a revolution. The notion of a "Mandate of Heaven" figures prominently in Mencian populism, and here seems to represent the will of the majority of the people. That is to say, if a

⁷⁷¹ Phan actually was in Beijing by August 1919, according to his *Autobiography*. It is likely that he would have observed some portion of the New Culture Movement there or in Hangzhou. Phan Bội Châu, *Overtaken*, 244.

⁷⁷² Phan Bội Châu, *Chu Dịch*, 743-744.

change is not a reflection of the will of the people, then it should not be considered a revolution.

The final paragraphs present instances of revolution drawn from around the world. These modern examples of revolution are specifically linked to nationalist causes. Phan points out that Washington, Kemal, and Lenin were considered “fathers of the nation” after completing revolutions, suggesting that Phan implicitly associates revolution with nation-building.

Phan’s Coherent Vision of a Modern Confucian Revolutionary Ideology

Having demonstrated how Phan conceives of and utilizes the *Book of Changes*, I consider now the overall significance of his commentary. The key questions are: what does the text reveal about Phan’s ideological ambitions and how do these ambitions complicate historical and theoretical narratives in which Phan is implicated? It reveals Phan’s coherent vision of a modern Confucian revolutionary ideology.

First, Phan’s vision is coherent and totalistic. This is made evident in the introduction and again in Phan’s explanation of the Great Commentary. *The Changes* includes all things under heaven and upon the earth and nothing escapes it.⁷⁷³ Such a perspective is on par with other contemporary totalizing visions such as those of French colonialism, Marxist historical materialism, Weberian rationalism, or biological science. All of these ideologies claim to represent the entire world, even the entire universe, and to have a special knowledge of what causes change. Phan’s vision is distinct from these other ideologies insofar as it locates the *cause* of change in change itself. That is, no single substance or quality animates the totality – not *civilisatrice*, the economic base, transcendental ethics, or biodynamic energy.

In Phan’s correlative cosmology, neither is the totality a unitary self-generative whole. Rather, all things have their own particular orienting principles, which are ultimately analogous to the orienting principle of the whole or *dao* 道, but not reducible to it. Phan’s ideological articulation is based fundamentally on ideas derived from what is known as correlative cosmology: an epistemological system that organizes and classifies phenomenon through analogies and the ascertaining of essences. Chenshan Tian contends the system also underlies Chinese dialectics, including those articulated by the Chinese Communist Party.

Second, Phan’s vision is modern.⁷⁷⁴ Despite apparent similarities, Phan’s totalistic vision is different from those of earlier exponents of *The Book of Changes*. Specifically, Phan demonstrates throughout his commentary that *The Book of Changes* is applicable to the modern era by refracting modern events through hexagrams and hexagram lines to reveal the clarifying utility of the text. The text, if used properly, could be a tool for understanding and responding to the modern world.⁷⁷⁵

⁷⁷³ Phan Bội Châu, *Chu Dịch*, 724.

⁷⁷⁴ It is important distinguish between modernity and the process of modernization. According to Frederic Jameson, modernity is a feeling, specifically a feeling of newness. He writes, “Modernity would describe the way ‘modern’ people feel about themselves...the modern feeling seems to consist in the conviction that we ourselves are somehow new, that a new age is beginning, that everything is possible and nothing can ever be the same again; nor do we want anything to be the same again, we want to ‘make it new,’ get rid of those old objects, values, mentalities, and ways of doing things, and somehow be transfigured.” Alternatively, modernization, “has something to do with industrial progress, rationalization, reorganization or production and administration along more efficient lines, electricity, the assembly line, parliamentary democracy, and cheap newspapers.” Frederic Jameson, *Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991). 304, 310.

⁷⁷⁵ Joseph Levenson rightly points out, maintaining an idea after that idea’s time has passed changes the idea. Levenson writes, “An idea is always grasped in relative association, never in absolute isolation, and no idea, in history, keeps a changeless self-identity.” Levenson, *Confucian*, xxviii.

An important aspect of Phan's commentary is his continual emphasis on time, timeliness, and calculation. In a creative explanation of time and space in the *Zhun* 屯 hexagram (No. 3), Phan notes how when it is nighttime in America, it is daytime in Asia. Not only does Phan here demonstrate his awareness of international time zones, he shows how *The Book of Changes* can function in a global modality. In explaining the importance of thorough consideration in the context of the third line of the *Qian* 乾 hexagram (No. 1), Phan uses the metaphor of taking a train :

When going from Huế to Hà Nội, do we not need to know beforehand which train to take? Knowing the final train is fundamental, [but must we] not also know how many trains must be taken in between, how many hours this will take, how much it will cost, what luggage we will take with us, how many people we will need to help us, what precautions to take to ensure a successful trip and where we will stay when we get off in Hanoi?

Moreover, between leaving and arriving, what dangers might there be?

Such matters as listed above must be calculated thoroughly and only then can we decide to leave and [actually] get to the place we want to go. If these fundamentals are followed, our design of getting to Hanoi will not fail.

Phan had taken many trains and ships earlier in life and understood quite well the importance of being on-time and attending closely to many details at once. A diligent reader of *The Book of Changes*, then, would be able to make better use of modern transportation. Beyond this, they would be able to master any modern technological system which differed from the situations presented in *The Book of Changes* only in terms of speed and complexity, not in terms of kind or type.

In addition to timeliness, Phan claims another aspect of modernity: being civilized. Having criticized the French claim to “civilization” in earlier works, Phan repeats the argument in line five of the *Bi* 比 hexagram. First he explains how when hunting, sage kings would leave one of four sides open to allow animals to escape. In contrast to this practice, Phan writes, “Look at the policies of the colonizers from the civilized nations - they simply throw down the net but do not open it again. On the outside they appear civilized but within they are extremely boorish!”⁷⁷⁶ Phan's discursive claim stabs right at the heart of the French colonial paradox - the country of *Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité* was denying all of these to the Vietnamese. A necessary element of modernity for Phan was a sophisticated ethics - a set of values to serve as a personal and social standard.

Third, Phan's vision is Confucian, but Confucian only insofar as it draws from the Confucian repertoire to articulate an argument centered upon the capacity of the superior man to successfully cultivate his personal moral force, gather the people to him through virtuous conduct, and carry out a national revolution.⁷⁷⁷ Phan's Confucianism is a distinctly hero-based

⁷⁷⁶ Phan Bội Châu, *Chu Dịch*, 150.

⁷⁷⁷ There is considerable debate over exactly how to conceptualize and discuss ‘Confucianism.’ A large part of this problem stems from attempts to conceive of Confucianism as a coherent ideology. Rather than an ideology, Benjamin Elman, John Duncan, and Herman Ooms call Confucianism alternatively “a repertoire of world-ordering devices” or a “repertoire of common techniques or tactics.” Seen as a repertoire, Confucianism could take many forms and retain both intellectual and emotional value in a variety of different geographical and historical contexts. Furthermore, a repertoire does not face the same definitional problems as an ideology. However, I would

ideology emphasizing virtues such as courage, determination, and perspicacity.⁷⁷⁸ Phan elsewhere wrote prodigiously about Vietnamese heroes, so it comes as no surprise to find such examples in his Commentary.⁷⁷⁹

While Phan consistently references heroes displaying Confucian values, he dispensed with what Alexander Woodside calls the “defensive corporatism” engendered by state exams and Neo-Confucian state orthodoxy.⁷⁸⁰ That is, Phan’s Confucian ideology is *non-institutional*, similar in many ways to the non-institutional Confucian inspired ontologies of Xiong Shili and Liang Shuming. Phan makes this clear in a gloss to the *Pi* 否 hexagram (No. 12): “Monarchy flourishes, but one day it will fall. As monarchy falls, the common man will rise.” The ease with which Phan dismisses the dynastic state indicates that his version of Confucianism is really quite distinct from the articulations of Confucianism identified and discussed by Shawn McHale and Nola Cooke. Like his Chinese counterparts, Phan developed an ideology that incorporated portions of the Confucian repertoire with aspects of Western political theory and philosophy. Phan’s Confucianism is distinctive for his articulation of personal ethical values within an ontological framework informed by correlative cosmology.

Fourth, Phan’s vision is political and revolutionary. Throughout the commentary Phan describes a process whereby a perceptive individual who gauges the time correctly could overcome adversity to achieve political success. The politics described in the commentary is based on a principle of analogical expansion. That is, Phan contends that the proper cultivation of virtue and ordering of what is near will inevitably extend and apply to larger sociopolitical units and more significant situations. Politics, then, falls primarily under the Confucian concepts of “grouping 群.” Nevertheless, Phan conceives of groups only as instances in which people coalesce around leaders. The groupings here are not social so much as they are charismatic.

For Phan, the purpose of politics in the modern global context is to constitute a national unit

make a further correction. It seems to me most appropriate to think of a Confucian repertoire containing a vast array of potentially mutually conflicting texts, concepts, principles, narratives, and practices upon which individuals can and have drawn for the purpose of articulating ideological visions. See Benjamin Elman with John B. Duncan and Herman Ooms. “Introduction.” *Rethinking Confucianism: Past and Present in China, Japan, Korea, and Vietnam*, in eds. Benjamin Elman, et al. (Los Angeles, CA: UCLA Asian Pacific Monograph Series, 2002),. 4-5.

Such a definition also accords with Hao Chang’s term, a “storehouse of moral wisdom.” Hao Chang, “New Confucianism and Contemporary China,” In *The Limits of Change: Essays on Conservative Alternatives in Republican China*, ed. Charlotte Furth. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976), 300.

⁷⁷⁸ 104. Phan Bội Châu, *Chu Dịch*, 185.

⁷⁷⁹ Phan dedicates some fifteen pages in *Phan Bội Châu Niên Biểu* to the students who took part in the Đông Du movement, describing how many were killed on the battlefield, the gallows, or took their own lives. Phan’s grand monument to such men was written in 1920 with the *Việt Nam Nghĩa Liệt Sĩ* (The History of the Martyrs of Vietnam). Prior to this, he also wrote *Hà Thành Nhị Liệt Sĩ* [*The History of the Two Martyrs of Hanoi*] following a failed attempt in 1908 to poison French soldiers and attack Hanoi, *Trần Đông Phong Truyện* [*The Story of Tran Dong Phong*] about a young student who committed suicide, *Tái Sinh Truyện* [*The Story of a Resurrection*] about Bùi Chính Lộ, who took his own life in a Siamese prison after killing two French operatives, *Kỷ Niệm Lục* [*A Record of Memories*] concerning the lives of Tăng Bạt Hồ and Vương Thúc Quý, and *Sùng Bái Giai Nhân* [*A Tribute to Shining Lives*], a collection of biographies of recent heroic figures. The greatest single individual to receive confirmation and praise from Phan was Phạm Hồng Thái. In *Phạm Hồng Thái Liệt Sĩ Truyện* [*A Biography of the Martyr Phạm Hong Thai*] and several other writings, Phan recounted the life of the young man and his explosive assassination attempt on Governor-General Merlin in 1924.

⁷⁸⁰ Alexander Woodside, “Territorial Order and Collective-Identity Tensions in Confucian Asia: China, Vietnam, Korea.” *Daedalus* 127, no. 3, 1998), 210.

out of resonant groups of bioculturally similar people (one's countrymen), and to overcome any political force exercising sovereignty over that grouping. Phan does not spend much time in the commentary discussing the particular situation of Vietnam. This points to the global nature of Phan's political ambitions. Beyond the national unit, Phan, like Kang Youwei, seems to have envisioned some sort of world unity. This global unit is mentioned only in passing, and seems to be a largely unarticulated utopian goal to be considered once the national unit has been successfully made sovereign and defended against international enemies.

Finally, Phan's vision is ideological. *The Book of Changes* offers the most comprehensive, rich, and cosmologically sound means of interpreting the world, history, and nature of political and charismatic power. It thus serves as an ordering framework for a political theory of revolution. Phan presents *The Book of Changes* as a system for categorizing moral examples. It is a device, a theoretical framework for understanding all events, all times, all pathways and instances of change. It is also a toolbox, full of images that allow access into the very nature of change and time. Used properly, it offers the reader who would intuit its meaning an escape route, a source of emotional and psychological succor, and a means of conceptualizing a way forward.⁷⁸¹

Phan's ideology draws from correlative cosmology, but does so in a coherent fashion that establishes clear prescriptions for individual and group political action. Phan is able to interpret world events, both past and present, through the prismatic framework of *The Book of Changes*. He is further able to propound clear instructions for personal moral cultivation, the gathering of followers, and the carrying out of revolution. All actions are to be taken only *after* careful and conscious observation of the situation to determine an appropriate ethical course in accordance with the nature of change and time itself. This could thus be described as a political-ethical temporal ideology of drawing on the Confucian repertoire. Phan employs *The Book of Changes* as a refractive ordering device through which he articulates a coherent vision of a modern Confucian nation.

Conclusion: Effectiveness and Comparisons

In this evaluation of Phan's commentary, I have sought to demonstrate that "Confucianism," "Modernism," and indeed "nationalism" are best understood not as fixed categories by which to classify intellectual production, but rather terms that indicate frames of reference and repertoires of cultural and philosophical content from which individuals can draw to form more or less cohesive ideologies that describe their perspective of the world and offer visions of change within it. This commentary presents a conceptual device, the use of which, Phan argues, would allow perceptive and well-cultivated patriotic leaders to first cultivate their own virtue and capacity, then carry out a revolution producing a modern nation founded on principles of personal and collective virtue, politico-moral heroism, and social harmony. Phan's commentary lays out a coherent vision of the cosmos and suggests the most appropriate means of acting within it.

How effective was Phan's ideology? On the face of it, not very. Phan's commentary was not published until 1969 -twenty-nine years *after* he passed away. It has not had a significant influence on Vietnamese philosophers, politicians, or for that matter, scholars. Phan did not

⁷⁸¹ Hall and Ames say *The Book of Songs* serves a similar function to the function the *Book of Changes* serves for Phan. They write, "People of different ages with different concerns could use the text creatively to arrange and express their experiences, to structure their priorities and to argue for a specific point of view." David Hall and Roger Ames, *Thinking Through Confucius* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1987), 64.

achieve the ideological influence he intended with this text.

If we consider the text on its own merits, that is, as a presentation of a systematic framework for understanding the modern world, a rather different evaluation is possible. Phan interprets and explains *The Book of Changes* in such a way that time itself becomes the primary ontological unit. This allows for a modern understanding of temporality, albeit one distinct from the Western notion of temporality as empty, homogenous, and linear. By focusing on the superior man's overriding need to accord with time, Phan reorients the text and fundamentally alters its interpretive possibilities. By focusing his reader's attention on time, in effect, Phan can "keep up" with the velocity of the modern.⁷⁸²

Phan's focus on the development of proper ethical attributes for a hero draws upon traditional sources, but presents them within modern contexts and facing modern problematics, such as colonialism. In this sense, Phan is demonstrating the utility of traditional values, provided they are oriented around a modern conception of time. Phan's modern heroes, such as Cai E and Camillo Cavour, display the same characteristics of courage, charisma, determination, and perspicacity as do traditional heroes. Phan's point is that virtues do not change. For Phan, what made a man a strong leader in the past will make him a strong leader in the future as well. Phan's employment of values found in traditional texts underscores his belief in the fundamental validity of certain portions of Confucian doctrine, but they are precisely the portions he is most able to accommodate to a modern global conception of revolution.

Though it is easy to criticize Phan's validation of traditional virtues, it is worth comparing them to the virtues upheld by the organization typically praised for its modern and effective approach to politics and nation-building: The Vietnamese Communist Party. There are many homologies. Both ideological perspectives include an ontological of dialectical time, place a strong emphasis on personal moral cultivation, and posit revolution as their goal. However, there is a critical difference. Whereas *The Book of Changes* is systematic, it uses analogical reasoning, which is primarily *descriptive of the totality* and *prescriptive* for the individual. Communist ideology is primarily *prescriptive for the totality* and *descriptive* of the individual (assignment of class status).

Thus, at its heart, Phan's ideology is most effective for an *individual* navigating the modern world. It is a road map for young Vietnamese revolutionaries who are determined to learn, develop morals, and do whatever might be required to succeed. On a societal scale, Phan's framework and vision would quickly prove inadequate. However, on a personal level, Phan's way of interpreting and explaining the world, and an individual hero's place in it, are remarkably coherent, morally sophisticated, and psychologically satisfying.

Appendix - Data Analysis of the Content of the Commentary

As indicated in the corresponding chart (See Appendix A1), the most important finding is that 80% (441/551) of the references were to Chinese texts or historical figures. This exceeds the number of references to Vietnamese texts and historical figures, 10% (55/551), by a factor of eight. We can draw three conclusions from this. First, Phan Bội Châu's knowledge of Chinese history and literature was considerable. Second, Phan had no compunction about employing Chinese references, which suggests that he saw China less as a foreign nation to compete with

⁷⁸² For an excellent discussion of this and other velocity-related theoretical concerns, see Paul Virilio, *Speed and Politics* (Los Angeles, CA: Semiotext(e), 2007). Virilio points out that in the modern era, that which is *more rapid* will inevitably overcome that which is *more wealthy*. He locates the geographical source of velocity: "speed is the hope of the West [italics in original]," 70.

and more as a reservoir of meaningful cultural content. Third, Phan seems to have assumed that his readers would at the very least recognize and comprehend his references, for he makes little effort to explain them.

Of the Chinese references (See Appendix A2), 246 are citations from identifiable texts. Approximately 64% (158/246) of these citations are from works traditionally understood as classical Confucian texts. These include *The Book of Documents* or *shujing* 書經 (16), *The Book of Songs* or *shijing* 詩經 (8), and the *Zuo Commentary* or *zuozhuan* 左傳 (9). The Daoist citations are primarily from the *Dao De Jing* 道德經 (14). The portion described as Later Commentaries come from a vast range of sources. Of these, there is considerable representation from late Tang and Song dynasty scholars including Han Yu 韓愈 (768-824),⁷⁸³ Shao Yong, Cheng Yi, and Sima Guang 司馬光 (1019-1086). The “foreword” is particularly interesting because of the individuals Phan references in it. In rapid succession, Phan mentions the polymath Shao Yong, the strategist Zhang Liang 張良 (262-189 BCE), the philosopher Mencius 孟子 (372-289 BCE?), and Lu Jiuyuan 陸九淵 (1139-1192) and Wang Yangming 王陽明 (1472-1529), the founders of the Lu Wang School.⁷⁸⁴ He does this only to elucidate his distinction between Buddhism, Daoism, and the study of *The Book of Changes*.

However, the bulk of citations (109) come from a group of classical Confucian texts known as the Four Books (See Appendix A3).⁷⁸⁵ This set of texts, selected by the Neo-Confucian educator Zhu Xi, comprise the core of the Neo-Confucian curriculum in China. These include the *Analects* or *lunyu* 論語 (39), the *Mencius* or *mengzi* 孟子 (39), the *Great Learning* or *daxue* 大

⁷⁸³ Phan offers a particularly interesting story about Han Yu as a gloss to the second line of the *Xun* 巽 hexagram (No. 57, Penetration): “Han of Changli [Han Yu] was banished to Chaozhou. He went to Hang Mountain. The clouds and snow blocked the mountain pass and he couldn’t see the path. He prayed to himself sincerely and suddenly the clouds dissipated and the snow hardened. Chaozhou often had people injured by crocodiles. The people of Chaozhou at that time were savages. They said crocodiles were spirits and they did not dare touch them. He had men go purchase bows and arrows to shoot them with. When planning to attack a crocodile, first a proclamation was thrown into the river informing the crocodiles that if they truly were spirits then they needed to leave within three days or they would all be wiped out. In two days, thunder and lightning suddenly and violently struck the river. A great many crocodiles followed the wind away. From that point forward the people of Chaozhou had no more crocodile problems.” The line in question reads: “Nine in the second line. There is penetration underneath the bed. If one employ many priests and sorcerers there will be good fortune and no error.” Phan Bội Châu, *Chu Dich*, 630.

⁷⁸⁴ The Lu-Wang school refers one of the two major Neo-Confucian schools, the other being the Cheng-Zhu school associated with the Cheng brothers, Cheng Yi 程頤 (1033-1107), Cheng Hao 程顥 (1032-1085), and Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130-1200).

⁷⁸⁵ Citations from the Four Books can be found throughout the text, in comments on judgments, line statements, or in Phan’s “extra notes” provided to gloss his exegetical remarks. Nevertheless, Phan is somewhat selective; for 16 out of 64 hexagrams (exactly one quarter), there are no citations from the Four Books at all. Phan’s use of the Four Books ranges from the definitional to the pedagogical, but throughout he displays a tendency to emphasize the importance of the virtuous individual and of learning. A majority of citations concern the actions, behaviors, and states of mind necessary for an individual to become or be considered a superior man 君子. A number of others underscore the importance of timeliness and of patience under duress. Of those citations that relate to social groupings, most concentrate on the effect the superior man has on those around him.

學 (10), and the *Doctrine of the Mean* or *zhongyong* 中庸 (21). The Four Books were imported into Vietnam at the time of the Ming occupation (1407-1427), and served as the basis for Vietnamese Confucian education in village schools such as the ones Phan attended in Nghệ An province. In his *Autobiography*, Phan recalls memorizing portions of *The Book of Songs* and the *Analects*, even going as far as to compose his own *Analects of Mr. Phan*, for which he was reprimanded.⁷⁸⁶

Of course, the *Analects* is a foundational text for the Confucian repertoire. It provides many anecdotes, aphorisms, and pragmatic principles an individual can use to determine their own way to walk a moral path. The text demonstrates a concern for ritual corruption and a decline in ethical conduct associated with the moral chaos of the Spring and Autumn period (771-476 BCE).⁷⁸⁷ The sense of moral concern for the political state of the Central Country only increased as the “Way of the Zhou” deteriorated in the violent atmosphere of the Warring States period (475-221 BCE). In addition to serving as Phan’s childhood primer and his textbook for the civil service exams, *The Analects* can be best understood as a resource Phan drew upon for guidance when faced with political and social trouble.⁷⁸⁸

Phan’s liberal use of *Mencius* is striking, although not surprising. Of the Four Books, the *Mencius* held a privileged reputation for Vietnamese Confucian scholars. Alexander Woodside points out, “There is no doubt that Mencianism had become broadly internalized in the consciousness of Vietnamese village scholars by the 1700s.” Furthermore, Woodside suggests that the influence of *Mencius* may have been stronger in Vietnam than in China due to the “narrower, more controlled range of Confucian scholarship.”⁷⁸⁹

⁷⁸⁶ Phan, *Overtured*, 48.

⁷⁸⁷ Edward Slingerland writes, “Such a situation of moral chaos is what Confucius saw around him in a society that had lost the true Way because of its obsession with externalities.” Edward Slingerland, “Introduction.” *Confucius: Analects*, trans. Edward Slingerland. (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 2003), xxiii.

⁷⁸⁸ Phan draws primarily on four chapters of the *Analects* (See Appendix A4): Chapter One 學而, Chapter Four 里仁, Chapter Seven 述而, and Chapter Fifteen 衛靈公. Chapter One focuses on the importance of learning and virtuous public behavior. Phan cites the opening line three times: “The Master said, ‘To learn and then have occasion to practice what you have learned - is this not satisfying? To be patient even when others do not understand - is this not the mark of a gentleman?’” *Confucius*, Trans. by Slingerland, 1. Learning here does not mean simple academic learning, but rather the moral progression of the individual. Phan thus reinforces his contention that the ability to properly utilize *The Book of Changes* requires constant attention to one’s conduct, thinking, and sense of determination. Chapter Four concentrates on the goodness embodied by the superior man and the latitude this virtue allows him in influencing the perceptions and opinions of others. Meanwhile, Chapter Seven, concerns, “the importance of a properly directed and sufficiently intense will or intention.” *Confucius*, Trans. by Slingerland, 64. Chapter Fifteen has no central unifying theme, but the passages Phan cites generally highlight the forbearance and probity exercised by the superior man in the face of adversity. From this collection of citations, we can see Phan emphasizing the qualities of a resolute, virtuous leader, a man that could draw on his inner will no matter the array of forces against him.

⁷⁸⁹ Alexander Woodside, “History, Structure, and Revolution in Vietnam.” *International Political Science Review* 10, no. 2 (1989): 149. Phan’s use of the *Mencius* is distinctive and bears some scrutiny. Written after a conceivable “Confucian” doctrine had taken form, the *Mencius* is a text concerned with defending the faith against other hostile doctrines such as those of Yang Chu and Mozi. Schwartz, *World of Thought*, 259. *Mencius* contends that human nature is good, but that it can be corrupted if the people are not afforded a “stable livelihood.” *Ibid.*, 278. As such, it is important for a ruler to ensure the people’s material needs are met. Providing for the people’s economic livelihood is, according to *Mencius*, one of the most important duties of a sovereign and necessary for any attempt to improve the people’s moral condition. A ruler failing to do so is not a proper ruler, and can be

Phan's textual allusions thus give the impression that he seeks to use *The Book of Changes* to foster and guide virtuous heroes capable of maintaining their inner will amidst the turmoil of the modern age. Phan's emphasis on developing one's perception so that one can take action in a timely manner suggests that he sees the *Book of Changes* as a calibrating device, a catalyzing prism through which change can be ascertained and harnessed, no matter its velocity. Those able to understand the message will become heroes of the modern age.

The historical references in Phan's commentary are primarily individuals - mostly heroes, but occasionally villains (See Appendix A5). Phan uses the exploits of these individuals to gloss particular hexagrams and explain their significance.⁷⁹⁰ Many of the references are to the four

legitimately dethroned. H.G. Creel, *Chinese Thought: From Confucius to Mao Tse-tung* (New York, NY: 1953), 71. While this suggests an analogue of the Western notion of popular sovereignty, Benjamin Schwartz takes pains to point out that, "one is struck by the extraordinary passivity of the people. Without the sages, they are completely at the mercy of nature and totally unable to cope with their most rudimentary needs." Schwartz, *World of Thought*, 287.

It is particularly interesting, then, that Phan does *not* cite Mencius in this capacity, although his discussion admits of a certain Mencian populism. Most of the 39 citations of the *Mencius* pertain to the refinement of personal virtue in the face of difficulty, in line with Phan's citations from the *Analects*. Mencius, like Confucius, stresses the importance of proper moral cultivation. However, he emphasizes that this be accomplished by means of a "constant accumulation of righteousness." Creel, *Chinese Thought*, 79. Phan's citations focus on a potent kind of moral force described by Mencius. Phan cites the following line twice: "Be skillful at nourishing one's vast flow of energy." Phan Bội Châu, *Chu Dịch*, 221, 328. Following this line in the *Mencius* is an explanation of the term "vast flow of energy 浩然之氣." Mencius states, "It is difficult to explain. It is vital energy. If raised continuously and not harmed, it will fill up all between heaven and earth. It is vital energy. It accords with righteousness and the Way. Without it, one goes hungry. It is brought into being by an accumulation of righteousness. It is not obtained by sporadic righteous acts." *Mencius*, ed. by Li Weihui (Xinhua Publishing Company, 2003), 66. [My translation]. The passage goes on to compare the proper accumulation of righteousness with planting seeds and allowing them time and space to grow. The cultivator of virtue is thus analogous to the cultivator of grain. If one is able to emulate the diligence and patience of the farmer, one may obtain access to a vast store of moral energy - a source of the willpower, perspicacity, and personal charisma that are the makings of a great leader. Phan's citations from *The Great Learning and Doctrine of the Mean* are also mostly along these same lines. Towards the latter half of the commentary, Phan shifts from citing the Four Books precisely using Sino-Vietnamese, and begins paraphrasing in colloquial Vietnamese. It is unclear why he does so.

⁷⁹⁰ Two figures receive a significant amount of attention: Yi Yin 伊尹 (c. 1600-1549 BCE) and Zhuge Liang 諸葛亮 (181-234). Yi Yin, as described in the *Mencius*, was a minister in the early Shang dynasty who helped Emperor Tang of Shang 商湯 (r. 1675-1646 BCE) defeat the last Xia ruler Jie 夏桀 (1728-1675). Phan mentions Yi Yin ten times, usually in his capacity as a sagely advisor. In 1905, Phan took the young Cùròng Đễ, a member of the Nguyễn dynasty, to Japan, hoping to eventually help him take the throne and establish a constitutional monarchy. This plan failed, but the narrative is noticeably similar to the Yi Yin story Phan repeats throughout the commentary. Phan was not alone in his appreciation of Yi Yin. Alexander Woodside notes that Ngo Thi Nham, a prominent advisor to Emperor Quang Trung of the Tay Son, "publically represented himself as a Vietnamese version of the famous reformer in Mencius (Yi Yin), who had believed that he could make any ruler into a sage emperor; Ngo Thi Nham even took Yi Yin's name as his own." Woodside, "History," 150. Interestingly enough, Phan uses the example of Ngo Thi Nham fleeing after the fall of the Tay Son to explain the *Bo* 剝 hexagram (No. 23, Splitting Apart). Phan Bội Châu, *Chu Dịch*, 296. Zhuge Liang was a famous strategist and advisor to Liu Bei 劉備 (161-223), a warlord who made himself Emperor of the Shu-Han 蜀漢 state (221-263) during the Three Kingdoms period (220-280). Phan mentions Zhuge Liang nine times, also in his capacity as a sagacious advisor and brilliant tactician (Phan also references Liu Bei twice). Though Zhuge Liang was not as successful as Yi Yin, his reputation as a crafty and perceptive man capable of pulling off victories such as at the famous battle of Red Cliff 赤

putative authors of the *Book of Changes*: Fu Xi (6), King Wen (17), the Duke of Zhou (10), and Confucius (36). The perseverance and struggles of King Wen and Confucius during difficult times are a common theme.⁷⁹¹ Mentions of legendary and historical figures range from the sage kings Yao 堯 and Shun 舜 to Liu Xiucheng 李秀成 (1823-1864), a Taiping military commander who died along with 3,000 martyrs rather than submit to the Qing dynasty.⁷⁹²

While they are few (7), Phan's references to modern Chinese figures are some of the most interesting in his commentary. Sun Yatsen appears twice as a positive figure and national leader. The remaining five references are to Yuan Shikai 袁世凱 (1859-1916) (4 mentions), a Qing general who assumed the Presidency of the nascent Republic of China in 1912 and then declared himself Emperor in 1915 in a short-lived attempt to revive the monarchy, and his one-time commander-in-chief Cai E 蔡鐸 (1882-1916), who raised a rebellion from Yunnan province which extinguished Yuan Shikai's ambitions. In a witty explication of the third line of the *Dun* 遯 hexagram (No. 33, Retreat), Phan demonstrates the importance of knowing when to be patient and when to take action (See Appendix A).

It is not entirely clear why Phan included such a long section on Cai E. It seems more an example of authorial exuberance than a morally appropriate gloss for the line in question, which reads: "Nine in the third line, shows one retreating but hassled, this is dangerous and distressing. Fostering a retainer or concubine would bring good fortune."⁷⁹³ Rather than breeze over a line that counsels a hero to find succor in "drink and pleasure," Phan here seems to revel in the sheer appropriateness of the example. Nevertheless, it is a fascinating example of how the modern events can be viewed through the lens of particular hexagrams in *The Book of Changes*.

Vietnamese Historical References

Though Chinese references far outnumber Vietnamese ones, the latter offer a unique example of a national history refracted through the prism of correlative cosmology. These examples effectively demonstrate that Confucian virtues and ethical conduct can be found in Vietnam just as they can in China. Interestingly, Vietnamese historical references usually follow

壁 ensured a long legacy within (though not central to) the Confucian repertoire. In his *Autobiography*, Phan mentions learning *The Essentials of Zhuge Liang* (*Vũ-hầu tâm-thư*) by heart. Phan, *Overtured*, 52. Guy Alitto notes that Liang Shuming had a similar interest in Zhuge Liang. Alitto, "Conservative as Sage," 236. Thus, both of Phan's most referenced individuals were advisors who embodied traits Phan found important: tactical insight and the ability to achieve some measure of political success. Most importantly, these two men understood the nature of time and the importance of timely action.

Another individual Phan pays particular attention to is Jizi 箕子 (5), a semi-legendary figure purported to have been a virtuous relative of the last king of Shang, the evil tyrant Zhou Xin 紂辛 (1075-1046 BCE). Jizi supposedly feigned madness to avoid being killed after remonstrating against Zhou Xin's conduct. After Zhou Xin was defeated, Jizi then assisted King Wen of Zhou in administering the state.

⁷⁹¹ Phan mentions both to explain line five of the *Wuwang* 無妄 hexagram (no. 25, Innocence): "King Wen was imprisoned at You Li and Confucius went hungry between Chen and Cai. Since they were innocent of these maladies, what need had they for medicine?" The implication is that only those guilty of having put themselves in jeopardy need be anxious about the result. As King Wen and Confucius held true to their virtue, they could persevere without external assistance. Phan Bội Châu. *Chu Dịch*, 221, 315.

⁷⁹² Li Xiucheng's story is used to explain the top line of the *Sui* 隨 hexagram (No. 17). Phan Bội Châu, *Chu Dịch*, 245.

⁷⁹³ James Legge's translation.

directly after Chinese ones, setting up analogical parallels between historical events in both countries.⁷⁹⁴

Heroes and emperors comprise the bulk of the 55 historical references. Trần Hưng Đạo (4),⁷⁹⁵ Lê Lợi (4), and Gia Long (1762-1820) (3) exemplify, respectively, loyalty, wherewithal, and good judgment.⁷⁹⁶ In addition to rulers, Phan also introduces Vietnamese sagely advisors.

⁷⁹⁴ As an illustration of Phan's use of Vietnamese history to explain *The Book of the Changes*, I present an example of failure that shows Phan's technique of establishing parallels between Chinese and Vietnamese historical situations. To explain the third line of the *Kun* 困 hexagram (No. 48, Oppression), Phan writes, "During the Han Dynasty, Cai Yong 蔡邕 [132-192] was killed for crying over the corpse of Dong Zhuo 董卓 [?-192]. Because Yang Xiong sang the praises of Wang Mang 王莽 [45 BCE-23 CE] and jumped from a building trying to commit suicide, he ended up wasting his life and was scorned on his tombstone. Nguyễn [Hữu] Chính [?-1787] abandoned Lê and Trịnh and went to the Tây Sơn. In the end the Tây Sơn destroyed the Trịnh, whereupon Chính came under suspicion and was killed by the Tây Sơn. Lê Văn Chất [1769-1826], a famous Tây Sơn general, followed Gia Long after turning against the Tây Sơn. In the end, he and his descendants were executed by the Nguyễn Dynasty." Phan Bội Châu. *Chu Dịch*, 535.

The line, a *yin* line trapped between two *yang* lines and located on a *yang* position, reads: "Imprisoned in stone and rests upon brambles. Upon entering the hall, one does not see one's wife. There will be misfortune." This line would apply to any individual trapped between two forces. Clearly for Phan, the fact that at least fifteen centuries intervene between the examples does not affect their analogous relationship. It is interesting that the Vietnamese examples both involve "traitors" whereas the Chinese examples involve men who simply chose the wrong patron. This may indicate a subtle critique of Vietnamese who collaborate with French colonialism, and a warning that when Vietnam achieves independence a last minute conversion to the nationalist cause may not save them.

⁷⁹⁵ To explain line four of the *Sui* 隨 hexagram (No. 17), a strong line in a weak position, Phan writes, "Trần Hưng Đạo takes responsibility for this line. When the Mongols invaded our country three times the king moved the capitol and the Retired Emperor fled to Thanh Hoa. The many forces of the national army were entrusted to a Great Prince, but the people doubted whether he could exercise authority and save the country. However, his lordship, being patriotic and hating the enemy, was able to drive off the Mongols. When he greeted the king and the Retired Emperor, the country was still in a dangerous state and owed its safety to the Great Prince. The king had abandoned the throne and relied on the Great Prince to get it back. When he had risen to high position, above the entire world, but still refused to take the country." Phan Bội Châu, *Chu Dịch*, 242.

The corresponding line in *The Changes* reads: "Nine in the fourth line, one who follows reaps success, but to persevere [on one's own accord] will bring disaster. If one is sincere in abiding by the Way and makes that evident, how could he be blamed?" Here, Phan both provides an appropriate explication of the line and commends Trần Hưng Đạo for his military capability and loyalty. This line is an excellent example of how distinct the mantic and moral readings of the text can be. Richard Rutt provides a reconstructed version of the line without a moral interpretation: "Pursuit ends in finding. Augury: Disastrous. Sacrificing captives on the way; in a covenant, could there be misfortune?" Rutt, *Zhouyi*, 240.

⁷⁹⁶ Emperor Gia Long of the Nguyễn dynasty (1802-1885) and his rival Quang Trung of the Tây Sơn (1778-1802) appear in two contrasting vignettes. The first is used to explain the first or bottom line of the *Guai* 夬 hexagram (No. 43, Breakthrough), in which one "forcefully moves forward ahead of one's toes (one gets ahead of oneself), thus failing to achieve victory:"

"In the Tây Sơn period, when Emperor Quang Trung heard that the Manchu enemy had entered Hanoi, he first came up with a plan. He ordered men to convey [his desire to] surrender to the Manchus to make the enemy arrogant. He then ordered five columns to secretly attack Long Thành, cleanly driving out 150,000 Manchu troops. This was victory by achieving victory before acting.

In Siam, at the same time, Gia Long gathered reinforcements and hastily extended his forces, 150,000 strong, into Cambodia, intending to take the south. He did not expect Quang Trung to extend his forces from the north down to the south to attack Cambodia [which he did]. In one battle the Siamese troops fell like leaves. This was defeat by acting before achieving victory." Phan Bội Châu, *Chu Dịch*, 494.

Clearly Quang Trung is shown to be the better general because he recognized the timing of the

Glossing the second line of the *Song* 訟 hexagram (No. 6, Conflict), Phan writes:

During the Lê dynasty, the Nguyễn and the Trịnh fought each other for the throne. The Lê Emperor was weak and, although he wanted to side with the Nguyễn, he was unable to. The Nguyễn wanted to contend with the Trịnh, but the Trịnh were too powerful and still enjoyed the support of the people of the north. The Nguyễn Lord sent an emissary to plot with Nguyễn Bình Khiêm [1491-1585], who advised the Nguyễn to leave the north to the Trịnh. However, he explained further, “You can take refuge beyond the mountains.” This meant taking refuge beyond the Ngang pass. Thus the Nguyễn Lord requested the land of Ô Châu, known today as Thuận Hóa. This is exactly the meaning of the line “When you are unable to contend, retreat to a safe refuge 不克訟，歸而逋.”⁷⁹⁷

Here we see Nguyễn Bình Khiêm, a famous scholar of *The Book of Changes* in his own right,⁷⁹⁸ serving a similar role as Yi Yin and Zhuge Liang. In several examples, Phan clearly references intra-Vietnamese warfare - an interesting choice for a nationalist ostensibly interested emphasizing Vietnamese unity vis-a-vis the French colonial state. Phan’s sole concern is the

situation. Gia Long in this instance did not and over-extended. The phrase “moving ahead of one’s toes 壯于前趾” offers a sense of acting before the time is right to act.

The second narrative is used to explain the second line of the *Lü* 旅 hexagram (No. 56, Wandering), in which one wanders up to an inn carrying one’s property and thereby obtains the service of a young servant, allowing one to go on:

“At this point in the *Yijing*, the story of Gia Long being forced by the Tây Sơn to flee to Siam comes to mind. Nguyễn Huỳnh Đức was captured by Quang Trung. Quang Trung wanted Huỳnh Đức to work for him so he tried his best to persuade him, even sleeping in the same bed with him, but Huỳnh Đức wasn’t satisfied. Outwardly, he paid obeisance to Quang Trung, but he remained every day dedicated to his old lord.

One day, while sleeping in Quang Trung’s bed, [Huỳnh Đức] murmured in his sleep, “Kill the enemy in Huế...Kill the enemy in Huế.” Quang Trung understood and the next morning he asked Huỳnh Đức, “I’ll ask you straight, I’ve been very kind to you, what are your true thoughts?”

Huỳnh Đức complained, “I thank you my lord, but you cannot order me to forget my lord. If I should know where he is, I would go to him immediately. Quang Trung was satisfied and told him, “Your lord is in Bangkok, I will send someone to take you there.” The next morning Quang Trung gathered his officers and held a feast to see off Nguyễn Huỳnh Đức and send a man to show him the way to Siam. Huỳnh Đức went to Bangkok and visited Gia Long. As soon as they saw each other, he embraced Gia Long’s knee and cried for a long while, he couldn’t say a word. The King of Siam saw and exclaimed, “If Vietnam has servants such as this, how could you not go back?”

The King of Siam thereupon sent reinforcements to convey the Emperor [Gia Long] to Gia Dinh [Sai Gon]. From this we know that having a ‘good and trusty servant’ is wonderful during the time of wandering.” Phan Bội Châu, *Chu Dịch*, 622.

At first glance it is odd to see an Emperor discussed in reference to the peripatetic *Lü* hexagram, yet here it is entirely appropriate.³ Gia Long was the heir to the Nguyễn Lords, who had dominated the state of Đàng Trong in what is now Southern Vietnam from 1588 until they were deposed by the Tây Sơn rebels in 1777. Gia Long, followed by Nguyễn Phúc Ánh, then traveled back and forth through Siam [Thailand] and the southern islands off the coast of the Mekong Delta for many years. We can see here the value Phan places on finding and retaining talented and loyal assistants. Phan himself wandered throughout China from 1912 until 1924, often relying on the same young men he had brought to Japan during the Eastern Travel Movement. For an insightful explanation of the *Lü* hexagram, see Hellmut Wilhelm, *Heaven, Earth, and Man in the Book of Changes* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 1977), 164-189.

⁷⁹⁷ Phan Bội Châu, *Chu Dịch*, 127.

⁷⁹⁸ Richard Smith notes, “Nguyen [Binh Khiem] used the *Yijing* to unite Neo-Confucian metaphysics with Daoism and Buddhism. He also gained fame as an able and insightful exponent of Shao Yong’s numerological approach to divination.” Smith, *The I Ching*, 152.

degree to which an action corresponds to the timing of the situation. He evinces no interest in which side is the “right” one. This suggests strongly that Phan’s worldview is amoral, although it is clearly normative. As I will discuss in greater detail later, Phan’s vision of reality combines the sociopolitical concerns of Social Darwinism with notions of strategic ethical temporality drawn from *The Book of Changes*.

Other Citations and References: Buddhism, Japan, and the West

This category includes fifty-four heterogeneous examples ranging from references to the Śūraṅgama Sūtra (Kinh *Lãng Nghiêm* 楞嚴經)⁷⁹⁹ to an explication of the phrase “wind comes from fire 風自火出” by reference to “the Western scientific axiom that mechanical movement relies on fire and electricity to produce wind, thus [indicating] electricity is a product of fire and wind.”⁸⁰⁰ These citations and references are a mixed bag, but show Phan’s willingness to perceive nearly any phenomena as perfectly relatable to the hexagrams and lines of *The Changes*. The very catholicism of Phan’s approach indicates an ordering method at odds with Western rational classification systems. Nevertheless, there is an effort on Phan’s part to demonstrate a totalistic epistemology - one that can and does find useful analogues for any phenomenon.

The foreword is particularly interesting because of the individuals Phan integrates into it. In rapid succession, Phan mentions the polymath Shao Yong, the strategist Zhang Liang 張良 (262-189 BCE), the philosopher Mencius 孟子 (372-289 BCE?), and the Lu-Wang School founders Lu Jiuyuan 陸九淵 (1139-1192) and Wang Yangming 王陽明 (1472-1529), to elucidate his distinction between Buddhism, Daoism, and the study of *The Changes*.

Most of Phan’s references to Buddhism note how Buddhists or Buddhist texts interpret particular words or lines of *The Changes*. While explaining the *Guan* 觀 hexagram (No. 20, Contemplation), Phan cites the *Diamond Sutra*: “Those who see me in form or seek me through sound are on a mistaken path; They do not see the Tathagata.”⁸⁰¹ Phan states that this is exactly like the line from the Commentary on the Judgment: “Contemplation. One washes one’s hands but does not sacrifice.” Though a Buddhist might disagree, Phan at least makes an effort here to draw parallels between the two philosophical perspectives. At other points, Phan makes distinctions between the doctrines. For example, when explaining the *Wuwang* 無妄 hexagram (No. 25, Innocence), Phan writes: “In Buddhism, rashness 妄 is a hated word, while in the study of *The Changes* innocence 無妄 is treasured.”⁸⁰²

⁷⁹⁹ Phan Bội Châu. *Chu Dịch*, 299.

⁸⁰⁰ Phan Bội Châu. *Chu Dịch*, 428.

⁸⁰¹ “若以色见我 以音声求我 是人行邪道 不能见如来。” Phan Bội Châu, *Chu Dịch*, 266.

⁸⁰² Phan Bội Châu, *Chu Dịch*, 310. Phan’s use of Buddhism thus indicates an attempt to incorporate other epistemological systems into his own. By presenting the refractive facets through which Buddhists observe phenomenon, Phan suggests that not only are all things relatable, methods of knowing themselves are akin to looking into the prism of reality from a different side. This attempt to seek holistic knowledge both of things and ways of perceiving them reflects what is truly radical about Phan Bội Châu: he saw no fundamental disagreement between types or modes of reality. Taking Kang Youwei’s syncretism one step farther, Phan sought to discursively establish the unity of the entire universe - an extreme reaction to the fragmentation of the Vietnamese socio-polity akin in revealing ways the projects of Hegel and Marx.

Phan offers only a few references to Japan. This is rather odd given that he spent five years (1905-1909) there, and was initially quite impressed with Japanese technology and social customs. However, by the 1920s, Phan had begun to describe Japan as a threat.⁸⁰³ Whether related to these concerns or not, Phan only includes eight references to Japan in his commentary. In one interesting example, Phan references Zhu Shunsui (1600-1682), a famous Ming loyalist who fled to Japan and worked for Tokugawa Mitsukuni, and Mạc Ngọc Luyến, who left Vietnam for Longzhou. Phan cites these two men as examples for a phrase from line four of the *Mingyi* 明夷 (No. 36, Brightness Wounded), which Phan explains as “finding comfort when the brightness is wounded.”⁸⁰⁴ Phan here reads the line as a validation of self-selected exile as a response to the foreign occupation of one’s homeland. Certainly this line thus read could apply to Phan himself during his long exile (1905-1924).

Phan’s references to Western historical figures and events are few, but particularly interesting. In the introduction, Phan notes how Richard Wilhelm spent twenty years in Qingdao studying *The Book of Changes* and received a doctorate from Kaiser Wilhelm II. Phan’s references here testify to his broad learning and, in effect, claim that his work participates in a modern global discourse on the *Book of Changes*. Phan demonstrates his enthusiasm for Camillo Cavour⁸⁰⁵ and George Washington, but counts Napoleon as a dictator who took things too far. Explaining the top line of the *Qian* 乾 hexagram (No. 1, The Creative) entitled “the arrogant dragon,” Phan notes that George Washington refused to declare himself king or President for life and turned down a second term while Napoleon, like Yuan Shikai, declared himself emperor, thus inviting his own downfall.⁸⁰⁶ “Socialism” is mentioned five times in various contexts. As an offside gloss for the *Xu* 需 hexagram (No. 5, Waiting for Nourishment), Phan cites Marx’s *Critique of the Gotha Program*.⁸⁰⁷

By far the most curious reference to a Western situation appears in Phan’s explanation of the *Song* 訟 hexagram (No. 6, Conflict, See Appendix B). Here Phan attempts a materialist explanation of international conflict through a reading of the “Sequence of the Hexagrams,” one of the Ten Wings that offers usually not-altogether-convincing explanations for why one hexagram follows another. It is not clear from where Phan derived his information, but since he was held in jail in Guangzhou from 1914 to 1917, it is entirely possible it was through prison hearsay. It is also possible Phan read about WWI in a Chinese newspaper. Given the endemic food shortages associated with Vietnam’s subsistence economy,⁸⁰⁸ it is not ultimately surprising that Phan would focus on food as a principle cause of warfare. Regardless of the provenance of the “bread problem” explanation, we see here a clear attempt to interpret modern events as representations of hexagrams shifting in time.

⁸⁰³ Duiker, “Phan Bội Châu,” 84.

⁸⁰⁴ Phan Bội Châu, *Chu Dịch*, 418.

⁸⁰⁵ Glossing the *Daguo* 大過 hexagram (No. 28, Great Achievement), Phan points out how Camillo Cavour, like Yi Yin, farmed and read books, secretly researching the past for over ten years before unifying Italy. Phan Bội Châu, *Chu Dịch*, 339.

⁸⁰⁶ Phan Bội Châu, *Chu Dịch*, 47.

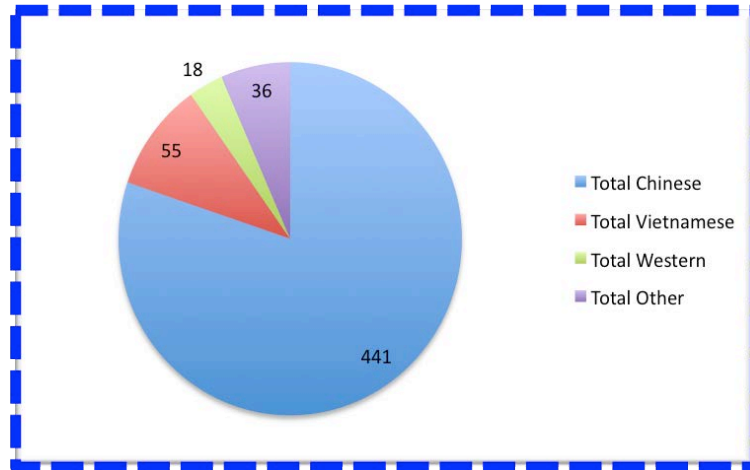
⁸⁰⁷ Phan refers to his source as “the book entitled *Socialism*.” However, the citation is “From each according to his ability, to each according to his need.” Phan Bội Châu, *Chu Dịch*, 109.

⁸⁰⁸ James Scott, *The Moral Economy of the Peasant: Rebellion and Subsistence in Southeast Asia*. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1976).

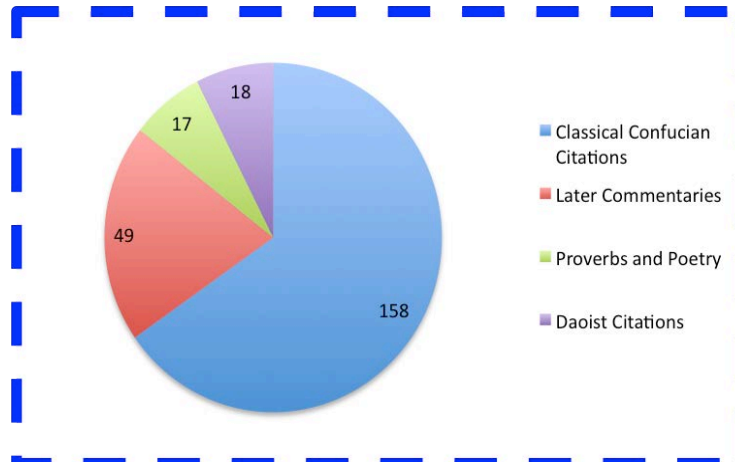
Appendices

Appendix A - Charts

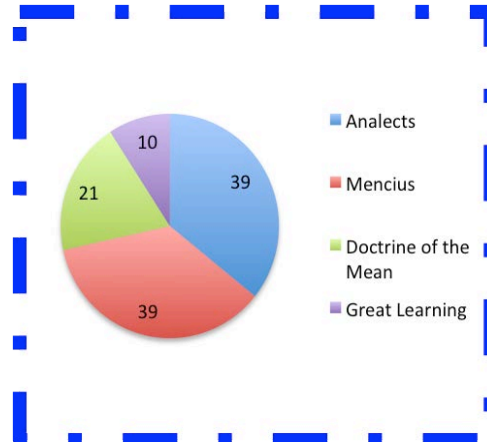
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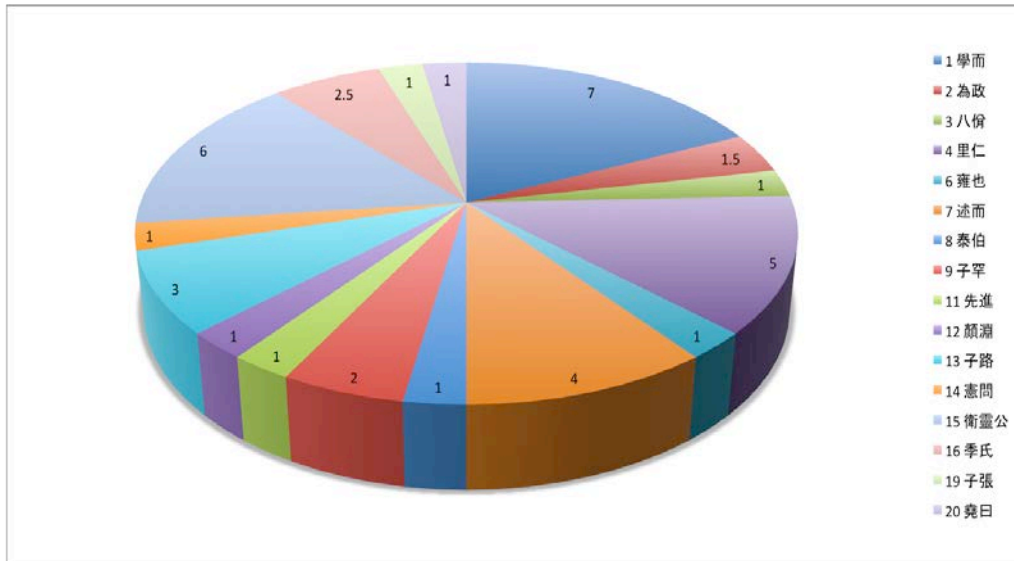
2. Citations from Chinese Works.



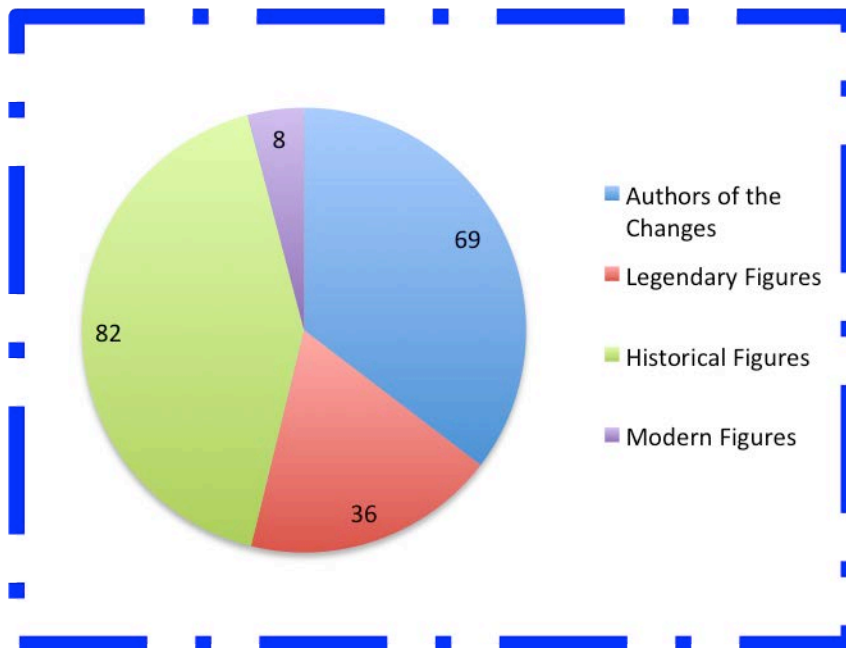
3. Citations from the Four Books



4. Citations from the *Analects*



5. Chinese Historical References



Appendix B - Yuan Shikai and Cai E

“When the Republic of China was founded, Cai E was the Military Governor of Yunnan Province. Because Yuan Shikai wanted to oppose democracy by declaring himself Emperor and he knew that Cai E supported democracy, Yuan ordered Cai E to come to Beijing. If he did not come to Beijing, Yuan would send his army to attack. At the time, Cai E was not strong enough to fight against Yuan, so he contained himself and went to Beijing.

Yuan kept him in Beijing and made him Commander in Chief, but did not allow him to attend to military matters. Instead, Yuan sent a dozen agents to spy on Cai E every day. Cai E had no opportunity to hide from Yuan, so he waited two years in complete secrecy. Every day, aside from the time he spent in Yuan’s hall, he was only with the actress [Xiao] Fengxian 小鳳仙. An agent was sent to spy at Fengxian’s house for a long time, but seeing Cai E doing absolutely nothing, finally grew disheartened and bored and began to take his guard duties less seriously. Cai E knew that Yuan still did not trust him, and since a revolt [against Yuan] was not forthcoming, Cai E continued to suffer patiently and secretly married Fengxian. Every day after leaving Yuan’s hall he went immediately to stay at Fengxian’s house and did not return to the mansion. Yuan sent another operative to spy on the mansion to see if there was a plot. Cai E understood Yuan’s intent. One day when Cai E took Fengxian to the mansion Cai E’s wife grew jealous and came to blows with him, scratching and tearing his face. Cai E immediately asked Yuan for a divorce. Legally, for the Commander in Chief to divorce his wife, he needed the permission of the President. Yuan saw this and declared Cai E highly improper. At that point Cai E’s wife took a portion of his money and left for his hometown in Hunan with the divorce papers. From this point forward Cai E ate and slept religiously at Fengxian house, did not bother to go to the mansion and spent his days and nights lost in drink and pleasure. Two years later, in the fourth year of the Republic, Yuan officially pronounced himself Emperor Hongxian and exchanged nationalism for imperialism.

The next morning at seven o’clock sharp, gallantly dressed up in his military attire with his sword and helmet, his carriage gleaming, [Cai E] went from Fengxian’s house straight to the Tian’an Gate (Tian’anmen) to report to the eunuch guarding the gate and asked to be let into the Imperial Hall. The guarding eunuch replied, “The Emperor has not yet come forth, wait for a bit and you can come in at nine o’clock.” Cai E immediately changed his whole uniform and placed his entire carriage smack in front of the Tian’an Gate and announced to everyone “Wait for me here. It’s early and I haven’t eaten breakfast. I am going to the Oten restaurant for a little bit and I will be back at nine o’clock.”

Cai E then grasped his Commander in Chief’s sword and beckoned for a rickshaw to run him straight to Fengxian’s house. He tossed his sword and threw off his uniform and everything else, including his general’s quill, and donned some light clothes. Cai E took Fengxian under his arm onto a train headed to Tianjin, then immediately boarded a Japanese ship for Hong Kong where he met his teacher Liang Qichao and friend Ân Thừa Hiến who were waiting for him. Beijing was suddenly missing a Commander in Chief. Yuan was enraged and killed twelve policemen and twelve agents. The next month Yunnan was the first to rise up against Yuan. Everywhere else responded and within three months Emperor Hongxian had fallen and Yuan died soon after. Cai’s wife went to Sichuan to help him with affairs. From this we know the hero’s way of Retreat 遯 and furthermore that the power of servants is not negligible. When Cai E died, the entire country met to commemorate him. Fengxian also wrote a couplet for him:

Unhappy fate! Zhou Lang’s life cut short
It was known early on that Li Jing was a hero.”⁸⁰⁹

Appendix C - Germany in The Great War

“The *Song* hexagram [Conflict] comprises all of the conflicts, large or small, from within a family up to the international stage.

In 1914 Europe began a war that lasted four years. The number of casualties in the combatant countries reached 10 million. After the war was over, scholars sought to find out what had caused it. There was a simple and very correct answer: ‘the bread problem.’ This meant that the fighting had simply started over food. How correct!”

At the start of the 20th century, before the war began, Europe was completely fixated on economic problems and the problem of securing a food supply.

⁸⁰⁹ Phan Bội Châu, *Chu Dịch*, 392-294.

At that time, the population of Germany had risen to over 70 million and it seemed as if there would not be enough food to eat. [Germany] needed colonies to expand business around the globe. Because of difficulties, Germany was a late developing [nation], most of the valuable and wealthy land around the world had already been seized by Britain, France, and America. Although [Germans] wanted to get food from the sea, [they could not] because of the Red Hairs' [Britain] maritime monopoly. After twenty years of heartbreak, the Germany Kaiser initiated a Great War on land against the French and Italians and by sea against the Red Hairs. Even if [Germany] should lose, it would be preferable to die with honor than to die of starvation. Britain and France, fearing German hegemony and that their own food supplies might be captured, banded together to contend with Germany.

To summarize, the European imperialist war shattered the earth and shook the heavens, but if we seek out its causes, we find two:

One is the issue of capturing food and the other is that of maintaining enough food. These were the causes of the European war and it was because of food that [the combatants] clashed, that blood flowed into rivers and bones piled up into hills. This was caused by 'the bread problem' alone.

This shows the subtle import of *The Book of Changes* [which states that] if there is Waiting for Nourishment [需], there will certainly be Conflict. Truly this strikes right through to the heart of world affairs!

Oh! Looking at the world's present and future, [we can see] 'the bread problem' has yet no solution. If things continue badly, like in the beginning of the 20th century, the Second Great War will likely affect the entire world; it is unavoidable. Any peace or disarmament without a solution to the food shortage problem will be nothing but idle talk.

Waiting for Nourishment leads to Conflict; Conflict leads to the Army [師]. Reading the Book of Changes brings immeasurable grief!"⁸¹⁰

Appendix D - Lord Mengchang of Qi

"During a time of peace the result of 'increasing what is below' is quite small. However, during a time of great obstacles and troubles, that 'increase' will be seen as very great! In the past Lord Mengchang, the Chancellor of Qi, lent a sum to the people of Xue in the amount of several tens of thousands. When interest came due, he sent Feng Huan to collect on the contracts. He asked Lord Mengchang, "After I collect the debt, should I buy anything to bring back?" Lord Mengchang replied, "If you see anything missing from my house, then buy that." Feng Huan went, taking the contracts with him in a carriage. As soon as he reached Xue, he saw that the people had met several years of poor harvests and that life was bleak. Feng Huan immediately gathered the people and announced, "The Lord Chancellor told me to come here principally to pay attention to the people's sentiment and not to demand a debt. Right now the people feel miserable, on behalf of the Chancellor, your debts are hereby exempted." Whereupon he lit many contracts on fire before the people. Feng Huan returned with empty hands and reported to Lord Mengchang. Lord Mengchang asked, "Why are your hands empty?" Feng Huan pleaded, "I saw the people were starving and miserable, so I burned the contracts. Seeing that your home is already full of expensive and strange things, [I felt] there was only one thing still missing: 'Righteousness.' So I bought 'Righteousness' and brought it back for your good lordship." Lord Mengchang was unhappy, but he allowed Feng Huan to stay.

Not long afterward the King of Qi died and his son became King. Many courtiers who detested Lord Mengchang's power and influence impeached him before the King, accusing him of many evils. The King was furious. He dismissed Lord Mengchang from the Chancellorship and banished him from the capital.

Lord Mengchang was frightened that his entire life would become difficult. Feng Huan came to his table and urged him to go to Xue. Lord Mengchang listened to his advice and left in the middle of the night, speeding his carriage to Xue. He arrived at the border at mid-day. The people had heard he was coming and young and old, men and women all turned out to greet the carriage of Lord Mengchang. They gathered before his carriage and yelled in unison: "The father of our district has returned!" There were tens of thousands on either side of his carriage.

Lord Mengchang looked back and said to Feng Huan, "Today I understand what gain the 'righteousness' you bought has brought us!"

The King of Qi heard about this and feared that Lord Mengchang had won too much of the people's

⁸¹⁰ Phan Bội Châu, *Chu Dịch*, 121-122.

adoration and feared that [Lord Mengchang] would soon be able to overthrow him. He immediately invited Lord Mengchang back to Qi, appointed him Chancellor as before, and sternly reproached the group that had impeached him.

From reviewing this case, we can understand the words “decreasing what is above and increasing what is below 損上益下” and that “advantageous for crossing the great river 利涉大川” are not idle words.”⁸¹¹

Appendix E - Exegesis on Revolution

Revolution means to change what is old. Whenever a matter grows old or something becomes old, there must be revolution. This is for two reasons.

First, according to history anything that has been around for a long time accumulates evil. If evil is accumulated for a long time and cannot be changed, there comes a time when medicine cannot clear it out. At this point there must be revolution.

Second, the circumstances are different today than they were in the past. We must attune to present day society. We have to welcome with high regard new and strange trends. After we have welcomed with high regard new and strange trends, there will certainly be outdated things to get rid of. Because of the two reasons stated here, in the course of life it is impossible to escape revolution.

Because of this there must be a hexagram for revolution in the *Book of Changes*. Revolution is quite a commonplace phenomenon. For example, when clothing is torn one must purchase new clothing. If a house becomes old one must erect a new house. To talk of these things is not at all strange, but then there are issues of a more difficult nature, such as personal or familial revolution, which cannot be undertaken carelessly, or national and social revolutions, which are so much more severe and dangerous.

To explain, with so many old things and set habits, a sudden change can bewilder people. Moreover, suddenly smashing the old foundations before a new foundation is erected can terrify people. Not to mention one cannot carry out revolution alone! One must rely upon the majority of the people. How difficult!. Human nature prefers what is familiar and sticks to the old. Few people understand. Most people are only happy once things are going, but do not have faith at the beginning. So heavy, Revolution! So hard, Revolution! What should we think in regard to timing? One can only wait upon the situation and reflect on the principle of righteousness. This way the time for revolution will come naturally. When things have gotten to the point of revolution, one must carry out revolution. A long time has passed and the principle of righteousness is now clear. The situation still tends toward this direction and now the people's hearts must follow. This means that revolution has been happening for a long time but only now are people ready to believe.

A nation or a society, having suffered a great defeat that brought it to the point of termination, will fall silent. For example, Xia was not willing to become Shang, Shang was not willing to become Zhou, though at those times the common people feared death at the hands of the tyrants Jie and Zhou. It was Tang who had to drive out Jie to carry out a revolution over the Xia, it was Wu who had to strike Zhou to carry out a revolution over the Shang. Tang and Wu's revolutions were in accordance with the way of Heaven and fulfilled the desires of the people.

The word 'Revolution' is on the tongues of people nowadays. But what does it mean to them? Up until now no one has provided a suitable explanation. Please follow this explanation of the meaning drawn from the *Book of Changes*: 'cách' means change, 'mệnh' means a correct mandate. Changing a nation, a court, or a government all mean replacing an old mandate with a new mandate.'

For example, in a family replacing an old habit with a new habit is called 'family revolution.'

For an ethnicity, to replace that race with this race is called 'ethnic revolution.' To replace an old corrupt administration with a new administration is called 'national revolution.' To replace an old class with a new class is called 'social revolution.' For some matters one cannot say 'revolution.' In these cases it is enough to say 'change,' whereas adding the word 'mandate' would be excessive.

For example: moral revolution, career revolution, craft revolution, economic revolution, artistic revolution. Compared with national revolution and political revolution, [we might say] for one group it is correct to say 'mandate,' whereas for the other group it does no good to say 'mandate.'

At the end of the hexagram for Revolution there must be a warning: 'resting in correctness brings success.' For example, Yuan Shikai overthrew the Manchus and established the Republic of China. This was the

⁸¹¹ Phan Bội Châu, *Chu Dịch*, 479-480. This story seems to be a Vietnamese paraphrasing of “The Biography of Lord Mengchang” from the *The Records of the Grand Historian* or the *Shiji* 史記. Sima, Qian (1995). *The Grand Scribe's Records*, vol. VII. (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press). 189.

conclusion of the revolution, but he continued to alter the body politic and set up the Hongxian Dynasty. In the end he lost both his dignity and his life.

Napoleon toppled the monarchy, opened the National Assembly, and established the constitution. Was this not the end of the revolution? Yet he turned around and declared himself emperor to flatter himself. In the end he also lost both his dignity and his life. Both of these men 'kept going, thus inviting disaster.'

When we read the words, 'resting in correctness brings success,' we must admire Washington. After eight years of bloody war he drove out the British government and founded the United States, he let another person take over as President and was content to be an average citizen. Today the people of America still call him the father of the nation - is this not an example of 'resting in correctness brings success?'

Never mind the far, [let us consider] what is closer. How great were the causes of Mustapha Kemal in Turkey and Lenin in Russia and how much their people believed in them! Before they had carried out revolutions they were seen as saints by the people, after they completed the revolutions they were seen as parents.

Whoever is born in the time of revolution or who wants to carry out revolution, must absorb the entire spirit of the hexagram Revolution."

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