

IV.

The Fall of a Royal Throne: The August Revolution in Vietnam and the Last Emperor¹

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Introduction

A revolution is a drama involving a change of regime. But unlike normal changes of government, it is always accompanied by the end of an old system and the birth of a new one. Needless to say, those most in the spotlight in this drama are the directors and actors of the new system. Therefore, revolutions are often viewed in the context of history in a way that conforms to their own perspective and are justified accordingly. Discussions of such events focus on questions such as “Why did they succeed?” “How has the revolution they initiated shaped the fate of society, state and nation?” etc.

Vietnam’s August Revolution of 1945 is a typical case. The Revolution is viewed by Vietnamese as first and foremost the victory of Hồ Chí Minh and the Việt Minh led by him, as well as the birth of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam.² Hà Nội, the capital of Tonkin and of the colony of French Indochina, was always the focal point of the Revolution. Hồ Chí Minh established a provisional government and declared the independence of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam in Hà Nội. There he also worked to manifest the authority of the new government, dealing with military representatives of the Chinese Guomindang who came in as Allied occupiers and with the French, who were determined to re-establish colonial rule. Meanwhile, around the same time, another dramatic event was developing in Huế, the royal capital in Annam (central Vietnam), approximately 700 km south of Hà Nội. More accurately, perhaps, we should speak of these particular developments as one scene within the larger drama of the August Revolution. The “tragic hero” of this scene was Bảo Đại (r. 1925–45), the last Emperor of the Nguyễn Dynasty.

In March 1945, soon after the *coup de force* against the French by the Japanese military, Bảo Đại declared that the 1884 Treaty of Protectorate with France was null and void and announced the independence of the Empire of Vietnam, following a proposal made by Yokoyama Masayuki, a Japanese “Am-

¹ This paper is by and large a translation of the author’s article in Japanese: 白石昌也 [Shiraishi Masaya] 「王権の喪失：ヴェトナム八月革命と最後の皇帝」 [The fall of a royal throne: The August Revolution in Vietnam and the last Emperor] in 土屋健治編 [Tsuchiya Kenji ed.] 『講座現代アジア』 [Course: Contemporary Asia], vol. 1 (ナショナリズムと国民国家 [Nationalism and nation-state], 東京大学出版会 [University of Tokyo Press], 1994, pp. 309–40.

² 白石昌也 [Shiraishi Masaya] 『ベトナム：革命と建設のはざま』 [Vietnam between revolution and nation-building], 東京大学出版会 [University of Tokyo Press], 1993, p. 34; a list of major works on the August Revolution is on p. 244.

bassador.”³ In April, the Emperor ordered Trần Trọng Kim to form the first Cabinet of an “independent” nation. This was actually the birth of false “independence” under a new master, namely the Japanese military. The Bảo Đại-Trần Trọng Kim regime did not last very long, however. It was not easy for the government to create an “independent” nation during the final phase of the war when Japan’s defeat seemed virtually imminent. The dysfunctional government rapidly fell into a state of paralysis. Shortly afterward, on August 15, Japan surrendered to the Allies. In the meantime, the waves of revolution coming from the north took the imperial capital of Huế by storm. A week later Bảo Đại offered to abdicate and transfer power to the Việt Minh revolutionary government. On August 30, he held an official abdication ceremony in the presence of representatives of the provisional government sent from Hà Nội. This was only a little more than five months after the March declaration of “independence.” The abdication of Bảo Đại signaled the end of the Nguyễn Dynasty that had lasted for 143 years, and at the same time, the closure of a thousand years of feudal dynasties in Vietnam.

From a historical perspective, the abdication of Bảo Đại and the collapse of the Nguyễn Dynasty were in a way inevitable, and those events could have been seen as just a few minor episodes in the powerful surge of the August Revolution. The Nguyễn Dynasty, which had been incorporated into the French colonial system in the 1880s, was generally viewed as nothing more than a “puppet” monarchy. In March 1945 Bảo Đại, who had become the last Emperor of that puppet regime, bet the fate of the Dynasty on the “wrong horse,” namely the Japanese military. The latter were stunned at their defeat, and by that point the central and local institutions of the Bảo Đại-Trần Trọng Kim government had already fallen into a state of paralysis. Even inside the Cabinet, a number of Ministers were expressing their intention to resign. There was an air of excitement for the Revolution even in the royal capital. Day after day crowds of demonstrators carrying red flags with a gold star and revolutionary slogans and holding swords and sticks were surging past the gates of the royal palace.

Emperor Bảo Đại had no other choice but to abdicate; he was destroyed by the Revolution. This is the logical conclusion from a historical perspective.⁴ But why did he consent to “voluntary” abdication and transfer of power? A mere narrative of political events may not fully answer this question. Moreover, the drama surrounding the last Emperor was not complete with Bảo Đại’s decision to step aside. The revolutionary government accepted the formal transfer of power by sending a representative

³ Yokoyama Masayuki was actually “conseiller économique” (economic advisor) at the Japanese Embassy, cum director of the Institute of Japanese Culture in Hanoi. (His personal memoirs in Archives d’outre-mer: FRANOM 2 HCI/226~227, ch.1). Perhaps he was treated as an “Ambassador” as a matter of convenience in negotiating with the Court. Matsumoto Shunichi, Ambassador to French Indochina (in Hà Nội) returned to Japan on May 7, two months after the Japanese military coup; no replacement was nominated by Tokyo. See 秦郁彦 [Hata Ikuhiko] 『戦前期日本官僚制の制度・組織・人事』 [System, organization, and personnel of the Japanese bureaucracy in the prewar period], 東京大学出版会 [University of Tokyo Press], 1981, p. 309.

⁴ For the official Việt Minh view of the Bảo Đại-Trần Trọng Kim government, see Trần Huy Liệu *et al.* ed., *Xã hội Việt Nam trong thời Pháp-Nhật* [Vietnamese society during the Franco-Japanese period], 2 vols., NXB Sử Địa, Hà Nội, 1957. A partial Japanese translation is in アジア・アフリカ研究所編 [Institute of Asia-African Studies ed.] 『資料ベトナム解放史』 [Documents: History of Vietnamese liberation], Vol. 1, 労働旬報社 [Rodo Junposha], 1970, pp. 238–320; for various events in Huế and other major cities during this period, see Trần Huy Liệu *et al.* ed., *Cách mạng Tháng Tám* [The August Revolution], 2 vols., NXB Sử học, Hà Nội, 1960; selections from this book are translated in the Japanese work just cited, pp. 353–404.

group from Hà Nội to the abdication ceremony, and it took the further step of recognizing the abdicated Emperor (now a commoner known by his personal name of Vĩnh Thụy) as “Supreme Adviser” of the new regime.

According to official interpretations by the Hà Nội authorities, these measures were a reflection of the Việt Minh government’s generosity towards the “feudal ruling class.” They are also portrayed as demonstrations of Hồ Chí Minh’s commitment to “national solidarity.”⁵ However, the official interpretation only provides a somewhat simplistic view of the process whereby an empire or “universe” with the Emperor at the top was destroyed and finally assimilated by the revolutionary government. In this paper, the author will focus on Bảo Đại around the time of the Revolution to understand how he saw it and what led him eventually to decide on his “voluntary” abdication, based on memoirs written by his close aides as well as Bảo Đại himself. At the same time, we will also examine the implications of the attitude of Hồ Chí Minh and his revolutionary government, which accepted Bảo Đại’s “voluntary” act.

While Bảo Đại represented the spirit of the past as the symbol of a dying “empire,” he tried to adapt himself to the new order created by the revolutionary government. That effort alone may have been a reflection of his way of life. At the same time, his life must have had some common ground with the lives of many Vietnamese, including not only mandarin bureaucrats and village notables, but perhaps urban intellectuals and farmers as well, who to some degree had preserved the old order in their worldview. Thus Bảo Đại’s actions may have had considerable influence on their behavior and thinking.

I. Prior to the August Revolution—the Emperor and the Trần Trọng Kim Cabinet

Phạm Khắc Hòe, who was the Chief Palace Secretary (*Ngự tiền Văn phòng Tổng lý* 御前文房総理) provides the following account in his memoir.⁶ Following the Japanese military coup on March 9, 1945, Emperor Bảo Đại issued the first imperial rescript (*du luận*) of the “independent” nation on March 17, whose essential features were; (i) the Emperor would assume power himself; (ii) the political system would be based on the Confucian motto *dân vi quý* (“the people are the most precious,” 民為貴); (iii) adequate human resources would be mustered for building the foundations of a nation; and (iv) policies matching the people’s aspirations would be implemented. Chief Secretary Hòe had high expectations for the idea that “the people are the most precious.” He made efforts for the formation of a new Cabinet, replacing the existing Privy Council (*Viện Cơ mật* 機密院). On March 19, the Six Ministers (*Lục bộ Thượng thư* 六部尚書) led by Phạm Quỳnh submitted their resignation to the Emperor, and thus the Privy Council was dissolved. The Emperor sent invitation telegrams to key personnel living in various places in compliance with the recommendation of Hòe and other officials. The Court

⁵ For example, editor Hồng Chương’s preface in Phạm Khắc Hòe, *Từ triều đình Huế đến chiến khu Việt Bắc* [From the Huế Court to the Việt Bắc combat zone], NXB Hà Nội, Hà Nội, 1983, pp. 6–7.

⁶ Unless otherwise specified, the discussion in this section is based on *ibid.* See also the 1985 edition (published by NXB Thành phố Hồ Chí Minh) and the 1987 edition (published by NXB Thuận Hóa). There are some differences between the first edition (published in 1983) and the later re-editions. This book has been translated into Japanese: 白石昌也訳 [Shiraishi Masaya tr.] 『ベトナムのラスト・エンペラー』 平凡社 [Heibon-sha], 1995. A short biography of Hòe is found in the editor’s preface.

initially considered appointing Ngô Đình Diệm as head of the new Cabinet. However, as soon as they recognized that this went against the Japanese authorities' wishes, they gave the job to Trần Trọng Kim, an elder Confucian scholar and historian. On April 17, Kim submitted a cabinet list of eleven members to the Emperor.

The new Cabinet did not consist of elderly court bureaucrats like the conventional Six Ministers. Though there were a few older men, including Kim himself, the majority of the Cabinet members were young professionals such as lawyers, medical doctors, and engineers who had received a French-style education. Moreover, very few individuals considered to be pro-Japanese political activists were included in the new Cabinet.⁷ The novelty of Cabinet members with no bureaucratic background was first demonstrated in the Court ceremony for receiving their official appointments. They attended the official ceremony dressed not in traditional formal attire, but instead in plain jackets, trousers and shoes with Vietnamese-style turbans. After the official appointment ceremony, the new Cabinet ministers attended a cocktail party, instead of the traditional audience with the Emperor and Empress. They were invited to sit on chairs surrounding a sofa occupied by the imperial couple. Their cheerful and relaxed conversation lasted for more than an hour. Their talk was sprinkled with French words and also the sounds of champagne corks popping. The Emperor was having friendly conversations with Cabinet members who had studied in France on topics such as the sophisticated Parisian lifestyle.

According to Bảo Đại's memoir, he received the rank of Crown Prince at the age of nine in 1922, and shortly after that he went to France for his schooling. He continued to live in France until 1932, his stay interrupted only by a short home visit in 1926 for his coronation ceremony after his father, Emperor Khải Định (r. 1916–25), died. Bảo Đại was the first (and the last) Vietnamese ruler to have studied in France. Unlike other Emperors in the past, he did not practice formal polygamy. The Empress Nam Phương was a daughter of a Catholic millionaire in Cochinchina. She was only 18 years old when they married in 1934. Educated in France as well, she loved sports and music just like the Emperor. A son and three daughters were born to the couple prior to 1945.⁸

Now, let us continue delving into the recollections of Phạm Khắc Hòe regarding the final months of the war. Before long, the Emperor was losing his motivation for heading the “independent” government bestowed by the Japanese. In early June, Nguyễn Duy Quang, Provincial Governor of Khánh Hòa, was recalled to the Court and appointed Minister of the Imperial Household (a new non-Cabinet

⁷ The Kim Cabinet and its composition are discussed in Masaya Shiraishi, “La présence japonaise en Indochine 1940–1945” in Paul Isoart ed., *L'Indochine Française 1940–1945*, Presses Universitaires de France, Paris, 1982, pp. 233–50; and Shiraishi, “The background to the formation of the Trần Trọng Kim Cabinet in April 1945: Japanese plans for governing Vietnam,” in Takashi Shiraishi and Motoo Furuta ed., *Indochina in the 1940s and 1950s*, Southeast Asia Program, Cornell University, Ithaca, pp. 113–41. The original version of the latter is 白石昌也「チャン・チョン・キム内閣成立（1945年4月）の背景：日本当局の対ベトナム統治構想を中心として」, in 土屋健治, 白石隆編 [Tsuchiya Kenji and Shiraishi Takashi ed.], *東南アジアの政治と文化* [Politics and culture of Southeast Asia] 東京大学出版会 [University of Tokyo Press], 1984, pp. 33–69. See also Kim's memoir, *Một cơn gió bụi* [A gust of dusty wind], NXB Vĩnh Sơn, Sài Gòn, 1969, pp. 46ff; the book has been translated into Japanese by 陳荊和 (Chen Chingho): 「風塵のさなかに：見聞録(2)」『創大アジア研究』 [Soka University Asian Studies] no. 2 (1981), pp. 175–217.

⁸ Bao Dai, *Le dragon d'Annam*, Plon, Paris, 1980, pp. 11–68. See also Phạm Khắc Hòe, *Từ triều đình Huế*, p. 89 for their children.

post). Quang came from an extremely rich family, and his wife was a celebrated beauty. With this wealthy retainer in his entourage, the Emperor fell back into the life of gambling, dining, drinking, and hunting which he had followed before the Japanese *coup de force* changed his circumstances. He was sometimes accompanied on overnight hunting trips to Quảng Trị by the young and beautiful French wife of Ambassador Yokoyama, his personal advisor.⁹

Phạm Khắc Hòe became even more disappointed with the attitude of the new Prime Minister, Trần Trọng Kim, toward the motto “the people are the most precious.” Kim interpreted it in line with a phrase from the *Analects* of Confucius¹⁰ that “The people may be made to follow a path of action, but they may not be made to understand it” (*dân khả sử do chi, bất khả sử tri chi* 民可使由之, 不可使知之); in other words, one can only expect the people to obey a ruler blindly, but not to understand the principles of politics. In Hòe’s mind, the original meaning of Mencius’s saying “the people are the most precious, then the state, and least of all the monarch” (*dân vi quý, xā tấc thứ chi, quân vi khinh* 民為貴, 社稷次之, 君為輕) was that the ruler was less important than the people or the state.¹¹ Witnessing the conservative attitude of elderly Confucian scholar Kim, Hòe was losing hope for the new government.

By June or July, news of the expansion of Việt Minh power in the northern region had reached the Court in Huế. Half of the Cabinet, including Trần Trọng Kim, left in July to investigate the situation in Tonkin as well as to negotiate with the Headquarters of the Japanese military in Hà Nội. By the time Kim returned to Huế in early August, the loyalties of the younger ministers had already drifted away. On August 5, the Prime Minister offered the Cabinet’s resignation to the Emperor, who accepted it the following day. Nonetheless, the Emperor was compelled to ask Kim to form a new Cabinet since he could not find anybody else at that point who was willing to take such a risk. Thus Kim remained as interim Prime Minister. Through personal contacts with the young ministers as well as conversations with Tôn Quang Phiệt,¹² a Việt Minh intellectual living in Huế, Phạm Khắc Hòe became increasingly pessimistic about the Empire’s future. Phiệt broke the news to Hòe that the “top executive” had given the order to organize the Emperor’s abdication. The “top executive” meant the Việt Minh leadership, but Phiệt refrained from giving any details. On August 12, the Emperor issued an imperial rescript (*đụ*) to reappoint Kim’s recently resigned Ministers as an “interim Cabinet.”¹³

⁹ Yokoyama had originally a Japanese wife, but after her death he married a French woman.

¹⁰ This is a phrase found in the *Analects* 論語 of Confucius, “*Taibo*” 泰伯 section; 早稲田大学編輯部編 [Waseda University Editorial Board ed.] 『先哲遺著国字解全書』 (Complete book of Japanese interpretations of ancient philosophers’ works), vol. 1, 早稲田大学出版部 [Waseda University Press], 1909, pp. 149–50; 吉田賢抗 [Yoshida Kenko], 『論語』 [Analects of Confucius] (新釈漢文大系一) [Compendium of Chinese classics in new interpretations I], 明治書院 [Meiji Shoin], 1960, p. 182.

¹¹ This is a phrase found in Mencius, *Jinxin* Part Two 孟子盡心下; 早稲田大学編輯部編 [Waseda University Editorial Board ed.] 『先哲遺著国字解全書』 (Complete book of Japanese interpretations of ancient philosophers’ works), vol. 2, 早稲田大学出版部 [Waseda University Press], 1910, p. 455; 内野熊一郎 [Uchino Kumaichiro], 『孟子』 [The Book of Mencius] (新釈漢文大系四) [Compendium of Chinese classics in new interpretations IV], 明治書院 [Meiji Shoin], 1960, pp. 491–92; 市川本太郎 [Ichikawa Mototaro], 『孟子之綜合的研究』 [Comprehensive study of Mencius], 市川先生記念会 (長野) [Mr. Ishikawa Memorial Association], Nagano City, 1974, pp. 370ff.

¹² Tôn Quang Phiệt was from the Nghệ-Tĩnh region like Phạm Khắc Hòe. Phiệt would later become a major player in the Historical Study group in Hà Nội along with Trần Huy Liệu, Minister of Propaganda in the first Việt Minh government.

¹³ Sources differ as to when the Kim administration actually resigned. Neither Báo Đại’s nor Kim’s memoirs mention any recon-

Around August 15, with the Japanese surrender, a movement emerged in the Court led by Nguyễn Duy Quang (Minister of the Imperial Household), Phạm Quỳnh (former Minister of the Interior), and Trần Văn Chương (Kim's Foreign Minister). They tried to communicate with their former French masters in order to bring the situation under control.¹⁴ Phạm Khắc Hòe took precautions to keep the Emperor from becoming involved in this movement. On the morning of the 17th, the Emperor presided over a meeting of the interim Cabinet. Foreign Minister Chương proposed to send messages to Harry S. Truman, King George VI, Chiang Kai-shek, and Charles De Gaulle. Overcoming an objection that he should also send a letter to Stalin, the Emperor adopted the first proposal.¹⁵

Then a motion was made by some of the young Ministers, including Interior Minister Trần Đình Nam claiming that not only the Cabinet but also the Emperor himself should “resign” and transfer their power to the Việt Minh. The suggestion was based on the grounds that the Việt Minh was the most powerful influence, and thus the best way to prevent foreign manipulation was to have all the people tightly unite around that force. Kim raised strenuous objections to the suggestion that the Emperor should “resign,” and the two sides got into a heated debate. A few of the Ministers with legal training mediated and proposed a compromise plan to maintain the monarchy as a formality while transferring real power to the Việt Minh, who would be asked to form a Cabinet. This suggestion was based on the rationale that a “legitimate” government capable of maintaining order and taking a position against the imminent Allied occupation was an urgent need.

Imperial Rescript No. 105 dated August 17 was immediately prepared; it was Hòe's job as usual to prepare the official document and obtain the Emperor's signature. The draft consisted of two main points. First, it said that Bảo Đại would be willing to transfer power to the Việt Minh and invite its leaders to Huế to arrange the formation of a new Cabinet. Second, it said the issue of the form of government would be decided by the people later, and that the Emperor should comply with the people's will as to whether he should stay or leave. Bảo Đại was in a good mood, for he had bought some time and was able to maintain his royal throne for the time being. It was decided that Phan Anh, Minister of Youth, would be sent to Hà Nội to convey the Emperor's intention.

Just as Bảo Đại was about to close the cabinet meeting, Interior Minister Trần Đình Nam proposed that an imperial decree (*chiếu 詔*) should be issued to call for national unity. Phạm Khắc Hòe, who had been consulted on the matter ahead of time, read out the draft. It said that the people of Vietnam were entitled and resolved to maintain independence and asked all patriotic Vietnamese to support the Emperor and help the nation. The decree also promised that Bảo Đại was committed to becoming a role model for the people in a spirit of self-sacrifice. Some Cabinet members including Kim made an issue of the wording of the latter point. However, Bảo Đại agreed on the original draft. It said as follows:

stitution of the Cabinet after its initial resignation. The discussion here follows Hòe's account.

¹⁴ Trần Huy Liệu *et al.* eds, *Cách mạng Tháng Tám* also mentions a movement in the Court trying to collaborate with the French; see アジア・アフリカ研究所編, 『資料ベトナム解放史』, p. 393.

¹⁵ Bảo Đại, *Dragon d'Annam*, pp. 114–5 states that he sent messages to world leaders on August 18.

In order to strengthen national independence and protect the rights of the people, We the Emperor are willing to make every sacrifice. We took the Throne for the well-being of the people of Vietnam. We would choose to be an ordinary citizen of an independent nation rather than the ruler of an enslaved nation. We trust that the entire people will be committed to uniting their hearts and making sacrifices just as We are doing.

In the afternoon on the same day, Hoè prepared the official document to be submitted to the Emperor for his signature.¹⁶

II. The Sage of Nam Đàn: A 16th-Century Prophet and the Destiny of the Empire

1. The First Prophecy

Although an imperial rescript was issued to order the Việt Minh to form a cabinet, there was no reply from Hà Nội. The Emperor was frustrated at not being able to identify the Việt Minh leaders. From Bảo Đại's perspective, the only reasonable sequence of events was for whoever received an order to come instantly to Huế to see him before proceeding any further. On August 20, Phạm Khắc Hòe heard a rumor that a declaration by revolutionary Nguyễn Ái Quốc calling for an uprising had been posted in Huế, which was filled with demonstrators. Hòe immediately went to confirm this before reporting it to the Emperor. Bảo Đại knew nothing about Nguyễn Ái Quốc other than that he was the author of a play titled "Bamboo Dragon" which mocked Emperor Khải Định. Although Hòe's knowledge about Quốc was also limited, he told the Emperor everything he knew. However, stories about "a famous revolutionary who had traveled to Western countries in his earlier life and got involved in political activities" did not attract Bảo Đại's attention.¹⁷ For a young ruler who had studied in France for over ten years and had a better command of French than Vietnamese, Quốc's "Western-influenced" background might be of little interest.

Hòe then told Bảo Đại about the following prophecy that had been spread in olden times in the Nghệ-Tĩnh region (Nghệ An and Hà Tĩnh provinces). The prophecy said, "*Đụn Sơn phân giải, Bò Đái thất thanh, Nam Đàn sinh Thánh.* (崙山分解, 輔 [or 蹠] 帶失聲, 南壇生聖)" It was said that this prophecy came from the famous 16th-century prophet Trạng Trình (Nguyễn Bình Khiêm). It can be translated as follows: "When the row of mountains in Đụn Sơn is divided and Bò Đái stream has fallen silent, a Sage will be born in Nam Đàn." Hòe explained the meaning of this prophecy as follows. The row of mountains known as Đụn Sơn was divided by road construction at the end of the 19th century. In Bò Đái, there used to be water freely flowing all day long, but now the sound of the stream was no longer heard. These events suggested that this old prophecy was trustworthy, and indicated that the time had come for a Sage to appear. Who, then, was the Sage? The people thought at first that it was

¹⁶ The text of this decree, dated August 17, is reproduced in Trần Trọng Kim, *Một cơn gió bụi*, pp. 195–6 (pp. 211–12 in the Japanese translation).

¹⁷ Phạm Khắc Hòe, *Từ triều đình Huế*, pp. 59–61.

the revolutionary Phan Bội Châu, but around 1920, a rumor started to circulate that it must be the patriot Nguyễn Ái Quốc. This coincided with the period when people began to hear about Quốc's revolutionary activities in France.¹⁸

Based on the above explanation by Phạm Khắc Hòe, the author will add some additional comments on the prophecy. Among the place names included in the prophecy, the easiest one to identify is Nam Đàn. This is the name of a district in Nghệ An province. Nam Đàn was certainly the native place of both Phan Bội Châu (born in 1867) and Nguyễn Ái Quốc (born in 1890). Phan Bội Châu was a revolutionary in the early 20th century. He was captured by French agents in Shanghai in 1925, sent back to Hà Nội under escort, and confined to Huế until his death in 1940.¹⁹ Nguyễn Ái Quốc (born Nguyễn Sinh Cung and later named Nguyễn Tất Thành) left Vietnam in 1911 and eventually settled in Paris. In 1919 he became a member of the French Socialist Party. He also submitted a “Request by the people of Annam” to the Peace Conference in Versailles under the name Nguyễn Ái Quốc. In 1920, when the Socialist Party was split and the French Communist Party was formed, he became one of the founding members. In 1922, he became a chief editor of *Le Paria*, a new journal of the Communist Party's Colonial Issues Committee. He wrote a number of articles. The play “Bamboo Dragon” that Báo Đại knew about had been performed when then-Emperor Khải Định visited France in 1922 as part of an event organized by Communist Party journal *l'Humanité* with a satirical intention.

Quốc's articles and pamphlets were brought to Vietnam secretly, and they gradually made his name famous. Later, he adopted his best-known name of Hồ Chí Minh and led the successful August Revolution in 1945.²⁰ Phan Bội Châu's career as a revolutionary activist ended in 1925. On the other hand, Quốc's reputation began to spread in the early 1920s. In other words, Hòe's explanation that an earlier “Sage” in Nam Đàn was replaced in people's minds by another around the 1920s is reasonable.

Next, we will discuss the name of the mountain Đụn Sơn. “Đụn” is not found in a list of Sino-Vietnamese characters, but the *chữ Nôm* (demotic script) character “庵” may be used, which means a stack of paddy.²¹ “Sơn” (mountain) should be represented by the Sino-Vietnamese character 山. A mountain

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 61.

¹⁹ On Phan Bội Châu see 白石昌也 [Shiraishi Masaya], 『ベトナム民族運動と日本・アジア：ファン・ボイ・チャウの革命思想と対外認識』 巖南堂書店 [Gannando-Shoten], 1993. It has been translated into Vietnamese as Masaya Shiraishi, *Phong trào dân tộc Việt Nam và quan hệ của nó với Nhật Bản và Châu Á: Tư tưởng của Phan Bội Châu về cách mạng và thế giới* [The Vietnamese national movement and its relations with Japan and Asia: Phan Bội Châu's thoughts on revolution and the world], vol.1 (Nguyễn Như Diệm tr. and Chương Thâu ed.), and vol.2 (Trần Sơn tr. and Chương Thâu ed.), NXB Chính Trị quốc gia, 2000.

²⁰ Major biographies of Hồ Chí Minh by Western authors include Jean Lacouture, *Hồ Chí Minh: A political biography*, Peter Wiles tr., Vintage Books, New York, 1968 (the Japanese translation is 吉田康彦, 伴野文夫訳 『ベトナムの星』 サイマル出版会, 1968); Pierre Brocheux (Claire Duiker tr.), *Hồ Chí Minh: A biography*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2007; and William J. Duiker, *Hồ Chí Minh: A life*, Hachette, New York, 2000. In addition, for narratives of events from the 1920s to the 1940s, see Dương Kinh Quốc ed., *Việt Nam những sự kiện lịch sử (1858–1945)* [Vietnam: Historical events 1858–1945], vol.2, NXB Khoa học xã hội, Hà Nội, 1982; Dương Quốc Anh ed., *Việt Nam những sự kiện lịch sử (1858–1945)* [Vietnam: Historical events 1858–1945], vol.3, NXB Khoa học xã hội, Hà Nội, 1988; and Huỳnh Kim Khanh, *Vietnamese Communism 1925–1945*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 1982, pp. 53–63. Vietnamese versions of Nguyễn Ái Quốc's writings during his stay in France are in *Hồ Chí Minh Toàn tập* [The complete works of Hồ Chí Minh], vol. 1, NXB Sự thật, Hà Nội, 1980.

²¹ For *Nôm* characters, the present study uses Nguyễn Quang Xy and Vũ Văn Kính, *Từ điển chữ Nôm* [Dictionary of *Nôm*], Trung tâm Học liệu, Sài Gòn, 1971; the reference for Sino-Vietnamese characters is Đào Duy Anh, *Hán-Việt Từ điển* [Sino-

called Đụn Sơn 鹿山 must presumably be located in Nghệ An province. Looking into the relevant literature, I found an account in a collection of Phan Bội Châu's anecdotes published by the famous historian Chương Thâu which includes a description of the landscape in Nam Đàn, home area of Phan Bội Châu: “When looking up, you will see the mountain of Rú Đụn (also called Hùng Sơn). On the mountain are Vạn An Castle of Mai Hắc Đế, who fought against the invading Tang army in 772, and his shrine.”²²

Keeping the above reference in mind, let us consult the section on “Mountains and Rivers” in Nghệ An in the gazetteer *Đại Nam Nhất thống chí*. It has a description of Hùng Lĩnh Sơn 雄嶺山 (Mount Hùng Lĩnh) as follows: “在南壇東烈，秀攬二社。[···] 其南山下為萬安衛，梅黑帝遺壘也。有廟在焉。屋漏話云，驩州今巨鎮，雄嶺古名山，湖分川四塞，江合海重關。是又安之一鎮山也。”²³ This may be roughly translated as:

Mount Hùng Lĩnh 雄嶺山 straddles the two communes of Đông Liệt 東烈 and Tú Lâm 秀攬 in Nam Đàn 南壇 District.” [Several names of other mountains and adjacent rivers near Mount Hùng Lĩnh which are listed in the original text are omitted here.] At the southern foot of Mount Hùng Lĩnh, there is Vạn An Post 萬安衛, which is the remains of a castle of Emperor Mai Hắc Đế 梅黑帝. A shrine to him has also been erected. [An old book] says that Hùng Lĩnh is a giant fortress in Hoan Châu 驩州 [an old name for the area including Nghệ-Tĩnh], which has been a celebrated mountain since olden times. The rivers flow from every direction into the lake, from which many streams run down into inlets and the sea. It is really a great mountain guarding Nghệ An Province.

Mount Hùng Lĩnh 雄嶺山 must be identical with Mount Hùng (Hùng Sơn), which was introduced by Chương Thâu as another name for the mountain Rú Đụn. It is common for Vietnamese places to have two toponyms, an “official name” written in Sino-Vietnamese characters and a vernacular or colloquial name very often written in *Nôm* script. Thus “Mount Hùng Lĩnh” is the official name while “Mount Rú Đụn” is the colloquial name for the same mountain.²⁴

In the same source there are references to the Old Castle of Vạn An 萬安故城 in the “Ancient Remains” section and the Mai Hắc Đế Shrine 梅黑帝祠 in the “Shrines and Temples” section. The former reference only notes that the castle is located in the east of Nam Đàn District, guiding the readers to

Vietnamese dictionary], NXB Trường thi, Sài Gòn, 1957.

²² Chương Thâu, *Giai thoại Phan Bội Châu* [Anecdotes about Phan Bội Châu], NXB Nghệ An, Vinh, 1991, pp. 13–14.

²³ 『大南一統志』 [Đại Nam Nhất thống chí] [Gazetteer of Đại Nam] 乂安省 [Nghệ An Province] (Tokyo reprint), 印度支那協會 [Society of Indochina], 1941, p. 1540; (Sài Gòn published edition), Nhà Văn hóa, Sài Gòn, 1965, p. 42 (Chinese text) and p. 38 (Vietnamese translation).

²⁴ Nguyễn Huyền Anh, *Việt Nam danh nhân từ điển* [Dictionary of famous Vietnamese], Nhà Sách Khai trí, Sài Gòn, 1967, pp. 190–91 mentions that Mai Thúc Loan (Mai Hắc Đế's real name) escaped from attack by Tang forces, hid in Độn Sơn and died shortly thereafter. Here, the toponym “Độn Sơn” is used instead of Mount Hùng Lĩnh; “Độn” is similar to “Đụn.” The name “Rú Đụn” is introduced as another name for Hùng Sơn in Chương Thâu, *Giai thoại*, as mentioned earlier.

refer to the “Shrines and Temples” section for more details.²⁵ The latter section says that the shrine is located in Hương Lan Commune 香攬社 of Nam Đàn District, with the following explanation:

Mai Hắc Đế’s real name was Mai Thúc Loan (梅叔鸞). With his dark face and muscular appearance, he won wide popularity. Due to the extreme tyranny of the [Chinese] An Nam Protectorate 安南都護 during the Kaiyuan 開元 reign of the Tang Dynasty [the first half of the 8th century], many local people escaped to the mountain forests and began to engage in predatory practices. This was when Mai Thúc Loan stood up to go after the bandits. Moreover, he allied with countries such as Champa and Cambodia and thus rallied 300,000 soldiers. After occupying Hoan Châu (驩州), Mai Thúc Loan proclaimed himself Emperor and established his capital at Vạn An. When the Tang sent a punitive force, Mai Hắc Đế gathered soldiers on Hùng Sơn 雄山 (Mount Hùng) and carried out resistance for several years, but he eventually died of illness there. The local people built a shrine on the south of the mountain to worship his spirit.²⁶

Here the mountain where Mai Hắc Đế barricaded himself is indicated as Hùng Sơn 雄山, presumably a shortened form of “Hùng Lĩnh.” In any case, the description in this text proves that Mount Hùng Lĩnh is a famous mountain in Nghệ An, treated as a sacred place especially by the legend of Mai Hắc Đế. Available sources cannot confirm whether a road was constructed on the mountainside at the end of the 19th century, but if the earlier statement of Phạm Khắc Hòe is right, the shape of the mountain was modified during the early colonial period. Thus, what “Sage” implies here should be a hero fighting against French rule.

Next we will consider Bò Đái. The gazetteer describes Võ Nguyên Tuyền 武原泉 as follows: “在清漳縣，一名蒲帶泉。自箕山上懸崖數十丈，注于藍江。相傳古者，泉聲鈴鈴十里外。近來沙土培壅，泉流不息，而泉聲寂不聞矣。古訣云，蒲帶絕聲，即此。”²⁷ This passage roughly means that Võ Nguyên Tuyền

also known as Bò Đái Tuyền 蒲帶泉, is located in Thanh Chương District 清漳縣. From the top of Mount Cơ 箕山, it falls over several tens of *trượng* 數十丈 of precipice down into the Lam River 藍江. Legend has it that the pure sound of its [running] water could be heard from as far away as ten *lý* 十里. But this sound has disappeared recently due to accumulated earth and sand blocking the flow of water. This is what an old tale (古訣) means when it says that “Bò Đái is silenced.”

The document here refers to *Bò Đái Tuyền* 蒲帶泉²⁸ as another name for *Võ Nguyên Tuyền* 武原泉; the

²⁵ *Đại Nam Nhất thống chí* (Nghệ An), pp. 1570 (Tokyo edition), 72 (Sài Gòn edition Chinese), 74 (Sài Gòn edition Vietnamese).

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 1578 (Tokyo edition), 78 (Sài Gòn edition Chinese), 80–81 (Sài Gòn edition Vietnamese).

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 1565–66 (Tokyo edition), 67–8 (Sài Gòn edition Chinese), 68 (Sài Gòn edition Vietnamese).

²⁸ The original text has “Bò Đái” 蒲帶 (two Sino–Vietnamese characters), while Hòe’s memoir has “Bò Đái” (which would require a Nôm character for the first word, either 輔 or 躡).

former toponym is colloquial, the latter Sino-Vietnamese. What the term “*tuyền*” (泉) actually means is a valley with rapid flowing or falling water. According to the document, the reason for the “silence” was the accumulation of earth and sand, presumably not a manmade cause. Since *Đại Nam Nhất thống chí* was finally completed in the third year of Duy Tân (1908), it is implied that there had been some abnormal change in the valley before the beginning of the 20th century. Although the precise meaning of “old tale” (古訣) is unclear, this may be an indication that some kind of legend or prophecy had existed since olden times. Thanh Chương is a mountainous district, lying to the west of Nam Đàn District and extending to the Lao border.

The next section will discuss another, more famous prophecy attributed to the same prophet, Nguyễn Bình Khiêm.

2. The Second Prophecy

Since Phạm Khắc Hòe believed the above prophecy to be true, his tone was quite serious when he talked to the Emperor. Bảo Đại also showed considerable interest in this story, and quoted the following phrase by the same prophet: “*Hoành Sơn nhất đái, vạn đại dung thân* 橫山一帶，萬代容身，”²⁹ literally “[In] the Hoành Sơn area, ten thousand generations are secured.” Hòe gives the following account of an episode involving this prophecy. In October 1944, Bảo Đại organized a party in his palace at Đà Lạt to celebrate his 32nd birthday; a number of French guests were invited. Together with Governor-General Jean Decoux and Phạm Quỳnh, Minister of the Interior, he arranged a small performance at the party. Decoux made a toast which included the above prophecy in his congratulatory speech, deliberately using the Sino-Vietnamese pronunciation with no translation so as to make it sound somewhat mysterious. Needless to say, most French people present had no idea what it was about. Then Bảo Đại told Phạm Quỳnh, who had the honor of sitting with the Emperor, to give an explanation in French.

Phạm Quỳnh, pretending to be caught off guard, thought for a while, and began his comments like an impromptu speech. He said, first, “the author of this prophecy was Trạng Trình, namely Nguyễn Bình Khiêm. He was a unique and great prophet who made truthful prognostications about everything.” Second, “this prophecy was about Nguyễn Hoàng, who was Bảo Đại’s ancestor, i.e. the founder of the Nguyễn royal family [in the 16th century]. Its contents proved to be an indication of the lasting nature of the Nguyễn Dynasty.” (The details of this will be discussed below). Third, “the fact that the great Governor-General of French Indochina Decoux mentioned this prophecy at a party celebrating the Emperor’s birthday implies that a promise was made in the name of the French government to protect the Nguyễn Dynasty under any circumstance for the common interests between the French and the Vietnamese people.”

According to Hòe’s memoir, the details of the prophecy that Phạm Quỳnh explained at this time were as follows:

²⁹ Phạm Khắc Hòe, *Từ triều đình Huế*, p. 61.

Nguyễn Hoàng, founder of the Nguyễn royal family, was originally a military commander in the north under the rule of Trịnh Kiểm [in the 16th century]. But he was ordered to become a military governor in Thuận Hóa [the area including Huế]. Hoàng visited the prophet Trạng Trình asking to read his future. The prophet's answer was "*Hoành Sơn nhất đái, vạn đại dung thân.*" It meant that the fate of the family would be secured for generations if protected by the Hoành Sơn mountains. In fact, Nguyễn Hoàng became the military governor of the area south of the Đèo Ngang [the Ngang Pass in the Hoành Sơn area of present-day Quảng Bình province] and founded the genealogy of Nguyễn [as rulers]. Since his arrival in Thuận Hóa in 1558 until today, there have been nine generations of military governors [through the late 18th century] and 13 reigns of emperors [since 1802]. This demonstrates the stable rule of the Nguyễn Dynasty. Especially since they received the protection of great French government [through the 1884 treaty], their rule has become even more firm.³⁰

The original story about Khiêm's prophecy had been widely spread as a "legend" concerning the origins of the Nguyễn Dynasty. The dynastic chronicles *Đại Nam Thực lục Tiền biên* give the following account (summary):

Nguyễn Kim and Nguyễn Hoàng, father and son, along with Trịnh Kiểm, fought against the Mạc family that had usurped the throne [from the Lê dynasty in 1527], contributing to the restoration of the Lê [in 1592, after decades of civil war]. But after the death of Nguyễn Kim, the conflict between the Nguyễn and Trịnh families escalated [during the course of their war against the Mạc]. Compared to the Trịnh who had become thoroughly entrenched in the Lê forces, the Nguyễn were in a lesser position. Nguyễn Hoàng, worrying about the situation, secretly sent a messenger to Nguyễn Bình Khiêm to read his future. When Nguyễn Hoàng heard the answer [i.e., the prophecy about the Hoành Sơn], he immediately understood its meaning. Then, he asked his elder sister [Trịnh Kiểm's wife] to mediate so that he could become a governor of Thuận Hóa [in the extreme south of the realm]. Trịnh Kiểm agreed to this plan, and his appointment was officially given by the Lê Emperor. Nguyễn Hoàng thus assumed his post in Thuận Hóa in the tenth month in the first year of Chính Trị 正治 [1558].³¹

The following is a quote from the original description of the scene where Nguyễn Bình Khiêm was making his prediction: "聞阮秉謙（海陽中庵人，莫狀元，以太保致仕）精於術數。密使人往問之。秉謙目庭前假山，浪吟曰橫山一帶，萬代容身。使者歸以告，上會其意."³² This may be translated as follows:

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 93–5.

³¹ 『大南寔録前編』 *Đại Nam Thực lục Tiền biên* [Chronicle of Đại Nam, preliminary section] (Keio University reprinted edition), 慶応義塾大学語研究所, 1961, vol. 1, pp. 1–6; a Vietnamese translation is in Nguyễn Huyền Anh, *Việt Nam danh nhân từ điển*, pp. 248–9.

³² *Đại Nam Thực lục Tiền biên*, vol. 1, p. 6.

Having heard that Nguyễn Bình Khiêm (from Trung Am in Hải Dương, *Trạng nguyên* [the highest degree in the examination system] of the Mạc, retired with the rank of *Thái bảo*) was a master of fortune-telling, [Nguyễn Hoàng] secretly sent a messenger and asked the prophet to read his future. Khiêm, while looking at a man-made hill in the front yard, chanted the following phrase: “*Hoành Sơn nhất đái, vạn đại dung thân.*” As soon as the messenger returned and reported this, Nguyễn Hoàng immediately knew what that meant.

The following is the description of Hoành Sơn in *Đại Nam Nhất thống chí*:

Hoành Sơn 橫山 is a mountain range along the border between Bình Chánh district 平政県 of Quảng Bình province 廣平省 in the south and Kỳ Anh district 奇英県 of Hà Tĩnh province 河靜省 in the north. The range is shaped like a great wall and was a key defensive area between the North and the South of the country. Both the first and the second Emperors of the Nguyễn Dynasty, Gia Long and Minh Mạng, carefully prepared their defenses there. When Nguyễn Hoàng, founder of the Nguyễn lineage, was still in Hà Nội, he sent a messenger to Nguyễn Bình Khiêm to ask his fortune. Khiêm walked toward a man-made hill in the front yard, looking at a troop of ants beside it, and said, “*Hoành Sơn nhất đái, vạn đại dung thân.*” In fact, our Nguyễn Dynasty had its foundations in this area and controlled the southern region.³³

Regarding the career of Nguyễn Bình Khiêm, the passage quoted earlier from *Đại Nam Thực lục Tiền biên* mentions very briefly that he originated from Trung Am 中庵 village in Hải Dương Province 海陽省, passed the exam under the Mạc regime as *trạng nguyên* (狀元, the most successful candidate), and retired with the rank of *Thái bảo* 太保. The *Hải Dương Phong vật chí* (Records of Hải Dương features), compiled in 1811, also mentions that Khiêm was born in Trung Am and completed the final stage of his examinations in the year Ất Mùi 乙未 (1535) according to the Sino-Vietnamese calendar. The Mạc granted him the title of *Trình quốc công* 程國公; the term “*công*” is usually translated as “duke.” The text also says that several years later, when an envoy from the Qing dynasty came to Vietnam, he praised Nguyễn Bình Khiêm, saying “In the area of Lingnan 黎南, I found a great person named Trình Tuyền 程泉 who was well acquainted with the sciences.”³⁴ According to another document, Nguyễn Bình Khiêm’s widely known pseudonym “Trạng Trình” 狀程 referred to his examination title *Trạng nguyên* 狀元 combined with his title of *Trình quốc công* 程國公.³⁵

Bào Đại in his memoir referred to the same prophecy. After he returned from France in 1932, he or-

³³ 『大南一統志』 [*Đại Nam Nhất thống chí*] 廣平省 [Quảng Bình province] (Tokyo reprint), pp. 973–4.

³⁴ 『海陽風物誌』 [*Hải Dương phong vật chí*] [Records of Hải Dương features]; Nha Văn-hóa, Bộ Văn-hóa Giáo-dục và Thanh-niên, Sài Gòn, 1968, pp. 217 (Chinese text) and 67 (Vietnamese translation).

³⁵ Thái Văn Kiem and Hồ Đắc Đàm ed., *Việt Nam Nhân vật chí Vựng biên* [Collected biographies of individual Vietnamese], Nhà Văn hóa, Sài Gòn, 1962, pp. 109–11. Nguyễn Bình Khiêm’s prophecy about Nguyễn Hoàng is also quoted in this book and in Nguyễn Huyền Anh, *Việt Nam danh nhân từ điển*, pp. 218–19.

dered the officials in charge of archives to provide him with historical materials so that he could study the history of the Nguyễn Dynasty. According to his study, the origin of the Nguyễn could be traced back to Nguyễn Bặc during the Đinh Dynasty (the latter half of the 10th century), but its more direct founders were Nguyễn Kim (born in 1468), Bặc's 13th-generation descendant, and his son Nguyễn Hoàng (born in 1525). One day Hoàng sent a messenger to an ascetic scholar named Nguyễn Bình Khiêm who was said to have supernatural powers. When the messenger arrived, Khiêm mumbled, "A l'abri d'une chaîne de montagnes traversale, pendant dix mille générations, il sera tranquille." while looking at a rock in his front yard. When Hoàng heard the messenger's report and understood what the prediction meant, he asked his elder sister, who was married to Trịnh Kiểm, for help. Through that connection, Hoàng was appointed as governor of Thanh Hóa province. When he arrived at the border of Thanh Hóa, the local residents welcomed him holding seven jars of water. The headman of the commune said to him, "You now have your own government. Our people are giving you jars of water as a gift. This indicates that you will found a throne."³⁶ Except for the last part that describes the local people welcoming Hoàng, the details are not different from the passage in *Đại Nam Thực lục Tiền biên* quoted earlier. However, it is clearly a mistake to read Hoàng's assigned post as the governor of Thanh Hóa rather than Thuận Hóa. Thanh Hóa was the birthplace of the Nguyễn family, located farther north of Hoàng Sơn.³⁷

Bao Dai went on to recount some episodes involving his earliest ancestor, Nguyễn Hoàng. In the course of a battle against the remnants of the Mạc family in 1572, a goddess appeared in his dream and promised to assist him. He selected the most beautiful girl among her handmaidens, and adopted a clever tactic that she taught him, which enabled him to defeat the enemy. Hoàng built a temple on the site of his victory to worship the goddess. Peace was achieved and spread through his territory, which would develop into a virtual kingdom. In 1613, just before his death, Hoàng called his son to tell him that the whole area of Thuận Hóa and Quảng Nam would be a land protected by a natural fortress, and suggested: "The throne will be secured for thousands of generations by making use of the region's natural and geographical advantages." That was how the capital of the Nguyễn family was established in Thuận Hóa (Huế).³⁸ The episode regarding the goddess was a summary of the description in the entry for the year Nhâm Thân 壬申 (1572) of *Đại Nam Thực lục Tiền biên*,³⁹ while Nguyễn Hoàng's testament was a summary of the entries for the years Nhâm Dần 壬寅 (1602) and Quý Sửu 癸丑 (1613) of the same chronicle.⁴⁰

³⁶ Bao Dai, *Dragon d'Annam*, pp. 36–8.

³⁷ The *Đại Nam Thực lục Tiền biên* reports that Nguyễn Hoàng, who went South in 1558, built a military post in Ái Tử 愛子, Vũ Xương district 武昌縣 (or Đăng Xương district 登昌縣), now in Quảng Trị province; see also *Đại Nam Nhất thống chí*, Quảng Bình province (Tokyo reprint), p. 848.

³⁸ Bao Dai, *Dragon d'Annam*, pp. 38–9.

³⁹ *Đại Nam Thực lục Tiền biên* (Keio University edition), vol.1, pp. 10–11.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, vol. 1, pp. 21, 23–4.

3. Link between the Two Prophecies

Bảo Đại linked those two prophecies in his mind: the first concerning the Sage from Nam Đàn district of Nghệ An and the second regarding the earliest ancestor of the Nguyễn royal family. What did they mean? For an answer to that question, let us continue to look into Phạm Khắc Hòe's memoir.

After some exchanges with Hòe about the prophecies, Bảo Đại concluded by saying: "If the leader of the Việt Minh is actually Sage Nguyễn Ái Quốc, then I am prepared to abdicate right away." Three days later, on August 23, the local Việt Minh leaders in Huế sent an ultimatum to Bảo Đại that all his power and command over the royal guard force should be transferred to them. A Cabinet meeting was convened on very short notice in the Court, and the decision was adopted to accept the Việt Minh's demand and to offer the Emperor's abdication. This was also the occasion where Trần Trọng Kim's provisional Cabinet was finally dissolved.

In the morning of the following day (August 24), when Hòe came to see Bảo Đại, the Emperor showed him a telegram with a gloomy look on his face. The telegram had been received at night on the previous day from the Bắc Bộ (Tonkin) People's Revolutionary Committee in Hà Nội. It said that "the Provisional People's Revolutionary Government has been established, with Hồ Chí Minh as Chairman. We demand the Emperor's immediate abdication for the sake of national independence and unification." The telegram was signed by Nguyễn Xiển, Nguyễn Văn Huyền, Ngụy Như Kontum, and Hồ Hữu Tường. The message disappointed and saddened Bảo Đại, because there was no mention of Nguyễn Ái Quốc at all. That meant a denial of the first prophecy "*Nam Đàn sinh Thánh*" (A Sage will be born in Nam Đàn), and consequently of the second prophecy "*vạn đại dung thân*" (ten thousand generations are secured) as well. Understanding the situation, Hòe visited friends and acquaintances in different parts of the city of Huế to confirm that Hồ Chí Minh was none other than Nguyễn Ái Quốc himself. As soon as Bảo Đại learnt this news, he said in French: "*Ça vaut bien le coup alors.*" What he meant was it would be worth following through with his abdication.⁴¹

Phạm Khắc Hòe's memoir as stated above can lead to the following conclusions. First, the prophecies for the Sage of Nam Đàn and for the founder of the Nguyễn royal family were given by the same prophet. Therefore, if the first prophecy came true, the second one would inevitably as well. In other words, so long as the leader of the revolutionary government was the Sage of Nam Đàn, i.e. Nguyễn Ái Quốc, then the peace and security of the Nguyễn clan would be eternal. Second, under the circumstances, even if Bảo Đại ended up abdicating, it would not ruin the political fortunes of the Nguyễn clan, as long as his power was handed over to Sage Nguyễn Ái Quốc. That was how the implications of the prophecies were interpreted by both a young Emperor who had spent more than a decade in France and his Chief Palace Secretary who was becoming a Việt Minh sympathizer. In addition to that, we need to suggest a third conclusion as follows. Now at this point, the peace and security of the Nguyễn royal family depended on the presence of Sage Nguyễn Ái Quốc. In other words, only if Quốc

⁴¹ Phạm Khắc Hòe, *Từ triều đình Huế*, pp. 62–9.

was the revolutionary leader would the prophecy that “ten thousand generations [of the Nguyễn clan] are secured” be guaranteed. Thus, Sage Nguyễn Ái Quốc would influence the destiny of the outgoing Emperor and his clan. Bảo Đại, who should be the Son of Heaven, could no longer govern the existence of his subject Nguyễn Ái Quốc. This was a powerful sign of a “reversal of order” or alteration of Heaven’s will, meaning a “revolution.”

Bảo Đại recalled a series of events during this period as follows. In the evening of August 22, the head of the Huế Post Office delivered a telegram from Hà Nội, demanding that he transfer power. On the following day, he found that everyone had departed, leaving him alone in the palace. In solitude his thoughts were as follows:

Now the League for the Independence of Vietnam [Việt Minh] has mobilized masses of people, concretized the wishes of the people, and given me an order. I have no knowledge of their leaders, but they are communicating with the Allied forces: the Chinese, Americans, and French. I, on the other hand, sent messages to President Truman, Generalissimo Tchang Kai-shek, the king of England, and General de Gaulle, but have received no response. They have weapons and the means to acquire power, while I have been isolated in a quiet palace, unable to coordinate even my own aides. This situation seems to imply a miraculous achievement of their success. Isn’t their overwhelming success a sign that they have obtained the Mandate of Heaven (*mandat du ciel*)? The people naturally have quite unquestionable instincts. In a historic moment, they never fail to make a commitment to those who have the mission to guide and lead them.⁴²

We can clearly see from his memoir that Bảo Đại himself was coming to the realization that it was time to accept Heaven’s will.⁴³

III. Emperor and Court

According to Phạm Khắc Hòe’s memoir, when he had a conversation with Bảo Đại about the above two prophecies, the emperor related another supernatural occurrence:

It happened on National Day about two months ago. I left the Kiến Trung Palace and arrived at the Can Thành Palace through the corridor. I was in a palanquin, just heading to the Thái Hòa Palace where the ceremony was going to be held. A huge beam suddenly fell with a loud noise in the middle of the corridor that I had just walked through. If that had happened a few seconds earlier, I would have been killed. My mother, who had seen the whole thing, thought that it was a sa-

⁴² Bao Dai, *Dragon d’Annam*, pp. 118–119; Bảo Đại’s and Phạm Khắc Hòe’s memoirs differ by one day as to when the telegram was received.

⁴³ Paul Mus, *Viet Nam, Sociologie d’une guerre*, Editions du Seuil, Paris, 1952, ch. 2 is a classic interpretation of the August Revolution from the perspective of the “Heavenly Mandate”; see also John T. McAlister, Jr. and Paul Mus, *The Vietnamese and their revolution*, Harper & Row, New York, 1970, ch. 3.

cred presage that some significant turnaround would occur during my reign. But I am still alive as you see now.⁴⁴

The National Day of the Nguyễn Dynasty was the day commemorating the coronation of Gia Long, the dynasty's first Emperor, in 1802.⁴⁵ Kiến Trung Palace 建中殿 was a place for the Emperor's day-to-day activities and also housed his office for conducting routine work. Can Thành Palace 乾成殿 was used as a private residence for successive rulers until the reign of Emperor Duy Tân (1907–16), while Thái Hòa Palace 太和殿 was used for major ceremonies.⁴⁶

Having heard this story, Hòe expressed his agreement with the Empress Dowager's judgement and pointed out that the incident had happened just before the Emperor conducted the ceremony for National Day. He said, "the huge fallen beam symbolizes fallen French colonialism. The French used to escort you to the site of national ceremony. The reason why you have survived even after the French departure is that the revolution has given sanctuary to you, Sire." In response, the Emperor asked, "Do you mean I should abdicate and hand over all my power to the Việt Minh?" Hòe answered, "Yes, Your Majesty."⁴⁷

Bảo Đại's own memoir contains a detailed description of the incident as well:

The entire royal court gathered to celebrate the national ceremony on Gia Long's coronation day. The most important ritual of the year was held without the presence of the French and other foreigners. The imperial flag was unfurled over the royal cavalry. As the exalted host of the ceremony, I was waiting in the reception hall. Then I was about to enter the temple to perform a ritual to the ancestors in the name of my people. As soon as I took my seat in a palanquin, a huge beam fell with a loud noise in the corridor where I had passed through just seconds before. My mother prognosticated: "A grave incident was just foretold; we just received a divine prophecy. Soon this will become a major turning point for the Emperor."⁴⁸

There is not much difference with the account in Hòe's memoir, but we need to note the following points. First, the ceremony on this National Day was the most important among the annual Court events.⁴⁹ Second, it was being held without foreign officials; in other words, this was the first national

⁴⁴ Phạm Khắc Hòe, *Từ triều đình Huế*, p. 62.

⁴⁵ *Đại Nam Thực lục Tiền biên* (Keio University edition), vol. 17, p. 1. According to this text, on the first day of the fifth month in 1802, an altar was set up to worship Heaven and the name of the reign was changed to "Gia Long." This was the beginning of the Nguyễn Dynasty. See also 岩村成允 [Iwamura Shigemitsu] 『安南通史』 [Overview of Annam History], 富山房 [Fuzanbo], 1941, p. 282.

⁴⁶ For details of these buildings, see Phạm Khắc Hòe, *Từ triều đình Huế*, pp. 11, 29–30 as well as 『大南一統志』 [*Đại Nam Nhất thống chí*], 京師 [Kinh sư, Imperial capital] (Tokyo reprint), 印度支那協會, 1941, pp. 54ff.

⁴⁷ Phạm Khắc Hòe, *Từ triều đình Huế*, p. 62.

⁴⁸ Bao Dai, *Dragon d'Annam*, p. 111.

⁴⁹ A ritual ceremony on the Nam Giao platform 南郊壇 was another major event performed by the Emperor, but only once every three years (*ibid.*, pp. 81–90), thus it was not an "annual event."

ceremony held as an “independent” nation.

The following is Bảo Đại’s interpretation of the incident: Since olden days, the emperor’s destiny had been considered with a link to the destiny of the royal court. All existence of this world, such as human, animals, plants and minerals, was merely a reflection of the universe. A universal counterpart to everything should exist somewhere. Everything coming into being in this sacred imperial palace would find its echo in the Emperor himself as well as in his life.⁵⁰

Looking at the memoirs written by Bảo Đại and Phạm Khắc Hòe, we can clearly see the following points. First, this incident took on a sort of fatalistic tone when it was recounted. There was some background context that one could not dismiss as mere coincidence. The incident occurred in the midst of the turbulence starting with the Japanese military coup and lasting through Japan’s defeat and the August Revolution. Second, there was a belief that the royal Court, Emperor, and imperial family shared the same destiny and had a supernatural causal relationship with the destiny of the entire kingdom.⁵¹ Third, it was particularly significant that the incident had occurred just before the most important annual event for the Court. Fourth, there was a question of how to evaluate the national ceremony without the attendance of foreign officials. Bảo Đại had a latent desire to think of it as a symbol of the Empire of Vietnam becoming “independent.” On the other hand, Phạm Khắc Hòe interpreted it as a demonstration that the imperial Court had lost its protector, the French. Hòe’s idea was based on his judgement that the imperial dynasty of Vietnam had already lost any potential for self-reliance. Thus, in his mind the only option the Emperor could take at this point was to depend on a new protector, namely the revolutionary government.

Bảo Đại eventually accepted Hòe’s argument. According to the latter’s memoir, on August 24 he obtained Bảo Đại’s consent to send a reply to Hà Nội affirming the Emperor’s willingness to step down.⁵² The telegram also requested that “the leader of the Provisional People’s Revolutionary Government immediately come to Thuận Hóa (Huế) to receive the transfer of power from the Emperor in order to assume responsibility for the history and the people of this country, and to have the new government officially appear in front of the people’s eyes.” On the following day he received a reply from Hà Nội informing him of their intention to send delegates of the revolutionary government to Huế. On the same day, the imperial rescript for the emperor’s abdication was publicly announced in the royal capital. On August 26, Bảo Đại held a ceremony to report his abdication to his ancestors in the Thế Miếu 世廟, the shrine dedicated to the previous rulers of the Nguyễn Dynasty. Only a few imperial bureaucrats attended the ceremony and then went to Kiến Trung Palace to bid farewell to the Emperor and Empress. Hòe spent the next few days reviewing the list of Court assets that would be handed over to

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 111.

⁵¹ Mythological aspects of imperial palaces in Vietnam are discussed in 白石昌也 [Shiraishi Masaya] 「ベトナムの〈まち〉：特に〈国〉との関連を中心として」 [Vietnamese ‘towns’ in the particular context of their relationship with the ‘state’] in 『東南アジア研究』 [*Southeast Asian Studies*] (Kyoto University), 21, 1 (1983): 97–113.

⁵² Bảo Đại’s memoir (pp. 118–119) suggests the date of August 23 when he sent a reply to the “Comité des Patriotes” in Hanoi, telling his intension of “le transfert des pouvoirs” and demanding the Committee leaders to immediately come to Hue.

the revolutionary government.

On August 29, a delegation of the Provisional Revolutionary Government sent from Hà Nội arrived in Huế. The Court requested that after the Emperor's abdication, the new government treat the dynasty's ancestral tombs and shrines with respect and that royal family members be treated like other citizens without any discrimination. The delegation agreed. The following day, the abdication ceremony was performed in the pavilion at Ngọ Môn 午門, the main gate for the imperial palace. The delegation's vehicles entered from the central doorway of Ngọ Môn, which had been reserved only for the Emperor and Governor-General of Indochina. The Emperor's yellow flag was first flown on the flag-staff on Ngọ Môn. Bảo Đại, dressed in the formal attire of yellow turban and *áo dài*, read out the rescript of abdication in front of tens of thousands of people. When he had finished, the yellow flag was lowered and the Việt Minh's red flag with a gold star (which became the national flag of the newly-born Democratic Republic of Vietnam) was raised, while a twenty-one-gun salute was fired. Bảo Đại handed over the huge golden seal of state weighing nearly 10 kg and a great sword of state stored in a gold-encrusted scabbard to the chief of the delegation, Trần Huy Liệu.

After Liệu, who was Minister of Propaganda in the Provisional Government, read aloud the statement, Nguyễn Lương Bằng (who became Vice-President of the DRV 24 years later), attached a badge showing the red flag with a gold star on Bảo Đại's clothing. This was how the commoner Vĩnh Thụy was born. On September 1, Vĩnh Thụy and his family left the Forbidden City, taking their personal belongings, and moved into a private residence, An Định Palace. On September 2, Hồ Chí Minh read the famous Declaration of Independence at Ba Đình Square in Hà Nội, formally establishing the Democratic Republic of Vietnam.⁵³

Conclusion

For Bảo Đại, the August Revolution meant his abdication and the end of his Empire. During the period between his declaration of "independence" on March 11 and his abdication on August 30, he had been forced into a situation where he had no alternative to giving up his throne even though he was still hoping for the survival of the dynasty. During the days following the Japanese surrender on August 15, the Emperor went through the process of persuading himself to abdicate. What he always kept in mind during that period was the importance of "the Mandate of Heaven" and the need to ensure peace and security for the imperial family. Apparently, what directly influenced his state of mind were the words and behavior of key personnel, such as Phạm Khắc Hòe and some Ministers in the Cabinet, who were already acting in concert with the Việt Minh.⁵⁴ More fundamentally, however, there was an air of excitement for the Revolution surrounding the entire nation and specifically in the city of Huế, a

⁵³ The description of events in this section is mainly based on Phạm Khắc Hòe, *Từ triều đình Huế*, pp. 69–90. Although there are discrepancies in details with the account found in Bao Dai, *Dragon d'Annam*, pp. 117–22, they are not discussed here.

⁵⁴ Hòe's memoir suggests that he himself had the greatest influence on Bảo Đại's decision to abdicate and transfer power; Bảo Đại, on the other hand, wrote that it was Tạ Quang Bửu, Deputy Minister of Youth, who provided him with information about the Việt Minh and significantly influenced his state of mind (*ibid.*, pp. 113, 118).

stark contrast with the mood in the imperial palace, which was becoming increasingly quieter and more isolated as time went by.

The Việt Minh leadership under Hồ Chí Minh, President of the Provisional Government, was strategically using Bảo Đại's mental turbulence to make arrangements for his abdication. Hồ did not respond to Bảo Đại's request to come to Huế and form a new Cabinet; instead, he established his own government in Hà Nội. However, he respected the formalities of transferring power from the imperial court. Hồ did not attend the abdication ceremony conducted in Huế; instead, Trần Huy Liệu, who was unimpressive in Bảo Đại's eyes, was sent on Hồ's behalf.⁵⁵ In any case, the abdication ceremony performed in front of tens of thousands of audience was to a large degree the act of a "theater state."⁵⁶ A few days later, the former Emperor, now the commoner Vĩnh Thụy, was invited to be "Supreme Adviser" for Hồ's new government and was summoned to Hà Nội where Hồ resided.

Similarly, the new government agreed to take care of the tombs and shrines of the Nguyễn Dynasty. This was the minimum condition that Bảo Đại eagerly desired in order to guarantee the fulfilment of the prophecy, "ten thousand generations are secured." In exchange, he would turn over his palace, which shared his destiny, along with the golden seal and great sword of state that were the symbols of the Throne, as well as the treasures of successive emperors. Hồ Chí Minh dealt with these issues in a manner corresponding to each of Bảo Đại's ideas, notably his interpretations of kingship and his acceptance of the changing Mandate of Heaven. Thus Hồ and his government set up a stage on which Bảo Đại would eventually submit to the new order.

What was left to Vĩnh Thụy as a commoner was the role of "Supreme Adviser" for the new government. He left the former royal capital of Huế for Hà Nội. In Cabinet meetings he was given a seat directly opposite Hồ Chí Minh, rather like the position of a hostess sitting face-to-face with a host at a banquet table. Similarly, Hồ always placed Vĩnh Thụy on his right in public and would gesture for the latter to precede him when they met guests from foreign countries. Each time Vĩnh Thụy had to say, "No, thank you, Mr. President, please go ahead; I am nothing more than an adviser."⁵⁷

The usefulness of the former Emperor Bảo Đại or Vĩnh Thụy for the revolutionary government was multifaceted. From a domestic perspective, the staging of a peaceful transfer of imperial power provided a solid basis for demonstrating the new government's legitimacy. Appointing the former Emperor as "Supreme Adviser" was indisputable proof of the revolutionaries' "unite the people" policy as well as a good test case to manifest the new government's tolerance towards members of the old regime.⁵⁸ From a diplomatic perspective, his presence seemed to have some positive influence in negotiations

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p.119. Bảo Đại could not help but feel somewhat disappointed at what he felt was an unprepossessing delegate sent by the government for his abdication ceremony.

⁵⁶ Clifford Geertz, *Negara, the theatre state in nineteenth-century Bali*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1980; translated into Japanese as 小泉潤二訳『ヌガラ：19世紀バリの劇場国家』みすず書房，1990; and George Balandier, *Le pouvoir sur scènes*, Baland, Paris, 1980; the Japanese translation is 渡辺公三訳『舞台の上の権力：政治のドラマツルギー』平凡社，1982.

⁵⁷ Bao Dai, *Dragon d'Annam*, pp. 130-131, 135.

⁵⁸ Shiraishi, 『ベトナム民族運動と日本・アジア』, pp. 705-706.

with Guomindang generals, French delegates and US military officers. However, over time his usefulness began to fade, a process which was already foreshadowed in the first meetings in Hà Nội between the President of the new government and the former Emperor.

Phạm Khắc Hòe's memoir provides the following account. On September 4, 1945, Vĩnh Thụy arrived in Hà Nội. The next morning, he visited Hồ's official residence to pay a courtesy call. That afternoon, President Hồ visited Vĩnh Thụy's villa for a return call. Hồ arrived at three o'clock in the afternoon: Vĩnh Thụy and his staff greeted him outside and then followed him inside the building, where he was invited into the guest room. Hòe urged the staff to leave the room for fear of disturbing the host and his guest. However, many of them were so fascinated at seeing President Hồ in person for the first time that they were unwilling to leave and remained in the room until Hồ went out to the terrace, taking Adviser Vĩnh Thụy by the arm. On the terrace the two men, arm-in-arm, walked back and forth talking for nearly half an hour. Hòe wrote his impressions of this meeting.

The thin veteran revolutionary leader wore a high-necked khaki shirt and rubber sandals.⁵⁹ Arm-in-arm with him was an overweight young ruler whose cheeks were so plump that they almost covered his eyes. His hair was brushed with oil, and he wore tightly fitting clothing with a chic tie around his neck. His shoes were glossy. This combination of the two demonstrating national unification was a rare and even unique scene in world history.⁶⁰

The contrasting styles of the old and new heads of state symbolized the differences in government, order and era between the former and current regimes. Eventually this unique "national solidarity" would fail. With the outbreak of the First Indochina War at the end of 1946, the two men would end up confronting each other once again: one as leader of the revolutionary government leading a war of resistance against France in the mountains and the other as a head of a state backed up by the French, working in a palace in Sài Gòn.

⁵⁹ On the leader's image symbolized by Hồ Chí Minh's clothes and sandals, see 白石昌也 [Shiraishi Masaya] 「ホーチミンの指導者像に関する一考察：〈ホーチミニティ〉のドラマトウルギー（1）」 (A consideration of Hồ Chí Minh's image as a leader—the dramaturgy of Hochiminity [1]) in 『高崎経済大学論集』 [Essay collections of Takasaki City University of Economics], 30, 3/4 (1988): 83–108. See also Charles Fenn, *Ho Chi Minh: A biographical introduction*, Studio Vista, London, 1971; the Japanese translation is 陸井三郎訳 『ホー・チ・ミン伝』 2 vols., 岩波書店, 1974.

⁶⁰ Phạm Khắc Hòe, *Từ triều đình Huế*, pp. 99–103.