

NGUYỄN TRIỀU

Hoàng Tử Cảnh



the fall of the empire



Forbidden City at Huế



Monsignor Pigneau de Béhaine

With the assistance of the bishop of Adran, Monsignor Pigneau de Béhaine (Bá Đà Lộc) and his mercenaries, Nguyễn Anh, the last survivor of the Nguyễn family arrived at defeating the Tây Sơn, the Peasants of the West, and unifying the country by exercising his sole authority over the whole Vietnamese territory from the border of China to the gulf of Siam. He also gave Huế its splendor and greatness again as the capital city of Vietnam. He became thus our first emperor known as "Gia Long".

Why does Vietnam become an empire? It was initially due to the enlargement of Vietnam by annexing the kingdom of Champa and the Cochinchina of the Khmer people, and especially due to Nguyen Anh being himself a zealous admirer of the Ming dynasty. That is one of the reasons why Hue has an astonishing resemblance to the forbidden city of Peking. The sudden death of emperor Quang Trung Nguyễn Huệ, the squabble among His successors, and Nguyen Anh's own exceptional qualities have enabled him to create and consolidate this empire. He had an incomparable patience, a faultless tenacity, a gifted ability to know how to use talented people such as Võ Tánh, Lê Văn Duyệt etc..., and his humility and magnanimity toward the foreigners particularly the missionaries.

Viet-Nam mon pays natal. Terre des dragons et des légendes.

Đặng Anh Tuấn. © Copyright 2008

Gia Long's recognition towards one of them, the bishop of Adran, Monsignor Pigneau de Behaine was exemplary at the burial of the latter in 1799 in Saigon. He assigned his son to lead the funeral cortege with an imperial guard of more than 12,000 men, not to include the presence of all the dignitaries, his wife the queen, his children, and even his mother.

He owed much of his Crown, his empire to this missionary who had hidden and protected him effectively during the pursuit of the Tây Sơn in the Hà Tiên region, and who had recruited for him the best French volunteers such as **Chaigneau, Vanier, de Forçant** etc... in his conquest of power. Thanks to these volunteers, emperor Gia Long arrived at building a formidable navy that allowed him to gain decisive and glaring victories over the Tay Sơn troops, particularly at Qui Nhon in 1801.

In spite of his territorial conquest, emperor Gia Long is not praised and lauded as much as in the case of emperor Quang Trung Nguyen Hue because he has been blamed of maladroitness for having killed his two travelling

companions (**Nguyễn Văn Thành, Đặng Trần Thường** etc..). His stifling traditionalism, his conservatism and the will to do better than the Chinese model by his indefectible attachment to the mandarinal bureaucracy, his impermeability to modernizational reforms, and his recourse for foreign forces in the conquest of power, all of these worked in favor of the prelude for foreign interventions especially France in Vietnam.

His successors **Minh Mạng, Thiệu Trị** and **Tự Đức** continued to work imperturbably in this absolute conservatism and blinded isolationism while maintaining a policy of persecution of foreign missionaries, French in particular. In spite of **Nguyễn Trường Tộ's** warning memoranda, emperor Tu Duc continued to persist in his disastrous policy, which justified the French intervention by the battleship Catinat's bombardment of Đà Nẵng (former Tourane) in 1856. The suicide of **Phan Thanh Giản** marked not only the end of the French-Vietnamese dialogue but also the disarray of the learned men and the mandarins facing French military power. The exemplary bravery of **Nguyễn Tri Phương** was no longer enough to oppose it. This has inevitably led to the conquest of Vietnam through the following stages:

- from 1867 to 1869, the conquest of Cochinchina,
- Tonkin and Annam (1882-1885)
- and the resistance of learned men (1885-1895).

The passive resistance of emperors **Thành Thái** et **Duy Tân** was no longer enough to save the waning empire. It was the beginning of the colonial organization with a purely French administration in Cochinchina. These changes encouraged the appearance of a middle-class with Western values. In the urban environment, the daily life started to feel some western influence too. In the homes of the bourgeois appeared the first ceiling fans Marinelli, the gramophones distilling all day long one of the songs in vogue of Joséphine Baker protesting her double relationship "I have two loves", beds with mattress and springbox replacing the hard wooden beds. Well to do Vietnamese sent their children to high schools such as Albert Sarraut in the north or Chasseloup-Laubat (which later became Jean Jacques Rousseau in the 60's) in the south or to establishments reserved for the metropolis. **Võ Nguyên Giáp**, **Khái Hưng** come from these schools. Young fortunate students sent to metropolis began to have an attachment with certain liberal ideas. Their view was no longer that of their parents imbibed with a thousand-year old confucian culture; their future was that of a Vietnam more modern and liberal. Then an unknown Vietnamese of the name **Nguyễn Ái Quốc** was part of it. In the regions bordering the Mekong Delta and Central Vietnam, plantations were created, some of which served as a background for **Nhất Linh's**, **Khái Hưng's**, and **Hồ Biểu Chánh's** novels, as well as recently for Cathérine Deneuve's film on Indo-China. It was also the time when writer **Marguerite Duras'** mother was the director of a school for girls at Sadek in the Mekong delta.



The last empress
Nam Phương



The last heir of the throne
Bao Long

For half a century, Indochina became thus a source of raw materials and cheap labor and especially a market permitting the flow of goods from, and of raw materials to the metropolis. This imbalance in the French-Vietnamese rapports inevitably entailed the vindication for independence of Vietnam, which compelled the Vietnamese to first be on the way to revolt (Yên Bái with **Nguyễn Thái Học** for example), then on the road of deportation (**Hàm Nghi, Duy Tân, Phan Bội Châu, Phan Chu Trinh, Huỳnh Thúc Kháng, Phạm văn Đồng** etc...) and finally face to face with the French in a painful war instead of bringing them together in the goodwill of cooperation, dialogue and mutual development advocated by colonel Parfait-Louis Monteil in 1924, one year before his death, or in the way of friendship that was traced by the bishop of Adran, Monsignor Pigneau de Behaine and emperor Gia Long in the building of an empire.

The maladroitness of one, the territorial ambitions of another, the bitterness of one, the kind way of living of another have unavoidably led to misunderstanding and confrontation but nothing affected the friendship that has developed for a century between the two peoples. This friendship has been found between Yersin, the Livingston of Indochina, and the Vietnamese fishermen of Nha Trang, or between Monsignor Pigneau de Béhaine and emperor Gia Long, or between Charles Edouard Hocquart and the Vietnamese people in his photographs. Commissioner Jean Sainteny talked about it in "Histoire d'une Paix Manquée" concerning a meeting with Hồ Chí Minh.

The regrets and sentiments of one toward another have nothing but to strengthen the will to consolidate and perpetuate this friendship forever. The Francophone summit which was held on November 14, 1997 is not foreign to this friendship although only 1% of the Vietnamese population can speak French today.

1802-1945

- Gia Long (1802 - 1820)
- Minh Mạng (1820 - 1841)
- Thiệu Trị (1841 - 1847)
- Tự Đức (1848 - 1883)
- Dục Đức (1883)
- Hiệp Hoà (1883)
- Kiến Phúc (1883 - 1884)
- Hàm Nghi (1884 - 1885)
- Đồng Khánh (1885 - 1889)
- Thành Thái (1889 - 1907)
- Duy Tân (1907 - 1916)
- Khải Định (1916 - 1925)
- Bảo Đại (1926 - 1945)

