

Lưu đày

For keen and sensitive characters, exile is sometimes a form of torture much more cruel than death. Novelist Staël is right to say so. Exile is only an ultimate recourse conceived by a Vietnamese when there is no possibility to live freely, or when he feels frustrated or powerless like the general in retreat of the talented novelist Nguyễn Huy Thiệp in a country snatched away to foreign powers after so many years of effort and sacrifice to fall into a dismal self-colonization.



A great homage to all Boat-People who have perished in the China sea

Exile is not only the beginning of a new life but also the start of a new hope. Sometimes, it is the surest way to shelter oneself from any threat and suspicion. It is the case of Duke **Nguyễn Hoàng**. This one, who had for some years got out victorious from several dazzling battles with the **Mạc**, became the subject of anxiety for his brother-in-law **Trịnh Kiểm** by the end of the years 1554. To monopolize for himself the power, the latter did not hesitate to eliminate **Nguyễn Ưông**, the brother of Nguyễn Hoàng. Facing this intention of malevolence, Nguyen Hoang, worried and distraught, had to discretely send an emissary to the renowned scholar of that time, **Nguyễn Bình Khiêm**, our Vietnamese **Nostradamus** to ask for advice. Arriving at his place of retreat **Bạch Vân am**, the emissary laid down one hundred ounces of gold before the scholar and begged him to give advice. But the scholar continued to be impassive. Only by the end of the interview, he

he stood up with his cane and went toward the garden. Then looking admirably at a miniature decorative artificial mountain made of a dozen gravels tangled together upon which some ants kept on climbing, he began to say:

*Hoành sơn nhất đái vạn đại dung thân
Một dãy Hoành Sơn có thể dung thân được ở đó*

One can take refuge on the side of the Annamitic Range.

The emissary reported to Nguyễn Hoàng what scholar Nguyễn Bình Khiêm had said. Overcome by this tremendous idea, he pretended to have gone crazy and asked his sister **Ngọc Bảo**, the favorite of Trịnh Kiểm to intervene

with the latter so that he be sent right away as governor of Thuận Hóa - Quang nam, known as a corner the most unhealthy and dangerous, inhabited by barbarians and infested with wild cats. But it was here that the Ma.c troops continued warfare. Machiavellian, Trinh Kiểm accepted the request without hesitation because he took this occasion to liquidate not only Nguyễn Hoàng through the intermediary of the Ma.c, but also to squarely fit his legitimacy before the partisans of his deceased father-in-law, general **Nguyễn Kim**. Thanks to this stratagem, Nguyen Hoang succeeded in founding later the Dynasty of nine Nguyen lords in the South. This has permitted one of his descendants of the name **Nguyễn Ánh** (or Gia Long) to start a long march toward the South and later founded the Nguyễn Dynasty. Just the same, Nguyễn Ánh had to spend several years in exile in Bangkok (Thailand) before he could take back the throne.

Exile is not always the Eldorado as one still continues to think it is nowadays in Vietnam, but many times it is the beginning of a dangerous adventure and an endless frightening nightmare. More than a million Vietnamese boat people have perished in this adventure at the mercy of the China sea and Thai pirates during the first years after the fall of Saigon. Those who succeeded in coming out alive continued to be penned like prisoners in camps in Thailand, Malaysia or Indonesia during the 90's. Exile is also the start of a long banishment, the end of a national jump and of a lived experience. It is the case of king Hàm Nghi. After three years of struggle in the mountainous regions of Quảng Bình, he was captured alive November 1st, 1888 following the treason of the Mường chief Trương Quang Ngọc. Despite his capture, he continued to feed doubts among the colonial authorities because they found him to be a young boy of 18 years old, with medium size, so slender in his gait and above all so cultured, which contradicts rumor that Hàm Nghi was a vulgar and rude character placed on the throne by regent Tôn Thất Thuyết. No sign of weakness and fatigue appear on his face after three years of tracking, misery and hunger in these mountainous regions. He continued to remain not only impassive but also silent on his identity before endless questionings from his jailers. Many mandarins were sent on the spot to verify whether the young captive was indeed king Hàm Nghi but none was able to move the latter except the old scholar Nguyễn Thuận.

Seeing the king continuing his enactment, Nguyễn Thuận, tears in eyes, bowed down before him dropping his cane. Facing the sudden appearance of this scholar, the king forgot the role he was playing against his jailers, lifted him up and knelt in front of him: " I beg you, my teacher". At that moment he realized he made a mistake by recognizing this one because Nguyễn Thuận was his tutor when he was younger. He never regretted this gesture because for him the respect toward his teacher went beyond any other consideration. Thanks to this recognizance, the colonial authorities were sure they had captured king Hàm Nghi, which allowed them to pacify Việt-Nam. As for king Hàm Nghi, he was deported at the age of 18 to Algeria. He never saw Vietnam again. Even his body was not returned to Vietnam but was interred at Sarlat (Dordogne, France).

Hàm Nghi



Exile

The attachment of any Vietnamese to his homeland is so profound it is impossible for him not to think of returning to Vietnam and die someday. Exile is only a transition period in his life but it never constitutes an end in itself.