

**A Nôm Source on Nineteenth-Century Vietnamese History:  
Đặng Đức Tuấn's *Thuật tích việc nước nam***

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**I. Introduction**

What does one do with nineteenth century Vietnamese Christians? Over the past thirty-five years, both in Vietnam and in the West, scholars investigating nineteenth century Vietnamese Christianity have explained well what *not* to do. Vietnamese scholarship, for example, has generally reminded us that we should not assume that all Vietnamese Christians were collaborators with the French. This scholarship has emphasized the Vietnamese Catholics who were involved in resisting French aggression in both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.<sup>1</sup> In contrast, beginning with Milton Osborne's 1970 essay on Trương Vĩnh Ký and Phan Thanh Giản and continuing with Mark McLeod's reading of Nguyễn Trường Tộ, Western historians have reminded us that Vietnamese Christians cannot be folded into the nationalist historiographical project. At the same time this scholarship suggests that they cannot be dismissed as proto-French automatons, mindlessly and weakly collaborating with the enemy to destroy their country.<sup>2</sup> In recent years, Australian-based scholars Nola Cooke and Jacob Ramsay have produced sophisticated accounts of the role of Christians in the complex regional political relationships underlying such issues as the southern rebellion of Lê Văn Khôi (1833-1835), and the voices of Vietnamese Christians in published accounts in the French journal *Annales de la Propagation de la Foi*.<sup>3</sup> In her article, Cooke reminds us not to repeat the problematic assumptions of earlier historiography on nineteenth century Vietnamese Catholics, which either "marginalized local Catholics by treating them as a footnote to the larger European economic and political expansion" or, in the case of missionary narratives, turned their stories into parables for "the struggle for truth and enlightenment against falsehood and barbarism."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Phan Khắc Từ, "Nhìn lại tổ chức và phong trào yêu nước của người công giáo Việt nam," *Tạp chí Công san* 86 (2005). Retrieved 13 March 2006 from

[http://www.tapchiconsan.org.vn/show\\_content.pl?topic=4&ID=2915](http://www.tapchiconsan.org.vn/show_content.pl?topic=4&ID=2915); Hữu Hợp and Tố Thanh, "Công giáo Việt nam trong cuộc chiến chống thực dân Pháp xâm lược [1945-1954], *Nghiên cứu lịch sử* 238:1 (1988): 61-65.

<sup>2</sup> Milton E. Osborne, "Truong Vinh Ky and Phan Thanh Gian: The Problem of a Nationalist Interpretation of Nineteenth Century Vietnamese History," *Journal of Asian Studies* 30:1 (November 1970): 81-93; Mark W. McLeod, "Nguyen Truong To: A Catholic Reformer at Emperor Tu-Duc's Court," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 25:2 (September 1994): 313-331.

<sup>3</sup> Jacob Ramsay, "Extortion and Exploitation in the Nguyen Campaign against Catholicism in 1830s-1840s Vietnam," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 35:2 (June 2004): 311-329; Nola Cooke, "Early Nineteenth Century Catholics and Others in the Pages of the *Annales de la Propagation de la Foi*," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 35:2 (June 2004): 261-286.

<sup>4</sup> Cooke, "Early Nineteenth Century Catholics," 261.

This scholarship has done an excellent job of demonstrating the complexity of the struggle over identity and loyalty that nineteenth century Vietnamese Christians faced and has shown the important limitations of both colonial and postcolonial interpretations of Vietnamese Christians. However, its emphasis on negative injunctions and the infinite complexity of nineteenth century Christian intellectuals might still render scholars confused and unsure how to interpret them. This problem is exacerbated by the fact that the dominant view among Vietnamese scholars seems to contradict the dominant view of Western scholars. Most Vietnamese scholarship tends to emphasize the important role of some Vietnamese Christians in resisting the French, while most Western scholarship describes their motivations for capitulating to the French or even their rejection of the Nguyễn in favor of the French. Yet surely nineteenth century Vietnamese Christians could not have been rejecting French imperialism and embracing it at the same time.

The answer may be as simple as avoiding the assumption that all nineteenth century Vietnamese Christians acted alike. The flaw in lumping personalities as diverse as Trương Vĩnh Ký, Phan Thanh Giản, Nguyễn Trường Tộ, and Đặng Đức Tuấn together under a unified mantle of nineteenth century Vietnamese Christianity is easy to see. Moreover, in assigning conflicting negative injunctions on how not to see Vietnamese Christians, it is important not to neglect that many of these figures changed their opinions over time, were internally conflicted about both the French and Nguyễn positions, and had mixed feelings not only about how to reconcile their religious and national identities but also if such a reconciliation was necessary, or even if a conflict in identities existed at all. From this vantage point we can see that for many Vietnamese Christians in the late nineteenth century, taking a stand on the current issues of their time, from French aggression to Nguyễn persecution, involved a complex personal struggle, a negotiation of one's identity in which one's view might change drastically over time or have contradictions that are seemingly difficult to resolve.

The poet, diplomat, writer, and historian Đặng Đức Tuấn (1806-1874) exemplifies this trend. At different periods in his life, this descendent of several well-known Catholic officials who served the Nguyễn dynasty was arrested by the Nguyễn for being a subversive catholic priest, served the Nguyễn as a translator and mediator for the treaty of Saigon, and became a critic of French policies, even though he had been a student or apprentice to several French missionaries who had been instrumental in formulating those French policies.

Father Đặng Đức Tuấn is a complex individual who has left us with several intriguing texts written in six-eight *nôm* verse. These texts concern the history of Christianity in Vietnam, the nineteenth-century history of Vietnam, and the recounting of his own involvement in the negotiations over the Treaty of Saigon in 1862. This paper presents an analysis and commentary on selected passages on the only of Father Tuấn's texts that is available in its original *nôm* form at the Sino-Nom Archives in Hanoi: his *Thuật tích việc nước Nam* (A Narrative of Events in the Southern Country).<sup>5</sup> This text

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<sup>5</sup> Đặng Đức Tuấn, *Thuật tích việc nước nam* (Hanoi: Sino-Nom Institute, ND), ms. AB 196; see also Trần Nghĩa and François Gros, *Di sản Hán-Nôm thư mục đề yếu*, quyển III (Hanoi: Khoa học xã hội, 1993), 278.

displays Đặng Đức Tuấn's complex anticolonial but pro-Christian views. It valorizes early European missionary activity while in the end condemning French imperialism as antichristian. This paper will argue that Father Tuấn uses his narrative of Vietnamese history to justify his position as a strong supporter of Catholic missionaries in Vietnam but an opponent of French aggression. He portrays the best Catholic missionaries and the most effective of Vietnamese emperors as being motivated by the same fundamental values: creating peaceful and orderly communities and fostering tranquility and stability. By making this the theme of his historical narrative, Father Tuấn is able to portray Catholicism as something positive for the Vietnamese state and at the same time is able to condemn the Franco-Spanish expedition of 1858-1862 as the cause of chaos and war.

While preparing this paper, I discovered that *Thuật tích việc nước Nam* appears to be an earlier version of another work attributed to Đặng Đức Tuấn under the title *Việt nam giáo sử diễn ca*, one of several manuscripts by Đặng Đức Tuấn that were apparently discovered in southern Vietnam in the 1960s.<sup>6</sup> While this text is not to my knowledge currently available in nôm form and is not listed under that title in *Di Sản Hán Nôm*, Professor Lam Giang and Father Võ Ngọc Ngã transliterated the text quite accurately into *quốc ngữ* and provided substantial commentary on the meaning and possible significance of the text in their (now rare) 1970 publication *Đặng Đức Tuấn: Tinh hoa công giáo ái quốc Việt nam*. The text of *Việt nam giáo sử diễn ca* does differ in several places from *Thuật tích việc nước nam*, but these differences, which include occasional reversal of word order and substituted vocabulary, are minor.<sup>7</sup> Given my late discovery of this resource, this paper will chiefly discuss the interpretation of the text as a whole rather than difficulties in interpreting specialized vocabulary or rare characters, since those interested in those elements may consult the very similar text in Professor Lam Giang's book. Before examining the text itself, however, let us briefly turn to a discussion of Đặng Đức Tuấn's fascinating background and life.

## II. Đặng Đức Tuấn's Biography

Đặng Đức Tuấn is not the most significant figure in the history of the Đặng Đức clan. That honor goes to his great-grandfather, Đặng Đức Siêu (1750-1810), from Bồng Sơn district in Bình Định province, who became a mandarin at the Hàn-lâm academy in Phú Xuân under the reign of Lord Nguyễn Phúc Thuần (1765-1777).<sup>8</sup> In the late 1780s, after Nguyễn Phúc Ánh reestablished himself at Gia Định, Đặng Đức Siêu fled south to

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<sup>6</sup> Lam Giang and Võ Ngọc Ngã, *Đặng Đức Tuấn: Tinh Hoa Công Giáo Ái Quốc Việt Nam* (Saigon: Tác Giả Tự Xuất Bản, 1970), 5. The authors do not provide any additional details on the circumstances of the discovery of Đặng Đức Tuấn's manuscripts.

<sup>7</sup> To cite just two examples early in the text that are representative of the minor discrepancies between the two versions: *Thuật tích việc nước nam* records the following: “*nước nhà thịnh trị muôn dân an hoà*,” [our country was prospering and the many people were at peace] whereas *Việt nam giáo sử diễn ca*, in an interesting deviation, has the sentence as “*thái bình thịnh trị nhân dân an hoà*,” eliminating the direct reference to the nation. Similarly, *Thuật tích việc nước nam* asks us to “*đổi ơn Chúa Cả nghìn vạn*” [give thanks to God ten million times] where the *Việt nam giáo sử diễn ca* is transliterated as “*Đội ơn Chúa Cả cao quang*” [To give thanks to God on High].

<sup>8</sup> Nguyễn Huyền Anh, *Việt nam danh nhân từ điển* (Saigon: Khai trí, 1967), 56; Nguyễn Q. Thắng and Nguyễn Bá Thế, *Từ điển nhân vật lịch sử Việt nam* (Hanoi: Văn hoá, 1997), 132.

serve him, taking with him knowledge of the Tây Sơn military strategy further north. After that time, he was appointed to the Board of Rites, where he became the major transcriber of royal proclamations for Nguyễn Phúc Ánh. Đặng Đức Siêu was also appointed an assistant to Crown Prince Nguyễn Phúc Cảnh (1779-1801).<sup>9</sup> It was likely in this capacity that he became well acquainted with the Bishop of Adran, Pierre Pigneaux de Béhaine (1740-1799), who in the early 1790s was still recognized as a “governor” for the young crown prince,<sup>10</sup> and on the occasion of whose death he wrote one of his three famous gravestone inscriptions.<sup>11</sup>

Đặng Đức Siêu established an admirable standard for his descendants, many of whom also became officials at various levels. Included in this list was Đặng Đức Siêu’s grandson Đặng Đức Lành, a local official in Bình Định province who have birth to a son, Đặng Đức Tuấn, in 1806. Đặng Đức Tuấn and his two brothers were trained from a young age to study not only the four books and five classics of the Confucian canon but also important Christian texts, thus making them widely and highly educated.<sup>12</sup> Đặng Đức Tuấn became particularly known in his local area for his outstanding grasp of poetry. Undeterred from their studies by the edicts of the Minh Mạng emperor proscribing Christianity in 1825 and the harsh and sometimes arbitrary punishments meted out on Vietnamese Christians during and after the Lê Văn Khôi rebellion (1833-1835), Đặng Đức Tuấn and his older brother Hoá passed the *tú tài* (flowering talent) examination.<sup>13</sup>

In 1841, the new Apostolic Vicar of Cochinchina, Monsignor Etienne Théodore Cuénot (1802-1861), established a number of programs to try to boost the number of indigenous priests in Vietnam, including an effort to recruit talented Vietnamese Christians to study at the Seminary for native clergy in Penang.<sup>14</sup> As part of that effort, the Monsignor offered Đặng Đức Tuấn a position to go to Penang, which Tuấn accepted. During nearly a decade in Penang, Tuấn learned Latin, English, and French, became an expert in teaching both Christian and secular literature in *chữ hán*, as well as canon law and religious history. Upon his return to Vietnam, he was given a position as an assistant to the apostolic vicar of Western Tonkin, Monsignor Jean-Denis Gauthier (1810-1877).

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<sup>9</sup> Lam Giang, *Đặng Đức Tuấn*, 11.

<sup>10</sup> For evidence of the Bishop’s role as “governor” and Nguyễn Phúc Ánh’s requirement that his son pay homage to the Bishop, see Charles B. Maybon, *Histoire moderne du pays d’Annam* (1592-1820) (Paris: Plon-nourrit, 1919), 314. Though there is no direct evidence for this, we may speculate that it is through these encounters that the Đặng Đức clan was converted to Christianity.

<sup>11</sup> Lam Giang, *Đặng Đức Tuấn*, 12; Nguyễn Q. Thắng and Nguyễn Bá Thế, *Từ điển*, 132. The other famed gravestone inscriptions were for Võ Tánh and Ngô Tùng Châu.

<sup>12</sup> Lam Giang, *Đặng Đức Tuấn*, 12; Nguyễn Q. Thắng, *Từ điển tác gia văn hoá Việt nam* (Hanoi: Văn hoá thông tin, 1999), 173.

<sup>13</sup> Lam Giang, *Đặng Đức Tuấn*, 13.

<sup>14</sup> “Notice Biographique: Cuénot, Etienne-Théodore,” *AMEP* Vol. 365. Retrieved 10 March 2006 from <http://archivesmep.mepasie.org/recherche/notices.php?numero=0365&nom=Cuenot>; see also Lam Giang, *Đặng Đức Tuấn*, 13.

The Seminary, the General College for Native Clergy, is a preparatory seminary run by the *Société des Missions Étrangères*.

By the late 1850s, as hostilities between the Nguyễn and Franco-Spanish expeditionary forces began, persecutions of Christians in Vietnam began to reach new heights. Cathedrals were destroyed and Christian communities fled and scattered about Vietnam.<sup>15</sup> Father Tuấn was forced to hide in the houses of other native Christians and take circuitous routes to avoid capture. Finally, at the beginning of 1862, Father Tuấn was imprisoned by Nguyễn officials in the village of Mộ Đức (southeast of Quảng Ngãi). Owing to the fact that he was found with two Western texts, however, Father Tuấn court officials ordered him to be sent to Huế, where they apparently discovered his talent and scholarly pedigree and made him an attaché to the delegation led by Phan Thanh Giản and Lâm Duy Hiệp to Gia Định to negotiate the *nhâm tuất* treaty (Treaty of Saigon).<sup>16</sup> After the *nhâm tuất* treaty was signed, Đặng Đức Tuấn went back to his duties as a priest in various locations, mostly within Bình Định province. Yet he was never fully out of politics. He petitioned the court on several occasions as an advocate of modernization and as an advocate of other reformers such as Nguyễn Trường Tộ (1828-1871) and penning a number of histories, poems, and other works. He died in the hamlet of Chánh Khoan in Bình Định province in 1874.<sup>17</sup>

In Lam Giang's words, Father Tuấn's writing "reveals on the one hand the heart of a man who has suffered the undeserved misfortune of a Catholic but on the other a person who speaks in the direction of the strength of the unity of a people in defending the nation."<sup>18</sup> These qualities are reflected in the narrative of *Thuật tích việc nước nam*, to which we now turn.

### III. Christianity, Order, and Peace: The Text of *Thuật tích việc nước nam*

Father Tuấn begins his narrative history of Vietnam with a retelling of the auspicious beginnings of Christianity in Vietnam. He emphasizes that Christianity came to Vietnam during a time of peace and order, and that in converting the village of An Vực in Thanh Hoá, missionaries provided the light of the gospel improved an already tranquil and prosperous situation in the area. Here are his words:

*Đạo thiên chúa giảng truyền nam thổ,  
Lê Hoàng triều vĩnh tộ cứu niên.  
Thái hoà ngài báu đặc yên,  
Hồng nhận vấn tiếng viễn biên không trần.  
Nửa nghìn gặp hội phong vân,  
Nước nhà thịnh trị muôn dân an hoà.  
Các thầy nước Bút Tu Ga,  
Vâng lệnh toà thánh trái qua Đàng Ngoài.  
Giảng truyền Đạo chúa thiên thai,  
Vệt mây vên ngút phát gai tìm đàng.  
Đội ơn Chúa Cả nghìn vạn,*

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Lam Giang, *Đặng Đức Tuấn*, 15.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 15.

*Kiểm tìm chiêm lạc mở mang đạo lành.  
Làng An Vực trước dành thọ giáo,  
Đầu hết đã hướng đạo hồi tâm  
Từ xưa nẻo lạc đường lầm,  
Điều răn dạy tạc Phúc Âm ghi lòng.  
Non cao biển thẳm mây trùng,  
Ngửa mình yển sáng khắp trong bầu trời,  
An Vực sáng trước mỗi nơi  
Rày còn bia tạc để đời hậu lai.*

*The Christian Path was spread on the Southern ground,  
In the ninth year of the perpetual blessing [reign] of the Lê Dynasty (1628).  
The realm had reached a state of great peace and tranquility,  
And a drifting bird surveying the land would find its distant borders free of dust.  
Five hundred thousand could gather together with the wind and the clouds,  
Our country was flourishing and its many people were at peace.  
Priests from Portugal followed the sacred order to come to Đàng Ngoài.<sup>19</sup>  
Preaching the gospel of the Lord of Heaven,  
The wind whipped up the mist and blew down the roots on the path.  
Ten million thanks be to God,  
The Christian sword quickly opened up the way.  
The village of An Vực<sup>20</sup> was empty before it received the Word,  
In the end, it took the Lord into its heart.  
In the past the way had been lost and difficult,  
But now, the gospel was preached, cherished, and recorded.  
From the lofty mountains to the churning oceans,  
The light of heaven shined completely on everyone.  
An Vực established this before every place,  
And then chiseled it in stone for the generations to come.<sup>21</sup>*

In this passage, Father Tuấn takes the time-honored strategy of equating Confucian conceptions of order, prosperity, and peace with similar Christian beliefs about the importance of peace and justice. This strategy of searching for equivalencies between literati culture and Christianity had been one frequently used by Jesuits in converting literati in China, and had been one of the major ways in which missionaries in Vietnam had tried to “inculturate” Christian beliefs as well.<sup>22</sup> Just as a Confucian scholar who had passed the *tiến sĩ* examination or who had conducted himself nobly as an official might have a stele engraved with his name and accomplishments, so too were steles erected in An Vực to record the coming of the missionaries and the conversion of the village to Christianity. Just as Confucius sought to return Spring and Autumn period

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<sup>19</sup> Portuguese priests had arrived in Cochinchina by 1614. For more information, see Peter C. Phan, *Mission and Catechesis*. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1998).

<sup>20</sup> In the district of Hoàng Hoá, Thanh Hoá province.

<sup>21</sup> Đặng Đức Tuấn, *Thuật tích việc nước nam, fo. I*; see also Lam Giang, *Đặng Đức Tuấn*, 31.

<sup>22</sup> Lionel Jensen, *Manufacturing Confucianism: Chinese Traditions and Universal Civilization* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997), 31-76; David E. Mungello, *The Great Encounter of China and the West* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2005), 20-67; Peter Phan, *Mission and Catechesis*.

China to the peace, prosperity, good government, and tranquility of the reigns of the Sage Kings Yao and Shun, so Christian missionaries valued peace and tranquility as well, and only increased it by shining the light of the gospel on Vietnam.

To Father Tuấn, the success of the mutual Christian/Confucian project of maintaining peace and tranquility can be shown by the fact that in the more than two centuries after the introduction of Christianity, Vietnam experienced relative peace (the division of *Đàng Trong* and *Đàng Ngoài* is entirely glossed over by the text). Moreover, when chaos broke out, the perpetrators of the disharmony, the Tây Sơn, persecuted Christianity. In the meantime, the forces of peace and good government, the Nguyễn, team up with Christians to restore order, thus proving that both the Nguyễn and the Christians were in the right. First, he establishes that in this time Christianity had been doing well:

*Ơn thầy, nghĩa Chúa nào phai,  
Lần hồi mở đại trong ngoài khắp nơi.*

*Thanks to God, the righteous religion had flourished,  
In this time the path had soared out everywhere.<sup>23</sup>*

But the coming of the Tây Sơn upsets the applecart both for good government and for Christians:

*Hai trăm năm đã có hơn,  
Chiêu Thống kế vị Tây Sơn dấy loạn.  
Cho hay thiên vận tuần hườn,  
Thanh suy, biến diệc, nguy an đổi dời.*

*After more than two hundred years,  
Chiêu Thống (Illustrious Government) had been on the throne, [but] the Tây Sơn  
created chaos.  
And so heaven's will came full circle,  
Abundance was transformed to decline, peace to danger, changing and shifting.<sup>24</sup>*

Here, Father Tuấn uses the double meaning of the reign title of the last Lê emperor, Chiêu Thống (r. 1787-1789), to emphasize that good government had in fact been the norm in Vietnam for more than two hundred years. The span of time that Father Tuấn gives shows the association between Christianity and good government, since the period of slightly more than two hundred years also coincides the establishment of Christianity in Vietnam. The connection becomes even more apparent when Father Tuấn emphasizes that a Christian missionary, Bishop Pigneaux de Béhaine, is responsible for saving the country and restoring unity and order:

*Đạo truyền có chúa gây nên,  
Lang sa nội giảng khắp miền Việt nam.*

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<sup>23</sup> Đặng Đức Tuấn, *Thuật tích*, fo. II; Lam Giang, *Đặng Đức Tuấn*, 38.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

*Bá Đa Lộc làm giám mục,  
Chấn chiên lành dưỡng dục khi song.*

*[When] The way of the Lord had become emaciated,  
The French came in to preach throughout all the regions of Vietnam.  
Pigneaux de Béhaine became the Bishop,  
And he nurtured, reared, and tended his Christian flock like no other.<sup>25</sup>*

As Father Tuấn quickly explains, it was not just the Vietnamese Christians who enjoyed the Bishop's tender nurturing, but "all of the weeping areas of Nam Việt." In addition, the Nguyễn clan received literal nurturing through the Bishop's role as surrogate father of Prince Nguyễn Phúc Cảnh, the "little crown prince" who goes with the Bishop on a trip France and India to recruit Westerners to come to the aid of the Nguyễn.<sup>26</sup> For Father Tuấn, Pigneaux's actions bring about unification and peace in Vietnam. Even though the Bishop dies in 1799, three years before the Nguyễn are able to win a definitive military victory over the Tây Sơn, the Bishop was still the person ultimately responsible for the reunification and pacification of Vietnam, as Father Tuấn explains when telling the story of the Bishop's death:

*Lòng giúp nước cứu dân mỗi,  
Việc giảng truyền mọi nơi chưa an.  
Nào hay biến cuộc sưng tang,  
Cõi trần từ tạ Thiên đường nghĩ ngơi.  
Đức vua thương tiếc rụng rời  
Mất tay tả hữu mất người phúc tâm.*

*Having a heart to help save the country and its sick people,  
Preaching the word everywhere there was not yet peace.  
His budding knowledge transformed the circumstances and made things clear,  
From dust and decline he nursed the heavenly path back to good health.  
The righteous king was stricken with panic,  
He had lost his left hand man, lost the person at the center of his heart.<sup>27</sup>*

Thus, when Nguyễn Ánh, with the help of the French volunteers, succeeds in reunifying the country in 1802, it is thanks to the efforts of Bishop Pigneaux.<sup>28</sup> Once again, the efforts of good Christians and those of righteous monarchs were one and the same: to restore order and promote peace, tranquility, and good government in the land.

By the 1830s, as persecutions of Christianity became common, the road to peace and tranquility was lost, and this would have disastrous consequences for both the legitimate Nguyễn rulers and their Christian subjects. As someone who worked painstakingly to prove his loyalty to the Nguyễn, Father Tuấn must discuss the

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<sup>25</sup> Đặng Đức Tuấn, *Thuật tích*, fo. IV; Lam Giang, *Đặng Đức Tuấn*, 50-51.

<sup>26</sup> Đặng Đức Tuấn, *Thuật tích*, fo. IV-V; Lam Giang, *Đặng Đức Tuấn*, 50-53.

<sup>27</sup> Đặng Đức Tuấn, *Thuật tích*, fo. VII; Lam Giang, *Đặng Đức Tuấn*, 59.

<sup>28</sup> Đặng Đức Tuấn, *Thuật tích*, fo. IX; Lam Giang, *Đặng Đức Tuấn*, 67-68.

persecutions without explicitly blaming the Emperor Minh Mạng (1820-1840) who is doing the persecuting. He manages this by emphasizing that the origins of the persecutions lie in the Dương Sơn incident of 1831. A land dispute between the mostly Christian village of Dương Sơn, which lies several dozen kilometers northwest of Huế, and the neighboring village of Cổ Lão led to an armed skirmish for which the court eventually blamed the Christians and sentenced them to harsh prison sentences.<sup>29</sup> The court also blamed a French missionary, Father François Jaccard (1799-1838), for the violence and sentenced him to death, though the sentence was not enforced and was effectively commuted to house arrest in Huế.<sup>30</sup> By arguing that an ill-considered local dispute was the origin of the Christian persecutions in nineteenth-century Vietnam, Father Tuấn could effectively continue his explanation of how the forces of confusion and chaos prevented both Christians and the Nguyễn from seeing the correct path without seeming disloyal:

*Máy thiên tạo hoá xoay vần,  
Khôn lường ý nhiệm, khôn phân lý màu.  
Dương Sơn, Cổ Lão cơ cầu,  
Kiện nhau giới hạn, thanh nhau đất làng.*

*Things were slowly changed and became confused  
The world descended and rightness weakened, the world divided and reason was  
lost;  
Dương Sơn and Cổ Lão created  
A continuous dispute with each other their boundary and their land.<sup>31</sup>*

The unwise and “confused” actions at Dương Sơn led to the Christian path being obscured to the persecution of missionaries and Vietnamese Christians through the 1850s, and ultimately to the invasion of Vietnam by the joint forces of the Franco-Spanish military expedition led by Rigault de Genouilly in 1858. Even though this Franco-Spanish was undertaken under the aegis of the Pope in order to protect Christians in Vietnam from persecution Father Tuấn will not abide it:

*Ít ngày nghe chuyện rõ ràng,  
Tây Dương tàu sứ Cửa Hàn dạo chơi.  
Trước đã bày chuyện báo đời,  
Rày còn tái lại, trời ơi là trời!*

*Only a few days after the message became clear,  
Western ships were sent on a mission to overpower Cửa Hàn.  
Before all the generations the news was announced,  
Now the multitudes all told the officials: Oh no, oh no!<sup>32</sup>*

<sup>29</sup> See Jacob Ramsay, “Extortion and Exploitation,” 315.

<sup>30</sup> “Notice Bibliographique: François Jaccard,” *AMEP* Vol. 348. Retrieved 10 March 2006 from <http://archivesmep.mepasie.org/recherche/notices.php?numero=0348&nom=Jaccard>

<sup>31</sup> Đặng Đức Tuấn, *Thuật tích*, fo. XI; Lam Giang, *Đặng Đức Tuấn*, 73.

<sup>32</sup> Đặng Đức Tuấn, *Thuật tích*, fo. XVI; Lam Giang, *Đặng Đức Tuấn*, 73.

Rather than regarding the French imperialists as welcome saviors, Father Tuán saw the French aggression as the disastrous culmination of the cycle of persecution, violence, and war.

#### **IV. Conclusion**

Catholic intellectuals of the late nineteenth century like Father Tuán were placed in a very difficult position. Many of them still felt some degree of loyalty to the Nguyễn, though surely that loyalty was tempered by the fact that for decades Nguyễn emperors had persecuted their religion and, in the case of Father Tuán, even imprisoned them. But on the other hand, Father Tuán recognized that the loss of Vietnamese territory to the French was not a desirable solution to the problem of Christian persecution in Vietnam. Given these complex sentiments, Father Tuán attempted to legitimate his opinions through recourse to a narrative of Vietnamese history based on the joint ideals of peace, order, and harmony that he saw as inherent in both the Confucian and Christian tradition. When good rulers and good Christians influenced Vietnam, order prevailed; but when they did not, chaos broke out. Since war with the French was the ultimate disruption of order and tranquility, it could be seen as the bad consequence of Christian persecution rather than as a legitimate attempt to stop such a persecution. For Father Tuán, history becomes the thread that he is able to tease through the small eye of the needle that he has created for his own complex anti-imperialist Christian identity.