

“SWEATING BUFFALOES” AND CHAOTIC ARCHIVES:

NGUYEN PAPERWORK AND VIETNAM’S BUREAUCRATIC OPERATION, 1802-1841

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Declaration

I hereby declare that the thesis entitled “‘Sweating buffaloes’ and chaotic archives: Nguyen paperwork and Bureaucratic operation, 1802-1841” has been carried out at the Hamburg University, under the guidance of Prof. Dr. Kai Vogelsang and Prof. Dr. Thomas Engelbert. The work is original and has not been submitted in part or full by me for any degree at any other university.

I further declare that the material obtained from other sources has been duly acknowledged in the dissertation.

Date: 15 October 2020

Place: Hamburg



開基全武略
求治闡文功
萬姓同瞻仰
光天化日中

Opening the state by military strategies
Sustaining the governance by civil techniques.
All subjects are submitted [to the monarch].
The sky is bright because of the sun.

Emperor Minh Menh, r. 1820-1841

*Although you inherited the Chinese Empire on horseback,
you cannot rule it from that position.*

Lu Txia teaching to the Great Khan Ogodei

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Abstract

**"SWEATING BUFFALOES" AND CHAOTIC ARCHIVES: NGUYEN
PAPERWORK AND VIETNAM'S BUREAUCRATIC OPERATION,
1802-1841**

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This is a story of how written correspondence and paperwork changed the way human beings govern their society, organize their state, and forge their political identity. It reflects the struggle of early modern statecraft in the defining tasks of centralization, bureaucratization, and institutionalization by using practical writings, official documents, and archived paperwork. The Nguyen dynasty had engaged with one of the most important political projects in pre-colonial Vietnam through which emerged the foundation of a centralized state. Unified Vietnam was first established in 1802 under Gia Long Emperor (r. 1802-1820) but heavily suffered from factionalism and regional tensions. The second emperor, Minh Menh (r. 1820-1841), transformed Gia Long's unfinished Vietnam through a massive project of political centralization, bureaucratic institutionalization, and territorial homogenization. He introduced complex correspondence infrastructures, Grand Secretariat (1830), provincial system (1831-32), and Grand Council (1835).

Most importantly, significant changes came to regional-central communication and the consolidation of inner palace structures. The former created the environment in which paperwork operated while the latter turned the Grand Palace into an influential headquarter of paperwork and decision-making. The centralization of the flows of official documents reshaped both Hue's power landscape and the bureaucratic mechanisms under which the realm was governed. Gia Long's military-oriented bureaucracy was an incomplete state-and-territory project where the audience of high-ranked officials (*Congdong*) played significant roles in delivering central authority. That was the era of the *'politics of Congdong paperwork.'* Minh Menh's designs of administrative documents and correspondence reveal the intricate evolutions of the Nguyen administration. Complex governing tasks and large-scale military operations demanded thorough transformations of the inner court. The second emperor showed significant interests in personal rule and recording bureaucratic operations in papers. He demanded frequently updated information and to work directly with memorials. In his view, routine and periodic official reports were

indispensable channels of state governance. They were assisted by additional confidential and express correspondence, which was initiated during the 1820s-30s. Thanks to these bureaucratic innovations, Hue entered the '*politics of edicts*' and the '*politics of vermilion endorsements*.'

Finally, the evolution of paperwork played a critical role in delivering imperial and state authority. The maneuver of Hue's deliberative structure was responsible for governing efficiency and bureaucratic accountability of the state. The success, however, came with no low cost. There are no better metaphors to indicate the Nguyen dynasty's struggles for paperwork, institutions, and correspondence than '*sweating buffaloes*' and '*chaotic archives*.' They mirror the Nguyen's fights for centralizing governance and documenting the state between 1802 and 1841. The tasks generated tremendous pressures on the bureaucracy because of underfunding and staff-shortage. As a result, official communication, paperwork, and institutional designs captured enormous portions of the society's time, energy, commitment, resource, and imagination with the belief that the more administrative records were at work, the more advanced and accountable the governance became.

On the contrary, the Kafkaesque spectre of complex paperwork, as seen in mid-1830s Vietnam, prevented many initiatives of bureaucratic reform. Minh Menh's experiments of paperwork between 1820 and 1841 illustrate the vulnerability of early modern bureaucratic operations in facing the increasing demands of centralizing state authority and documenting state affairs. This challenge is not unique to the Vietnamese but adds a valuable case study to understand early modern statecraft in East Asia better.

Keywords: Nguyen dynasty, political culture, paperwork, Minh Menh emperor, Nguyen palace manuscripts, imperial archive

Abstract

„Schwitzende Büffel“ und chaotische Archive: der Schriftverkehr am Hofe der Nguyen und Vietnams bürokratische Vorgänge, 1802 – 1841

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Diese Arbeit beschäftigt sich mit der Frage, wie schriftliche Mitteilungen und offizieller Schriftverkehr die Art und Weise veränderten, mit der Menschen die Gesellschaft regeln, den Staat organisieren und politische Identität schaffen. Sie untersucht die Anstrengungen eines frühen modernen Staatswesens, mit Hilfe informeller schriftlicher Mitteilungen, offizieller Dokumente und eines archivierten Schriftverkehrs die Aufgaben zu definieren, die mit Zentralisierung, Bürokratisierung sowie Institutionalisierung verbunden sind. Damit brachte man eines der wichtigsten politischen Projekte im vorkolonialen Vietnam auf den Weg: die Schaffung der Grundlagen eines modernen Landes. Unter Kaiser Gia Long (reg. 1802 – 1820) wurde Vietnam 1802 zum ersten Mal vereint, aber das Land musste sich mit Fiktionalismus und regionalen Spannungen auseinandersetzen. Der zweite Kaiser Minh Menh (reg. 1820 – 1841) führte jenen Prozess, den Gia Long begonnen aber nicht zu Ende geführt hatte, fort, indem er die politische Zentralisierung, bürokratische Institutionalisierung und territoriale Vereinheitlichung weiter vorantrieb. Von besonderer Bedeutung waren hierbei die Einführung eines strukturierten Korrespondenznetzes, eines „Hohen Sekretariats“ (1830); eines Systems der Provinzen (1831-32) sowie eines „Hohen Rates“ (1835).

Die Kommunikation zwischen den Regionen und der Zentrale wurden tiefgreifend verändert und die Strukturen des Herrscherhaus konsolidiert. Mit Ersterem schuf man Verwaltungsstrukturen für den offiziellen Schriftverkehr, mit Letzterem wurde das Herrscherhaus zu einer einflussreichen Kommandozentrale des offiziellen Schriftverkehrs wie der Entscheidungsfindung. Die Zentralisierung dieses Schriftverkehrs bedeutete nicht nur eine Neugestaltung des Machtgefüges von Hue, sondern auch jener bürokratischen Mechanismen, deren man sich bei der Regierung dieses Gebietes bediente. Die auf das Militär ausgerichtete Bürokratie Gia Longs führte zu sehr unzulänglichen Beziehungen zwischen Staat und Territorium. Die Untergebenen hochrangiger Beamter und Offiziere spielten die entscheidende Rolle bei der Durchsetzung der Autorität der Zentrale. Es war die Epoche der „Politik des offiziellen Schriftverkehrs der Congdong“. Die Form und das Format der Verwaltungsdokumente und der offiziellen Korrespondenz unter Minh Menh veranschaulichen, zu welcher komplizierten Veränderungen es in der Verwaltung der Nguyen kam. Gewaltig Regierungsaufgaben und groß angelegte militärische Operationen

erforderten eine umfassende Transformation des inneren Herrschaftsapparats. Der Kaiser legte großen Wert auf persönliche Herrschaftsausübung und klar dokumentierte Verwaltungsabläufe. Er ordnete an, dass alle Informationen und Nachrichten unverzüglich auf den neuesten Stand gebracht wurden und dass er über unmittelbaren Zugang zu den Schriftstücken seiner Beamten verfügte. Standardisierte und periodisch wiederkehrende Berichte stellten unabdingbare Kommunikationskanäle staatlichen Regierungshandelns dar. Diese Berichte wurden durch vertrauliche Express-Mitteilungen ergänzt, die als Reaktion auf jene Gewaltausbrüche eingeführt wurden, die in den 20er und 30er Jahre des 19. Jahrhunderts die Gesellschaft erschütterten. Es begann nun die „Politik der Edikte“ und die „Politik der „Zinnoberroten Vermerke“.

Diese grundlegende Umgestaltung spielte eine entscheidende Rolle bei der Durchsetzung kaiserlicher und staatlicher Autorität. Nicht nur die geschickten politischen Manöver und die persönliche Durchsetzungsfähigkeit des Kaisers, sondern auch diese ausgeklügelten Strukturen trugen wesentlich zur Effizienz der Regierungsarbeit und zu einer stärkeren Verantwortlichkeit des bürokratischen Apparats bei. Dieser Erfolg war allerdings mit hohen Kosten verbunden. Es gibt keine besseren Metaphern als „schwitzende Büffel“ und „chaotische Archive“ um jene Auseinandersetzungen zu beschreiben, die mit diesem Schriftverkehr, seine Institutionen und deren Mitteilungen verbunden waren. Sie spiegeln die schweren Auseinandersetzungen wieder, welche die Nguyen zwischen 1802 und 1841 auszufechten hatten, um die Regierungsarbeit zu zentralisieren und zu dokumentieren. Aufgrund der Unterfinanzierung und des Mangels an qualifiziertem Personal bedeuteten diese Aufgaben eine gewaltige Herausforderung für den bürokratischen Apparat. Denn diese Form der Kommunikation, des Schriftverkehrs und des institutionellen Gefüges sowie die Vorstellung, dass ein mehr an Berichten der Verwaltung auch zu größeren Fortschritten und einer besseren Kontrolle der Regierungsarbeit führen würde, kosteten enorme Mengen an Zeit, Energie, Engagement sowie anderer gesellschaftlicher Ressourcen. Die Kafkaesque Entwicklung, die Mitte der 30er Jahre des 19. Jahrhunderts zu beobachten war, letztlich als erwies sich kontraproduktiv. Sie verhinderte viele Reforminitiativen und führte in Hue zu immer neuen Umorganisationen führte, mit denen man die Auswirkungen jener komplexen Dokumentenflut Herr zu werden versuchte, die immer ausgefeiltere Regelungen hervorrief und die Effizienz des Regierungsapparats beeinträchtigte. Die Experimente im offiziellen Schriftverkehr, die unter Minh Menh in die Wege geleitet wurden, veranschaulichten die Schwächen und die Verwundbarkeit staatlichen Dokumentationswesens und einer auf Bürokratie basierten Autorität in einer Welt vormoderner Nationalstaaten aber auch die Anstrengungen eines frühen modernen Staatswesens im traditionellen Ostasien.

Stichworte: Nguyen Dynastie, Politische Kultur, offizieller Schriftverkehr, Kaiser Minh Menh, Nguyen Palast-Manuskripte, kaiserliches Archiv.

Tóm tắt

**“TRÂU TOÁT MÔ HÔI” VÀ CÁC VĂN KHỐ HỒN LOẠN: VĂN BẢN HÀNH
CHÍNH TRIỀU NGUYỄN VÀ SỰ VẬN HÀNH CỦA NỀN HÀNH CHÍNH VIỆT
NAM, 1802-1841**

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Đây là câu chuyện về văn bản hành chính và sự can dự của chúng vào một trong những dự án chính trị lớn nhất của lịch sử Việt Nam thời tiền thực dân. Ở đó, văn bản hành chính không chỉ đóng vai trò là phương tiện truyền tải thông tin mà còn là công cụ quyền lực và biểu tượng cho tính chính thống của nhà nước trung ương.

Nước Việt Nam hiện đại được phôi thai với công cuộc thống nhất lãnh thổ và xây dựng nhà nước tập quyền bắt đầu với sự trị vì của hoàng đế Gia Long (1802-1820) và Minh Mệnh (1820-1841). Cấu trúc chính trị, lãnh thổ, thực hành văn hóa... mà họ xác lập trở thành khuôn khổ cho sự định hình các giá trị và bản sắc của Việt Nam trong hơn một thế kỷ sau đó. Chính vì thế việc tìm hiểu nền hành chính đầu thế kỷ XIX cho thấy cách thức mà Việt Nam đã ra đời như thế nào và nhà nước đã sử dụng công cụ hành chính, thủ pháp chính trị nào để cai trị Việt Nam trong bước đầu này.

Tầm quan trọng của câu chuyện về văn bản hành chính, thông tin liên lạc và thiết lập thể chế của triều Nguyễn là ở chỗ nó phản ánh cách thức văn bản thành chính góp phần vào dự án chính trị sơ kỳ hiện đại, nơi có nhiều biến động nhanh chóng về kinh tế, xã hội, và đòi hỏi vai trò lớn và khả năng bao quát cao của nhà nước. Chính vì thế, đây là nỗ lực nhằm tham gia vào một cuộc vận động chính trị có tính toàn cầu về tập trung hóa quyền lực, thống nhất hóa hệ thống hành chính và lãnh thổ thông qua chuẩn hóa văn bản hành chính, quy tắc thông tin liên lạc và liên hệ giữa các cấp chính quyền, giữa chính quyền trung ương và địa phương. Văn bản hành chính không chỉ được coi là phương tiện của truyền tin mà quan trọng hơn là tạo ra môi trường cho sự vận hành của thiết chế nhà nước. Dòng chảy của văn bản như mạch máu trên cơ thể của bộ máy quan liêu. Vì thế, sự chuyển đổi không ngừng của hệ thống chính trị triều Nguyễn từ 1802 đến 1841 đã giúp tạo ra các cách thức vận hành nhà nước theo hướng ngày càng tập trung và được giám sát chặt chẽ, từ ‘*nền chính trị văn bản Công đồng*’ tới ‘*nền chính trị các bản dụ*’ và ‘*nền chính trị châu phê*’. Kết quả này không chỉ giúp củng cố sự thống nhất của Việt Nam mà còn thực hiện các ý đồ đế chế và mở rộng ra khu vực của vua Minh Mệnh.

Tuy nhiên, ở khía cạnh khác của quản trị nhà nước, việc sử dụng văn bản hành chính và xây dựng thiết chế cho hệ thống văn bản hành chính cho thấy những vấn đề nhà nước sơ kỳ hiện đại ở Việt Nam phải đối mặt. Cuộc đấu tranh vùng miền và các khuynh hướng chính trị đã gây ra các tranh chấp lớn về cách thức tổ chức hệ thống chính trị. Xung đột này chủ yếu giữa phe quân sự chủ yếu từ miền Nam và miền Trung với nhóm các học giả bắc Hà được đỡ đầu bởi các nhân vật như Nguyễn Văn Thành, Đặng Trần Thường, Vũ Trinh... những người đã tìm cách phát triển hệ thống hành chính thời bình cho Việt Nam sau năm 1802 nhằm thay thế cho bộ máy chiến tranh cũ. Vấn đề thứ hai mà hệ thống hành chính triều Nguyễn gặp phải liên quan đến quá trình văn bản hóa quá chi tiết nền hành chính, làm cho hệ thống trở nên phức tạp, và gây ra sức ép lớn lên các cơ quan trung ương và hệ thống lưu trữ. Việc sử dụng quá nhiều văn bản liên quan đến việc Minh Mệnh không đặt niềm tin vào con người mà là thể chế và ‘giấy trắng mực đen’. Chính vì thế gây ra tình trạng ‘trâu toát mồ hôi’ vận chuyển văn bản và các văn khố hoàng cung hỗn loạn. Từ giữa những năm 1830s, hệ thống hành chính ở Huế buộc phải tiến hành cắt giảm văn bản. Hệ thống hành chính phức tạp và giấy tờ bừa bộn này rõ ràng không chỉ là hệ quả của thử nghiệm chính trị của Minh Mệnh mà còn là một vấn đề có tính lịch sử của bộ máy quan liêu ở Việt Nam, một đặc trưng của nền văn hóa chính trị Việt Nam. Điều này rõ ràng không đơn thuần là đặc trưng riêng có của Việt Nam mà còn giúp hiểu rõ hơn về nền hành chính Đông Á thời sơ kỳ hiện đại.

Từ khóa: văn bản hành chính, châu bản, lịch sử chính trị, triều Nguyễn, Gia Long, Minh Mệnh, lịch sử Việt Nam

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Vũ Đức Liêm

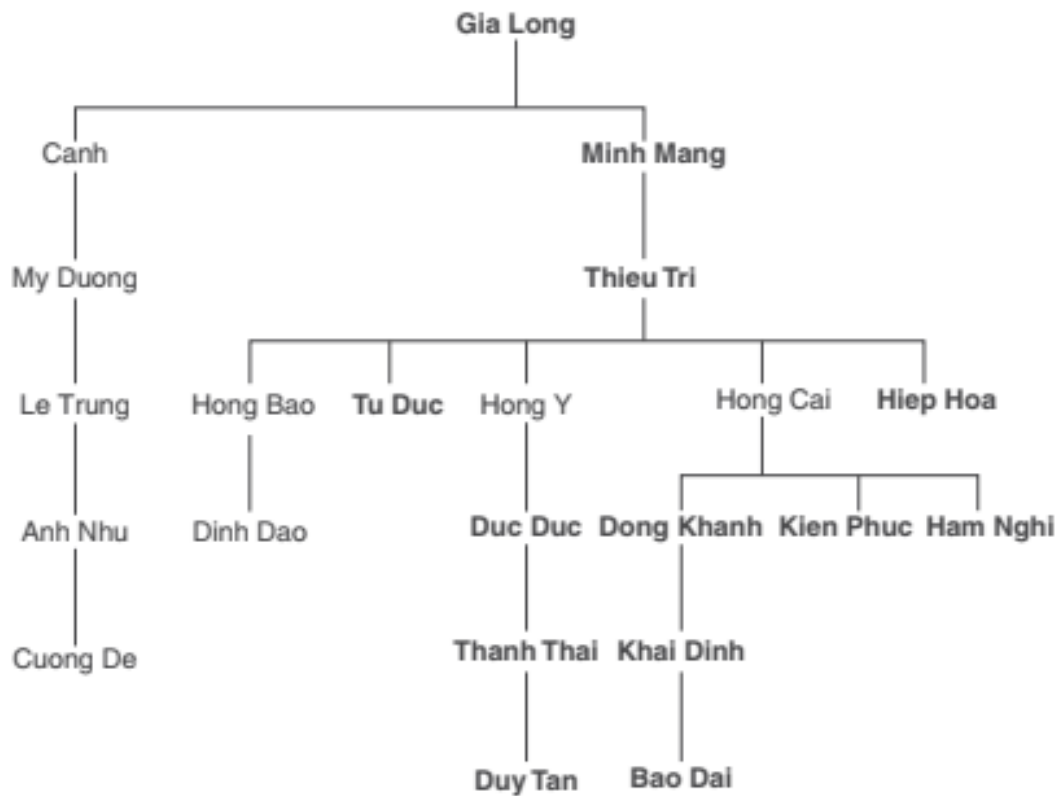
Hamburg
October 2020

Reign Titles of the Nguyen Emperors (1802-1945)

(with abbreviations used in the text and notes)

No.	Abbreviation for the ruling reigns	Reigns	Vermilion records	Abbreviations
1	GL	嘉隆 Gia Long, 1802-1820	嘉隆硃本	GLCB
2	MM	明命 Minh Mệnh, 1820-1841	明命硃本	MMCB
3	TT	紹治 Thiệu Trị, 1841-1847	紹治硃本	TTCB
4	TD	嗣德 Tự Đức, 1847-1883	嗣德硃本	TDCB
5	DD	育德 Dục Đức, 1883	Do not exit.	
6	HH	協和 Hiệp Hòa, 1883		
7	KP	建福 Kiến Phúc, 1883-1884		
8	HN	咸宜 Hàm Nghi, 1884-1885		
9	DK	同慶 Đồng Khánh, 1885-1889	同慶硃本	DKCB
10	ThT	成泰 Thành Thái, 1889-1907	成泰硃本	ThTCB
11	DT	維新 Duy Tân, 1907-1916	維新硃本	DTCB
12	KD	啟定 Khải Định, 1916-1925	啟定硃本	KDCB
13	BD	保大 Bảo Đại, 1926-1945	保大硃本	BDCB

The Nguyen dynasty genealogy



Source: Keith Taylor (2013): 648.

Abbreviations used in the notes

Ch.,	Chinese
DNTL/ <i>shilu</i>	<i>Đại Nam thực lục</i> 大南寔錄 (Nguyen Veritable Records).
DVSKTT	<i>Đại Việt sử ký toàn thư</i> 大越史記全書 (Complete History of Dai Viet).
GL1	First-year of the Gia Long reign [1802], and so on...
HDSL/ <i>huidian</i>	<i>Khâm định Đại Nam hội điển sự lệ</i> 欽定大南會典事例 (Official Compendium of Institutions and Usages of Imperial Dai Nam)
HDSLTB	<i>Khâm định Đại Nam hội điển sự lệ tục biên</i> 欽定大南會典事例續編 (A Continuation of the Official Compendium of Institutions and Usages of Imperial Vietnam)
HTCBML	<i>Hoàng triều châu bản mục lục</i> 皇朝硃本目錄 (Catalogue of the Vermilion records of the Imperial dynasty)
HVDDC	<i>Hoàng Việt nhất thống dư địa chí</i> 皇越一統輿地志 (Geographical Records of the Unified Imperial Viet).
HVLL	<i>Hoàng Việt Luật Lệ</i> 皇越律例 (Laws and Regulations of Imperial Viet, or The Gia Long Code).
JFK Library	The John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum.
KDTB/ <i>fanglue</i>	<i>Khâm định tiểu bình lưỡng kỳ nghịch phi phương lược chính biên</i> 欽定勦平兩圻逆匪方略正編 (The Official compendium of rebel suppression in the northern and southern territories of the Empire).
KDBK	<i>Khâm định tiểu bình Bắc kỳ nghịch phi phương lược chính biên</i> 欽定勦平北圻逆匪方略正編 (The Official compendium of rebel suppression in the northern territory of the Empire, 1836).
KDNK	<i>Khâm định tiểu bình Nam kỳ nghịch phi phương lược chính biên</i> 欽定勦平南圻逆匪方略正編 (The Official compendium of rebel suppression in the southern territory of the Empire).
KDVSTGCM	<i>Khâm Định Việt Sử Thông Giám Cương Mục</i> 欽定越史通鑑綱目 (The Imperially Ordered Mirror and Commentary on the History of the Viet, 1884).
MM	Minh Mệnh (1820-1841)
MM1	First-year of the Minh Mệnh reign [1821], and so on...
MMCY	<i>Minh Mệnh chính yếu</i> 明命正要 (Abstracts of the Minh Mệnh policies)
MMNC	<i>Ngự chế văn</i> 御製文 (Minh Mệnh's imperial writings)
NA1	Trung tâm Lưu trữ Quốc gia I, Hà Nội (National Archives Number I, Hanoi).
NTCB	<i>Châu bản triều Nguyễn</i> 阮朝硃本 (Vermilion records of the Nguyen dynasty)
QSDB	<i>Quốc sử di biên</i> 國史遺編 (Lost Records of the State History)
V.,	Vietnamese

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Note on technical matters

Reigns and date

The new Nguyen reign title names began on the first Lunar New Year' Day following the death of the previous ruler. As a result, Minh Menh emperor ruled under the Gia Long reign title while finishing the remaining months of his father's final year. Thieu Tri Emperor had ruled for twenty days under his father's ruling title (Minh Menh) before ascending the throne on 10/02/1841. Emperors also had personal names, tabooed during the Nguyen, and posthumous titles, dedicated only to deceased rulers.

	Lunar calendar	Western calendar	Ruler
Gia Long reign title	5/1/1802	07/02/1802	King Gia Long
	13/05/1806	28/06/1806	Emperor Gia Long
	19/12/1819	03/02/1820	
	1/1/1820	14/02/1820	Emperor Minh Menh
Minh Menh reign title	1/1/1820	14/02/1820	Emperor Minh Menh
	28/12/1840	20/1/1841	Emperor Thieu Tri
	28/12/1840	20/01/1841	
Thieu Tri reign title	19/1/1841	10/02/1841	Emperor Thieu Tri

Dates in the Nguyen paperwork, *shilu* (the Nguyen Veritable records), *huidian* (dynastic statutes), etc., are rendered following the Lunar calendar, in order: year/month/day. Where necessary, western equivalents will be given in parentheses.

Place names, personal names, and title names

A wide range of proper names, place names, title names, organizational names... both in China and Vietnam are recalled in this thesis. Romanization of the classical Chinese is provided to allow compatibility with their use in common references in the field. Names of people, places, titles that belong to present-day China will be presented using the Pinyin system while those belong to present-day Vietnam are written in modern Vietnamese Romanized scripts. Classical Chinese characters are given where necessary. A table of place names, people's names, and official terms are provided at the end of this thesis for the sake of keeping track of diverse terminologies and proper names used in this thesis.

On languages and technical terms

The material for this dissertation includes sources in Sino-Vietnamese (Nom), classical Chinese, simplified Chinese, and Vietnamese Romanized scripts (Quoc Ngu)... Where appropriate, I have included other languages in the text. When not clear from the context, linguistic origins for Vietnamese (V.) and Chinese (Ch.) terms are clarified. Chinese pronunciations are in standard Chinese (Mandarin) unless otherwise indicated.

For Sino-Vietnamese and Chinese biographic sources, I have used contemporary standard Vietnamese pronunciation and pinyin Romanization. However, for the sake of accuracy, Sino-Vietnamese, traditional and simplified written Chinese employed in the biography, which includes sources published before and after the advent of simplified written Chinese in the PRC.

With the exertion of the main text, names of people, places, and official titles in Vietnamese will be introduced with full diacritical marks.

Vietnamese units of measurement

Cân 斤	600 grams, cf. Chinese <i>jin</i>	
Hộc 斛	5 liters	
Phương 方	38.5 liters	
Đầu 斗	1 liter or 0.91 quarts (dry).	
Đồng 銅	1 cash	
Bách (mạch) 陌	60 cash of copper coin.	
Quan 貫	600 cash	
Lý 里	600 meters	
Mẫu 畝	3600 square meters, or 0.9 acres.	
Sào 巢	360 square meters, or 0.09 acres.	
Trượng 丈	4.44 meters	
Tầm 尋	2.2 meters	
Thước/ xích 尺/ 雉	0.44 meters	
Thôn/ tấc 寸/ 掣	0.044 meters	

Source: Le Thanh Khoi (1955); Nguyễn Thế Anh (1971).¹

¹ Le Thanh Khoi, *Le Việt-Nam: Histoire et Civilization* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1955); Nguyễn Thế Anh, *Kinh Tế và Xã Hội Việt Nam Dưới Các Vua Triều Nguyễn* (Vietnamese Economy and Society under the Nguyen Dynasty) (Saigon: Lửa Thiêng, 1971).

Principal events mentioned in the text

1428	Establishment of the Le dynasty (1428-1789)
1460-1497	Le Thanh Tong reign
1771-1802	Tayson movement
8/2/1762	Birth of Gia Long Emperor (Nguyen Phuc Anh)
<i>King Nguyen Phuc Anh</i>	
1780	Nguyen Phuc Anh proclaimed himself king in Saigon, age 18.
1785	Nguyen Phuc Anh found refuge in Siam.
Autumn 1788	Nguyen Phuc Anh retook Saigon.
8/1788	<i>Congdong</i> was established.
3/1790	Nguyen Phuc Anh ordered palace secretaries to record the royal daily journey.
12/1790	Regulating the <i>Opening Seal-box rite</i> .
25/5/1791	Birth of Nguyen Phuc Dam (Minh Menh Emperor).
13/06/1801	Nguyen Phuc Anh captured Phu Xuan (Hue).
21/04/1802	The casting of imperial, five armies, and <i>Congdong's</i> seals.
<i>King Gia Long</i>	
1/06/1802	Nguyen Phuc Anh proclaimed the Gia Long ruling title.
20/07/1802	Gia Long captured Thang Long (Hanoi). Vietnam was unified.
1802	Establishment of the Northern region. Nguyen Van Thanh appointed General-Commander of the North
1802	Gia Dinh (Saigon) was ordered to report once a month to Hue
1802	First Nguyen diplomatic envoy to China.
1803	Appointing 25 staff to the palace office.
1803	Recording time and date of postal transportation for official supervision.
1803 (3 rd month)	Setting the time-limit for postal-delivery between Gia Dinh and the Capital.
1803 (3 rd month)	Regulating taboo characters.
1803 (5 th month)	Regulating the court audience.
1803 (5 th month)	Casting authenticated seals for palace offices and <i>Congdong</i> .
1803 (7 th month)	Reconstructing the metropolitan school
1803	Gia Long received Qing's official recognition.
1804	Gia Long named the country "Vietnam".
1804	Presenting official regulations and bureaucratic rankings.
1804	Casting the Six Board seals.
1804 (7 th month)	Regulating postal transportation between northern and southern regions and the Capital.
1805 (1 st month)	Construction of the meeting halls for civil and military offices. Reregulating court audiences.
1805 (1 st month)	Civil and military offices begun to report daily affairs at the Hall of Diligent Politics.
1805 (7 th month)	Construction of the Hall of Great Harmony.
<i>Emperor Gia Long</i>	
28/06/1806	Gia Long proclaimed himself emperor at the Hall of Great Harmony.
1806	The first regional examination.
1808	Establishment of the Southern region.
1808 (7 th month)	Casting copper seals for southern commanderies.

1808 (7 th month)	Regulating postal transportation.
1808 (12 th month)	Commanderies from Quang Binh to Binh Thuan: recording their daily affairs and report to Hue once a month.
1809 (7 th month)	Six Board presidents were first appointed in full.
1811 (1 st month)	Local and board officials must sign their names on documents for authentication.
1812 (1 st month)	Setting regulations for transferred documents between postal offices and the palace
1812	The Gia Long code was implemented.
1812	Le Van Duyen appointed General-governor of the South
1812 (7 th month)	Constructing new postal stations
1814 (7 th month)	Adding couriers to the postal networks along rivers and waterways in the Lower Mekong
1815 (7 th month)	Establishing the rules for declaring names in memorials.
1816	The Northern region sent officials back to Hue for reporting three times a month
07/04/1816	Nguyen Phuc Hieu [Dam] appointed crown prince, age 25.
14/04/1816	Casting a silver seal for the crown prince Regulating the crown prince-issued document-types
1817	Nguyen Van Thanh committed suicide, age 59
1819	Le Van Duyet and Pham Dang Hung appointed superintendents.
3/2/1820	Death of Emperor Gia Long, age 58
<i>Emperor Minh Menh</i>	
14/2/1820	Minh Menh Emperor enthroned at the Hall of Great Harmony.
1820	The founding of the Office of Records and Books
1820	Casting authenticated seals for officials.
1820	Regulating express postal delivery
1821	Minh Menh's northern tour
1821	The founding of the Bureau of State History
1821	Founding of the State Academy
1822	The first metropolitan examination
1824	Introducing of the <i>tally suggestion</i>
1824	Compiling <i>Imperial writings</i> , the first collection
1825	Construction of the Hall of Books-storage
1825	Deaths of Pham Dang Hung and Trinh Hoai Duc
1828	Founding of the Postal Office
1826	Construction of the Eastern Hall, the palace archive
1826	Death of Le Chat, age 57
1826	Phan Ba Vanh rebellion
1827	The Northern commanderies were in a direct communication with Hue.
1827	Regulating postal delivery by horses.
1827	The defeat of the Phan Ba Vanh rebellion.
1827	Presenting official regulations and bureaucratic ranks.
1828 (3 rd month)	Truong Dang Que first appointed palace secretary.
1828	Ha Tong Quyen appointed palace secretary
1828	Regulating the use of imperial seals.
1830	Founding of the Grand Secretariat
1830 (1 st month)	Truong Dang Que and Phan Thanh Gian first appointed grand secretaries.
1830	Ha Tong Quyen first appointed grand secretary.
1831	Establishment of the provincial system in the Red River delta.
1832	Greetings palace memorials
1832	Death of Le Van Duyet, age 68.

1832	Introducing the provincial system in the lower Mekong.
1832	Founding of the Censorate.
1832	Postal bamboo tubes for paperwork delivery.
1833 (4 th month)	Truong Dang Que first appointed the President of the Board of Defense and in charge of the Censorate.
1833	Le Van Khoi rebellion.
1833	Siamese invasions.
1833	Nong Van Van rebellion.
1834	Introducing the Abstract Dynastic Statutes (14 volumes).
1834	Western protectorate [direct rule over Cambodia].
1835	The founding of the Grand Council.
1835 (1 st month)	Truong Dang Que, Nguyen Kim Bang, Phan Ba Dat, and Phan Thanh Gian first appointed grand councilors.
1835	The founding of the Transmission Office.
1835	Presenting regulations for exchanged documents.
1836	Greeting palace memorials in charge by the Grand Council.
1836	Cadastral survey of the Lower Mekong.
1836	Compiling of the <i>Military strategies</i> .
1837 (12 th month)	Reregulating the <i>tally suggestion</i> .
1838	Minh Menh renamed Vietnam to Dai Nam (the Great South)
1839	Death of grand secretary Ha Tong Quyen, age 41
1840	Death of grand secretary Hoang Quynh
1840	Truong Dang Que appointed superintendent, age 47
20/1/1841	Death of Emperor Minh Menh, age 50
10/02/1841	Thieu Tri enthroned at the Hall of Great Harmony, age 34

Significant people mentioned in the texts

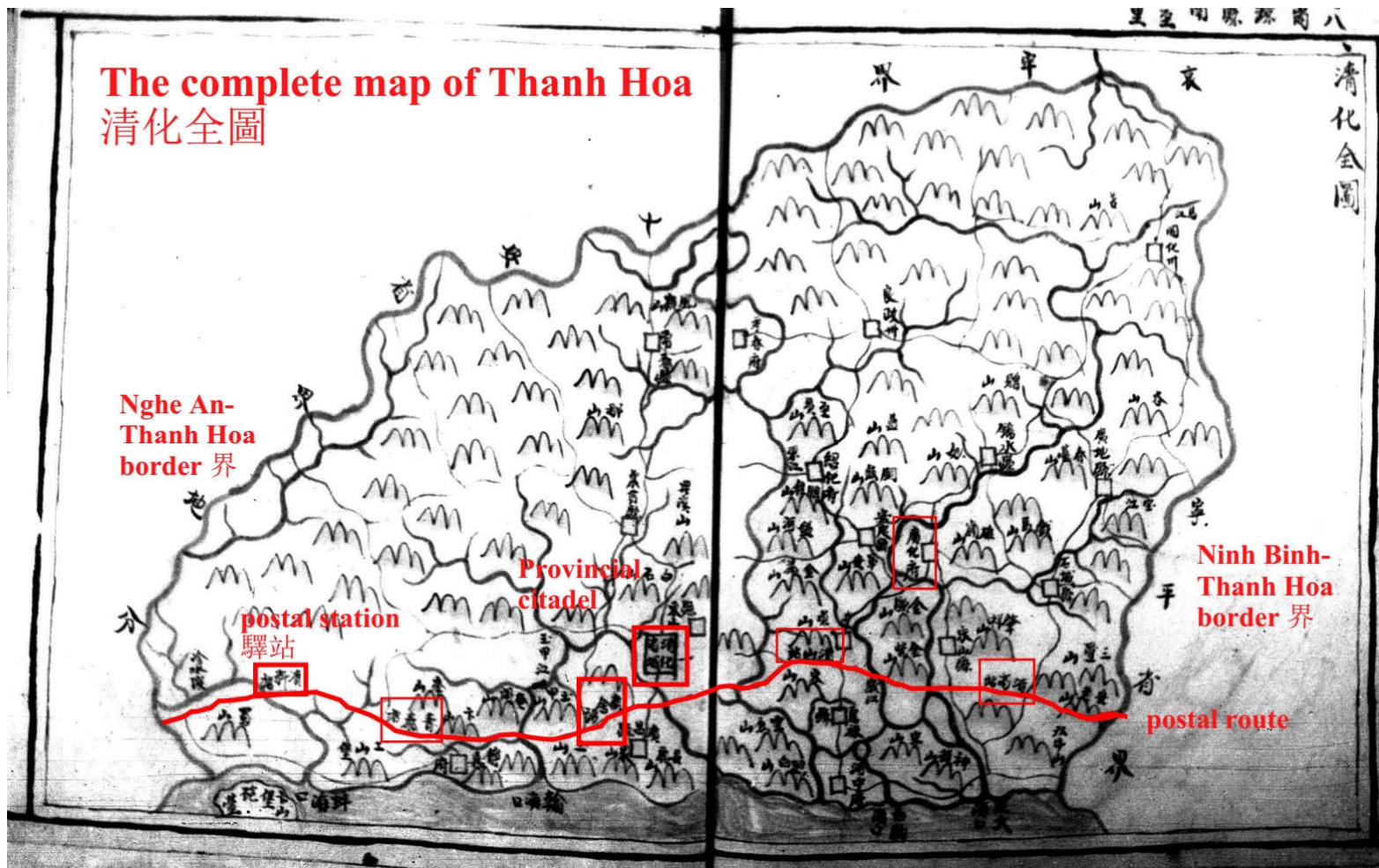
Names	Roles	Notes
Cảnh Hưng	Lê Emperor, r. 1740-1786	d. 1786
Doãn Uẩn	General-governor	d. 1850
Đặng Đức Siêu	President of the Board of Rites, Minh Menh's mentor	d. 1810
Đặng Trần Thường	President of the Board of Defence	d. 1816
Hà Duy Phiên	Board president, privy councilor	
Hà Tông Quyền	Grand secretary and privy councilor	d. 1839
Han Yu	Tang scholar and governmental official	d. 824
Heshen	Qing grand secretary and grand councilor, executed in 1799	d. 1799
Hồ Quý Ly	Founder of the Ho dynasty, r. 1400-1407.	d. 1407
Hoàng Kim Hoán	Chief of Hanlin Academy, Manager of State Academy, and Vice Board President.	d. 1830
Hoàng Kim Xán	President of the Board of Justice and General-governor	d. 1832
Hoàng Ngũ Phúc	Lê-Trịnh general commander	d. 1776
Hoàng Quýnh	Palace secretary, grand secretary, imperial emissary	d. 1839
Hu Weiyong	Ming chancellor, executed in 1380	d. 1380
Jiaqing	Qing Emperor, r. 1796-1820	d. 1820
Kangxi	Qing emperor, r. 1661-1722	d. 1722
Lê Bá Tú	Grand secretary	
Lê Duy Hoán	Leader of the Le family, executed in 1816.	d. 1816
Lê Đại Cương	General-governor, superintendent of the Cambodia affairs	d. 1847
Lê Đăng Doanh	Imperial emissary, board president, privy councilor	d. 1848
Lê Quang Định	Board president	d. 1813
Lê Quý Đôn	Scholar and Lê government official	d. 1784
Lê Thánh Tông	Lê Emperor, r. 1460-1497	d. 1497
Lê Tông Chất	Commander of the Rear Army and General-Commander of the North	d. 1826
Lê Trọng Thử	Scholar and Lê government official	d. 1783
Lê Văn Công	Palace secretary, imperial emissary	
Lê Văn Duyệt	Commander of the Left Army, Commander of the imperial guards, General-Commander of Gia Dinh, and superintendent of the early Minh Menh court.	d. 1832
Lê Văn Khôi	Rebel leader	d. 1834
Lý Trần Quán	Scholar and Lê government official	d. 1786
Lý Văn Phức	Vice board-president, envoy to China.	d. 1849
Lương Tiến Tườg	Board president.	
Ngô Đình Giới	Mentor of Minh Mệnh and Thiệu Trị	
Ngô Nhân Tịnh	Board president	d. 1813
Nguyễn Công Trứ	Vice board-president, General-governor, Vice-Army commander, Vice Censor-in-Chief	d. 1858
Nguyễn Du	Vice board-president, envoy to China	d. 1820
Nguyễn Đăng Giai	Nguyễn Đăng Tuân's son, board president, general-governor, imperial commissioner, grand academician	d. 1854
Nguyễn Đăng Tuân	Mentor of Thiệu Trị and Tự Đức,	d. 1844
Nguyễn Đức Xuyên	Commander of the War-elephant Army	d. 1824
Nguyễn Gia Cát	Academician, vice board-president, envoy to China	
Nguyễn Hữu Thân	Board president, Assistant General-commander of the Northern region	d. 1831
Nguyễn Khoa Minh	President of the Board of Public Works.	d. 1837
Nguyễn Phúc Ánh	Gia Long emperor	d. 1820

Nguyễn Phúc Cảnh	Gia Long's eldest son and crown prince	d. 1801
Nguyễn Phúc Đảm	Minh Menh Emperor	d. 1841
Nguyễn Phúc Miên Tông	Thieu Tri Emperor	d. 1847
Nguyễn Phúc Mỹ Đường	Gia Long's grandson and Minh Menh's competitor for the throne.	d. 1849
Nguyễn Trãi	Lê scholar and official.	d. 1442
Nguyễn Tri Phương	Imperial emissary, grand secretary, grand councilor, army commander, imperial commissioner, superintendent.	d. 1873.
Nguyễn Trung Mậu	Grand secretary	
Nguyễn Văn Nhân	Commander of the Imperial Guards	d. 1821
Nguyễn Văn Thành	Northern General-Commander	d. 1817
Nguyễn Văn Thoại	Army general and superintendent of Cambodian affairs.	d. 1829
Nguyễn Văn Thuyên	Nguyễn Văn Thành's son	d. 1816
Nguyễn Viên	Scholar, Gia Long advisor, and drafter of Congdong documents	d. 1806
Nhữ Đình Toán	Scholar and Lê government official	d. 1773
Nông Văn Vân	Rebel leader	d. 1836
Phạm Đăng Hưng	President of the Board of Rites	d. 1825
Phạm Đình Hồ	Le scholar, Nguyen dynasty chief of the State Academy, Hanlin Academician Recipient of Edicts, and royal lecturer of the first rank	d. 1839
Phạm Quý Thích	Scholar and Lê government official	d. 1825
Phạm Văn Nhân	Commander of the imperial guards	d. 1815
Phan Bá Đạt	Doctoral degree holder, Vice Censor-in-chief, grand councilor	d. 1846
Phan Bá Vành	Rebel leader	d. 1827
Phan Huy Chú	Governor of the capital, author of <i>Categorized Records of the Institutions of Successive Dynasties</i>	d. 1840
Phan Huy Thục	President of the Board of Rites	d. 1844
Phan Thanh Giản	Grand secretary, privy councilor, and imperial commissioner, grand academician	d. 1867
Phan Thúc Trục	Scholar and Nguyễn government official	d. 1852
Phan Trọng Phiên	Scholar and Lê government official	d. 1798
Phan Văn Thúy	Army general	d. 1833
Qianglong	Qing Emperor, r. 1735-1796	d. 1799
Tạ Quang Cự	Commander-in-chief, general-governor, imperial commissioner	d. 1862
Thân Văn Quyền	Palace secretary, grand secretary	d. 1836
Tống Phước Lương	Commander of the Navy	
Trần Công Tuấn	Palace secretary	
Trần Danh An	Scholar and Lê government official	d. 1794
Trần Hựu	The compiler of the Gia Long Code	
Trần Lợi Trinh	Board president	d. 1829
Trần Văn Năng	Army general	d. 1834
Trịnh Hoài Đức	President of the Board of Revenue and Minh Menh close advisor, grand academician	d. 1825
Trương Đăng Quế	Grand Secretary, President of the Board of Defense, grand councilor, imperial commissioner, grand academician	d. 1863
Trương Minh Giảng	Board president, superintendent of the Cambodia affairs	d. 1841
Trương Tiến Bửu	Army general	d. 1827

Vũ Trinh	The compiler of the Gia Long Code, and drafter of Congdong documents and court letters.	d. 1828
Vũ Xuân Cẩn	General-governor, board president, grand academician	d. 1852
Yongle	Ming Emperor, r. 1402-1424	d. 1424
Yongzheng	Qing Emperor, r. 1722-1735	d. 1735
Zhu Yuanzhang	Ming Emperor, r. 1368-1398	d. 1398

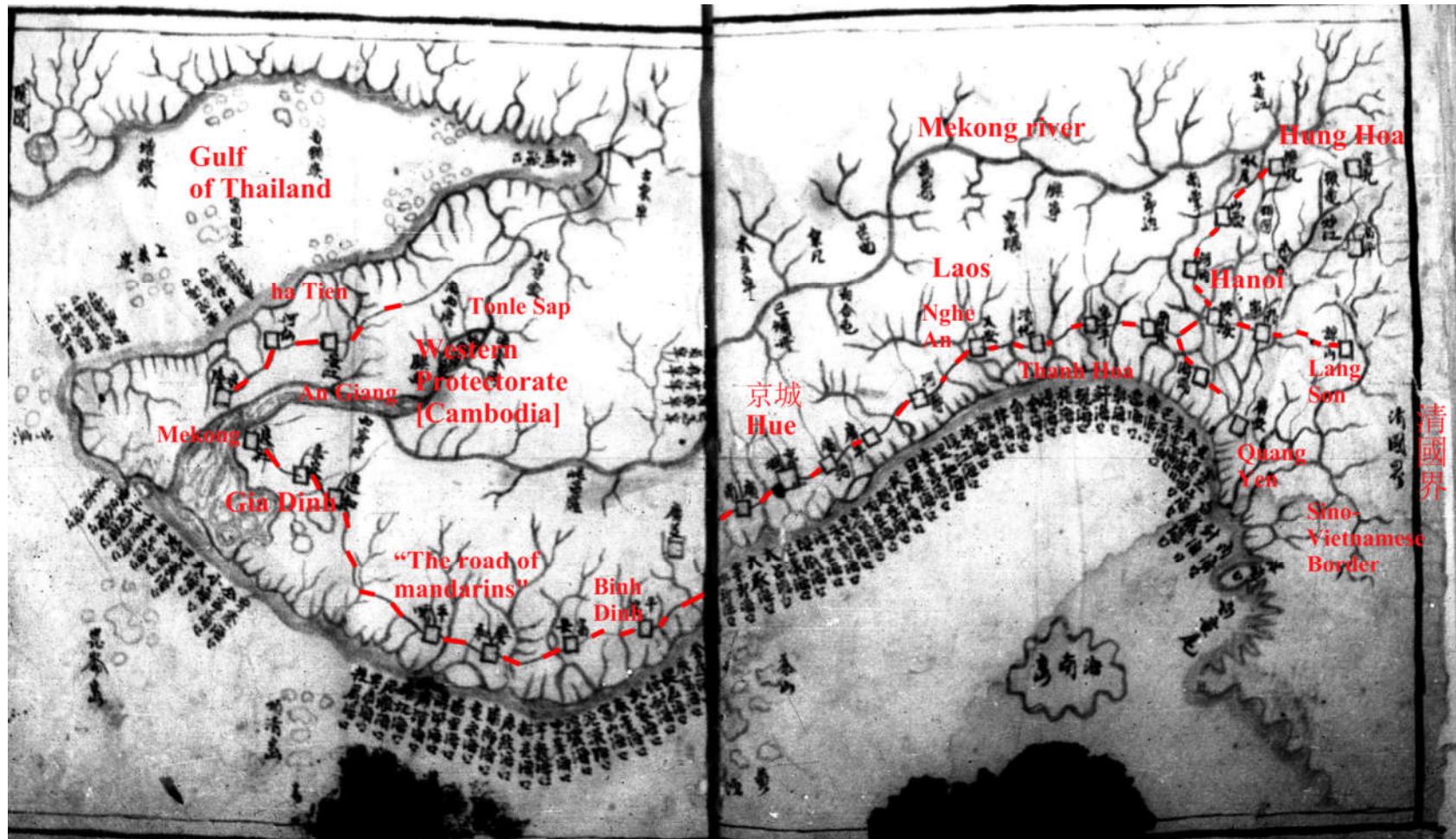


Map 1. Vietnam in 1835 (Alexander Woodside 1988)



Map 2. The complete map of Thanh Hoa Province 清化全圖, (the 1840s?) with 'postal route'/'the road of mandarins' 官路 and postal stations 驛站

Source: The Complete Maps of Dai Nam/ 大南全圖, EFEO Microfilm, A. 2959: 37.



Map 3. The complete map of the Great South 大南全圖, (the 1830s?), included 31 provinces 省, 62 seaports 海口, and the postal route from Sino-Vietnamese border to the Western Protectorate 鎮西城 [Cambodia]

Source: The Complete Maps of Dai Nam 大南全圖, EFEO Microfilm, A. 2959: 3.

CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION

文武之政，布在方策。

The government of Kings Wen and Wu is laid out on the wood and bamboo tablets

The Doctrine of the Mean 中庸

There is nothing of the slightest moment done here, in public matters, without writing - whereas at Siam, on the other hand, it was found impossible to get the officers of Government to commit a single sentence to the paper upon almost any subject.

John Crawford, 1822

I. 1. "Sweating buffaloes"

The year was 1833. A postal bamboo-tube 驛筒 dispatched from Hung Hoa province 興化省, containing important military-involved files, was heading to Hue- the capital 京城 of imperial Vietnam, laying 700 km south of Hanoi. Both the Grand Palace and the kingdom were in days of turmoil. Earlier, news of Le Van Khoi 黎文儂 rebellion in lower Mekong came amidst kingdom-wide insurrections. Across the northern region 北圻, ethnic minorities and lowland starving peasants rebelled in unparalleled scales that could reasonably place the ruling Nguyen dynasty in peril.¹

Correspondence packages of the Hung Hoa's kind were Minh Menh's behests. The second emperor, of the family that ruled unified Vietnam since 1802, was anxiously waiting for frontier updates. The documents came to his desk in early June 1833, however, with a surprise. Among the expected reports was an anonymous letter 匿名書 lamented northerners' miserable lives because of private debts 北圻各省民庶為私債苦迫情狀. It indicated that, clearly, someone had opened the sealed postal package along the transporting process. The emperor was outrageous, not because of the debt-collectors but the anonymous letter itself, which violated the communicational rules he had dedicated tremendous time and energy to establish. He declared, "this practice cannot be prolonged" 此風斷不可長也,² and issued an edict

¹ See more on the Nguyen's political and military challenges in Vu Duc Liem. "Vietnam at the Khmer Frontier: Boundary Politics, 1802–1847," *Cross-Currents: East Asian History and Culture Review* 5, no. 2 (2016): 534–64; idem, Village rebellions and social violence in early nineteenth century Vietnam, in *A Global History of Violence in the Early Modern World*, eds., Erica Charters, Marie Houllemare, and Peter Wilson (Manchester University Press, 2020), 52-70.

² *Đại Nam thực lục* 大南寔錄 (Nguyen Veritable records). (Tokyo: Institute of Cultural and Linguistic Studies, Keio University, 1961-1977), hereafter: *DNTL*, Second reign (II), book 94: 27b.

appointing a considerable number of literati in officialdom and leveraging the use of paperwork on an unprecedented scale. With the design that aimed at documenting state affairs and utilizing written correspondence to operate the bureaucracy, the emperor found himself discouraged amid a flood of official files and disorganized archival holding. Here are his own words of lamenting:

為政之道貴在簡要。向見諸衙所上文書，因循辦過多涉煩碎，若不均量減省則汗牛充棟，將不勝繁。又恐承辦太多，或於重大事體，竟致疏誤。⁵

The way of doing politics is essentially based on simplicity. So far, records submitted by governmental institutions are too complicated and detailed. Unless reducing the document-volume, they are too chaotic; buffalos are sweating because of transporting them; (if) collecting them together, they can be as high as the roof of the storehouse; [the paperwork is thus] calling for excessive works that can potentially cause erroneous and confusing to the crucial affairs".

The 1833-episodes of postal transmission and document-storage reveal significant aspects of bureaucratic operation in nineteenth-century Vietnam: the interrelation between paperwork, administrative correspondence, and decision-making. They embodied one of the most momentous transformations of the early modern bureaucracy under which the dynastic administrative culture was shaped. The following pages are a story of its evolution and subsequent challenges of documenting and recording the state, which is mirrored by no better metaphoric images than the "sweating buffaloes" and "chaotic archives". Paperwork was at the centre of a bureaucratic dilemma on communication, official records, and institutional designs. Official documents, as this thesis suggests, played essential roles in shaping the Nguyen political identity. They were recognized as symbols of state power and a medium of institutional constructions, which are both vividly exhibited on the pages through layouts, structures, and paratexts. The use of paperwork was critical to the transformation of early nineteenth-century Vietnam. Institutional changes, centralizing state, personal rule, territorial consolidation, pacifying rebellions, and imperial expansion would be impossible without consolidating an efficient communication structure. Not only were skillful manoeuvre and personal perseverance responsible for accomplishing the modern Vietnamese contour, but the flow of paperwork and official communication.

This study examines dynastic administrative records and the practice of paperwork production as part of the state operation. Paperwork or official documents

⁵ DNTL, II, 109: 13b.

refer to all forms of practical writings dedicated to bureaucratic functions. In traditional Vietnamese and Chinese administrative systems, they were generally defined by the term "公文" *cong van*, lit., "public documents". Given their highly complex history and diverse genres, this research, however, focuses on documents that involved the Grand Palace and palace archives. These papers reach the highest levels of bureaucratic management and decision-making. In the Ming and Qing administrative and archival contexts, the palace documents are known as *gong zhong dangan* 宮中檔案, while most of the extant Hue palace archives are now labeled as *chauban* 硃本 (vermilion records).

The use of multiple official document types will be explored by revealing their distinctive functions, symbolic meanings, textual patterns, and paratexts. These features allow the reconstruction of the correlation between statecraft performance and document-production. The Nguyen's centralized state-project (1820-1841) brought back the discontinued tradition of promulgating Neo-Confucianism as the dominant state ideology.⁶ Networks of local education and literati-involved institutions were reestablished after three decade-disruption by the Tayson uprising (1771-1802).⁷ The Nguyen administrative operation returned the stage to scholar-officials, whose flourish was believed to signal an age of peace, prosperity, civility, and complex governance.⁸ The shifting authority from army generals to the learned officials resulted in the promotion of practical writing as the predominant medium of governance in which paperwork manifested the relationship between monarch and the bureaucrats, between rulers and the ruled.

Official papers and state documents played essential roles in the traditional Vietnamese bureaucracy. The use of "literary Sinitic"⁹, well-defined textual formats,

⁶ The tradition prevailed from the fifteenth century Le dynasty but heavily disrupted by civil wars and internal conflicts between 1527 and 1802. See John Kremers. Whitmore, "The Development of Le Government in Fifteenth Century Vietnam" (Ph.D. Thesis, Cornell University, 1968); idem, "Chiao-Chih and Neo-Confucianism: The Ming Attempt to Transform Vietnam," *Ming Studies* 1977, no. 1 (January 18, 1977): 51–92; and Lê Kim Ngân, *Tổ Chức Chính Quyền Trung Ương Dưới Triều Lê Thánh Tông (1460-1497)* (*Organization of the Central Government under the Le Thanh Tong Reign (1460-1497)*), (Saigon: Bộ Quốc Gia Giáo Dục, 1963).

⁷ For a glimpse of those three decade turmoil and warfare, see Vũ Đức Liêm, "The Age of Sea Falcons: Naval Warfare in Vietnam, 1771-1802," in *Warring Societies of Pre-Colonial Southeast Asia: Local Cultures of Conflict Within a Regional Context*, ed. Kathryn Wellen and Michael Charney (Copenhagen: Nordic Institute of Asian Studies, 2017), 103–29. For an example of the local private academy, see Nguyễn Tuấn Cường, "Private Academies and Confucian Education in the 18th Century Vietnam in East Asian Context: The Case of Phúc Giang Academy," in *The International Workshop Confucian Academies in East Asia* (Berlin, 2017).

⁸ See, for instance, the role of civil officials at the Minh Menh court in Figure 1.3 Minh Menh's ego network, 1820-1835, based on Nguyen veritable records.

⁹ As the documents were written in classical Chinese and Sino-Vietnamese scripts, I adopt here the term coined by Victor H. Mair, 'literary Sinitic'. See Victor H. Mair, *The Columbia History of*

symbolic wordings, and paratextual arrangement was institutionalized "as part of an ideological apparatus" and practical mechanisms that "demanded and created a certain kind of imperial political subject".¹⁰ That paperwork authority was activated as part of the ideological foundation for empire-construction and conducting statecraft. Beyond vehicles of information, those documents embodied visualization of political hierarchy. They defined the mechanism in which the empire operated through the connection between central and local bureaucracy, between the inner and outer courts. The inner court refers to the emperor's working space within the palace compound, mostly including palace secretaries and assisted organizations.¹¹ There, the networks of paperwork-circulation could be reconstructed and served as a map of the Nguyen administration. Determined by sophisticated regulations, the paperwork's movement highlights the process of power consolidation and demonstrates the interrelation between the functions of official papers and institutional designs in early modern statecraft.

This study attempts to enrich our understanding of the Vietnamese political culture on aspects of official documents, bureaucracy, and governance by telling an institutional and social story of paperwork. Although the Nguyen political history, and to a lesser extent, dynastic institutions, have been subjected to some scholarly interests, our knowledge of the topics is far from settled.¹² The present examination is among

Chinese Literature (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001); idem, "The Classification of Sinitic Languages: What Is 'Chinese'?", *Breaking Down the Barriers* 1 (2013): 735–54.

¹⁰ Christopher Connery examined the role the classics projected a 'roadmap' for 'empire' in ancient China and how the ideas were so powerful to the practitioners (the literati 士) and rulers of the Sinicized zones. Christopher Leigh Connery, *The Empire of the Text: Writing and Authority in Early Imperial China* (Boulder: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1998): 1. The most important classical discussion on textual genres and their political implication was Liu Xie's *The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons*. Chinese version: Liu Xie 劉勰, 文心雕龍 *Wenxin Diaolong* (*The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons*), (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1987); and English translation, Liu Xie, *The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons: A Study of Thought and Pattern in Chinese Literature*, Transl. with an Introd. and Notes by Vincent Yu-Chung Shih (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959). For an useful examination of 'textual genres' and 'order', see Wai-Yee Li, "Between 'Literary Mind' and 'Carving Dragons': Order and Excess in Wenxin Diaolong," in *A Chinese Literary Mind: Culture, Creativity and Rhetoric in Wenxin Diaolong*, ed. Zong-qi Cai (Stanford, C.A.: Stanford University Press, 2001), 193–225. I have also drawn some connections to the Vietnamese bureaucratic tradition of paperwork in Vũ Đức Liêm, "Biểu Tượng Hóa Ngôn Ngữ Quyền Lực: Cấu Trúc và Tổ Chức Văn Bản Học Của Văn Bản Hành Chính Hoàng Cung Triều Nguyễn, 1802-1841 (*The Art of Visualizing Authority: Structural Organization of the Nguyen Bureaucratic Manuscripts, 1802-1841*), in *Bảo Tàng Cổ Vật Cung Đình Huế* (*Hue Museum of Royal Fine Arts*), Vol. 8 (Huế: Thuan Hoa, 2017), 40–70.

¹¹ See Figure 1.2. Hue's power networks visualized through paperwork flows. Also, for the Qing inner-court system, see Beatrice S. Bartlett, *Monarchs and Ministers: The Grand Council in Mid-Ch'ing China, 1723-1820* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 13–14.

¹² See Trần Quốc Vương and Hà Văn Tấn, *Lịch Sử Chế Độ Phong Kiến Việt Nam, Tập 1* (*History of the Vietnamese Feudal System, Vol. 1*) (Hà Nội: Giáo dục, 1960); Phan Huy Lê, *Lịch Sử Chế Độ Phong Kiến Việt Nam, Tập 2* (*History of Vietnamese Feudal system, Vol. 2*) (Hà Nội: Giáo dục, 1959); Phan Huy Lê, Vương Hoàng Tuyên, and Đinh Xuân Lâm, *Lịch Sử Chế Độ Phong Kiến Việt Nam, Tập 3* (*History of the Vietnamese Feudal System, Vol. 3*) (Hà Nội: Giáo dục, 1960); Đỗ Bang,

the first of its kind to deal specifically with paperwork, correspondence, and shifting political institutions. Its significance places on the fact that despite the universal recognition of the Sino-Vietnamese cultural and political linkages, few scholars have investigated the practical aspects of governing techniques: how Chinese classics were appreciated in the Vietnamese socio-political contexts? The pressures that influenced Vietnamese rulers on institutional choices? What kinds of recognition, motivations, and mechanisms for 'local' rulers to follow the 'Chinese' ways of operating bureaucracy? How "Vietnamese", at different times and spaces, acknowledged the 'Chinese' factors in their political designs? And how local literati came with strategies and solutions to better address their specific circumstances?

For a historiography of early nineteenth-century Vietnam, answers to those questions possess more weight of urgency because, under these initial social and political conditions, the country's present-day contour was shaped. A clear understanding of Vietnam's modern history and politics is not plausible without a detour to the struggles of Gia Long and Minh Menh for bureaucratic management and territorial control. Their daunting endeavors were, for the first time, to run the newly-unified empire from a single political center: Hue. These efforts shed light upon the challenging territory consolidation and antagonistic regionalism in Vietnam, which continued their devastating impacts through the bloody twentieth-century conflicts.¹³ In that story, official documents and bureaucratic correspondence provide answers to many of those issues from their unique perspectives. More specifically, they highlight

ed., *Tổ Chức Bộ Máy Nhà Nước Triều Nguyễn, Giai Đoạn 1802-1884 (Organization of the State Machine of the Nguyen, 1802-1884)*, (Huế: Thuận Hóa, 1997); Nguyễn Minh Tường, *Cải Cách Hành Chính Dưới Triều Minh Mệnh (1820-1840)* (Administrative reforms under the Minh Menh reign (1820-1840), (Hà Nội: Khoa học Xã hội, 1996); idem, *Tổ Chức Bộ Máy Nhà Nước Quân Chủ ở Việt Nam (Từ Năm 939 Đến Năm 1884)* (*The Organizational Structure of the Vietnamese Monarchies*) (Hanoi: Khoa học Xã hội, 2015); Phan Đại Doãn et al., *Một Số Vấn Đề Quan Chế Triều Nguyễn (Some Issues of the Nguyen Bureaucratic Institution)* (Huế: Thuận Hóa, 1998); Alexander B. Woodside, *Vietnam and the Chinese Model: A Comparative Study of Vietnamese and Chinese Government in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century* (CA, MA: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1988); Ralph. B Smith, "Politics and Society in Viet-Nam during the Early Nguyen Period (1802-62)," *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* 2 (1974): 153-69; John K. Whitmore, "Social Organization and Confucian Thought in Vietnam," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 15, no. 2 (1984): 296-306; Nola Cooke, "The Composition of the Nineteenth-Century Political Elite of Pre-Colonial Nguyen Vietnam (1802-1883)," *Modern Asian Studies* 29, no. 4 (1995): 741-64; Yoshiharu Tsuboi, *L'Empire Vietnamien Face a La France et a La Chine, 1847-1885 (The Vietnamese Empire Facing France and China)*, (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1987); Emmanuel Poisson, *Mandarins et Subalternes at Nord Du Vietnam, Une Bureaucratie à l'épreuve (1820-1918 (Mandarins and Subalterns in Northern Vietnam: A Bureaucracy On Trial)*, (Paris: Maisonneuve & Larose, 2004); Byung Wook Choi, *Southern Vietnam under the Reign of Minh Mạng (1820-1841): Central Policies and Local Response* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Southeast Asia Program Publications, 2004)..

¹³ See the suggestions made by Keith W. Taylor and Christopher E. Goscha: Keith W. Taylor, "Surface Orientations in Vietnam: Beyond Histories of Nation and Region," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 57, no. 4 (1998): 949-78; Christopher E Goscha, *Vietnam: A New History* (New York: Basic Books, 2016).

the particular defiance that confronted the Nguyen monarchs and their designs for power concentration. By the 1830s, the new vigor of the state authority was achieved through bureaucratic rearrangement. One key contributing factor was the prevailing paperwork that facilitated efficient communicational networks and increased direct emperor-rule.

The paperwork's complex evolutions and the emerging roles of practical writing in Minh Menh's political project have inspired this thesis to de-emphasize the focus away from theories and abstract cultural discourses. By contrast, it analyzes functional bureaucratic operations by identifying the circumstances and factors that motivated power-players like Gia Long, Minh Menh, Nguyen Van Thanh, Truong Dang Que, etc., and their adherents. What determined their choices of administrative 'model'? And how significant "ideology" and political "theory" played in envisioning the bureaucratic establishment? In brief, the debate is, in the promotion of official documents and institutions, Minh Menh stood on the ground of a "realist" or "idealist"? Examining the Nguyen paperwork through their typologies, formats, paratexts, and organizations undoubtedly allows a better understanding of different aspects of Hue's political culture between 1802 and 1841.

Despite my reliance that this study has examined a significant amount of bureaucratic documents to illustrate the argument, there is always an expectation that the investigated sources could be grounded in better historical and socio-political contextualization. Because of the chaotic nature of state archives in modern Vietnam and the endless political turmoil that surged between 1780 and 1975, such an apparent demand proves immensely challenging, if impossible. Even to today's archivists at the national archives, the task of tracing back histories of their holding documents is intimidating because no systematic record of the historical storage seems available. Thus, reconstructing the archival lineage of the Nguyen paperwork is particularly frustrating.



Figure 1.1. Disorder came to the Hall of Great Harmony.

A soldier walks among dirt and debris of battle at the Imperial Palace in the Citadel of Hue during the Tet Offensive, February 1968. (AP Photo/Eddie Adams). The turmoil of that scale had come to Hue in high frequency in 1883, 1885, 1945, 1946, 1954-55, 1968, and 1975.

Not least, this research recognizes the disorganized nature of the remained palace documents. It was right before, the disordered imperial archives, as it is now for the holding collection at the National Archive No. 1 (NA1, Hanoi). While document-keepers have no crystal clear comprehension of the provenance of those items they protect, political chaos and warfare spared no chance for paperwork and their stories. Here is the nineteenth-century scholar Phan Huy Chu 潘輝注 and his lament:

知矣惟歷朝會典從前未有成書編年國史之記稍多刑略况自丙午兵興以來舊章散逸其存者故家世族之藏斷簡遺文之載又皆龐雜訛舛未有頭緒該歷朝典故者茫無依據然則辨別事類以為典憲一書者斯非學當務哉茲舉大要言之如封珉之華

惟歷朝會典從前未有成書，編年國史之記猶多刪略，况自丙午年兵興以來，舊章散逸，其略存者，故家世族之藏，斷簡遺文之載，又皆龐雜訛舛未有頭緒，談歷朝典故者，茫無依據。

Bureaucratic statutes of the previous dynasties have not been well recorded in books. State chronicles only briefly documented annual ritual events and practices. Besides, because of military activities from the *Binh Ngo* year 丙午年 (the 43rd year of the sexagenary cycle/1786) until now, books have been lost; extant damaged manuscripts are compiled with confusion; the [compiled] mistakes are

unable to consult; discussions on the dynasties' institution are obscure because of no clue.¹⁴

The result is a challenging journey for this study to embark on, if not exasperating. Not only because of the fragmented nature of the official documents but also of the destruction of dynastic statutes and manual works. In many cases, it is virtually impossible to access palace documents that link to specific historical events or contextualize the situations in which the records themselves once lived.¹⁵ To the best of our knowledge, their provenances were only relocated by examining production processes and circulation. However, like the complexity of historical figures and past events, each administrative manuscript has passed by more than one hand, lived more than one life, and adventured more than one excursion that a single story is far from fully apprehending.

This study attempts to investigate as many extant records as they can be traced, and contextualize their historical and bureaucratic contexts of production and storage. Twelve thousand existing manuscripts (of 23 000 pages), issued between 1802 and 1841, are a haunting sum. More challenging is the fact that not only their provenance is obscure but also the scale of lost documents remains uncertain.¹⁶ Most of them can be only detected through sealed stamps, signatures, catalogued stamps, and exhaustive digging into events and entries chronicled in the *Veritable records* 大南寔錄, and *Collected Statutes* 大南會典事例.

The remaining paperwork is only made possible because of hundreds of people whose devotions were dedicated during the last two centuries. There stood, from clerks and secretaries of the Grand Secretariat 內閣 and Privy Council 機密院 to early twentieth-century western-styled cabinet, from scribes at the State Bureau of History

¹⁴ Phan Huy Chú, *Lịch Triều Hiến Chương Loại Chí* 歷朝憲章類志 (*Categorized Records of the Institutions of Successive Dynasties*) (Paris: EFEO Microfilm, 1819), *Preface* 序.

¹⁵ Unlike the Qing imperial archives where piles of palace records allow detailed examination of historical events. Two excellent examples of historical reconstruction based on the search on imperial archives are Philip A. Kuhn, *Soulstealers: The Chinese Sorcery Scare of 1768* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990); Jonathan D. Spence, *Treason by the Book* (New York: Penguin Putnam Inc., 2001).

¹⁶ See my analysis in the chapter II. The scale of the Nguyen palace paperwork was briefly mentioned in “Hoàng Triều Châu Bản Mục Lục 皇朝硃本目錄 (Catalogue of the Vermilion Records of the Imperial Dynasty)”, henceforth *HTBML* (Unpublished, Yale University Library, Maurice Durand Han Nom, MS 1728); Chen Jinghe, *Mục Lục Châu Bản Triều Nguyễn* (*Catalogue of the Nguyen's Chauban*). *Tập I: Triều Gia Long* (*The Gia Long Reign*), (Huế: Viện Đại học Huế, 1960); idem, “The Imperial Archives of the Nguyen Dynasty (1802-1945),” *Journal of Southeast Asian History* 3, no. 2 (1962): 111–28; Tana li, “Mục Lục Châu Ban Triều Nguyen (Catalogue of the Nguyen Archives). Compiled and Edited by Chen Chingho. Hue: Committee for the Translation of the Vietnamese Historical Sources, University of Hue, Edited by Chen Chingho,” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 28, no. 2 (1997): 465–67.

國史館 to archivists and scholars of the Nguyen imperial state (to 1945), the French colonial government (to 1955), the State of Vietnam (to 1954), the Republic of Vietnam (to 1975), and the Socialist Republic of Vietnam (from 1975). Modern institutions such as *des archives et des bibliothèques de l'Indochine*, *L'École française d'Extrême-Orient* (EFEO), *Ngu tien van phong* (Hue Palace Office, from 1932), the Chinese Council for Eastern Asian Studies (Taipei), the Asian Foundation, Harvard-Yenching Institute, *Vien Dai hoc Hue* (Hue University), *Uy ban Van hoa* (The Council of Culture), *Trung tam Luu tru Quoc gia* (National Archives) are also indispensable for this rescue mission. Without the paperwork-guardian, such as Paul Boudet, Pierre Daudin, Ngo Dinh Nhu, Nobuhiro Matsumoto, Chen Jinghe, Phan Huy Le, etc., to name a few, a journey to this bureaucratic realm would have been implausible.¹⁷

1. 2. Why paperwork?

In October 1822, a British diplomat made landfall at the Da Nang seaport (eighty kilometers to the south of Hue). Having departed from Bangkok, John Crawfurd was impressed by Vietnamese mandarins and their working procedures that relied extensively on written documents for "almost any subject".¹⁸ The observation was indeed a testimony to the paperwork-based administrative operations of the Nguyen. No account of Vietnamese institutional and political history will be complete without considering the use of various official documents, ranging from imperial

¹⁷ Paul Boudet was the first director of the Archives and Library of Indochina. See more on Masson André, "Paul Boudet (1888-1948)," *Bibliothèque de l'école Des Chartes* 107, no. 2 (1848): 335–37. For the French system of archives in Indochina, see de Ferry Ferréol, "Les Archives En Indochine," *La Gazette Des Archives* 8 (1950): 33–41 and Bui Quang Tung, "Pour Une Meilleure Conservation Des Archives Vietnamiennes," *France-Asie* 109–110 (1955): 742–46. For a glimpse on the Nguyen's imperial libraries in early twentieth century, see 松本信廣 Nobuhiro Matsumoto, "越南王室所藏安南本書目 (A Catalogue of the Annamese Books in the Imperial Archive of Viet Nam)," *The Historical Science* 14, no. 2 (1935): 111(293)-154(336). For early research on *chauban*, see P. Boudet, "Les Archives Des Empereurs d'Annam et l'histoire Annamite," *BAVH* XXIX (1942): 229–60, and Pierre Daudin, *Sigillographie Sino-Annamite* (Sài Gòn: Imprimerie de l'Union, 1937). For more about historian Chen Jinghe, see Léon Vandermeersch, "Chingho A. Chen (1917-1995)," *Bulletin de l'Ecole Française d'Extrême-Orient* 83, no. 1 (1996): 10–17. For Chen Jinghe's works on *chauban*, see Chen, *Mục Lục Châu Bản Triều Nguyễn (Catalogue of the Nguyen's Chauban). Tập I: Triều Gia Long (The Gia Long Reign)*; Chen, *Mục Lục Châu Bản Triều Nguyễn (Catalogue of the Nguyen's Chauban). Tập II: Triều Minh Mệnh (The Minh Menh Reign)*, (Hue: Vien Dai hoc Hue, 1962). For works by Vietnamese National Archives No. 1, see Phan Huy Lê et al., eds., *Mục Lục Châu Bản Triều Nguyễn, Tập II 阮朝硃本目錄 (Catalog of the Nguyen Vermilion Records, Vol. II)* (Hà Nội: Văn Hóa, 1998); Trung tâm lưu trữ Quốc gia I, *Mục Lục Châu Bản Triều Nguyễn. Tập I. Gia Long (1802-1819); Minh Mệnh I (1820) – Minh Mệnh V (1824) (Catalogue of the Nguyen Vermilion Records. Vol. I. Gia Long Reign (1802-1820) and Minh Menh Reign (1820-1824)* (Hà Nội: Nxb Văn hóa thông tin, 2010).

¹⁸ John Crawfurd, *Journal of an Embassy from the Governor-General of India to the Courts of Siam and Cochinchina* (London: Henry Colburn, New Burlington Street, 1828), 263.

edicts to local reports. They attributed indispensable components to the dynastic political culture.

Practical writings and state authority are topics of enduring human concern. Ancient Chinese emperors, Roman dictators, and medieval Popes shared the interests in deploying paperwork for power-control and governance.¹⁹ Premodern Vietnamese states emerged at the southern edge of Chinese empires in the tenth century. To strengthen interactions with the Sino-world of East Asia, they had the Temple of Literature 文廟 and State Academy 國子監 erected as early as the 1070s. Five years later came the first civil service examination that elevated Confucian literati 士 protagonists on the political stages. Vietnam had embarked on an irreversible bureaucratic journey where the environment for document-based governance and statecraft gradually emerged. Official paperwork, such as proclamations 詔, was frequently utilized for imperial announcements from the eleventh century. "Memorials" 奏 first appeared in dynastic records in 1158, while in 1042, the first legal code, the *Judicial Books* 刑書 was presented.²⁰ Vietnamese scholar-officials had set sail for a new horizon of the political culture.

Paperwork plays a crucial role in facilitating the evolutions of governmental institutions. Like the early imperial days of Qin and Han China, official papers infiltrated bureaucratic correspondence in early modern Vietnam.²¹ Each page of the files is a first-hand witness to the Nguyen state's institutional development, governing

¹⁹ Barend J. ter Haar, "Toward Retrieving Early Oral Traditions: Some Ruminations on Orality and Textuality in Early Chinese Culture," in *New Perspectives on the Research of Chinese Culture*, ed. Pei-kai Cheng and Ka Wai Fan (Singapore: Springer Singapore, 2013), 45–61; Kai Vogelsang, "Inscriptions and Proclamations: On the Authenticity of the 'Gao' Chapters in the 'Shujing,'" *Bulletin of the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities* 74 (2002): 138–209; Mark Edward Lewis, *Writing and Authority in Early China* (NY: SUNY Series in Chinese Philosophy and Culture, State University of New York Press, 1999); Haicheng Wang, *Writing and the Ancient State: Early China in Comparative Perspective* (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2014); Connery, *The Empire of the Text: Writing and Authority in Early Imperial China*; Liesbeth Corens, Kate Peters, and Alexandra Walsham, eds., *The Social History of the Archive: Record-Keeping in Early Modern Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016). Markus Friedrich, *Die Geburt Des Archivs. Eine Wissensgeschichte* (München: Oldenbourg, 2013) and English translation: Markus Friedrich and John Noël Dillon, *The Birth of the Archive* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2018).

²⁰ "Đại Việt Sử Ký Toàn Thư 大越史記全書 (Complete Book of the Historical Record of the Great Viet), (Henceforth, *DVSKTT*)," Nom Foundation, accessed August 7, 2020, <http://www.nomfoundation.org/nom-project/History-of-Greater-Vietnam?uiLang=en>, Basic Records 本紀, book 2: 30b-31a.

²¹ The topic has been intensively investigated through examination of legal/ official tomb manuscripts during the Qin and Han periods at CSMC (Hamburg University). See Jingrong Li, "The Ernian Lü Ling Manuscript" (PhD dissertation, Hamburg University, 2014); Thies Staack, "Reconstructing Early Chinese Bamboo Manuscripts: Towards a Systematic Approach Including Verso Analysis" (PhD dissertation, Hamburg University, 2016); Leif T. Luckmann, "Lehrtexte Für Den Beamten. Eine Studie Zu Zwei Grabmanuskripten Aus Der Qin-Zeit (Educational Texts for Officials: A Study on Two Tomb Manuscripts from the Qin Period)" (PhD Dissertation, Hamburg University, 2018).

procedure, and administrative identity. The bureaucratic transformation was visually imprinted on paperwork. Because of the deprived conditions of dynastic archives and the massive loss of official records, the remaining paperwork is an indispensable source to Vietnamese political history, and sometimes, the only window to various aspects of the past statecraft.

In addition, they shed light on one of the most important debates over the traditional state and society that involved historical, politico-cultural interactions between "Vietnam" and "China". In this domain, despite being published for nearly five decades, the most detailed scholarly examination remains Alexander Woodside's *Vietnam and the Chinese model* (first published in 1971). This classic study sets out for the influential approach, the "Vietnamese/ Southeast Asian" and the "Chinese" characters of the country's political culture. More importantly, they were placed in the conflicting term of competition, antagonism, and identity contestation. Embarking on the initial discussions launched by French scholars at the dawn of the twentieth century, prof. Woodside challenges the colonial scholarship and their adherents' view on Vietnam as a 'smaller dragon'.²² The belief was that, through the first-millennium interaction with and being ruled by different Chinese empires, Vietnam "became a miniature replica of China (*"the smaller dragon"*), and that it was precisely through its contact with the larger kingdom, and by adopting customs and political institutions, that Vietnam was subsequently able to maintain its autonomy for the next thousand years."²³ By contrast, Woodside argued for a world of dichotomy where peasants and local intelligentsia represented the 'Southeast Asianness' while the capital's elite was of the "Chineseness". Such a binary composition of political and cultural practice, however, lures us to a trap of projecting Vietnam's identity via the assumption of "China" and "Southeast Asia" as singular cultural institutions.²⁴

²² Joseph Buttinger, *The Smaller Dragon: A Political History of Vietnam* (New York: Praeger, 1958). For more on French scholarships, see Henri Maspero, "Études d'histoire d'Annam," *Bulletin de l'École Française d'Extrême-Orient* 18, no. 1 (1918): 1–36; Henri Maspero, "L'Expedition de Ma Yuan," *Bulletin de l'École Française d'ExtrêmeOrient* 18 (1918): 11–28; Keith W. Taylor, "An Evaluation of the Chinese Period in Vietnamese History," *JAS* 2 (1980): 139–64.

²³ Liam C. Kelley, *Beyond the Bronze Pillars : Envoy Poetry and the Sino-Vietnamese Relationship* (Honolulu: Association for Asian Studies, 2005), 9.

²⁴ A good example of this influence is Frances FitzGerald, *Fire in the Lake: The Vietnamese and the Americans in Vietnam* (New York: Random House, 1972). One remedy to get beyond these abstract modifiers is to keep track of the flows of human and information in real time, searching for their background, connection, intellectual networks, and information circle... to explain why they behaved such ways and what had them motivated. This thesis is an effort to surpass such an abstract debate by looking at the practical dimensions of administration: paperwork. Also see other examples of this treatment: Liam C. Kelley follows the envoys' cultural practice (2005). Kathlene Baldanza has mapped out Pham Than Duat's knowledge network and drawn the connecting networks of the Vietnamese scholar into the East Asian repertoire of classical knowledge. See Kathlene Baldanza, "Books without Borders: Phạm Thân Duật (1825–1885) and the Culture of Knowledge in Mid-Nineteenth-Century Vietnam," *JAS* 77, no. 03 (August 29, 2018): 713–40.

During the second half of the 20th century, nationalist scholars amplified the "Vietnamese" characters in the search for the country's political identity. Influenced by decolonization, their eyes were turned on "the local" as new forces of political players. The search for "Vietnamese identity", for instance, has inspired historians like Phan Huy Le, Tran Quoc Vuong, Ha Van Tan, Keith W. Taylor, etc., who believed in a pre-Han indigenous distinctiveness that allowed Vietnamese to survive northern (Chinese) domination and assimilation-attempts.²⁵

There are problems with those approaches, however.

During the last decades, prof. Taylor has abandoned his long-held view of the early Vietnamese proto-national tradition. His new book, *a history of the Vietnamese* (2013), no longer recognizes "Vietnam" and "China" as applicable political and cultural modifiers in early Sino-Vietnamese interactions.²⁶ Besides, Woodside added two critical notes to his previous work. First was the argument that there was no single "Chinese model" historically, and second, proposing a geo-cultural configuration so-called 'Confucian commonwealth' in which traditional East Asian intellectuals shared the idea that they 'belonged to a far-flung Confucian commonwealth which comprised, in time and space, something more than just the contemporary Chinese and Vietnamese governments." As a result, he suggests a new paradigm for understanding the Nguyen bureaucratic practices, "Vietnam and its classical inspirations".²⁷

Also, see my discussion on early modern Vietnam's political and cultural identity in Vũ Đức Liêm, "Connecting Networks and Orienting Space: Relocating Nguyen Cochinchina between East and Southeast Asia in the Sixteenth and Eighteenth Centuries," in *Imagining Asia: Networks, Actors, Sites*, ed. Andrea Acri et al. (Singapore: ISEAS–Yusof Ishak Institute, 2019), 358–92; Vũ Đức Liêm, 2019, Chinese political culture in the 19th century Vietnam: A view from the perspective of cultural transfers, The Intercultural Transfers — 35 years after the first attempts to establish a new paradigm (Leipzig University: 12–14 December 2019).

²⁵ The region of the present-day northern Vietnam was placed under direct Chinese colonization between 111 BCE and 900s AD. Keith W. Taylor was a Vietnam war's veteran, later trained by the first generation of Southeast Asianists in the US, those influenced by the 1940-50s French scholarship and Vietnam's nationalist movements during the 1960-70s. See *Hùng Vương Dựng Nước (The Hung Kings Found the Nation)*, 4 vols. (Hà Nội: Khoa học Xã hội, vol. 1, 1970; vol. 2, 1972; vol. 3, 1973; vol. 4, 1974); Huy Lê Phan et al., *Lịch Sử Việt Nam, Tập I [History of Vietnam, Vol. 1]* (Hà Nội: Nhà xuất bản Đại học và giáo dục chuyên nghiệp, 1991), and Keith W Taylor, *The Birth of Vietnam* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983). I also briefly touch on early Vietnamese history in Vũ Đức Liêm, "Mythische Vergangenheit Und Die Politik Der Nationalen Identität Im Heutigen Vietnam," in *Vietnam. Mythen Und Wirklichkeiten*, ed. Jörg. Wischermann and Gerhard. Will (Bonn: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 2018), 63–89.

²⁶ Keith W. Taylor, *A History of the Vietnamese* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2013).

²⁷ Woodside, *Vietnam and the Chinese Model*, Preface for the Paperback Edition; idem.

Alexander Woodside, "Diễn Từ Nhận Giải Văn Hóa Phan Châu Trinh 2017 (Acceptance Speech for the Phan Chau Trinh Cultural Foundation Prize 2017)," accessed August 7, 2018, <http://quyphanchautrinh.org/giai-phan-chau-trinh/ChiTiet/894/giao-su-alexander-woodside?nam=65&bc=66>.

Historian Liam Kelley examines that "common intellectual world" by analyzing a unique literary repertoire: "envoy poetry".²⁸ His research vividly revealed a keen consciousness in which Vietnamese diplomats and scholar-officials found themselves participants of the sharing realm of beliefs, values, and traditions associated with the "Chinese" classics.²⁹

How does Nguyen's paperwork practice claim its roles in that century-long scholarly debate? Bureaucratic documents signify not only abstract ideas of symbolic political hierarchy but also a measure of effective governance and institutional arrangements. The pre-colonial tradition of bureaucratic documentation was an integrated element of the political culture that defined "Vietnameseness" before Vietnam entered modernized politics. This study exemplifies new efforts preventing the use of modern political notions such as "Vietnam", "China", and "Southeast Asia" in projecting cultural practices of the past societies. Paperwork, as bureaucratic objects, is a visualized demonstration of how people applied their political ideology and governing technique with references to their circumstances.

Minh Menh's political project has been conveniently labeled by the conventional scholarship "Confucianized" and 'Sinicized". These ideological and cultural frameworks are deployed in the justification of institutional and governing changes from the upper political apparatus to the suppression of rebellions, from Hue's *mission civilisatrice* in Cambodia to the widespread use of edicts in the delivery of imperial authority. Although "Vietnam" grew up in the shadow of different Chinese empires, their sociopolitical landscape was far more sophisticated than any dogmatic adaption of the "Chinese models". The Nguyen's political institutions, correspondence, and paperwork are intriguing examples of a frontier society that had projected itself out of the Sinitic traditions. The design of official documents, for instance, was arduous for both Gia Long and Minh Menh. Seal-imprints, signatures, taboo characters, Sino-Vietnamese scripts, and document types, to name a few, had to place under rigid regulations. More challenging was the scheme to formulate administrative procedures,

²⁸ The poetry collections composed by Vietnamese missions during their journeys of paying tribute 朝貢 to the Chinese courts. For the Sino-Vietnamese tribute exchange, see Trương Bửu Lâm, "Intervention versus Tribute in Sino-Vietnamese Relations, 1788–1790," in *The Chinese World Order*, ed. John K. Fairbank (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968), 165–79.

²⁹ The examined cases were twenty Vietnamese envoy poets in total. Kelley, *Beyond the Bronze Pillars*, 2, 233–38.

Despite stressing the 'Chinese' character of the Vietnamese cultural practices, particularly among the intellectual elite, the author recognizes two critical 'weaknesses' of his scholarly exploration. First, the difficulty to contextualize those poetries in "socio-historical circumstances of the time"; second, the justification for the proposal that the worldview and experience belonged to a limited number of diplomatic envoys, in their peculiar circumstances, could be fully sympathized by much broader and more vibrant Vietnamese intellectuals.

form institutions, and maneuver paperwork flows. Following these practices, our attention was placed on factors that determined the dynastic choices of institutions and document types. How were governance theories of the classics appreciated by Minh Menh? How do Zhou, Ming, or Qing models possess any fundamental benchmark values for Hue's strategic visions of bureaucratic designs? How were selected aspects of the Chinese administrative operations measured and adapted in Hue? Minh Menh's ruling style also merits further discussion. It involved the circumstances under which he reigned, the entourage of royal favorites, and their power competition that profoundly impacted the information flows. Thus, this research brings to the old picture new approaches through the sources and angles that have been neglected.

Nguyen's official documents have the unique capacity to illustrate the process in which "Chinese" institutions and governing practices walked into the Hue court. While Alexander Woodside grounded the dynastic behaviors on their cultural and political attachment to the competing matrixes of "China" and "Southeast Asia", my suggestion emphasizes ideological and technical applications under the shifting early nineteenth-century political conditions. Engaging with the transformation from the Gia Long to Minh Menh reigns, paperwork and document-production attributed to the broader frame of the dynastic institutionalization. The use of multiple bureaucratic writing genres with their patterns, characters, and functions demonstrates the correlation between complex governance and paperwork and theorizes the dialectic relationship between administrative documentation and statecraft.

Hue's state-centralization brought back the discontinued tradition of promulgating Confucianism as the dominant official ideology. Consequently, scholar-officials returned to occupy the bureaucratic stage.³⁰ With their ascendancy, paperwork was empowered as the embodiment of the state authority. The result was the burgeoning bureaucratic documentation under which official records became the only legitimate and accepted medium of governmental correspondence. Their existence became part of the administrative tradition. In fact, paperwork presents a self-referential display of the bureaucratic hierarchy under which state authority was conveyed and projected on the paper surface. The sophisticated regulations applied for document production between 1820 and 1841 highlight the central transformations of the Nguyen state.

³⁰ Whitmore, "Social Organization and Confucian Thought", 296–306; Nola Cooke, "Nineteenth-Century Vietnamese Confucianization in Historical Perspective: Evidence from the Palace Examinations (1463-1883)," *JSEAS* 25, no. 2 (1994): 270–312; Cooke, "The Composition of the Nineteenth-Century".

First, Nguyen's paperwork and bureaucratic evolution

It is beyond doubt that official correspondence, swift and reliable, was crucial to administrative operations. The 490 BCE – Marathon-runner of the ancient Greek brought with him not only military messages but also the fate of Athens. Miscommunication, delaying correspondence, and misleading information are ubiquitous recipes for failed states and collapsed empires. Broken communication, for instance, disintegrates political structures and disrupts the measures that societies take in response to crises. However, from the 'fake' succession-edict at the Chinese Qin court (210 BCE) to the competing fake news in today's Washington D.C., bureaucracy, paperwork, and communication are constant contestation.³¹ Not all correspondences were unambiguously received, such as '*Veni, vidi, vici*', written by Julius Caesar to the Roman Senate.³² Their intricate nature, multiple formats, contents, and conflicting interests confront any bureaucratic structure of antiquity and contemporary. The Mongol empires struggled with their networks of verbal and written messages. The Chinese Ming political transformation (1368-1664) was, speaking from the communicating perspective, a prolonged nightmare of competing for information-control and decision-making among emperors 皇帝, grand chancellor 宰相, palace eunuchs 太監, heir apparent 太子, and grand secretaries. So was the Qing (1636-1911), who had inherited the Ming's tradition and turned to a system so intricate that until the Qianlong reign (1735-1796), improper deployment of memorial-types was the frequent subject of imperial laments.³³

Vietnam under the Gia Long and Minh Menh reigns was facing its own political test. Factionalism and inhomogeneous administrative organization threatened to tear the newly-unified kingdom apart. Creating governmental institutions, forming communication networks, addressing official personnel shortages, and setting governing regulations were just a few priorities of the bureaucrats' to-do-list. The first

³¹ After the sudden death of China's first unified emperor, Qin Shi Huang Di 秦始皇帝, prominent courtiers Li Si 李斯 and eunuch Zhao Gao 趙高 plotted a false edict that gave succession to the adolescent prince Huhai 胡亥 instead of the matured Fusu 扶蘇 who was on guarding duty at the northern frontier. Zhaogao and Li Si then dispatched another false imperial letter to Fusu, condemning him of disloyalty and instructed him to commit suicide, which he did obey on the letter's arrive. Although the original versions of those 'fake' documents remain disputed, the damages they inflicted to the dynasty and the impacts they casted on the destiny of Chinese history have been overpowering. Derk Bodde, "The State and Empire of Ch'in," in *The Cambridge History of China, Vol. 1*, ed. Denis Twitchett and Michael Loewe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986): 81-82.

³² Luca Grillo and Christopher B. Krebs, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to the Writings of Julius Caesar* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 53.

³³ John K. Fairbank and S. Y. Teng, "On The Types and Uses of Ch'ing Documents," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 5, no. 1 (January 1940): 6-8.

unifier-Gia Long (嘉隆, 1802-1820), 'refused' that Herculean task by distributing tolerance to local warlords and autonomous regional administrations. That precarious solution, however, resulted in a significant price paid by his son, Emperor Minh Menh 明命 (1820-1841). As an administrative centralizer, he opened Pandora's box of social conflicts and spent three forth of the reign on "rearranging" Vietnam. Bureaucratic centralization, administrative homogenization, and cultural unification (and "cultivation" 教化) required consolidating correspondence and document-flows.

Unsurprisingly, Minh Menh started the project with paperwork, introducing new branches of correspondence and deliberation to the court. The Office of Records and Books 文書房 (1820), Grand Secretariat 內閣 (1830), Hanlin Academy 翰林院 (1830), and Privy Council 機密院 (1835) served as imperial personal secretaries by (wholly or partly) dealing with paperwork and information-flows. Those inner-court structures navigated documents to a unified system allowing the emperor to oversee correspondences directly. When the arrangement was fully institutionalized in the mid-1830s, it was strictly operated. Most of the elaborate court affairs had their records carefully written, preserved, and were get-at-able for future archival reviews. The paper-flows were veins of a bureaucratic body (see Figure 1.3. *Hue's power networks visualized based on paperwork flows*). The monarch's ability of bureaucratic orchestration was not only depended on his political maneuvers but also the skill to utilize paperwork for controlling the deliberative institutions.

From that perspective of communication management, this research analyses the relationship between monarchical and bureaucratic authorities through their engagement with paperwork. The transformation from Gia Long to Minh Menh has been recognized as a journey from the "politics of *Congdong*"³⁴ to the "politics of imperial edicts 諭" and "politics of vermilion endorsements 硃批". Edicts and imperial rescripts are the basic forms of practical writings exercised by Emperor Minh Menh under which the empire was operated following the strokes of his brush.

³⁴ *Congdong* 公同, the Gia Long's audience of high-ranked officials, established in 1788 and dismissed under the Minh Menh reign.

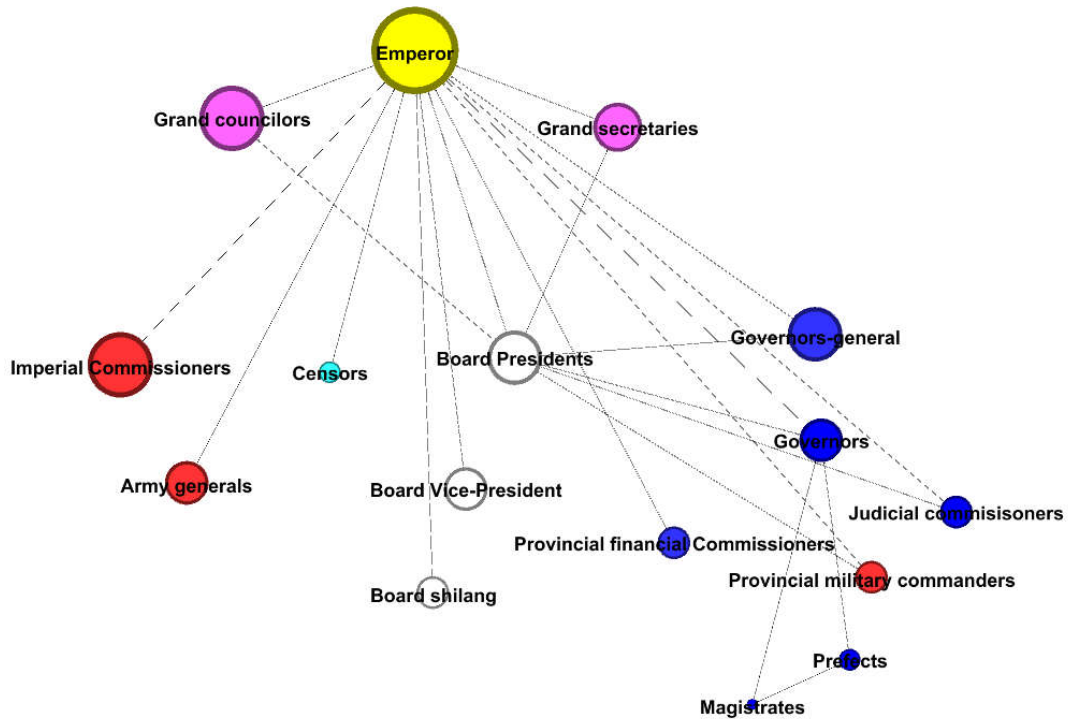


Figure 1.2. Hue's power networks visualized through paperwork flows.
 Different bureaucratic branches channeled the document movements:

- Red nodes:* military officials.
- White nodes:* board officials
- Blue nodes:* provincial civil officials
- Green node:* censors
- Violet nodes:* inner court officials

Source: by the author

Second, paperwork defines power networks and shapes the bureaucratic community.

The 1833-story of postal misconduct and archival chaos reveals significant traits of Hue's bureaucratic correspondence and paperwork in shaping the early modern political culture. As a communication medium, practical writing dominated all governing operations and fashioned the dynastic authoritative webs. The document-based information-flows were crucial to rehabilitate the bureaucracy, crush rebellions, and expand the emperor's personal rule. Minh Menh's political scheme was the last, most systematic, and influential in the country's pre-colonial age. The attempt aimed to upgrade the complex administration in dealing with increasingly socio-economic dynamism. Paperwork and involved court institutions played crucial roles in that mission. By contextualizing their rise in the historical, political, administrative, and ideological contexts, not only a vivid picture of communication evolution emerges but also influential, sometimes hidden, hands of power players come to light.

Paperwork's most important function was to advance Minh Menh's reorganization of the court. One aspect of that reform was the shift of institutional authority caused by rechanneling information flows at the court. The newly-organized networks of documents provided intelligibility and accountability for the bureaucracy and the capacity to track down bureaucratic decisions through archives and preserved records. Any attempt to reconstruct an institutional history of the Nguyen has to engage with mapping paperwork-circulation and information-flow that infused into its bureaucratic structure. Official documents allow those power-webs to be located based on regulations and paratextual information they carried. Signatures, sealed imprints, remarks, and endorsements not only point to the organizational linkages but also personal bonds. The frequency of written communication was one indicator; the other was the striking "vermilion endorsements" 硃批. Emotional elements, including conspicuous sentimentality, were indisputable evidence indicating the power complexes that Minh Menh generated and nurtured. The following diagram, for instance, shows the imperial power networks. Each of these ties testifies to the quality of correspondence facilitated through the paperwork.

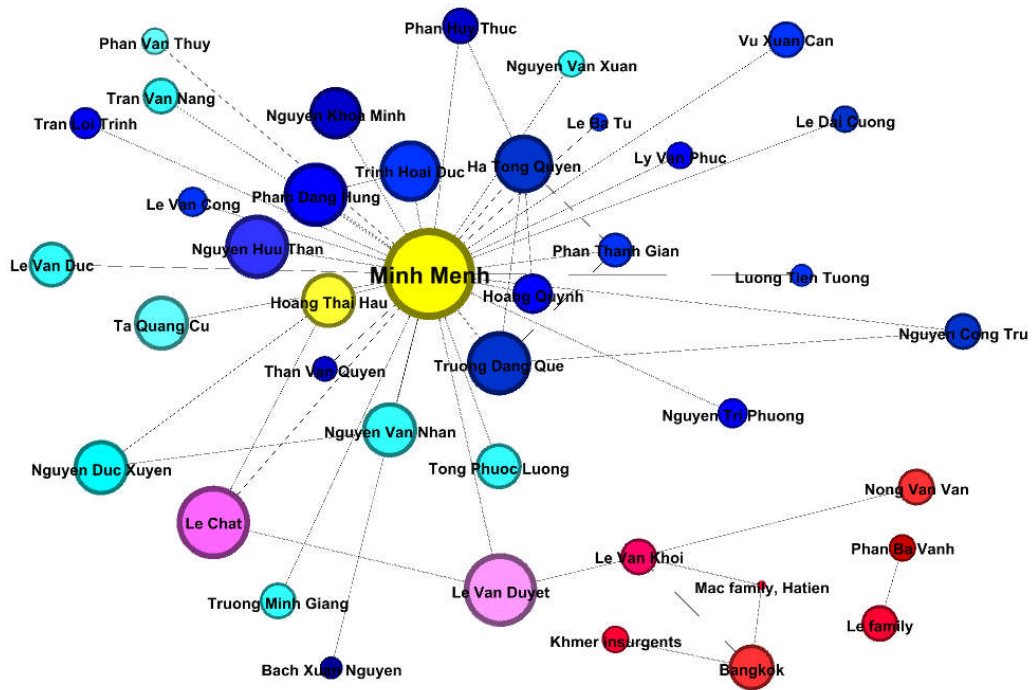


Figure 1.3. Minh Menh's ego network, 1820-1835, based on Veritable Records 寔錄 and vermilion records 硃本.

- Notes:
- Red nodes: rebels and enemies.
 - Blue nodes: civil officials on the Minh Menh's camp.
 - Pink nodes: Targeted generals and governors-general by Minh Menh.

Green nodes: Military generals on the Minh Menh camp.
Yellow nodes: emperor and royal family members.
Source: by the author

While hierarchical orders conventionally depict the political arena, personal attachments are nevertheless another platform of decision-making.³⁵ Written documents recognize these forms of power distribution in human relationships. Institutional ties and hierarchical organization profoundly interact with social networks to engineer executive authority. These concealed allegiances existed behind the dynasty's compiled chronicles and can only be disclosed based on the document flows. The trace of Minh Menh's direct written communication was a compelling case in point. Take Hoang Quynh 黃炯, Le Van Cong 黎萬功, Than Van Quyen 申文權, and Nguyen Tri Phuong 阮知方, for instance. Albeit their ranks were hardly above 3A (正三品, in a nine-grade system 九品), they were crucial confidants and informants for the emperor for decades.³⁶ Therefore, following the movements of paperwork was one way to delineate the sophisticated power structure through which the empire was maneuvered.

The sociopolitical reception of paperwork leads to emerged communities of intellectuals, bureaucrats, and decision-makers. Official documents demarcated social groups through their sharing experiences of literacy skills, bureaucratic knowledge, and governing interests.³⁷ The bureaucrats, for example, were characterized by an acquaintance of technical administration. They were attached not only through the insights of the classical political knowledge but also working commitments with paperwork. The use of document types defined their roles and ranks in the system and provided them with capacity and responsibility for administrative performances. The

³⁵ Among the new approach to 'social networks' as power-structures, see Niall. Ferguson, *The Square and the Tower: Networks, Hierarchies and the Struggle for Global Power* (London: Allen Lane, 2017). One of the topic that recently captures both historical and digital scholarship is the Networks of Enlightenment. Researchers are able to connect different online collections of correspondence of the early modern period, linking people across Europe, the Americas and Asia from the early 17th to the mid-19th century. It was the first global social network where ten of thousands of historical figures formed one of the world's great historical "conversations". See Marian Hobson, *Diderot and Rousseau: Networks of Enlightenment* (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2011); Dan Edelstein and Chloe Edmondson, *Networks of Enlightenment: Digital Approaches to the Republic of Letters* (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2019). And the Enlightenment Programme at TORCH (Oxford University), <http://www.torch.ox.ac.uk/enlightenment> (accessed on March 14, 2019).

³⁶ Quynh and Cong served Minh Menh since he was a prince. See more on chapter IV.

³⁷ Such as the grand secretaries *Thị lang Nội các* 侍郎內閣 and grand councilors *Cơ mật đại thần* 機密大臣.

ability to handle paperwork was the first and foremost condition to pursue a governing career, making "*Politik als Beruf*".³⁸

Third, paperwork and official correspondence in the making of modern Vietnam.

As a medium of correspondence and delivering decision-making, paperwork took part in the great 1830s-transformation of the Vietnamese state. Without a centralized state, Minh Menh was unable to afford the first stage of modern 'Vietnam' in the making. Without the paperwork, such an effective government would be unable to realize, and efficient central governance from Hue was unrealistic. The consolidation of the communication system made official correspondence sustained, swift, and reliable. So were the state's decision-making and policy executions. Express-delivered imperial edicts, court letters, and memorials were the cases in point, effectively connecting the imperial palace with frontier generals, discussing military strategies, and mobilized logistic supplies. Among Hue's principal achievements were the defeats of rebellions, subjugating Siamese invasions, unifying territory, and rearranging administration in the whole empire.³⁹ Bureaucratic documents appeared, and directly involved, in all those accomplishments following their bustling movements along 150 postal stations, stretching two thousand kilometer length of '*the road of mandarins*' 官路.⁴⁰ Within fourteenth days, news from all corners of the empire, including the newly colonized Cambodia, was able to reach the emperor's desk.⁴¹

The unified and homogeneously-administered Vietnam came out in 1836 owed much of its delivery to the assistance of paperwork. Those documents signify the power of communication and centralized bureaucracy in the making of early modern Vietnam, particularly during the crisis-decade (1826-1836), allowed Hue to handle hazardous military situations and effectively mobilized supplies.⁴² A vehicle to

³⁸ Term coined by Max Weber in his lecture on state, bureaucracy and politicians. See Tony Waters and Dagmar Waters, eds., *Weber's Rationalism and Modern Society: New Translations on Politics, Bureaucracy, and Social Stratification* (New York: Palgrave Macmillian, 2015): 135-198.

³⁹ For some of these Nguyen's challenges, see Vũ, "Vietnam at the Khmer Frontier: Boundary Politics, 1802–1847"; Choi, *Southern Vietnam under the Reign of Minh Mạng*.

⁴⁰ The term was widely used in the early nineteenth century, see *DNTL*, I, 52: 16b; II, 4: 27b.

⁴¹ See the depiction of this traffic line on the complete map of the Great South 大南全圖, (1830s?) [大南全圖: 共三十二省六十貳海口], included 32 provinces 省, 62 seaports 海口, and the postal route from Sino-Vietnamese border to Western Protectorate [Cambodia/ 鎮西城], in "Đại Nam Toàn Đồ 大南全圖 (the Complete Maps of the Great South)" (Manuscript, EFEO Microfilm, A.2959, n.d.), 3. Sample of how these networks were arranged and operated, see *the complete map of Thanh Hoa Province/ 清化全圖*, (1840?) with 'postal route/' "the road of mandarins" 官路, postal stations 驛站. "Đại Nam Toàn Đồ 大南全圖 (The Complete Maps of the Great South)," 37. Also, see more on the communication system in chapter II.

⁴² See Vũ. "*Village Rebellion and Social Violence*".

bureaucratic implementation and transcendence of new governing vigor, the documents amplified efficiency of the changing state-operational method, power managerial technique, and institutional adaptation. They enlarged the strength of centralized institutions and sophisticated correspondence, under which, for the first time, a single state came to present all along eastern mainland Southeast Asia. The 1830s-Vietnamese empire was born out of the inner-palace rearrangement and correspondence-consolidation.

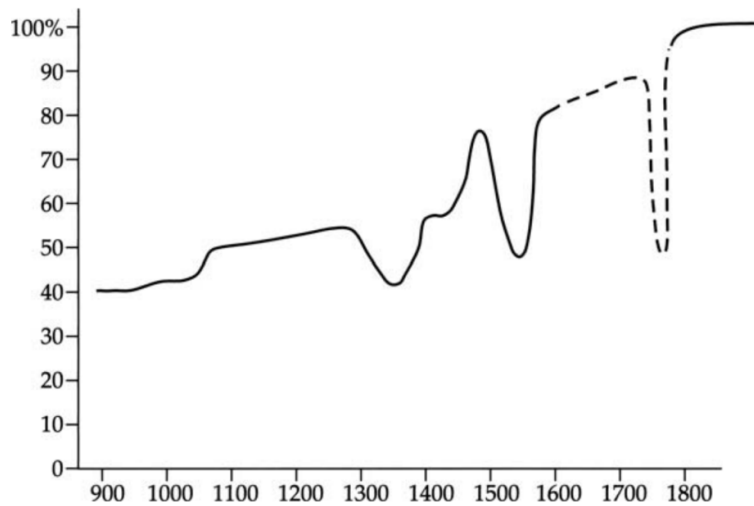


Figure 1.4. Territorial consolidation of "Vietnam".
Source: Lieberman. *Strange Parallels*, (2009): 14.

In addition, the design of palace archives was an achievement of the Nguyen bureaucracy. They are also the only state archival system of the imperial period that came out under the historical light. When Hue took part in fostering new forms of administrative operation based extensively on documents, the concentration of document preservation was required. Not only because of the classical idea that governance "is laid out on the wood and bamboo tablets" 布在方策, but also the urgent demand of classifying and reorganizing palace documents which were increasingly piled up even just into the third year of the Minh Menh reign (1822).⁴³ The bustling archive, as showed below, was both a space of papers-preservation and a bureaucratic theatre. Eastern Tower 東閣, the Grand Secretariat archive, deposited the most important official documents of the realm, also highly symbolic of the bureaucratic might of the empire.⁴⁴ The Hue mandarins' inspiration came from the classics' imperial models, where preserving official records was essential to governance. Archives and

⁴³ *Khâm Định Đại Nam Hội Điển Sự Lệ* 欽定大南會典事例 (*Official Compendium of Institutions and Usages of Imperial Vietnam*) (Vien Han Nom, VHv. 1570., n.d.), hereafter: *HDSL*, Preface 序: 1a.

⁴⁴ Later in 1835, there was also the Privy Council archive.

bureaucratic manuscripts played crucial roles in traditional administration. By developing official archives in Hue, the dynasty recognized their part in the operations of the state. Minh Menh, in particular, was inspired by the idea that his statecraft and codified institutions must be recorded and transmitted through “tens of thousands of generations to follow”.⁴⁵ The Nguyen archives were a compelling reflection of the interrelation between centralized bureaucracy and institutionalized paperwork. During the Minh Menh reign, the Dai Nam Empire 大南國 emerged in a profound association with the archival establishment. The prevailing administrative culture, based on the comprehensive utilization of paperwork, had escalated in excessive document deployment. By the early 1830s, the monarch came to realize that the disproportionate paperwork of unnecessarily detailed records had been all collected and restored.

These archives were attached to the emperor's workplace: the Hall of Diligent Politics 勤政殿, through a corridor of a short walking distance. Through that channel, paperwork was mobilized for annual reviews, compiling dynastic chronicles, and occasionally imperial consultations. The expansion of palace archives during the 1830s was the most sophisticated documentation project in early modern Vietnam. The issue is of high significance because of the belief adhered by many political theorists that "modern" states develop through the intensification of written rules, complex documents, and documentation-procedures.⁴⁶ Some of those archival and bureaucratic practices, as described in Max Weber's terms, has entered 'modern' and are seen among the most effective political structure developed by premodern states (as viewed from the Chinese bureaucracy).⁴⁷ What is more, Alexander Woodside recognizes some of those governing aspects as “the lost modernities” of traditional East Asia.⁴⁸ Among those, a well-organized state archival system was unquestionably the envy of their medieval and early modern Europeans. Postal networks and “official” roads in Vietnam, for instance, continued their life well into colonial and modern times, and remain as today's critical national traffic lines. So does the consolidation of territorial

⁴⁵ DNTH, II, 71: 21a-b.

⁴⁶ My thanks to Prof. Alexander Woodside for sharing his thoughts on more comparison between Nguyen and Qing's management of paperwork, and the role the documents played in transforming their politics in the early modern age.

⁴⁷ G. William Skinner, “What the Study of China Can Do for Social Science,” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 23, no. 4 (August 1964): 517–22.

⁴⁸ Alexander B. Woodside, *Lost Modernities: China, Vietnam, Korea, and the Hazards of World History* (CA, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006). While political scientist Francis Fukuyama early form of Chinese bureaucratic organization, especially the control of territory, organizing central state and the rule of law. See Francis Fukuyama, *The Origins of Political Order: From Prehuman Times to the French Revolution*, 1. ed. (New York, NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2012).

administration and establishment of provincial systems 省, which formed the foundational administrative contour of modern Vietnam.⁴⁹

Forth, Nguyen's paperwork is a unique window to the dynastic political culture.

Due to the lack of records about state institutions, paperwork's examination is indispensable to enrich our understanding of Vietnamese political history. The Le dynasty, for example, despite their 361-year rule (1428-1789), left behind very few records on its bureaucratic organization.⁵⁰ Official manuscripts might provide unique perspectives about the bureaucracy from which they were born and served. Seal imprints, signatures, layouts, taboo characters, and writing materials were directly born out of the interaction between documentation and institutions, between governance and the social, cultural, and technological conditions. The manuscripts were a peculiar window to understand the trajectories of institutional changes through their visual and physical characteristics. They also partly suggest the mechanism of governing, imperial ruling styles, and symbolic authority. Paratextual elements allow us to map the paperwork movements and reconstruct their previous lives. That angle is part of this thesis approach, grounding official documents on broader circumstances of institutions, power competitions, factionalism, and socio-economic changes. The process in which those conditions shaped paperwork and *vice versa* were among the defining characters for the rise and decline of the nineteenth-century Vietnamese state.

The manuscript analysis involves the investigation of textuality, materiality, and paratexts. It illustrates the correspondence between administrative techniques and paperwork designs. The subject has been neglected by the contemporary scholarship on Nguyen Vietnam, ignoring its usefulness for drawing the connection between changing political ideology, shifting dynasty, and competing paperwork production. However, the study of manuscript cultures when it comes to official papers remains problematic, at least in two aspects. First, most of the emphases take into considering the relationship between "texts" and "authority", recognizing "textuality" and "genres" as central modifiers of political performance while leaving out various significant aspects of manuscript culture. In other words, these studies investigate official

⁴⁹ I discussed one aspect of that subject, the Vietnam-Cambodia border in Vũ, "Vietnam at the Khmer Frontier: Boundary Politics, 1802–1847."

⁵⁰ For the discussion of the Le sources on bureaucratic institutions, see John K. Whitmore, "*The Development of Le Government in Fifteenth Century Vietnam*" (Ph.D. Thesis, Cornell University, 1968); Insun Yu, *Law and Society in Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century Vietnam* (Seoul, Korea: Asiatic Research Center, Korea University, 1990), and Philippe Langlet, *L'ancienne historiographie d'état au Vietnam, I: Raisons d'être, conditions d'élaboration, et caractères au siècle des Nguyen* (Paris: École française d'extrême orient: 1990).

documents with the inclination toward the history of political ideology and philology.⁵¹ Second, while there is a prevailing interest in the social, cultural, intellectual, archival, and technological aspects of the manuscripts,⁵² few explore documents in their own pragmatic and functional performances, on the ground of bureaucratic institutions and governing operations.⁵³ This thesis portrays paperwork as an embodiment of political culture by exploring paratexts and using a quantitative approach. The official documents are presented with agents and agencies in their voices of bureaucratic mediation and attestation of power relationships. Features such as materiality, visual design, and layout arrangements thus capture our great appreciation.

Part of the thesis approach derives from the CSMC umbrella of manuscript studies and the promotion of manuscript investigations across cultures and civilizations.⁵⁴ One of the priorities as the departure point of our methods is the holistic examination of official documents as written artifacts. The treatment can be observed in this thesis with the emphasis on analyzing paratexts, layouts, stamps, and textual organizations that are not often witnessed in other studies of political and institutional history. These angles of investigation, however, hope to convey new messages, shed new light, and present a new understanding of the documents' social and political lives. In doing so, this thesis's approach takes into account not only political events and abstract political ideology but their visual exhibitions on the paper surfaces.

Within this framework, two excellent examinations of the Qing palace documents are Silas Wu's *Communication and Imperial Control in China (1970)* and Beatrice S. Bartlett's *Monarchs and Ministers: The Grand Council in Mid-Ch'ing*

⁵¹ See Wang, *Writing and the Ancient State*; Connery, *The Empire of the Text*, Lewis, *Writing and Authority in Early China*.

⁵² Including their roles in the age of printing and book culture. For instance, see for instance Cynthia Joanne Brokaw and Kai-wing. Chow, eds., *Printing and Book Culture in Late Imperial China*, Studies on China: A Series of Conference Volumes (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 7; Beatrice S. Bartlett, "Ch'ing Documents in the National Palace Museum Archives; Part One: Document Registers: The Sui-Shou Teng-Chi," *National Palace Museum Bulletin* 10 4 (1975): 1–17; idem, "Ch'ing Documents in the National Palace Museum," *National Palace Museum Bulletin* 13 6 (1979): 1–21; idem, "The Ch'ing Central Government Archives: Provenance and Peregrinations," *Journal of East Asian Libraries* 63 (1980): 25–33; Mark C. Elliott, "The Manchu-Language Archives of the Qing Dynasty and the Origins of the Palace Memorial System," *Late Imperial China* 22, no. 1 (2001): 1–70.

⁵³ The exceptional are Enno Giele, *Imperial Decision-Making and Communication in Early China: A Study of Cai Yong's Duduan*, Opera Sinologica (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2006); Philip A. Kuhn, *Soulstealers: The Chinese Sorcery Scare of 1768* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990); Jonathan D. Spence, *Treason by the Book* (New York: Penguin Putnam Inc., 2001); Beatrice S. Bartlett, "Qing Statesmen, Archivists, and Historians and the Question of Memory," in *Archives, Documentation, and Institutions of Social Memory: Essays from the Sawyer Seminar*, ed. Francis X. Blouin and William G. Rosenberg (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2007), 417–26.

⁵⁴ See CSMC projects, https://www.manuscript-cultures.uni-hamburg.de/Projekte_p2_e.html (accessed on December 12, 2018).

China, 1723-1820 (1991).⁵⁵ Their interests whole-heartedly dedicated to communication and inner-court consolidation during the mid-Qing, particularly to the system of palace memorials 奏摺. The present thesis, however, aims at a broader approach to three significant kinds of paperwork: *Congdong* documents (issued by the audience of high-ranked officials), emperor's documents, and memorials. By locating them in the Nguyen bureaucratic landscape, their visual, functional, and institutional transformations are the main interest of this investigation. The evolution of Nguyen's efforts of recording the state was a significant reference, not only to the past but also to contemporary administrative issues.

In the end, not all the designs for paperwork came in positive successes. Bureaucratic excessive complexity and intricate archival management haunted the 1830s-bureaucrats. This thesis finally addresses a vital issue of Vietnamese political tradition concerning the scale and use of paperwork. The “sweating buffaloes” were a metaphorical indication of the limit of early modern statecraft and how an Asian society was desperate for efficient governance. State archives, increasing bureaucratization, and excessive use of paperwork were not uniquely Vietnamese. They belonged to a broader perspective of governing demands and changes across the region, if not globally.⁵⁶ Rapid economic changes, social dynamism, demographic mobility, and new requirements of effective governance confronted those emerging states with better-organized bureaucracy and efficient communication. My discoveries into the Vietnamese problems were their under-funded state structure weakened by the personnel-and-financial shortage. In 1471, there were only 2.700 officials appointed in Hanoi, of which 70% were the military staff. At the end of the eighteenth century, the number was 3.500, including mandarins and subalterns 官吏.⁵⁷ By the mid-1830s, Nguyen state-employed roughly 5.000 officials. Only 170 among them were civil personnel of rank 3A (正三品) and above (of the nine official grades 九品), while each board had staffed by seventy to 120 officials. These men governed an empire of

⁵⁵ Wu, *Communication and Imperial Control in China*; Bartlett, *Monarchs and Ministers*. Also, see her dissertation, Beatrice S. Bartlett, “The Vermillion Brush: The Grand Council Communications System and Central Government Decision Making in Mid Ch’ing China” (PhD dissertation, Yale University, 1980).

⁵⁶ The raise of early modern fiscal-states in Europe and modern central archives for instance. See Friedrich and Dillon, *The Birth of the Archive*. Christopher Storrs., ed., *The Fiscal-Military State in Eighteenth-Century Europe: Essays in Honour of P.G.M. Dickson* (Ashgate: Farnham, 2008). Patrick K. O’ Brien and Philip A. Hunt, “The Rise of a Fiscal State in England, 1485–1815,” *Historical Research* 66, no. 160 (June 1, 1993): 129–76; Jan Glete, *War and the State in Early Modern Europe: Spain, the Dutch Republic, and Sweden as Fiscal-Military States, 1500-1660* (London: Routledge, 2002).

⁵⁷ Vũ Đức Liêm and Dương Duy Bằng, “Phe Phái, Lợi Ích Nhóm, và Quyền Lực ở Việt Nam Đầu Thế Kỷ XIX (Factionalism, Interest Group, and Political Power in Early Nineteenth Century Vietnam), *Nghiên Cứu Lịch Sử* 9 (2018): 26–36.

nearly 400.000 thousand km² (including Cambodia) and ruled over a population of eight to ten million.⁵⁸

The bulk of paperwork is the accurate indicator of the limit of Hue bureaucracy. A reappraisal of documents and efficient governance is necessary for the sake of better understanding the administrative challenge that faced Nguyen and evaluating Minh Menh's institutional solutions. This research project was initiated with my eagerness dedicated to Minh Menh's designs of the complex administration and the use of intricate practical writings. In the end, is not it the Kafkaesque bureaucracy among the signatory features of our “modernity”. Facing the sweating buffaloes and the chaotic archives, the frustrated Hue officials who begged their emperor for document reduction realized that power consolidation and state institutionalization did not come with low cost.⁵⁹ By the mid-1830s, for instance, records were presented in unnecessarily detailed, both complicating official affairs and spreading anxiety to the monarch and bureaucrats. Many administrative initiatives were blocked because of this excessive document use.⁶⁰ A wide range of correspondence obstacles remained unfixable, including classified documents of standard and express deliveries, open and confidential, the treatment of imperial endorsed files, and the sufficiently standardized rules. Some of these managerial failures continued lingering Hue central court, especially to the Minh Menh's grandson, Tu Duc Emperor (嗣德, ruled 1847-1883). The literature-aficionado and physically weak ruler was obsessed with the bulk of daily paperwork and recalled back the Gia Long court structure when high-ranked courtiers held enormous responsibilities on processing official documents. The move, however, would bring the dynasty another crisis.

Finally, there are two challenges when conducting this research. First, unlike studies of Chinese political history, the state of the fields in Vietnam is rudimentary.⁶¹

⁵⁸ Woodside, *Vietnam and the Chinese Model*, 143; Tana Li, *Nguyen Cochinchina, Southern Vietnam in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998), 159–72; Yumio Sakurai, “Vietnam after the Age of Commerce” (Unpublished ms., n.d.), 1,3. Even in the late eighteenth century China, 25.000 state officials governed over a population of 200 million. Mark C. Elliott, *Emperor Qianlong: Son of Heaven, Man of the World* (New York: Pearson Longman, 2009), 15.

⁵⁹ See the memorials in which Nguyen officials suggested of paperwork depletion, MNCB, 51: 296, 323, and 325.

⁶⁰ For instance, the boards denied Nguyen Cong Tru petition for military reform in 1833 because “Records are chaotic. Even [the documents] before our eyes are so disorganized that unmanageable. Cong Tru’s initiative is implausible”. Original text, “冊籍紛繁，將目前已不勝其擾矣。公著所言不可行也”. DNLT, II, 94: 3a.

⁶¹ At the time of writing, there is only one published book of printed facsimiles, including twenty *chauban*. See Ủy ban Biên giới Quốc gia - UBGGQG, *Tuyển Tập Các Châu Bản Triều Nguyễn về Thực Thi Chủ Quyền Của Việt Nam Trên Hai Quần Đảo Hoàng Sa và Trường Sa (Selected Nguyen Dynasty’s Chauban on the Exercise of Vietnamese Sovereignty over Paracels and Spratlys Islands)* (Hà Nội: Nxb Tri Thức, 2003).

Institutional history, in particular, is the domain of little interest, in which Woodside's work (1971) remains the only comprehensive treatment of early nineteenth-century Nguyen.⁶² Second, the scope of this thesis deals with thousands of documents, written by hundreds of different hands, on various paper sizes and subject matters. Some published facsimiles date back to the 1940s (by French scholars) with no original documents left behind.

In many cases, cursive handwriting and small-sized stamps make them nearly impossible to decipher. With that being said, this thesis is among the first to investigate the Nguyen palace documents and the dynasty political culture. A handful of works, including those by French archivist Paul Boudet (1942), Taiwanese historian Chen Jinghe 陳荊和 (V., Tran Kinh Hoa, 1960, 1962), Vietnamese historian Phan Huy Le (1998, 2010), Nguyen Cong Viet (2013), and NA1 are essential guidelines for this study to depart.⁶³ As a result, the perspective presented here is the best story I can account for, based on my best accessibility of the existing documents that are still very much placed under the scrutiny of the state-run archive in Hanoi. Hopefully, that archival system will soon be more open, and new materials will provide a better understanding of this fascinating and essential subject.

⁶² See for instance research on the Qing political history, H. S. Brunnert and V. V. Hagelstrom, *Present Day Political Organization of China* (Shanghai: Kelly and Walsh, 1912); John King Fairbank and Siyu Deng, *Ch'ing Administration: Three Studies*, Harvard-Yenching Institute Studies (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1960); Charles O Hucker, "An Index of Terms and Titles in 'Governmental Organization of The Ming Dynasty,'" *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 23 (1960): 127–51; E-tu Zen Sun, *Ch'ing Administrative Terms*; Charles O. Hucker, "Governmental organization of the Minh dynasty," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 21 (1958): 1–66; idem, *A Dictionary of Official Titles in Imperial China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1985), and Endymion P. Wilkinson, *Chinese History: A New Manual*, Fifth edit (Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University Press, 2000). There are works in Vietnamese that deal with early nineteenth century Vietnam. Nguyen Minh Tuong (1996), for example, focuses on the so-called 'Minh Menh administrative reform' (*cải cách hành chính Minh Mệnh*), while other scholars pay little interest on Hue paperwork and communication. See Đỗ Bang et al., *Tổ Chức Bộ Máy Nhà Nước Triều Nguyễn, 1802-1883 (The Organization of the Nguyen State Structure, 1802-1883)* (Huế: Thuận Hóa, 1997); Nguyễn Phan Quang, *Việt Nam Thế Kỷ XIX (1802-1884) (Vietnam in the XIXth Cencentury (1802-1884)* (Hà Chí Minh City: Nxb thành phố Hồ Chí Minh, 2002).

⁶³ Major manuals on the research of chauban are Nguyễn Thị Thu Hương, Thị Thu Thủy Đoàn, and Nguyễn Công Việt, *Ấn Chương Trên Châu Bản Triều Nguyễn, 1802-1945 (Sealed Imprints on the Nguyen Vermilion Records, 1802-1945)* (Hanoi: Nxb Hà Nội, 2013); Trung tâm Lưu trữ Quốc gia I, *Ngự Phê Trên Châu Bản Triều Nguyễn (Imperial Endorsements on the Nguyen's Chauban)*, (Hà Nội: Nxb Đại học Sư phạm, 2015); Kim Hoa Lý, *Châu Bản Triều Nguyễn: Tư Liệu Phật Giáo qua Các Triều Đại Nhà Nguyễn 143 Năm Từ Gia Long 1802 Đến Bảo Đại 1945 (Chauban of the Nguyen Dynasty: Sources on Buddhism through the Nguyen Reigns between 1802 and 1945)*, (Hanoi: Van hoa Thông tin, 2003); Phan Huy Lê, "Châu Bản Triều Nguyễn và Châu Bản Năm Minh Mệnh 6-7 (Nguyen Vermilion Records and Vermilion Records in the Minh Menh's 6th-7th Years)," in *Mục Lục Châu Bản Triều Nguyễn 阮朝硃本目錄, tập 2. Năm Minh Mệnh 6 (1825) và 7 (1826)*, ed. Huy Lê. Phan et al. (Hà Nội: Văn Hóa, 1998), XI–XLVII; 1, *Mục Lục Châu Bản Triều Nguyễn. Tập 1. Gia Long (1802-1819); Minh Mệnh 1 (1820) – Minh Mệnh 5 (1824) (Catalogue of the Nguyen Vermilion Records. Vol.1. Gia Long Reign (1802-1820) and Minh Menh Reign (1820-1824))*; Chen, *Mục Lục Châu Bản Triều Nguyễn, tập 1: triều Gia Long (Catalogue of the Nguyen's Chauban, volume I, the Gia Long Reign)*.

I. 3. Plan of the thesis

As far as the paperwork's functions, characters, and lives are concerned in this thesis, the following pages are arranged in four chapters. Their purposes are to contextualize the documents' blossoming in the historical, political, administrative, and ideological contexts. They provide detailed pictures of how official documents had come to define early nineteenth-century Vietnam. They have proceeded from perspectives of institutions, power competitions, factionalism, governance, communication, and personal ruling experiences. Equally important is how these factors had come to shape official records and design their structures. Finally, this study reflects some thoughts on the legacy of early modern paperwork and their roles in laying the foundation of modern bureaucracy.

Chapter II presents two Vietnams, of Gia Long and Minh Menh, and how they contribute to the making of modern Vietnam. It examines both Nguyen central state structure (the boards, palace offices) and territorial organization to stress the role communication and deliberative network played in the bureaucratic operation. During the Gia Long days, the primary function of the central court was to manage the new unified territory. Hue could do little to intervene in regional administrations of the Red river delta 北城 and lower Mekong 嘉定城.

Minh Menh was not happy with that. His aim of personal rule commanded efficient correspondence and reliable information collection. Installing a centralized correspondence system and consolidating inner-court institutes were central to that administrative project. The changing Hue's political landscape led to profound, systematic reforms of the system in which paperwork was drafted, transmitted, processed, implemented, and preserved.

Chapter III looks at the nature of the Nguyen palace archives and the existing collection of vermilions records 硃本 at the National Archive No. I (NA1, Hanoi). Part of its past life will be reconstructed, particularly 23,000 survival manuscripts produced between 1802 and 1841. By investigating their archival journeys, genres, and quantitative analysis, this chapter lays the ground for examining their evolution in bureaucratic operations.

Chapter IV takes the insights into the transformation of three major types of Hue palace documents: *Congdong* documents (issued by the audience of high-ranked courtiers), emperors' documents (drafted by the emperor or issued in his name), and memorials 奏. Each encapsulates an instrument via which the Vietnamese state functioned under different styles of political authority.

The conclusion attempts to locate paperwork in the broader context of Vietnamese political tradition and its roles in shaping Vietnamese governance and administration.

I. 4. Sources

This study examines a collection of twenty-three thousand extant palace documents produced between 1802 and 1841. They belong to the remaining holding body of nearly 85,000 records, more than 400,000 pages of official files issued under the Nguyen dynasty (1802-1945).⁶⁴ The archival collection is categorized as *chauban* (硃本, lit., *vermilion records*); named after their most distinctive feature of bearing imperial “vermilion endorsements” 硃批. *Chauban*, however, includes more than twenty different types of officials documents connected with administrative matters that are delivered by bureaucratic correspondence channels. Their contents involve people from all walks of life, reflecting their concerns both individually and nationally, from issues of borders and frontiers to rice-fields ownership dispute, from diplomatic relations with the West to the suppression against Christians.

Despite the collection's indispensable values, I have recognized its highly complicated history. For many documents, their previous lives are mostly obscure. The archival system in Hue had profoundly evolved and shifted, resulting from frequent political turmoil and warfare. Hue's imperial city was under military attacks or political crises in 1883, 1885, 1945, 1946, 1954-1956, 1968, and 1975. We have absolutely no idea of the fate of the *chauban* from the dawn of the twentieth century to 1958 when the collection – thousands of uncared manuscripts piled up in boxes lying outside the reading room of the Bao Dai Library (Hue) - came to Chen Jinghe's attention.⁶⁵

Knowing the collection is challenging, but accessing it is another story. Between the “sweating buffaloes” and “sweating archive-diggers” stands a thin line of historical nostalgia and beads of sweat. Those who have worked with Vietnamese state

⁶⁴ See more in chapter III.

⁶⁵ Li, “Review of Muc Luc Chau Ban Trieu Nguyen”. See more on Chen and southern Vietnam project on working with the Hue palace archives in Vandermeersch Léon, “Chingho A. Chen (1917-1995),” *BEFEO* 83 (1996): 10–17, Trương Đản Nguyễn, Gặp Người Cuối Cùng Trong Nhóm Biên Dịch “Mục Lục Châu Bản Triều Nguyễn” (Meet the Last Member of the Translating Group of ‘the Catalogue of Nguyen Vermilion Records), *Tạp chí Sông Hương*, 2009, <http://tapchisonghuong.com.vn/tap-chi/c175/n3369/Gap-nguoi-cuoi-cung-trong-nhom-bien-dich-Muc-luc-Chau-ban-trieu-Nguyen.html> (accessed on March 10, 2019); Nguyễn Văn Đăng, “Về Hoạt Động Của Nhà Đông Phương Học Trần Kinh Hòa (1917-1995) Trên Đất Việt Nam (The Activities of Orientalist Chen Jinghe (1917-1995) in Vietnam),” *Nghiên Cứu và Phát Triển* 1, no. 90 (2012): 107–18; Nguyễn Tuấn Cường, “Giáo Dục Hán Học Trong Biến Động Văn Hoá Xã Hội: Viện Hán Học Huế, 1959-1965 (Sinological Education in a Socio-Cultural Change: A History of the Institute of Sinology in Huế, 1959-1965),” *Tạp Chí Nghiên Cứu và Phát Triển* 7–8, no. 114–115 (2014): 135–64.

archives can testify. Only less than 100 Nguyen palace documents have been published as facsimiles. The situation makes the search for archive-holding documents a discouraging journey. Even the recognitions by UNESCO as a world documentary heritage (2014) and registered heritage of the memory of the World (2017) could do little to liberate them from that bureaucratic restriction.⁶⁶

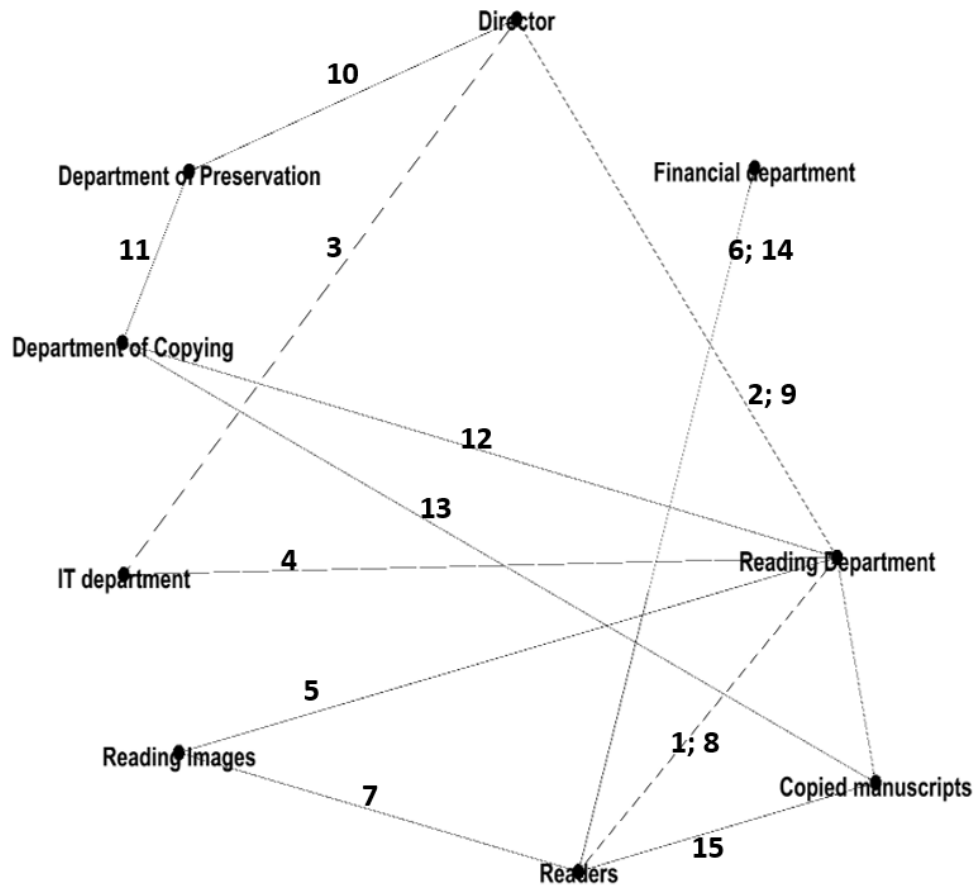


Figure 1.5. National Archive No. 1 (NA1) procedures
 Seven (07) steps to acquire reading materials and fifteen (15) for a copied manuscript.
 Source: NA1 procedures (June 2016).

This part must be written, not only because of my personal experiences but a testimony to the continuous authority of official documents in political life. It was on that journey that I discovered “two lives of an archive” through a search for Vietnamese political culture. How possible it is that those 200 year-documents still

⁶⁶ “Imperial Archives of Nguyen Dynasty (1802-1945): Documentary Heritage Submitted by Vietnam and Recommended for Inclusion in the Memory of the World Register in 2017,” UNESCO, accessed August 7, 2018, <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/communication-and-information/memory-of-the-world/register/full-list-of-registered-heritage/registered-heritage-page-4/imperial-archives-of-nguyen-dynasty-1802-1945/>.

haunted the present as they did so powerfully in the past. I spent my summers of 2014, 2015, and 2016 in Hanoi, searching for accessibility to the collection. The staff at the NA1 could not be more helpful to me, but the bureaucratic procedures were frightening. On one occasion, it took me three months for orders to copy manuscripts, in which only two out of my six requests were approved. Just at the moment, the summer fieldwork came to an end. The story of paperwork and the politics of official files are central to political practices in Vietnam, as I witnessed firsthand in the course of this research. In addition, today's Vietnam possesses the most cumbersome system of bureaucratic documents and procedures in Southeast Asia. Legacies of the past are undeniable, in which, who better deserved “credit” for but Minh Menh! Modern Vietnamese administration has not entirely departed from its historical roots. Images of the past can still be vividly observed in the present because "history doesn't repeat itself, but it often rhymes."

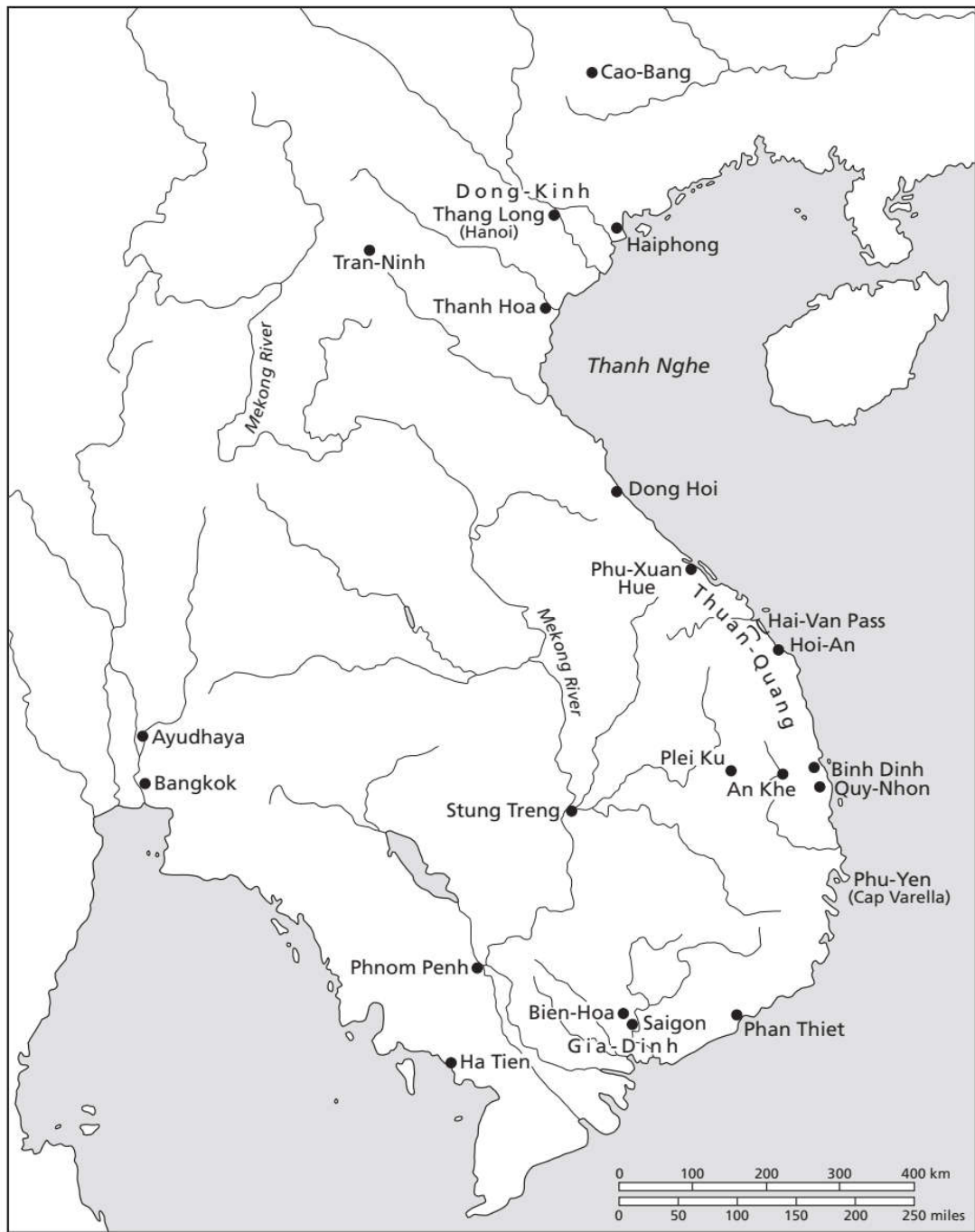
Despite the frustrations, to the best of my capacity, I have expanded my sources to an extensive gathering of seventeenth-nineteenth centuries- paperwork, including those at the Sino-Vietnamese collection at the National Library, Sino-Vietnamese Institute (Hanoi), private collections at private and local archives in Vietnam, EFEO library in Paris (*Bibliothèque de l'EFEO Paris*), Cornell Library, Harvard-Yenching Library, British Library, Japanese National Archives, Yale Library, Library of the Temple University, Philadelphia; Hue province museum, Hué Museum of Royal Fine Arts, Vietnam National Museum of History, *Bibliothèque Nationale de France*; and the Hamilton Library at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa. They allow me to acquire many sources, from the seventeenth century Trinh Lords' diplomatic letters, Tay Son emperor Quang Trung's Sino-Nom correspondences, to the imperial edict written by Emperor Minh Menh himself. To contextualize those documents, a large number of dynastic compilations and historical records are consulted. They include the Nguyen's *Veritable Records of the Great South* 大南寔錄, *Biographies of the Eminent in Dai Nam* 大南列傳, *Essential Records of Minh Menh* 明命正要 (1837); *Official Compendium of Institutions and Usages of Imperial Vietnam* 欽定大南會典事例; *Minh Menh's Imperial Writings* 明命御製文; *Official Compendium of rebel suppression in northern and southern territories of the empire* 欽定勦平兩圻逆匪方略正編 (1836); *Categorized Records of the Institutions of Successive Dynasties* 歷朝憲章類誌 (by Phan Huy Chu 潘輝注, 1819); *Lost Records of the National History* 國史遺編 (by Phan Thuc Truc 潘叔直); *Writing formats of imperial edicts and memorials* 表論文體, 1852; *Essays Penned Randomly in the Rain* 雨中隨筆 (Pham

Dinh Ho 范廷琥), and *Catalogues of the chauban documents of the present dynasty* 皇朝硃本目錄 (Ms, Yale Library).⁶⁷

Without those sources, a study of early modern Vietnamese official documents and manuscript culture is hardly realizable. This effort is, however, the embryo of the field manuscript culture in Vietnam. At the time of writing, nevertheless, it comes to my knowledge that archival procedures at NAI have been recently relaxed. I sincerely hope that the change has come for further research on the field. For those who embark on the same journey, I could not help but wish them luck!

With that in mind, let the story begin.

⁶⁷ DNNTL; HTCBLM; *Đại Nam Liệt Truyện, Tiên Biên* 大南烈傳, 前編 (*The Primary Compilation of Biographies of the Great South, Initial Period*) (Tokyo: Keio Institute of Linguistic Studies, reprint, 1961); *Đại Nam Chính Biên Liệt Truyện, Sơ Tập* 大南正編列傳初集 (*First Collection of the Primary Compilation of Biographies of Imperial Vietnam*) (1889, Tokyo: Keio Institute of Linguistic Studies, 1962); *Đại Nam Chính Biên Liệt Truyện, Nhị Tập* 大南正編列傳二集 (*Second Collection of the Primary Compilation of Biographies of Imperial Vietnam*) (1909, Tokyo: The Institute of Cultural and Linguistic Studies, Keio University, 1981). Minh Mệnh, *Minh Mệnh Chính Yếu* 明命政要 (*Abstract of the Minh Menh Policies*), (1837, Sài Gòn: Phủ Quốc-vụ-khánh đặc-trách Văn-Hóa, 1972-1974); HDSL: *Khâm Định Đại Nam Hội Điển Sự Lệ* 欽定大南會典事例 (*Official Compendium of Institutions and Usages of Imperial Vietnam*) (Viện Hán Nôm, VHv 1570, 1851); Minh Mệnh, *Ngự Chế Văn* 御製文 (*Imperial Writings*) (Viện Hán Nôm, A. 118, 1834); Chú, *Lịch Triều Hiến Chương Loại Chí* 歷朝憲章類誌 (*Categorized Records of the Institutions of Successive Dynasties*); Phan Thúc Trực 潘叔直, *Quốc Sử Di Biên* 國史遺編 (*Lost Records of the National History*), ed. Chen Jinghe (Hong Kong: Centre of Asian Studies, Hong Kong University, 1965); *Biểu Luận Văn Thể* 表論文體 (*Writing Formats of Memorials*) (Thư viện Quốc gia, R. 321, 1852); Phạm Đình Hồ 范廷虎, “Vũ Trung Tùy Bút 雨中隨筆 (Essays Penned Randomly in the Rain)” (Viện Hán Nôm, A.145, n.d.).



Map 1.2. Before Vietnam

Source: Whitmore and Zottoli (2009).

CHAPTER II.

THE BIRTH OF MODERN VIETNAM

“No period more significant than this one.”

Alexander B. Woodside, 1988: 111.

茲本朝奄有南方，提封日闢東邊一帶訖于南海遶過西溟。凡戴髮含齒皆隸版圖，海澨山陬盡歸率土原稱越南，今稱大南，更明名義。

Now, our dynasty has the entire South; the territory is expanding that stretching eastward to the Southern Sea, going across to the Western Sea. People with teeth and hair are entirely incorporated into the map; [people] everywhere, from beaches to forests' corners, submit [to us]. [The realm] was previously called Viet Nam, now changes to Dai Nam to uphold the principles of righteousness.

Emperor Minh Menh, 1838 (DN TL, II, 190: 1b-2a).

II. 1. Gia Long's Vietnam

II. 1. 1. Political Organization

In summer 1802, an army was heading to the northern Vietnamese political center of Thang Long, where for 800 years stood the capital city of the Daiviet kingdom 大越 (*Great Viet*).¹ Its commander was Nguyen Phuc Anh 阮福暎, the only surviving young prince of the Southern realm of Cochinchina (*Dang Trong/ The Inner Region*). The man had led a twenty-five-year power struggle against multiple enemies of Tayson, Chinese diasporas, and local rulers before crowning himself Emperor Gia Long 嘉隆.² The event introduced Vietnam to a new age with a new story of empire expansion.

Gia Long's "Vietnam", however, was a state in the making. Given his political background, and more significantly, the composition of the 1802-Vietnamese

¹ For an overview of Dai Viet history, see Taylor, *A History of the Vietnamese*. Whitmore and Zottoli, "The Emergence of the State of Vietnam", 197–233.

² In 1802, Gia Long proclaimed himself king 王 of the unified Vietnam. The 'emperor' title 皇帝 only came in 1806. DN TL, I, 28: 1a; 29: 1a. For the war to unify Vietnam, see Vũ Đức Liêm, "The Age of Sea Falcons: Naval Warfare in Vietnam, 1771-1802," in *Warring Societies of Pre-Colonial Southeast Asia: Local Cultures of Conflict Within a Regional Context*, ed. Kathryn Wellen and Michael Charney (Copenhagen: Nordic Institute of Asian Studies, 2017), 103–29. For more on Nguyen Cochinchina, see Tana, *Nguyen Cochinchina*; idem, "An Alternative Vietnam? The Nguyen Kingdom in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 29, no. 1 (1998): 111–21.

geopolitics, the project of unifying ‘Vietnam’ was uncertain. Going into exile since fourteen, he was not familiar with Confucian training and complex bureaucratic management.³ The Nguyen prince relied mainly on the military network that brought him to triumph while modestly turning to the Le governmental model for macro-structural arrangements to rule the post-war society.⁴ The Le state, reigned northern Vietnam between 1460 and 1788, was heavily influenced by that of the Ming China. It centered around Six Boards 六部 and several specialized institutions, such as State Academy 國子監, State Institute of Cosmology 欽天監, Censorate 都察院, State Academy of Medicine 太醫院, and Department of Imperial Household 尊人府.⁵

On the other side of the coin, Gia Long was aware of his vulnerable position in the newly-conquered empire that stretched, for the first time, from the Sino-Vietnamese border to the Gulf of Thailand. After centuries of separation and antagonism, “Vietnamese” of various regionalism and ethnicity were far from ready to leave local identities behind.⁶ Unlike other dynasties, anti-Nguyen rebellions were sparked from the beginning.⁷ As a result, the first version of modern Vietnam was a compromise between the ruler’s desire for stability and his powerful generals’ ambition of maintaining local autonomy. In that world, the military was paramount over the fragile civil faction.

Table 2.1. Dividing territories in 1810-Vietnam

Regions	Ruling authorities	1810	
Northern Administration 北城 (eleven commanderies 鎮)	Northern Governor-general 北城總鎮	Son Nam Thượng	Inner commanderies 內鎮
		Son Nam Hạ	
		Kinh Bắc	
		Son Tây	
		Hải Dương	

³ Liam C. Kelley recently points out that the Nguyen Cochinchina should not be seriously considered as a state. Liam C. Kelley, “Princes (Not Kings) in Đàng Trong,” 2019, [https://leminhkhai.wordpress.com/2019/04/27/princes-not-kings-in-dang-trong/?fbclid=IwAR1OkuREhJ-](https://leminhkhai.wordpress.com/2019/04/27/princes-not-kings-in-dang-trong/?fbclid=IwAR1OkuREhJ-Hd69mn7zB5zaxMo1INPY1JJKNWygw2i0sWloXRa_2_B0eF3Q)

Hd69mn7zB5zaxMo1INPY1JJKNWygw2i0sWloXRa_2_B0eF3Q. (accessed on April 27, 2019). Despite the view projected by conventional and nationalist scholarship on the Nguyen Cochinchina as a state, I would also suggest the otherwise, the perception of Dang Trong as a fully-functioned state was initiated by the nineteenth century Nguyen’s dynastic historiography and modern Vietnamese historians. See for instance Trần Thị Vinh, “Thế Chế Chính Quyền Đàng Trong Dưới Thời Các Chúa Nguyễn (Thế Kỳ XVI-XVIII) (Dang Trong’s Governmental Institution under the Nguyen Lords (16th -18th Centuries)), *Nghiên Cứu Lịch Sử*, 10 (2004): 3–14.

⁴ For the establishment of the Le government, see Whitmore, “The Development of Le Government”; Insun, *Law and Society*.

⁵ Whitmore, “The Development of Le Government”, 98–150.

⁶ See Taylor, “Surface Orientations”, 949–78 and my treatment of the subject in Vũ Đức Liêm, “‘Nam Tiến’ và Cái Bẫy Địa Lý Của Người Việt (Vietnamese ‘March to the South’ and the Trap of Geography)”, BBC Vietnamese, October 2018, https://www.bbc.com/vietnamese/forum-46007247?fbclid=IwAR2ApH9LFwxvkF4lpehsEIPX9h11CoGcSXTU-aux4IJG6TgwrqfZdQ_7fUM. (Accessed on March 12, 2019).

⁷ Vũ, “Village Rebellion and Social Violence”.

		Thái Nguyên	Outer commanderies 外鎮
		Lạng Sơn	
		Tuyên Quang	
		Cao Bằng	
		An Quảng	
		Hưng Hóa	
Hue's direct control, Eleven military units: four military garrison 營 ⁸ and seven commanderies 鎮.	Nguyen Emperor Gia Long 嘉隆皇帝	Quảng Bình	Capital 京圻
		Quảng Trị	
		Quảng Đức	
		Quảng Nam	
		Thanh Hóa	Commanderies 鎮
		Nghệ An	
		Quảng Ngãi	
		Bình Định	
		Phú Yên	
		Bình Khang	
		Bình Thuận	
Southern Administration 嘉定城 (five commanderies 鎮)	Southern Governor- general 嘉定城總鎮	Phiên An	Commanderies
		Biên Hòa	
		Vĩnh Thanh	
		Định Tường	
		Hà Tiên	

In the two densest demographic and most important economic centers, the Red River and Mekong Deltas, relatively loose political control was implemented through the appointments of the trusted generals, Nguyen Van Thanh (阮文誠; 1758 – 1817) and Le Van Duyet (黎文悅, 1763-1832), as viceroys. In the first two decades of the nineteenth century, Vietnam was under military rule. The kingdom was far from settled, but a temporary negotiation and coalition between Hue central court and local powerhouses in Hanoi and Saigon, where two commander-generals 總鎮 governed. Their vicerealty was unchallengeable, including supreme administrative and judicial authority that allowed them “to be free from appointing and punishing officials, and taking legal actions before reporting to the emperor.”⁹ Paperwork from the regional offices was collected only for periodic correspondence with the central court.

Although Gia Long declared himself an emperor 皇帝 and announced Vietnam the “Middle kingdom” 中國,¹⁰ the shortage of civil-service personnel prevented the state from executing complex bureaucracy. After two hundred years of warfare and territorial expansion, Northern, Central, and Southern Vietnam embarked on a political divergence and dynamic demographic mobility. The militarily-overwhelmed governance and information-flows monopolized by a small number of high-ranked generals indicated the state’s incapability to address postwar complex administrative

⁸ Doanh 營 is a Sino-Vietnamese word for “garrison”. During the Nguyen Cochinchina, it turned to be an administrative unit term, “đinh” (a southern vernacular pronunciation of the character 營).

⁹ DNTL, I, 18: 30b-31a.

¹⁰ DNTL, I, 29: 1a; Woodside, *Vietnam and the Chinese Model*, 18.

challenges, remarkably rapid responses to local affairs. The maintenance of the war machine retained the communication-decision structure and paperwork production in wartime fashion. Court institutions, for instance, were minimally organized, operating merely through sending down “orders” rather than addressing complex policies involving sophisticated sociopolitical issues. The Six-board offices 六部公堂 came to act in 1806, while their presidents 六部尚書 were only fully staffed in 1809.¹¹

Four secretary offices were formed for information-gathering, namely Office of Books-Assistance 侍書院, Office of Records-Assistance 侍翰院, Inner Office of Records-Assistance 內翰院, and Department of Seal Management 尚寶司. They took charge of the ‘imperial office,’ as suggested in the titles, from book-collection, drafting emperor’s documents, assisting imperial affairs, and managing imperial seals. However, they were not the only governmental institutions that delivered the emperor’s written authority. At the same time, *Congdong* - the Council of high-ranked officials promulgated another channel that involved the central court’s paperwork and decision-making. An interesting characteristic of the *Congdong*’s papers is that they were delivered in the name of the court but not necessary with the emperor’s acknowledgement.

嘉隆年間，凡章疏案牘均由公同閱擬。間有關重事件，然後請旨裁定；餘尋常小事，既經公同妥議，傳示施行，不必一一入奏。¹²

“During the years of the Gia Long reign, memorials and reports were processed and analyzed by *Congdong*, if there is something important, asking for imperial decision is necessary; for the rest of the routine businesses, *Congdong* discussed and put into implementation, memorializing all [affairs] to the emperor is unnecessary.”

The existence of regional commandery offices was an obstacle to the imperial direct communication system. Most regional commanders were militarily-oriented men who maintained limited correspondence with the court through plainly-written paperwork, mainly presented in the forms of short reports.¹³ In that context, *Congdong* was playing as a crucial deliberative structure based on the operation of executive documents.¹⁴

¹¹ Original text, “六部置尚書自此始”, DNTL, I, 39: 16b.

¹² DNTL, IV, 27: 9b.

¹³ The best attestation is certainly three volume of *Gia Long châu bản* 嘉隆硃本 (Gia Long’s vermilion records), hereafter *GLCB*: 1, 2, 3, in “Châu Bản Triều Nguyễn 阮朝硃本 (Vermilion Records of the Nguyen Dynasty)” (Trung tâm lưu trữ Quốc gia I, Hà Nội, 1802-1945).

¹⁴ See *GLCB*, vols. 1-3.

Without a consolidated process of storing paperwork, the files were dispersed among the boards. The palace secretary offices and Six Boards organized their own document storage, while the transmission of emperor-documents was primarily conducted without direct imperial intervention in written forms. As showed in the following, Gia Long kept an eye on this deliberative structure but took no bold action to call for change. *DNTL* indicated his sense of insecurity toward the powerful generals but did little to intervene, except the downfall of Nguyen Van Thanh (1816).¹⁵

A possible explanation came from the emperor's background. He originated from *Cochinchina* - a land of a relatively-poor intellectual tradition.¹⁶ The centre of Confucian education and well-organized state-institutions located in the north, represented by the “Northern-River Intellectuals” 北河士夫. These men, unfortunately, perceived the new dynasty with wary eyes and questioned its legitimacy.¹⁷ On the other hand, Gia Long welcomed them with high skepticism and sometimes hostility. Partly because of that mutual distrust, Thang Long (Hanoi) was not selected to be the new state's capital. Instead, a close retainer with the reputation of “education and political cunning” was appointed to administer the Red river delta.¹⁸

At the central court, a small civil cohort was expected to manage the operation of official documents. Prominent among them were many Chinese descendants such as Trinh Hoai Duc (鄭懷德, 1765 - 1825), Dang Duc Sieu (鄧德超, 1751 – 1810), Le

¹⁵ *DNTL*, I, 51: 16a-b. See my analysis of the 1816 affair in Vũ and Dương, “Phe Phái, Lợi Ích Nhóm”. As a result, the bureaucratic system in Hue was fragmented. Territorially speaking, Vietnam was far from a unified state but a geographical amalgamation of different political terrains and administrative traditions. The use of paperwork was on a modest scale because of the small number of literati who were willing to serve the new dynasty. Even if they did, their positions soon became secondary to the military counterparts both in ranks and in political power. According to official regulation in 1804, board president was in rank 2A, equal to deputy-commander general *Phó tướng* 副將, while Chief army division *Chưởng quân* 掌軍 entitled to rank 1A. *DNTL*, I, 24: 3b-9a.

¹⁶ For more, see Lê Quý Đôn. *Phủ Biên Tạp Lục* 撫邊雜錄 (Chronicles of the Prefectural Borders), 1776, 2 vols. (Sài Gòn: Tủ sách cổ văn, Ủy ban dịch thuật, 1973), 2: 142b; Olga Dror and K.W. Taylor, eds., *Views of Seventeenth-Century Vietnam: Christoforo Borri on Cochinchina and Samuel Baron on Tonkin* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Southeast Asia Program, 2006), 122. Claudine Ang, *Poetic Transformations: Eighteenth-Century Cultural Projects on the Mekong Plains* (CA, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2019).

¹⁷ See the view of the eighteenth century northern literati on the Nguyen *Cochinchina* in Lê, *Phủ Biên Tạp Lục*. French official Langglois described in 1802 the expectation of the northerners that Gia Long will place a Le family member on the throne. They were however disappointed when Gia Long crowning himself. Hoàng Xuân Hãn, “Thống Nhất Thời Xưa,” in *La Sơn Yên Hồ Hoàng Xuân Hãn, Tập II*, ed. Xuân Hãn Hoàng (Hà Nội: Giáo dục, 1998), 1405.

¹⁸ Taylor, *A History of the Vietnamese*, 400. In 1805, Thang Long 昇龍 was ‘downgraded’ by replacing the character long 龍 (dragon) to long 隆 (prosperity). In 1831, the area was turned to be a province 省 known as Hanoi 河内 (The [land] Inner [between] Rivers). *DNTL*, I, 27: 7b. See my discussion on the subject, Vũ Đức Liêm, “Khi Thăng Long Đều Mất Rồng: Sự ‘Giáng Cấp’ Của Hà Nội Thế Kì XIX (When Thang Long Lost the Dragon: The Downgrade of Hanoi in the XIXth Century),” Tia Sáng, accessed June 7, 2020, <https://tiasang.com.vn/khoa-hoc-cong-nghe/Khi-Thang-Long-de-mat-rong-su-“giang-cap”-cua-Ha-Noi-the-ki-XIX-23150>.

Quang Dinh (黎光定, 1759 - 1813), and Pham Dang Hung (范登興, 1764-1825). During the first decade of the Gia Long reign, these men cooperated with a few northern scholar-officials (Ngo Thi Nham, Nguyen Gia Cat, Dang Tran Thuong, Nguyen Vien, and Vu Trinh) to organize the flow of official papers.¹⁹ Their talent was deployed on various forms of documents, including diplomatic exchanges with Beijing in a request for “tribute relationship” 朝貢 and “conferring the recognized title” 册封 to the Vietnamese king. Trinh Hoai Duc was the chief architect of the reestablishment of Sino-Vietnamese diplomacy.²⁰ Le Quang Dinh, a Hanlin scholar and President of the Board of War, organized the first Nguyen geographical survey that led to the compilation of *the Geographical Records of the Unified Imperial South* 皇越一統輿地志 (1806). In 1815, Dang Duc Sieu-President of the Board of Rites, was appointed a mentor to Gia Long’s fourth prince, who in 1820 would become Emperor Minh Menh.

Another eminent literati figure was Nguyen van Thanh (阮文誠; 1758 – 1817), Commander-General of the north. By 1810, he left office and spent three years in Hue to mourn the death of his mother. Gia Long, however, ordered him to sort out the *Nguyen Imperial Law Code* 皇越律例, which he presented in 1812. Thanh was the leading patronage of many northern literati in these early years, including Dang Tran Thuong, Nguyen Gia Cat, Tran Huu, and Vu Trinh. His efforts advanced civil personnel and brought more literati to officialdom.²¹

The peculiar circumstance of the civil-military relationship had formidable impacts on the scale and efficiency of statecraft and administrative paperwork. In 1802, all commanderies-defenders 鎮守 were selected from army staff. They were assisted by Commandery-Assistant 協鎮 and Advisor-to-Assistant 叅協 who were formally staff of the Hanlin community 翰林 or royal secretaries 侍書.²² The military domination weakened the interests in metropolitan examinations.

¹⁹ On Nguyễn Viên, see DNTL, I, 16: 16b-17a. Keith W. Taylor, “Nguyễn Công Trứ at the Court of Minh Mạng,” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 47, no. 2 (2016): 259. On Vũ Trinh, see DNTL, 20: 15a.

²⁰ DNTL, First collection 初集, 11: 4a-5b.

²¹ DNTL, I, 17: 24b; 38: 9a; 40: 1a; 41: 17a-18a.

²² DNTL, I, 17: 23a-b. The picture of social and power conflicts under the Gia Long reign were extremely complex. Nguyễn Đức Xuyên (Commander of the War-elephant Army) for instance, targeted surrendered Tayson army generals. Nguyễn Viên, a favor scholar of Gia Long criticized surrendered Tayson civil officials. Lê Chất, a former Tayson commander and ally of Lê Văn Duyệt made the complaint to Gia Long in 1802. See DNTL, 20: 18a-21b; DNTL, I, 20: 2b; Nguyễn Đức Xuyên, “Lý Lịch Sự vụ 履歷事務 (Official Biography),” *Nghiên Cứu và Phát Triển* 6–7, no. 123–124 (2015).

Consequently, the bureaucratic environment was in no favor of complex correspondence and sophisticated administrative institutions.²³

The conflict between southern military leaders and northern literati profoundly impacted the dynasty's bureaucratic transformation.²⁴ That social and political spirit could be noticed in the central bureaucracy. It was seen in the personal hatred between the two most potent factions: Nguyen Van Thanh and Le Van Duyet and the power struggle that shattered the newly-emerged intellectuals.²⁵ These new faces represented increasingly complex administrative techniques in which their literary skills were increasingly appreciated in a post-war society. At the same time, although the dominant militia enjoyed the power's upper hand, they gradually lost the advantage when dealing with more and more complex written communication. Commandery-defenders had to rely on the literati subordinates for day-to-day paperwork.²⁶ The war-style bureaucracy was struggling to keep up with progressively intricate administrative tasks.

Gia Long was aware of the changing bureaucratic circumstance and the subsequent rising tension but reluctant to take interfering action. He chose to uphold the system without fundamental changes and guaranteed no further disturbance. In doing so, he played a tug-of-war with the two political tendencies and tried to keep the game in the balance. On the one side stood Le Van Duyet and southern generals, who lacked interest in Confucianism and Chinese techniques of state governance. He did not pay much attention to political ceremonies either. "He [Duyet] often killed any dog that happened to be in front of the king".²⁷ The general came from an atmosphere of low literacy in which "scholarly culture was more pragmatic, more concern with geography, medicine, fortune-telling, and astrology than that of the rest of Vietnam".²⁸

²³ The *Geographical Records of the Unified Imperial South* 皇越一統輿地志 and the unprecedented Sinitic *Gia Long Code* 皇越律例 (which heavily adopted the Qing Code 大清律例) were among the best politically intellectual highlights of the Gia Long age. See Lê Quang Định, *Hoàng Việt Nhất Thống Địa Dư Chí* 皇朝一統地輿志 (*The Geographical Records of the Unified Imperial South*) (Thư viện Quốc gia, No. R.1684., 1806); Nguyễn Văn Thành, Trần Hữu, and Vũ Trinh, *Hoàng Việt Luật Lệ* 皇越律例 (*The Imperial Viet Law Codes*), 20 books (Thư viện Quốc gia Việt Nam, 1813); Taylor, *A History of the Vietnamese*, 401.

²⁴ See my discussion on the subject: Vũ and Dương, "Phe Phái, Lợi Ích Nhóm"; Vũ Đức Liêm, "Phe Phái và Cảnh Tranh Quyền Lực ở Việt Nam Đầu Thế Kỷ XIX (Factionalism and Power Competition in the Early XIXth Century Vietnam)," Tia Sáng, 2018, <http://tiasang.com.vn/-khoa-hoc-cong-nghe/Phe-phai-va-can-tranh-quyen-luc-o-Viet-Nam-dau-the-ky-XIX-11180>.

²⁵ DNTL, I, 12: 34b.

²⁶ In 1802, each northern commandery 鎮 was placed under control of a military official, called Commandery-defender 鎮守. DNTL, I, 17: 23b.

²⁷ Phan Thúc Trục, *Quốc Sử Di Biên* 國史遺編 *Lost Records of the National History*, trans., Nguyễn Thị Oanh, et., al. Hereafter: *QSBD*, (Hà Nội: Khoa học Xã hội, 2010): I, 64b.

²⁸ Lê, *Phủ Biên Tạp Lục*, 2: 142b. Dror and Taylor, *Views of Seventeenth-Century Vietnam*, 122; Woodside, *Vietnam and the Chinese Model*, 220.

On the other, the northern overlord, Nguyen Van Thanh became a strong advocate for graduate officials and complex governance. Because of his proposal, the first regional examination was reopened in 1807, in which sixty-two young scholars were selected.²⁹ Thanh's initiatives also encouraged Gia Long to receive more degree holders into officialdom.³⁰

By the early 1810s, Nguyen Van Thanh's patronage of the northern literati resulted in their dramatic rise. These new faces and their insights into institutions and political management immediately called for Gia Long's attention. In 1805, Dang Tran Thuong recommended 14 Le dynasty's degree holders to Gia Long.³¹ Although he promoted several graduates and organized three regional examinations subsequently, the emperor said no to metropolitan examinations.

In the mid-1810s, however, came the downfall of the 'northern faction.' First, Dang Tran Thuong (President of the Board of Defense 兵部尚書) and Nguyen Gia Cat (Vice president of the Board of Rites 禮部左參知) were dismissed from office in 1811 because of their involvement in a scandal of granting posthumous titles to Hoang Ngu Phuc 黃五福, a Le-Trinh general and enemy of the Nguyen family.³²

Thuong, originally from Hanoi, joined Gia Long force in 1793 and soon became a trusted advisor because of his knowledge of the north. In 1794, he was appointed the Vice president of the Board of Personnel 吏部右參知 and acted as one of the best scholars and military-strategic minds for the Nguyen.³³ After the expulsion in 1812, he was targeted by Le Chat (a close ally of Le Van Duyet), and put to death in 1816 on corruption charges.³⁴ Nguyen Gia Cat was another northern 'intellectual star' to join the new dynasty. In 1802, he was appointed *Scholar of the Hall of Diligent Politics* and *drafter of imperial documents* 勤政殿學士兼製誥令, responsible for managing paperwork in the Northern region 辦北城詞章.³⁵ In the same year, Cat was sent to Beijing to seek diplomatic recognition for the Nguyen and successfully argued the case of Nguyen Phuc Anh's reign title. "Gia Long" 嘉隆, the term was questioned by Beijing officials because the two characters are identical to that of the reign titles of the Qing dynasty emperor Jiaqing 嘉慶 and Qianlong 乾隆. In his response, Nguyen Gia Cat argued "Gia Long" came from the idea that Nguyen Phuc Anh had unified the

²⁹ Taylor, *A History of the Vietnamese*, 401.

³⁰ HDSL, 224: 6a-b.

³¹ DNLT, I, 26: 17a-b.

³² DNLT, I, 42: 16b-17a; Taylor, *A History of the Vietnamese*, 412.

³³ DNLT, I, 7: 14a-b.

³⁴ DNLT, I, 54: 14b.

³⁵ DNLT, I, 18: 28b.

land from 嘉定 Gia Dinh (Saigon) to 昇龍/ 昇隆 Thang Long (Hanoi).³⁶ Although in 1802, the character ‘long’ in ‘Thang Long’ was 龍 (dragon), not 隆 (prosperity), Cat seemed to win the Qing over, and the question was never raised again.

		嘉 Jia	Jiaqing	嘉 Gia	嘉定 Gia Dinh (Saigon)
Gia Long 嘉隆 1802	Gia 嘉	慶 Qing	嘉慶 1796	定 Dinh	
	Long 隆	乾 Qian	Qianlong 乾隆 1735	昇 Thang	昇龍, 昇隆(later) Thang Long (Hanoi)
		隆 Long		龍-Long 隆 (1805) ³⁷	

The tragic end of the northern faction came in 1816. A surprised and dramatic chain of events led Nguyen Van Thanh and his son imprisoned and executed.³⁸ Gia Long had probably sent warning signals to Thanh in 1812 by punishing him for the argument that favored Thuong and Cat.³⁹ However, it did not work out as Thanh continued to expand his clique. According to *DNTL*, he aimed to place the immature Gia Long’s grandson in the crown prince post. As a skeptic military commander, Gia Long found factionalism a threat to the dynasty and brought the succession crisis to an end with the death of Thanh.⁴⁰

The fates of those three men show that the project of post-war bureaucracy was highly competing. Outranked and outnumbered by the military, many scholar-officials were not in a favorable position to have Gia Long’s eyes and ears. After the-1816 crisis, many of them retreated. Those who remained, such as Nguyen Du, a vice board-president and member of one of the most prominent Le-Trinh intellectual families, was said to “act so timorously, always discuss affairs with no opinion”.⁴¹

In fact, dynastic stability was Gia Long’s priority. His choice of the fourth prince (Prince Dam) on succession rather than the legitimated immature grandson proved his sense of uncertainty. The emperor did not expect his generals to perform

³⁶ Kelley, *Beyond the Bronze Pillars*, 78–80. *DNTL*, I, 19: 9a-10b. “Bắc Ninh Toàn Tỉnh Dư Địa Chí 北寧全省輿地志(Geographic Gazetteer of the Complete Province of Bac Ninh)” (Viện Hán Nôm, A. 2889, 1891), 1/24a.

³⁷ Changed in 1805, *DNTL*, I, 27: 7b.

³⁸ Thành’s son (Nguyễn Văn Thuyên 阮文詮), a local tribute candidate 鄉貢 was in a wide contact with northern intellectuals. He wrote an exchange poem showing desire of changing circumstances of the age with new leadership and sources from the countryside (佐我經綸轉化機). Regardless to the unclear treason, the poem came to Lê Văn Duyệt, who then convinced Gia Long of the “plot”. The son was beheaded and Thành was driven to commit suicide. *DNTL*, I, 51: 16a-17b.

³⁹ *DNTL*, I, 42: 17b.

⁴⁰ *DNTL*, I, 51: 16a-b. It is important to remind that *DNTL*, first reign (Gia Long) was compiled under the Minh Menh reign, and carefully guarded by the emperor himself. Thus, the view of Thành and northern intellectual group certainly reflected Minh Menh interest to promote his legitimate secession.

⁴¹ *DNTL*, II, 4: 16b-17a.

funeral obsequies with bloody hands and thus looked for stability at the cost of political compromise. The reality, however, was far from his expectation. Hue bureaucracy featured provisional negotiations among military leaders and local chiefs. As the court relied heavily upon the generals and commandery-defenders for decision-making, the statecraft was military-oriented and bitterly suffered from the civil-military competition. They forged Gia Long's administrative culture by defining the correspondence structure and institutionalization of the state. Here were his last words on his deathbed: "now, the big affair under the Heaven has already been established. I am about to go; (I) have nothing to say, except for one thing, be careful not to provoke any problems at the frontiers" 今天下大定矣, 吾且崩無所言, 但他日慎勿聞邊釁.⁴²

Although nothing about internal politics was said, the successor soon 'challenged' his father's legacy both internally and externally by creating an empire unparalleled in Vietnamese history.

II. 1. 2. Official correspondence in the Gia Long reign

Maintaining official communication was Hue's most challenging task to run the new realm. Postal stations stretched 2,000 kilometers, connecting Sino-Vietnamese and the Khmer frontier. The dynastic choice of Hue as the capital city was historically understandable because of the family association with the place since the 1600s. Politically and economically. However, it might not be a wise decision. Although the city was geographically equidistant from the two major economic and demographic centers of the Red and Mekong Rivers, roughly between 700 and 900 kilometers, topographical isolation soon confirmed that Hue was far from an ideal option. The direct channel that connects Hue to the sea, the Perfume River 香江, is narrow and shallow with unpredictable currents and sand dunes. The nearest deep seaport locates sixty kilometers to the south, in Da Nang, but mountain passes and thick forests made overland travelling very discouraging.⁴³

The Nguyen dynasty was the first to establish the north-south communication system that connected three previous political domains (Le-Trinh Tonkin, Tayson in the center, and Nguyen Phuc Anh in the lower Mekong). Although pilgrims, merchants, migrants, and soldiers had traveled along the significant North-South route, known as

⁴² DNTL, I, 60: 15a-b.

⁴³ My analysis of Hue's geopolitical can be seen in Vũ, "'Nam Tiến' và Cái Bẫy Địa Lý Của Người Việt (Vietnamese 'March to the South' and the Trap of Geography)." For the trip from Da Nang to Hue, see Cai Tinglan 蔡廷蘭, *Hainan Zazhe* 海南雜著 (*Miscellaneous Notes from the Southern Seas*) (Taipei: Taiwan Yin Hang, 1959).

“the road of thousand miles” 千里路,⁴⁴ for centuries, it was never a well-organized network, especially between Hue and the southern region, where boats were used.⁴⁵ Aware of this geographical disadvantage, the dynasty invested heavily in constructing new communication networks. Immediately after ascending the throne, Gia Long ordered the President of the Board of Defence Le Quang Dinh to conduct a comprehensive geographical survey.⁴⁶ It took four years before the first dynastic gazetteer was accomplished, a ten-volume *Geographical Records of the Unified Imperial South* 皇越一統輿地志. Dinh wrote about its significance: “... recording the strategic and accessible rivers and mountains honestly, from far to a near distance of the roads. Territorial limitations and origins of the seas and rivers, all have to be comprehensively and widely acknowledged and demonstrated on maps 圖版 as visibly as knowing the back of one’s hand, because this is essential and indispensable to uphold all under the heaven”.⁴⁷ In the memorial presented the work to Gia Long, he confirmed, “the broad territory from Gia Dinh to Lang Son, from near to far roads, from the capital to frontier prefectures was recorded clearly with all temporary royal palaces, postal stations, local temples, markets, river ports, bridges, hostels, famous places of all sort, demographic density or dispersion, and strategic rivers and mountains. All have been surveyed and documented”.⁴⁸ The primary focus of the gazetteer, as stated, placed on a description of roads, measuring traveling distance, and mapping postal networks. Using “a half-day walk of a normal person” as measurement, they calculated standard time-limits for postal transportation.⁴⁹ It was an intense endeavor to manage the correspondence network through which administrative documents traveled. Hue provided postal stations 驛站 authenticated cards 信牌 to

⁴⁴ Later, when more roads were constructed, they were called *The Road of Official Communication* 關報路. *Đại Nam Nhất Thống Chí* 大南一統志 (*The Unification Records of Dai Nam*), *Tỉnh Thanh Hóa* 清華省 (*Thanh Hoa Province*), *Tập Hạ* 下集 (*Second Book*) (Sài Gòn: Văn hóa Tùng thư, số 5, 1960), 36.

⁴⁵ On the postal system in southern Vietnam, see Vũ, “Vietnam at the Khmer Frontier”, 534–64. Also see Charles J. Wheeler, “Re-Thinking the Sea in Vietnamese History: Littoral Society in the Integration of Thuận Quảng, Seventeenth–Eighteenth Centuries,” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 37, no. 1 (2006): 123–53; Nola. Cooke and Tana. Li, eds., *Water Frontier: Commerce and the Chinese in the Lower Mekong Region, 1750-1880* (Boulder: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2004).

⁴⁶ DNTH, I, 30: 12b-13a; Lê Quang Định, *Hoàng Việt Nhất Thống Dư Địa Chí* 皇越一統輿地志, *Phan Đăng dịch*, hereafter, *HVDDC*, (Huế: Thuận Hóa, 2005), 1838–46.

⁴⁷ Preface of *HVDDC*: 11. Also see John K. Whitmore, “Cartography in Vietnam,” in *History of Cartography: Volume Two, Book Two*, ed. J. B. Harley. and David Woodward (Chicago, 1994), 478–508.

⁴⁸ *HVDDC*: 11

⁴⁹ *HVDDC*: 12

supervise the paperwork flows.⁵⁰ The court also threatened responsible officials with sentences if those stations were left damaged 鋪舍損壞:

凡急遞鋪舍損壞, 不為修理什物, 不備鋪兵數少, 不為補置及令老弱之人。當役者, 鋪長笞五十, 有司提調官吏各笞四十。⁵¹

If a damaged postal station is left unrepaired; habitual equipment unavailable, and young postal soldiers 鋪兵 insufficient, the elderly will be forced to work, postal chiefs 鋪長 will face fifty [bamboo] rod [light strokes]; superintendents and local officials will face forty light strokes.

The speed of communication was also a matter of concern. Couriers had to maintain the space of 300 miles a day and night (or three miles per 15 minutes).⁵² If the postal items were delayed for three *khac* 刻 (45 minutes), the transporters were subjected to twenty to fifty light-stroke penalties.⁵³ Severe punishments were applied to the damaging of imperial writings 製書 and official seals 印信 that led to the pending death penalty 斬監候。⁵⁴ In the case of lost imperial edicts and seals, the sentence was 90 heavy strokes and 2-year hard labor.⁵⁵ When it came to military affairs and border issues, horses were required for correspondence. If horses were not provided and the dispatches delivered via conventional manners, the involved would be subjected to 100 heavy strokes. If the delay causes military consequences, the punishment is a suspended death penalty. For information related to the famine and the army supply, and no horse was used for the communication, postal officers would be sentenced to 80 heavy strokes. On the contrary, forty light strokes are reserved for those who mistakenly deliver routine postal items by horses.⁵⁶

II. 1. 3. Paperwork-production and bureaucratic operation

⁵⁰ *The Gia Long Code* 皇越律例, hereafter, *HVLL*, 4: 10a-b.

⁵¹ *HVLL*, 11: 23a.

⁵² A Vietnamese *dam* (mile) ranges from 444.44 meter, 576 meter, and 720 meter.

According to Hoàng Phê et al., *Từ Điển Tiếng Việt (Vietnamese Dictionary)* (Hà Nội: Khoa học Xã hội, 1988), 264, one *dặm*: 444,44 meter.

Vĩnh Cao and Nguyễn Phó, *Từ Lâm Hán Việt Từ Điển (Sino-Vietnamese Dictionary)* (Huế: Thuận Hóa, 2001), 1368, suggests that one *dặm*: 1800 尺 (xích) = 576 meter.

Lê Thành Khôi, *Lịch Sử Việt Nam Từ Nguồn Gốc Đến Năm 1858 (Histoire Du Việt-Nam: Des Origines à 1858)* (Hà Nội: Thế giới, 2014). (p. 610) suggests that one *dặm*: 720 meter.

⁵³ *HVLL*, 11: 19a-b.

⁵⁴ Suspended death sentence 斬監候 allows the convicts await for Autumn assizes for final imperial decision of execution.

⁵⁵ *HVLL*, 5: 3a-b.

⁵⁶ Article on “*Paperwork deserved [to be transported by horse] but were not provided accordingly*” 文書應給驛而不給, *HVLL*, 11: 26a-b.

Understanding the nature of the production of bureaucratic documents during the Gia Long reign is challenging. The first problem comes from only five existing volumes of palace paperwork produced between 1802 and 1820 that were clearly insufficient to provide a detailed picture of the state's communication system. Those 821 extant documents suggested that the *Congdong* was heavily responsible for document production.⁵⁷ Formed in 1789 by Nguyen Phuc Anh's closest retainers, *Congdong* was the center of his war machine and the communication-decision structures. As analyzed, both remained archival holdings and *DNTL* indicated limited direct contacts between the capital, regional 城, and commandery 鎮 administrations. Written and organized in imperfect shape, usually careless handwritings, the majority of the palace archival holdings concerning instructions and orders to direct local duties and mobilize resources.

Several prominent paperwork types can be recognized, for instance, those issued by *Congdong* in the emperor's authority. They include *Congdong sai* 公同差 (orders for official missions), *Congdong khien* 公同譴 (indictment or punishment), *Congdong truyen* 公同傳 (administrative directions), *Congdong pho* 公同付 (certificates and nomination), and *Congdong di* 公同移 (summoning officials). In essence, they were directives to officers of inferior levels, which allow us to detail the deliberative pattern of the bureaucracy between 1802 and 1820.

Since most of commandery defenders were army personnel, written correspondence and paperwork-based administration were not their interests. The responsibility of paperwork was felt to Commandery-Assistant and local secretariats. In the northern region, for instance, Gia Long appointed two renowned scholars, Nguyen Gia Cat 阮嘉吉 and Pham Quy Thich (范貴適, 1760-1825) be in charge of official documents 辨北城詞章.⁵⁸ He later ordered the gathering of 100 learned men who were good at writing to establish the Copiers Office 書寫司 (1813-1814).⁵⁹ At the same time, the use of official seals was limited at both local and central governmental levels. Four palace secretary organs, for instance, were authorized with no seals. In the court, they shared document-involved responsibilities with *Congdong*

⁵⁷ National Archive No. 1, *Mục Lục Châu Bản Triều Nguyễn. Tập 1. Gia Long (1802-1819); Minh Mệnh I (1820) – Minh Mệnh V (1824) (Catalogue of the Nguyen Vermilion Records. Vol.1. Gia Long Reign (1802-1820) and Minh Menh Reign (1820-1824))*, (Hà Nội: Nxb Văn hóa thông tin, 2010), 7.

⁵⁸ *DNTL*, I, 18: 28b.

⁵⁹ Original text, “十三年奏準北城核實善書南北字體精工五十名立為書寫司。” [“In Gia Long's 13th years [1814], a memorial was approved that allowed the Northern Citadel to examine people who write well and are skilled at the forms of characters, and to choose 50 people from the North and the South to establish a Copiers Office.”], *HDSL*, 17: 12a.

and Six Boards, but the latter dominated the paperwork landscape and administered flows of palace documents.⁶⁰ Outside Hue, two viceroys oversaw paper flows through their Commander-general offices. In theory, there was no direct correspondence between northern and southern commanderies and Hue until 1827.⁶¹

While major correspondence channels were between *Congdong*, boards and regional commanders, they interrupted imperial secretary institutions by directing administrative documents to different court organs. With no single destination for paperwork control, various institutions were called on, in which the emperor and his office were just part of this intricate information-processing structure.

Although working directly with paperwork was not his interest, Gia Long's attention to communication and official documents remained strong in power symbolism and administrative practice. As a gesture to solidify his king title 王 (*vuong*), he presented several imperial seals 寶 in 1802 and had local reports submitted in the form of memorials 奏.⁶² Months later, he ordered local postal stations to record detailed temporal measurements of delivery for assessments 命諸地方驛站接遞公文各, 詳誌日辰之, 驗遲速,⁶³ and sending out lists of taboo characters 國諱尊字.⁶⁴

Toward the end of the reign, however, Gia Long took more intervening acts on the production of official documents. In 1815, the court redefined the structure of memorials with personal signatures and conventional wordings. “‘Rectification for names’ is the first principle of politics (正名乃為政之先)”, declared the emperor, “‘Recently, among memorials from provinces and Hue capital, there are papers that only mention official titles [of the memorialists]. This [practice] is unacceptable in the emperor-officer relationship because officials have to inform their names in front of the throne. Names in national sound 國音 are also rustic 鄙俚. From now on, officials have their name, title, and rank distinctly written down in documents and memorials. In the case of ordinary people, for males, written by the name “*danh*” (名); for females, written by “*thi*” (氏) (for example, the name Giap 名甲, written ‘Tran Van Giap’ 陳文甲; Thi At (氏乙) written ‘Ly Thi At’ 李氏乙. All vulgar language is prohibited 俗語竝禁.”⁶⁵

⁶⁰ See for instance the role of Tran Cong Tuan 陳公詢 of the palace secretary office in *GLCB*, vol. 5, on the emperor medical reports.

⁶¹ DNTL, II, 43: 16b.

⁶² DNTL, I, 16: 14a; 17: 2b.

⁶³ DNTL, I, 20: 24a.

⁶⁴ DNTL, I, 20: 19a.

⁶⁵ Original text, “正名乃為政之先。邇來，中外章奏其中或只稱官爵，揆之君前臣名於義未。至所稱人名雜用國音尤為鄙俚。自今章疏冊籍所敘職官者，其著官

He not only recalled classical concepts of authority in the practice of paperwork but also projected paperwork uniformity and institutionalized their productions.⁶⁶ The 1812 imperial law code devoted thirty-seven out of 398 articles for administrative correspondence, paperwork, and seal usage. Most legal infringements were designed for severe punishments, such as eighty heavy strokes for violating taboo-character rules (book 5, article 4); ten to forty strokes for delaying document delivery (book 5, article 7); and beheaded execution for circulating forged imperial edicts. The death penalty was also applied to the violation of document contents (*suspended death sentence*) or imitating paperwork-formats and seals of the Six Boards and Censorate (*strangulation*).⁶⁷ The code also categorized paperwork-misconducts as a severe crime list (賊盜上), second only to treason.⁶⁸ Stealing edicts 詔, seals 印信, and imperial documents 製書 paid the price of immediate beheading. In contrast, those who swiped official documents and authenticated seal stamps were sentenced to 100 heavy strokes and stigmatized characters on their faces.⁶⁹

II. 2. Minh Menh's state project, 1820-1841

銜姓名氏人則男稱名，女稱氏。如名甲陳文甲，氏乙李氏乙。俗語竝禁”。DNTL: I, 51: 9a. On “rectification of names”, the classical concept has a broad implication. In general, it refers to the idea of how to use names accurately or appropriately to describe reality. More specifically, “one way to conceptualize the rectification of names is to see it as establishing a hierarchically organized set of spaces within which each individual can find his or her proper ‘place’.” In politics, it is the establishment of official titles in bureaucratic systems in which individual expects to act in accordance with legal, ritual, and moral obligations. Bo Mou, ed., *Routledge History of Chinese Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 2008), 119, 165. See more on John Makeham, *Name and Actuality in Early Chinese Thought* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994).

⁶⁶ Previous scholars on the Nguyen Vietnam conceptualized the process of ‘suppressing’ Nom characters 喃字 and the use of ‘national sounds’ 國音 as political sinicization (Woodside 1988). Recent scholarship, including Keith W. Taylor, John D. Phan, and Liam C. Kelley have denied the nationalist inclination of that interpretation, but focus more on the standardization and advancement of scripts and vernacular language in early modern Vietnam. See Keith, W. Taylor, “Literacy in Early Seventeenth-Century Northern Vietnam,” in *New Perspectives on the History and Historiography of Southeast Asia: Continuing Explorations*, ed. Michael A Aung-Thwin and Kenneth R Hall (New York: Routledge, 2011), 183–98; John D. Phan, “Rebooting the Vernacular in 17th Century Vietnam,” in *Rethinking East Asian Languages, Vernaculars, and Literacies, 1000-1919*, ed. Benjamin Elman (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 96–128; Kelley, “Gia Long and Nôm,” Le Minh Khai’s SEAsian History Blog, 2017, <https://leminhkhai.wordpress.com/2017/09/29/gia-long-and-nom/>; Liam C. Kelley, “Minh Mạng and Nôm,” Le Minh Khai’s SEAsian History Blog, 2017, <https://leminhkhai.wordpress.com/2017/09/24/minh-mang-and-nom/>. (accessed on February 10, 2019).

⁶⁷ HVLL, Section of Forgery Violations 詐偽, 17: 22a-9a.

⁶⁸ HVLL, 12: 1a.

⁶⁹ HVLL, the severe crime list 賊盜上, book 12.



“文獻千年國
車書萬里圖
鴻龐開闢後
南服一唐虞”⁷⁰

Minh Menh emperor

The thousand-year civilized state
Expanding upon the thousand-mile map
From the *Hong Bang*⁷¹ clan to opening the lineage
The South has emerged as glorious as *Tang* and *Yu*.

II. 2. 1. Minh Menh: the Personality

The day was February 14, 1820. Minh Menh, at 30, entered the Hall of Supreme Harmony 太和殿, bearing in mind an ambitious political project. However, just one little problem stood between him and the dream of empire; that was, there were few he could trust. By 1820, not many bureaucrats and wartime veterans could comprehend his vision. Even fewer were ready to be on board with him. He would spend the next fifteen years nurturing a new intellectual group that prepared for the job and, at the same time, cultivating one of the most systematic statecrafts in pre-colonial Vietnam. Much of that enduring bureaucratic installation, as suggested in the present study, had to do with paperwork. It allowed the introduction of the “bureaucracy of edicts” and “bureaucracy of endorsements”. As a principal channel of official correspondence, memorials stood central to that paperwork ecology.⁷²

Minh Menh had done more to arrange the Vietnamese state than any other rulers of the nineteenth century had. His project had geographical contours of the realm forged, state institutions established, and dynastic political culture inaugurated “for generations to follow”. Acquired emperors at thirty, he was well-prepared, enthusiastic, ambitious, and committed to the job. The man’s personality was built up along the process of power accumulation that shaped his bureaucratic style of “an intelligent and active ruler with definite ideas about how to govern”.⁷³ The man himself defined the heydays of the ‘Confucian high fundamentalism’ in pre-colonial Vietnam.⁷⁴

⁷⁰ A Minh Menh’s poem carved on a wooden panel at the Palace of Supreme Harmony 太和殿 in Hue Forbidden city.

⁷¹ The first legendary ruling dynasty of Vietnam. See Kelley, “The Biography of the Hồng Bàng Clan”, 87–130.

⁷² The term ‘Memorial’ was the nineteenth century British translation of the types of reports, petitions and a number of other submitted papers to the Chinese emperors.

⁷³ Taylor, *A History of the Vietnamese*, 415

⁷⁴ Reid, *A History of Southeast Asia*, 224.

Educated by erudite Confucianists from a young age, Minh Menh was nurtured in a distinctive cultural and political atmosphere that made him intellectually outperform his father. The lack of administrative experience, faithfulness to Neo-Confucian orthodoxy, and dedication to centralization, however, would define his political orientation and fashion characters of his state project. While Gia Long, a conqueror and military leader, opened to diverse bureaucratic employments and inhomogeneous organizations, his son did not embody “toleration of administrative heterogeneity and cultural diversity”.⁷⁵ The ruler’s most prominent charisma was determination in conducting political centralization and willingness to pay high prices for his accomplishments.⁷⁶

Born in 1791 in the Lower Mekong to a mother who originated from Hue, Gia Long’s fourth prince had a significant advantage over his three deceased elder brothers: growing up in a relatively peaceful, relaxed time and was well-accessed to systematic education.⁷⁷ His chief mentor, Dang Duc Sieu (鄧德超, 1751 – 1810) was a prominent literati thinker and Gia Long’s favorite President of the Board of Rites 禮部尚書.⁷⁸ A native of the central province of Binh Dinh, the veteran scholar, posed a strong influence on Minh Menh with knowledge of the classics and political institutions. Here is the *DNLT*’s praise for Dang Duc Sieu, “Sieu was appointed to educate the royal family members, greatly useful for helping princes learning... Sieu’s family was Christian but abandoned the religion to pursue Confucian learning. In terms of virtue and charisma, he was the leading mandarin of our court”.⁷⁹ Minh Menh himself dedicated a great deal of appreciation to his teacher. “President of the Board of Rites

⁷⁵ Taylor, *A History of the Vietnamese*, 416.; Wynn W. Wilcox, “Transnationalism and Multiethnicity in the Early Nguyen Anh Gia Long Period,” in *Viet Nam: Borderless Histories*, ed. Nhung Tuyet Tran and Anthony Reid (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006), 194–218.; Byung Wook Choi, *Southern Vietnam under the Reign of Minh Mạng (1820-1841): Central Policies and Local Response* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Southeast Asia Program Publications, 2004), 101–28; idem, “Creation of One People in 19th-Century Vietnam: From ‘Han Di Huu Han’ to ‘Nhat Thi Dong Nhan.’” *Dongbuga Yeoksa Nonchong: Northeast Asian History Journal* 23, no. 3 (2009): 73–97.

⁷⁶ See for instance, Minh Menh’s determination to pacify the Khmer land and settle Vietnamese control over Cambodia: Vũ, “Vietnam at the Khmer Frontier: Boundary Politics, 1802–1847.”

⁷⁷ Vũ Đức Liêm, “Làm Thế Nào Để Tạo Ra ‘lý Lịch’ Của Vua? (How to Create a King’s ‘Profile’?) An ninh Thế giới, 2019, <http://antgct.cand.com.vn/Khoa-hoc-Van-Minh/Lam-the-nao-de-tao-ra-ly-lich-cua-vua-543567/>. (Accessed on June 15, 2020).

⁷⁸ See more in *DNLT, First Collection*, 10: 3a-9b. Minh Menh’s other mentors included Tran Hung Dat, Ngo Dinh Gioi, Nguyen Duc Thinh, Le Dai Nghia, Nguyen Dang Tai, Nguyen Dang Vinh, Nguyen Dang Diep, Phan Duc Lan. See *DNLT*, 5: 3b-5b; 26: 10b-12b; 34: 11a.

⁷⁹ Đại Nam nhất thống chí 大南一統志 (*The Unification Records of Dai Nam*, 1882), in Nguyễn Minh Tường, *Cải Cách Hành Chính Dưới Triều Minh Mệnh (1820–1840)* (*Minh Menh Administrative Reforms (1820-1840)*) (Hà Nội: Khoa học Xã hội, 1996), 42.

Dang Duc Sieu followed my father's appointment to supervise my reading and helped me learn a lot for years. He had nothing short to the obligation."⁸⁰

Minh Menh possessed a profound knowledge of political institutions by engaging with many readings of Chinese classics and Vietnamese dynastic histories. The man showed his interest in administrative institutions during an audience with Gia Long in 1818 when the prince presented the *Statutes of the Qing* 大清會典.⁸¹ As a ruler, he frequently ordered books and newspapers (such as *the Peking Gazette*) from China; kept updating situations in China and Southeast Asia, and dispatched missions to French and England in the aftermath of the Opium War (1840).⁸² With that being said, historians such as Alexander B. Woodside, Yu Insun, and Yoshiharu Tsuboi offer high regard to Minh Menh because of his well-aware of regional politics. He was said to possess a comprehensive vision of the West and believed that his realm, not the Manchu, was the 'true' herald of the Chinese classical civilization.⁸³ In addition, the man was a highly literary emperor whose literature legacy included 3,500 poems and a selected volume of 1,209 edicts and proclamations.⁸⁴ His personality formidably embodied resilient efforts of intensive application of paperwork to bureaucratic operations. Paperwork was not the only device of power control but also the symbolic benchmark of political civility.

With percipient insights of the classics, Minh Menh attached his realm to the exemplary ancient Chinese states. Guided by "a moderate tendency to greater independence in political thought", the ruler was convinced that "Vietnam did not share the stage with only one contemporary 'Chinese model'".⁸⁵ What is more, with obsessions toward overpowerful ministers, factionalism, and corruption in mind, he determined to prevent chief mandarins from monopolizing state affairs and threatening imperial authority.⁸⁶ The comprehension of Chinese and Vietnamese statecraft freed

⁸⁰ Minh Mênh, *Minh Mênh Chính Yếu* 明命政要 (*Abstract of the Minh Menh Policies*) (1837, Sài Gòn: Phủ Quốc vụ khanh đặc trách Văn Hóa, 1972-1974), I: 128.

⁸¹ DNTL, I, 58: 10b.

⁸² For instance in 1839 Minh Menh was reading a Qing court circulation of reports (京抄), which suggested that a Vietnamese silver mine produced two million taels (*lang*) of silver yearly, mined by the Chinese who brought all of them back to China. DNTL, II, 69: 29b-30a; 202: 23a-b.

⁸³ Insun Yu, "Vietnam-China Relations in the 19th Century: Myth and Reality of the Tributary System," *Journal of Northeast Asian History* 6, no. 1 (2009): 81-117. Yoshiharu Tsuboi, *L'Empire Vietnamien Face a La France et a La Chine, 1847-1885 (The Vietnamese Empire in the Face of France and China)* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1987); Woodside, *Vietnam and the Chinese Model, 1988*.

⁸⁴ As they were collected and printed. See these volumes at Viện nghiên cứu Hán Nôm (Hanoi), including 1. Minh Menh imperial writings 明命御製文 (1834): A. 118/1-3 (1.840 pages); VHV. 69/1-7 (1,158 pages), and VHV. 70/1-5 (920 pages); *Minh Mênh ngự chế thi* Minh Menh imperial poetry 明命御製詩, woodblock printed, 73 volumes.

⁸⁵ Woodside, *Vietnam and the Chinese Model*, 13-14.

⁸⁶ MNCB, 40: 82, 83.

the man from depending on any particular bureaucratic design. Discussions in preparing for the Grand Secretariat in 1830, for instance, indicated that the emperor found no single best administrative model but was highly flexible and confident in the construction of his own.⁸⁷ He compared Dai Nam (大南, the *Great South*) with the ancient Zhou city-states and belittled the Qing for their “barbarian origin”.⁸⁸ In an audience in 1834, he declared that “the Qing’s victory over the Ming was projected by the Huns (*Xiongnu* 匈奴), entering the Central Kingdom 中國, using savagery 夷 to transform civility 夏” (清之得明, 以匈奴入中國, 以夷變夏).⁸⁹

Nevertheless, the process of bureaucratic institutionalization underwent careful consideration. Minh Menh’s favorite ‘power game’ maintained check and balance for the central bureaucracy under which every official post was subjected to mutual supervision. Using examples of past administrations, the emperor expected no chancellor 宰相 with the anxiety of power manipulation as he aroused the Ming and Qing experiences. He critically prohibited the political participation of eunuchs and court women by quoting the lessons of the Tang and Ming. In his words, that prohibition “must be followed forever” by all Nguyen successors.⁹⁰ His greatest nightmare was to be choreographed by influential officers and eunuchs who, as history suggests, isolate the ruler from the correspondence systems. The fear followed Minh Menh at every step of the political centralization project. In the 1829 edict, he announced that “Ming Emperor *Chengzu* 成祖 established the Grand Secretariat 內閣, entitled Hanlin members Grand Academicians 大學士, but limiting their ranks at the fifth grade for the politically advisory function. Later on, the higher the rank one climbed, the more powerful the official became; therefore, despite having no chancellor, there was indeed one in reality. Thus, Ming *Jiajing* Emperor (嘉靖) used *Yansong* (嚴嵩), Qing *Qianlong* (乾隆) used *Heshen* (和珅). They [*Yansong* and *Heshen*] were incapable, superficial, and power abuse. Those lessons are real and not so long ago”.⁹¹

One of Minh Menh’s role models and source of inspiration was Emperor Le Thanh Tong (黎聖宗, r., 1460-1497). Mastering the classics as one of the most knowledgeable men of his time, Le Thanh Tong was influenced by the Ming governmental system when conducting a systematic construction of institutions, legal

⁸⁷ DNTL, II, 63: 24b-27a.

⁸⁸ In 1838, Minh Mên renamed Vietnam the *Great South* 大南. MNCB, 67: 95; 87: 106.

⁸⁹ DNTL, II, 137: 16a.

⁹⁰ DNTL, II, 31: 3a; 151: 22b-23b; 156: 1a-b; 197: 1a-b.

⁹¹ MNCB: 40: 83.

structures, and civil service examinations.⁹² The Le state was at work for three centuries, mostly in northern Vietnam, before insurgency and civil war rose to the Nguyen (1802). Minh Menh's admiration for Le Thanh Tong came with complements, especially his literary legacy and political skills. "Among emperors of the previous ages, Le Thanh Tong could be considered as a virtuous ruler 賢君, [to whom] I usually appreciate" 我国前代諸帝如黎聖尊亦可謂繼體賢君，朕嘗欣慕之， said the Nguyen king.⁹³ This attitude contradicted his frequent criticism of Ming and Qing rulers sharply. Qianlong, for instance, was disparaged for his political performance and poetry compositions.⁹⁴ Stood in Minh Menh's idealized portrait of an emperor were those who were able to establish "regulations and legal institutions that lasted for generations" [國家立法定製期之久遠].⁹⁵

我越文獻啟邦，英君代作，惟黎聖尊 [宗]⁹⁶ 尤不世出。良法善政具在史書，且復萬幾之暇游意藝文，著作甚富，流風餘韻鏗乎在聞。朕追思古人寔深企慕。⁹⁷

Our Viet started as a *domain of Manifest Civility* 文獻, virtuous kings frequently appear, but Le Thanh Tong was one of many generations. (His) good policies were all written down in books; moreover, during free time, (he) entertained with literature, composing so many [works which] the reputation of elegance [of the writings] has been still around. I think of the person with a great appreciation.

During his two-decade reign, Minh Menh attempted to set up institutions and paperwork regulations that could sustain as touchstones for ages. He invested a great deal of energy to monitor the paperwork system. The extensive deployment of official documents, among many, came to shape the dynasty's new political culture:

帝明慎政體，凡中外章疏一一經覽，面論諸御擬旨批發。事重者多自擬撰或草或硃批，批本自此始。⁹⁸

The emperor was brilliant and careful in political management. Rigorously and carefully, all the local and central reports submitted to the emperor are personally reviewed; [he then] directly gave orders to all institutions for

⁹² See Nguyen Ngoc Huy and Ta Van Tai, *The Lê Code: Law in Traditional Vietnam, A Comparative Sino-Vietnamese Legal Study With Historical-Juridical Analysis and Annotations* (Athens and London: Ohio University Press, 1987); Whitmore, "Chiao-Chih and Neo-Confucianism, 51–92; idem, "The Development of Le Government."

⁹³ DNTL, II, 40: 23a; 64: 14b.

⁹⁴ DNTL, II, 219: 2a.

⁹⁵ DNTL, II, 48: 13a-b.

⁹⁶ Character "Ton" was replaced for "Tong" 宗 because 宗 was taboo character for Emperor Thieu Tri's proper name: Nguyen Phuc Mien Tong 阮福綿宗.

⁹⁷ DNTL, II, 71: 7b.

⁹⁸ DNTL, II, 1: 17b.

consulting and implementation. For crucial affairs, the emperor issues instructions, prepares instructing drafts or makes comments. This practice marked the beginning of imperial endorsements 硃批 on the memorials.

That political charisma and authoritative determination fashioned a peculiar milieu under which complex institutional evolution of bureaucratic documents flowered. The king's personal motivation for promoting paperwork uniformity was resulted not only in the emerging scholar-officials (paperwork operators) but also in the engagement of practical writings with intricate statecraft as the 'infrastructure' of governance.

II. 2. 2. Bureaucratic centralization

凡製度紀綱思欲隨宜創立為萬世法。

For all institutions and regulations, [I want] to reflect on [them] and flexibly establish [them] as the model for ten thousand generations.

Minh Menh emperor, 1826 [DNLT, II, 38: 18a]

While Minh Menh's legacy has been perceived in contesting perspectives, he is remembered mainly among today's Vietnamese as a great reformer (*nha cai cach*).⁹⁹ As a result, his state project is recognized as a profound "administrative reform" (Viet. *Cai cach hanh chinh*).¹⁰⁰ Since 1986, 'reform' was a fashionable term among Vietnamese historians and political scientists.¹⁰¹ Speaking of administrative

⁹⁹ Marcel Gaultier, *Gia-Long* (Saigon: S.I.L.I. C. ARDIN, 1933); idem, *Minh-Mang* (Paris: Larose, 1935); Eliacin Luro, *Le Pays d'Annam: Étude Sur l'organisation Politique et Sociale Des Annamites* (Paris: Leroux, 1878); Joseph Buttinger, *The Smaller Dragon: A Political History of Vietnam* (New York: Praeger, 1958); Choi, *Southern Vietnam under the Reign of Minh Mạng*, Jacob Ramsay, *Mandarins and Martyrs: The Church and the Nguyen Dynasty in Early Nineteenth-Century Vietnam* (Stanford University Press, 2008). Nicolas Weber, "The Vietnamese Annexation of Panduranga (Champa) and the End of a Maritime Kingdom," in *Memory and Knowledge of the Sea in Southeast Asia*, ed. Danny. Wong Tze-Ken (Kuala Lumpur: Institute of Ocean and Earth Sciences, University of Malaya, 2008), 65–76. Nicolas Weber, "The Destruction and Assimilation of Campā (1832-35) as Seen from Cam Sources," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 43, no. 1 (2012): 158–80.

¹⁰⁰ Nguyễn, *Cải Cách Hành Chính*; Nguyễn Minh Tường, *Tổ Chức Bộ Máy Nhà Nước Quân Chủ ở Việt Nam (Từ Năm 939 Đến Năm 1884) (The Organizational Structure of the Vietnamese Monarchies)* (Hanoi: Khoa học Xã hội, 2015); Trương Thị Yến, ed., *Lịch Sử Việt Nam, Tập 5: Từ Năm 1802 Đến Năm 1858 (History of Vietnam, Vol. 5: From 1802 to 1858)* (Hà Nội: Khoa học Xã hội, 2017); Phan Huy Lê, ed., *Lịch Sử Việt Nam, Tập II: Từ Thế Kỷ XIV Đến Giữa Thế Kỷ XIX (History of Vietnam, Vol. 2: From XIV to the Mid-XIX Centuries)* (Hà Nội: Đề tài độc lập cấp nhà nước, 2005); Văn Tạo, *Mười Cuộc Cải Cách, Đổi Mới Lớn Trong Lịch Sử Việt Nam (Ten Big Reforms in Vietnamese History)* (Hà Nội: Nxb Đại học Sư phạm, 2012).

¹⁰¹ In 1986, Vietnam decided to open for economic reform (*Doi moi*). The event also leads to new waves of revising historical scholarship, including the reappraisal of the Nguyen. See Bruce Lockhart, "Re-Assessing the Nguyễn Dynasty," *Crossroads: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 2001, 9-53; Patricia Pelley, *Post-Colonial Vietnam: New Histories of the National Past* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002).

management, however, Minh Menh is better recognized as an advocate of political centralization rather than a ‘reformist’. He did not initiate any significant innovation in political organization, agrarian society, legal structure, tax system, and education, but “adjusted policies in various localities in response to changing conditions, aiming at a general appearance of uniformity”.¹⁰²

Following that analysis, this thesis considers Minh Menh a political centralizer of governance, institution, territory, and cultural practice under the Neo-Confucian guidelines. The emperor was either unaware or not interested in theorizing those administrative designs. His priority was placed on the efforts of the political homogenization of the vast and diverse empire. Between 1527 and 1802, emerging frontiers weakened central governments, causing power diffusion along the mobilized peripheries of various Vietnamese-speaking groups, who were moving southward nearly a thousand kilometers within two hundred years.¹⁰³ Although the bureaucrats continuously re-invented themselves to maintain state control over the rural, power erosion and executive dysfunction caused severe consequences to the efficiency of the states and their connection with villages.¹⁰⁴

The stage was set for a new dynasty: the Nguyen.

Gia Long brought the age of turbulence to an end by unifying a vast political surface-threelfold larger than that of Le Thanh Tong (1490). Managing that domain was tremendously challenging to the new dynasty’s administrative network. In response, no bold political intervention was taken. The postwar power fragmentation relied on the army chiefs and militia networks. The central court was the prolonged war machine until the Six Boards were fully installed nearly a decade later (1809).¹⁰⁵ Gia Long’s palace secretary offices were formed by several small and separated organs and possessed no weighty authority involved in paperwork management and decision-making.

Minh Menh, however, desired personal rule. Within days on the throne, he “observed that all memorials that were sent to the Six Boards, their *supplementary envelopes* 副封 were opened and read by board officials. If the affairs were reportedly unsuitable, they did not submit [to the emperor]. From now on, Six Boards must

¹⁰² Taylor, *A History of the Vietnamese*, 417

¹⁰³ See Vu, “‘Nam Tiên’ và Cái Bẫy Địa Lý Của Người Việt”.

¹⁰⁴ For the declining central states in early modern Vietnam, see Li, *Nguyen Cochinchina*; George E. Dutton, *The Tây Sơn Uprising: Society and Rebellion in Eighteenth-Century Vietnam* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2006); Vu, “Village Rebellion and Social Violence in Early Nineteenth Century Vietnam.”; Insun Yu, “The Changing Nature of the Red River Delta Villages during the Lê Period (1428-1788),” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 32, no. 2 (2001): 151–72.

¹⁰⁵ DNL, I, 10: 9a.

memorialize those inappropriate reports to prevent information concealing”.¹⁰⁶ He continued spending the next fifteen years reconstructing boards’ structure, adding more institutions to the court, forging more seals, and enforcing more regulations. As a result, the Bureau of State History 國史館, Hanlin Academy 翰林院, Grand Secretariat 內閣, Privy Council 機密院, Censorate 都察院, Court of Judicial Review 大理寺, Office of Transmission 通政使司, and Office of Postal Transmission 郵政司 constituted the foundation of the Nguyen statecraft.

The following is a brief introduction to Minh Menh’s administrative designs concerning official correspondence and the proliferation of paperwork. Born to a concubine, Minh Menh’s childhood was shadowed by his elder brother and legitimate crown prince Nguyen Phuc Canh (阮福景; 1780 - 1801). Son of the lawful queen 皇后, Canh’s charisma remained unchallengeable among army leaders and Westerner mercenaries. So was his claim to the throne before the immature death caused by smallpox in 1801.¹⁰⁷ Minh Menh entered the Hall of Great Harmony with few confidants and a palace full of enemies and arrogant generals. It was paperwork, institutions, and statecraft skills that determined not only the fate of the monarch, the stability of the dynasty but the prospect of the 18-year-old unified Vietnam.

II. 2. 3. Palace secretary offices and the Grand Secretariat

Minh Menh’s first institutional move was to consolidate the imperial secretary office. Four previous organs were amalgamated into the Office of Records and Books 文書房, staffed by the emperor’s most trusted entourage.

初置文書房。命禮部僉事阮登洵，內翰知簿陳公詢，該合許德第，黎伯秀，黃炯，阮文順充侍書，侍翰典司尚寶及文書章奏圖籍。¹⁰⁸

Establishment of the Office of Books and Records. Appointing senior assistant 簽事 of the Board of Rites Nguyen Dang Tuan, Secretarial Staff-member 知簿內翰 Tran Cong Tuan, Senior secretaries 該合 Hua Duc De, Le Ba Tu, Hoang Quynh and Nguyen Van Thuan to be Book-Assistants [to the emperor] 侍書 and Writing Assistant 侍翰, to

¹⁰⁶ Original text, “帝以向來，四方章奏部臣先發副封事有不合卻不以奏。乃敕六部，自今，章疏不合者必以事聲明毋得私駁以防壅蔽。” DNTL, II, 1: 35b.

¹⁰⁷ See Vũ Đức Liêm, “Đậu Mù - Một Chú Giải Nhỏ Của Lịch Sử Việt Nam (Smallpox as a Footnote in Vietnamese History),” Tia Sáng, 2018, <http://tiasang.com.vn/-khoa-hoc-cong-nghe/Dau-mua--mot-chu-giai-nho--cua-lich-su-Viet-Nam-11091>. Also, see Michele C. Thompson, “A Negotiated Dichotomy: Vietnamese Medicine and the Intersection of Vietnamese Acceptance of and Resistance to Chinese Cultural Influence” (Ph. D. thesis, University of Washington, 1998).

¹⁰⁸ DNTL, II, 1: 9a.

preserve imperial seals, books and paperwork, reports and memorials, maps and records.

Many new courtiers came from his princely inner circle, including servants and advisors. The appointment shows Minh Menh's careful treatment of the Office of Records and Books.¹⁰⁹ It was empowered with an authenticated seal 關防印 and was allowed to conduct new executive roles. The office thus was transformed from a secretarial institution into an emperor-assisted authority. Mediating between boards and the ruler, the Office of Records and Books allowed the throne information access and direct management of paperwork flows. If power is the “participation in the making of decisions”,¹¹⁰ the palace office was clearly an intended channel that Minh Menh inserted into Hue’s deliberative structure.

Aiming at elaborate bureaucratic performances, palace secretaries were well-selected from scholar-reservoirs such as the State Academy and Hanlin community. By 1825, secretarial staff took a wide range of responsibilities in imperial dispatched missions, investigating criminal cases, supervising court departments, providing political advice, coordinating with Six Boards, and organizing the paperwork-flow heading to the emperor’s desk.¹¹¹ In essence, Gia Long’s offices of books and seal-keeping had evolved into the hub of Hue’s correspondence system.¹¹² That concentration of paperwork profoundly affected the power shift between *Congdong*, Six Boards, and the palace, resulting not only in the conformity of document processing but also in declining court audiences as an executive mechanism. In other words, the rechanneled documents displaced Hue’s decision-making sites, from the ministerial hall to the throne hall.

¹⁰⁹ L. Cadière, “Les Français Au Service de Gia-Long (The French Served Gia Long),” *Bulletin Des Amis Du Vieux Hué - BAVH* 4 (1926), 434.

¹¹⁰ Abraham Kaplan and Harold Lasswell, *Power and Society* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961), 75.

¹¹¹ See, for instance, Hoàng Quỳnh and Lê Vạn Công on their frequent missions outside the capital. DNTL, II, 6: 10b; 8: 27b, 18: 7a. Vũ Đức Liêm, “Hoàng Quỳnh: Một Chân Dung Quyền Lực Triều Minh Mệnh (Hoang Quynh: A Political Portrait of the Minh Menh Reign),” *Tia Sáng*, 2019, <https://tiasang.com.vn/khoa-hoc-cong-nghe/Hoang-Quynh-Mot-chan-dung-quyen-luc-trieu-Minh-Menh-19545>. (accessed on June 4, 2020).

¹¹² DNTL, II, 26: 11b.

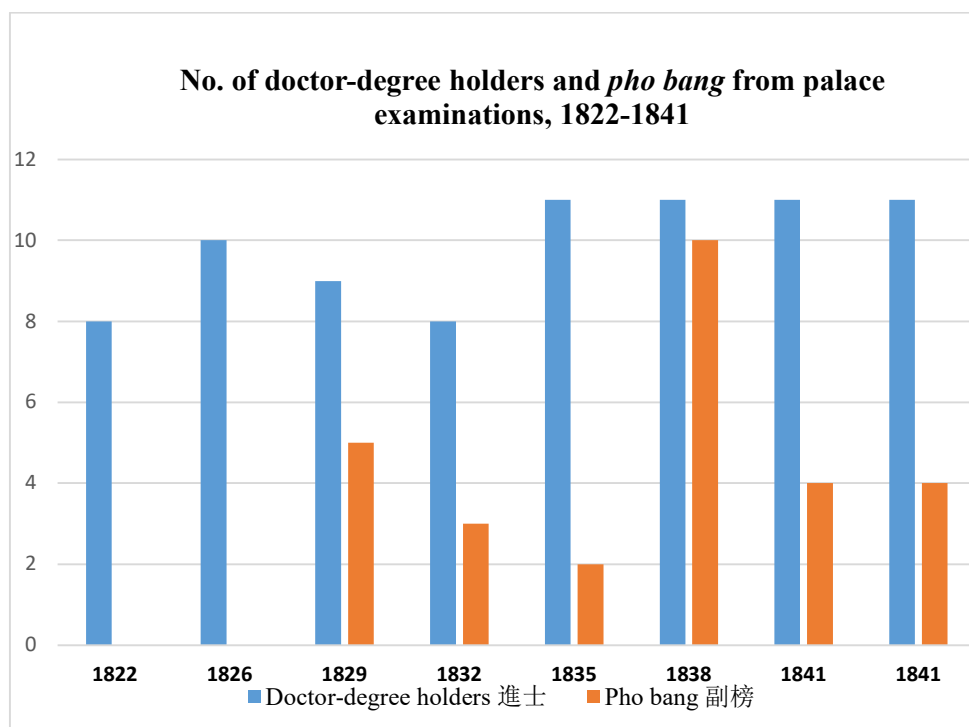


Chart 2.1. Numbers of doctor-degree holders and Supplementary List of Presented Scholars from palace examinations, 1822-1841

Source: author

Note: *pho bang* 副榜: Supplementary List of Presented Scholars (or Subordinate list of Doctor-degree holders), selected from 1829.

The expansion of the palace office facilitated direct imperial control over the court via several appliances. While placing his confidants in key official posts, he could manifest imperial power on pages of paperwork through vermilion endorsements. With the imperial brush landed on memorials and proclamations, *Congdong* was dismissed from most of its paperwork responsibility. At the same time, the boards were placed under monitoring, and emperor-attended audiences levered to the central stage of the bureaucratic deliberation.¹¹³ A few months after the palace secretary's office was at work, the site was strengthened with new security order: “[the office] is the state’s secrecy and centrality, those are not staffs are prohibited from entering” 文書房乃國家樞密，非預事者禁不得入。¹¹⁴

To expand boards’ corresponding capacity, six secretarial offices were institutionalized so the ministries could respond more effectively to paperwork. They were part of the new network of inter-court communication. In 1828, paperwork delivered by the Postal Office must be registered at the Board of Defense before

¹¹³ As discussed detailed in chapter IV.

¹¹⁴ DNTL: II, 4: 12a.

sending to the palace office for examination 凡諸城鎮章奏投遞諸衙門, 均由郵政司關白, 兵部按數, 編送文書房稽覈.¹¹⁵ The responsibility of managing and storing vermilion records was also shifted from the boards to the palace office, particularly after the construction of the palace archive (1826) and the birth of the Grand Secretariat (1830).¹¹⁶ Instead, board officials remained focused on exchanging paperwork, drafting “tally suggestions” 票擬 (from 1824), and supervising seals of the boards.¹¹⁷

Table 2.2. Board secretary departments

The Six Boards	Board secretary Departments	Departments of official seals
The Board of Personnel (吏部)	Lai Truc Xu (吏直處)	Lai An ty (吏印司)
The Board of Revenue (戶部)	Ho Truc Xu (戶直處)	Ho An ty (戶印司)
The Board of Public Works (工部)	Cong Truc xu (工直處)	Cong An ty (工印司)
The Board of Rites (禮部)	Le Truc xu (禮直處)	
The Board of Defence (兵部)	Binh Truc xu (兵直處)	
The Board of Justice (刑部)	Hinh Truc xu (刑直處)	

Source: Nguyen Minh Tuong, 1996: 86-97.

The more Minh Menh involved with governance, the more documents were heading towards the palace. The written correspondence was carried through a newly upgraded postal structure, while written bureaucracy was operated by the emerging scholar-officials. Consequently, memorials, as vividly confirmed from the extant palace documents and *DNTL*, became the primary exchanged channel of bureaucratic maneuver. Periodic reports, for example, were required, submitted by provincial officers, including quarterly “respects-paying memorials” 請安摺 and monthly “rice price reports” 奏報米價.¹¹⁸ The paperwork system leading to the throne was highly regarded as “Vietnam’s most triumphant domestication of Chinese literary administrative methods of processing information”.¹¹⁹

Centralization of the palace archives came in 1826 when vermilion records were placed into the hands of the palace office and preserved at its storehouse, the *Eastern Tower* 東閣.¹²⁰ Minutes’ walk from Minh Menh’s working office (the Hall of Diligent Politics); the palace office and its archive soon became center of the realm’s

¹¹⁵ *DNTL*, II, 51: 29a-b.

¹¹⁶ *DNTL*, II, 15: 9a-b; 38: 11b.

¹¹⁷ *DNTL*, II, 26: 6a-b, 85: 36a.

¹¹⁸ For rice-price reports for instance, see Phan Huy Lê, “Châu Bản Triều Nguyễn Với Việc Nghiên Cứu Lịch Sử Kinh Tế (Nguyen Vermilion Records with the Research of Economic History),” *Kỷ Yếu Hội Thảo Quốc Tế Việt Nam Học Lần Thứ Nhất*, 1998, 437–55.

¹¹⁹ Woodside, *Vietnam and the Chinese Model*, p. 96

¹²⁰ *HDSL*, 224: 3a.

correspondence structure. Not far from the palace was the Six Board archive, *Tower of Book-storage* 藏書樓. Under construction by one thousand soldiers, the magnificent two-storey building is located on an island in the middle of a lake, where records of land and the population of the kingdom are kept.¹²¹ Dedicated to the emperor commitments to paperwork, archive, and complex bureaucracy, the stone inscription that marked the accomplishment of the Tower of Book-storage read,

國家冊籍所以垂憲來，茲必有總滙積儲之，處以謹避水火，乃可傳諸久遠，而著為典常。¹²²

State's books and records could exist and transfer legal regulations from ancient times to today, all due to the careful preservation at the storehouses, keeping them away from water and fire. They can be maintained for many generations, forever providing institutional models for people to follow.”

The introduction of the imperial archives marked a watershed in the dynasty's institutional history. Centralized storage of paperwork demonstrates an aspect of modern statecraft operation. Thirty years before the birth of Minh Menh's palace archive, the French *Archives nationales* was introduced, collecting all pre-revolution private and public records seized by the revolutionaries. Hue palace archive, however, indicated broader bureaucratic transformations involved both the imperial secretary structure and the expansion of Minh Menh's personal rule. The burgeoning use of official documents and their increasing executive function required the archive to be enlarged and institutionalized.

Emperor's direct rule also demands a great deal of assistance from the palace office. Recording governance relies on systematic applications of practical writings and assisted institutions. Seals were cast and delivered to all administrative levels.¹²³ The paperwork flows were concentrated in a single channel and closely guarded by

¹²¹ DNTL, II, 33: 15b.

¹²² In the full original text, “臣聞：國家冊籍所以垂憲來，茲必有總滙積儲之，處以謹避水火，乃可傳諸久遠，而著為典常。奉我皇上萬幾之暇，厯念及此特命起樓于皇城之東北，砌築並用磚石，周圍浚湖。湖之外繚以垣牆支帑項何啻鉅萬。落成之後，敕有司檢撰典籍綱吉，昇藏於樓之。上層二，以闡鴻猷於賁飭留永鑑於豐詒。樓為藏書建也，因奉以命名云。明命柒年歲次丙戌孟冬月穀旦”。 See “*Tàng Thư Lâu Ký* 藏書樓記 (Stone Inscription of the Book-Stored Hall)” (Stone stele, Viện Hán Nôm, no. 5672, 1825).

¹²³ Nguyễn Thị Thu Hương, Đoàn Thị Thu Thủy, and Nguyễn Công Việt, *Ấn Chương Trên Châu Bản Triều Nguyễn, 1802-1945 (Sealed Imprints on the Nguyen Vermilion Records, 1802-1945)* (Hanoi: Nxb Hà Nội, 2013), 15–16. Six Board seals were presented in 1804. In 1820, Minh Menh bestowed official seals to chief military and civil personnel 文武大臣 (DNTL, II, 1: 8b-9a). Finally yet importantly, all officials of the forth rank and above were provided with personal seals in 1826 (DNTL, II, 37: 5a).

multiple court institutions.¹²⁴ Then, a profound shift in the paperwork environment came in 1827. Due to increasing famine and social violence, northern officials were instructed to submit memorials to Hue directly.¹²⁵ As eleven more administrative units in contact with the Grand Palace, the paperwork amount that landed on Minh Menh working desk were doubled. Within two years, the Office of Records and Books was demolished and replaced by the Grand Secretariat (06/02/1830).¹²⁶

Table 2.3. Official seals of the Nguyen bureaucratic system

Bureaucratic levels	Seals	Functions	Notes
Imperial seals	Tỳ璽, bảo 寶, kim bảo tỳ 金寶璽, ngọc tỳ 玉璽	Used in imperial documents and paperwork related to the imperial family.	
Official seals	Ấn 印	Used by central court officials and local personnel of prefects 知府 and county magistrate 知縣	
Authenticated seals	Kiểm án 鈐印	Authenticated seals that were attached to the official seals 印.	
Authenticated seals	Quan phòng 關房	Designed for high-ranked official titles and institutions	
Official seals	Đồ ký 圖記	Designed for low-ranked civil and military officials	
Official seals	Kiểm ký 鈐記	Designed for postal and military stations, and small military units	
Official seals	Triện 篆	Designed for commune chiefs 該總, 正總, village chiefs 里長.	
Personal seals	信記	Personal seals of all ranked officials.	

The change, however, did not come smoothly. It took a decade of careful observation and experimentation before the ‘*Nguyen Grand Secretariat*’ was introduced. The institution first appeared when Ming Hongwu emperor executed senior grand councilor 丞相 *Hu Weiyong* 胡惟庸 on the charge of corruption and treason (1384). As the Chancellery post was abolished, the emperor became a “sole coordinator of both the civil and the military establishments”.¹²⁷ He mobilized secretarial assistance from the Hanlin Academy’s members to oversee the boards. The initiative, however, did not proceed efficiently because the palace was soon overwhelmed with paperwork. Ming Emperors responded to the administrative

¹²⁴ Cadière, “Les Français Au Service de Gia-Long (The French Served Gia Long)”, 434

¹²⁵ Instead of sending reports through the office of northern regional commander in Hanoi. DNTL, II, 43: 16b.

¹²⁶ MNCB, 40: 83.

¹²⁷ Charles O. Hucker, *A Dictionary of Official Titles in Imperial China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1985), entry 483.

problem by forming a separate assistance organ of mid-ranked personnel. It was a hybrid proposal that claimed the chancellery executive responsibility with a lowered-rank, inner-court substitute. The hybridization, however, did not always operate in the ways of design. Chief secretaries sometimes climbed up to top ranks and again manipulated the court by having the emperor's ears.

Such a scenario haunted Minh Menh more than anything else.¹²⁸ One good example took place in 1829 as two chief palace secretaries, Truong Dang Que 張登桂 and Tran Duy Trinh 陳維楨, insistently intervened in a legal case that opposed the king's opinion. His furious response came with an announcement: "there is a saying, 'encountering a ferocious tiger is still better than to meet throne-manipulated mandarins'. Now they [Que and Trinh] want to influence justice and misdeed and maneuver people's crimes. What would happen if [I] promoted grand secretaries to higher ranks? Luckily, I have not been old enough; my mind is not yet lazy; thus, they cannot deceive me. What would happen if there were a mediocre ruler, were not all the power monopolized by those subordinates? Once I get old and tired, there is no certainty that they will not plunder politics."¹²⁹

As a result, he gave words of warning to the successors on the Grand Secretariat: "my sons and grandsons (and all those following) should keep these procedures and not allow them to change, [if not] there will be terrible consequences. If the next generations break my words, there should be loyal officials to intervene".¹³⁰ At the same time, court institutions were regularly encouraged by mutual inspection in which the Grand Secretariat is subjected to boards' monitoring:

"If the Grand Secretariat's opinion was different from those of the Six Boards, the latter are allowed to keep their views and present them to the emperor. On the contrary, if things are concealed or suspicious agenda appear on the Six-Board's drafted memorials, the Grand Secretariat might complete or correct them. If the Grand Secretariat does not notice the Six Board mistakes, ... and if the faults are later unearthed, both members of the institutions that are

¹²⁸ DNTL, II, 63: 24b-26b.

¹²⁹ DNTL, II, 63: 23a. Original text, "語云：寧逢猛虎不寧遇近臣。此輩今日尚欲顛倒是非，出入人罪。儻改置內閣，權位稍隆其勢又將何如邪？幸朕春秋未高，聽斷未怠，故不為彼所惑。毋論迭傳之後，不幸而一遇中材之主，則政柄下移為可慮。即朕他日倦勤又安，必此輩之無所專擅乎？"

¹³⁰ HDSL, 224: 6b-7a.

responsible for inspecting the paperwork and the wrongdoers shall be punished.¹³¹

Figure 2.1. The evolution of Hue palace secretary offices



Notes: Thi thu vien: Department of Books Assistance
 Thi Han vien: Department of Records Assistance
 Thuong bao ty: Department of Seal Management
 Noi Han Vien: Department of Inner Record Assistance
 Van Thu phong: Office of Records and Books
 Noi Cac: Grand Secretariat

The Grand Secretariat and its operations are crucial to the understanding of changing Nguyen's institutional history. The office was placed at the heart of the Hue communication and decision structure, which initiated personal rule, bureaucratic centralization, and empire expansion.¹³² Its four subordinate organs were set in different functional performance: Department of Seal Management 尚寶曹, Department of Recording Imperial Journal 記注曹, Department of Maps and Books 圖書曹, and Department of Petitions and Records 表簿曹.¹³³ In 1837, two among those were renamed, but their functions were primarily maintained. The Department of Seal Management was responsible for keeping royal and governmental seals (國寶印 and 公印). When edicts and proclamations were ratified and memorials endorsed by the emperor, they were stamped and circulated further along the bureaucratic lines.

¹³¹ MNCB, 40: 83.

¹³² The unification of the northern and southern regional administrations and imperial expansion in Cambodia could not be plausible without the Grand Secretariat and Privy Council assistance. See Choi, *Southern Vietnam under the Reign of Minh Mạng (1820-1841): Central Policies and Local Response*; “Trần Tây Phong Thổ Ký 鎮西風土記 (The Customs of Cambodia), Trans., Li Tana,” *Chinese Southern Diaspora Studies* 1 (2007): 148–56; *KDTB, Khâm Định Tiễu Bình Nam Kỳ Nghịch Phi phương lược chính biên, quyển 4-7; 欽定剿平南圻逆匪方略正編 (Official Compendium of Rebel Suppression in Southern Territory of the Empire, Books 4-7)* (Viện Khoa học xã hội vùng Nam Bộ, Hnv.164, 18AD).

¹³³ HDSL, book 224.

Vermilion records were deposited at the Department of Petitions and Records. The Department of Recording Imperial Journal was designed to follow the emperor on tours, documenting imperial activities, comments, and discussions during court audiences. Finally, the Department of Maps and Books took care of emperors' writings, managed imperial libraries, preserving maps and diplomatic files.

Table 2.4. The Grand Secretariat organization in 1830

Grand Secretariat	Thượng bảo tào	尚寶曹	Department of Seal Management
	Biểu bạ tào	表簿曹	Department of Petitions and Records
	Ký chú tào	記注曹	Department of Recording Imperial Journal
	Đồ thư tào	圖書曹	Departments of Books and Records

Table 2.5. Chief palace secretaries and grand secretaries, 1820-1835

Years	Names	Ranks
1820	<i>Palace Secretary Office</i>	
MM1-1820	Nguyễn Đăng Tuấn, Trần Công Tuấn, Hứa Đức Đệ, Lê Bá Tú, Hoàng Quýnh, Nguyễn Văn Thuận, Lê Vạn Công, Nguyễn Cửu Khánh, Nguyễn Trường Huy, Nguyễn Văn Mưu	
MM2-1821	Nguyễn Đăng Tuấn, Trần Công Tuấn, Hứa Đức Đệ, Lê Bá Tú, Hoàng Quýnh, Nguyễn Văn Thuận, Lê Vạn Công, Nguyễn Cửu Khánh.	
MM3-1822	Hứa Đức Đệ, Hoàng Quýnh	
MM4-1823	Hứa Đức Đệ, Hoàng Quýnh	
MM5-1824	Hoàng Quýnh, Thân Văn Quyền	
MM6-1825	Thân Văn Quyền, Tôn Thất Bạch	
MM7-1826	Trương Đăng Quế, Phan Đình Sỹ	
MM8-1827	Thân Văn Quyền, Phan Đình Sỹ, Phan Khắc Kỷ	3B-4A
MM9-1828	Thân Văn Quyền, Tôn Thất Bạch	3B-4A
1830	<i>Grand Secretariat</i>	
MM11-1830	Phan Thanh Giản, Trương Đăng Quế, Hà Tông Quyền	3A
MM11-1830	Hà Quyền, Trương Đăng Quế, Thân Văn Quyền	3A
MM12-1831	Hoàng Quýnh, Lê Văn Đức, Nguyễn Huy Chiêu, Trương Phúc Đĩnh, Hà Duy Phiên.	3A
MM13-1832	Hà Tông Quyền, Thân Văn Quyền, Trương Phúc Đĩnh	3A
MM14-1833	Hà Tông Quyền, Trương Phúc Đĩnh, Thân Văn Quyền, Nguyễn Tri Phương, Hoàng Quýnh.	3A

The Grand Secretariat embodied both a palace office and a central state archive. Their operation was, however, beyond textual and secretarial. Inspecting imperial treasures, monitoring princes' education, participating in organizing ceremonies and metropolitan examinations, and supervising court institutions, to name a few, were

added to its checklist.¹³⁴ The check and balance between the palace office and six boards was upheld on the ground that two grand secretaries were affixed to rank 3A only (正三品, on the scale of nine official grades). They were usually concurrent *thi lang* 侍郎 of the boards and known in official records as ‘侍郎內閣’: *thi lang* who entered the Grand Secretariat.¹³⁵

Table 2.6. Official ranks of grand secretaries and privy councilors

Grand Secretariat	Board personnel	Ranks	Privy Council
	01 President Thuong thu 尚書	2A	04 grand councilors
	02 vice presidents Tham tri 參知	2B	
02 grand secretaries, affixed to rank 3A	02 <i>thi lang</i> 侍郎	3A	

Board personnel and grand councilors outranked grand secretaries (see Table 2.6).¹³⁶ If grand secretaries acquire a higher rank (rather than 3A), they have to leave the palace office and focus only on the board affairs. Other ‘Vietnamized’ aspects of the Nguyen palace office placed on two following distinctions. First was the authorization of the official seal. As the debate went on in Hue, the court realized that in the Qing system, grand academicians 大學士 and lower-rank officials possessed no official seals. The Nguyen bureaucrats, however, believed in its strategic position: “the affairs are numerous, thus, [the Grand Secretariat] should possess an authenticated seal as a safeguard measure” 且機要之地，事務殷繁，須有關防以憑信驗。¹³⁷ The second was the working relationship between the Grand Secretariat and emperors. In Beijing, the Qing Grand Secretariat was ‘distinctively an outer-court body, located far from the emperor in the distant southeastern corner of the palace’.¹³⁸ The office in Hue is located within a short walking distance from the emperor's working hall (the Hall of Diligent Politics) and is closely involved with the emperor’s daily working routine.¹³⁹

¹³⁴ For instance, see MNCB, 40: 39 (16/1/MM11) and MNCB, 40: 46 (24/1/MM11).

¹³⁵ The Nguyen Boards had a president 尚書, which was equal to that of Ming Qing China. Hue’s two vice-presidents were called *tham tri* 參知, derived from the Chinese Tang and Yuan term, *sanzhi zhengshi* 參知政事, but was no longer applied in the Ming and Qing systems. Therefore, *thi lang* 侍郎 were the third highest board officials. In contrast, *shihlang* was vice president (second highest rank) at the Ming, Qing boards.

¹³⁶ MNCB: 40, 83. In the Qing system, grand secretaries entitled to rank 2A (under Kangxi reign) and 1A (under Yongzheng reign). Bartlett, *Monarchs and Ministers*, 33-4.

¹³⁷ DNTL, II, 63: 28b.

¹³⁸ Bartlett, *Monarchs and Ministers*, 32.

¹³⁹ I discuss more on this working relationship in chapter IV.





			
Figure 2.2. Authenticated seal of the Office of Records and Books “文書房關防” (1820). Size: 3.2 x 4.2 cm Source: MMCB, 88: 67	Figure 2.3. Authenticated seal of the Office of Records and Books “文書房關防” (1825). Size: 3.2 x 4.2 cm Source: MMCB, 10: 93	Figure 2.4. Authenticated seals of [the officials] in charge of the Grand Secretariat affairs “充辦內閣事務關防” (1830). Size: 3.2 x 4.2 cm Source: MMCB, 41: 20.	Figure 2.5. Authenticated seals of [the officials] in charge of the Grand Secretariat affairs “充理內閣事務關防” (1887). Size: 3.2 x 4.5 cm Source: DKCB, 5: 149.

Table 2.7. The making of the Minh Menh inner court, 1820-1836

Years	Inner-court offices and their sub-departments			Locations
MM17 (1836)	北司 Northern Department	南司 Southern Department		勤政殿左廡 Left Corridor of the Hall of Diligent Politics
MM14 (1835)	機密院 Privy Council			
	內閣 Grand Secretariat			
MM 10 (1830)	尚寶曹 Department of Seal Management	記注曹 Department of Recording Imperial Journal	圖書曹 Department of Maps and Books	表簿曹 Department of Petitions and Records
	文書房 Office of Records and Books			
MM1 (1820)	侍書院 Department of Books-Assistance	侍翰院 Department of Records-Assistance	內翰院 Department of Inner Record-Assistance	1826: 東閣 Eastern Hall 1820: 左廡 Left Corridor
GL2 (1803)	侍書院 Department of Books-Assistance	侍翰院 Department of Records-Assistance	尚寶司 Department of Seal Management	
GL1 (1802)	侍書院 Department of Books-Assistance	侍翰院 Department of Records-Assistance		

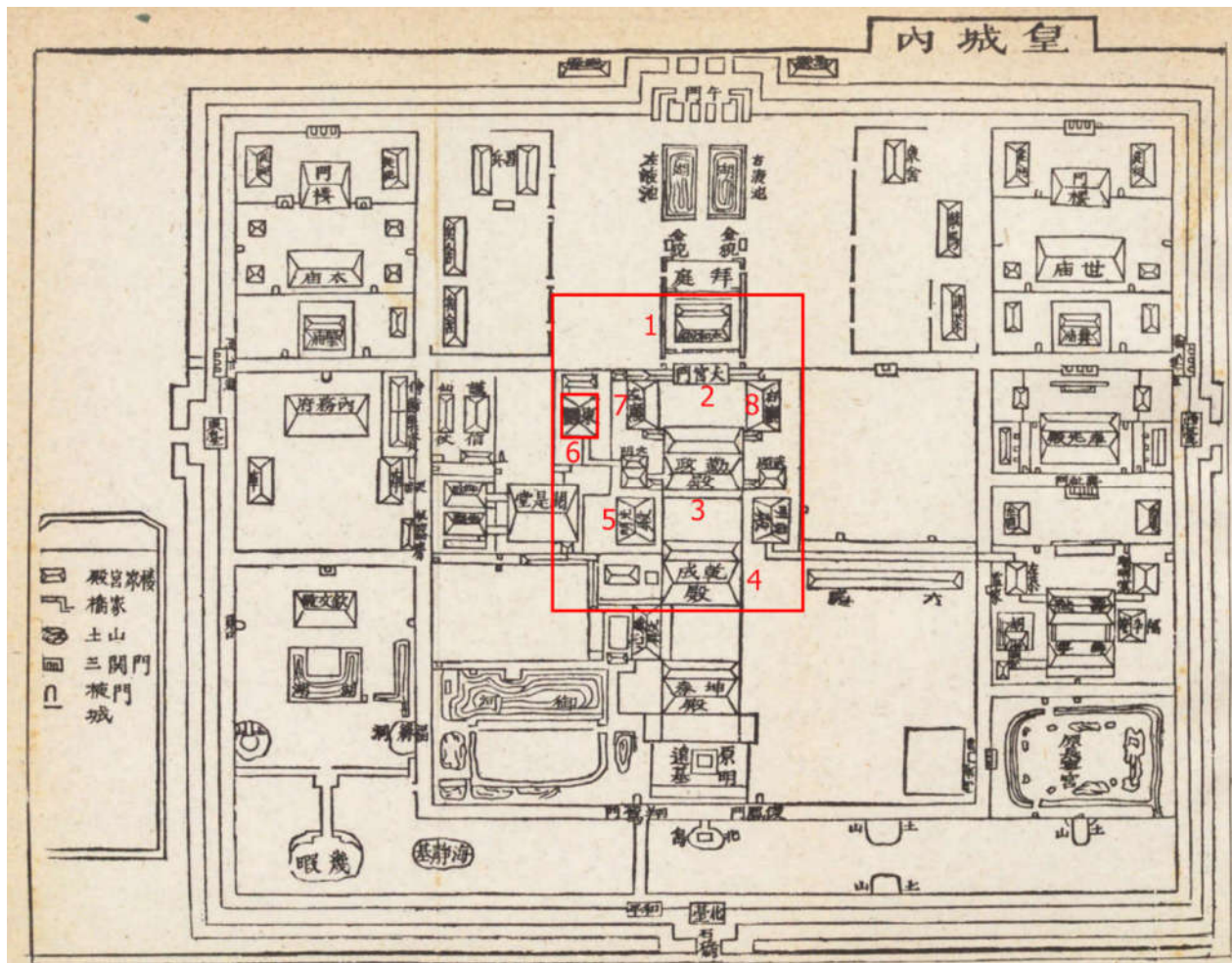


Figure 2.6. The Plan of Hue's Forbidden City (皇城內) in 1909

Source: Cao Xuan Duc 高春育, Luu Duc Xung 劉德稱, and Tran Xan 陳燦. *Dai Nam thath tong chi* 大南一統志 (Thuan Hoa 順化, 1909), National Library, Vietnam, book 1, no. R.779. map no. 2, The Inner Imperial City (皇城內).

Note:

- 1- 太和殿- Hall of Great Harmony
- 2- 大宮門-Palace's main gate
- 3- 勤政殿-Hall of industrious politics
- 4- 乾成殿 – Qiancheng Hall.
- 5- 光明殿 – Guangming Hall
- 6- 東閣 – Eastern Tower
- 7- 左廡 – Left Corridor
- 8- 右廡 – Right Corridor.

II. 2. 4. Local administrations

Among Minh Menh’s priorities were the elimination of two viceroalties and creating a homogenous administrative landscape in the realm. The man was not happy with the lack of bureaucratic legibility and autonomous jurisdictions performed by the regional administrations.¹⁴⁰ In 1831, Hue had a lengthy debate on the provincial system before suggesting its “fifteen benefits” 十五利, including three related to managing paperwork and official correspondence.¹⁴¹ Working to detach military and civil bureaucracies, Minh Menh replaced Gia Long administrative structure of districts, prefectures, military commanderies, and special ethnic zones with a new form of uniformity. After a decade of preparation, two semi-autonomous regions in Hanoi and Saigon were abolished (1831-1832), following a dramatic episode of kingdom-wide insurgency. Despite strong local opposition, the realm now stood thirty-one standard provinces. Provincial governors, appointed by the court, were carefully selected from the Minh Menh’s generation of degree-holders.

Table 2.8. The evolution of local administration in Vietnam, 1802-1834

1802-1830		1832	1834	
Regions	Ruling authorities	Provinces (Governor 巡撫)	(Governor-general 總督)	Regional divisions
北城 Northern Administration (11 commanderies 鎮)	Northern Governor-general 北城 總鎮	1. Cao Bằng	Lạng Bằng	Northern region 北圻
		2. Lạng Sơn		
		3. Hưng Hóa	Son Hưng Tuyên	
		4. Tuyên Quang		
		5. Sơn Tây		
		6. Thái Nguyên	Ninh Thái	
		7. Bắc Ninh	Hải Yên	
		8. Quảng Yên	Định Yên	
		9. Hải Dương		
		10. Hưng Yên		
		11. Nam Định	Hà Ninh	
		12. Hà Nội		
		13. Ninh Bình		
Hue’s direct control 11 military units: 營 (4) and commanderies 鎮 (7)	Nguyen Emperor Gia Long 嘉隆皇帝	14. Thanh Hóa	Thanh Hóa	Regions to the left 左圻
		15. Nghệ An	An Tĩnh	
		16. Hà Tĩnh	Bình Trị	Immediate region to the left 左直圻
		17. Quảng Bình		
		18. Quảng Trị	Thừa Thiên	Capital
		19. Thừa Thiên	Nam Ngãi	
20. Quảng Nam				

¹⁴⁰ In case of the southern region, see Choi, *Southern Vietnam under the Reign of Minh Mạng*. For northern region, see Vũ Đức Liêm, “Nguyễn Công Trứ: Nhận Thức Thời Đại, Thực Hành Chính Trị” (Nguyen Cong Tru: awaking to the age and political practice) *Tạp Chí Khoa Học Xã Hội và Nhân Văn* 5, no. 1 (2019): 21–36; Vu, “Village Rebellion and Social Violence”.

¹⁴¹ DNTL, II, 76: 14b-15a.

		21. Quảng Ngãi		Immediate region to the right 右直圻
		22. Bình Định	Bình Phú	Region to the right 右圻
		23. Phú Yên		
		24. Khánh Hòa	Thuận Khánh	
		Bình Thuận		
嘉定城 Southern Administration (5 commanderies 鎮)	Southern Governor- general 嘉定 城總鎮	Biên Hòa	An Biên	Southern region 南圻
		Gia Định (Phiên An)		
		An Giang	An Hà	
		Hà Tiên		
		Vĩnh Long	Long Tường	
		Định Tường		

By the early 1830s, each province was run by five key officers. Governor-general 總督, an administrator of two provinces, was responsible for monitoring civil and military offices. Governor 巡撫 was responsible for promulgating the imperial mercifulness, ruling people, supervising administration, promoting good customs, and eliminating lousy life manners. Underneath were three commissioners of finance and taxes *bo chanh* 布政, jurisdiction and law *an sat* 按察, and military affairs *lanh binh* 領兵.¹⁴²

The central court closely watched upon them through an inspecting institution: the Censorate *Do sat vien* 都察院. By sending inspectors to provinces, the surveillance system reported directly to the throne. Written correspondence and periodic reports were regulated. In 1832, provincial chiefs (Governor-general, Governor, Financial Commissioner, and Judicial Commissioner) were requested to visit the court every three years. In addition, governors-general and governors were obligated to submit four *respects-paying memorials* 請安摺 a year, while two were designated for financial and judicial commissioners.¹⁴³ However, to have the throne frequently updated, officials were repeatedly requested to memorialize without depending on the seasonal reports.¹⁴⁴

Table 2.9. Local official posts in 1834

<i>Official titles</i>	<i>Ranks</i>	<i>Notes</i>
Governor-general 總督 <i>Tong doc</i>	2A	
Governor 巡撫 <i>Tuan phu</i>	2B	
Commissioner of finance and taxes 布政 <i>Bo chanh</i>	3A	
commissioners of jurisdiction and law 按察 <i>An sat</i>	3A	
commissioners of military affairs 領兵 <i>Lanh binh</i>	3A	

¹⁴² MMCY, vol. 1: 205-06.

¹⁴³ HDSL, 5: 11a-b.

¹⁴⁴ DNTL, II, 166: 2a-b. Also, see HDSL, book 5.

If the increasing use of paperwork and written bureaucracy counted as advance and efficiency of a government, Minh Menh was certainly aiming at those displays. His mandarins, however, were not ready yet. In 1824, he was confounded that the Board of Defense submitted a list of local battalion commanders 該隊, and requested imperial approval. The emperor had to calm the bureaucrat's nerves by assuring, "The court should have a code of conduct. From now on, when the court council recommends high-ranked officials, it should have waited for my vermilion endorsement as a gesture of appreciation. For appointing low-rank officials, [the lists] should be briefly memorialized before implementing, and no direct imperial endorsement is necessary" (朝廷 須體統. 自今, 廷臣所舉牧守大吏, 候朕硃圈以示寵異職卑者. 但可略奏請旨施行, 不必圈點瑣碎為也).¹⁴⁵

With the expansion of local administration, the scale of paperwork production was significantly burgeoning with routine, periodic, and confidential memorials. The Grand Secretariat became the hub of administrative affairs and deeply engaged with the decision-making structure. The middle-ranked secretariat advanced beyond the initial secretarial function, leading them to the inner circle of court politics. On the other hand, administrative standardization required both diversification and uniformity of paperwork to navigate documents through the complex governmental structure.

Table 2.10. The Nguyen bureaucratic structure in the 1830s

EMPEROR 皇帝						
Ranks						
	Office of the Duke-ranked princes 皇子之公府					Central government
1A		Imperial Household Department 尊人府		Privy Council 機密院		
2A					Censorate 都察院	
3A			Grand Secretariat 內閣			
2A		Six Boards 六部				
2A			General-governor			

¹⁴⁵ DNLT, II, 26: 6a-b.

			總督		
2B			Governor 巡撫		
3A		Commissioner of finance and taxes 布政	Commissioner of jurisdiction and law 按察	Commissioner of military affairs 領兵	
5B			Prefect 知府		
6A			County magistrate 知縣		
9B			Commune chief 該總,		
			Village chief 里長		

Increasing exchanged correspondence between central and local governments, inner and outer courts, and inter-institutions intensified paperwork-involved pressures on Hue bureaucracy. Growing direct communication between Hue and provinces required more capable staff and well-established regulations. In 1835, the court presented a comprehensive guideline of paperwork types and drafting formats applied to all forms of bureaucratic exchanges.

Table 2.11. Types and uses of Nguyen's exchanging documents in 1835

No.	Institutions	Dispatched document types	Received Institutions	Responded document-types
1	Office of the Duke-ranked Prince 皇子之公府	Exchanged paperwork 咨移	Imperial Household Department 尊人府 and nine ministers 九卿 (including Six Boards 六部, Censorate 都察院, Court of Judicial Review 大理寺, Office of Transmission 通政使, and chief military and civil officials	咨呈 Replied reports
		Instructions 教示	Inferior and subordinate officials, institutions 行所屬用教示	稟 reports
2	廷臣 Court audience	Directions 傳示	All military and civil officials in the inner and outer office 內外文武大小職官	
3	Imperial Household Department	Exchanged paperwork 咨移	Nine ministers and chief civil and military officials	Exchanged paperwork 咨移
		Orders 照會	Grand Secretariats 內閣 and court institutions 府, 武庫, 寺, 監.	咨呈 Replied reports
	Boards and court institutions	Orders 札	Department chiefs 郎中, Senior secretaries 員外郎 and lower-ranked staff of the institutions	稟 Reports
	Censorate 都察院		Censors 科道 and officials of lower ranks	
Military headquarters 軍營	Commander of army units 管衛 and those in lower ranks			

	Grand Secretariat		Staff members	
	State Academy		Staff members	
	Civil and military officials to staff of other institutions	Orders 照會	Officials of the ranks of 4 and 5.	呈文 reports
		Orders 札	Officials of the ranks of 6 and lower	
4	Thua Thien Prefect 承天府 (the Capital)	Orders 札	Officials and people under jurisdiction.	稟 Reports
		Exchanged paperwork 咨移	General-Governor, Governor, commissioners of Finance and Taxes, of Judicial of other provinces	Exchanged paperwork 咨移
	General-Governor, Governor, commissioners of Finance and Taxes, of Judicial of other provinces	Exchanged paperwork 咨移	General-Governor, Governor, commissioners of Finance and Taxes, of Judicial of other provinces	Exchanged paperwork 咨移
		Orders 照會	Commissioners of Finance and Taxes, of Judicial of the province	咨呈 Replied reports
		Orders 札	Low-ranked staff in the province	
	Commissioners of Finance and Taxes, of Judicial	Exchanged paperwork 咨移	Provincial military chiefs	
		Orders 照會	Lower-ranked officials in the province	呈文 Reports
		Orders 札	Subordinate officials and people	
	Prefectures, counties	稟 Reports	General-Governor, Governor, commissioners of Finance and Taxes, of Judicial of the province	
		呈文 Reports	General-Governor, Governor, commissioners of Finance and Taxes, of Judicial of other provinces	
			Commissioner of military affairs	

The flow of paperwork was channelled through the Postal Office and Office of Transmission before heading to the Board of Defense for registration. The palace office then collected all registered documents and arranged for court audiences.¹⁴⁶ By 1824, inter-court exchanges were mainly conducted between Grand Secretariat and Six Boards via *tally suggestions*, after Le Van Duyet and Le Chat complained that Minh Menh was exhausted himself by working on every single document.¹⁴⁷

By the mid-1830s, kingdom-wide conflicts, Siamese invasions, and imperial expansion in Cambodia tested the capacity of Hue governance in several domains, including correspondence efficiency. Facing the crisis, the emperor had days of sleeplessness and decided to reduce daily food consumption as a gesture of

¹⁴⁶ DNTL, II, 51: 29a-b.

¹⁴⁷ DNTL, II, 26: 6a-b.

repentance,¹⁴⁸ but the real challenge came to the Grand Secretariat. They must work with the Board of Defence on strategic analysis and express military communication. This responsibility was taken by a few trusted courtiers, including grand secretary Ha Tong Quyen 何宗權, who played essential roles in drafting confidential and urgent military instructions.¹⁴⁹

The Grand Secretariat, however, had its limit. Staff-quota was set by thirty.¹⁵⁰ Over-produced paperwork sometimes went beyond its capacity. More importantly, the office gradually moved away from the secretarial function while entering deep into the executive domain. Minh Menh was unsatisfied. In an announcement in 1833, he ordered the reduction of administrative documents from boards 部 and court institutions 院: “The way of conducting politics essentially relies upon simplicity. So far, documents submitted by court institutions are too complicated and detailed” (為政之道，貴在簡要。向見諸衙所上文書，因循辦過多涉煩碎).¹⁵¹ The increasing memorial flow was among the salient factors that exhausted the secretary institution. In 1834, the emperor was again alerted to the system, “recently, the Grand Secretariat made many mistakes because of the lack of staff’s mutual inspection. Moreover, [the staff] do not identify who is competent or not”. This time, more detailed regulations and assigned personal responsibilities were implemented.¹⁵² The second consequence of the Grand Secretariat’s overload was the expansion of the inner court. A new correspondence and executive body was born with commitments to strategic decision-making: the Privy Council (1835).¹⁵³

II. 2. 5. The Privy Council

The Privy Council was the ending result of more than a decade of political centralization and empire building. The bulk of official works, communication, and strategy discussion required a flexible and confidential institution to assist the emperor in emergency response. Army campaigns in the decade of warfare (1826-1836) militarized communication networks between Hue and frontiers.¹⁵⁴ Phan Ba Vanh in the Red River delta, Nong Van Van in the Sino-Vietnamese border, Le

¹⁴⁸ DNTL, II, 104: 31b.

¹⁴⁹ DNTL, II, 162: 15a.

¹⁵⁰ HDSL, 224: 6b-7b.

¹⁵¹ DNTL, II, 109: 13b-14a.

¹⁵² HDSL, 224: 14b.

¹⁵³ HDSL, 5: 1a.

¹⁵⁴ Vu, “Village Rebellion and Social Violence in Early Nineteenth Century Vietnam”, 64-65.

Van Khoi in the Lower Mekong, and Siam-Vietnam wars in Cambodia turned Vietnam into a warzone.¹⁵⁵ Frequent delay of northern express transmissions of documents led to the emperor's disappointment:

“The setting up of postal horses is for transporting documents related to essential affairs; why [there are] such delays?”

駟驛之設往來傳遞機務攸關，豈應如此遲。¹⁵⁶

In 1834, direct Vietnamese rule over Cambodia (known as *Western Protectorate* 鎮西城) expanded Hue's communication network and logistic operation several hundred kilometers to the west of Gia Dinh.¹⁵⁷ At that point, Minh Menh started consulting with several Chinese advisory institutions, including the Sung Privy Council 樞密院 and Qing Grand Council 軍機處.

帝諭內閣曰：國家分職設官，樞機周備部院閣，竝已分明職製，慎乃攸司。至如軍國大事，朕臨期面諭，部閣承旨票擬，向來亦已竝臻妥善。更念軍國要機，事關重大，必須仿宋之樞密院，清之軍機處，斟酌而行，俾別為一所，事有專責則綱維品節益致其周。茲準設機密院，遇有軍國大事，別諭簡充機密大臣奉票施行，以昭慎重。其合行事，宜令廷臣會議條奏候旨裁定及議上。¹⁵⁸

“The emperor gave the Grand Secretariat instruction that ‘the state appoints officials. All the key posts are sufficient. The boards, intuitions, and the Grand Secretariat share unambiguous functions, and all have to follow assigned responsibilities. Talking about the military and state affairs, they are all essential business. When there is a problem, I directly give orders; then, the boards and the Grand Secretariat follow the instructions, going after tally suggestions. Until now, things have proceeded smoothly. However, [I] think, for those highly secret strategies and state issues, there is a demand to modify the Sung Confidential Institution and the Qing Grand Council and creatively establish one of our own. Only administrative specialization facilitates accountable regulations, bureaucratic systems, and official responsibility. From now on, I mandate the formation of the Privy

¹⁵⁵ Vũ Đương Luân, “The Politics of Frontier Mining: Local Chieftains, Chinese Miners, and Upland Society in the Nông Văn Vân Uprising in the Sino-Vietnamese Border Area, 1833–1835,” *Cross-Currents: East Asian History and Culture Review* 3, no. 2 (2015): 349–78; Nguyễn Phan Quang, *Việt Nam Thế Kỷ XIX (1802-1884) (Vietnam in the XIXth Centenary (1802-1884))* (Thành phố Hồ Chí Minh: Nxb thành phố Hồ Chí Minh, 2002). Puangthong Rungwasdisab, “War and Trade: Siamese Interventions in Cambodia, 1767-1851” (PhD thesis, University of Wollongong, 1995); Choi, *Southern Vietnam under the Reign of Minh Mạng*.

¹⁵⁶ DNTL, II 92 15b.

¹⁵⁷ DNTL, II, 142: 17b-18a; 145: 14b-15a; 213: 11a-b; Vu, “Vietnam at the Khmer Frontier”, 550–51.

¹⁵⁸ DNTL, II, 140: 10a.

Council. When there are state affairs, [I] will select high-ranked officials as grand councilors.”

The most salient characteristic of this institutional ‘domestication’ was the ‘cooperation’ between Grand Secretariat and Privy Council. These were not disjointed communicational channels but shared the same postal system. The latter even inherited both the working place of the former (the left corridor of the Hall of Diligent Politics 勤政殿左廡) and its staff.¹⁵⁹ Regulations designed for the Privy Council suggested how it became an extended superior advisory group rather than a distinct organ among the palace offices. “If there are memorials submitted by *yamen* 衙門 [administrative offices] that are directed to the Grand Council for examination and suggestion-making, or [grand councilors] are instantly summoned to draft imperial edicts, the Council chiefs must immediately gather for audience and submission [the tally suggestion/draft]. When the drafts are approved, [they] should be carefully rewritten. If [the involved] affairs are confidential, [the Council] requests imperial seals to stamp. If there is the need to send out vermilion records, imperial edicts would be required. Besides, the copies of confidential records are mandatory to have the Council’s seal stamped. Attending grand councilors must sign and stamp [with personal seals on the copied], before delivering to responsible officials. Affairs are not confidential should follow normal regulations, transfer to the Grand Secretariat to apply imperial seals, and deliver for implementation”.¹⁶⁰ Furthermore, the Grand Secretariat was liable for inspecting the daily use of seals at the Privy Council and reporting to the emperor monthly.¹⁶¹

Table 2.12. Grand Secretaries and Grand Councilors, 1835-1840

Years	Grand Secretaries (Two at a time)	Grand Councilors (Four at a time)	Notes
MM15 (1834)	Hà Tông Quyền Trương Phúc Đĩnh Thân Văn Quyền Nguyễn Tri Phương Hoàng Quýnh		
MM16 (1835)	Hà Tông Quyền Nguyễn Tri Phương Hoàng Quýnh Trương Đăng Quế	Nguyễn Kim Bảng Trương Đăng Quế Phan Bá Đạt Phan Thanh Giản	Trương Đăng Quế transferred to Grand Secretariat. Nguyễn Kim Bảng returned to the board.

¹⁵⁹ HDSL, 5: 3a.

¹⁶⁰ DNTL, II, 140: 11a. Original text, “遇有何衙門章疏交院票擬，或不期宣召承旨票擬旨諭，院臣即會辦具章進呈，得旨後乃精繕。如事關慎密，請寶于院所欽用，有應發紅本請之遵行。餘凡事應密錄均押用院印，竝當直院臣畫押照所關者發交。非慎密事者，仍照例交閣用寶轉交辦理。”

¹⁶¹ DNTL, II, 140: 11a.

MM17 (1836)	<u>Hà Tông Quyền</u> Lê Bá Tú Nguyễn Tri Phương	<u>Hà Tông Quyền</u> Nguyễn Khoa Minh Trương Đăng Quế Phan Bá Đạt	Phan Bá Đạt returned to the board.
MM18 (1837)	<u>Hà Tông Quyền</u> Nguyễn Tri Phương	<u>Hà Tông Quyền</u> Trương Đăng Quế Nguyễn Khoa Minh Đoàn Khiêm Quang Nguyễn Tri Phương	Nguyễn Khoa Minh dismissed, back to the board.
MM19 (1838)	<u>Hà Tông Quyền</u> Nguyễn Tri Phương	<u>Trương Đăng Quế</u> <u>Hà Tông Quyền</u> Phan Thanh Giản Tôn Thất Bạch	
MM20 (1839)	Lâm Duy Nghĩa Hoàng Quýnh Nguyễn Tri Phương	Trương Đăng Quế Hà Tông Quyền Lê Văn Đức Lê Đăng Doanh Hà Duy Phiên Đặng Văn Thiêm	
MM 21 (1840)	Lâm Duy Nghĩa Nguyễn Tri Phương Lê Bá Tú Trương Văn Uyển	Trương Đăng Quế Phan Thanh Giản Nguyễn Trung Mậu Lê Đăng Doanh	
MM22 (1841)		Trương Đăng Quế	Regent 顧命大臣

Notes: Underlined names held both posts in succession.

Unlike the Grand Secretariat, Privy Council was less institutionalized and smaller in scale; that suited better for “discussing strategic issues and assisting [the emperor] on military affairs”.¹⁶² Its staff was numbered by sixteen, under the leadership of four grand councilors ranked grade four and above. Twelve assistants and secretariats possessed the ranking from grade 5 (two persons), grade 6 (two persons), to grade 7 (four persons). Authenticated ivory cards were given to grand councilors, inscribing “grand councilor” 機密大臣 and “Privy Council assistants” 機密行走 for the subordinates. The office itself possessed a silver seal, “the Privy Council seal” 機密院印. For the Council’s operation at night, one grand councilor and two assistants had to attend office preparing for royal summons.¹⁶³

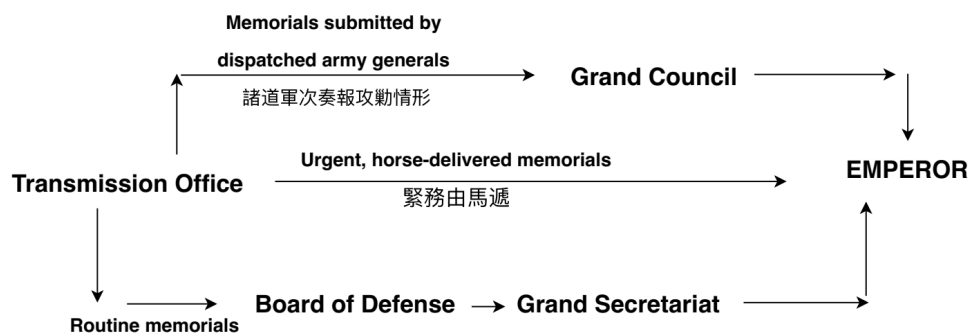
Based on the dynastic compiled *Military Strategies* 方略 and *DNTL*, the Privy Council played a leading role in the deliberative operation that restored order in Vietnam, including suppressing rebellions, pacifying Cambodia, and defeating

¹⁶² HDSL, 5: 1a.

¹⁶³ DNTL, II, 140: 10a-11b.

the Siamese invasions. It expanded new forms of communication between the emperor and frontier generals through speedy strategic instructions. One month after the Privy Council was at work, Minh Menh demanded urgent and horse-transported delivery 緊務由馬遞 be directly deposited at his desk. Reports submitted by army generals, on the other hand, will be immediately transferred to the Privy Council before submitting to the throne (自後接到諸地方本章，如緊務由馬遞者仍遵前諭，自進，其諸道軍次奏報攻勦情形，準接受後立即轉交機密院呈進).¹⁶⁴ As a result, by 1835, three memorial types were travelled through the Transmission Office. They included routine memorials that were operated by the Grand Secretariat and Six Boards.¹⁶⁵

Figure 2.7. Three types of memorials in 1835



Within their functions, the primary agenda concerned grand councilors were military strategies and diplomatic affairs. Unfortunately, since the Council's archive was so little known, the nature of paperwork passed by the grand councilors' hands was obscure. The extant body of 153 volumes of *Military strategies* compiled by the grand councilors themselves (namely Truong Dang Que, Nguyen Kim Bang, Phan Ba Dat, and Ha Tong Quyen) was among a few that shed some light on the scale and operations of Hue's confidential correspondence, including memorials, military reports, and edicts that were drafted between 1833 and 1835.¹⁶⁶

Table 2.13. The *Compiled Military Strategies* of the Minh Menh reign

		Books
目錄	Content	1
御製勦平北圻逆匪詩集	Imperial poetry on the occasions of rebel suppression in the northern territory [by Minh Menh]	1

¹⁶⁴ DNTL, II, 143: 9a.

¹⁶⁵ DNTL, II, 51: 29a-b.

¹⁶⁶ See KDTB.

御製勦平南圻賊寇詩集	Imperial poetry on the occasions of bandit suppression in the southern territory [by Minh Menh]	1
欽定勦平北圻逆匪方略正編	Official compendium of rebel suppression in the northern territory	80
欽定勦平南圻逆匪方略正編	Official compendium of rebel suppression in the southern territory	47
欽定勦平順省蠻匪方略附編	Additional records of Official compendium of barbarian rebel suppression in Thuan province [Binh Thuan and Khanh Hoa]	15
欽定勦平暹寇方略正編	Official compendium of Siamese bandit suppression [1833]	8

The Privy Council's orchestration of paperwork also involved periodic and *greetings palace memorials*. The latter, in particular, was regulated in 1833 and was firstly processed by the Grand Secretariat until 1836.¹⁶⁷ Soon, the *greetings palace memorials* became a highly anticipated source of information through which the emperor earned direct and frequent updates from General-Governors, Governors, and provincial commissioners. Because of the reports' significance, Minh Menh sharply criticized submissions of low information-value that did not address people's lives and official businesses.¹⁶⁸ In short, the system of *greetings palace memorials* and the involvement of the Privy Council are illustrated in the following diagram:

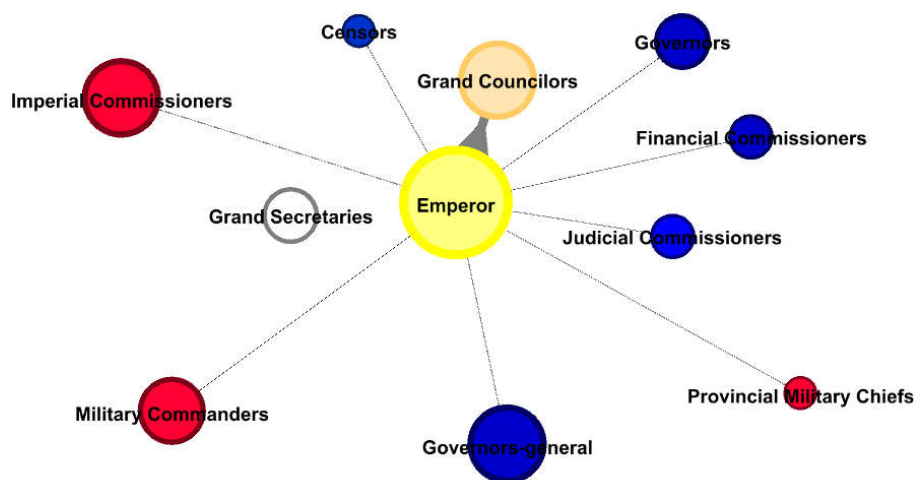


Figure 2.8. The network of *greetings palace memorials*

Source: author

Institutional evolutions and the project of political centralization recognized Minh Menh as a remarkable monarch, not only in Vietnam but also in

¹⁶⁷ DNTL, II, 89: 14a; 166: 4a.

¹⁶⁸ DNTL, II, 89, 14b. Original text, “帝以諸省督撫布按節次拜摺請安, 多不敘及民情吏治, 每每批示切責之因”.

the East Asian context.¹⁶⁹ At the turn of the nineteenth century, Japan was in the late Tokugawa. Korean started suffering from emerging social violence, with the first rebellion sparked in 1811, and soon more were about to come.¹⁷⁰ Qing China was in a crisis as uprisings led by peasants and religious groups were flooding the empire. Regional militarization eroded state control by exploiting the weakness of regular governmental armies.¹⁷¹ Beijing was losing ground because of failed traditional governance in an increasingly violent and mobile society.¹⁷² At the same time, the Vietnamese emperor transformed an entity of geopolitical fragmentation into a consolidated territory. In 1836, he defeated all significant insurgencies in the realm. Hue officials proudly declared their kingdom “empire” (great kingdom 大國) and “superior civilized state” 文明上國.¹⁷³ Finally, in a gesture claiming equivalence to the Great Qing 大清 in the North, Minh Menh decided to rename his domain *Great South* 大南.¹⁷⁴

茲本朝奄有南方，提封日闢東邊一帶訖于南海遶過西溟。凡戴髮含齒皆隸版圖，海濱山陬盡歸率土原稱越南，今稱大南，更明名義。¹⁷⁵

“Now, our dynasty covers entirely the South; the territory expands eastward to the Southern Sea, going across to the Western Sea. People with teeth and hair are entirely incorporated into the map; everywhere, from beaches to forest corners, [people] submit [to us]. [The realm] was previously called Viet Nam, now changes to Dai Nam to uphold the principles of righteousness.”

¹⁶⁹ See Anthony Reid, ed., *The Last Stand of Asian Autonomies: Responses to Modernity in the Diverse States of Southeast Asia and Korea, 1750-1900* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997).

¹⁷⁰ Woodside, *Lost Modernities*, 40.

¹⁷¹ Philip A. Kuhn, “Local Self-Government under the Republic: Problems of Control, Autonomy, and Mobilization,” in *Conflict and Control in Late Imperial China*, ed. Frederic Jr. Wakeman and Carolyn Grant. (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1975), 257–98.

¹⁷² Barend ter Haar, *The White Lotus Teachings in Chinese Religious History* (Leiden: Brill, 1992), 250–61; Philip A. Kuhn, *Rebellion and Its Enemies in Late Imperial China, Militarization and Social Structure, 1796-1864*, Harvard East Asian Series (Cambridge, Mass. [u.a.]: Harvard University Press, 1970), 39-40.; Dian H. Murray and Baoqi Qin, *The Origins of the Tiandihui: The Chinese Triads in Legend and History* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1994); Wensheng Wang, *White Lotus Rebels and South China Pirates: Crisis and Reform in the Qing Empire* (CA: MA: Harvard University Press, 2014); Susan M. Jones and Philip A. Kuhn, “Dynastic Decline and the Roots of Rebellion,” in *The Cambridge History of China, Vol. 10, Part 1*, ed. John K. Fairbank (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 107–62.

¹⁷³ Lý Văn Phức, *Mân Hành Tạp Vịnh Thảo* 閩行雜詠草 (*Random Chants from a Journey to Mân*) (Viện Hán Nôm, A. 1291, 1831), 24b-25a; “*Trần Tây Phong Thổ Ký* 鎮西風土記, 155.

¹⁷⁴ DNTL, II, 190: 1a-b.

¹⁷⁵ DNTL, II, 190: 1b-2a.

The vulnerability of Gia Long's transitional statecraft based on regional power negotiation was replaced by institutionalizing checks and balances set up during the 1830s. Minh Menh did so by carefully observing different Chinese "models" and untangling Vietnamese problems of regional tension and military-civil competition. More literati filling in official posts does not necessarily mean the problems were immediately solved. At least, the shift created a relatively reliable institutionalization for state operation. The written bureaucracy was among his most significant designs. Official documents were not merely a channel of communication but the infrastructure to run an empire on records. Paperwork visualized the politics of imagination, mapped the administration, and forged the new governing identity of the Vietnamese state. This bureaucratic legacy paved the foundation for Nguyen's governance until the early twentieth century. Several administrative characteristics of the Minh Menh's Vietnam had shaped the country's modern contour.¹⁷⁶ In the birth of modern Vietnam, there was probably "no period more significant than this one."¹⁷⁷

Those geopolitical and governing evolutions were achieved by the emperor's personality, regional negotiation, and changing local contexts... No less significant was the role played by paperwork and the correspondence system. They transformed imperial communication by adding regulations, facilities, infrastructure, and personnel to the bureaucracy. Document flows linked bureaucratic components with efficiency and allowed Minh Menh's imperial project to be plausible. The emerging scholar-officials orchestrated new administrative and communication-decision structures. Being carefully selected by Minh Menh, their vigor and professionalization based on knowledge and skills of working with paperwork and political institutions had changed the country's culture of administration. The following was the number of doctoral degree holders and their official careers.

¹⁷⁶ Such as geographical and administrative organization and the major correspondence systems.

¹⁷⁷ Alexander Woodside, *Vietnam and the Chinese*, 111.

Table 2.14. Palace examinations between 1822 and 1841

	Examiners	Doctor-degree holders 進士 and <i>pho bang</i> 副榜 (Supplementary List of Presented Scholars)	Hometown	Graduated Age	Official appointments	Ranks
1822	Trịnh Hoài Đức	1-進士: Nguyễn Ý 阮懿	Son Nam	27	Biên tu 編修	7A
	Nguyễn Hữu Thân	2-進士: Lê Tông Quang 黎宗瑠	Son Nam	21	Tham hiệp 參協	4A
	Nguyễn Văn Hưng	3-進士: Phan Hữu Tính 潘有性	Nghe An	41	Tư nghiệp Quốc tử giám 國子監司業	4B
	Nguyễn Huy Trinh	4-進士: Hà Tông Quyền 何宗權	Son Nam	25	Tham tri 參知, Cơ mật đại thần 機密大臣, Thị lang Nội các 內閣侍郎.	2B
		5-進士: Đinh Văn Phác 丁文樸	Nghe An	33	-	
		6-進士: Vũ Đức Khuê	Hai Duong	30	Tuần phủ 巡撫	2B
		7-進士: Phan Bá Đạt 潘伯達	Nghệ An	40	Phó Đô Ngự sử, Tổng đốc Định An 副都御史, 總督	2A
		8-進士: Trần Lê Hiệu 陳黎傲	Thanh Hoa	38	Lang trung 郎中	4A
1826	Nguyễn Xuân Thục	1-進士: Hoàng Tế Mỹ 黃濟美	Son Tay	32	Tham tri Bộ Hình 刑部參知	2B
	Trần Lợi Trinh	2-進士: Nguyễn Huy Hựu 阮輝佑	Hai Duong	44	Đốc học 督學	5A
	Phan Huy Thục	3-進士: Phan Thanh Giản 潘清簡	Vinh Thanh	31	Cơ mật đại thần 機密大臣, Quốc sử quán tổng tài 國史館總裁; Hiệp biện đại học sĩ 協辦大學士.	1B
		4-進士: Chu Văn Nghị 朱文議	Bac Ninh	40	-	
		5-進士: Vũ Tông Phan 武宗璠	Hoai Duc	23	Đốc học tỉnh Bắc Ninh 北寧督學	5A
		6-進士: Tô Trân 蘇珍	Hung Yen	36	Tả tham tri Bộ Lễ 禮部左參知	2B
		7-進士: Ngụy Khắc Tuân 魏克循	Nghe An	26	Thượng thư Bộ Hộ 戶部尚書	2A
		8-進士: Đặng Văn Khải 鄧文啟	Hung Yen	33	Lang trung 郎中	4A
		9-進士: Vũ Thời Mẫn 武時敏	Nghe An	32	Bổ chánh 布政	3A
		10-進士: Nguyễn Văn Thắng 阮文勝	Hoai Duc	24	Tham hiệp 參協	4A

1829	Hoàng Kim Xán	1-進士: Nguyễn Đăng Huân 阮登勳	Son Tay	25	Lang trung Bộ Lễ 禮部郎中	4A
	Lê Đăng Doanh	2-進士: Bùi Ngọc Quý 裴玉櫃	Son Nam	34	Tả tham tri Bộ Lại 吏部左叅知, 按察	2B
	Nguyễn Đăng Tuân	3-進士: Phạm Thế Hiển 範世顯	Nam Dinh	27	Tham tri 叅知	2B
	Lê Văn Đức	4-進士: Nguyễn Trữ 阮佇	Son Nam	26	An sát 按察	3A
		5-進士: Trương Quốc Dụng 張國用	Nghệ An	33	Thượng thư 尚書, Hiệp biện đại học sĩ 協辦大學士, Cơ mật đại thần 機密大臣.	1B
		6-進士: Phạm Thế Lịch 範世歷	Nam Dinh	39	Tổng đốc Bắc Ninh 北寧總督	2A
		7-進士: Ngô Thế Vinh	Nam Dinh	27	Lang trung Bộ Lễ 禮部郎中	
		8-進士: Phạm Quý 範貴	Bắc Ninh	25	Tổng đốc Bình Phú 平福總督	2A
		9-進士: Trần Huy Phác	Nghệ An	33	Án sát 按察, Bố chính 布政	3A
		05 Supplementary List of Presented Scholars : 1- Phạm Văn Hợp; 2- Dương Đăng Dụng; 3- Phan Văn Nhã; 4- Nguyễn Ngọc Thường; 5- Trần Ngọc Giao.				
1832	Nguyễn Khoa Minh	1-進士: Phan Trứ 潘著	Hải Dương	39	Tuần phủ Thuận Khánh	2B
	Trương Minh Giảng	2-進士: Phạm Sĩ Ái 範士愛	Hải Dương	27	Thị lang Bộ Binh 兵部侍郎	2B
	Hoàng Quỳnh	3-進士: Nguyễn Văn Lý 阮文理	Ha Noi	38	Đốc học Hưng Yên 興安督學	4A
	Hà Duy Phiên	4-進士: Đỗ Tông Quang 杜宗光	Hải Dương	29	Đô sát Phó Đô Ngự sử 都察副都御史	2B
		5-進士: Phạm Bá Thiệu	Bac Ninh	40	Án sát 按察	3A
		6-進士: Vũ Công Độ 武功度	Nam Dinh	28	Bố chính 布政	3A
		7-進士: Nguyễn Tấn 阮瓚	Ha Tinh	29	Viên ngoại lang 員外郎	5A
		8-進士: Phạm Gia Chuyên 範嘉璋	Ha Noi	42	Quốc tử giám Tư nghiệp 國子監司業	4B
		03 Supplementary List of Presented Scholars: 1- Nguyễn Mậu Trạch; 2-Trần Trứ; 3-Nguyễn Bá Nghi.				
1835	Trương Đăng Quế	1-進士: Nguyễn Hữu Cơ 阮有機	Hải Dương	32	Tổng đốc 總督	2A
	Phan Thanh Giản	2-進士: Phạm Văn Huy 範文輝	Thanh Hóa/ Thừa Thiên	25	Thị lang 侍郎	2B

		3-進士: Bạch Đông Ôn 白冬溫	Hà Nội	25	Lang trung 郎中	4A	
		4-進士: Lưu Quỳ 劉揆	Hà Nội	25	Tri phủ 知府	5B	
		5-進士: Nguyễn Thố 阮措	Thanh Hóa	43	-		
		6-進士: Nguyễn Hoảng Nghĩa 阮弘義	Hà Tĩnh	51	Thự Tri phủ 署知府	5B	
		7-進士: Bùi Đình Bảo 裴廷保	Hà Tĩnh	29	Tri phủ 知府	5B	
		8-進士: Hoàng Văn Thu 黃文收	Thừa Thiên	31	Cơ mật viện 機密院, Tổng đốc 總督, Thượng thư 尚書	2A	
		9-進士: Nguyễn Đức Hoan 阮德權	Quảng Trị	31	Tuần phủ 巡撫	2B	
		10-進士: Lê Văn Chân 黎文真	Bình Định	23	Tuần phủ 巡撫	2B	
		11-進士: Nguyễn Thế Trị 阮世治	Quảng Trị	32	Án sát 按察	3A	
		02 Supplementary List of Presented Scholars: 1- Vũ Ngọc Giá; 2- Đinh Văn Minh.					
1838	Trương Đăng Quế	1-進士: Nguyễn Cửu Trường 阮久長	Quảng Bình	32	Thị lang 侍郎, Tuần phủ 巡撫	2B	
	Hà Duy Phiên	2-進士: Phạm Văn Nghị 范文誼	Nam Định	34	Tri phủ 知府, Đốc học 督學		
		3-進士: Đinh Viết Thân 丁曰慎	Nghệ An	25	Tri phủ 知府	5B	
		4-進士: Phạm Chân 范真	Quảng Bình	35	Án sát 按察	3A	
		5-進士: Nguyễn Văn Tùng 阮文松			Tri phủ 知府	5B	
		6-進士: Lê Duy Trung 黎惟忠	Hà Nội	44	Tri phủ 知府, Đốc học 督學	5A	
		7-進士: 陳時敏 Trần Thời Mẫn [Trần Tiễn Thành 陳踐誠]	Thua Thien	26	Cơ mật đại thần 機密大臣, Quốc sử quán tổng tài 國史館總裁, Binh bộ thượng thư 兵部尚書, Văn minh điện Đại học sĩ 文明殿大學士.	1A	
		8-進士: Hoàng Trọng Từ 黃仲辭	Thừa Thiên	29	Án sát 按察	3A	
		9-進士: Lê Thiện Trị 黎善治	Quảng Nam	43	Tuần phủ 巡撫	2B	
		10-進士: Đoàn Khuê 尹奎	Nam Định	26	Tổng đốc 總督	2A	
			11-進士: Dương Danh Thành			-	

		10 Supplementary List of Presented Scholars: 1- Nguyễn Trường Vĩnh; 2- Tạ Kim Vực; 3- Dương Công Bình; 4- Nguyễn Hữu Độ; 5- Lê Thúc Đôn; 6- Diệp Xuân Huyền; 7- Nguyễn Văn Dục; 8- Phan Quang Nhiều; 9- Nguyễn Văn Siêu; 10- Nguyễn Xuân Bằng.				
Total		80				

Source: Stelae of the names of doctor-laureate of the Minh Menh metropolitan examinations (Hue Temple of Literature), stele rubbings at Viện nghiên cứu Hán Nôm:

皇朝明命戊戌年會試科進士題名碑 Stela of the names of doctor-laureate of the 1838 metropolitan examination, Viện nghiên cứu Hán Nôm, Inscription collection, No. 05698.

皇朝明命拾陸年乙未會試科進士題名碑 Stela of the names of doctor-laureate of the 1835 metropolitan examination, Viện nghiên cứu Hán Nôm, Inscription collection, No. 05692.

皇朝明命拾叁年壬辰會試科進士題名碑 Stela of the names of doctor-laureate of the 1832 metropolitan examination, Viện nghiên cứu Hán Nôm, Inscription collection, No. 05697.

皇朝明命拾年己丑會試科進士題名碑 Stela of the names of doctor-laureate of the 1829 metropolitan examination, Viện nghiên cứu Hán Nôm, Inscription collection, No. 05696.

皇朝明命柒年丙戌會試科進士題名碑 Stela of the names of doctor-laureate of the 1826 metropolitan examination, Viện nghiên cứu Hán Nôm, Inscription collection, No. 05699.

皇朝明命叁年壬午會試科進士題名碑 Stela of the names of doctor-laureate of the 1822 metropolitan examination, Viện nghiên cứu Hán Nôm, Inscription collection, no. 50695.

DNTL; HDSL; DNLT, and *Quan Lại Lý Lịch* 官吏履歷 (Biographies of Officials) (Thư viện Khoa học Xã hội vùng Nam Bộ, HNv. 155).

CHAPTER III. THE NGUYEN PALACE PAPERWORK

As an emperor rules over his empire, his words have a mysterious effect. Though he himself remains deep and silent in front of an embroidered screen, his voice heard to the limits of the four borders. To accomplish this, he depends on the edicts. ...¹

Literary mind and the carving of dragons, Liu Xie.

“For, in its severity, the law is at the same time writing. Writing is on the side of the law; the law lives in writing ... writing directly bespeaks the power of the law, be it engraved in stone, painted on animal skins, or drawn on papyrus”.²

Society against the State, Pierre Clastres.

III. 1. *Chauban* and the Nguyen palace paperwork

The primary sources for this study come from the extant Nguyen palace paperwork housed at NA1 (Hanoi), particularly 12,000 documents belonging to the Gia Long and Minh Menh reigns. This collection is commonly known as the Nguyen dynasty’s *chauban* 阮朝硃本.³ This chapter briefly introduces its nature and historical journey during the last two centuries. It begins with an examination of “*chauban*” as a concept of document type, archival category, and political practice before tracing their provenance, historical trail, and typology. The conceptual evolution of “*chauban*” will be explored by investigating how the term was coined and transformed from a paperwork’s feature to an archival category. This part illustrates a general understanding of the *chauban*’s archival journey and the struggle to define and categorize these kinds of bureaucratic papers. My research approach is based on three major types of official documents: *Congdong* paperwork, emperor documents,

¹ HDSL, 112: 1a.

² Pierre Clastres, *Society against the State: Essays in Political Anthropology* (Brooklyn, NY.: Zone, 2007), 177.

³ Before the downfall of the Nguyen dynasty (1945), catalogued records referred to the extant palace paperwork as “Vermilion records of the Imperial Dynasty” 皇朝硃本. See “Hoàng Triều Châu Bản Mục Lục 皇朝硃本目錄 (Catalogue of the Vermilion Records of the Imperial Dynasty)”, hereafter *HTCBML* (Unpublished, Yale University Library, Maurice Durand Han Nom, MS 1728, n.d.). “*Vermilion records of the Nguyen dynasty*” 阮朝硃本 was first introduced as a research and archival concept by Taiwanese scholar Chen Jinghe in the early 1960s. See Chen, *Mục Lục Châu Bản Triều Nguyễn, volume 1*; idem, *Mục Lục Châu Bản Triều Nguyễn, volume 2*; idem, “The Imperial Archives of the Nguyen Dynasty (1802-1945),” and R. B. Smith, “Sino-Vietnamese Sources for the Nguyễn Period: An Introduction,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 30, no. 3 (October 24, 1967): 600–621.

and memorials, investigating their textual, paratextual characters, and bureaucratic life.

This section prepares the reader with a panorama of the palace archives and their holding items. This understanding is essential because it sheds light on several important questions about the Nguyen archival institution and the role stored paperwork played in political operations and the dynastic compilation of books.⁴ Their bureaucratic and archival life contributes unique insight into the Vietnamese traditional administrative practice.

III. 1. 1. Bureaucratic documents

Studies of political formation recognize the role of practical writings in state and empire building.⁵ Official documents, as a medium, exercise institutional authority, operate the administrative business, and form a social group of the literati 士, from which come the utmost power players: the bureaucrats.⁶ In search of the Vietnamese past, however, little attention devotes to paperwork and its roles in governance.⁷ What are bureaucratic documents? Their types and uses? Genres and administrative functions? These questions touch on the foundation of politics and administration that vary among cultures and societies. They constitute practical writings employed by the state for administration. The documents reflect the state authority by a visual translation on paper (on other writing surfaces) with symbols, characters, and seal stamps. Paperwork's evolution was associated with and was part of the transformation that involved state, ideology, and governing complexity.

The use of administrative documents in traditional Vietnam was frequently changed following constant political innovations. Paperwork and institutional development were closely interrelated, in which official papers not only served statecraft but also visually constituted various aspects of political authority. From the fifteenth century, Vietnam journeyed deep into Confucianization with institutionalized state ideology, bureaucratization, and the elevation of paperwork production for

⁴ Such as *DNTL* (Veritable Records), *DNLT* (Official Biographies), *HDSL* (Dynastic Statutes), Military strategies, *MMCY* (Abstracts of the Minh Menh policies), and *DNNTC* (Unification Records of Dai Nam).

⁵ See Lewis, *Writing and Authority in Early China*; Wang, *Writing and the Ancient State*.

⁶ Connery, *The Empire of the Text*, 79–81.

⁷ See for instance Lê Quý Đôn, *Văn Đai Loại Ngữ* 芸臺類語 (*Categorized Sayings from the Van Terrace*) (Hà Nội: Văn hóa Thông tin, 1995); Phan, *Lịch Triều Hiến Chương*, 1819.

administration.⁸ In daily governance, written correspondence executes official affairs and administers society through communication, census, and cadastral records. These functions demonstrate the political agency of paperwork and the milieu under which official records were manufactured and activated. Corresponding to administrative performances, they took different forms, expressed in various types, served multiple uses, and featured diverse structural organizations, physical appearances, and materiality.

While several dozen of their types have been identified in Qing bureaucracy, more than twenty walked in and lingered in the extant Nguyen archival collection.⁹ They were the results of practical writings in bureaucratic operations, including legal codes 律, customary law 例, orders 令, proclamations 詔, edicts 諭, decrees 旨, ordinances 敕, congratulatory memorials 表, memorials 奏, petitions 疏, directions and exchanged documents 咨, instructions 咨移, 教示, 札, reports 稟, 咨呈, orders/instructions 傳示, commands 照會, 咨; replied reports 呈文, 咨呈, men-registered records 丁簿, land-registered records 地簿, and imperial genealogy 玉譜. The genres came from the tradition of deploying writings for the practical and symbolic political presentation that traced back to the classics.¹⁰ Confucius fondly discussed the relationship between governance and paperwork.¹¹ Official manuscripts, such as legal bamboo strips, were widely at work in the Qin and Han societies.¹² The use of practical writing genres became part of the more extensive literary, philological, and political dialogues among the intellectuals and scholar-officials. The sixth-century scholar Liu Xie 劉勰 communicates *wen* 文 with the law of changing nature and human society:

⁸ See Whitmore, “Chiao-Chih and Neo-Confucianism, 51–92; idem, *The Development of Le Government*.

⁹ On Qing official documents, see Fairbank and Teng, “On The Types and Uses of Ch’ing Documents”, 1–71; idem, “On The Transmission of Ch’ing Documents”, 2–46; Sun, *Ch’ing Administrative Terms*; Brunnert and Hagelstrom, *Present Day Political Organization of China*.

¹⁰ For instance, Connery, *The Empire of the Text*; Alan K. Bowman and Greg. Woolf, eds., *Literacy and Power in the Ancient World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Lewis, *Writing and Authority in Early China*; Wang, *Writing and the Ancient State*.

¹¹ Liu Xie, *Wenxin Diaolong*, 42.

¹² The topic has been intensively investigated through examination of legal/ official tomb manuscripts in the Qin and Han periods at Center for the Studies of Manuscript Culture-SMC (Hamburg University). See Li Jingrong, “The Ernian Lü Ling Manuscript” (PhD dissertation, Hamburg University, 2014); Thies Staack, “Reconstructing Early Chinese Bamboo Manuscripts: Towards a Systematic Approach Including Verso Analysis” (PhD dissertation, Hamburg University, 2016); Leif T. Luckmann, “Lehrtexte Für Den Beamten. Eine Studie Zu Zwei Grabmanuskripten Aus Der Qin-Zeit (Educational Texts for Officials: A Study on Two Tomb Manuscripts from the Qin Period)” (PhD Dissertation, Hamburg University, 2018).

“文之為德也大矣，與天地并生者何哉？夫玄黃色雜，方圓體分，日月疊璧，以垂麗天之象；山川煥綺，以鋪理地之形：此蓋道之文也。仰觀吐曜，俯察含章，高卑定位，故兩儀既生矣。惟人參之，性靈所鍾，是謂三才。為五行之秀，實天地之心，心生而言立，言立而文明，自然之道也。”

“*Wen*, or pattern, is a very great power indeed. It is born together with heaven and earth. Why do we say this? Because all color-patterns are mixed of black and yellow, and all shape-patterns are differentiated by round and square. The sun and moon like two pieces of jade manifest the pattern of heaven; mountains and rivers in the beauty display the pattern of earth. These are, in fact, the *wen* of *Tao* itself.”¹³

The authority of writing is the embodiment of heaven and the human pattern of behavior through the sages’ teaching. They can transform the universal principles to govern society.

“爰自風姓，暨于孔氏，玄聖創典，素王述訓，莫不原道心以敷章，研神理而設教，取象乎《河》、《洛》，問數乎蓍龜，觀天文以極變，察人文以成化；然後能經緯區宇，彌綸彝憲，發揮事業，彪炳辭義。故知道沿聖以垂文，聖因文以明道，旁通而無滯，日用而不匱。《易》曰：「鼓天下之動者存乎辭。」辭之所以能鼓天下者，乃道之文也。”

“From the time of Master Feng to the time of Confucius, both Feng, the first sage, who invented writing, and the “King Without Crown”, who transmitted the teachings, drew their literary embellishments from the mind of *Tao*, and both taught by reference to divine principles. Both took images from the Yellow River Map and the Lo River Writing, and both divined by means of milfoil stems and tortoise shells. Both observed heavenly patterns in order to comprehend their changes exhaustively, and both studied human patterns of behavior in order to transform them. It was in this way they were able to legislate for the universe and to establish the principles governing human society, to achieve gloriously in fact, as well as to beautify literary forms and ideas. From these things, we know that *Tao* is handed down in writing through sages, and that sages make *Tao* manifest in their writings. This principle may be extended to all things without difficulty, day after day, without exhausting its applications. The *Book of Changes* says, “The stimulation of all celestial

¹³ Liu Xie, *Wenxin Diaolong*, 45; Liu Xie, *The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons*, 8–9.

movements depends upon the oracular judgments,” and their power to stimulate the celestial world is derived from the pattern of *Tao*.”¹⁴

A heyday for literati participation in officialdom began with the rise of Neo-Confucianism in late imperial China and Vietnam. They partook in the burgeoning urban class (though to a much lesser extent in Vietnam), whose shared education, reading, and knowledge of the classics forged a distinctive sociopolitical community.¹⁵ The intellectual pioneers penetrated administration through civil service examination and utilized literary skills and political expertise to enter public service.¹⁶ For them, “writings carry doctrine” 文以載道. To translate into the modern language, it is the idea that writings must carry the ideology that can transform the world.¹⁷ For “gentlemen” 君子 and Confucian adherents, one way to conduct the doctrine 道 is the path of self-development: self-cultivation 修身, raising a family 齊家, running the country 治國, and pacifying the world 平天下.¹⁸ Writing is recognized as a form of the literati’s self-expression and an instrument of governing and ruling society.

Since this thesis deals with a wide range of technical terms of paperwork and bureaucratic institutions, it is worth reminding that translating traditional East Asian administrative and institutional terminology into Western languages is an age-old challenge. The Qing communication system, for instance, was “a close, employing a special body of terminology for the use of the actors within the network. Even some of the most eminent researchers of the Qing bureaucracy have been into misconceptions through failure to grasp the significance of this terminology.”¹⁹ No less complicated were those of the Nguyen. It is perplexing to define paperwork and

¹⁴ Liu Xie, *Wenxin Diaolong*, 46; English translation in Liu Xie, *The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons: A Study of Thought and Pattern in Chinese Literature*, 12.

¹⁵ Peter K. Bol, *Neo-Confucianism in History*, Harvard East Asian Monographs (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2010); Benjamin A. Elman, *Civil Examinations and Meritocracy in Late Imperial China* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2013). For Vietnam, see Whitmore, “Chiao-Chih and Neo-Confucianism”; idem, “Social Organization and Confucian Thought in Vietnam,” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 15, no. 02 (September 7, 1984): 296–306.

¹⁶ On examinations and society, see Benjamin A. Elman and Alexander B. Woodside, eds., *Education and Society in Late Imperial China, 1600 - 1900* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994). On education, the literati, and bureaucrats, see Woodside, *Lost Modernities*.

¹⁷ Lin Ruihan 林瑞翰, *Songdai Zhengzhi Shi* 宋代政治史 (*Political History of the Song Period*) (Taipei: Zheng zhong shu ju, 1989), 484.

¹⁸ Zhang Dainian 张岱年, *Kongzi da Cidian* 孔子大辞典 (*A Great Dictionary of Confucius*) (Shanghai: Shanghai cishu chubanshe, 1993), 504.

¹⁹ Silas Wu’s observation with references to Franz Schurmann, *Ideology and Organization in Communist China* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1966) and Teng Wenju 鄧文如’s misinterpretation of paperwork terms, see Teng Wenju, “Tan Junji Chu 談軍機處 (On the Grand Council),” *Shixue Nianbao* 2, no. 4 (1937): 193–98.

correspondence terms and locate them in concrete institutional contexts. Making sense of the conjunction between practical writings and administration is already problematic. Historians H. S. Brunnert, V. V. Hagelstrom, John K. Fairbank, S. T. Teng, Silas Wu, E-tu Zen Sun, Charles O. Hucker, Endymion Wilkinson, and many others revealed their haunted experiences.²⁰ Hucker discussed the “aggravations, confusions, and embarrassments” in dealing with the “traditional China’s ubiquitous governmental nomenclature”. Silas Wu, on the other hand, was overwhelmed by the number of works that should be done in dealing with Chinese technical terms alone. In his words, “working on many aspects of the Chinese technical terminology found in the Qing documentation demands the life’s work of many scholars.”²¹

Although the Nguyen Vietnam possessed voluminous dynastic chronicles, encyclopedias, laws, and governmental statutes,²² they did not necessarily guarantee a less vague understanding of institutions and governing procedures. *Chauban* and the palace documents are a vivid testimony of that complexity. As major holding items at the imperial archives, they embodied the essence of dynastic bureaucracy but were left with little care due to political turmoil and warfare in the 20th century.²³ Later, the manuscript collection was placed behind sealed doors of state control. The documents were out of the public eye, except for a few glimpses of privileged scholars. Scholarly works on *chauban* thus remain at the introductory level.²⁴

²⁰ See Brunnert and Hagelstrom, *Present Day Political Organization*; Sun, *Ch’ing Administrative Terms*; Hucker, *A Dictionary of Official Titles in Imperial China*; idem, “An Index of Terms and Titles in ‘Governmental Organization of The Ming Dynasty,’” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 23 (1960): 127–51; idem, *The Ming Dynasty: Its Origins and Evolving Institutions, Issue No. 34, Michigan Papers in Chinese Studies* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1978); Endymion P. Wilkinson, *Chinese History: A New Manual*, (Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University Press, 2018).

²¹ See Wu, *Communication and Imperial Control*, 3.

²² For a glimpse at Hue’s collections of dynastic records and compiled books, see Nobuhiro Matsumoto 松本信廣, “越南王室所藏安南本書目 (A Catalogue of the Annamese Books in the Imperial Archive of Viet Nam),” *The Historical Science* 14, no. 2 (1935): 111(293)-154(336). Chen Jinghe, R. B. Smith, and Li Tana discuss the nature of the Nguyen palace documents during the first half of the twentieth century in Chen, “The Imperial Archives of the Nguyen”, 111–28; Smith, “Sino-Vietnamese Sources for the Nguyễn Period”; Tana Li, “Review of Muc Luc Chau Ban Trieu Nguyen”, 465–67.

²³ Last dynastic records on imperial deployment of Hue palace archives came from Thành Thái 成泰 (1889-1907) and Duy Tân 維新 (1907-1916) reigns. See vermilion record of Thành Thái reign 成泰硃本, 24: 63; 25: 169; 26: 129; and Vermilion records of Duy Tân reign 維新硃本, 27: 65.

²⁴ By 1995, few published works deals with *chauban* extensively, including Chen, *Mục Lục Châu Bản Triều Nguyễn (Catalogue of the Nguyen’s Chauban). Tập I: Triều Gia Long/The Gia Long Reign*; Chen, “The Imperial Archives of the Nguyen Dynasty (1802–1945.” Chen, *Mục Lục Châu Bản Triều Nguyễn (Catalogue of the Nguyen’s Chauban). Tập II: Triều Minh Mệnh / The Minh Menh Reign.*, Thê Anh Nguyễn, *Phong Trào Kháng Thuế ở Miền Trung Năm 1908 qua Các Châu Bản Triều Duy Tân (The Anti-Tax Movement in the Central Region in 1908: A View from Vermilion Records)* (Hanoi: Nxb Văn học, 2008); Lý, *Châu Bản Triều Nguyễn: Tư Liệu Phật Giáo qua Các Triều Đại Nhà Nguyễn 143 Năm Từ Gia Long 1802 Đến Bảo Đại 1945/ Chauban of the Nguyen*

III. 1. 2. *Chauban* - Vermilion Records

Vermilion records were not so much a document type, but an idea of the administrative operation.

Chauban (lit., *Vermilion records*) is a body of bureaucratic manuscripts defined by emperors' endorsements 御批 or reviews 御覽 that left minium-ink remarks on the papers.²⁵ During one and a half-century of the Nguyen, none had the authority to mark the memorials vermilion, but the rulers. Vermilion records, therefore, are not a specific genre or document type but a working process applied to the paperwork related to the emperor's personal rule and decision-making. Not all memorials bear vermilion endorsements, and those, by definition, should be theoretically excluded from the *chauban* collection. However, the extant *chauban* embodies diverse paperwork types – those went through various producing processes and originated from different palace-storage institutions.

“Vermilion records” was a powerful concept regarding political institution and correspondence authority. Despite its significance and the frequent reference in *huidian* (*Collective Statutes* 會典) and *shilu* (*Veritable records* 寔錄), the term was hardly defined. In the Nguyen context, endorsed records 批本, vermilion records 硃本, and red records 紅本 were most commonly associated with the emperor-endorsed paperwork. The following document demonstrates an example of their usage in the administrative context. A drafted edict 奉上諭 was prepared in 1837 by grand secretaries Ha Tong Quyen 何宗權 and Hoang Quynh 黃炯. Official note “刑部奉守紅本恭錄. 內閣遵照” indicates that the Board of Justice kept and copied the *red record* 紅本 under the Grand Secretariat's supervision 遵照.²⁶

Dynasty: Sources on Buddhism through the Nguyen Reigns between 1802 and 1945, and Nguyễn Thê Anh, *Kinh Tế và Xã Hội Việt Nam Dưới Các Vua Triều Nguyễn (Vietnamese Economy and Society under the Nguyen Dynasty)* (Saigon: Lửa Thiêng, 1971).

²⁵ The term ‘endorsed records’ 批本 first appeared in *shilu* in 1820. DNTL, II, 1: 17b. The term vermilion records 硃本 first appeared in Tu Duc palace documents in 1858. See TDCB, 92: 295; 233: 152; 276: 216; 287: 114; 297: 401; 381: 100, 120.

²⁶ MNCB, 54: 154. In *shilu*, “紅本” first appeared in 1822. See DNTL, II, 15: 9a-b.

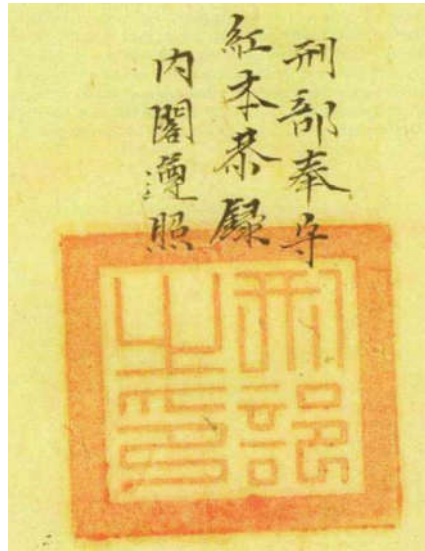


Figure 3. 1. Official notes on a memorial of the Minh Menh reign
Source: MNCB, 54: 92.

Although similar terms were deployed in the Ming-Qing bureaucracies, they were associated with various administrative regulations. In a much more sophisticated conduct, Beijing's reviewed documents were variously known as red records 紅本, endorsed records 批本, endorsed in red 批紅, vermilion endorsements 硃批, and imperial endorsements 御批. While the shared character among them was to place emperors' instructions in red/ vermilion on memorials, the mechanism was much diverse depending on the process that applied imperial remarks to paperwork. Disruptions may come from high-ranked officials, palace secretaries, and powerful eunuchs, as evidently shown in the Ming. The Grand Secretariat and Six Boards were responsible for the *tally suggestions* 票擬 and proposed answers, but palace eunuchs were in charge of inscribing imperial decisions on memorials.²⁷ The Ming's red records, therefore, experienced no emperor's personal endorsements. Subsequently, the system paved the way to eunuch domination of court politics. The Directorate of Ceremony 司禮監, Office of Books and Writings 文書房, and eunuch scribes 秉筆太監 controlled memorial flow, transcribed imperial instructions and sent them out for implementation. The production of Ming red records was operated within the eunuch network, to which the dynasty would pay a high price.²⁸ Nguyen rulers were deeply

²⁷ Silas H. L. Wu, "Transmission of Ming Memorials, and the Evolution of the Transmission Network, 1368-1627," *T'oung Pao* 54, no. 4-5 (1968): 276-80.

²⁸ By the sixteenth century, chief eunuch of ceremonial 司禮太監 and chief eunuch of seals 掌印太監 gradually climbed to the most powerful positions by monitoring the eunuch scribes 秉筆太監. To the dynasty end, those notorious palace power-holders went as far as seizing emperor

aware of that threat. Minh Menh strictly forbade eunuchs (and court women) from engaging in political affairs.²⁹ Consequently, they had little chance to intervene with palace manuscripts rather than play reduced roles in circulating paperwork inside the palace compound.³⁰

Qing bureaucracy, on the other hand, possessed a complex history of producing red records due to the use of both Chinese and Manchu scripts.³¹ Emperor Kangxi's reluctance to provide direct endorsements on "*personal memorials*" 奏本 suggested the uneasy path to effective and confidential royal communication.³² The practice was only institutionalized during the successor reigns, Yongzheng (雍正, r. 1722-35) and Qianlong (乾隆, r. 1735-96), who conveniently ruled the empire through the vermilion brush.³³ The most dramatic administrative evolution of the inner court was the promotion of the Grand Council 軍機處. It evolved from a small, fragmented, and non-statutory organ to the most powerful office in the empire. By the end of the Qianlong reign, chief grand councilor Heshen (和珅; 1750-1799) was able to request one duplicate of every memorial delivered to his office.³⁴

Possessing multiple memorial types, the Qing system also created two endorsement-categories. The division between *routine* 題本 and *personal memorial* 奏本 left the former an unlikely chance to bear a direct rescript. Instead, regular memorials and emperor's approved endorsements were dispatched to the *Office for Copying Emperor Endorsements* 批本處 where the rescripts were transcribed on the memorials, which were by then known as *red endorsements* 批紅. Emperor personal

decision-making and omitting the grand secretariat. Some brought memorials home, drafted their own rescripts. See Wu, "Transmission of Ming Memorials, and the Evolution of the Transmission Network, 1368-1627"; Xia Xie 夏燮, *Ming Tungchien* 明通鑑 (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1959), MTC, 1576.

²⁹ DNTL, II, 152: 22a; 156: 1a; 197: 1a.

³⁰ In 1825, Minh Menh strongly rebuked board officials because of placing the term "內監奉傳" (inner-palace eunuch [sent imperial] instructions) on a document. To the emperor argument, eunuchs were just doorkeepers, thus the boards must report all verbal emperor-sent-out instructions before implementing. DNTL, II, 31: 3a.

³¹ Fairbank and Teng, "On The Types and Uses of Ch'ing Documents," 18; Mark C. Elliott, "The Manchu-Language Archives of the Qing Dynasty and the Origins of the Palace Memorial System," *Late Imperial China* 22, no. 1 (2001): 1-70.

³² Kangxi Emperor 康熙, r. 1661 - 1722. Elliott, "The Manchu-Language Archives...", 58.

³³ A vivid example of how Yongzheng Emperor administered through vermilion endorsements, see Jonathan D. Spence, *Treason by the Book* (New York, N.Y.: Penguin Putnam Inc., 2001). Also, see Bartlett, "The Vermillion Brush".

³⁴ Bartlett, *Monarchs and Ministers*, 233-37.

endorsements only applied to palace memorials and will be recognized as *vermilion rescripts* 硃批 or *imperial endorsements* 御批.³⁵

The research on the Nguyen vermilion records suffers from the lack of concrete definitions and the insufficient classified categories of the palace archives. Organizing palace paperwork was an uneasy task. The Qing Grand Council's archive alone contained 150 different headings of classification.³⁶ Destruction of the palace archives themselves was another challenge for reconstructing their pasts. A report in 1942 indicated that by then, the Grand Secretariat archive was left with no door and manuscripts laid damaged in rainwater.³⁷ The records also stood outside scholarly attention. For instance, prominent Japanese Orientalist Matsumoto Nobuhiro 松本信廣 in his pioneering account of the catalog of the Nguyen imperial storage of documents and books (越南王室所藏安南本書目, 1935) gave no reference to the archival files.³⁸

The nature of vermilion records impacted the way Hue archival files were processed. *Chauban* and other official documents were collected and intermingled in thousands of volumes 集.³⁹ By 1942, more than three thousand extant volumes indicated that they were arranged in more than one way based on types, dates, and topics.⁴⁰ Endorsed memorials appeared in a mixture with other bureaucratic records, notably *Congdong* documents, emperor documents, and exchanging files. In addition, two essential facts added more confusion to the definition of *chauban*.

First, not only memorials bore vermilion endorsements. Draft proclamations 詔, for instance, were sometimes applied with minium remarks. Courtiers, for example, prepared Minh Menh proclamation of ascending the throne (Figure 3.2) before submitting it for approval. The endorsement reads, “是” [approved].⁴¹ Second, some memorials bore transcribed endorsements in black ink.⁴² Each submitted memorial

³⁵ Fairbank and Teng, “On The Types and Uses of Ch’ing Documents,” 17–18.

³⁶ Fairbank and Teng, “On The Types and Uses of Ch’ing Documents,” 4.

³⁷ Chen, *Mục Lục Châu Bản Triều Nguyễn (Catalogue of the Nguyen’s Chauban)*. Tập I: *Triều Gia Long (The Gia Long Reign)*, xvii.

³⁸ Matsumoto 松本信廣, “越南王室所藏安南本書目 (A Catalogue of the Annamese Books in the Imperial Archive of Viet Nam).” Also see Émile. Gaspardone, “Bibliographie Annamite,” *Bulletin de l’Ecole Française d’Extrême-Orient* 34, no. 1 (1934): 1–400.

³⁹ As regulated in 1844. HDSL, 224: 10a-11a.

⁴⁰ Catalog of the vermilion records of the dynasty 皇朝硃本目錄, Yale Library, No. MS 1728, p. 49

⁴¹ MMCB, 2: pp. 1-9.

⁴² See for instance, MMCB, 11: 47.

(the main version 正本) was accompanied by two duplicated 副本. While the former enjoyed direct minium review, the latter were transcribed with a black-ink copy of the imperial rescripts.⁴³

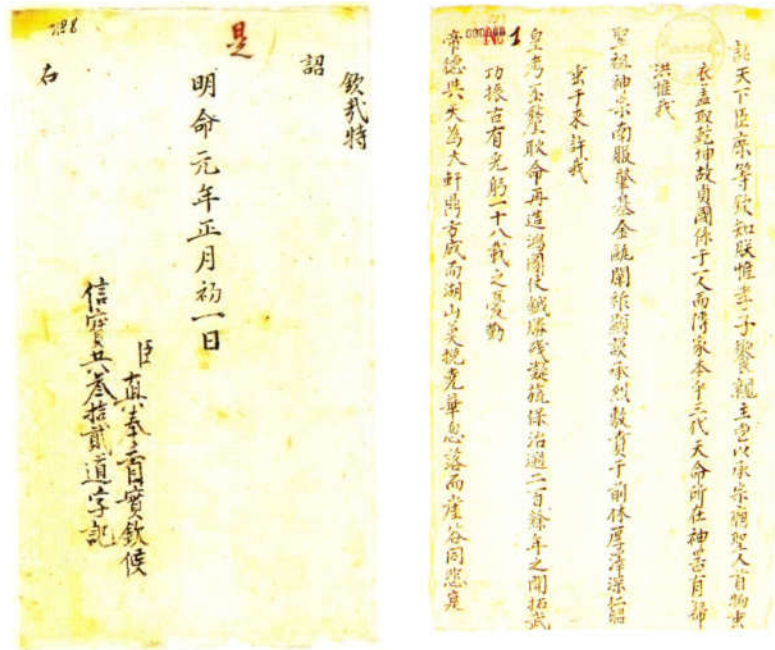


Figure 3.2. The Minh Menh proclamation of ascending the throne (14/02/1820). Source: MNCB, 2: 1.

The diverse use of scripts also adds complexity to the recognition of *chauban* as a multifaceted phenomenon of paperwork production. What is labeled as *chauban* at the NA1 includes memorials written in four scripts: classical Chinese (and Sino-Vietnamese script [Nom]), Romanized National language (*Quoc ngu*) and French.⁴⁴ Emperor endorsements were also applied accordingly. As a result, the palace paperwork witnessed a 143-year changing dynastic political culture with shifting language, script use and institutional performance.

⁴³ HDSL, 226: 6b-7a.

⁴⁴ France established colonialization in Vietnam in 1884 with the division of the country into three dependent territories. The southern part (Cochinchina) was a colony; the north (Tonkin) and the centre (Annam) were protectorates with the nominally ruled Nguyen dynasty. Thus, there was demand of communication and official documents that conducted in French.

By the early twentieth century, western-oriented reforms were applied to both administration and education. With the last metropolitan examination organized in 1919, the age of using Chinese scripts for paperwork was in sharp decline. Both French and Romanized scripts were promoted and became increasingly dominant during the last two reigns, Khải Định (啓定, 1916-1925), and Bảo Đại (保大, 1926-1945).

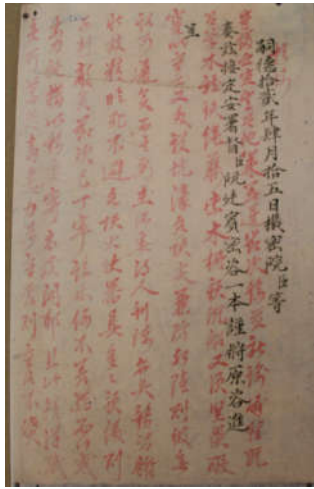


Figure 3.3. A Vermilion record in classical Chinese
Source: TDCB, 104: 204.



Figure 3.4. A Vermilion record in Romanized Vietnamese script
Source: BDCB, 17: 92.

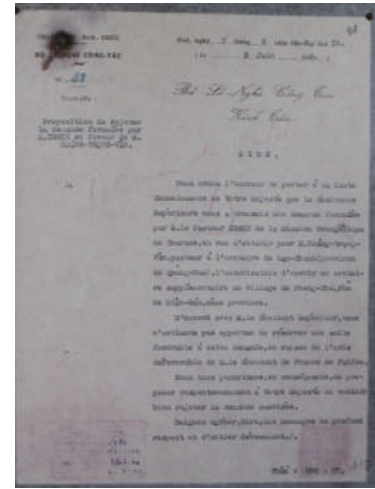


Figure 3.5. A Vermilion record in French
Source: BDCB, 26: 110.

There were few attempts to define and reorganize the palace archives in the past. Routinely, vermilion records and court letters were collected and placed at the Grand Secretariat archive (the Eastern Hall) without systematic processing. Under the Minh Menh reign, the most urgent challenge came to reducing the use of paperwork, as lamented by both courtiers and the ruler himself in 1829 and 1833, respectively.⁴⁵ Successive emperors sometimes recalled the manuscripts for consultation because of their value as “the standard institutional politics”. In 1906, Thanh Thai emperor (成泰, 1889-1907) requested to review all *chauban* produced since the Gia Long reign. The Bureau of State History was asked to report their condition. The report makes clear that many volumes belonged to the Thieu Tri (紹治, 1841-1847) and Tu Duc (嗣德, 1847-1883) reigns were destroyed during the French capture of Hue in 1885. Natural disasters also claimed some roles in the paperwork destruction, as in the case of the 1906-cyclone.⁴⁶

At the turn of the twentieth century, however, archived court paperwork was largely neglected. The last two emperors, Khai Dinh and Bao Dai, in particular, had a great passion for Western political institutions. Stored Chinese-script palace records were increasingly irrelevant to the new administrative concerns because of the newly-appointed officials with French-influenced educational backgrounds. Because of their fading bureaucratic significance, the surviving palace paperwork was subjected to storage only, including two archival projects between 1942 and 1964. The first was

⁴⁵ DNLT, II, 88: 13a; 109: 13b-14a; MNCB, 51: 296.

⁴⁶ Thành Thái vermilion records (ThTCB), 26: 129.

responsible by archivist Ngo Dinh Nhu (1942), while the second was conducted by Taiwanese historian Chen Jinghe 陳荊和 (V., *Tran Kinh Hoa*) and his colleagues from the Committee for the Translation of the Historical Records of Vietnam (*Uy Ban Dich Thuat Su Lieu Viet Nam*) (1959-1964). These efforts laid the foundation for our modern knowledge of the Nguyen palace archives.



3.6.



3.7.



3.8.



3.9.

Figure 3.6. The cover of GLCB, 4 (*Letters from foreign counties* 外國書札).

Figure 3.7. The cover of the GLCB, 5 (*Reports of the State Academy of Medicine: Emperor daily medical records* 太醫院藥片: 御藥日記).

Figure 3.8. The archival seal, “*Hoàng triều châu bản*” 皇朝硃本 (*Vermilion records of the Imperial dynasty*) stamped on the cover page of the GLCB, 4 (c. 1942).

Figure 3.9. The seal of the Institute of Culture on Nguyen palace documents.

Source: MNCB, 6: 263-66.⁴⁷

Quốc gia Việt Nam – Trung phần- Văn Hóa [The State of Vietnam - Central region - Culture]⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Some of the catalogued numbers were stamped by the Chen Jinghe project, while the rest was done by staff at the NA1 during the late 1990s and early 2000s. My thanks to Ms. Nguyễn Thu Hoài (NA1) for the information.

⁴⁸ The State of Vietnam (État du Việt-Nam) lasted between 1949 and 1955.

Viện Văn Hóa (Institute of Culture) was established at the same time with the P. Boudet and Ngô Đình Nhu attempts of cataloguing Hue’s archives and libraries (1942). According to Chen Jinghe, the most precious items in the palace collections were moved to a new Institute of Culture just outside the eastern gate of the inner city. In 1955, a Vietnamese scholar, Bùi Quang Tùng reported the poor nature of the archive to the École française d’Extrême-Orient (EFEO). In 1959, the Committee for the Translation of the Historical Records of Vietnam was founded. Their efforts

Ngo Dinh Nhu's efforts marked the first time the palace archives were comprehensively examined and cataloged. Little was known, however, except the fact that the project secured manuscripts from different imperial archives and libraries and bound them into volumes.⁴⁹ Details of the process were briefly introduced by French *Archiviste-Paléographe* Paul Boudet. In his *Les Archives des Empereurs D'Annam et L'Histoire Annamite* (The Annam Emperors' archives and Annamese history, 1942), the author revealed the classified categories of the Grand Secretariat record-storage with seven groups of holding items:

1. All the treaties with the King of Annam [Vietnam]
2. Diplomatic exchange with other countries
3. Manuscripts of the imperial writings.
4. Maps.
5. Administrative documents bearing imperial endorsements, or *chauban*. Most of them were found at the Bureau of State History, where they were deployed for compiling dynastic chronicles. Although there are original manuscripts, those in the Bureau of State History are duplicated records.
6. Papers of the Palace examinations.
7. Books and manuscripts were collected during the Minh Menh reign.

Boudet not only showed the admiration for the magnificent archive building (the Eastern Tower) but also mentioned two other sites as the grand secretariat's sub-storehouses, including Bao Dai Library 保大書院 at the Pavilion of Morals 彝倫堂.⁵⁰ The first scholar working full-scale with the Nguyen palace manuscripts, solidifying the *chauban* concept, and re-cataloging the archival remnant is Chen Jinghe (1917-1995).⁵¹ In his monumental and highly symbolic works, 阮朝硃本目錄 (*Catalogue of the Nguyen chauban*, two volumes., 1960-62), *chauban* was defined as *memorials* 奏疏 that came through emperor's

brought the surviving Hue palace documents from the Institute of Culture to a building near Hue University library. See Chen, *Mục Lục Châu Bản Triều Nguyễn (Catalogue of the Nguyen's Chauban)*. Tập I: Triều Gia Long/The Gia Long Reign, xxiii; Smith, "Sino-Vietnamese Sources for the Nguyễn Period: An Introduction," 600–601.

⁴⁹ Chen, *Mục Lục Châu Bản Triều Nguyễn (Catalogue of the Nguyen's Chauban)*. Tập I: Triều Gia Long (The Gia Long Reign), xxxii.

⁵⁰ Paul Boudet, "Les Archives Des Empereurs D'Annam et L'Histoire Annamite," *Bulletin Des Amis Du Vieux Hué* 29 (1942): 235–36.

⁵¹ See more on Chen life and works on Vandermeersch Léon, "Chingho A. Chen (1917-1995)," *Bulletin de l'Ecole Française d'Extrême-Orient* 83 (1996): 10–17.

endorsements 御批 or *reviews* 御覽.⁵² This definition transformed a heavy influence on modern archivists and historians who have followed Chen's and his colleagues' footsteps. For nearly half a century, the two-volume catalogs were the only reference to the Nguyen palace paperwork.⁵³

One significant impact of the Chen Jinghe works was to elevate *chauban* as the representative concept of the palace paperwork. The existing archival holdings, therefore, came to be known as *chauban* of the Nguyen dynasty 阮朝硃本.⁵⁴ The conceptualization has been adopted by today's Vietnamese scholarship in which the term is defined as "bureaucratic documents with imperial endorsements or reviews".⁵⁵ At the National Archive no. 1 (NA1, Hanoi), the collection is labeled *vermilion records* regardless of their provenance and paratextual features. As the entire collection of nearly 85,000 files was (re)cataloged during the late 1990s, the first two volumes have been published (1998 and 2010), in which *chauban* is represented by more than twenty different paperwork types. When the manuscripts were presented to the application for the UNESCO heritage register, they were called the *chauban* collection; however, the official recognition by the UN organization comes to "the imperial records of Nguyen dynasty (1802-1945)".⁵⁶

Since no regulation applied to the emperor, his endorsements could be delivered in multiple forms, not always written. At the same time, not all memorials were expected to imprint with royal rescripts due to their unequal significance. Crucial state affairs could be sometimes replied to by separate emperor's documents. Minh Minh occasionally took the brush himself.⁵⁷ Nevertheless, the vast majority of surviving Minh Minh reign's memorials (more than 60%) were inscribed with direct

⁵² Chen, *Mục Lục Châu Bản Triều Nguyễn*, vol. 1, ix.

⁵³ The next published catalog came in 1998.

⁵⁴ In an article appears in the *Journal of Southeast Asian History*, Chen in fact defined the collection as "the Imperial Archives of the Nguyen Dynasty", see Chen, "The Imperial Archives of the Nguyen Dynasty (1802–1945)."

⁵⁵ Phan Huy Lê, *Mục Lục Châu Bản Triều Nguyễn (Catalogue of the Vermilion Records of the Nguyen Dynasty)*, Vol. 1 (Hà Nội: Văn hóa Thông tin, 2010), iii.

⁵⁶ UNESCO certificate on May 15, 2014. Also, see "Nomination Form International Memory of the World Register: IMPERIAL ARCHIVES OF NGUYEN DYNASTY (1802 - 1945)," UNESCO, 2014, http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/CI/CI/pdf/mow/nomination_forms/vietnam_nguyen_en.pdf, (Accessed on March 19, 2019).

⁵⁷ See Minh Minh. 御製文初集 *Imperial writings*, the first collection [1834]. Vien Han Nom (Hanoi, 2000); Lê Thị Toán and Vinh Cao, "Chi Dụ - Ngu Bút Của Vua Minh Mệnh," (Minh Minh personally-written edicts, rescripts) *Nghiên Cứu và Phát Triển* 5, no. 76 (2009): 108–12.

endorsements. The rescripts are usually of four kinds, vermilion spots 硃點, vermilion comments 硃批, vermilion circles 硃圈, and vermilion expunction/modification 硃抹.

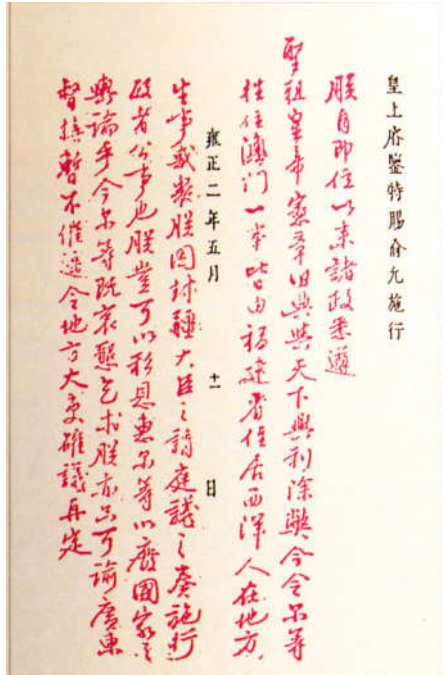


Figure 3.10. Emperor Yongzheng rescript (01/07/1724).
Source: 中國第一歷史檔案館, 清宮廣州十三行檔案精選, 廣東經濟出版社, 2002: 59.



Figure 3.11. Emperor Minh Menh rescript (14/04/1836).
Source: MNCB, 52: 252.

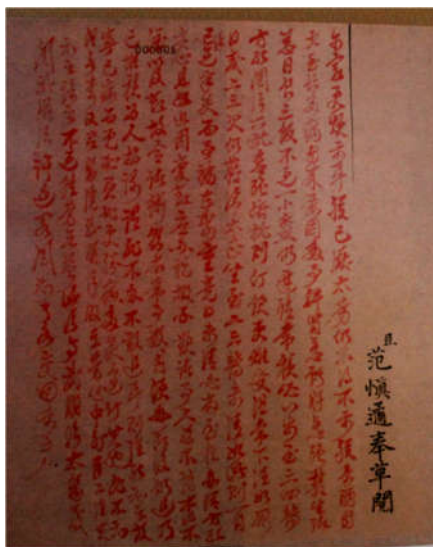


Figure 3.12. Emperor Tu Duc rescript (1879).
Source: TDCB, 331: 299-301.

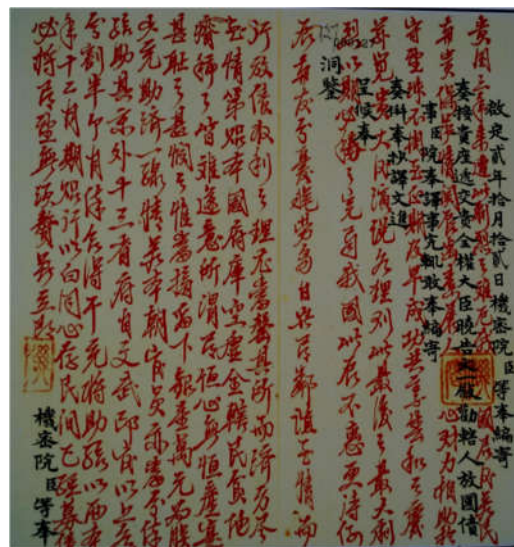
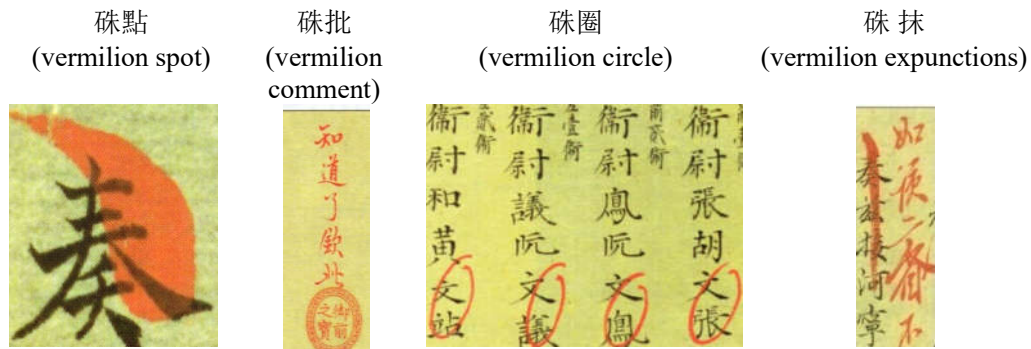


Figure 3.13. A sample of Emperor Khai Dinh rescript (1917).

Vermilion comments 硃批 were vermillion written of the imperial decisions. A large number of endorsements were brief acknowledgments/confirmations such as “[I] *acknowledged*” 知道了, “[you] *follow the memorialized*” 依奏, “[you] *follow the discussed*” 依議, “[I] have seen” 覽, and “*implemented/ proceeded*” 行. These wordings could be found in both Qing and Nguyen memorials.⁵⁹ Vermilion spots 硃點 indicated that the reviewing and approving of the emperor. The mark 點 in minium ink over the character “奏” [memorialize] can be understood as “acknowledged”, “seen”, “fine”, “proceed”... In contrast, imperial dissent manifests through brush lines crossing out mistaken characters or information. They are known as vermillion expunctions, modifications, and corrections (硃抹, 硃數, and 硃改). Last but not least, imperial selections over several possibilities, candidates, and options, were done by vermillion circles 硃圈 that highlighted the imperial choices. The following are samples of the endorsed types.⁶⁰



The burgeoning complexity of terminology and paperwork types resulted from Hue’s bureaucratic evolution between 1802 and 1841. Changing institutional designs profoundly reshaped the paperwork practice. The deliberative system guarantees the emperor’s ultimate decision-making while allowing advice and secretarial assistance

⁵⁸ National Archive No. 1, *Châu Bản Triều Nguyễn: Di Sản Tư Liệu Thuộc Chương Trình Ký Úc Thế Giới Khu Vực Châu Á Thái Bình Dương Của UNESCO (Nguyen Vermilion Records: Register of the UNESCO Memory of the World Program in Asia/Pacific)* (Hà Nội: NA1, 2014).

⁵⁹ On Qing’s imperial endorsements in general and Yongzheng in particular, see Qiqiao Yang 楊啟樵, *Yongzheng Di Ji Qi Mizhe Zhidu Yanjiu 雍正帝及其密摺制度研究 (Research on the Yongzheng Emperor's System of Confidential Memorials)* (Xianggang: Sanlian shudian, 1981); Yijing Qiu 邱怡靜, “*Cong Zouzhe Zhupi Kan Qing Qianqi Junchen Yiti Zhi Guanxi 從奏摺硃批看清前期君臣一體之關係 (Monarch-Minister Relationship in the Early Qing Period Seen from Endorsed Palace Memorials)*” (PhD dissertation, Soochow University, 2007).

⁶⁰ See more in National Archive No. 1, *Châu Bản Triều Nguyễn: Di Sản Tư Liệu Thuộc Chương Trình Ký Úc Thế Giới Khu Vực Châu Á Thái Bình Dương của UNESCO (Nguyen Vermilion Records: Register of the UNESCO Memory of the World Program in Asia Pacific)*.

offered by some close retainers. Although generating plenty of space for personal rule, the system also required a strong ruler on the throne.⁶¹

Besides, since the bureaucracy operated by codifying imperial instructions to be laws and customary practices, constant reform of the palace-assisted institutions was the emperor's secret weapon to control ministers and prevent them from power manipulation. In Minh Menh's interests, he facilitated frequent replacements of court organizations. Changing paperwork production resulted from institutional transformation and the monarch's design to (re)navigate the correspondence structure.

III. 2. Archiving the Nguyen Palace paperwork

The discussion now focuses on paperwork archivization in which the Nguyen palace documents were registered and stored. Knowledge of Vietnamese archival tradition is thin, fragmented, and contains primarily obscure and tragic events. Unlike China, Vietnam lacked socio-political and intellectual institutions to maintain official records. Public offices were highly vulnerable to social turmoil. The practice of manuscript culture was limited, while small-scaled central and regional libraries were frequent victims of repeated political chaos and natural disasters.

III. 2. 1. Libraries and archives in Vietnamese history

The tradition of paperwork production had begun as early as the tenth century when the Vietnamese established political autonomy in the Red River delta. Living at the edge of Chinese empires allowed their access to classical texts and the use of bureaucratic documents in administrative operations.⁶² Despite the Chinese view of the southern frontier as uncivilized and literarily-immature,⁶³ local literati were well-known for their intellectual pride and imagined their state a "domain of manifest

⁶¹ In terms of physical and intellectual power to maintain the system. See Fairbank and Teng, "On The Types and Uses of Ch'ing Documents," 34.

⁶² This also included the fact that northern Vietnam was under Chinese dominance for nearly a thousand years. See Jennifer Holmgren, *Chinese Colonisation of Northern Vietnam: Administrative Geography and Political Development in the Tongking Delta, First to Sixth Centuries A.D.*, Oriental Monograph Series (Canberra: Australian National University, Faculty of Asian Studies, 1980); Keith W Taylor, *The Birth of Vietnam* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983).

⁶³ Tang scholar Han Yu 韓愈 noted, "Viet's custom is not interested in the antiquity; thus the transmission (of historical knowledge) is not genuine" 越俗不好古, 流傳失其真. Lian Zhong 仲聯, *Han Changli Shi Xinian Jishi (Shang) 韓昌黎詩繫年集釋 (上)* (*Collection of the Annotations of Hanyu Poetry Sorted by the Composed Years, First Volume*) (Taipei: Xuehai chubanshe, 1985), 193.

civility” 文獻之邦.⁶⁴ Vietnam was among the first submitted tribute to the Ming after the dynasty-founder Zhu Yuanzhang 朱元璋 reunified China in 1368. The emissary surprised the Ming emperor by confirming that their customs did not follow the Yuan ‘barbarity’, rather the Zhou’s ‘civility’. Nanjing’s appreciation resulted in the conferred investiture “*the domain of manifest civility*” 文獻之邦, and the promotion of the Vietnamese envoy three ranks above the Korean counterpart.⁶⁵

“*Domain of manifest civility*” became the essence of intellectual analysis and cultural orientation of early imperial Vietnam. To be civilized was to acquire the classical Chinese traditions, including ‘institutional records’ 文 and ‘wise men’ 獻.⁶⁶ The civility benchmark located and maintained Vietnamese cultural and political status in the East Asian world.⁶⁷ Vietnamese intellectuals also expanded their “Efflorescence” to the literary tradition. To fifteenth-century scholar Nguyen Trai (阮 薦, 1380–1442), the cultural practice in the South [*the Great Viet* 大越] was no inferior to that of the North [*China*]:

Now, our Great Viet is truly a cultured country
The features of our mountains and our rivers [our land] are different [from those of the North],
Just as the customs of the South and the North are also different
From the time of the Trieu, Dinh, Ly, and Tran dynasties’ establishment of our state,
And from the time of the Han, Tang, Sung, and Yuan dynasties [of the North],

⁶⁴ Lê Quý Đôn, Kiến Văn Tiểu Lục 見聞小錄 (Jotting about Things Seen and Heard) (Vien Han Nom, A. 32, 1777): 4, 15a-16b.

⁶⁵ See Nguyễn Trãi, *Ức Trai Di Tập* 抑齋遺集 (*Uc Trai’s Bequeathed Anthology*) (Hà Nội: Viện Hán Nôm, VHV.1772/2-3), 6: 30a-b.

⁶⁶ Liam C. Kelley, “Vietnam as a ‘Domain of Manifest Civility’ (Văn Hiến Chi Bang),” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 34, no. 1 (2003): 66–67.

⁶⁷ A fifteenth century Vietnamese emperor responded to the Ming that his domain’s ‘caps and robes’, ‘rites and music’ were those of Han and Tang:

欲問安南事，	You ask about An Nam’s affairs,
安南風俗淳。	An Nam’s customs are pure.
衣冠唐制度，	Its caps and robes follow the Tang statutes,
禮樂漢君臣。	Its rites and music are like those of the Han emperor and his officials.
玉甕開新酒，	New wine is enjoyed in jade saucers,
金刀斫細鱗。	Fine fish is sliced with golden knives.
年年二三月，	Every year in the second and third months,
桃李一般春。	The peach and plum trees are both in spring bloom.

Việt Âm Thi Tập 越音詩集 (*Collection of Poetry in Viet Sound*) (Hà Nội: Viện Hán Nôm, A. 1925, n.d.), 26b. Thanks to Prof. Liam C. Kelley for the assistance of the English translation.

See more on the sense of southern identity among Vietnamese intellectuals in George E. Dutton, Jayne S. Werner, and John K. Whitmore, *Sources of Vietnamese Tradition* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), pp.33, 67, 93, 236; Peter F. Kornicki, *Languages, Scripts, and Chinese Texts in East Asia*, vol. 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 308.

Each emperor has ruled over his own quarters.⁶⁸

Such cultural orientation actively developed among the educated and became a source of intellectual resistance against Chinese Efflorescents- Barbarians discourse.⁶⁹ When Hue official Ly Van Phuc (李文馥, 1785–1849) and the Vietnamese delegation journeyed to Fujian Province, he was infuriated by a sign posted outside the hostel scheduled for him to stay that read, “*Hostel for the An Nam Barbarians*” 安南夷館. Immediately ordered the sign destroyed, he then composed an essay, “*On Distinguishing Barbarians*” 辯夷論 to protest the Qing local officials.

“以言乎治法則本之二帝三王，以言乎道統則本之六經四子，家孔孟而戶朱程。其學也源左國而流班馬。其文也詩賦則昭明文選而以李杜為依歸，字畫則周禮六書而以鍾王為楷式。賓賢取士，漢唐之科目也。博帶峩冠，宋明之衣服也。推而舉之，其大者如是。夫是而謂之夷則吾正不知其何以為華也。”

“As for the laws for governing the kingdom, they are based on those of the Two Emperors and the Three Monarchs [of antiquity]. With regard to the transmission of the way, it takes as its root the Six Classics and the Four Books, the teachings of Confucius and Mencius, and those of Zhu Xi and Cheng Yi. As for learning, it springs forth from the Zuo Commentary and the “Odes of the States,” and can be traced back to Ban Zhao and Sima Qian. As for writing, poetry and rhapsodies, there are the Collected Writings of the Zhaoming [Reign], and reliance on Li Bo and Du Fu. For calligraphy, it is the six scripts in the Rites of Zhou, with Zhong You and Wang Xizhi taken as models. In employing worthies and selecting scholars, the Han-Tang exam system is employed, while sashes and caps follow the garments of the Song-Ming. How

⁶⁸ Original text,

惟，我大越之國，
實為文獻之邦。
山川之封域既殊，
南北之風俗亦異。
自趙丁李陳之肇造我國，
與漢唐宋元而各帝一方。

Bùi Huy Bích, *Hoàng Việt Văn Tuyển 皇越文選, Quyển 5 (Selected Writings of the Imperial Viet, Book 5)* (Hà Nội: Thư viện Quốc gia, No. R.980), 3. English translation from Dutton, Werner, and Whitmore, *Sources of Vietnamese Tradition*, 93. One problem with that English translation is the fact that in the original has no mention of “Viet” in the fifth sentence. I thus make some revision accordingly.

⁶⁹ Peter Francis Kornicki, *Languages, Scripts, and Chinese Texts in East Asia* (Oxford University Press, 2018), 6–7.; Liam C. Kelley, “‘Confucianism’ in Vietnam: A State of the Field Essay,” *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 1, no. 1–2 (February 2006): 316.

numerous are the examples. If all of this is called Barbaric, then I know not what it is that we call Efflorescent!”⁷⁰

The ‘civility’ values were translated into different forms of cultural practices, including writing and literature, political institutions, and education. Books and manuscript collections were the hallmarks of the “Southern” intellectual competency in upholding the Confucian culture. When it comes to the history of libraries and archives, unfortunately, the educated Vietnamese were overwhelmed by the lament of lost records and destroyed books.⁷¹ Eighteenth-century scholar Le Quy Don 黎貴惇 wailed in 1777 that the literati before him had composed abundantly, but to his days, few scholarly works were surviving.

中州記誌不可勝數，雖多不盡傳，一覽類書可知大畧。南國號稱文獻。自李陳二民迄於本朝，先諸作者亦夥，歲遠言湮見傳魚幾。好古之士稽考弗由。

“In the Central Plains [China] records are unaccountable, recording too much but unable to spread. Thus, at once, one can only get a brief knowledge of the subject. Our Southern kingdom is famous as a domain of manifest civility; from the Ly, Tran to our dynasty, previous scholars compiled abundantly. However, from time to time, records are lost, and only a few remain. Scholars who are interested in antiquity can find no source to consult.”⁷²

The circulation of books and manuscripts in Vietnam is closely connected to the Chinese market. The exchanges were facilitated via tributary relations 朝貢, through which came book-trade and intellectual correspondence.⁷³ Vietnamese had

⁷⁰ Lý Văn Phức 李文馥, *Mãn Hành Tạp Vịnh Thảo* 閩行雜詠草 (*Random Chants from a Journey to Mãn*) (Vien Han Nom, A. 1291, 1831), 24b–25a. English translation, Kelley, “‘Confucianism’ in Vietnam: A State of the Field Essay,” 317.

⁷¹ George Dutton, “The Nguyen State and the Book Collecting Project” (Unpublished manuscript, 2013). I would like to thank Prof. George Dutton (UCLA) for sharing his work and thoughts.

⁷² Le Quy Don 黎貴惇. Preface of the *Small Chronicle of Things Seen and Heard* 見聞小錄序, 1777, EFEO Microfilm, 2a.

⁷³ Li Tana, “Considering Book Trade - the Material Foundation of Confucian Learning in the 17th and 18th Centuries Vietnam,” *Vietnam Social Sciences* 124 (2007): 4–17; Li Tana, “The Imported Book Trade and Confucian Learning in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Vietnam,” in *New Perspectives on the History and Historiography of Southeast Asia: Continuing Explorations*, ed. Michael Aung-Thwin and Kenneth R. Hall (Oxon, UK: Routledge, 2011), 167–82.

Taiwanese scholar Chen Yiyuan 陳益源 has conducted extensive research on book exchanges between Qing China and Nguyen Vietnam in the nineteenth century. See Chen Yiyuan 陳益源, *Yuenan Li Wenfu de Bei Shi Jingli Ji Qi Yu Zhongguo Wenxue Zhi Guanxi* 越南李文馥的北使經歷及其與中國文學之關係 (*Vietnamese Envoy Ly van Phuc and His Relation with Chinese*

adopted terminologies and institutions related to library and record-stored sites.⁷⁴ The modern term for the library, “*thur việ̣n*” (“institute of books” or “book hall”), probably arose in the fourteenth century, derived from a Chinese phrase: “書院” (*shuyuan*). The *Complete Chronicle of Dai Viet* (大越史記全書) mentioned a storehouse 藏 constructed in 1011 under the Ly dynasty 李朝 (1009-1225) to preserve Buddhist canons as gifts of the Sung China.⁷⁵ Although storehouse (庫, 藏), hall/tower (閣, 樓), and library (書院) were later constructed in northern Vietnam, they were mainly dedicated to book storage.⁷⁶ There was, however, little differentiation between “library” and “archive”. The most well-known “state library” was the Bureau of State History. The site was first established in the thirteenth century to keep records, books and other dynasty-related works.⁷⁷

Official archives and paperwork, however, were a more complicated story. The main reason placed on the non-existence of a clear distinction between archives and libraries in traditional bureaucratic practice. Paperwork was attached to both court institutions and palace libraries, and, as shown in the Nguyen, was frequently displaced for the purposes of compiling dynastic histories. Second, the vulnerability of official documents in times of social violence and political turmoil. Both imperial document-

Literature) (Tainan: Guoli chengong daxue, 2008); Chen Yiyuan 陳益源, *Shijiu Shiji Yuenan Shijie Yu Zhongguo Goushu Jilu Zhi Diaocha Yu Yanjiu* 十九世紀越南使節於中國購書記錄之調查與研究 (*Investigating the Records of Book-Trade of the Nineteenth Century Vietnamese Envoys*) (Tainan: Guoli chengong daxue, 2010); Trần Ích Nguyễn, *Thư Tịch Trung Quốc và Thơ Văn Đi Sứ Trung Hoa Thời Nguyễn* 越南阮朝所藏中國漢籍與使華詩文 (*Chinese Books and Envoy Literature of the Nguyen Dynasty*) (Hà Nội: Nxb Đại học Sư phạm, 2018).

⁷⁴ For instance in 1852, Emperor Tu Duc established a new library, *Tự Khuê Thư Việ̣n* 聚奎書院 on the ground floor of the Eastern Hall. The place was to preserve the books of the court, following the traditional classifying method of dividing all sorts of books into Jing (經 "Classics"), Shi (史 "Histories"), Zi (子 "Masters"), and Ji (集 "Collections"). Chen Jinghe 陳荊和, “The Imperial Archives of the Nguyen Dynasty (1802–1945),” *Journal of Southeast Asian History* 3, no. 02 (September 24, 1962): 124.

⁷⁵ DVSKTT, book 2: 5a. the original text, “是歲城內左起大清真右起萬歲寺構鎮福藏。城外建四大天王錦衣龍興聖壽寺。”

⁷⁶ See for instance the Lê-Trịnh scholar Nguyễn Huy Oánh (阮輝儻, 1713 - 1789) and his private Phúc Giang Academy 福江書院. Oánh visited eleven academies 書院 [shuyuan] in the course of conducting the diplomatic mission in China between 1766 and 1767. His most favor however was the Yuelu Academy 嶽麓書院 (Hunan province). That firsthand experience allowed the scholar to promote his own academy to be among these most prominent in Vietnam. Nguyễn Tuấn Cường, “書院與木雕版在東亞儒家知識的傳播：越南教育家阮輝及其 1766-1767 年出使中國的案例研究 (Academies and Woodblocks in the Dissemination of Confucian Knowledge in East Asia: A Case Study of Vietnamese Educationist Nguyễn Huy Oánh and His Diplomatic Mission to China from 1766 to 1767),” *Taiwan Dongya Wanming Yanjiu Xuekan* 15, no. 2 (2018): 43–68.

⁷⁷ Until the French introduced the *Bibliothèque centrale de l'Indochine* (1917); DVSKTT, Basic records 本紀, 3: 33a. The 1272 entry indicates the institution-name was Academy of State History 國史院.

stored sites and local offices were the rebellion's favorite targets. Each and every time the flame of chaos reached the capital, it claimed the destruction of the palace archives. Nineteenth-century scholar Phan Huy Chu (潘輝注, 1782-1840) emotionally lamented such tragedies when trying to assemble manuscripts of the previous centuries.

“惟歷朝會典從前未有成書編年國史之記猶多刪略，況自丙年兵興以來，舊章散逸，其略存者，故家世族之藏，斷簡遺文之載，又皆龐雜訛舛未有頭緒，談歷朝典故者，茫無依據，然則輯見聞別事類以為典憲一書者，斯非學當務次歟。”

“The bureaucratic statutes of the previous dynasties have not been recorded in books. State chronicles only document annual ritual events and practices briefly. Besides, because of military events from the Binh Ngo year [1786] until now, books are lost; the remained damaged manuscripts are organized in confusion; mistakes [of the manuscripts] are unable to consult; the discussion of [the successive] dynastic institutions is obscure. Therefore, recording what one sees and listens to, and cataloging them in standard subjects; are not they the mission of the intellectuals?”⁷⁸

The imperial citadel 昇龍皇城 in Hanoi went up in flames in 1371, 1405-07, 1516, 1592-3, 1786, 1789, and 1802. The most devastating event was the fifteenth century Ming invasion in which books, manuscripts, and stone inscriptions were systematically targeted. Ming Emperor *Yongle* 永樂 (1402-1424) demanded every single written character removed.

兵入除釋道經板經文不毀外，一切書板文字以至俚俗童蒙所習如：上大人丘乙己，之類片紙隻字悉皆毀之，其境內凡有古跡中國所立碑刻則存之，但是安南所立者悉坏之，一字不存。

As the Army entering [Annam/ the *Great Viet*], except for books and woodblocks of *Jingwen* [the classics], Buddhism, and Taoism, all woodblocks, manuscripts, and books had to be burned, including children's books. Every piece of the script needs to be destroyed. Searching through their kingdom, only stone stelae erected by the Chinese should remain; the rest - even a single character – carved by Annamese have to be extinguished.⁷⁹

That “cultural massacre” opened the narrative of lost books of the Vietnamese elite. It created a black hole of institutional knowledge for the Le state (1428-1789),

⁷⁸ Phan Huy Chú 潘輝注, *Lịch Triều Hiến Chương Loại Chí* 歷朝憲章類誌 (*Categorized Records of the Institutions of Successive Dynasties*), hereafter *LTHCLC*, (Paris: EFEO Microfilm, 1819), 2a-b.

⁷⁹ Li Wenfeng 李文鳳, “Yue Jiao Shu 越嶠書,” in *Si Ku Quanshu Cun Mu Congshu* 四庫全書存目叢書 (*Surviving Catalogue of the Emperor's Four Treasuries*), Book 162 (Jinan: Qilu shushe, 1996), 695.

who then broke up with the previous political tradition by creating a new bureaucratic structure that moved closer to the Ming system.⁸⁰ Gone with the smoke of the Chinese invasion were the imperial libraries, archives, and the vast majority of the paperwork. The earliest surviving document at the NA1 is a *Certificate of appointing official* 吏部爲試官事, dating back only to December 14, 1488.⁸¹ No classified catalog and archival principles were left behind, leading to a complete obscured picture of the pre-Nguyen official correspondence and paperwork operation.

Dynastic documents and official archives were also prioritized targets of dynasty-changed violence. The early Nguyen was a convincing case in point. Both Gia Long and Minh Menh ordered Tayson documents, books, and writings obliterated. In 1840, the monarch commanded northern officials in Hanoi to search and erase the vestige of inscriptions related to the Trịnh clan.⁸²

⁸⁰ John K. Whitmore, “The Development of Le Government in Fifteenth Century Vietnam” (Ph.D. Thesis, Cornell University, 1968), Whitmore, “Chiao-Chih and Neo-Confucianism: The Ming Attempt to Transform Vietnam.”

⁸¹ *Tư Liệu Thời Kỳ Hồng Đức (The Hong Duc Files)* (Hà Nội: Trung tâm lưu trữ Quốc gia I), file. no.1.

⁸² DNTL, II, 114: 14b-15a. See the destruction of the Tayson seal, DNTL, II: 16: 11b.

In 1828, Minh Menh expressed his regret at the fact that after the dynasty establishment, a considerable amount of Tayson paperwork were confiscated and destroyed. He then ordered to have all the extant Tayson official documents collected. DNTL, II, 56: 4a-b.

A number of Lê-Trịnh’s compiled manuscripts managed to survive, containing transmitted paperwork in edited volumes. Some of them deserve a brief introduction. *The Collection of Copied Imperial Investitures* 敕文抄集, for instance, provides 42 official investitures 敕 bestowing to Lê officials and their family members. The majority involves rewarding and appointing posthumous titles to the high-ranking officials and their relatives. See *Sắc Văn Sao Tập* 敕文抄集 (*Collection of Copied Imperial Investitures*) (Hà Nội: Viện Hán Nôm, A. 1624).

The Collection of Fine Writings of the Prosperous Time 盛世佳文集 contains 198 documents of imperial investitures 敕, imperial writings 製, proclamations 詔, congratulatory reports 表, memorials 奏, official reports 疏... Its miscellaneous contents, textual genres, and authorship serve well the manuscript intention, which was to dedicate to the cultural and literary proudness of the Lê age. Interestingly, as showed in the manuscript, the concept of fine 佳文 was devoted explicitly to paperwork. Drafted by the dynasty’s most prominent official-scholars, such as Phan Trọng Phiên (潘仲藩), Nhữ Đình Toản (汝廷瓚, 1702-1773), Trần Danh Án (陳名案, 1754-1794), Phạm Quý Thích (范 貴 適, 1760-1825), and Lí Trần Quán (李陳瓚, 1721-1786), the collection illustrates a great deal of scholarly appreciation to the fondness, proudness, and enthusiasm of the Lê intelligentsia to the art of doing practical writings. See *Thịnh Thế Giai Văn Tập* 盛世佳文集 (*Collection of the Fine Writings of the Prosperous Time*) (Hà Nội: Viện Hán Nôm, A. 438, n.d.).

Documents relating to day-to-day administrative affairs were presented in other less voluminous manuscripts. The *Collection of the Lê’s Official documents* 黎朝公文抄集, for example, exhibits 54 folios of official files issued by the Supervising Censor 監察御史 and Commandery Military Commission 鎮守衙 in Sơn Tây prefecture 山西道. The file includes official reports 申, report submissions 恭, contracts 契, and official agreements 約 in subjects of taxation, lawsuits, and military conscription in the reigns of Cảnh Trị (景治, 1663-1671), Vĩnh Trị (永治, 1676-1680), Vĩnh Thịnh (永盛, 1705-1720), Vĩnh Hựu (永祐, 1735-1740), and Cảnh Hưng (景興,

III. 2. 2. The Nguyen palace paperwork: an archival journey

“Archive” in Vietnamese literarily means “storing and preserving” (*luu tru*). While the term reflects the practice derived from western institutions of keeping official records, traditional Vietnam recognizes no equivalent terminology. The exception is probably “storage” 藏 (*tàng*), but it invokes different connotation, mainly applied to books and religious canons. More interestingly, there was no clear separation between state archives and imperial libraries, as seen at the Easter Hall (founded in 1826) and the Book-Storage Hall (founded in 1825). The Grand Secretariat “archive”, for instance, contained not only paperwork but also the emperor’s library, his compilations, maps, a portion of the court treasure, and official seals. Hue “palace archives” differed from their early modern Western European counterparts.⁸³ The peculiar nature of storage and usage of archival documents also added complexity to

1740-1786). See *Lê Triều Công Văn Sao Tập* 黎朝公文抄集 (*Collection of the Copies of Lê’s Official Documents*) (Hà Nội: Viện Hán Nôm, A. 2775, n.d.).

The most celebrated eighteenth century scholar-official, Lê Quý Đôn (黎貴惇, 1727-1784) also added to his enormous complicated repertoire a multiple-text-manuscript known as Administrative Petitions, Memorials, and Congratulatory Reports of the Famous Lê Officials 黎朝名臣章疏奏啟. This six hundred folio text includes three textual units, namely Reports and Memorials of the Prominent Lê Officials 黎名臣啓 (folios 1-230), Petitions of the prominent Lê Officials 黎國朝名臣章疏 (folios 223-509), and Memorials of the Famous Lê Officials 黎名臣奏啟 (folios 519-601). These units consist of many important official documents drafted not only by Đôn and his father (Lê Trọng Thử 黎仲庶, also a scholar-official and doctoral degree holder in 1724), but also by a wide number of elite scholars of the time. See Lê Quý Đôn, *Lê Triều Danh Thần Chương Sớ Tấu Khai* 黎朝名臣章疏奏啟 (*Petitions of the Prominent Lê Officials*) (Thành Phố Hồ Chí Minh: Viện KHXH vùng Nam Bộ, no. Hnv. 161, n.d.). There are also manuscripts produced as sample essays for metropolitan examinations, such as *Chiếu Biểu* 詔表 (*Imperial Edicts and Congratulatory Reports*) (Thành Phố Hồ Chí Minh: Viện khoa học xã hội vùng Nam Bộ, no. hnv. 225, n.d.); *Lê Triều Cảnh Hưng Giám Văn* 黎朝景興監文 (*Selected Examination Essays at the State Academy in the Cảnh Hưng Reign*) (Hà Nội: Viện Hán Nôm, A. 2816, n.d.); *Lê Triều Hội Thi Đình Đối Sách Văn* 黎朝會試庭對策文 (*Palace Examination Essays of the Lê Dynasty*) (Hà Nội: Viện Hán Nôm, A. 3026/1-3, n.d.).

Emperor’s and diplomatic documents were subjects of quite a few projects of manuscript compilation. The most important was probably the 272-folio manuscript: Proclamations of the Chinh Hoa reign 正和詔書. Despite of the title, this collection consists of 100 documents [道], not only decrees 旨 and edits 諭, but also memorials 表, and reports 啟. The documents were issued by Lê emperors, Trịnh lords, drafted by court officials on various topics of political affairs between Chính Hòa (正和, 1680-1705) and Cảnh Hưng reign (景興, 1740-1786). Although all paratextual components were deducted, those rare documents present a vivid insight into the structure of power relationship between emperor’s palace and the lord’s court. See *Chinh Hòa Chiếu Thư* 正和詔書 (*Proclamations of the Chinh Hoa Reign*) (Hà Nội: Viện Hán Nôm, A. 256., n.d.).

Diplomatic letters is also a significant part of the Lê political culture. A considerable number was transliterated into volumes while the original formats were largely vanished. Most notably, Nguyen Trãi’s letters to Ming officials in Hanoi between 1427 and 1428 were collected in *Writings Composed While in the Army* 軍中詞命集. See Nguyễn Trãi, *Úc Trai Di Tập* 抑齋遺集 (*Úc Trai’s Bequeathed Anthology*); Book 4: *Quân trung từ mệnh tập* 軍中詞命集 (*Writings Composed While in the Army*).

⁸³ For an useful analysis of the birth of Western archives, see Markus Friedrich and John Noël Dillon, *The Birth of the Archive* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2018).

the dynastic paperwork ecology, including confusing document flows and storage sites.⁸⁴ The lack of archiving space, staff shortage, and frequent displacement of the holding items indicated that the palace archives did not merely serve as sites of document deposit, as demonstrated in chapters IV and V.

The social history of Vietnamese archives remained obscure.⁸⁵ We know little of how pre-Nguyen dynasties maintained their paperwork and records of land, population, and taxation. The Nguyen was the first that gave a relatively concise understanding of the paperwork life. The following tables provide details of Hue's state libraries and archives between 1802 and 1945.

Table 3.1. Libraries and archives in Hue, 1821-1945

Dates	Libraries/ archives	Collection	Functions	
1821-1945	國史館書院 Library of the Bureau of State History		Library	Storing paperwork for historical compilation
1825-1945	藏書樓 Book-Storage Hall	12,000 volumes of land-records (1945) ⁸⁶		
1826-1942 1852-1942	東閣 Eastern Tower 聚奎書院 Tu khue Library			Archive
1835	Grand Council archive			Archive
1857	藏本堂 Woodblock-preservation House			
1909-1923 1923-1947	新書院 New Library 保大書院 Bao Dai Library	2.640 items ⁸⁷		
1922-1945	古學院 Academy of Antiquity Studies ⁸⁸			

⁸⁴ As frequently seen in 1822, 1828, 1833, and 1834. DNTL, II, 15, 9a-b; 54: 19b; 94: 22b; 123: 15b-16a.

⁸⁵ See Bích Hồng Dương, *Lịch Sử Sự Nghiệp Thư Viện Việt Nam Trong Tiến Trình Văn Hóa Dân Tộc History of Library in the Course of Vietnamese National Culture* (Hà Nội: Bộ Văn hóa Thông tin, 1999); Tô Lan Nguyễn, “Lược Khảo về Thư Viện Công Việt Nam Thời Phong Kiến (An Outline of Vietnamese Public Library in the Feudal Period),” *Nghiên Cứu Lịch Sử* 9 (2009): 59–69.

⁸⁶ In 1906, land-records and vermilion records were reviewed by Hue court, following an order of Emperor Thành Thái. See ThTCB, 24: 63. See Phan Thanh Hải and Lê Thị Toán, “Tàng Thơ Lâu và Dự Án Xây Dựng Thư Viện Cổ Đô (The Book-Storage Hall and the Project of Constructing the Library of the Former Capital),” in *Di Sản Văn Hóa Huế - Nghiên Cứu và Bảo Tồn* (Huế: Trung tâm Bảo tồn Di tích Cổ đô Huế xuất bản, 2007), 299.

⁸⁷ *Tân Thư Viện Thủ Sách* 新書院守冊 (*Catalog of the New Library's Books*) (Hà Nội: Viện Hán Nôm, A. 2645/1-3, 1914).

⁸⁸ *Cổ Học Viện Thư Tịch Thủ Sách* 古學院書籍守冊 (*Catalogue of the Library of the Academy of Antiquity Studies*) (Hà Nội: Viện Hán Nôm, 1924-1925), no. A.2601/1-11. For the documents related to the establishment of the Academy of Antiquity Studies, see Phạm Văn Khoái, “Hai Công Văn Thiết Lập Viện Cổ Học Buổi Sơ Kỳ (Two Documents on the Early Establishment of Academy of Antiquity Studies),” *Tạp Chí Hán Nôm* 2, no. 99 (2010): 3–12. Nguyễn, Lược Khảo về Thư Viện Công Việt Nam; Trần, *Thư Tịch Trung Quốc và Thơ Văn Đi Sứ*, 15–18.

Figure 3.14. Sites of books and paperwork deposited in Hue, 1802-1835

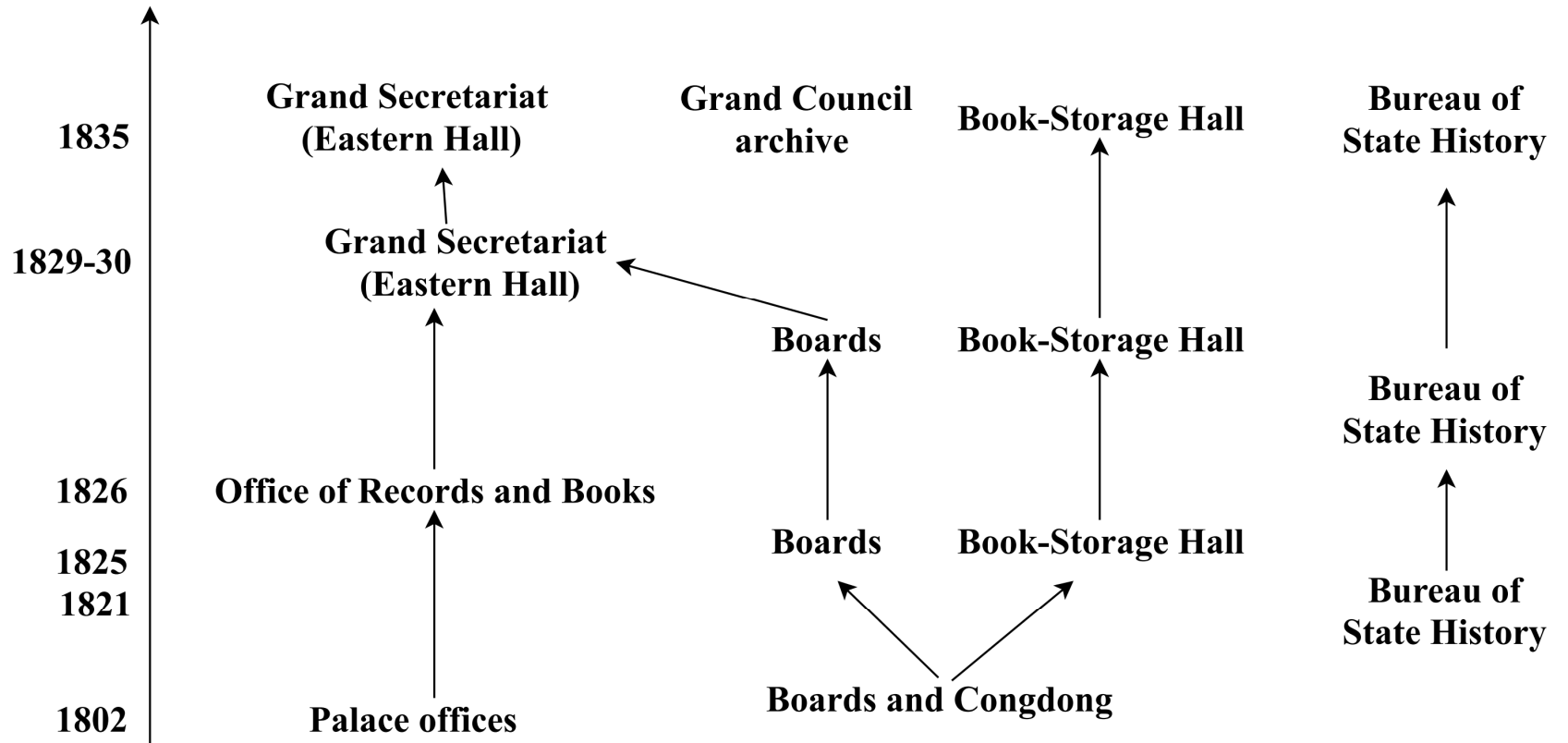


Table 3.2. Catalogs of books and records of Hue libraries and archives, 1902-1925
Source: Vien Han Nom.

Cataloged manuscripts		Cataloged years	Shelf no.	
Tu Khuê thư viện tổng mục sách 聚奎書院總目冊	Catalog of the Tu Khue Library	1902	A.110/2-3	+ Jing (經 "Classics"): 776 volumes (簿) and 69 manuscripts (本) + Shi (史 "Histories"): 350 volumes and six manuscripts + Zi (子 "Masters"): 486 volumes and 147 manuscripts
Tu Khuê thư viện tổng mục sách, Quốc thư bản 聚奎書院總目冊, 國書板	Catalogues of the Tu Khue Library	1902	A.111	+ Ji (集 "Collections"): 543 volumes and 41 manuscripts. + 7190 volumes of Jing, Shi, Zi, Ji at the Eastern Hall. + 77 volumes, 96 manuscripts, and 50 books of Western documents (books) + 80 volumes and 332 manuscripts of official correspondence. + 77 volumes and 585 documents of diplomatic letters and 232 volumes of 703 documents of the Nguyen diplomatic letters.
Nội các thư mục 內閣書目	Book-catalogue of the Grand Secretariat.	1908	A.113/2	271-cataloged items related to the Nguyen dynasty. Jing (經 "Classics"): 344 items Shi (史 "Histories"): 406 items Zi (子 "Masters"): 604 items Ji (集 "Collections"): 642 items.
Tân thư viện thủ sách 新書院守冊	Catalog of the New Library	A.2645/2-3 and A.1024	1914	2640 cataloged items, including Vietnamese, Chinese, and Western books and manuscripts.
Nội các thủ sách 內閣守冊	Book-catalogue of the Grand Secretariat.	A.2644	1914	Eastern Hall: 67 volumes. Tu Khue Library: 267 volumes.
Cổ học viện thư tịch thủ sách 古學書籍院守冊	Catalog of the library of the Academy of Antiquity Studies	A.2601/1, A.2601/6, A.2601/10	1924-1925	New-book deposit: 262 newly printed journals and books. Jing (經 "Classics"): 47 volumes. Shi (史 "Histories"): 430 volumes. Zi (子 "Masters"): 6550 volumes. Ji (集 "Collections"): 562 volumes. National Books Deposit (國書): 601 volumes of imperial writings, French Studies, National History, Literature, and Books in the National Sound 國音書.

The foundation of the Nguyen archival system relied heavily on one particular ruler, Minh Menh Emperor. His administrative construction laid the ground for institutions, facilities, and regulations for paperwork storage. One year after enthronement (1821), his passion for records of the past affairs was revealed in an edict:

朕惟歷代帝王之興，必有一代之史以紀其言行政事，垂之後世。

I think that the rise of kings and emperors from previous generations must be described in the historical works of their times, recording [their] sayings, actions, and politics to bequeath to the later generations.

朕游情古典，遙追先志...特准中外臣庶，凡有家藏編錄記先朝故典，不拘詳略以原本進納，或送官抄錄，各有獎賞。⁸⁹

I pay attention to the classical statutes and follow the previous generations' wills. ...

Thus, [I] request the inner and outer [capital and provincial] officials and people whose families possess records of the previous reigns [Nguyen Lords], regardless of detailed or concise, to submit [the records] in their original formats or allow the state to copy [the records], there will be rewards.

Due to the increasing paperwork and centralization of the document movements, palace archives soon became part of his political designs. Under the Gia Long reign, there was no centralized processing and storing of the palace records. *Congdong*, although it possessed a working hall 公同署, was not known for its archival function.⁹⁰ Instead, the Six Board managed all “inner and outer, large and small political affairs”⁹¹, each court organization had to preserve their documents. The new paperwork pressure came when “bureaucratic businesses have increased; documents are enlarging day by day, and are out of control or lost as time goes by.”⁹² Here is Minh Menh’s response in 1829:

其合尊人府，六部諸衙，檢撰自嘉隆元年至明命十年，凡欽奉諭旨，欽定體例，竝六部奏準及內外章奏，一切文移案牘，有關於政務者，分門定類，按其年月前後，一一類編成集，務期綱舉，日張井井有條，以備查覈，而垂定式。⁹³

“Directing the Imperial Household Department and Six Board departments to measure and arrange all issued edicts, regulations, and approved memorials dated between GL1 [1802] and MM10 [1829] that belonged to Six Boards and

⁸⁹ DNTL, II, 3: 5b-6a.

⁹⁰ DNTL, I, 3: 16a.

⁹¹ Original text, “內外大小政事均由六部關掌”.

⁹² Original text, “就中機務至眾卷帙日繁歲月易流或有散逸”, DNTL, II, 60: 39a.

⁹³ DNTL, II, 60: 39b.

inner-and-outer petitions. It is imperative that records 文移案牘 related to political affairs 政務 are classified based on types and dates before gathering in volumes 集 so that the [paperwork] categories are clear, [paperwork] organization is coherent, and [the paperwork] can be ready for review.”

Ambiguous regulations for record storage were another reason to upgrade the archival guiding principles. One year earlier, the ruler was informed that the boards did not take proper responsibility for maintaining *red records* 紅本.⁹⁴ The result was more institutional settings in Hue bureaucracy. When Minh Menh introduced “*vermilion records*” through the practice of endorsements,⁹⁵ both the administrative structure in general and paperwork practice, in particular, had turned to a new page. The authority of endorsed memorials reshaped both decision-making mechanisms and archival procedures. Emperor’s writings and courtier-drafted edicts became the dominant form of delivering imperial power. All those records were subjected to strict archival accumulation. The necessity to collect endorsed memorials and emperor documents was explained by the man himself:

上諭 朕受皇考付托之重，故臨政之初，日夜孜孜，歷求治理。每日御殿辦事，雖不至萬幾之多，而在京文武各衙門，在外諸城鎮具奏章疏，何啻數百餘件。皆隨事降旨，立即批發，未嘗稍萌逸豫。況批本乃創自今始，故凡事即面諭廷臣，或部院堂官擬旨批發，間有關要事件，在廷諸大臣倘一時未能領會，與朕偶有思慮所及，不得不自擬撰，或草付，或硃批。自元年至今，已積幾千百餘件。⁹⁶

Edict I received a heavy responsibility from my father [Gia Long]; at the beginning of my reign, I worked hard from early morning to late night, carefully monitoring the political affairs. Every day at the imperial hall, although memorials sent from the capital and outer regions have not numbered in tens of thousands, those submitted by the court military and civil offices and outer prefectures are no less than several hundred. Despite that number, [I] all come through, instruct edicts and then dispatch immediately. Moreover, the endorsement is now applied; therefore, I directly order court officials or Boards’ attendant personnel to draft and send [the papers out]. However, there are essential issues that high-ranking officials are temporarily unable to adjust to or matters that I suddenly think of them. Those I must personally draft, or suggest proclamations or endorsements [as well]. Until now, they have collectively numbered in tens of thousand items.”

⁹⁴ DNTL, II, 54: 19b.

⁹⁵ DNTL, II, 1: 17b.

⁹⁶ Minh Mệnh, *Ngự Chế Văn, Sơ Tập* 御製文, 初集 (*Imperial Writings, First Collection*) (Hà Nội: Trung tâm khoa học xã hội và nhân văn quốc gia, Viện nghiên cứu Hán Nôm, 2000, 1834), 1a-b.

Minh Menh was an autocratic micromanager who paid tremendous attention to details of written bureaucracy. The dynastic machine of compilation came with the establishment of the Bureau of State History in his first ruling year.⁹⁷ In the fifth year, the board repositories were presented, marking the fundamental development of the state archivization by separating the board files of land estates and taxation from palace paperwork.⁹⁸ In the commemoration of the board archive [藏書樓 Book-storage Hall], a stela was erected to highlight the role of records 冊籍 in state politics: “records of kingdoms exist and transfer legal regulations from the ancient to the present-day. It is all because of the careful preservation at storehouses, keeping them away from water and fire. By that, they can be maintained for many generations, forever providing institutional models for people to follow.”⁹⁹ One year later came the Eastern Tower-the Grand Secretariat archive, which would be lasted for more than a century (1826-1942). Strategically located adjacent to the emperor's working office [The Hall of Diligent Politics], it deposited most of the palace paperwork, including vermilion records, diplomatic treaties, maps, and imperial writings.¹⁰⁰ The place was run with stringent regulations and high safeguards. Staffs were given small ivory plates, inscribing “ivory tag to enter the Grand Secretariat building” 入閣牙牌.¹⁰¹

⁹⁷ MNCB, 3: 120-128.

⁹⁸ DNTL, II, 33: 15b.

⁹⁹ The stela inscription of the Hall of Books-storage 藏書樓記, Vien Han Nom, no. 5672. Original text, “國家冊籍所以垂憲來, 茲必有總滙積儲之, 處以謹避水火, 乃可傳諸久遠, 而著為典常”. Previous scholars, such as Paul Boudet was confused between the Book-storage Hall and the Eastern Tower. In an article in 1942, he noted that the Hall of Books-storage belonged to the Grand Secretariat. In fact, it was the Six Boards' archives. See Boudet, “Les Archives Des Empereurs D'Annam et L'Histoire Annamite,” planche XLII and XLIII.

¹⁰⁰ On Maps deposited in the Grand Secretariat archives, MNCB, 51: 208.

¹⁰¹ HDSL, 224: 5a.

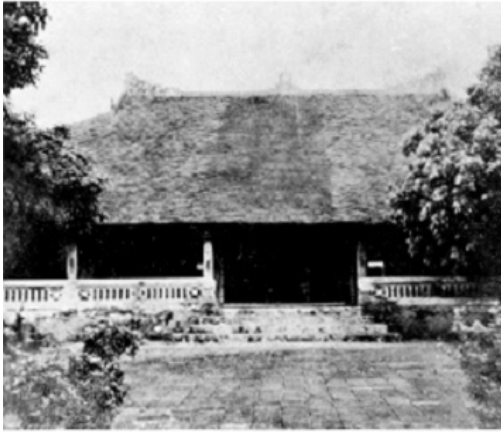


Figure 3.15. The Bureau of State History. Source: Paul Boude (1942).

Figure 3.16. The Book-storage Hall. Source: Paul Boude (1942).

Because of having no clear boundary between the Grand Secretariat and Grand Council archives¹⁰² and frequent displacements of archival holdings for the compilations of *DNTL*, *huidian*, *fanglue* (方略, *Military strategies*), *zheng yao* (政要 *Abstract Policies*), *lie chuan* (列傳 *Dynastic biographies*) and *yitong zhi* (一統志, *Complete geography*)... the holding documents ended up quite chaotic.¹⁰³ Endorsed memorials as a mechanism of delivering imperial decisions were sometimes sent out on administrative missions.¹⁰⁴ Many of them had not yet been recalled until 1834.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰² In 1836, for example, the Grand Secretariat-held *greetings palace memorials* 請安奏 and paintings were transferred to the Grand Council. *DNTL*, II, 166: 4a.

¹⁰³ The contour of the Grand Council archives can be traced back through some of their publications. The most prominent was *Military Strategies*, including edicts and memorials of military communication between 1833 and 1836. See *Khâm Định Tiều Bình Lương Kỳ Nghịch Phi Phương Lược Chính Biên* 欽定勦平兩圻逆匪方略正編 (*Official Compendium of the Rebel Suppression in the Northern and Southern Territories of the Empire*) (Viện Hán Nôm, Vh.v.2701, 1836).

¹⁰⁴ *DNTL*, II, 44: 3a.

¹⁰⁵ *DNTL*, II, 123: 15b-16a.

Those issues represented just the tip of the iceberg compared to complex regulations and institutional challenges faced by the Hue bureaucrats.

Minh Menh recognized the situation and had the archives frequently inspected. In 1832, a committee of Six Board staff was sent to examine the Eastern Hall, where paperwork-related misconducts resulted in several demotions and punishments.¹⁰⁶ Another investigation conducted by the Censorate in 1836 suggested that the boards and Grand Secretariat were responsible for the loss of 2,000 paperwork items and recommended penalties for 100 officials.¹⁰⁷ Nevertheless, these control measures could not do little in the massive displacement of paperwork to compile dynastic works, including *huidian* and *DNTL*.¹⁰⁸

Table. 3.3. The compilation of the Nguyen *huidian* (1802-1895)

Statutes	Drafted dates	Printed dates	Volumes	Notes
Official Compendium of Institutions and Usages of Imperial Vietnam 欽定大南會典事例 ¹⁰⁹	1843-1851	1868	262	Covering the period between 1802-1851
A continuation of the Official Compendium of Institutions and Usages of Imperial Vietnam 欽定大南會典事例續編 ¹¹⁰	1889-1895	1917	61	--- 1852-1889

¹⁰⁶ “帝以內閣機務總匯之地所當詳加檢覈乃命六部堂官黎登瀛，潘輝湜，張明講，阮忠懋，阮繡，何維藩率本部司員各三稽覈自明命元年以來在閣章疏文書圖籍印信…及清查冊上賞董理及隨辦員人級紀金銀錢有差節次。閣臣皆以錯誤坐降罰。”

“The emperor recognized that the grand secretariat is a strategic place, therefore needs monitoring carefully. Chief staffs at the Six Boards, including Le Dang Doanh, Phan Huy Thuc, Truong Minh Giang, Nguyen Trung Mau, Nguyen Tu, Ha Duy Phien deployed three personnel in each board to examine holding items at the grand secretariat, including memorials, petitions, official records, maps, and seals that dated back from 1820. ... When the final report submitted, the chief staffs and assistants were awarded with ranks and golden and copper coins accordingly. The Grand Secretariat’s officers were downgraded and punished because of their malfunctions.” *DNTL*, II, 80: 5b.

¹⁰⁷ II 176 31b

¹⁰⁸ Although Chen Jinghe suggested that one copy of the endorsed memorials was sent to the Bureau of State History for reference, first, as far as I am concerned, his suggestion was not confirmed by any dynastic source; second, it was not supported by the nature of the surviving documents either. See Chen, “The Imperial Archives of the Nguyen Dynasty (1802-1945),” 122.; Smith, “Sino-Vietnamese Sources for the Nguyễn Period: An Introduction,” 615.

¹⁰⁹ See *HDSL: Khâm Định Đại Nam Hội Điển Sự Lệ* 欽定大南會典事例, 1851, (*Official Compendium of Institutions and Usages of Imperial Vietnam*) (Vien Han Nom, VHV. 1570).

¹¹⁰ *Khâm Định Đại Nam Hội Điển Sự Lệ Tục Biên* 欽定大南會典事例續編 (*A Continuation of the Official Compendium of Institutions and Usages of Imperial Vietnam*) (Vien Han Nom, printed 1917,

Table 3.4. The compilation of the Qing *huidian* (1684-1899)

Reigns	Works	Compiled dates	Volumes	Printed dates	Notes
Kangxi	<i>Kangxi huidian</i> 康熙會典	1684-1690	162	1696	
Yongzheng	<i>Yongzheng huidian</i> 雍正會典	1724-1733	250	1734.	Adds the institutions of 1687 to 1727 to the <i>Kangxi huidian</i> .
Qianlong	<i>Qianlong huidian</i> 乾隆會典	1747-1764		1768	
	<i>Qiding de Qing huidian</i> 欽定大清會典		100		
	<i>huidian zeli</i> (會典則例), (Supplementary regulations and sub-statutes)		180		
Jiaqing	<i>Jiaqing huidian</i> 嘉慶會典	1801-1818	80	1822	
	<i>Shili</i> (事例), Supplementary regulations and Sub-statutes)		920		
	<i>Tu</i> 圖: Illustrations		132		Adds institutions since the previous edition up to 1813.
<i>Guangxu</i>	<i>Guangxu huidian</i> 光緒會典	1886-1899	100	Shangwu, 1904	Adds institutions, supplementary regulations, and statutes between 1813 and 1896. ¹¹¹
	<i>Shili</i>		1,220		
	<i>Tu</i> 圖		270	Reprinted, <i>Zhonghua</i> 14 vols, 1991, 1995.	

VHv.2793/1-30. Also see *Quốc sử quán triều Nguyễn, Khâm Định Đại Nam Hội Điển Sự Lệ Tục Biên* 欽定大南會典事例續編 (Hà Nội: Giáo dục, 2004), vol. 1: 9.

¹¹¹ Wilkinson, *Chinese History: A New Manual*, 946–47.

Table 3.5. The compilation of the Nguyen DNTL

Source: DNTL; Cao Tu Thanh (2012); HDSL; HDSLTB¹¹².

Reigns/ periods	Compiled dates	Printed dates	Volumes	Notes
大南寔錄前編 Primary compilation of the Veritable Records of Imperial Vietnam	From 1821	1844	12	1558-1777
大南列傳前編 Collection of biographies of Imperial Vietnam		1852	6	1558-1777
大南寔錄正編, 第一紀 Primary compilation of the Veritable Records of the first reign of Imperial Vietnam	1821-1847	1848	60	1778-1820
大南寔錄正編, 第二紀 Primary compilation of the Veritable Records of the second reign of Imperial Vietnam	1841-1861	1861	220	1820-1841
大南寔錄正編, 第三紀 Primary compilation of the Veritable Records of the third reign of Imperial Vietnam		1879	72	1841-1847
大南寔錄正編, 第四紀 Primary compilation of the Veritable Records of the fourth reign of imperial Vietnam		1899	70	1848-1883
大南寔錄正編, 第五紀 Primary compilation of the Veritable Records of the fifth reign of Imperial Vietnam		1902	8	1883-1885
大南寔錄正編, 第六紀 Primary compilation of the Veritable Records of the sixth reign of Imperial Vietnam		1909	11	1885-1888
大南寔錄正編, 第七紀 Primary compilation of the Veritable Records of the seventh reign of Imperial Vietnam ¹¹³	-1939		10	
大南寔錄正編列傳初集 First collection of the primary compilation of biographies of Imperial Vietnam.		1889	33	
大南寔錄正編列傳二集 Second collection of the primary compilation of biographies of Imperial Vietnam.		1909	46	

¹¹² For more on the Nguyen historiography and the conditions of dynastic historical compilation, see Philippe Langlet, *Khâm Định Việt Sử Thông Giám Cương Mục: Texte et Commentaire Formant Le Miroir Complet de l'histoire Việt Établi Par Ordre Impérial; Chapitres 33 et 34* (Saigon: Imprimerie Đông-Nam-A, 1970); idem, *L'ancienne Historiographie d'État Au Vietnam, Part I: Raisons d'être, Conditions d'élaboration et Caractères Au Siècle Des Nguyễn* (Paris: École Française d'Extrême-Orient, 1990); idem, *L'ancienne Historiographie d'État Au Vietnam, Part II: Kham Định Việt Su Thông Giám Cương Mục: Texte et Commentaire Du Miroir Complet de l'histoire Việt Établi Par Ordre Impérial (1856 - 1884); Chapitres 36 et 37 (1722 - 1735); Traduction et Notes Explicatives* (Paris: École Française d'Extrême-Orient, 1985).

¹¹³ See Cao Tụ Thanh, "Đại Nam Thực Lục Chính Biên: Đệ Thất Kỳ Quyển Thứ," (DNTL, the 7th reign), *Nghiên Cứu và Phát Triển* 7, no. 96 (2012): 137-44; Quốc sử quán triều Nguyễn, *Đại Nam Thực Lục Chính Biên Đệ Thất Kỳ (Veritable Records of the Nguyen Dynasty, the Seventh Reign)*, Trans., Cao Tụ Thanh (Thành Phố Hồ Chí Minh: NXB Văn Hóa - Văn Nghệ, 2012).

Toward the end of the nineteenth century, political disorder contributed more to paperwork and archival destruction. The French attacks and lootings of Hue in 1883 and 1885 were just the beginning of a catastrophic journey. In 1886, the court surveyed the dynastic property, vermilion records, and state documents.¹¹⁴ Information about that survey was unfortunately unknown. Two decades later, Emperor Thanh Thai (1906) made another instruction to measure all archival holdings at the Grand Secretariat, especially cadastre, vermilion records, and prepare a catalog.¹¹⁵ The Bureau of State History was instructed to collect all *vermilion records* used for compiling *DN TL* and present them for the emperor's review.¹¹⁶ His order also involved classifying all stored files under his reign, in which 256 volumes were reported.¹¹⁷ To the best of our knowledge, the archive was last renovated in 1910 before the dismissal of the Grand Secretariat (1933).¹¹⁸

At the same time, a fundamental institutional shift occurred in the second half of nineteenth-century Vietnam. New libraries and record-stored sites were found in Hue, including Tu Khue Library 聚奎書院 (1852), Woodblock-storage Hall 藏本堂 (1857), Bao Dai Library 保大書院 (at the Pavilion of Morals 彝倫堂), New Library, etc.¹¹⁹ They not only created a new space for paperwork-holding but shifted the structure of state archival and library systems.¹²⁰ On May 2nd, 1933, Emperor Bao Dai ended the 104-year history of the Grand Secretariat with the alternative *Imperial Palace Office* 御前文房.¹²¹ The former's archives were then abandoned. By 1942, the building was leaky, and paperwork was left deteriorating.¹²²

Table 3.6. The journeys of Hue palace documents, 1942-1991

¹¹⁴ *Đông Khánh châu bản* 同慶硃本 (Vermilion records of the Dong Khanh reign), hereafter *DKCB*, 1: 101.

¹¹⁵ *Thành Thái châu bản* 成泰硃本 (Vermilion records of the Thanh Thai reign), hereafter *ThTCB*, 59: 63.

¹¹⁶ *ThTCB*, 58: 169.

¹¹⁷ *ThTCB*, 60: 129.

¹¹⁸ *Duy Tân châu bản* 維新硃本 (Vermilion records of the Duy Tan reign), hereafter, *DTCB*, 28: 65.

¹¹⁹ Boudet, "Les Archives Des Empereurs D'Annam", 235–36.

¹²⁰ See Nguyễn Tô Lan, "Thư Tịch Hán Nôm Việt Nam Trong Sở Tàng Thư Triều Nguyễn qua Các Bộ Thư Mục (Sino-Vietnamese Books in the Nguyen Libraries: Views from Extant Catalogs)," *Tạp Chí Hán Nôm* 5, no. 90 (2008): 12–26.

¹²¹ Chen, *Mục Lục Châu Bản Triều Nguyễn*, volume 1, xii.

¹²² Chen, "The Imperial Archives of the Nguyen Dynasty (1802-1945)," 125.

Years	Stored sites	Cataloging projects	Notes
1942	Institute of Culture (outside the palace Eastern Gate)	Tran Van Ly Ngo Dinh Nhu, etc.	
1959	Hue University	Chen Jinghe and the Committee of Translation of Vietnamese Historical Sources	
1961	Da Lat archive		
1975	National Archive no. II (Ho Chi Minh city)		
1991	National Archive no. I (Hanoi)	National archive no. I	

Between 1942 and 1991, the efforts to rescue and re-catalog the extant Hue state documents present one unexpected consequence. They complicated the manuscript collection by rearranging and amalgamating various newly-collected records from local/ private archives. During the 1942-project, for instance, palace paperwork belonged to at least five libraries, and archived were admixed. In the end, the Western-trained archivist Ngo Dinh Nhu (Vice-director of the Indochinese Library) turned this intermixed paperwork body into six categories:

- 1- Vermilion records
- 2- Treaties
- 3- Diplomatic letters
- 4- Printed books
- 5- Examination papers
- 6- Miscellany¹²³

In this first modern venture of an exhaustive investigation of the manuscripts, the project created the preliminary step in shaping current knowledge of the *chauban*. It also raised initial scholarly interests in the collection, mostly by French and

¹²³ Chen, *Mục Lục Châu Bản Triều Nguyễn*, volume 1, xvii. Born to a prominent political family in central Vietnam, Ngô Đình Nhu (1910-1963) earned his knowledge of the modern archival technique in the French educational system. He completed a bachelor degree in literature in Paris and then studied paleography and librarianship before graduating from French archival school, the *École Nationale des Chartes*. His professional as an archivist by training took part in introducing the foundation for modern Vietnamese archivalism. For three years between 1942 and 1944, the project collected administrative manuscripts from five palace archives and libraries in Hue, including the Bureau of State History, Book-storage Hall, Grand Secretariat archive, Grand Council archive, and Bao Dai Library to form a single collection. With *vermilion records* as the major holding, the collection was presented in a catalog drafted in both literary Chinese and modern Vietnamese. Each version had three copies, submitted to the emperor, sent to Institute of Culture, and kept for preservation respectively. Nhu's thesis at the *École Nationale des Chartes* can be found in the following, *Les mœurs et les coutumes des Annamites du Tonkin au xviii^e siècle* (The customs of the Annamese of Tonkin in the seventeenth century), École Nationale des Chartes, 1938, <http://theses.enc.sorbonne.fr/titres?de=1938> (accessed on January 5, 2019).

Vietnamese scholars.¹²⁴ In 1942 when French scholar Paul Boudier published an article, “*Les Archives des Empereurs d’Annam et l’Histoire Annamite*” (The Archives of the Annam emperors and History of the Annam People) in the *Bulletin des Amis du Vieux Hue*.¹²⁵ Compared to Nobuhiro, Boudier presented a comprehensive account of the Nguyen depositories, including a brief introduction to the history of the Vietnamese manuscript culture and bureaucratic writings (pp. 229-233), the palace secretary offices, and the Bureau of State History (pp. 234-38). The central part is dedicated to five categories of the holding items, namely:

1. Pre-nineteenth century official records.
2. Records were issued in the reign of Gia Long and his successors.
3. Official investitures.
4. Imperial writings.
5. Literature.

Although records at the Eastern Hall may not be available to Boudier, he was able to access some vermilion records at the Bureau of State History, in which two memorials belonging to the Gia Long and Minh Menh reigns were presented. In the following years, however, the first Indochinese war (1945-1954) would claim most of the destruction of the palace records. Nguyen dynasty collapsed in 1945, leaving the imperial city ransacking. Piles of palace records were sold at local markets of Dong Ba,

¹²⁴ In 1937, French historian Pierre Daudin published an essential work on Sino-Vietnamese Sigillography through surveying officials and private seals. Despite coming across various collections and classical references, and given the fact that palace manuscripts (*chauban* in particular) are great sigillography sources, Daudin did not consider *chauban* and mentioned none in the referential list. Another archivist and historian, Matsumoto Nobuhiro 松本信廣 (1897-1981), one of the founders of Southeast Asian Studies in Japan, also plays a pioneering role in opening the Nguyen royal libraries (王室所藏) to the public intellectual. Despite having a field trip to French Indochina in 1933, he was unable to make a comprehensive survey of the grand secretariat archives. His paper, *Catalogue of the An Nam’s Imperial Archives* (1935) provides a brief introduction to more than four hundred cataloged units belong to different Nguyen libraries. The absence of “*chauban*” however might suggest that Matsumoto was not able to touch upon the Eastern Tower manuscripts where several thousand volumes of memorials located.

See Pierre Daudin, *Sigillographie Sino-Annamite* (Sài Gòn: Imprimerie de l’Union, 1937).; Matsumoto Nobuhiro 松本信廣, 越南王室所藏安南本書目, 史學, Vol. 14, No. 2 (1935. 8), p. 111(293)- 154 (336); Petra Karlova, “Orientalism in Pre-War Japanese Ethnology: The Case of Matsumoto Nobuhiro’s Writings on Southeast Asia between 1933-1939,” *Waseda University Journal of the Graduate School of Asia-Pacific Studies* 29, no. 3 (2015): 1–19.

¹²⁵ Paul Boudier published the article, “Les Archives Des Empereurs D’Annam et L’Histoire Annamite” in 1942. On the Vietnamese archives, also see Bui Quang Tung, “Pour Une Meilleure Conservation Des Archives Vietnamiennes,” *France-Asie* 109–110 (1955): 742–46.

Bao Vinh, Nam Pho, and Sam.¹²⁶ As Chen Jinghe predicted, at least 80 per cent of the Hue imperial archives had gone.¹²⁷ One crucial source related to the palace archives in those turmoil years was probably the *Catalogue of the Imperial chauban* 皇朝硃本目錄 (hereafter *HTCBML*). The manuscript at the Yale library belongs to a collection of the prominent EFEO scholar Maurice M. Durand.¹²⁸ This brief 57-page catalog exposes two exciting features. First, the scale of *chauban* manuscripts reached 3,171 volumes (compared to more than 700 nowadays).¹²⁹ Secondly, the phrase “*Imperial dynasty*” 皇朝 used to entitle this catalog may suggest that the scribe/ author was associated with the Nguyen or under the Nguyen rule.



Figure 3.17. The cover and page 3 of *HTCBML*.
Source: *HTCBML*.

¹²⁶ Ngự tiền Văn phòng Châu bản - Triều Bảo Đại 御前文房硃本朝保大 (Vermilion records of the Palace secretary office – Bao Dai reign), 保大元年 Bao Dai’s first year [1939], No. GLH HN 000004. Private Library of Phan Thuận An (Huế, Việt Nam), http://vietcenter.temple.edu/glh/glh.php?dcat=dc:identifier&page=1&dc_invcode=hn%2F000004%2F001%2F001 (accessed October 10, 2018). This volume of BDCB is an example of the Nguyen bureaucratic manuscripts deposited in many private libraries in Huế. The volume contains 93 pp of 80 manuscripts produced during the first year of the BD reign (1939).

¹²⁷ Chen, *Mục Lục Châu Bản Triều Nguyễn*, volume 1, xxxii.

¹²⁸ *Hoàng triều châu bản mục lục* 皇朝硃本目錄 (Catalogue of the Imperial *chauban*), Durand Maurice Collection, Yale University Library, No. MS 1728.

¹²⁹ *HTCBML*, 49. The manuscript also lists all the volume from reign to reign; starting with the volume-title 書名共部數, then comes the content 內容, volume number 現釘數, cataloged number 號數, cataloged number in French 數法, and the volume-condition 備或欠. Many are marked with the conditional description in literary Chinese “污弊” and Vietnamese scripts: “*hãm nát*” (damaged). See *HTCBML*, 6.

Chen Jinghe had examined *chauban* more thoroughly than any other. His contributions were based upon a detailed investigation of the collection between 1959 and 1965. Born in Taizhong (Taiwan) on 28/09/1917, Chen studied Oriental History under the direction of Professor Matsumoto Nobuhiro (Keio University, Japan). Between March 1943 and September 1945, he worked as an intern at the EFEO, where he learned Vietnamese, Southeast Asian history and married a Vietnamese woman. He started a teaching career at the National University of Taiwan in 1946 before earning support from the China Foundation (New York) for further study at the *Institute des hautes études Chinoises de Paris*.¹³⁰ In 1958, he returned to Vietnam and worked as a visiting professor at Hue University and then the general secretary of the “Committee for the translation of the Vietnamese Historical Sources” between 1959 and 1965.¹³¹ The table below shows the volume of the Hue’s extant documents in 1959, reported by Chen.

¹³⁰ Léon Vandermeersch, “Chingho A. Chen (1917-1995),” *Bulletin de l’Ecole Française d’Extrême-Orient* 83, no. 1 (1996): 10–17.

¹³¹ According to Chen’s wife, the story of rescuing the palace manuscripts traced back in 1958 as he was doing research at the Bao Dai Library. Chen found a large number of boxes stacked outside the reading room. Opening the boxes, he found that they contained the extremely valuable Nguyen palace memorials with total of 612 volumes (just 19% of the original 3,171). In 1959, professor Hoa was appointed by the Southern Vietnam’s president, Ngo Dinh Diem as President of the “Committee for the translation of the Vietnamese Historical Sources”. Considering catalogization of the *chauban* as the committee’s priority, he was so eager to save the manuscript that he began to work immediately without waiting for the final approval of the Department of Education. By that, he was said to spend his own pocket money during the first four months of the project. With collaboration and aid from Harvard-Yenching Institute, Asia Foundation, and Chinese Council for Eastern Asian Studies (Taipei), the project could employ veteran scholars who mastery Sino-Nom language to summarize each memorial in roughly one hundred-word Sino-Nom, and then a Vietnamese translation. The summary of each memorial was paid with 10 *dong* (equivalence to two kilogram of rice).

See Li, “Review of Muc Luc Chau Ban Trieu Nguyen (Catalogue of the Nguyen Archives), Compiled and Edited by Chen Chingho. Hue: University of Hue, 1960-1962,” 465. And the story told by Ngô Văn Lại, youngest member of the translation committee in the 1960s: Nguyễn Trương Đán, “Gặp Người Cuối Cùng Trong Nhóm Biên Dịch ‘Mục Lục Châu Bản Triều Nguyễn (Meet the Last Member of the Translating Group of ‘the Catalogue of Nguyen Vermilion Records),” *Tap chí Sông Hương*, 2009, <http://tapchisonghuong.com.vn/tap-chi/c175/n3369/Gap-nguoi-cuoi-cung-trong-nhom-bien-dich-Muc-luc-Chau-ban-trieu-Nguyen.html>. (accessed on October 10, 2018).

Table 3.7. The Extant Nguyen palace paperwork in 1959¹³²

No.	Reigns	Volumes
1	Gia Long Reign (1802 - 1919)	5
2	Minh Menh Reign (1820 - 1840)	83
3	Thieu Tri Reign (1841 - 1847)	51
4	Tu Duc Reign (1848 - 1883)	352
5	Kien Phuc Reign (1884)	1
6	Dong Khanh Reign (1886 - 1888)	4
7	Thanh Thai Reign (1889 - 1907)	74
8	Duy Tan Reign (1907 - 1916)	35
9	Khai Dinh Reign (1916 - 1925)	4
10	Bao Dai Reign (1926 - 1945)	2
Total	611 tomes in 10 reigns	611

Between 1960 and 1962, a two-volume catalog was published, presenting four out of five Gia Long's chauban-volumes (723 documents), and ten out of eighty-three volumes of the Minh Mennh reign (971 documents). By 1965, the project had already worked on records of the Tu Duc reign (until the 1870s).

Table 3.8. Chen Jinghe's project of cataloging chauban¹³³

Reigns	No. of cataloged volumes	No. of documents	
		Unpublished catalog	Published catalog
Gia Long	4 volumes		723
Minh Menh reign	33+ 10 volumes	4,93	971
Thieu Tri reign	35 volumes	5,978	
Tu Duc reign	53 volumes	7,842	
Total	121 volumes	18,351	1,694
		20,045	

Part of Chen's project also involved the digitalization of chauban. Some of the microfilm rolls were presented to the US government and are now stored at the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum (JFK Library, Boston). They comprise

¹³² Chen, *Mục Lục Châu Bản Triều Nguyễn*, volume 1, xvii–xviii.

¹³³ Catalogues of the Nguyen Imperial documents, Hue University of Science Library; and Li Tana's Review of Chen's works (1997).

A recent report from the NAI shows a slightly different number of 18,191-catalogued documents.

Reigns	No. of catalogued volumes	No. of documents
Minh Menh reign	33 volumes	4,428
Thieu Tri reign	35 volumes	5,885
Tu Duc reign	53 volumes	7,878
Total	121 volumes	18,191

See Nguyễn Thu Hoài, "Cấu Trúc Nội Tại Châu Bản Triều Minh Mệnh (Internal Structure of the Chauban of the Minh Menh Reign)" (MA thesis, Hanoi National University, 2010), 43.

sixty-four microfilm rolls of the Nguyen administrative records, five volumes of the GLCB, and 59 volumes of the MMCB, with 13,260 images. Some of those files were copied and sent to other libraries in the US and Australia, such as the Australian National University (ANU, Canberra), Hamilton Library (the University of Hawaii at Manoa), and Harvard-Yenching Library (Harvard University).

II. 3. Structures of the extant Nguyen palace paperwork

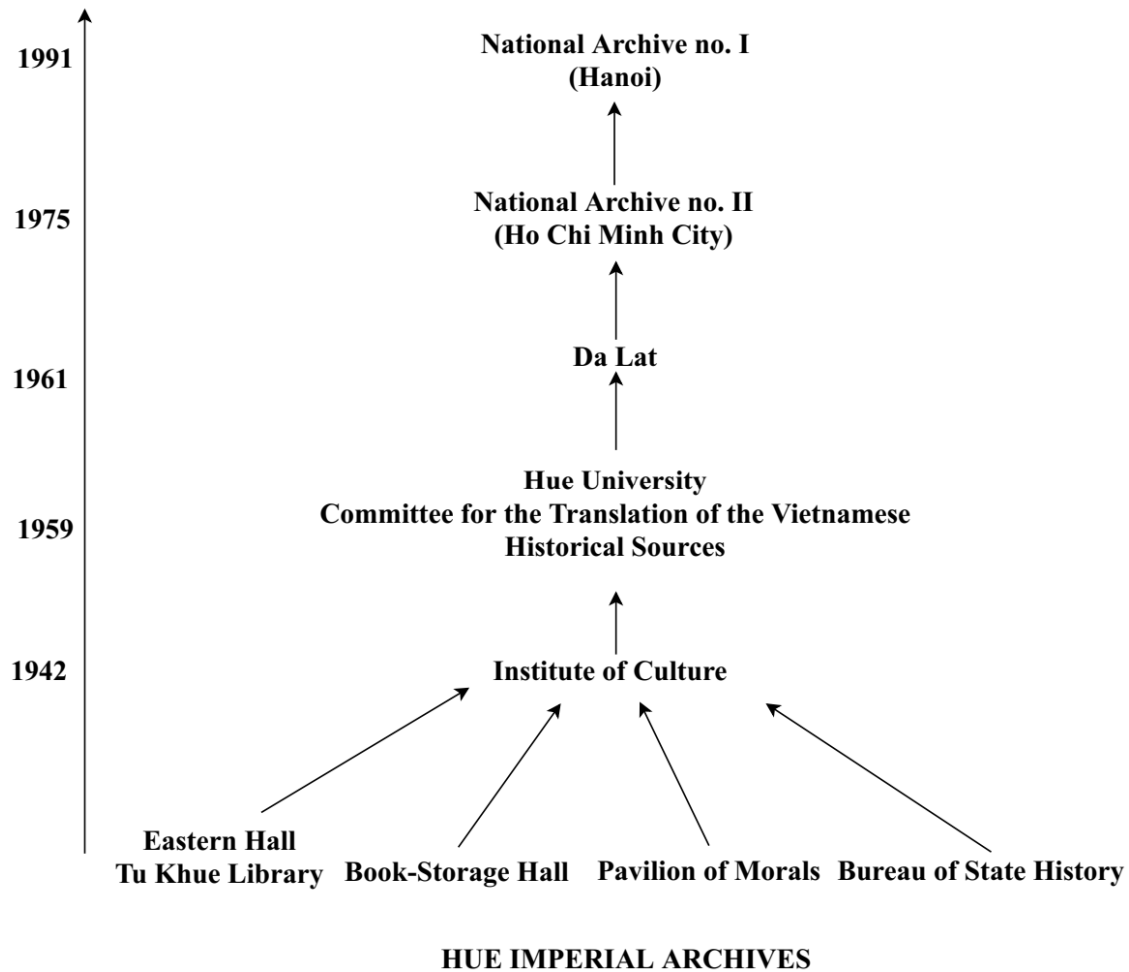


Figure 3.18. The journeys of Hue archival records, 1942-1991. Source: author.

After decades under tight archival control, chauban was sent from Saigon to Hanoi in the early 1990s, where a new state project re-cataloged and preserved the manuscripts. Reports by the NA1 in 1991 suggested that they had received 611 volumes of vermilion records, as inspected in 1975. Additionally, the collection added

128 volumes of newly collected manuscripts, 15 volumes of curdled and damaged manuscripts, and four packs of unbound records. The 1993 survey reported their physical conditions:

4%	9%	75 %	12 %
heavily-curdled and damaged	slightly-gluey and torn	slightly-moldy and damp	Good condition

Among 27- heavily-damaged volumes, six belong to the Minh Menh reign, six to the Thieu Tri reign, fourteen to the Tu Duc, and one to the Thanh Thai reign.¹³⁴ The ten-year mission (1993-2003) presented a new catalog with an additional 132 new volumes. In total, 82,511 documents (400,000 pages and 716 volumes) have been summarized, cataloged, and digitalized.¹³⁵

Table 3.10. The scale of the Nguyen Palace records at the NA1, 2015 ¹³⁶
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¹³⁴ Nguyễn, *Cấu trúc nội tại*, 38–39.

¹³⁵ Philippe Langlet also briefly the history of the Nguyen palace archives. See Philippe Langlet, “Lecture de Deux Rapports Dans Les Archives Du Règne Tự Đức (1868),” in *Monde Du Việt Nam: Hommage à Nguyễn Thế Anh*, ed. Mantine Fréderic and W. Taylor Keith (Paris: Les Indes Savantes, 2008), 197–242.

¹³⁶ Trung tâm lưu trữ Quốc gia I, *Mục Lục Châu Bản Triều Nguyễn, Tập 1 (Gia Long, 1802-1819) và Minh Mệnh, 1820-1824) (Catalogue of the Nguyen Vermilion Records, Vol.1 (Gia Long Reign, 1802-1820 and Minh Menh Reign, 1820-1824))* (Hà Nội: Nxb Văn hóa thông tin, 2010), iii–vi. Trung, iii–vi. There has been also a process of publishing new *chauban* catalogue conducted by the NA1. In 1998, Catalog of the Nguyen *chauban*, vol. 2 (阮朝硃本目錄) was published, covering 10 volumes of the MNCB (vol. 11- vol. 20). With the support of Toyota Foundation, an English translation of this work was done in 2000. The first catalogued volume however, came out after 10 years (2010) as a revised and an edited version of Chen’s works (1960 and 1962). At the same time, there are also scholars who start working on those administrative manuscripts, but mostly utilizing *chauban* as historical materials rather than a subject of philology and manuscript culture. With the recent openness of the NA1, we certainly looking forward for coming research on the field in both the dynastic paperwork and the history of its archives and libraries that based on new materials that come to public access. Phan Huy Lê, “Châu Bản Triều Nguyễn và Châu Bản Năm Minh Mệnh 6-7 (Nguyen Vermilion Records and Vermilion Records in the Minh Menh’s 6th-7th Years),” in *Mục Lục Châu Bản Triều Nguyễn 阮朝硃本目錄, tập 2. Năm Minh Mệnh 6 (1825) và 7 (1826)*, ed. Huy Lê. Phan et al. (Hà Nội: Văn Hóa, 1998), XI–XLVII; Phan Huy Lê, *Mục Lục Châu Bản Triều Nguyễn (Catalogue of the Vermilion Records of the Nguyen Dynasty), Vol. 2* (Hà Nội: Văn Hóa, 1998).

Other works on *chauban* include Nguyen The Anh, *Phong Trào Kháng Thuế ở Miền Trung Năm 1908 qua Các Châu Bản Triều Duy Tân (The Anti-Tax Movement in the Central Region in 1908: A View from Vermilion Records)*; Hoa, *Châu Bản Triều Nguyễn: Tư Liệu Phật Giáo qua Các Triều Đại Nhà Nguyễn 143 Năm Từ Gia Long 1802 Đến Bảo Đại 1945 (Vermilion Records of the Nguyen Dynasty: Sources on Buddhism through the Nguyen Reigns between 1802 and 1945)*; Vương Đình Quyền, *Văn Bản Quản Lý Nhà Nước và Công Tác Công Văn, Giấy Tờ Thời Phong Kiến Việt Nam (State-Administered Documents and Paperwork Management in the Feudal Vietnam)*

	Reigns	No. of volumes in the 1960s.	Additional volumes in 2003	Heavily-damaged volumes	Catalogued volumes	No. of documents
1	Gia Long	5	2	0	7	878
2	Minh Mệnh	83	5	6	47	11,825
3	Thiệu Trị	51	2	6	47	7,375
4	Tự Đức	352	35	14	373	41,460
5	Kiến Phúc	1	0	0	1	92
6	Hàm Nghi	0	2	0	2	157
7	Đồng Khánh	4	22	0	26	3,189
8	Thành Thái	74	24	1	97	10,398
9	Duy Tân	35	16	0	51	4,939
10	Khải Định	4	6	0	10	834
11	Bảo Đại	2	18	0	20	1,364
	Total	611	132	27	716	82,511

For the Gia Long and Minh Menh reigns, existing documents are numbered 12,703. They are diverse in types and formats corresponding to the bureaucratic nature of their times. A brief examination of the extant chauban dated 1805, 1821, 1830, and 1837 hopes to give a glimpse at the manuscript body that will be investigated in the coming chapters. The years are chosen because they provide the best possible detailed analysis of the Nguyen archives. With 422 documents, GL4 (1805) owns the highest quantity of remaining paperwork of the first reign. MM2 (1821), MM11 (1830), and MM18 (1837) were significant times of the dynastic institutional reforms.

(Hà Nội: Chính trị Quốc gia, 2002); Bradley C. Davis, *Imperial Bandits: Outlaws and Rebels in the China-Vietnam Borderlands* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2017); Nguyễn Công Việt, *Ấn Chương Việt Nam (Seals of Vietnam)* (Hà Nội: Khoa học Xã hội, 2006); Trung tâm Lưu trữ Quốc gia I TTLTQG1, *Ngự Phê Trên Châu Bản Triều Nguyễn (1802 - 1945) (Imperial Comments on the Nguyễn Vermilion Records (1802-1945))* (Hanoi: Đại học Sư phạm, 2016); Nguyễn Thị Thu Hương, Thị Thu Thủy Đoàn, and Nguyễn Công Việt, *Ấn Chương Trên Châu Bản Triều Nguyễn, 1802-1945 (Sealed Imprints on the Nguyen Vermilion Records, 1802-1945)* (Hanoi: Nxb Hà Nội, 2013); Vũ Thanh Hằng, Trà Ngọc Anh, and Tạ Quang Phát, *Châu Bản Triều Tự Đức (1848-1883): Tuyển Chọn và Lược Thuật (Vermilion Records in the Reign of Tự Đức (1848-1883): Selections and Abstracts)* (Hanoi: Nxb Văn học, 2003).

As part of the cooperation between the CSMC (Hamburg University) and NA1, Ms. Tran Thi Xuan is conducting a research on *The Archival practice of the central government of the Nguyen dynasty (1802-1945)*. The study is hoped to shed new light on this obscure subject. I also like to thank Tran Thi Xuan for many lengthy fruitful discussions on the topic.

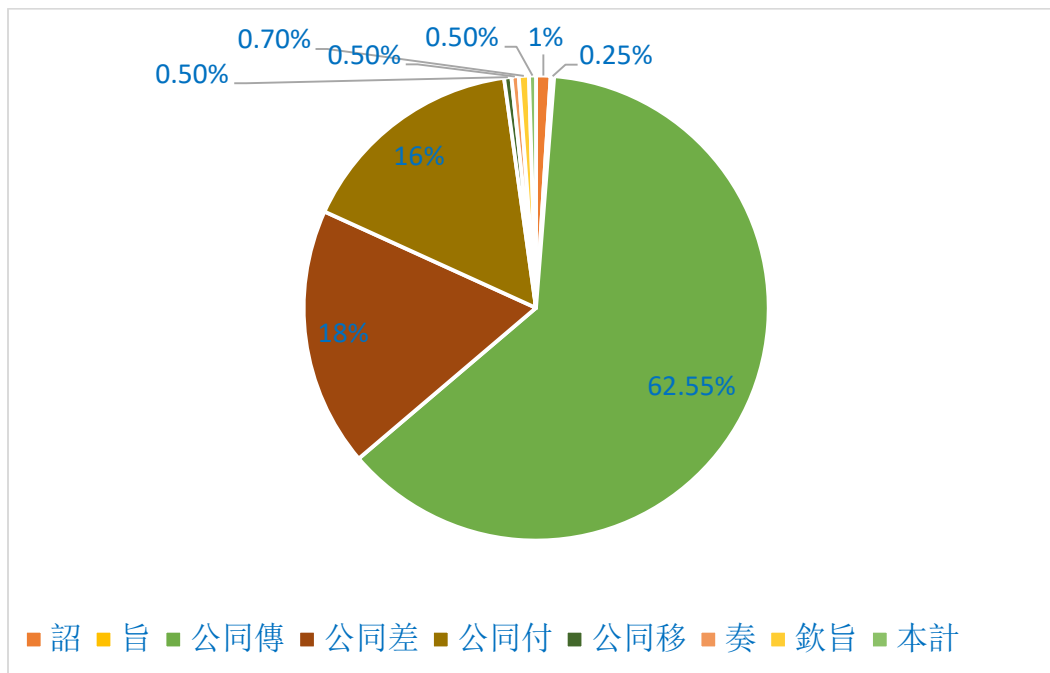


Chart 3.1. The proportion of the 1805-extant paperwork (by percentage)

Source: author

Notes

No.	Type of documents	Percentage
1	詔 Proclamations	1%
2	旨 Decrees	0.25%
4	共同差 Orders for official missions	18%
5	共同傳 Administrative directions	62.55%
6	共同付 Certificates and nominations	16%
7	共同移 Directives to inferior offices	0.50%
8	奏 Memorials	0.50%
9	欽旨 Following imperial decree	0.70%
10	本計 Official plans or reported lists.	0.50%

The following chart shows the proportion of 1821-extant chauban by percentage. It was the second year of the Minh Menh reign when the new emperor searched for a document-based system to facilitate bureaucratic centralization. Memorials contribute 82% of the remaining. Emperor documents [edicts] took second place with 15%. Personal rule shifted the mechanism of court communication in Hue. More direct information came to the emperor's desk in the form of memorials. The delivery of the ruler's orders was also translated more into written form, resulting in the rise of edicts

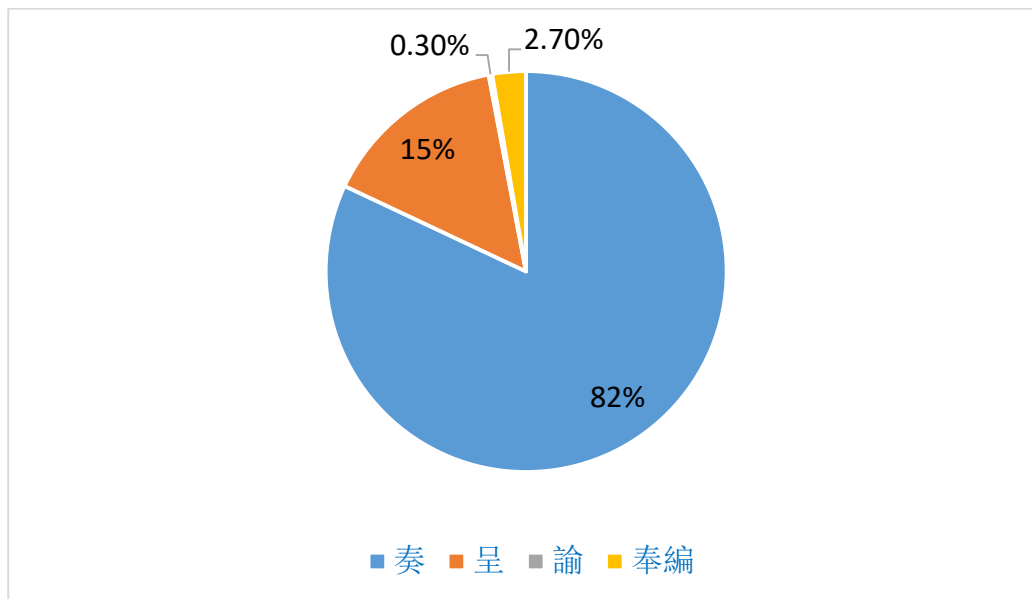


Chart 3.2. The proportion of the 1821 existing paperwork (by percentage)

Source: Author

Notes: 奏 (memorials), 呈 (reports), 諭 (edicts), 奉編 (official notes).

MM11 (1830) and MM18 (1837) played essential roles in the paperwork evolution of the second reign because they signalled the developments resulted from undeviating institutional establishments. In 1830, the Grand Secretariat was founded and accompanied by the centralization of the palace record. The move intensified the paperwork-based bureaucratization before palace papers climaxed in 1834. With military campaigns in the north, south, and Cambodia, a flood of official records plundered into the imperial capital. The need for reforming paperwork regulations arose. Immediately, the bureaucrats were ordered to reduce record production.¹³⁷

Table 3.11. The proportion of paperwork produced in 1830 (by percentage)

Source: MMCB, NA1.

Total / types	Following imperial edicts 奉諭	Official notes 奉編	Following imperial decrees 奉旨	Following imperial ordinances 奉勅	Proclamation 詔	Edicts 諭	Memorials 奏	Replied reports 覆	Decreed 旨	Reports 編
968 documents	4	9	27	2	6	1	897	16	1	2
100 %	0.4%	0.9%	2.7%	0.2%	0.6%	0.1%	90.1%	1.6%	0.1%	0.2%

¹³⁷ DNTL, II, 109: 13b-14a.

The pattern of the remaining chauban in 1837 might feature some of the changing paperwork policies, reflected through document-type proportions. While extant memorials dominated the document landscape (79%), edicts captured 15% of the share. At the same time, some exchanged documents were reduced compared to their percentage contribution in 1830.

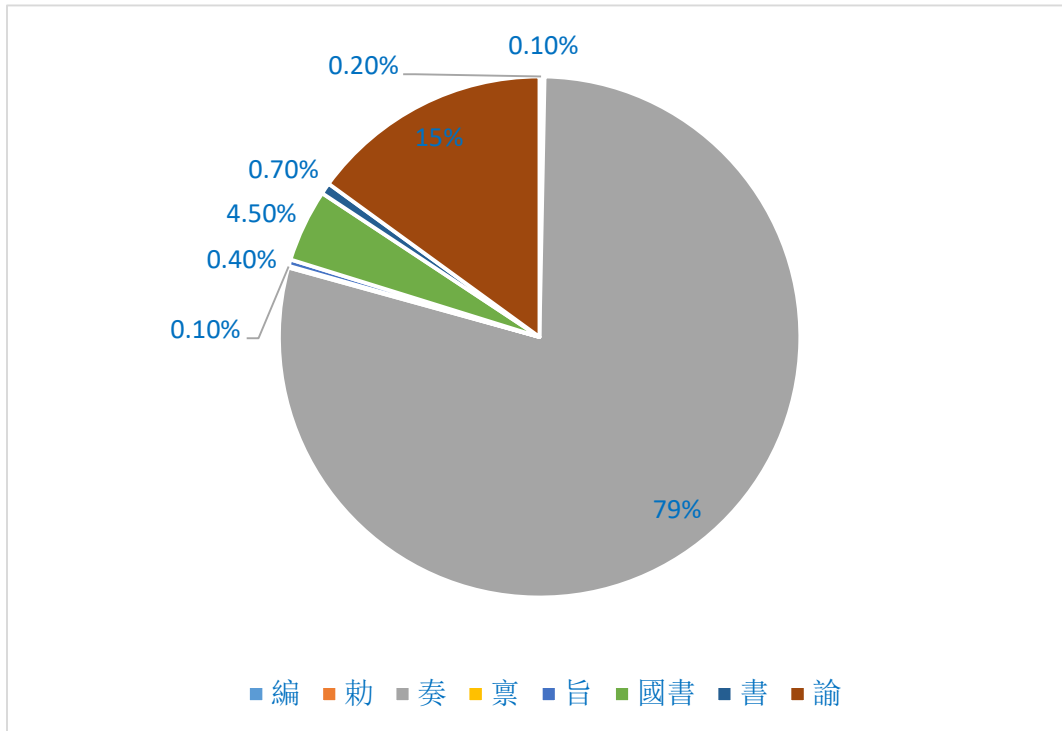


Chart 3.3. The proportion of the 1837 extant paperwork (by percentage)
Source: author

Notes: 奏 (memorials), 稟 (reports), 旨 (decrees), 國書 (diplomatic letters), 書 (official letters), 諭 (edicts).

The emperor's design of promoting written bureaucracy motivated such a fluctuating rhythm. Official records were mobilized for the control of the administration. The results were more institutions, and mutually-inspected principles were introduced to the administration. The burgeoning quantity of tally suggestions 票擬, exchanged documents 咨, reports 呈, official notes 片錄, replied reports 覆呈 etc. were a direct outcome of the local-central and inter-institutional correspondence while the emperor stood at the middle of such a paperwork orchestra. Transformation of the document types was also grounded upon overseeing different phrases of record circulations. Drafters, scribes, transporters, examiners, and decision-makers made

themselves visually presented on the pages. So did the hierarchical ranking and administrative level with seal stamps, elevated characters, and document layouts. Bureaucratic standardization attached document types with specified hierarchical usage. The operation of the Hue administration became heavily dependent on the document system. As a result, paperwork culture had taken part in shaping the dynasty's political culture.

CHAPTER IV. DELIVERY OF IMPERIAL AUTHORITY: FROM THE WORDS OF CONGDONG TO THE WORDS OF EMPERORS

皇王施令，寅嚴宗誥。我有絲言，兆民伊好。輝音峻舉，
鴻風遠蹈。騰義飛辭，渙其大號。

The august king, in giving orders,
Shows inner reverence and outer respect in his pronouncements.
His words are like silk,¹
And all the people love to hear them.
Their brilliant sound soars high,
And on might winds is carried to a distance.
Vigorous idea ad lively language
Decorate these, his majestic commands.²

Liu Xie, *Wenxin Diaolong*.

IV. 1. The Politics of *Congdong* Paperwork

Because official communication determines statecraft efficiency, correspondence and deliberative mechanisms are essential to bureaucratic operations. The determination was even more vital to early nineteenth-century Vietnam when the newly-unified domain required the establishment of infrastructure and institutions to deliver central authority. Rapidly-expanded territory and a delicate bureaucratic system placed the Hue court in high demand of complex correspondence. In 1790, Nguyen Phuc Anh ruled a domain of roughly 40,000 square kilometers. That territory extended rapidly in 1802 by 250,000 and nearly 400,000 in the mid-1830s, including eastern Laos and Cambodia.³ Expanding communication management confronted the small war cabinet and its capability to uphold increasingly composite governance. Bureaucratization enlarged that state structure, at the same time generating factional conflicts and regional antagonism. Gia Long's statecraft identity had evolved from a local-warlord government to an imperial court. Here is that critical political shift seen from the perspectives of correspondence and paperwork.

¹ "The words of the ruler are like silk fiber, but when they are spoken they are like threads; the words of a ruler are like threads, but when they are spoken they are like robes". *The Book of Rites* 禮記. See Liu, *The Literary Mind*, 111, note 9.

² Liu Xie, *Wenxin Diaolong*, 244; English translation, Liu Xie, *The Literary Mind*, 116.

³ Ngaosyvathn Mayoury and Ngaosyvathn Pheuiphanh, *Paths to Conflagration: Fifty Years of Diplomacy and Warfare in Laos, Thailand, and Vietnam, 1778-1828* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998); *Trấn Tây phong thổ ký* "鎮西風土記"; Vũ Đức Liêm, "The Rise of the Nguyen Dynasty and Change in the Power Paradigm of Early Nineteenth Century Mainland Southeast Asia" (MA thesis, Chulalongkorn University, 2012).

Between the 1780s and 1820s, Congdong played essential roles in the struggle for leadership and decision-making. In 1778, the seventeenth-year-old prince Phuc Anh became the state leader in Saigon, but the real power-holder was a military leader, Do Thanh Nhan (杜清仁, ?-1781). As the most powerful commander in the lower Mekong, Nhan controlled the Dong Son army [東山上將軍 *Dong Son Superior Commander*], and profoundly contributed to the rise of the young prince. In 1780, the Nguyen ruler appointed Nhan regent 輔政, and soon he felt the bitterness of power abuse.⁴ Although Nhan was executed one year later, the experience haunted Nguyen Phuc Anh. It also prevented the future Gia Long emperor from ever creating any single power-concentrated post under his authority. When the prince recaptured Saigon in 1788, he denied a single powerful post but a committee of courtiers: Congdong.⁵ The organ soon became the heart of Nguyen's war machine, acting as a war cabinet and executive authority.⁶ Although authoritative scholars of Vietnamese history equated its roles to a Grand Council,⁷ Congdong's functional operations expanded to the advisory, executive, and judicial domains.

The birth of Congdong was associated with the late eighteenth-century bureaucratic environment, which witnessed the emergence of local polity and statecraft. In Hanoi, Trinh Lords appointed *the Officials of the Lord-Palace* 府僚 and *Six Offices* 六番 (a replication of the Six Boards).⁸ Tayson, under the Quang Trung reign, presented to the *Court audience* 朝堂.⁹ The same fashion guided Nguyen Phuc

⁴ See Choi, *Southern Vietnam*, 25–27.

⁵ On Nguyễn Phúc Ánh's exile and power-struggle, see Vũ, "The Age of Sea Falcons, 103–29.

⁶ Nguyễn Phúc Ánh ruled as a king in southern Vietnam between 1788 and 1802 before became King Gia Long (from 1802), and Emperor Gia Long (from 1806) of the unified Vietnam.

⁷ Chen, *Mục Lục Châu Bản*, vol., xxxiii.; Choi, *Southern Vietnam*, 21, note 7.

⁸ *Khâm Định Việt Sử Thông Giám Cương Mục* 欽定越史通鑑綱目 (*The Imperially Ordered Mirror and Commentary on the History of the Viet*), hereafter *KDVSTGCM*, (National Library, 53 volumes, 1884), books 34-35.

⁹ Tayson extant documents reveal the roles of the *Court audience* 朝堂 which was somehow identical to the Nguyen's *Congdong*. Its seal, "Seal of the Court Audience" 朝堂之印 was strikingly displayed in a number of important official files (figure 4.1) where the institute executed major administrative affairs at the court as the same manner operated by *Congdong*. See two official instructions 傳 by *Court audience* 朝堂 to Nguyễn Thiếp in 1792. Hoàng Xuân Hãn, *La Sơn Phu Tử* (Paris: Minh Tân, 1952), 253, 254.

Anh’s war machine. In that manner, Congdong was designed for the advantage of swift decision-making and mobility in times of warfare. After the 1802 victory, the Gia Dinh court gradually transformed into a bureaucratic state. Still, a cohort of the ruler’s confidants and board chiefs continued to maintain Congdong for two decades more.

Table 4.1. Key Nguyen’s civil officials, 1788-1809¹⁰

Years	Names	Titles/ roles	Notes
1788	Nguyễn Văn Thành	General-Commander of the North, chief compiler of the Gia Long Law code	
	Lê Quang Định	Board President	
	Trịnh Hoài Đức	President of the Board of Revenue and Personnel, Assistant to the General-Commander of the South, envoy to the Qing (1802)	
	Ngô Tông Chu	President of the Board of Rites	
	Ngô Nhân Tịnh	Vice president of the Board of Defence	
1791	Đặng Đức Siêu	President of the Board of Rites	
	Phạm Ngọc Uân	Vice-President of the Board of Justice	
	Lê Bá Phẩm	Vice-President of the Board of Justice	
1793	Đặng Trần Thường	Vice-President of the Board of Personnel	
1794	Trần Phúc Hậu	Vice-President of the Board of Justice	
1794	Lê Bá Phẩm	Vice-President of the Board of Justice, envoy to the Qing (1804)	
1795	Trần Văn Tính	Vice-President of the Board of Public Works	
	Trần Lợi Trinh	Hanlin scholar	
	Hoàng Văn Diễn	Academician of the Eastern Hall.	
1797	Trần Hưng Đạt	Vice-President of the Board of Rites, Minh Menh Emperor’s maternal grandfather	
1800	Phạm Đăng Hưng	Vice-President of the Board of Personnel, Tu Duc Emperor’s maternal grandfather.	
	Trần Văn Trạc	Surrendered Tayson official, Vice-President of the Board of Justice.	
	Nguyễn Gia Cát	Academician of the Hall of Diligent Politics, Vice-President of the Board of Rites, envoy to the Qing (1802)	

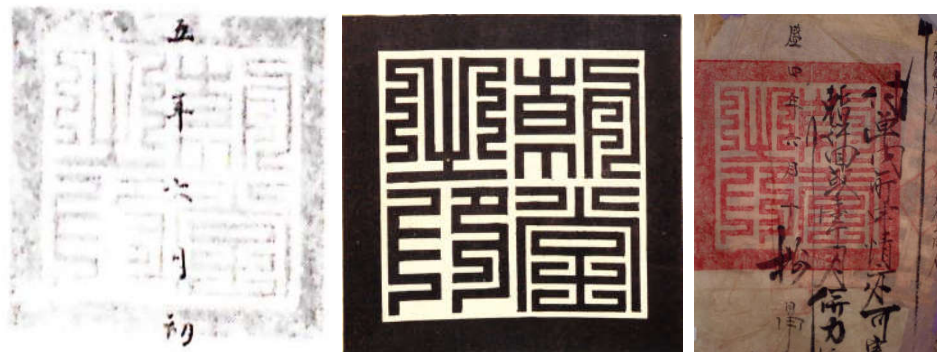


Figure 4.1. The Tayson seal stamp: “Seal of the Court Audience” 朝堂之印.

Source: Hoàng, 1952: 254, 259.

See Lê Nguyễn Lưu, “Dấu Ấn Chương Thời Tây Sơn Trên Văn Bản Hán Nôm Huế (Tayson Sealed Stamps on Sino-Nom Documents in Hue),” *Tạp Chí Nghiên Cứu và Phát Triển* 3, no. 68 (2008): 49; Nguyễn Công Việt, *Ấn Chương Việt Nam (Seals of Vietnam)* (Hà Nội: Khoa học Xã hội, 2006), 255–56. Lê Nguyễn Lưu provides a number of sample of sealed stamps on Tayson documents in private storage in Hue region, Lê, “Dấu Ấn Chương Thời Tây Sơn Trên Văn Bản Hán Nôm Huế (Tayson Sealed Stamps on Sino-Nom Documents in Hue).” See more on the Tayson court under the Quang Trung reign, and its staff shortage in *KD/STGCM*, 47: 31a.

¹⁰ In 1809, for the first time, a full-Six Board installation was presented. *DNLT*, I, 10: 9a.

1802	Nguyễn Viên	Academician of the Hall of Diligent Politics	
	Vũ Trinh	Vice-President of the Board of Justice	
	Nguyễn Du	Vice President of the Board of Rites, envoy to the Qing (1813).	
	Nguyễn Hữu Thân	Vice-President of the Board of Personnel, envoy to the Qing (1809).	
	Hoàng Kim Hoán	Hanlin scholar	
1809	Trần Hựu	Academician of the East Hall ¹¹	

The image of Congdong in the Nguyen *Veritable Record* was unfortunately obscure. This is mainly because the historical record was compiled under the Minh Minh and Thieu Tri rules, who had no interest in portraying Congdong as an “autonomous” branch of executive power. Dynastic history suggests that Congdong had a meeting hall 公同署 where military-and-civil officials conducted discussions 文武會議. The council’s responsibility was to discuss and issue royal commands (凡遵旨傳示差派公同稱之). Its papers were authorized with the seal, “*Discussed and decided together*” 僉言允協” in black ink 墨泥.¹² Congdong, however, was not only advisory but also executive and judicial. A month after the founding, it was requested to process cases of unsatisfied claimers who found the local officers’ judgments unjust.¹³ In other circumstances, their endorsed documents 批憑 were mandatory to detain unregistered males 漏丁.¹⁴ The transportation of Congdong paperwork became an essential part of Gia Dinh communication, resulting in new regulations under which only documents that bore Congdong and the crown prince-sealed stamps were subjected to the postal delivery 凡奉差員人有公同與東宮之印給者方得驛遞.¹⁵

How Congdong collected the submitted documents and drafted their own is another story. Little was known about its documentation functions, including processing and preparing paperwork. There were hundreds of surviving Congdong files at NA1, concerning state affairs of all kinds. Dynastic records also indicated its role in delivering instructions and commands following royal orders.¹⁶ In other words, the court audience spread royal authority through their channels. The drafters of the *Congdong* paperwork mainly remained unknown. Dynastic biographies (*DNLT*) named a few crucial figures, including Nguyen Vien 阮瑣 ((1752-1804), a scholar

¹¹ *Đông các học sĩ* 東閣學士.

¹² *DNTL*, I, 3: 16a.

¹³ *DNTL*, I, 3: 20a-b.

¹⁴ *DNTL*, I, 4: 13a-b.

¹⁵ *DNTL*, I, 7: 2a.

¹⁶ *DNTL*, I, *Notes on the use of the DNLT* 凡例: 1b-2a. “綸音頒下曰敕曰諭公同遵旨傳示者亦以敕諭書之.” [“The royal sent-down instructions are called ordinance and edict. Congdong followed to deliver [the royal commands]; [the documents] are also called ordinance and edict”].

from Thanh Hoa whose talent and loyalty had Gia Long's confidence. Appointed as Scholar of the Hall of Diligent Politics, he worked closely with the monarch, recommended candidates for officialdom, and strongly opposed appointments of former Tayson officials to the new state.¹⁷ “Most of the *Congdong* instructions and village code-of-conducts were drafted by Vien” 共同傳詞鄉飲條例, 多出瑣所撰也.¹⁸ His rise suggests how royal confidants entered Congdong and their role in the operation of court documents.

After 1802, Congdong continued upholding the center of Hue bureaucracy and took responsibility for both deliveries of imperial authority and some executive roles. In 1803, the king issued a proclamation 詔 to high-ranking court officials, encouraging them to do bureaucratic work: “Our kingdom has just been pacified, the affairs are abundant. I have tens of thousands of businesses daily, [I am] afraid that they will not be all [treated] perfectly. You are close [to the throne], should work diligently, and do well for politics” (國家甫定, 事務殷繁, 朕一日萬幾, 恐不能一一周悉. 卿等咸預弼隣, 當思明聽翼爲共裨政理). As a result, military officials whose ranks were Division Commander, Division Vice-Commander, and Deputy-Chief General (統制, 副都統制, 副將); and from Boards' Vice President (參知, 2B)¹⁹ were summoned to gather monthly on four days: the 1st, 8th, 15th, and 23rd at the Left Hall (左廡). For state affairs that board departments were unauthorised to address, the court audience was the one that should discuss. For essential issues, [the court audience] should also debate in advance before memorializing for approval” 凡四日會議于左廡. 凡百司庶務不能決者, 商同裁理. 至如關重事體亦先酌議然後奏裁.²⁰ Royal authorization was the secret of the Congdong authority. In 1802, it was provided with a new seal “*Seal of the Congdong*” 共同之印; this time, minium ink was allowed to be used.²¹ With the Hall of Great Harmony constructed in Hue and Gia Long claimed the emperor title in 1806, the court meeting grew to six times a month, including two *Grand court audiences* 大朝 (on the 1st and 15th days) and four *regular court audiences* 常朝 (on

¹⁷ DNTL, I, 16: 16b; 18: 1a; 21 3a.

¹⁸ DNL, I, 20: 21b.

¹⁹ According to Gia Long's 1804 pronouncement of official ranking. *DNTL*, I, 24: 5a-b.

²⁰ DNTL, I, 21: 6a.

Also see the regulation for court audiences under the Gia Long reign, including 大朝: ‘*grand court audiences*’, 常朝: ‘*routine court audiences*’. HDSL, 71: 1a-b.

²¹ DNTL, I, 16: 14a.

the 5th, 10th, 20th, and 25th days).²² Three years later, it was said that heads of Six Boards were fully appointed for the first time.

Table 4.2. Six Boards and palace chiefs in 1809

Source: DNTL, I, 39: 16b.

Court organizations	President	Vice presidents	Notes
Board of Rites	Đặng Đức Siêu		
Board of Personnel	Trần Văn Trạc	Phạm Quang Triệt Phạm Đăng Hưng Nguyễn Hữu Thiện	
Board of Defence	Đặng Trần Thường	Nguyễn Quang Diệu Ngô Nhân Tĩnh Võ Danh Trung Võ Đức Thông	
Board of Justice	Nguyễn Tử Châu	Lê Bá Phẩm Vũ Danh Trung Hoàng Ngọc Uân	
Board of Revenue	Lê Quang Định	Trần Tiến Bửu Nguyễn Thành Chân Trương Minh Thành Lê Việt Nghĩa	
Board of Public Works	Trần Văn Thái	Nguyễn Khắc Thiệu Nguyễn Đức Huyền	
Palace offices	Trần Đình Trung: Official of Seal Management 尚寶卿. Nguyễn Khoa Minh, Trương Văn Trinh, Võ Văn Vượng, Trần Văn Phân: Hanlin scholar and Royal Assistant of Books 翰林侍書.		

In this new bureaucratic context, discussions made by military-and-civil officials 文武會議 and court debates 廷議 were the essential mechanisms of decision-making. As seen in the case of the Nguyen Van Thanh scandal in 1816; court debates were inevitable for policymaking.²³ Investigations, impeachments, and judgments were conducted based on those intense discussions.²⁴ Thanh was among the most distinguished commanders by rendering outstanding service to the founding of the dynasty 開國功臣, serving as a close assistant, military advisor, and general commander of the Nguyen army. In 1802, he became northern General-Commander, chief compiler of the dynasty law code (1812), and by 1815, the most powerful official in Hue. His career took a drastic turn in the mid-1810s when he campaigned for Gia Long's immature grandson (Nguyen Phuc My Duong 阮福美堂, 1798 – 1849) to be the crown prince. In 1816, nevertheless, Thanh's son, Nguyen Van Thuyen 阮文詮 was accused of composing a treasonous poem and plotting a rebellion.²⁵ Suspicious of

²² DNTL, I, 29: 4b.

²³ DNTL, I, 52: 8a.

²⁴ Under the Minh Menh reign, the boards would played the main role in the process of investigation, report, and judgement.

²⁵ DNTL, I, 51: 17a-b.

Thanh and his faction of power manipulation, Gia Long opened a court investigation that led to the downfall of Thanh and his allied intellectuals in the north. The tragic end came when Thuyen were executed for treason and Thanh committed suicide.²⁶

Examining the court’s handling of the event, it is indicated that *Congdong* had the case processed carefully. Firstly, Le Van Duyet, Thanh’s chief political enemy, revealed the accusation to the emperor, who then ordered courtiers to launch an investigation 帝命廷臣治其獄.²⁷ Due to some conflicting evidence, Nguyen Van Thuyen was released before another memorial of impeachment against Thanh surfaced. This time, Gia Long sent the memorial to court discussion 章下廷議²⁸. In response, Thuyen confessed to the treasonous pipe-laying, while his father submitted a petition claiming innocent. Eventually, the monarch requested the court audience to deliver a final investigation (命廷臣覆議阮文詮逆案),²⁹ to which they concluded, “The crime of father and son of [Nguyen] Van Thanh is explicit, please issue penalties [to them]” 文誠父子反狀已顯, 請速治.³⁰ Court discussions turned out to be the primary platform of the Hue deliberation. Court debates were organized based on the inner-court flow of paperwork, including investigation reports, memorials, and petitions.

Accusers and investigators		The accused and victims		
Lê Văn Duyệt	Commander of the Left Army	Nguyễn Văn Thành	Commander of the Central Army	Committed suicide
Lê Chất	Commander of the Rear army	Nguyễn Văn Thuyên		Executed
Phạm Đăng Hưng	President of the Board of Rites	Vũ Trinh	Vice-President of the Board of Justice	Exile
Trương Duy Hòa	Local secretary officer	Lê Duy Cận	Royal Le family member	Executed
Nguyễn Trương Hiệu		Tổng Phước Ngoạn	Military commander	Removed from office
Nguyễn Văn Nhân	Army Commander	Trần Ngọc Nhữ	Court official	Exile
Nguyễn Đình Đức		Trần Đăng Tuấn	Court official	Reprimanded

The following investigation focuses on *Congdong* evolution and its roles in operating paperwork. This process paralleled another significant bureaucratic change

²⁶ DNTL, I, 51: 16a-17b. See more on Nguyễn Văn Thành in *DNLT*, book 21; Nguyễn Văn Đăng and Mai Văn Đước, “Dấu Tích Danh Nhân Nguyễn Văn Thành Trên Đất Thừa Thiên Huế (Sites of the Famous Figure Nguyen Van Thanh in Hue),” *Tap Chí Nghiên Cứu và Phát Triển*, Số 2, no. 128 (2016): 95–106.

²⁷ DNTL, I, 51: 18a.

²⁸ DNTL, I, 52: 7b, 8b.

²⁹ DNTL, I, 53: 13b.

³⁰ DNTL, I 55 15b.

at Hue court, the emergence of the Six Boards. Board expansion competed with Congdong on the executive ground because they brought into the system new professional staff. In 1808, for instance, heads of the board's department 簽事 (rank 3A) were allowed to report affairs at the court.³¹ A year later, Six Boards were fully staffed for the first time with six presidents 六部置尚書自此始.³² Institutional specialization eroded *Congdong's* authority and gave rise to new specialized and technical institutions. In other words, during the Gia Long time, *Congdong*, the boards, and the emperor were in a post-war negotiation for political bureaucratization. In the next reign, *Congdong* was dismissed, the boards were given direct access to the throne and Hue welcomed a new *bureaucracy of vermilion endorsements*.

³¹ DN TL, I, 36: 10a-b.

³² DN TL, I, 39: 16b.

Table 4.4. Civil bureaucrats of the Gia Long reign, 1802-1820.

	Palace secretary offices 侍書院	Six Boards 六部					
		Board of Rites 禮部	Board of Defence 兵部	Board of Justice 刑部	Board of Public Works 工部	Board of Personnel 吏部	Board of Revenue 戶部
1800	<i>Noi thi thu vien</i> (內侍書院): Le Van Nghia					V. P. Phạm Đăng Hưng	
1802	<p>Han lam vien thi thu phung chi, Thuong bao thieu khanh (翰林院侍書奉旨, 尚寶少卿): Truong Minh Thanh</p> <p><i>Thuong bao thieu khanh</i> (尚寶少卿): Tran Dinh Trung</p> <p><i>Thi thu</i> (侍書): Nguyen Van Quang, Võ Hữu Hợp...</p> <p>Adding 28 <i>thi han, noi han</i> (侍翰, 內翰) into <i>thi thu vien</i> (侍書院).</p> <p><i>Han lam vien thi thu</i> (翰林院侍書): 13 positions</p>		President Le Quang Dinh	V.P. Nguyen Dang Huu		V.P. Phạm Đăng Hưng	
1803	<p>Adding 25 staffs into <i>thi thu vien</i> (侍書院).</p> <p><i>Thuong bao thieu khanh</i> (尚寶少卿): Lê Văn Phú, Phạm Nhữ Phong</p>						
1804	<i>Han lam thi thu</i> (翰林侍書): Nguyen Khoa Minh					V.P. Phạm Đăng Hưng	<p>P. Trịnh Hoài Đức</p> <p>V.P. Nguyen Hữu Đồng, Nguyen Văn Kiêm</p>

1806	<i>Thuong bao thieu khanh</i> (尚寶少卿): Lê Văn Phú					V.P. Phạm Đăng Hưng	P. Nguyen Kỳ Kế
1807	<i>Thuong bao thieu khanh</i> (尚寶少卿): Phạm Nhữ Phong <i>han lam thi thu</i> (翰林侍書): Nguyen Công Định						
1808	<i>Thuong bao thieu khanh</i> (尚寶少卿): Trần Đình Trung <i>Thuong bao thieu khanh</i> (尚寶少卿): Phạm Nhữ Phong <i>Thi thu</i> (侍書): Nguyen Khoa Minh						
1809	<i>Han lam thi thu</i> (翰林侍書): Nguyen Khoa Minh	P. Đặng Đức Siêu	P. Đặng Trần Thường	P. Nguyen Tử Châu	P. Trần Văn Thái	P. Trần Văn Trạc V.P. Nguyen Hữu Thân, Phạm Đăng Hưng	P. Lê Quang Định
1810		P. Đặng Đức Siêu died			P. Tran Van Thai died	V.P. Phạm Đăng Hưng	
1811		P. Phạm Như Đăng	P. Dang Tran Thuong deposed.	P. Nguyen Tử Châu died			P. Le Quang Dinh V.P. Nguyen Hữu Thân
1812		P. Trịnh Hoài Đức		P. Phạm Như Đăng	P. Ngô Nhân Tĩnh, concurrently Vice Governor-General of Gia Dinh	V.P. Phạm Đăng Hưng	
1813		P. Phạm Đăng Hưng	V.P. Nguyen Tăng Địch,	P. Phạm Như Đăng	P. Ngo Nhan Tinh died.	P. Trần Văn Trạc died P. Trịnh Hoài Đức	P. Lê Quang Dinh (died).

		V.P. Trần Quang Tỉnh, Bùi Đức Mân	Võ Trinh, Nguyễn Xuân Thực	V.P. Võ Văn Doãn	V.P. Phan Tiến Cảnh, Đoàn Viết Nguyên	V.P. Phạm Quang Triệt, Lê Chính Lộ, Trần Văn Tuân	V.P. Hoàng Văn Diễm, Nguyễn Công Tiệp
1814						P. Trinh Hoai Duc transferred to Gia Dinh	P. Nguyen Đình Đức
1815		P. Phạm Đăng Hưng (GLCB, 3: 49)	Nguyễn Đăng Hựu (GLCB, 3:49)				
1816							
1817						P. Nguyễn Hữu Thiện	
1818			P. Nguyễn Đăng Hựu retired.	P. Phạm Như Đăng died			P. Nguyễn Đình Đức died

Source: *DNTL* (大南寔錄), *DNLT* (大南列傳).

Notes: P. : Board President.

V. P. : Vice Board-president.

The extant *Congdong* documents at the NA1

The collection at the NA1 contains only the *Congdong* paperwork of the Gia Long and early Minh Menh reigns before Minh Menh had the council eliminated.³³ Most of the *Congdong* papers are deposited in three volumes of GLCB and can be categorized into five major document types:

Major <i>Congdong</i> documents		
<i>Congdong khien</i>	公同譴	Indictments or punishments
<i>Congdong sai</i>	公同差	Orders for official missions
<i>Congdong truyen</i>	公同傳	Administrative directions
<i>Congdong pho</i>	公同付	Certificates and nominations
<i>Congdong di</i>	公同移	Directives to subordinate offices. ³⁴

Although slightly varied in functions, the textual organizations of these paperwork types are mostly identical. As it frequently appears, *Congdong* documents usually consist of several texts of different types. The record of the GL4/1/20 (19/02/1805), for instance, incorporates a directions 公同傳 and an *order for official mission* 公同差. Sometimes the manuscripts contain texts of different compositional dates.³⁵ The table below illustrates the bulk of existing *Congdong* documents in Gia Long's paperwork collection. Most of them, dated back to 1806 and 1807, were bound in three volumes. Their story exposes exciting facts about how the Hue court operated, how state authority was delivered, and how official correspondence was conducted.

Table 4.5. Surviving *Congdong* documents of the Gia Long reign, 1802-1820.

Source: NA1.

Typology	No. of texts	Volumes	Folios no.
Orders for official missions (公同差)	81 texts	GLCB Vol. 1	7, 12, 14, 16, 21, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 55, 55, 63, 64, 67, 68, 68, 70, 74, 76, 79, 79, 87, 90, 93, 94, 94, 97, 102, 106, 106, 107, 108, 110, 143, 144, 144, 146, 149, 153, 154, 154, 157, 174, 174, 180, 182, 187, 187, , 199, 206, 215, 215, 216, 227, 228, 232, 235, 238, 241, 248, 249, 261, 264, 267, 270, 273, 282, 283, 284, 287, 302, 302, 303,
Administrative directions (公同傳)	306 texts	GLCB, 1: 260 texts	5, 5, 6, 7, 8, 8, 8, 9, 9, 10, 10, 10, 11, 12, 12, 14, 15, 15, 16, 18, 19, 20, 20, 20, 22, 22, 25, 26, 37, 37, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 41, 43, 44, 44, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 54, 54, 54, 56, 56, (57), 58, 58, 58,

³³ DNLT, II, 56: 16b-17a.

³⁴ Chen, *Mục Lục Châu Bản*, vol I, xxxiii.

³⁵ GLCB, 1: 14, 174.

			59, 60, 60, 61, 63, 65, 65, 66, 66, 67, 68, 70, 71, 72, 74, 75, 77, 78, 80, 80, 81, 81, 82, 85, 85, 86, 86, 87, 87, 87, 87, 88, 88, 88, 89, 90, 90, 91, 91, 91, 92, 92, 93, 94, 95, 95, 97, 98, 98, 98, 100, 100, 101, 101, 101, 101, 101, 101, 102, 102, 104, 105, 105, 105, 106, 107, 108, 111, 114, 117, 120, 123, 126, 130, 131, 132, 133, 134, 135, 136, 139, 139, 140, 141, 142, 143, 144, 145, 146, 147, 149, 151, 153, 155, 156, 158, 162, 162, 163, 163, 163, 163, 163, 164, 164, 164, 164, 164, 165, 165, 169, 169, 170, 170, 171, 171, 172, 173, 175, 177, 178, 179, 179, 180, 186, 188, 189, 189, 191, 191, 191, 192, 192, 193, 195, 195, 196, 196, 197, 198, 199, 200, 201, 202, 203, 204, 206, 207, 207, 208, 209, 213, 214, 214, 215, 215, 216, 216, 217, 217, 217, 218, 218, 219, 219, 219, 222, 222, 222, 223, 223, 224, 224, 224, 225, 226, 245, 246, 247, 252, 252, 254, 255, 256, 257, 258, 277, 278, 279, 279, 280, 281, 281, 282, 283, 294, 295, 295, 296, 296, 298, 299, 300, 301, 302, 303
		GLCB, 2: 42 texts	8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 15, 21, 23, 26, 27, 27, 28, 29, 31, 33, 35, 37, 38, 39, 41, 46, 47, 51, 53, 54, 55, 56, 58, 63, 65, 66, 67, 68, 69, 72, 73, 74, 76, 77, 80, 81,
		GLCB, 3: 4 texts	90, 97, 230, 232,
Certificates and nominations (共同付)	78	GLCB, 1: 78 texts	13, 13, 16, 17, 18, 42, 46, 50, 62, 62, 69, 69, 71, 93, 137, 137, 137, 137, 138, 147, 155, 167, 168, 168, 168, 172, 173, 181, 181, 194, 202, 205, 209, 209, 209, 209, 210, 210, 210, 210, 211, 211, 211, 211, 211, 212, 212, 212, 212, 220, 220, 220, 220, 220, 220, 220, 220, 220, 220, 220, 221, 221, 221, 221, 221, 221, 221, 221, 221, 249, 253, 281, 293, 300, 300, 302,
Directives to inferior offices (共同移)	2	GLCB, 1: 2 texts	23, 24

The following charts present the scale and proportion of each document type by percentage. Administrative directions are reportedly the most significant contributor, with 306 texts, nearly double the total number of the three other types combined (161)

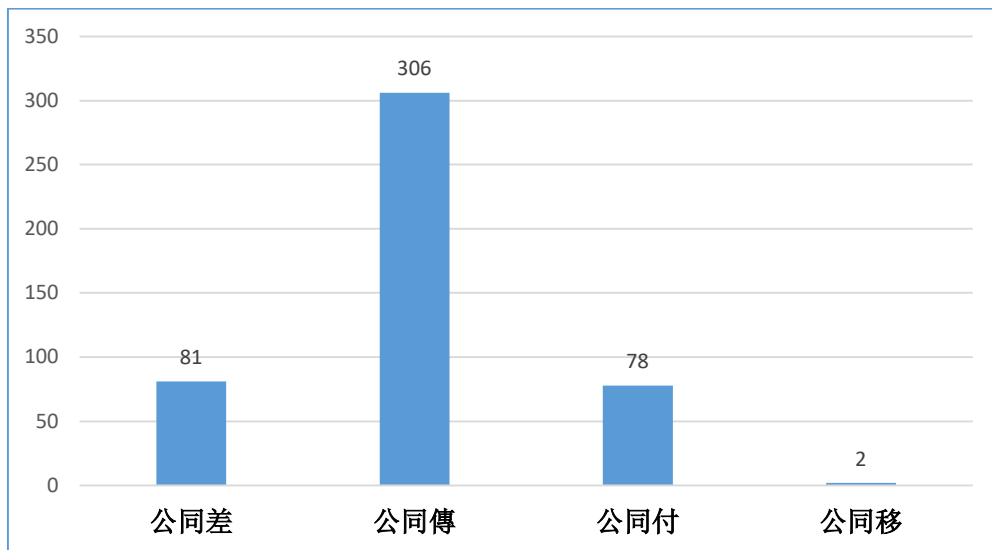


Chart 4.1. The extant Congdong paperwork of the Gia Long reign

Source: author

Notes: Orders for official missions (共同差); Administrative directions (共同傳); Certificates and nominations (共同付); Directives to inferior offices (共同移)

By percentage, *Administrative directions* contribute up to 66% of the surviving files, as demonstrated in the following pie chart (4.2.).

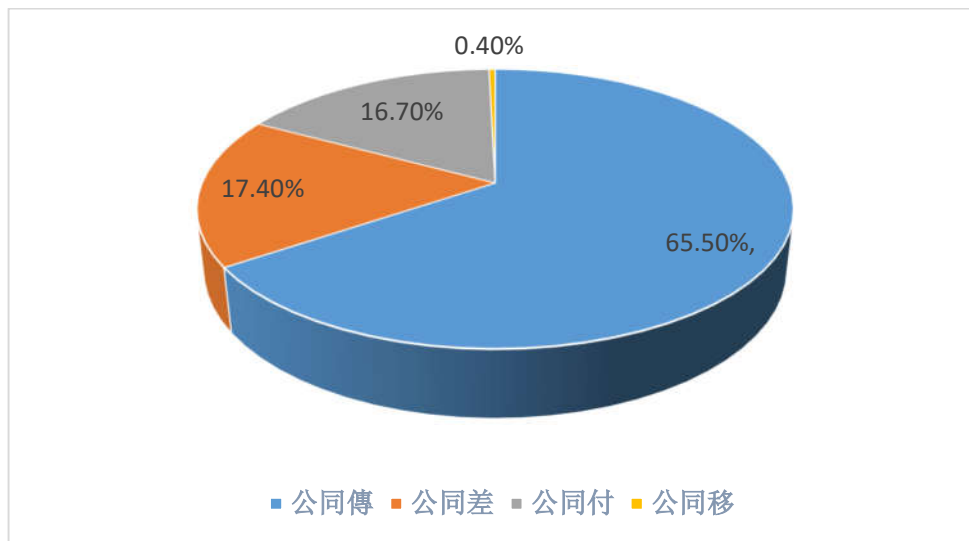


Chart 4.2. The proportion of the remaining Gia Long's *Congdong* documents

Source: author

Notes: Orders for official missions (共同差); Administrative directions (共同傳); Certificates and nominations (共同付); Directives to inferior offices (共同移).

Because the surviving Gia Long's palace paperwork is largely fragmented, they provide an uncompleted panorama of the Congdong documents. Their diverse

subject matters, however, indicated the council’s role in the operation of the state and decision-making in which final decisions were made on behalf of Gia Long in written form.³⁶ The practice came as Congdong was authorized to draft paperwork on routine matters. When the central court moved to Hue in 1802, such authority reached a new high, including the drafting and delivering of royal orders and instructions in types of ordinances and edicts.³⁷ This paperwork-responsibility advanced Congdong to a more significant symbolic and executive authority.

The amount of paperwork produced monthly is another significant indicator of the scale of Hue governance. More than 90% of the remaining GL palace documents come from five years (1805, 1806, 1807, 1817, and 1819). The first month of GL4 (1805) possesses 206 *Congdong* records, and their distribution is demonstrated in the following chart with most archival files belonging to the first seventh months.

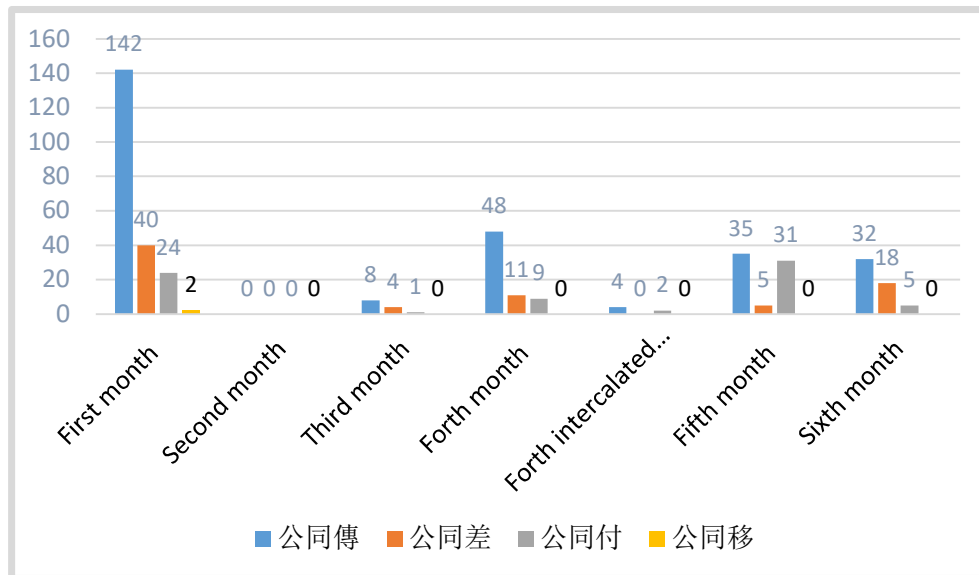


Chart 4.3. The extant *Congdong* documents in 1805 (GL4)

Source: author

Notes: Orders for official missions (公同差); Administrative directions (公同傳); Certificates and nominations (公同付); Directives to inferior offices (公同移).

Because of the unknown lost documents, reconstructing the scale of producing Congdong paperwork is challenging. A few valuable paratexts left by court personnel indicated that Congdong-issued documents were measured quarterly, including the

³⁶ DNLT, IV, 27: 9a-b.

³⁷ DNLT, I, *Notes on the use of the Shilu* 凡例: 1b-2a.

following unknown-dated account that informed the quantity of paperwork between the 4th and 6th months of GL4 (1805), to which 267 documents were reported.

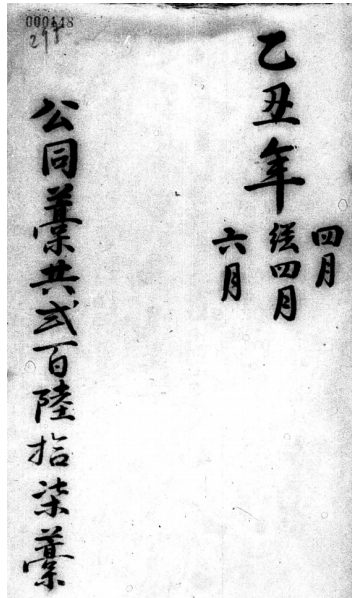


Figure 4.2. *Congdong* document of the GLCB, 1: 148.

Date: unknown.

乙丑年四月繼四月六月，共同彙共貳百陸拾柒彙。

“In *At Suu* year (the second year of the sexagenary cycle [1805]), in the 4th, 5th and 6th months, *Congdong* documents were [numbered by] 267.”

With nearly a hundred documents were produced monthly, the body of *Congdong* files was expected to be quite considerable, given two decades of the Gia Long reign and fourteen years of *Congdong* operation in Saigon (1788-1802). However, apart from a few hundred left, there is nothing we can recall to illustrate this paperwork’s history. Toward the end of the first reign, *Congdong* paperwork falls short in the archival holdings, as illustrated in the below chart. Only one surviving document is found, which belongs to the GL18 (1819), and 11 others dated back to the early Minh Menh reign. At the same time, as shown in *DN TL* and *huidian*, the transfer of power from Gia Long to Minh Menh was also accompanied by the declining *Congdong* roles in producing paperwork and the enactments of proclamations as a new channel of delivering imperial authority. This contrasting tendency is demonstrated in the following sections, highlighting the circumstance that formed Hue’s paperwork landscape.

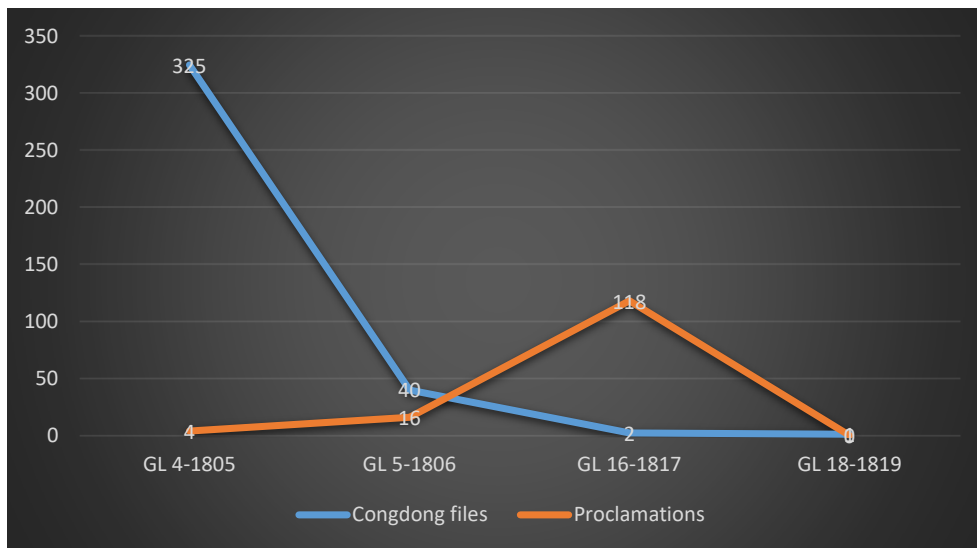


Chart 4.4. Extant *Congdong* documents and royal proclamations, 1802-1820

Source: Author

Evolutions of *Congdong* documents

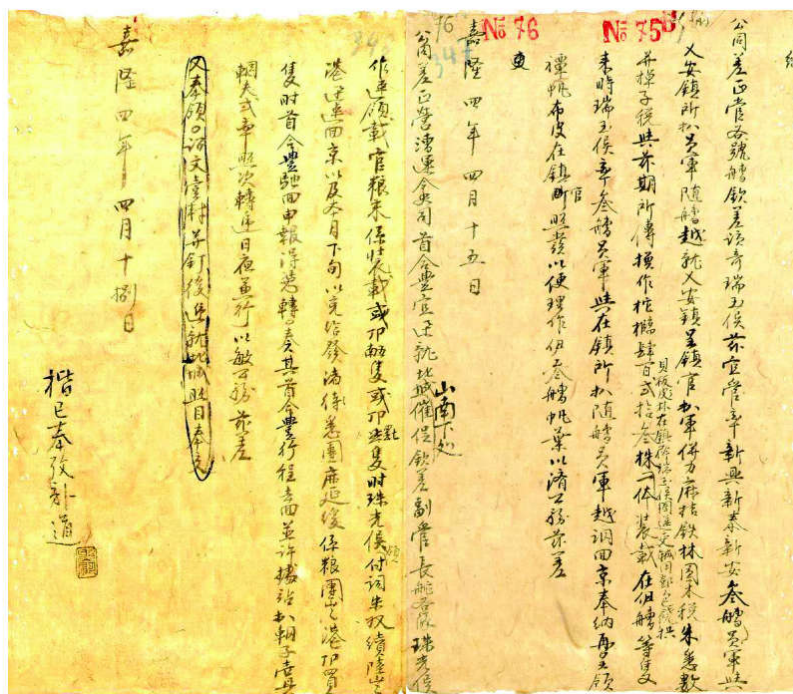
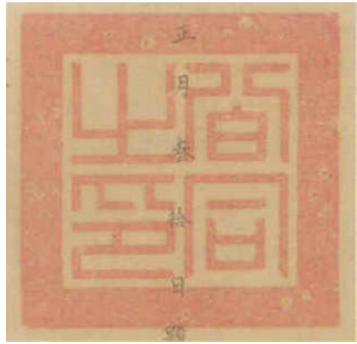


Figure 4.3. A *Congdong* instruction dispatched military officials to Nghe An 乂安 and Son Nam Ha 山南下 for the transportation of timber and grain.

Date: GL4/4/15 (1805) and GL4/4/18 (1805)

Source: GLCB, 1: 174.

Congdong documents contribute a significant proportion of the remaining Gia Long palace paperwork, their organization and evolution somehow diagram Hue’s decision-making apparatus. Forging a distinctive textual structure, these documents usually consist of three parts, namely the main body, reign title, and official remarks. This pattern, however, was variously arranged, resulting in the paperwork’s diverse physical planning. *Congdong* seals, for instance, were applied heterogeneous among 467 documents (道).



“*Congdong Seal*” 公同之印.
Size: 9,7 x 9,7 cm



“*Congdong all agree*” 同寅協恭,
authenticated seal. Size: 3,2 x 3,2 cm

Figure 4.4. *Congdong* seals
Source: Nguyen, et al., 2013.

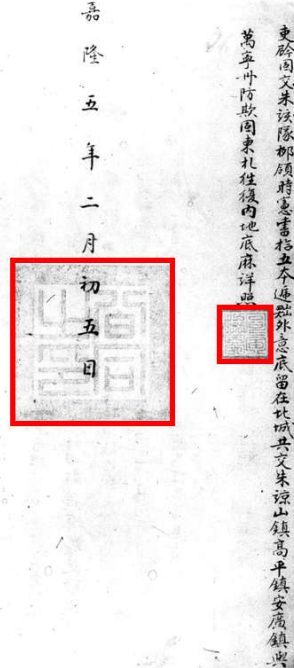


Figure 4.5. Imprints of the *Congdong* seals on GLCB.
Source: GLCB, 2: 12.

According to *DNTL*, the first seal, “discussed and decided together” 僉言允協, was created in 1788 at the birth of *Congdong* (印刻僉言允協四序用墨泥).³⁸ When Nguyen Phuc Anh declared himself king of the unified Vietnam, the new “*Congdong Seal*” 公同之印 was cast and measured 9.7 x 9.7 cm. Before 1802, only royal seals 寶璽 were applied minium-coloured, then the privilege came to seal stamps of *Congdong* and Five Armies 五軍.³⁹ The change strengthened the legitimate authority of those offices and added a new paratextual feature to the Nguyen paperwork. The appearance

³⁸ *DNTL*, I, 3: 16a.

³⁹ *DNTL*, I, 16: 14a; Nguyễn, Đoàn, and Nguyễn, *Án Chương Trên Châu Bản*, 2013, 74. The Five Armies include *Tiền quân* 前軍 Front Army; *Hậu quân* 後軍 Rear Army; *Tả quân* 在軍 Left Army, *Hữu quân* 右軍 Right Army; and *Trung quân* 中軍 Central Army.

of “*Congdong Seal*” stamp in red is uniquely essential to elevate the organization’s symbolic significance. The change promulgated Congdong document’s bureaucratic function since the size of the Congdong seal’s stamp was only secondary to that of royal imprints.⁴⁰ A year later, an additional authenticated seal for Congdong was also instituted, the “*Congdong all agree*” 同寅協恭 which was used to certify documents and texts that were initiated, drafted, and circulated by the council.

Gia Long recognized these seals' hierarchal representation and their executive roles in bureaucratic operations. In 1794, he declared to postal stations that only documents bearing Congdong and the crown prince seal stamps were subjects of official delivery.⁴¹ Not all of the remaining *Congdong* documents, however, exhibited that compliance. Most of the remaining Gia Long palace documents [vol. 1] shows no trace of the “*Congdong Seal*” and its authenticated imprints. The situation is strongly dissimilar in volume 2, particularly the *Congdong* files that were directed to the Northern region. Many bore stamps of “*Congdong Seal*” while only a few were applied with authenticated imprints at the ending page as officially required (see GLCB, 2: 12). The inconsistent appearance of the seal stamps might indicate the early nature of the Nguyen bureaucracy where administrative regulations were far from homogeneous, and the archival system fragmented. Much unsealed paperwork, inscribed with numerous written mistakes and strikethrough, might suggest their drafting nature and the circulations of drafts in and out of the palace. At the same time, little paratextual distinctiveness was highlighted among five types of Congdong paperwork, except *Congdong instructions following royal orders* 公同欽旨遣/傳 which were prepared by the council following royal directions. As demonstrated in GLCB (2: 59), this document-kind appeared more ceremonial, including the performance of character elevation and personal seal imprints from relevant officials.

These fragmented textual displays indicate some preliminary understanding of the production of Congdong documents and their evolution. The Nguyen *huidian* devoted no entry to the topic because, in their view, Congdong and courtiers 廷臣 were not recognized as court institutions 部衙 and should not be measured as autonomous executive structures. In addition, very few paratextual details surfaced in papers that

⁴⁰ See for instance the imperial seal stamp, *Quốc gia tín bảo* “國家信寶” [Imperial Seal that keeps the trust of the State], for instance, measured 11.5 x 11.5 cm. Nguyễn, Đoàn, and Nguyễn, *Án Chương Trên Châu Bản*, 2013, 33. Also see more on imperial seals in Nguyễn, Phạm, and Nguyễn, *Kim Ngọc Bảo Tỳ*, 2009.

⁴¹ DNTL, I, 7: 2a.

allow us to trace back information of drafters and reviewers. Although there were a number of documents, as informed by the paratexts, were carefully examined 真已攷, in most of the cases, details of the scribes and examiners were excluded.

Figure 4.6. Samples of official remarks on *Congdong* paperwork



“權奉攷壹道”
Following [the
instruction] to
check the document
once.
GLCB, 3: 215

“真已攷貳道”
Checking the
documents twice.
GLCB, 1: folio. 65

“興奉攷”
Allowed [by
imperial
command] to
check.
GLCB: 1, 287

“興奉攷”
Allowed [by
imperial
command] to
check.
GLCB, 1: 284

“權奉攷壹道”⁴²

Followed [imperial instruction] to check the document once.

“興奉攷”⁴³

Allowed [by imperial command] to check.

“真已攷貳道” (Checking the document twice).⁴⁴

Again, very little was known of those who conducted the checking and whether there was an assigned official group accountable for producing *Congdong* documents. Without any official signature, a small stamp, remained unknown to whom or to which



institution the seal belonged (), and was understood simply as “checked and

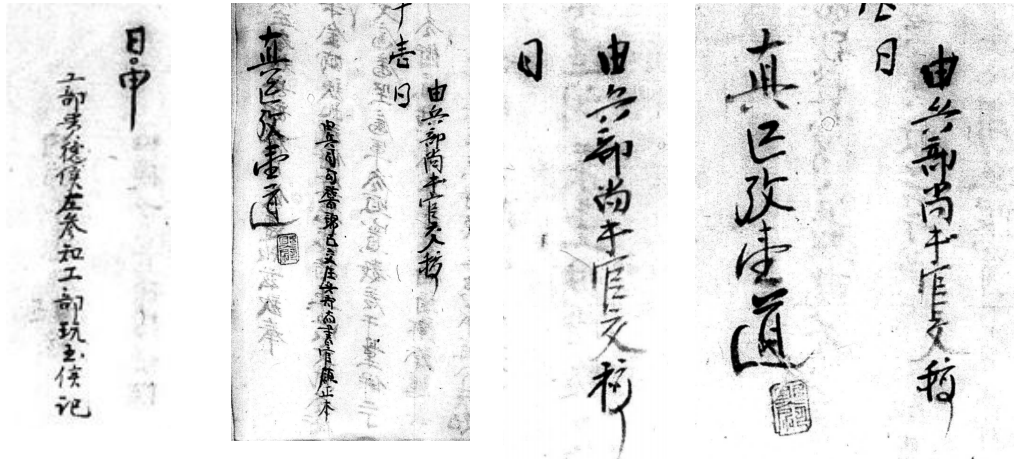
⁴² GLCB, 3: 215.

⁴³ GLCB, 1: 287; GLCB, 1: 284.

⁴⁴ GLCB, 1: 65. This case, the remark comes without “奉” (*carrying with respect to imperial instruction*).

reviewed” 照刷.⁴⁵ A few other paratexts point to organizations that were involved in preparing the documents, as shown below.

Figure 4.7. Paratexts on Gia Long’s *Congdong* documents



A-Paratext of the GLCB, 1: 260⁴⁶ B-Paratext of the GLCB, 1: 136⁴⁷ C-Paratext of the GLCB, 1: 130⁴⁸ D-Paratext of the GLCB, 1: 135⁴⁹

[A] 日申, 工部貴德候左參知公部玩玉候記.⁵⁰

On the Than day, Marquis Quy Duc at the Board of Public Works and Ngoan Ngoc Marquis at the Board of Public Works signed.

[B] 由兵部尚書官交稿.

(由兵局勾幕即已交在兵部尚書官領正本.)

真已攷壹道.⁵¹

Delivered by the President of the Board of Defense.

(Delivered by officials at the Board of Defense. The President of the Board of Defence kept the original document.)

Checking the text once.

[C] 由兵部尚書官交稿.⁵²

The President of the Board of Defence delivered the document.

⁴⁵ My thanks to Nguyen Huu Su for the help to decipher this imprint.

⁴⁶ The paratext reads, “日申, 工部貴德候左參知公部玩玉候記”.

⁴⁷ The paratext reads,

“由兵部尚書官交稿

由兵局勾幕即已交在兵部尚書官領正本.

真已攷壹道”.

⁴⁸ The paratext reads, “由兵部尚書官交稿”.

⁴⁹ The paratext reads,

“由兵部尚書官交稿

真已攷壹道”.

⁵⁰ GLCB: 1, 260.

⁵¹ GLCB, 1: 136

⁵² GLCB, 1: 135; GLCB, 1: 130.

[D] 由兵部尚書官交稿.

真已攷壹道.⁵³

The President of the Board of Defence delivered the document.

Checking the text once.

These details give rise to some possible explanations of the process by which the documents came into being. Very often, court audiences had final decisions concluded before responsible organizations drafted paperwork and sent them for inspection, but in cases of issuing imperial instructions, the papers were applied to both official and authenticated seal imprints. A *Congdong* direction following an imperial request (公同欽旨遣) addressed to the Northern General-commander Nguyen Van Thanh indicates the latter.

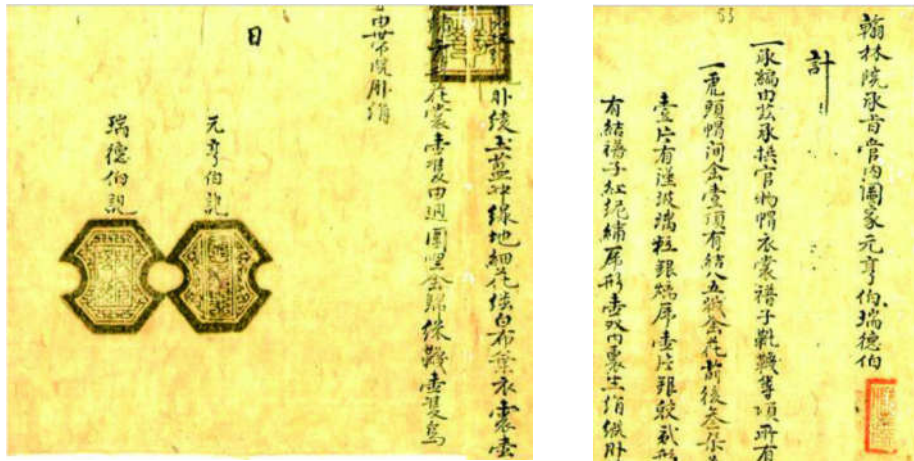


Figure 4.8. *Congdong* direction to the Northern General-commander.

Date: GL5/08/07 (18/09/1806).

Source: GLCB, 2: 59.

In this paper, two court officials prepared a report 計 attached to the instruction to propose a list of royal awards (clothes, etc.). In the end, the drafters' titles, signatures, and seal imprints were submitted: "Hanlin Academician Recipient of Edicts (翰林院承旨) and managers of the Inner Court Treasure (管內圖家), namely Earl Nguyen Hanh and Earl Thuy Duc Listed: [...] Earl Nguyen Hanh signed [and stamp]; Earl Thuy Duc signed [and stamped]".⁵⁴ This textual structure was not typical, though. A simple layout primarily defined *Congdong* paperwork in the GLCB (volume 1), adding to frequent writing mistakes and crossing out. Some pages fill with brutally crossed-out texts as products of the drafting process. Nevertheless, the lack of archival details leads to no settled conclusion about their provenance. As far as the surviving files are concerned, it indicates that the textual feature became increasingly regular, and Nguyen officials probably indulged in the practice. As experienced in the following, the drafters gratified the lack of restrictions of crossing-out and correction:

⁵³ GLCB, 1: 135.

⁵⁴ “翰林院承旨管內圖家阮亨伯瑞德伯, 計: [...] 阮亨伯記, 瑞德伯記.”

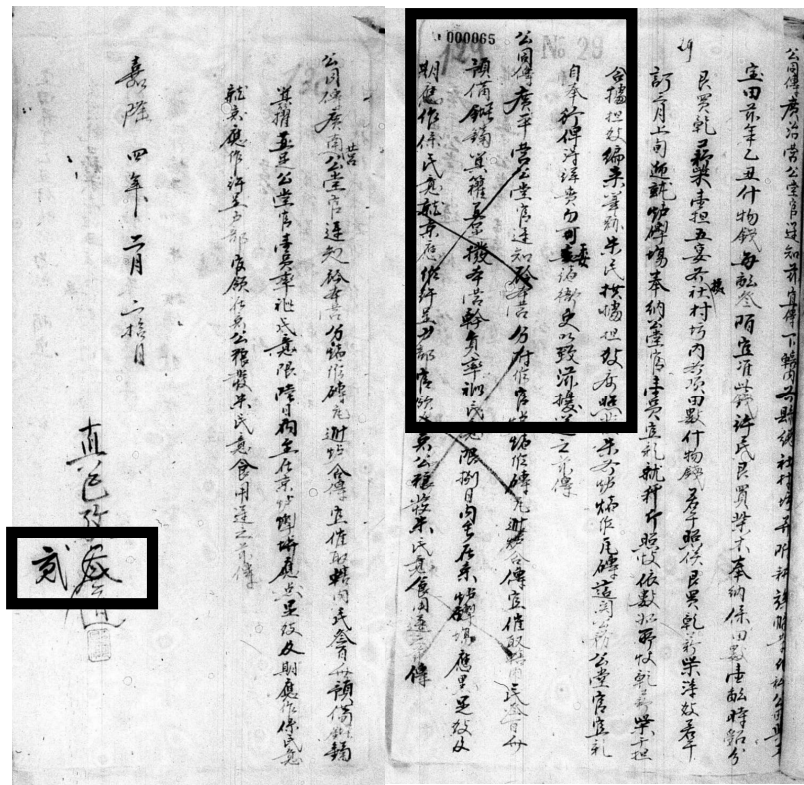
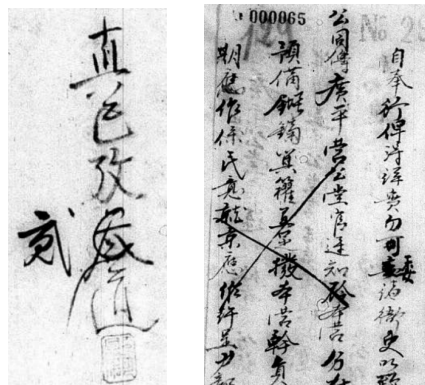


Figure 4.9. Congdong document of the GLCB, 1: 65.
Date: GL4/2/20 (1805)

The above Congdong instruction was dispatched to the Quang Tri commandery office 廣治營公堂官, concerning the collection of land tax and timber for brick kilns. Written in a cursive style in both Nom [Sino-Vietnamese] and classical Chinese, the heavily crossed-out text gives a few hints of the loose nature of the wartime administration. The heavily-deleted text also did not alert the scribes and reviewers who supplemented their own writing mistakes: “真已攷參道” (Actually checking the document thrice). The character “參” (three) was crossed out and replaced by “貳” (two) with no certification.



At the same time, nearly half of the text was deleted because it was addressing the wrong received office (to Quang Binh commandery 廣平營 instead of Quang Nam 廣南營). No authentication was made by the involved officials to certify the deleted and corrected characters, except for the official remark: “真已攷~~攷~~(參)貳道.” As a result, both the text and official comments were heavily modified.

In 1803, Hue bureaucrats had their eyes on the problem and acquired three more small silver seals for official usage. The authenticated seal “*Congdong all agree*” 同寅協恭 was specifically designed to apply at the juncture of each paper sheet and on crossed-out characters (刻同寅協恭四字, 凡公同傳示夾縫之處及洗改者俱用之).⁵⁵ On the other hand, heterogeneous writing styles seem to disclose the dynastic neglect of recognizing its documentation’s symbolism. Although many Nguyen scholar-officials had served the Le court and well comprehended the authority of official writing styles, the Nguyen did not seriously consider the matter until the Minh Menh reign.⁵⁶ The silence of sources on Gia Long’s paperwork regulations left a void in understanding bureaucratic written correspondence. Not much was known, neither of the chief Congdong personnel nor the circulation of court documents. The papers’ physical features, crossing-out texts, and inconsistent writing styles show the non-uniformity applied to the written correspondence of the Gia Long time.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ DNTL, I, 21: 12a.

⁵⁶ Lê scholar-officials developed a strong sense of ‘political identity’ that associated with their official writing style. As appeared in the 1488-Certificate of appointing official issued by Lê Ministry of Personnel to Phạm Nam on 14/12/1488 (NA1, Hồng Đức files, no. 1.), *hoa áp* scripts (V. *hoa áp tự*, C. *huaya xu* 花押字) or (V. *lệnh thư*, C. *lingshu* 令書) was the technique developed by the Lê bureaucracy for more than two hundred years (till 1714). This official writing style overwhelmingly dominated both the production of administrative documents and stone inscriptions (as reflecting in more than 90% of the stone stelae). Vietnamese scholars whose pride and cultural ego presented the term “Southern Scripts” (Nam tự 南字) celebrated the script. According to the nineteenth-century scholar Phạm Đình Hồ (范廷琥, 1768-1839), “[Lê’s] official documents were written in a distinctive Southern Style. Because of the primary intention to prevent textual forgery, an official writing style was invented followed the motif of flower. One every six years, those learn to master that writing pattern took part in examinations. The selected then become secretary-officials at local offices (*yamen*).” The Lê’s Southern Style of Regular Script, however, marks a critical character of the dynastic official writing. It represented an intellectual invention to define the distinctiveness of “Southern” bureaucratic documentation, instead of borrowing classical Chinese calligraphy. The advancement was done by growing intellectual maturity, those proved themselves not only mastering Chinese governing technique, but also having the capability of localizing an essential channel of “Northern” civilizational instrument: the art of writing. See Phạm Thị Thủy Vinh, ed., *Văn Bia Lê Sơ (Inscriptions of the Le Dynasty)* (Hà Nội: Khoa học Xã hội, 2014); Phạm Đình Hồ 范廷琥, “*Vũ Trung Tỳ Bút* 雨中隨筆 (Essays Penned Randomly in the Rain)” (Viện Hán Nôm, A.145), 24; Nguyễn Hữu Sứ, *Lịch Sử Thư Pháp Việt Nam (History of the Vietnamese Calligraphy)* (Hà Nội: Thế Giới, 2017), 137.

⁵⁷ Particularly, for instance, comparing to the standard that Minh Menh set up for his Grand Secretariat in 1829. DNTL, II, 63: 24b-29a.

The intellectual environment in Hue was chiefly responsible for this situation. The careless cursive handwriting with a high frequency of corrections and inserted characters certainly did not come from the best scholarly skill. In a document of 276 characters, the twelve-line Congdong instruction possesses three crossed-out and four inserted characters (GLCB, 1: 255). Issued on 13/7/1805 (GL4/6/17), the document gave a guideline to people of the Con Lon Island (崑崙, also known as Poulo Condore), offshore of Gia Dinh, in response to a memorial by the island’s chief military division, Marquis Nhuan Duc (該奇德潤侯). The court allowed the island people to present an annual demographic report because of the geographical distance.⁵⁸ Additionally, the islanders’ tax was deducted, and they were allowed to carry handguns for self-protection from piracy. The corrected sections of the text located in the body paragraphs and the date-line “嘉隆四年六月拾柒日” (GL4/6/17) was initially mistaken as “拾五日” (the 15th day).

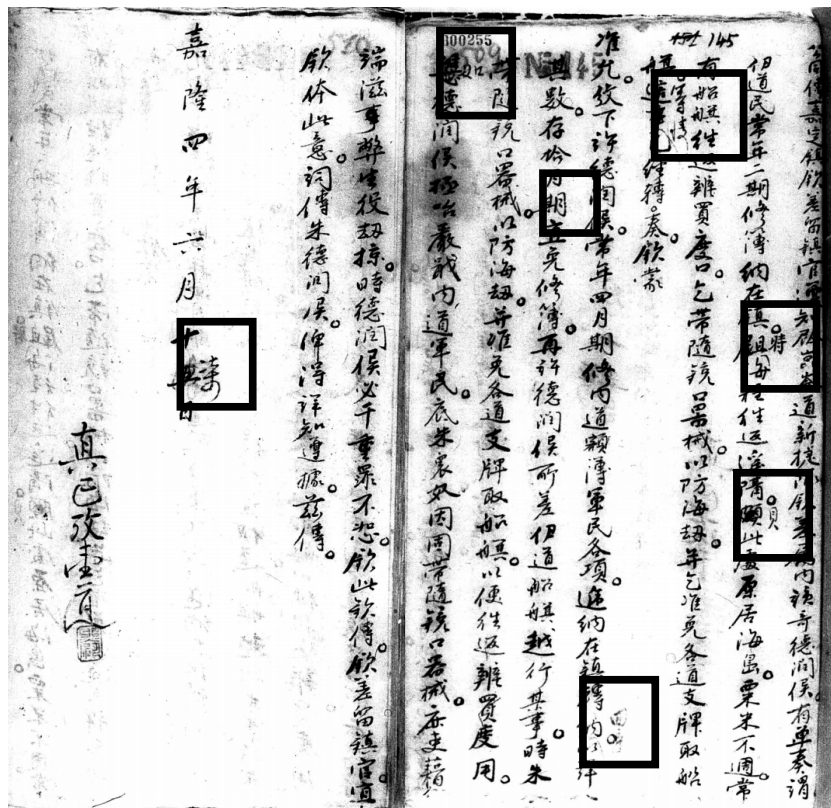


Figure 4.10. Congdong document of GLCB, 1: 255. Date: GL 4/6/17 (1805).

⁵⁸ Instead of twice as regularly required. See a detailed examination of this document, Phạm Văn Thắm, “Đơn vị Hành Chính Đạo (道) qua Châu Bản Thời Gia Long (Dao as an Administrative Unit: Viewed through the Gia Long Vermilion Records),” in *Thông báo Hán Nôm học*, Viện Nghiên cứu Hán Nôm (Hà Nội, 2012), 644–48.

By early 1800, two major intellectual groups in Hue, namely the southern Ming loyalists (明鄉) and the northern Le graduates, seemed not to play any particular role in producing *Congdong* papers. The former, including Trinh Hoai Duc, Dang Duc Sieu, Le Quang Dinh, and Ngo Nhan Tinh, joined early in the Nguyen forces and formed the core of the Saigon leadership before 1802. The latter, guided by Nguyen Van Thanh, Dang Tran Thuong, Nguyen Gia Cat, Nguyen Du, and Vu Trinh, was “less trusted” and struggled to get into the inner bureaucratic circle.⁵⁹ During the early Gia Long reign, these groups were either dispatched to Beijing for essential diplomatic missions or allocated to Saigon and Hanoi to secure the newly-established stability.⁶⁰ After 1802, Nguyen Van Thanh, Dang Tran Thuong, and Nguyen Gia Cat were appointed in Hanoi. In 1805, Trinh Hoai Duc, as President of the Board of Revenue, was dispatched to Gia Dinh as Commissioner of Defence 留鎮, and Dang Duc Sieu was appointed mentor to Prince Dam, the future Minh Menh.⁶¹

By the early 1810s, the first generation of the Nguyen’s intellectuals was fading away while their successors were immature or lacked royal confidence. Dang Duc Sieu died in 1810. In 1811, Dang Tran Thuong and Nguyen Gia Cat were charged with suspended death sentences.⁶² Later, Thuong was executed, and the northern intellectual cohort lost momentum. Finally, a death blow to this group came in 1816 when the Northern Governor-general, Nguyen Van Thanh, fell out of Gia Long’s favor after severe struggles for succession. Thanh committed suicide, and many of his protégés were exiled.⁶³

Although the Six Boards’ staff were fully appointed until 1809, severe factional fighting at the court distracted the bureaucrats from efforts to advance the paperwork system. Gia Long’s attention was probably overwhelmed by the construction of the Forbidden City, pacifying local rebels, overseeing two mighty overlords (in Hanoi and Saigon), and finally guaranteeing a smooth succession of his fourth son. One year after the defeat of Tayson, Army Chief-Commander Le Van

⁵⁹ These northern scholars were usually targeted by both southern officials and military leaders. See, for instance, Nguyễn Đức Xuyên submitted a long petition warning Nguyễn Phúc Ánh about the untrustworthy civil and military officials of the Tayson 文武偽臣. See Nguyễn Đức Xuyên, “Lý Lịch Sự vụ 履歷事務 (Official Biography),” *Nghiên Cứu và Phát Triển* 6–7, no. 123–124 (2015): 67–70; and Vũ and Dương, “Phe Phái, Lợi Ích Nhóm”, 26–36.

⁶⁰ In 1802, Trịnh Hoài Đức and Ngô Nhân Tịnh were on a mission to inform the Qing of the Nguyen’s triumph. They were followed by Lê Quang Định and Nguyễn Gia Cát envoy to request for the Qing’s investiture.

⁶¹ DNTL, I, 26: 6a, 8b;

⁶² DNTL, I, 42: 16b-17a.

⁶³ DNTL, I, 55: 15b.

Duyet was dispatched to the Central region to pacify highlanders' resistance.⁶⁴ He would come back and forth until 1819 after a 133-kilometre stonewall was constructed to protect the lowland population.⁶⁵ In the North, Army Chief Commander Le Chat was tied up in ongoing campaigns to claim the absolute rule of the new dynasty.⁶⁶ In 1810, Gia Long announced the delay of regional examinations because of “years of starvation”.⁶⁷ In the end, only two regional examinations were held, bringing 220 licentiates 鄉貢 into officialdom.⁶⁸ Most of these newly-graduated men were appointed district magistrates 知縣.⁶⁹ Only a few could advance to Hue's central bureaucracy. The scholarly environment of the Gia Long court determined the adjustment and operation of bureaucratic documents.⁷⁰

In this context, the design of *Congdong* documents was aimed at the swift correspondence of delivering commands and instructions. Hue bureaucracy did not pursue complex textual innovation but maintained a modest paperwork system. Some of these textual and structural elements were surprisingly identical to that of Tayson's court commands. As exhibited by the *Congdong* instruction (GLCB, 2: 253) on 15/08/1807, the major textual component included two parts: the main body and stamped reign title.



⁶⁴ DNLT, I, 20: 5a.

⁶⁵ Andrew Hardy and Nguyễn Tiến Đông, “Đá Vách: Nguyễn Cochinchina’s Eighteenth-Century Political Crisis and the Origins of Conflict in Quảng Ngãi” (Paper presented at the workshop “Nguyễn Vietnam, 1558-1885: Domestic Issues,” Harvard University, May 11–12, 2013., 2013); Andrew Hardy, “Chams, Khmers, Hrê, La Mosaïque Ethnique,” *L’Histoire* 62 (2014): 18–20.; Andrew Hardy and Nguyễn Tiến Đông, *Khảo Cổ Học Trường Lũy: 5 Năm Nghiên Cứu (The Archaeology of the Long Wall: 5 Year Research)* (Hà Nội: Khoa học Xã hội, 2011).

⁶⁶ DNLT, I, 35: 5a-6b.

⁶⁷ DNLT, I, 40: 22a-b.

⁶⁸ 62 in 1807; 99 in 1813, and 59 in 1819. My calculation based on the *DNLT*.

⁶⁹ DNLT, I, 43: 4b.

⁷⁰ Even until 1823, Minh Menh complained on the shortfall of civil officials at the court 今文班大臣希少. DNLT, II, 23: 14b.

a

b

Figure 4.11. Samples of the Tayson and Nguyen documents.

a- The Congdong document of the GLCB, 2: 53.

b- *Official letter of Nghe An General Commander to Nguyen Thiep, requesting an audience with Emperor Quang Trung*

Source: Hoang 1952: 251. Courtesy also to Hoang Ngoc Cuong with high-resolution images from the Vietnam National Museum of History.

Transcription of *Congdong* document of the GLCB, 2: 53:

公同傳欽差北城總鎮掌前軍平西大將軍郡公遵知：倉遞回太原鎮鎮官計開屬鎮各員與藩臣各員，前期捉獲匪夥功簿事已詳悉，內有伊鎮鎮守員義屬鄧廷權包固經受職爵哈渚，貝貫址在某府縣社時簿內空詳開。

倉哪準放宜飭下太原鎮鎮官詳開伊名來歷貫址，授納差遞回京轉奏欽此傳詳知。遵奉茲傳。

嘉隆陸年七月十貳日[stamp: 公同之印]

Translation

Congdong instructed the Imperial Commissioner, Governor-General of the Northern Citadel, Marshal of the pacifying-Tayson Army, and Duke title that Officials of the Thai Nguyen commandery had submitted reports on defeating bandits and naming those with a feat of arms to be recorded in official profiles. Concerning the Commandery-defender Dang Dinh Quyen, however, it has not been clearly informed of his career promotion, official title, and hometown at which commune, district, and prefecture?

Now, following [the imperial] instruction, requesting Thai Nguyen officials to report the personnel's profile and hometown, and handling the report to the dispatched official to return to the capital. Be aware of this [imperial] instruction and respectfully follow!

Gia Long 6/07/12 (02/09/1808) [stamp: *Congdong* Seal]

This document, addressing Northern General-commander Nguyen Van Thanh, demonstrates careful preparation and drafting. The uniform organization settled 24 characters per line. Such a layout was sustained under the Minh Menh reign to deliver imperial instruction. The emperor also took away the document-issued function of *Congdong* and replaced it with his edicts (諭, 上諭, and 奉上諭). Although attending courtiers 侍臣, grand secretaries 內閣堂官, and grand councilors 機密大臣 were required to draft those emperor's documents, the monarch had concentrated different written channels of imperial authority under his direct command.

The destroyed archives and obscure arrangement of the *Congdong* documents do not allow us to draw established conclusions on how systematically the paperwork was produced and promulgated. The first volume of the Gia Long palace manuscripts

contains files related to the Central and Southern regions, while the second volume mainly covers northern affairs, and the third is a miscellaneous amalgamation of geographical locations and document types. One possible speculation is that those carelessly-written records were drafts prepared at the court before they were rewritten, sealed, and sent down for implementation. Well-organized paperwork in the second volume, on the other hand, was the sent-out documents restored in the Northern region 北城 before being recalled back to Hue sometime later and ended up at the palace archives.⁷¹ Yet, no previous study has led us in this direction, and little evidence is found to sustain the hypothesis. Because of that ambiguity, I have presented the best analysis based on a thorough and systematic investigation of the files. The documents have undergone much political and archival chaos. Tracing back their journeys may acquire more diggings and new sources in the future.

Among prominent paratextual features of Congdong papers, the irregular appearance of the “Congdong Seal” continues to be a conundrum testing our coherent understanding of the document's evolution. Adding to this puzzle is the report that the use of the *Congdong* seal was not regulated until 1822 when Minh Menh (re)ordered all instructing documents (傳示文憑) imprinted with *Congdong Seal* imprints.⁷² As a representative institution (and a decision-making body), *Congdong* enjoyed the privilege of issuing court documents for three decades. However, the more centralized and bureaucratized Hue became, the less paperwork-authority it possessed. The most symbolic evolution probably places on the “competition” between Congdong and the palace to represent the utmost paperwork-authority of the realm.

A month after Nguyen Phuc Anh proclaimed himself King Gia Long, *Congdong*'s privilege of granting certification of official appointment 敕示 suffered the first blow. Hue military personnel immediately requested direct royal-awarded documents, bypassing the Congdong channel:

頒給諸軍營員弁敕示. 先是諸將士從戎但給以旨差, 旨傳及公同付; 隸諸軍營差遣. 至是掌領官彙冊奏諸給與朱敕朱示.⁷³

Bestowing the certificate of official appointment 敕示 to military personnel at commanderies. Earlier, generals and soldiers who served in the army had been

⁷¹ My thanks to Tran Thi Xuan (CSMC) for sharing thoughts on this matter.

⁷² DNTL, II, 14, 2a.

⁷³ DNTL, I, 17: 5b.

granted royal commands 旨差, royal instructions 旨傳, and Congdong appointments 公同付,⁷⁴ and then assigned to the commanderies. Now, the military commanders submitted a list in request of changing [the certificate] to vermilion royal appointments 朱敕, 朱示.⁷⁵

The rise of new royal papers, namely minium-royal appointments signalled the increasing bureaucratic perception of kingship and royal authority. These new forms of paperwork are associated with the growing idea of “rectification of name” (正名) as Gia Long institutionalised his court.⁷⁶ Although the court audience would continue holding a prominent role in managing state affairs and operating the official documents, the throne gradually shifted to the center of the paperwork system. In 1803, he regulated monthly court meetings and retained royal approvals for decision-making.⁷⁷

The Minh Menh age began with a rearrangement of the central power. The demotion of Congdong caused a fundamental shift in the production of court papers. First was the rise of the court audience that was “relegated” to deliver executive commands. New morning court meetings now requested the participation of all officials of the fifth rank 五品 and above.⁷⁸ Gradually, executive and document-issued authority was taken from *Congdong*, and replaced by direct imperial control of the court audiences and court’s paperwork production. In 1820, *Congdong* no longer appointed chief postal stations 驛站隊長, instead, office installations must directly report to the emperor for consideration (準定: 自今諸驛站隊長有補缺者如諸軍營例, 皆以奏開 (著由公同專補)).⁷⁹

The most surprising element of Minh Menh’s intervention was the arrival of his brush on *Congdong* documents. There was no better symbol of the royal authority than the red endorsement on official papers.⁸⁰ As *Congdong’s* paperwork became the subject of the emperor’s reviews, he was signalling to Hue bureaucrats that the age of “old bureaucracy” was over. Imperial control of routine businesses marked the end of the autonomous courtier audience.

⁷⁴ Previously, *Congdong* issued the three document-types.

⁷⁵ “Vermilion royal appointments” (朱敕, 朱示) refer to direct imperial commissioning of appointing officials.

⁷⁶ On the notion of “rectification of name”, see chapter II.

⁷⁷ DNTL, I, 21: 6a.

⁷⁸ DNTL, II, 5: 1 a-b.

⁷⁹ DNTL, II, 8: 18b-19a.

⁸⁰ MMCB, 2: 5-6.

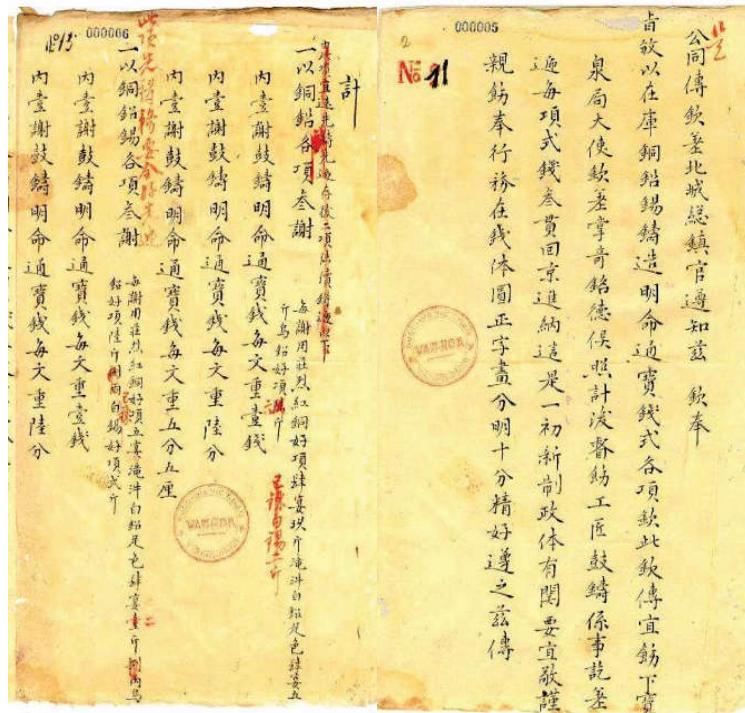


Figure 4.12. Minh Menh’s endorsement on *Congdong* instruction on 15/02/1820.
Source: MMCB, 2: 5-6.

The application of royal vermilion corrections and remarks [硃改, 硃批] on *Congdong* papers was more than a gesture of monarchical shift or regime change, but an immediate enforcement of the personal rule. On the second day of the first Minh Menh year, the minium brush started taking control of Hue’s paperwork system with the first existing review on a *Congdong* instruction. His enthusiasm for paperwork control immediately set up a new bureaucratic operation that would soon transform the dynastic deliberative structure. Minh Menh’s determination for political consolidation was unchallengeable, and so was the dream to construct everlasting institutions and administrative regulations for generations to follow, including a complex paperwork system.⁸¹ The royal treatment of *Congdong* marked the first major bureaucratic transformation in the early 1820s in Hue,⁸² where executive responsibilities such as conducting routine affairs, appointing personnel, and assigning district magistrates 知縣 and prefects 知府 were returned to the throne.⁸³ A few existing post-1820 *Congdong* documents indicate the council’s declined roles in decision-making and paperwork production. The use of official seals, including the “Congdong Seal”, was

⁸¹ DNTL, II, 71: 21a-b.

⁸² The second certainly came to the Office of Records and Books.

⁸³ GLCB, 1: 137.

strictly re-regulated and the paratextual structure of official papers was redefined following new institutional designs. As a gesture of respecting the king 尊君, only imperial seals 寶璽 were stamped over the character “年” (year, in the reign title line) while other seal stamps must be located lower, over the character “月” (month) in the reign-title line.⁸⁴

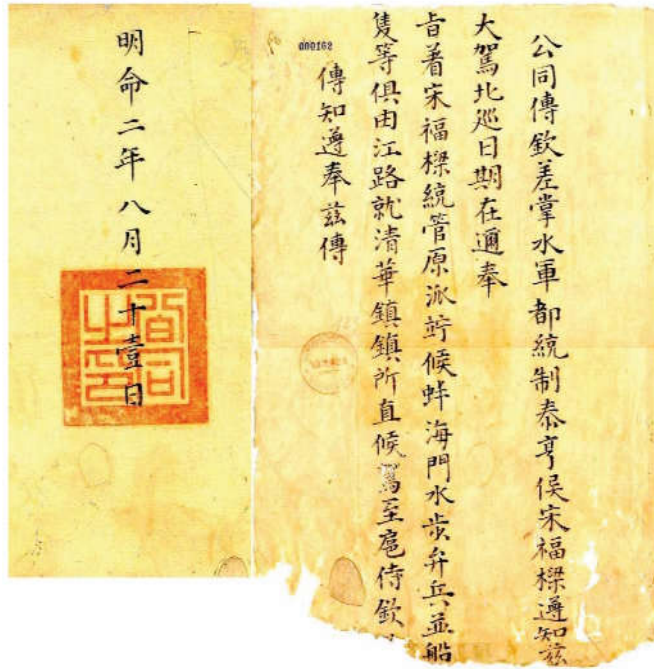


Figure 4.13. Congdong instruction ordered Naval Chief, Tong Phuoc Luong 掌水軍, 宋福樑, to prepare ships and troops for the Northern tour. *Congdong Seal* was ordered to stamp lower in the date-line. Date: 16/09/1821. Source: MNCB, 1: 162.

The new regulation, however, could not free Minh Menh from the vigilance of detailed textual violations. In the summer of 1822, he came across a memorial in which the emperor-reserved character “memorialize” 奏 was elevated 抬 to the second line while the characters “*Congdong*” were placed on the first. The enraged monarch declared that “this is not a normal mistake” because symbolically speaking, the high-ranked officials were honored, not the emperor 格其心反廷臣為尊. Consequently, imperial guards were sent out to carry stroke-penalty upon the responsible.⁸⁵ That same year, the emperor decided to eliminate the *Congdong*. Although *Congdong* was abolished, the emperor’s obsession with its paperwork authority was far from over. Systematic efforts were projected to prevent the court audience from producing executive documents. To do so, he turned to the palace offices and the Six Boards by allowing them directly take charge of bureaucratic affairs:

⁸⁴ DNNTL, II, 14: 5a-b. See, for instance, MNCB, 1: 162.

⁸⁵ DNNTL, II, 15: 4a.

“準定：自今諸公事有旨準，廷臣傳旨者用公同之印，餘事關何衙各自咨報，用印篆施行。惟文武官員陞調補授赴莅，由吏兵二部照例行咨，著為令。⁸⁶

From now on, only public affairs 公事 have imperial approval 有旨準, should the courtiers imprint [the documents] with the “Congdong Seal”. Other matters should be imprinted with [the organization’s] seals [to whom the affairs involved]. Specifically, the promotion and appointment of military and civil officials are responsible to the Boards of Personnel and Defence for issuing and dispatching documents. They will become norms.

The Office of Records and Books began channeling paperwork directly to the Hall of Diligent Politics, which allowed the new structure of imperial communication to grow. To guarantee “*Congdong Seal*” was handled appropriately and documents were overseen by various administrative personnel, the seal was kept in shifts among high-ranked courtiers.⁸⁷

Hue’s institutional transformation reached its peak in the late 1820s when Minh Menh had the last shot to dismiss the official council from any permanent decision-making role. The documents previously sent out by Congdong were ordered to terminate. To the monarch, the authority of the official paperwork could not be activated without imperial acknowledgement; his power was surpassed by none, and no governing decision or enforced document was permitted without his awareness.⁸⁸ This discourse of power was fundamental to Minh Menh’s imperial project and the construction of Dai Nam as an empire 大國. It invited the emperor to institutional reconstruction and, inevitably, imperial intervention to reshape the landscape of state documentation. In 1828, all *Congdong*-promulgated documents, including royal command 旨差, royal instructions 旨傳, and *Congdong* directions 公同付 were inspected. Officials who had previously received these documents must exchange

⁸⁶ DNTL, II, 23: 15a-b.

⁸⁷ DNTL, II, 45: 13b.

⁸⁸ DNTL, II, 26: 6a-b. The original entry reads,

“帝躬勤庶政，凡四方章疏繪音批示日以繁多。黎文閱黎質等常以煩勞為言。自是事關六部者交部票擬。”

The emperor had worked hard on politics. He reviewed most of the memorials and reports that came from the four directions. Le Van Duyet and Le Chat usually said that this was so hardworking. Since then, those affairs were sent to the Six Boards for making tally suggestion (票擬).

them for imperial investitures 憑敕, while all other *Congdong* paperwork had to demolish (至如原得旨差旨傳及公同付詞各收銷).⁸⁹

With the birth of the Grand Secretariat, centralized communication, and complex paperwork regulations, the court meetings had almost no role to play in producing administrative paperwork. In 1829, it was suggested that sons of officials who had received *Congdong* command 旨差, instructions 旨傳, and directions 公同差付, should no longer enjoy the privilege of exemption from military conscription. In response, the emperor declared that his “state has established a standard bureaucratic structure, [thus] every mandarin 官 should have a certification of imperial appointment to authorize” 有詔敕為徵信.⁹⁰ The withholding of the *Congdong* paperwork and promoting imperial investitures 詔敕 as the only legitimate written form of official recognition solidified the monarch’s endeavor to associate bureaucratic documentation with the symbolic dynastic authority.

He had reasons to worry about *Congdong* documents when the last regional overlord Le Van Duyet died in 1832. Duyet played a critical role in the final dynastic triumph as one of the most celebrated Gia Long's commanders.⁹¹ His fifty-one years of service, military influences, and charisma directly opposed Minh Menh’s aim of territorial centralization.⁹² The monarch took a swift move to abandon the office of regional administration in lower Mekong, replacing it with a province system. Encouraged by the emperor, Duyet’s enemies accused him of six treasonous acts and ten death-penalty crimes. The accusation included personal storage of ten sheets of papers pre-stamped the seal 國家信寶 [*Imperial Seal that keeps the trust of the State*] and ten other with 公同印 [*Congdong Seal*].⁹³ Tragically, the suppression against Duyet’s allies engulfed the southern region into turmoil, including Siamese invasions in 1833-1834 and the war in Cambodia.⁹⁴ The Saigon rebels captured many official seals and distributed many forged documents to rally troops and supplies. Hue was frustrated with the situation. They immediately provided the southern offices with

⁸⁹ DNLT, II, 56: 17a-b.

⁹⁰ DNLT, II, 58: 2a-b; DNLT, I, 23: 24b.

⁹¹ Vũ, “The Age of Sea Falcons: Naval Warfare in Vietnam, 1771-1802.”

⁹² Choi, *Southern Vietnam under the Reign of Minh Mạng*; Vũ and Dương, “Phe Phái, Lợi Ích Nhóm”.

⁹³ DNLT, II, 83: 17b.

⁹⁴ See *Khâm Định Tiễu Bình Lương Kỳ Nghịch Phi Phương lược Chính Biên 欽定勦平兩圻逆匪方略正編* (*Official Compendium of the Rebel Suppression in the Northern and Southern Territories of the Empire*) (Viện Hán Nôm, Vh.v.2701, 1836); Vũ, “Vietnam at the Khmer Frontier”, 534–64.

alternative seals and alerted the circulation of fake bureaucratic paperwork.⁹⁵ Minh Menh's obsession with the insecure paperwork authority led to tightening control of the “Congdong Seal”. The usage of the seal now required participation, discussion, and agreement of all involved officials (廷臣奏議及文憑用公同印, 者文武當直會同檢看登記).⁹⁶ Finally, in 1835, “Congdong Seal” was abolished and replaced by “Seal of the Court Council” (廷臣之印), measured in the same size, 9.7 x 9.7 cm.



Figure 4.14. “Seal of the Courtiers”
“廷臣之印”.

Source: TDCB, 119: 59

The fabrication of *Congdong* documents was probably responsible for the decision. Minh Menh wanted to reduce the threat that official records produced by rebels could turn against Hue. In addition, the monarch argued that the use of the “*Congdong* Seal” had been so obscure that all court organizations could apply it. The differentiation was not clear. Therefore, the seal was replaced by “Seal of the Court Council” and should only be deployed when the council memorializes bureaucratic issues (改鑄廷臣之印. 向來廷議用公同印. 帝念公同二字諸衙亦可通, 用文義未別. 乃改為廷臣之印, 令有司吏鑄. 凡廷臣有議奏施行事務者用之).⁹⁷ Minh Menh realized *Congdong*'s ambiguous role as a semi-organization, semi-institution, and semi-executive body. To limit its paperwork power, he directed them away from executing tasks. The document-issued function was assigned to the Six Boards and Grand Secretariat, while the emperor himself took direct control of court audiences.

The story of Hue's paperwork has turned the page.

The decline of *Congdong* documents reflects a dramatic shift in court politics under which Minh Menh's rule and institutional evolution transformed the bureaucratic structure. By demoting the court council, the emperor aimed to directly control the deliberative system based on centralizing communication and specializing

⁹⁵ I discuss in details in the chapter on memorials (Chapter V). Also, see *DNTL*, II, 102: 5a-b.

⁹⁶ *DNTL*, II, 71: 22a.

⁹⁷ *DNTL*, II, 163: 1a.

court institutes. The Gia Long state was designed for war-situation and guaranteed speedy responses executed by a small group of loyal retainers. Their dominant form of communication appeared not through a two-way exchange but through top-down orders and instructions. The new structure orchestrated by Minh Menh features a sophisticated system that could afford a flexible and diverse arrangement of administrative correspondence. The process does not merely reflect institutional changes, shifting ruling style, and reshaping paperwork-environment, but more engrossingly, the re-forging of the dynastic political identity.

We shall continue the journey of the Nguyen paperwork and correspondence with the rise of emperor documents as a mechanism of delivering imperial authority.

IV. 2. Do you hear the emperor: the bureaucracy of edicts

The words of a ruler are lofty and laden with meaning; hence, they are suspended on high for all to look up to, they are the laws to all chieftains, and they are pledges capable of winning the confidence of all states.

Literary mind and the carving of dragons, Liu Xie.

This section investigates paperwork issued by emperors. They could be drafted in the name of or written by emperors personally, but all shall be here labelled as emperor documents. Their types, function, and symbolism are essential to understanding the monarchical thoughts and determinations to control the document-based bureaucracy. Ruling as “Son of Heaven,” the emperor’s words and their written forms presented sacred political power.⁹⁸ Proclamations 詔, decrees 旨, and edicts 諭 are the major formulae that had been used since the Qin time.⁹⁹ They symbolize the emperor’s appearance in person; therefore, the paperwork-receiving ceremony needs to be performed as protocol demands, which includes burning incense and prostrating on the ground as gestures of acknowledging with due humility and awe.¹⁰⁰

Proclamations are documents that declare the emperor’s announcements, usually at the state level, concerning state policy of high importance. Proclamations also involved ceremonial performances, dispatching the army, and conferring official titles. *Edicts* are documents enacted by the emperor to carry orders or instructions. They sometimes contained messages of imperial advice and suggestion to the subjects and, therefore, could appear in both written and oral formats. Court officials would write down royal verbal commands for implementation. Depending on the circumstances of enactment, edicts vary in the appellation, comprising *thuong du* 上諭, *thanh du* 聖諭, *chi du* 旨諭, and *sac du* 敕諭. Again, it depends upon the emperor’s ruling style and his textual routine that edicts and decrees could sometimes be interchangeable. In the Nguyen context, decrees are identical to edicts, despite having a narrower authoritative implementation.

⁹⁸ Victor H. Mair, “Language and Ideology in the Written Popularization of the Sacred Edict,” in *Popular Culture in Late Imperial China* (Berkeley, California: California University Press, 1985), 325–59.

⁹⁹ Liu, *Wenxin Diaolong*, 242–44.

¹⁰⁰ See HDSL, book 115: on dispatching and receiving imperial proclamations; Jonathan D. Spence, *Treason by the Book* (New York: Penguin Putnam Inc., 2001), 32.

IV. 2. 1. On emperor documents

There are essential matters that high-ranked officials temporarily were unable to adjust or matters that I suddenly think of. In response, I must personally draft or suggest a proclamation or endorsement. Until now, they have collectively numbered in hundreds and thousands of items.”¹⁰¹

Emperor Minh Menh

That was Minh Menh's declaration in the preface of his collection: *Imperial writings, Initial volume* 御製文, 初集. The quantity of the drafts might be exaggerated; however, it is a significant indicator to reflect the emperor's conceptualization and practical efforts to exercise his authority. This changing way of conducting imperial rule signified an intrinsic shifting nature of the bureaucratic performance in early nineteenth-century Vietnam. Unlike Gia Long, whose commands were primarily given through the *Congdong* channel, Minh Menh reformed imperial communication by diversifying its forms of delivery and enforcement. The participation of imperial written documents in decision-making contributed to a new bureaucratic environment in Hue, where institutional interaction was profoundly reconstructed.

Imperial commands were enacted at the center of administrative tradition in Vietnam (and China). Given that the emperor was the political structure's focal point, his supremacy in making executive decisions represented the uppermost authority. Understanding how the commands were carried out and implemented is the key to unravelling the essential mechanism in which society, politics, and bureaucracy operate. It is a touchstone to measure the efficiency of governance and the progressiveness of governmental models. Identifying the role Nguyen emperors played in the state apparatus gives us vivid insights into how the power network was created and those involved with the process in which imperial authority was consulted, carried, and delivered down to the regional and local levels. The paperwork movements in this projection of administration and governance allow our understanding of the competence of the state to acquire sufficient information.

Imperial authority was delivered through a wide range of verbal and written mediums. The emperor plays a “hybrid” character: a ‘human’ form of a righteous ruler and a heavenly reincarnation with the mandate to harmonize “people” 人, “land” 地, and “Heaven” 天. That universal supremacy derives from the symbolism of the Son of Heaven and the executive duties that he conducts Under Heaven. Guided by Confucian

¹⁰¹ DNTL, II, 24: 7a-b.

doctrine, he expects to edify an example of virtuousness and moral standards that cultivate human beings' happiness and fulfil their duty and behaviors. Imperial commands, therefore, were not only authoritative but also highly symbolic in displaying dynastic legitimacy.

Depending on state institutions and the ruler-personality, the emperor's ruling could be delivered in forms of verbal communication. Written records transcribing those verbal messages were varied document formats, including *verbal edicts* 口諭, *transmitting verbal edicts* 傳口諭, *verbal edicts delivered during audience* 面諭, *following verbal edicts* 奉口諭, *following verbal edicts that delivered during audience* 奉面諭, *transmitting decrees* 傳旨, and following decrees 奉旨. The monarch's words carry absolute executive rule, as the classical Chinese proverb goes, “君要臣死, 臣不得不死” (*the king wants officials to die, it is impossible for the officials not to die*).¹⁰² At the same time, written commands were usually deployed in formal and complex situations. The result of these communicational channels was the production of emperor paperwork. Although sharing the same appellation, “emperor documents,” they varied in formats, capacity, and functions. The documents could be written by the emperor or drafted by designated officials, mostly high-ranked and trusted personnel of the inner court. In ceremonial circumstances, however, imperial paperwork appeared in investiture to deities or offering posthumous titles to high-ranked officials' family members 敕. These kinds of papers were explicitly prepared by the Hanlin Academicians and Department of Imperial Ordinances 敕諭房 at the Board of Rites.

This intricate practice of paperwork came from a long political tradition of more than two millennia.¹⁰³ Emperor writings attributed to that symbolically sophisticated and well-regulated administrative discourse, as evidently discussed in voluminous textual scholarship and dynasties' statutes. Jiaqing *huidian* 嘉慶會典 detailed that: “the emperor's words (諭音) which are transmitted to the people are called Decree (勅), Proclamation or Mandate (詔), Ordinance (誥), or Command (旨); all are drafted in proper form and submitted to the Emperor. Whenever there is a great ceremonial observance to be promulgated to all the officials, then the form Decree (勅

¹⁰² Wuhan daxue, *Rujia Lunli Zhengming Ji* 儒家伦理争鸣集 (*Collected Essays of the Debates of Confucian Ethics*) (Hubei: Hubei jiaoyu chubanshe, 2004), 33.

¹⁰³ Their significance can be found in early scholarly works such as Cai Yong's *Du doan* 獨斷, Liu Xie's *Wenxin Diaolong* 文心雕龍, *Chaoming wenxuan* 昭明文選, *Wenzhuang yuan qi* 文章緣起.

辭) is used; whenever there is a great political matter to be announced to the ministers and the people and to be handed down as a rule of law, then the Proclamation or Ordinance is used”.¹⁰⁴

Between the emperor’s verbal and written communication stood another distinction. The *Commentary on the Da Qing Law* 大清律例按語 dedicated a section to imperial decree 制書, suggesting that “the words of the Son of Heaven are called “announcement” 制; transliterations of those words call *shi* 書, such as in types of proclamation 詔, ordinance 敕, and edict 諭.”¹⁰⁵ The same differentiation was made in the Nguyen *huidian*, referencing back to Liu Xie’s *Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons* to project the symbolic presentation of the imperial writings, particularly proclamations:

劉勰文心雕龍曰：皇帝御世言也神淵默黼宸而響盈四表唯詔策。平昔軒轅，唐虞同稱為命。其在三伐事兼誥誓降；及七國竝稱曰令，秦改今為詔，漢初定儀則命有四，三曰詔書。

夫！王言崇祕大觀在上所以百辟其刑，萬邦作孚；故授官選賢則儀炳重離之輝優；文對策則氣含雨露之潤；敕戒詔誥則筆吐星漢之葩；從戎變伐則聲有洊雷之威；眚災肆赦則文有春露之滋；明罰法敕則辭有秋霜之烈。此詔書之大略也。¹⁰⁶

“Liu Xue’s *Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons* wrote that: “As an emperor rules over his empires, his words have a mysterious effect. Through he himself remains deep and silent in front of an embroidered screen,¹⁰⁷ his voice is heard to the limits of the four borders. To accomplish this, he depends on the edict. Long ago, in the times of Yellow Emperor, of Tang [Yao], and of Yu [Shun], [royal pronouncements] were called command 命. During the period of Three Dynasties [royal pronouncements] were included ordinance 誥 and oath 誓. In the period of Seven States, [royal pronouncements] were called instructions 令; in the Qin dynasty, was renamed proclamation 詔. In the early Han period, rules and regulations were formulated, royal pronouncements were of four types, the third one was proclamation 詔書.

¹⁰⁴ Fairbank and Teng, “On the Types and Uses of Ch’ing Documents”, 60-61.

¹⁰⁵ “天子之言曰制；書則載其旨昔，如詔敕諭箭之類”。Pan Deshe 潘德畬, *Da Qing Luli Anyu* 大清律例按語 (*Commentary on the Code of the Great Qing*) (Pan shi haishan xian guan, 1847), book 3, *Zhishu* 制書 (Imperial writings): 4a.

¹⁰⁶ HDSL, 112: 1a-b. The quote from *Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons* is:

“詔策：皇帝御宇，其言也神。淵嘿黼宸，而響盈四表，其唯詔策乎！”

As an emperor rules over his empires, his words have a mysterious effect. Through he himself remains deep and silent in front of an embroidered, his voice is heard to the limits of the four borders. To accomplish this, he depends on the edict and the *ce*, or script”.

Liu Xie, *Wenxin Diaolong*, 242; English translation: Vincent Yu-chung Shih (1959: 108).

¹⁰⁷ In the Chinese court culture, sitting before the embroidered screen is a symbol of the royal personage.

The words of a ruler are lofty and laden with meaning; hence they are suspended on high for all to look up to, they are the laws to all chieftains, and they are pledges capable of winning the confidence of all states. Therefore, in making appointments and selecting the virtuous for such appointments, and edict should contain ideas as bright as the sun and the moon; in enforcement, it should be rich in the literary quality, with the grace of the breeze and the timely rain; in warning or ordinary decree, it should have brilliance that flows from the brush, sparkling like stars in the Milky Way; in connection with the conduct of military expeditions, it should thunder forth in rolling majesty; in giving pardon, it should be as gracious as the dews in the spring; and in the just application of law and punishment, its language should be as sharp as the autumn frost. These are the main principles governing the royal edict.¹⁰⁸

Comprising a wide range of official writings, emperor documents allowed the expansion of the imperial written commands and the textual genre that associates with imperial authority. Their shared feature is the authoritative linkage to the emperor. Only the emperor had the power to execute those decisions and thus was legitimated to document-issuing. As a result, several characters were reserved exclusively for the emperor's paperwork that had the merit of being thoroughly investigated. Despite their significance, few scholars deal specifically with emperor documents. While *Ch'ing administrative terms* (E-tu Zen Sun, 1961) concerns the terminology of the Six Boards, H. S. Brunnert and V. V. Hagelstrom (1912) dedicated no considerable attention to imperial communication.¹⁰⁹ From the 1970s, the body of scholarship on Ming-Qing institutions and official correspondence emerged, including Kuo-chi Lee (1970); Silas Wu (1967, 1968, 1970, 1972), Pei Huang (1985, 1994), Hans Ulrich Vogel (1993), Beatrice S. Bartlett (1990, 2006), and Mark Elliott (2001). However, their ultimate concern is imperial archives and the palace memorials system.¹¹⁰ So does the

¹⁰⁸ English translation in Liu, *The Literary Mind and the Carving of Dragons*, 109–10.

¹⁰⁹ Sun, *Ch'ing Administrative Terms*, 71–75.

¹¹⁰ Brunnert and Hagelstrom, *Present Day Political Organization of China*; Kuo-chi Lee, "Bemerkungen Zum Ch'ing-Dokumentenstil: Eingaben an Den Kaiser (Tsou)," *Oriens Extremus* 17, no. 1/2 (1970): 125–35. Pierre-etienne Will, "Transmissions Secrètes et Succession Impériale à l'époque Mandchoue," *T'oung Pao, Second Series* 5, no. 1 (1972): 120–36; Wu, "The Memorial Systems of The Ch'ing Dynasty", 7–75; Wu, "Transmission of Ming Memorials", 275–87; Wu, *Communication and Imperial Control in China*; Wu, "A Note on The Proper Use of Documents for Historical Studies", 230–39; Marina Miranda, "The Division of Top-Ranking Posts in the Grand Council from 1729 until 1820," *Rivista Degli Studi Orientali* 66, no. 1/2 (1992): 121–42.; Pei Huang, "The Grand Council of the Ch'ing Dynasty: A Historiographical Study.," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London* 48, no. 3 (1985): 502–15.; Pei Huang, "The Confidential Memorial System of the Ch'ing Dynasty Reconsidered," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London* 57, no. 2 (1994): 329–38.; Hans U. Vogel, "Dokumente Und Dokumentenstil Der Ch'ing-Zeit: Einige Bemerkungen," *Oriens Extremus* 36, no. 2 (1993): 209–31; Bartlett, *Monarchs and Ministers*; Bartlett, "Qing Statesmen, Archivists, and Historians", 417–26; Elliott, "The Manchu-Language Archives", 1–70. For compelling views on metropolitan-provincial communication, see Philip A. Kuhn, *Soulstealers: The Chinese Sorcery Scare of 1768* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1990); Spence, *Treason by the Book*; R. Kent. Guy, *Qing Governors and Their Provinces: The Evolution of Territorial Administration in China, 1644-1796* (Seattle, Washington: University of Washington Press, 2010); John W. Dardess, *A Political Life in Ming China: A Grand Secretary and His Times* (Lanham: Rowman &

increasing bulk of Chinese scholarship on the subject. Most of them are dedicated to investigating the secret memorial system 奏摺 and its role in reshaping the nature of the Mid-Qing politics, particularly about the personal ruling and bureaucratic innovation of the Kang-Yong-Qian reigns (1661-1799).¹¹¹

The thin scholarship on Vietnamese state paperwork and institutional history illustrates no better analysis of the use of imperial writings but a modest observation of official archives and bureaucratic records. Matsumoto Nobuhiro (1936), Pierre Daudin. (1937); Paul Boudet (1942); Chen Jinghe (1960, 1962, 1962), R. B. Smith (1967), Phan Thuan An (1993), Vuong Dinh Quyen and Vu Thi Phung (2000); Vu Thi Phung (2005), Ngo Duc Tho and Trinh Khac Manh (2006), and Philippe Langlet (2008) stress on history of Vietnamese official documents and communication, while do not specifically investigate textual and archival aspects, such as typology, classification, formats, and genre.¹¹² *Cac the van chu Han Viet Nam* (Types of documents written in Classical Chinese in Vietnam, 2010), for instance, exhibits a brief introduction to emperor-issued documents, including proclamations 詔, ordinances 誥, decrees 旨, and edicts 諭.¹¹³ Scholars on

Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2013); S. Dabringhaus and J.F.J. Duindam, *The Dynastic Centre and the Provinces The Dynastic Centre and the Provinces: Agents and Interactions* (Leiden: Brill, 2014); and last but not least, a lively account of the Ming Inner power circle by John W. Dardess: John W. Dardess, *Four Seasons: A Ming Emperor and His Grand Secretaries in Sixteenth-Century China* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016).

¹¹¹ Official papers 公文, however, have recently been the object of a certain amount of attention, for instance, on Han's imperial proclamations, Wei Xin 魏昕, *Handai Zhaoling Yanjiu* 漢代詔令研究 (*Study of the Imperial Proclamations of the Han Time*) (Changchun: Dongbei shifan daxue, 2015). On Minh's ordinances, see Li Fujun 李福君, "Shi Lun Mingdai de Gaochi Wenshu 试论明代的诰敕文书 (An Attempt to Discuss Ordinances and Documents of the Ming Time)," *Dangan Xue Tongxun* 3 (2007). On a general view of Ming's *gongwen*, see Chen Long 陳龍, *Ming Dai Gongwen Biange Lun* 明代公文變革論 (*Discussing the Evolution of the Ming Official Documents*) (Nanjing: Nanjing Shufan daxue, 2007); Xiao Hong 肖虹, *Ming Dai Gongwen Lilun Yanjiu* 明代公文理論研究 (*Research Theory of the Ming Official Documents*) (Nanjing: Nanjing Shufan daxue, 2017); and on the Qing rule, see Sun Shulei 孫書磊, *Qing Dai Gongwen Zhedu Kao Lue* 清代公文制度考略 (*Preliminary Examination of the System of Qing Official Documents*) (Xining: Qinghai Shifan daxue, 2007); Wang Xueshen 王学深, "Qing Dai Gaoming Yuchi Mingfeng Zeng Wenshu Yanjiu 清代诰命与敕命封赠文书研究 (Study Ordinances and Investiture Documents of the Qing Time)," *Zhongguo Guojia Bowuguan Guan Kan* 6 (2013): 111–29.

¹¹² See Matsumoto Nobuhiro 松本信廣, "越南王室所藏安南本書目 (Catalogue of the Royal Libraries of Vietnam)," *Shigaku* 14, no. 2 (1936): 121–32; Pierre Daudin, *Sigillographie Sino-Annamite* (Sài Gòn: Imprimerie de l'Union, 1937); Paul Boudet, "Les Archives Des Empereurs D'Annam et L'Histoire Annamite," *Bulletin Des Amis Du Vieux Hué* 29 (1942): 229–59; Bui Quang Tung, "Pour Une Meilleure Conservation Des Archives Vietnamiennes," *France-Asie* 109–110 (1955): 742–46; Chen, "The Imperial Archives", 111–28; Ngô Đức Thọ and Trịnh Khắc Mạnh, *Cơ Sở Văn Bản Học Hán Nôm* (*Introduction to the Study of Sino-Vietnamese Texts*) (Hà Nội: Khoa học Xã hội, 2006).

¹¹³ Trần Thị Kim Anh and Trần Cẩm Hoàng, *Các Thể Văn Chử Hán Việt Nam* (*Types of Documents Written in Classical Chinese in Vietnam*) (Hà Nội: Khoa học Xã hội, 2010).

administrative records 公文 have largely neglected a considerable amount of emperor-issued paperwork, partly because of their unique nature, functions, and formats. As illustrated in the following, however, the magnitude that imperial writings transformed the landscape of the Nguyen administration was profound.

In the Qing context, Fairbank and Teng (1940) provided the first introduction to emperor documents in English and presented twenty-six terms related to imperial communication.

Table 4.6. Types of emperor documents in Qing China

No.	Types	Sub-types
1	Commands	Imperial command (敕, 勅, 勅), command-edict (敕諭), transmitted command (傳敕), Nominative command (坐名敕)
2	Decrees	Imperial decree (制), imperial decree (制書), imperial decree (制辭), Decree (令旨)
3	Edicts	Vermilion edict (硃諭), Imperial edict (上諭), imperial edict (諭), and Imperial edict (諭旨)
4	Endorsements	Vermilion pen or endorsement (硃筆), Vermilion endorsement (硃批), Red endorsement (批紅), Imperial endorsement (御批)
5	Instructions	Instructions and Edicts (訓諭)
6	Ordinance	Ordinance (詔).
7	Patents	Patent by command (敕命), Patent by ordinance (詔命), patent (冊)
8	Proclamations	Imperial proclamation, mandate (詔), Yellow bill bearing a proclamation (詔黃), Imperial proclamation, and ordinances (詔誥).
9	Rescripts	Imperial rescript, imperial decree (旨).
10	Utterances in general	Imperial utterances (絲綸), Yellow copies (謄黃), Yellow prints (搨黃).

Source: Fairbank and Teng: 1939, 1940.

The Nguyen system of imperial written communication was less complex, with a reduced quantity of paperwork-type and regulations. The situation, however, does not necessarily mean that deciphering them is less challenging, given the nature of the Nguyen palace archives, which include more than two thousand proclamations, decrees, and edicts produced between 1802 and 1841. It is not to mention a large number of imperial investitures 敕 that could be well numbered in several dozen

thousand, located in villages and family storage across Vietnam.¹¹⁴ Most of them made no direct connection to the palace archives and thus shall not be included in the present examination. However, they are certainly a compelling subject for further study on Nguyen's bureaucratic culture and manuscript practice.¹¹⁵

IV. 2. 2. Emperor's paperwork in the Nguyen archives

The remaining archives of the Gia Long reign do not provide a lucid view of the emperor's paperwork. The extant is far from adequate to draw a clear picture of the relations between the ruler and his textual representation of authority. Both the vermilion records and Nguyen *DNTL* give no evidence of Gia Long's direct engagement with drafting paperwork or no clue of any piece of writing that the ruler conducted personally. The remaining provides 164 proclamations, edicts, and decrees, contributing 19% of the existing archives, as shown in the chart below.

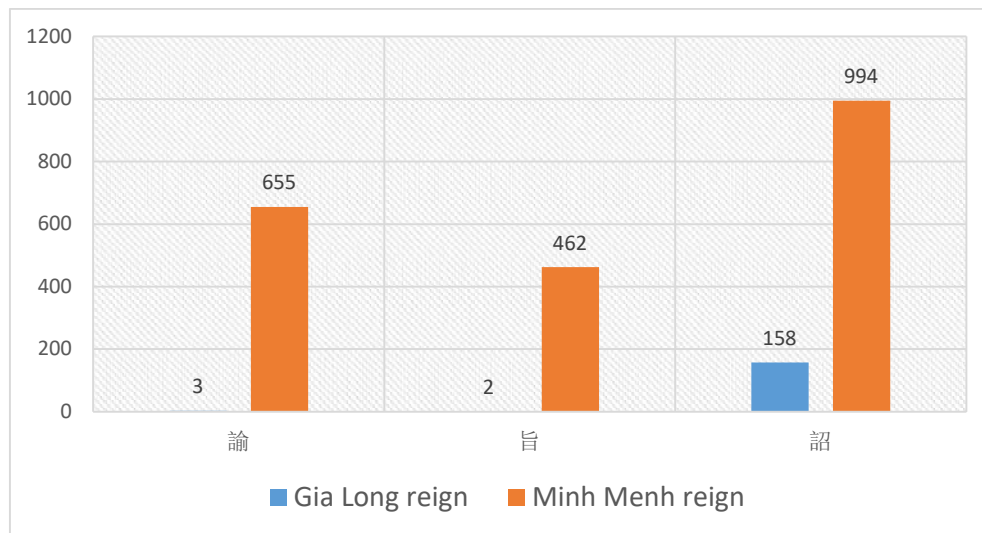


Chart 4.5. The extant emperor documents in the Gia Long and Minh Menh reigns
Source: author

Notes: Proclamations (詔), decrees (旨), and edicts (諭).

The surviving emperor's paperwork of the first reign is limited, with less than ten documents per year. The exception was GL16 (1817) with 118. Although this

¹¹⁴ *DNTL*, IV, 7: 21a. In 1851, the investitures for local deities alone had reached 13,069, not to mention almost the same number awarded to high rank officials' family members.

¹¹⁵ Details of regulation and official procedures related to bestowing investitures (敕, 誥敕, and 敕文), see *HDSL*, books 18-21.

volume might not lead us somewhere near to the original number, it at least gives a hint about the scale of their production.

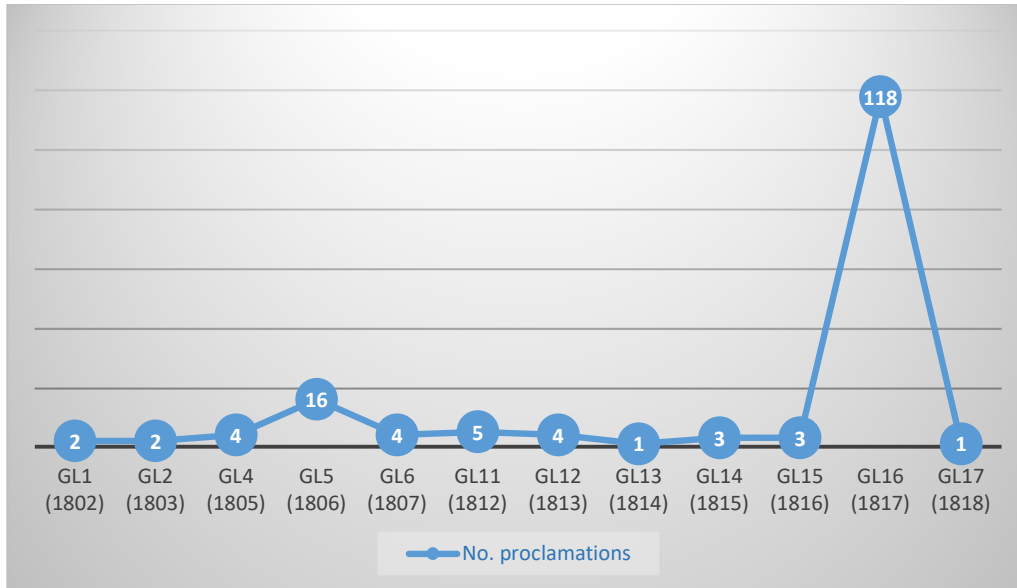


Chart 4.6. The nature of extant proclamations in the GL reign, 1802-1820 [Based on surviving Nguyen palace paperwork]
Source: author.

In projecting a pattern of the *proclamation's* monthly production, 118 extant manuscripts of the GL16 are taken as a case study. However, there was an average of ten existing papers per month; the fourth and twelfth account for the largest existing number: twenty-one and twenty, respectively, which is significant compared to the rest of the GL years. The propagation of imperial documents also involved more textual performance and ceremony since most were dedicated to appointing officials, rallying troops, and conferring official titles. The emperor was aware of and attempted to build up symbolic authority,¹¹⁶ in which the production of emperor paperwork was undoubtedly part of the project.

¹¹⁶ Michel Duc Chaigneau, *Souvenirs de Hue* (Paris: Imprimerie Imperiale, 1867), 110–12.

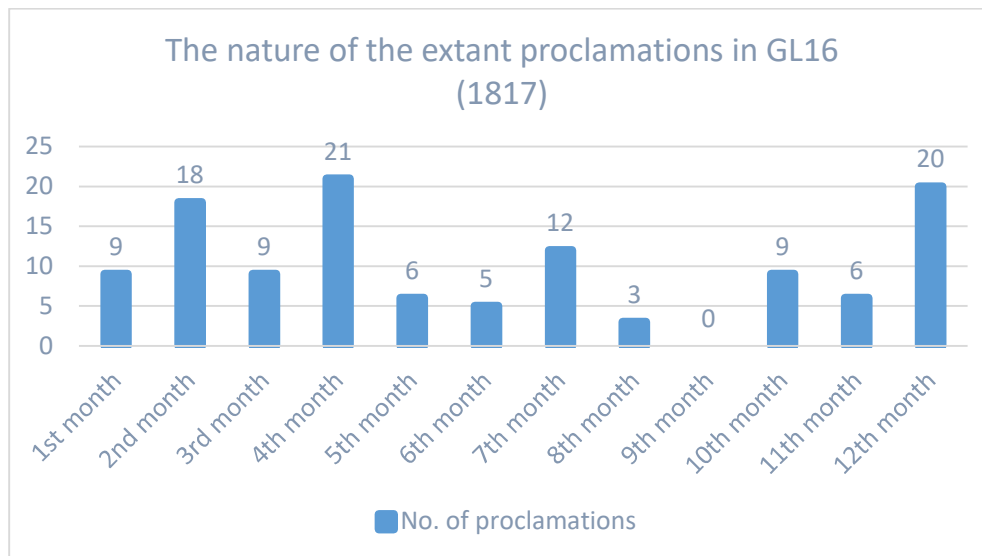


Chart 4.7. The nature of existing proclamations in GL16 (1817)

[Based on the extant Nguyen palace paperwork]

Source: author.

During the same length of the two-decade rule, the heritage of emperor documents left behind by Minh Menh was far more sophisticated. The repertoire contains 2,111 documents (994 proclamations, 462 decrees, and 655 edicts), 13 times more than the scale of surviving Gia Long archival holdings.

As one of the most literary emperors in the country's history, Minh Menh took a great deal of interest in commanding written authority. In the domain of literary performance, he also left a unique anthology of 3,500 poems. In 1827 and 1833, part of the compilation was printed as *Imperial Poetry Collection* 御製詩集, and then distributed to princes, high-ranked officials, and provincial schools.¹¹⁷ His administrative writings were no less impressive, containing thousands of pages of political essays. While few exist in the manuscript form, the majority were twice selectively woodblock-printed.¹¹⁸ The preface of the first volume exposes Minh Menh's awareness of deploying imperial authority through personal writings. The monarch stressed the significance of the papers to the fact that:

¹¹⁷ DNTL, II, 47: 24a.

¹¹⁸ Minh Mệnh. *Ngự chế văn, sơ tập* 明命御製文 (Imperial writings, First volume), 1834, including 1,209 essays, Sino-Nom Institute Library; no. A.118; Minh Menh's *Imperial Poetry* (御製詩集), 1831, including 8 printed versions, Sino-Nom Institute Library, A.134A (First collection 初集); A.134B (Second collection 二集); VHv.68 (Third collection 三集); A.134d (Forth collection 四集; Fifth collection 五集); A.134C – the sixth collection (六集).

... 間有關要事件，在廷諸大臣倘一時未能領會，與朕偶有思慮所及，不得不自擬撰，或草付，或硃批。自元年至今，已積幾千百餘件。又北巡時，上皇太后奏摺并幾暇間有雜文亦積至若干。因思以上等事或久睽慈範，寤寐不安。事實上形之筆札，或安邊討逆，籌辦軍機；或禱雨祈晴，屢邀吳貺；或訓迪官常，申明法令，一至雜著銘記不忍日久棄置。爰親自刪去未最關要者十之四五焉，因命彙為御製文集。再令筆畫端楷者書之，以備覽耳。非記文也，記實也。嗣後遞年有所擬作，亦令據實續繕，以鑒政事之得失，始終之勤怠，仍用以親自勉勵云著。將此諭旨冠于集端可也。欽此！
明命四年十一月二十一日

... There are essential affairs that the court's high-ranked officials have been aware of or things that I reckon; thus, [I] have to draft. There are also *imperial draft* 草付 and *red endorsements* 硃批 from the early years, which have been collectively incorporated into hundreds and thousands of packages 件. In addition, when I was on the northern tour, I offered “*respects-paying memorials*” to my mother. They can be incorporated with several miscellaneous writings drafted at my leisure. Besides, when I am away from my mother or awake from interrupted sleep, my feelings appear on the strokes of the brush. Or [when I] work out a military strategy to pacify bandits and keep the country in peace; or [when I] pray Heaven for rain and sunlight many times; or [when I] instruct officials to clarify state institutions and compile *miscellaneous writings* 雜文, *stele inscriptions* 銘文, and *essays* 記文.

Those writings should not be left in corners forever. I therefore personally examine, deduct four to five out of ten [40-50%] of unimportant papers, and order [them] collected into the *Collection of Imperial Writings* 御製文集. I also gathered scribes who are good at *regular script* 楷書 to copy them down. This [volume] is not a collection of literary works but records real political affairs. My annual compilations shall be collected and precisely recopied to demonstrate good and bad political events, hard work and laziness, and encourage myself. The copy of this decree is considered a preface of the volume. MM4/11/21 (22/12/1823).

In 1835, Minh Menh's *decrees, edicts, and endorsements* were prepared for a second printing. It included instructions and commands involving military situations in the northern and southern territories. The memorial in which the Grand Council and Grand Secretariat presented the *Military strategies (fanglue)* announced that:

自兩圻用兵，欽奉指授方略有特出硃毫批示者有欽頒諭旨施行者。神文聖武之懿藹乎如日月之行天，沛乎如江河之互地。今北圻大功告蕝，

請將事屬北圻捕務諸紅本竝間有御製詩章先行撰述，次及南圻捕務恭纂成編於以公之天下傳之來世。¹¹⁹

Since military campaigns were launched in the two territories, they have been strategically instructed by imperial endorsements or edicts. [The emperor's] *writings* 文 are marvellous; the military mind is incredible, as bright as the moon and stars in the sky, as overflowing as rivers in the endless land. Nowadays, the glorious victory in the north has been accomplished, [we] would beg to collect the *red records* 紅本 concerning the northern pacification, inserting with emperor's poems to compile into books. Writings of the southern campaign shall be incorporated then to announce to all *Under Heaven* and pass to the coming generations.

Emperor's writings were among the backbone of the making of political language. By dispersing those compilations, a dialogue was established between the imperial paperwork symbolism and the monarch's subjects. In 1833, Minh Menh announced that anyone who sought to acquire a copy of the imperial composition should bring enough ink and papers to the Bureau of State History, where printing woodblocks were available.¹²⁰ Locating emperor documents within that political matrix, one can spot a strong linkage between the emphasis on practical writing and the significant quantity of documents produced under imperial governance. There was no successive emperor whose appreciation of issuing written correspondence surpassed Minh Menh. Written instructions were essential to conduct the imperial statecraft. Thousands of edicts were sent directly to the frontiers and battle zones between 1833 and 1836, providing colorful illustrations of the shifting conceptualization and practice of emperor writings in Hue's political culture. Those paperwork types were vastly reserved for state ceremonies under Gia Long, and turned to mass production in pragmatic exchanges between the emperor and his bureaucrats. Minh Menh had an aptitude for supervising and commanding officials through the written channel and generated an intricate documentary system to implement his imperial vision. He did so by breathing new life and dynamism into Hue's conventional and inflexible paperwork usage. The authoritative representation of *proclamations*, *decrees*, and *edicts* was mobilized effectively for the operation of the empire. Their extant volume ranks second only to memorials, contributing 17.8% of the total existing Minh Menh palace paperwork.

¹¹⁹ DNTL, II, 155: 23b-24a.

¹²⁰ DNTL, II, 92: 4b.

Minh Menh understood the art of conveying and mobilizing power on paper and was noticeably capable of maximizing their representational authorization through personal writings. The following edict, for instance, was written by the emperor at cold-winter midnight, as he was on tour on 20/01/1823. Since the ruler was touched by cold winds and rains, he offered sincere sympathy to the escorted officials and imperial guards to whom silver and copper coins were granted. While the structure and organization of this particular edict shall be analyzed in the next section, it is a testimony to the emperor's commitment to promoting the paperwork types associated with imperial power. Thus, the document symbolically carries a powerful message of mercy and benevolence of a truly Heavenly-mandated ruler.



Figure 4.15. The edict was written by Minh Menh Emperor on 20/01/1823.
Source: Le and Vinh (2009)

The emperor's passion for written correspondence was accompanied by systematic endeavors to utilize communication and exchange documents for bureaucratic operations. A compactly paperwork-based bureaucratic system was growing sophisticated, even unnecessarily intricate. The monarch experienced it firsthand as he was aware of the "sweating buffaloes" transporting official papers.¹²¹ Hue was facing the pressure of over-employed imperial documents. In 1833, a requested reduction of proclamations was issued: "from now on, for those central militaries and civilian officials that are degraded or forced retirement, *proclamations* should no longer be used. Instead, [replaced by] *certified documents* 憑 that are responsible by the Boards of Defence and Personnel".¹²² The order,

¹²¹ DNTL, II, 109: 13b-14a.

¹²² DNTL, II, 88: 13a. Original text, "隼定: 嗣凡京職文武官員降級勒休, 者由吏兵二部給母須仍繕憑前詔".

however, did not prevent the use of *edicts* for daily communication in which imperial decision-making was initiated following strokes of the emperor's brush.

IV. 2. 3. Gia Long's emperor documents

The Gia Long reign presented distinctive features regarding exercising royal commands. The man's personal warfare experiences and educational background defined his perception of royal authority and the mechanism to inaugurate it. The young Gia Long was not a first-ranked prince.¹²³ At twelve, he fled from Hue; witnessed the whole family annihilated at fifteen, and became king 王 at eighteen. His next two decades were neither Confucian training, as normally expected, nor practising princely authority, but endless desperate battles in the most hardship terrain of the Lower Mekong.¹²⁴ The lesson he learned and upheld for the rest of his life was that royal authority had nothing to do with ceremonies and symbolic titles but with the practical enforcement of power that none should violate.¹²⁵ The most humiliating experience came to the eighteen-year-old boy in 1780 when his uncle, Lord Due Tong (1765-1776) and his cousin, Lord Tan Chinh (1776-1777), were killed by Tayson in 1777. Led by a former army official, Do Thanh Nhan (?-1781), the largest independent military group in Gia Dinh (Dong Son army) found the Nguyen's sole survival member an investment to potential political profit. With their support, Nguyen Phuc Anh ascended the throne in 1780 with the price of the teenager's humiliation from power abuse. *DNTL* reveals:

Do Thanh Nhan was vainglorious of his talent and power over the Dong Son army and thus plotted to usurp authority. Since [he] was in charge [of the Nguyen Phuc Anh's government], the arrogance was increasing. The power of life and death came from his [Do Thanh Nhan] hands; Nhan's decision cut the royal budget, but he did not agree to provide anything for royal expenditure [...]. When the king visited his residence, Nhan did not show any appropriate manner, and his men also arrogantly followed his behavior.¹²⁶

¹²³ His father was elder brother to the Lord of Cochinchina.

¹²⁴ Vu, "The Age of Sea Falcons", 102.

¹²⁵ See Gia Long's conversation with Michel Đức Chaigneau and his father Jean-Baptiste Chaigneau (1769–1832), a French official at the Hue court. Chaigneau, *Souvenirs de Hue*, 111–13.

¹²⁶ *DNTL*, 27: 24b-25a.

The usurper was eliminated in 1781, and never again did the king allow his authority to be violated. At the same time, his close interaction with westerners allowed some cross-cultural insight into the conceptualization of the kingship he personified. Later, Gia Long commented to his western personnel that the term “Son of Heaven” in Vietnamese was an absurdity—at least in mixed Vietnamese-European companies. “I told everybody who called me “Son of Heaven” that I have a father and a mother,” said the emperor.¹²⁷ These reveal Gia Long’s pragmatic treatment of imperial powers that was profoundly shaped by his teenage experiences and interactions with Western mercenaries.

The monarch, however, was a skilful actor, knowing how to mobilize textual authority and the power of official papers to legitimate his rule and engage with crafty political performances. Two years after reclaiming Saigon (1788), he organized the first New Year ceremony with the *seal-opening rite* 開寶, which took a deep root in Chinese and Vietnamese tradition.¹²⁸ The significant demonstration of the 1790 rite was conducted at a critical moment of establishing the Nguyen rule in lower Mekong, where they were preparing for the coming fierce battles against Tayson.¹²⁹ The seal-opening ceremony was a perfect symbolic exhibition of royal authority through a liturgical performance conducted at the ancestral temple 太廟, Inner palace, and the public.¹³⁰ The gesture aimed to cultivate confidence and public morale among his officials and populace and solidify his leadership in a tumultuous time.

Gia Long particularly focused on one royal seal, “大越國阮主永鎮之寶” (*The Seal of the eternal rule of the Nguyen Lord of Daiviet kingdom*) and associated with his mythic rise to power. The narrative was tremendously significant to the myth of the dynastic foundation. The sacred seal testified to the legitimate ruling line and proved the prince of profound charismatics to claim the throne.

¹²⁷ Chaigneau, *Souvenirs de Hue*, 111–13.; Woodside, *Vietnam and the Chinese Model*, 10.

¹²⁸ The significant symbolic meaning of the ceremony of “opening the imperial seal box” (開寶/印) is to mark a new and innovative governance of the reign for a promising and prosperous year to come with hope, expectation, and determination of the ruler under the Heavenly bless.

¹²⁹ On the warfare situation during the 1790s, see Vu, “The Age of Sea Falcons”.

¹³⁰ DNTL, I, q. 5: 12a-13b.



Figure 4.16. The seal “*Daiviet quoc Nguyen chua vinh tran chi bao*” 大越國阮主永鎮之寶.

Measured: 10.84 x 10.84 cm.

Date: 05. 01. 1710 (Vinh Thinh 5/12/6)

Source: Vietnam National Museum of History; Image: Vu Quoc Quan, Nguyen Dinh Chien, *Nguyen Cong Viet* (2009): 112.

Reportedly to be cast on January 5, 1710, the seal was recognized as “the Heirloom Seal of the Realm” of the Nguyen family (後列聖相傳奉為國).¹³¹ The disseminated story was that it accompanied Nguyen Phuc Anh in fierce battles for two decades. A signal of heavenly blessing that was later highlighted in *DNTL*. The emperor himself was said to instruct his son, and future Minh Menh (後嘉隆年間, 帝嘗諭皇太子于即聖祖仁皇帝曰):

此寶歷世相傳. 昔日屢經兵火, 人不圖存此寶乃能終始提携. 詔文除授一切行用, 取信國中人皆嚮應. 所關國家不細. 信是神器有歸似有鬼神訶護, 卒使全還趙璧傳之子孫. 且我國家列聖相繼重熙累洽二百餘年, 今憑藉寵靈奄有全越, 積慶固有自來. 詩云: 周雖舊邦其命維新, 則其肇興周屋固始於文王武王而締造初基寔自古公王李當. 時所留鼎彝舊物周人亦必奉為重器. 况我先祖所貽之國寶乎. 嗣後當以此為傳國之寶. 我子孫固真世世相承守而勿失傳之億萬年無疆有承也.

This precious seal was to pass through generations. [It] previously experienced many fierce battles, lives were lost, but the seal remained. Edicts (詔文) and official appointments all used this seal. [the seal] maintains faith (取信) in the realm, and everybody follows; the interrelation to the kingdom's fate is not insignificant. It is the Heavenly blessing and support from spirits and gods that the jade of the Zhao kingdom returns and passes through generations of decedents. In addition, our realm's sage ancestors succeeded

¹³¹ *DNTL*, I, 8: 7b.

splendidly for 200 years; now, because of divine assistance the Viet realm is unified, and the blessing (慶) has been long generated. Shijing [Classic of Poetry] writes, “Zhou is an old state, but its fate is new,” although the foundational succession came from Kings Wen and Wu (文王, 武王), the early contribution came to Gugong wang (古公王) and Lidang (李當). Even the ancient artifacts such as the ding (鼎) and yi (彝) possessed by the Zhou, are precious artifacts of inheriting the state, not to mention our ancestors’ royal seal. From now on, [the seal] is the Heirloom Seal of the Realm (傳國之寶). My sons and grandsons must pass [the seal] through for generations, not to have it lost, but to maintain the succession for tens of thousands of generations.¹³²

Gia Long’s written command was delivered through two primary channels. “The royal sent-down instructions were called ordinances 敕 and edicts 諭. Congdong followed to implement [the royal instructions], [the documents] are also called ordinances and edicts” 諭音頒下曰敕曰諭. 公同遵旨傳示, 者亦以敕諭書之.¹³³ In the previous sections, we have experienced Congdong’s roles in transmitting royal directions, royal summons, and Congdong instructions followed royal orders (旨差, 旨傳, and 公同欽 (旨) 傳). This part examines the administrative roles of the emperor’s writings. Most of the assistance to royal communication came from a specific official group, Hanlin Academicians 翰林.¹³⁴ Prominent among them were the Hanlin Academicians of drafting imperial ordinance 翰林院制誥, the post that Nguyen Phuc Anh started selecting as early as 1789.¹³⁵

Although Gia Long himself did not attend well-Confucian training, it was evident in his effort to deploy administrative documents in the exercise of imperial commands. The enriching textual authority and cultivating kingship were part of his endeavor to redefine and symbolize imperial images of the newly unified realm. For more than two decades (1780-1802), he did not allow official imprints to appear in

¹³² DNTL, I, 8: 7a-8b.

¹³³ DNTL, I, 凡例: 1b-2a.

¹³⁴ During the Gia Long reign, Hanlin Academy (翰林院) was not yet to be an institution, but titles awarded to mid-ranked officials of high scholarly skills to serve at the court.

¹³⁵ Hucker, *A Dictionary of Official Titles*, entry 955: “知制誥” (Lit., to be responsible for drafting imperial pronouncements).

In 1789, Nguyen Phuc Anh appointed Nguyen Dang Huu the title of *Hanlin Academicians of drafting imperial ordinance* (翰林院制誥) and three other: Nguyen Khac Trieu, Tran Quang Tinh, and Dinh Cong Khiem Hanlin Academicians 翰林院. DNTL, I, 3: 20a.

red.¹³⁶ This gesture indicates his vision of the power of textual and paratextual elements possessing great symbolic representation. When the triumph came in 1802, Gia Long introduced five more royal seals 寶¹³⁷:

Seals		Functions
<i>Thao toi an dan chi bao</i>	討罪安民之寶	Dispatching army
<i>Sac chinh van dan chi bao</i>	勅正萬民之寶	Instructing people and officials
<i>Menh duc chi bao</i>	命德之寶	Promoting royal family members and officials with Duke's title and higher
<i>Che cao chi bao</i>	制誥之寶	Promoting officials with marquis title and below
<i>Quoc gia tin bao</i>	國家信寶	Used for routine affairs

Traditionally, the production of imperial seals (寶 and 璽) signified the uppermost imperial authority and dynastic legitimacy.¹³⁸ Their imprints marked essential icons on the construction of emperor paperwork. Fifteenth-century Le dynasty, for instance, firmly committed to the practice. Nine months after enthronement, the second Le ruler ordered six imperial seals cast (1435), including *Thuan thien thua van chi bao* (順天承運之寶), *Dai thien hanh hoa chi bao* (代天行化之寶), *Sac menh chi bao* (勅命之寶), *Che cao chi bao* (制誥之寶), *Ngu tien chi bao* (御前之寶), and *Ngu tien tieu bao* (御前小寶).¹³⁹ The second Nguyen ruler, Minh Menh, not only inherited the Gia

¹³⁶ DNLT, I, 16: 14a.

¹³⁷ DNLT, I, 16: 14a.

¹³⁸ *Bao* 寶 and *xi* 璽 were only for the emperor usage. During the Sui and Tang, the emperors reportedly used eight “*xi*” (璽) which were also known as eight *bao* (寶) for imperial documents. Under the Sung, the monarch had six seals (六寶), later developed to eight *bao* (八寶), and nine *bao* under the Emperor Huizong (徽宗, 1082-1135). The Southern Sung then added two more (十一寶) in the collection. Under the Yuan period, imperial seals called “*xi*” (璽) in the number of eleven. The collection of imperial seals (寶璽) was well-defined under the Ming. See Xu Lianda 徐連達 and Zhu Ziyang 朱子彥, *Zhongguo Huangdi Zhidu* 中國皇帝制度 (*The Institution of Chinese Emperors*) (Guangdong: Guangdong jiaoyu chubanshe, 1996), 121; Nguyễn, *Án Churong Việt Nam (Seals of Vietnam)*, 58-59. For the Ming dynasty seals, see Tingyu Zhang, *Mingshi 明史 (Ming History)* (1739, Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1991), book 68. For a useful overview of Chinese official seals 官印 which includes imperial seals, see Kazutada Kataoka, *Zhongguo Guanyin Zhidu Yanjiu* 中国官印制度研究 (*Study of the Chinese System of Official Seals*) (Dongfang shudian, 2008).

¹³⁹ DVSKTT, 11: 16b, 24b-25b; 12: 38a-b, 40b. The original text:

十六日，奏告天地及太廟，以鑄「順天承運之寶，代天行化之寶，勅命之寶，制誥之寶，御前之寶，御前小寶，共六顆。...

三月初六日，鑄寶璽成，命右弼黎文靈等至太廟奏告。六璽皆以金銀為之。順天承運之寶，藏而不用，傳國用之。代天行化之寶，征伐用之。制誥之寶，制詔用之。勅命之寶，勅諭及號令，賞罰，大事用之。御前之寶，帳簿及籍簿用之。御前小寶，機密用之。然政事猶用牙印；施行新寶，俱未用之。

Long’s collection of royal seals but also conducted a ‘mass-production’ of his own.¹⁴⁰ Minh Menh also strengthened the symbolic connection of his blessing birth with a Heavenly red seal that appeared in his mother’s dream, a good omen that guided his mandate of heaven.¹⁴¹

Nguyen Phuc Anh’s declaration of his new ruling name, Gia Long, on May 31, 1802, was announced through a royal proclamation. The document described the change as a significant transformation under the Heaven 茲既與天下而維新. Transformation, however, should be maintained with confidence 革就以有孚 to strengthen the foundation 尚佇衍基圖於不拔, the announcement continues. Therefore, it should require that “from now on, all pronouncements, edicts, and commands 誥諭命令 are referred to as ‘proclamation.’ At the beginning of the paper, stamped the seal “取信天下文武權行” (“*Keeping the trust under the Heaven for civil and military authority*”).¹⁴² By regulating the type and format of the imperial writings, Nguyen’s bureaucrat recognized their tremendous possession of authoritative symbolism and, thus, should be subjects of careful arrangement. For a glimpse at Gia Long’s written commands during the first ruling year, twenty-two edicts were comprised at length in the Nguyen *DNTL*. These royal announcements indicated the significance of royal orders in addressing crucial dynastic issues and self-projecting images of the new ruling house.

IV. 2. 4. The first year of the Gia Long reign

As the highest form of bureaucratic command, these proclamations shed some light on the very political nature of the Gia Long age. Because none appeared in original formats, a brief look at these royal pronouncements exposes the landscape under which they were issued and circulated.

No	Date	Content	References
1	31/05/1802	辛未, 祇告列聖之靈, 禮成, 帝御殿受朝賀, 建元嘉隆, 大赦國內. 詔曰: [...] On the Tan Mui day [the 8 th day of the sexagenary cycle], [the emperor] respectfully reported to the spirits of the sage ancestors. When the ceremony	DNTL, I, q. 17: 1 a-b.

¹⁴⁰ See more on Nguyễn, Phạm, and Nguyễn, *Kim Ngọc Bảo Tỷ Của Các Hoàng Đế và Vương Hậu Triều Nguyễn Việt Nam (Royal Seals of Emperors and Queens of the Vietnam Nguyen Dynasty)*.

¹⁴¹ DNTL, I, 5: 19b-20a; II, 1: 1a. Also, see my treatment of the story in Vũ Đức Liêm, “Làm Thế Nào Để Tạo Ra ‘Lý Lịch’ Của Vua? (How to Create a King’s ‘Profile’?)” An ninh Thế giới, 2019, <http://antgct.cand.com.vn/Khoa-hoc-Van-Minh/Lam-the-nao-de-tao-ra-ly-lich-cua-vua-543567/>.

¹⁴² DNTL, I, 17: 2b.

		ended, the emperor sat at the palace, received an official commendation, announced the reign title “Gia Long” (嘉隆), and announced an amnesty to the realm. The proclamation read, “...”.	
2	The month	5 th 賞水步諸軍, 詔曰: [...]. Awarding [troops of] the navy and infantry, the proclamation read, “...”.	DNTL, I, 17: 2b-3a.
3	The month	6 th 徵乂安丁田關津產物諸稅, 詔曰: [...]. Collecting land tax, poll tax, and local products in Nghe An, the proclamation read, “...”.	DNTL, I, 17: 16a.
4	The month	6 th 緩清華兵徭租稅, 詔曰: [...]. Suspending military conscription and land tax for Thanh Hoa, the proclamation read, “...”.	DNTL, I, 17: 17a.
5	The month	6 th 帝駐蹕于昇龍城, 御敬天殿 (故黎所建), 羣臣朝賀, 詔諭: [...]. The emperor stationed in Thang Long (Hanoi), sat at the Kinh Thien Palace (built by the Le). The officials attended and offered commendations. Proclaiming to instruct the Northerners that read, “...”.	DNTL, I, 17: 20b.
6	The month	6 th 以北河大定布告中外, 詔曰: [...]. Announcing the pacification of the North to the Inner and Outer [regions], the proclamation read, “...”.	DNTL, I, 17: 21b.
7	20/07/1802	二十一日駕至昇龍城, 偽官相率拜降, 羣盜悉清, 大勳用集. 於戲! 天地晦, 王師蕩滌, 迄成拯救之功; 雲雷沌, 君子經綸, 佇享昇平之福. 詔諭 北河豪目曰: [...]. On the 21 st day, the royal procession came to Thang Long [Hanoi]. [Tayson’s] Officials came to surrender. All the bandits were destroyed, and the tremendous meritorious deed had been accomplished. The sky was dark. The imperial army came to rescue [people]; amidst the violence of thunders and clouds, the gentlemen struggled back and forth to earn the good fortune of peace. Proclaiming to instruct Northern officials and people, read, “...”.	DNTL, I, 17: 22b-23a.
8	The month	7 th 詔諭黎舊臣及鄉貢士人等, 詔曰: [...]. Proclaiming an instruction to the former Le officials, read, “...”.	DNTL, I, 18: 1a.
9	The month	7 th 錄北河忠義諸臣, 詔曰: [...]. Recording [biographies of] Northern loyal and righteous officials, the proclamation read, “...”.	DNTL, I, 18: 1b.
10	The month	7 th 命擇鄭後主鄭祀. 初大駕北伐, 鄭族人人懼誅. 帝洞悉其情, 下詔諭之曰: [...]. Commanding the selection of Trinh’s family members to take significant responsibility for worshipping [the family ancestors]. Earlier, as the news of the [imperial] Northern campaign spread out, Trinh family members were afraid for their life. The emperor was aware of this, and issued the proclamation that read, “...”.	DNTL, I, 18: 2b

11	The month	7 th	申戒水步諸軍，詔曰：[...]. Again, admonishing the navy and infantry, the proclamation read, "...".	DNTL, I, 18: 4a-b
12	The month	7 th	命平定富安立功臣廟，詔曰：[...]. Ordering Binh Dinh and Phu Yen to build a temple for meritorious officials, the proclamation read, "...".	DNTL, I, 18: 6b
13	The month	8 th	命留京大臣權建太廟于皇城之左。詔曰：[...]. Ordering capital officials to build a royal ancestral temple at the left of the imperial city, the proclamation read, "...".	DNTL, I, 18: 14b.
14	The month	8 th	黎族鄭族與黎文武舊臣藩酋等上表勸進請正帝位。帝謙讓不受，詔曰：[...]. Le and Trinh families, former military and civil officials, and highland vassal chiefs memorized to ask the king to proclaim emperor. The king modestly declined: the proclamation read, "...".	DNTL, I, 18: 17b.
15	The month	9 th	九月，封黎後黎維 ^襖 為延嗣公。先是西賊之亂維 ^襖 從其父維 ^祇 奔保樂。維 ^祇 為賊所殺。維 ^襖 潛隱依于太原藩臣麻世固等。至是帝命訪求黎後，世固以聞遂召而封之。詔曰：[...]. In the 9 th lunar month, awarding a Le decedent, Le Duy Hoan, the title Dien Tu Duke 延嗣公. Earlier during the Tayson, Duy Hoan followed his father, Duy Chi, and [both] fled to Bao Lac. Duy Chi was killed by Tayson, and Duy Hoan took exile under a vassal in Thai Nguyen, named Ma The Co. Now, the king asked for information about the Le family, and The Co brought the news [of Duy Hoan]. [The king] summoned [Duy Hoan] and conferred the title. The proclamation read, "...".	DNTL, I, 18: 24b-25a.
16	The month	9 th	給鄭族祀田，令鄭[木+胥]監其祀。詔曰：[...]. Bestowing land [dedicated to worshipping] the Trinh family, ordered Trinh Tu to be in charge; the proclamation read, "...".	DNTL, I, 18: 25b-26a
17	The month	9 th	賜故黎開國中興諸功臣子孫饒蔭。詔曰：[...]. Offered titles to sons and grandsons of the founding-state officials and Le officials (of the restoration period), the proclamation read, "...".	DNTL, I, 18: 26a.
18	The month	10 th	嘉定饑，詔留鎮官發倉粟一萬斛以貸貧民。諸休養人員及京官有妻子在貫者亦貸之。 Gia Dinh faced starvation. [the king] decreed commandery officials to lend ten thousand <i>hoc</i> of rice to poor people. Retired officials and capital officials whose wives and children remained in their hometowns [Gia Dinh] can also borrow [the rice].	DNTL, I, 19: 1b
19	The month	11 th	十一月，大告武成。癸酉，祭天地神祇。甲戌，獻俘于太廟。命肅直管都統制阮文謙，刑部參知阮登祐押引阮光纘及其弟光維，光紹，光盤于城門外，凌遲處死五象分屍。(用五象分繁其五體而分裂之此乃刑之最極者)。取阮文岳，阮文惠骸骨搗碎拋棄。岳惠纘頭骨與惠夫妻木主幽之外園家。	DNTL, I, 19: 3b-4a.

		(明命二年改監獄室永遠幽禁). 其黨陳光耀, 武文勇等各盡法處治, 梟首示眾, 下詔布告中外. 詔曰: [...]. In the 11 th lunar month, conducting a ceremony to announce the military triumph. On the 10 th day of the sexagenary cycle, sacrificed to the sacred Heaven and Earth. On the 11 th day of the sexagenary cycle, making a sacrifice at the royal ancestral temple. Ordered Nguyen Van Khiem, Commander of the capital standing army and Vice-President of the Board of Justice, to escort Nguyen Quang Toan and his young brothers: Quang Duy, Quang Thieu, and Quang Ban, to the imperial city's outer gate and executed by five-elephants dismemberment (used five elephants that tie to the head, legs, and arms to dismember; it is a gruesome punishment); smashed skeletons of Nguyen Van Nhac and Nguyen Van Hue and threw away; skulls of Nhac, Hue, Toan, and altars of Hue and his wife prisoned at the Outer storehouse (in the second year of Minh Menh reign, it was commanded that they should be imprisoned forever). The followers [of Tayson], Tran Quang Dieu, and Vo Van Dung were executed with extreme retribution, exhibited their heads to the public, and proclaimed a proclamation to Outer and Inner [regions] that read, "...".	
20	The 11 th month	賞水步諸軍, 詔曰: [...]. Awarding the navy and infantry, the proclamation read, "...".	DNTL, I, 19: 6a
21	The 11 th month	錄望閣功, 詔曰: [...]. Recording the deed of arms of those who followed [Nguyen Phuc Anh] to Bangkok, the proclamation read, "...".	DNTL, I, 19: 8a
22	The 11 th month	蠲減嘉定租稅, 詔曰: [...]. Offering tax exemption to Gia Dinh, the proclamation read, "...".	DNTL, I, 19: 12a-b.

Four major topics were addressed in those royal proclamations, namely, 1. Proclaiming the establishment of the new ruling dynasty and conferring official titles; 2. Announcing to and awarding the armies; 3. Addressing the populace; and 4. Proclamations to the antecedent dynasties (Tayson, Le, and Trinh). The most significant number (nearly 50%) was announcements of the new regime and royal ascending to the throne. These were Nguyen's most important agenda that not only "introduced" the family but also justified their triumph and cultivated the reigning legitimacy. After claiming himself king of all Viet's domains, Nguyen Phuc Anh, without an explanation, announced he would rule under the reign title "Gia Long." Finally, in the 6th month (1802), the monarch proclaimed to all under Heaven that

the great campaign to take revenge on Tayson and restore peace and order had come successful (proclamation no. 6).

One of the heavily-relied political discourses was the validation of their fighting purpose, which was to take revenge on Tayson's injustice and crimes.¹⁴³ Gia Long announced, "I hear that because of nine generations to take revenge is the great righteous principle according to the Spring and Autumn Annals; showing pity to common people that eliminate the bandits is the highest benevolence of kingship" (朕聞: 爲九世而復讎春秋大義, 弔萬民而代罪王者至仁).¹⁴⁴ He went on to explain that the accomplishment came from Heavenly assistance, "powerful spirit" 靈 of his ancestors, and the army's hardworking labors.¹⁴⁵ Therefore, the first proclamation was devoted to the ceremonial worshipping of Heaven (no. 1). It was followed by the construction of the royal family shrine (no. 13); another for officials whose lives were lost during the war (no. 12). Two other announcements were dedicated to celebrated officials who contributed to the dynastic founding (no. 17, 21); and two praised the armies (no. 2, 20). These proclamations were presented in carefully-arranged order for the inauguration of the new dynasty, its self-political portrait, and its power-projection scheme.

¹⁴³ Not only was the Tayson blamed for the deaths of Nguyen family members, and the destruction of the Nguyen lords' tombs, their rebellion broke the ruling line of two hundred year Nguyen Cochinchina. See DNLT, I, 15: 12a-b. Also, see Nola Cooke, "The Myth of the Restoration: Dang Trong Influences in the Spiritual Life of the Early Nguyen Dynasty (1802-47)," in *The Last Stand of Asian Autonomies: Responses to Modernity in the Diverse States of Southeast Asia and Korea, 1750-1900*, ed. Anthony Reid (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), 269-98.

¹⁴⁴ DNLT, I, 19: 4a (proclamation no. 19). The Nguyen Cochinchina lasted for nine reigning lords before disrupted by Tayson and Trinh's invasion in 1774.

¹⁴⁵ DNLT, I, 19: 5a-b. Original text, "此寔仗上玄助順, 九廟協靈, 羣師宣勞, 三軍效力以致然也". [That was because of the Heavenly blessing, of the nine-ancestor temples' spirit, of the generals' efforts, of the three armies' competition, so the task was archived.]

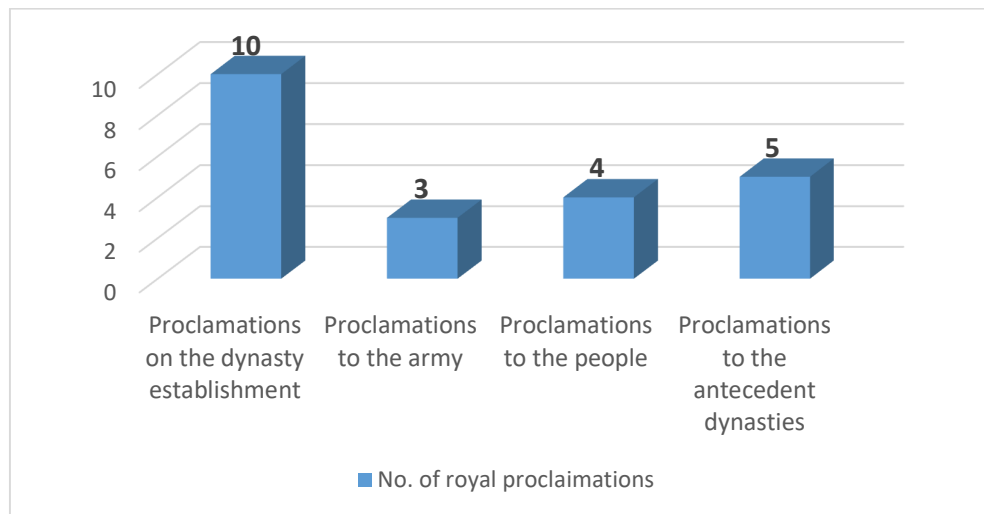


Chart 4.8. Gia Long's first-year proclamations mentioned in *DNTL*
 Source: *DNTL*, books 17, 18, 19.

Three announcements came to the army. Two presented awards (no. 2 and no. 20) and one instruction (no. 11) offer praise and maintain the soldiers' imperative establishment. Four proclamations addressed the people, mostly related to taxation reduction and military conscription exemption. The announcement presented to the Nghe An people was a compelling case because it showed the ruler's sensitivity to the topic. He was aware of their desperation under the Tayson but had no choice but to continue collecting grain and tax for the army. As a result, he claimed that it was a tough decision to make in an inevitable circumstance to guarantee the final victory. This announcement showed both the scepticism and vulnerability of Nguyen when campaigning further into the North. In the same manner, one message was delivered to Thanh Hoa commandery – the hometown of the Nguyen family, as a gesture of earning their favor (no. 4). Seven other proclamations addressed the Northerners on various topics that not only proclaimed the dynastic establishment but also guaranteed peace and benevolent royal policies (no. 4, 5, 7, 9, 10, 17). Finally, as part of the tradition vindicating fairness, righteousness, and benevolence, the triumphed must convict defeated enemies with punishments and bestow precedent dynasties with titles. In this respect, one imperial document addressed the Le officials, had them disarmed and returned for amnesty (no. 7). Two were aimed at the Trinh family, granted them lands and titles (no. 11 and no. 16), and one for the Le dependents who were appointed a duke rank (no. 15). The cultivation of the ruling legitimacy was an essential element of early Nguyen's political discourse. Gia Long was aware of his

vulnerable position, turned down the recommendation to declare emperor title, and solemnly responded in a proclamation (no. 14). Finally was the treatment of the Tayson, under which a royal proclamation returned to the revenge rhetoric and defended the severe penalties that were designed for the defeated (no. 19).

Proclamation became the most crucial channel of royal communication where major agendas were highlighted and bureaucratic discourses projected. As mentioned above, three messages were delivered to the armies, four on taxation and military duty, eight to northern officials, local headmen, Le-Trinh families, and one to de-legitimize the Tayson. The bureaucratic environment in which these proclamations came out and the topics they stressed illustrated a lively picture of the interaction between power, symbolic authority, and communication at the moment of regime change and dynastic establishment. They demonstrated Hue's core concerns, careful language choice, and the construction of ruling legitimacy. These documents opened an insightful window to the textual realm of the early reign with principal issues and narratives that were brought to the political stage. Our calculation clarifies that most of the proclamations were dedicated to the declaration of the new ruling house, where the insecure king sought to generate confidence in people and officials.

IV. 2. 5. Between 1802 and 1806

Grounding these analyses in a larger perspective of Gia Long's royal communication and conjoining them with the existing palace manuscripts, the picture of written commands indeed emerges labyrinthine. As shown above, the extant Gia Long palace paperwork contains only 158 royal documents. One hundred eighteen among them are proclamations produced in 1816. During the early reign, however, there has not been clear evidence of functional distinction among edicts, decrees, and proclamations. The majority of the early Gia Long orders were presented in proclamations. To the best of our measure, they are largely aimed at dispatching officials on missions, delivering orders, announcing tax exemptions, and promoting personnel.¹⁴⁶ A clear shifting pattern only emerged in the Minh Menh reign when his favor first came to the usage of proclamations but soon affixed to official

¹⁴⁶ See samples in GLCB 1: 1, 2; especially GLCB, 2, and our table that summarizes Gia Long's first year proclamations above. At the same time, very few other orders appeared in form of decrees 旨 and edicts 上諭. See GLCB, 1: 4, 304, 305.

announcements and appointments. Coming to the mid-reign, he turned to edicts to deliver commands, with many drafted by himself. Finally, at the end of the reign, the monarch overwhelmingly relied on attending officials 侍臣, such as board chiefs 六部堂官, grand secretaries, and grand councillors for drafting paperwork.

Due to the obscure nature of Gia Long's emperor documents, we are still far from a clear picture of their production and circulation. Most of the extant, for instance, bore no imperial seals, while others contain a dense appearance of Nom characters. This feature probably resulted from the role of scholar-officials who formed Gia Long's initial retainers and those who were well-involved in the production of imperial writings, such as Dang Duc Sieu, Nguyen Vien, and Vu Trinh. The following proclamation, for instance, reflects the format of early Gia Long's written commands. After the defeat of Tayson in the summer of 1802, the king requested a detailed report on royal clan members. In 1558, when one family group moved to the Central Region and became Nguyen Lords of Cochinchina, the rest remained in Thanh Hoa (under the Le-Trinh rule).¹⁴⁷ The following announcement was Gia Long's request for information about the family branch in Thanh Hoa.

¹⁴⁷ Taylor, "Nguyen Hoang and Vietnam's Southward Expansion," 42–68.

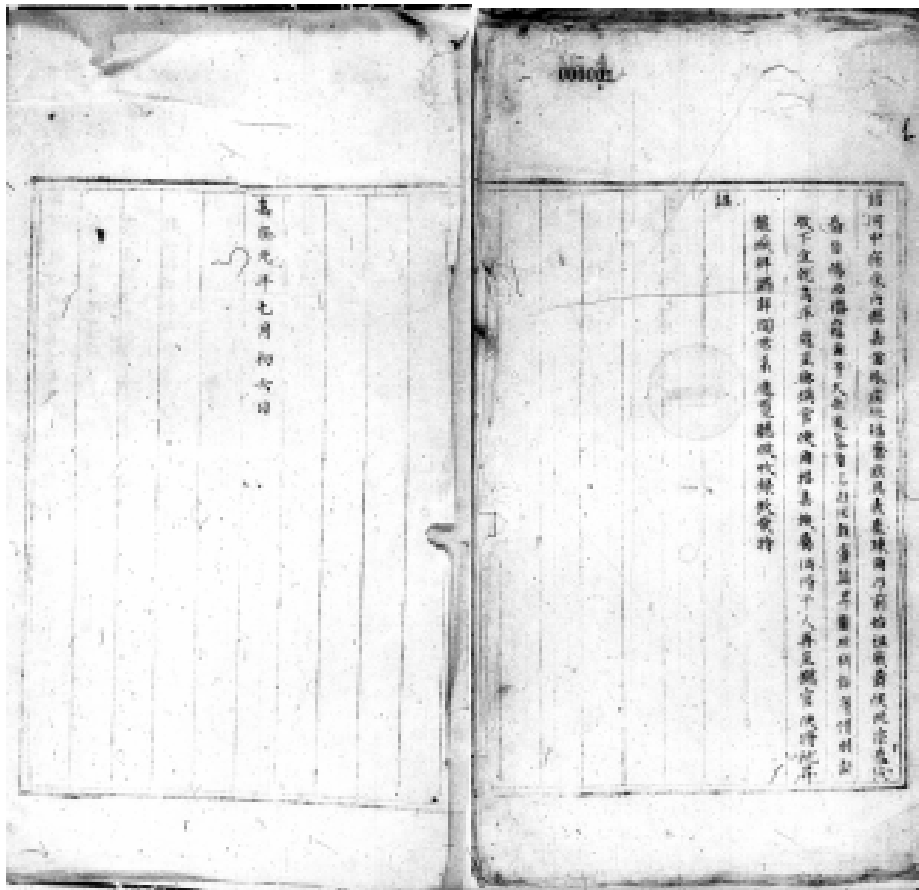


Figure 4.17. Gia Long proclamation to Nguyen Phuc Phan on collecting information about royal family members

Date: 03. 08. 1802 (GL1/07/06)

Source: GLCB, 1: 1.

Transliteration:

詔：河中府宋山縣嘉苗外庄阮福奮。茲具表陳爾乃前始祖威壽候阮宗泰後裔，自偽仁件西僭，竊爾等久在流落。茲[...] 招回族黨詣昇龍城拜謁等情。特詔放下宜就高平處呈與鎮官，便爾招集族屬倘得千人再呈鎮官，便將就昇龍城拜謁詳開世系，進覽聽候收錄。欽哉特詔。

嘉隆元年七月初六日

Translation:

Proclamation to Nguyen Phuc Phan 阮福奮 at Gia Mieu Outer Village 嘉苗外庄, Tong Son county 宋山縣, Ha Trung prefecture 河中府: now, knowing that you are a decedent of the great Uy Tho Marquis, Nguyen Tong Thai 威壽候, 阮宗泰; [I] sympathize with your long exile, [and I] have summoned relatives to Thang Long citadel. [When] This decree sends down, you should make yourself known to Cao Bang officials. If you can gather a number of your relatives, the quantity should be informed to the

officials, [then you] come to Thang Long [Hanoi] to pay respects 拜謁, report your genealogy in detail, and wait for an appointment 收錄. Respectfully follow this decree! Date: 03/08/1802 (GL1/07/06).

Bearing no stamp, this royal document constitutes a broader category of its kind where textual organization, layout, and paratextual components were far from systematically-established. These proclamations were initially aimed at delivering administrative commands and instructions. In the following years, more graduates of the former Le dynasty joined Hue court. Their knowledge of bureaucratic institutions shifted the dynastic intellectual environment toward the Le model. As seen below, they established a prominent group of newly-appointed Hanlin scholars, such as Hanlin Academician Recipient of Edicts 翰林院承旨, Hanlin Academician Drafting Royal Ordinance 翰林院制誥, and Palace Secretary Recipient of Decrees 侍書院奉旨. Their expertise in administration and paperwork played essential roles in delivering written royal commands.¹⁴⁸ In June 1802, after the capture of Thang Long (Hanoi), Gia Long immediately recruited twenty-eight northern scholars as palace secretaries.¹⁴⁹ Vu Trinh, a high-ranked Le official, for instance, was summoned (with ten others) to have an audience with Gia Long and then followed the new monarch to Hue, where he was appointed a palace scholar 侍中學士.¹⁵⁰

Hue's bureaucrat, however, was occupied with redefining regulation and standardization of imperial paperwork. The most challenging was differentiating their ceremonial and administrative functions before mapping the dynastic institutional operation. For instance, the first three royal commands attached to the GLCB (vol. 1) reflect this divergence. The first two proclamations aim to summon Nguyen's family members to Hanoi for a royal audience. The third one commanded officials to Saigon and escorted Gia Long's aunt and sister [姨母, 國妹] to Hue, which was issued in an edict form (旨諭).¹⁵¹ They all bore no seal mark and provided no detail of the responsible official for drafting or processing.

Gia Long realized the paperwork's problem and created new court bodies to deal not only with the production of royal documents but also with the formulations of their formats, structure, and uniformed paratext. In the declaration

¹⁴⁸ Hucker, *A Dictionary of Official Titles*, entry 2 143: “翰林學士承旨”: Hanlin Academician Recipient of Edicts.

¹⁴⁹ DNTL, I, 17: 26b.

¹⁵⁰ DNTL, I, 20: 13b.

¹⁵¹ GLCB, 1: 1-4.

that introduced the Gia Long reigning title on 31/05/1802, the monarch ordered the use of proclamations in all imperial commands, which led to the dismissal of ordinances 告, edicts, orders 命, and commands 令. To define the layout, he required a stamp of *Thu tin thien ha van vu quyen hanh* 取信天下文武權行 (*Keeping the trust under the Heaven for civil and military authority*) placed at the very beginning of the paper (自是, 告諭命令皆用詔。紙首用取信天下文武權行寶).¹⁵²



Figure 4.18. Royal seal *Thu tin thien ha van vu quyen hanh* 取信天下文武權行
 Measured by 4,12 x 5,40 cm.
 Cast date: 27. 01. 1710 (Vinh Thinh 5/12/28)
 Source: Vietnam National Museum of history.
 Image: Courtesy of Nguyen, Le, and Nguyen, 2009: 114.

In the same month, requests for textual uniformity were applied to three other types of Congdong documents that had been previously issued in the royal commands. Congdong-transmitted royal instructions (旨差, 旨傳, and 公同付) were recommended to replace by vermilion appointments (朱敕 and 朱示).¹⁵³ The change immediately invited a new bulk of work to Hanlin Academicians and increased personnel demands. Four Hanlin Academicians of Drafting Imperial Writings 翰林院制誥 were employed, thirty more assigned to the title of Hanlin Academicians, six to Hanlin Academician Recipient of Edicts 翰林院承旨, and thirteen Hanlin

¹⁵² DNLT, I, 17: 5b.

¹⁵³ DNLT, I, q. 17: 5b. Original text:

“頒給諸軍營員弁敕示。先是諸將士從戎但給以旨差, 旨傳及公同付; 隸諸軍營差遣。至是掌領官彙冊奏諸給與朱敕朱示。”

On appointing investiture to military officials at prefectures and commanderies. Previously, appointed military personnel were bestowed the appointment with Congdong-transmitted imperial instructions (旨差, 旨傳, and 公同付) and assigned at prefectures and commanderies. Now, [local] military commanders (掌領官) presented lists to be awarded with red investitures and red-command papers (朱敕 and 朱示).

Academician Secretary 翰林院侍書.¹⁵⁴ The employment of the fifty-three Hanlin scholars to the bureaucracy was probably the most extensive recruitment of civil personnel during the Gia Long years. Not surprisingly, they concentrated on two major camps: first, assisting with royal written communication, and second, forming the emerging palace secretary staff. In the Gia Long time, Hanlin Academy was not yet become an organization. Still, it contained awarded titles bestowed to official scholars between four and six grades involved in producing the royal writings. As revealed by *huidian*, in 1802, Gia Long set up two secretary offices: the Palace Office of Books 侍書院 and Palace Office of Records 侍翰院. To staff the former, the king offered two more positions, Recipients of Decrees 奉旨 and Secretary of Books 侍書 of unlimited quota. These two posts were selected among Recipient of Edicts, Secretariats, Ordinance Drafters (承旨, 侍講, 侍讀, 制誥, 修撰) at Hanlin Academy and Academy of Recommended Scholars 貢士院. The key “cooperator” and “coordinator” of that palace secretary structure was the Official of Seal Management 尚寶卿, ranked 3B.¹⁵⁵ The change increased the number of personnel and professional staff at the inner court and strengthened the interdependence of the palace networks. In the next chapter, we shall investigate their cooperation in the treatment of memorials, but for now, the concentration is on the imperial written commands.

Apart from the increasing number of personnel, the striking new feature of this emerging inner court was its emphasis on the document’s paratext-uniformity. Inter-institution exchange and bureaucratic specialization were essential for the system's efficiency because they allowed constant and speedy flows of royal writings from the palace. The development in 1803 was also designed for the maintaining and processing of royal written orders by adding two significant posts to the network: Assistants of Seal Management 尚寶少卿.¹⁵⁶ Moreover, the Department of Seal Management 尚寶司 was founded with eighteen staff, while the Palace Office of Books 侍書院 received thirty-nine more personnel.¹⁵⁷ The growth of these bodies resulted in the domination of the Department of Seal Management 尚寶司 and the Department of Drafting Royal Documents 絲綸所. The former supervised the collection of royal seals while the latter specified penning royal writings.

¹⁵⁴ DNTL, I, 17: 6a-7b; HDSL, 8: 14a-b.

¹⁵⁵ DNTL, I, 24: 5b.

¹⁵⁶ DNTL, I, 20: 2a.

¹⁵⁷ HDSL, 8: 14a-b. This number probably identical to those mentioned in *DNTL* at the same period.

Under the Gia Long reign, several efforts were made to manage the royal written commands. Officials had to return appointed proclamations when demoted or removed from office.¹⁵⁸ Between 1802 and 1806 was a transitional period for the standardization of paperwork regulations. However, other types of royal documents were expected to replace by proclamations, decrees, and edicts that could still be found in the Gia Long palace files.¹⁵⁹ Their appearance indicated that the 1802 proclamation did not come fully implemented. As seen in the above analysis, a considerable amount of Congdong-transmitted royal commands 公同欽旨傳 were issued in parallel with proclamations. The documents produced between 1802 and 1806, in particular, give a sophisticated hint to the diverse nature of transmitting royal commands and the ways they entered dynastic politics. The following are samples of two decrees. They delivered royal orders to the Northern officials to purchase Chinese tea 北茶 and sun-dried tangerine peel 陳皮. Transliteration and translation of the first document are detailed in the following to demonstrate their textual fashion and paratextual organization.

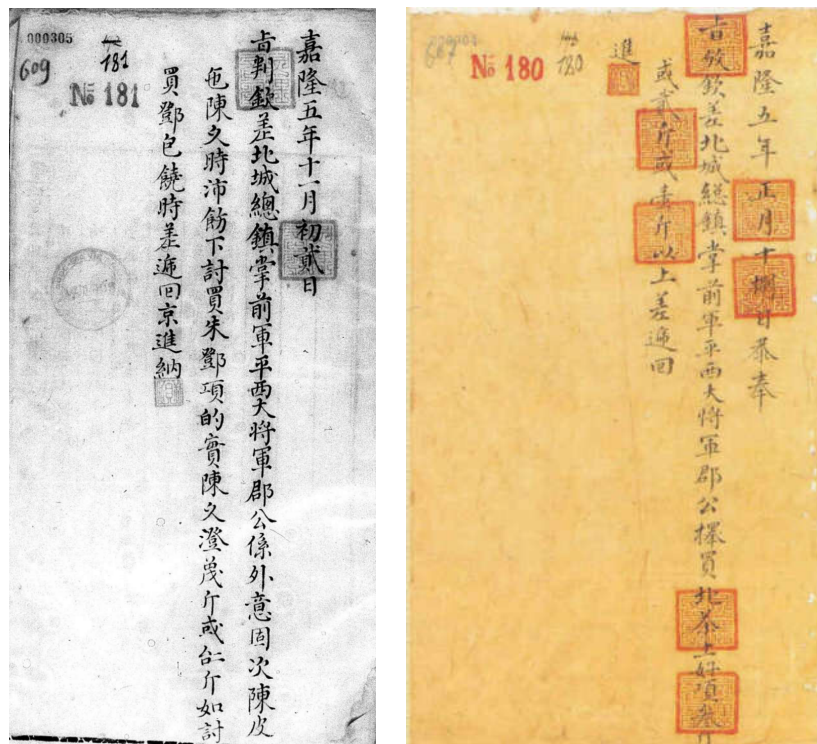


Figure 4.19. A Gia Long's emperor documents issued in 1806
 Left: GLCB, 1: 305.
 Right: GLCB, 1: 304.

¹⁵⁸ GLCB, 2: 2.

¹⁵⁹ See GLCB 1: 304, 305; GLCB, 2: 20; GLCB, 3: 49.

Transcription:

“嘉隆五年十一月初貳日
旨判欽差北城總鎮掌前軍平西大將軍郡公係外意固次陳皮匏陳久時
沛飾下討買朱鄧項的實陳久澄蔑斤或缸斤。如討買鄧包饒時差遞回
京進納。” [印: 文理密察].¹⁶⁰

Translation:

On 11/12/1806 (GL5/11/2), a royal decree to the Royal Commissioner, General-Commander of the North, Chief of Front Army, Senior-General of the Pacifying Tayson, and Duke title to search and buy one or two *jin* 斤 of high-quality *chenpi* [sun-dried tangerine peel]. The purchased amount should be reported and sent to the capital.

[Imprints: “文理密察”-“*the text has been confidentially checked*”].

The simple structure and layout indicate their functional design for delivering routine administrative orders. On the other hand, the inconsistent use of document type for these identical royal commands, such as decrees, Congdong instructions 公同傳, and Congdong commands (公同差 and 公同付), added puzzles to the distinction between royal documents and those of Condong, Imperial Household Department, and the Inner Palace 大內.¹⁶¹ By 1803, a new power element on papers was introduced, the royal authenticated seal, “文理密察” (“*the text has been confidentially checked*”,



), measuring 2.8 x 2.8 cm (silver), which first appeared in 1803.¹⁶² The seal shall become an indispensable part of the production of royal paperwork in the future.

IV. 2. 6. Between 1806 and 1820

When Gia Long obtained the emperor title in 1806, more symbolic performances and codified procedures were associated with the emperor’s paperwork. As historian Alexander Woodside pointed out, the Nguyen bureaucracy could not adhere to the Chinese classical institutional system without deploying its worldview and idea of imperial authority. As a result, Nguyen rulers attached to the Chinese

¹⁶⁰ GLCB, 1: 305.

¹⁶¹ See GLCB, 1: 91, a Congdong instruction 公同傳 to Northern officials to purchase lychee and send back to the grand palace (date: GL4/3/8). For instance:

GLCB, 1: 300, “公同付”: ordering to purchase areca nut.

GLCB, 1: 302, “公同傳”: ordering to purchase areca nut.

GLCB, 1: 303, “公同差”: ordering to purchase ginseng.

¹⁶² DNTL, I, 21: 12a.

concepts of empire and were saluted at the court as emperors 皇帝. These two Sino-Vietnamese words had separately suggested divinity in ancient China until the imperial unifier Qin *Shi Huangdi* 秦始皇帝, had joined them together to refer to and mean a human "emperor." Nguyen emperors also personally alluded to themselves by the august first-person pronoun *tram* (Ch. *zhen*, 朕), which had been used exclusively by Chinese emperors. More significantly, Hue rulers invoked a more inveterate Chinese term for kingship. They called themselves "Sons of Heaven."¹⁶³ Their perception of imperial authority profoundly impacted the operations of official documents and bureaucratic institutions.

Acting as an emperor required an intricate system of imperial writings. Hue bureaucrats thus focused more on documents' format, structure, and paratextual symbolism. On the very proclamation that announced his emperorship, Gia Long instructed that the beginning of imperial ordinances 制 should be started with the phrase, "Having received from Heave the imperial succession" 承天興運 which was believed to convey the sense of expanding the great royal lineage of the Viet realm (諸有制冊冠用承天興運等字於, 以弘先聖之業正我越之统).¹⁶⁴ With the burgeoning use of imperial documents, the emperor paid more commitment to the controlling mechanism by regulating their layout and paratextual establishment. According to *DNTL*, the Nguyen court ordered casting three authenticated seals; two were dedicated to imperial papers. *Van ly mat sat* 文理密察 (*the text has been confidentially checked*), for instance, was designed to apply at the margin of the juncture of the papers, while 'bao' 寶 (lit., [*imperial*] seal) on correcting characters (鑄小方銀篆三。一刻 "文理密察" 四字, 凡詔文疏冊夾縫之處用之。一刻 "寶" 字, 有洗改者用之).¹⁶⁵ These seals came as signals of the expanding imperial authority through the written channel. As part of the paratextual components, they defined both symbolic and practical usage of the administrative documents. As a result, a new set of regulations emerged to outline their structure and layout, in which the deployment of the authenticated seals: *Van ly*

¹⁶³ Woodside, *Vietnam and the Chinese Model*, 9.

¹⁶⁴ *DNTL*, I, 19: 3b. The same manner followed that of the Qing, "奉天承運皇帝制曰...": "Having received from Heaven the imperial succession, the Emperor decrees as follows...". Fairbank and Teng, "On The Types and Uses of Ch'ing Documents," 47.

¹⁶⁵ *DNTL*, I, 21: 12a.

mat sat 文理密察 and *Thu tin thien ha van vu quyen hanh* 取信天下文武權行 (*Keeping the trust under the Heaven for civil and military authority*) were expanded.¹⁶⁶

Such a reconfiguration of the emperor documents could only be possible with the increasing participation of the former-Le graduates. Many had entered the Nguyen officialdom and served as Gia Long's close advisors and secretaries. They included Nguyen Vien (appointed as Scholar of the Hall of Diligent Politics 勤政殿學士), Nguyen Gia Cat (Scholar of the Hall of Diligent Politics and Drafter of Imperial Decrees 勤政殿學士兼制告令), Nguyen Du, Nguyen Quang Chau, Tran Huu, Le Duy Thanh, and Tran Toan (Scholars of the Eastern Hall 東閣學士). These elite intellectuals, expanding significantly between 1802 and 1806, modelled Hue's administrative structure after the Le tradition. They supplied expertise and skills for managing Gia Long's imperial writings. In the inner court, an increasing quantity of mid-ranked staff came to work directly with the emperor's orders or related to the emperor's written instruction, such as Hanlin Academicians Recipients of Edicts 翰林院承旨, Hanlin Academicians of Drafting Imperial Decree 翰林院制告, Secretary Recipients of Edicts 侍書院奉旨. These new faces soon became part of the bureaucratic network that maintained the flow of imperial written communication between secretary offices, the boards, *Congdong*, and commanderies 營鎮. Vu Trinh, for instance, had championed the role of drafting imperial documents before his downfall in 1816.¹⁶⁷ Acting as Palace Scholar 侍中學士 from 1802, he also became Gia Long's reading companion.¹⁶⁸ The dynastic *Compilation of Biographies* confirmed that "proclamations and imperial commands of the early Gia Long were mostly penned by Trinh" 嘉隆初詔冊文辭多出其手.¹⁶⁹

Functional diversification grew when imperial documents involved more responsibility for administrative operations. In a symbolic gesture, Gia Long ordered to re-issue of imperial investitures to 'legitimate' deities of the realm 頒神敕于中外 (1810).¹⁷⁰ Unlike official installation that provides legal recognition to mandarins,

¹⁶⁶ The latter must be stamped at the beginning of the text, before the opening expression: "承天興運". See GLCB, 2: 14, 17, 18, 19, 20, 22, 24, 25, 30, 32, 34, 36, and 40.

¹⁶⁷ DNTL, I, 55: 16b.

¹⁶⁸ DNTL, I, 43: 16a-b.

¹⁶⁹ DNTL, I, 20: 15a.

¹⁷⁰ DNTL, I, 41: 9b.

imperial documents of deity investiture 神敕 claim the emperor’s connection to the supernatural forces, the link that solidified his authority in the worldly realm.

The diversification of the emperor’s documents involved the expansion of direct royal display of authority. The structure of these papers evolved as pragmatic and well-designed with new paratexts and imprints. The changes expanded the administrative power of imperial written communication and laid a foundation for Minh Menh’s paperwork innovation by recognizing imperial writings as a major channel of bureaucratic execution.

A glimpse at Gia Long’s proclamations shows the emergence of their new structural designs. The following document addressed the subject of tax exemption. Dated 01/05/1814 (GL13/3/12), the proclamation features the hallmark of its type. Beginning with a seal imprint (*Thu tin thien ha van vu quyen hanh* 取信天下文武權行), the main text addresses the consequence of bad weather conditions that disrupted people’s life. Because the way of conducting kingship 王道 is to expand mercy and practice virtuous politics 推恩善政, the text suggests, the emperor issued a pronouncement of tax deduction:

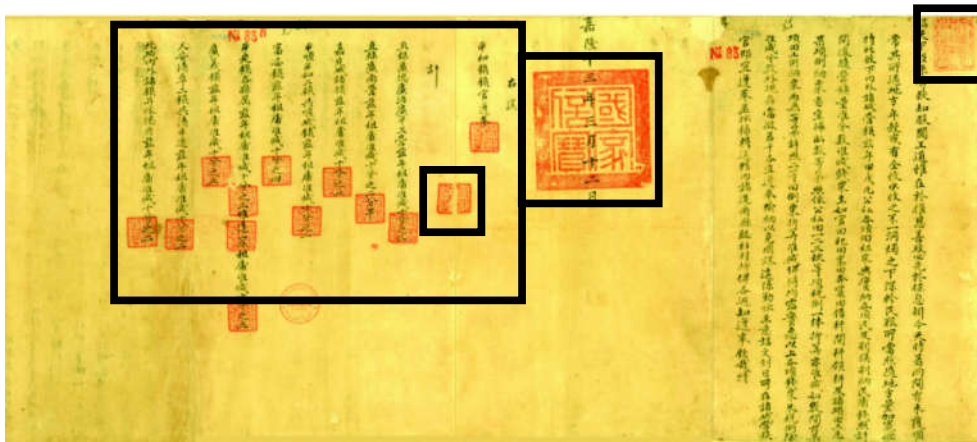


Figure 4.20. Gia Long’s proclamation of tax exemption in 1813
Date: 01/05/1814 (GL13/3/12).
Source: GLCB, 2: 101.

To the left of the main seal imprint “*Quoc gia tin bao*” 國家信寶 (*Imperial Seal keeps the trust of the State*) placed detailed instructions on the scale of tax deduction applied for each region:

右送

平和鎮鎮官遵奉

計:

直隸廣德廣治廣平三營茲年租庸准減十分之三。

直隸廣南營茲年租庸准減十分之二分半

嘉定城諸鎮茲年租庸准減十分之五。

平順平和二營與順城鎮茲年租庸准減十分之二。

富安鎮茲年庸准減十分之四。

平定鎮各縣屬茲年租庸准減十分之三惟篷山縣租庸准減十分之五。

廣義鎮茲年租庸准減十分之五。

又安清華二鎮與清平道茲年租庸准減十分之二。

北城內外諸鎮并懷德府茲年租庸准減十分之二。

To the right are delivered destinations:

Officials at Binh Hoa commandery followed in execution.

Listing:

Three commanderies of Quang Duc, Quang Tri, Quang Binh: this year, tax is deducted by three-tenths [30%].

Quang Nam: this year, tax is deducted by 2.5-tenths [25%].

Gia Dinh region: this year, tax is deducted by five-tenths [50%].

Binh Thuan, Binh Hoa, and Thuan Thanh¹⁷¹ commanderies: this year, the tax was deducted by two-tenths [20%].

Phu Yen: this year, tax is deducted by four-tenths [40%].

Districts in Binh Dinh commandery: this year, tax is deducted by three-tenths [30%]. Only Bong Son district: the tax is deducted by five-tenths [50%].

Quang Ngai commandery: this year, tax is deducted by five-tenths [50%].

Two commanderies of Nghe An and Thanh Hoa, and Thanh Binh district: this year, tax is deducted by two-tenths [20%].

Commanderies in the Northern region: this year, tax is deducted by two-tenths [20%].

Fifteen stamps appeared in this document came from two imperial and one authenticated seal.¹⁷²



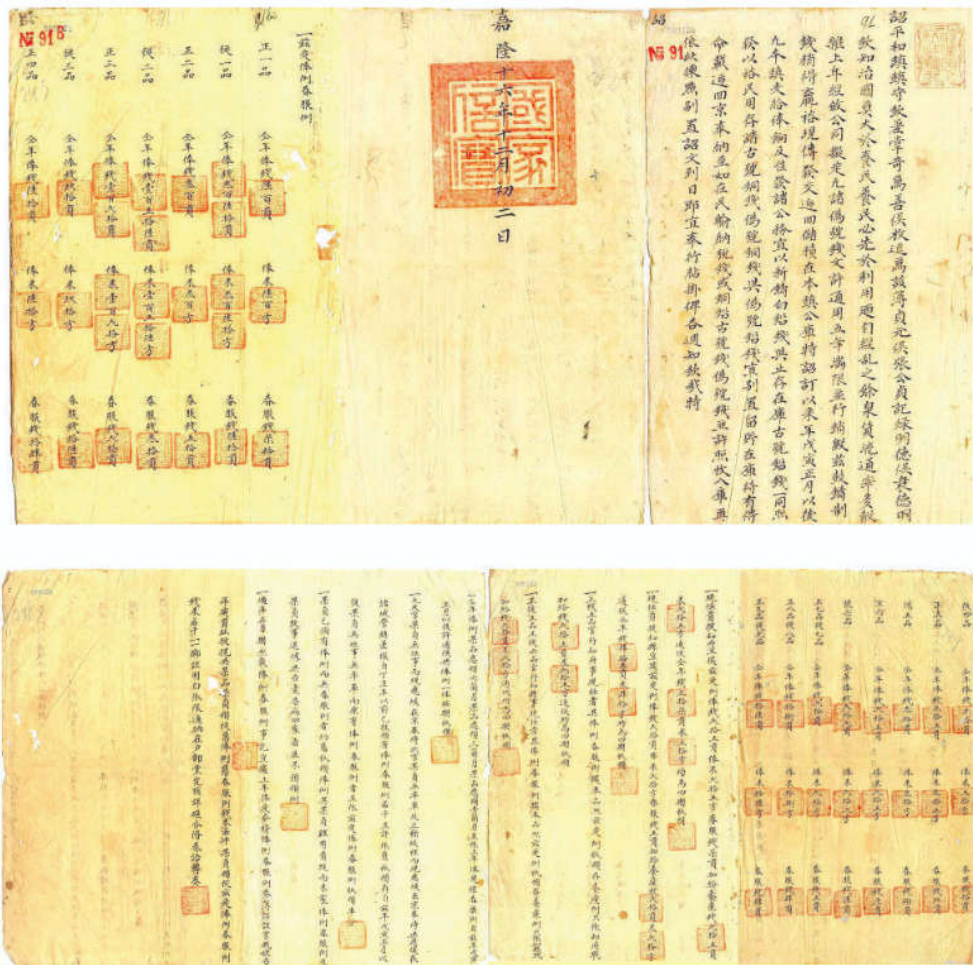
¹⁷¹ The former Champa domain, see Nicolas Weber, "The Destruction and Assimilation of Campā (1832-35) as Seen from Cam Sources," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 43, no. 1 (2012): 158–80.

¹⁷² The round stamp, as discussed above, came from the Institute of Culture (Viện Văn Hóa).

Figure 4.21. Authenticated stamps on Gia Long proclamation on 01/05/1814.
Source: GLCB, 2: 101.

文理密察¹⁷³ 取信天下文武權行¹⁷⁴ 國家信寶¹⁷⁵
2.8 x 2.8 cm 4 x 5 cm. 11.5 x 11.5 cm.

These imprints shape the document's paratextual character and set an antecedent for later usage of official seals in which most numerical characters were certified. Seventy-two stamps in the following proclamation speak for a formidable ingredient of the Nguyen paperwork where imprints were indispensable to verify the information.¹⁷⁶



¹⁷³ Văn lý mật sát (*The text has been confidentially checked*).
¹⁷⁴ Thủ tín thiên hạ văn vũ quyền hành (*Keeping the trust under the Heaven for civil and military authority*).
¹⁷⁵ Quốc gia tín bảo (*Imperial Seal keeps the trust of the State*).
¹⁷⁶ Imperial authenticated seal, Văn lý mật sát 文理密察 (*the text has been confidentially examined*) was commonly used in Gia Long and Minh Menh's imperial documents. See more in GLCB, 2: 120-123.

Figure 4.22. Proclamation to Binh Hoa Commandery officials on using newly-cast copper coins for official salary, attached with an official payroll
Date: 08/01/1818 (GL16/12/2).
Source: GLCB, 2: 120.

Hue bureaucrats expanded the capacity of imperial documents and intended to manage them by adding more regulations and stamps. One effective way to navigate their flows was to enrich the pages with supplemented administrative information and allowed the records to be mapped and reviewed. In 1815, personnel-appointed proclamations were required to include details of those who made the promoting recommendations.¹⁷⁷ Consequently, additional paratextual elements indicated their growing engagement with bureaucratic procedures. These indicators were significant to sketch the paperwork movement. The increasing use of imperial documents for executive performance confirmed that they gradually reached beyond the “safe zone” of ceremonial service, and entered the domain of practical administration. Some late-Gia Long reign proclamations, for instance, had the paratexts indicating that they were drafted by the boards before sending out for review, stamps, and enforcement.¹⁷⁸ The



scribers and examiners also left traces of their authenticated imprint: (照刷, lit., checked/ reviewed).

These signals of paratextual evolution indicated the functional transformation of the Gia Long emperor paperwork. The change was grounded on a gradual shift of the mechanism of decision-making that involved imperial writings when the inner court and Six Boards were deliberately developing in 1810.¹⁷⁹ They demanded (and preferred) direct communication with the emperor and acquired the emperor’s instructions on essential affairs. This direct correspondence channel released the boards from depending upon the court council (*Congdong*). Some of the archival files illustrated this bureaucratic trend. The proclamation on 11/01/1818 (GL16/12/5) summoned the northern General-Commander and his army to the capital, inserted with the following paratextual details:

户部堂奉草。
應已攷壹道。¹⁸⁰

The Board of Revenue followed the imperial order to draft.

¹⁷⁷ DNTL, I, 50: 6b.

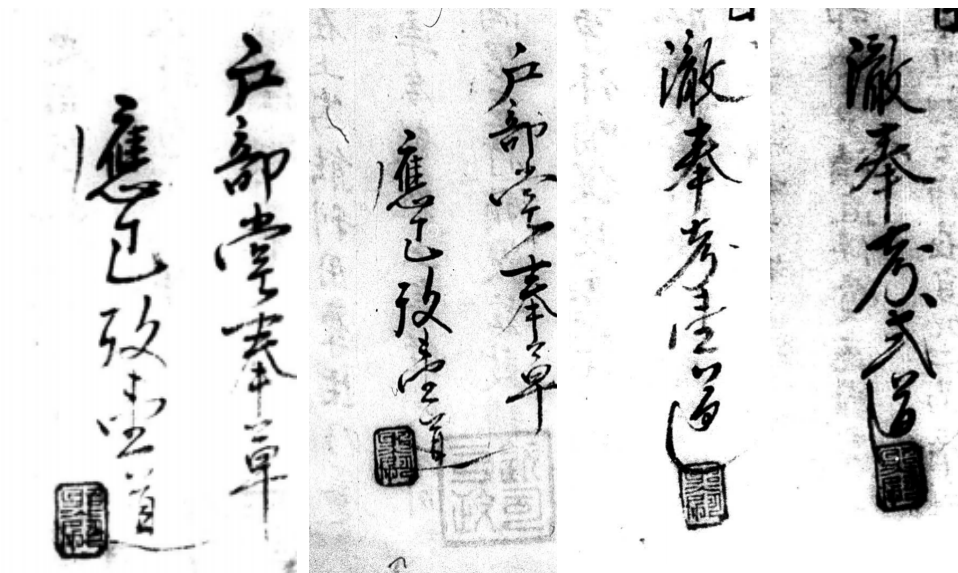
¹⁷⁸ GLCB, 3: 203.

¹⁷⁹ The first full Six Boards’ Presidents were only appointed in 1809. DNTL, I, 39: 16b.

¹⁸⁰ GLCB, 3: 203.

Followed up to check the document once.

The situation was also applied to other proclamations, confirming that the board's chief staff prepared them before being reviewed. One of those ending remarks read, “澈奉攷貳道” [Followed [the imperial order] to check twice].¹⁸¹



“户部堂奉草。
應已攷壹道。”¹⁸²
GLCB, 3: 199.
Date: GL16/12/2.

户部堂奉草。
應已攷壹道。¹⁸³
GLCB, 3: 203.
Date: GL16/12/5.

澈奉攷壹道¹⁸⁴
GLCB, 3: 198.
Date:
GL16/12/2

澈奉攷貳道¹⁸⁵
GLCB, 3: 179.
Date:
GL16/10/23.

Figure 4.23. Paratexts of Gia Long proclamations

The more elaborate these paratexts grew, the more executive authority imperial documents possessed. Due to their pragmatic function and the ability to involve administrative businesses, they invited increasing imperial power to the decision-making process. The progression reshaped dynastic communication and defined a new balance of power between the inner court, Six Boards, and the court audience. Ascending the throne in 1820, Minh Menh inclined to this tendency, using imperial documents for direct governance of the inner court and the boards on a scale unparalleled in traditional Vietnam.

¹⁸¹ GLCB, 3: 178.

¹⁸² “The Board of Revenue followed royal order to draft. Followed to check one document.”

¹⁸³ “The Board of Revenue followed royal order to draft. Followed to check one document.”

¹⁸⁴ “Followed [royal order] to thoroughly check one document.”

¹⁸⁵ “Followed [royal order] to thoroughly check two documents.”

IV. 2. 7. Minh Menh's first year

“人君，一言一動天地神祇寔臨鑒之”¹⁸⁶

For the king, a single word and gesture are all under Heavenly scrutiny.

Minh Menh, June 1820.

The second Nguyen emperor was determined to exploit the executive capacity of imperial documents. The man not only accessed classical repertoires but also thoroughly studied Ming-Qing institutions. As a crown prince, he came across the Qing *huidian* and presented the work to his father (1818).¹⁸⁷ He declared in 1823 that “among histories of the Han, Tang, Song, Yuan, and Ming, none that [I] have not read” 凡漢唐宋元明諸史，無不同覽。¹⁸⁸ He was familiar with the Qing's imperial writings, including those of Qianlong and Jiaqing. On one occasion, he had Jiaqing's edict read aloud during an 1836-court audience.¹⁸⁹

Like his father, Minh Menh demanded a practical and effective implementation of imperial authority. More than any other Nguyen emperor, however, the man was skilful and strongminded to command writing for policy delivery and bureaucratic operation. One of his first moves was to return to the dynastic symbolic seal, “*The Seal of the eternal rule of the Nguyen Lord of Daiviet kingdom*” 大越國阮主永鎮之寶, which had been recognized by Gia Long as the *Heirloom Seal of the Realm* 傳國之寶.

明命元年，庚辰二月吉日奉聖祖仁皇帝御手親封奉行遵藏至十八年丁酉十二月二十二日再奉開閱一次復加硃書識仍舊遵藏用以重之億萬世云。¹⁹⁰

In the Canh Thin year [the 17th year of the sexagenary cycle], on a blessed day of the second month of MM1 [1820], Emperor Minh Menh personally sealed [the box that contains the seal “*The Seal of the eternal rule of the Nguyen Lord of Daiviet kingdom*”]. In the Dinh Dau year [the 34th year of the sexagenary cycle], on 06/02/1820, [the emperor] opened and checked [the seal] again, wrote vermilion characters [to authenticate], and sealed off [the box] to pass [the seal] through many generations to come.

In a more emblematic demonstration, Minh Menh's birth was associated with his mother's dream of receiving a seal, “as red as the sun,” from a Heavenly figure 初夢

¹⁸⁶ DNTL, II, 3: 24 a-b.

¹⁸⁷ DNTL, I, 58: 10b.

¹⁸⁸ MMCY, 19: 4a.

¹⁸⁹ DNTL, II, 163: 17b.

¹⁹⁰ DNTL, I, 8: 8b.

神人獻璽一，紅色如日。帝生寔應其兆。¹⁹¹ In that spirit, the reigning title was “Minh Menh” 明命. Here is his explanation:

朕承“明命”于天，受“明命”于皇考其以今年庚辰為明命元年，正徽稱以昭大統。¹⁹²

I received the Heavenly bright instruction 明命 and inherited brilliant instructions 明命 from my father. Thus, this year [the 17th year of the sexagenary cycle-1820] is named the first Minh Menh year to rectify the blessing and highlight the excellent continuity.

As it is well said by the author of Ecclesiastes, “*there is nothing new under the sun,*” Minh Menh followed his father’s 1790 *seal-opening ceremony* and commemorated the 1820 event with an announcement addressing the rite’s significance.¹⁹³ Enthronement after a severe power contest and deeply influenced by the classical Chinese textual authority, the second ruler found bureaucratic records the highest measure of governing mechanism in which not only were his commands enforced but ruling legitimacy generated. Minh Menh announced the first *seal-opening rite* with a long and celebrated proclamation addressing inner and outer officials and people 己未開寶，詔諭中外臣庶。

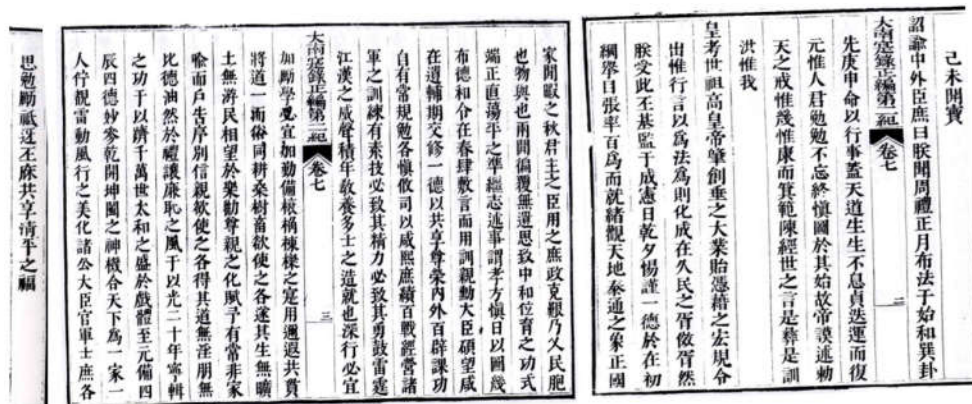


Figure 4.24. Minh Menh’s proclamation on the 1820 *seal-opening rite*
Date: 15/2/1820 (MM1/1/2).
Source: DNTL, II, 7: 2a-4a.

¹⁹¹ DNTL, II, 1: 1b.
¹⁹² DNTL, II, 1: 4a.
¹⁹³ DNTL, II, 7: 2a.

This document is the only proclamation Minh Menh made on the *seal-opening* rite during his twenty-one-year reign.¹⁹⁴ It embodied a special message of hope and expectation, boosting morale and confidence in the bureaucrats, people, and the emperor himself. Unlike his father, who became a unified ruler at forty and emperor at forty-four, Minh Menh, at thirty-one, was relatively “immature” and lack of both military and administrative experience. It may be uneasy for the newly enthroned at the court filled with powerful generals and ministers who had spent their entire life serving the dynasty.¹⁹⁵ By 1821, Le Van Duyet, for instance, had commanded the army for forty years. Therefore, the pronouncement was a nineteenth-century Vietnamese “*State of Union*” address where the new ruler reflected the statecraft vision and his political mission.

The first-month 正月 [of the lunar calendar], he announced, was often a moment of hope and revitalization of vital energy. Thus, it is time that politics should be started. His father had already established a remarkable career that allowed political succession for generations to come. It is his job, however, to move the line forward and prosperously. Minh Menh’s conceptualization of symbolic emperorship directly conformed to how he commanded written documents. For that purpose, the rite of *seal opening* is a moment of revealing. In his words, “political commands are designed for implementing, and the words are rules” 規令出惟行, 言以爲法爲則. Their function was to cultivate people 教化. In doing so, the harmony between the ruler and the officials, between officials and people, and between human beings and nature was maintained (君主之, 臣用之, 庶政克, 乃又民胞也, 物與也, 兩間徧覆無遺). After offering his political vision, the monarch ended the announcement with words of confidence and assurance.

合天下爲一家, 一人; 佇觀雷動風行之美化。諸公大臣官軍士庶各思勉勵
祇迓丕庥亨清平之福。

[His reign] unifying all under Heaven as one family, as one person, spreading
the splendid transformation as powerful as those of the rains and winds. From

¹⁹⁴ Also, it was intentionally recorded in *shilu* at length.

¹⁹⁵ See more on the nature of the Minh Menh court, Vũ Đức Liêm. Phe phái và cạnh tranh quyền lực ở Việt Nam đầu thế kỷ XIX (Interest group, factionalism and power in early nineteenth century Vietnam), <http://tiasang.com.vn/-khoa-hoc-cong-nghe/Phe-phai-va-canhh-tranh-quyen-luc-o-Viet-Nam-dau-the-ky-XIX-11180> (accessed on March 10th, 2018). An expanded version of this research can be seen at, Vũ Đức Liêm. Interest group, factionalism and power in early nineteenth century Vietnam. Paper presented at Colloque international « Echanges culturels franco-vietnamiens », Hanoi National University of Education, April 2018.

high-ranked officials to soldiers and people, let us endeavor to earn great fortune and together enjoy prosperous peace.¹⁹⁶

For a comparative analysis of the use of proclamations in Gia Long and Minh Menh's first year, the following is a list of Minh Menh pronouncements recorded at length in *DNTL*. The table includes fifteen documents that announced the most concerned affairs close to the emperor's heart and his enthusiastic commitment to the "new politics."

No.	Time	Contents	References
1	1 st month	庚辰，明命元年，清嘉慶二十五年。春正月戊午朔，帝即皇帝位于太和殿，建元大赦，頒詔中外。詔曰：[...]. In the Canh Thin year [the 17 th year of the sexagenary cycle-1820], Minh Menh's first year (Qing Jiaqing's 25 th year), on the first day-the Mau Ngo day [the 55 th day of the sexagenary cycle], the emperor ascended at Hall of Great Harmony, named his ruling title, offered a great amnesty to all under the Heaven, and announced a proclamation that read, "...".	DNTL, II, 1: 2a-3b.
2	1 st month	收錄軍功諸舊臣，詔曰：[...]. Recording [information of] former officials with deeds of arms. The proclamation read, "...".	DNTL, II, 1: 7b.
3	1 st month	命中外各舉賢良方正文學之士，詔曰：[...]. Ordering inner and outer officials to recommend learned men of good-natured, honest, and well-scholarly. The proclamation read, "...".	DNTL, II, 1: 8b.
4	1 st month	戒諭中外臣庶，詔曰：[...]. Admonishing inner and outer officials and people. The proclamation read, "...".	DNTL, II, 1: 11b.
5	2 nd month	命諸海口預貯卹難錢米。詔曰：[...]. Ordering [officials at] the seaports to prepare copper coins and grain for victims of maritime accidents, the proclamation read, "...".	DNTL, II, 1: 25b.
6	3 rd month	命清華督鎮阮文玩祭告原廟。詔曰：[...]. Ordering Thanh Hoa Commander Nguyen Van Ngoan to offer worship at the ancestral temple. The proclamation read, "...".	DNTL, II, 1: 30b-31a.
7	3 rd month	帝以城臣黎文豐調度得宜，下詔褒獎加，賞軍士白金三百餘兩，授審掌奇將校以次陞賞。 The emperor thought regional official Le Van Phong had appropriately conducted military operations, [thus] proclaimed to acknowledge. [He] Also awarded the troops with 300 stales of silver.	DNTL, II, 2: 2b
8	3 rd month	丙寅，帝率羣臣奉今冊上大行皇帝。尊諡曰：開天弘道立紀重統神文聖武峻德隆功至仁大孝高皇帝廟號世祖。...禮成，布告中外。詔曰：[...]. On Binh Dan day [the 3 rd day of the sexagenary cycle], the emperor led officials to offer a golden book [of investiture] to <i>Dai hanh hoang de</i> [Gia	DNTL, II, 2: 4a-6b.

¹⁹⁶ DNTL, II, 7: 2a-4a.

		Long] with the posthumous title of “Khai Thien Hoang Dao Lap Ky Thuy Thong Than Van Thanh Vu Tuan Duc Long Cong Chi Nhan Dai Hieu Cao hoang de,” his imperial shrine name 廟號 is The To After the ceremony, [the emperor] proclaimed to all the inner and outer. The proclamation read, “...”.	
9	5 th month	詔求故典, 詔曰: [...]. Announcing a proclamation to search for records of the past. The proclamation read, “...”.	DNTL, II, 3: 5b-6a.
10	6 th month	辛卯, 加上皇妣簡恭齊孝翼正順元皇后, 尊諡曰: 承天[イ+左]聖厚德慈仁簡恭齊孝翼正順元高皇后。。。翌日頒詔中外, 詔曰: [...]. On Tan Mao day [the 28 th day of the sexagenary cycle], offering more posthumous titles to the imperial sister 皇妣, “Gian Cung Te Hieu Duc Chinh Thuan Nguyen hoang hau” to “Thua Thien Ta Thanh Hau Duc Tu Nhan Gian Cung Te Hieu Duc Chinh Thuan Nguyen Cao Hoang hau.” ... The next day, announcing a proclamation to the inner and outer that read, “...”.	DNTL, II, 3: 13a-15b.
11	6 th month	賜京外官宴銀, 詔曰: [...]. Bestowing silver as compensation for the court banquet for metropolitan and provincial officials. The proclamation read, “...”.	DNTL, II, 3: 16a-b.
12	7 th month	建開國臣忠節功臣廟. 先阮文仁請為開國諸臣立廟。帝曰: 卿言正合朕意. 忠節之臣亦須祀有常所乃下詔曰: [...]. Constructing shrines for founding-state officials and loyal followers. Earlier, Nguyen Van Nhan had requested to build a temple for those who contributed to the dynastic establishment. The emperor said, “your words fulfil my wish. Loyal officials should have a place to worship.” [The emperor thus] proclaimed an announcement that read, “...”.	DNTL, II, 4: 1 a-b.
13	7 th month	詔求真言, 詔曰: [...]. Announcing a proclamation encouraged straightforward policy recommendation, the edict read, “...”.	DNTL, II, 4: 3b-4a.
14	9 th month	[Le Van Duyet pacified a Khmer rebellion]. [Minh Menh] issued an edict to praise and awarded coins to the troops.	DNTL, II, 5: 14a-b.
15	11 th month	詔開鄉會恩試科。詔曰: “...”. Proclaiming the opening of regional and palace examinations [under the imperial favor], ¹⁹⁷ the edict read, “...”.	DNTL, II, 7: 10 a.

These proclamations established a detailed portrait of Minh Menh with charisma, filial piety 孝, and guaranteed his rule of virtue 德 and benevolence 仁. Four of them (no. 1, 6, 8, 10) related to the royal family, paying tribute to his ancestors,

¹⁹⁷ *Ân thí khoa* 恩試科 were special metropolitan examinations held on auspicious occasions. In this context, the examination was organized under the Minh Menh imperial favor of his enthronement.

offering posthumous titles to his father, sisters, etc., Unlike the sense of scepticism and vulnerability in Gia Long’s proclamations, Minh Menh attempted to exhibit a great deal of confidence. He dedicated two announcements offering awards to military officials, one admonishing people, and two dedicated to the founding-state officials. They, as intended, set exemplary gestures of his attentiveness to people and officials, as much to the confidence he expected in return from the imperial subjects. They signalled the vision of a new bureaucratic practice with weighty reliance on Confucian scholars. He proclaimed that they should be recommended based on talent (no. 3), and their forthright voices were welcomed (no. 13). Finally, he gathered regional graduates to the court by announcing that special provincial and palace examination would be organized under the imperial favor (no. 15). In the years to come, the “invitation” was taken by a considerable quantity of literati, who walked into the court, assisted the emperor’s institutional designs, and profoundly transformed the dynastic political culture.

Minh Menh’s first-year proclamations on subject matters (source: <i>DNTL</i>)				
His filial piety	To founding-state officials	A benevolence ruler	To the armies	To officials and people
4	2	4	2	3

In short, imperial proclamations possessed tremendous symbolic bureaucratic authority that allowed Minh Menh to construct a new kind of image of the monarch - a scholar and ruler whose reign was projected with optimism, expectation, and determination. The vision of strong emperors later orchestrated bureaucratic centralization and institutionalization. It opened up the reconstruction of direct and efficient correspondence and deliberation. The responsibility fell on new groups of ministry chiefs, grand secretaries, and grand councillors whose professionalization and governing skills were indispensable to the emerging emperor's paperwork to a new high.

IV. 2. 8. Professionalization and centralization of producing emperor documents

If the late Gia Long reign witnessed the increasing involvement of emperor paperwork in routine political affairs, two new substantial bureaucratic innovations introduced under the Minh Menh reign would continue enforcing that trend. The first involved edict-drafted organizations. The second was related to regulating paratextual structure. The process was handled carefully and determined by his awareness of

written documents' symbolic and pragmatic powers. The emperor once declared that to be a king, “every single word and gesture are all under Heavenly scrutiny” 人君，一言一動天地神祇寔臨鑒之。¹⁹⁸ In 1820, responding to a request made by the Quang Tri commandery to withdraw the policy that had been declared in a previous proclamation, the monarch stated, “ink on the proclamation has not yet dried. If the order was recalled, where could the people’s confidence be placed?” (本年產物稅例前已蠲赦。今詔墨未乾，復令徵收，何以取信於民?)¹⁹⁹

The reform started with the centralizing production of the emperor's documents. Minh Menh selected more assistants for the palace offices. Not only were Hanlin Academicians employed, but their responsibilities also specialized in dealing with different types of emperor paperwork. In 1821, veteran scholar Hoang Kim Hoan was appointed Chief Hanlin Academician (翰林院掌院學士, rank 3A), and took charge of drafting imperial proclamations and ordinances that the Board of Rites had previously prepared. In that position, Hoan’s duty was to organize the Hanlin community for the drafting task (以廣平記錄黃金煥為翰林院掌院學士 (秩正三品). 命禮部嗣有詔敕悉交金煥分委翰林奉撰).²⁰⁰

The appointment was the first endeavor from 1802 to centralize the preparation of imperial ordinances.²⁰¹ Hoang Kim Hoan (?-1830), a native of Hue, was Minh Menh’s trusted scholar-official. Joining Gia Long's court as a Hanlin Academician in 1802, eight years later, based on academic performance, he was promoted to princes’ mentor (1810). He took the job four years before being deployed to the boards and provinces. Served twice as chief ambassador to Beijing, Chief of the State Academy, and examiner of the palace examination (1826), Hoan demonstrated merit that the monarch highly appreciated. The new position allowed the man to play a crucial role in rearranging Hue’s production of imperial writings. His efforts were not only part of the exercises in improving administrative efficiency and tightening bureaucratic disciplines but also in enhancing imperial authority in an uncertain environment of the transitional court.²⁰²

¹⁹⁸ DN TL, II, 3: 24 a-b.

¹⁹⁹ DN TL, II, 1: 27a.

²⁰⁰ DN TL, II, 7: 15b.

²⁰¹ These documents were mostly presented as investitures to deities and high-rank-official family members.

²⁰² For this power transition, see Vũ Đức Liêm and Dương Duy Bằng, “Phe Phái, Lợi Ích Nhóm, và Quyền Lực ở Việt Nam Đầu Thế Kỷ XIX (Factionalism, Interest Group, and Political Power in Early Nineteenth Century Vietnam).”

The increasing production of ordinances and investitures extended the bulk of work for the Board of Rites and the Hanlin Academicians. In addition, Minh Menh carried out two more reforms in 1829 and 1832 on the title-granted documents by enforcing new institutional and paratextual installations. These establishments defined the nature of emperor paperwork in the decades to come, ranging from paper sizes, seal-usage to delivery procedures. In 1834, the dynasty systematically bestowed imperial ordinances 誥敕 to civil and military officials.²⁰³ The mass distribution could reach tens of thousands of granting papers and profoundly influenced how Hue operated the drafting and circulation of the royal paperwork.²⁰⁴ The burgeoning state documentation imposed pressure on the Hanlin community, the boards, and the inner palace staff. In 1830, the Board of Personnel requested more employees to meet the growing responsibility of drafting imperial ordinances (吏部奏請增置部屬, 以分派繕寫封贈誥敕爲辭). Minh Menh turned down the proposal, claiming that there was a personnel quota for each department and he found no reason that drafting emperor ordinances could go beyond the board's capacity since the task was always part of their duty.²⁰⁵ The Hanlin community, however, was in constant shifts during the first half of the Minh Menh reign. By 1830, there were twenty Hanlin titles, ranked from grades 9 to 3, compared to seventeen in 1804. The following table offers an overview of these changes.

Table 4.7. Appointed Hanlin titles

Gia Long reign (1802-1820)		Minh Menh reign (1820-1841)			
(no quota for all titles)	1804	1820	1821	1827	1830
14 titles	17 titles	18 titles	20 titles	19 titles	20 titles
Han lam vien chuong vien hoc si 翰林院掌院學士			3A		
Han Lam vien truc hoc si 翰林院直學士				3A	
Han lam vien thi doc hoc si 翰林院侍讀學士		4A			
Thi giang hoc si 侍講學士				4B	
Thi doc 侍讀	5A			5A	

²⁰³ DNTL, II, 60: 20a-b; 87: 20a-21b; 119: 20a.

²⁰⁴ See for instance the imperial recognition 敕封 of Tong Phuoc Khuong 宋福匡 in the feats of arm of chasing away enemy and rebels, dated MM14/3/7 (26/04/1833), measured by 52 x 152 cm. See “State Appointment to Tông Phước Khuông (制封宋福匡),” Vietnam Nôm Manuscripts Field Digitization Project, Temple Digital Collections, 1833, <https://digital.library.temple.edu/digital/collection/p16002coll24/id/860>. (accessed on March 19, 2018).

²⁰⁵ DNTL, II, 67: 14b.

Thi giang 侍講	5A			5B	
Thua chi 承旨	5A	4B		5B	
Truoc tac 著作					
Tu soan 修撰	5A	6B		6B	
Bien tu 編修		7A		7A	
Kiem thao 檢討		7B		7B	
Dien ba 典簿		7B		8B	
Dai chieu 待詔		9B		9B	
Cung phung 供奉					
	Che Cao: 制誥 (5A)			Dismissed	
	Thi thu 侍書 (5A)			Dismissed	
	Thi thu vien 侍書院 (6B)				
	Cong si vien 貢士院 (6B).			Dismissed	
		Han lam vien thi doc 翰林院侍讀 (5A)			
			Han lam vien thi giang hoc si 翰林院侍講學士 (4B).		
				Thi doc hoc si 侍讀學士 (4A).	
				Dismissed Han lam vien, Thi han vien,	
					Han lam vien cung phung 翰林院供奉 (9A-B).

Source: HDSL, 9: 3a-b.

Since imperial ordinances and investitures were more ceremonial than practical executive operations, the monarch was unenthusiastic to any enlargement of the Hanlin community. By 1830, no further action was taken, although he continued to be pressured by the Hanlin Chiefs with requests for more personnel. In 1837, the issue came back for the last time in the proposal that board-affiliated graduates should be temporally assigned to support Hanlin's overloaded capacity.²⁰⁶ The proposal was

²⁰⁶ DNTL, II, 178: 4b-5a.

again rejected because the emperor believed the task entirely belonged to the Hanlin's duty.

From the monarch's view, a more critical business was concerned with constructing and maintaining networks delivering imperial commands. In that communication channel, the emperor's writings played the role of supreme executive authority. In doing so, the centralization of the inner palace secretary offices was required because they facilitated imperial correspondence and allowed the monarch to stay in touch with central and local governments.

Emperor paperwork, and edicts, in particular, became the dominant channel through which Minh Menh operated personal rule. Although the emperor reserved the right to draft his orders, it was usually the case that imperial documents were prepared by palace secretaries, ministry chiefs, and inner court key advisors, who belonged to the Office of Records and Books (1820-1829), Grand Secretariat (1829-1933), and Privy Council (1835). Many of the drafters served as attending officials 侍臣.²⁰⁷ Minh Menh regulated a new type of audience in which key officials were summoned to discuss a wide range of topics, from Qianlong's poetry to Vietnamese political affairs. Between 1826 and 1830, those men were Nguyen Huu Than, Luong Tien Tuong, Nguyen Khoa Minh, Hoang Kim Xan, Than Van Quyen, Phan Huy Thuc, Truong Dang Que, Ha Tong Quyen, and Ha Duy Phien, whose affiliations were with either the inner palace offices or the boards. When it came to decision-making that involved the discussed matters, these attending courtiers were required to draft the edicts.²⁰⁸ This particular bureaucratic mechanism was generated by the gradual improvement of the officials' literary capability and by boosting mutual trust between the monarch and his ministers. In the end, the dissemination of written edicts proved to be an effective and accelerated instrument for executing imperial authority. It allowed for increasing the capacity of producing written royal instructions and guaranteed supervision over the drafting process. In the middle of his reign, by designing a well-established inner court with the Grand Secretariat and Grand Council, Minh Menh could control the paperwork's contents and flows and generate an environment of intensive mutual inspection. In 1834, he ordered supervising secretaries and censors 科道 to keep an eye on the edicts' implementation and report any disruption or delay.²⁰⁹ Because the documents' drafting, reviewing, and delivery were carried out at a higher sequence, the palace could increase the pace of imperial communication and decision-making.

²⁰⁷ See for instance, DNLT, II, 38: 1b; 43: 10a; 44: 1a; 47: 24b; 48: 8a; 50: 1a; 51: 13a; 54: 7b; 56: 15b; 63: 24b; 100: 17b...

²⁰⁸ See the imperial edict drafted by Nguyen Huu Than, MNCB, 1: 5.

²⁰⁹ DNLT, II, 138: 26a.

The proclamation of the Minh Menh enthronement in 1820, for instance, suggests some features of the drafting regulations through its paratext. Given the document's significance, it was carefully penned before submitting it for review with a request for deploying the imperial seal. The paratext reads, "Your subjects follow the edict; wait for the imperial seal to stamp on thirty-two documents" 臣真奉旨實欽候信寶共叁拾貳道字記.²¹⁰ The emperor's minium endorsement read "是" (yes/ indeed/allowed).

The second example is an edict drafted by an attending courtier before sending it down for review and implementation. Its circulation suggested the passage in which imperial writings came enforced. Prepared by the President of the Board of Personnel, Nguyen Huu Than, on 22/02/1820, the instruction dispatched officials to the Northern region.²¹¹ The text was thoroughly reviewed by the emperor, whose insertions were marked with vermilion characters on the page. Thirteen imprints of the authenticated seal, "御前之寶" (*Ngũ tien chi bao*) proved the careful supervision that the edict went through. Imperial commands of this kind were usually issued during the court audience with the emperor's direction. The situation will significantly change in the coming years with the increasing demands of executive edicts. Minh Menh allowed ministers and Grand Councilors to receive verbal instructions and draft the documents at their offices; at the same time, it required more vigilance of the Boards, Grand Secretariat, and Censors 科道 on the process.²¹²

²¹⁰ See the proclamation of the Minh Menh enthronement on 14/02/1820 (MM1/1/1). MNCB, 2: 1.

²¹¹ MNCB, 1: 5. Opening text:

“明命元年正月初九日，吏史部尚書臣阮有慎面奉上諭：...” [MM1/1/9, Chief official of the Board of Personnel, Nguyen Huu Than, received imperial verbal command, issued an edict that: "..."]

²¹² DNTL, II, 101: 25b.

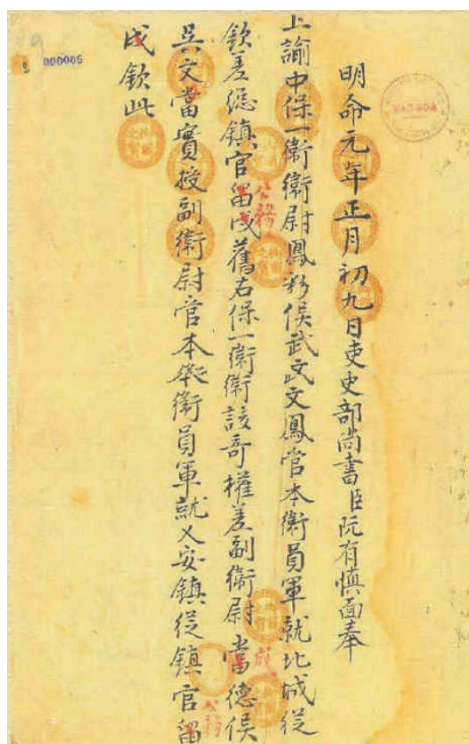


Figure 4.25. The edict 上諭 was drafted by the President of the Board of Personnel, Nguyen Huu Than, on 22/02/1820
Source: MNCB, 1: 5.

One particular type of the surviving emperor's documents of the Minh Menh reign was his handwritten papers. He declared that during the first decade of his rule, the number reached “hundreds and thousands of packages” 千百餘件, and they were printed in *Minh Menh Imperial Writings* (MMNC), but almost none of them survived in the original format.²¹³ Many were brushed on significant occasions or crucial administrative affairs.²¹⁴ Despite their declining number in the last reigning years, the gesture of taking the brush and penning the documents himself signified both the eagerness and enthusiasm of acting emperorship. The minium writings symbolized his care for politics and his firm commitment and determination to rule. Within a month after the death of Minh Menh, his son, Emperor Thieu Tri ordered the Grand Council

²¹³ Based on the Nguyen's dynastic statutes, documents written by the emperor were subjects of preservation at the Grand Secretariat. HDSL, books 224-225.

²¹⁴ Our attention comes to two red imperial commands. The first belongs to the Hue Palace Museum, was written on 20/01/1823 (MM3/12/9) while the emperor on tour to pay tribute to his father's tomb, in which the emperor showed appreciation to his officials who served him in the cold weather. At the end of the command placed two characters, *imperial brush* 御筆 and the imperial seal, “御前之寶”. Lê Thị Toán and Vĩnh Cao, “Chỉ Dụ-Ngự Bút Của Vua Minh Mệnh (Minh Menh's Personal Writings),” *Nghiên Cứu và Phát Triển* 5, no. 76 (2009): 108–12. The second minium edict 硃諭 was mentioned in 1835, when the emperor showed his acknowledgement to high rank officials who helped to pacify rebellions between 1833 and 1835. DNTL, II, 162: 14b-15a.

and Grand Secretariat to collect “every single character” of his father’s writings and burn them during the buried rite:

敕機密內閣: 自明命初元以後, 凡一切文書除諸衙奏本具在當案, 餘不奉有聖筆批示片書隻字各宜恭檢什襲進呈, 于內閣上層敬謹尊藏, 俟寧陵日獻化。²¹⁵

Ordering the Grand Council and Grand Secretariat: from MM1 [1820] onward, except for the memorials that must deposit in whole storage, all the records, even those containing vestiges of a single character written by the previous emperor [Minh Menh], must be respectfully collected and stored at the upper floor of the Grand Secretariat. [They] will be incinerated during the burial ceremony.

IV. 2. 9. The paratextual evolution

國寶之用所以布信令, 示訓行器至重, 而典至鉅也。

The use of imperial seals is to proclaim righteous commands. Thus, [its] messages are essential and [administrative] procedures are crucial.”

Minh Menh, 1828 (DNTL, II, 50: 18a).

This section investigates the paratextual evolutions of Minh Menh’s emperor paperwork, particularly the redefining structure, character elevation, and the use of seal imprints. The most crucial aspect of transformation has probably been imperial seals’ stamps because they fashioned new authoritative symbolism and layout organization of the papers. The introduction of seal imprints into documents was the move that captured Minh Menh’s efforts to standardize written commands. The below table indicates a chronology of increasing imperial seals and establishing regulations related to their usage. This reign marked a significant period where most official seals 官印 were introduced to the Nguyen administration, including authenticated 關防 and imperial seals 寶璽.

Table 4.8. Imperial seals of the Minh Menh reign

No.	Date	New imperial seals and seal-imprint regulations	Notes
	1820	Under Gia Long, the imperial authenticated seal was <i>Van ly mat sat</i> “文理密察” (<i>The text has been confidentially examined</i>), measured by 2.8 x 2.8 cm (1803). ²¹⁶ The court later added a smaller seal, “文理密察” (<i>Van li mat sat</i>), used on documents of the Inner Court Treasury 內務府.	

²¹⁵ DNTL, IV, 1: 16a-b.

²¹⁶ DNTL, I, 21: 12a; a sample of the seal in use, see GLCB, 1: 305.

		In 1820, Minh Menh ordered unifying their usage, abandoning the smaller ones. ²¹⁷ “命文書房嗣後欽用文理密察寶竝用大顆。初文理密察寶有二，其大者隨御前之寶印用諭旨乃章疏。小者用於內務府用籍。帝以二者竝行未爲畫一，命藏其小顆，凡事一以大者行用之。”	
	1820	Casting an imperial seal for the late Gia Long emperor 世祖高皇帝, “世祖高皇帝寶” and a golden seal for his queen, “高皇后寶.” ²¹⁸	
	1822	Changing the place of storing the imperial seals from the Hall of Diligent Politics to the Hall of Central Harmony. 置御寶于中和殿。 ²¹⁹	
	1822	Destroying a Tayson golden seal. ²²⁰	
	1823	“From now on, documents concerning reviewed reports on exporting or importing products from local and capital departments, the seal <i>Ngu tien chi bao</i> “御前之寶” should be stamped on the reign title while the seal <i>Van ly mat sat</i> “文理密察” imprints on the part of the texts [that refers to] delivered items and quantity.” 準定：嗣凡諸城營鎮竝各衙門銷送查奏，用準：於年號處用御前之寶，數目用文理密察寶。 ²²¹	
	1827	Casting new imperial seals: “皇帝尊親之寶” (Hoang de ton than chi bao), “救命之寶” (sac menh chi bao); “欽文之璽” (kham van chi ty), “睿武之璽” (Due vu chi ty), “治曆明時之璽” (tri lich minh thoi chi ty). ²²²	
	1828	Regulating the rules for using imperial seals. 定寶璽行例用 ²²³	
	1828	Re-casting of the seal <i>Van ly mat sat</i> “文理密察” seal, replacing the silver seal with a golden one; and introducing the square-shaped authenticated seals, “文衡公器,” made of ivory, used for regional and palace examinations. ²²⁴ 改鑄文理密察寶(舊用銀改用黃金)。改製文衡公器方篆會試場二顆，鄉試六場場各四顆(舊用銅改用牙)。	
	1835	Carving of the imperial seal of “皇帝之璽” (Hoang de chi ty), [recognized] to be a precious seal of generations. 命鑄刻皇帝之璽，永爲世寶。 ²²⁵	
	1836	The seal <i>Hoang de chi ty</i> 皇帝之璽 had been successfully carved. 皇帝之璽鑄刻告成。 ²²⁶	
	1/1837	Carving of the imperial jade seal, “行在之璽” (Hanh tai chi ty), stamps on imperial documents issued when the emperors were on tour. ²²⁷	

²¹⁷ DNTL, II, 4: 2 ab.

²¹⁸ DNTL, II, 3: 1b.

²¹⁹ DNTL, II, 13: 3 a-b.

²²⁰ DNTL, II, 16: 11b.

²²¹ DNTL, II, 21: 5a.

²²² DNTL, II, 48: 2a-b.

²²³ DNTL, II, 50: 18a.

²²⁴ DNTL, II, 51: 5a.

²²⁵ DNTL, II, 163, 1a.

²²⁶ DNTL, II, 170: 3a-b.

²²⁷ DNTL, II, 177: 8a-b.

		命鑄刻行在之璽。(玉質, 方二寸三分, 厚三分通高一寸七分一釐。) 嗣凡巡狩省方, 駕已在途其有應頒訓條, 敕書者用之.	
	1839	Casting the imperial seal <i>Te gia chi bao</i> “齊家之寶” (Imperial Seal of ruling the family). ²²⁸	
	1838	In 1838, Minh Menh changed the name of his realm from Vietnam (越南) to Dai Nam 大南 (Great South), and ordered to cast the imperial seal <i>Dai Nam thien tu chi ty</i> 大南天子之璽 (Imperial Seal of the Emperor of Dai Nam). ²²⁹	

The activation of these seals resulted in profound changing court institutions and paperwork’s paratextual reconfiguration. Their authoritative significance was attached to the idea of emperorship and imperial authority and was forcefully absorbed and implemented by Minh Menh. Unlike Gia Long’s produced-imperial seals, which did not always contain the casting date, those introduced during the Minh Menh reign demonstrated a high standardization from the casting technique, materiality, and sizes, to the decoration icons.²³⁰ The table below provides an overview of imperial seals that were produced by the nineteenth-century dynasty:

Table 4.9. The production of imperial seals in nineteenth century

No.	Reigns	Date	Imperial golden seals 金寶	Imperial Jade and Ivory Seals 玉璽-牙印	Total	Notes
1	Lord Nguyen Phuc Chu	1710	2	2	4	
2	Gia Long	1802-1820	12	0	12	
3	Minh Menh	1820-1841	12	3	15	With dates of production
4	Thieu Tri	1841-1847	6	4	10	With dates of production
5	Tu Duc	1848-1884	5	2	7	With dates of production
Total			71	14	85	

Source: Le Q. Q, Nguyen D. C, Nguyen C. V., 2009: 49.

Not only instituting additional official seals, but also Minh Menh was aware of their symbolic roles in defining the politics of his court. He carefully attached them to the traditional Chinese norms and practices of seal usage. In 1820, the seal depository site was shifted from the Hall of Diligent Politics to the Hall of Central

²²⁸ DNLT, II, 195: 6a-b.

²²⁹ DNLT, II, 200: 16a.

²³⁰ Chiên, Quân, and Việt, *Kim Ngọc Bảo Tỷ Của Các Hoàng Đế và Vương Hậu Triều Nguyễn Việt Nam (Royal Seals of Emperors and Queens of the Vietnam Nguyen Dynasty)*, 49.

Harmony. The move was justified by the Ming dynastic tradition and was appreciated by his late father:

我皇考建中和殿寔比大明乾清宮，乃天子起居之正殿也。可將御寶等顆遵置于殿中和。如有用寶，大學士協同尙寶文書房奏明，得旨，後內鑒俸詣勤政殿印，用訖卽封鎖尊置如故。其顆鑰仍由尙寶執掌，永著爲令。²³¹

My father [Gia Long] built the Hall of Central Harmony, like the Great Ming's Hall of Heavenly Purity 乾清宮, which was the principal place for the emperor to rule. Thus, imperial seals should be deposited there. When there is a need for deployment, Grand Academicians 大學士, chief of the Department of Imperial Seals 尙寶, and the Office of Records and Books memorialize the affair. When an approved edict was sent down, Inner Eunuchs brought the seals to the Hall of Diligent Politics. After being used, [the seals] must be immediately sealed off and returned to the places. The key [of the seal box] is kept by the Chief of the Department of Imperial Seals. All must be recorded as rules and passed on forever.

Minh Menh associated the Hue practice with a more celebrated imperial tradition by referencing the Ming as a model to establish the seal-used regulations. In 1828, he presented the most detailed instructions on seal imprints in paperwork 定寶璽行例用.²³² Recognizing the significance of imperial seals, the emperor declared, “The role of imperial seals is to certify the righteous commands. Thus, [their] messages are important and [administrative] procedures [concerned the seal's usage] are essential” 國寶之用所以布信令，示訓行器至重，而典至鉅也. Because of that powerful symbolic spirit, his father [Gia Long] tried hard to establish regulations, “conduct reforms to hundreds of things, and issue the use of six imperial seals.” Under his regime, Minh Menh added twelve more to the collection, and each was stipulated with a well-defined application for different document types. Adding to those was the treatment of two imperial authenticated seals, “文理密察” (*Van li mat sat*) and “御前之寶” (*Ngu tien chi bao*) and their application on emperor-endorsed memorials.²³³ As seen on the table of *Imperial seals under the Minh Menh reign*, the 1828 regulation settings were not the last time the emperor took systematic approaches to the imprints. In 1836, he introduced the seal *Hoang de chi ty* “皇帝之璽” (lit., “Seal of the Emperor”), made of jade. The appreciation and proudness of the seal were enormous because an imperial seal of precious jade was an ultimate symbol of the emperor's authority, as stated in the classical tradition. However, jade and skilful jade engravers

²³¹ DNTL, II, 13: 3 a-b; MMCY, 18: 2a.

²³² DNTL, II, 50: 18a-19b.

²³³ DNTL, II, 50: 18a-19b.

were scarce, and imperial seals must be cast in gold. The emperor showed enormous interest and enthusiasm when the jade seal came out. Those involved with the production process were awarded, and the seal was assigned to be used on essential imperial documents:

“...至如行用準定，凡遇改元賜赦，大慶覃恩，諸大端則用此璽頒行，俾昭盛典。乃命繕此諭文，用璽鈐押，頒給諸直省鎮西城各一。”
又改定嗣，凡誥諭親勤狩省方，訓諭中外諸大吏，頒賜外國敕書，諸用皇帝之寶，俾有分別。²³⁴

For the use of the seal [皇帝之璽 *Seal of the Emperor*], it is decided that: for significant events such as changing the reign title, providing great amnesty, providing amnesty on occasions of grand celebration of emperor's birthday, stamping this jade seal [on imperial documents] for implementation, to glorify the dynastic ceremony.

Thus, [the emperor] had the edict copied, stamped with the imperial jade seal, and sent to provinces and Cambodia. [The emperor] also commanded that: from now on, documents that are bestowed to celebrated officials, imperial instructions to high-ranked officials while the emperor is on tour, and diplomatic letters to foreign countries, all use “皇帝之寶” to make the distinction.

The year 1838 was another moment of change. It has been six years since Minh Menh annexed the Northern and Southern Regions and established the provincial system in Vietnam. The dynasty defeated Siamese invasions, suppressed several hundred rebellions throughout the realm, established a network of army plantations, and conducted a land survey and population registration.²³⁵ Like Emperor Qianlong and *the Ten Great Campaigns* 十全武功 that commemorated his military achievements,²³⁶ Minh Menh celebrated his accomplishments by redefining the realm of his reign as a *great kingdom* 大國 in the South.²³⁷ By recognizing the equality of

²³⁴ DNTL, II, 170: 3a-4a.

²³⁵ See Nguyễn Phan Quang, *Việt Nam Thế Kỷ XIX (1802-1884) (Vietnam in the XIXth Centenary (1802-1884)* (Thành phố Hồ Chí Minh: Nxb thành phố Hồ Chí Minh, 2002); Nguyễn Phan Quang, *Cuộc Khởi Nghĩa Của Lê Văn Khôi, 1833 - 1835 (The Military Rebellion of Le Van Khoi, 1833-1835)* (Thành phố Hồ Chí Minh: Nxb Thành phố Hồ Chí Minh, 1991); Choi, *Southern Vietnam under the Reign of Minh Mạng (1820-1841): Central Policies and Local Response*; Liêm, “Vietnam at the Khmer Frontier: Boundary Politics, 1802–1847”; and Nguyễn Đình Đầu, *Nghiên Cứu Địa Bạ Triều Nguyễn (Research the Nguyen Cadastral Records), 10 Vols.* (Thành phố Hồ Chí Minh: Nxb Đại học Quốc gia thành phố Hồ Chí Minh, 2010).

²³⁶ Mark C. Elliott, *Emperor Qianlong: Son of Heaven, Man of the World* (New York: Pearson Longman, 2009), 88–106.

²³⁷ On the Nguyen bureaucrats' perception on their realm as a great kingdom 大國, see Ly Van Phuc, *Random Chants from a Journey to Mân 閩行集詠*, (1831), A. 1291, 24b–25a; Unknown author, 1836. *The Customs of Cambodia 鎮西風土記*, in *Miscellaneous records of geography 諸輿志雜編*, Vien Han Nom, VHV. 1729. English translation by Li Tana, “Trần Tây Phong Thổ Ký 鎮西風土記 [The Customs of Cambodia], Trans., Li Tana.”

the northern empire of the Great Qing 大清, the monarch proclaimed the birth of the Great South 大南. It came with no surprise that a new symbolic imperial authority emerged, “the Seal of the Emperor of the Great South” 大南皇帝之璽.²³⁸

Imperial seals and their appearance on emperor documents signified a significant change in the dynastic political culture regarding projecting imperial authority. As suggested, part of this thesis’s argument is that, due to the non-existence of an independent channel of palace memorials 密奏, and the lack of imperial confidence in the bureaucrats, the use of official seals (sometimes to an excessive scale) became the signature of the Nguyen governing culture.²³⁹ Two imperial authenticated seals, *Ngu tien chi bao* “御前之寶” and *Van ly mat sat* “文理密察,” for instance, were most commonly used on imperial documents and other inner palace paperwork. In 1833, the Grand Secretariat was required to bring two seals to accompany the emperor on short tours.²⁴⁰ Their stamps appeared as an integral part of the imperial written structure to shape the paratexts and visualize the central executive power. Adding stamps presented a unique institutional mechanism through which the dynastic authority was symbolized, and emperorship was established and envisioned on paper.

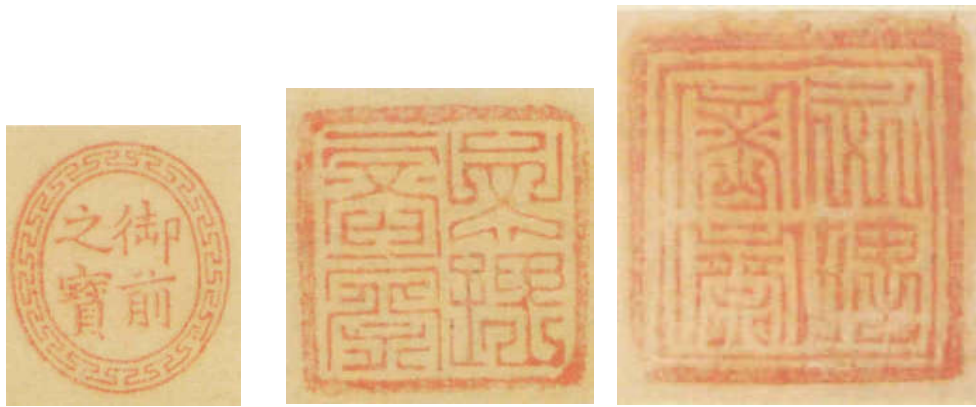


Figure 4.26. Imperial authenticated seals
Left: *Ngu tien chi bao* 御前之寶, measured by 2.5 x 3.0 cm²⁴¹

²³⁸ DNTL, II, 200: 16a.

²³⁹ Although Minh Menh created the system of the Greetings Palace Memorials, 請安摺 and sometimes labeled them as confidential memorials 密摺, he frequently shared the information with courtiers and had the Grand Secretariat and Grand Council processed the documents. DNTL, II, 89: 14a; 166: 4a.

²⁴⁰ DNTL, II, 89: 12b.

²⁴¹ Re-casting in the Đồng Khánh reign (同慶; 1864–1889) in rectangular, measured by 3.3 x 3.6 cm.

Central: *Van ly mat sat* 文理密察, silver, measured by 2.8 x 2.8 cm, cast in 1803.²⁴²
Right: *Van ly mat sat* 文理密察, gold, measured by 3.7 x 3.7 cm, cast in 1828.²⁴³

Minh Menh's direct administrative management transformed the operation of the Nguyen bureaucratic structure, from *representative decision-making* (by the official council: *Congdong* 公同 and *Dinhthan* 廷臣) to the *politics of imperial written commands* (硃批 和 諭). Official documents played as a virtual channel of authoritative execution and reshaped Hue's bureaucratic culture by forming the backbone of bureaucratic correspondence.

Complex regulations were also instituted on the production of imperial documents, particularly regarding the uniformity of their structure and layout. For a systematic understanding of the imperial textual structure, we attempt to classify those formats and illustrate them with a general paratextual pattern. On three occasions, Minh Menh ordered standardizing the production of ordinances and investitures (in 1829, 1832, and 1834). Paratextual structure and procedures of imperial investiture 敕 and imperial ordinances 誥敕 were re-defined. The process intervened in a wide range of categories, from materiality, paper type, textual structure, layout, imprint, and decoration motif to the number of claws the dragon icons possessed in associating with the receivers' ranks.²⁴⁴

These features, however, continued elaborating under the emperor's thorough supervision. In the late 1830s, realizing the inconsistency of the textual format of official-appointed proclamations 詔文, Minh Menh demanded that the pronouncements add details of the previous and nominated official titles for clarification.²⁴⁵ Regulations of character elevation in edicts and decrees came to establish. Characters that related to the precedent dynastic posthumous titles and the



See Thành Thái vermilion records (TTCB), 75: 21-23.

²⁴² DNTL, I, 21: 12a.

²⁴³ Previously: silver, measured by 2.8 x 2.8 cm. GLCB, 1: 304, 305.

²⁴⁴ A considerable number of imperial investitures were presented to officials' family members. DNTL, II, 60: 20 a-b; 87: 20 a-21 b; 119: 20 a.

²⁴⁵ DNTL, II, 70: 5b. Original text, “帝以向來有旨調頒別職人員, 吏部繕給詔文有旨者調頒新職, 者亦有者以本職調頒者, 未有一定. 諭嗣後何員蒙得調頒者, 詔文內須一例明敘其人原授職銜, 及準以本職調頒新授職銜俾得分曉.”

Temple of Literature 歷代帝王廟, 文廟等字 should be raised to the first line.²⁴⁶ Finally was the format-uniformity that applied to the imperial ordinances presented to officials [定給與官員誥敕例]. This document type, functioning as investiture bestowal, was in high demand during the 1830s. The new procedure had official papers provided to military officials (rank 5A and above), civil officials (rank 5B and above), and county magistrates (rank 6 A-B) in forms of ordinances 誥敕, while proclamations 詔文 were designed for the rest. It also required that documents presented to personnel between the fifth and first rank used the term “issued imperial words that read ...” [制曰: ...], while for the sixth rank, the employed term was “issued an investiture that read ...” [敕曰: ...].²⁴⁷

Paratextual elaboration of the emperor's paperwork, on the other hand, demonstrates their increasing executive function. Additional details provided information on responsible personnel for the affairs, scribes, received dates, imprints, and a list of the delivered destinations. If necessary, the documents were endorsed with imperial minium reviews. These paratextual transformations were equal to those fashioned on memorials because both document types were vehicles for the monarch-minister dialogues for decision-making. For instance, the paratext on the proclamation in which Minh Menh ordered mandarins of the fourth rank and above to report their records of public career (or Official Biography 履歷事務) reads, “本月二十式日, 臣鄭懷德欽用信寶拾肆道” [On the 22nd day of this month, your subject, Trinh Hoai Duc used imperial seal for fourteenth documents].²⁴⁸ Accordingly, two days after the paper was drafted, the President of the Board of Personnel [Trinh Hoai Duc] took charge of its enforcement and issued sealed copies for delivery.

²⁴⁶ DNLT, II, 77: 19a.

²⁴⁷ DNLT, II, 87: 20a-21b. Also, see more on imperial ordinances 誥憑 in HDSL, books 18, 19, and 20.

²⁴⁸ MNCB, 2: 230.

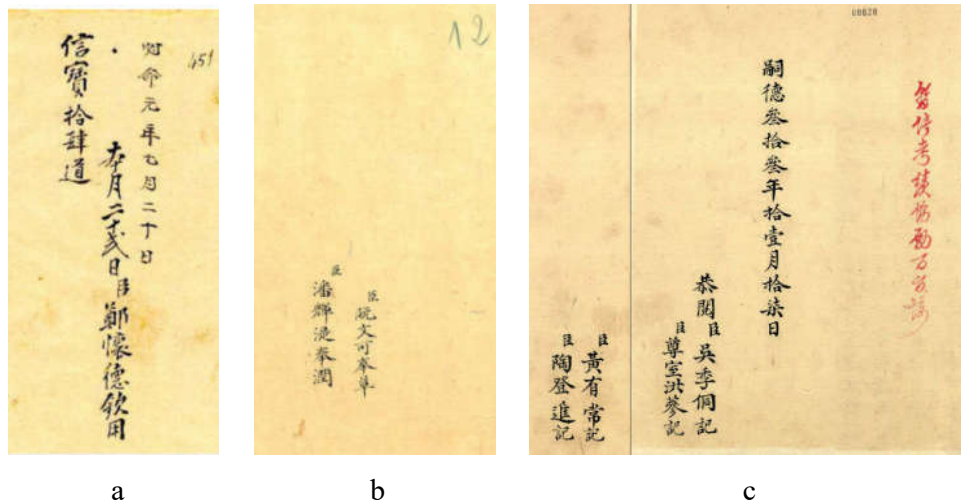


Figure 4.27. Paratexts on Minh Menh and Tu Duc's emperor documents
 Left: Minh Menh's proclamation on 28/08/1820 (MM1/7/20).
 Source: MMCB, 2: 230.²⁴⁹
 Central: Minh Menh proclamation on 16/12/1841 (MM21/11/4).
 Source: MMCB, 80: 6.²⁵⁰
 Right: Tu Duc edict on 18/12/1880.
 Source: TDCB, 343: 17.²⁵¹

The following edict 上諭 provides a concrete example of the mechanism by which imperial paperwork activates. The suggestion is that process of memorials, making endorsements, and drafting edicts were carried through close monarch-minister interactions.²⁵² On 13/8/1837 (MM18/7/13), the Board of Public Works submitted an assessment report on returned soldiers from a mission. The memorial was reviewed by two board chiefs, Ly Van Phuc and Ha Duy Phien (李文馥 and 何維藩), before approaching the emperor. His endorsement concerned one official reads, “為兵再俟差派” [“return to the army and wait for the next deployment”].²⁵³

²⁴⁹ MMCB, 2: 230.

²⁵⁰ MMCB, 80: 6. The paratext reads, “臣阮文可奉草. 臣潘輝湜奉潤.” [Your subject Nguyen Van Kha drafted. Your subject, Phan Huy Thuc polished [the text]].

²⁵¹ TDCB, 343: 17. The paratext reads, “恭閣臣吳李侗記. 臣尊室洪蔘記. 臣黃有常記. 臣陶登進記”. [Your subjects at the Grand Secretariat signed, Ngo Li Dong, Ton That Hong Sam, Hoang Huu Thuong, Dao Dang Tien].

²⁵² MMCB, 57: 245.

²⁵³ The memorial's paratext reads, “臣阮文祐奉草. 臣何維藩臣李文馥奉閱” [Your subject Nguyen Van Huu drafted. Yours subjects, Ha Duy Phien and Ly Van Phuc reviewed].

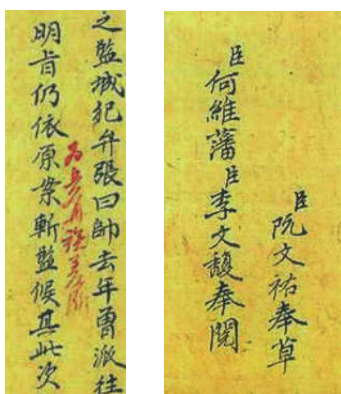


Figure 4.28. Paratexts of the memorial of the Board of Public Works on 13/8/1837
Source: MNCB, 57: 244.

Following the imperial remark, an edict was prepared on the same day, addressing the decision of rewards and punishments. Phien and Phuc participated in a royal audience, received instruction, and drafted an implemented edict 奉上諭. In this case, three officials were responsible for the emperor's document:

Responsibilities	Names	Notes
Drafter 奉草	Nguyen Van Huu 阮文祐	“臣阮文祐奉草”.
Reviewers 奉閱	Ha Duy Phien 何維藩 Ly Van Phuc 李文馥 ²⁵⁴	“臣何維藩臣李文馥奉閱”.

Finally, Minh Menh’s review was made, using vermilion spots 硃點 (over the characters “*minh*” 明 and “*hui*” 又) as a gesture of approval. That edict is a vivid example of the working process in which the monarch and his ministers communicated, the pace of court discussion and decision-making before an edict was issued, reviewed, and delivered. Within one day, the document was introduced following the royal audience and imperial endorsements. The decision made for the case was more detailed than the emperor’s preliminary brushing. It involved more officials, including a list of twenty-two soldiers 兵丁 and thirty-one conscripted men 民夫 (又奉照在行兵丁二十二名 (水師二十名, 鑿城二名). 民夫三十一名, 合併聲敘).

²⁵⁴ According to *shilu* (DNLT, II, 193: 2b), in May 1838, Nguyễn Văn Hữu hold the post of Department Secretary 司務. In July 1838, Hà Duy Phiên was President of the Board of the Public Works 工部尚書 and Lý Văn Phúc was Department Chief at the Board of Public Works 工部郎中, 辦理部務. One month later (August 1837), Phuc was promoted to Acting Vice-President of the Board of Public Works 署工部右侍郎. DNLT, II, 183: 19a, 31a.

In July 1838, the grand secretaries was Lê Bá Tú and Nguyễn Tri Phương. This month, they were both demoted by Minh Menh, and replaced by Hà Tông Quyền (DNLT, II, 183: 27a). A part from Quyen, three other Boards’ Vice Presidents were commanded in September 1837 that alternately worked at the Grand Secretariat. DNLT, II, 184: 30b.

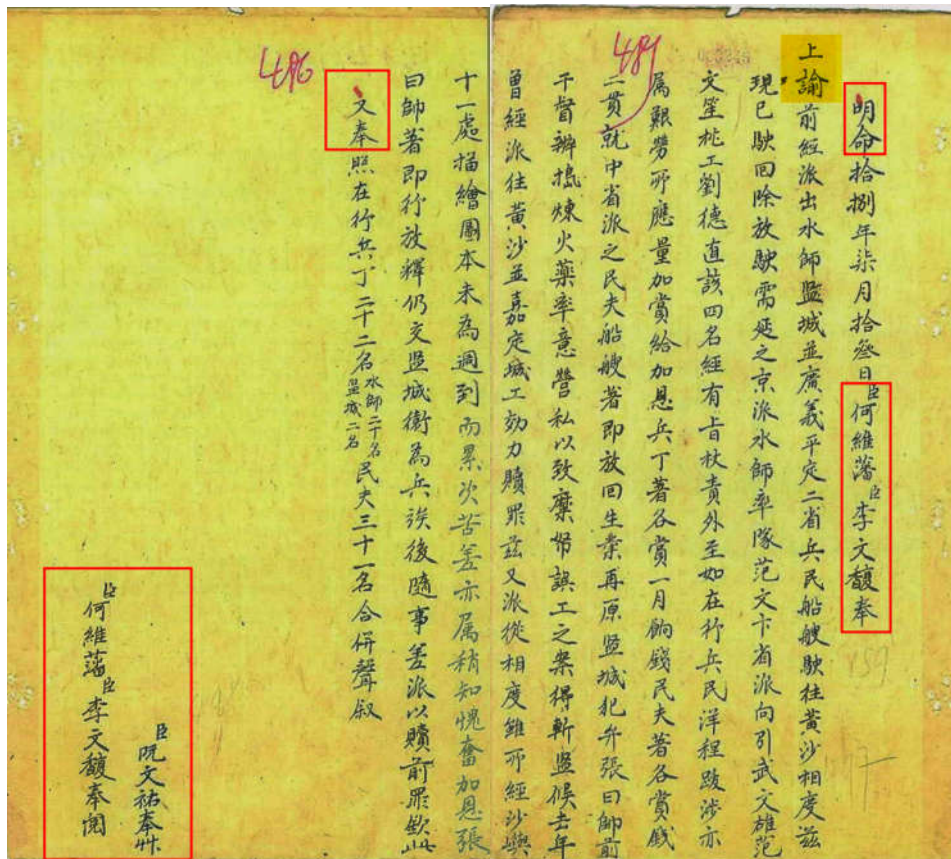


Figure 4.29. Edict implemented by Ha Duy Phien and Ly Van Phuc
 Date: MM18/7/13.
 Source: MMCB, 57: 245.

The case indicates the efficiency of imperial communication and the working routine between Minh Menh and his ministers in decision-making and presenting enforced documents. The paper was produced on the same day the memorial was submitted. Toward the end of the reign, Minh Menh was comfortably working with boards and grand secretaries and had more confidence in their role in producing emperor documents. Both the audience and edict drafting were acquired in a shorter period. This accomplishment probably benefited from the wartime situation between 1832 and 1836, when imperial decision-making required more secrecy and speed.²⁵⁵

²⁵⁵ Also see the discussion on the interrelation between emperor paperwork and changing nature of the dynastic politics in chapter VI.

IV. 2. 10. Penalties for violations of paperwork-regulations

The activation of imperial authority through written papers required the creation of an institutional and paperwork environment. That cultural and bureaucratic matrix allows emperor documents to act in their agency along the process of production, circulation, reception, enforcement, implementation, and archivization.²⁵⁶ To exercise the legitimate and legal authority of official documents, penalties for textual and paperwork violations were carefully exercised by state authority. As discussed above, paperwork-related contravention guarantees severe penalties. The throne showed no mercy for the violators and was highly attentive to potential power corruption and manipulation of imperial authority.²⁵⁷ Harsh punishments were applied for a wide range of faults, from misunderstanding imperial verbal edicts (口諭 and 面諭), damaged papers, unpunctual delivery, and incorrectly written characters, to the unauthorized use of seals.

The first worth-to-mention case came as soon as 1820 and involved Vice-President of the Board of Personnel, Le Dong Ly 黎仝裏. Earlier, Ly had received an imperial ordinance that instructed him to prepare a proclamation for appointing a metropolitan official to a provincial post. Unfortunately, the appointee's former title was not abolished, so he came to the province with the seal that belonged to the previous post. Infuriated by the immoderation, Minh Menh summoned Ly to the court, indicted him against the imperial wills (抗旨), and ordered him to put in stocks. The list of "victims" then expanded. Veteran scholar-official and President of the Board of Personnel Trinh Hoai Duc, chief palace secretary offices: Le Van Cong and Hoang Quynh were summoned and remonstrated. Finally, he announced an edict to the Board of Personnel, strongly stressing the significance of the accuracy of written imperial commands.²⁵⁸

The case was not unique in the delivery of imperial authority via paperwork under the Minh Menh reign. As we discuss later in this section, the emperor's writings profoundly shaped the nature of Hue's politics. Not only the emperor's words are subjects of "Heavenly observation," but also they carry the function of governance. Therefore, a miswritten character in ordinances 誥文 may cause direct summon of

²⁵⁶ Kienitz Sabine, "AG Wirkmacht – Agency: Effecting Reality," Working Paper, Group W, Center for the Study of Manuscript Culture (Hamburg University), 2015, 1.

²⁵⁷ MNCB, 40: 82-83.

²⁵⁸ DNTL, II, 5: 18a-b.

board presidents, while slow delivery could be the reason for severe blames and demotions to others.²⁵⁹

Penalties were utilized as a means of raising awareness and submission to the power of the emperor paperwork. Textual and physical violations immediately led to the monarch's caution and attentiveness. In 1824, a senior official was impeached because of misunderstanding the monarch's verbal edict 面諭. To make the case, he announced that "imperial vocal orders should have listened carefully. If there is any unclear, one should memorialize [for clarification]. Otherwise, any irresponsible drafting [of imperial documents] shall lead to a severe discussion of impeachment."²⁶⁰ Related to the circulation of verbal instructions, palace eunuchs were strictly prevented from intervening in court affairs. Minh Menh forcefully declared that they are not part of the bureaucratic structure and, thus, should have absolutely no influence upon the courtiers. When the emperor was aware that the Board of Revenue sent a document to Quang Nam commandery, in which the phrase, "內監奉傳" ([imperial command] delivered by inner palace eunuch) was included; he was furious. The Board's Vice President was summoned and severely reprimanded:

凡內監奉傳報何事，必須覆奏，後奉明旨於行。今猶云："內監奉傳"何也？且彼但守門傳命，不預政事。據所傳而行不幾於政由闈宦乎？²⁶¹

If the inner palace eunuch delivers any [imperial command], it should be memorialized, and wait for imperial edicts for implementation. Now, it is said [in the board's document] that "[imperial command] delivered by inner palace eunuch," why is it so? They [the eunuchs] only keep the doors and deliver messages, and could not intervene in the political affair. If [officials] unconditionally follow the [the eunuch's] words to implement, is not it the case that politics relies on the eunuchs?

Concealing written mistakes and unauthorized use of imperial seals were severely targeted by Minh Menh because they attached to his obsession with power corruption and manipulation of information. Among Le Van Duyet's notorious crimes, accused by the court in 1832 stood the charge of illegal possession of ten sheets of pre-stamped paper with the imprint of "國家信寶" (*Quoc gia tin bao*).²⁶² As a result, the supervision of imperial seals was crucial to paperwork production. The emperor

²⁵⁹ DNLT, II, 79: 22a; DNLT, II, 11: 5b.

²⁶⁰ DNLT, II, 30: 1b. Original text, "因敕自今，凡奉面諭，須敬聽明白。有礙者，覆奏，若輕率安擬到有違誤，即交嚴議".

²⁶¹ DNLT, II, 31: 3a.

²⁶² DNLT, II, 83: 17b. On the case of Lê Văn Duyệt, see Choi, *Southern Vietnam under the Reign of Minh Mạng*.

himself ordered a monthly report on the quantity of the stamps.²⁶³ A considerable proportion of official notes that appeared on the drafts of emperor documents was about information related to the seal-usage, including seal types and volumes of stamped documents. In the enthroned proclamation in 1820, for instance, officials were requesting the imperial seal for imprinting on 32 documents.²⁶⁴

Two following emperor files provide paratextual details that demonstrated the use of imperial seals. The first is a proclamation in which Minh Menh ordered mandarins of the fourth rank and above to submit an official biography. At the document's end place a remark penned by the President of the Board of Personnel, Trinh Hoai Duc: “本月二十式日，臣鄭懷德欽用信寶拾肆道。” [On the 22nd day of this month, your subject, Trinh Hoai Duc followed to use the imperial seal on fourteen documents].²⁶⁵ The other is an ordinance 敕文, which confers deity-title 尊神 to Thien Y A Na Goddess 天依阿那.²⁶⁶ The ending paratext, stamped by the Board of Rites' authenticated seal (“禮部”), reads, “拾月拾捌日，禮部欽用救命之寶敕文壹道” [On the 18th day of the 10th month, the Board of Rites followed to use the seal “救命之寶” (*Sac menh chi bao*) on one ordinance].²⁶⁷

²⁶³ See MMCB, 25: 1, 3, with orders of deploying official seals by the Inner Palace Treasury. Other requests of using imperial seals, including the *Emperor Seal* 皇帝之璽; see MMCB, 29: 32.

Also, MMCB: 31: 60.

MMCB, 51: 3, 25; 184, 298, 327.

MMCB, 54: 105.

MMCB, 57: 150.

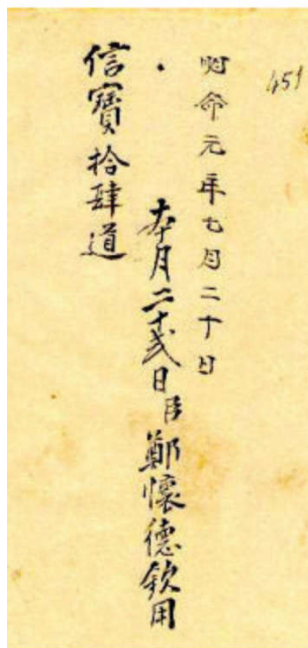
MMCB, 79: 3.

²⁶⁴ MMCB, 2: 1.

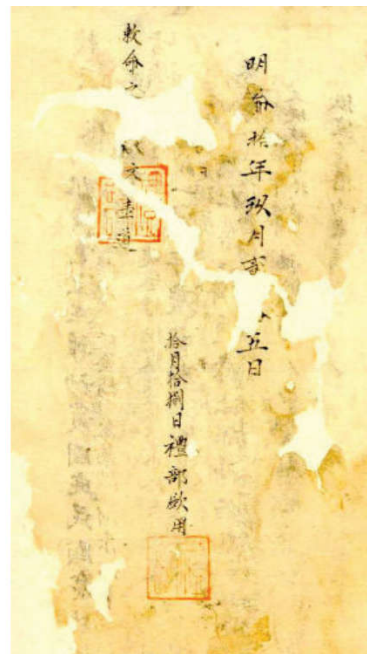
²⁶⁵ MMCB, 2: 230.

²⁶⁶ Dated on MM 10/9/25 (1829). MMCB, 31: 200. Thien Y A Na was originally a Cham Goddess, later worshiped by Vietnamese and officially recognized by the Nguyen dynasty. See more on Nguyễn Thế Anh, “Thien Y A Na, Ou La Récupération de La Déesse Cam Po Nagar Par La Monarchie Confucéenne Vietnamienne,” in *Cultes Populaires et Sociétés Asiatiques*, ed. Alain Forest, Ishizawa Yoshiaki, and Vandemeersch Léon (Paris: l’Harmattan, 1991), 73–86.

²⁶⁷ MMCB, 31: 300.



a



b

Figure 4.30. Paratexts related to the seal usage on Minh Menh's emperor documents

a. Minh Menh proclamation to high-ranked officials to report their public service profiles.

Date: 28/08/1820 (MM1/7/20).

Source: MMCB, 2: 230.

b. Minh Menh ordinance of investiture to Thien Y A Na Goddess.

Date: 22/10/1829 (MM10/9/25).

Source: MMCB, 31: 300.

As the management of imperial seals became the central issue of the Nguyen's official documentation, there was a need for standardizing the imprint regulations. After abandoning the stamping fee on bestowed imperial ordinances, Minh Menh set a time limit between five to thirty days for the boards to apply stamps on ordinances 誥, investitures 敕, proclamations, and edicts (1833).²⁶⁸ It was the responsibility of the Grand Secretariat and Censorate 都察院 to expose the delay and impeach the violators for penalties.²⁶⁹ The concern for the seal-usage procedure was escalated after an incident in 1832, where Minh Menh's vigilance towards imperial-seal management was tested. The case involved two secretariats who attempted to cover up their mistakes by unapproved use of the imperial seal 御寶. Four board chiefs 侍郎 including two grand secretaries were aware of the unlawful act but failed to disclose it. Three of them faced pending death penalties while two others were deposed to be

²⁶⁸ DNTL, II, 90: 18a.

²⁶⁹ DNTL, II, 90: 16a-b.

soldiers and banned for life from entering public service again.²⁷⁰ Minh Menh was uncompromising in the implicit use of imperial seals and showed no tolerance for those high-ranked officials.²⁷¹

Concealing information and disrupting imperial communication were other sources of the emperor's obsession. Those acts were considered as the recipe of factionalism 朋黨之禍.²⁷² To the monarch, potential manipulations of the emperor's written commands pose threats to the efficiency, integrity, and accountability of the bureaucracy. It was in 1837 when the Board of Defence delivered a proclamation 詔文 to Gia Dinh (Saigon) with a written mistake. The province returned the document to the board thrice, asking for a correction. The board's staff, however, failed them an answer and covered up the mistake by not responding to the requests until provincial officials memorialized to the throne. Realized that the court officials neglected their duty and the system failed to respond to local correspondence, Minh Menh argued, "The staff disguises the board's chiefs like the ministers conceal the court. They conspired with each other to cover up [the mistake] for one year, and no one among the board's heads was aware. What can one say about that?" Consequently, one board member was sent to exile 流, another with hard labor 徒, and the board chiefs were demoted. Finally, the emperor ordered the Board of Defence and Censorate to settle new regulations for receiving and dispatching documents. A new office called "Department of Seals" 印曹 was established while the process of applying seal imprints on documents required the attendance of the board heads. In addition, all sent-out and received papers must be enumerated and reported monthly.²⁷³ For Minh Menh, sealed imprints were the problem and the solution to bureaucratic control.

In short, increasing paperwork regulations transformed the institutional operation in Hue. Whether applying penalties for a textual violation or creating a paperwork atmosphere for the activation of imperial authority, they facilitated a new landscape of written authority where imperial commands sent down in written forms played an essential role in exercising executive governance. The new channel of delivering emperor authority shifted the nature of deliberation and the monarch-minister relationship. In addition, it reshaped the dynastic administrative institutions

²⁷⁰ DNTL, II, 81: 8b-9a.

²⁷¹ Although two among those offenders (Hoàng Quýnh and Lê Vạn Công) had served the emperor for years, since he was a young prince, that close relation, however did not save them from the monarch's wrath. DNTL, II, 18: 4a-10a.

²⁷² DNTL, II, 81: 11a.

²⁷³ DNTL, II, 187: 13b-14a.

and how the throne communicated with both courtiers and local government. This is the departure point for our last section which investigates the interrelation between imperial writings, official communication, and the structure of the court power.

IV. 2. 11. Emperor paperwork and the changing dynastic politics

Minh Menh was intensely committed to both written paperwork and literary composition. The emperor frequently referenced his reign to two other rulers, Le Thanh Tong and Qianlong.²⁷⁴ While the Qing emperor took pride in composing 42,000 poems and left roughly a thousand prose pieces of various kinds, Minh Menh was also well-known not only for thousands of poetic pieces but also for a considerable quantity of written instructions and essays.²⁷⁵ A significant amount of those official writings claimed to be drafted by himself appeared in the form of edicts. The initial volume of *Imperial Writings* 御製文, 初集 contains fourteen books 圈, with 384 edicts while the

²⁷⁴ DNLT, II, 71: 7b.

²⁷⁵ Sugimura Yuzo 杉村勇造, *Ken-Ryu Kotei 乾隆皇帝 (The Qianlong Emperor)* (Tokyo: Nigen sha, 1961), 29–30.; Alexander B. Woodside, “The Ch’ien-Lung Reign,” in *The Cambridge History of China, Vol. 9, Part 1*, ed. Willard J. Peterson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 232, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CHOL9780521243346.007>. Minh Menh poetry collection contains 5,000 woodblock-printed pages with 4,000 poems. Some of the Minh Menh’s works are included:

No			
1	Ngự chế tiểu bình Bắc Kỳ nghịch phi thi tập	御製剿平北圻逆匪詩集 (1835)	Poetry collection of Imperial compositions during the campaign of suppression of Northern rebellion
2	Ngự chế tiểu bình Nam Kỳ nghịch phi thi tập	御製剿平南圻逆匪詩集 (1835)	Poetry collection of Imperial compositions during the campaign of suppression of Southern rebellion
3	Ngự chế thi sơ tập	御製詩初集, 10 books, 865 poems	Minh Menh’s imperial poetry, 1 st vol.,
4	Ngự chế thi nhị tập	御製詩二集, 10 books, 613 poems	Minh Menh’s imperial poetry, 2 nd vol.,
5	Ngự chế thi tam tập	御製詩三集	Minh Menh’s imperial poetry, 3 rd vol.,
6	Ngự chế thi tứ tập	御製詩四集, 10 books, 522 poems	Minh Menh’s imperial poetry, 4 th vol.,
7	Ngự chế thi ngũ tập	御制詩五集, 10 books, 509 poems	Minh Menh’s imperial poetry, 5 th vol.,
8	Ngự chế thi lục tập	御製詩六集, 10 books, 574 poems	Minh Menh’s imperial poetry, 6 th vol.,
9	Ngự chế văn sơ tập (1834)	御製文初集, 13 books	Minh Menh’s imperial writings, first vol.,
10	Minh Menh ngự chế văn	明命御製文, 1209 essays	Minh Menh’s imperial writings
11	Minh Menh chiếu dụ	明命詔諭	Minh Menh’s proclamations and edicts
12	Thánh dụ huấn dịch thập điều (1834)	聖諭訓迪十條	The Sacred Edict of Ten Points of Moral Instruction.

second collection (御製文, 二集) includes 204.²⁷⁶ The extant manuscripts at Hue palace archives also inform of a repertoire of 2,111 emperor documents issued between 1802 and 1841, comprising 994 proclamations, 462 decrees, and 655 edicts. The volume was more than thirteen times in scale compared to those of the Gia Long collection.

As thousands of emperor-written commands entered the bureaucracy, they elevated imperial correspondence as a significant channel of dynastic deliberation. The Gia Long administration was dramatically transformed, from *Congdong* to direct imperial control. The process was assisted by the centralization of the inner palace offices as the communication hub. They facilitated the flow of imperial documents, which were increasingly empowered with executive function. In 1822, Minh Menh ordered prefect-appointed proclamations added with the phrase, “催督錢糧諸公務” (responsible for the businesses of tax and money).

Interestingly enough, the emperor’s direct involvement with all state affairs was a new phenomenon in Hue. The bureaucrats could not help but respond reluctantly. His “aggressive” control of the administrative businesses certainly confused the courtiers who, for decades, had been familiar with Gia Long’s official council. In 1824, the Vice President of the Board of Personnel even presented a list of chiefs of local military unit 該隊, and asked for imperial approval.

The emperor had to calm the bureaucrat’s nerves by assuring him that “The court should have a code of conduct. From now on, when the court council recommends high-ranked officials, it should expect my minium endorsements as a gesture of appreciation. For appointing low-ranked officials, [the list] should be briefly memorialized before implementation, and no imperial endorsement is necessary” 朝廷須體統。自今，廷臣所舉牧守大吏，候朕硃圈以示寵異職卑者。但可略奏請旨施行，不必圈點瑣碎爲也。²⁷⁷ This assurance, however, did not utterly reflect Minh Menh’s approach to the dynastic administration. In the same year, he conducted a personal review of every 340 legal cases that involved 840 arrested people in the Northern region. When he realized that there were 200 people capitalized each year, an instruction was made to the Board of Justice that every single such case must be reported for approval.²⁷⁸

²⁷⁶ MMNC, First collection, Vien Han Nom, VHV. 69; *Second collection*, Vien Han Nom, VHV. 70.

²⁷⁷ DNTL, II, 26: 6a.

²⁷⁸ DNTL, II, 26: 7a-b.

Prominent courtiers and army chiefs Le Van Duyet and Le Chat immediately intervened. They recalled Gia Long's working style and warned Minh Menh that his way of governing was unnecessarily hardworking.²⁷⁹ A more profound response of Hue's bureaucrats, however, involved the changing official attitude and reception of the emperor's authority. Because the monarch and bureaucracy were not static entities, their relationship with other historical players was continually evolving.²⁸⁰ Minh Menh's new-style leadership redesigned bureaucratic operations and created a new balance of power. It required institutional establishment to uphold centralizing communication and the performance of personal rule.

The new politics was based on direct imperial control under which the court structure gradually gravitated to the palace. The correspondence network was consolidated and decision-making was only granted following imperial symbolic "signatures" (whether the stamps, endorsements, or edicts). Criminal detention, for instance, must be authorized with an imperial stamp. "If there is a charge of arresting criminals, the palace secretary offices must stamp the seal "*Ngu tien chi bao*" 御前之寶 on imperial edicts and warrants, [and then] send to the boards" 有句到人犯, 文書房即於諭本並句到本內各用御前之寶, 送部.²⁸¹ This instruction, however, seemed not to free Minh Menh from fear of potential textual corruption. Further procedures for the Board of Justice were put into place. Accordingly, "if an edict [of detention] is copied and delivered to court departments, the important characters [of the text that] declares the crimes should be stamped by the board's authenticated seal. It is because of preventing implicit textual modification" 復敕刑部: 凡恭錄旨語行諸衙門者, 其罪名關鍵數目處各以部篆鈐, 蓋於防出入.²⁸²

These were just two of Minh Menh's efforts to operate his state through authorizing emperor documents. It took the monarch a decade to place some confidence in the bureaucrats, and more importantly, in the regulations and norms that had been carefully installed. Because of his profound reliance on documentation to prevent power corruption, the state became heavily dependent on written communication. He demanded every single character of imperial edicts penned down, copied, delivered, and implemented correctly. He built up the inner palace institutions with trusted retainers, whose years of service, commitment, and loyalty had been tested. These figures of the early reign were Nguyen Dang Tuan, Tran Cong Tuan, Hua Duc

²⁷⁹ DNTL, II, 26: 6a-b.

²⁸⁰ Brantly Womack, ed., *China's Rise in Historical Perspective* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2010), 217.

²⁸¹ DNTL, II, 35: 13a.

²⁸² DNTL, II, 35: 13b.

De, Le Ba Tu, Hoang Quynh, Nguyen Van Thuan, and Le Van Cong. Serving in the palace offices, their responsibility not only guaranteed that imperial words were disseminated appropriately but also acted as the emperor's "ears and eyes." Hoang Quynh and Le Van Cong, for instance, assisted Minh Menh since he was a young prince. They were regularly dispatched on missions, examined local situations, collected information, and reported directly to the throne.

Nevertheless, Minh Menh's aim was not to settle a form of absolute despotism but instead of returning disciplines and fostering institutional establishment. His reign was an essential turning point in domestic governance which was evolving from the loose, uncertain, and fragmented structure of the Gia Long era. Unlike Yongzheng, who demanded total submission to his wisdom, Minh Menh openly asked for and encouraged consultation in the process of decision-making.²⁸³ The vigilant monarch was, to some extent, aware that "an institution is the lengthened shadow of one man."²⁸⁴ Institutions are sets of rules and procedures collectively acknowledged by human society. Immoderation, abuse, or denigration by rulers could lead to power corruption, disrupting institutional structures and weakening their legitimacy. Minh Menh required his courtiers to be cautious, even in the reception of imperial orders. He criticized court officials who failed to expose his inappropriate decision.²⁸⁵

Burgeoning imperial written commands facilitated a new atmosphere of bureaucratic operation where they were recognized as the uppermost form of bureaucratic authority. In 1827, officials who carried imperial edicts 旨諭 or endorsed papers on missions were provided with travelling expenses.²⁸⁶ The change confirms a move towards the system that we define as "the bureaucracy of edicts," in which emperor documents became a major channel of delivering imperial authority. In that same year, witnessed mass social chaos in the Northern region, Minh Menh issued a long edict to cultivate confidence in the commoners and strengthen morale in officialdom. He ordered, "the document must be announced to all counties so officials and people will be self-restrained [from bad behaviors], disciplined to themselves to set a model for others. In doing so, high-ranked officials and local personnel should exhibit a great responsibility to take care of people. [it is my] high expectation" (今以

²⁸³ Frederick W. Mote, *Imperial China, 900-1800* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999), 889.

²⁸⁴ Waldo R. Emerson, *The Selected Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson* (New York: Modern Library, 1950), 154.

²⁸⁵ DNTL, II, 59: 13 a-b.

²⁸⁶ DNTL, II, 44: 3a.

此諭曉告全轄，令吏民各自戒戢要之正，其本頒以身率先使人有所視傲則干城之尊，闔大員及所轄司牧寔有厚青焉，有厚望焉。²⁸⁷

Increasing the production of imperial papers boosted pressure on the inner palace, requiring new procedures and specialized personnel. In 1827, the monarch demanded to settle detailed regulations for disseminating imperial orders, both verbal and written. For verbal communication (面諭, 口諭), the new instruction read, “It is approved that from now on if officials are approached by courtiers, imperial guards, and palace eunuch with emperor-commanded cards for the deliver [of imperial verbal instruction], one should follow the rule to carry on and then submit confidential memorials on the nature of the command” (準定自今, 諸衙門如見官員侍衛內監齋俸王命牌傳示某事, 照例遵行. 仍據傳旨某事具片寔封呈覽).²⁸⁸ In other words, each imperial verbal instruction required a confidential written report in return. The emperor had reason to worry about the transmission of imperial instructions, particularly through the verbal channel. The mushrooming volume of imperial commands and their increasingly complex nature involved more boards and court organs and demanded a new system of operation. He found a gap between the boards and the Office of Records and Books in which the latter was not entirely in the position of reviewing the edicts’ implementation.

In 1829, despite the lack of clarity of an edict written by Minh Menh, it was implemented by the boards, leading to an inappropriate official appointment. The improper went on and was spotted by no courtier until the emperor himself came across the court’s book of official profiles. He immediately summoned the Boards of Defence and Personnel and announced:

補授陳文貴之旨乃朕親撰草. 付因補授字下無伊衛副衛尉等字, 樣到爾等有此誤亦屬有辭. 然貴以正四品副衛尉, 而遽授正三品侍衛內衛尉, 宣非起等何? 不指此覆奏. 且爾等職掌要樞, 得預言諍. 如朕有不是處亦可批鱗力諒方盡臣子職事. 今尋常細故尚不畱心, 關重事體其將余何? 豈不負設官分職而孤朕虛懷容納之意于?
茲亦不必深責, 只須將此諭旨抄給各部院俾, 知朕文字少未明晰而無人執此陳奏.²⁸⁹

I personally drafted the edict appointed official Tran Van Quy. Because underneath the phrase “補授” [appointed to] places no phrase “伊衛副衛尉” [maintain as vice-captain], so you officials were making a mistake. Quy was in rank 4A, below the required rank for a Chief Imperial Guard, which is 3A. Why did you not expose [the improper]? In addition, you officials hold

²⁸⁷ DNTL, II, 45: 26b.

²⁸⁸ DNTL, II, 45: 29b.

²⁸⁹ DNTL, II, 59: 13 a-b.

important positions that are allowed to present advice. If I make inappropriate decisions, [you] should bravely dissuade, doing the best official responsibility. Now, you are careless about small details, how about great affairs? Has [that manner] deserted my efforts to establish administrative personnel and my willingness to listen to advice!

Now, an unrelenting penalty is unnecessary, [but you] must copy this edict and deliver to boards and court institutions, [for them] to know that although my writing was unclear, no one memorialized to point out.

This is a compelling case of a transiting bureaucracy where the process of decision-making relied heavily on imperial edicts. It also suggested a communication disruption between the monarch and courtiers. To guarantee no more repeating incidents, Minh Menh demanded all imperial edicts be reviewed, recopied, and restored before they were sent down. By that time, the bureaucracy's Achilles heel was the absence of a centralized secretary office that could gather more capable personnel, work closely with the emperor, and keep an eye on the boards. Minh Menh had the answer, a "secret weapon" that, for years, he had carefully observed and inspected from the Ming and Qing state structures. Eight months after the incident, he conducted an unprecedented innovation at the inner palace: the founding of the Grand Secretariat. Among its key roles were to manage imperial writings and mediate monarch-minister communication. The result was a centralized and strictly overseen structure that supported '*the bureaucracy of edicts.*'

No institutional design illustrates Minh Menh's aptness as a student of institutional history better than his vision for the Grand Secretariat. Alert of the potential damage caused by a powerful inner-court institution, he affixed the grand secretaries' rank at 3A, reserved their low profile, and claimed that these rules must be maintained forever. Mutual inspection between the boards and Grand Secretariat was strongly commanded.²⁹⁰ In his word, "such administrative arrangement creates a mutual tie and mutual supervision to prevent corruption [of power]. If there was not mutual monitoring, [officials would] act in factionalism, creating internal threats. There is no worse crime than that and must be executed without mercy. This time, the grand secretaries' ranks are clearly defined in regulations. My sons and grandsons must follow and maintain a statute. In the future, [the rule] must not be changed to prevent any potential harm." To assure that those words are followed by generations to come, he ordered to "store the edict at the Bureau of State History forever. One copy should be made, stamped with "Seal of Emperor" 皇帝之寶 and preserved at the

²⁹⁰ See the edict declared the establishment of the Grand Secretariat on 06/02/1830 (MM 11/1/13). MNCB, 40: 83.

Grand Secretariat archive while others copies send to court departments and provincial offices.”²⁹¹

With the founding of the Grand Secretariat and Grand Council (1835), the era of imperial edicts has come of age because their specific design was to assist the emperor with written commands. Like the edict sent to the Imperial Commissioners and Chief General Pham Van Dien 范文典 on 09/12/1840 on information exchange,²⁹² hundreds (if not thousands) of these instructions had been drafted by Ha Tong Quyen, Truong Dang Que, Phan Ba Dat, and Phan Thanh Gian. They carried correspondence between the palace and frontier officials and army chiefs. More than any other time, direct imperial instructions were most needed in moments of turmoil.²⁹³

After a decade of reign, the monarch was able to gather a cooperative group of scholar-officials at the inner court, numbered between four and six. With a strong educational background and intellectual skills, these men were competent to manage a complex administrative structure and earn the emperor’s confidence to handle his written orders. The centralized inner court allowed edict production and circulation with a considerable quantity. They turned the palace into a capable machine of administrative execution, as observed in Minh Menh’s palace archival holdings and a wide range of dynastic compilations, including *Abstract of the Minh Menh Policies* (MMCY, 1837), *Imperial Writings* (明命御製文, 1834, 1841), and *Military strategies* (*fanglue* 方略, 1836).²⁹⁴

The trend reflected a long administrative practice of the rational East Asian despotic apparatus. When the monarch strengthens control over state affairs, he would be flooded with the burgeoning bulk of paperwork and attempted to search for an

²⁹¹ MNCB: 40: 83. Original text:

“夫如此立法原期相維相制求絕弊端，如有不削又負承望風旨，陰結朋黨，表裏為奸，則罪莫大焉，諫極勿赦。再此次內閣品秩職司，朕已明定條章，我之子孫當遵守成憲，他日不得改置增加致滋弊竇。

... 此論付史館敬謹存貯，俾傳永久。再寫出一通鈐用皇帝之寶藏之東閣仍抄多分給在京革衙門在外諸城鎮使咸知畢。”

²⁹² MMNC, Second Collection, 8: 25a-b.

²⁹³ See more on edicts on military affairs, *Khâm Định Tiểu Bình Bắc Kỳ Nghịch Phi phương lược chính biên* 欽定勦平北圻逆匪方略正編 (*Official Compendium of Rebel Suppression in Northern Territory of the Empire*) (Viện Hán Nôm, VHv.2701, 1836); *Khâm Định Tiểu Bình Nam Kỳ Nghịch Phi Phương Lược Chính Biên* 欽定勦平南圻逆匪方略正編 (*Official Compendium of Rebel Suppression in Southern Territory of the Empire*) (Viện Hán Nôm, VHv.2765, 1836); Minh Mênh, *Ngự Chế Tiểu Bình Nam Kỳ Nghịch Phi Thi Tập* 御制勦平南圻逆匪詩集 (*Collection of the Imperial Poetry on the Occasion of Rebel Suppression in the Southern Territory of the Empire*) (Viện Khoa học xã hội vùng Nam bộ, Hnv.303, 1835); Minh Mênh, *Ngự Chế Tiểu Bình Bắc Kỳ Nghịch Phi Thi Tập* 御製勦平北圻逆匪詩集 (*Collection of the Imperial Poetry on the Occasion of Rebel Suppression in the Northern Territory of the Empire*) (Viện khoa học xã hội vùng Nam bộ, Hnv.302, 1835).

²⁹⁴ See, for instance, DNTL, II, 66: 2a-b; 18a-b, 19b.

effective, responsive mechanism. We noticed in 1824 that chief officials complained of Minh Menh's working manner being overly meticulous. It took him six years to respond by redesigning the inner court and bringing more trusted retainers into play. These new actors gradually upheld the responsibility of assisting imperial written correspondence via endorsements and edicts. By the early 1830s, the emperor confidently executed state affairs through these two administration-managed written mechanisms. In August 1830, for instance, pirates gathered in Ha Tien and defeated several Nguyen warships. Responding to a memorial by a southern General-commander, the emperor issued an edict addressed to all officials involved in the case.²⁹⁵ The second separate edict, however, came to the General-commander himself with instruction and intimidation of the consequence if he would fail to tackle the problem.²⁹⁶ The two documents recognized the new "routine" in which the emperor corresponded to regional offices through direct imperial orders in written forms. Compared to the *Congdong*-transmitted imperial instructions (公同欽旨傳) in the 1810s, the Nguyen state had advanced a long way in spreading imperial voices and with them, authority.

The exercise of the emperor's power, however, was a recurring issue. New formidable challenges returned between 1832 and 1836 when the Northern and Southern Regions were dissolved. Eleven Northern provinces (1831), six in the South (1832), and Cambodia (1834) joined Hue's direct administration. The annexation increased the paperwork flows to Hue by at least two to three times. Moreover, rebellions sparked as a result of tightening state control plundered over the Red River, Lower Mekong deltas, and Siamese invasions caused a dramatic demand for speedy and confidential communication.²⁹⁷ As we investigate in the next section, the boards and Grand Secretariat were instructed to present *tally suggestions* attached to memorials, so the emperor could direct his time and energy to follow significant military affairs. Part of the solution to keep the palace informed was to deploy imperial commissioners on the ground and have them regularly reported. Minh Menh also sent more instructions in the form of confidential edicts, which were discussed and drafted by grand councillors and grand secretaries only. The most renowned figure among these imperial assistants was Ha Tong Quyen 何宗權 (1798-1839). A native of Thanh Oai (present-day Hanoi), Quyen belonged to the first generation of doctoral-degree

²⁹⁵ DNTL, II, 69: 7 a-b.

²⁹⁶ DNTL, II, 69: 8a.

²⁹⁷ I discuss social violence in the northern region in Vu, "Village Rebellion and Social Violence in Early Nineteenth Century Vietnam." For the situation in Lower Mekong and Cambodia, see Vu, "Vietnam at the Khmer Frontier."

holders of the Nguyen reign.²⁹⁸ His intellectual skills, competence at literary composition, bluff personality, and ability to get along with courtiers soon earned him the emperor's tremendous favor.²⁹⁹ Eight years after the palace examination, the man had proved himself a sternly rigorous administrator. He was nominated grand secretary and served the post for more than a decade until his sudden death at the age of forty-one. He competently managed the Grand Secretariat and became Minh Menh's favourite edict drafter. His ability to draft edicts and to address state affairs with clarity, incisiveness, and celerity was greatly praised 內閣侍郎何權承諭詳明, 事務敏捷.³⁰⁰



Figure 4.31. The edict prepared by grand secretaries Ha Tong Quyen and Hoang Quynh on punishments and rewards for soldiers on a mission.
Date: 05/09/1835 (MM16/7/13).
Source: MNCB: 54: 92.

At the same time, when confidential memorials concerning military situations flooded into the Hue palace, they occupied most of the inner court capacity. Many of them required speedy and confidential imperial responses. From 1834, the monarch encouraged provincial heads to submit more secret memorials. They included

²⁹⁸ DNLT, II, 25: 8b.

²⁹⁹ DNLT, II, 219: 26a.

³⁰⁰ DNLT, II, 162: 15a.

“*Greeting palace memorials*” 請安奏³⁰¹ and quarterly reports on the local security situation.³⁰² Consequently, the Grand Secretariat was overburdened with documents of secret affairs. In addition, it was not ideal for the organization to handle all confidential businesses of the realm because of their close connection with the Six Boards. In January 1835, Minh Menh added to the inner court the Grand Council, with particular focuses on analyzing military strategies, handling secret memorials, and preparing imperial writings. The administrative configuration in Hue was now structurally alike to that in Beijing but functionally diverged in a more simplified and pragmatic direction. Hue’s Grand Council did not necessarily play the role of its Qing counterpart (*Junji chu* 軍機處) in the sense that it did not create a separate and powerful communication system, instead of adding an extended hand to the Grand Secretariat concerning confidential affairs and paperwork. Ha Tong Quyen, for instance, was acting as both grand secretary and grand councillor, and a key drafter of the emperor’s documents.³⁰³

In essence, two specific types of official documents: edicts and memorials motivated Nguyen’s inner court institutional innovations. Their increase in number and the need for processing and management appealed to Minh Menh with more administrative transformation, if not changing the dynastic governing culture. By 1833, such pressure was raised when news of the southern rebellion sparked. Along the western frontier, five Siamese armies prepared for invading, adding fuel to the Khmer revolt in Cambodia. At the Sino-Vietnamese border, the most significant highland uprising was about to start. Minh Menh had no choice but to count on secret edicts 密諭 and confidential memorials 密奏 to run his turbulent empire. His first reaction was to strengthen postal communication where each station deposited four horses.³⁰⁴ Through that channel, Minh Menh demanded frequent and direct correspondence with general governors and governors. In the spring of 1833, he sent secret edicts to provincial heads and requested reports of security conditions in the form of confidential memorials 密摺.³⁰⁵ In other words, confidential edicts and memorials were the tools of crisis management. The *Military Strategies* indicated that they were dispatched daily. With improving the delivery system that was able to afford high-

³⁰¹ “*Greeting palace memorials*” was the term translated by Silas H. Wu, see Wu, “The Memorial Systems of The Ch’ing Dynasty (1644-1911),” 9.

³⁰² DNTL, II, 89: 14a; 91: 27b.

³⁰³ DNTL, II, 162: 15a.

³⁰⁴ DNTL, II, 91: 31b.

³⁰⁵ DNTL, II, 91: 27b.

speed paperwork flow, emperor documents could take part in direct decision-making on the ground, including conducting military operations.³⁰⁶

By 1833, confidential edicts frequently travelled all over the realm.³⁰⁷ At top speed, it took only four days to communicate between Hue and Hanoi, and six days to Saigon.³⁰⁸ The palace could correspond and execute policies across the empire utilizing imperial writings. The written channel, in Minh Menh's perception, was the best medium of effectiveness and reliability for governance.³⁰⁹ Finally, he could 'enjoy' personal rule as a fruit of centralizing communication and institutionalization that he had constructed for more than a decade. As a result, the emperor was able to set a new tone of bureaucratic identity reaching beyond Gia Long's legacy. *The politics of edicts* arose directly from the centralization and professionalization of the inner court. The successful operation of imperial edicts between 1832 and 1836 strengthened Minh Menh's confidence in the courtiers. He found the enlarging production of imperial writings and addressed the need for new regulations, at least to release his ministers and councillors from the overburdened drafting responsibility. The new procedure required chief staff at the boards and Grand Secretariat to pen the edicts' main version 正本, while leaving the duplicate to their assistants.³¹⁰ In preparing for the change, he ordered grand secretaries to keep an eye on training staff with skills in drafting imperial documents. Samples of edicts were provided in the hope of improving their drafting capacity.³¹¹

Imperial documents had undergone a long journey of innovation and elevated themselves to a major element of the dynasty's bureaucratic operation. Centralizing correspondence strengthened the emperor's direct control of the administration and profoundly constituted a new decision-making structure. Emperor paperwork involved a fundamental institutional reconfiguration in Hue where they redefined the power relationship within the bureaucracy, between the inner and outer court, and between the monarch and his ministers.

Minh Menh's legacy was a product of his time and responding to the mandate of his age as Nguyen's most proficient manager of the state apparatus. Addressing

³⁰⁶ See examples of Minh Menh's involvement with making operational plans for military campaign in Ninh Binh and Thanh Hoa provinces. DNTL, II, 92: 1 a-b.

³⁰⁷ DNTL, II, 96: 3a-b, 13b.

³⁰⁸ DNTL, II, 69: 8b.

³⁰⁹ This point comes to our last chapter when we discuss the interrelation between centralized governance and increasing complexity of official documentation. Was it the case that the more documents the better the administrative system became?

³¹⁰ DNTL, II, 101: 25a-26b. Original text, “凡事之關重者, 其正本六部則由堂官, 內閣則由充辦之員, 各照原票, 親自繕寫. 副本, 準佐領代之若”.

³¹¹ DNTL, II, 104: 31a.

administrative fragmentation, regionalism, and over-powerful courtiers, he deployed centralized communication and standardized official documents as tools for concentrating authority. Edicts (as well as memorials and vermilion endorsements) allowed the monarch to gain the upper hand over the bureaucrats. Expanding the imperial written commands signalled not only the efficient emperor's control but also the increasing confidence of the monarch in the personnel and system he designed. It is, however, significant for us to remind that such confidence was never enough for Minh Menh to lose sight of the personal rule. Not frequently have we seen in the East Asia political tradition, an emperor who forcefully encourages and expects from courtiers a high criticism mindset, even coming to the reception of his commands.³¹²

In the end, *the bureaucracy of edicts* was not far away from *the bureaucracy of vermilion endorsements*, and that leads to the last section of the Nguyen official paperwork's evolution: the search for the memorial system.

³¹² DNTL, II, 104: 31a.

CHAPTER V. MEMORIALS IN THE MAKING OF EMPIRE

Until now, the Department of Internal Affairs 內務 and Military Storehouse 武庫 have submitted memorials of elaborate affairs. I usually, during the meals, review [the files] three times; five times ... If the matters involve the state-reserve, even small details have to be recorded and stored. [However] It would be better if you [the Grand Secretariat] have a plan to prevent excessive paperwork.¹

Emperor Minh Menh

This chapter examines the evolution of memorials between 1802 and 1841 from political, administrative, and institutional perspectives. The paperwork's functional, organizational, and paratextual changes were analyzed through their interactions with bureaucratic institutionalization. By observing a wide range of categories, including types, structures, layouts, paratexts, circulations, and vermilion rescripts, it is argued that the expanding use of memorials had reshaped the dynastic administrative operations and presented a new Nguyen's bureaucratic culture.

V. 1. Two-way communication

The problem of bidirectional correspondence in the early Nguyen

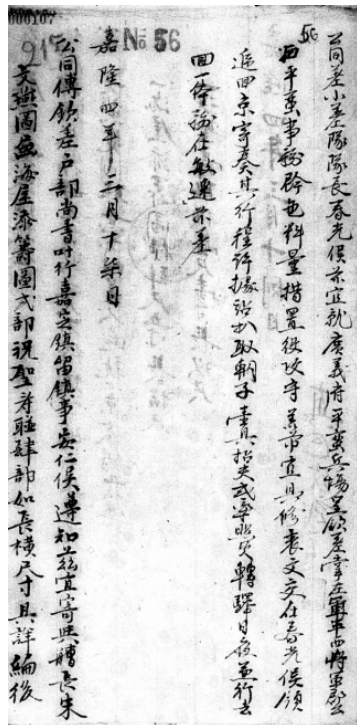


Figure 5. 1 Congdong instruction demanded ground reports on military situations in Quang Ngai, 16/04/1805
Source: GLCB, 1: 107.

¹ DNTL, II, 190: 2b.

On 16/04/1805, a Congdong command 公同差 was dispatched to the Chief Commander of the Left Army 掌左軍, Le Van Duyet. The general was in Quang Ngai, 250 km to the South of Hue, on a mission to pacify highland insurrections.² He was ordered to submit a memorial 表文 to report ground situations to the court. The correspondence was made possible through a dispatched army staff who was directed to meet Duyet in person, brought with him the Congdong document, and waited for Duyet's report before delivering it back to the capital.³ This story demonstrated the mechanism under which the court acquired updated information. The process, however, pointed out the incomplete nature of the early Nguyen communication structure on two significant elements. First, the submission of updated military reports was not well-regulated. Second, during the early Nguyen reign, postal networks stretching to far-flung corners of the realm were poorly operated.

The obstacles to two-way communication were placed on infrastructure and institutions. To access updated information on critical affairs, the court had no choice but to send out requests. One month after the Congdong instruction was directed to Le Van Duyet, another was dispatched to Thanh Hoa Commandery, demanding frequent reports on severe crimes that occurred in the region.⁴ The same order came to Quang Nam Commandery [廣南營公堂官遵知] on 23/07/1805 and sought detailed updates on a Chinese merchant vessel [何日船主陳陞泰出港? 公堂官立即修表遞回京得便發遞公文覆報內地].⁵ Despite the significance of the requested information, they were not subjects of the regular central-local exchanges unless the Hue authority called for local report duty.

As a result, official communication was conducted through a fragmented structure where court couriers had to be employed to deliver paperwork.⁶ Corresponding procedures were heterogeneous and time-consuming as documents had to pass through regional administrations in Hanoi and Saigon. On 09/03/1804, for instance, Congdong gave an order to Hanoi to provide travel documents that allowed an officer to return to Hue.⁷ This process revealed both the decentralized nature of Hue's communication system and the complicated undertaking in that administrative paperwork was trapped.

² DNTL, I, 26: 8a.

³ GLCB, 1: 107.

⁴ On 25/05/1805. See GLCB, 1: 186.

⁵ GLCB, 1: 300.

⁶ See GLCB, 1: 107.

⁷ GLCB, 2: 11.

Three decades later, by contrast, a new administration prevailed in Hue, aiming at documenting most of the detailed official affairs.⁸ The use of official paperwork reached an unparalleled scale, so complicated that the Nguyen court had to take action in restricting unnecessary memorial submission. In 1827, Minh Menh emperor reminded provincial offices not to present petitions of gratitude 陳謝 when receiving printed imperial writings (嗣後, 賞賜詩文, 毋須陳謝爲也).⁹ By 1833, when chaos at the Grand Secretariat archive came to the monarch's awareness,¹⁰ the decision was to take drastic actions in reducing the volume of provincial reports. On 30/01/1834, an edict was issued guiding the flow of rice-price reports:

諭上: 米價之貴錢有關民生之利病。前者, 朕以民天一事欲急於上開經有旨。如驟增驟減逾一陌以上者, 準不時奏報矣第念似此增減頗屬無機幾, 想民生利害亦不甚關著若一一遞行奏報, 頗覺煩瀆而役役馳遞不免更勞郵傳茲著。¹¹

Edict: rice price, whether it is high or low, concerns the people's benefits. Previously, I considered the people's affairs urgent, wanted [the issues] to be promptly reported, thus, proclaimed that if the rice price sharply shifts by at least one *mach* (陌, 1 *mach* = 60 cash),¹² [local officials] must frequently memorialize. [Now, I] think such fluctuations do not affect considerably the people's enrichment or impoverishment. [In such cases], if express reports are deployed, it is a burden to the postal office.

The rice-price reports that were applied for fourteen-year before were significantly deducted because of the increasing paperwork in Hue and the pressure of transporting them posed upon the imperial postal network. Following the monarch's commitment, one week later, the Board of Personnel suggested the unnecessary for low and middle-ranked demoted officials to present memorials of clarification to the court.¹³

The expanding written correspondence between 1802 and 1841 elucidates another aspect of the growing implementation of practical writing in governance. Not only Minh Menh called for documenting the bureaucracy but also aimed to establish a new official written culture under which paperwork acquired more popularity than ever as a crucial technique for obtaining information and operating administration. The dynamic, speedy, and effective official correspondence was profoundly important to the Nguyen, particularly during the decade of warfare and social rebellion (1826-1836).

⁸ DNTL, II, 190: 2b.

⁹ DNTL, II, 47: 24b.

¹⁰ DNTL, II, 109: 13b-14a.

¹¹ MMCB, 51: 126.

¹² The measure is suggested by Nola. Cooke and Tana. Li, eds., *Water Frontier*.

¹³ MMCB, 51: 296. This suggestion in fact was just the beginning of an exhaustive consultation launched by the Nguyen bureaucrats in reducing the paperwork during the mid-1830s.

The growing written communication created a large amount of circulating paperwork of diverse types and colossal quantity. By increasingly relying on documents, the administration was in high demand for clerks and scribes. The bureaucracy needs new regulations and institutions to organize the incoming record flows. ‘Written politics’ led Minh Menh to a reform replacing his father's legacy with an intricate administrative structure and professionalized, well-trained scholar-officials. The burgeoning paperwork left a profound impact on nineteenth-century political culture and changed the way Vietnamese governed themselves. To some extent, the same phenomenon also occurred in early modern Europe with the emerging official records and archives:

Inventories and reports helped rulers both supervise their servants and gain a better knowledge of the means available to them. The kings of Europe relied on written sources of information, especially in the economic sphere. Recent scholars have declared the written accounting practices of merchants the key to European bureaucratic and information history.¹⁴

Fixing the correspondence system

As analyzed above, the problem of Gia Long's official communication was placed on three domains. Resolving them required both optimization and reform of the administrative capacity that dealt with producing, processing, and implementing records. Firstly, no clear statute was set to regulate periodic and occasional memorials and the kinds of information that were subjected to report submission. Officials, especially those who possessed military background, were not familiar with making frequent correspondence with the court unless instructed. In 1812, the emperor issued a proclamation encouraging metropolitan and local officials to submit petitions “to discuss administrative businesses” 條陳政事.¹⁵ However, an observation of the remaining Gia Long palace documents and the dynastic *shilu* indicates that his efforts earned little success.

The second challenge for the transporting of paperwork comes from lacking a well-facilitated postal infrastructure. With the unification of Vietnam in 1802, for the first time, the North-South official road (*Thousand-mile Road* 千里路, or *The Road of*

¹⁴ Friedrich and Dillon, *The Birth of the Archive*, 20. One of the studies that pointed out by Markus Friedrich is Jacob S. Soll, *The Information Master: Jean-Baptiste Colbert's Secret State Intelligence System* (Ann Arbor: the Michigan University Press, 2009).

¹⁵ GLCB, 2: 91.

Mandarins) emerged from previously disjointed sections.¹⁶ Travelling along the line was, however, never an easy task. Until the 1830s, travellers and couriers were often endangered by wandering tigers and bandits.¹⁷ The situation was witnessed by the Chinese scholar Cai Tinglan 蔡廷蘭, who recorded his strenuous journey on foot through central and northern Vietnam in 1835.¹⁸

Considerable improvement of the communication structure came in 1805 as official exchanges appeared more demanding.¹⁹ Although the postal network between Hanoi and the Sino-Vietnamese border was carefully constructed for diplomatic envoys,²⁰ correspondence activities were far from regular. Only in the late 1820s, Hue created a new military complex stretching from Nam Dinh to Quang Yen to protect the coastal communities from piracy. Its function was to encounter pirate assaults, eliminate bandits, prevent rice smuggling to south China, and control the people influx moving along the coasts.²¹ Military posts were erected along the three-hundred-kilometre coastline. Each was guarded by thirty to one hundred soldiers and protected all strategic waterways in Tra Ly, Diem Ho, Thai Binh, Lach Tray, Da Bach, and the island world from Cat Ba to Mong Cai.²² By the early 1830s, new exchanged channels were set up both along the coastline and the western midland corridor stretching from Son Tay to the south. The defensive complex was designed to block intruders from Hung Hoa, Ninh Binh, and Thanh Hoa from entering the delta, and boosting the flow of official reports to Hue.²³

In the lower Mekong, composite natural topography heavily impeded postal communication. Ha Tien and the western part of the peninsular were connected to Gia Dinh by sea until the Vinh Te canal was completed in 1824. Upgrading overland and water communication were only introduced through the 1833-1835 massive

¹⁶ DNLT, 92: 4a.

¹⁷ DNLT, II, 112: 12a; 197: 15a.

¹⁸ Cai was a Qing scholar-official. His travel in 1835 was disrupted by a storm that drifted the ship to Quang Ngai (in central Vietnam). He memorialized the situation to Minh Menh Emperor and was allowed to return to China by the overland road. Cai recorded the journey and his interaction with local Vietnamese in *Miscellaneous Notes from the Southern Seas*. See Tinglan Cai, *Hainan Zazhe* 海南雜著 (Miscellaneous Notes from the Southern Seas) (Taipei: Taiwan Yin Hang, 1959). The Vietnamese translation can be found in Trần Ích Nguyễn, *Thái Đình Lan và Tác Phẩm Hải Nam Tạp Trú* (Cai Tinglan and the Miscellaneous Notes on the Places at the South of the Sea) (Hà Nội: Lao động, 2008).

¹⁹ In July 1805, for instance, the first regulation for postal organization in Gia Dinh was established. See GLCB, 1: 290.

²⁰ Phan Thúc Trức, *Quốc Sử Di Biên* (Lost Records of the National History), ed. Chen Jinghe (Hong Kong: Centre of Asian Studies, Hong Kong University, 1965), 22.

²¹ DNLT, II, 60: 29a-b.

²² Robert J. Antony, "Giang Binh: Pirate Haven and Black Market on the Sino-Vietnamese Frontier, 1780-1802," in *Pirates, Ports, and Coasts in Asia: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. John Kleinen and Manon Osseweijer (Singapore: ISEAS, 2010), 31-50.

²³ DNLT, II, 189: 31a.

infrastructure-building. In 1835, overland transportation was settled throughout the southern provinces. Chau Doc was connected to Vinh Long by a new 114-kilometers road, while other routes linked Chau Doc with Ha Tien, the Vinh Te bank, and Phnom Penh. A postal system was added along those routes. Forts in Ha Tien and Chau Doc were reinforced as vital communicational centers, allowing gathering information and maintaining correspondent flow from Phnom Penh, Gia Dinh, and Hue. Chau Doc, in particular, has a location that not only well overlooked the Mekong but also was conveniently connected to Ha Tien (84 kilometers), Phnom Penh (102 kilometers), and Vinh Long (111 kilometers).²⁴ By 1836, express correspondence between Ha Tien (and Phnom Penh) and Hue was conducted for only eight days.²⁵

By the late eighteenth century, the network of official communication was massively interrupted by warfare, particularly in the areas of newly Vietnamese colonization (like the Lower Mekong). The 1802 unification strengthened information exchanges across the realm. Hue's direct communication was set up with eleven commanderies from Thanh Hoa to Binh Thuan, while leaving sixteen others for regional autonomy.²⁶ Although Hanoi and Saigon submitted monthly reports on regional affairs, the remaining Gia Long archives showed no systematic trace of this corresponding channel. Significant changes only came under the Minh Menh reign, signalled by the frequent flows of local communication. In 1827, reports from northern commanderies were instructed to be directly submitted. The deaths of Le Chat (1826) and Le Van Duyet (1832) significantly weakened the regional authorities. The newly appointed northern overlord was expected of more consultation with Hue.²⁷ By 1832, the regional overlord system was abandoned. Thirteen provinces in the north and six in the lower Mekong were incorporated into the Nguyen direct authority. The bureaucratic change promptly amplified the magnitude of written correspondences at least by a threefold increase and posed dramatic challenges to the state machine.

The growing paperwork profoundly reshaped Nguyen's institutional innovations, including the forming of the palace archives. Within three years, the Censorate, Privy Council, Office of Transmission, and new regulations were brought to work. Among their primary functions was to operate paperwork. Official documents

²⁴ Vu, "Vietnam at the Khmer Frontier.

²⁵ HDSL, 253: 30b-31a.

²⁶ Including four military commanderies *doanh* 營: Quang Binh, Quang Tri, Quang Duc, Quang Nam, and seven commanderies *鎮*: Thanh Hoa, Nghe An, Quang Ngai, Binh Dinh, Phu Yen, Binh Khang, Binh Thuan.

²⁷ In the spring of 1824, there were reportedly 320 cases and 840 pending death-sentenced criminals of the previous years that remained unjudged. The number for 1824 was 450 undecided cases and 740 prisoners. The number of pending cases in 1825 was 490 with 930 people remained imprisoned. *DNTL*, II, 26: 7a; 32: 1a; 40: 18b-19a; 53: 22b.

redesigned the bureaucratic machine, resulting in new measures on how decision-making owned to the efficiency of the communication system. The value of correspondence to imperial control was distinct and substantive. Centralizing imperial communication was not uniquely Vietnamese, but a widespread practice applied in traditional East Asia. Inherited the Qin's legacy of a unified territory, the Han Empire, for instance, struggled to define both mechanisms and institutions for conducting imperial communication and arranging state archives.²⁸ Organizing state communication was essential to political success in imperial China as Silas Wu, Pei Huang, and Beatrice Bartlett have vividly demonstrated through the investigations of the mid-Qing communication system.²⁹ Unlike massive volumes of scholarship dedicated to Chinese governmental institutions, the history of Vietnam's state communication has hardly been studied at all. The relationship between the inner court 内廷 and the monarch, for instance, is a subject of enormous interest in China but attracts little attention in Vietnam.

Boosting direct central-local correspondence

Bureaucratic communication and deliberation are executed through the paperwork. The written correspondence, therefore, was not merely a form of exchanging information but a governing technique. Maintaining an uninterrupted connection between the central government and local authorities was the ultimate goal of centralized politics. The task for the early Nguyen rulers was even more challenging because standing between them were two mediate structures: regional administrations 城 and the *Congdong*. One sandwiched between commanderies 鎮 and the central court 朝廷, and the other stood between the emperor and the boards. These arrangements kept the throne from direct accessibility to ground information and away from preliminary political debates, as declared by Gia Long in 1803.³⁰ In response, Minh Menh's designs involved two specific improvements, first on the memorial system, and second, on the institutions that were responsible for the memorials' transportation, circulation, processing, and implementation. Official correspondence

²⁸ See Enno, Giele. *Imperial Decision-Making and Communication in Early China: A Study of Cai Yong's Duduan*, Opera Sinologica (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2006); Max J. Fölster, "Libraries and Archives in the Former Han Dynasty (206 BCE–9 CE): Arguing for a Distinction," in *Manuscripts and Archives*, ed. Alessandro Bausi et al. (Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2018), 201–30, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110541397-007>.

²⁹ Wu, "The Memorial Systems of The Ch'ing Dynasty, 7–75; Bartlett, *Monarchs and Ministers: The Grand Council in Mid-Ch'ing China*; Francis X. Blouin and William G. Rosenberg, eds., *Archives, Documentation, and Institutions of Social Memory: Essays from the Sawyer Seminar* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: University of Michigan Press, 2007).

³⁰ DNTL, I, 21: 6a.

will gravitate toward the palace through the inner-court institutions and finally allowed the monarch to stay firm at the heart of the deliberative structure.

Memorials, as a written form of information-exchange, were not alien to Vietnam's imperial communication. The term first appeared in Dai Viet dynastic chronicles [*DVSKTT*] in an entry in 1158 when a Vietnamese envoy came back from the Song court and reported a bronze box in which the Chinese emperor received "memorials from the four directions" 四方章奏. The bureaucrats in Hanoi believed the same memorial-container should be placed at the Ly court so [the king] could be aware of his subordinate situations.³¹ The paperwork-type then became part of the political life of medieval Vietnam. During the Le Thanh Tong reign (1460-1497), the Ming memorial system was adopted. The deployment of "*de ban*" (Ch: *tiben*, 題本) and "*tau ban*" (Ch: *zouben*, 奏本) for state communication was briefly reported in court discussions, despite their unclear usage and distinction.³²

The early Nguyen communication-system was under the management of the Board of Defence, based on the military stations stretching throughout the realm. They employed a large number of conscripted local males 夫 whose service returned in no payment.³³ Unlike the comprehensively-constructed picture of the Qing postal network, many aspects of Nguyen's communication remained obscure.³⁴ *Shilu* suggested that in the early Minh Menh days, mandarins abused postal services for private usage, while postal superintendents and couriers evaded responsibilities. "Using relatives for the postal posts; the superintendent is absent from duty; when there are postal items, [the superintendent] forces couriers of express delivery, or transporting regular dispatches at express speed, what is more, [they] beating couriers. There are even pretended officials with no administrative duty to make corrupt use of the system, [they] intimidating [the superintendents] for two or three couriers to serve; [they] omitting their relatives from courier-duty."³⁵

³¹ *DVSKTT*, 4: 12b. Original text, "阮國使宋回, 上言: 臣到宋國, 見庭中有銅匱以受四方章奏. 臣請傲而行之, 以達下情. 帝從之."

³² *DVSKTT*, 12: 25a. Original text, "定奏本、題本體式、各該衙門該奉聖旨繳題施行等本則曰題本. 各衙門官吏百姓一切公私事務理應陳奏、則曰奏本。" [Established the regulations for memorials (奏本 and 題本). Those attach to serve emperor's edicts or [report] on yamen's affairs are *dè bản* 題本. All other memorials on private and official businesses by yamen's officials and people are *tau bản* 奏本]. For a brief introduction to the Ming memorial system, see Silas H. L. Wu, "Transmission of Ming Memorials, and the Evolution of the Transmission Network, 1368-1627," *T'oung Pao* 54, no. 4-5 (1968): 275-87.

³³ Instead, they were offered tax deduction.

³⁴ John K. Fairbank and S. Y. Teng, "On The Transmission of Ch'ing Documents," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 4, no. 1 (1939): 14-39.

³⁵ *DNTL*, II, 6: 17a.

It took several decades to establish the postal infrastructure along the Vietnamese coastlines. Increasingly military communication boosted more paperwork-transportation. After the unification, rebellions against the Nguyen sparked across the kingdom and required immediate postal upgrade. Although the first indication of the Nguyen water and overland communication-posts 水陸驛 appeared in *shilu* in 1672, the system was far from well-constructed.³⁶ The first postal line opened in the Lower Mekong in 1748, known as the Thousand-mile Road 千里衢, centered at the regional headquarter in Gia Dinh.³⁷ More stations were installed along the central coastline following Nguyen Phuc Anh's military campaigns in the late 1790s. In 1793, correspondence between Binh Thuan and Gia Dinh was strengthened by eleven newly established posts 驛舍.³⁸ In the following year, regulations of official communication were implemented, bringing the system available only to documents sealed by Congdong and the crown prince (凡奉差員人有公同與東宮之印給者方得驛遞).³⁹ The change, however, did not prevent the service from officially mishandling private deployments. In early 1798, restrictions were set on the system's usage that applied only to "urgent, important official missions" 緊要公務, and ordered detailed journals of all deliveries.⁴⁰

By 1801, the postal network along the Road of Officials 官路驛站 reached Quang Binh, following significant military advances. Dispatched officials (of the Departments of Transportation, such as *Inner-Horses* 內馬, *Left-Horses* 左馬, *Right-Horses* 右馬) journeyed along the line, oversaw couriers, recorded monthly postal items, and spotted wrongdoing behaviors.⁴¹ Months later, other misconducts came alerted, including anonymous letters 匿名書 and letters of denunciation. Submitted by soldiers and people from Thuan Hoa, those records went through the trail of bureaucratic communication to enter the court. Gia Long was furious. He strongly condemned both anonymous letters and the malfunctioned usage of postal service 文書投遞事屬關重, 嗎籌訴狀豈得交妄遞.⁴²

³⁶ *DNTL*, Initial Period 前編, 5: 11a-b.

³⁷ *DNTL*, Initial Period 前編, 10: 16a.

³⁸ *DNTL*, I, 6: 29b. For the Nguyen's military campaigns during the 1790s, see Vũ Đức Liêm, "The Age of Sea Falcons: Naval Warfare in Vietnam, 1771-1802," in *Warring Societies of Pre-Colonial Southeast Asia: Local Cultures of Conflict Within a Regional Context*, ed. Kathryn Wellen and Michael Charney (Copenhagen: Nordic Institute of Asian Studies, 2017), 103–29.

³⁹ *DNTL*, I, 7: 2a.

⁴⁰ *DNTL*, I, 9: 37a. Original text, "嗣凡緊要公務於聽給驛, 所過登記, 月底由道內轉達, 其私役及要索竝禁."

⁴¹ *DNTL*, I, 15: 4a.

⁴² *DNTL*, I, 14: 27a.

In 1803, following the royal tour to the north and a Chinese envoy to Hanoi, a system of roads and stations linked Hue to the Sino-Vietnamese border was upgraded. The line was developed for centuries but heavily disrupted during late eighteenth-century warfare. Seven new guesthouses were constructed between Hanoi and Lang Son.⁴³ Officials were missioned to travel from Hanoi to Nghe An and designed a postal house 驛舍 every 4,000 *truong* 丈 (r. 18 kilometers).⁴⁴ Five years later, each station on the Main Official Road 正官路 was improved to a compound of three buildings, walled by a wooden fence, marked with a sign and was at the ready for hosting travelling officials and soldiers.⁴⁵

By the early 1810s, the scale of communication expanded significantly. Following the infrastructural improvement, local post offices were required to keep journals of receiving times and delivering items for speed measurement 命諸地方驛站接遞公文, 各詳誌日長以驗運速.⁴⁶ Hanoi, Gia Dinh, and other commanderies were instructed to produce one hundred postal bamboo tubes 竹筒, carved with ordinal numbers and places of origin. Each tube attached to several clothing bags varied in colors designed for different document types. Yellow, for instance, was intended to memorial 奏表, 奏本 while blue 藍色 to official records 公文. With the documents placed inside, the tube was carefully sealed, attached with delivered information, and placed in one of the designated-color bags. The whole package was covered by a white bag, sealed off by hot resin, and stamped by the seal of the departure station. Each delivered item was attached to a receipt paper indicating transporting information and authenticated stamps.⁴⁷

As a result, delivery time was set for postal routes. For 950 kilometer between Saigon and Hue, twelve days was designed for *most urgent* 最敏, fifteen at regular speed, sixteenth to eighteen at the cost of a stroke penalty, and nineteenth to death penalty 以死罪論. By 1836, the express transportation 最緊 was reduced to nine days.⁴⁸ At that time, the empire's postal network included ninety-nine major stations,

⁴³ DNLT, I, 19: 10a-b.

⁴⁴ Truong 丈: 4, 44 m.

⁴⁵ HDSL, 252: 13a.

⁴⁶ DNLT, I, 20: 14a.

⁴⁷ HDSL, 253: 1a-b. Original text, “嘉隆十一年, 公同傳嘉定城北城及各營鎮官依式預竹筒一百件. 上截刻鎮字某城某營鎮名號. 下截刻一號第一號挨挨次至第一百號. 并預製盛筒布袋二. 如發遞奏表奏本, 則俗用黃色. 公文俗用藍色. 有發遞表文公文日記依例黏封元好, 貯入這筒. 再外, 加黏封日謹密. 又用白布束結. 此筒仍以紫蟻膠烙為信.”

⁴⁸ DNLT, I, 20: 17b-18a; HDSL, 253: 5a.

each had four horses and couriers numbered between thirty and one hundred. Apart from written correspondence, officials on duty were able to rely on those stations to journey through the realm.⁴⁹ The meticulous monarch even claimed that postal wooden and bamboo tubes 驛筒 were not elegant 雅, and had them decorated with lacquers and yellow paint.⁵⁰ This innovation was not merely adding colors to the containers but transferring new confidence and advanced management to the correspondent service, from which the power of paperwork was activated.

With the expanding intervention in Cambodia in the 1830s, the correspondence line was rapidly constructed for collecting frontier information 以備關報邊務.⁵¹ Most of the upgrades concentrated on serving military communication, which was increasingly surged. Le Van Duyet was sent to Quang Ngai (in 1802, 1804, 1805, 1807, 1808, and 1816), to Cambodia (in 1813), to Nghe An and Thanh Hoa (1819), Le Chat to Thanh Hoa, Ninh Binh (in 1808, 1812), Le Chat and Nguyen Hoang Duc to construct a new road in Quang Nam, Quang Ngai, Binh Dinh, Phu Yen and Binh Hoa (1809)... These dispatches dramatically increased communication and official transportation. In 1814, some postal houses in Saigon possessed 300 couriers.⁵² Officials even sent gifts to their colleagues through the network before facing a warning from Gia Long that using the state postal system to transport personal belongings was prohibited, and subjected to penalty consequences 自今, 諸地方驛敢有因公附奇私物者罪之.⁵³

The improving correspondence permitted more information flows to Hue, particularly generating the facility of executive commands conducted by court departments. The Six Boards, fully installed in 1809, earned more significant roles in bureaucratic communication, including processing and delivering paperwork related to their fields of responsibilities. In other words, the emerging complexity of administration confronted Congdong's simple documentary operation and provided space for prevailing professionalized board personnel. The power that was attached to paperwork was changing hands:

“嗣後，在京六部奉發公同傳及公文艚務長舵務稅務係事關，何部該部遞到諸營鎮以至嘉定城北城。或在嘉定城北城及各營鎮發遞表文，

⁴⁹ HDSL, 252: 3b-4a.

⁵⁰ HDSL, 252: 5b-6a.

⁵¹ DNLT, I, 47: 8b.

⁵² DNLT, I, 49: 12a.

⁵³ DNLT, I, 52: 1a.

或公文日記至京，呈納何部立即遵依式例撥給站番人，或二人或三人，依付詞內即刻頒遞務得敏速。”⁵⁴

From now on, when the Six Boards in the capital following ordered to deliver Congdong's instructions and official records 公同傳及公文 concerning grain transportation 糧務, maritime transportation 長舵務, and taxation 稅務; the responsible board should dispatch [the related documents] to the commanderies and Southern and Northern Regions. If the Southern and Northern Regions and commanderies submit petitions, paperwork, and daily records to the capital, [the documents will be] channelled to the boards. [As the paperwork is transported, local offices] immediately follow the [postal] rules, direct attending couriers, two or three people, following information provided on the attached paper to seek proper express delivery.

With the new imperial vision of power control, direct communication between the palace and provinces was enhanced by newly-built institutions. They empowered more authority to the inner court (Grand Secretariat and Privy Council), allowing them more accessibility to paperwork.

Gathering information was not an end in itself but a means of governance. The scale of correspondence between rulers and local personnel was the measure of administrative efficiency that determined the faith of bureaucracy as a whole. From day one, Minh Menh was on constant alert for information concealing and forged documents. In the very second month of the reign, he criticized the boards' practice of having their staffs open “*duplicate copies*” 副封 before submitting to the throne. In the monarch's view, there were risks that inappropriate cases could be dropped at the official will 事有不合卻不以奏. Consequently, the imperial instruction required all memorials, regardless of their impropriety, submitted to prevent concealing information 毋得私駁以防壅蔽.⁵⁵ The ruler found documenting social and political affairs indispensably vital to administration. A bureaucracy of utmost integrity and accountability is a written one. In the spring of 1826, the Board of Defense transmitted a verbal message verbally to local officials on the issue of decamped soldiers and their monthly salary. When the news reached Minh Menh, the furious monarch had the Board President heavily penalized. In his condemnation,

“向来凡事必待奏，得旨後錄送施行，或在部應辦者則行咨存照。況關兵機錢糧之事，而乃輕率口囑可乎！儻差人卒爾遺忘率意臆說豈不至誤大事？段曰元武輝達之罪可勝言”⁵⁶

⁵⁴ HDSL, 253: 12b.

⁵⁵ DNLT, II, 1: 35b. Original text, “帝以向來，四方章奏部臣先發副封，事有不合卻不以奏。乃敕六部，自今，章疏不合者必以事聲明，毋得私駁以防壅蔽。”

⁵⁶ DNLT, II, 37: 19a-b.

“Until now, every single affair has to be reported and wait for decrees before [it is] copied and sent 錄送 for implementation. Or [if] conducted by the boards, there should be [copied and] restored records for review 存照. Let alone [this affair] essentially concerns military strategy and salary, [how can it be] spread through the verbal message? How much damage could this cause If the messenger forgets [the information], and creates his own? The felony of Doan Viet Nguyen and Vu Huy Dat was so incalculable that cannot be adequately addressed.

Immediately after Minh Menh entered the Hall of Great Harmony, a burgeoning flow of memorials headed to the palace. Among the remaining palace documents, the first correspondence arrived on 21/02/1820 (MM1/1/8) in which the joined Boards of Justice and Revenue proposed to sell rice on credit to poor households in Quang Nam (to the south of Hue). In response, the imperial endorsement read, “依奏” (*Complying to the memorialized*).⁵⁷ The first rice-price report appeared on 25/05/1820 by the northern Deputy General-commander 北城副總鎮, in which the imperial rescript read, “知道了, 另有旨” (*Acknowledged, there will be the following decree*).⁵⁸ Minh Menh had worked with court paperwork for at least a year before claiming the throne himself. Volume 5 of the Gia Long palace documents contains ninety-four medical reports on the emperor’s health condition between 09/02/1819 and 30/01/1820. Those memorials appeared in *khai* form (Ch: *qi*, 啟), which was reserved only for submission to the crown prince.⁵⁹ Personal seal imprints and red endorsements indicated that he was ready to work on state documents in close cooperation with both the boards and palace staff.⁶⁰

In 1826, more fundamental changes brought the central court into close interaction with local authorities. In the north, the notorious and influential regional overlord Le Chat died after twenty-eight years of serving the dynasty. Forfeiting its military charismatics, the region was immediately consumed by the flame of turmoil. In response, commanderies’ officials were instructed to have their memorials directly submitted to Hue (instead of passing by Hanoi regional administration).⁶¹ Postal stations were expanded under which Hue was able to afford accelerated correspondence with frontier generals.⁶² In contrast to the above-mentioned

⁵⁷ MMCB, 1: 7.

⁵⁸ MMCB, 1: 36.

⁵⁹ Minh Menh became a crown prince on 07/04/1816. DNTL, I, 52: 11b-12a.

⁶⁰ In this case, the Board of Rites 禮部 and palace clerks 內翰. See GLCB, 5: 153. With an official note reads, “校本月日題啟內翰臣阮文詢奉內批” (Transferring of this document on the day of this month).

⁶¹ MMCY, 18: 12a.

⁶² DNTL, II, 43: 16b

correspondence in 1805, when court-dispatched personnel was required for the communication, an extensive posting system was now webbed across the kingdom with documents transported by local couriers.

The warfare decade between 1826 and 1836 dramatically expanded military communication and boosted written correspondence between Hue and provinces. Our calculation shows 868 remaining memorials in 1830, according to the palace collection. The fourth month alone contributed 152, compared to 307 memorials in the 7th month of MM18 (1837). The ratio was at more than ten documents per diem, at least. This calculation, however, leaves aside a considerable quantity of confidential memorials and edicts addressing military affairs believed to be managed by the Privy Council. In the fifth month of MM14 (1833), fifty-one memorials and thirty-seven edicts were on the exchange between Minh Menh and his generals in the north alone.⁶³ Adding to seventy-three remaining palace documents, the monthly paperwork suggested that 200 (at least) had come through or involved Minh Menh's hands.⁶⁴ The volume of existing records indicated bustling correspondence between the palace and frontier-officials. They all were carefully examined by the emperor with prudent endorsements and promptly responded edicts. To uphold the growing written communication and escalating documentary governance, nevertheless, Hue had to take pains to transform its bureaucratic culture.

Minh Menh tried to solve the problem of communication by establishing the Postal Office 郵政司 in 1820. It was among his first efforts to create centripetal information-flows. The institute was responsible for transporting records throughout the empire, from Sino-Vietnamese border to the Cambodian capital Phnom Penh. The number of staff at the Postal Office increased from sixteen to twenty in 1827 and to thirty in 1828.⁶⁵ The Nguyen *huidian* suggested that post-stations were built every twenty to thirty-six miles. Each had one postal superintendent 驛承 and one overseeing official 驛牧. Under their authority were thirty-to-100 conscripted labors 夫 and four reserved horses.⁶⁶

Table 5.1. Postal stations in nineteenth-century Vietnam

No.	Province 省/Citadel 城	No. of the Postal stations 驛站
1	The Capital	1

⁶³ My calculation places between MM14/5/1 and MM14/5/29. KDBK, 11-13.

⁶⁴ *MMCB*, vol. 46. Monthly military exchange with the south could be counted about forty papers. The first month of the MM16 (1835), for instance, presented 32 memorials and edicts. My calculation on KDNK, Vien Han Nom, VHv. 2765, book 37.

⁶⁵ DNTL, II, 48: 17b; 54: 30a.

⁶⁶ HDSL, 252: 1a.

2	Thua Thien Prefecture	7
3	Quang Nam	7
4	Quang Nghia	5
5	Binh Dinh	6
6	Phu Yen	7
7	Khanh Hoa	9
8	Binh Thuan	16
9	Bien Hoa	6
10	Gia Dinh	5
11	Dinh Tuong	3
12	Vinh Long	2
13	An Giang	5
14	Ha Tien	2
15	Quang Tri	4
16	Quang Binh	6
17	Ha Tinh	6
18	Nghe An	5
19	Thanh Hoa	5
20	Ninh Binh	2
21	Ha Noi	7
22	Nam Dinh	2
23	Bac Ninh	5
24	Thai Nguyen	1
25	Lang Son	9
26	Cao Bang	2
27	Son Tay	8
28	Hung Hoa	1
29	Hung Yen	1
30	Hai Duong	4
Total		149

Sources: HDSL, 252 9a-13a.

During the first four of Nguyen's reigns (1802-1883), 149 stations were at work with careful monitoring of the court.⁶⁷ In 1821, for instance, 35 stations were erected between Quang Duc and Hanoi following the emperor's plan for a northern tour.⁶⁸ Postal superintendents and couriers were supplied with rice and allowed to employ conscripted local men. An announcement in 1822 revealed the amount of grain distributed to postal stations: "48 *phuong* 方 (1.368 kilograms⁶⁹) for each in Quang Duc (2 stations); 60 *phuong* (1710 kilogram) for each in Quang Tri (4 stations) and Quang Binh (6 stations), 80 *phuong* (2280 kilogram) for each in Nghe An (11 stations) and Thanh Hoa (8 stations), 60 *phuong* (1710 kilogram) for each in Thanh Binh (2 stations), and Son Nam Thuong (5 stations)."⁷⁰ In 1827, Minh Menh declared,

⁶⁷ HDSL, 252: 9a-13a.

⁶⁸ DNTL, II, 4: 12b.

⁶⁹ 1 *phuong* 方 of rice can be measured at 28.5 kg. See Choi, *Southern Vietnam under the Reign of Minh Mang*, 73.

⁷⁰ DNTL, II, 10: 19a.

“Although the postal affair is essential to the state politics, couriers earn no salary. [I] think of them days and nights, who are exhausted on duty, therefore [I] presented [them] many times with copper coins and grain”. He then offered them six month-salary of 180 copper coins and 120 *phuong* of rice.⁷¹ In 1838, the court decided to deduct tax for postal conscripted couriers.⁷² New procedures were also added promising rewards of one to six copper coins for timely deliveries, and sentences of ten light strokes to 90 heavy strokes for the delayed. Missing postal tubes could lead to 100 heavy strokes and two-month wearing cangue while lost confidential records were potential to face capital punishment for both superintendents and couriers.⁷³

The expanding infrastructure of communication played crucial roles in collecting information and transporting administrative documents on which decisions were made in Hue. Between 1832 and 1838, for instance, several dozen rebellions sparked and chaos came amid five-Siamese invasions and Vietnamese expansions in Laos and Cambodia. Most of the Nguyen military officials were dispatched to the battlefields while thousands of military reports were heading to Hue, allowing the court to follow the military situations and responded with imperial instructions.⁷⁴ Without that sophisticated correspondence channel, the dynasty deliberation would not have such efficiency, and the process of decision-making would be far from well-timely.⁷⁵

Postal networks and roads constructed under the Minh Menh reign were significant in many aspects, for both practical usage and the symbolic implication of empire-construction.⁷⁶ For the first time, gazetteers and cartography presented the idea of a united Vietnam geographically and politically. Such a new imagined configuration highlighted seaports 海口, postal stations 驛站, official roads 官路, and newly established Vietnamese colonies.⁷⁷ That geo-interpretation was momentous in nurturing the sentiment of belonging to a cultural and political entity from which came

⁷¹ DNLT, II, 32: 23 b.

⁷² DNLT, II, 197: 8b.

⁷³ HVLL, 11, articles on Postal services 郵驛, 19a-21a.

⁷⁴ DNLT, II, 106: 20b. See KDTB.

⁷⁵ In a memorial in 1838, the Board of Defence suggested the improvement of the communication system in the south. “Military station in the southern provinces (Biên Thịnh, Biên Long, Biên Phúc, Biên Lê, Gia Cẩm, Gia Nhân, Gia Tân, Gia Lộc, Định Tân, Định Hoà, Định An, Vĩnh Phúc, Vĩnh Giai, Giang Đông, Giang Mỹ, Giang Tư, Giang Phúc, Giang Nông, Tiên An, all of 19 posts), previously conducted businesses by boat. From now on, overland routes are ready, thus, (the Board of Defence) asks for public horses, two for each station for use in the case of express communication of warfare. If there is an advantage of wind and water, boats also can be employed, if not, horses can be used. For other routine communications, boats are utilized as usual.” DNLT, II, 196: 9a-b.

⁷⁶ Like the Roman roads in the making of the Rome empire.

⁷⁷ “*Đại Nam Toàn Đồ* 大南全圖 (The Complete Maps of the Great South)” (Manuscript, EFEO Microfilm, A.2959, n.d.), 3.

the contour of modern Vietnam.⁷⁸ Therefore, paperwork, communication, and postal infrastructure took part in the embodiment of the Vietnamese empire and created an environment for its “subjects” to take part in that imperial politics.

Table 5.2. Time-limit for paperwork-delivery in early nineteenth-century Vietnam

No.	Destinations (from the Capital)	Highly urgent	Urgent	Normal
1	Quang Nam	01 day	01 day, 02 hours	01 day, 05 hours
2	Quang Nghia	02 days, 01 hour	02 days, 04 hours	
3	Binh Dinh	03 days, 04 hours	03 days, 09 hours	04 days, 08 hours
4	Phu Yen	03 days, 11 hours	04 days, 05 hours	05 days, 06 hours
5	Khanh Hoa	05 days, 02 hours	05 days, 11 hours	07 days, 04 hours
6	Binh Thuan	06 days, 07 hours	07 days, 07 hours	09 days, 06 hours
7	Bien Hoa	08 days, 11 hours	10 days, 06 hours	13 days, 01 hour
8	Gia Dinh	09 days	10 days, 06 hours	13 days, 01 hour
9	Dinh Tuong	09 days 07 hours	11 days, 03 hours	14 days
10	Vinh Long	10 days	14 days 09 hours	14 days, 07 hours
11	An Giang	10 days, 11 hours	12 days, 11 hours	16 days, 02 hours
12	Ha Tien	12 days, 06 hours	14 days, 09 hours	16 days, 02 hours
13	Tran Tay (Cambodia)	12 days	14 days, 01 hour	17 days, 07 hours
14	Quang Tri	04 hours	05 hours	06 hours
15	Quang Binh	01 day, 02 hours	01 day, 04 hours	01 day, 07 hours
16	Ha Tinh	02 days, 01 hour	02 days, 06 hours	03 days, 01 hour
17	Nghe An	02 days, 06 hours	02 days, 10 hours	03 days, 07 hours
18	Thanh Hoa	02 days, 06 hours	02 days, 10 hours	03 days, 07 hours
19	Ninh Binh	03 days, 10 hours	04 days, 06 hours	05 days, 08 hours
20	Nam Dinh	04 days, 01 hour	04 days, 06 hours	06 days
21	Hung Yen	04 days, 03 hours	05 days	06 days, 03 hours
22	Hai Duong	04 days, 07 hours	05 days, 05 hours	06 days, 10 hours
23	Quang Yen	05 days	05 days, 10 hours	07 days, 04 hours
24	Ha Noi	04 days, 06 hours	05 days, 03 hours	06 days, 07 hours
25	Son Tay	04 days, 09 hours	05 days, 07 hours	07 days
26	Hung Hoa	04 days, 11 hours	05 days, 09 hours	07 days, 02 hours
27	Tuyen Quang	05 days, 07 hours	06 days, 07 hours	08 days, 02 hours
28	Bac Ninh	05 days, 04 hours	05 days, 06 hours	06 days, 10 hours
29	Thai Nguyen	05 days	05 days, 11 hours	07 days, 05 hours
30	Lang Son	05 days, 06 hours	06 days, 06 hours	08 days, 01 hour
31	Cao Bang	06 days, 04 hours	07 days, 05 hours	09 days, 03 hours

Sources: HDSL, 253: 28b-32b.

For expressed-delivered items, the couriers have to transport them to the next station regardless of the weather or security conditions. Received officials have to check the document-conditions as stated in the attached information sheet, and added

⁷⁸ As the case of the pre-colonial boundary between Vietnam and Cambodia. See Vu, “Vietnam at the Khmer Frontier: Boundary Politics, 1802–1847.”

their stamp before the records continued the journey. Whatever might happen along the trip, accidents, couriers' sickness, or natural disasters... must be mentioned in the supplementary paper. Each station received three flags indicating different natures of transportation: highly urgent, urgent, and routine.⁷⁹ In 1836, a comprehensive regulation for limited speeds of postal delivery was issued. According to the *huidian*, transporting from the Capital to the North applied at highly urgent speed was 11.361 kilometers (2,854 *truong* 丈) per hour, 9.44 for urgent delivery, and 7.52 for regular dispatches. To the South, those numbers were 9.376; 6.036; and 6 kilometers, respectively.⁸⁰ Overall, northern couriers carried documents from Hanoi to Hue at the speed of 152 kilometers a day while their southern counterparts delivered paperwork between Saigon and Hue at the rate of 126 kilometers a day.⁸¹

The Transmission Office

In the early 1820s, the Postal Office was responsible to manage paperwork flows heading to the boards and palace offices. After the Phan Ba Vanh rebellion (1826-1827), however, the responsibility of record-inspection was authorized to the Board of Defence. If the documents arrived in the morning, they would be distributed on the same day. Papers that arrived in the afternoon were sent to the court the next morning. Any delay has to be reported and face punishment.⁸² Highly urgent and urgent memorials, however, were exceptional. If the postal tube arrives at night when palace gates have already been closed, the couriers are allowed to exchange the dispatches through the gates' interstice.⁸³

The situation points out the operational gap between local delivery and central receiving of paperwork. More essential was the problem of outside-inside palace

⁷⁹ The highly urgent for red flag, the urgent for black flag and the normal for blue.

For the transporting techniques, each postal station was equipped with a postal seal 站牌 and postal tubes 站筒. Tram bai 站牌 is a wooden seal with name of the postal station and underneath carved with hour, day, and month (left blank). When the post receives documents, the superintendent seals on a paper attached with the documents and fill on with hour, day and month in which the files pass through their station. Postal tubes 站筒 are bamboo tubes with the station-names where it belongs. Documents are kept in the sealed envelopes and put into the bamboo tube. The tube is then placed in a textile bag, which is glued by the shellac resin. Yellow bags are designated for memorials while white bags for memoirs and other documents. The paper attached with the texts has to clearly inform of their type, destination, and the number of tubes and papers are transported. It also gives details upon the state of the documents (normal or express, routine or confidential), the day in which the documents started their journey, and when it flows through consequent stations. See more on HDSL, book 264.

⁸⁰ HDSL, 253: 20a-b.

⁸¹ Vương Đình Quyền, "Thông Tin Liên Lạc Dưới Triều Minh Mạng (The Communication under the Reign of Minh Mang)," *Tạp Chí Lưu Trữ Việt Nam* 4 (1994).

⁸² DNLT, II, 51: 29a-b.

⁸³ DNLT, II, 50: 14b.

communication. By 1834, the Postal Office was no longer allowed to transfer documents to the Board of Defence directly. A new body appeared to receive arriving paperwork and to redistribute them among central institutions: the Transmission Office 通政司. Its functions included collecting, inspecting, and categorizing incoming documents. If the records were marked confidential, they had to be immediately submitted to the emperor. Routine reports were transferred to the Board of Defence for registration. Finally, the Transmission Office was also involved with inspecting the court's paperwork before sending them down to provinces. In normal circumstances, the records were dispatched out of the capital every three days, except for express communications.⁸⁴

In 1834, official correspondence burst with military reports that led to the growing demand for paperwork inspection. Another challenge for the Transmission Office was the increasing complexity of documents involved with multiple boards. Quite often, these boards and court institutions shirked their duty by shifting the responsibility to each other. That irresponsible manner soon spread as a common practice that Hue spent many lengthy court audiences discussing. The result was a detailed procedure that gave the Censorate more inspecting authority over the paperwork flow:

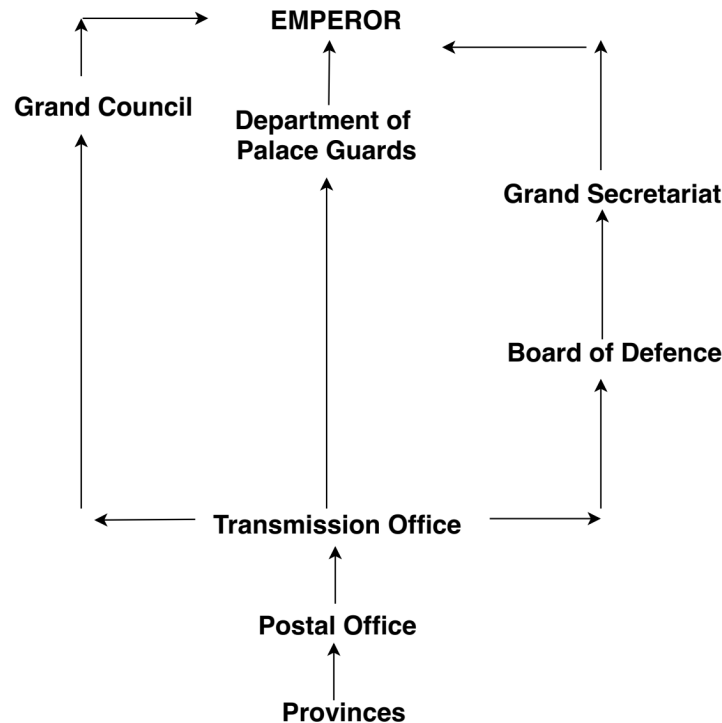
1. The previous regulation: when provincial memorials and reports were submitted, if they got imperial responses by edicts or vermilion remarks, the Grand Secretariat copied and distributed them for implementation. From now on, vermilion records are transferred to censors 科道 at the Censorate, who shall decide to channel the documents to proper organs at the Six Boards. If there are two, or three boards involved [with the document], the most important one has the duty [of processing it]. If responsibility is equally shared among them, the one that is first mentioned must be in charge of the vermilion records. If the affair is urgent, all related bodies are required to take part in it, regardless of whether they process the duplicate copies or the original copy of the vermilion record ...
2. The censor-in-charge should carefully distribute the duplicate of the vermilion records. If he makes the right decision, [but] the organ refuses to cooperate, and caused the wasting of time, the sensor must immediately inform the court. If the sensor makes imprudent choices, the organ can report the court and relocates the vermilion records to the right body. ...
3. The edicts and memorials have already been stamped with imperial seals 國寶, then must be sent to the censors by the Grand Secretariat. Any delay or wrongdoing must be reported.

⁸⁴ Vũ Thị Phụng, *Văn Bản Quản Lí Nhà Nước Thời Nguyễn, giai Đoạn 1802-1884 (Documents of State-managements of the Nguyen period, 1802-1884)*, (Hà Nội: Nxb Đại học Quốc gia, 2005), 134; DNTL, II, 141: 8a-b.

4. Memorials and reports issued by the central government, according to the previous regulation, are submitted by the boards or by the Grand Secretariat. Provincial documents placed in postal tubes and sealed envelopes (except secret memorials transported by the Palace Guards 侍衛所), have to send to the Postal Office and Transmission Office. The heads of the Transmission Office examine the red paper attached to the envelope 皮外貼紅; if there are essential affairs, the whole package should immediately submit to the emperor. [...]

7. Each institute specializes in assigned businesses, such as the Board of Defence on preventing enemy invasion and rebellion; the Board of Justice on robbery and criminal; the Board of Revenue on salary and grain distribution; the Board of Public Works on constructing materials. So far, provincial memorials are functionally confusing: [the boards are] placing reports on foreign invasion and robbery into the same file, combining [matters of] salary and constructing materials into one document. ... [As a result] It takes weeks to re-categorize [the paperwork]. From now on, province-produced paperwork must be categorized into distinct types and volumes. Only in cases of integrated and inseparable matters, documents can be sorted into the composition (format). If officials are still disordered and irresponsible, the Transmission Office should report to the court for punishment.⁸⁵

Figure 5.2. The Nguyen's correspondence system



The communication-decision structure under the Minh Menh reign embodied three institutional bodies: the Postal Office, Transmission Office, and the Grand Secretariat. The first took accountability for the paperwork movements between the

⁸⁵ DNTL, II, 141: 12a-14a.

capital and provinces. The second distributed paperwork in the capital, and the third stood between the emperor and his bureaucrats. The formation of the Privy Council in 1835 was Minh Menh's efforts to set up a duplication of the Qing model.⁸⁶ The design, however, merely aimed at confidential paperwork operations. The Grand Secretariat and Privy Council used the same postal network and paperwork regulations, but their performances applied to different confidential measures. The practice resulted in a less tensional bureaucracy when the Nguyen councilors were not overwhelmingly influential on the Grand Secretaries. In fact, they worked in cooperative manners and both subjected to mutual inspections. Minh Menh clearly learned the lessons from the manipulation of powerful Qing grand councilors.

When paperwork became widely-deployed for operating governmental control, Minh Menh was partly released from the obsession that such potent officials would monopolize the court communication system. During his reign, there was no one ready to do so. By allowing Six Boards to monitor the Grand Secretariat and *vice versa*, the monarch not only constantly placed his most trusted mandarins on the top decisional making dialogues but also had the system guarded carefully. No one stood unchecked, whether board presidents or grand councilor.

To safeguard the deliberative structure from the potential of being manipulated, he ordered eunuchs and court women to keep a distance from public affairs. Officials who did not directly involve with, or no longer took part in the palace secretary offices were strictly prohibited from passing by those buildings.⁸⁷ In the same year of that ban, the court issued authenticated seals for high-ranked civil and military officials 文武大臣. Previously, they used official seals, but from now on, those personal seals have to be implemented for obeying the imperial edicts or submitted memorials.⁸⁸ Comparing to Qing China, official and personal seals were much more accessible to the Vietnamese mandarins. While Chinese officials ranking below Grand Academicians were not allowed to have seals,⁸⁹ their Vietnamese counterparts enjoyed the imperial promotion of seal-usage. Some Nguyen administrative records examined in this thesis, for instance, bore 20 to 30 stamps.⁹⁰

⁸⁶ DNTL, II, 87: 12b-13a.

⁸⁷ DNTL, II, 4: 12a.

⁸⁸ DNTL, II, 1: 8b-9a.

⁸⁹ DNTL, II, 63: 28b.

⁹⁰ *Tờ bằng Lý Sơn* (the Ly Sơn Order), MM 15 (1834), the Governmental Committee of the Borderline, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Hanoi. Also, Trần Trọng Dương, "Khảo Cứu Tờ Bằng

V. 2. Sword and brush

On February 14, 1820, Minh Menh, age 30, entered the Hall of Supreme Harmony. The new monarch bore in mind an ambitious political project, just one little problem, however, stood between him and the dream of empire. There were few who he could trust. By 1820, not many bureaucrats and war-time veterans were able to comprehend his vision of sophisticated administration. Even fewer were ready to be on board with him. He shall spend the next fifteen years nurturing a new intellectual group designed for the job whose assistance was vital to the cultivation of the most sophisticated statecraft in precolonial Vietnam. Much of that bureaucratic installation had to do with paperwork and the involved institutions. They allowed the introduction of the “*bureaucracy of edicts*” and “*bureaucracy of endorsements*.” Memorials, as the principal channel of official correspondence, stood at the center of that paperwork ecology.⁹¹ As a new central medium of official communication, they engage in a political contest between sword and brush, between Gia Long’s post-war bureaucracy and Minh Menh’s complex governance.

The power of official documents and communication in the bureaucratic arrangement was vividly demonstrated a century earlier in Beijing. Palace memorials (奏摺, 密奏) transformed mid-Qing politics, and allowed Kangxi, Yongzheng, and Qianlong effective personal control of the state, especially conveying authority through varied bureaucratic obstacles of the royal clan’s aristocratic committees.⁹² In that struggle, paperwork was game-changing in bureaucratic management. Very much along the same line were Minh Menh’s efforts of creating a controllable, liable administrative landscape that was instrumented by official documents. The process was a two-decade story of the monarch, who commanded paperwork, memorials in particular, to envisage his dream of centralized-state making and empire-expansion. Although in today’s Vietnam, the resonance of this fascinating story is remembered by few, it is worth recognizing as a part of human beings’ struggle for modernizing bureaucracy. The legacies of that project reached beyond the emperor’s intentions, testified by those “sweating buffaloes,” chaotic palace archives, and the complex and

Lý Sơn: Văn Bản, Hiệu Điểm và Dịch Thuật (Research on the Royal Certificate in Lý Sơn: Writing, Punctuation and Translation),” *Tạp Chí Nghiên Cứu và Phát Triển* 1, no. 118 (2015): 38–57.

⁹¹ The term ‘Memorial’ were the nineteenth century British translation of the types of reports, petitions and a number of other submitted papers to Chinese emperors.

⁹² See Wu, *Communication and Imperial Control in China*; Wu, “The Memorial Systems of The Ch’ing Dynasty (1644-1911)””; Bartlett, *Monarchs and Ministers: The Grand Council in Mid-Ch’ing China, 1723-1820*; Beatrice S. Bartlett, “Qing Statesmen, Archivists, and Historians and the Question of Memory,” in *Archives, Documentation, and Institutions of Social Memory: Essays from the Sawyer Seminar*, ed. Francis X. Blouin and William G. Rosenberg (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2007), 417–26.

standardized administrative structure. They attributed this to the Vietnamese experience of constructing early modern statecraft.

What follows is an account of how memorials went through this political transformation and turned themselves into valuable assistance for the monarch's power concentration. The emperor was well-prepared for the task. He carefully designed the use of paperwork, provided guidelines, set up regulations and assisted institutions. Hundreds of official seals were distributed. One hundred-fifty postal stations were established. Censorate's supervision and several newborn institutes came into play, whose function was first and foremost dedicated to bureaucratic communication and decision-making. Between 1802 and 1820, for instance, *most urgent* 最緊 was reduced from twelve to nine days for 1000 kilometer - Gia Dinh-Hue communication.⁹³ At the same time, the empire's postal network expanded into an intricate linkage known as 'the road of mandarins' 官路 or 'roads of official correspondence' 關報.⁹⁴ The most important is certainly the 'one thousand-mile road' 千里路, stretching from the Sino-Vietnamese border to the lower Mekong.⁹⁵ Along the roads stood hundreds of stations, each had four horses and couriers numbered between thirty and one hundred.⁹⁶

The significance of memorials in Minh Menh's official transformation was the relation between designing paperwork's structure and administrative evolution. None of the Nguyen reigns indicated such profound changes in the paperwork landscape as those under the Minh Menh time. As a result, it became the benchmark for Hue's administration in the next century, until Western reforms took domination. Minh Menh pursued a paperwork-environment of his command. That paperwork realm was carefully guarded by the ruler who was hungry for information and control. His trust was placed in no single favorite personnel or institution but 'while paper and black ink' (*giay trang muc den*).⁹⁷ Complex mechanisms of document-operation defined his

⁹³ DN TL, I, 20: 17b-18a; HDSL, 253: 5a.

⁹⁴ DN TL, I, 52: 16b; *Đại Nam Nhất Thống Chí* 大南一統志 (*The Unification Records of Dai Nam*), *Tỉnh Thanh Hóa* 清華省 (*Thanh Hoa Province*), *Tập Hạ* 下集 (*Second Book*) (Sài Gòn: Văn hóa Tùng thư, số 5, 1960), 36. *Quan báo* '關報' literally means "以文書通知": using documents for communication. 漢典, <http://www.zdic.net/c/3/104/279652.htm> (accessed on November 7, 2018).

⁹⁵ See Vũ Đức Liêm, "Bảo Mật, Thư Nặc Danh, và Bưu Chính Trong Nền Chính Trị Triều Minh Mên: Vụ Án Dịch Trám Thanh Hóa, 1833-1834 (Secrecy, Anonymous Letters, and Postal Transmission in the Minh Menh's Politics: The Case of Thanh Hoa Postal Scandal, 1833-1834)," in *EFEO Research Project on Nguyen Chauban*, ed. Andrew Hardy (Hà Nội: EFEO Hà Nội, forthcoming).

⁹⁶ HDSL, 252: 3b-4a.

⁹⁷ Vietnamese proverb, refers to the authenticity of paperwork.

sense of authority and power symbolism.⁹⁸ The palace documents were resorted, re-categorized, and mobilized often. In 1831, for instance, the court was instructed to search and copied the post-1819 paperwork with taboo characters:

內外諸衙門文書，自嘉隆十八年以前，詔敕旨諭間有明著御名及別字同音者，請令各抄依原本，如恭遇照禮部錄送字樣攷填。別字同音則隨文義改填仍一併繕疏欽遞。其抄本由部對照確寔，於紙尾書：年，月，日，廷臣奉抄送等字，押用“同寅協恭”小篆送文奉守。原本收銷。至如公同傳詞及疏文稟文竝諸文書亦照此洗填仍畱存照。⁹⁹

Records of the inner and outer *yamen* 內外衙門 [issued] from 1819 onward; [if they are] proclamations, commands, decrees, and edicts that recorded the emperor's proper names and other homonymous characters 字同音, [they are] now requested to copy the original entirely 抄依原本. If encountering any [characters of imperial proper names], it is followed by the rules set by the Board of Rites for alternative characters to replace. The homonymous characters are replaced according to textual meaning and then report altogether.

Documents are handed over to the boards for collating and certifying, [it has to] write down at the page-end these characters: “year...month...day, court officials [followed imperial instruction] to copy and dispatch” (年, 月, 日, 廷臣奉抄送), seal with the stamp “同寅協恭” (*Court officials all agree*), and retain the copies. The original should be collected and destroyed. Treatment of *Congdong* instructions, reports, petitions, and others should follow accordingly, collating characters, replacing [them], and preserving [them].

Taking all into measures, however, Minh Menh's struggle for centralizing and standardizing paperwork was any but an easy task. He spent two decade-reign designing the inner court, facilitating communication-network, constructing institutions, redefining document-types, issuing seals, drafting endorsements, lamenting the paperwork overabundance, bewailing the low-quality 'greeting palace memorials' 請安摺, and on good days, diligently correcting official reports.

A court of two politics

By 1820, Minh Menh had come of age as a ruler, and so did his courtiers to be very influential powerholders. Le Chat 黎質 (1769-1826)¹⁰⁰, Le Van Duyet 黎文悅 (1763-1832)¹⁰¹, Nguyen Van Nhan 阮文仁 (1753-1822), Nguyen Duc Xuyen 阮德川

⁹⁸ His carefully-guarded paperwork regulation was among the dominant character of Hue political culture, counted in every detail, ranging from the use of Nom script 喃字, destroying a stone inscription written in Nom by Trinh Lords, to taboo characters 諱字, and the speed of paperwork transportation. DNTL, II, 214: 14b;

⁹⁹ DNTL, II, 77: 15b-16a.

¹⁰⁰ Commander of the Rear Army 掌後軍, Governor-General of the North 北城總鎮.

¹⁰¹ Commander of the Left Army 掌左軍, Gia Dinh's Governor-General 嘉定城總鎮.

(1759-1824)¹⁰², Tong Phuoc Luong 宋福樑¹⁰³... were first rank generals who took part in founding the dynasty. They controlled two-thirds of the country's most prosperous demographic and economic centers. More importantly, they showed little interest in the monarch's plan for new governance. They were sceptical toward Minh Menh's administrative scheme, and so was his eye on their excessive authority. This power struggle had a profound impact on dynastic communication and paperwork because, in the end, the debate over bureaucratic operation comes down to the question of who had the final ink-stroke on written state paperwork.

The relationship between Le Van Duyet, Le Chat, and Minh Menh was among the most complex and unascertained of this dynasty's history. It represented the conflicts, not only in terms of personality but also in the vision of future bureaucracy in the post-Gia Long era. Duyet and Chat embodied the traditional negotiation of regional power and territorial fragmentation that was reluctantly recognized by Gia Long in 1802 and 1808 via the introduction of northern and southern regional authorities.

悅郡在朝戇直，行儀簡畧，不立等威，常撞殺前侍狗，斬廣平鎮守及趙子龍，上亦寬容待之。

... 常養山獠三十名隨候，縱魚池潭為樂。¹⁰⁴

The Duke Le Van Duyet was straightforward at the court, conducted simple rites, did not follow the [bureaucratic] hierarchy, and frequently killed any dogs that come in front of the king [Gia Long]. He beheaded the army commander of the Quang Binh Commandery, Trieu Tu Long, but was pardoned by the king.

... The Duke often had 30 highlanders as an entourage and went fishing at ponds and lakes for leisure. ...

The scholarly Minh Menh, on the other hand, personified the tenacity of a new political scheme: territorial centralization, standardizing administration, proper 'name-rectification' 正名, and rites applied for monarch-minister relations 君臣關係.¹⁰⁵ His attacks on Catholicism added fuel to the existing court's internal skirmish.¹⁰⁶ Le Van Duyet was undoubtedly unsatisfied with the new emperor of a well-Confucian train

¹⁰² Commander of the War-elephant Army 掌象軍

¹⁰³ Commander of the Navy 掌水軍

¹⁰⁴ Phan, *Quốc Sử Di Biên* 國史遺編 (*Lost Records of the National History*), 68.

¹⁰⁵ On the discussions of 'rectification of names' 正名, see Dainian Zhang. 2002. *Key Concepts in Chinese Philosophy*. New Haven: Yale University Press, pp. 461-65; and John Makeham. 1994. *Name and Actuality in Early Chinese Thought*. Albany: SUNY Press.

¹⁰⁶ Byung Wook Choi and Jacob Ramsay have discussed the subject at some length. See Choi, *Southern Vietnam under the Reign of Minh Mạng*, 45-82; Jacob Ramsay, *Mandarins and Martyrs: The Church and the Nguyen Dynasty in Early Nineteenth-Century Vietnam* (Stanford University Press, 2008); DNLT, I, 23: 8b;

and the hostility Minh Menh delivered to western merchants. By 1824, most French advisors had left Hue; they included Gia Long's doctor, Jean Marie Despiau and navy official Jean-Baptiste Chaigneau (to whom Gia Long appointed Vietnamese name: Nguyen Van Thang 阮文勝, 1769–1832) and Philippe Vannier (Nguyen Van Chan 阮文震, 1762–1842).¹⁰⁷ Chaigneau and Vannier were upset with Minh Menh since he was selected as crown prince in 1816.¹⁰⁸ Their families left for Europe on 15/11/1824 after decades of serving the dynasty.¹⁰⁹ At the same time, in both the Red River delta and the Lower Mekong, stood a large number of Catholics. Although the two Governors-general certainly did not prepare to create more enemies and trouble-makers inside their encloses, Minh Menh's suppression of the religion would add more predicaments to the empire in the making.¹¹⁰

In this context, the 'isolated' emperor relied heavily on mobilizing trusted mandarins and utilizing paperwork for correspondence and authoritative expansion.¹¹¹ The increasing paperwork and newly-established institutions, however, immediately caused disruptions between Minh Menh and his influential generals. The conflict took part in immensely shaping the nature of Nguyen's politics:

辰帝方留意文治，進用文臣，命鄭懷德等稽查典禮，條奏施行。質舉悅每進見奏事，多不合，至以懷德等生事逢迎抵斥之。帝念悅等勲舊大臣，每且置之假以辭色未忍加罪。¹¹²

At that time, the emperor favored civil governance 文治, privileged civil officials 文臣, and instructed Trinh Hoai Duc to study the classics and memorialize [about administrative establishments] to implement. Every time Chat and Duyet entered audiences and memorialize state affairs, [their conducts] were mostly inappropriate, so [they] blamed Hoai Duc to manipulate the emperor and criticize [him]. The emperor thought that Duyet [and Chat] were high-ranked officials, compromised by kind words, and had no heart to punish.

¹⁰⁷ Claudia M. Thompson, "A Negotiated Dichotomy: Vietnamese Medicine and the Intersection of Vietnam Eise Acceptance of and Resistance to Chin Eise Cultural Influence" (PhD dissertation, University of Washington, 1998).

¹⁰⁸ For those French, Canh prince (and his eldest son - Gia Long's grandson) was unquestionably legitimate to the throne.

¹⁰⁹ MMNC, I, 6: 11a-b, and Michel Duc Chaigneau, *Souvenirs de Hue* (Paris: Imprimerie Imperiale, 1867).

¹¹⁰ Adrien C. Launay, *Histoire Generale de La Societe Des Missions Etrangeres, Tome 2* (Paris: Tequi, Libraire-Editeur, 1894), 535.

¹¹¹ Marcel Gaultier presented two important research in this subject where Western sources shed light on how Minh Menh's mobilization of those trusted men created tensions at the court. See Marcel Gaultier, *Gia-Long* (Saigon: S.I.L.I. C. ARDIN, 1933); Marcel Gaultier, *Minh-Mang* (Paris: Larose, 1935).

¹¹² DNLT, II, 24: 10b.

A decade after the event, Duyet's adopted son, Le Van Khoi rebelled against Minh Menh (1833). An attack was launched in Hue, denouncing Duyet and Chat who passed away in 1832 and 1826, respectively. Le Ba Tu (黎伯秀, *Thi lang* 侍郎 at the Board of Personnel) accused Le Chat of once declaring that:

The superior [Minh Menh] relied on Trinh Hoai Duc and Nguyen Huu Than as faithful right-hand men 心腹. [We can] simply bring several hundred men, enter the court, and scream out loud, they [Duc and Than] would knee down to the ground.

上恃鄭懷德阮有慎為心腹。只須數百人入朝，大喝一聲則此輩伏地，惟我所。¹¹³

This statement came in line with one of Chat's previous comments, recorded in the *Biographies of the Eminent of Dai Nam* 大南列傳:

悅以勲舊大臣承顧命，朝廷倚為重，然秉性躁率，朝見言語多不循禮度，帝每含容之。… 質言於悅曰：方今朝廷總攬權綱恢張百度，進用文臣，責成吏治。吾輩皆以開胃，起家惟知直情徑行，或愆禮法，太平治典自與草創不同，不如上表請解一城事務，畱京奉侍庶保無過。¹¹⁴

Duyet was a long-served 勲舊 and high-ranked 大臣 official who received Gia Long's will 承顧命 [to serve Minh Menh], [thus] the court significantly relied on [Duyet], [however] his character is hot-tempered and inelegant, [his] language during the audiences was out of conduct. The emperor [however] was lenient. ... [Le] Chat told Duyet: the court now took control of inaugurating hundreds of regulations, privileged civil officials to initiate governance. We are of military background, intrinsic with straightforward language [so that] violated the [new] legal procedures. The statute of peaceful time is different from that of the early dynasty-building. There is no preferable for us to submit resigned memorials from the Citadels' governance, maintain at the capital to serve [the emperor] to disengage from any possible infringement.

Duyet and Chat's attitudes toward Minh Menh were based on the conviction that their military role was irreplaceable. In 1824, for instance, they were kneeling and crying at the court under the compulsion that they should be allowed to punish subordinate officials at will.¹¹⁵ Minh Menh responded with calm and concession but the other side

¹¹³ DNLT, II 24 16b.

¹¹⁴ DNLT, II, 23: 8a-b.

¹¹⁵ DNLT, II, 24: 12a.

of the coin was no less intriguing. Not only acting as a regent 承顧命大臣,¹¹⁶ Le Van Duyet shifted sides in 1816 to favor Minh Menh for the crown was decisive to the latter's chance of power.¹¹⁷ Duyet's maneuvers led to the death of Minh Menh's chief adversary, Nguyen Van Thanh (Chief of the Front Army and General-governor of the North) in 1816. In 1824, Minh Menh dealt a death blow to his legitimate opponent, Gia Long's grandson Dan 皇孫旦.¹¹⁸ The move came after Duyet memorialized, by way of the confidential report (悅密以事奏), accusing Dan's mother of sexual abuse and incest. Consequently, she was put to death by drowning under Duyet's supervision, following Minh Menh's instruction (帝命收執宋氏檻送悅溺殺之).¹¹⁹ With that assistance, Minh Menh's position at the Hall of Great Harmony was more secure than ever before.¹²⁰

But the throne came with a price.

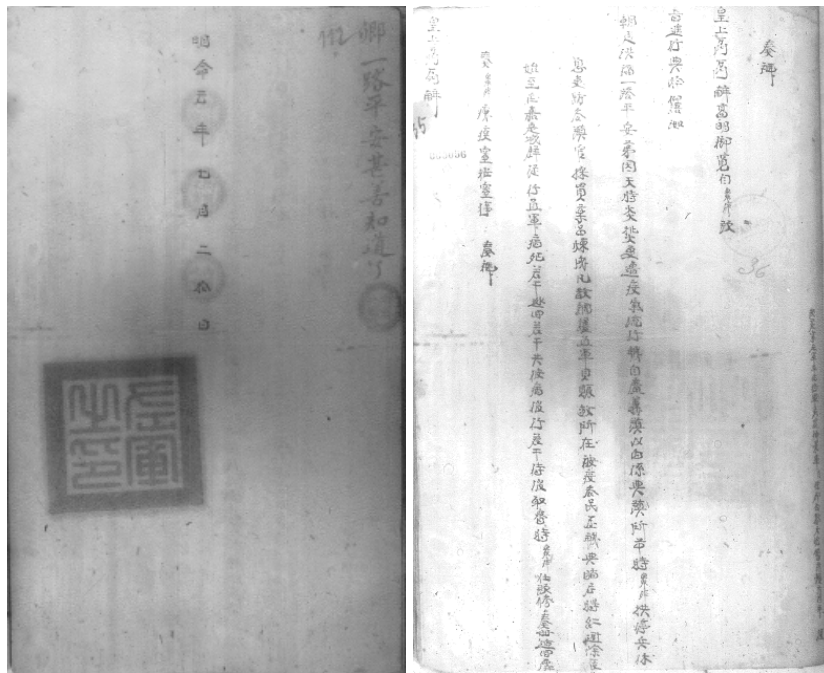


Figure 5.3. Memorial submitted by Le Van Duyet on MM1/7/20, reported his returned journey to Saigon

¹¹⁶ On the deathbed, Gia Long appointed Lê Văn Duyệt and Phạm Đăng Hưng superintendents 承顧命大臣. Duyệt, Commander of the Left Army and General Governor of Gia Dinh was also appointed Commander of the Imperial Guards. Phạm Đăng Hưng was the prominent President of the Board of Rites 禮部尚書.

¹¹⁷ See Vũ and Duong, "Phe Phái, Lợi Ích Nhóm", 26–36.

¹¹⁸ DNLT, I, 48: 6b.

¹¹⁹ The original text, "有告應和公美堂與其母宋氏涓淫亂私事，悅密以事奏。帝命收執宋氏檻送悅溺殺之。美堂廢為庶人。" DNLT, II, 23: 7b-8a.

¹²⁰ On Minh Menh's dealing with Lê Văn Duyệt and Lê Chất, Nguyễn Đức Xuyên, see for instance, Duyệt's memorial to Minh Menh (MMCB, 1: 56); Chất's mother memorial (MMCB, 1: 80); and Xuyên's memorial (MMCB, 9: 201). Also, see DNLT, books 23, 24.

Minh Menh's endorsement: “卿一路平安甚善. 知道了” (*It is so pleasant that you arrived safely. Acknowledged!*)
 Seal stamp: “左軍之印” (*Seal of the Left Army*)
 Source: MNCB, 1: 56.



Figure 5.4. Memorial of Le Chat's mother requested a tax deduction
 Source: MNCB, 1: 80.

Minh Menh's endorsement read:

着稅例仍舊，但念伊子有功於國，再加恩自辛巳年以後，特准陶氏村本身所領泳淋潭礮石蔑所，每年蠲免半分陸佰貫，只納半分陸佰貫，以示朕惠養老者至意。戶部知道。欽此。¹²¹

The tax quota is maintained. However, your son has rendered excellent services to the state; thus it is to extend my mercy that from the 18th year of the sexagenary cycle (1820), especially vouchsafe Dao Thi Thon 陶氏村 a yearly 50 per cent deduction of 600 *quan* 貫 tax of the Kinh Thach region, Vinh Lam lagoon 泳淋潭礮石蔑所. [Thus, you only have to] pay half of the 600 *quan* tax, to echo my appreciation of the elder. The Board of Revenue should be aware of [the decision] to implement.

¹²¹ Those endorsements (MNCB, 1: 56, 80) written by Minh Menh to his first ranked generals show great tenderness and fondness of the monarch.

The compromise was, however, provisional. Despite the incentive through titles and generous gifts to Duyet and Chat, Minh Menh was unable to appease their anxiety about Hue's expansion of political control through new institutions and regulations. From taxation, rice transportation, and military mobilization to official appointments, Minh Menh was purposefully preparing for taking control of the two river deltas. His struggles lasted for fifteen teen years, not only defining Vietnam in the territorial contour that is seen today but also inaugurating the new dynastic political culture.

In that enduring administrative challenge, institutional installations and paperwork operations played a dynamic role. It all started with Minh Menh's new cohort led by Pham Dang Hung (President of the Board of Rites), Trinh Hoai Duc 鄭懷德 (President of the Board of Personnel) and Nguyen Huu Than 阮有慎 (President of the Board of Revenue). Surviving the war of succession, these men immediately became the monarch's new favorites whose sharing intellectual interest and governing vision were in a time of much need. They performed as 'personal secretaries,' mentors, advisors, executors, and doers in laying the ground for the coming politics. Under their services, Hue's political landscape was dramatically shifted within years. While sending Duyet and Chat on missions of military pacification, the emperor surrounded himself with some prestige scholar-officials whose knowledge of administration was appreciated. Apart from Van Thu Phong, these 'assisting officials' of non-statutory and low profile.

To leverage the authority of the civil branch, Trinh Hoai Duc was the first to claim the first rank (一品) in 1821. The move, however, was carefully consulted with two first-ranked commanders (1A), Nguyen Van Nhan 阮文仁 (Commander of the Right Army 掌右軍) Nguyen Duc Xuyen 阮德川 (Commander of the War-elephant Army 掌象軍).¹²² Months later, Duc became vice-Grand Academician, President of the Board of Personnel and the Board of Defence 協辦大學士, 吏部尚書兼領兵部尚書 (1B). Dynastic record recognized him as *a prominent official of the realm* (為國重臣, *Shilu*). Minh Menh also gave him high praise, declaring that, "[he/Minh Menh] usually discussed politics with [Duc] and accomplished many eye-opening experiences" (常與論政事, 多所施展).¹²³

¹²² DNTL, II, 10: 14a.

¹²³ DNTL, II, 31: 21a. For a brief biography of Trịnh Hoài Đức, see *Trịnh Hoài Đức lược lịch* 鄭懷德略歷 (A Brief biography of Trịnh Hoài Đức), in Trịnh Hoài Đức, *Cán Trai Thi Tập* 艮齋詩集 (*Poetry Collection of Cán Trai*), ed. Chen Jinghe (Xianggang: Xin ya yan jiu suo, 1962), 7–13.

In the mid-1820s, a new cohort of imperial favorite encircled the monarch. This inner-court associated personnel enjoyed informal and non-statutory recognition, and appeared in dynastic records vaguely as ‘attending officials’ 侍臣.¹²⁴ Working closely with Minh Menh, most of them came from the civil branch of high-ranked and of central and southern backgrounds. By empowering these men, a new balance of power was raised in Hue. Complex bureaucracy gave the civil mandarins the upper hand because of their knowledge of political institutions and skills in managing paperwork.

Table 5.3. High-ranked civil personnel during early Minh Menh reign

Names	Titles	Time	Ranks	Hometown
Pham Dang Hung 范登興	President of the Board of Rites 禮部尚書, and regent 承顧命大臣 (1820)	1764-1825	2A	Tien Giang
Trinh Hoai Duc 鄭懷德	President of the Board of Personnel 吏部尚書, Vice-Grand Academician 協辦大學士 (1821)	1765 - 1825	1B	Bien Hoa
Nguyen Huu Than 阮有慎	President of the Board of Personnel 吏部尚書, Vice-Grand Academician 協辦大學士 (1825)	?-1831	1B	Thua Thien
Ngo Dinh Gioi 吳廷价	Vice-President of the Board of Justice 刑部參知	-	2B	Quang Binh
Le Ba Pham 黎伯品	President of the Board of Justice 刑部尚書 (1826)	1749-1823	2A	Gia Dinh
Nguyen Xuan Thuc	President of the Board of Defense 兵部尚書 (1825)	?-1827	2A	Khanh Hoa
Tran Loi Trinh 陳利貞	President of the Board of Personnel 吏部尚書 (1826)	?-1829	2A	
Nguyen Khoa Minh 阮科明	President of the Board of Justice 刑部尚書 (1826)	-	2A	Thua Thien
Tran Van Tinh 陳文性	President of the Board of Public Work 工部尚書 (1826)		2A	
Phan Huy Thuc 潘輝湜	President of the Board of Rites 禮部尚書 (1826)		2A	Nghe An
Luong Tien Tuong 梁進祥	President of the Board of Revenue 戶部尚書 (1826)		2A	Thua Thien
Hoang Kim Xan 黃金燦	Acting-President of the Board of Justice 署刑部尚書 (1826)		2A	Quảng Binh
Nguyen Dang Tuan 阮登洵	Vice President of the Board of Personnel 吏部左參知 (1828)		2B	Quang Binh

They were encouraged to study the classics and advise the monarch in institutional constructions. It was not the Le dynasty’s knowledge and experience that

¹²⁴ DNTL, II, 38: 1b.

were attractive to Minh Menh.¹²⁵ Within one month of the reign, he urged officials to borrow books from the library in search of “the way of governance 治道”: “The way of governance places on books and records, without an in-depth-research, one can not patently perceive. Recently Thanh Hoà library 清和書院 holds many outstanding books from the four corners. If you, during your leisure, have interests in reading books, borrow them to look through.” (帝諭羣臣曰：治道載諸典籍，非博覽研究不能遍知。今清和書院多貯四方奇書，卿等公暇有志讀書，者借而觀之).¹²⁶

Unfortunately, many of those ministers died in 1824-1826 and leaving a vacuum in the inner circle of assistance. His solution was to recruit a new generation of scholar-officials through regional and metropolitan examinations. Seven palace examinations were organized between 1822 and 1841 (the last was under the Thieu Tri’s watch) to which ninety-three graduates were entitled. Sixty-nine earned doctoral degrees 進士, while twenty-four others were appointed *pho bang* 副榜 (Supplementary List of Presented Scholars or Subordinate list of Doctor-degree holders).¹²⁷ The selection of these men started in 1829, reflecting Minh Menh’s ability (and desperate need) to boost graduate quantity for an increasingly expanding state structure.

¹²⁵ See John K. Whitmore, “The Hồng Đức Heritage: Northern and Southern Perspectives in the Nineteenth Century” (Conference ‘Nguyễn Việt Nam, 1558-1885: Domestic Issues,’ Cambridge, MA, Havard University, 2013).

¹²⁶ DNTL, II, 1: 12a.

¹²⁷ Table 5.4. List of metropolitan Examinations in the Minh Menh reign

No.	Year of Examination	No. of Candidates	No. of Doctoral Holders 進士	No. of 2 nd Rank Doctoral Holders 副榜
1	The 3 rd Year of the Minh Menh Reign (1822)	164	8	
2	The 7 th Year of the Minh Menh Reign (1826)	206	10	
3	The 10 th Year of the Minh Menh Reign (1829)	167	9	
4	The 13 th Year of the Minh Menh Reign (1832)	173	8	3
5	The 16 th Year of the Minh Menh Reign (1835)	123	11	2
6	The 19 th Year of the Minh Menh Reign (1840)	136	10	10
Total		969	56	20

Sources: HDSL; Cao Xuân Dục, *Quốc Triều Đăng Khoa Lục* 國朝登科錄 (List of Successful Examination Candidates of the Ruling Dynasty) (Sài Gòn: Bộ Quốc Gia Giáo Dục, 1962); Nola Cooke, “The Composition of the Nineteenth-Century Political Elite of Pre-Colonial Nguyen Vietnam (1802–1883),” *Modern Asian Studies* 29, no. 4 (1995): 741–64, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X00016164>.

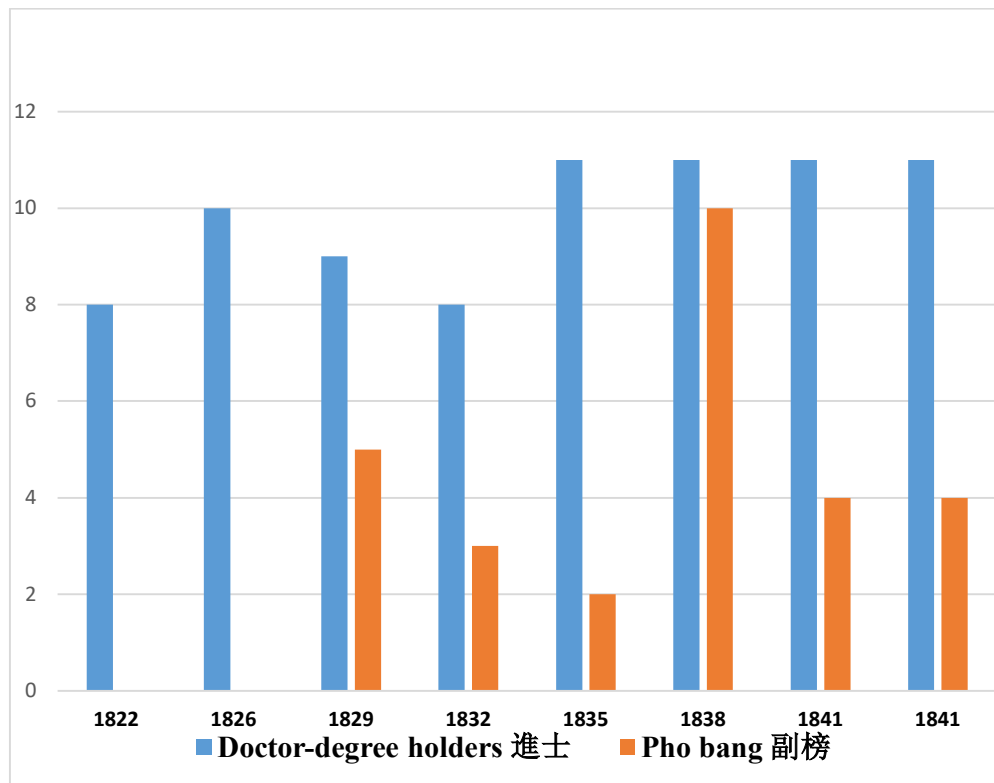


Chart 5.1. Numbers of doctor-degree holders and *pho bang* from palace examinations, 1822-1841

Source: author

Note: *pho bang* 副榜: Supplementary List of Presented Scholars or Subordinate list of Doctor-degree holders, selected from 1829.

The majority of those graduates came from northern and central Vietnam, despite Minh Menh's efforts to diversify their geographical affiliations. In fact, they were nurtured by the strong intellectual tradition and frequently linked to prominent scholar-families.¹²⁸ During the Minh Menh reign, only two candidates were southerners, compared to twenty-nine northerners, thirty-three from Central, and seventeen from Thanh-Nghe-Tinh. However, as time went by, the tendency became clear that men of the Centre would rise to top positions at the court.

¹²⁸ Cooke. *The Composition of the Nineteenth-Century*, 741-764.

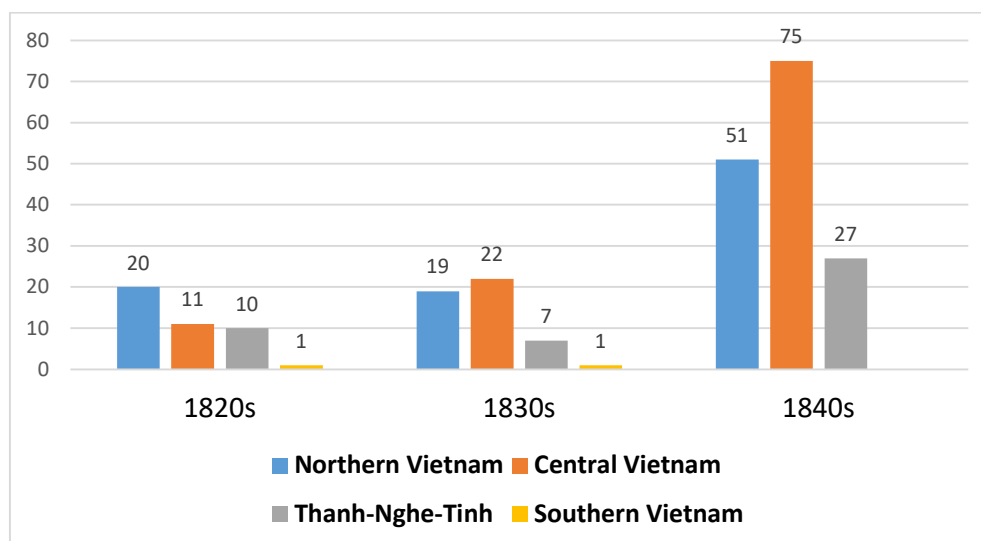


Chart 5.2. Doctoral degree holders and *pho bang* by region and by decade, 1820s-1840s.

Source: Data from Nola Cooke (1995).

Despite those efforts, the result of selecting scholar-officials was the source of Minh Menh’s obsession. Not enough qualified candidates were selected to fill essential posts. The emperor lamented the low intellectual quality, was upset with their skills and frequently asked for official recommendations 保舉. In the winter of 1829, he declared that “the court employment of officials is of no limitation 朝廷用人非以一格限. Until now, there are regional and palace examinations, and regulations for prefecture and county recommendation 鄉會有科，府縣有貢... [Although I] once asked officials to recommend the talent they know, the recent quantity is so scanty 而近來所舉無幾若廣. ... I now order fourth-ranked personnel and above 四品一上 in the capital and local officials 地方官 to recommend those above 40 years of age, with profound learning, fine intellectual skill 剝削通識, to be nominated as educational officers 教職. This is a useful norm to designate talent, and should not be seen as ‘dead words’ 具文. ...”¹²⁹

The emerging dominance of that newly inaugurated personnel shifted the balance of authority in Hue and brought ‘one court two politics’ to an end somewhere between 1826 and 1828. When the second first-ranked minister 協辦大學士, Nguyen Huu Than 阮有慎 was appointed, Minh Menh was able to mobilize him to the northern region. The monarch started projecting his authority in Hue and beyond with the new intellectual cohort and dispatched trusted men. These new faces not only transformed

¹²⁹ DNTL, II, 62: 11 a-b.

Nguyen's politics but also initiated a new bureaucratic environment for the prevailing paperwork.

Table 5.5. Prominent courtiers, 1825-1835

1825			
Military officials 武官	Death	Civil officials 文官	Death
Lê Văn Duyệt 黎文悅	1832	Trịnh Hoài Đức 鄭懷德	1825
Lê Chất 黎質	1826	Phạm Đăng Hưng 范登興	1825
Nguyễn Đức Xuyên 阮德川	1824	Nguyễn Hữu Thân 阮有慎	1831
Tổng Phước Lương 宋福樑	----	Hoàng Kim Xán 黃金燦	1832
Trương Tiến Bửu 張進寶	1827	Trần Lợi Trinh 陳利貞	----
Trần Văn Năng 陳文能	1834	Nguyễn Khoa Minh 阮科明	1837
Nguyễn Văn Thoại 阮文瑞	1829	Phan Huy Thục 潘輝湜	1844
Phan Văn Thúy 潘文瓔	1833	Lê Đăng Doanh 黎登瀛	----
Lê Văn Đức 黎文德			
1835			
Military officials 武官	Death	Civil officials 文官	Death
Nguyễn Văn Xuân 阮文春	1837	Trương Đăng Quế 張登桂	1867
Trần Văn Năng 陳文能	1834	Hà Tông Quyền 何宗權	1839
Tạ Quang Cự 謝光巨	1862	Nguyễn Khoa Minh 阮科明	1837
Phạm Văn Điển 范文典	1842	Thân Văn Quyền 申文權	1836
Trương Minh Giảng*張明講	1841	Phan Bá Đạt 潘伯達	1846
Doãn Uẩn* 尹蘊	1850	Phan Thanh Giản 潘清簡	1867
Nguyễn Công Trứ* 阮公著	1858	Vũ Xuân Cẩn 武春謹	1852
Lê Đại Cương*黎大綱	1847	Hoàng Quýnh 黃炯	1839
Nguyễn Tri Phương 阮知方	1874	Nguyễn Đăng Tuân 阮登洵	1844

Source: DNLT, DNLT, *Quan lại lý lịch 官吏履歷 Officials' biographies*, manuscript, Viện Khoa học Xã hội vùng Nam Bộ, NHv. 155.

Notes: * those came from a civil background. It is a notable phenomenon that Minh Menh encouraged civil personnel to participate in military campaigns, those he called *Nho tướng 儒將*: 'Confucian generals.' See, for instance, the case of Nguyen Cong Tru in DNLT, II, 219: 21b.

As seen in many political dramas in Hue between the 1810s and 1830s, their outcome was essentially determined by the ability to mobilize the new graduates for conducting sophisticated governance. The use of paperwork for complex governmental tasks allowed the emergence of the civil branch at both the court and local administrations. While previous discussions draw attention to courtiers' conflicts, my research has extended the analysis to factionalism and group interests. It suggests a more complex political and institutional contesting in determining the future of Vietnamese bureaucracy,¹³⁰ in which paperwork and document circulation were the

¹³⁰ Vũ and Dương, "Phe Phái, Lợi ích Nhóm, 26-36; Vũ Đức Liêm. "Phe Phái và Cạnh Tranh Quyền Lực ở Việt Nam Đầu Thế Kỷ XIX (*Factionalism and power competition in early nineteenth century*

defining aspects of political culture. As shown in the table above, when Chat and Duyet died in 1826 and 1832, the Gia Long's generation of great officials 大臣, including two superintendents 顧命大臣 (Le Van Duyet, d. 1832 and Pham Dang Hung 范登興, d. 1825) had already left the political stage. Their posts were immediately acquired by scholar-officials of Minh Menh's personal choices. Earning fondness, but not indiscipline, these newcomers soon realized that the monarch could spare anything, but corruption and factionalism. As a prince, Minh Menh saw himself as a victim of the court's political conflicts and showed no mercy to factionalism 朋黨. In 1832, knowing that two Grand Secretaries Hoang Quynh 黃炯 and Nguyen Huy Chieu 阮輝沼 concealed a drafting mistake of their subordinates who had illicitly deployed imperial seal 御寶 to cover up, Minh Menh was furious. He issued a long edict to all capital and provincial *yamen* 內外各衙門, warning about the threat of political factions. "The perilousness of factionalism in times of Han, Tang, Song, Ming is vividly mirrored. ... Favoring allies, accusing opponents, protecting friends, and deceiving the king, [thus] committing unpardonable crimes" (具明朋黨之禍漢唐宋明, 殷鑒不遠究之其... 黨同伐異, 事事朦蔽, 佞友欺君, 罪陷不赦).¹³¹

Even the monarch's most favorite enjoyed no exception. Early summer of 1830, Grand Secretaries 內閣侍郎 Truong Dang Que 張登桂 and Phan Thanh Gian 潘清簡 were preparing for Minh Menh's 40th birthday 四旬大慶. They submitted a flashy congratulatory account 大慶頌, praising his achievement from the time of crowing (歷述帝臨御以來憂勤政治為致福, 得壽之本). The following was Minh Menh's response rescripted on that document:

爾等不思勉盡厥職錯誤日增。今乃作此不裨寔用之文，於過失何補。朕豈好面諛乎？其擲還仍傳旨申飭。¹³²

You do not try your best to fulfil your duty, making mistakes day after day. Now, [you] composing this useless account that has nothing to do with your omission. I am not a fan of superficial flattery. Rejecting the document and issuing an edict to admonish.

The event, however, was not so distant from the last time Grand Secretaries were penalized. Four months earlier when Que was serving as *Thuong bao thieu khanh*

Vietnam), *Tia Sáng*, 2018, <http://tiasang.com.vn/-khoa-hoc-cong-nghe/Phe-phai-va-canh-tranh-quyen-luc-o-Viet-Nam-dau-the-ky-XIX-11180> (accessed on October 10th, 2018).

¹³¹ DNTL, II, 81: 11a.

¹³² DNTL, II, 65: 32a-b.

尚寶少卿 (4B), overseeing palace Secrecy Offices 管理文書房事務; he participated with Tran Duy Trinh 陳維楨 (*Han lam vien thua chi* 翰林院承旨, 5B) in a legal-case intervention. The emperor was enraged, had Trinh tied with rope and declared:

語云：寧逢猛虎不寧遇近臣。此輩今日尚欲顛倒是非，出入人罪。儻改置內閣，權位稍隆其勢又將何如邪？幸朕春秋未高，聽斷未怠，故不為彼所惑。毋論迭傳之後，不幸而一遇中材之主，則政柄下移為可慮卽。朕他日倦勤又安，必此輩之無所專擅乎？¹³³

There is a saying that it would rather face a vicious tiger than deal with these close officials 近臣. They manipulate wrong and right and maneuver people's wrongdoing. If instituting the Grand Secretariat with a bit higher authority, what could happen? Fortunately, my age now is not too old, [I am not] yet languishing to conduct affairs, so they are unable to deceive me. Need not to say of a future mediocre ruler 中材之主, it would be agitated that the court authority would be monopolized in their hands; or if I am one day shattered, the hazard of their manipulation is not impossible.”

It was not accidental that the announcement was made in the same month Minh Menh introduced the Grand Secretariat. The fury reflected his anxiety and obsession with factionalism and over-powerful ministers. Shadows of Nguyen Van Thanh, Le Chat, and Le Van Duyet still haunted the throne, whose struggles for supremacy began when he was an immature and low-ranked prince. The disturbing experience could not help but fuel his determination for personal rule. In doing so, he proved to be a keen student of history. “Ming Shizong 明世宗 [Jiajing Emperor] used Yan Song 嚴嵩 [1480-1567], Qing Gaozong 清高宗 [Qianlong Emperor] used Heshen 和珅; all were manipulated, creating disasters that almost destroyed the state. The exemplars are not far away,” said Minh Menh to his court.¹³⁴

Those contexts set a perfect start for an analysis of official paperwork and its correlation with the raise of Minh Menh. Obsessed with over powerful ministers and eunuchs in Ming and Qing, his trust is owned by no favored personnel or official organ, but paperwork, seals, signatures, and mutual inspection. On MM7/2/12, he issued an edict 諭 to the palace Secretary Office 文書房, showing

¹³³ DNTL, II, 63: 23a-b.

¹³⁴ DNTL, II, 64: 3b-4a.

anger at the practice of the Board of Defense whose communication with the local office was conducted verbally. In his word, “reading the memorial [that reported the case] makes [me] extremely terrified” 覽奏之下殊為駭異. The malfeasance was “unspeakable” 可勝言哉.¹³⁵ To him, maintaining reported and receiving daily correspondence was essential to state governance. Written paperwork elevated to an indispensable medium for state-operation. The primary task of the bureaucrats, as the imperial design, was to update information and sustain the correspondence-flow. In the summer of 1826, Minh Menh conducted a northern tour in Quang Binh 廣平巡幸 where he ordered the appointed prince who remained at the capital 留京皇子: “every day, whether receiving any regional memorial or not, [you] report [to me] once about the capital’s situation” 每天不拘有無接到各處奏摺, 即將京中平安奏報一次.¹³⁶

To place paperwork and institutions at work, he started rearranging the court audience. Imperial audiences were the meeting where the monarch assembled and discussed affairs with ministers and officials. Two types of practice were chronologically recognized. First, courtiers were empowered to discuss governed issues in advance before submitting the results to the emperor. Second, the throne directly orchestrated court audiences where administrative matters were debated at the imperial presence. Decision-making was usually delivered to five different kinds of audiences: ‘*grand court audiences*’ 大朝, ‘*routine court audience*’ 常朝, ‘*daily-memorial briefing*’ 奏事, emperor’s summoned audiences [special audiences] 陛見¹³⁷, and finally *court-discussions without the emperor* 公同會議, 朝廷會議.

Between 1802 and 1841, however, Hue Grand Palace witnessed them all. As demonstrated during the Gia Long days, Congdong 公同 dominated Hue’s bureaucratic operation, although this should not lead to the simple implication of a politically powerless throne. By the time Minh Menh was crowned, all court-meetings were placed under his direct arrangement. Three places hosted those meetings: 1. The Left and Right Corridors (左廡 and 右廡); 2. The Hall of Diligent Politics; and 3. The Hall of Great Harmony. The first was the mandarin-gathering

¹³⁵ MMNC, I, 8: 4b-5a.

¹³⁶ MMNC, I, 8: 35b.

¹³⁷ See example of the special audiences during the Kangxi reign, in which officials were called in for the meeting by imperial order. Wu, *Communication and Imperial Control in China*, 127–41.

place, preparing for their audience with the emperor (at the Hall of Diligent Politics), the second was reserved for *routine court audiences*, and the third hosted *grand court audiences* only. It took Gia Long nine years to construct those buildings, and thus the nature of official convocation was not only fragmented in terms of the institutional procedure but also the physical conditions. It vividly reflected the nature of court meetings in Hue during the early Gia Long reign, where the active space of political operation was the Congdong Hall.

In 1803, court discussions 廷議 were Hue's major bureaucratic process. In Gia Long's claim, because the newly-pacified kingdom had so many affairs, he instructed military and civil officials of high-ranked (2B for the civil and 2A for military officials¹³⁸) to gather four times per month at the Left Corridor. Their role was to debate issues and make proposed decisions before presenting them to the throne.¹³⁹ Two years later (1805), a public office for military and civil personnel was constructed 建文武公署, forming the tradition of the Left and Right Corridors as gathering places of courtiers on the 2nd, 9th, 16th, and 24th days of the month.¹⁴⁰ In the following year, the Hall of Great Harmony was erected, and the full system of court meetings was set in motion. The construction was complete one year before Gia Long declared emperor's title 皇帝 (1806). In that spirit, court meetings were regularized into three categories: "grand court audience" 大朝, "routine court audience" 常朝, and "memorial-presenting audience" 奏事.¹⁴¹ "Grand court audiences" took place on the 1st and 15th days, gathering 6th-ranked officials (6 A-B) and above at the Hall of Great Harmony. Frequent court audiences 常朝 conducted on the 5th, 10th, 20th, and 25th days, participated by the 4th-ranked officials (4 A-B) and above at the Hall of Diligent Politics. Finally, memorial-presenting audiences 奏事 occurred in the unoccupied days.

These imperial meetings were among the highest concerns of the monarch. Nine months into his reign, Minh Menh was alarmed by the fact that court officials

¹³⁸ Military officials 武官: from *Thong che* 統制, *Pho do thong che* 副都統制, *pho tuong* 副將 (2A). Civil officials 文官: from vice board-presidents 參知 (2B). see more in *Quan Lai Ly Lich* 官吏履歷 (Biographies of Officials) (Thành phố Hồ Chí Minh: Thư viện Khoa học Xã hội vùng Nam Bộ, HNv. 155, Minh Menh reign, n.d.).

¹³⁹ DNTL, I, 21: 6a. The original text, "定廷議例, 詔曰: 國家甫定, 事務殷繁, 朕一日萬幾, 恐不能一一周悉. 卿等咸預弼 ... 當思明聽翼為共裨政理. 自今, 武自統制, 副都統制, 副將以上, 文自參知以上: 月以初一, 初八, 十五, 二十三. 凡四日會議于左廡. 凡百司庶務不能決者, 商同裁理. 至如關重事體亦先酌議然後奏裁."

¹⁴⁰ DNTL, I, 26: 8b.

¹⁴¹ DNTL, I, 29: 4b.

朝臣 usually came late after the emperor had been already seated for the morning meeting. An imperial announcement was made, ordering a six a.m. gathering of civil and military personnel of the 5th rank and above at the Left Corridor. On the days of court discussion 公同會議之日, however, each department 衙 must have one staff on the spot for summoning 衙各一人直候.¹⁴²

Minh Menh profoundly transformed the mechanism of court operations. The peculiar feature of court audiences under the Gia Long reign was the fact that they were shaped by two most important kinds of meetings: ‘court discussion’ 廷議/ 朝廷會議 (on the 2nd, 9th, 16th, and 24th days at the Public Hall of Military Officials 武公署) and ‘daily briefing’ 奏事 (started at 5 am 卯刻 at the Hall of Diligent Politics 命文武羣臣日以卯刻詣勤政殿奏事).¹⁴³ Minh Menh directly controlled the official gatherings and thus, could better oversee all the administrative activities. In 1822, he went on to reshape the bureaucratic landscape by rearranging the procedures and structure of those meetings. Two significant decisions were made to provide centralized supervision over two days of ‘grand court audience’; four days of ‘frequent audience’, four days of ‘court meeting’, and nine days of ‘daily briefing’.¹⁴⁴

MONTHLY WORKING SCHEDULE AT HUE COURT, 1822

	DAY/TASK					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
	大朝	廷議	奏事	在公署	常朝	在公署
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
奏事	廷議	奏事	在公署	常朝	在公署	奏事
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
在公署	大朝	廷議	奏事	在公署	奏事	在公署
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
常朝	在公署	奏事	廷議	常朝	在公署	奏事
28	29	30				
在公署	奏事	在公署				

Table 5.6. Monthly working schedule at Hue court, 1822

Notes:

大朝: ‘grand court audiences.’

常朝: ‘routine court audiences.’

在公署: ‘working at offices’

¹⁴² DNTL, II, 5: 1a.

¹⁴³ DNTL, I, 26: 8b, 11a.

¹⁴⁴ DNTL, II, 15: 6b-7a.

The new schedule allowed more space for monarch-minister interactions. Minh Menh did spend a great deal of interest in consulting with two chief ministers, Trinh Hoai Duc and Nguyen Huu Than. In 1822, they were asked, “recent court meeting and daily briefing, how to compare to those of the previous days?” 邇來朝參奏事視與前日何如? In response, Duc and Than replied:

前者日常奏事，臣等退朝已自勞倦，故事多委積。今奏事有日則常日得以專心，辦理部務稍清。¹⁴⁵

Previously, after the daily briefing, we retreated from the court with exhaustion; thus, the affairs piled up. Recently, the briefing is delivered on designated days, so [we are] able to concentrate on working, [and thus] the boards’ businesses are in proper arrangement.

This “positive feedback” resulted from the reform allowing ministers to have twelve working days at their offices. On days with no scheduled audience, the emperor presented ‘green cards’ 綠頭牌 to the court *yamen*, on which they write down the businesses that wish to have imperial instructions.¹⁴⁶

Table 5.7. Monthly court meetings during the Gia Long and Minh Menh reigns

	朝廷會議/ 廷議 Court discussions	奏事 Memorial-presenting audiences	常朝 Frequent court audiences	大朝 Grand court audiences
GL2 (1803)	Official ranks: 2B and above. Time: 4 Day (1 st , 8 th , 15 th , 23 rd) Venue: the Left Corridor 左廡			
GL4 (1805)	Time: 4 days (2 nd , 9 th , 16 th , 24 th) Venue: 武公署 The Office of Military Personnel	Time: Hour of Cat (5-7 am) Venue: the Hall of Diligent Politics		
GL5 (1806)			Time: 4 days (5 th , 10 th , 15 th , 20 th). Venue: the Hall of Diligent Politics. Official ranks 4 A-B and above.	Time: 2 days (1 st , 15 th) Venue: the Hall of Great Harmony Official ranks: 6A-B and above
1/MM2 (1822)			4 days (5, 10, 20, 25)	2 days (1 st , 15 th)
4/MM2 (1822)	4 days (2 nd , 8 th , 16 th , 24 th) Ranks from 3B	9 days (3 rd , 13 th , 23 rd , 7 th , 17 th , 27 th , 9 th , 19 th , 29 th)	4 days (5 th , 25 th , 11 th , 21 st) Venue: the Hall of Diligent Politics	2 days (1 st , 15 th) Venue: the Hall of Great Harmony

¹⁴⁵ DNTL, II, 15: 7b-8a.

¹⁴⁶ DNTL, II, 15: 8a.

	Venue: Left and Right Court Hall 左右朝堂	Venue: the Hall of Diligent Politics		
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Expanding the inner-court structure and palace archives

The ‘intellectualizing bureaucracy’ allowed Minh Menh to enlarge the inner-court structure. The shifting power balance between the civil and military branches had profound impacts on the court operation and explained how memorials came into play as the predominant medium of official correspondence. The new administration gradually eliminated the situation of ‘one court two politics’ through the expansion of the inner court. The process increased not only the staff-number but also their institutional status from secretarial to advisory. The power shift turned the emperor’s office into the heart of Hue's political operation, and for that matter, the final destination of all memorials of the empire.

The increasing role of the inner court, however, came with a dazzling obsession with power-abuse. Palace offices were immediately safeguarded with a new set of regulations. The prudent and detail-minded bureaucratic manager endured long working hours at night, and carefully went through, corrected, and endorsed memorials. The scepticism he placed on established institutions and powerful ministers strongly determined the imperial bureaucratic designs.

Table 5.8. The making of Minh Menh’s inner-court, 1820-1836

Years	Inner court offices and their sub-departments			Locations
MM17 (1836)	北司 Northern Department	南司 Southern Department		
MM14 (1835)	機密院 Privy Council			左廡勤政殿 Left Corridor to the Hall of Diligent Politics
MM 10 (1830)	尚寶曹 Department of Imperial Seals	記注曹 Department of Imperial Journal	圖書曹 Department of Maps and Books	表簿曹 Department of Memorials and Records
	內閣 Grand Secretariat			
MM1 (1820)	侍書院 Palace Office of Books	侍翰院 Palace Office of Records	內翰院 Palace Inner-Office of Records	
	文書房 Office of Records and Books			1826: 東閣 Eastern Hall

				1820: 左廡 Left Corridor
GL2 (1803)	侍書院 Palace Office of Books	侍翰院 Palace Office of Records	尚寶司 Department of Imperial Seals	
GL1 (1802)	侍書院 Palace Office of Books	侍翰院 Palace Office of Records		

The Office of Records and Books was a signatory move to centralize the inner palace information network. The institute first appeared in the Ming period when palace eunuchs invaded the administrative stage. They prevented the Transmission Office from direct submitting memorials to the throne by creating a new inner-court secretary network that single-handedly emperor's accessibility to memorials. In that capacity, they 'monopolized' the paperwork-flow between Grand Secretariat and the emperor.¹⁴⁷ Gia Long and Minh Menh allowed no eunuch to come close to the palace's Secretary Offices. Instead, only graduates were employed to assist the emperor's official works (his library, writings, drafting documents, issuing edicts...) Minh Menh gradually turned them into a well-organized group to monitor all administrative operations of the Six Boards. Their first office was the Left Corridor, located inside the Great Palace Gate 大宮門, laying between the Hall of Great Harmony and the Hall of Diligent Politics. At this location, the office's staff could reach the emperor within a hundred meter-distance. In 1827, Eastern Hall was constructed right behind the Left Corridor, creating more space for both the palace archive and the coming Grand Secretariat (1830). These organs rechanneled all imperial paperwork at the Six Boards and concentrated into the flow that went through those corridors and workplaces that connected to the emperor's office, the Hall of Diligent Politics. Their authority came with a new concept of *thi than* '侍臣' or 'attending officials,' which emerged as early as 1821.¹⁴⁸ In 1826, two *attending officials* were Luong Tien Tuong (Vice-President of the Board of Revenue 戶部右叅知) and Hoang Kim Xan (Vice-President of the Board of Public Works 工部右叅知).¹⁴⁹

The new political environment was a field of paperwork operation, orchestrated by the emperor himself. He set rules for institutional functioning and selected staff whose promotion and demotion was primarily based on working capacity. Every move involved the Grand Secretariat and Privy Council, for instance, was taken

¹⁴⁷ Silas H. L. Wu, "Transmission of Ming Memorials, and the Evolution of the Transmission Network, 1368-1627," *T'oung Pao* 54, no. 4-5 (1968): 278-79.

¹⁴⁸ DNTL, II, 1: 28a-b.

¹⁴⁹ DNTL, II, 38: 2a.

into cautious measures, particularly the carefully-guarded paperwork and official correspondence. The change presented a bureaucratic landscape in which memorials became so essential for administration because the emperor was in the position of trusting no one, but paperwork.

Table 5.9. Chiefs of palace secretary offices and grand secretaries, 1820-1835

Years	Names	Ranks
MM1-1820	Nguyễn Đăng Tuân, Trần Công Tuân, Hứa Đức Đệ, Lê Bá Tú, Hoàng Quýnh, Nguyễn Văn Thuận, Lê Văn Công, Nguyễn Cửu Khánh, Nguyễn Trường Huy, Nguyễn Văn Mưu	
MM2-1821	Nguyễn Đăng Tuân, Trần Công Tuân, Hứa Đức Đệ, Lê Bá Tú, Hoàng Quýnh, Nguyễn Văn Thuận, Lê Văn Công, Nguyễn Cửu Khánh.	
MM3-1822	Hứa Đức Đệ, Hoàng Quýnh	
MM4-1823	Hứa Đức Đệ, Hoàng Quýnh	
MM5-1824	Hoàng Quýnh, Thân Văn Quyền	
MM6-1825	Thân Văn Quyền, Tôn Thất Bạch	
MM7-1826	Trương Đăng Quế, Phan Đình Sỹ	
MM8-1827	Thân Văn Quyền, Phan Đình Sỹ, Phan Khắc Kỳ	4A-B
MM9-1828	Thân Văn Quyền, Tôn Thất Bạch	4A-B
MM10-1829	Grand Secretaries: Phan Thanh Giản, Trương Đăng Quế, Hà Tông Quyền	3A
MM11-1830	Hà Quyền, Trương Đăng Quế, Thân Văn Quyền	3A
MM12-1831	Grand Secretaries: Hoàng Quýnh, Lê Văn Đức, Nguyễn Huy Chiêu, Trương Phúc Đĩnh, Hà Duy Phiên.	3A
MM13-1832	Grand Secretaries Hà Tông Quyền, Thân Văn Quyền, Trương Phúc Đĩnh	3A
MM14-1833	Grand Secretaries Hà Tông Quyền, Trương Phúc Đĩnh, Thân Văn Quyền, Nguyễn Tri Phương, Hoàng Quýnh.	3A

The following table shows appointed Privy Councilors and Grand Secretaries between 1835 and 1841. Two significant features among those men were: first, none was spared from multiple demotions and reprimands; second, they were constantly displaced, even dismissed from their positions. Only three (Hà Tông Quyền, Trương Đăng Quế, and Phan Thanh Giản) held both positions. Minh Mệnh's strategy was to appoint them in shifts, alternatively among Six Boards, Grand Secretariat, and Privy Council. Before the Privy Council came into play, so far, ten officials were selected for the posts of grand secretaries. The situation changed with the introduction of the Privy Council, where Minh Mệnh brought in a wide variety of nominees. Fourteen of them had held the positions during those six years (1835-1841).

Table 5.10. Grand secretaries and grand councillors, 1835-1841

Years	Grand Secretaries (Two positions at a time)	Grand Councillors (Four positions at a time)	Notes
MM15 (1834)	Hà Tông Quyền Trương Phúc Đĩnh Thân Văn Quyền Nguyễn Tri Phương Hoàng Quýnh		
MM16 (1835)	Hà Tông Quyền Nguyễn Tri Phương Hoàng Quýnh <i>Trương Đăng Quế</i>	Nguyễn Kim Bảng <i>Trương Đăng Quế</i> Phan Bá Đạt Phan Thanh Giản	Trương Đăng Quế transferred to the Grand Secretariat. Nguyễn Kim Bảng returned to the board.
MM17 (1836)	<i>Hà Tông Quyền</i> Lê Bá Tú Nguyễn Tri Phương	<i>Hà Tông Quyền</i> Nguyễn Khoa Minh Trương Đăng Quế Phan Bá Đạt	Phan Bá Đạt returned to the board.
MM18 (1837)	<i>Hà Tông Quyền</i> Nguyễn Tri Phương	<i>Hà Tông Quyền</i> Trương Đăng Quế Nguyễn Khoa Minh Đoàn Khiêm Quang Tri Nguyễn Phương	Nguyễn Khoa Minh dismissed to the board.
MM19 (1838)	<i>Hà Tông Quyền</i> Nguyễn Tri Phương	<i>Trương Đăng Quế</i> <i>Hà Tông Quyền</i> Phan Thanh Giản Tôn Thất Bạch	
MM20 (1839)	Lâm Duy Nghĩa Hoàng Quýnh Nguyễn Tri Phương	Trương Đăng Quế Hà Tông Quyền Lê Văn Đức Lê Đăng Doanh Hà Duy Phiên Đặng Văn Thiêm	
MM 21 (1840)	Lâm Duy Nghĩa Nguyễn Tri Phương Lê Bá Tú Trương Văn Uyển	Trương Đăng Quế Phan Thanh Giản Nguyễn Trung Mậu Lê Đăng Doanh	
MM22 (1841)		Trương Đăng Quế	顧命大臣

Notes: those whose names are underlined, held both positions.

For three decades between 1802 and 1835, the inner court evolved from a fragmented group of emperor's 'personal' secretaries and books and seal keepers to an advisory and executive body. In 1834, Grand Secretariat staff 內閣屬員 increased from twenty-eight to thirty.¹⁵⁰ Later, sixteen Privy Council personnel was added to the palace paperwork-operation system. The two organizations managed all papers that

¹⁵⁰ DNTL, II, 138: 26b.

moves in and out of the Grand Palace and became the central hub of information and bureaucratic operation of the realm.

But the rapid expansion of the inner court came with a little bit of trouble. The institutions themselves turned out to be the new source of Minh Menh's headache. It took four decades for the memorial system to take shape in Hue. Following institutional innovation, paratextual elements such as signatures, layouts, imprints, and character elevation were modified under a constantly-shifting bureaucratic environment. In 1788, months after Congdong claimed the leading role of operating official documents in Saigon, regulations of paperwork-circulation were elaborated with new instructions. Paperwork in the form of petitions claiming innocence, for instance, should be supplemented with clear indications of name and resident place.¹⁵¹ Their submission had to be reviewed and endorsed by chief local officials (公同或公堂官批憑) before flowing upward in the bureaucratic system.¹⁵² The Nguyen prince (Nguyen Phuc Anh) realized the indispensable role of written correspondence in facilitating bureaucratic establishment. Three decades of Tayson's disruption (1771-1802) largely destroyed the educational structure and significantly reduced the volume of trained scholars. Not only did Minh Menh advance written communication as a foundational mechanism of centralized bureaucracy but also leveraged the revitalization of the local gentry for more competent scholar-officials. As documenting politics became a standard norm, legal procedures, local statistics, taxation, land registration, and exchanged information were entered into documentation. In return, the paperwork's proliferation generated tremendous pressure upon Hue's insufficient personnel.

The Nguyen bureaucrats needed fifteen years to adjust where comprehensive administrative reform was required because there stood many layers between the monarch and provincial officials. A more substantial inner court was high anticipation, empowered with a more reliable capacity of efficiently handling complicated paperwork. To enrich the information flow to the metropolitan, a great deal of investment was spent on postal infrastructure. By 1802, although a tentatively interconnected postal line stretched from the Sino-Vietnamese border to Gia Dinh, insufficient regulation and organization could not guarantee smooth operations of papers' movement. Which official levels were allowed to memorialize? Types of

¹⁵¹ DNTL, I, 3: 23b.

¹⁵² DNTL, I, 4: 13b.

deployed documents? The movement of paperwork within an ambiguously-defined and staff-shortened Six Boards and Congdong? We do not have definite answers yet.

By 1794, only documents related to the King, *Congdong*, and the crown prince were subjected to official delivery.¹⁵³ When the demand emerged following increasing administrative complexity, the quantity of paperwork that entered correspondence sharply enlarged. Four years later, the king had to intervene and reserved postal service only for “urgent official affairs” 緊要公務.¹⁵⁴ The mechanism of document processing, however, was simplified under the Gia Long reign, centripetal toward the weekly courtier discussion 廷議.¹⁵⁵

Minh Menh was not pleased with the “indirect” monitoring of paperwork. When officials recommended the *non-action* practice 無爲 of imperial rule,¹⁵⁶ he immediately declared to the court:

“近有上言者勸朕每事委臣下垂拱無爲以法古者之治。朕思之有所未喻安有事事委棄垂衣拱手以博無爲之名哉?”¹⁵⁷

Recently, there was a submission that I should rely on courtiers [to rule], droop down my cloth, fold my arms on my chest,¹⁵⁸ and do nothing to follow the politics of antiquity. I have pondered about it, and unable to comprehend that if all the affairs leave untouched, [and I only] droop down the cloth and fold my arms on my chest, how can that becomes [the way] to achieve the reputation of being *non-action* 無爲.

One of his primary concerns was to seek uninterrupted control of official documents. The reform was carried out by attaching to two major agendas: first, centralizing palace communication; second, redefining paperwork’s organizations and

¹⁵³ DNTL, I, 7: 2a.

¹⁵⁴ DNTL, I, 9: 37a.

¹⁵⁵ DNTL, I, 26: 8b.

¹⁵⁶ *Wuwei* 無爲 or non-action emerged in classical china as a guiding concept of human life and political practice, and later appeared in most of the ancient Chinese schools of thought. It entered Daoism and became one of the major notions that represents “a universal rule in guiding human life and wisdom in achieving political rule and social order.” Among the Confucian thinkers, the term was defined as nonassertiveness, a practice that “requires political leaders to have the internal virtue to guard against the lust of power and arbitrary will” or bias intervention into the affairs. See Xuezhi Guo, *The Ideal Chinese Political Leader: A Historical and Cultural Perspective* (Westport, CT.: Praeger, 2002), note 7, 84; Benjamin I. Schwartz, *The World of Thought in Ancient China* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985).

¹⁵⁷ DNTL, II, 5: 1a-b.

¹⁵⁸ “Drooping down cloth and folding hands on one’s chest” 下垂拱/ 垂衣拱手 as politically metaphoric gestures of *non-action*.

formats. The design of official documents was part of Minh Menh's power projection, which involved empire-making, state-building, documentation of the state, and archivalization of bureaucratic papers. The use of written records as an everyday administrative practice was linked to emerging graduate intellectuals. While written correspondences allowed them to establish socio-political lives within the administration, they generated an ecology for scholar-officials to form a growing community inside the bureaucracy. These newly trained mandarins stood behind the adoption of written governance and became die-hard devotees to the emperor's administrative vision.

Those innovations, however, triggered new problems in the central bureaucracy. Internal conflicts among court factions prevailed, partly driven by the burgeoning official records and document administration. Written correspondence required writing competency, and threatened some of the most powerful military figures in the land with power erosion. The administrative authority now depended on the capability of accessing information and managing complex procedures, which were much favored by young court scholars. The competition between civil and military personnel reflected the nature of transitional governance in Hue, the situation of "*one court, two politics*." As seen in the above case of using a verbal message for correspondence, Minh Menh's obsession with non-documenting administrative operations was formidable. Hue court demanded a highly elaborate system of rapid and efficient communication based on writing. Royal decrees, memorials, and court papers enlarged the body of paperwork and generated tremendous pressures on the inner court and Six Boards while engaging with increasingly complex written politics. The growth of palace records challenged the very nature of the Nguyen administration in both theoretical and practical frameworks. Firstly, it required the recognition of paperwork as the key measure of a "civilized" empire that was envisioned in the traditional East Asian political theory.¹⁵⁹ Secondly was the competency to orchestrate intricate paperwork-system in conjunction with the burgeoning state monopolies over trade, agriculture, hydraulic construction, taxation, and warfare.

In both cases, considerable personnel employment and new document regulations were required. The institutional use of papers claimed systematic treatments of the palace archivalization. Imperial archives resulted from careful management of processing, cataloguing, and preserving. In addition, the holding files

¹⁵⁹ See more on Connery, *The Empire of the Text*, 1998.

were the constant readiness for imperial consultation and dynastic compilation.¹⁶⁰ The modern ‘narrow’, conventional notion of state archives points mainly to the restoration of bureaucratic records (of judicial, administrative, military, commercial, and diplomatic). By achieving that occupation, the emergence of the palace archive (from 1826, and particularly from 1829, with the birth of the Grand Secretariat),¹⁶¹ profoundly redefined the Nguyen political culture and the way officials run the state based on practical writing. In 1826, the Eastern Tower was constructed behind the Left Corridor where Hue bureaucrats gathered and prepared for their daily meetings (建東閣在左廡之後).¹⁶²

Apart from document-holding, the Eastern Tower was a multi-functional, frequently administration-operated space, including hosting imperial audiences and banquets.¹⁶³ In that sense, the palace archive was not a dark and dusty corner of the Forbidden City, but a dynamic ground of administrative exhibition, where storing documents must be at the ready for consultations and where paperwork was an integral part of decision-making. This archival practice was attributed to the idea of official records: “*the politics of kings Wen and Wu placed on tablets,*” and they are foundational to the dynastic governance.¹⁶⁴ Ministers and courtiers were requested to work with paperwork scrupulously while having themselves frequently monitored. The preface of the dynastic *huidian* affirmed the state’s function to compile and promulgate books and records (國家創制立法必頒召布尚書). The exemplary set by ancient sage kings meant to be followed by posterity. Therefore, “imperial-direct” 欽

¹⁶⁰ Liu Xie’s *Wen xin diao long* shows how genre of official writings entered political philosophy and projected different forms of authoritative symbolism. Cai Yong’s *Duduan* (獨斷) indicates how standardized official correspondence took part in administrative performance of an empire. Recently, Max Fölster (Center for the study of Manuscript Culture-CSMC, Hamburg) discusses the differentiation between “archive” and library in Han’s political practice and its role in shaping the court culture of the time. Fölster, “Libraries and Archives in the Former Han Dynasty (206 BCE–9 CE): Arguing for a Distinction.” For a brief view on Chinese imperial archives, see Wenxian Zhang, “Dang An: A Brief History of the Chinese Imperial Archives and Its Administration,” *Journal of Archival Organization* 2, no. 1–2 (June 22, 2004): 17–38; Wenxian Zhang, “The Yellow Register Archives of Imperial Ming China,” *Libraries & the Cultural Record* 43, no. 2 (2008): 148–75; Beatrice S. Bartlett, “An Archival Revival: The Qing Central Government Archives in Peking Today,” *Qingshi Wenti* 4, no. 6 (1981): 81–110; Bartlett, “Qing Statesmen, Archivists, and Historians and the Question of Memory,” 417–426; Elliott, *The Manchu-Language Archives*, 2001.

¹⁶¹ Not to confuse with the Hall of Book-storage, an “archive” of the Six Boards, constructed outside the Grand Palace in 1825 to restore mostly official records of taxes, land and population registration. MMCY, 18: 8b; DNTL, II, 33: 15b.

¹⁶² DNTL, II, 38: 11b.

¹⁶³ DNTL, II, 40: 24b; 41: 14b; 43: 10a, 13a.

¹⁶⁴ *Ngữ Văn Hán Nôm, Vol. 1: Tư Thư* 四書 (*Chinese Classic Texts, Vol.1: Four Books*) (Hà Nội: Nxb Khoa học Xã hội, 2004), 132. Original text, “哀公問政。子曰：‘文、武之政，布在方策’。 It was referenced by Nguyen officials at the preface of *HDSL*. See *HDSL*, Preface (序): 1a, 4a.

奉, edicts 旨諭, boards' records, metropolitan and provincial memorials 內外章奏, if approved by imperial edicts 內外章奏經奉旨準, must be catalogued 分門定類 based on the date of issue. Because the files related to the essentiality of politics 有關係政體, they are necessary to be thoroughly defined, classified and preserved.¹⁶⁵

The archival arrangement embodied some of the dynastic upheld perceptions of storing paperwork and the role they played in court politics. While the boards' files were deposited outside the palace compound (*the Tower of Book-Storage* 藏書樓),¹⁶⁶ the Eastern Tower served as a documentary center for the palace bureaucracy, including the Grand Secretariat, Privy Council, and the emperor. Locating behind the Left Corridor, where courtiers gathered for daily and weekly audiences, the palace archive was one of the most interesting, but neglected aspects of the dynasty's political culture. The place, not only was a space of knowledge in our modern treatment of archives¹⁶⁷ but possessed significant political symbolism and practical uniqueness of Vietnamese imperial states. Like the *Archives du Parlement de Paris* and *Chambre des comptes de Paris* of early modern France, born at the dawn of the emerging modern age, of creating governmental secretaries and the precursors of ministers; Hue state archives formed a particular bureaucratic atmosphere and network that defined governed methods and official culture of the time.¹⁶⁸

"There is no political power without control of the archives", claimed Jacques Derrida.¹⁶⁹ It would also be true that "there is no power without archives".¹⁷⁰ The term itself, derived from ancient Greek and Latin, referred to a space of knowledge and institution that personifies sociopolitical power and control.¹⁷¹ The Nguyen terms, Hall of Book-Storage and Eastern Tower, inclined to the classical thoughts of the interaction between records of Sages' teachings, paperwork, and the conducting of

¹⁶⁵ *HDSL*, Preface (序): 1a, 4a.

¹⁶⁶ *MMCY*, 18: 8b; *DNTL*, II, 33: 15b.

¹⁶⁷ Jeannette A. Bastian, "Moving the Margins to the Middle: Reconciling 'the Archive' with the Archives," in *Engaging with Records and Archives: Histories and Theories*, ed. Fiorella Foscari et al. (London: Facet Publishing, 2016), 3.; Friedrich and Dillon, *The Birth of the Archive*, 5–6.

¹⁶⁸ Markus Friedrich. *The birth of archives* (2018), 33-34.

¹⁶⁹ Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), p. 4.

¹⁷⁰ Eric Ketelaar, "The Panoptical Archive," in *Archives, Documentation, and Institutions of Social Memory. Essays from the Sawyer Seminar*, ed. Francis X. Blouin and William G. Rosenberg (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2006), 144.

¹⁷¹ Roberto G. Echevarria, *Myth and Archive: A Theory of Latin American Narrative* (Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1995), 31.

administrative authority.¹⁷² Minh Menh found the necessity of a palace archive from the increasing number of official documents and its legitimate symbolism of political civility 文獻. In return, the palace archive profoundly redesigned Hue's bureaucratic operation and reshaped institutions and structures of executive power.

While palace archives became part of the bureaucratic space, emerging 'written bureaucracy' via the emperor's documents and memorials shifted information control to the inner palace. Minh Menh's careful treatment of bureaucratic documents derived from a high appreciation of archived files. Five months before the Grand Secretariat was formed, Six Boards were instructed to collect all stored memorials and files and bound them together in volumes (命六部諸衙纂輯體例章奏). The royal concern was addressed: "the affairs are plenty, paperwork is increasingly intricate. As time passes, many [documents] would be lost. If there is no effort to review and bind them in volumes, there will be no regulations to conduct daily businesses."¹⁷³ Not only were the papers essential to establish governing procedures, but also they represented heritages of prosperous times that deserved to be much appreciated. In Minh Menh's own words, "The rise of kings and emperors always left with records of their times. Among those, there are virtuous politics 善政 and fine regulations 良法 that should be compiled into books, [so that they] can maintain for long" (必須登載成編然後, 可以垂久遠). The emperor highlighted the significance of the documentary legacy of the dynasty. In his words, Gia Long was recognized because he "had expanded the politics [so it can be] vividly checked" 政治恢張, 歷歷可考. Under his reign, "antiquity's regulations are examined; established statutes are reviewed; therefore, [the applied laws] are adapted and made suitable to the time" (遠稽古範, 近監成憲, 與建顯設宜惟其辰). To meet the imperial design of documentary preservation; edicts (諭旨), approved regulations (欽定體例), memorials from Six Boards, provinces (六部奏準及內外章奏), and significant judicial files (文移案牘) that are related to

¹⁷² On the subject of cross-culture perceptions of library and archives, see CSMC working paper, including my brief note on those in the imperial Vietnam, Martin Delhey et al., "Wordlists for Libraries and Closely Related Phenomena in Different Manuscript Cultures from Asia, Africa and Europe" (Hamburg, 2015), Link to this document: http://www.manuscript-cultures.uni-hamburg.de/papers_e.html (accessed on October 15, 2017).

¹⁷³ DNTL, II, 60: 39a. Original text, "就中, 機務至眾, 卷帙日繁, 歲月易流或有散逸, 黨非一番纂輯, 何以成典例而示經常."

politics (有關於政務) must be composed in volumes; so that they could be handily-accessible conservation and review”.¹⁷⁴

The Grand Secretariat, emerging in 1829, was profoundly attached to that process of archival institutionalization. Its four departments 曹 were functionally (partly or fully) archival: 1. Department of Imperial Seals 尚寶曹, 2. Department of Records 記注曹, 3. Department of Books and Maps 圖書曹, and 4. Department of Records and Petitions 表簿曹. Their official responsibilities were addressed in detailed procedures which indicated Hue’s energetic interest in documenting and archiving the state:

尚寶曹奉守寶璽諸冊，竝諸衙印篆關防圖記鈐記牙牌各項，竝諭旨諸副本，恩詔敕諭諸紅本，詔敕誥命諸草本。又凡詔旨敕諭已蒙欽定及內外章疏冊籍已準辦者，遵奉用寶事清照例對同諸衙換交照辦。其間章疏冊籍各本，何本奉有硃批，硃圈，硃點者，仍於副本錄送，其紅本交表簿曹奉守。又在京諸衙及在外章疏，間有不合已經奏明請駁者，各取具片錄存照。

The Department of Imperial Seals keeps records of seal usages, office seals and certified seals of court departments,¹⁷⁵ duplicated imperial edicts and proclamations (諭旨諸副本), vermilion versions of merciful edicts and proclamations (恩詔敕諭諸紅本),¹⁷⁶ drafts of imperial ordinances, instructions, edicts, and proclamations (詔敕誥命諸草本).¹⁷⁷ If the edicts, proclamations, and ordinances are under imperial approval (欽定); metropolitan and provincial documents are approved for implementation, [the Department] stamps seals and dispatches for implementation accordingly. Among those petitions and paperwork, for the ones that have the emperor’s endorsements, selections, and marks (硃批, 硃圈, 硃點), [the department] copies and delivers the duplicates (副本) [for implementation], while sends the vermilion versions (紅本) to the Department of Records and Petitions (表簿曹) for preservation. For all inappropriate memorials and petitions (章疏) involving metropolitan and local offices that [officials] have memorialized to reject, [the department] has them copied all, then kept for further review (存照).

記注曹奉守尚方筆硯，遇有郊祀，廟饗及諸忌辰，禮部恭進祝文，候書御名者，恭進筆硯。又奉帝御殿聽政及朝會巡幸，專記起居綸音暨百司

¹⁷⁴ DNTL, II, 60: 39a-b. The original text, “凡欽奉諭旨，欽定體例，竝六部奏準及內外章奏，一切文移案牘，有關於政務者，分門定類，接其年月前後一一類編成集，務期綱舉目張井井有條以備查覈而重定式。”

¹⁷⁵ Samples of the records of daily deployment of imperial seals (寶璽諸冊), see report of the Board of Personnel (吏部) on the use of seal “救命之寶” on 20/06/1833 (GL14/5/3), *MMCB*, 46: p. 176 (Microfilm, Hawai’i).

¹⁷⁶ Edicts and proclamations that were personally written by the emperor in red ink.

¹⁷⁷ For instance, see the draft of Minh Menh’s proclamation of enthronement in *MMCB*, 2: 1.

所上奏議章劄皆記之。吏兵二部以接到內外發遞章疏冊籍接數錄交，必稽覈其日晨之遲早，有違悞者，具事奏明又命名冊。及太醫院所進御藥表，集善堂贊善等員所上諸皇子講學日記冊，皆收掌之。又欽定諸體例，及內外推舉章疏，降罰處分案件，及遞年秋審冊，皆奉守其副本以備稽考。

The Department of Records keeps the emperor's writing equipment (尚方筆硯), [...] when the emperor is in audiences, court meetings, and on tours, [the department] records his speeches and activities, and memorials that presented to him. When the Boards of Personnel and Defense submit metropolitan and provincial memorials, [the department] reviews the time of submission, makes a list, and reports any wrongdoing. All medical recipes submitted by the Imperial Medical Bureau (太醫院) and reports on princes' learning ... are kept. Duplicates (副本) of the emperor-approved [documents], metropolitan and provincial petitions of recommendation, judicial rulings, legal documents, and records of the Autumn Assizes are kept for further assessment.

圖書曹奉守御製詩文，及官書畫圖邦交屬國公文。

The Department of Books and Maps (圖書曹) keeps imperial compilations, books and maps, diplomatic files, and those of the vassal polities.

表簿曹奉守硃批、硃圈、硃點之紅本及內外表章簿籍諸副本。¹⁷⁸

The Department of Records and Petitions keeps vermilion documents (紅本) of the emperor's endorsements, rejections, and marks (硃批, 硃圈, and 硃點), and duplicates of the metropolitan and provincial memorials and records.

Except for cadastral and demographic records, the small tower behind the courtier's waiting hall was the empire's documentary center. It was the place where all imperial communication and decision-making were preserved in written forms. Located conveniently at the right of the Great Grand Palace Gate (大宮門), and minutes-walk from all emperor's major working spots (Hall of Great Harmony 太和殿, Hall of industrious politics 勤政殿...), the archive was designed to engage closely with the inner palace network.¹⁷⁹

Although the production and management of bureaucratic documents became increasingly professionalized, paperwork's acceleration was increasingly challenging to the dynasty. Compared to Ming and Qing China where tens of millions of documents were restored inside the Forbidden City or fourteenth century Papal State with an average of 50,000 documents a year,¹⁸⁰ Hue bureaucracy was more modest in

¹⁷⁸ DNTL, II, 63: 27b-28a.

¹⁷⁹ See the plan of Hue's Inner Imperial City 皇城內 in 1909.

¹⁸⁰ Zhongguo di yi lishi dang'an guan 中国第一历史档案馆, *Zhongguo Diyi Lishi Dangangan Guancang Dangan Gaishu* 中国第一历史档案馆馆藏档案概述 (*An Introduction to the Contents of the First Historical Archives of China*) (Beijing: Dangan chubanshe, 1985), 3, 27.

Bartlett, "An Archival Revival: The Qing Central Government Archives in Peking Today." Philip A. Kuhn, "News From the First Historical Archives, Beijing," *Ch'ing-Shih Wen-t'i* 5, no. 2 (1984):

scale. So was its administrative organization. The Grand Secretariat was numbered thirty to thirty-four staff. From 1834, the inner court added eighteen more workings at the Privy Council.¹⁸¹ In other words, fifty personnel managed the whole empire's paperwork flow, making copies, drafting the emperor's edicts, preparing *tally suggestions*, applying official seals, discussing with the Boards, and restoring official records. As illustrated above, Hanlin chiefs were desperate for staff shortages; personnel insufficiency was common among the Boards whose staffs were only numbered between eighty and 120.¹⁸² In 1823, the Board of Defense made the case to Minh Menh, claiming that its seventy clerks (未入流書吏) were deficient in handling abundant paperwork (冊籍紛繁, 承辦不給).¹⁸³

Document-processing and archival operations were themselves daunting tasks. Emerging official papers gave rise to a privileged bureaucratic community whose information accessibility and intimacy to the emperor defined the decision-making cohort in Hue. These men, Truong Dang Que, Ha Tong Quyen, Phan Huy Thuc, Nguyen Khoa Minh, Phan Thanh Gian, Than Van Quyen, and Ha Duy Phien, were small in number, acted in a state of no existed experience of the archival organization. Minh Menh and his ministers were engaging in a “trial and error” kind of bureaucratic execution. The paperwork system was sophisticated, particularly the flow of vermilion-endorsed memorials which resulted in many emerging document-involved

135–42; Nancy Park and Robert Antony, “Archival Research in Qing Legal History,” *Late Imperial China* 14, no. 1 (1993): 93–129; Elliott, “The Manchu-Language Archives”; Beatrice S. Bartlett, “Research Note: The Newly Digitized Archives Program at China’s Number One Historical Archives, Beijing,” *Late Imperial China* 32, no. 1 (2011): 1–12.

A useful analysis of the Qing Palace archival documents, see Endymion Wilkson, ed., *Chinese History: A Manual*, rev. ed. (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2000), chapter 50. I also mentioned above voluminous published facsimiles and transcriptions of the Qing *dangan* (Palace documents, 檔案), such as: *Gongzhongdang Kangxi Chao Zouzhe* 宮中檔康熙朝奏摺 (*Secret Palace Memorials of the Kangxi Reign, 9 Volumes*) (Taipei: National Palace Museum, 1975 – 1977); *Gongzhongdang Yongzheng Chao Zouzhe* 宮中檔雍正朝奏摺 (*Secret Palace Memorials of the Yongzheng Reign, 32 Volumes*) (Taipei: National Palace Museum, 1977-1980); *Gongzhongdang Qianlong Chao Zouzhe* 宮中檔乾隆朝奏摺 (*Secret Palace Memorials of the Qianlong Reign, 75 Volumes*) (Taipei: National Palace Museum, 1982 – 1988); 中国第一历史档案馆 *Zhongguo di yi lishi dangan guan, Kangxi Chao Hanwen Zhupi Zouzhe Huibian* 康熙朝漢文朱批奏摺彙編 (*Collection of Memorials in Chinese with Imperial Comments by the Emperor Kangxi, 8 Volumes*) (Beijing: Dangan chubanshe, 1984); 中国第一历史档案馆 *Zhongguo di yi lishi dangan guan, Yongzheng Chao Hanwen Zhupi Zouzhe Huibian* 雍正朝漢文朱批奏摺彙編 (*Collection of Memorials in Chinese with Imperial Comments by Emperor Yongzheng, 40 Vols*) (Hangzhou: Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 1989); *Nian Gengyao Zouzhe Zhuanji* 年羹堯奏摺專輯 (*The Memorials of Nian Gengyao, 3 Volumes*) (Taipei: National Palace Museum, 1971). On early modern Western official archives, see Friedrich. *The birth of archives*, (20018), p. 17.

¹⁸¹ HDSL, 8. The regulation for Privy Council’s establishment did not reveal its archival function. DNTL, II, 140: 10a-11b.

¹⁸² HDSL, book 8.

¹⁸³ DNTL, II, 21: 16b.

challenges. As early as 1822, the storage of vermilion records was placed under question:

定諸衙奉守紅本例:

如吏部奉旨事關戶部者, 紅本交戶部. 戶部錄送吏部存照. 或吏部所奏之事, 令戶部代奉批准, 者紅本交吏部. 吏部亦錄送戶部存照. 或吏部奉旨事關戶禮兵三部, 而事重在禮部, 紅本交禮部. 禮部亦錄送吏戶兵三部存照. 餘以此推. 諸地方疏冊所關之, 守紅本, 其錄送副本畱文書房.¹⁸⁴

Established regulations for keeping vermilion records among the court departments:

If the Board of Personnel [followed the imperial command] conducts an affair, [but] the affair related to the Board of Revenue, vermilion papers should be kept by the Board of Revenue, who should deliver a copy to the Board of Personnel for future reference (存照). Or if the affair is submitted by the Board of Personnel, but the Board of Revenue is authorized to execute, the vermilion record is assigned to the Board of Personnel to make a copy and send it to the Board of Revenue for further review. Or the affair is authorized to the Board of Personnel 吏部奉旨, but concerned three Boards of Revenue, Rites, and Defense, and among those, the Board of Rites is most involved, the vermilion record is commissioned to the Board of Rites, who makes three copies and delivers to the Boards of Personnel, Revenue, and Defense for further examination. Other matters should follow the same norm. Court institutes retain vermilion records related to local affairs of their responsibility and deliver copies of them to keep at the Palace Secretary Office.

By that time, however, the inner palace institute (文書房) was not responsible to manage the memorial system, but store part of the copies of the original paperwork. As a result, endorsed documents were scattered at all metropolitan offices. Since many were copied and kept at the involved organs for assessment, documentary decentralization caused a dramatic increase in exchanging documents among the Boards. The forming of the palace archive hoped to end that paperwork turmoil by providing centralization of documents' restoration. The task was partly achieved when the Grand Secretariat came into play in 1829 but the chaos caused by bureaucratic documents was far from over. This time, too many of them were pouring into the Forbidden City. By 1834, Minh Menh cautioned the bureaucrats that "buffaloes are

¹⁸⁴ DNTL, II, 15: 9a.

sweating” because of transporting documents.¹⁸⁵ What is more, Six Boards laid responsibility on each other in delayed paperwork processing (先是諭旨發下，有事關二部，互相諉不肯認辦者). The disruption left the emperor with no choice but to place new authority upon the censors (科道) of overseeing paperwork circulation.¹⁸⁶

Beyond the palace, the anxiety of sophisticated paperwork swept to provinces where officials felt the heat of increasing documentary obligation. In an 1836-greetings memorial 請安奏, General-governor Nguyen Van Tram sought authorization for local offices to reject redundant submitted papers related to occasional legal cases. Giving a suggested list included records of family affairs, marital status, and land registration, the mandarin believed that “Not all of these cases should be necessarily documented, created legal profiles, and recorded interrogations so that [provincial offices] are able to prevent superfluous judicial papers. For cases that have already been investigated, they should be dismissed if there are withdrawal requests.”¹⁸⁷ Unsurprisingly, Minh Menh was astounded by the proposal. He had the court debated before the idea was terminated. Part of the pressure faced by the Nguyen dynasty involved “governing a complex and increasingly-dynamic society with a small bureaucracy.”¹⁸⁸ The management of paperwork and archives was part of the escalating administrative sophistication that was blooming in a rapidly modernizing society.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁵ DNTL, II, 109: 13b-14a.

¹⁸⁶ DNTL, II, 141: 12a-b.

¹⁸⁷ DNTL, II, 172: 7a-b. Original text, “凡戶婚田土及雜犯母須一一立案取供以省案牘。何事已經控拏而求息者聽其退訟”

¹⁸⁸ The matter is compatible to that of the Qing China to some extent. See Philip A. Kuhn and Pierre-Etienne. Will, *Origins of the Modern Chinese State* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2002), 21.

¹⁸⁹ Early nineteenth century Vietnam was an underfunded state, run by an under-numbered bureaucrats whose failure to keep up with social and economic dynamism, and unable to transformed itself into an early modern fiscal-state, as seen in the early modern Europe. Alexander Woodside touched upon the topic by analyzing provincial administration under the Nguyen. See Woodside, *Vietnam and the Chinese Model*, 141–52. I also develop some of this theme in the coming published chapter, Liêm, *Village rebellions and social violence in early nineteenth century Vietnam*. The same situation occurred in China in the late imperial period, through the sharp increase of the ratio of subjects to state-appointed officials. See James Lee C. Campbell and Wang Feng, “Positive Check or Chinese Checks?,” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 61, no. 2 (May 2002): 600; Colin McEvedy and Richard Jones, *Atlas of World Population History* (London: Penguin, 1978), 166.

V. 3. Emerging memorials

The growing administrative role of memorials between 1802 and 1841 was among the most significant political transformations of the Nguyen political culture. Its meaning was grounded on the fact that memorials became the most popular channel of official communication between local-central government, and among central institutions with the emperor. The quantity and quality of memorials indicate how well-functioning the bureaucracy was connected, and the scale of accountability of the state.

Rising inter-bureaucratic interaction was featured through the escalating exchanged documents. They are paperwork flow among different governmental levels for authentication, clarification, discussion, report, and inspection. Those documents entered an intricate paperwork network that the Nguyen court paid enormous attention to constructing and regularising. In 1835, the court presented detailed and systematic instructions for their usage. They were listed in all forms of correspondence and proper types of record employment.¹⁹⁰

Table 5.11. Types of exchanged documents, 1835

Document types	Correspondence functions
Tu di 咨移 [exchange document]	Among equal institutions
Giao thi 教示 [instructions]	To inferior personnel
Tu trinh 咨呈 [replied (submitted) documents]	Responding to 咨移
Truyen thi 傳示 [transmitting orders]	Congdong gives orders
Chieu hoi 照會 [requests, orders].	To court institutions such as Palace Storehouses 內務府, Treasury, Military Storehouse 武庫, and court departments 寺, 監.
Trat 札 [orders]	Communication with officials of the sixth rank and below
Trinh van 呈文 [report]	Reports
Tu 咨 [requests, orders]	Orders are sent to local officials and personnel.
Bam 稟 [reports]	Submitted by people, local officials, and personnel.

Several of these types are recognized in the Minh Menh collection of palace paperwork. They include exchanges 咨, reply 覆, inventories 片錄, report 稟, orders 申, instructions 札飭, certificate 憑, reports 咨呈, replied reports 覆呈, announcements 通知, and orders 照會. Many were lost (or excluded from the archives)

¹⁹⁰ DNTL, II, 140: 30b-32b.

partly because of their “subordinate” communication role. The papers, remained in the palace storage, principally engaged in exchanges with the central government. Each of these types owns specific responsibilities corresponding with the intended administrative level. The chart below describes the scale of the surviving Minh Menh’s exchanged documents. The highest number comes from replied reports 覆 (868 documents), which usually contain clarification and response to official enquiries. Submitted reports 呈 (86 documents), exchanges 咨 (211 documents), inventories 片錄 (206 documents), and reports 稟 (115 documents) were also regularly employed. In total, they contribute 7,3 % of the remaining Minh Menh palace records.

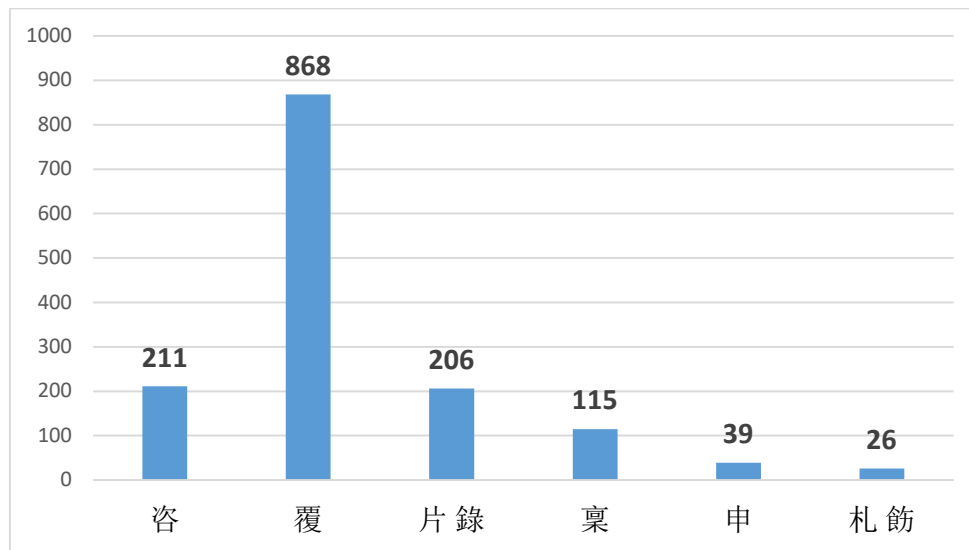


Chart 5.3. Extant exchanged documents of the Minh Menh reign, 1820-1841
 Notes: 咨 (orders); 覆 (replied reports), 片錄 (inventories), 稟 (reports), 申 (reports of clarification/ explanation), 札飭 (instructions)

The thriving memorials and exchanged paperwork were responsible for the promotion of intellectual engagement with the administration. As discussed in chapter I, part of Minh Menh's political ambition was to replace the egotistical military generals with a new generation of loyal Confucian scholars. By immersing the bureaucracy into a dynamic scholarly atmosphere, his desire for paperwork-based governance arose with flourishing record production at all administrative levels. Diverse document-exchange was benefited from the blossoming literati entrance into officialdom. Among the surviving Minh Menh paperwork, 59% reportedly belonged to the central bureaucracy, while 41% was owned by local administrations.

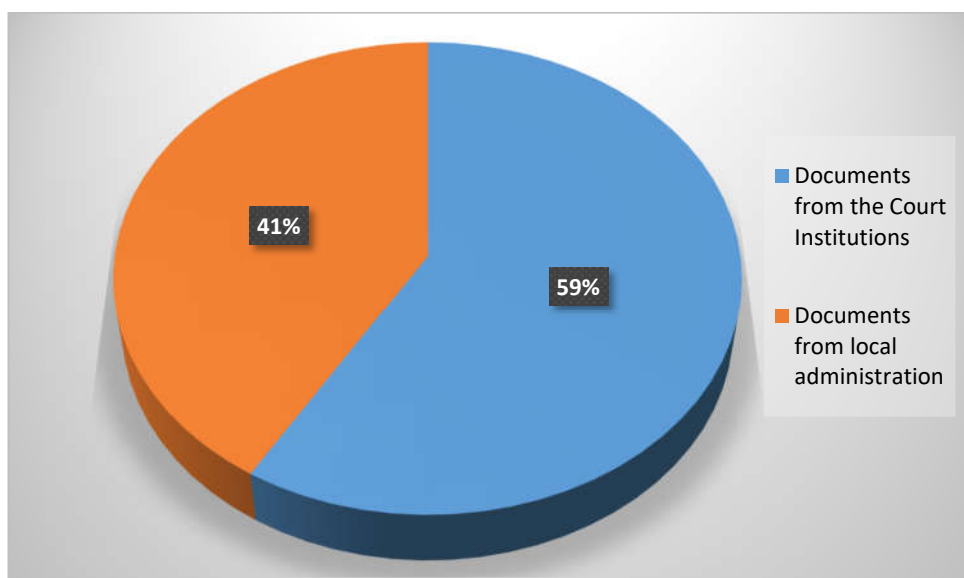


Chart 5.4. Origins of the remaining Minh Menh paperwork (by percentage)

Source: author

The two following charts exhibit more detail in those numbers and analyze the proportion of shared contributions made by various institutions and provinces. At the central court, while the army provided the highest number of remaining records (1,024), Grand Secretariat and Six Boards were central players in paperwork performance. These organs not only formed the primary network of document flow but also were key paperwork-producers (3,877 documents in total). Palace institutions keep the state functioning as a bridge between the emperor, central bureaucrats and local government. Memorials, in particular, occupied the most considerable portion of the existing palace paperwork. The chart below illustrates the production of memorials during the Gia Long and Minh Menh reigns. Since a significant volume of documents was destroyed, we may not be able to come close enough to the original collection's full scale. However, it is not so exaggerated to say that from the ashes of this tragedy of paperwork-destruction, the extant might reveal some useful suggestions for the understanding of trends and transformation in Hue bureaucracy.

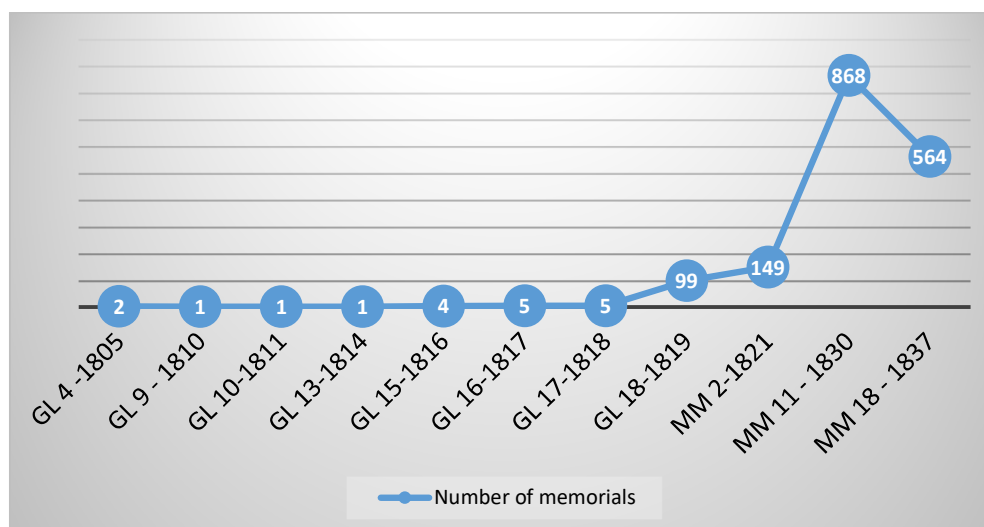


Chart 5.5. Surviving Nguyen palace memorials, 1805-1837

Source: author

The collection of Gia Long memorials, however, is insufficient in number. They are dominantly dedicated to cadastral and demographic reports, following the ruler's inquiries after he united the realm in 1802. Among the existing body, ninety-nine documents of the GL18 (1819) are petitions 啓 and submitted documents 上進. They are typologically identical to memorials but were probably destined for the crown prince.¹⁹¹ They form volume 5 of the Gia Long palace paperwork, which solely contained medical reports that involved the emperor's last year. Some of the documents, like the petition 啓 of the deputy chief of the Academy of Medicine 太醫院, Doan Van Hoa on Gia Long's medical treatment (08/01/1820) bore endorsements. The rescripts usually reflected complements on the royal physicians and wishes for the emperor's good health.¹⁹² The petition on 20/12/1819, for instance, bore a minium rescript that read, “願如醫言歡喜何限” (*Wish the physician's words [come] true, how joyful it is!*).¹⁹³

With Minh Menh's ascending to the throne, memorials immediately became the primary medium of bureaucratic communication. He was hungry for local information, from rice prices and weather conditions, and charged corruption cases, to frontier security. The upsurge of memorials and their correspondence-role grounded

¹⁹¹ Gia Long was unwell during his last reigning year and the state affairs likely was in the crown prince Dam (the future Minh Menh). I discuss more in the following.

¹⁹² GLCB, 5: 153.

¹⁹³ GLCB, 5: 115.

on the fact that the Hue ruler increasingly used endorsements for decision-making and information-control. Endorsed memorials became an indispensable element of the Minh Menh statecraft. Unlike Gia Long, who did not directly intervene in paperwork,¹⁹⁴ written records were the foundation of the Minh Menh governance. As the bureaucratic system turned to be a paperwork highway, the top-down order delivery of the previous reign came to an end. As memorials captured a new capacity of authorization, they made up 63.8% of the existing palace files (7,534 out of 11,825 documents). Twenty-five out of eighty-two Minh Menh's surviving catalogued volumes contain only memorials. The chart below illustrates the nature of existing memorials between 1821 and 1837, where at least nearly nine hundred were presented to the grand palace in 1830. The development resulted from Minh Menh's administrative renovation that allowed new paperwork flows to the emperor's desk.

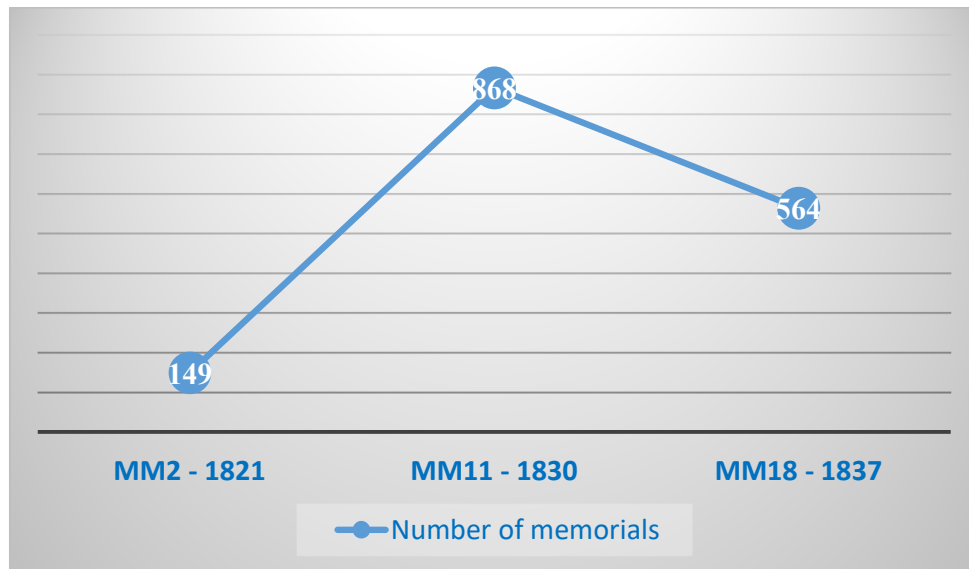


Chart 5.6. Numbers of existing memorials between 1821 and 1837

Source: author

The memorials embodied various forms, covered a wide range of contents, and the reporters belonged to many administrative levels. They also adventured through a well-structural and sophisticated communicational system of Postal Offices and Transmission Offices that spread all over the empire before heading to the Grand Secretariat, Six Boards, and Censorate. The following chart suggests a pattern of memorial production during the Minh Menh reign. To make the case,

¹⁹⁴ Not directly working with paperwork does not mean that he did not working directly with the affairs when necessarily.

three years: MM2 (1821), MM11 (1830), and MM18 (1837) have been selected and analyzed following the monthly production of paperwork.

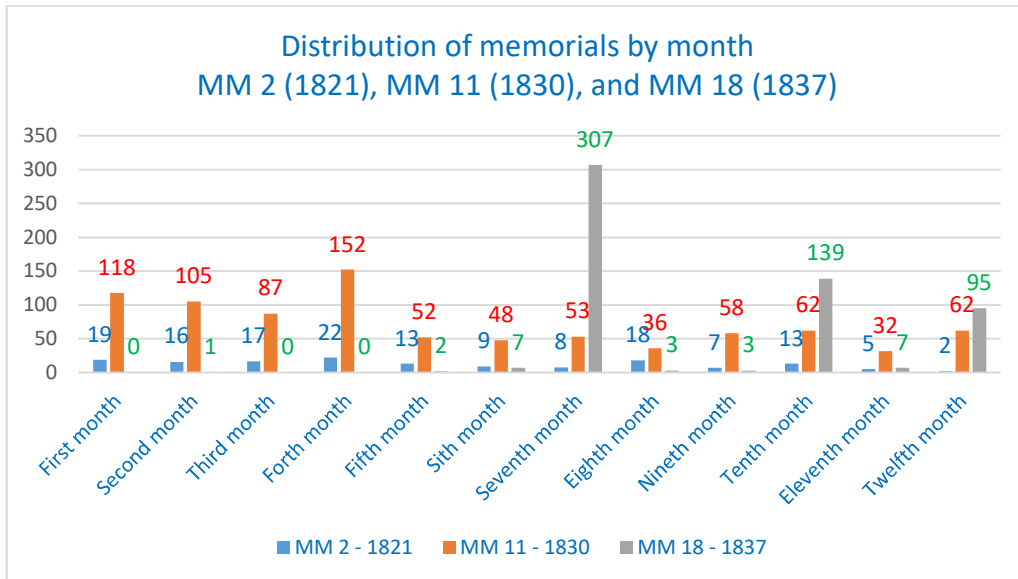


Chart 5.7. Distribution of extant memorials by month in MM2 (1821), MM11 (1830), and MM18 (1837)

Source: Author

The chart exposes an indicative demonstration of the scale of memorial production during the Minh Menh era. Some months present a considerably high quantity, such as the seventh month of MM 18 (1837), where 307 memorials were archived, at least. That number means at least ten per day had come to the emperor's office. As our survey indicated, imperial endorsements were applied to a large proportion of the memorials thanks to the substantial transformation of the Minh Menh political projection that linked central bureaucracy with local administration through the memorial system. In doing so, other paperwork networks were designed to accommodate and assist the memorial channel. While most of them conventionally ended up at local archives and had been largely destroyed in countless political upheavals, some remain at the palace archives. They are labelled here as exchanged documents.

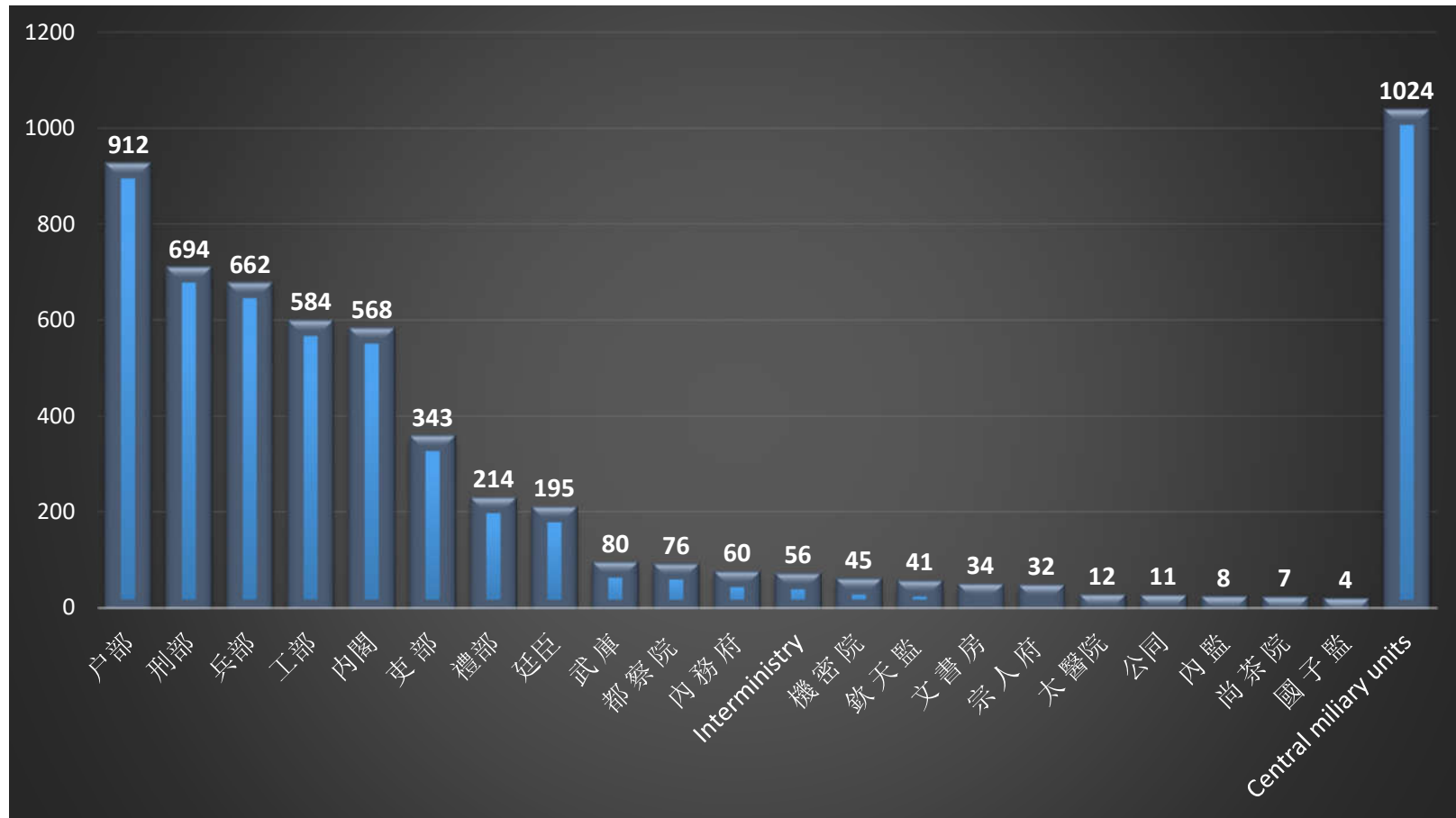


Chart 5.8. Contributors to the extant Minh Menh memorials, 1820-1841 (by central court institutions)

Source: author

Notes: 戶部 (Board of Revenue), 刑部 (Board of Justice), 兵部 (Board of Defence), 工部 (Board of Public Works), 內閣 (Grand Secretariat), 吏部 (Board of Personnel), 禮部 (Board of Rites), 廷臣 (Courtiers), 武庫 (Military Storehouse), 都察院 (Censorate), 內務府 (Palace Storehouses and Treasury), 機密院 (Grand Secretariat), 欽天監 (Institute of Cosmology), 文書房 (Office of Records and Books), 宗人府 (Imperial Household Department), 太醫院 (The Institute of Medicine), 公同 (Congdong), 內監 (Palace Eunuchs), 尚茶院 (Office of Tea), and 國子監 (State Academy)

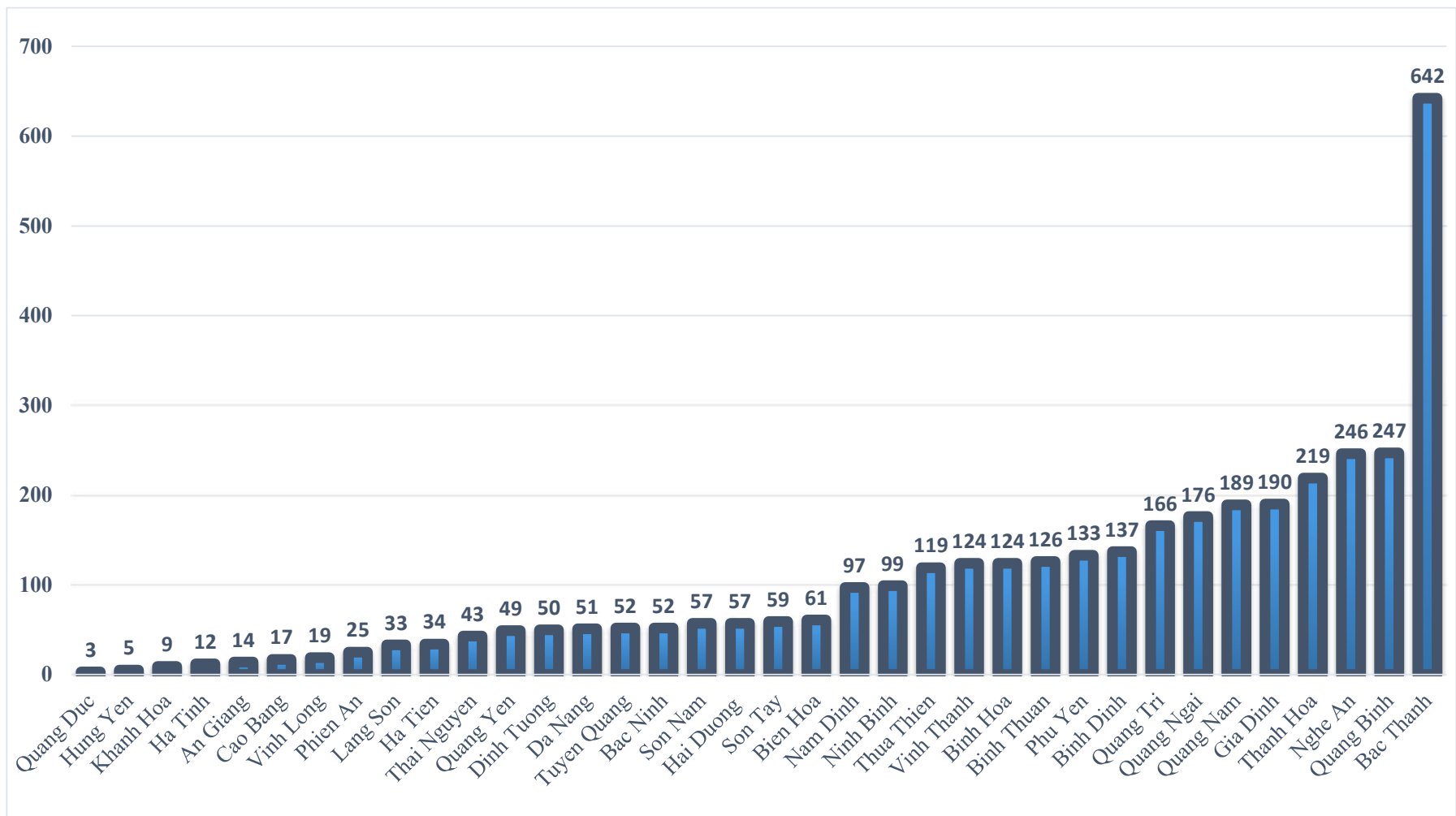


Chart 5.9. Memorials submitted by local administrations during the Minh Menh reign (source: author)

The two above charts indicate the scale of memorial volumes contributed by court institutions and provinces. The contribution made by local governments, for instance, was complex, due to several administrative rearrangements in the early nineteenth century. Under the Gia Long reign, only the central territory was under Hue's *de facto* control, while the northern and southern regions were ruled by viceroyalty in which local paperwork was first processed in the regional capital. In 1831-1832, the two were dissolved, resulting in an empire of thirty-one provinces and the Capital city (Thua Thien prefecture 承天府). The above chart (5.9), through the shifting pattern of memorial submission, reflects the movement of political space and distribution of paperwork in the Vietnamese geographical landscape. While the north, including 11 provinces, provided the highest number of existing Minh Menh reign's memorials (642); central provinces (Thanh Hóa, Nghệ An, Quảng Bình, Quảng Nam, Quảng Ngãi, Quảng Trị, Bình Định, Phú Yên, and Bình Thuận) experienced a close correspondence with Hue. In addition, there were thousands of memorials on military situations submitted by the Sothern, Southern territories, and frontier officials that were excluded from the existing Minh Menh palace papers. They might constitute the Privy Council archive that was used for the compilation of the *Military Strategies*.¹⁹⁵

To make a case for exchanged documents, we examine tally suggestion 票擬. These “tally suggestions” or “Cards of comment” play a distinct role in communicated paperwork. The document type is bureaucratically multifunctional. They were designed for the emperor's review, at the same time, subjected to mutual inspection among the Grand Secretariat, boards, and Privy Council. Minh Menh dedicated particular interest in the tally suggestion, not only because of the working convenience but also of his intention to orchestrate all court affairs and prevent informational manipulation. With that substantial administrative function, tally suggestion captured the ruler's frequent attention, sometimes exasperation, on official incompetence of paperwork performance. The essence of exchanged documents was placed on facilitating internal communication. Tally suggestion is not exceptional. They emerged in 1824 after years of Minh Menh's hard work in processing memorials:

帝躬勤庶政,凡四方章疏綸音批示日以繁多. 黎文悅黎質等常以煩勞爲言. 自是事關六部者交部票擬.

¹⁹⁵ See KDTB.

The emperor is assiduous. Memorials 章疏 submitted from the four corners are subjects of his daily personal endorsement. Lê Văn Duyệt and Lê Chất usually said that his working manner is too heavy. Since then, if there are issues related to the *Six Boards*, the responsible board is commanded to draft *tally suggestions*.¹⁹⁶

To address the problem, he had responsible boards draft suggestions. Their content included a summary of the issue and the board's view of suggestive policy implementation based on dynastic law codes, statutes, and previous customary cases. Soon enough, the *cards of comment* became a critical daily communicational channel between the boards and the emperor. An 1825 case, for instance, demonstrated how *tally suggestion* took part in court-daily politics. The emperor requested the Board of War a tally suggestion but received no response. He then summoned the board staff several times for an audience, but no one appeared. In the end, his patience was running out. “[Although] the Board of War is an essential institution, does its laziness cause dysfunctional?” [兵部乃樞要重地而懈怠.若是豈不至貽誤邪?], said the furious ruler, before having the board's Vice-President (參知), Nguyen Khoa Minh tied with ropes until the next day.¹⁹⁷

In the coming years, *tally suggestions* found their way to formalization, and standard applications were designed for boards, Grand Secretariat, and Privy Council. The evolution of paperwork type reveals the process under which official papers were planned with additional functions and elaborated by adding more official hands. When the Grand Secretariat came to establish, it generated a documentary landscape where the tally suggestion bridged the inner and outer court. Minh Menh, while demanding both the Grand Secretariat and the Six Boards' responsibility for their consultations, offered mechanisms for mutual supervision. Over-powerful officials and information manipulation were the emperor's ultimate obsessions. They explained his extraordinary commitment to orchestrate the flow of bureaucratic paperwork. The following are his own words: the edict of forming the Grand Secretariat (1830):

茲再著嚴條以照職守著. 嗣後如遇內閣各擬旨不合處, 準六部堂官摘出參奏, 六部擬旨及奏之事中間有不合之處, 而內閣摘處參奏. 如事已妥合而六部或內閣各妄逞意見, 輒敢指為不合事由何衙門亦準據實處復奏後欽定. 倘六部擬旨議奏有不合處而內閣不能核出, 或內閣擬旨又不合處而六部不能核出, 列經發覺或朕摘出, 除不合之處從輕重坐罪外, 其失察之員名, 必按律加等懲辦. 夫如此立法原期相維相制求

¹⁹⁶ DNTL, II, 26: 6a-b.

¹⁹⁷ DNTL, II, 31: 9a-b.

絕弊端，如有不削又負承望風旨，陰結朋黨，表裏為奸，則罪莫大焉，諫殛勿赦。¹⁹⁸

Strict regulations are now set in stone for clarifying official obligations. From now on, if the Grand Secretariat's policy suggestions (擬旨) are found inappropriate, Six Boards officials are required to expose 參奏. If policy suggestions and memorials submitted by Six Boards officials were incorrect, the Grand Secretariat is requested to disclose them. If the two have already made the case, and none is convinced, the debating issues should be pointed out, and I will make decisions. If the suggestions and denouncing memorials submitted by Six Boards were inaccurate and the Grand Secretariat fails to investigate, or Grand Secretariat makes inadequate suggestions and the boards failed to expose them; when those cases reveal or I discover them; I will issue punishments for irresponsible officials accordingly. Such legal instructions target mutual official supervision and restriction to prevent corruption. If there are no such restrictions, officials will gather in parties and corrupt the system. These crimes are unparalleled and subjected to the death penalty without mercy.

Following institutional settings, more paratextual features were supplemented onto the document's pages, including signatures of involved officials along the process of circulation. The new paratext exposed names and titles of responsible personnel and immediately impacted their working attitude. The practice came after an incident in which a tally suggestion was drafted inappropriately, and submitted to the throne without the inspection of board chiefs. Involved officials received a strong warning and new paperwork regulations were presented:

以向來，六部所擬旨語但著部司奉草，而堂官無署名。勅嗣凡擬旨呈進須於紙尾明敘：部司員奉草堂官何員奉閱等序樣。儻其中事理有不合處即照輕重分別懲辦。著為例。¹⁹⁹

Until now, when Six Boards submit suggestions, the pages mention only drafting departments without attending the official's name. [I] order from now on, if drafting recommendations are made, the page's end should include phrases detailing drafting departments and reviewing standing officials. If

¹⁹⁸ MMCB, 40: 83.

¹⁹⁹ DNTL, II, 72: 10b-11a.

there are still inaccuracies, the punishments will be implemented accordingly. Recording this [instruction] for regulation.

In 1832, however, another paratextual fraud took Minh Menh by enraged. This time, the problem came from the process of copying imperial endorsements and applying sealed stamps upon each tally suggestion. Previously, Grand Secretariat's drafted suggestions were held at the boards' office for one day before being stamped and processed by the board chiefs. Within this short proximity, the documents were 'unguarded' and vulnerable to manipulation. The new regulation had them sealed off with authenticated stamp 關防, had the numerical characters on the text checked, and had erased and overwritten words marked, so the next day, board chiefs could inspect the text and imprint their official seals.²⁰⁰ By adding more paratextual features to exchanged documents, the state demonstrated how textual design could be a technique of administrative management. Tally suggestion is an example of that evolution to accommodate executive demands. Both paperwork and governmental regulations were designed to serve Minh Menh's bureaucratic operation. In the early 1830s, an increasing number of memorials headed to the capital, and the flow of tally suggestions was dramatically growing. This time, Minh Menh aimed at fostering the speed of paperwork-movement.

隼定: 嗣凡通政司接到四方章疏折出副封畧看,其中事理如無關礙,即照向例交辦.間有事關何部而是部稍涉干連及應由是部議奏者即將原本呈進請,交內閣票擬.得旨,後轉交所司辦理毋須一槩交部票擬,其例應交票擬疏冊,如事理繁多,所交之部不便票擬應詳加覆議者,即其由聲敘請由內閣擬旨交議,然後理覆議續進不得徑自率議.²⁰¹

Approving: from now on, when the Transmission Office receives memorials from the four corners, it is allowed to open the duplicate copies 副封 for review. If there are routine affairs, the documents should be immediately applied following the existing procedures. The involved board is requested to make comments, and the files are sent to the Grand Secretariat for preparing tally suggestions. When imperial decisions are declared (the document) is returned to the responsible office, not necessarily to the one that made the tally suggestion. If the board assigned with drafting tally suggestions is hustling with many affairs and seeks more time for preparation, the Transmission Office should report the

²⁰⁰ DNTL, II, 85, 35b-36a.

²⁰¹ DNTL, II, 164: 6a.

situation immediately and request an extension. The Grand Secretariat will work accordingly [following the situation], and the discussion about the case should continue and then be submitted [to the throne]. No careless and overhasty administrative exercise is allowed.

The instruction accelerated the speedy paperwork stream in the central bureaucracy with the specific improvement of processing and drafting tally suggestions. The ruler has a good nose for institutional maneuvers. He was able to identify problems and gave expeditious responses, particularly when coming to paperwork and written communication. Two years later (1837), he allowed more flexibility to the mechanism of proposing administrative advice and exchanging consultation. Important affairs, for instance, were recommended for direct discussions with the court audiences.²⁰² The new practice aimed at hastening bureaucratic discussions to address the piling up of administrative papers in Hue. Minh Menh had ruled for seventeen years and the documentary-based statecraft he designed had undergone remarkable experiences. The journey he started in the early 1820s with the enthusiastic promotion of written communication resulted in the volume of official papers reaching a high point in 1834 when court officials were overwhelmed, and the ruler started ordering paperwork reduction.²⁰³ His 1837 instruction was part of the effort to decrease paperwork production.

The introduction of *yellow suggestion cards* 黄粘 in 1838 was a further step in facilitating such a vigorous documentary atmosphere.²⁰⁴ They responded to the complaint that preparing separate tally suggestions was time-consuming for both drafters and examiners. Involved officials not only have to summarize the case but also cross-check other judgments. To save time for both parties, tally suggestions were replaced by a piece of yellow paper provided with essential information and advice on possible actions to take. The card was then attached to the memorials and submitted to the throne for endorsements:

用黃紙一片標敘何年月日，接到何省奏疏，或案敘何事，照內恭擬旨語粘于奏本面旁仍將這粘黃正本貯入原封進呈，以便披覽。俟奉硃點或有硃硃

²⁰² DN TL, II, 187: 24b-25a.

²⁰³ DN TL, II, 88: 13a.

²⁰⁴ In 1843, however, the “*yellow suggestion card*” was abolished by Thieu Tri Emperor. Tu Duc Emperor recalled this document-type in 1848, focused on the fact that the papers should be attached to long-text memorials as a summary. HDSL, 226: 6b-7a, 9a.

批硃改交出，照內批奉候寶施行。其原粘黃紙片經奉硃筆批示者，折出粘入副本交內閣奉守。²⁰⁵

Using a separate piece of yellow paper which states clearly the day, month, and by whom the memorial was received, and its main content, and then making suggestions for imperial endorsements to place on top of the memorial. The yellow card should be retained in an envelope with the memorial and submitted together for convenient revision. When the emperor's endorsements or [instructed] edicts are enacted, they should be copied and sealed off for implementation. The yellow card should be attached to the duplicate copies of the memorials 副本 and deposited at the Grand Secretariat for storing.

The Grand Secretariat was authorized to collect those yellow suggestion cards and bind them in volumes for archivization. Unfortunately, none of those tomes exists, but a few cards prepared during later reigns may reveal some aspects of this document type. The following *yellow suggestion card* was attached to a memorial in 1862, bearing imperial remarks in red. In this particular case, the tally suggestion was endorsed by the emperor, and itself became a vermilion document.

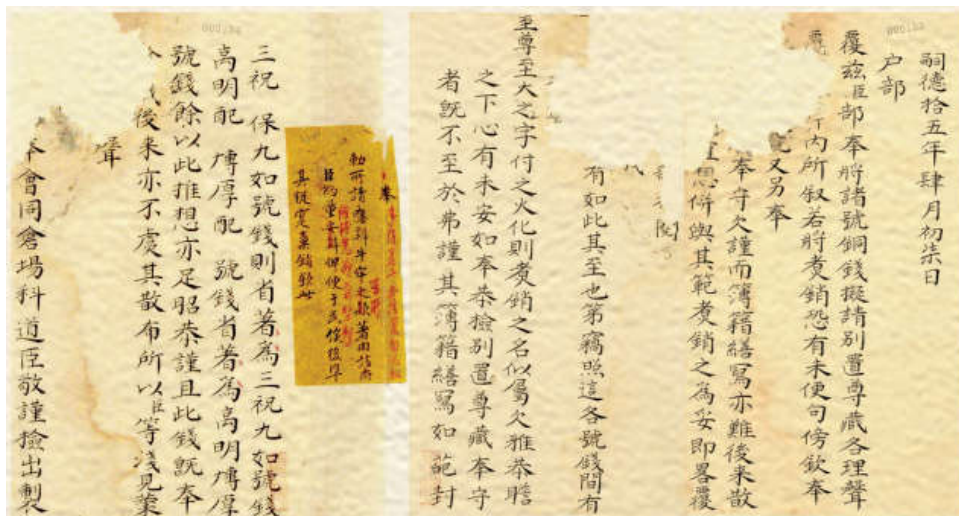


Figure 5.5. A yellow suggestion card on Tu Duc reign's memorial, dated 1862
Source: *TDCB*, 139: 153.

Despite frequent regulation reestablishment and changing paperwork types, imperial passion and enthusiasm for exchanged documents and tally suggestions

²⁰⁵ DNTL, II, 188: 15b-16a.

experienced no sign of enervation. Document inspections were placed under heavy guard, which accumulated in a high standard for official liability.

內閣黎伯秀林維義等近來所上票擬文理多含糊。帝每爲之抹改累牘連篇動至移晷者降；諭譴各罰三月俸不準查抵，仍通諭部閣嗣，凡奉諭旨要須紬繹分明，票擬詳細著潦草苟完辭義有不通暢，致煩硃筆批攷全篇或大半者罪之。²⁰⁶

Recently, tally suggestions submitted by the Grand Secretariat staff Lê Bá Tú 黎伯秀 and Lâm Duy Nghĩa 林維義 are careless and overhasty. The emperor usually has to erase [mistakes] and correct page after page, and sometimes [the corrections] sustain court audiences till sunset. [The ruler, therefore] Announced to punish them three-month salary deduction. [He] Also instructed boards 部, Grand Secretariat 閣, and court departments 嗣 that tally suggestions should be clearly drafted and carefully treated. If careless preparation and imprecise language and words trouble the emperor's endorsement [and he has] to correct the whole or half of the text, the author will be punished.

Minh Menh's control technique and incredible commitment to textual inspection were second to none among Nguyen's emperors. The consolidation of power in the emperor's hands allowed him to diversify and standardize document-usage, and apply varied formats, types, and textual symbols for hierarchical representation. The project of political centralization was assisted by enthusiastic and determined initiatives of creating a paperwork ecology where institutions and textual formats were constantly modified and neatly adjusted. The interconnection between document type and administrative functionalization is relevant to a broader discourse of language, written genre, and power symbol. While the employment of proper written form "discourages ambiguity", "instils a sense of discipline in the user", and "favors the natural inclination of writing systems toward propriety",²⁰⁷ standardized paperwork types played essential roles in signifying bureaucratic hierarchy. They expand the use of writing as a means of administrative authorization. By enacting rules and conforming

²⁰⁶ DNTL, II, 178: 31a-b.

²⁰⁷ Robert Pattison, *Literacy: The Politics of the Word from Homer to the Age of Rock* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 62.

standardization for hierarchical usage, official papers were instrumented to define political status and map the governmental structure.

The association between paperwork and bureaucratic organizations is an essential aspect of the pre-modern East Asian political operation. Memorials, edicts, proclamations... were not merely subjects of metropolitan examinations and in preparation for future bureaucrats,²⁰⁸ but more importantly, embodied the signature of their professional administrative career. Their roles reached beyond any discussion of literary genre and bureaucratic specialization became a symbol of a social and political profession. The employment of paperwork and competence to command them, as pointed out in Weberian *Politik als Beruf*, are the signatory of social and political identity.

²⁰⁸ Alexander B. Woodside, *Lost Modernities: China, Vietnam, Korea, and the Hazards of World History* (CA, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 3.

V. 4. The bureaucracy of vermilion endorsements

On the ground of institutional evolution in the Hue court, paperwork attained a great deal of bureaucratic role. Official remarks and imperial endorsements became direct mechanisms of decision-making. As demonstrated, Gia Long Emperor laid the foundation for the new central state where he built-up infrastructures and institutions for direct communication between Hue and local administrations. As the six boards gradually emerged, their paperwork authority was growing. In 1804, ministerial official seals were cast and distributed to ranking officials.²⁰⁹ The construction of the first official compound inside the Imperial City started in 1806, paving the way for emerging sophisticated inner-court institutional operations.²¹⁰ Subsequently, new court-audience regulations came implemented, which required four monthly meetings of high-ranked officials in which state affairs were discussed in advance before submitting for royal decisions 然後奏裁.²¹¹ The bureaucratic system only went in the complete setting in 1809 when all six board presidents were inaugurated.²¹² The request for weekly court meetings in 1805 was just the beginning of a deliberate institutional adjustment. In the same year, the board chiefs were instructed to carry out duties days and nights at their offices.²¹³

Apart from boosting imperial communication, Gia Long added more staff to palace offices. When two administrative regions were settled in Hanoi and Saigon (1802 and 1808), they had to submit monthly reports to Hue.²¹⁴ Those official papers did not stand the test of time, and thus gave us no clue of their contents and formats. *DNTL*, however, provides some details of the paper-based communication structure between Saigon, Hanoi and Hue. Northern General-commander Nguyen Van Thanh had conducted frequent exchanges with the capital in 1803, 1804, 1807, 1808, 1809, and 1810 via submitting petitions.²¹⁵ Other written correspondences in the forms of

²⁰⁹ *DNTL*, I, 24: 5a-b.

²¹⁰ *DNTL*, I, 26: 8b.

²¹¹ *DNTL*, I, 26: 9a.

²¹² *DNTL*, I, 39: 16b.

²¹³ *DNTL*, I, 27: 15a-b.

²¹⁴ *DNTL*, I, 18: 32b-33a. The Hanoi administration, in particular had to send officials back to Hue twice a month for updating information. *HDSL*, 253: 12a.

²¹⁵ *DNTL*, I, 38: 5a.

petitions (表 and 疏) and memorials also appeared with frequency in the dynastic records.²¹⁶

There should not be an assumption of the sharp contrast between the fragmented and inconsistent Gia Long's bureaucratic world and the complex and well-defined of the Minh Menh state.²¹⁷ Such a view was sparked precisely because, in the existing

²¹⁶ For instance, in the fourth moth of GL8 (1809), following Thanh's petition was a memorial submitted by Thanh Hoa's highland chief, Ha Cong Thai. The document was informed in *shilu*, “清華上道正統領何功泰奏言...” (*Thanh Hoa's highland chief, Ha Cong Thai memorialized...*). Gia Long responded by an edict (諭), “帝諭之曰：覽爾此奏具見惻誠” (the emperor instructed that: I read your memorial and see your loyalty). *DNTL*, I, 38: 5a. It is safe to imagine that there would be a considerable number of such written exchanges kept at Hue's official buildings during the Minh Menh reign. Most of them were certainly mobilized for the compilation of Gia Long's *shilu* (大南寔錄正編, 第一紀: first reign) and the Primary Compilation of Biographies of Dai Nam, Initial Period (大南列傳, 前編) lasted between 1821 and 1847. *DNTL*, I, Preface, edict: 7a.

²¹⁷ Previous scholars, such as Taiwanese historian Chen Jinghe painted a largely fragmented image of the Hue court based on his assessment of the Congdong, allegedly seen as quasi-Privy Council. The conventional understanding also indicates that paperwork remained in the courtiers' grip. My suggestion however shows otherwise. Gia Long might not have been so distant from his ministers as previously demonstrated, but found himself rely on group of trusted retainers for rule, as he did so often during the last two decade-warfare. Such a working style was unnecessarily translated into the monarch's absent interests to have accessibility to ground information and less active on the utmost level of decision-making. Chen Jinghe, *Mục Lục Châu Bản Triều Nguyễn*, vol. 1, xviii. Also, see Chen Jinghe, “The Imperial Archives of the Nguyen Dynasty (1802–1945),” *Journal of Southeast Asian History* 3, no. 02 (September 24, 1962): 111–28.

It was unlikely the case that Gia Long was uninterested in communicative integration. He conducted a wide range of written correspondences that contributed to the 1802-military success. He then commanded a careful deployment of cadastral records, demographic registrations, and yearly army conscription. They highlighted his ability to mobilize practical writing for efficient governance. As a ruler in Hue, he recognized the correspondent vacuum between commanderies 鎮 and metropolitan 朝廷 in which no well-organized postal system and fixed norms of frequent official reports were at work. He found the necessity, if not attractiveness, of written documents in state management, but was assisted with no specialized service on local-central correspondence. The inner-court office (such as palace offices of Books and Records) had little to do with official memorials. That meant the emperor's direct touch upon them depended on the ministers' will. Our traditional view of court councils or aristocratic councils is usually a counter-power against centralized monarch/ ruler. It certainly holds true in many of the most renowned episodes of human history, whether be Rome, Mongol, or Manchu Qing empires. Qing centralizers such as Kangxi and Yongzheng struggled against countless agencies of assembly, council, audience formed by imperial clansmen, noblemen, bannemen, princes and ministers. To prevent power taken away, those emperors, instead of taking bloody fights, had the agencies weakened by constantly creating new ones and set them into competition. Among key battlegrounds was information control. Gia Long's Congdong however was essentially not in the same category. The king had both confidence and faith on those close retainers whose decades-services brought him victory, the throne, and a unified empire. Nevertheless, the monarch's inconvenience in working with paperwork might play some role in his political scheme. Earlier in his rule, Congdong was authorized to process local reports in his behalf. In an 1803-edict, the ministers were asked to discuss bureaucratic affairs among themselves before proceeding for decision.

“定廷議例，詔曰：

國家甫定，事務殷繁，朕一日萬幾，恐不能一周悉。卿等咸預弼隣，當思明聽翼為共裨政理。自今，武自統制，副都統制，副將以上，文自參知以上：月以初一，初八，十五，二十三。凡四日會議于左廡。凡百司庶務不能決者，商同裁理。至如關重事體亦先酌議然後奏裁。

“Established regulations for the court audience. The proclamation read:

“Our kingdom is just pacified, the affairs are abundant. I have daily tens of thousands of businesses, [I am] afraid that they will not be all [treated] perfectly. You are close [to me], should work diligently, and do good for politics. From now on, military officials, ranked from

scholarship, the dissimilarities between the two were unduly painted. Conventional historiography drew a sharp contradiction between the two, which might lead to a misperception about the “primitive” of the former and the highly advanced of the latter.²¹⁸ Gia Long showed consistent commitment to some form of documentary uniformity. His only “problem” is, instead of acting as a systematic follower of the “Chinese models”, the monarch with little training in classical Chinese political institutions chose to address particular practical demands in times of need.²¹⁹ From day one of ruling Gia Dinh (1788), Gia Long had an eye on official documents and ordered new regulations applied for papers’ layout and circulation.²²⁰ Lately, signatures on petitions came under notice, particularly in cases of documents claiming innocence. For those documents to enter the bureaucracy, reviews by local chief officials or heads of court departments were compulsory before they elevate for further consideration. As this thesis revealed above, the more the Gia Long administration entrenched and proliferated, the more sophisticated its idea about and practice of paperwork evolved. By conceptualizing both the symbolic and applied usage of emperor documents, Hue expanded the Hanlin community and recruited more inner-court staff (up to fifty). The same development applied to memorials and other forms of paperwork. Gia Long firmly committed to the maximization of documentary authority and proved deadly serious in cases of violation. And he stood by

Division Commander 統制, Division Vice-Commander 副都統制, and Lieutenant General 副將; civil staffs from Vice Board-Presidents [2B], gather monthly on four days: the 1st, 8th, 15th, and 23rd [of the month] at the Left Hall 左廡. For those affairs that board departments are unable to address, should [the court audience] discuss to implement. For those important affairs, [the court audience] should also debates in advance before memorializing for approval.”

See Wu, *Communication and Imperial Control in China*, 9–19. Giele, *Imperial Decision-Making and Communication in Early China*, 85; Beatrice S. Bartlett, for instance, has vividly demonstrated the Yongzheng distrust of “organization with plenipotentiary powers” and a jealous mind of “possible alternative power centers that might rival his own”. Bartlett, *Monarchs and Ministers*, 7. See chapter 4 of this thesis on the evolution of the *Congdong* documents. According to the Gia Long’s 1804-statute of official ranking. DN TL, I, 24: 5a-b. DN TL, I, 21: 6a.

²¹⁸ Vietnamese historian Nguyễn Minh Tường (1996, 2010) suggested that there was a “administrative reform” under Minh Menh, and for that sake of argument, portraying the Gia Long court as “*hủ bại và tình trạng phân quyền*” (degenerate and fragmented nature). Tường has suggested about “*sự lộng quyền của hàng ngũ quan đại thần đứng đầu các bộ, các trấn lớn*” (the overpowering authority of chief courtiers and commanders) and “*tệ nạn tham quan ô lại, cường hào, ác bá hoành hành ở các cấp hành chính trung gian và cơ sở*” (the evil of greedy mandarin, corrupt clerks, and local bullies overwhelmed all intermediary and local bureaucratic levels) (1996, pp. 9-10). See Nguyễn Minh Tường, *Cải cách Hành chính dưới Triều Minh Menh (1820–1840)* (Administrative Reform under the Reign of Minh Menh (1820–1840)) (Hanoi: Social Science publishing house, 1996); idem. *Tổ chức bộ máy nhà nước quân chủ Việt Nam (Từ năm 939 đến năm 1884)* (Organization of the Vietnamese monarchy states from 939 to 1884) (Hanoi: Social Science publishing house, 2015). Choi Byung Wook, on the other hand, draws a sharp contrast between Gia Long and Minh Menh’s policy on managing the lower Mekong, between a loosely system of state control of the former and a more centralized and unified of the latter. See Choi. *Southern Vietnam under the reign of Minh Mang*; Taylor. *A History of the Vietnamese*, 398-425.

²¹⁹ Even though it was sometimes suggested (as in 1811), Gia Long ordered the palace offices to present the *Mingshi* 明史, and he “read until the midnights”. DN TL, I, 40: 4a.

²²⁰ GLCB, 1: 107.

his words. When a crown prince's written command and his seal stamp were forged (偽造皇太子令旨及寶信), He ran out of mercy and had the wrongdoer immediately beheaded.²²¹

Gia Long Emperor fell ill for thirty-two days, from 03/01/1820 (GL18/11/18), and died on 03/02/1820. During that period, he reassigned governance to the fourth son,²²² who was said to “invite reputable physicians and discussed with them from early mornings to nights” (復博召名醫與之，朝夕商確焉).²²³ On 16/01/1820 (GL18/12/1), the emperor was absent from a vital audience to which the New Year calendars were distributed.²²⁴ Two days later (18/01/1820-GL18/12/3), the crown prince, princes, and chief ministers were summoned to the Grand Palace. On the deathbed, Gia Long passed his son the empire: “That is my challengingly-achieved career, [I] give [it] to you now. Keep it carefully” [此朕艱難之業，也令以付汝當慎守之].²²⁵ Within eight days (26/01/1820-GL18/12/11), his health severely declined. Once again, the court entourage was recalled, this time was for the proclamation of throne-inheritance 遺詔.²²⁶ The emperor died one week later at 58, on 03/02/1820 (GL19/12/19). The first reign of the Nguyen had ended, taking with it a tumultuous life of a great conqueror. After fighting, then came writing. Succeeding a conqueror was a state-maker whose scheme of ruling empire profoundly reshaped Vietnamese political culture, and whose design of documentary authority created a complex paperwork system of non-parallel in pre-colonial Vietnam.

²²¹ HDSL, 199: 29b.

²²² DNTL, I, 60: 12b. Original text, “丙子，皇太子入侍，詔軍國庶事悉啓皇太子裁決，然後奏開。” On the day of Rat, the crown prince came for attendance. [The emperor] proclaimed that important state affairs are reported to the crown prince for decision, then memorialize [to the throne].

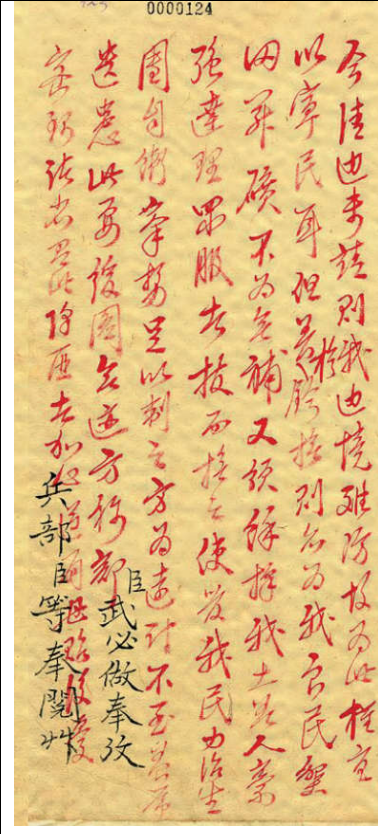
²²³ DNTL, I, 60: 13a.

²²⁴ DNTL, I, 60: 14b.

²²⁵ DNTL, I, 60: 14b.

²²⁶ DNTL, I, 60: 18b.

Figure 5.6. Samples of Emperors' endorsements: Minh Menh (1820-1841), Thieu Tri (1841-1847), and Tu Duc (1847-1883).

					
<p>GLCB, 5: 145</p>	<p>GLCB: 5: 153.</p>	<p>MMCB, 2: 306-307</p>	<p>MMCB, 6: 263-266.</p>	<p>TTCB, 45: 249 – 250.</p>	<p>TDCB, 170: 123 – 124</p>

Neither personnel nor institutions: “in written records he trusts.”

Minh Menh was able to initiate a new form of bureaucratic operation by re-institutionalizing the inner and outer court structures. After his enthronement (14/02/1820),²²⁷ trusted men and close assistants came to form the emperor’s inner-court cohort: the Office of Records and Books.²²⁸ In the years to come, the palace secretary and other executive and advisory structures grew into the Grand Secretariat and Privy Council. The emperor’s confidence, however, was not placed on personnel and institutions but on written and sealed records. His faith in paperwork defined not only the bureaucratic structure but also how official papers functioned and how statecraft evolved. The monarch’s obsession with the growing inner court (expansion and bureaucratization) recognized a constant threat to his authority. Two particular aspects of that anxiety were to restrain the inner-court executive power and to manage the flows of paperwork that came through their offices.

In that political ecology, the bureaucracy of vermilion endorsements was born.

As a student of Qing history, Minh Menh’s daunting distress of being manipulated by grand secretaries and grand councillors was not a secret. He constantly kept an open eye on exchanges between palace offices and six boards. In 1826, when personnel at the Office of Records and Books were absent from attending duty, the Board of Personnel was asked to discuss penalties. Learning that the board suggestion was only ‘twenty light strokes’ 笞二十, the monarch went furious. He threw the board memorial to the ground 帝怒以奏本擲地, and addressed the vice-president: “Are you afraid of the Office of Records and Books! [Despite] Being at my left and right, they are lazy and irresponsible. What would happen if they were at the prefecture and county offices! You are high-ranked officials of the state, [you] should keep the spirit of public service and discard personal interests, how come [you] be that biased?”²²⁹ A handful of key officials will end up in the palace electron, comprising Truong Dang Que, Ha Tong Quyen, Hoang Quynh, Phan Thanh Gian, Phan Ba Dat, and Nguyen Khoa Minh; but none of them was immune to multiple demotions.

²²⁷ DNTL, I, 1: 2b-3a.

²²⁸ DNTL, I, 1: 9a.

²²⁹ DNTL, II, 46: 10a. Original text, “帝怒以奏本擲地, 曰: 汝等畏文書房邪? 彼在朕左右猶敢玩愒, 若在府縣當如之何? 汝等為國大臣, 當永矢公忠屏絕私意, 豈宜有所瞻徇?”

Table 5.12. Chronological demotions of

Hoang Quynh, Truong Dang Que, Phan Thanh Gian, and Ha Tong Quyen

Years/ official ranks	Hoang Quynh	Truong Dang Que	Ha Tong Quyen	Phan Thanh Gian
	Grand Secretary	Grand secretary and Privy Councilor	Grand secretary and grand councillor	Grand secretary and grand councillor
1820	Reprimanded			
1826	Dismissed from all official titles, condemned to hard labor.			
1827		Downgraded		
1828	Demoted two grades			
1829	Subject to a court investigation		Demoted two grades.	
1830			Demoted three grades, Reprimanded.	Demoted three grades, Reprimanded.
1831		Dismissed from office, dispatched on navy duty.		Dismissed from office, deployed as a soldier; sent to Singapore on duty.
1832	Removed from all titles, pending death penalty 斬監 候			
1834		deducted three- month salary		
1835	Reprimanded edict			
1836				Removed from office
1838	Demoted one grade, deduced one year-supplemented salary 俸			
1839	Demoted four grades.			Demoted six grades, dispatched for gold mining in Quang Nam, then walked back from Quang Nam to Hue on foot (r. 200 km).

Instead, the ruler focused on varied aspects of memorial production, assuring that imprints, signatures, and mutual inspections were the unsurpassed solution to power control. He mapped the bureaucratic structure, re-defined the hierarchy, and designed a comprehensive paperwork system for the application. The following table is the administrative arrangement established during the early 1830s.

Table 5.13. The Nguyen bureaucratic structure in the 1830s

Ranks			Emperors			Central government
	Duke-ranked prince					
1A		Imperial Household Department		Privy Council		
2A					Censorate	
3A			Grand Secretariat			
2A		Six Boards				
2A			General-governors			Local government
3A		commissioner of finance and taxes	Commissioner of jurisdiction and law	Commissioner of military affairs		
5B			Prefects			
6A			County magistrate			
9B			Commune chiefs			
			Village chiefs			

The structure was supported and upheld by a wide range of institutions and regulations. Law code and administrative ranks kept them in place, and so did the seal system that translated bureaucratic statuses and imperial authority into the language of symbol and iconography. Paperwork was part of the institutions that operated and defined the dynasty's political culture. Memorials, in particular, made the bureaucracy of vermilion endorsements possible. In the following, this thesis will explain how memorials transformed Nguyen's bureaucracy.

Minh Menh dedicated tremendous commitment to the memorial system. He redefined and regulated a wide range of structural formats, layouts, script usage, stamps, and signatures. Not only focusing on paperwork uniformity and information security but this document type was also turned into a powerful vehicle of communication and authoritative execution. In 1822, the monarch had officials punished because of the violation of character-elevation 抬.²³⁰ Months later, he replaced simplified numerical characters 單畫 in court documents with complex ones 茂密字, for instance, 'number 1' [一] was replaced by character 壹; 'number 2' [二] by character 貳, etc., to prevent illicit modification 以防改換.²³¹ In addition, the system of official seals was significantly rearranged to reshape the memorials' outline and guarantee their bureaucratic function.

²³⁰ MMNC, I, 3: 15a-b.

²³¹ DNTL, II, 18: 7a.

Sealed stamps and signatures secured the memorials from information corruption, and by that, guaranteed the emperor and his court a great deal of confidence.

Table 5.14. The system of official seals in early Nguyen

Bureaucratic levels	Seals	Functions
Imperial seals	璽, 寶, 金寶璽, 玉璽	Used in imperial documents and paperwork related to the imperial family.
Official seals	印	Used by central court officials to the local personnel of prefects 知府 and county magistrate 知縣
Authenticated seals	鈐印	Authenticated seals
Authenticated seals	關房	Designed for high-ranked official titles and institutions
Official seals	圖記	Designed for low-ranked civil and military officials
Official seals	鈐記	Designed for postal and military stations, and small military units
Official seals	篆	Designed for commune chiefs 該總, 正總, village chiefs 里長.
Personal seals	信記	Personal seals of all ranked officials.

Minh Menh-designed memorials were the benchmark of Hue’s communication system. Stamp positions, character elevation, official signatures, and vermilion endorsements configure the layout and empower them with executive capacity. As a result, they played essential roles in early modern East Asian governance, including Ming, Qing China, and Nguyen Vietnam.

Table 5.15. Ming, Qing, and Nguyen memorial systems

Periods	Memorial types	Sub-types	Responsible organizations	Notes
明朝 Ming dynasty’s imperial communication	題本 Official memorial		通政司 Transmission Office 內閣 Grand Secretariat 文書房 Office of Records and Books	
	奏本 Personal memorial			
	封本 Confidential memorials			
清朝 Qing dynasty’s imperial communication	本章 Routine memorials	題本 <i>tiben</i>	內閣 Grand Secretariat	
		奏本 <i>zouben</i>		
	奏摺 Palace memorials		軍機處 Privy Council	

阮朝 Nguyen dynasty's imperial communication	奏 Memorials	文書房 : Palace Secretary Offices 內閣: Grand Secretariat	
	封本, 寔封, 密奏 Confidential memorials	皇帝: Emperor	
	請安摺 Greeting palace memorials / Palace memorials	機密院 Privy Council	

The result of years of textual, paratextual, and institutional evolutions came to visualize the five-part structure that will come to define the dynastic memorial in the century to come. They include [1] the name of the memorialist (persons and/or organizations), [2] main text, [3] reign title, date, and main stamp, [4] official signatures, remarks, and stamp, [5] imperial endorsement and imperial authenticated imprint. The following provides an analysis of that organization in an 1826 memorial.

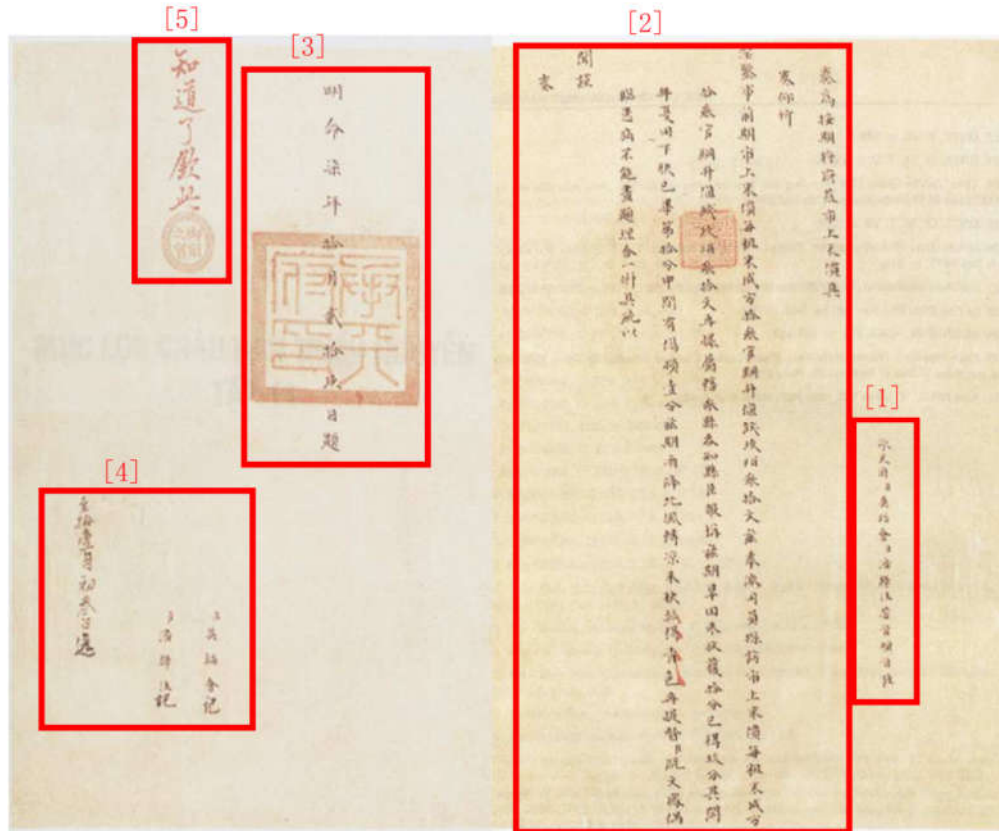





Figure 5.7. Memorial on rice price and weather conditions of Thua Thien Prefecture (1826)
Source: MNCB, 20: 33.

[1]	承天府臣吳福會臣潘輝注稽首頓首謹	Officials at the Thua Thien prefecture, Ngo Phuc Hoi and Phan Huy Chu kotow and respectfully report:
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[2]	<p>The main body of the memorial: 奏為按期將府莅市上米價具 奏仰祈聖鑒事前期市上米價每 粗米成方拾參官銅升值錢玖陌 參拾文.茲奉派司員探訪市上米 價每粗米成方拾參官銅升值錢 玖陌參拾文.再據屬轄參縣各 知縣臣 報稱茲期早田禾收穫拾 分已得玖分其開年夏田下秧已 畢第拾分中間有傷損壹分.茲 期雨降北風轉涼禾秧並得青色. 再提督臣阮文鳳偶臨患病不能 畫題理合一併具疏以聞謹奏. 關防印: 文理密察.</p>	<p>During the last period, the rice price at the market was 13 copper coins 官銅 per <i>thang</i> 升; equivalent to 9 <i>mach</i> 陌 and 30 <i>van</i> 文. Now, officials have been dispatched to the markets, reporting that the rice price is 13 copper coins 官銅 per <i>thang</i> 升; equivalent to 9 <i>mach</i> 陌 and 30 <i>van</i> 文.</p> <p>According to reports by three county magistrates in the prefecture, the crop has been harvested by the ninth ten [90%]. Rice-sowing in preparation for the summer crop has been accomplished, although 10% [of the seedlings] was damaged. There is also rains recently, and northern winds turn [the weather] cold, thus the seedlings are well-grown.</p> <p>Also, because the military commander Nguyen Van Phuong is unwell, [so he] could not write [the memorial], [we] collect information to write a report to memorialize.</p>
[3]	<p>Reign title and main stamp: 明命柒年拾月貳拾玖日題. 印: 承天府印.</p>	<p>MM7/10/19 [18/11/1826] Stamp: Thua Thien phu an 承天府印 (Thua Thien Prefecture Seal).</p>
[4]	<p>Official signatures: 臣吳福會記. 臣潘輝注記.</p>	<p>Your official, Ngo Phuc Hoi Your official, Phan Huy Chu</p>
[5]	<p>Emperor endorsements 硃點, 硃批: “知道了, 欽此!”²³²</p>	<p>Minium spot and minium endorsement: “<i>acknowledged!</i>”</p>
Seal-imprints		
		<p><i>Van ly mat sat</i> 文理密察 “The text has been confidentially checked”.</p>
		<p><i>Ngu tien chi bao</i> 御前之寶 Seal of the Palace Office</p>
		<p><i>Thua Thien phu an</i> 承天府印 Seal of the Thua Thien Prefecture</p>

²³² MMCB, 20: 33. Also see Nguyễn Thu Hoài. *Cấu trúc nội tại châu bản triều Minh Mệnh* (Internal structure of the chauban of Minh Menh reign), 2010, 68-71.

This document exemplified the imprint roles in outlining memorial structure. The growing use of stamps and official signatures was among the most remarkable paratextual changes. Five months after being emperor, Minh Menh set the rule that records of the Palace Storehouses and Treasury must be collected every five days and brought to the Office of Records and Books for applying seal stamps. Also, involved officials must sign their names underneath for inspection.²³³ In 1822, he regulated seal usage for court institutions and showed no mercy to rule-breakers.²³⁴ In at least two cases during the early reign, the violators were sentenced to the death penalty.²³⁵ At the same time, deployments of imperial seals must be recorded for re-assessment.²³⁶

In 1826, military and civil officers of the fourth rank and above were given a square-shaped private seal 私製方篆.²³⁷ The move marked the beginning of a systematic transformation that will reshape both the documents and the process of bureaucratic institutionalization. From 1827, confidential memorials entered a new channel of private communication between frontier officials and the palace.²³⁸ The expansion of memorial usage was a clear sign of the interrelation between institutional construction, correspondence, and deliberation. Both Grand Secretariat and Privy Council were established to address the burgeoning memorial flow to Hue when the emperor sought additional secretarial and advisory hands to orchestrate the paperwork movement.²³⁹ As a result, new memorial types came into play, adding complexity to the palace operation of paperwork. The respects-paying memorials (or *greeting palace memorials*) were regulated in 1833 but were preserved at the Grand Secretariat before relocating to the Privy Council in 1836.²⁴⁰ In the mid-1830s, secret memorials enlarged dramatically, which led to new inner-court expansions. After a decade in power, Minh Menh was able to direct state affairs via the memorial channel. Paratextual designs allowed them to be tracked, inspected, and their journey mapped. The memorial movement was carefully safeguarded. The Grand Secretariat, Privy Council, and Censorate were prohibited from direct communication with provinces. When military commissioners in Cambodia submitted a confidential report 密覆 to the Privy Council in 1835, Minh Menh ordered the paper returned, and the senders reprimanded.²⁴¹ When southern rebels captured local

²³³ DNTL, II, 3: 9a-b.

²³⁴ DNTL, II 14 5ab.

²³⁵ DNTL, II, 13: 20b; 48: 16b.

²³⁶ See, for instance, the report on the use of red imperial seals 朱寶 by court institutions in 1825. MMCB, 12: 47.

²³⁷ DNTL, II, 37: 5a.

²³⁸ DNTL, II, 43: 16b.

²³⁹ DNTL, II, 87: 12a-b; 22b-23a.

²⁴⁰ DNTL, II, 89: 14a; 166: 4a.

²⁴¹ DNTL, II, 149: 16b.

offices, acquired official seals and issued false documents, Minh Menh immediately alerted the system and cast the new ones for replacement.²⁴² Even the Privy Council was placed under official inspection. Its seal usage must be supervised by chief palace guards and grand secretaries.²⁴³

To the monarch, there was no realm for unchecked authority, regardless of how influential it was. Institutional control also touched on the process of copying imperial endorsements. The year was 1832; some palace secretaries had altered an original minium endorsement when applied to duplicated copies of the memorial 副本. Because no grand secretary was aware of the illicit act, it was the seal keepers to be blamed. As a result, authenticated seals were now required to stamp on tally suggestions, at junctures of papers, and over revised characters.²⁴⁴ The move went along with new regulations on official signatures. From 1822, all board-submitted documents must bear the signatures of the department chiefs 郎中 and officials of higher ranks, called *hoa ap* 花押.²⁴⁵ These new paratextual elements reshaped memorials, empowered the paperwork with tremendous bureaucratic authority, and transformed them into a tool of administration.

What did those changes mean to the practice of political authority? How the expansion of memorials and their executive function allowed Minh Menh to attain personal rule, made it possible to Hue to establish administrative centralization and paved the way for Vietnam to emerge for the first time as an ‘empire’ 大國?

Memorials as a device of personal rule

The memorial transformation targeted the increasing complexity of the Hue administration. The year was 1820. A trusted official, Vu Xuan Can 武春謹 was dispatched to govern Quang Tri commandery (90 kilometers to the north of Hue). He memorialized the palace, claiming that ‘although households in Quang Tri is not so many, the amount of affairs is the same as that of other commanderies. I can manage them single-handedly.’ 廣治戶口雖少而事與他營鎮同獨，臣一人深惟不勝是懼。 In the monarch’s response, “you proceed to take charge of the post. If having difficult decisions to make, memorialize [to me] by postal horses” 汝第往事，有難決馳驛以奏。²⁴⁶ Can’s memorial came months after an incident in the north. The region was facing starvation

²⁴² DNTL, II 102 5a-b.

²⁴³ DNTL, II 140 11b.

²⁴⁴ DNTL, II, II 85 35b-36a.

²⁴⁵ DNTL, II, 14: 20a.

²⁴⁶ DNTL, II, 4: 9b.

and the Northern vice General-governor Le Van Phong 北城副總鎮黎文豐, without informing the court, had given deprived farmers loans of public grains. Minh Menh was immediately alarmed by the action and issued a reprimanded edict condemning the unauthorized behavior. “If people in your administration have starvation, and are not in case of an urgent need, [you should] dispatch memorials to report [to me]; within a week, [I] will have an edict to implement, and [my response] shall not be late. How could you behave so arbitrarily?”²⁴⁷ Then came the summer of 1821. The ruler, now had reigned for one and a half years, engaged in a conversation with his favorite palace secretary, Hoang Quynh 黃炯. Here is a taste of it:

明命：朝臣以朕何如？

黃炯：曩者章奏其辭有鄙俚者一一釐正，人頗難之。今已漸化矣。

明命：朕豈好異哉？欲其穩雅而已。

Minh Menh: How do court officials appraise me?

Hoang Quynh: Previously, memorials' wording is vulgar 鄙俚, [then] have your detailed instruction to correct. [First] People were afraid. Now, [they] have already been familiar with [the new rules].

Minh Menh: [It is] Not because of my interest in the abnormal, [I] just want to make [the memorials] consistent and elegant 穩雅.

The above events echo the significance of memorials in the making of the Nguyen bureaucracy. Minh Menh's determination of memorial correspondence and edict-based decision-making was the guideline of the political culture. His first concern was to create an administrative atmosphere where memorials could be activated. A handful of regular memorial types were invented, keeping Hue in a constant supply of information. The first was 'rice-price reports' 奏報米價, presented as early as 25/05/1820.²⁴⁸ In the following years, quarterly memorials were included, notably reports on local security and 'greeting palace memorials'.

By the mid-1820s, political turmoil sparked in the northern region, which required direct imperial intervention. In 1823, Nghe An Commandery officials received an edict that requested reports on local security situations. It was because the emperor 'has heard that in your region, bandits gathered and caused trouble; people live in no peace' 今風聞該轄盜匪群聚肆行騷擾。民不寧居. He ordered 'the situation accurately memorialized' 情形確實具奏.²⁴⁹ The responding report was submitted eleven days later.²⁵⁰ Taking the

²⁴⁷ DNTL, II, 2: 19b. Original text, ‘今若爾轄民有艱食亦非甚緊，即宜飛章馳奏，旬日之間旨下施行，亦不為緩豈可專輒如是邪？’

²⁴⁸ MNCB, 1: 36.

²⁴⁹ MNCB, 6: 128.

²⁵⁰ MNCB, 6: 128.

fact that paperwork delivery between Nghe An and Hue took three days,²⁵¹ the case indicates both the pace and mechanism of communication conducted by Minh Menh. Responding to the memorial was the endorsement: “硃批: ‘知道了. 另有旨, 欽此.’” (*Acknowledged! Will have a separate edict.*). More memorials would approach Hue in the coming years following escalating violence in northern Vietnam. On 19/01/1827, an edict was written by Minh Menh to the regional government in Hanoi:

近日節次頒發北城諭旨事件, 有無接到, 已未遵行, 而數次阮有慎等奏摺終無敘及, 何也? 著吏部飛咨飭問迴覆.²⁵²

Recently, there are edicts delivered to the Northern Region on specific affairs, [However] whether the officials have received them or not? [whether they] execute the affairs or not? Nothing was stated in Nguyen Huu Than’s memorials. Why is it so? Instructing the Board of Personnel immediately inquires [the northern office] to report.

Disruptive communication was not uncommon. Dispatched personnel 參贊 such as Nguyen Cong Tru did not present sufficient information via regular channels as expected by the ruler. His demand for direct written communication with selected mandarins provided new bureaucratic functions for memorials. The change gave confidential reports new capacities to engage with administration, deliberation, and decision-making. It allowed them to adjust to the bureaucratic weakness of the Nguyen state in terms of staff shortage and gave Minh Menh new extended hands on the grounds.²⁵³ Most importantly, by adding vermilion endorsements, he activated the paperwork’s capacity to engage with decision-making and power control. The emperor had redefined memorials.

Redefining memorials

²⁵¹ DNTH, II, 44: 3a-b.

²⁵² Minh Menh edict on 19/01/1827. MMNC, I, 9: 42a.

²⁵³ See, for instance, Choi (2004) demonstrates how trusted mandarins in southern Vietnam helped to carry Minh Menh’s political agenda. Choi, *Southern Vietnam*. My take on the subject involves Nguyen Cong Tru and other officials in the Red River delta during the 1830s, whose direct and confidential communication with Hue played essential roles to make the emperor’s administrative reform plausible. See Vũ Đức Liêm, “Chơi Với Vua Như Đùa Với Hồ’: Nguyễn Công Trứ Trong Trật Tự Quyền Lực Của Minh Mệnh (Serving a King Is like to Play with Tiger: Nguyen Cong Tru in the Minh Menh Power Order),” in *Nguyễn Công Trứ và Sự Nghiệp Lập Thân Kiến Quốc*, ed. Nguyễn Công Lý et al. (Hà Nội: KHXH, 2018), 157–87.

Minh Menh fundamentally transformed memorials in terms of structure and function. The “information-hungry” ruler set up infrastructures for paperwork and transportation. In 1827, he applied new standards of postal transport, including the categories of *most urgent* 最緊, high-speed 次緊, and regular deliveries 常行.²⁵⁴ Time-limit was established for transporting official papers to every corner of the empire.

Table 5.16. Delivery pace of memorials from Hanoi and Gia Dinh to Hue (1820)
Source: DNTL, II, 1: 23b-24a.²⁵⁵

	Gia Dinh (1000 km)	Hanoi (700 km)	notes
最緊 Most urgent	Less than nine days (reward nine copper coins 緡)	Less than four days six hours (reward six copper coin 緡)	
	Nine days (reward six copper coins 緡)	Four days six hours (reward four copper coins 緡)	
	Ten days (No reward)		
	Ten days and one hour (30 slight strokes)		
	11 days 01 hour (50 light strokes)		
	...Punishment up to 90 heavy stroke		
次緊 High-speed delivery	Ten days (a reward of four copper coins 緡)	Five days (a reward of three copper coins 緡)	
	11 days (no punishment)	Six days (no punishment)	
	12 days 01 hour (30 light strokes)	Seven days one hour (30 light strokes)	
常行 Normal delivery	12 days	Six days	
	13 days (no punishment)	Seven days (no punishment)	
	14 days 1 hour (30 light strokes)	Eight days one hour (30 light strokes)	

In 1826, violence escalated in the northern region caused of the Phan Ba Vanh rebellion. Immediately, direct communication and confidential reports were deployed at high frequency. Minh Menh suggested Nguyen Cong Tru, a close advisor in the Red River delta, to submit private reports: “from now on, if having urgent affairs, [you are] allowed

²⁵⁴ DNTL, II 44 3a.

²⁵⁵ Comparing to the postal deliveries under the Gia Long period:

Table 5. 17. Time-limit for Gia Định-Hue postal delivery 驛程限, 1803

Source: DNTL, I 20 17b.

Delivery types	Time-limits	Notes
最敏 most urgent	12 days	
次緊 High-speed delivery	13 days	
常行 Normal delivery	14 days	
Late delivery penalty	15 days (no reward)	
	16-18 days (stroke penalty)	
	19 days (death penalty)	

to directly submit sealed documents” 嗣有緊要機務準其寔封真達。²⁵⁶ The ‘sealed reports’ (寔封: lit. *sealed [reports] of truth*), sometimes known as ‘main version’ 正本, were the infantile version of confidential memorials. Originally, Minh Menh referred to the Han system of *sealed reports* 寔封 and *duplicate versions* 副封. The *duplicate* bore memorialist’s signatures on the envelope and could be opened and read by court ministers before the *main versions* were submitted to the emperor if the contents were found appropriate.²⁵⁷ On the edict written on 02/03/1827, Minh Menh provided details of how the communication of *sealed memorials* should be conducted.

嗣後如有緊要機事務理該上聞者，準爾實封派人直達或咨呈該城由驛發遞。欽此。²⁵⁸

From now on, if there are urgent affairs to report, you are permitted to use ‘direct memorial’ and employ people for transportation or communicate with the northern regional government for postal delivery.

Nguyen Cong Tru, a third-grade official (3A, *thi lang* 侍郎) was allowed (and instructed) to correspond with the palace via confidential reports 實封派人直達. This was the first time such a command was ‘officially’ delivered, following a critical military situation in the Red River delta. The rebel leader, Phan Ba Vanh gathered up to 5,000 followers, captured coastal areas of several provinces, and inflicted severe military defeats upon the imperial army.²⁵⁹ Tru was not unique, however, when it came to correspondence with the throne. On the same day, another official, Nguyen Duc Nhuan 阮德潤 was instructed with the same request, and so were officials from Ninh Binh five days earlier.²⁶⁰

That memorial flow formed a new exchange channel between dispatched, frontier officials and the throne, at a time when confidential correspondence was not fully-fledged yet. Communication using the memorialists’ couriers 實封派人直達 opened a brand new source of information to the emperor. It is not difficult to realize that Minh Menh’s initiative derived from the palace memorial system invented by emperor Kangxi; however, the Vietnamese application was not in full operating mode until 1831. That year, provincial officials were encouraged to submit memorials collectively, individually, and

²⁵⁶ DNTL, II, 43: 24b. Also see Minh Menh’s instruction to Nguyen Duc Nhuan with identical request, “嗣有緊要事務，準寔封奏聞”. DNTL, II, 43: 26a-b. On Nguyen Cong Tru on this period, see Vu, “Nguyễn Công Trứ: Nhân Thức Thời Đại, Thực Hành Chính Trị (Nguyen Cong Tru: On the Question of His Age and Political Actions).”

²⁵⁷ MMNC, Vol. 1, First collection, trans. Tran Van Quyen (Hanoi: KHXH, 2000), note 1: 228.

²⁵⁸ MMNC, I, 10: 15b-16a.

²⁵⁹ See my detailed treatment of this crisis in Vu, *Village rebellion and social violence...*

²⁶⁰ DNTL, II, 43: 26a-b.

confidentially on local situations.²⁶¹ Several months later, *greeting palace memorials* were added to the list.²⁶²

The expansion of memorial usage indicated the activation of paperwork authority. Private memorial submissions held essential roles in the extension of Minh Menh's rule. Dispatched officials such as Le Van Cong, Hoang Quynh, Nguyen Tri Phuong, and frontiers generals such as Ta Quang Cu, Le Van Duc, Truong Minh Giang, and Nguyen Cong Tru were able to communicate directly with the palace. Their memorial reached the emperor's desk without delay or interventions of the boards. The communication channel allowed Minh Menh to bypass regional governments, as seen in his dealing with political crises and military conflicts in Hanoi and Saigon between 1826 and 1832. In that sense, the activation of memorials shifted administrative relationships and power structure in Vietnam. They rechanneled information flow, relocated power-centre, transformed the mechanism of decision-making, and literarily turned the emperor's desk into the headquarter of imperial governance.

A brand new bureaucracy was born: the bureaucracy of minium endorsements. The command of state affairs via official papers and delivering decisions via rescripts reflected through Minh Menh's vehement commitment to engage with paperwork operations. He was the first to introduce the concept of endorsed records 本批 in 1820.²⁶³ In 1826, he stated:

朕聽政之暇，凡中外章疏每於燈下，口讀手書或漏下二三鼓乃寢。²⁶⁴

After court audiences, I work with inner and outer [court's] memorials under the lamp, reading and reviewing [them] until the second, and third drum echoes [11 pm to 1 am] before going to bed.

As this thesis suggests, Minh Menh's statecraft viewing from the paperwork perspective was defined by the administration of edicts and the administration of vermilion endorsements. I have illustrated how imperial edicts played vital roles in the performance of personal rule by taking direct control of decision-making. Vermilion rescripts, on the other hand, provided the monarch with swift interventions in administrative affairs. Issuing an edict required preparation, and frequently, the mobilization of drafters. The vermilion brush is an ideal choice to assure imperial decisions are implemented with less deployment of the palace staff. The administrative significance of minium rescripts went

²⁶¹ DNTL, II, 76: 15b-24b.

²⁶² DNTL, II, 89: 14a.

²⁶³ DNTL, II, 1: 17b.

²⁶⁴ DNTL, II, 39: 4a.

far beyond a decision-making mechanism. They envisioned the planning of governance and emperorship. As a result, the nuclear activity of Hue bureaucracy, concerning official papers, was to manage the circulation and preservation of endorsed documents. It experienced the ruler encouraged officials to submit private memorials (*sealed papers* 封本 and *sealed papers of truth* 寔封) via direct exchanges with the palace (1827). He reprimanded those who failed to memorialize back, in response to royal instructions. Memorials were also deployed to report on implementations of verbal edicts. “When palace eunuchs verbally deliver any affair, [the received officers] first memorialize and wait, then follow clear imperial edicts to execute.” 凡內監奉傳報何事，必須覆奏，後奉明旨於行。²⁶⁵ Therefore, any attempt to understand the Nguyen political culture and Minh Menh’s rule would be incomplete if one does not consider endorsed memorials and their bureaucratic roles. In addition, the memorials themselves were visual demonstrations of institutional transformations.

As a result, the treatment of minium endorsements was the central concern of the Nguyen court to which tremendous commitment and initiative were dedicated. In the bureaucratic view, working with memorials was the quintessential representation of ‘diligent and talented governance’ 明慎政體. *DNTL* suggests that: “Memorials whether submitted from the capital or outer regions all undergone the emperor’s exhaustive scrutiny, [he then] directly instructing court offices via endorsements. He deals with most of the essential businesses, either endorsing or drafting responses. It is the beginning of the practice of endorsing memorials.”²⁶⁶ Minh Menh explained the initiative to command the vermilion brush, because “There are important issues that high-rank officials were temporarily unable to adjust or matters that I suddenly think of. For those, I must personally draft [edicts] or suggest proclamations or endorsements.” 間有關要事件，在廷諸大臣倘一時未能領會，與朕偶有思慮所及，不得不自擬撰，或草付，或硃批。” By the MM4 (1823), the quantity of those documents had reached ‘more than hundreds and thousands of items’ 已積幾千百餘件。²⁶⁷

The ‘art of vermilion endorsement’ can be taken in different forms. Each has the capacity to exercise various executive measures, and Minh Menh had them all installed. He utilized the vermilion brush to intimidate, encourage, show fondness, and give detailed instructions. As suggested in a nineteenth-century memoir, Minh Menh overwhelmingly

²⁶⁵ *DNTL*, II, 31: 3a.

²⁶⁶ *DNTL*, II, 1: 17b. Original text, “帝明慎政體，凡中外章疏一一經覽，面論諸御擬旨批發，事重者多自擬撰或草或硃批，批本自此始。”




²⁶⁷ *MMNC*, 1b-2a.

dominated the court and inflicted fear on courtiers and palace secretaries.²⁶⁸ Analysis of the following endorsed memorial intends to sketch a brief introduction to the picture of Hue's bureaucracy at work. The memorial was submitted on 15/06/1825 (MM6/4/29) by Left and Right Chief commanders of the Central Imperial Guards Ton That Binh and Tran Van Cuong 侍中左右統制宗室炳, 陳文強. They proposed a list of escorted officials assigned to follow the imperial tour in Quang Nam 上御廣南. Selections were made by the emperor, through vermilion circles 硃圈 and vermilion spots 硃點 on the official names.²⁶⁹

	Names		Endorsed form
	宗室炳 Tôn Thất Bình	侍中, 左統制臣宗室炳 Thị trung, Tả Thống chế thần Tôn Thất Bình Attending [general] at the center, Chief Commander to the Left, named Ton That Binh	硃圈 Vermilion circle
	胡文張 Hồ Văn Trương	前壹衛, 衛尉張胡文張 Tiền nhất vệ, Vệ úy Trương, Hồ Văn Trương First division of the front, commander Trương, named Ho Van Trung	硃圈 Vermilion circle
	阮文鳳 Nguyễn Văn Phương	前貳衛, 衛尉鳳阮文鳳 Tiền nhị vệ, Vệ úy Phương, Nguyễn Văn Phương Second division of the front, commander Phương, named Nguyen Van Phuong.	硃圈 Vermilion circle
	阮文議 Nguyễn Văn Nghị	左壹衛, 衛尉議阮文議 Tả nhất vệ, Vệ úy Nghị, Nguyễn Văn Nghị First division to the Left, commander Nghị, named Nguyen Van Nghi	硃圈 Vermilion circle
	黃文站 Hoàng Văn Trạm	左貳衛, 衛尉和黃文站 Tả nhị vệ, Vệ úy Trạm, Hoàng Văn Trạm Second division to the Left, commander Hoa named Hoang Van Tram	硃圈 Vermilion circle
	阮有欽 Nguyễn Hữu Khâm	左壹衛, 衛尉欽阮有欽 Tả nhất vệ, Vệ úy Khâm, Nguyễn Hữu Khâm First division to the Left, commander Kham, named Nguyen Huu Kham	vermilion spots 硃點
	陳文祿 Trần Văn Lộc	中壹衛, 副衛尉祿陳文祿 Trung nhất vệ, Phó vệ úy Lộc, Trần Văn Lộc First division to the Center, lieutenant commander Loc, named Tran Van Loc	硃圈 Vermilion circle

²⁶⁸ Chaigneau, *Souvenirs de Hue*, 253.

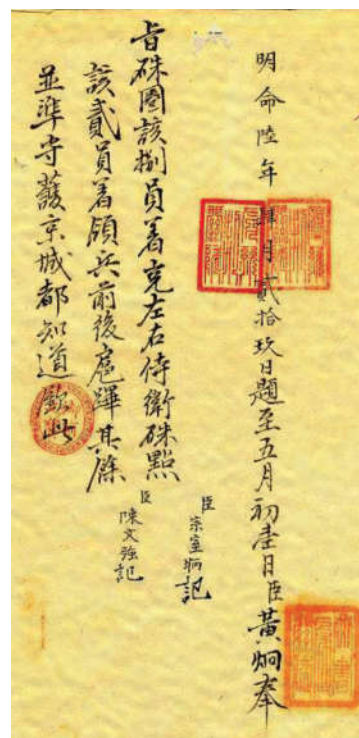
²⁶⁹ MMB, 12: 76-77. The memorial was translated in Vietnamese in Trung tâm Lưu trữ Quốc gia I TTLTQG1, *Ngự Phê Trên Châu Bản Triều Nguyễn (Imperial Endorsements on the Nguyen's Chauban)* (Hà Nội: Nxb Đại học Sư phạm, 2015), 41-43.

	黃文隱 Hoàng Văn Ẩn	中貳衛, 副衛尉隱黃文隱 Trung nhị vệ, Phó vệ úy Ẩn, Hoàng Văn Ẩn Second division to the Center, lieutenant commander An, named Hoang Van An	vermilion spots 硃點
	陳文機 Trần Văn Cơ	前貳衛, 副衛尉機陳文機 Tiền nhị vệ, Phó vệ úy Cơ, Trần Văn Cơ Second division of the front, lieutenant Co, named Tran Van Co	硃圈 Vermilion circle
	黎福寶 Lê Phúc Bảo	右貳衛, 副衛尉寶黎福寶 Hữu nhị vệ, Phó vệ úy Bảo, Lê Phúc Bảo Second division to the Right, lieutenant commander Bao, named Le Phuc Bao	硃圈 Vermilion circle

One day later (16/06/1825), the memorial passed through the hand of the chief palace secretary (*Office of Records and Books*), Hoang Quynh 黃炯. The 4A-ranked mandarin had served Minh Menh since the latter resided at the princely mansion and was among the first to enter the palace secretary office in 1820. Quynh's remark on the memorial read:

題至五月初壹日, 臣黃炯奉旨: 硃圈該捌員著充左右侍衛。硃點該貳員著領兵前後, 扈蹕其餘並準守護京城。部知道。欽此。

Noted on the first day of the fifth month, your official Hoang Quynh received the imperial instruction 奉旨: vermilion circle 硃圈 [selected] eight persons [who are] nominated to be imperial guards to the left and right 左右侍衛. Vermilion spots [selected] two officials [who are] escorted at the front and rear. The rest [of the list] remains to protect the capital city. The board [Board of Defence] acknowledges.



The official statement translated the imperial rescript into bureaucratic implementation. It was certified by two sealed stamps, the authenticated seal of the Office of Records and Books 文書房關防 and the imperial authenticated seal 御前之寶.

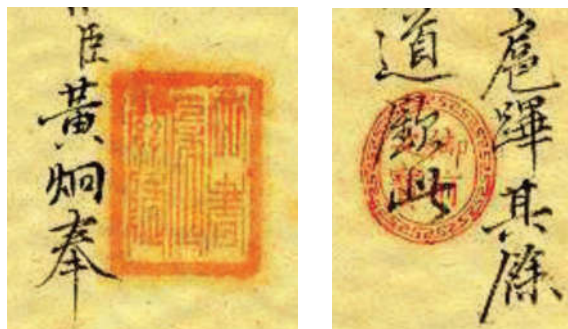


Figure 5.8. Authenticated stamps of the Office of Records and Books (Left) and the imperial authenticated stamp (Right)
Source: MMCB, 12: 76-77.

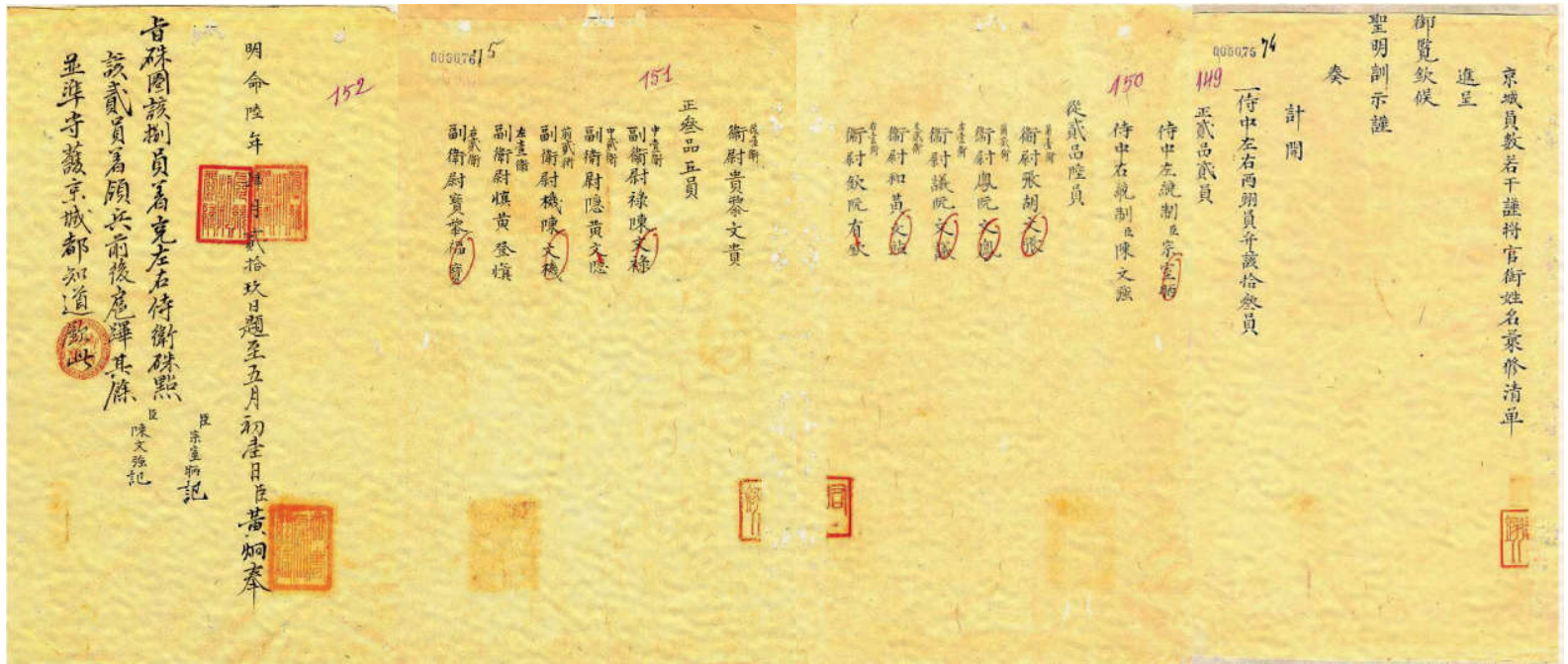


Figure 5.9. Memorial of Ton That Binh and Tran Van Cuong on 15/06/1825
Source: MMCB, 12: 76-77.

Because the processing of endorsed memorials occurred at the inner court, the place was carefully guarded. Even board presidents (2A) were not allowed to enter the Office of Records and Books without authorization.²⁷⁰ Ruling by vermilion brushes depended on the capacity and accountability of the inner palace. Communication disruption and the vulnerability of information manipulation were the major, and frequent, sources of political chaos. The emperor put his faith in papers. In doing so, he expanded and institutionalized the palace structure between 1820 and 1836, filling the inner court with confidants. His confidence, however, was placed on neither individual nor institution, but on written paperwork. Endorsed memorials ruled that world of bureaucracy because they mediated institutional exchanges. The official records bear witness to the entire process in which decisions were made, and visually exhibit those steps on the pages.

The beginning of endorsed memorials was not a smooth journey. There was no operation center for the red records 紅本 in the early Minh Menh days. The boards outranked palace secretary offices, resulting in the powerlessness of the latter to monitor the implementation of imperial rescripts. In addition, palace offices were only allowed to keep duplicate copies of memorials for storage. When endorsed memorials were sent down, the boards sometimes avoided taking paperwork responsibility. The situation led Minh Menh to take action in 1822; ordering all endorsed memorials must be processed, particularly in case of affairs involving more than one board. Accordingly, the most involved ministry has to retain the original endorsed papers, then copy 錄 and send 送 them to the concerned boards for future consultations 存照. Finally, a duplicate copy must be deposited at the Office of Records and Books for preservation 錄送副本留文書房.²⁷¹

The practice was retained till the late 1820s, although the palace archive (the Eastern Hall) was erected in 1826.²⁷² The growing influx of memorials challenged the board's paperwork cooperation. In 1828, board officers shifted the blame on each other in managing emperor-rescripted papers, resulting in new regulations for paperwork processing.²⁷³ At the same time, Minh Menh had the documents firmly guarded to prevent potential interventions and information corruption. As a move to expand executive authorities of minium rescripts, officials were sent out on missions with endorsed memorials.²⁷⁴

²⁷⁰ DNTL, II, 17: 23b-24a.

²⁷¹ DNTL, II, 15: 9a.

²⁷² DNTL, II, 38: 11b.

²⁷³ DNTL, II, 54: 19b.

²⁷⁴ DNTL, II, 44: 3a.

The institutionalization of the Grand Secretariat renovated administrative operations at Hue Grand palace. Their activities centralized the flow of rescripted memorials. Endorsed papers were all collected and stored at a single location: the palace archive.²⁷⁵ The Grand Palace under the Minh Menh reign was extended with staff and paperwork authority. It permitted the Grand Secretariat directly assign memorials to the involved boards and supervises their working process. At the same time, violations of the imperial rescripts guaranteed a high price to pay. One of the convicts was the favourite grand secretary Ha Tong Quyen, who was removed from office (1831) after altering one character in a memorial to fit the emperor's comment.²⁷⁶ A more severe case came in 1832 that alarmed Minh Menh and led to the initiation of new conducts for re-scribing the emperor's endorsements. In that case, the original rescript, “得革” *removed (from the office)* was illicitly replaced by “為降調徑” *demoted and transferred*, but the Board of Justice failed to investigate. The ruler had no choice but to launch new rules under which only chief officials at the boards and Grand Secretariat were allowed to copy imperial endorsements and orders.²⁷⁷

The management of endorsed documents, however, continued to be challenging. Censors were mobilized to take part in supervising memorial flows.²⁷⁸ The enforcement turned paperwork operations into a complex administrative business: managed by the Grand Secretariat, examined and implemented by the boards, and overseen by the Censorate. Sent-out officials with vermilion records became a new way of administration. In 1834, the court ordered the recollection of endorsed documents, edicts, and minium records that had been previously sent out on missions 硃批諭旨紅本發往諸地方遵行.²⁷⁹ Vermilion edicts were also delivered to boards and provinces following dispatched officials.²⁸⁰ The growing use of endorsed memorials outside the palace signalled new bureaucratic dynamism. Vermilion rescripts carrying the emperor's instructions took part in governance and empire expansion.

One captivating characteristic of Minh Menh's endorsements was his efforts to maintain the 'neutral sense', and make them official, rather than personal, vulgar, or emotional. He hesitated to demonstrate personal favor publically. However, as shown on

²⁷⁵ DN TL, II, 63: 27b-28a.

²⁷⁶ DN TL, II, 77: 5a. Because a Grand Secretariat staff miscopied a Minh Menh's compilation concerning the county of Thanh Xuyen 青川縣 to Thanh Chau 青州縣, Quyen had changed the county-name on the memorial to suit the record, and later was impeached by another Grand Secretariat staff. The grand secretary Than Van Quyen was also demoted by three ranks.

²⁷⁷ DN TL, II, 85: 35a-b.

²⁷⁸ DN TL, II 141 12a-b.

²⁷⁹ DN TL, II, 123: 15b-16a.

²⁸⁰ DN TL, II, 206: 21a-b. My thanks to Professor Alexander B. Woodside for drawing my attention to this significant event.

thousands of memorials, the rescripts appeared in a wide range of styles, formats, and sometimes, a sense of intimacy, particularly when it came to high-ranked and trusted officials. In these cases, the endorsements were medium to cultivate personal relations. Taking Minh Menh’s remark to Nguyen Duc Xuyen, Commander of the War-elephant Army (掌象軍阮德川, 1A), for example. On 28/12/1824, the general submitted a request to the throne, asking to withdraw next year-salary in advance due to the family's financial difficulty. The emperor endorsed as follows:

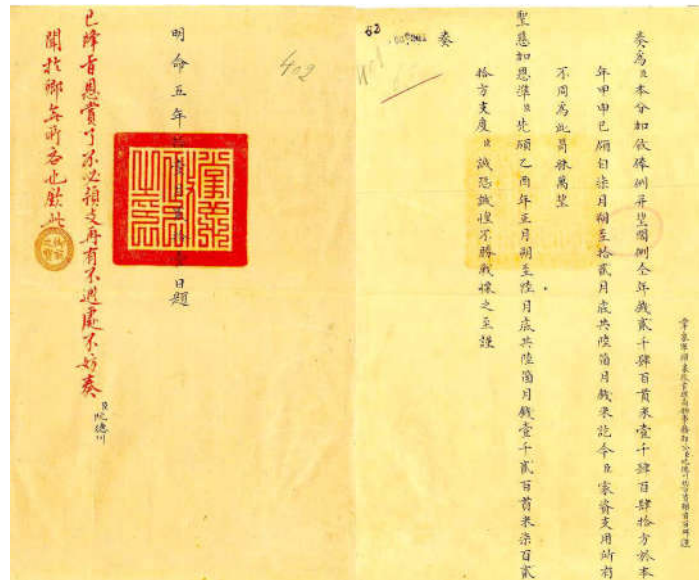


Figure 5.10. Nguyen Duc Xuyen’s memorial on 10/12/1823
Source: MMCB, 9: 201.

已降旨恩賞了，不必預支。再有不週處，不妨奏聞。於卿無所吝也。²⁸¹

[I have] Already issued an edict with reward [to you], [you] do not need to collect [the salary] in advance. [If] there is anything in need, [you are] free to memorialize. For you, there is nothing parsimonious.²⁸²

The above language speaks for itself. Minh Menh wanted influential military figures like Xuyen on his side to compete with Le Chat and Le Van Duyet.²⁸³ Sometimes, the rescripts could be in hard language, especially in cases of failed missions and military defeats. Minh Menh was well-known for showing impatience with military failures. When an official named Phan Thanh Gian refused to advance his troops due to steep geographical

²⁸¹ MMCB, 9: 201.

²⁸² On the relationship between Xuyen and the emperor and royal family, see his ‘official biography’: Nguyễn Đức Xuyên, “*Lý Lịch Sự vụ 履歷事務 Official Biography*,” *Nghiên Cứu và Phát Triển* 6–7, no. 123–124 (2015).

²⁸³ Vu and Duong, “Phe Phái, Lợi Ích Nhóm, và Quyền Lực ở Việt Nam Đầu Thế Kỷ XIX (Factionalism, Interest Group, and Political Power in Early Nineteenth Century Vietnam).” See more on Nguyễn Đức Xuyên in Nguyen, “*Lý Lịch Sự vụ*.”

terrain, he memorialized to the court and pleaded the consequences. Minh Menh was unhappy with the response and wrote back:

不謂汝等如此退縮以致長惡挫威，覽奏不勝髮指。
 Do not expect that you are so cowardly, [you are] nurturing the power of evils;
 reviewing the memorial [makes me] so angry that my hairs go straight.²⁸⁴

In the end, the ruler was skilful in using memorials and rescripts to fortify the personal relationship. His endorsements were carefully considered and written because of the intention to maintain the bureaucratic structure that would not be partial by royal favor. With some exceptions, however, Minh Menh’s passion for his close confidants came sentimental and emotional, including replied endorsements to Le Van Duyet, Le Chat, Nguyen Duc Xuyen, Ta Quang Cu, Nguyen Cong Tru, Hoang Quynh, Nguyen Tri Phuong, Phan Thanh Gian... These were de facto “hands of the king”, whose assistances were essential to the emperor’s political project. The following is part of his exchanges with Hoang Quynh in 1838:

Hoang Quynh	Minh Menh
First memorial: “I am going to administer at the outer region; my family is poor, my children are immature, [they are] counting on nothing to have food. [Thus, I request] to deposit my salary of grain at home for my family to use.”	Endorsement: “Awarding 100 copper coins and 100 <i>phuong</i> of grain to feed the children. I know that you are poor, [and thus will not] deduct from your salary. Your character is negligent 疎躁. From now on, you must be mindful to avoid mistakes.”
Second memorial: “I am a man of no talent, thanks to your generosity that I am employed, appointed to the responsibility to protect the frontier. [The emperor] granted favors not only upon me but also my children. Also, your two-word teaching 疎躁 (negligent) is like inserting acupuncture needles into my paralyzed body. I read the endorsement, and suddenly my problem is cured. This is because the emperor is a gentle father and a stern teacher. Although, I am far away from thousands of miles, [I] always respect like in a short distance. From now on, I will try to overcome my careless character, be mindful of curing my hot temple, and of replying to your countless attentiveness that giving birth and a settled position to me”.	Endorsement: “Only [those] recovering from the pain understand the pain. You should keep [that] in mind every day, do not forget, [only that, you will] grow up 成人”. ²⁸⁵

²⁸⁴ DNTL, II, 74: 20b.

²⁸⁵ DNTL, II, 172: 2b-3a.

Adding more capacities for the emperor to deliver vermilion rescripts was the introduction of *tally suggestions* and *yellow suggestion cards*. By the early 1830s, memorials submitted by the Six Boards and Grand Secretariat usually contained summaries of several others, supplementing with their policy suggestions 恭擬奉旨. The move increased the speed of processing official papers and gave birth to a new form of decision-making where the emperor inscribed directly on summarized memorials with policy suggestions made by boards and the Grand Secretariat.²⁸⁶

Memorials, statecraft, and the Vietnamese vision of documenting bureaucracy

Rulers collected information not merely as an end in itself but also as a means of controlling their subjects. That is another reason why it became customary to document social and political affairs and events in writing as completely as possible.

Markus Friedrich, 2018: 20.

In 1320, the king of France ordered the *Chambre des Comptes* to keep a journal for every session. He decreed, “We desire that all matters shall be entered [in this book] daily, so that one may know about everything that is done there of which one should have a record.”²⁸⁷ The concern of paperwork and political accountability was certainly shared in Hue in the 1820s as its ruler ordered the state treasury and storehouses to collect their records and applied stamps every five days.²⁸⁸ The design of memorials, in particular, became the center of the correspondence system. Their flows involved a wide range of court organizations, supervised by collective efforts, and operated through complex institutional networks, from the Transmission Office, Postal Office, palace guards and eunuchs, boards, grand secretaries, grand councillors, and censors to the monarch.

On a much smaller scale compared to the Ming and Qing systems, however, the Nguyen was not in the position of upholding the same level of institutional complexity. The Vietnamese court did not invest much in textual styles and complex regulations but was greatly concerned with paperwork authentication and secrecy. That being said, they still created problems of their own. The respects-paying memorials, for instance, were

²⁸⁶ See, for instance, the memorial submitted by the Grand Secretariat on 10/01/1836 (MM14/11/22) that contained information of six other petitions. The summarized contents were added with the Grand Secretariat’s policy suggestions for each case, including a petition submitted by prince asking for granted name, two reports by the Board of Defence on military affairs, one report from Binh Thuan province, one edict concerning the situation in Nam Ngai, and a report related to the palace eunuch Nguyen An 阮恩. The vermilion spots endorsed by Minh Menh on each summary was a convenient way to show his approval of the suggestions. MNCB, 49: 293-294.

²⁸⁷ Friedrich and Dillon, *The Birth of the Archive*, 21.

²⁸⁸ DNTL, II, 3: 9a-b.

developed in 1832 on the ground of growing local rebellions. Minh Menh sought updated local information and ordered quarterly ‘confidential’ reports from chief provincial mandarins.²⁸⁹ That effort to set up a new channel of imperial communication had been seen under the Kangxi reign.²⁹⁰ In Beijing, the very greetings memorials gradually evolved into the palace memorial system. The Vietnamese application was sometimes absent from the confidential aspect. Minh Menh frequently revealed the contents of the *greetings palace memorials* and had the court debated.²⁹¹ What is more, these private reports were processed and stored by the Grand Secretariat before transferring to the Privy Council in 1836.²⁹²

In the same manner, the use of seals and other paperwork elements was implemented, resulting in constructing organizations of the Nguyen memorials. Minh Menh’s major concern however was more than their conformity. His frequent complaints and disappointments were placed on the quality of memorials and the recommended initiatives. After receiving 1833 seasonal *respects-paying memorials*, he complained to the President of the Board of Rites, “Recently, provinces submitted annual reports, including To Tran, governor of Dinh Tuong, Nguyen Cong Lieu, governor of Phu Yen. They mentioned neither people’s livelihood, nor bureaucratic affairs, but fully bragged with flattering words. Their writing styles are too poor. Oh, mandarins serve the emperor like sons serve their father. However, they do not have any single heartfelt words and conducted the writing without any responsibility. Given the fact that they are degree-holders, how worse that military officials’ writings could be; no wonder those [the writings] of the General-governor of An Tinh, Ta Quang Cu, General-governor of Ninh Thai, Nguyen Dinh Pho, are unsurprisingly bad”.²⁹³ To the end of his reign, the situation experienced insignificant improvement. In an edict in 1839, the monarch continued the upsetness when coming through respects-paying memorials:

此次經覽諸地方督撫布按請安摺內夾敘條陳各款，就中可采者少而不可采者殊多。卽如平富總督武春誦之夾言買象。高平阮世槿之無事增兵。武抵改革服飾于山蠻。黎有德敘查拿偷竊于邑里，凡此有何關要而亦以夾敘入奏。甚至如鄭文儒之請移林分居民，欲悉撒人家屋宇... 總之謬妄黷陳不通事理，瑣瑣細細，無一可觀。²⁹⁴

²⁸⁹ DNTL, II, 89: 14a.

²⁹⁰ Wu, *Communication and Imperial Control in China; Evolution of the Palace Memorial System, 1693-1735*, 109–10.

²⁹¹ DNTL, II, 135: 2a-11a

²⁹² DNTL, II, 166: 4a.

²⁹³ DNTL, II, 89: 14b.

²⁹⁴ HDSL, 5: 16a-b.

Coming across this year's respects-paying memorials from local general governors, governors, judicial commissioners, and financial commissioners, are full of unrealistic policies rather than practical ones. For example, Binh Phu general governor Vu Xuan Can suggests purchasing elephants; Nguyen The Dao in Cao Bang province, despite the peaceful time, suddenly asks for more soldiers; Vo Dinh asks to transform the highlanders' customs; Le Huu Duc asks to capture robbers in villages which is of no significance to present in memorials. Even Trinh Van Nho asks to displace people in the forests and seek to destroy their houses ... In all, those are insane words, making no sense and unworthy details of no use.

The complaint returned in the following year, targeting governors-general who failed to respond to the imperial remarks on respects-paying memorials.²⁹⁵

It is intriguing to realize that those administrative efforts were part of the design of empire construction. Empire designers, such as Qianlong and Minh Menh expected from mandarins excellent literary skills that should be applied to the memorial system. Minh Menh's administrative centralization generated a new generation of Confucian-training scholars who were power-hungry and prepared to take responsibility for fashioning the textual and documentary infrastructures of the empire. Minh Menh set high standards for his subordinates in promoting writing and the use of administrative documents. Communication was vital to the efficiency and accountability of the bureaucracy and determined the emperor's scheme of personal rule. The result was enormous commitments invested in the operation of memorials.

With the emperor placing his faith in paperwork, the overuse of official stamps, intricate regulations, constant institutional innovations, and overproduction of official records came as no surprise. How much paperwork was enough for bureaucratic efficiency? The question is perfectly valid from the perspective of today's governance. It was undoubtedly the query that kept Minh Menh awake at night. The emperor was moving from the eagerness of documenting the state to lamenting the excessive production of papers that overwhelmed the Grand Secretariat capacity and its archive, and exhausted metropolitan staff. Board presidents and Chief of the Hanlin Academy 翰林院院長/掌 bewailed the staffing deficiency for edict-drafting and copying.²⁹⁶ The expanding use of official papers transformed the Nguyen administration. Each memorial type emerged leading to a new correspondence channel and a possible mechanism of decision-making.

Increasing paperwork inflicted pressures, not only on the central court but also on the whole administrative system. In 1836, the anxiety of excessive official papers spread

²⁹⁵ HDSL, 5: 17a-b.

²⁹⁶ DNTL, II, 178: 4b-5a.

to provinces. One governor-general submitted a petition, proposing that legal cases concerning households, marital relations, lands and rice fields, and minor miscellaneous disputes should not be all set in court records and conducted interrogations to reduce paperwork complexity (凡戶婚田土及雜犯母須一一立案取供以省案牘。何事已經控拏而求息者聽其退訟).²⁹⁷ Minh Menh was certainly astonished, if not shocked, but managed to calm his bureaucrats' nerves. He claimed that the official was an uneducated military person who only listened to others without his initiative. He just wanted to set things right but turned himself into extreme (黃文站武弁不學，不過偏聽人言，非出自己見，其中多屬矯枉過正).²⁹⁸ Despite those efforts, the paperwork obsession continued lingering. The fear of having too much paperwork served as a legitimate constraint for further administrative reforms. In the summer of 1833, in response to a proposal for military reform by Nguyen Cong Tru, the court claimed that it was unrealizable because of the bulk of work. "[Right now], official records are already tumultuous, unable to manage. Cong Tru's opinion is impossible to conduct. The emperor approves" (冊籍紛繁，將目前已不勝其擾矣。公著所言不可行也。帝然之).²⁹⁹ The impact of overproduced paperwork was highly consequent. They obstructed official initiatives of renovations and even created chaos and dysfunction in the court. In 1836, the Censorate launched an investigation on boards and the Grand Secretariat and revealed the loss of 2,000 documents that involved 100 officials.³⁰⁰

Finally, there were staff problems when their shortage was found at all court institutes, mostly related to paperwork-managed responsibilities. After the 1826 palace examination, ten more graduates were added to the inner court. Two years later, the Transmission Office increased its staff by 50%.³⁰¹ Lastly, Grand Secretariat and Privy Council enforced the palace structure with 50 people, but the growth seems never sufficient. As demonstrated above, the desperation of chief offices in searching for new personnel quotas was frequent. Minh Menh, on the other hand, had more to worry about regarding the quality and competency of degree holders. On more than one occasion, he lamented the fact that the newly selected were ill-prepared for working with paperwork and literary composition. To be fair, the emerging literati under Minh Menh's patronage were indispensable to the profound bureaucratic transformations. Scholar-officials played key performers in the paperwork-based political culture. With centralized institutionalization being the foundation of the Nguyen imperial governance, the mission

²⁹⁷ DNTL, II, 172: 7a-b.

²⁹⁸ DNTL, II, 172: 7b.

²⁹⁹ DNTL, II, 94: 3a.

³⁰⁰ DNTL, II, 176: 31b.

³⁰¹ DNTL, II, 54: 30a.

of the intellectuals was not only to transform a military-oriented administration but also to create an ecology for the operation of official papers. Metropolitan examinations paved the way for them to migrate into and gradually dominate the bureaucrats. Within a decade, Truong Dang Que, Ha Tong Quyen, Phan Ba Dat, Truong Quoc Dung, Phan Thanh Gian, Ha Duy Phien, Hoang Quynh, etc., elevated to leading court figures. With their rise, Gia Long's uncompleted empire was fundamentally reconstructed.

Vietnam between 1802 and 1841 exemplified an early modern state in innovating, searching for a better administrative apparatus through political centralization, and deploying practical writings as a governing medium. While these changes highlight some aspects of political modernization,³⁰² the struggles over documenting the state indicate the society's long-term challenge in managing official papers. The early nineteenth-century dynasty was facing a cross-cultural and administrative phenomenon of mutual engagement between official archives and bureaucratic innovations, as seen in Europe, the Ottoman Empire, Japan, and China.³⁰³ In the end, Vietnam, however, failed to either modernize their statecraft or make it efficient. As a result, the considerable reduction of paperwork started in 1834. By the early 1860s, Minh Menh's grandson, the weak and indecisive Tu Duc (1848-1883) was likely exhausted with the complex system of official records designed by his grandfather. The king ordered a detour to the "good old days" of the Gia Long bureaucracy.³⁰⁴ The paperwork's 'turmoil' between the 1830s and 1840s resulted from multiple factors. Whether the blame rested on Minh Menh's high ambition, the incompetency of his ministers, or the universal late-imperial bureaucratic dysfunctions, it is clear that the experiences they endured were part of broader trends confronted the traditional societies on the eve of the modern age.

³⁰² See Christopher E Goscha, *Vietnam: A New History* (New York: Basic Books, 2016).

³⁰³ For an overview of the Qing Archives, Bartlett, "Qing Statesmen, Archivists, and Historians and the Question of Memory," 2007. For Korea, see Youn Eunha, "Archival Traditions in Korean History: From Medieval Practice to the Contemporary Public Records Management Act," *Archival Science* 12 (2012): 23–44, and a brief introduction for China: Zhang, "Dang An: A Brief History of the Chinese Imperial Archives and Its Administration." Among the most useful analysis on early modern Europe is Markus Friedrich, *The Birth of Archives* (2018). For a comprehensive treatment of archives, see Blouin and Rosenberg, *Archives, Documentation, and Institutions of Social Memory: Essays from the Sawyer Seminar*.

³⁰⁴ MNCB, 51: 126, 296, 323, 325; DNTL, IV, 27: 9a-b.

CHAPTER VI. CONCLUSION

WRITTEN BUREAUCRACY, DOCUMENTING THE STATE

我朝自有制度與清典不同。

Our dynasty has its own statutes that are dissimilar to those of the Qing.

Hue courtiers, 1832 (DN TL, II, 83: 3b).

“Writing appears to be necessary for the centralized, stratified state to reproduce itself. . . . Writing is a strange thing. . . . The one phenomenon which has invariably accompanied it is the formation of cities and empires: the integration into a political system, that is to say, of a considerable number of individuals . . . into a hierarchy of castes and classes. . . . It seems to favor rather the exploitation than the enlightenment of mankind.”

Lévi-Strauss, 1955: 265–66¹

Until now, records produced by the locals were mostly jumbled: [records] of banditry and burglary are gathered in one volume, [records] of official salary, and materials-expense are bound in one tome. Only when the deadline comes, [the records] are reviewed and classified. Thus, it requires weeks to report check”²

Minh Menh Emperor, 1835.

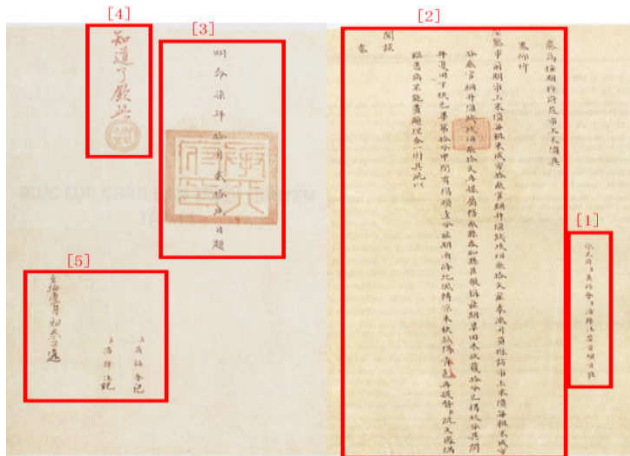


Figure 6.1. A five-part structure of Nguyen’s official documents.
Source: MNCB, 20: 33.



Figure 6.2. A document issued by the Vietnam National Steering Committee for COVID-19 Prevention and Control concerning the pandemic (11/03/2020).
Source: Vietnam Ministry of Health

¹ Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques* (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1955).

² DN TL, II, 141: 13b-14a.

Figure 6.2 is an official document issued by the Vietnam National Steering Committee for COVID-19 Prevention and Control concerning the pandemic on 11/03/2020. This thesis was finished under the social conditions that were legally enforced by that document. As discussed in chapters IV and V about the five-part structure of the Nguyen memorials, I could not help but notice the incredible reverberation imprinted on the contemporary practice of official papers. “*History does not repeat itself, but it often rhymes.*”³ The traditional bureaucratic methods heavily influence the present-day administrative culture. The *déjà vu* indicates a strong historical continuity of bureaucratic institutions but has captured little scholarly attention.

The obsession with paperwork is a long Vietnamese tradition. The transformation and production of official documents took part in shaping bureaucratic operations. Our story, voiced from “sweating buffaloes” to sweating archive-diggers, reflects an enduring struggle in which paperwork was not only a vehicle to deliver governance but also a timeless preoccupation of the states. The year was 1465, under Le Thanh Tong's reign. Tran Ban, a grand academician 大學士陳盤 complained that “people are taking their convoluted cases to courts; documents are urgent [to be processed, but] officials are unable to manage” 民告煩瑣、簿牒倥傯、官不能燭理. Consequently, one additional secretary 書吏 was supplemented to each *yamen*.⁴ Three hundred sixty-eight years later, laments of redundant paperwork came to the Hue court again and frustrated many initiatives of administrative innovations.⁵ The historical resonance leaves us no surprise regarding the present government. One hundred eighty-five years after the “sweating buffaloes”, Vietnam possesses one of the most complex paperwork systems in Southeast Asia, where at least 7,000 document forms are recommended to be withdrawn.⁶

There has been a peculiar legacy of paperwork operation maintained for more than half a millennium and occupied various bureaucratic structures from the traditional to modern, from colonial to communist Vietnam.

³ This quote and its variants have often been attributed to Mark Twain.

⁴ DVSKTT, 12: 20a-b.

⁵ DNLT, II, 109: 13b.

⁶ Phạm Huyền, “Gần 50% ‘giấy Phép Con’ Trái Luật (Nearly 50% of Supplemented Documents Are Illegal),” accessed August 4, 2020, <https://vietnamnet.vn/vn/kinh-doanh/gan-50-giay-phep-con-trai-luat-281745.html>; Hà Duy, “7.000 Giấy Phép Con: Không Tự Cất Bỏ, Nghĩ Chiêu Biễn Tướng (7,000 Supplemented Documents: Unable to Abolish but Disguise to Maintain),” accessed August 4, 2020, <https://vietnamnet.vn/vn/kinh-doanh/dau-tu/7-000-giay-phep-con-khong-tu-cat-bo-nghi-chieu-bien-tuong-301887.html>.

Bureaucracy on the test

This thesis recognizes a consistent pattern of Vietnamese political practice regarding official documents. Their evolution rhymes with the transformations of state, society, and governance. For more than two thousand years, a human community of different peoples acuminated themselves at the southern edge of Chinese empires. They are known in history as “Viet” 越, “*People at the capital*” 京, “*Han people*” 漢人, and “*Vietnamese*”.⁷ Their autonomy was born in the crumbling Tang empire, evolved through different geopolitical organizations, from a collection of Chinese colonies to the kingdoms of Dai Co Viet 大瞿越, Dai Viet 大越, Nguyen Cochinchina, Le-Trinh Tongking, the 1802-unified Vietnam 越南, and the Great South 大南 (1838). Their territorial domains had expanded multiplied between 1400 and 1850, stretching from the Red River delta to the Lower Mekong, from the Sino-Vietnamese to Vietnam-Cambodia borders. Their political philosophies had journeyed from local cults to Buddhism and Confucianism. Their governing structure had grown from fragmented networks of regional chieftains to the Sino-classic-inspired centralized states. Their practice of governance, while involving sophisticated institutional establishments and territorial expansions, was served by one central instrument: paperwork. The use of documents in bureaucratic operations was an essential part of the political traditions, severely impacting the waning and waxing precolonial Vietnamese states and societies.

This study has followed the transforming political culture concerning paperwork, correspondence, institutions, and governance at a critical moment of that *longue durée*, the early modern bureaucracy between 1802 and 1841. Rarely seen before, this is a Vietnam mirrored through official documents, a story of bureaucratic commitments to paperwork, and the excessive complex documentation that haunted its bureaucrats. The case has attested itself to a fascinating example of human society’s search for paperwork practice as part of the broader early modern governing system. Communication and correspondence performed crucial roles in conducting statecraft and constructing empires. This thesis showed that bureaucratic manuscripts were instrumental and symbolic to the administrative authority. Their evolution between 1802 and 1841 shaped the Nguyen political culture and advanced its centralized state-building. Hue court recognized the interaction between practical writings and political institutionalization as the pathway to accountability and efficiency. However, Minh Menh’s appreciations and commitment to the state documentation were stimulated by

⁷ For instance see Taylor, *A History of the Vietnamese*; Goscha, *Vietnam: A New History*; Whitmore and Zottoli, “The Emergence of the State of Vietnam”, 197–233.

excessive fascination. That enthusiasm was responsible for the over-employed and overproduced paperwork to which the dream of a well-governed state turned to spectres of detailed documentation.

This research has contextualized the changing political landscape under which the first unified Vietnam empire emerged. It has also considered a wide range of territorial, bureaucratic, and institutional changes that defined early nineteenth century “Vietnam”. There emanated new ideas of the imperial space, state, bureaucracy, and political culture projected by the Nguyen family. They attempted to run the new domain stretching two thousand kilometers from the single political center of Hue and were trying to make sense of “Vietnam” for the first time. That political and intellectual complexity has been analyzed from the perspectives of geo-and-administrative territory, governmental structure, and deliberative institutions in which paperwork and written communication contributed significant roles in making a new Vietnam.

Between the Gia Long and Minh Menh reigns, momentous changes came to regional-central communication and consolidation of the inner palace structures. The former created an administrative environment where paperwork operated, while the latter turned the palace into the influential headquarter of document-processing and decision-making. Centralizing paperwork flows reshaped not only the institutional and power landscape but also the bureaucratic mechanisms under which the realm was governed. Gia Long’s military-oriented bureaucracy was an incomplete state-and-territory project where the meetings of high-ranked officials (*Congdong*) played substantial roles in delivering central authority. It marked an era of a “*bureaucracy of Congdong paperwork*”.

Then came the Minh Menh reign, a vivid illustration of the interrelation between institutional shifts and state documentation. If changing bureaucratic apparatus provides new institutions for governance, paperwork as instruments of correspondence determines formats, channels, and deliberative mechanisms under which state authority is conveyed and visually exhibited. That journey started with an idea of mighty kingship, a personal vision of direct rule, and a political scheme of an empire. With guidance and the spirit of “Confucian high fundamentalism”, the second Nguyen Emperor targeted the military-style bureaucracy and its underdeveloped correspondence system to project administrative centralization.⁸

The administrative documents reveal intricate evolutions in the Nguyen bureaucracy. Complex governing tasks and large-scale military operations started in

⁸ Reid, *A History of Southeast Asia*, 224.

1826, demanded thorough transformations of the inner court. The emperor showed great interest in personal rule and fully-documented administration. He determined to have frequently updated written information and work directly with memorials. Routine and periodic reports instrumented state governance. Moreover, confidential and express correspondence was initiated following the 1820s-30s emerging social violence. From a paperwork point of view, Hue had entered a “*bureaucracy of edicts*” and “*bureaucracy of vermilion endorsements*”.

The increasing employment of scholar-officials from the 1820s invited many paperwork practitioners. They formed the newly expanded inner-court institutions and constituted a dynamic environment for practical writings. Within weeks of the Minh Menh rule, Gia Long’s fragmented palace secretary offices were amalgamated into the Office of Records and Books (1820). It took a decade for the subsequent designs to come, the Grand Secretariat (1830) and Grand Council (1835), that personal rule was available through orchestrating the imperial correspondence system. Those institutional transformations have been remarkable as they profoundly defined Hue statecraft for the next century.

Paperwork, as demonstrated, evolved along with all those institutional and administrative changes, acting like bloodlines in a bureaucratic body. The heart of that structure was the palace secretary agencies: those, by the early 1830s, grew to be the communication hub and a ‘headquarter’ of the state authority. The shift from a military state to the civil government through complex bureaucratization and ‘documentation’ relied extensively upon expanding the use of paperwork. The process upgraded Gia Long’s unfinished state and presented a consolidated and centralized one based on sophisticated institutional operations. Metropolitan-provincial and intra-institutional communication formed the backbone of the new administrative vigor that determined the Nguyen’s achievements during the 1830s.

Institutional constructions for their enactment were the prevailing inner-court and imperial secretary offices. Their raise was guaranteed by the emperor’s ability to gather a healthy cohort of talented confidants. From 1828, Hoang Quynh, Truong Dang Que, Phan Thanh Gian, Ha Tong Quyen, Nguyen Tri Phuong, Than Van Quyen, and Nguyen Tri Phuong played leading roles in assisting the throne in keeping track of administrative affairs, monitoring report-flows, and preventing potential information disruption. Subsequently, they consolidated paperwork movements to the final destination, the emperor’s desk, where imperial power visualized in the form of direct treatment of documents. *Drafting* 擬撰, *compiling for implementation* 草行, and *vermilion endorsements* 硃批 enabled Minh Menh to introduce signatory symbols of

the documentation authority on the pages of paper. His remarks on memorials gave rise to a brand new practice and concept of paperwork authority, *endorsed records* 批本.⁹ As a result, the empire was now literarily operated following the vermilion strokes of imperial brushes.

Following the traces of document and institutional changes, I have examined a considerable number of administrative manuscripts and recognized the practice of paperwork production as a crucial part of the Nguyen political operation. Various aspects of paperwork's sociopolitical life have been investigated, ranging from functions, usage regulations, and physical features to power symbolism. The practice of multiple document types, for instance, has been recognized in association with organizations, patterns, layouts, and paratexts as manifestations of the correlation between governing performance and document designs in imperial Vietnam. Minh Menh's political system brought back a discontinued tradition of promulgating Confucianism as the dominant ideology. The northern Le-Trinh state structure was abandoned. Instead, the Hue emperor had his eyes on the Ming-Qing bureaucratic organizations. This study has captured that turning point by revealing the process in which Minh Menh translated "Chinese" governing ideas and techniques into "Vietnamese" with particular references to paperwork and communication and their attributions to the country's early modern political culture.

The changing direction of the Nguyen bureaucracy left profound imprints on institutions and the environment in which official documentation was activated. Shifting territorial management, consolidation of the central authority, personal rule, and empire expansion retained burgeoning pressures on the correspondence and deliberative structure. I have demonstrated the roles of warfare, contesting regionalism, and disputing legitimacy challenged Gia Long's state organization. They also upheld the maintenance of communication, message deliveries, and paperwork production via the *Congdong* channel. That administrative landscape took the turn in 1820 when the newly-enthroned emperor no longer accepted (and absolved) the deliberative system that bypassed the throne; no longer recognized regional commanders as acting viceroys, and no longer allowed the existence of unchecked court authority. A wind of change had come. In effect, Minh Menh took the wind out of the bureaucrats' sails by designing more institutions of checks and balances and mutual inspections. New correspondence channels were established as witnessed in 1827-1828 and 1832-1834. The burgeoning paperwork led to enforcement of the inner palace and imperial

⁹ Cao Xuân Dục, *Quốc Triều Chính Biên Toát Yếu* 國朝正編撮要 (*Abstract of the Imperial Dynasty*) (National Library, R. 351, 1908), 1b.

archives in 1825 and 1829-30, while escalating military campaigns during the early 1830s introduced the Grand Council. With a strong background knowledge of Chinese politics, Minh Menh displayed confidence in adapting governing techniques and statecraft. He proceeded as a realist who committed only to the practical need of governance and was limited by no bound to the selection of ruling methods referenced by Chinese dynasties. It turns out that Ming and Qing, in particular, were his most consulted models.

Paperwork on the mission

How paperwork embarked on the bureaucratic mission has been addressed as the central theme of this thesis. It vividly details how the designs of bureaucracy went hand in hand with practical writings, correspondence, and institutionalization. This close association was the critical aspect of the Nguyen administrative operations and had substantial impressions on the waned and waxed dynasty and state authority. The period between 1802 and 1841 transpired to be an “ideal” moment for such an investigation because of dramatic transformations of bureaucracy and official documents, under which interactions between the two were incredibly integrated. Different forms of practical writings assisted the reorganization of Hue’s deliberative structure and promoted efficient delivery mediums of the state authority. To deliver administrative tasks, paperwork’s fluctuation must adapt to bureaucratic changes, of which four key aspects have been highlighted in the following:

First, the growing complexity of governance was reflected through the correlation between the rising quantity of official personnel and diversifying paperwork. The increasing demand for document production gave a new intellectual community the ultimate “function” of working with practical writings. The documents, mushrooming in their amount and complexity, shaped the nature of Hue political practice by participating in the rearrangement of the bureaucrat community and redefining the characters of its state. The “military-style” and instruction-delivered administration were abandoned, substituted by sophisticated processes of bureaucratization. As I have demonstrated, the activation of paperwork authority made the progression possible. At the early stage of growing practical writings, Gia Long had already deployed dozens of Hanlin-entitled scholars to handle the increasing emperor’s documents. At the same time, several academicians 學士 (Nguyen Vien, Nguyen Gia Cat, Vu Trinh, Nguyen Du, etc.,) were appointed for the mission of recording bureaucracy, including drafting *Congdong* instructions and court letters.

Minh Menh's vision of total control increased the bureaucratic institutions that involved creating two competing camps at central authorities: the Six Boards (outer court, located outside the imperial palace) and inner-court Grand Secretariat and Grand Council. As a result, Hanlin Academy was reestablished, and metropolitan examinations were recalled for the first time since 1788.¹⁰ Grand secretaries and grand councilors played essential roles in consolidating paperwork and assisting decision-making because of their daily attendance with the emperor on policy discussion and edict-drafting. These men were central to the system of paperwork management. They underscored that the entire imperial machine of correspondence was operated through the palace chief staff.¹¹

As this thesis has made clear, expanding governing tasks required more appointed scholar-officials, who were responsible for commanding sophisticated systems of state documentation and archives. By the mid-1820s, for instance, paperwork stored-houses were constructed for Six Boards and the palace office. The latter was within minutes-walk from the emperor's daily working place, the Hall of Diligent Politics. In fact, Minh Menh's rule relied heavily on reliable and accountable correspondence networks. The instigation of that complex paperwork's performance, ranging from official investitures 敕封, 册封 to imperial edicts 諭, from village reports 稟 to confidential memorials 密奏, testified to the upgrading quality of political debates and decision-making.

Second, this thesis confirms the direct connection between official correspondence and the efficiency of administrative control. In the late 1820s-and-early-1830s, bureaucratic rearrangement created new information channels centripetal toward Hue palace. The result was additional passages of reporting, new types of edicts and memorials. Direct correspondence between provinces and the imperial court was an essential installation among these communication infrastructures, while confidential reports and imperial instructions furnished unchallengeable mediums for personal imperial rule. Minh Menh was able to command this intricate system with newly-appointed capable staff and a new set of institutional regulations. Although grand secretaries and grand councilors were responsible for all the paperwork that went through the palace, their draft replies were cautiously monitored by the boards, Censorate.

¹⁰ During the Gia Long reign, Hanlin 翰林 existed only as conferred titles (Hanlin academicians) for scholar-officials. Minh Menh founded the Hanlin Academy in 1830.

¹¹ There were two grand secretaries and four grand councilors during the 1830s.

That structure embodied one of the most significant features of Minh Menh's statecraft innovation. In China, the defined character of the mid-Qing correspondence reform was to utilize palace memorials as an imperial personal instrument to bypass the old bureaucracy.¹² Yongzheng's consolidation of the inner palace, for instance, was an act of institutionalization. He legitimized the conduct of personal rule via written communication of various forms. Consequently, the Qing Grand Council was an influential agency of no ordinary restriction and in no position to be supervised by outer courtiers. Minh Menh's priority concentrated on consolidating paperwork flows. The inner court was installed through careful designs to process documents and deliver decision-making. Grand Secretariat was placed under restrictions on staff number, fixed ranks for grand secretaries (3A), and subjected to boards' surveillance.

By constructing a system based on information flows and paperwork processing, Minh Menh gave the answer to one of the most challenging bureaucratic battles in early modern Nanjing, Beijing, Thanglong (Hanoi), and Hue. That was the competition between imperial and bureaucrats' authority. The rulers' nightmare came in the dilemma of doing all administrative tasks alone or authorizing the power to courtiers/agencies who frequently enough, as reality testifies, came to violate the throne authority. Minh Menh was able to handle the risk of breaking the vulnerable bureaucratic equilibrium by not investing too much influence on the imperial confidants. When he died in 1841, no court organization and personnel enjoyed the paramount authority of potential competition against the throne. Those arrangements determined the designs of paperwork and its paths of circulation. The trusted mandarins, especially grand secretaries and grand councilors, became the emperor's secretaries, but none stood above regulations. Official documents could map out their flows within the bureaucratic structure and configure a network of power relations. A wide range of textual and paratextual elements (signatures, seal imprints, tally suggestions, draft replies, official remarks, and imperial rescripts) provided mediums to maintain accountability and hold court institutions and personnel in check.

Third, this thesis has specified how diversifying document types effectively corresponded to the increasing complexity of administration. Changing document genres expanded the devices for delivering state authority. Their formats, paratexts, and regulations indicate state governance's nature, complexity, and efficiency. *Congdong* documents, for instance, represent a bureaucracy that is based on top-down delivery orders and unsophisticated deliberation. The modestly-designed inner-

¹² Beatrice S. Bartlett, "The Vermillion Brush", 299.

bureaucratic exchanges resulted in simple forms of official reports and hasty short instructions.

Changing document types were a recognized pattern during the early Minh Menh reign. My calculation indicates that roughly 65% of 12,000 extant palace documents are memorials. Among the other twenty different paperwork types attributed to the archival materials, they formed the archival materials. In 1835, the court placed nine different categories of exchanged paperwork on regulation and issued long instructions for their usage. By the time, administrative exchange was systematically regulated, conformed to designated document types and wording choices. That diversification was the compelling sign of several administrative evolutions, including increased topics brought into documentation, rechanneling information deliveries, and growing bureaucratic complexity.

With the abandonment of *Congdong* documents and prevailing edicts and memorials, Hue bureaucratic environment evolved vibrant due to increasing flows of paperwork and deliberative webs. Minh Menh not only welcomed more correspondence passages but also demanded high-quality reports from provincial chiefs. The burgeoning complexity of governing businesses required new types and formats for memorials. At least four among them were recognized, namely routine reports, quarterly reports (on rice price, weather condition, and security...), *greetings palace memorials*, and confidential memorials. In essence, exchanged documents profoundly improved the quality of policy debates and boosted the sophistication of decision-making in Hue.

Minh Menh expanded the delivery of imperial authority by adding several emperor's document types into enactment. They were intended to disseminate the Son of Heaven's words to every corner of the empire to symbolize the direct connection between the Heavenly-mandated ruler and his subjects. The politics of edicts and vermilion rescripts visualized the imperial power and presented in the uncontested agency of personal calligraphy and royal seal imprints. Minh Menh's commitment to personal rule defined the dynastic politics through meticulous endorsements on thousands of memorials. Imperial rescripts: *imperial draft edicts* 批諭, *special edicts* 特諭, *edicts* 上諭 present the idea that decision-making is reserved and emanated by the monarch only. The sent-out edicts, for instance, were signified with the character "edict" 諭 and wording compounds such as *edict command* "諭旨" and *the edict read* "諭曰" as signals of the unchallengeable imperial authority. Paperwork, therefore, was not only the vehicle of information delivery but also embodied visual and textual symbols of authority and power hierarchy.

The consolidation of correspondence and paperwork movements generated policy debate at the inner court. The birth of the Grand Secretariat, in particular, extended the use of *tally suggestions* in presenting draft replies to the emperor. They were later applied under the close mutual inspection between the palace office and the boards. Extant board and Grand Secretariat memorials indicate that they contain summaries of several reports, adding proposal replies and policy recommendations. By endorsing these summarized reports, the emperor was able to provide decisions in a swift sequence. In 1838, “*yellow attachments*” 黄粘 were added to the system, although they seem not as significant as that of the Qing due to frequent exchanges between Minh Menh and palaces secretaries and board chiefs.

Forth, the organizational arrangements of the Nguyen paperwork possessed some defining features of the early nineteenth-century Vietnamese administrative performance. Layout, paratexts, imprints, signatures, authenticated sealed stamps, official remarks, and imperial rescripts demonstrated intense bureaucratic endeavors to culminate a wide range of modifiers and symbols that convey state authority, legitimacy, and, not least, visions of administrative functionalism. The uniformity of the five-part structure and script-homogenization was an effort to make the bureaucracy “legible”, so that power networks could be mapped and navigated.¹³ They also took part in the challenging task of introducing the dynastic paperwork identity. The Nguyen family emerged after a fierce military fight against Tayson and Le-Trinh. The battle for legitimacy then turned to the domain of official documentation, where paperwork-formats signify not only the dynastic identity but also its imperial mandate.

The evolution of layout, structure, and paratexts strongly corresponded to shifting institutional arrangements, which were nothing short of profound between 1802 and 1841. The expansion of the inner court, the introduction of the Grand Secretariat, the Grand Council, and the provincial system were among the leading factors in defining paperwork organization. Official seals, for instance, captured enormous interest in Hue. It took years of endeavors to pursue a system of administrative seals that applied to the whole bureaucracy, from commune chiefs and local postal stations to Duke-ranked princes. By the early 1820s, hundreds of the new seals (official, personal, and authenticated) were distributed. From inscribed characters to materiality, from sizes to usage, from stamped positions [on papers] to document types [for deployments], the regulations were incredibly complex that Nguyen

¹³ A typical Nguyen document was constructed in a five-part organizational pattern: [1] reporters/memorialists/ draft organizations, [2] main text, [3] reign title, date, and main sealed imprints, [5] official signatures, and [4] official/imperial remarks.

sigillography alone could be the subject of many scholarly lifetimes. As I have suggested an exemplary of seventy-two seal-stamped documents, the nature of sealed deployments reflected the mistrust among state, bureaucratic institutions, and their personnel. The result was to add as many certified measures as possible on papers.

Many other textual and paratextual elements were also re-regulated. Complex numeric characters replaced simplified ones to prevent information corruption.¹⁴ Official signatures were required and carefully inspected. Memorialist names were affixed to the memorial-heard for the opening section, while official remarks demarcate the document-ending structure. These components were prudently conjoined after decades of visual designs. They were integral parts of a unified paperwork configuration that allowed documents to be navigated, inspected, and traced along their circulated trails.

Among official remarks, imperial endorsements 御批 were attached to the papers with uniquely authoritative functions, displayed by the emperor's brushes. Vermilion spot 硃點, vermilion comment 硃批, vermilion circle 硃圈, and vermilion expunction 硃抹 symbolize the imperial authority both in pragmatic and representative senses, as pointed out in chapters III and V. More than 60% of the extant Minh Menh's memorials bear vermilion rescripts, indicating his commitment to directly handling official records and delivering authority via his own hands.

From the late 1830s, the "quality" of vermilion rescripts, however, "declined" with more usage of cursory wordings. At the same time, vermilion marks 硃點 [vermilion spots] and short acknowledged phrases, such as "是" *yes/ right/ indeed*, "知道了" *acknowledged*, "覽" *seen/ viewed*, "可" *permitted/ proceeded ...* were prevailing as the Minh Menh reign wore on. It was not only the ruler's declining health to be blamed, but several factors had come into play. An increasing amount of memorials was one among them. After more than a decade of gathering trusted courtiers, the close inner-court cohort had earned more royal confidence, benefited them from the growing executive authority, and authorized responsibility of drafting imperial reliefs. By that time, the emperor entrusted many routine businesses to the court confidants.

¹⁴ There are two numeric system in classical Chinese:

Arabic numeric system	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Chinese simplified numeric system	一	二	三	四	五	六	七	八	九	十
Chinese complex numeric system	壹	貳	參	肆	伍	陸	柒	捌	玖	拾

Archival documents also capture another textual sign of the shifting manner of power delivery. The endorsement, ‘*There will be a separate decree*’ 另有旨, was frequently rendered for either significant affairs or the convenience of calling official drafting in response. Not only did the emperor eschew conducting significant decisions through personal writings, had he increasingly counted on the inner palace drafting roles. The practice ratifies that the imperial maneuver of decision-making relied on the designs and operations of paperwork. Expanding documentation leveraged the complexity of administration. Minh Menh had made far greater use of paperwork for correspondence and governance, as suggested in this thesis, “*the politics of edicts and rescripts*’. The inner-court assistants enabled the emperor to command varied forms of imperial writings in response to memorials without executing the task himself. Grand secretaries and grand councilors, such as Ha Tong Quyen, played crucial roles in preparing confidential edicts and court letters of military strategies during the 1830s. Diversifying writing genres and regulating their organizational features captured Minh Menh’s attention. He aimed to formalize and institutionalize the use of paperwork so that their format uniformity and elaborate designs were part of the sophisticated statecraft on display.

Concisely, this study makes detailed calculations of the four-decade paperwork’s textual, organizational, and paratextual evolutions. These changing patterns were grounded and contextualized from the perspective of correspondence and institution. Hidden bureaucratic motivations were addressed; their pragmatic and symbolic meanings were exposed. Each element of the paperwork design resulted from prudent measures, a product of thoughtful plans, and a symbol of highly guarded authoritative messages. This research has vividly pointed out the visual translation of state power and institution on papers. The Nguyen paperwork demonstrated how abstract political ideology and complicated administrative practices could be presented in the forms of layouts, signatures, seal imprints, character elevation...

Paperwork, state-building, and empire-making

This thesis has encapsulated the story of paperwork in constructing a centralized state and imperial expansion. Communication and correspondence were essential to early modern political operations. What happened in Hue was a vivid demonstration of their role in making modern Vietnam.

I have demonstrated that official documents, as the embodiment of the Hue state authority, became a medium of governance and vehicle of power relationships. By making the connection between political transformation and document operation, a

distinctive feature of the Nguyen statecraft has been recognized: the use of practical writings as a crucial technique of administration. Beyond their roles as information containers, paperwork reflects the visual configuration of hierarchy and maps out the mechanisms in which the empire functioned through inter-institutional and inter-regional connections. The well-organized paperwork and sophisticated regulations established between 1820 and 1841 highlight the Nguyen efforts of political centralization and administrative homogenization.

To a broader framework of social and political changes, the documents proved the capacity to illuminate their age and the sociopolitical environment they engaged. One crucial revelation is their engagement with the projection of imperial Vietnam. Although the use of practical writings is not unique to the Nguyen, the Vietnamese experience was intriguing because official documents and written communication provided enormous contributions to the birth of a unified “Vietnam”. By the mid-1830s, the entire eastern mainland Southeast Asia, stretching along 3,300-kilometer coastlines, was united and governed by a single political center. Thirty-two provinces were connected and administered along with a network of two thousand kilometers of postal roads, from Sino-Vietnamese borders to present-day Cambodia. Communication, logistics, postal facilities, and efficient correspondence claimed their roles in the achievements of state-making and imperial expansions. In itself, paperwork was both the result and foundation of Hue governing practice, bearing all administrative agenda from frontier campaigns to the “cultivation” 教化 of people, from tax records to diplomatic exchanges... In which the contour of a modern state was emerged.

Confronting the Nguyen state was the emerging social, economic, and political dynamism that demanded responsive and efficient governance. Consequently, paperwork had prevailed, activated through multiple channels to distribute and implement state power. Before the telegraph, telephone, radio, and internet, document-based information flows were the only form of correspondence and decision-making. The Nguyen’s struggles in deploying practical writings for statecraft indicated the potentialities and limits of the pre-industrial communicational vehicles in bureaucratic operations. The means of correspondence and deliberation circumscribe political models and their governing capacities. In other words, political performance and paperwork evolution rhyme in defining the bureaucratic pattern and political culture of their age. The core of that relationship relied on paperwork to form the inter-institutional exchanges. There is no better visual demonstration of that inter-institutional relationship than the structural exhibition of bureaucratic manuscripts.

The activation of paperwork in the Nguyen administrative system required a great deal of political institutionalization related to their production, circulation, processing, and storage. Legal codes, population registrations, statistical accounts, judicial cases, communicational reports, and other forms of writing fashioned the paperwork foundation of the state. From paratextual characters to the manuscript organization, they reflect the designs to control information and impose hierarchical order. On the Nguyen paperwork, one can well recognize the historical evolution of the Vietnamese state, shifting institutions, expanding imperial authority, and constructing a correspondence mechanism from which “Vietnam” walked its first steps as a unified modern political entity.

The lost bureaucratic modernities

When the British envoy John Crawfurd landed in Da Nang in 1822, his impression made clear that, unlike Siam, administration in Vietnam was extensively conducted on paperwork. That impressiveness of bureaucratic sophistication came from an enduring political tradition shared by many East Asian societies. Their states were nurtured by “the rise of embryonic bureaucracies, based upon clear rules, whose personnel were obtained-in form at least independently of hereditary social claims, through meritocratic civil service examinations.”¹⁵ Practitioners of that statecraft tradition required sophisticated knowledge of institutions and mastery of practical writings.

Paperwork determined the nature of pre-industrial administration by facilitating them with the medium of communication and control. Efficient correspondence, swift communication, and accountability are the recipe for effective governance. Practical writings defined the bureaucrats and the environment in which they functioned by forming the social and political community of those having the ability to work with official documents. Civil service examinations, for instance, aimed to prepare the candidates with the necessary skills of paperwork management. In that practice, one finds the coming of bureaucratic “modernity” and the linkage between documents and state institutionalization, bureaucratization, and meritocracy. The discourse of “modernity”, however, was dominated by western thoughts that emerged in the nineteenth century, with a firm adherence to capitalism and industrialism. Such Euro-centric measures of “modern” remain largely unchallenged, despite the repeated calls of “beyond Marx, beyond Weber”.

¹⁵ Woodside, *Lost Modernities*, 1.

Given that little attention has been dedicated to the search for “modernity” in non-western societies,¹⁶ our examination of early modern Vietnamese paperwork and its political roles sheds light on such an effort. It is believed that “modernity” is constituted by a manifold process that does not necessarily take place at the same time. Official documents and bureaucratic institutions can be among aspects that were pioneered and adjusted in East Asia long before the introduction of the modern Western nation-states.

Official documents guided the Vietnamese to act and convey their statecraft with particular characteristics of the political tradition. Paperwork, as a bureaucratic instrument, determined the medium and distribution of the state power that had successfully contributed to the evolution toward modernity in Vietnam. As has been illustrated in this research, official records were mobilized to deliver state authority. Their sealed marks, signatures, wording choices, endorsements, etc., nevertheless are not only outcomes or reflections of the political designs but also possess the power to intervene and adjust to institutions and power networks, to visualize bureaucratic relationships, and to provide accountability and “legibility” to the state. Those aspects of paperwork functions undoubtedly belong to the East Asian “lost modernities” of governing tradition, as suggested by Alexander Woodside (2006).

Diversifying document genres, burgeoning exchanged paperwork, complex regulations, and prevailing palace archives, to name a few, were part of the advancing trend in the evolution of state-documentation and centralized governance. They not only justified the intellectual commitment “to the text-based dream of empire”,¹⁷ but also revealed the process in which paperwork accommodated itself to modern socio-economic dynamism. Paperwork and Hue bureaucracy were pursuing new mechanisms for administering a modernizing society. Expanding usage of practical writings provided efficiency to the Nguyen government through consolidation of correspondence, institutionalization, and bureaucratization. The construction of imperial archives and frequent deployments of stored records indicated the high dependence of administration on official writings. For the Nguyen, state “documentation” was part of the answer to modernizing politics.

In the end, the significance of paperwork and state governance in Vietnam places on two significant aspects. First, it was the experience of local, non-western

¹⁶ Alexander Woodside and Francis Fukuyama recently argues that ‘modernity’ is not necessarily a monolithic condition that can be (and only) copied and transferred from the West. Many phenomena and trends of developments had independently started at different times and different parts of the world. See Woodside, *Lost Modernities*; Fukuyama, *The Origins of Political Order*.

¹⁷ Lewis, *Writing and Authority in Early China*, 4.

society in the struggle to modernize governing systems in which the consolidation of the state, territory, correspondence and decision-making were the key targets. Second, the Vietnamese practices of official documents, state archives, and bureaucratic institutionalization demonstrate the universal challenges of early modern statecraft and modernity beyond East and West, Asia and Europe. Paperwork was one actor on the stage of bureaucratic culture but possessed powerful capacities in manifesting order, hierarchy, and legitimacy.

One should not underestimate the power that paperwork and correspondence possess in bureaucratic operation. While contributing significantly to the introduction of early modern Vietnam, they also inflicted chaos and anxiety in the Nguyen bureaucracy by causing complex regulations, excessive production, and over-deployment. The tremendous pressure placed on the system captured enormous portions of the society's time, energy, commitments, resources, and imaginations in designing regulations and institutions with the belief that more administrative records lead to efficiency and accountability. The Kafkaesque spectre, as seen in 1834, prevented many reform initiatives and led to new transformations in Hue. However, the opening of Pandora's Box of complicated paperwork could not be undone. Since the questions of the impacts of document complexity were under-addressed, it is significant to recognize their legitimacy and relevance in today Vietnam's politics and societies. Hue's "sweating buffaloes" were just the beginning of many administrative challenges posed to the dynasty. Minh Menh's experiments on paperwork between 1820 and 1841 illustrate the vulnerability of documentation and state authority in the pre-modern nation-state era. From the emperor's health condition to courtiers' power ambitions, from memorial flows to the copies of imperial endorsements, every factor counted and prepared to break off the bureaucratic equilibrium in the fight for supremacy. The designs were suited only to a decisive and diligent monarch. A physically weak and mediocre ruler would not be ready for the bulk of paperwork and would be vulnerable to the ambitions of high-ranked officials. That day, unfortunately, came only eight years after the death of Minh Menh. His grandson, the frail Tu Duc, could not help but miserably fall into that trap.¹⁸

Within decades, Vietnamese history would take a turn for the worse. /

¹⁸ For Thiệu Trị's enthronement in 1841, Trương Đăng Quế was appointed *superintendent* 顧命大臣. For Tự Đức ascendancy in 1847, it was Trương Đăng Quế who acted as *Testamentary-charged official*, while Vũ Văn Giải, Nguyễn Tri Phương, and Lâm Duy Thiệp were *superintendents* 輔政大臣.

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GLOSSARY

<i>An Nam</i>	安南	<i>Annan</i>	Northern Vietnam under the Tang rule
<i>Án sát</i>	按察	<i>Ancha</i>	Commissioner of Jurisdiction and Law
<i>Ấn</i>	印	<i>Yin</i>	Seals
<i>Ấn tín</i>	印信	<i>Yinxin</i>	Official Seals
<i>Ấn tào</i>	印曹	<i>Yin cao</i>	Department of Seals
<i>Bái yết</i>	拜謁	<i>Baiye</i>	Paying respects
<i>Bản chương</i>	本章	<i>Benzhang</i>	Routine memorials (Qing dynasty)
<i>Bản kế</i>	本計	<i>Ban ji</i>	Official plans, reported lists
<i>Bằng</i>	憑	<i>Ping</i>	Certified documents (Issued by provincial offices)
<i>Bằng đảng</i>	朋黨	<i>Pengdang</i>	Factionalism
<i>Bằng sắc</i>	憑敕	<i>Ping chi</i>	Royal investitures
<i>Bảo</i>	寶	<i>bao</i>	Royal seals
<i>Bảo cử</i>	保舉	<i>Bao ju</i>	Official recommendation
<i>Bảo đại thư viện</i>	保大書院	<i>Bao da shuyuan</i>	Bao Dai Library
<i>Bắc hà sĩ phu</i>	北河士夫	<i>Bei He shi fu</i>	The Northern Intellectuals
<i>Bắc Kỳ</i>	北圻	<i>Bei ji</i>	The Northern regional administration
<i>Bắc thành</i>	北城	<i>Bei cheng</i>	The Northern citadel
<i>Bắc trà</i>	北茶	<i>Bei cha</i>	Chinese tea
<i>Bắc Ty</i>	北司	<i>Bei si</i>	The Northern Department (the Privy Council)
<i>Bản</i>	稟	<i>Bing</i>	Official reports (document-types)
<i>Bệ kiến</i>	陛見	<i>Bi jian</i>	Special audiences
<i>Biên tu</i>	編修	<i>Bian xiu</i>	Editors
<i>Biểu</i>	表	<i>Biao</i>	Congratulatory memorials
<i>Biểu bạ tào</i>	表簿曹	<i>Biao bu cao</i>	Department of Petitions and Records
<i>Biểu văn</i>	表文	<i>Biao wen</i>	Congratulatory memorials
<i>Binh bộ</i>	兵部	<i>Bingbu</i>	The Board of Defense

<i>Binh bộ Thượng thư</i>	兵部尚書	<i>Bingbu shangshu</i>	President of the Board of Defense
<i>Binh đinh</i>	兵丁	<i>Bingding</i>	Conscripted soldier
<i>Binh Trực Xứ</i>	兵直處	<i>Bing zhi chu</i>	The Secretarial Department of the Board of Defence
<i>Bình bút thái giám</i>	秉筆太監	<i>Bing bi tai jian</i>	Eunuch scribes (Ming China)
<i>Bình thiên hạ</i>	平天下	<i>Ping tianxia</i>	Pacifying the world
<i>Bộ</i>	部	<i>Bu</i>	Boards
<i>Bố chính</i>	布政	<i>Buzheng</i>	Commissioners of finance and taxes
<i>Bưu chính ty</i>	郵政司	<i>Youzheng si</i>	The Office of Postal Transmission
<i>Cai cơ</i>	該奇	<i>Gai qi</i>	Battalion-commander
<i>Cai đội</i>	該隊	<i>Cai dui</i>	Platoon-commander
<i>Cai hợp</i>	該合	<i>Gai he</i>	Squad-commander
<i>Cai tổng</i>	該總	<i>Gai zong</i>	Commune chief
<i>Càn Thành điện</i>	乾成殿	<i>Gan cheng dian</i>	The Qiancheng Hall
<i>Cáo</i>	誥	<i>Gao</i>	Ordinance
<i>Cáo mệnh</i>	誥命	<i>Gaoming</i>	Patent by ordinance
<i>Cáo sắc</i>	誥敕	<i>Gao chi</i>	Bestowing investitures
<i>Cần Chính điện</i>	勤政殿	<i>Qin zheng dian</i>	The Hall of Diligent Politics
<i>Cần chính điện học sĩ</i>	勤政殿學士	<i>Qin zheng dian xueshi</i>	Scholar of the Hall of Diligent Politics
<i>Cận thần</i>	近臣	<i>Jinchen</i>	Royal retainers
<i>Chánh tổng</i>	正總	<i>Zheng zong</i>	Commune chief
<i>Châu bản</i>	硃本	<i>Zhuben</i>	Vermilion records
<i>Châu cải</i>	硃改	<i>Zhu gai</i>	Vermilion correction
<i>Châu phê</i>	硃批	<i>Zhupi</i>	Vermilion endorsements
<i>Châu dụ</i>	硃諭	<i>Zhu yu</i>	Vermilion edict
<i>Châu điểm</i>	硃點	<i>Zhu dian</i>	vermilion spots
<i>Châu số</i>	硃數	<i>Zhu shu</i>	Vermilion modification
<i>Châu抹</i>	硃抹	<i>Zhu mo</i>	Vermilion expunction/ modification
<i>Châu khuyên</i>	硃圈	<i>Zhu quan</i>	Vermilion circles

<i>Châu sắc</i>	朱敕	<i>Zhu chi</i>	Vermilion royal appointments
<i>Châu thị</i>	朱示	<i>Zhu shi</i>	Vermilion royal appointments
<i>Chế</i>	制	<i>Zhi</i>	Imperial decree
<i>Chế thư</i>	制書	<i>Zhi shu</i>	Royal decree
<i>Chỉ</i>	旨	<i>Zhi</i>	Decree
<i>Chỉ sai</i>	旨差	<i>Zhi cha</i>	Royal commands
<i>Chỉ truyền</i>	旨傳	<i>Zhi chuan</i>	Royal instructions
<i>Chính bản</i>	正本	<i>Zhengben</i>	Main versions (of official documents)
<i>Chính danh</i>	正名	<i>Zhengming</i>	Rectification of names
<i>Chính sự</i>	政事	<i>Zhengshi</i>	Administrative affairs
<i>Chiệp tấu</i>	摺奏	<i>Zhe zou</i>	Qing memorials
<i>Chiếu</i>	詔	<i>Zhao</i>	Imperial proclamations, mandate
<i>Chiếu cáo</i>	詔誥	<i>Zhao gao</i>	Imperial proclamations and ordinances
<i>Chiếu hoàng</i>	詔黃	<i>Zhao huang</i>	Yellow bill bearing a proclamation
<i>Chiếu hội</i>	照會	<i>Zhaohui</i>	Official Orders (document types)
<i>Chiếu phúc</i>	照覆/復	<i>Zhaofu/fu</i>	Communication in reply to chao-hui 詔會
<i>Chiếu sắc</i>	詔敕	<i>Zhao chi</i>	Royal investitures
<i>Chiếu thư</i>	詔書	<i>Zhaoshu</i>	Proclamations
<i>Chiếu văn</i>	詔文	<i>Zhaowen</i>	Proclamations
<i>Chu Triều</i>	周朝	<i>Zhou chao</i>	Zhou dynasty (r. 1040 BC-259 BC)
<i>Chương sớ</i>	章疏	<i>Zhang shu</i>	Memorials and petitions
<i>Chương ấn thái giám</i>	掌印 太監	<i>Zhang yin taijian</i>	The chief eunuch of seals (Ming China)
<i>Chương quân</i>	掌軍	<i>Zheng jun</i>	Commander of the Nguyen army
<i>Chương tả quân</i>	掌左軍	<i>Zhang zuo jun</i>	The Chief Commander of the Left Army
<i>Chương tượng quân</i>	掌象軍	<i>Zhang xiang jun</i>	The Commander of the Army of War- elephant
<i>Côn Lôn</i>	崑崙	<i>Kunlun</i>	The Con Lon Island (Con dao, also known as Poulo Condore)
<i>Cơ mật đại thần</i>	機密大臣	<i>Jimi dachen</i>	Privy Councilors
<i>Cơ mật hành tẩu</i>	機密行走	<i>Jimi</i>	Privy Council assistants

		<i>xingzou</i>	
<i>Cơ Mật Viện</i>	機密院	<i>Jimiyuan</i>	The Privy Council
<i>Cơ Mật Viện ấn</i>	機密院印	<i>Jimiyuan</i>	The Privy Council's Seal
		<i>yin</i>	
<i>Cổ học viện</i>	古學院	<i>Gu xueyuan</i>	The Academy of Antiquity Studies
<i>Cố mệnh đại thần</i>	顧命大臣	<i>Gu ming dachen</i>	Superintendents
<i>Công ấn</i>	公印	<i>Gongyin</i>	Official seals
<i>Công bộ</i>	工部	<i>Gongbu</i>	The Board of Public Works
<i>Công Ấn Ty</i>	工印司	<i>Gongyin si</i>	The Seal Department of the Board of Works
<i>Công đồng</i>	公同	<i>Gongtong</i>	The Council of high ranking Officials
<i>Công đồng di</i>	公同移	<i>Gongtong yi</i>	Summoning officials
<i>Công đồng hội nghị</i>	公同會議	<i>Gongtong huiyi</i>	Congdong discussions
<i>Công đồng khâm chỉ truyền</i>	公同欽旨傳	<i>Gongtong qin zhi chuan</i>	The Congdong - transmitted imperial instructions
<i>Công đồng khiển</i>	公同譴	<i>Gongtong qian</i>	Indictment, punishment
<i>Công đồng phó</i>	公同付	<i>Gongtong fu</i>	Certificates and nomination
<i>Công đồng sai</i>	公同差	<i>Gongtong cha</i>	Orders for official missions
<i>Công đồng truyền</i>	公同傳	<i>Gongtong chuan</i>	Administrative directions
<i>Công đồng thự</i>	公同署	<i>Gongtong shu</i>	The Congdong's working hall
<i>Công húy</i>	公諱	<i>Gong hui</i>	Public taboo words
<i>Công sự</i>	公事	<i>Gongshi</i>	Public affairs
<i>Công thự</i>	公署	<i>Gongshu</i>	Administrative offices
<i>Công trực xứ</i>	工直處	<i>Gong zhi chu</i>	The Secretarial Department of the Board of Public Works.
<i>Công văn</i>	公文	<i>Gongwen</i>	Public documents
<i>Cống sĩ viện</i>	貢士院	<i>Gong shi yuan</i>	The Academy of Recommended Scholars
<i>Cử nhân</i>	舉人	<i>Juren</i>	Regional Graduates

<i>Cung nghệ phụng chỉ</i>	恭擬奉旨	<i>Gong ni feng zhi</i>	Policy-suggestions
<i>Cung đương án</i>	宮中檔案	<i>Gong zhong dangan</i>	Palace documents
<i>Cửu khanh</i>	九卿	<i>Jiu qing</i>	Nine ministers
<i>Danh</i>	名	<i>Ming</i>	Name
<i>Dịch bài</i>	站牌	<i>Zhan pai</i>	Postal seals
<i>Dịch mục</i>	驛牧	<i>Yi mu</i>	Postal overseeing officials
<i>Dịch đồng</i>	驛筒	<i>Yi tong</i>	Postal tubes
<i>Dịch thừa</i>	驛承	<i>Yi cheng</i>	Postal superintendents
<i>Dịch trạm</i>	驛站	<i>Yizhan</i>	Postal Stations
<i>Dịch trạm đội trưởng</i>	驛站隊長	<i>Yizhan duizhang</i>	Chief of postal stations
<i>Dịch trình hạn</i>	驛程限	<i>Yi cheng xian</i>	Time-limit of postal delivery
<i>Dịch xá</i>	驛舍	<i>Yi she</i>	Postal houses
<i>Đại cung môn</i>	大宮門	<i>Da gong men</i>	The Palace's Great gate
<i>Đại học sĩ</i>	大學士	<i>De xueshi</i>	Grand Academicians
<i>Đại Lý Tự</i>	大理寺	<i>Dali si</i>	The Court of Judicial Review
<i>Đại Nam</i>	大南	<i>Danan</i>	The Great South (name of Vietnam between 1838 and 1945).
<i>Đại nội</i>	大內	<i>danei</i>	The Inner Palace
<i>Đại Thanh Hội Điển</i>	大清會典	<i>Da Qing huidian</i>	Official Compendium of Institutions and Usages of the Great Qing
<i>Đại triều</i>	大朝	<i>dachao</i>	Great court audiences
<i>Đại Cồ Việt</i>	大瞿越	<i>De Qu Yue</i>	Great Viet (name of the Viet state)
<i>Đại Việt</i>	大越	<i>Dayue</i>	Great Viet (name of the Viet state)
<i>Đặc dụ</i>	特諭	<i>Teyu</i>	Special edicts
<i>Đề bản</i>	題本	<i>Tiben</i>	Official memorials (Ming dynasty) Routine memorials (Qing dynasty)
<i>Doanh</i>	營	<i>Ying</i>	Military garrison

<i>Di</i>	夷	<i>Yi</i>	Savagery
<i>Di chiếu</i>	遺詔	<i>Yizhao</i>	The proclamation of throne-inheritance
<i>Di luân đường</i>	彝倫堂	<i>Yiluntang</i>	The Pavilion of Morals
<i>Dinh trấn</i>	營鎮	<i>Ying zhen</i>	Commanderies
<i>Diện dụ</i>	面諭	<i>Mianyu</i>	Verbal edicts
<i>Dụ</i>	諭	<i>Yu</i>	Edicts
<i>Dụ chỉ</i>	諭旨	<i>Yuzhi</i>	Imperial edict
<i>Đài</i>	抬	<i>Tai</i>	Character elevation
<i>Đắc cách</i>	得革	<i>De ge</i>	Removing from office
<i>Đằng hoàng</i>	騰黃	<i>Teng huang</i>	Yellow copies
<i>Địa bạ</i>	地簿	<i>Dibu</i>	Cadastral registers
<i>Dinh bạ</i>	丁簿	<i>Tingbu</i>	Men-registered records
<i>Đình nghị</i>	廷議	<i>Ting yi</i>	Court discussions
<i>Đình thần</i>	廷臣	<i>Ting chen</i>	Court officials
<i>Đình thí</i>	庭試	<i>Ting shi</i>	Palace Examinations
<i>Đồ</i>	徒	<i>Tu</i>	Penal hard labor
<i>Đốc học</i>	督學	<i>Duxue</i>	Provincial commissioners of education
<i>Đồ bản</i>	圖版	<i>Tuban</i>	Maps
<i>Đồ ký</i>	圖記	<i>Tuji</i>	Official seals (Designed for low-ranked civil and military officials)
<i>Đô sát viện</i>	都察院	<i>Douchayuan</i>	The Censorate
<i>Đồ thư tào</i>	圖書曹	<i>Tushu cao</i>	The Departments of Books and Records
<i>Đông Các</i>	東閣	<i>Dongge</i>	The Eastern Tower (the Grand Secretariat's Archives)
<i>Đông các học sĩ</i>	東閣學士	<i>Dongge xueshi</i>	Scholars of the Eastern Hall
<i>Đình nghị</i>	廷議	<i>Ting yi</i>	Court debates
<i>Đình thần</i>	廷臣	<i>Ting chen</i>	Court officials
<i>Đường quan</i>	堂官	<i>Tang guan</i>	Board's chief officials
<i>Gia Định thành</i>	嘉定城	<i>Jiading chen</i>	Gia Dinh Citadel (the Southern Administration)
<i>Gia Định thành</i>	嘉定城總	<i>Jiading</i>	The Southern Governor-General

<i>tổng trấn</i>	鎮	<i>chen</i> <i>zongche</i>	
<i>Gia húy</i>	家諱	<i>Jiahui</i>	Royal family's taboo characters
<i>Giáo chức</i>	教職	<i>Jiaozhi</i>	Educational officials
<i>Giáo hóa</i>	教化	<i>Jiaohua</i>	Cultivating people
<i>Giáo thị</i>	教示	<i>Jiaoshi</i>	Official Instructions (document-types)
<i>Giáp phiến</i>	夾片	<i>Jiapian</i>	Supplementary memorials
<i>Hải khẩu</i>	海口	<i>Haikou</i>	Seaports
<i>Hán nhân</i>	漢人	<i>Hanren</i>	Han people [Viet people, Nguyen dynasty]
<i>Hàn lâm</i>	翰林	<i>Hanlin</i>	Hanlin scholars
<i>Hàn Lâm Viện</i>	翰林院	<i>Hanlin yuan</i>	Hanlin Academy
<i>Hàn lâm viện chế cáo</i>	翰林院制誥	<i>Hanlin yuan zhi gao</i>	Hanlin scholar of drafting imperial ordinance
<i>Hàn lâm viện cung phụng</i>	翰林院供奉	<i>Hanlin yuan gongfeng</i>	Hanlin scholar of assistance
<i>Hàn lâm viện chủ sự</i>	翰林院掌院學士	<i>Hanlin yuan zhang yuan xueshi</i>	The Chief scholar of the Hanlin Academy
<i>Hàn lâm viện phụng chỉ</i>	侍書院奉旨	<i>Shi shuyuan feng zhi</i>	Palace secretary of the Royal Library, Recipient of Decrees
<i>Hàn lâm viện thị giảng</i>	侍書院侍講	<i>Shi shuyuan shi jiang</i>	Hanlin scholar, Expositor - in - waiting.
<i>Hàn lâm thị thư</i>	翰林侍書	<i>Hanlin shi shu</i>	Hanlin scholar and Royal Assistant of calligraphy
<i>Hàn Lâm Viện Thừa chỉ</i>	翰林院承旨	<i>Hanlin yuan cheng zhi</i>	Hanlin Academician Recipient of Edicts
<i>Thừa Thiên phủ</i>	承天府	<i>Chengtian fu</i>	Thua Thien prefecture (the Capital)
<i>Hầu</i>	侯	<i>hou</i>	Marquis
<i>Hiệp biện đại học sĩ</i>	協辦大學士	<i>Xiebian daxueshi</i>	Vice-Grand Academician
<i>Hiệp trấn</i>	協鎮	<i>Xiezhen</i>	Commandery-Assistant
<i>Hình bộ</i>	刑部	<i>Xingbu</i>	Boards of Justice
<i>Hình Thư</i>	刑書	<i>Xingshu</i>	The Judicial Books (the Vietnamese law code issued in

			1042)
<i>Hình trực xử</i>	刑直處	<i>Xing zhi chu</i>	The Secretarial Department of the Boards of Justice
<i>Hoa</i>	華	<i>Hua</i>	Civility
<i>Hoa áp tự</i>	花押字	<i>Huaya zi</i>	Hoa ap script
<i>Hoàng đế</i>	皇帝	<i>Huangdi</i>	Emperor
<i>Hoàng hậu</i>	皇后	<i>Huanghou</i>	Empress
<i>Hoàng khảo</i>	黃考	<i>Huangkao</i>	Deceased Imperial Father
<i>Hoàng niêm</i>	黃粘	<i>Huang zhan</i>	Yellow suggestion cards
<i>Hoàng tôn</i>	皇孫	<i>Huangsun</i>	Royal grandsons
<i>Hoàng tử</i>	皇子	<i>Huangzi</i>	Prince
<i>Hoàng tử chi công phủ</i>	皇子之公府	<i>Huangzi zhi gong fu</i>	Office of the Duke-ranked Princes
<i>Hoàng thành nội</i>	皇城内	<i>Huangchen g nei</i>	The Forbidden City
<i>Hương cống</i>	鄉貢	<i>Xiang gong</i>	Licentiates
<i>Hương húy</i>	鄉諱	<i>Xiang hui</i>	Taboo characters related to the royal hometown
<i>Hương thí</i>	鄉試	<i>Xiangshi</i>	Regional Examination
<i>Hữu kỳ</i>	右圻	<i>You qi</i>	The region to the right of the Capital
<i>Hữu trực kỳ</i>	右直圻	<i>You zhi qi</i>	The immediate region to the right of the Capital
<i>Hữu vu</i>	右廡	<i>You wu</i>	The Right corridor to the Hall of Diligent Politics
<i>Húy</i>	諱	<i>Hui</i>	Taboo
<i>Húy tự</i>	諱序	<i>Hui xu</i>	Taboo characters
<i>Hung Nô</i>	匈奴	<i>Xiongnu</i>	The Huns
<i>Kê</i>	計	<i>Ji</i>	Reports (document type)
<i>Khắc</i>	刻	<i>Ke</i>	Fifteen minutes
<i>Khải</i>	啟	<i>Qi</i>	Memorials to the crown prince
<i>Khải thư</i>	楷書	<i>Kaishu</i>	Regular script
<i>Kinh</i>	經	<i>Jing</i>	The Classics
<i>Kinh thành</i>	京城	<i>Jingcheng</i>	The Capital
<i>Khâm chi</i>	欽旨	<i>qinzhi</i>	Following imperial decree (document type)
<i>Khâm sai</i>	欽差	<i>qincha</i>	Imperial commissioners

<i>Khâm thiên giám</i>	欽天監	<i>Jintian jian</i>	The Institute of Cosmology
<i>Khẩu dụ</i>	口諭	<i>Kouyu</i>	Verbal edicts
<i>Khố</i>	庫	<i>Ku</i>	Storehouse
<i>Khoa đạo</i>	科道	<i>Ke dao</i>	Censors
<i>Khởi cư chú</i>	起居注	<i>Qiju zhu</i>	Chronicles
<i>Khu mật viện</i>	樞密院	<i>Shumi yuan</i>	The Sung's Privy Council
<i>Kiểm ấn</i>	鈐印	<i>Qian yin</i>	Authenticated seals (attached to the official seals ấn 印)
<i>Kiểm ký</i>	鈐記	<i>Qian ji</i>	Official seals (Designed for postal and military stations, and small military units)
<i>Kim bảo</i>	金寶	<i>Jnbao</i>	Imperial golden seals
<i>Kim bảo tỳ</i>	金寶璽	<i>Jin bao xi</i>	Imperial seals
<i>Kinh báo</i>	京報	<i>Jingbao</i>	The Peking Gazette
<i>Khai bảo</i>	開寶	<i>Kai bao</i>	Seal-opening rite
<i>Khai quốc công thần</i>	開國功臣	<i>Kaiguo gongchen</i>	Eminent officials contributed to found the dynasty.
<i>Kháng chỉ</i>	抗旨	<i>Kang zhi</i>	Against royal wills
<i>Khẩn yếu công vụ</i>	緊要公務	<i>Jinyao gongwu</i>	Urgent official affairs
<i>Ký chú tào</i>	記注曹	<i>Ji zhu cao</i>	The Department of Recording Imperial Journal
<i>Ký văn</i>	記文	<i>Ji wen</i>	Essays
<i>Lại ấn ty</i>	吏印司	<i>Li yin si</i>	The Seal Department of the Board of Personnel
<i>Lại bộ</i>	吏部	<i>Li bu</i>	The Board of Personnel
<i>Lại bộ tham tri</i>	吏部參知	<i>Libu sanzhi</i>	Vice president of the Board of Rites
<i>Lại trực xử</i>	吏直處	<i>Li zhi chu</i>	The Secretarial Department of the Board of Personnel
<i>lãm</i>	覽	<i>Lan</i>	Royal review
<i>Lãnh binh</i>	領兵	<i>Ling binh</i>	Provincial military Commissioner
<i>Lánh hữu chi</i>	另有旨	<i>Ling you zhi</i>	'There will be a separate decree'
<i>Lang trung</i>	郎中	<i>Langzhong</i>	Senior secretary
<i>Luân âm</i>	綸音	<i>Lun yin</i>	Emperor's words
<i>Lậu đinh</i>	漏丁	<i>Lou ding</i>	Unregistered males
<i>Lệ</i>	例	<i>Li</i>	Customary law

<i>Lễ bộ</i>	禮部	<i>Libu</i>	The Board of Rites
<i>Lễ bộ Thượng thư</i>	禮部尚書	<i>Libu shangshu</i>	The President of the Board of Rites
<i>Lễ Ký</i>	禮記	<i>Liji</i>	The Book of Rites
<i>Lễ Trực Xứ</i>	禮直處	<i>Li zhi chu</i>	The Secretarial Department of the Board of Rites.
<i>Lệnh</i>	令	<i>Ling</i>	Orders
<i>Lệnh chỉ</i>	令旨	<i>Lingzhi</i>	Orders issued by the Trinh and Nguyen Lords.
<i>Lệnh thư</i>	令書	<i>lingshu</i>	<i>Linh</i> scrips (see <i>hoa áp tự</i>)
<i>Linh</i>	靈	<i>Ling</i>	Powerful spirit
<i>Luật</i>	律	<i>Lu</i>	Legal codes
<i>Lục bộ</i>	六部	<i>Liubu</i>	The Six Boards
<i>Lục bộ công đường</i>	六部公堂	<i>Liubu gongtang</i>	Official building of the Six boards
<i>Lục đầu bài</i>	綠頭牌	<i>Lu toupai</i>	Green cards to present memorials to the emperor
<i>Lục phiên</i>	六番	<i>Liu fan</i>	The Six Offices (a replication of the Six Boards at the Trinh Lord's palace)
<i>Lưu</i>	流	<i>Liu</i>	Penal exile
<i>Lưu trấn</i>	留鎮	<i>Liu zhen</i>	The Commissioner of Defence
<i>Lý trưởng</i>	里長	<i>Li chang</i>	Village chiefs
<i>Mân</i>	緡	<i>Min</i>	Copper coins
<i>Mật chiệp</i>	密摺	<i>Mi zhe</i>	Confidential memorials
<i>Mật dụ</i>	密諭	<i>Mi yu</i>	Confidential edicts
<i>Mật phúc</i>	密覆	<i>Mi fu</i>	Confidential reports
<i>Mật tấu</i>	密奏	<i>Mi zou</i>	Confidential memorials
<i>Mệnh</i>	命	<i>Ming</i>	Royal command
<i>Miếu húy</i>	廟諱	<i>Miao hui</i>	Posthumous taboo characters
<i>Nặc danh thư</i>	匿名書	<i>Niming shu</i>	Anonymous letters
<i>Minh hương</i>	明鄉	<i>Ming xiang</i>	Ming-loyalists
<i>Minh triều</i>	明朝	<i>Mingchao</i>	Ming dynasty (1368-1644)
<i>Minh văn</i>	銘文	<i>Mingwen</i>	Stele inscriptions
<i>Nam kỳ</i>	南圻	<i>Nan qi</i>	The Southern region
<i>Nam tự</i>	南字	<i>Nan zi</i>	The Southern Scripts
<i>Nam ty</i>	南司	<i>Nan si</i>	The Southern Department (the

<i>Nghĩ chỉ</i>	擬旨	<i>Ni zhi</i>	Privy Council) Policy-suggestions
<i>Nghĩ soạn</i>	擬撰	<i>Ni zhuan</i>	Drafting
<i>Nghị chính đại thần</i>	議政大臣	<i>Yizheng dechen</i>	High-ranked officials of the Deliberative Council (Qing dynasty)
<i>Ngoại quốc thư trát</i>	外國書札	<i>Waiguo shuzha</i>	Letters from foreign counties
<i>Ngoại trấn</i>	外鎮	<i>Wai zhen</i>	Outer commanderies
<i>Ngoại triều</i>	外朝	<i>Wai chao</i>	Outer court
<i>Ngọc phả</i>	玉譜	<i>Yu pu</i>	Royal genealogy
<i>Ngọc tỷ</i>	玉璽	<i>Yuxi</i>	Imperial jade seals
<i>Ngũ kinh</i>	五經	<i>Wujing</i>	Five Classics
<i>Ngũ quân</i>	五軍	<i>Wujun</i>	Five Armies
<i>Ngự bảo</i>	御寶	<i>Wu bao</i>	Imperial seals
<i>Ngự bút</i>	御筆	<i>Zhupi</i>	Vermilion brush/ endorsement
<i>Ngự chế</i>	御製	<i>Yu zhi</i>	Imperial writings
<i>Ngự chế thi</i>	御製詩	<i>Yuzhi shi</i>	Emperor-written poetry
<i>Ngự chế văn</i>	御製文	<i>Yuzhi wen</i>	Emperor-written essays
<i>Ngự danh</i>	御名	<i>Yuming</i>	Emperor's proper names
<i>Ngự dược nhật ký</i>	御藥日記	<i>Yu yao riji</i>	Daily medical records of the emperor
<i>Ngự lãm</i>	御覽	<i>Yu lan</i>	Royal reviews
<i>Ngự phê</i>	御批	<i>Yu pi</i>	Imperial endorsements
<i>Nha ấn</i>	牙印	<i>Ya yin</i>	Ivory Seals
<i>Nha môn</i>	衙門	<i>Yamen</i>	Administrative offices
<i>Niên hiệu</i>	年號	<i>Nian hao</i>	Reigning title
<i>Nguyễn triều</i>	阮朝	<i>Ruan chao</i>	Nguyen dynasty (1802-1945)
<i>Nội các</i>	內閣	<i>Neige</i>	The Grand Secretariat
<i>Nội các đại học sĩ</i>	內閣大學士	<i>Neige da xueshi</i>	Grand Secretaries (Qing dynasty)
<i>Nội các đường quan</i>	內閣堂官	<i>Neige tangguan</i>	Chiefs of the Grand Secretariat
<i>Nội các thuộc viên</i>	內閣屬員	<i>Neige shuyuan</i>	Grand Secretariat staffs
<i>Nội đình</i>	內庭	<i>Neiting</i>	The Inner court
<i>Nội đồ gia</i>	內圖家	<i>Nei tu jia</i>	The Inner Court Treasury

<i>Nội giám phụng truyền</i>	內監奉傳	<i>Neijian feng chuan</i>	[Imperial command] delivered by palace eunuchs
<i>Nội hàn viện</i>	內翰院	<i>Nei han yuan</i>	The Department of Inner Record-Assistance
<i>Nội trấn</i>	內鎮	<i>Nei zhen</i>	Inner commanderies
<i>Nội vụ phủ</i>	內務府	<i>Neiwu fu</i>	The Inner Court Treasury
<i>Phê bản xứ</i>	批本處	<i>Pi ben chu</i>	Office for Copying Emperor Endorsements (Qing China)
<i>Phê bằng</i>	批憑	<i>Pi ping</i>	Official-reviewed documents
<i>Phê hồng</i>	批紅	<i>Pi hong</i>	Red endorsements
<i>Phiến lục</i>	片錄	<i>Pian lu</i>	Inventories
<i>Phiếu nghị</i>	票擬	<i>Piao ni</i>	Tally suggestions
<i>Phó bản</i>	副本	<i>Fuben</i>	Duplicate versions
<i>Phó bảng</i>	副榜	<i>Fubang</i>	Supplementary List of Presented Scholars (or Subordinate list of Doctor-degree holders)
<i>Phó đô ngự sử</i>	副都御史	<i>Fu dou yu shi</i>	Deputy Chief of the Censorate
<i>Phó tổng trấn</i>	副總鎮	<i>Fu zong zhen</i>	Deputy regional commander
<i>Phó binh</i>	舖兵	<i>Pu bing</i>	Postal soldiers
<i>Phó phong</i>	副封	<i>Fu feng</i>	Supplementary envelopes
<i>Phong bản</i>	封本	<i>Feng ben</i>	Confidential memorials (Ming, Nguyen dynasties)
<i>Phu</i>	夫	<i>Fu</i>	Conscripted labors
<i>Phụ chính</i>	輔政	<i>Fu zheng</i>	Assisting administration (Regents)
<i>Phụ chính đại thần</i>	輔政大臣	<i>Fu zheng dachen</i>	High-ranked officials assist administration emperor [regents]
<i>Phủ</i>	府	<i>Fu</i>	Prefecture
<i>Phủ doãn</i>	府尹	<i>Fu yin</i>	Governor of the Capital
<i>Phủ liêu</i>	府僚	<i>Fu liao</i>	The Officials of the Lord-Palace (Trinh Lords)
<i>Phúc</i>	覆	<i>Fu</i>	Replied reports
<i>Phúc trình</i>	覆呈	<i>Fu cheng</i>	Replied reports to superior offices
<i>Phụng biên</i>	奉編	<i>Feng bian</i>	Official notes
<i>Phụng chỉ</i>	奉旨	<i>Feng zhi</i>	Following imperial decrees, recipients of decrees

<i>Phụng dụ</i>	奉諭	<i>Feng yu</i>	Following imperial edicts
<i>Phụng duyệt</i>	奉閱	<i>Feng yue</i>	Following a royal order to examine (paperwork)
<i>Phụng nhuận</i>	奉潤	<i>Feng run</i>	Following a royal order to edit (official records)
<i>Phụng thảo</i>	奉草	<i>Feng cao</i>	Following a royal order to draft (emperor documents)
<i>Phương lược</i>	方略	<i>Fanglue</i>	Military Strategies
<i>Quân cơ đại thần</i>	軍機大臣	<i>Junji dachen</i>	Grand Councilors (Qing dynasty)
<i>Quân cơ xử</i>	軍機處	<i>Junji chu</i>	The Grand Council (Qing dynasty)
<i>Quân doanh</i>	軍營	<i>Junying</i>	Military headquarters
<i>Quan ấn</i>	官印	<i>Guanyin</i>	Official seals
<i>Quan báo</i>	關報	<i>Guan bao</i>	The Road of official correspondence
<i>Quan đồng</i>	官銅	<i>Guan tong</i>	Copper coins
<i>Quan lại</i>	官吏	<i>Guanli</i>	Mandarins and subordinates
<i>Quan lộ</i>	官路	<i>Guanlu</i>	Postal route/ the road of mandarins
<i>Quan phòng</i>	關防	<i>Guanfang</i>	Authentication
<i>Quan phòng ấn</i>	關防印	<i>Guanfeng yin</i>	Authenticated Seals (Designed for high-ranked official title and institutions)
<i>Quản vệ</i>	管衛	<i>Guanwei</i>	Supervisors of army units
<i>Quang Minh điện</i>	光明殿	<i>Guangming dian</i>	The Guangming Hall
<i>Quân tử</i>	君子	<i>Junzi</i>	Gentlemen
<i>Quốc Bảo Ấn</i>	國寶印	<i>Guobao yin</i>	Seals of the State
<i>Quốc hiệu</i>	國號	<i>Guohao</i>	The title of a reigning dynasty
<i>Quốc húy tôn tự</i>	國諱尊字	<i>Go hui zun zi</i>	The list of a dynasty's taboo characters
<i>Quốc muội</i>	國妹	<i>Guo mei</i>	The king's sister
<i>Quốc âm</i>	國音	<i>Guo yin</i>	National sound
<i>Quốc sử quán</i>	國史館	<i>Guoshi guan</i>	The State Bureau of History
<i>Quốc sử quán tổng tài</i>	國史館總裁	<i>Guoshiguan zongcai</i>	Director-general of the State Bureau of History

<i>Quốc thư</i>	國書	<i>Guoshu</i>	Diplomatic letters
<i>Quốc tử giám</i>	國子監	<i>Quozijian</i>	The State Academy
<i>Quốc tử giám Tư nghiệp</i>	國子監司業	<i>Quozijian siye</i>	Director of Studies of the State Academy
<i>Quyển</i>	卷	<i>Quan</i>	Books, volumes
<i>Sách</i>	冊	<i>Ce</i>	Patent (official documents)
<i>Sách phong</i>	冊封	<i>Cefeng</i>	Recognition of conferring titles
<i>Sách tịch</i>	冊籍	<i>Ceji</i>	Books and records
<i>Sắc</i>	敕	<i>Chi</i>	Ordinances
<i>Sắc dụ</i>	敕諭	<i>Chiyu</i>	Patent by command
<i>Sắc thị</i>	敕示	<i>Chishi</i>	Documents of official appointment
<i>Sắc từ</i>	勅辭	<i>Chici</i>	Decree
<i>Sắc văn</i>	敕文	<i>Chiwen</i>	Bestowing investitures
<i>Sĩ</i>	士	<i>Shi</i>	Literati
<i>Sớ</i>	疏	<i>Shu</i>	Petitions
<i>Sở thị vệ</i>	所侍衛	<i>Sou shiwei</i>	The Department of the Palace Guards
<i>Tả kỳ</i>	左圻	<i>Zuo qi</i>	The Regions to the left of the Capital
<i>Tả trực kỳ</i>	左直圻	<i>Zuo zhi qi</i>	The Immediate region to the left of the Capital
<i>Tả vu Càn Chính điện</i>	勤政殿左廡	<i>Qinzheng dian zuo wu</i>	The Left Corridor of the Hall of Diligent Politics
<i>Tặc đạo thượng</i>	賊盜上	<i>Zei dao shang</i>	Severe crime list
<i>Tâm phúc</i>	心腹	<i>Xinfu</i>	Faithful right-hand men
<i>Tàng</i>	藏	<i>Cang</i>	Storehouse
<i>Tàng bản đường</i>	藏本堂	<i>Cang ben tang</i>	Woodblock-preserved House
<i>Tàng thư lâu</i>	藏書樓	<i>Cangshu lou</i>	The Tower of Book-storage
<i>Tảo sự</i>	早事	<i>Zaoshi</i>	Morning court discussion
<i>Tạp văn</i>	雜文	<i>Zawen</i>	Miscellaneous writings
<i>Tân thư viện</i>	新書院	<i>Xin shuyuan</i>	New Library
<i>Tấu</i>	奏	<i>Zou</i>	Memorials

<i>Tấu bản</i>	奏本	<i>Zouben</i>	Routine memorials (Qing dynasty)
<i>Tấu báo mễ giá</i>	奏報米價	<i>Zoubao mi jia</i>	Rice-price reports
<i>Tấu chiệp</i>	奏摺	<i>Zouzhe</i>	The memorial system Palace memorials (Qing dynasty)
<i>Tấu sự</i>	奏事	<i>Zoushi</i>	Daily-memorial briefing
<i>Tập</i>	集	<i>Ji</i>	Books, volumes
<i>Tề gia</i>	齊家	<i>Qijia</i>	Raising a family
<i>Tể tướng</i>	宰相	<i>Zaixiang</i>	Chancellor
<i>Tham tấu</i>	參奏	<i>Can zou</i>	Memorializing to expose the wrong-doings
<i>Thanh Hòa thư viện</i>	清和書院	<i>Qinghe shuyuan</i>	Thanh Hoa library
<i>Thanh triều</i>	清朝	<i>Qingchao</i>	Qing dynasty (1636-1911)
<i>Thành</i>	城	<i>cheng</i>	Citadel, regional administrations
<i>Thánh dụ</i>	聖諭	<i>sheng yu</i>	Instructions and Edicts
<i>Thánh huấn</i>	聖訓	<i>sheng xun</i>	Royal instructions
<i>Thái giám</i>	太監	<i>Taijian</i>	Eunuchs
<i>Thái tử</i>	太子	<i>Taizi</i>	Heir apparent
<i>Thái Hòa điện</i>	太和殿	<i>Taihe dian</i>	The Hall of Supreme Harmony
<i>Thái miếu</i>	太廟	<i>Taimiao</i>	The royal ancestral temple
<i>Thái y viện</i>	太醫院	<i>Taiyiyuan</i>	The State Institute of Medicine
<i>Tham hiệp</i>	參協	<i>Canxie</i>	Advisor-to the Commandery-Assistant
<i>Tham tri</i>	參知	<i>Canzhi</i>	The board's vice minister (ranked 2B)
<i>Tham tri chính sự</i>	參知政事	<i>Canzhi zhengshi</i>	Board's vice presidents (Tang and Yuan periods).
<i>Tháp hoàng</i>	搨黃	<i>Tahuang</i>	Yellow prints
<i>Thảo hành</i>	草行	<i>Coaxing</i>	Compiling for implementation
<i>Thảo phó</i>	草付	<i>Caofu</i>	Imperial drafts
<i>Thân</i>	申	<i>Shen</i>	Official reports (to superior offices),
<i>Thần sắc</i>	神敕	<i>Shenchi</i>	Imperial investitures to deities
<i>Thập toàn võ công</i>	十全武功	<i>Shi quan wugong</i>	The Ten Great Campaigns (Qing Emperor Qianlong)

<i>Thệ</i>	誓	<i>Shi</i>	Oath
<i>Thị độc</i>	侍讀	<i>Shidu</i>	Secretary of royal reading
<i>Thị độc học sĩ</i>	侍讀學士	<i>Shidu xueshi</i>	Scholars of reading assistance
<i>Thị hàn</i>	侍翰	<i>Shihan</i>	Writing Assistant
<i>Thị Hàn viện</i>	侍翰院	<i>Shihanyuan</i>	The Department of Records Assistance
<i>Thị lang</i>	侍郎	<i>Shilang</i>	The Board's third ranked officials (3A)
<i>Thị lang Nội các</i>	侍郎內閣	<i>Shilang neige</i>	Grand Secretariats
<i>Thị thần</i>	侍臣	<i>Shichen</i>	Attending courtiers
<i>Thị thư</i>	侍書	<i>Shishu</i>	Palace secretaries of writing assistance
<i>Thị Thư viện</i>	侍書院	<i>Shishuyuan</i>	The Department of Books Assistance
<i>Thị trung học sĩ</i>	侍中學士	<i>Shizhong xueshi</i>	Palace scholars
<i>Thị vệ xír</i>	侍衛處	<i>Shiwei suo</i>	The Palace Guards
<i>Thiêm sự</i>	簽事	<i>Qianshi</i>	Senior assistants
<i>Thiên Lý lộ</i>	千里路	<i>Qianli lu</i>	The Road of Thousand Miles
<i>Thiên tử</i>	天子	<i>Tianzi</i>	Son of Heaven
<i>Thiên Y A Na</i>	天依阿那	<i>Tian Y A Na</i>	Cham Goddess Thien Y A Na
<i>Thỉnh an chiếp</i>	請安摺	<i>Qing an zhe</i>	Respects-paying memorials
<i>Thông chính sứ ty</i>	通政使司	<i>Tong zheng shi si</i>	The Office of Transmission
<i>Thông tri</i>	通知	<i>Tongzhi</i>	Official announcement
<i>Thu thẩm</i>	秋審	<i>Qiu shen</i>	Pending death penalty' 斬監候 is the second level of capital punishment in which the convicts received final decision after imperial reviews or the Autumn Assizes
<i>Thư</i>	書	<i>Shu</i>	Books
<i>Thư lại</i>	書吏	<i>Shuli</i>	Secretaries at Yamen
<i>Thư tả ty</i>	書寫司	<i>Shu xiesi</i>	The Copiers Office
<i>Thư viện</i>	書院	<i>Shuyuan</i>	Library

<i>Thứ khẩn</i>	次緊	<i>Ci jin</i>	High-speed delivery
<i>Thừa chỉ</i>	承旨	<i>Cheng zhi</i>	Recipients of decrees
<i>Thừa cố mệnh đại thần</i>	承顧命大臣	<i>Cheng guming dachen</i>	High-ranked officials, recipients of the imperial posthumous edit (Regents)
<i>Thừa tướng</i>	承相	<i>Chengxiang</i>	Senior grand councilor
<i>Thực phong</i>	寔封	<i>Shifeng</i>	Confidential memorials (Nguyen dynasty)
<i>Thường hành</i>	常行	<i>Changxing</i>	Normal delivery
<i>Thường triều</i>	常朝	<i>Changchao</i>	Regular court audiences
<i>Thượng bảo tào</i>	尚寶曹	<i>Shangbao cao</i>	The Department of Seal Management
<i>Thượng bảo thiếu khanh</i>	尚寶少卿	<i>Shangbao shao qing</i>	The chief of the palace office
<i>Thượng bảo ty</i>	尚寶司	<i>Shangbao si</i>	The Department of Seal-Management
<i>Thượng dụ</i>	上諭	<i>Shangyu</i>	Edicts
<i>Thượng thư</i>	尚書	<i>Shangshu</i>	Board Presidents
<i>Thượng tiến</i>	上進	<i>Shang jin</i>	Submitting (documents) to the throne
<i>Thượng Trà viện</i>	尚茶院	<i>Shang cha yuan</i>	The Office of Tea
<i>Ti luân</i>	絲綸	<i>Silun</i>	Imperial utterances
<i>Tín bài</i>	信牌	<i>Xinpai</i>	Authenticated cards
<i>Tín ký</i>	信記	<i>xinji</i>	Personal seals for officials of all ranks.
<i>Tiến sĩ</i>	進士	<i>Jinshi</i>	Doctoral degree holders
<i>Tỉnh</i>	省	<i>Sheng</i>	Provinces (since 1831)
<i>Tỉnh thần</i>	省臣	<i>Sheng chen</i>	Provincial officials
<i>Tộc húy</i>	族諱	<i>Zu hui</i>	Taboo characters related to the royal family
<i>Tối khẩn</i>	最緊	<i>Zui jin</i>	Most urgent
<i>Tôn nhân phủ</i>	尊人府	<i>Zunren fu</i>	The Imperial Household Department
<i>Tôn quân</i>	尊君	<i>Zun jun</i>	Respecting the king
<i>Tồn chiếu</i>	存照	<i>Cun zhao</i>	Storage for further review
<i>Tổng đốc</i>	總督	<i>Zongdu</i>	The Governor-general

<i>Tổng trấn</i>	總鎮	<i>Zongzhen</i>	Commander-general
<i>Trảm</i>	斬	<i>Zhan</i>	Beheaded execution
<i>Trảm giam hậu</i>	斬監候	<i>Zhan jian hou</i>	Pending death penalty
<i>Trạm mục</i>	站目	<i>Zhan mu</i>	Chief of a postal station
<i>Trạm đồng</i>	驛筒	<i>Yi tong</i>	Postal bamboo-tube
<i>Trẫm</i>	朕	<i>Zhen</i>	Emperor's first-person pronoun (Nguyen dynasty)
<i>Trấn</i>	鎮	<i>Zhen</i>	Commandery
<i>Trấn Tây thành</i>	鎮西城	<i>Zhen xi cheng</i>	The Western Protectorate [Cambodia, 1834]
<i>Trấn thủ</i>	鎮守	<i>Zhenshou</i>	Commanderies-defenders
<i>Tráp</i>	劄	<i>Zha</i>	Official requests (documents sent from a superior to the subordinates)
<i>Trát</i>	札	<i>Zha</i>	Official requests (document types, from a superior to the subordinates)
<i>Trát súc</i>	札飭	<i>Zha chi</i>	Official orders (document types)
<i>Trần bì</i>	陳皮	<i>Chenpi</i>	Sun-dried tangerine peel
<i>Trần tạ</i>	陳謝	<i>Chenxie</i>	Petitions of gratitude
<i>Tri hội</i>	知會	<i>Zhihui</i>	Communication
<i>Tri huyện</i>	知縣	<i>Zhixian</i>	County magistrate
<i>Tri phủ</i>	知府	<i>Zhifu</i>	Prefect
<i>Trị quốc</i>	治國	<i>Zhiguo</i>	Ruling a state
<i>Triện</i>	篆	<i>Zhuan</i>	Official seals (Designed for commune chiefs Cai tổng 該總, Chánh tổng 正總, village chiefs Lý trưởng 里長).
<i>Triều cống</i>	朝貢	<i>Chaogong</i>	Tribute
<i>Triều đình hội nghị</i>	朝庭會議	<i>Gong tong huiyi</i>	Court audiences
<i>Triều đường</i>	朝堂	<i>Chao tang</i>	Court audience
<i>Trình</i>	呈	<i>Cheng</i>	Reports, petitions
<i>Trình văn</i>	呈文	<i>Chengwen</i>	Reports, petitions
<i>Trúc đồng</i>	竹筒	<i>Zhutong</i>	Postal bamboo tubes
<i>Trung thư khoa</i>	中書科	<i>Zhongshu</i>	Central Drafting Office,

		<i>ke</i>	responsible for drafting proclamations (Ming-Qing periods)
<i>Trung thư xá nhân</i>	中書舍人	<i>Zhongshu sheren</i>	Palace secretaries drafting royal instructions
<i>Truyền</i>	傳	<i>Chuan</i>	Official directions (to lower-ranked offices)
<i>Truyền thị</i>	傳示	<i>Chuan shi</i>	Official directions (document types)
<i>Truyền thị văn bằng</i>	傳示文憑	<i>Chuan shi wenping</i>	Instructing documents
<i>Truyền quốc chi bảo</i>	傳國之寶	<i>Chuanguo zhibao</i>	The Heirloom Seal of the Realm
<i>Trước tác</i>	著作	<i>Zhuzuo</i>	Compilers
<i>Tu soạn</i>	修撰	<i>Xiu zhuan</i>	Drafters
<i>Tu thân</i>	修身	<i>Xiushen</i>	Self-cultivation
<i>Tụ Khuê thư viện</i>	聚奎書院	<i>Jukui shuyuan</i>	Tu Khue library
<i>Tư</i>	咨	<i>Zi</i>	Directions and exchanged documents
<i>Tư di</i>	咨移	<i>Zi yi</i>	Exchanged paperwork
<i>Tư trình</i>	咨呈	<i>Zi cheng</i>	Replied reports
<i>Trình văn</i>	呈文	<i>Chengwen</i>	Official reports
<i>Tứ thư</i>	四書	<i>Si shu</i>	Four books
<i>Tứ tuần khánh</i>	四旬大慶	<i>Si xun daqing</i>	The royal 40 th birthday anniversary
<i>Tuần phủ</i>	巡撫	<i>Xunfu</i>	Governors
<i>Tỷ</i>	璽	<i>xi</i>	Imperial seals
<i>Ty Lễ giám</i>	司禮監	<i>Si lijian</i>	The Directorate of Ceremony (Ming China)
<i>Ty Luân sở</i>	絲綸所	<i>Si lun suo</i>	The Department of Drafting Royal Documents
<i>Văn hiến khai bang</i>	文獻啟邦	<i>Wenxian qi bang</i>	A domain of Manifest Civility
<i>Văn Minh Điện Đại học sĩ</i>	文明殿大學士	<i>Wenming dian de xueshi</i>	Grand Academician of the Wenming Hall
<i>Văn miếu</i>	文廟	<i>Miao</i>	The Temple of Literature

<i>Văn quan</i>	文官	<i>Wenguan</i>	Civil officials
<i>Văn sách</i>	文策	<i>Wence</i>	The Essay of Political Analysis
<i>Văn thần</i>	文臣	<i>Wenchen</i>	Civil officials
<i>Văn thư phòng</i>	文書房	<i>Wenshufang</i>	The Office of Records and Books
<i>Văn thư phòng quan phòng</i>	文書房關 防	<i>Wenshu fang guanfang</i>	Authenticated seal of the Office of Records and Books
<i>Văn võ đại thần</i>	文武大臣	<i>Wen wu dachen</i>	Civil and military high-ranked officials
<i>Vệ úy</i>	衛尉	<i>Wei wei</i>	Battalion commander
<i>Viện</i>	院	<i>Yuan</i>	Court institutions
<i>Viên ngoại lang</i>	員外郎	<i>Yuan wailang</i>	Board secretary
<i>Việt</i>	越	<i>Yue</i>	Viet ethnics
<i>Việt Nam</i>	越南	<i>Yuenan</i>	Name of the Nguyen kingdom between 1804 and 1838 (and from 1945).
<i>Võ quan</i>	武官	<i>Wuguan</i>	Military officials
<i>Vô vi</i>	無爲	<i>Wuwei</i>	Non-action
<i>Vũ khố</i>	武庫	<i>Wuku</i>	Military Storehouse
<i>Vương</i>	王	<i>Wang</i>	Kings
<i>Vương đạo</i>	王道	<i>Wangdao</i>	The way of conducting kingship
<i>Y nghị</i>	依議	<i>Yi zou</i>	Complying to the memorialized
<i>Y tấu</i>	依奏	<i>Yi yi</i>	Complying to the discussed