

Eve of Destruction
A Social History of Vietnam's Royal City, 1957 – 1967

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Abstract

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This research project illuminates how war transformed the social life of ordinary people in the city of Huế in central Vietnam, from the establishment of the University of Huế in 1957 to the Tết Offensive of January 1968. Examining the forces which impacted lifestyle, interpersonal relations, and cultural expression in the imperial city, it exposes the mutability of human experience in all walks of life in a centuries-old national seat and gives voice to the common people in this locus of education, religion, and culture. Vietnam War studies in both the US and Vietnam to date impose top-down perspectives which shape historical understanding in defined direction, and the insistent, nearly-exclusive scholarly focus on political and military activities which prevails has resulted in a comparative dearth of attention to social history and cultural change which exposes to scrutiny the narratives of individual human lives. To the urban residents, be they in the North, Center, or South, the war was not felt as immediately in the typical daily life as in the exurban countryside before 1968 yet nonetheless manifested itself in subtle and ominous ways.

The research is rooted in archival government documents, personal memoirs, literature, media, as well as interviews with a wide range of people of Hué living inside and outside the country. By emphasizing the voices of ordinary people under the shadow of war, this grassroots history seeks to remedy the Western-centered imbalance in the war's historiography and provide a new complimentary perspective to Vietnam studies. And beyond modern Vietnam, this research has implications for investigating social and cultural history of other communities that have survived conflicts.

Dedication

This work is dedicated to
my parents,
and to the war generation in my country.

Acknowledgements

As I have told many of my friends, I learned much more about my own country when I was abroad. I first became a history student in Vietnam, then went to the US to study the history of my nation. Along that long journey, I have received invaluable and consistent support and attention and owe a deep gratitude to my professors, colleagues, family members, and friends near and far.

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Abbreviation

ACH	Provincial Archives Center in Huế
ARVN	Army of the Republic of Vietnam
DMZ	Demilitarized Zone
DRVN	Democratic Republic of Vietnam
FRPO	The First Republic Presidential Office of the Republic of Vietnam Files
MACV	U.S. Military Assistance Command, Vietnam
NACII	National Archives Center II
NLF	National Liberation Front
PAVN	People's Army of Vietnam
PLAF	People's Liberation Armed Forces of South Vietnam
RVN	Republic of Vietnam
SRPO	The Second Republic Presidential Office of the Republic of Vietnam Files
TTPH	Thừa Thiên Provincial Headquarters Files
VC	Việt Cộng or Viet Cong
VND	Vietnam Đồng currency

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Introduction

In its more than two thousand years of history, Vietnam witnessed a “march to the south” of the Vietnamese people who first settled and formed their own nation state in what is now the northern part of the country. After about 1000 years under Chinese domination, the Vietnamese emperors of various dynasties gradually expanded their territory toward the south, adding the central narrow coastal strip in the middle of the millenium, and eventually forming its S-shaped country by the eighteenth century. In the process of expansion, from the fourteenth to eighteenth century, three regions in the north, central, and south with distinct characteristics emerged.

The area of modern Thừa Thiên – Huế province in central Vietnam was first annexed to the nation of Đại Việt in 1306 as a wedding present when the Vietnamese Emperor Trần Anh Tông betrothed his daughter Huyền Trân to King Jaya Simhavarman of the Champa kingdom. The name of the province then changed from Lý (Ry or Rí in Cham language) to Hoá (meaning “changes” in Vietnamese), later pronounced as Huế. When the Nguyễn Lords fortified their power in the early seventeenth century, Phú Xuân – a small provincial town north of Huế today – was selected as their capital of Đàng Trong in the southern part of by then divided Vietnam. As soon as the Nguyễn Dynasty ruled the entire country in 1802, Huế became the capital of Vietnam with the Forbidden Purple City, the massive walled citadel, the royal tombs, and gradually became a cosmopolitan area with a growing population and multiple services for the royal family. And it retained this function through French colonialism when the country was divided into three parts: Tonkin (northern Vietnam), Annam (central Vietnam), and Cochinchina (southern Vietnam). In fact Annam was still under the jurisdiction of the Emperor but in name only, and Huế’s political significance began to decline particularly since the French capture of

Huế on July 5, 1885. This day – “the Fall of the Capital Day” [Ngày thất thủ kinh đô] with casualties of more than a thousand Vietnamese people – marks the communal death anniversary of the city of Huế – the unique death anniversary of the imperial city that every household in Huế today still commemorates.

In the middle of the twentieth century, as the last King of the Nguyễn Dynasty, Bảo Đại, abdicated his throne upon the declaration of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRVN) with the capital Hà Nội in 1945, and Associated State of Vietnam in 1949 then the Republic of Vietnam (RVN) named its capital Sài Gòn in 1955, the former imperial capital of Huế continued as one of the primary cultural heart and soul, intellectual milieu, educational and religious centers of the nation. Even after the country was divided into two military–administrative zones after the Geneva Accords in 1954, to both the DRVN and the RVN¹ and in Vietnamese people’s heart and mind, Huế was regarded as one of the three major cities in Vietnam – Huế, Sài Gòn, Hà Nội – as indispensable parts of a full picture of present day Vietnam.

A study of Huế in the partitioned era when Hà Nội and Sài Gòn took the center stage is vital.

Since its emergence as a field of history in the early twentieth century, social history has been concerned with ordinary people, “real life,” the lived experience of the past, and everyday happenings rather than abstract ideologies, the “Great Men,” or turning–point events in the course of history. The “history of the people,” or “history from below,” is viewed as an alternative history to conventional political, military, and diplomatic history. One of its subfields, urban studies, as an interdisciplinary field of anthropology, geography, and sociology, researches

¹ After 1954, both the DRVN and RVN claimed their nation’s territory from the Nam Quan pass in the northern border with China to the southernmost point in Cà Mau cape. See for example, the Introduction and Article 1 of the Constitution of the DRVN in 1959, and the Introduction of the Constitution of the RVN in 1956.

the city in its development process in history, and its residents, families, social classes and their daily experiences, as opposed to the elites and their political or military decisions and events. Social and urban historians view ordinary people as agents equally contributing to shape the urbanization and history of their land. Social historical emphases and methodologies have certainly enriched historical understanding of the past.

Social history has remained a rather marginal subfield in historical writings on modern Vietnam, which are still so dominated by political, military and diplomatic interests, both in Vietnamese and Western publications. To be more precise, social history is still a fairly new concept in social sciences and humanities in Vietnam, never existing in the national history as a strong field of studies. Meanwhile urban history became more developed in the scholarship in the past twenty years with literature on coastal port cities, or the thousand-year-old capital of Hà Nội. In the post-war country with its immense legacies of prolonged and devastating conflicts, ideology and politics have played significant roles in history studies, causing more impediments to researching and writing social histories of wartime Vietnam. On the other hand, the heavy impacts of the Vietnam War on shaping the American characteristics and identity after the war era, plus various difficulties for foreign scholars to conduct research in Vietnam, have resulted in social history's neglect in scholarship outside Vietnam. As a consequence, social history remains severely understudied in revolutionary-nationalist narratives and conventional Western histories of Vietnam, "nation-building," and the war.

Research into social history of a city in wartime Vietnam is necessary.

Moreover, in the case of Vietnam with its strong regional differences, as Keith Taylor suggests, "posing a regional identity does not erase or diminish the potency of a national identity

but rather mimetically reinforces it in a schema of configuration.”² Understanding the relations between the specificities of time and place and the vicissitudes of human history in comparison with other periods and areas is important to gain better knowledge on the development of social and cultural thoughts and practices of the locals at the specific context where, and when, they arose. As Giebel reviews spatial representations of war in Vietnam after 1954, Huế serves as a good example of how regionalism cannot be understood well under the simple binary of “North Vietnam” and “South Vietnam.”³ It is in Huế as the tradition heartland of Vietnam that regionalism is strongly felt among the local inhabitants, and easily observed by outsiders.

Culturally speaking, in the 1950s – 1960s, “Huế is perhaps the most characteristically Vietnamese city in all of Vietnam,”⁴ as Skaidrite Maliks put it in 1964. Huế has been a living repository of the traditions and values of the past where the richness of Vietnam’s cultural heritage is most apparent in many respects. It has been a place of learning where the mandarin examinations had been held for hundreds of years and the seat of a large number of public and private primary and high schools. Artistically it was in Huế that musicians, artists, playwrights, actors, dancers, and artisans produced their best works for the royal family and the court. Here one could easily find talented poets; even the Emperors themselves were famous for their poems and verses.

In the 1950s – 1960s, Huế was the home of most of Vietnam’s former nobility who descended from the Emperors’ family, now having become ordinary citizens. Living in large garden houses on the northern and eastern edges of the city, these former nobles still clung to

² Taylor, Keith W. “Surface Orientation in Vietnam: Beyond Histories of Nation and Region.” *Journal of Asian Studies* 57, No. 4, (November 1998): 950.

³ Christoph Giebel. “National Liberation and the Cold War in Viet Nam: Some Thoughts on Spatial Representations of War after 1954.” Paper presented at the Third International Conference on Vietnamese Studies, Hà Nội, December 2008.

⁴ Skaidrite Maliks, *Research Notes on Hue as a Traditional City of Viet Nam*, Unclassified Document (Washington D.C.: Defense Documentation Center, 1964), 1.

their royal lifestyles as best they could, which set the tone for Huế. In contemporary society, the royal, noble, “mệ”⁵ characteristic was still embedded in Huế people’s life, from their lifestyle, manners, human relations, to language, and the way they organized their gardens. In Huế, “mệ” refers to high ranking mandarins, respected intellectuals, or some people who follow their lifestyle. The general characteristics of those “mệ” people are gentle, elegant, and noble, to maintain virtues of the royal family members. Although they live close to the “ordinary” people, they still exhibit their noble origin. In such an old imperial city, a common resident found it easy to share the nobles’ dignity and revere the traditions and pride in his or her city above region and nation. Similar to the dialect of Huế, the word “mệ” is unique to Huế and did not exist in the language spoken in nearby provinces.⁶

Huế was never renowned for its economic advantages. The narrow delta in the province could not even supply enough rice to support the city. The Huế area produces little material commodities except some craftsmen with small-scale production like straw hats; some lime and clay for light industrial production like cement. Huế’s privileges of development have relied on the spectacular historic and natural beauty to attract tourists. Neither did it historically serve as a military center in spite of its important location where the national railroad and Highway 1 pass over the Perfume River. As the seat of power for centuries, however, Huế nourished generations of political leaders, intellectuals, cultural figures of the nation in the twentieth century.

An examination of the central region with its immanence as an entity is essential.

⁵ The word “mệ” dated back to the time under the rule of Lord Võ Vương Nguyễn Phúc Khoát (1714-1765). In this former land of the Cham people, local vocabulary contains some words from the old Cham language, such as Tê (The), Rũa (Roh), Ấy (Ay), Ni (Ni), etc. Mệ also originates from a Cham word, “Melia,” which means elite, or nobility, or the personal pronoun of the elites and the nobility in the society. See Bùi Minh Đức, *Từ điển tiếng Huế: Tiếng Huế - Người Huế - Văn hóa Huế* [Dictionary of Huế Language: Language – People – Culture in Huế], (Hà Chí Minh City: Literature Press, 2004), 579-580.

⁶ In the provinces north of Huế, such as Quảng Trị, Quảng Bình, Nghệ An, Hà Tĩnh, the term “mệ” does not exist in the local language. See, for example, Võ Xuân Trang, *Phương ngữ Bình Trị Thiên* [Dialects of Bình Trị Thiên Area], (Hà Nội: Social Science Press, 1997); Trần Hữu Thung, *Từ điển Tiếng Nghệ* [Dictionary of Nghệ Language], (Nghệ An: Nghệ An Press, 1997).

In the education center of the nation, Huế continued its tradition when it became the seat of the second university of the RVN in 1957. Thanks to the rapid growth of the University of Huế in the late 1950s and early 1960s, Huế turned into a center of attraction and dispersion, gathering hundreds of young and bright people from all over the country, and sending them throughout the country just several years later. More importantly, intellectuals, students, and the university itself played a significant role as agents of social change in the city and the nation's new realities. Huế indeed changed greatly in the midst of various political struggles and religious crises, from the Buddhist crisis of 1963 to the anti-government protest movement of 1966. The year 1968 will forever be distinguished by the massacres and destruction of the Tết Offensive which irrevocably changed Huế's people and long-standing features of local life. When the war came to the city, Huế citizens suffered tremendously in death and destruction, and the former imperial capital of poetry became a dreadful hell. The period 1957 – 1967 therefore witnessed significant changes in the royal city on the eve of destruction.

The city of Huế, the most important city of the central region, the imperial capital of the last dynasty of Vietnam, the century old urban area of a distinct community, constitutes a perfect case study for a social history of modern wartime Vietnam.

This research project interrogates how war affected the social life in the city of Huế in 1957–1967 when the political transformations and military conflicts tended to obscure individual experience. It investigates the human experience of a wide cross-section of Huế residents, digging deep into the lives of civilians and those in the military; women, men, and children; nationalists of all political persuasions; Buddhists, Catholics, and atheists; ethnic Vietnamese and indigenous minorities; the elite, middle classes, and poor; intellectuals and those with less or no

education. The historical atmosphere of wartime Vietnam is reconstructed here from descriptions of ordinary people, and the description of their human relations and social and cultural life is based on what they considered significant.

In this project, human experiences in everyday life, people's daily concerns, lifestyle, strategies for survival, relations between individual-family-community-nation, social structure and network, gender role, as reflected in schooling, leisure activities, literature, music, and various transactions of daily life will be interpreted from different perspectives, providing better understanding of the social environment of the period. How did people negotiate their daily lives in the city where the war was neither that close, nor far away? What kinds of literature were they reading? What films were they watching? What leisure activities did they participate in? By examining these questions, my research seeks to understand how the people in Huế lived through the decade before the 1968 Tết Offensive destroyed the city.

In the mid-century period, the Buddhist crisis of 1963, the arrival of American troops near the city in 1965, the protest movement of 1966 – all made Huế synonymous with escalation and turmoil. By contrast, this research scrutinizes the history of the city of Huế with particular attention to its grassroots social and cultural life as opposed to being a conspicuous place of protest against the national government, campaigns against Communism or America, and the incubation of anti-war movements. This is by no means a total history of Huế, nor a comprehensive history of “the masses.” I am aware that voices in these pages are highly selective and the stories might appear even random while the reality in wartime was too complicated to be represented by any single individual from any perspectives in any particular place.

The research attempts to touch upon general cultural customs and traditions whenever it is relevant to better understanding the topics only with the desire to introduce part of the complex world of customs that any individual living in Huế at the time had to follow. From birthday to

death date in a circle of life, anyone would learn, then in turn instruct other members of the community, how to address yourself to the elderly, where you could sit at dinner, and what to wear to various worship ceremonies throughout the year. Some stories and norms may appear too familiar or trivial for locals, however, are noteworthy and worth telling to outsiders. On the one hand, they demonstrated a rich and multi-layered culture formed and developed over hundreds of years; on the other hand, they partially constrained the urbanization process introduced to Vietnamese society in the modern times by Westerners (French and American in particular).

I am aware that social life and cultural life are broad topics that would require a great amount of work to explore the rich and distinctive culture of Vietnam. However, this research is largely constrained by available sources materials, which limited my ability to explore many important subjects of the period. As analyzed in detail later, various topics of modern history of Vietnam remain controversial until today, as even the Vietnamese people themselves thus far can not agree on numerous issues on what, how, why history happened that way. With this in mind, I will not provide detailed discussions on, for example, who were behind the struggles, or whether they were fighting for religious or political purposes, or to what extent the struggle participants sympathized with the revolution. Based on the accessible materials, my research attempts to cover the process of getting involved in historical events of some participants, and how and why these historical events did or did not affect local life of some witnesses. In other words, I am more interested in the human factor in the historical context than any other aspects.

It was my original desire to walk the readers through the city of Hué in the 1957-1967 period. We would join them in community activities, street protests, or festivals throughout the years. We may stop here and there to watch female students in their white long dress walking home every afternoon, as well as observe a protest with banners and tear gas or the flame of self-

immolations. We could hear some popular songs they sang, or some noises of sudden grenade explosion. We might read their newspapers or literature, touch their essential items, or feel their happiness or frustration. We also get to know some people, Vietnamese or foreigners, who came from different backgrounds, and played different roles in the social changes. We could share with them difficulties in increasingly insecure and uncertain lives, including worries of theft, accidents, higher cost of living, or arrest by police. This historic tour would help reconstruct the social atmosphere of the 1957 – 1967 period in the history of the city of Huế to advance the current scholarship of Vietnam Studies.

Literature Review

Numerous accounts have been written of Americans and their lives during the Vietnam War, yet there is scant information on the common Vietnamese who lived that war. The scholarly focus on political-military environments and the comparative neglect of socio-cultural upheaval, all this skewed towards Western and male narratives. Also, as the first television war, Vietnam War images on media headlines, TV news, documentaries, and films dominated how Vietnam was depicted. For the US citizens, Vietnam in the 1960s therefore was situated in the context of fierce battles of an anti-communist war in the Far East, as was the city of Huế, if mentioned at all. Huế in the period before 1968 was nonetheless neither a hot battlefield, nor one of the places where any of the images of the war were taken.

To date almost all of the few existing publications on social aspects of the Vietnam War were written by American authors, and are limited by a dearth of source materials and informants. David Hunt's *Vietnam's Southern Revolution: From Peasant Insurrection to Total War* (2008) fruitfully brings to light the interior worlds of war and revolution; yet the research draws on mainly RAND Corporation interviews conducted in Định Tường Province from 1965

to 1968 with prisoners and defectors from the NLF, hence it is itself limited by sources and the characteristics of informants. Another social historical project *ARVN: Life and Death in the South Vietnamese Army* by Robert K. Brigham (2006) focuses only on the experiences of the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) soldiers. Additionally, *Village in Vietnam* by Gerald Cannon Hickey (1964), and *The Small World of Khanh Hau* by James Bausch Hendry (1964), provide mainly ethnographic descriptions of the economic, social, and administrative problems in the rural areas as materials were gathered in the course of a program of joint research carried out by the Michigan State University Advisory Group in Vietnam, in cooperation with the National Institute of Administration in 1958 – 1959 in Khánh Hậu village, Long An province in the deep south of Vietnam. Also about Long An province, *War Comes to Long An: Revolutionary Conflict in a Vietnamese Province* by Jeffrey Race (1972) focuses largely on the revolutionary social movement with top-down and outside-in analyses on local political and military activities.

Following the Annales School of various French historians, E. P. Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963), and joining the efforts of other Southeast Asia scholars to discover “history from below” such as Reynaldo Ileto (*Pasyon and Revolution*, 1979) and Jean Taylor (*The Social World of Batavia*, 1983), several Vietnam scholars only recently have pioneered studies into the social and cultural history of modern Vietnam. For instance, Shawn McHale's *Print and Power: Confucianism, Communism, and Buddhism in the Making of Modern Vietnam* (2004) examines how printing and press transformed the modern public life, as well as how Confucianism, Buddhism, and Communism shaped modern Vietnam. Hue-Tam Ho Tai in *Passion, Betrayal, and Revolution in Colonial Saigon* (2010) illustrates the life of ordinary Vietnamese in the late colonial era through the memoirs of a former revolutionary activist and political prisoner, Bảo Lương. Dissertations by Judith Henchy (2005), Tuan Hoang (2013) and

Mei Feng Mok (2016), as well as research projects in progress by Van Nguyen–Marshall and Heather Stur, discuss various social and cultural aspects of twentieth century Vietnam, yet primarily focusing on Sài Gòn and the southern part of the country.

Regarding the central region, scholars have not paid much attention to the entire region, even less to the social and cultural life in its localities in modern times. Only a few accounts are known in English. James W. Trullinger's *Village at War: An Account of Revolution in Vietnam* (1980) is a detailed description of military conflicts and political changes in a village outside of Huế area from the French colonial period to 1975. *Ghosts of War in Vietnam* (2008) by Heonik Kwon illustrates multiple aspects of local belief and practices regarding the world of dead in the Đà Nẵng – Quảng Nam area. Kwon successfully examines the cultural life and people's imagination of the past, providing a unique perspective to better understand post-war Vietnam. In *Imperial Heights: Dalat and the Making and Undoing of French Indochina* (2011), Eric Jennings discusses the process of building the city of Đà Lạt by Frenchmen over the past century. *Imperial Heights* offers an interdisciplinary approach to the history of the city as a product of a colonial period, an important contribution to the scholarship on urban studies.

Years after the end of the war, a great number of participants and witnesses of all sides of the Vietnam War have reported their experiences in their memoirs. Again, the majority were written by military generals and soldiers with special attention to military activities and victories. Le Ly Hayslip's *When Heaven and Earth Changed Places* (1989) is therefore an exceptional memoir by a Quảng Nam-based woman, since it provides a profound description of the wartime daily life at the ground level, where rural people were forced to adjust to new circumstances to live through the war. *Fallen Leaves: Memoirs of a Vietnamese Woman from 1940 to 1975* by Nguyen Thi Thu Lam (1989), *The Sacred Willow: Four Generations in the Life of a Vietnamese Family* by Duong Van Mai Elliott (1999), and *Late Blossom: Memories of Life, Loss and Love in*

Viet Nam by Laura Lam (2006), provide extraordinary stories of life through the eyes of the generation growing up during the French and later American wars. These memoirs bring to attention the anecdotes of daily life in wartime Vietnam.

I grew up in the northern part of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam where the previous generation of historians wrote the history of the “Resistance against America Imperialists to Save the Nation.” The national history of Vietnam is still largely a history adhering to the nationalist trope of continuous conflicts of the heroic resistances against foreign invasions in the last 2000 years under domination of the Chinese, French, and Americans. In the context of a post-war country, when my generation grew up with remnants and legacies of the war, even history students at the Vietnam National University are currently studying the version of “history of the victors” – little is studied about any PAVN’s setbacks, ARVN’s strengths, or America’s “support,” even less on social and cultural development. Similar to what the American military historians in the US have been doing in the US for the past 50 years, the Vietnamese historians have extensively focused on the military activities and political changes during what they describe as the prolonged national resistance.

Within post-war Vietnam, while a great amount of documents were lost and burned in wartime and self-destroyed after the war, the social life in the war era occasionally appears in some studies on specific aspects of the war through political and military lenses, and in the form of personal stories rather than as focused historical research.⁷ Moreover, stories about daily life are broadly viewed through political and military lenses, and only stories positively contributing to the conflict and the political lines successfully went through the censorship system and were publicly released. Inside and outside Vietnam until today, almost all of personal narratives were

⁷ See, for example, Ngô Kha (1989), Trần Thức (2005), Lê Công Cơ (2006), Hoàng Phủ Ngọc Phan (2012).

written by soldiers whose main concerns were military activities on the front or political decision in Hà Nội or Sài Gòn; therefore, these descriptions of battlefields at the ground level consider the local social life, if mentioned at all, only in relation to military activities. Furthermore, even within the “winning side,” many felt that their narratives would not be worth publishing compared to numerous heroic actions by other great figures. In response to the call for wartime diaries and letters, initiated by journalist Đặng Vương Hưng in 2005, thousands of documents by PAVN soldiers have reportedly been collected. The PAVN veterans, who certainly contributed to the 1975 “liberation of the south,” hesitated to send their diaries because “I think my diary is valueless compared to my comrades’ writings.”⁸ In this sense, other ordinary people, if ever recording their experiences during the war, might not make their writings available for historical research.

While various accounts of dynastic and cultural history of Huế of earlier periods have been written by local academics, scholarship on the city in modern times remains very limited. Existing histories on Huế by non-Vietnamese and Vietnamese scholars before the Tết Offensive in 1968 have been dominated by the 1963 Buddhist crisis or the 1966 protest movements, which skew the common understanding of 1960s Huế in the context of wartime Vietnam. Jerrold Schechter’s 1967 *The New Face of Buddha* and Robert Topmiller’s 2002 *The Lotus Unleashed* examines the urban struggles in Huế through a political and religious lens and from an American perspective. And these are only two examples of the complex scholarship on the year 1963 only (see the sub-conclusion of part II for more information). Lê Cung is the Vietnamese scholar who writes the most about the Buddhist movement in Huế in 1963, besides other scholars like Trần Văn Giàu, Trần Bạch Đằng, Trần Huy Liệu, etc. In his 2001 book *Phong trào Đô thị Huế trong*

⁸ Lê Văn Côn, personal letter to Đặng Vương Hưng in 2005, in *Một thời lính trận [Soldier Era]*, Nguyễn Trần Thái and Lê Văn Côn (Hà Nội: Công An Nhân Dân Press, 2007), 14.

kháng chiến chống Mỹ, 1954-1975 [*Urban Movements in Huế in the Resistance Against the America, 1954-1975*], Lê Cung's arguments are in accordance in various ways with those of Americans scholars in terms of the political causes and impacts of the social movement in the context of the Vietnam War. The thick book *Biến Động Miền Trung: Những Bí Mật Chưa Tiết Lộ, Giai Đoạn 1966 – 1968 – 1972* [*Turmoil in the Central Region: Undisclosed Secrets in the Period of 1966 – 1968 – 1972*] by Liên Thành (2008), is the only detailed account on the turbulent years in the central region to the present day. The author, currently living in Southern California, evidently demonstrates an extreme anti-communist standpoint, and a large amount of his information is of questionable balance.

On the other hand, various memoirs, articles, and literature works by many people of Huế appearing in anthologies, journals, self-published or internally distributed books, minutes of ceremonies and anniversaries, personal webpages or group forums reflect on a wide but random diversity of social life of the period. For example, in Catholic priest Cao Văn Luận's memoir *Bên Giòng Lịch Sử Việt Nam, 1940-1975* (*In the Course of the History of Vietnam, 1940-1975*, 1983), the war neither emerged significantly as a main concern in people's daily life nor strongly affected their experiences in Huế in the 1960s. His memoir about the wartime depicts a society in which people eagerly supported the development of the University of Huế, or actively joined the protest against the government for human rights and justice as those in other countries not at war. In short, there is no systematic scholarship that investigates the social life in the city of Huế in the war era.

Contribution to Scholarship

This research project constitutes the first full-length study of a social history of Vietnam's war and challenges common interpretations of the modern history of the country.

Studies of twentieth-century Vietnam by both Vietnamese and American scholars have focused obsessively on changes in regime, military operations, and political and military personalities. The history of the Vietnam War period (1940s - 1975) has been depicted largely through, for example, battles, massacres, cabinet decision, Communist Party lines, honor, victory, or loss, with almost no attention to everyday life “on the ground,” particularly the experiences, concerns, and activities of civilians as victims of the war. The few existing works on the human aspects of Vietnam’s war are flattened through political and military lenses and bereft of first-hand sources. My project functions as a corrective to imbalances in the existing historiographical literature and help to stimulate further scholarship attentive to human aspects of the war in Vietnam.

In a large number of publications on the Vietnam War, reflective of now-outdated Cold War ideological constructs, Vietnam is usually viewed as a divided country with a stark but questionable north – south binary. Rather than looking at central Vietnam as a distinct region, its northern portion is usually subsumed to be part of “the North,” and its southern one to be part of “the South.” Consequently, the distinguishing characteristics of the central region, its diversity of geography, peoples, and historical developments in a wide variety of social and cultural practices are largely disregarded in Vietnam studies. In the political and military oriented histories of the Vietnam War studies in both Vietnam and the US, research on society and culture of the central part of the country attracts even less attention. Focusing on Huế in the central region, my research adds more depth and detail to the picture of Vietnamese modern history.

In terms of historiography, given the lack of bottom-up social history of any region of Vietnam in current Vietnam studies, a crucial question is how to engage with this kind of history “from below” within the commonly-known understanding of the period. In other words, how can one make meaning from the history of ordinary citizens, or how do the daily concerns of an ordinary person fit into the well-studied national history? Yet the narratives of those ordinary

individuals who contributed less to the development of the course of history do indeed matter. By enhancing the voices of ordinary citizens under the heavy shadow of war, this research helps to better understand important aspects of Vietnamese history in the middle of the twentieth century thus far severely understudied. The narratives and chronicling of daily life I provide serve to show that there was much more to wartime Vietnam than just guerrillas and counter-insurgency, communism and capitalism, terrorism and *déracinément*, sufferings and evacuation, fear and death. Such alternative views of the local participants and witnesses challenge the common interpretation of modern history.

While providing perspectives from the bottom-up to better teach and study the subjects of modern Vietnamese and American history, this project asks crucial questions about how locals in Hué managed to live in chaos and war-weariness to understanding their survival strategies, experiences, daily concerns, worldview, and social connections, which helps to advance the study of war and conflict. To the field of urban studies, this historical account on the most important city of central Vietnam has the potential to inspire further research on the distinctive characteristics and changes in urban areas in the course of modern history. Based on archival documents and various interviews with a wide range of people of Hué inside and outside of the country, this research also contributes to the field of cultural anthropology with crucial methods to discuss trauma and sensitive topics with the war generation in post-war context and in the diaspora. In the long term, this work, when published in Vietnamese, will offer an interesting case for linguists to study the special dialects of Hué with emergence and disappearance of language used in the war and post-war periods.

By emphasizing Vietnamese voices, those of ordinary people in central Vietnam during this critical period, this ground-up, grassroots study seeks to remedy the imbalance in the war's historiography with a bottom-to-top cure, understanding from the inside rather than imagining

from the outside. Particular to Vietnamese studies and the study of war and conflict, my work reinterprets America's so-called "Vietnam War" and victorious Vietnam's "Resistance Against America", overriding these perspective framings with a more universal approach. And beyond modern Vietnam, my research has implications for studies of the social-cultural spheres of communities that have had to endure protracted violent conflicts.

Sources of Materials, Research Methods, and My Position

From pre-dissertation research trips to Huế beginning in 2011 through my research year there in 2014 and extensive travels in North America and Europe in 2015–2016 I have amassed both archival source and oral history materials for this research project.

This research is heavily based on the archival collection of government documents currently held at the Provincial Archives Center in Huế (ACH). They contain a large diversity of annual, monthly, and daily reports prepared by the National Police Department of the city of Huế, Thừa Thiên Province and the Central Region, sent to the Thừa Thiên Provincial Headquarters on various issues of local political, security, economic, social, and cultural situation. They also include a great amount of orders, permits, requests, letters, investigations, figures, statistics, reflecting all kinds of activities, concerns, complains, problems, etc. of the city from the government's view in the 1957–1967 period. The available reports reveal an extraordinary volume of details about many aspects of life in Huế, which provides a concrete, original, and vivid description of the city life. In most cases, the people were identified with full names, family background, parents' names, hometown, profession, age, ID numbers, previous convictions, etc. plus the events' time (down to the minute) and places (with house numbers or street intersections). Various good and bad, ups and downs, contentment and discontentment, even tiny details that might not appear worth telling, lively illustrate the contemporary historical

period, and at the same time, disclose the political and administrative systems, and how they conceptualized their society. However, the great numbers of hundreds of thousands of attendance of meetings and rallies, the frequent and well-attended political study sessions, the achievements of the local government, data like numbers of students or sale price staying the same for months with the exact sentences of “as previous month,” to name a few, raise the question of accuracy and reliability of these city reports. Unfortunately given the scarcity of sources available and accessible to researchers, it is impossible to cross check these sources.

In spite of its rich and diverse sources, unfortunately, this archival collection is poorly preserved and served to the public. The files are largely unorganized and in bad conditions, and researchers are not allowed to photocopy or take pictures. The staff also strictly censored and removed everything considered “sensitive” out of the files before researchers could touch them. This ACH office, not even known by most local scholars, is located behind the provincial government premises which are guarded day and night by policemen. One of my informants who used to serve in the provincial committee, then retired, informed me of the collection. It took me about two months to receive the access permit which must be signed by the head of the provincial government. Even with the paperwork, I was basically the only person researching there in a period of about five months, more off than on, as the staff kept refusing to grant me access to the collection. To make the long story short, they questioned my rare case as a young researcher and outsider of Hué, and eventually asked me to leave in the middle of my research, after many efforts of mine and any powerful connection I could ask, even knocking on the door of the director of the Department of Interior of the province. Less than a year later when I came back, I was informed that they had stopped serving the historical archival collection to the public although they continued other services of the office. This is one example of various difficulties of conducting research in social sciences and humanities in Vietnam, even for a native researcher

like myself; but at least I was able to approach a part of this rich primary sources – materials that none of the foreign researchers outside Vietnam are able to access.

Besides the provincial archives, I consulted the government documents of the RVN and DRVN currently held at respectively the National Archives Centers II (NACII) in Hồ Chí Minh City, and the National Archives Centers III in Hà Nội, as well as various newspapers, journals, and pamphlets of the time at many libraries in Huế, the General Sciences Library in Hồ Chí Minh City and in the US. The research sources are supplemented by local government documents, newspapers, and journals and ephemera of the time including private records such as diaries, memoirs, and family records. In addition to these research resources, photographic and audio-visual artifacts are used as critical supplementary sources.

In order to gain an empathetic understanding of urban life as existential reality, in this research, literature is considered a rich source for examining the opinions, worldviews, attitudes, desires, and emotions of common people in society. The fact that literature is work of fiction allows it to comment on life in a more indirect fashion than other kinds of materials such as archival documents, journal articles, and research papers. Critically reading literature helps to provide a true sense of contemporary life to interpret the socio-cultural life and historical atmosphere of the period. According to Sears, literary works “offer a method of reading the traces that elude archival constructions – emotional traces that historians may fail to record or witness.”⁹ Among numerous other literature accounts, Huế serves as the background of two great novels on the war and its aftermath. Tô Nhuận Vỹ (originally from Thừa Thiên Huế, who moved north in 1954 and returned to Huế in 1965 to lead the NLF urban network) reflected life in his hometown in his best-known novel *Dòng Sông Phẳng Lặng – The Quiet River* (three volumes,

⁹ Laurie Sears. *Situated Testimonies: Dread and Enchantment in an Indonesian Literary Archive*. (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2013), 2.

1470 pages) in 1974 – 1978. Nguyễn Mộng Giác (born in Bình Định province, studied and worked in Huế in the early 1960s, and married a Huế woman) spent seven years in 1982 – 1989 on writing his novel *Mùa Biển Động – A Season of Stormy Seas* (five volumes, 1730 pages) after leaving the country for the US. I introduced myself to both writers' families and have become close friends to better understand their personal lives and literary works, and the limitation of historians compared to fiction writers. Their novels were historical eye-witness testimony of the past, revealing the diverse and hidden aspects of the human society in ways that other historical materials cannot.

As a Vietnam national, I am aware of many problems of conducting historical research in Vietnam through various research projects I have done at national and local archival centers, public libraries and private collections, as well as via talking to many scholars inside and outside the country. Materials are heavily censored to make sure no dangerous information potentially causing troubles for the government or threatening the political stability is available for researchers in general. Throughout this research project, there are various topics I wished to investigate more deeply, or numerous random details that I encountered when reading through unsorted and unorganized archival files, yet I have to omit them to allow the story to flow smoothly, or only briefly mentioned them in hope of providing inspirations for future researches. Many questions hence remain unanswered.

Moreover, I conducted various semi-structured and unstructured interviews with a wide range of Huế residents around the country and overseas, both past and present, which capture their testimonies of the period. Starting this project without knowing anyone in Huế, I was able to broaden my network and travel to have multiple casual conversations with about 80 informants currently living in Huế, Hồ Chí Minh City, Paris, Brussels, Washington DC, Los Angeles, Sacramento, San Jose, San Diego, Seattle, etc. Wandering around the neighborhood

markets, visiting pagodas during their special ceremonies, attending various gatherings and events of the community, I introduced myself to a wide range of people who were government officials, doctors, professors, students, businessmen, monks, housewives, etc. I applied ethnographic methodologies to my interviews to earn people's trust to explore the silent parts and missing fragments of their stories. In stead of posing questions that historians today might have, I let my informants tell their narratives in the way they best conceptualized and structured them, and followed their stories to explore further their society. The personal narratives of the Vietnamese overseas community with which I am able to complete my research are materials that none of the scholars within the country thus far have had access to.

As I am collecting memoirs and oral materials I am conscious that the narratives that I address in my research reveal representative voices of the time, and that human experiences during the period vary greatly due to people's background and post-war experiences. Narrators' political conception, family history, personality, emotion, their lives after the war, and their assessment of the present and future may have long lasting impacts on shaping their memories and literary works and (fragmented) testimonies, particularly the process of selecting events and structuring stories, under- or over-stating, unintentionally or intentionally leaving details out. As the narratives have traveled with Vietnamese people around the world for 50 years, the images of the period have probably been modified to little notice of the survivors. The political sensitivity, a certain lack of multiple perspectives, the traumatic experiences, and the modesty of the people of Hué are a few impediments to researching and writing social history of wartime Vietnam.

Moreover, the people of Hué are traditionally known for their reticence and modesty in communicating with strangers, especially non-Hué people, about their personal life. In the aftermath of harsh experiences like the 1968 Tết Offensive, the evacuation in 1972, 1975, and the postwar situation, the act of telling stories of the past might become traumatic for most of the

people of Huế. The traumatic experiences returned to the survivors, or the survivors experienced the trauma again when they conversed with other people on their traumatic experience that they had lived through. I recognized these moments over various interviews; and I was able to urge them to tell their stories of the time – ones that they might never tell anyone including their grandchildren – as it is the only way to identify their existence in history and to make history exist.

I am aware that although I understand the local dialects and customs, I am considered an outsider, and it indeed took me time to build up good relationships and earn the trust to be received into the community of Huế. While being a native offers me certain advantages of social proximity to share and familiarize myself with the cultural customs and values more easily in the similar imagined community, the fact that I am not original from Huế and my family is not from the pre-1975 south positions me outside of their community and its history, hence enables me to question and study the city based on a fresh, alternative approach.

Notes on Terms

I decide to use Vietnamese diacritics for the Vietnamese personal and place names as in their Vietnamese forms, except a few words that have been well absorbed into English language such as the name of the country Vietnam instead of Việt Nam. Vietnamese names are written in the order of Last name – Middle name – First name, and Vietnamese identify themselves with their first name, which is the last word in their order. Meanwhile I respectfully keep Vietnamese authors' names in English order (First – Last name) if they chose to identify themselves that way. In so doing, I hope I could at least introduce how to write those names as they are used by their owners. Names of streets, places are the ones used in Huế in the 1950s – 1960s, some of which are no longer popular in the present day language. Time zones in the research are the RVN

time, which was UTC+07 for the period until December 31, 1959, and UTC+08 since January 1, 1960.

All translations from written and oral materials are my own work, excluding the lyrics of two songs in Chapter 6 and the Epilogue. The word “Việt Cộng” (or VC, sometimes Vietcong) is a common term in scholarship in English and daily conversations in overseas Vietnamese communities, however it is a degrading one used by the Republic of Vietnam government to refer to the National Liberation Front (NLF) in the war era. In this research, I use that term without insulting meaning but only in the context it was framed in the RVN. It is my endeavor to call individuals and groups of the past the way they identified themselves. Particularly with archival and oral sources, I use simple language of daily conversation in hope to properly illustrate how things were conceptualized and overcome some 50 years ago. As the work is written in English, I have little choice but to omit multiple local terms that are unique to Huế area and only popular in the war era before 1975.

Dissertation Structure

The dissertation consists of three main parts with two chapters each, followed by an epilogue.

Part I “Attraction and Dispersion” focuses on the years 1957 – 1962 when Huế became the center of attraction and dispersion since the establishment of the University of Huế. Chapter 1 introduces the city of Huế with its population and administration, infrastructure and the physical environment, and the economic life in the first republic of the RVN. Chapter 2 provides a description of social and cultural life in the city with the people’s daily routines, leisure activities, social services, and political life.

Part II “Hidden Currents, Roiled Lives” chronologically follows the local events between

Tết of 1963 to the next one in 1964 from the people's perspective and the diverse impacts 1963 brought to social and cultural life in Huế and the personal responses to what they witnessed. Chapters 3 and 4 capture a mixed interactive experiences of optics, acoustics, and aromatics of the era, as well as the emotions, spirit, and soul of the people of Huế.

Part III “Not Quite A War Yet” reflects changes in the social life in Huế during the struggle movement in 1964 – 1966 with themes that have not been discussed in detail in previous chapters, such as Huế people's distinctive characteristics, the phenomenal local journal *Lập Trường*, the local views on America, war, and communism. Chapter 6 analyzes crucial impacts of political changes on economic and educational life, as well as in the world of literature with the emergence of female writers of Huế, and war-protest songs of composer Trịnh Công Sơn.

The last chapter, Chapter 7 “Just Another Happy New Year...”, ends with social changes in 1967, especially the last few months of the lunar year to prepare for another Tết festival, with personal narratives up to the last night of the lunar year before the New Year's Eve at the end of January 1968, on the eve of the destruction of the Tết Offensive in the royal city of Vietnam.

Part I

Attraction and Dispersion: The Years of 1957 – 1962

In the aftermaths of the 1954 Geneva Accords, Vietnam was temporarily divided at the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) at the 17th parallel into two zones, administered until 1956 national election by the Democratic Republic of Vietnam of Hồ Chí Minh in the north and the newly proclaimed Republic of Vietnam under the presidency of Ngô Đình Diệm in the south. Vietnam then witnessed more than a million of immigrants shifting between the north and the south, political campaigns and agrarian policies throughout the nation. The city of Huế – the most important city only 60 miles south of the DMZ in the RVN – also joined the common effort to build the nation, and urbanized the former capital in the late 1950s and early 1960s.

This first part of the dissertation will introduce the city of Huế in six years from 1957 to 1962 with its physical environment, the economic life, social and cultural life in the city. The city's infrastructure, population, administration, and its people's daily routines, leisure activities, social services, education, religion will be discussed in detail as materials allow. As it was a sensitive topic in the tense atmosphere under Ngô Đình Diệm's regime, political life would be analyzed last, as it appeared to not be the foremost concern of the people. I am aware that many of these themes are overlapping and intermingled with each other, and equally important in history and history writings, hence the following structure is only suggestive. In this national center of education, the foundation of the University of Huế in 1957 contributed the most to turn the city into a cosmopolitan of attraction with hundreds then thousands of bright and highest-achieving students from the entire central region coming to Huế to study and work. After three to four years they graduated from schools in Huế to be appointed to teach or work throughout

southern half of the country, and dispersed Huế culture and lifestyle to other places in the first republic of the RVN before 1963.

Chapter 1

1.1 Administration and Population

Located between the 16th and 17th parallels, the city of Huế rests on a plain of about 14,5 square kilometers, 13 km from the sea with views of mountain ranges outlined on the horizon. Sông Hương núi Ngự – the river of Perfume and Royal Mountain formed an important part of the urban landscape and of many famous images of Huế in Fengshui, literature, and human memories. The slowly flowing Hương river divides the city into two parts: on the left bank is the imperial citadel with the busiest commercial streets and main market, and on the right bank there is the French colonial modern architecture of public buildings, schools, universities, post office, hospital, and banks.

According to Decree 57A dated October 24, 1956, the city of Huế became the capital of Thừa Thiên province, under the leadership of the Head of the Province (Tỉnh Trưởng), simultaneously the Mayor of the city (Thị Trưởng). The city of Huế at the end of the 1950s was administratively divided into three districts – Thành Nội, Tả Ngạn, and Hữu Ngạn – with their distinct characteristics of geography, residents, infrastructure, advantages and disadvantages for economic development. Each district was then divided into several wards. In addition, Tả Ngạn district also comprised several floating villages. The administrative office of each district was headed by a Chief (Quận Trưởng), one secretary, and an officer.¹⁰ In the process of administrative development, the smallest units under districts and wards varied from street zones (khu phố) to super-family (liên gia) to municipal councils (Hội đồng Hương chính).

In the late 1950s, the Mayor of Huế, also Provincial Head of Thừa Thiên, in cooperation with the military commander of the I Corps Tactical Zone, were in charge of the city in all

¹⁰ *Documentation of the Provincial Buddhist Association of Thừa Thiên Huế in 1957*, TTPH, ACH, no. 536.

respects and signing all regular and special reports to send to Sài Gòn. In the 1950s and 1960s, the three districts of Huế, similar to an “arrondissement policier” in France, were there to assist their residents in the event of loss or thefts, accidents, assaults, etc. At the lowest local level, leaders of zones and neighborhoods served as the bridge between the higher-ranking government officials and the people, and also arranged and facilitated meetings and study sections, announced government policies, brought charges against criminals, and mediated disputes.

While the chief of the province, mayor, deputy chiefs in charge of security (military personnel, often colonel or of higher rank) and social and cultural affairs (civilian), and chiefs of districts were appointed by the president of the RVN, the boards of lower units were elected by their residents. Personnel in the city council were carefully selected. Their personal and family backgrounds were checked, especially their roles during the periods of French colonialism, the Japanese occupation, and the Việt Minh era, before they were able to work for the local government.¹¹ It was a common problem for many councils during those years that their leaders were slow and negligent in the performance of their duties, for which they received no remuneration.

In February 1959, 521 officers were employed at the city police department, including 96 clerical staff at the central office, 166 in the traffic enforcement and ranger force, and the rest worked under the leadership of three district chiefs: 122 in Tả Ngạn, 78 in Hữu Ngạn, and 59 in Thành Nội district.¹² The work ethics and responsibilities were reiterated in national flag greeting ceremonies every Monday morning, admonishing all officials to punctually arrive at work, not to chitchat, read newspapers, or wander around offices during working hours.¹³ Mistakes were seriously treated, as a warning to all government officials to serve the nation, the government,

¹¹ *Documentation of the City of Huế in 1957*, TTPH, ACH, no. 590.

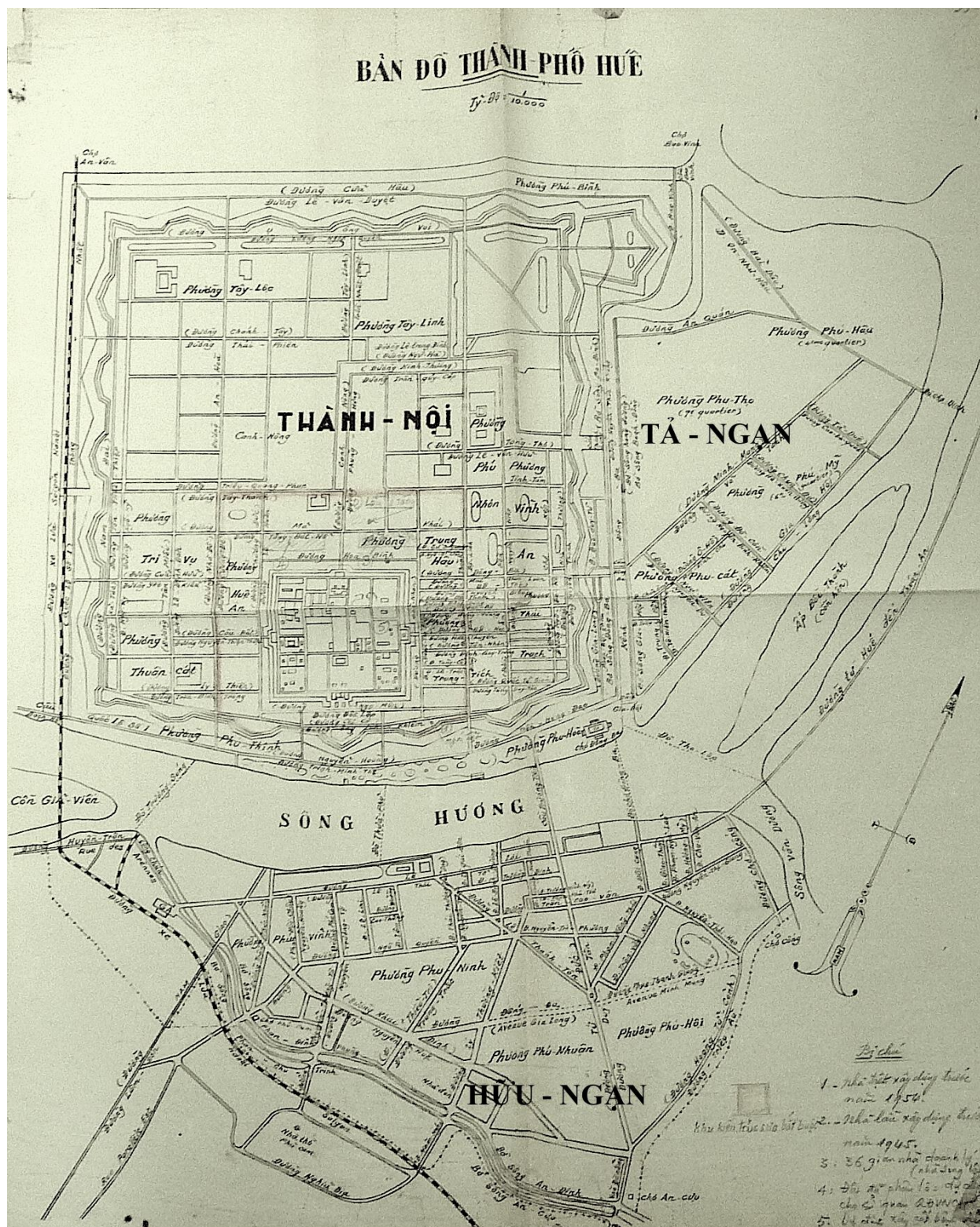
¹² *Monthly Reports of Various Provincial Departments in 1959*, TTPH, ACH, no. 316.

¹³ *Minutes of the City of Huế in 1961*, TTPH, ACH, no. 1219.

and the people at their highest capacity. In May 1958, one police officer of Đông Ba police station, Vương Đình Ba, was caught red-handed playing card games during work hours at a friend's house. The case was reported to the central office in June 1958, resulting in a punishment of dismissal for the laziness and lack of working ethics. Police officer Ba, out of shame, cut off two fingers to show his remorse. He then changed his attitudes, focusing on his duties and even taking extra projects to correct his mistakes.¹⁴ Through close connections between local residents and the state police, and their work in many incidents and reports, the police of Huế during the 1950s and 1960s were generally responsible, hard working, reliable, and helpful in providing security and protection. As their slogan went, "The police are people's friend" ["Cảnh sát là bạn dân"],¹⁵ they earned the population's trust.

¹⁴ *Documentation of the National Police Department of the Central Region in 1958*, TTPH, ACH, no. 731.

¹⁵ *Monthly Reports of Various Provincial Departments in 1959*, TTPH, ACH, no. 316.



Map of the city of Huế with three districts divided by the Hương river during the first republic of the RVN. Source: *Documentation on Construction of Houses, Schools, Historic Sites, Hospitals, in Huế in 1954 – 1975*, SRPO, NAC, no. 28921.

The District of Thành Nội, as indicated by its name, was the imperial citadel with the Purple Forbidden City, home of the last dynasty of Vietnam. The district faced the Hương River to the South and connected with urban Tả Ngạn district and rural Hương Trà district by a series of bastion gates. With each perimeter side of approximately 2,5 kilometers in length, the total area of about 5,2 square kilometers,¹⁶ the Citadel formed the district borders with fortified, six meter high brick ramparts and ringed by a four meter deep moat. The construction of the Vauban style citadel had begun in 1804, with famously beautiful and solemn palaces, the nine dynastic urns, the Serenity of the Heart lake (hồ Tĩnh Tâm), the King's Knight Flag tower, and with additional protective parts such as the Mang Cá fortification to the Northeast of the Forbidden City and the Tây Lộc Airport dating to the times of the last King, Bảo Đại. Thành Nội district was divided into ten wards, separated geographically by the walls and moat system within the citadel.

When the Nguyễn lords chose to build their Forbidden City in this area in the early 19th century, the families of mandarins and servants of the Emperor's family, followed by the commoners, gradually populated the land area surrounding the palace and pavilions inside the citadel. By 1957, the population of Thành Nội district was 30,281, about 29% of the total population of Huế. The population of mostly government officials, workers, and small businessmen¹⁷ slightly grew during these years.

Thành Nội's population	December 1957	January 1959	June 1959	January 1961
	30281	30048	30423	32644

Source: *Documentation on Activities of the District of Hữu Ngạn in 1957*, TTPH, ACH, no. 649; *Documentation of the District of Hữu Ngạn in 1959*, TTPH, ACH, no. 1000; *Documentation on Activities of the District of Thành Nội in 1959*, TTPH, ACH, no. 988.¹⁸

¹⁶ *Documentation on Activities of the District of Thành Nội in 1961*, TTPH, ACH, no. 1407.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ This is an example of the unorganized data of the archival collection at the ACH: there are information on Thành

Surrounding Thành Nội district on the east and south, directly between the Citadel walls and the riverbank was a slightly larger district, **Tả Ngạn district**, of 5.6 square kilometers.¹⁹ Tả Ngạn had nearly twice the population of Thành Nội, about half of the city people.

Tả Ngạn's population	December 1957	January 1959	March 1959	July 1959
	53356	48597	49604	49371

Source: *Documentation on Activities of the District of Hữu Ngạn in 1957*, no. 649; *Documentation of the District of Hữu Ngạn in 1959*, no. 1000; *Documentation on Activities of the District of Tả Ngạn in 1959*, TTPH, ACH, no. 999.

Because of its special geographical location, Tả Ngạn district consisted of two different parts: the most populated area connected to the most rural area of the city by Gia Hội bridge over Đông Ba river. On the side of the Citadel, one found the busiest center of Huế – Đông Ba Market, and the main streets of Trần Hưng Đạo and Phan Bội Châu. On the other side of Đông Ba river was Gia Hội neighborhood, home of the Chinese–Vietnamese community with Chinese pagodas and native place assembly halls, in juxtaposition to some pavillons of former princesses of the Emperor's family. Beside seven wards on land, the Hương and Đông Ba rivers of Tả Ngạn hosted 11 floating villages whose unique characteristics contributed to the diversity of Huế's geography, peoples, and culture.

From Thành Nội and Tả Ngạn districts on the left bank of the Hương river, one must cross either Trường Tiền or Bạch Hổ bridge or Thừa Phủ ferry to reach the other bank to **Hữu Ngạn district**. Designed by the famous French architect Gustave Eiffel, Trường Tiền bridge with its six arches and 12 spans was regarded as one of the most beautiful cultural icons of Huế, connecting the old and modern components of the city. Hữu Ngạn district had the smallest population, only 20% of Huế during the 1950s and 1960s. The majority of these residents were

Nội district in various files with the title of the Hữu Ngạn District. Many titles do not reflect the correct information of contents re. location, time, subjects.

¹⁹ *Documentation on Activities of the District of Hữu Ngạn in 1961*, TTPH, ACH, no. 1434.

middle class, including intellectuals, businessmen, and traders. Some 23,000 people in October 1961 included 25% government officials, 13% working in private business, 10% in military and security forces, 12% working in the industrial and commercial fields, and 40% laborers.²⁰

Hữu Ngạn's population	December 1957	January 1959	October 1961
	20730	21199	23333

Source: *Documentation on Activities of the District of Hữu Ngạn in 1957*, no. 649; *Documentation of the District of Hữu Ngạn in 1959*, no. 1000; *Documentation on Activities of the District of Hữu Ngạn in 1961*, no. 1434.

With the smallest area of 3.75 square kilometers, Hữu Ngạn district provided Huế with a modern, Western view of an urban area by the presence of the Provincial Headquarter, Radio Station, Morin Hotel, national hospital, University and high schools, Cathedral and churches, and many French and American offices. Hữu Ngạn also connected Huế with the outside world through the Railway station and the national highway to Phú Bài airport about ten kilometers south of the city. Scattered throughout the modern buildings were various centuries-old pagodas in Nam Giao area, charming old 19th century houses set in beautiful verdant gardens in Vỹ Dạ neighborhood, and beautiful roads to the Kings' tombs outside of Huế.

In the late 1950s, Huế was home to about 100,000 people, and the comparatively young population, as shown in the following two charts, offered the city diverse conditions and resources for its urbanization process.

²⁰ *Documentation on Activities of the District of Hữu Ngạn in 1961*, TTPH, ACH, no. 1434.

Population	Hữu Ngạn	Tả Ngạn	Thành Nội	Huế	%
Senior (over 56 years old)	1,902	4,689	2,065	8,656	8.3
30 – 55 years old	4,655	11,607	5,866	22,128	21.2
19-29 years old	3,853	8,117	5,101	17,071	16.5
14 – 18 years old	3,120	11,117	3,500	17,737	17
Less than 13 years old	7,200	17,826	13,749	38,775	37
Total	20,730 (20%)	53,356 (51%)	30,281 (29%)	104,367	100

Source: *Documentation on Activities of the District of Hữu Ngạn in 1957*, no. 649.

Population		Hữu Ngạn	Tả Ngạn	Thành Nội	Huế	%
Senior (over 50 years old)	Male	724	1802	1428	3954	3.96
	Female	980	2156	1561	4697	4.7
	Total	1704	3958	2989	8651	8.66
18-50 years old	Male	3706	9988	4602	18296	18.32
	Female	4805	11876	6199	22880	22.92
	Total	8511	21864	10801	41176	41.24
Less than 17 years old		10984	22775	16258	50017	50.1
Total		21199	48597	30048	99844	100

Source: *Documentation of the District of Hữu Ngạn in 1959*, no. 1000.

The **labor force** of Huế remained at the rate of 37.5% (1957) and 41.2% (1959) with the potential support of 54% (1957) and 50% (1959) under 18 years of age. The great number of men enlisted in ARVN or joining administrative training programs or study in Sài Gòn and elsewhere resulted in the imbalance in gender -- female residents were always about 5% to 10% more than males of all ranges of age -- although the birth and death rate appeared to be about equal, with even slightly more boys born than girls.²¹

Besides the descendents of the Emperor's family and the majority of "commoners," at the beginning of 1957, the population of Huế consisted of people from other locations moving

²¹ For example in March 1957, birth rate was 80 boys / 73 girls, death rate was 14 men / 13 women. See *Documentation of the City of Huế in 1957*, TTPH, ACH, no. 590.

permanently or temporarily to this developing urban center in hope of more opportunities for education, jobs and better living quality. A close look at the numbers of applicants to a basic training course in health care under scrutiny by the Police Department for the office of Human Resources of the Department of Health disclosed some components of Huế's growing population. At the end of 1956 and in early 1957, among 110 applicants having their personal and political background checked, 22 females and 88 males, only four people were from Huế. The largest portion were 72 people from other districts in Thừa Thiên province, followed by 19 others originating from the northern region (Quảng Bình, Thanh Hoá, Nam Định, Hưng Yên provinces), who had immigrated to south of the DMZ since 1954; and 15 people from central and southern-central regions, such as Quảng Trị, Quảng Nam, Bình Định, and Khánh Hoà. Almost half of them (49) had moved to Huế more than five years ago, many did so in 1947 after evacuation during the war with the French. A number of them had lived in the outskirts of Huế and immigrated to the city in the early 1950s for employment or educational purposes.²²

While many newcomers joined the Huế population, others left. The land development program (chính sách dinh điền) of Ngô Đình Diệm's government, particularly in 1957, became the subject of regular study sessions in many neighborhoods. Displays of pictures of people with gifts, financial aids, well organized trips and settlement, with happy smiles, cute kids with toys, etc., were rotating through the city wards every two days to encourage people to seek a better life in the deep South or the Central Highland such as Cà Mau, Buôn Mê Thuật, or Pleiku.²³ 22 families (120 people) in September 1957, and another 21 families (86 people) in October 1957 from three districts of Huế, together with hundreds of families from Thừa Thiên province,

²² *Documentation of the National Police Department of the Central Region and Monthly reports of 1957*, TTPH, ACH, no. 537.

²³ *Documentation on Activities of the District of Thành Nội in 1957*, TTPH, ACH, no. 643.

volunteered to move south, starting their new lives on newly developed land.²⁴ The land policy, in spite of the guardianship and management of the government, could not convince many people to risk their family's future in the remote areas compared to urban space like Huế. From November 27 to December 7, 1960 Tả Ngạn district ran a campaign to accelerate the process by establishing eight migrant campaign committees, organizing 18 study sessions in different places with the attendance of 1520 people, even visiting every household in the working class neighborhoods to convince families to move south. The campaign nonetheless failed in all respects: nobody registered to move south in 1961.²⁵

It was not only Vietnamese who came and went and brought new factors to Huế in the 1950s and 1960s. Hundreds of **foreigners** lived in Huế for either a few days or years, forming an inextricable part of the population of the city. In order to enter and stay in the RVN and Huế, these foreigners needed immigration paperwork, including a permission issued by the Department of Tourism or an expert ID card (thẻ chuyên viên). Once expired, long-term residents had to submit applications requesting an extension of stay. Not all extension applications successfully were approved, for example the case of Huỳnh Phước Mang in 1962. This ethnic Chinese man was born in Hải Phòng in 1911, moved south in 1941 and naturalized to Vietnamese citizenship in 1957 in Sài Gòn. He was then arrested for possession of marijuana in Sài Gòn and put in jail for two months. After his release on March 27, 1959, he was stripped of his ID card and citizenship and expelled from the country, yet he never left or reported his presence at the Department of Foreign Affairs in Sài Gòn. He then passed through many provinces with different jobs and ended up in Huế in 1961, employed at the shipyard of Phan Văn Thọ and staying at 144 Chi Lăng street. His application for immigration status adjustment

²⁴ *Reports of the District of Tả Ngạn and Thành Nội in 1957*, TTPH, ACH, no. 290; *Documentation on Activities of the District of Thành Nội in 1957*, TTPH, ACH, no. 643.

²⁵ *Documentation on Activities of the District of Tả Ngạn in 1960*, TTPH, ACH, no. 1196.

and issuance of a long-term resident card in Vietnam, dated April 3, 1962, was refused. He was ordered to appear at the Department of Foreign Affairs on July 20, 1962 for implementation of the expulsion order.

Monthly reports of the Police Department usually provided relatively accurate numbers of foreigners present in Huế, yet due to the reporting style and limited sources, some figures remain questionable. In 1962, there were almost 100 residents of foreign nationality in Huế, including Asians, (Western) Europeans, and Americans. Besides diplomatic officers at consulates, many of these people were employees of cultural centers, the University of Huế, the national hospital, or some local projects with the financial or technical support of foreign countries. As France had had a special relationship with Vietnam in the past, many local French residents were Vietnamese-speaking Catholic priests and nuns, most of whom also worked at educational institutions such as professors at the University of Huế or managers of the Jean d'Arc dormitory. The American community in Huế emerged as a minor group with three officials at the Consulate (first established in 1957, and there was always a CIA officer under the guise of a vice consul),²⁶ and several officials at USIS Public Affairs, the Vietnamese-American Association library, USAID (nurses and voluntary teachers). Most of the Germans in town these years were faculty members affiliated with the medical school of the University of Huế. The Chinese foreigners adding to the Chinese Vietnamese community made them the biggest non-Vietnamese group in Huế.

²⁶ Thomas Barnes, Interview by Laura Calkins, February to July 2004, transcript, Oral History Project, The Vietnam Archive at Texas Tech University, 47.

Date	1/2	1/31	2/24	3/26	4/30	5/2	5/29	6/28	7/30	8/28	9/29
American	7	7	8	6	7	7	7	6	6	7	7
Belgian											1
British				1	1	1	1	1	1	0	
Cambodian	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Canadian	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	2	2
Chinese	30	32	32	33	33	33	33	32	31	31	31
French	34	33	32	37	37	37	39	39	41	41	48
German	2	2	4	4							
Indian	6	4	4	4	3	2	3	5	5	5	5
Indonesian	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Lao	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0			
Swiss	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
Total	86	85	87	92	88	87	90	89	91	91	99

Numbers of foreigners in Huế in 1962 (only adults who went through immigration checks and fee submission). Source: *Monthly Reports of the City of Huế in 1962*, TTPH, ACH, no. 249; *Documentation on Numbers of Foreigners in Huế of the National Police Department of the Northern Central Region in 1962*, TTPH, ACH, no. 112.

It is important to note that by overseas Chinese, or “Hoa kiều,” Vietnamese people and the RVN officials referred to citizens of the Republic of China, the non-communist Chinese living in Taiwan, or people who had fled mainland China before communism ruled this country. The Chinese consulate at 2 Lý Thường Kiệt street welcomed its new consuls every two years with a welcoming delegation and flowers from the airport and light receptions with leaders of native place associations such as Hokkien, Hainan, Guangdong, and notable ethnic Chinese businessmen in town. In the early years of the first Republic of Vietnam, parallel with the “nation-building” process and administrative consolidation, the government of Huế put great efforts into the naturalization process, particularly for the Chinese community.

The district of Tả Ngạn, where almost all of the Chinese resided, once invited ten individuals daily to their office to encourage them to naturalize to Vietnamese citizenship for

their own interests and rights, which was offered only to those with good political background and cost a 1,000 VND fee for each case, according to Decree 13/58 dated October 3, 1958.²⁷ Besides encouragement and explanation, the local officials applied “firm measures” to people whose names were listed yet who never submitted their naturalization applications, such as limiting their out-of-town travel, checking their businesses, and regularly inviting them to the police office for further encouragement on naturalization.²⁸ Thanks to the determination and pressure tactics of the local government, the Chinese without Vietnamese citizenship in Tả Ngạn District decreased from 259 people in November 1958 to 75 in March 1959, out of a total of 1131 ethnic Chinese descents of all ages. This trend continued in the following years, decreasing to 32 in May 1962.

	Over 18		Under 18		Total
	Male	Female	Male	Female	
Born in Vietnam	198	127	203	267	795
Born in China /Taiwan, under the naturalization process	169	92	0	0	261
Not yet applied for naturalization (mostly seniors)	57	18	0	0	75
Total	424	237	203	267	1131

Numbers of the Chinese Vietnamese in Tả Ngạn District in March 1959. Source: *Documentation on Situation Chinese Vietnamese Community in Thừa Thiên Province in 1959*, TTPH, ACH, no. 167.

With a long and rich immigration history, the Chinese community created and enjoyed their culture in Huế with educational, religious, economic, social, sports, music, and art institutions. Many Chinese-Vietnamese mixed families were living juxtaposed with Vietnamese ones, becoming neighbors, friends, sellers and customers of each other.²⁹ Separate monthly

²⁷ *Documentation on Situation Chinese Vietnamese Community in Thừa Thiên Province in 1958*, TTPH, ACH, no. 151.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ Thùy An, “Con Đường Tuổi Thơ” [“The Childhood Path”] in *Nữ Lưu Miền Hương Ngự* [Women of the Hương

reports of the local police department on the Chinese community demonstrated the RVN government's heavy observation and concern, possibly due to their large population and their connections with communist Chinese countrymen.

Of a much smaller size and of much less concern to the government (therefore there is very limited historical materials left) were other groups of Asians, only existing in people's memories now. Also living in Gia Hội neighborhood with the Chinese, several Indians opened their fabric and convenient stores, visited their temples, and sent their children to their own primary school.³⁰ A Japanese Karate-Do master and former occupation soldier during World War II, Suzuki Choji, whose Vietnamese name was Phan Văn Phúc, chose to stay in Vietnam and join the Việt Minh League after 1945. With his Vietnamese wife and three children settling in Huế in 1954, he opened a Judo and martial art school at 8 Võ Tánh street that existed until 1972.³¹

	Chinese	French	Indian	Indonesian	Total
Feb 1959	80 (total 303 original)	13	11	1	105
May 1960	26	2	6	1	35
Jan 1961	27 (*)	2	4	1	34
Feb 1962	29	1	5	1	36
May 1962	32	1	5	1	39

Foreigners in Tả Ngạn District in 1959 – 1962. (*) Four Chinese had previous convictions, hence immigration status was under consideration. Source: *Documentation on Activities of the District of Tả Ngạn in 1959*, TTPH, ACH, no. 999; *Documentation on Activities of the District of Tả Ngạn in 1960*, TTPH, ACH, no. 1196; *Documentation on Activities of the District of Tả Ngạn and Hữu Ngạn in 1961*, TTPH, ACH, no. 344; *Documentation on Activities of the District of Tả*

Ngự Area], Ninh Giang Thu Cúc ed. (Forthcoming), <http://www.ptgdn.com/poems/coThuyAn/nulumienhuongngu-coThuyAn.htm> (Accessed March, 26, 2017).

³⁰ Nguyễn Lương Tuấn, “Góc Phố Trần Hưng Đạo, Ngã Giữa” [The Corner of Trần Hưng Đạo and Ngã Giữa], <http://cuuhoctruongnguyenduhue.blogspot.com/2015/08/goc-pho-tran-hung-ao-nga-giua-nguyen.html> (Accessed March, 26, 2017); Thuý An, “Con Đường Tuổi Thơ” [“The Childhood Path”] in *Nữ Lưu Miền Hương Ngự* [Women of the Hương Ngự Area].

³¹ Nguyễn Văn Dũng, interview by author, Huế, March 9, 2014; Nghĩa Dũng Karate, “Chưởng Môn Suzuki Choji,” Nghĩa Dũng Dojo, <https://sites.google.com/site/thiennhankaratedo/home/nguon-goc/chuongmonsuzukichoji> (Accessed March, 26, 2017).

Ngạn in 1962, TTPH, ACH, no. 1652; *Monthly Reports of the City of Huế in 1962*, TTPH, ACH, no. 362.

Temporary residents of Huế in 1957–1962 might have had very different backgrounds compared with permanent inhabitants. Sons and daughters of Huế marrying foreigners and living in Laos, Cambodia, France, or Switzerland, sometimes returned to their hometown to visit their families. There were Lâm Thị Năm (born in 1900 in Phnom Penh), who had lived in Laos since 1930 and who visited her family at 165 Trần Hưng Đạo in July 1960; Nguyễn Thị Thuận (born in 1919 in Laos), who was married to a Chinese husband and visited her uncle in Huế; Lê Thị Thoa (born in 1941 in Laos) who visited her father in Huế in August 1960;³² or the parents of six staying with the wife's family at 58 Lê Lợi road. In the last case, the husband, Antoine Nguyễn Văn Nam, born 1918, had joined the French army to fight against Germany from 1939 to 1946, returned to Huế and became a French citizen in 1951. After a short medical training program in France, he served at a military clinic in Laos until retirement in 1960 and returned permanently to Huế with his Vietnamese wife (also with French citizenship).³³ All of these foreign citizens, who either just arrived or found a second home in Huế, stayed in town for a long time or just a few days, joined other Vietnamese to witness, participate, and share the ups and downs of daily lives, bringing stories of the outside world to Huế and sending images of Huế to multiple places around the globe.

1.2 Physical Environment

Infrastructure

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, Huế joined the larger effort of the RVN's "nation-building" to urbanize the city. In three districts, construction workers were apparently busy all

³² *Documentation on Activities of Foreigners in Thừa Thiên Province in 1960*, TTPH, ACH, no. 323.

³³ *Ibid.*

year long fixing and expanding roads, fortifying bridges and sewers, installing public electricity and water lines for daily use and laundry. Particularly in Thành Nội district where most of the citadel structures were more than one hundred years old, local leaders continuously requested the city government to pay more attention to maintaining and developing the area. Yet their endeavors seemed not to have received effective responses, since only several streets were partially fixed in five years, while many others were added to the list of future projects. Seven roads slated to be maintained, fixed, tarred, and so forth in 1957 remained in bad condition until 1962; 11 roads on the list of March 1959 still remained on the list of 1962. Similar problems occurred with power installation in this period (See Appendix 1 for lists of roads in need of maintenance and light).

With the population growth in 1957–1962, many neighborhoods faced a lack of electricity and fresh water. The only power plant provided just enough power for the city, yet the price was high for the poor.³⁴ People in the low areas, especially in Tả Ngạn district, usually suffered from shortage of fresh water due to salt-marsh in the dry season, or flood during rainy and storm season every year.³⁵ The lack of electricity and fresh water were also of concern to new settlers relocated from illegally built houses, or evicted from their land for public constructions, such as 22 families in Thượng Thành, 431 families on Đình Bộ Lĩnh street and Canh Nông area moving to Tây Linh area in 1962.³⁶

Natural beauty was another concern of the city council. Planting more trees along the rivers and streets, pruning old trees obstructing daily activities or before each storm season; importing and collecting seeds and new plants to grow in nurseries; distributing shade trees and bonsais to public institutes, schools, hospitals; expanding green space in the city, were a few

³⁴ *Documentation on Activities of the District of Hữu Ngạn in 1961*, TTPH, ACH, no. 1434.

³⁵ *Monthly Reports of Thừa Thiên Provincial Department of Public Works in 1958*, TTPH, ACH, no. 777.

³⁶ *Documentation on Activities of the District of Tả Ngạn in 1962*, TTPH, ACH, no. 1652; *Documentation on Activities of the District of Thành Nội in 1962*, TTPH, ACH, no. 1660.

highlights of Huế's endeavors to improve its romantic beauty.³⁷ The city successfully planted 252 new willows on the left bank and 200 others on the right bank of the Hương River and managed to maintain parks and playgrounds in Thành Nội district in February 1959 before the summer approached.³⁸ With 43 parks (4 in Thành Nội, 23 in Hữu Ngạn, 11 in Tả Ngạn with one under maintenance) according to December 1961 statistics and three children's playgrounds with multicolor painted slides and seesaws, total green space in the city was about one square kilometer (about 7% of Huế area). Flamboyants (phượng), calophyllum inophyllum (mù u), neem tree (sầu đông), sugar palm (đoác), willow country-almond (bàng), longans, coconuts, etc. brought shade and beauty to many roads in Huế, becoming popular and lasting names for many in daily life, literature, and music, such as sugar palm street (in stead of Đống Đa street), and the "road of flying flamboyant" ("đường phượng bay" in Trịnh Công Sơn's songs).

The urbanization and improvement of living condition in Huế in the late 1950s and early 1960s was a joint financial and labor effort of both the residents and local government. It was local residents' idea in March 1958 to encourage households and stores along the main streets such as Trần Hưng Đạo, Duy Tân, and Phát Lát, to install neon lights and light up the area every night until 10 p.m. for artistic and security purposes.³⁹ In March 1962, in order to establish a new public laundry spot which totally cost 8,000 VND, the residents of Alley 5, Chi Lăng Street, Phú Mỹ ward, Tả Ngạn district contributed 3,000 VND and received the rest from the government.⁴⁰ People also joined the government in the common efforts to keep public spaces clean, beautiful, and open to all. They responsibly participated in monthly activities to clean public areas, dredge ditches, trim hedges and bushes, maintain riverbanks and steps, or build playgrounds in the

³⁷ *Newsletters and Monthly Reports of the City of Huế in 1961*, TTPH, ACH, no. 244.

³⁸ *Documentation on Activities of the District of Thành Nội in 1959*, no. 988; *Newsletters and Monthly Reports of the City of Huế in 1961*, no. 244.

³⁹ *Documentation on Applications and Forms of Thừa Thiên Province in 1958*, TTPH, ACH, no. 746.

⁴⁰ *Documentation on Activities of the District of Tả Ngạn in 1962*, TTPH, ACH, no. 1652.

neighborhood. In Tả Ngạn district for instance, each of eight wards and floating villages organized community service activities from two to seven times in November 1959; and one to two times in January 1960.⁴¹

There were nonetheless multiple complaints about the bad behaviors of locals regarding public properties. In June 1959, an anonymous citizen sent a letter to the city mayor expressing his dissatisfaction about some fellows who had camped out and littered at Lương Tả, a historic summerhouse in front of the Citadel's main gate.⁴² Following his observation, the local police admitted that, during the hot and dry season, families who could not afford a trip to the beach often brought their children to Phu Văn Lâu park and Lương Tả summerhouse to enjoy the cool breeze from the Hương River. Many brought snacks, had dinner, and stayed afternoons and evenings there, some with mats and blankets to sleep overnight and throw leftovers, wrappers, and plastic items around. There were also careless residents who picked or broke flowers and plants in the parks and public gardens, trampled and walked or even drove over the grass, and whose animals destroyed the lawns.⁴³ Police officers requested the government to apply punishments like fines or public service duties to keep the city green and clean.

Transportation

In the urbanization process, the city spent a great deal of attention to improve its public transportation system by constructing transportation hubs, establishing bus stop signs, amending traffic rules, requesting public vehicle maintenance for safety checks, etc. From only 14 busses in December 1955,⁴⁴ by July 1959 about 160 public transportation vehicles⁴⁵ were taking passengers and products to different destinations inside and outside the city. The central bus

⁴¹ *Monthly Reports of the Police Department of the District of Tả Ngạn in 1959*, TTPH, ACH, no. 315.

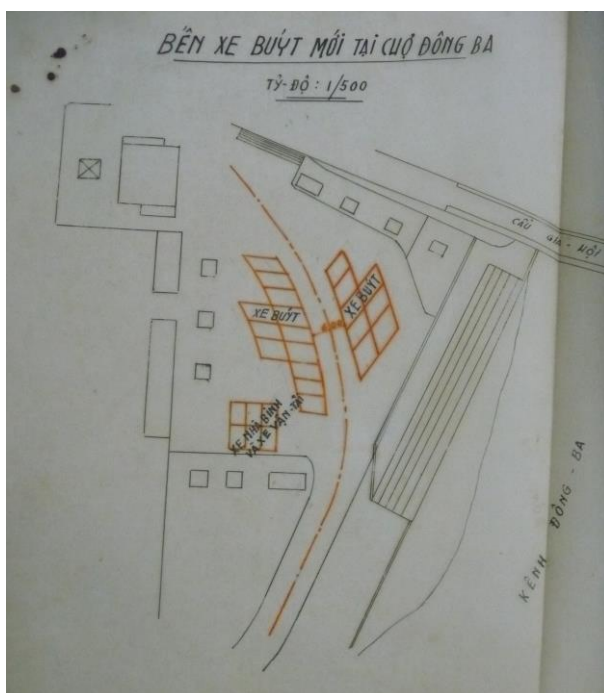
⁴² *Documentation on Activities of the District of Thành Nội in 1959*, TTPH, ACH, no. 988.

⁴³ *Newsletters and Monthly Reports of the City of Huế in 1961*, no. 244.

⁴⁴ *Documentation on the City of Huế in 1957*, TTPH, ACH, no. 585.

⁴⁵ *Documentation on Activities of the District of Thành Nội in 1959*, no. 988.

station in Tả Ngạn district, remodeled in 1958, instantly turned the area outside of Đông Ba market and the busy coffee shop Phần into the most crowded locale in the city. Every morning from 7 to 8 a.m. too many bicycles, Vespa motorbikes, and mopeds blocked bus operations outside the central hub; local police officers therefore had to direct traffic, and the speed limit was set to 10 kilometer per hour (about 6 mph).⁴⁶ A series of bus stop areas [“Chỗ xe buýt tạm ngừng”] were established with detailed instructions for bus drivers to stop within six meters (about 20 feet) for no longer than 3 minutes.⁴⁷



Map of the central bus station in Tả Ngạn district in 1958 (orange colored), the Đông Ba market was on the left. Source: *Documentation of Association of Transport of the City of Huế in 1958*, TTPH, ACH, no. 779.

Unlike Sài Gòn, the small city of Huế in the late 1950s and early 1960s had no taxis, yet in addition to buses locals could easily get around by cyclos. Since private cars were not common, only for high ranking government officials and well off businessmen, the most popular vehicles on the street these years were bicycles (with brand names of Sterling, Pacific, Mercier,

⁴⁶ *Documentation of Association of Transport of the City of Huế in 1958*, TTPH, ACH, no. 779.

⁴⁷ *Documentation on the City of Huế in 1957*, TTPH, ACH, no. 585.

Super-Atom, Racé, GMC, Mont d'or, Duralux, Prior, etc.) and motorbikes (Tschia, Quickly, Zundaap, Elimy, Rapid, HMW, etc.). According to decrees on May 21 and June 21, 1957, as long as they had convenient seats attached, these vehicles were allowed to have passengers on the back with no footboards required.⁴⁸ As the Hương River divided the city into two halves with only one main bridge (Trường Tiền) and another (Bạch Hổ) bridge a bit further, the Thừa Phủ ferry next to Trường Tiền bridge offered the poetic city unique and romantic sight beyond its transportation function. Every morning and afternoon students of high schools and university in neat uniforms and traditional long dresses on Thừa Phủ ferry dyed the city with the pure student colors and sounds.

Besides the central bus hub next to Đông Ba market, other public vehicle stations and boat ports at Nguyễn Hoàng, Gia Hội, An Cựu, to name a few, the railway station “Gare de Huế” in Hữu Ngạn, and an Air Vietnam office in Tả Ngạn welcomed passengers to and from Huế every day. Phú Bài Airport, constructed in 1940, about 15km (10 miles) from the center of the city, received 52 Huế – Sài Gòn flights each way every month, serving mostly foreigners, government officials and businessmen. Although demands and the capacity of the Huế – Sài Gòn flights certainly increased, the Air Vietnam’s business scenario in 1959 looked a bit dark.⁴⁹ In order to attract more passengers, in May 1959 air ticket prices decreased from 1,750 to 1,250 VND for flying oneway Huế – Sài Gòn, yet they were still much higher than train tickets.⁵⁰ It took the nonstop train about a day and a half to run from Sài Gòn to Huế, scheduled to arrive in Huế at 7:45 p.m. and leave at 7:10 a.m., although it was usually delayed for several hours because of difficult weather conditions or railway maintenance.⁵¹ The convenience of diverse means of transportation certainly provided Huế residents with more opportunities to expand their

⁴⁸ *Documentation on the City of Huế in 1957*, TTPH, ACH, no. 585.

⁴⁹ *Monthly Reports of Thừa Thiên Province from May to December 1959*, FRPO, NAC, no. 284.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ *Daily Reports of the Police Department on General Situation in the City of Huế in 1962*, TTPH, ACH, no. 361.

horizon and improve tourism and commercial exchange between Huế and other cities in the RVN.

Housing

After continuous years of wars and evacuations between 1940 and 1955, the stable political and security status during the early years of the Republic prompted residents and newcomers of Huế to think of longer-term plans for themselves and their family. Many people built new homes or renovated their old ones. Each month in 1957 the city council issued from several to tens of building permits for new houses, and up to several hundred permits to renovate or repair old houses or outhouses.

Type of House	Straw-based		Corrugated metal roofed		Tile roofed		Multiple stories	
	Build	Renovate	Build	Renovate	Build	Renovate	Build	Renovate
Aug 16 – Sep 16, 1957 (Huế)	1	104	11	21	10	22	3	0
Oct 20 – Nov 20, 1957 (Huế)	1	35	5	13	1	13	0	1
Jan 20 – Feb 20, 1960 (Thành Nội district)	2	5	3	4	0	11	0	1

Privately owned houses built or renovated in 1957, 1960. Source: *Documentation on the City of Huế in 1957*, TTPH, ACH, no. 585; *Activities of the District of Thành Nội in 1960*, TTPH, ACH, no. 243.

While government buildings and houses of government officials or wealthy families had multiple stories built by bricks and cements plus a multiple times larger garden, the majority of houses in the city were single story cottages, thatched with straw, and the rest were brick houses roofed with corrugated metal or tile. In Tả Ngạn district, for example, there were 1292 brick houses and 4003 straw bale houses in March 1959; 1346 brick houses and 4661 straw bale

houses in July 1959.⁵² An average household of Huế could own a small house with a garden and yard around. The size depended on the amount of money spent to purchase or rent or the political or professional rank in the case of state apportionment. In early 1957, 220m² of land at 170 Gia Hội (a populated street in Tả Ngạn district) cost 25,000 VND in March,⁵³ while 399m² on the busy main street of Trần Hưng Đạo was worth 250,000 VND in June.⁵⁴ According to surveys on the household status and state owned land of employees of the national hospital of Huế in December 1956 and January 1957, Lê Khắc Quyến, Head of the Department of Health in the Central Region, stayed in a two-story 200m² house with seven rooms and a 1500m² garden (apportioned in June 4, 1955),⁵⁵ while some other doctors' houses were about 50m² to 100m² in size with 300m² to 700m² of garden space, and nurses and assistants often stayed in two-bedroom apartments of 9 square meters and no garden.

Garden houses originally built by princes, princesses, and other elite members of the Nguyễn Dynasty continued to beautify the natural appearance of 1960s Huế with the unique and famous atmosphere, scenes, smells, and flavors of rare and beautiful bonsais, flowers, and fruit trees. In juxtaposition to state apportioned and private houses and royal garden houses, however, were a number of poor relocated settlements, charity camps, and nursing homes. Kê Trại camp in Ba Đình zone, Tả Ngạn district, for example, constructed in 1951 with American financial support, was under the management of the Department of Social Works in December 1957. Of 52 apartments, 20 were rented out to the poor and low income people at 40 VND a month; the remaining 32 apartments were given for free for wounded or disabled former soldiers. Some of these veterans secretly transferred or sold their apartments for 5,000 to 7,000 VND when leaving

⁵² *Documentation on Activities of the District of Tả Ngạn in 1959*, TTPH, ACH, no. 999.

⁵³ *Documentation of the City of Huế in 1957*, TTPH, ACH, no. 590.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *Documentation on Department of Health in 1957*, TTPH, ACH, no. 613.

the premises instead of returning the national properties to the Department of Social Works.⁵⁶

From an infrastructure perspective, the existence of one-story straw-based houses along bumpy and dark roads, the poorly equipped parks, and the lack of public cleanliness attitudes of some city residents did not provide the desired modern urban look to this most important city of the central region in 1957–1962. And in spite of constant maintenance and renovation, these simple constructions easily became victims of annual natural disasters sweeping through central Vietnam.

Weather and Natural Disasters

Located to the north of Hải Vân Pass, Huế has a sub-tropical monsoon climate which is similar to the northern part of the country more so than the south, with a cold winter and rains, bringing despondent and inward feelings to its people. The dry season was from April to September, with occasional quick tropical rains to decrease the high temperature, which was above 27°C on average and could be as high as 40°C in June or July.⁵⁷ The west winds from Laos made the summer in Huế even hotter and dryer, and paved roads and corrugated metal roofed houses retained the heat until late evening. The rainy season, on the other hand, kept the city wet and dark for about six months, with a large amount of precipitation in October and November in particular, turning the last months of a year into the storm and flood season.

⁵⁶ *Documentation on Activities of the District of Hữu Ngạn in 1957*, TTPH, ACH, no. 649.

⁵⁷ Đỗ Đình Cường, *Khí Hậu Việt Nam [Climate in Vietnam]* (Sài Gòn: Department of Meteorology, 1964), 67-70.

Month	1957	1958	1959
January	15	15	12
February	14	18	5
March	12	3	11
April	9	5	3
May	7	5	5
June	11	4	2
July	6	2	10
August	13	2	5
September	15	8	13
October	25	15	11
November	16	17	10
December	17	12	-
Total	160	106	87

Numbers of rainy days in Huế in 1957 – 1959, report dated on December 3, 1959. Source: *Documentation on Activities of the Weather Station in Thừa Thiên Province in 1961*, TTPH, ACH, no. 1436.

At the end of every year in 1957 – 1962, at least one or two storms or floods halt all life activities in the city, such as in October 1957, 1958, or in September and October of 1961, 1962.⁵⁸ Each of these natural disasters, only predicted and announced to the people shortly before it arrived, usually caused various damages to the city and its inhabitants. As a city of rivers and lakes, when rains fell and water levels increased, sometimes by more than one meter (about 4 ft), the low lands like some areas in Thành Nội district, along Đông Ba riverbanks, and Bãi Dâu in Tả Ngạn district quickly swamped under mud, which stopped all means of transportation, altered daily routines, closed markets, offices, and schools, temporarily blocked the poor road system, broke power poles and lines, blew down plenty of trees, washed away

⁵⁸ *Daily Reports of the Police Department of the City of Huế in 1957*, no. 289; *Monthly Reports of the District of Thành Nội in 1959*, TTPH, ACH, no. 240; *Daily Reports of the Police Department on General Situation in the City of Huế in 1962*, TTPH, ACH, no. 361; *Newsletters and Monthly Reports of the City of Huế in 1961*, no. 244; *Documentation on Activities of the District of Tả Ngạn in 1962*, no. 1652.

entire homes or roofs, and people had to evacuated to higher and dryer places. For example when Huế was under water in mid October 1957:

District	Tả Ngạn	Hữu Ngạn	Thành Nội
Properties	- 2 houses collapsed - 2 boats drifted away - 1 military camp collapsed - 1 immigrant camp collapsed - 1 road sunk	- 2 houses collapsed - 1 power pole damaged - Many power cables broken - 4 fences collapsed	- 7 houses collapsed - 4 power cables broken
Number of fallen trees	6	24	4
Number of people evacuated	- 40 families in Phú Hậu Ward to Phú Mỹ Primary school - 80 adults and 30 children in Phú Thọ Ward to Gia Hội primary school. - About 30 people living along Hương River to Gia Hội dispensary.	- 171 adults and 127 children in Phú Hội Ward to Nguyễn Tri Phương High school	NA

Source: *Daily Reports of the Police Department of the City of Huế in 1957*, TTPH, ACH, no. 289.

Before each storm season, while the locals stored up food, the government established relief commissions for instant assistance. In pursuit of maximum relief for the people, there were always one fire truck, one GMC military wagon, and an extra GMC for Thành Nội district only, ready for emergency cases around the city. Almost all officials of the security office, guards, and police remained on high alert and stayed days and nights at the dangerous and high water level spots during stormy days.⁵⁹

⁵⁹ *Daily Reports of the Police Department of the City of Huế in 1957*, TTPH, ACH, no. 289.



Thọ Lộc Dam in Hữu Ngạn District in the aftermath of the flood on October 19, 1958. Source: *Documentation on Applications and Forms of Thừa Thiên Province in 1958*, TTPH, ACH, no. 746.

And after the storms, the people of Huế together cleaned up the streets, rebuilt the houses and boats and planted more trees, with the assistance of volunteers, students, scout groups, charity institutions and religious congregations, and with government aid in the form of rice, clothes, and money. For example, two days after the storm “BABS” on September 16, 1962, People’s Representative Hoàng Trọng Bá sent 10 kg of rice to each of 423 people in three districts;⁶⁰ 3 professors and 30 students of the University and 70 Buddhist scout members of Tây

⁶⁰ *Daily Reports of the Police Department on General Situation in the City of Huế in 1962*, TTPH, ACH, no. 361.

Lộc visited and helped construct 9 houses on September 20 in Thành Nội area;⁶¹ the local government dispersed 107,310 VND to 415 families, and another 80 families received a total of 600 kg rice and 40 meters of fabric.⁶² “Living with the flood” had long become a way of living for Huế people, and Huế’s rain became a common theme in literature, music, and cultural life as a characteristic of this poetic city. Putting on raincoats made of straw, students still went to schools and vendors packed the market.

1.3. Economic Life

The economy has never been a prominent characteristic of urban Huế in its development history. In the 1950s and 1960s, the small city witnessed a slight development of an increasingly dynamic market as a result of a growing urban population. Economic life appeared to become stable and organized under the government’s close control, yet still relied heavily on diverse resources from the south and imports from Sài Gòn, as local products were only sufficient for local demands. Quantity, quality, and price of almost all daily necessities from rice, fabric, to cosmetic and books went up and down in close relation to with those on the Sài Gòn markets. The economic resources of the city appeared small and poor, offering only minor contributions to Huế’s urbanization and modernization process.

With **agricultural** land comprising about 30% of the total area of the city, Huế produced a variety of agricultural crops every year including rice, vegetables, nuts, corn, fruits, flowers, etc.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² *Documentation on Activities of the District of Tân Ngạn in 1962*, TTPH, ACH, no. 1652.

	Hữu Ngạn	Tả Ngạn	Thành Nội
Agricultural land (km ²)	1	1.5	1.3
Rice harvested / year (ton)	100	30	90
Corn (ton)	0	5	2
Bean (ton)	0	3	15
Fish (ton)	0	95	0

Land area and production capacity in Huế in 1957. Source: *Documentation on Activities of the District of Hữu Ngạn in 1957*, TTPH, ACH, no. 649.

Farmers raised draft animals for agricultural purpose and family raised chicken, ducks, and pigs for consumption, permitted by the police department and supported by the Veterinary department regarding disease control and prevention. For example, on December 17, 1962, the police station in Tả Ngạn district refused the request of Vương Kiểm Thanh's family at 47/2 Tô Hiến Thành street to raise more than 20 pigs in a 24 square meters due to its closeness to private households and the city center as well as its potential foul smell in the dry season.⁶³ In January 1957, the city of Huế registered 123 water buffalos and 90 cows in total and consumed 1042 tons of rice from the south.⁶⁴ The following figures are from Thành Nội district only.

Thành Nội District	July 1958	February 1959	March 1960	September 1960
Water buffalos	60	60	38	18
Cows	70	70	55	56
Chickens	2000	3000	3100	5821
Ducks	1500	1200	1012	1700
Pigs	500	900	600	1028

Animal husbandry in Thành Nội District in 1957 – 1960. Source: *Documentation of the District of Thành Nội in 1958*, TTPH, ACH, no. 809; *Documentation on Activities of the District of Thành Nội in 1959*, no. 988; *Documentation of the District of Thành Nội in 1960*, ACH, no. 1189.

In this district, 1449 farmers of total 30,423 individuals and 218 farming families of 4350

⁶³ *Documentation on Activities of the District of Tả Ngạn in 1962*, TTPH, ACH, no. 1652.

⁶⁴ *Documentation on the City of Huế in 1957*, TTPH, ACH, no. 585.

families⁶⁵ mostly resided in Tây Lộc and Tây Linh wards. They founded a farmer guild on March 2, 1959 with 40 members in Tây Lộc and 32 ones in Tây Linh,⁶⁶ and a collective farm (hợp tác xã) of Tây Lộc (founded on May 8, 1958) only active for irrigation purposes for the August rice season.⁶⁷ The office in charge of agricultural development also established a botanical terrarium in Tây Lộc ward for plant breeding experiments involving oranges, mandarins, limes, coconuts, etc. and sold the yields at low price for local gardeners.⁶⁸ Farmers of two wards, Phú Hậu (130 acres) and Phú Thọ (2 acres)⁶⁹ in Tả Ngạn district, founded a farmer guild which represented the local residents to borrow 100,000 VND from the government for agricultural development. Also in Tả Ngạn district, floating villages via their Fisheries Society took a loan of 58,000 VND from the government to purchase fishing tackles.⁷⁰ Local rice, vegetables, fruits, and fish then joined other products from Đà Lạt, the Mekong Delta, America, and France via air, railway, ground transportation to enter markets, stores, shops, and vendors in Huế.

A variety of **markets** in all districts providing supplies for daily consumption were under tight and comprehensive control and regulation of the Police Department. Besides the central Đông Ba market and two big ones of Bến Ngự and An Cựu, a wide range of markets of smaller sizes were sparsely located around the city, such as Tây Lộc, Cống, Xếp, Cầu Kho, to name a few. In 1957–1962, the city managed to rebuild some of the dilapidated markets, remodel wretched conditions, add structures and roofs for rainy days, and keep order to avoid blocking traffic.⁷¹ Construction of Hậu Ngũ market was completed on April 12, 1957 while Tây Lộc

⁶⁵ *Documentation on Activities of the District of Thành Nội in 1959*, TTPH, ACH, no. 988.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ *Documentation of the District of Thành Nội in 1958*, TTPH, ACH, no. 809.

⁶⁸ *Monthly Reports of the District of Thành Nội in 1959*, TTPH, ACH, no. 240.

⁶⁹ *Documentation on Activities of the District of Tả Ngạn in 1962*, TTPH, ACH, no. 1652.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ *Documentation on Activities of the District of Tả Ngạn in 1962*, TTPH, ACH, no. 1652; *Documentation on*

market was remodeled in 1957 and Công market was renovated in January 1961.⁷²

Đông Ba market, founded in 1899, was the biggest and busiest market of Huế. Similar to Bến Thành in Sài Gòn and Đồng Xuân in Hà Nội, Đông Ba market of Huế was well known for its long history, rich resources, and best products. Located in the central area of the city next to Đông Ba river and the central bus station, Đông Ba market attracted a large amount of vendors selling various products outside the market, along the pavement of Trần Hưng Đạo street, providing some hectic excitement to this serene city. The market consisted of four courts with corrugated metal and tiled roofs and a bell tower in a low area which was often flooded during rainy season. Booths of different goods were numbered and organized by zones for the convenience of management and commercial activities. Thanks to the political stability and commercial growth in the early years of the Republic, Đông Ba market became more and more crowded with increasing shopkeepers, vendors, and consumers.

This central economic hub of the city offered all kinds of luxurious and cheap, domestic and imported specialties and common necessities from Huế, its outskirts, remote areas from the deep south to the Central Highland, or foreign countries via the Sài Gòn entrepot. Here inhabitants of Huế and visitors from out of town could find five minute services like hair washing with traditional herbs or French shampoo, Elizabeth Arden lipsticks, or some mussels from the Đông Ba river right next to the market. The market catered to meticulous mothers and curious adolescents alike, all the rich, middle class, and poor, with special ingredients for wedding receptions, rare spices for Western dishes, or traditional food for annual ceremonies. The most popular and varied products were local and seasonal necessities such as lotus seeds from Tĩnh Tâm lake inside the citadel, sesame candy (mè xừng) from Nam Thuận and Thiên

Activities of the District of Thành Nội in 1962, TTPH, ACH, no. 1660.

⁷² *Documentation on Activities of the District of Thành Nội in 1957*, TTPH, ACH, no. 643; *Documentation on Activities of the District of Hữu Ngạn in 1962*, TTPH, ACH, no. 1653.

Hương, green bean cakes from Kim Long (northwest of Huế), mandarins of Hương Càn village (8 km north of Huế), pomelos (thanh trà) of Thủy Biều (7 km southwest of Huế), conical hats of Phủ Cam (in Hữu Ngạn district), knives and scissors from Hiền Lương forging village (20 km north of Huế), and potteries for daily usage from Phước Tích village (40 km north of Huế). Đông Ba market enriched the city's culture with its own distinctive characteristics, such as the manners of the fish mongers, for example, entering daily life culture with sayings “as shrewish as Đông Ba's fish mongers.”⁷³

Beyond the commercial function, Đông Ba market also operated as a busy information hub. Wandering around the market one could, intentionally or unintentionally, easily collect a variety of news, rumors, and hearsay from world politics, to a newly promoted general in Sài Gòn, to a new movie in Huế, or a family having visitors from out of town, etc. Just outside of Đông Ba market the two coffee shops Lạc Sơn and Phần, established sometime in the 1950s, industriously served as a communication center for the city. Here one could join various discussions on politics, religion, and entertainment right next to the Đông Ba police station. It was also the place one could observe the gender role within Huế society more vividly and clearly than anywhere else. Traditionally, 99% customers visiting Đông Ba market were female; and the secretive women of Huế would not dare to enter the “zone” of the Lạc Sơn and Phần coffee shops, where a wide range of men regardless of personal, political, religious, and educational backgrounds talked, debated, and argued in all possible manners over coffee, green tea, and some peanut candies. Conversations at Lạc Sơn and Phần coffee shops remain even today as legendary stories in people's memories, literature, and history of the city.

If people were not satisfied with products they found at Đông Ba market, all they had to do was to cross the street to the two **busiest streets** of Huế, Trần Hưng Đạo and Gia Long (later

⁷³ Nguyễn, Đắc Xuân, *100 năm Chợ Đông Ba [100 Years of Đông Ba Market]* (Huế: Thuận Hoá Press, 1999), 22.

Phan Bội Châu). Here people could find more stores with luxurious cosmetics, soaps, fabric, incense, embroideries, and jewelries, as well as pharmacies, tailor shops, photo booths, bookstores, publishing houses, cinemas, etc. The commercial activities were busy all day long, but became most crowded every afternoon as regular customers and plenty of young men wandered around, back and forth along these two streets (bát phố) to enjoy the bustle of the crowd, and particularly group after group of beautiful female students of Đồng Khánh high school and the University of Huế in their white traditional long dress, their long hair slightly scenting the air with lemongrass or lime odor. These “nghề” afternoons became unforgettably romantic memories of numerous young men of Huế in the 1960s.⁷⁴

According to government statistics, the majority of tailor shops, jewelries, pharmacies, repair shops in the city located on these two streets. The following numbers are of 1961.

Numbers of Shops	Phan Bội Châu St.	Trần Hưng Đạo St.	Total in the city of Huế
Tailor shops	12	11	53
Gold / Jewelry shops	17	6	31
Dental Care	2	1	4
Traditional and Chinese Medicine shops	5	2	13
(Western) Pharmacies	1	7	13
Bicycle/motorcycle shops or repair shops	9	4	24
Radio repair shops	1	3	4
Bookstores	2	0	2

Numbers of shops in Huế in 1961. Source: *Documentation of Department of Labor of Thừa Thiên Province in 1961*, TTPH, ACH, no. 1375.

Most of these stores were privately or family owned with a few apprentices and servants. With the only exception of Trường Tiền Pharmacy of 22 workers, most of them had from two to

⁷⁴ Tôn Thất Kỳ, interview by author, Huế, February 20, 2014; Hồ Tấn Phan, interview by author, Huế, February 23, 2014; Lê Ngọc Khởi, interview by author, Huế, August 21, 2014.

six workers, including apprentices who would open their own shops either in Huế or back in their hometown after several months or years of training. The best jewelers, tailors, shoemakers, photographers, mechanics, etc. had once served the Emperor's family and the court and thus continuously attracted and sent their students to many areas around the country. Decades later, Phan Văn Vĩnh, the apprentice of the Kim Hưng jewelry shop at 95 Trần Hưng Đạo over five years in 1959 – 1964, who later opened his own shop, Vĩnh Ký, on the same street (101 Trần Hưng Đạo now), still remembered his busy street of the 1960s like yesterday.⁷⁵ He had joined hundreds of young apprentices from many other places to learn their occupation in Huế.

Numbers of workers at tailor shop	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Numbers of shops (in total 53)	6	9	10	8	7	7	3	1	2

Size of tailor shops based on number of workers (including owner(s) and apprentices). Source: *Documentation of Department of Labor of Thừa Thiên Province in 1961*, no. 1375.



Advertisement sign of Vĩnh Ký jewelry shop at 101 Trần Hưng Đạo street. Source: Family collection of Phan Văn Vĩnh.

In economic and administrative reports of the city, the majority of workshops, agencies, and stores were regarded as small businesses, vastly outnumbering the ones with big capital.

	Hữu Ngạn	Tả Ngạn	Thành Nội
Big Business	3	94	6
Small Business	26	256	30

Numbers of small and big business in Huế in 1957. Source: *Documentation on Activities of the District of Hữu Ngạn in 1957*, TTPH, ACH, no. 649.

⁷⁵ Phan Văn Vĩnh, interview by author, Huế, August 15, 2014.

The government categorized all business into four groups: industrial, commercial, hotel and free business. Tả Ngạn district, for instant, always had more than 100 small and big businesses in these years.

	Industry	Commerce	Hotel	Free	Total
March 1959	19	70	1	20	110
October 1959	42	75	1	21	139
March 1962	46	75	1	21	143

Numbers of business in different categories in Tả Ngạn District in 1959, 1962. Source: *Monthly Reports of the Police Department of the District of Tả Ngạn in 1959*, TTPH, ACH, no. 315.

In the period of 1957 – 1962, **production and commercial activities** in Huế were generally on a small scale, sufficient only for the demands of the local market. Huế had neither natural resources nor a strong labor force for mass production, nor a dynamic consumption market. In five years, all Huế produced was merely from one sawmill (at 23 Nguyễn Huệ sawing 13600 m³ /year), one concrete brick enterprise (118 Phan Chu Trinh street), about 10 print shops (including Thánh Tâm at 33 Phan Đình Phùng, Sao Mai at 11 Lý Thường Kiệt, Thanh Bình at 22 Lý Thường Kiệt, Nguyễn Văn Bửu at 1 Lê Đình Dương street), 10 wood workshops, about 20 forges, more than 10 lime kilns, four soap workshops, and several workshops producing cajeput oil, wax lamps, etc.⁷⁶ Many more stores provided daily necessities for the locals such as noodles, candies and cookies, and breads; and seasonal business with lime juice, ice cream, ice cubes shops. Most of the 20 bakeries only operated in wintertime, because tropical summer heat did not support small funded business of fresh products. Business with more stable demands and consumption such as shoemaking, tailor, weaving, embroidery, traditional conical hat, incenses,

⁷⁶ *Documentation on Activities of the District of Hữu Ngạn in 1957*, TTPH, ACH, no. 649; *Documentation of the District of Thành Nội in 1958*, TTPH, ACH, no. 809; *Documentation on Activities of the District of Tả Ngạn in 1959*, TTPH, ACH, no. 999; *Documentation on Activities of the District of Thành Nội in 1959*, TTPH, ACH, no. 988; *Documentation of the District of Thành Nội in 1960*, TTPH, ACH, no. 1189; *Documentation on Activities of the District of Thành Nội in 1961*, TTPH, ACH, no. 1407; *Documentation on Activities of the District of Tả Ngạn in 1962*, TTPH, ACH, no. 1652.

etc., were usually handed down from generations to generations with special techniques and styles, and exist until today.

Đức Thành embroidery shop at 60 Phan Bội Châu street, owned by senior artist Lê Văn Kinh (born in 1931), produced baldachins, parasols, flags, and such for various local ceremonies. His father Lê Văn Hỡi designed and embroidered the Nguyễn Emperor's clothes and royal decorative products, and he himself was invited to embroider a portrait of President Ngô Đình Diệm for the Economic Festival of Thừa Thiên province in 1958.⁷⁷ The shop also sent many embroidery works to Sài Gòn and international exhibitions in the 1950s – 1960s. Crossing the street from Đức Thành embroidery shop was and still is the Hồng Phúc incense shop of Tạ Văn Hỷ, who had migrated from Hưng Yên province to Huế in his teenage years sometime in the 1930s, and settled down with a capable Huế wife with her family's traditional "printed cake" baking business. Developing his ancestor's occupation in central Vietnam, in the 1960s his workshop provided the best incense for Huế and nearby provinces, as well as many other products for daily life. Now almost 90 years old, he is still living in the same house on Phan Bội Châu street (95 Phan Đăng Lưu now) with little renovation, feeling proud of his family tradition expanding into two more big incense stores operated by his sons.⁷⁸

Regardless of size, category, or product, all businesses were under close **examination and inspection** by economic inspectors and auditors, who reported daily, weekly, and monthly to the Police Department and local government. For example, on March 23, 1957 condensed milk and tobaccos at Bảo Thành store were placed on hold as they did not post sale prices.⁷⁹ On April 9, 1958, Đồng Lợi hotel was suddenly inspected: its bookkeeping audited and all rooms

⁷⁷ Lê Văn Kinh also embroidered several portraits of Hồ Chí Minh upon the request of the government in the post-war period. Lê Văn Kinh, interview by author, Huế, August 26, 2014.

⁷⁸ Tạ Văn Hỷ, interview by author, Huế, August 21, 2014.

⁷⁹ *Daily Reports of the Police Department of the City of Huế in 1957*, TTPH, ACH, no. 289.

checked for prostitution.⁸⁰ On May 6, 1958, the store at 24B Phan Bội Châu was fined because of selling and buying illegal perfumes.⁸¹ Scales (Chinese and Western styles) were regularly checked to safeguard consumers' interests.⁸² Liquid products such as cooking oil, vinegar, fish sauce, and fruit juice from markets, stores, vendors, and coffee shops were repeatedly analyzed to examine ingredients and food safety.⁸³ Liquor stores were prohibited from selling strong and smelly liquors.⁸⁴ Bakeries were checked for hygiene condition and fire safety.⁸⁵ All deceitful activities were subject to fines or confiscation.

In addition to control product sources, price, and tax, the government required applications for business registration, activities, and changes. Most of these applications were accepted as requested or under some conditions such as operating hours, locations, and security. Công Tôn Nữ Thị Phùng, born 1899, submitted her application to practice fortune telling on December 31, 1957 to the city mayor. The approval process took one month, and the Police Department issued her a permit on January 31, 1958, stating that her practice venue should not block traffic and close before 9 p.m.⁸⁶ An application for a drink cart on one side of Phú Hoà sports facility was rejected in order to keep the space empty for urban aesthetic purposes.⁸⁷

Applying to produce foods or drinks always went through a more meticulous and complicated consideration of food safety, hygiene, house plan, the neighborhood's opinion, and comments on the owner's political background. The bakery of Mr. Mai Thế at 16 Trịnh Minh Thế, after an examination by a joint committee of the Department of Health and Police, was requested to heighten its chimney to avoid smoke for the nearby households on windy days and

⁸⁰ *Daily Reports of the Police Department on General Situation in the City of Huế in 1958*, TTPH, ACH, no. 301.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² *Daily Reports of the Police Department on General Situation in the City of Huế in 1962*, TTPH, ACH, no. 361.

⁸³ *Daily Reports of the Police Department on General Situation in the City of Huế in 1958*, no. 301.

⁸⁴ *Monthly Reports of Various Provincial Departments in 1959*, TTPH, ACH, no. 316.

⁸⁵ *Daily Reports of the Police Department on General Situation in the City of Huế in 1962*, no. 361.

⁸⁶ *Documentation of the City of Huế in 1957*, TTPH, ACH, no. 590.

⁸⁷ *Documentation on Applications and Forms of Thừa Thiên Province in 1958*, TTPH, ACH, no. 746.

not making noise when producing and delivering at nights and early mornings.⁸⁸ And in order to produce and distribute the two kinds of wines he invented, Hàng Khoa Nguyên, a 57 years old Chinese Vietnamese businessman residing at 24A Phan Bội Châu, had to submit patents and ingredient analysis certified by the Pasteur Institute in Sài Gòn, in addition to his winery's floor plan at 143 Chi Lăng street, and advertisement flyers.⁸⁹



Advertisements of two wines of Hàng Khoa Nguyên. Source: *Documentation of Permits of Thừa Thiên Province in 1958*, TTPH, ACH, no. 751.

In the small developing economy, **advertisement** played important roles in spreading the words to the loyal customers who had only been familiar with traditional, natural, seasonal, and easily accessible products. Permits were issued for cinema Nguyễn Văn Yển to hang an advertisement sign (March 10, 1958);⁹⁰ for Tinh Liên soap workshop of Mr. Phan Tú Liên at 83 Trần Hưng Đạo street to distribute their flyers which had gone through censorship in February 1958. It cost Tiến Lực open tour bus agency a 10 VND administrative fee for an advertisement

⁸⁸ *Documentation of Permits of Thừa Thiên Province in 1958*, TTPH, ACH, no. 751.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ *Documentation on Applications and Forms of Thừa Thiên Province in 1958*, TTPH, ACH, no. 746.

sign at Nguyễn Hoàng bus station to sell tickets to Nha Trang and Đà Nẵng (April 23, 1958).⁹¹ Before Tết 1958, the hair salon Mỹ Trang of Mr. Trần Đình Kham at 44 Lê Lợi road offered a 50% discount on all services, with a new Hongkong style expert from Tân Mỹ Paris Hair Salon in Sài Gòn.⁹²

ĐẠI HẠ GIÁ

HIỆU UỐN TÓC và HỚT TÓC
MỸ-TRANG VIỆN
44, Lê-Lợi — HUẾ

Kính cáo,

Nhằm dịp gần đến lễ Chúa Giáng-sinh và Tết Nguyên-đán, để đền đáp lại sự chiếu cố nồng nhiệt của quý Bà, quý Cô, bản hiệu đã có **thợ Hồng-Kông chuyên môn tại hiệu Tân-Mỹ Paris**, Đại-lý Đông-khánh Cho-lớn ra giúp sức, nghề nghiệp chuyên môn, đầy đủ kinh nghiệm, dùng thuốc uống tóc hảo-hạng, thuốc sữa, thuốc băng dầu, làm cho mái tóc dợn sóng tự nhiên và lọn lọn. Về nhà quý Bà, quý Cô tự chải lấy để dàng, thợ cắt chải đủ các kiểu mới, hợp thời trang.

Kể từ ngày 1/12/57 cho đến Tết Nguyên-đán, bản hiệu sẽ làm quảng cáo và **Đại hạ giá 50%** để đền đáp lại tấm lòng quý hóa của quý Bà, quý Cô. Hai năm qua vì chủ hiệu đau ốm nên việc tổ-chức kém phần chu-đáo. Nay bản hiệu cố gắng tìm thợ chuyên-môn tại Thủ-đô danh tiếng về giúp sức.

Vậy kính mời quý Bà, quý Cô lưu ý và chiếu cố, đến tại **MỸ-TRANG VIỆN** là nơi tập trung nghệ thuật, và nơi đó sẽ làm hài lòng quý Bà, quý Cô.

Kể từ 1/12/57 đến Tết Nguyên-đán giá tiền như sau :

Uống loại thuốc sữa	300\$	còn lại	150\$
Uống loại thuốc toàn đầu	250\$		125\$
Học sinh giá đặc biệt			100\$
Trẻ em			80\$

Cũng tại **Mỹ-Trang Viện**, chúng tôi có thợ hớt tóc lành nghề, tận tâm và nghệ thuật. Quý Ông, quý Cậu sẽ được vừa lòng mỗi khi ghé lại. Chúng tôi đã cố gắng tìm thuốc ép tóc nam theo ý muốn rất gọn gàng.

Phòng hớt được sửa chữa rộng rãi, mát mẻ hợp vệ sinh.

Giá làm sẽ tính phải chăng :

Cạo ép	80\$
Hớt, gội, ép	90\$
Hớt tóc	20\$

Moang quý khách chiếu cố.
Bản hiệu xin thành thật cảm ơn trước.

MỸ-TRANG VIỆN
Cạnh Phòng Triển-Lãm Đô-thị Huế
tức Nhà hàng Nguyễn-văn-Yên

K.Đ. số 3468 ngày 21/11/1957

Quảng Cáo

XƯỜNG XÀ-PHÒNG TINH-LIÊN

Kính Quý Ông, Quý Bà,

Áo xiêm ăn mặc thường xuyên,
Sao cho sạch sẽ là tiên giữa đời.
Xà bông bán khắp mọi nơi,
Vật tinh, giá rẻ hiện thời là ai?
Gọi tay thượng cổ lâu đời,
LÂM-TINH họ **LÝ** là người xứ kinh.
Xưởng chế tạo ở Xuân thành,
HOA SEN in tạc thêm hình **NGÔI SAO**.
Đã nhiều bọt lại ít hao,
Bọt ra theo nước dồi dào khỏe tay.
Thật tâm thật sự tỏ bày,
Mong sao biết đó biết đây để dàng.
Hoan nghênh Quý khách bạn hàng,
Gặp nhau vui vẻ ngày càng thêm đông.
Quý Thuần-Hóa xưởng xà-bông,
Mua may bán đắt hưởng chung lợi quyền.

Kính cáo
HÀNG XÀ-PHÒNG TINH-LIÊN
83, Đường Trần-Hung-Đạo, 83
HUẾ

K.Đ. số 3547 ngày 22-1-1958

Nhà in HOP-THÀNH — Huế

Advertisement of hair salon Mỹ Trang on the left, and the poem to advertize Tinh Liên soap on the right. Source: *Documentation of Permits of Thừa Thiên Province in 1958*, TTPH, ACH, no. 751.

In a Chinese-Vietnamese populated area in Tả Ngạn district, all shops, warehouses, agencies, and workshops were forced to fix their advertisement signs with bigger Vietnamese letters placed above Chinese characters within two weeks from the announcement on May 14,

⁹¹ *Documentation of the City of Huế in 1957*, TTPH, ACH, no. 590.

⁹² *Documentation of Permits of Thừa Thiên Province in 1958*, TTPH, ACH, no. 751.

1957.⁹³ Up to May 1958, cinemas or large agencies could rent mini-vehicles with loudspeakers to advertise new movies or products around crowded neighborhoods or busy streets. This “abuse of advertisement permits to broadcast loudly and noisily along streets disturbing the peace in the urban area,” was then banned, only permitted at certain public venues and at certain time (one hour per morning or afternoon).⁹⁴

In another effort to enhance commercial activities and broaden economic networks, the local government organized **economic fairs** and exhibitions to introduce local specialties of other locations. In his inaugural speech, the head of Thừa Thiên province addressed the main goals of the 1958 economic fair: for the residents of Huế to be better aware of the rich economic resources and potential of the province and nation, the remarkable economic and social accomplishment of the government in the past few years in order to enhance the people’s trust and enthusiasm toward the government,⁹⁵ offering great opportunities to observe, learn, and exchange experiences with successful businessmen from other provinces in the south central region and the Central Highland. The city mayor also emphasized “our ultimate ambition is that the festival with its location not far from the DMZ may transfer influences and inspirations to the northern countrymen, to recognize the rich economic scenario and prominent achievements of the Republic regime.”⁹⁶

The city of Huế spent more than two million VND to organize the fair from June 14 to July 15, 1958, with 60 exhibition booths of local schools, associations, and other provinces, to display specialties and economic products, technologies, equipments, with no taxes or fees, and free electricity, water, and other necessary resources. Moreover, the organizing board, including a three-member entertainment section, invited dance and music groups to perform, as well as

⁹³ *Documentation of the City of Huế in 1957*, TTPH, ACH, no. 590.

⁹⁴ *Documentation of Permits of Thừa Thiên Province in 1958*, TTPH, ACH, no. 751.

⁹⁵ *Documentation on Fests and Exhibitions in Huế in 1958*, TTPH, ACH, no. 765.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

sports teams to play friendly matches every weekend at no extra charge for the visitors. As a result, entrance ticket revenues could not even cover half of the provincial expenditures for the fair. For example, leaders of Thừa Thiên province sent an invitation to the South China Athletic Association in Hong Kong [Hội Nam Hoa] to play friendly football matches with local teams over Saturday and Sunday afternoons of June 28 and 29; the Đông Kinh Olympic Team of the Vietnamese Ping Pong Association to perform on July 1 and 2; a bodybuilder group from Sài Gòn under the leadership of bodybuilder Nguyễn Công Án; and several singing and dancing groups (12 to 14 performers each) of minority ethnic groups such as the Thái, Radhe' and Mường from Lâm Đồng, Đồng Nai Thượng, and Darlac provinces. All out of town groups were provided transportation, accommodation, per diem, and other expenses for the whole trip, plus guided tours to historic and scenic destinations in Huế. Additionally, a "Photography Exhibit" was organized at Lương Tạ house during the festival with 150 pictures of the economic, social and cultural life in the province. The local province awarded an "Economic Fair 1958" badge to each photographer whose picture had been selected for the exhibition.⁹⁷

In this small market, **prices** were adjusted according to prices in Sài Gòn and importation, and in response to transportation problems, weather conditions, or crop yields, etc. Within five years, the Huế market witnessed a slight increase in the prices of almost all products from rice (both the southern and local kinds), grains, to fabric and gold. Huế developed economic exchanges primarily with its outskirts or other places on some specific products which shopkeepers with larger capital imported and distributed to their partners with less fund. As the main food staple of Vietnamese for thousands of years, rice attracted the most attention from economic inspectors. It was a concern of both of the government and people that every year at times in between crops and during the rainy season when transportation was sometimes delayed,

⁹⁷ Ibid.

the price of rice would increase out of control because of opportunistic dealers.⁹⁸ Fifty five rice sale agencies mostly at Đông Ba market and the two main streets dispersed monthly from 4 to 8 tons (1962),⁹⁹ which was just enough for local consumption. In order to secure the quantity of rice for the local population and prevent rice resources to reach the communist enemy in the countryside and mountainous areas, inspectors of the Police Department were always busy with frequent checks of passenger vehicles (like out-of-town buses, trucks, train, or boats), guards at check points, regular patrols, irregular inspections for smuggling rice, etc. For example, in March 1957, economic inspectors detected 80 rice bags without permit at Nguyễn Hoàng bus station on the 13rd; another 277 kg of rice on a boat at Gia Hội dock on the 18th; 250 kg on the 20th; and 300 kg on the 24th on the way to the countryside.¹⁰⁰ Sometimes it could be the fault of owners of the vehicles or vessels, who did not understand the law and did not check their passengers carrying large amounts of rice to their home villages.¹⁰¹ The price of rice imported from the Mekong delta was usually a bit higher than the local rice, while the annual harvest in Thành Nội district and rural districts of Thừa Thiên province could also determine the price of rice in local markets. Unlike rice, prices of other grains seemed to be relatively more stable due to a smaller consumption scale.

⁹⁸ *Documentation of the City of Huế in 1958*, TTPH, ACH, no. 806.

⁹⁹ *Documentation on Activities of the District of Tân Ngạn in 1962*, TTPH, ACH, no. 1652.

¹⁰⁰ *Daily Reports of the Police Department of the City of Huế in 1957*, TTPH, ACH, no. 289.

¹⁰¹ *Daily Reports of the Police Department on General Situation in the City of Huế in 1962*, TTPH, ACH, no. 361.

100 kg	Jun '58	Jul '58	Sep '58	Oct '58	Nov '58	Feb '59	Mar '59	Aug '59	Oct '59	Dec '59	Mar '60	Sep '60	Jan '61
White Rice (South)	665	660	670	680	700	666	557	530	568	580	480	668	648
White Rice (Local)	600	600	660	700	670	700	600	560	NA	620	520	700	720
Black & Mung bean	1400	1400	1500	1500	1500	1300	1300	1300	1300	1300	1310	1250	1250
Red bean	1000	1000	1000	1000	1000	1000	1000	1000	1000	1000	1000	1850	1350
Corn	300	400	300	300	350	350	350	350	250	250	220	430	430
Lablab	-	600	600	600	600	600	600	-	600	600	600	-	-
Sweet potato	300	350	350	355	350	250	250	-	300	300	250	270	270
Potato	-	-	3200	3200	3200	2500	2500	-	2500	2500	2400	-	3000

Market price of white rice and grains in Thành Nội in 1958 – 1961. Source: *Monthly Reports and Minutes of the District of Thành Nội in 1958*, TTPH, ACH, no. 238; *Documentation of the District of Thành Nội in 1958*, ACH, no. 809; *Documentation on Activities of the District of Thành Nội in 1959*, ACH, no. 988; *Monthly Reports of the District of Thành Nội in 1959*, TTPH, ACH, no. 240; *Documentation of the District of Thành Nội in 1960*, ACH, no. 1189; *Documentation on Activities of the District of Thành Nội in 1961*, ACH, no. 1407.

Products imported and transported by various means, including boats and planes, greatly increased and even doubled their price when going through various big and small warehouses in Huế. Salt, for example, was transported to Huế regularly by boats from the coastal area in central Vietnam, hence it adjusted the price due to frequency of shipment. Nonetheless, its sale price on the market was stable at 2 VND per kilogram for years. Necessary and popular products for daily use were under close observation and inspection by the government, which generally resulted in their relatively stable prices.

Month	Mar	Apr	May	June	Aug
VND/ ton	1,100	1,100	1,000	900	800 – 900

Price of salt from coastal area in the southern central region transported to Huế by boats in 1959. Source: *Monthly Reports of Thừa Thiên Province from May to December 1959*, FRPO, NAC, no. 284.

	December 1957	June 1958
White rice, 1kg	7	6.7
Pork, 1kg	57	50
Beef, 1kg	70	70
Fish, 1kg		30
Salt, 1kg	2	2
Sugar, 1kg	20	21
Fabric, standard, 1m	24	
White fabric, premium, 1m		20

Market price of various products in Huế in 1957 – 1958. Source: *Daily Reports of the Police Department of the City of Huế in 1957*, no. 289; *Daily Reports of the Police Department on General Situation in the City of Huế in 1958*, no. 301; *Monthly Reports of Various Departments of Thừa Thiên Province in 1958*, TTPH, ACH, no. 307.

Of these average market price, the product's popularity and brand name also played a role in its sale price. For instance, sugar prices in June 1960 varied from 15 VND to 20 VND per kilogram, in which the golden sugar Hiệp Hoà was 15 VND, ivory sugar Kim Sa 18 VND, the premier big crystalized sugar (like the one imported from Taiwan) 19 VND, and the premier small crystalized sugar (like the French Cô Ba) 20 VND.¹⁰²

In January 1957, the city of Huế consumed 1042 tons of rice from the south, 62,674 liters of petroleum, and 200 tons of sugar and salt.¹⁰³ More specific statistical data from reports of the Police Department in 1957, 1960, and 1962 showed the city's daily consumption of pigs (from 30 to 50) or roasted pigs (2 to 3), cows (4 to 6), and water buffaloes (2 to 3). Most of these meats were from local famers, or occasionally beef from Đà Nẵng was transported to Huế markets after having been tested and certified at the Veterinary office.¹⁰⁴ The city banned all butchery activities one day per week (Thursdays in 1957 and Tuesdays of 1962) and on all Buddhist holidays. A seal from the veterinary office was required for all kinds of meats; butchery at home

¹⁰² *Documentation on Activities of the Police Department in the City of Huế in 1960*, TTPH, ACH, no. 1195.

¹⁰³ *Documentation on the City of Huế in 1957*, TTPH, ACH, no. 585.

¹⁰⁴ *Daily Reports of the Police Department on General Situation in the City of Huế in 1958*, TTPH, ACH, no. 301.

was illegal;¹⁰⁵ selling under the counter just a few kilograms of pork or beef left from previous days on prohibited days¹⁰⁶ or without the veterinary seal could result in a fine (from 240 VND for 4 kg pork¹⁰⁷ to 500 VND for 3 kilograms beef¹⁰⁸). All these so-called “smuggling meats” were confiscated and supplied to charity institutions.¹⁰⁹ Besides rice and meat, other products such as sugar, condensed milk, flour, salt, cement, corrugated metal, oil and gas, medicines and medical equipments were regularly searched and inspected.

On September 10, 1957 the city government met with taxation officials, representatives of businessmen and local notables to adjust **taxes and fees** in 1958 for some products and activities to suit market development. Egg sellers had paid a tax of 2.60 VND for 100 eggs, but now they only paid 2 VND,¹¹⁰ and vendors of rice congee, street soup, and rice cakes now paid the same amount of tax of 2 VND as vendors of phở and other kinds of noodles instead of 1.30 VND. The tax for fish mongers at markets and vendors was adjusted according to their basket size.

Tax in VND	Big baskets (40cm x 20cm)	Small baskets (30cm x 10cm)	Big containers (60cm x 30cm)
Prior to 1958	2.60	1.30	3.20
1958	3	2	4

Provincial tax (in VND) applied for seafoods products in 1958. Source: *Documentation on Activities of Social Organizations, Political Parties, and Religious Association in 1958*, TTPH, ACH, no. 820.

On June 12, 1957, the mayor sent out a communiqué to city residents to announce vehicle taxes for 1957 – all had to pay vehicle tax and card issuance fee at local police office before July

¹⁰⁵ *Daily Reports of the Police Department of the City of Huế in 1957*, TTPH, ACH, no. 289.

¹⁰⁶ *Daily Reports of the Police Department on General Situation in the City of Huế in 1962*, TTPH, ACH, no. 361.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁸ *Daily Reports of the Police Department of the City of Huế in 1957*, no. 289.

¹⁰⁹ *Daily Reports of the Police Department on General Situation in the City of Huế in 1962*, no. 361.

¹¹⁰ *Documentation on Activities of Social Organizations, Political Parties, and Religious Association in 1958*, TTPH, ACH, no. 820.

30, 1957.¹¹¹ This communiqué required each motorcycle owner to pay a tax of 50 VND per year, cyclo 60 VND per year, small and big carts with iron wheels 50 VND and 80 VND respectively. According to the minutes of a meeting three months later, parking fees for all vehicles from 1957 onwards also changed – 1 VND for bicycles, 2 VND for motorcycles, 3 VND for scooters (like mobylette, vespa, lambretta), plus 1 VND extra if parking from 8 p.m. to 5 a.m. As prices and fees for most basic and popular products were under 5 VND, currency bills of 1, 2, 5 VND sometimes became scarce.¹¹²

Mẫu 64 TT

VIỆT-NAM CỘNG-HÒA
BỘ TÀI-CHÍNH
NHÀ TỔNG GIÁM ĐỐC THUẾ VỤ
NHÀ THUẾ TRỰC-THẦU
TY THUẾ *Levié-Chele-Cuote-Bao-Nhè*

Thi-hành Dự số 8 ngày 13 tháng 4 năm 1953 về thuế Môn-Bài và các van-kiền ka-tiếp.
Bộ thuế số *1-NB/TP/VN*
Nợc thuế số *070*

THE MÔN-BÀI

Hạng 5 Bạc 8
Năm 1960

Họ và Tên Ông Lê-Vân-Khiết
Quốc-tịch: Việt-Nam
Giấy căn-cước số _____ cấp tại _____

Nghề-nghiệp: Hàng-thực-hành
Bằng-hiệu-hay-hội-danh: "Điền-Chánh"
Ở số 60 đường Phan-Bội-Châu
Được đem vào bộ Thuế Môn-bài ở thị
kể từ ngày 1-1-1960
Số thuế tổng cộng là 574,200

chiết-tính như sau :

	Số tiền	
Thuế chính-cung: <u>200,00</u>	} <u>320,00</u>	Số tiền này đã đóng
Thuế lý-lệ: <u>120,00</u>		tại Ngân-hộ <u>thị</u>
Bách-phần phụ-thu: <u>200,00</u>		ngày <u>7-10-60</u>
Phòng Thương-mại: <u>154,20</u>		theo biên-lai số <u>13060</u>
Tiền phạt: _____		
TỔNG CỘNG... <u>574,20</u>		

thị, ngày 7-10-1960
Trưởng Ty Thuế Trục-Thầu *Levié-Chele-Cuote-Bao-Nhè*,
(Ký và ghi rõ họ tên, chức vụ, đóng dấu)

Tax documentation of Đức Thành embroidery shop in 1960. Source: Family Collection of shop

¹¹¹ Documentation on the City of Huế in 1957, TTPH, ACH, no. 585.

¹¹² Monthly Reports of the District of Thành Nội in 1959, TTPH, ACH, no. 240.

owner Lê Văn Kinh.

Another economic concern of daily reports was the changes in the price of gold, the contemporary standard measurement of which was about 1.2 ounces of gold leaf, including a 10% tax. Gold prices experienced some ups and downs through the years and increased about 1,000 VND within five years of 1957 – 1962.

Price of Gold (VND/1.2oz)	Mar 1957	Oct 1957	Apr 1958	May 1958	Sep 1962
Fluctuation from beginning to late month	5,400 – 4,800 – 5,200	5,100 – 5,900 – 5,760	5,760 – 5,450 – 5,280	5,280	5,940

Price of gold in 1957. Collected from various reports in *Daily Reports of the Police Department of the City of Huế in 1957*, TTPH, ACH, no. 289.

Even within one month, the price of gold could fluctuate by several hundreds, for instance in March 1957 at Đông Ba market:

Dates in March, 1957	3, 4, 5, 7	8	11, 12, 13, 14, 15	18	21	22, 24, 25	26, 28	29, 30, 31
Price (VND/1.2oz)	5,400	5,300	5,200	4,800	5,200	4,800	5,100	5,200

Fluctuation in price of gold in March 1957. Collected from various reports in *Daily Reports of the Police Department of the City of Huế in 1957*, no. 289.

The developing yet still unstable economic life did not allow the majority of people to live extravagantly, and many chose to save gold for special occasions, ceremonies, and life events, or for potential risks. Some parents presented their daughters with a pair of gold earrings or a gold bracelet. These jewelry gifts, however, occasionally brought them unfortunate troubles.

Chapter 2

2.1 Daily life

Like any other society, Hué in 1957 – 1962 witnessed a wide variety of daily incidents, success and failures, fortunes and misfortunes, happiness and sadness, surprises, and risks. Some caused long-term impacts, some remained in memories for decades, and some might disappear instantly. Daily reports of the police department illustrated the everyday life in the city with details of petty theft and grand larceny, disorderly conducts, traffic accidents, suicides and misadventures, food poisoning, house fires, or smuggling, etc. The inhabitants relied on hardworking and dedicated local police officers to take victims to the central hospitals after traffic or labor accidents, to extinguish the flames of house fires, or retrieve the bicycles lost or stolen. Hué residents cooperated with and reported to the police to solve a great number of problems in their life. Due to the limited source materials, this part of the chapter will focus only on several important recurring events in the immense sea of incidents in the daily life of Hué in 1957–1962.

Thefts and larcenies in Hué in the 1950s and 60s varied in types from petty to grand larceny, time and place, criminals and victims, tricks of stealing or deceiving, personal or public properties. The majority of these crimes happened at night time, due to the inattention or carelessness of the victims, from forgetting to close the window, to leaving the kitchen storage unlocked or personal belongings unattended when swimming at the public bath spot.¹¹³ Almost all (if not all) perpetrators were male, aged from teen to senior (the oldest thief was reportedly 75 years old¹¹⁴), and some were possibly orphans, unemployed, or servants. Anyone in the city could become their victim, from a poor family, to a shopkeeper at Đông Ba market, or the

¹¹³ *Daily Reports of the Police Department on General Situation in the City of Hué in 1958*, TTPH, ACH, no. 301; *Daily Reports of the Police Department on General Situation in the City of Hué in 1962*, TTPH, ACH, no. 361.

¹¹⁴ *Daily Reports of the Police Department on General Situation in the City of Hué in 1958*, no. 301.

German professor at the University of Huế.¹¹⁵ Items of thefts and larcenies varied. They could be some kids' clothes drying in the front yard (on March 8, 1957),¹¹⁶ rice in storage at the railway station (March 26, 1962),¹¹⁷ four geese and eight eggs (November 26, 1959)¹¹⁸ or a chicken (September 11, 1962),¹¹⁹ a car spare tire in a garage (of Font Veille Claudius at the power plant office on April 26, 1958),¹²⁰ student awards in the rector's office (June 24, 1958),¹²¹ books at the libraries of Accueil Church, Francisco Church, and the French Information center (March 9, 1962),¹²² classical music recordings (of Professor Nguyễn Văn Trung on January 4, 1960),¹²³ urns (of Tường Quang pagoda on March 4, 1957),¹²⁴ electricity by changing the gears of the meter (March 5, 14, 29, 1957),¹²⁵ and jewelries and valuable properties of all kinds (like watches, radios, recorders) and money, etc. Many of these incidents were discovered in progress by the police, sometimes because of a dog barking, the screams of neighbors, or encountered by patrol groups or investigated by guards during curfew hours.

Of all types of larcenies, bicycle thefts were probably the most widespread crimes of the period, occurring almost every day in the city. Five minutes was all a thief needed to steal an unattended bicycle, even locked, right in front of the owner's house, a post office, playground, market, or a coffee shop. Interestingly, a bicycle might also be the item most often returned to its owner, even if it had been repainted with a different color or had a frame replaced. As every bicycle had a registration number, a buyer of a bike without the registration paperwork suspected

¹¹⁵ Professor Weil lost two wool blankets, two bed sheets, and one mosquito net on July 2, 1962. *Daily Reports of the Police Department on General Situation in the City of Huế in 1962*, no. 361.

¹¹⁶ *Daily Reports of the Police Department of the City of Huế in 1957*, no. 289.

¹¹⁷ *Daily Reports of the Police Department on General Situation in the City of Huế in 1962*, no. 361.

¹¹⁸ *Documentation on Activities of the District of Thành Nội in 1959*, TTPH, ACH, no. 988.

¹¹⁹ *Daily Reports of the Police Department on General Situation in the City of Huế in 1962*, no. 361.

¹²⁰ *Daily Reports of the Police Department on General Situation in the City of Huế in 1958*, no. 301.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² *Daily Reports of the Police Department on General Situation in the City of Huế in 1962*, no. 361.

¹²³ *Documentation of the National Police Department of the Central Region in 1958*, TTPH, ACH, no. 731.

¹²⁴ *Daily Reports of the Police Department of the City of Huế in 1957*, no. 289.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

it was stolen and then submitted it to the police (March 11 and 29, 1957).¹²⁶ A bike repair shop when asked to replace a pretty new frame felt suspicious and informed the police (March 16, 1957).¹²⁷ An unattended bike left by a cattappa tree in front of the court building for three days was handed over to the police by a local resident on May 31 and returned to the owner on June 1, 1962.¹²⁸

Pickpocketing was another type of common crime at all crowded places like cinemas, theaters, stadiums, markets, for example to steal a pen (April 3, 1958) or a great amount of money (April 19, 1958).¹²⁹ Deceiving was also very popular, from abusing someone's trust to borrowing money,¹³⁰ impersonating government officials or police (to steal money or properties, or watch a performance for free),¹³¹ or using quackery to cure diseases.¹³² Naïve children occasionally became victims of unscrupulous youths or adults because of their gold jewelries. On June 22, 1958 a man took a pair of gold earrings from a six year old girl and left her at King Tự Đức's tomb outside of Huế. The little girl, when returning home, also reported the case of another girl, 10, whose golden necklace was stolen, and who was then thrown into the river on the way.¹³³ On March 9, 1962, an 18 year old youth convinced an eight year old girl to get a ride to school and then stole her pair of earrings.¹³⁴ Although there were many honest people who submitted or reported unattended items to the police (such as the owner of a drink cart at Nguyễn Hoàng park, who handed a Technos watch of an American customer over to the police on June 30, 1962),¹³⁵ not many of the stolen properties were returned to their owners. They were likely sold to a

¹²⁶ *Daily Reports of the Police Department of the City of Huế in 1957*, no. 289.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

¹²⁸ *Daily Reports of the Police Department on General Situation in the City of Huế in 1962*, no. 361.

¹²⁹ *Daily Reports of the Police Department on General Situation in the City of Huế in 1958*, no. 301.

¹³⁰ *Monthly Reports of Various Provincial Departments in 1959*, no. 316.

¹³¹ *Daily Reports of the Police Department on General Situation in the City of Huế in 1958*, no. 301.

¹³² *Monthly Reports of Various Provincial Departments in 1959*, no. 316.

¹³³ *Daily Reports of the Police Department on General Situation in the City of Huế in 1958*, no. 301.

¹³⁴ *Daily Reports of the Police Department on General Situation in the City of Huế in 1962*, no. 361.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*

pawnshop or to an easy customer for a cheap price.

Traffic accidents were another common type of risk happening daily in Huế, ranging from crashes between all means of transportation with each other, passengers, or between a vehicle with the citadel wall, a sewer, or a ditch. Aggressive or unattentive drivers, plus bad conditions of roads and old vehicles were main reasons for the majority of traffic accidents. On March 13, 1957 an accident between a city bus and a GMC military vehicle injured two people.¹³⁶ On June 30, 1962, a 36 year old artist lost control of his lambretta scooter on the bumpy street of Nguyễn Huệ, which made his 18 year old pregnant wife fall down from the passenger seat.¹³⁷ A civilian driver testified to the local police against a military wagon driver who had not honked or signaled at an intersection and caused damages to the civilian vehicle. Occasionally, it was not the fault of drivers, when a 7 year old girl rushed out of her house to catch a bird on the street and was hit by a motorcycle on March 24, 1957.¹³⁸ As the underdeveloped infrastructure did not allow fast speeds in the city, most traffic accidents caused broken legs or some bruises; hence the victims would often recover very fast at the hospital. Some even settled the matter with each other. A military driver paid an amount of 2,000 VND to a mother and her child after a light crash, and they agreed not to appeal in the future (April 9, 1958).¹³⁹

Besides traffic accidents the national hospital of Huế received victims of all kinds of mishaps and labor accidents. A young man fell from a ladder while hanging up a speaker for the Đồng Xuân Lâu theater on October 13, 1957.¹⁴⁰ Another man fell from the citadel wall while

¹³⁶ *Daily Reports of the Police Department of the City of Huế in 1957*, no. 289.

¹³⁷ *Daily Reports of the Police Department on General Situation in the City of Huế in 1962*, no. 361.

¹³⁸ *Daily Reports of the Police Department of the City of Huế in 1957*, no. 289.

¹³⁹ *Daily Reports of the Police Department on General Situation in the City of Huế in 1958*, no. 301.

¹⁴⁰ *Daily Reports of the Police Department of the City of Huế in 1957*, no. 289.

getting rid of trash on May 29, 1962.¹⁴¹ A 14 year old boy picked up fire crackers at a wedding and burned his arm on April 29, 1958;¹⁴² another young man got his hand stuck in a sugar cane juice machine when trying to get the towel left inside on June 3, 1959.¹⁴³

Once in a while the city witnessed a tragic **death** due to a wrong dose of peniciline injection on May 25, 1958,¹⁴⁴ or a pregnant woman began labor right on Trịnh Minh Thế street without necessary medical care, and her baby died at birth on May 22, 1959.¹⁴⁵ Misfortune did not avoid visitors of Huế: a woman, 38, from Phú Vang district who had come to town to visit her relative died of “catching the wind” (“trúng gió” – local explanation of a stroke) on the way on April 30, 1958;¹⁴⁶ a servant of Tuý Nguyệt theater group drowned in the river while on tour in Huế on June 26, 1962;¹⁴⁷ a group of Cham people from Ninh Thuận province on their tour to sell traditional medicine rented a boat to sleep overnight on the Hương River; there, one of them died of asthma on March 26, 1962.¹⁴⁸

Suicide was apparently considered a “simple” solution for many weak and unprotected wives over family affairs in the Confucian society. A 29-year-old member of the Lotus singing group, having an argument with her 20 year old husband, leapt into the river on April 7, 1958.¹⁴⁹ Another wife who had been falsely accused of an adulterous affair attempted suicide by drinking poison on September 16, 1959; after her rescue and recovery, she jumped into a well ten days later, and was rescued again.¹⁵⁰ A fight with the mother (March 14, 1957),¹⁵¹ with the son (June

¹⁴¹ *Daily Reports of the Police Department on General Situation in the City of Huế in 1962*, no. 361.

¹⁴² *Daily Reports of the Police Department on General Situation in the City of Huế in 1958*, no. 301.

¹⁴³ *Monthly Reports of Various Provincial Departments in 1959*, no. 316.

¹⁴⁴ *Daily Reports of the Police Department on General Situation in the City of Huế in 1958*, no. 301.

¹⁴⁵ *Monthly Reports of Various Provincial Departments in 1959*, no. 316.

¹⁴⁶ *Daily Reports of the Police Department on General Situation in the City of Huế in 1958*, no. 301.

¹⁴⁷ *Daily Reports of the Police Department on General Situation in the City of Huế in 1962*, no. 361.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁹ *Daily Reports of the Police Department on General Situation in the City of Huế in 1958*, no. 301.

¹⁵⁰ *Monthly Reports of Various Provincial Departments in 1959*, no. 316.

¹⁵¹ *Daily Reports of the Police Department of the City of Huế in 1957*, no. 289.

21, 1958),¹⁵² or with the naughty step-daughter (July 12, 1962)¹⁵³ led to some other families' tragedies. Many suicide victims were rescued by family members and neighbors; and when the causes did not sound reasonable, local police officers, after resolving the conflict, fined the couples for disturbing the social order, as in the case in which a wife jumped into Ngũ Hà lake after a dispute with her husband on June 2, 1962.¹⁵⁴ The city rarely witnessed an infanticide like the case of an anguished 21 year old mother with an illegitimate child who decided to deliver her child in the river. Once discovering the dead baby, the residents and passersby donated 797 VND to buy some red wrap (giấy hồng đơn) and a coffin to bury the child at Mang Cá cemetery while the fugitive mother was added to the wanted list of the police.¹⁵⁵

Family issues caused many **disorderly conducts** in the city as well, from a husband beating his wife (May 7, 1958), a father battering his son (March 8, 1958) to a brother knifing his younger sibling over an inheritance (May 2, 1958).¹⁵⁶ Police officers sometimes prevented fights, for example, between two drivers of Phi Long and Tiên Lực companies to get more passengers (May 3, 1958),¹⁵⁷ some aggressive customers of lotteries (March 8, 1958),¹⁵⁸ or drunks over trivial issues (April 2, 1958,¹⁵⁹ March 11, March 20, June 6, 1962),¹⁶⁰ and many types of fights, arguments, or quarrels occurring in public space over debts, properties, or some other bitter manner, like a beautiful girl.

Prostitution, rape, and sexual harassment might sound unusual to such a closed, traditional, and conservative society like Huế, yet it occurred regularly in the 1950s – 1960s.

¹⁵² *Daily Reports of the Police Department on General Situation in the City of Huế in 1958*, no. 301.

¹⁵³ *Daily Reports of the Police Department on General Situation in the City of Huế in 1962*, no. 361.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁵ *Daily Reports of the Police Department on General Situation in the City of Huế in 1958*, no. 301.

¹⁵⁶ *Daily Reports of the Police Department on General Situation in the City of Huế in 1958*, no. 301; *Daily Reports of the Police Department on General Situation in the City of Huế in 1962*, no. 361.

¹⁵⁷ *Daily Reports of the Police Department on General Situation in the City of Huế in 1958*, no. 301.

¹⁵⁸ *Daily Reports of the Police Department on General Situation in the City of Huế in 1962*, no. 361.

¹⁵⁹ *Daily Reports of the Police Department on General Situation in the City of Huế in 1958*, no. 301.

¹⁶⁰ *Daily Reports of the Police Department on General Situation in the City of Huế in 1962*, no. 361.

While a future husband and wife sleeping together before their formal wedding could be arrested for ruining moral values and virtuousness (3 a.m. on March 9, 1962),¹⁶¹ a few hours later, four students of Quốc Học (8th and 9th grade) stopped a 16 year old girl on an empty street to rape her.¹⁶² Prostitutes could be caught in a public park under a tree, in front of a cinema, in a restaurant, and particularly on boats on the Hương and Đông Ba rivers. Many females from their teens to their 30s or early 40s, originally from Huế or outside of Huế, were sent to the special clinic for sexually transmitted diseases in the Gia Hội area (Bệnh viện gái / nhà lục xì Gia Hội).

In August 1958, for example, the police discovered eleven cases of prostitution in the whole city. Four cases occurred during daytime from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., three on boats, three in hotel rooms, or at an abandoned house on a field, Tây Lộc airport, or at Trần Quốc Toàn primary school. Of the eleven prostitutes, aged from 18 to 39 (mostly 18 and in their early 20s), eight women were originally from or resided out of Huế. The eleven men aged from 20 to 39 (mostly in their early 30s) were half local, half from out of town. The police recorded all eleven cases, fined all the men, and sent the prostitutes to Gia Hội clinic. Together with gambling (some of which were initially rooted in the royal family, and which also happened regularly in Huế, especially in 1957 – 1958 while decreasing in the later years), prostitution was regarded as one of the main vices targeted by the Ngô Đình Diệm's regime to avoid depraving fine customs and protect national decencies.

Another common life incidents in Huế in 1957 – 1962 was **house fires**, in many cases caused by misfortune, or inattentive and careless attitudes of adults and children. The reasons for house fires were plenty, for example, burning coal from a train running through town igniting a straw roof (April 1 and April 22, 1958), electricity short-circuiting (October 13, 1957, and April

¹⁶¹ *Daily Reports of the Police Department on General Situation in the City of Huế in 1962*, no. 361.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*

19, 1958), strong wind blowing flame from an oil lamp to woods stored in kitchen (June 9, 1958), or inattention while cooking or using an coal iron (June 22, 1962).¹⁶³ House fires were always extinguished by water, with the cooperation of neighbors, passersby, and police, and in many cases with the support of fire trucks, but only if the alley to the house was wide enough (see the case of June 7, 1962).¹⁶⁴ While house fires usually did not endanger lives, they caused severe damage to the house and also in many cases a fine from local police for the carelessness and inattention.

Dog bites were another common source of fines by the local police. Many cases of dog bites cost the owners 30 VND, plus the fees for the victim's anti-rabies shots at the hospital and the vaccination for the dog. **Food poisoning** could sometimes happen to a family of about three to five people for eating shrimp sauce, or some special kinds of fish.¹⁶⁵ The biggest food poisoning affair in these six years occurred after a party of the American MACV and their friends at Thuận Hoá hotel on the evening of September 13, 1962. The party started at 8 p.m., and by 3 a.m. 42 people had some food-poisoning diagnosis and visited the hospital. The reason might have been the cakes made by the bakery of Nguyễn Ngân at 3 Lý Thường Kiệt street.¹⁶⁶

While almost all of the above incidents were known among the victims' and the troublemakers' families, relatives, and neighbors, the city residents were sometimes awoken by some loud noises. A soldier committed suicide with a grenade on March 14, 1957,¹⁶⁷ a policeman watched a suspected criminal and fired two warning shots on March 13, 1962,¹⁶⁸ a 14-

¹⁶³ *Daily Reports of the Police Department of the City of Huế in 1957*, no. 289; *Daily Reports of the Police Department on General Situation in the City of Huế in 1958*, no. 301. *Daily Reports of the Police Department on General Situation in the City of Huế in 1962*, no. 361.

¹⁶⁴ *Daily Reports of the Police Department on General Situation in the City of Huế in 1962*, no. 361.

¹⁶⁵ *Daily Reports of the Police Department on General Situation in the City of Huế in 1958*, no. 301; *Documentation on Activities of the District of Tả Ngạn in 1962*, no. 1652.

¹⁶⁶ *Daily Reports of the Police Department on General Situation in the City of Huế in 1962*, no. 361.

¹⁶⁷ *Daily Reports of the Police Department of the City of Huế in 1957*, no. 289.

¹⁶⁸ *Daily Reports of the Police Department on General Situation in the City of Huế in 1962*, no. 361.

year-old boy played with some firecrackers and created a big explosion on June 29, 1962.¹⁶⁹ On rare occasions, animals could also cause some anxieties for local inhabitants. A python escaped from a cage at the National Hospital for five months, until finally beaten to death on May 29, 1958.¹⁷⁰ A group of water buffalo, spooked by the crowd on the busy Duy Tân street, escaped their harnesses, ran and gored two people on March 14, 1962.¹⁷¹ Besides these misfortunes and misadventures, like any other societies, people of Huế had plenty of happy private events and joyful public ceremonies to celebrate and to enjoy life either in a simple and elegant way or in a more grand and ostentatious style.

Lifestyle

Huế had long been esteemed in Vietnam for its rich heritage and traditional customs which were conspicuous in daily lifestyles in the 1950s – 1960s. Members of the extended royal family, or notable clans of Thân Trọng, Nguyễn Khoa, Hồ Đắc, Hà Thúc, and old residents of this imperial city formed various and distinctive mores embedded in their social and cultural activities. Immigrants from other places adapted to the local life, as in the old saying “Nhập gia tùy tục” [similar to “when in Rome, do as the Romans do”].

After the abdication of the last king in 1945, a number of Huế’s population descended from the Emperors’ family now became ordinary citizens, but clung to their royal, noble, “mệ” lifestyles as best as they could. In such an old city, the men tucked their shirts into their pants, even when hanging out with friends during holidays.¹⁷² The women of Huế, from a family servant to a street vendor, wore the traditional long dress “áo dài” in every public place. The

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ *Daily Reports of the Police Department on General Situation in the City of Huế in 1958*, no. 301.

¹⁷¹ *Daily Reports of the Police Department on General Situation in the City of Huế in 1962*, no. 361.

¹⁷² Lê Xuân Nhuận, “Trích Hồi ký lần ra Huế” (“Excerpt from Memoirs of a Visit to Huế”). In *1963-2013: Năm mươi năm nhìn lại (1963-2013: Fifty Years Looking Back)*, vol. 2. (California: Thien Tri Thuc Publications, 2013), 18.

tight fitting version of Trần Lệ Xuân (First Lady of the RVN, the sister in law of President Ngô Đình Diệm), with V-shaped collars and short sleeves, though popularized in Sài Gòn, was not that well received in the traditional city of Huế. The pregnant women, instead of a waistband thread, wore their normal long dresses with buttons along the waist opened and put another layer over to cover the pregnant belly. Until the 1960s, some families with old traditional custom did not allow their daughters to ride bicycles. The youth, however, were attracted by the modern lifestyle. They were keen on the new fashion, curly hairstyle, or driving motorbikes. According to Thái Kim Lan, a female student of Philosophy, her peers preferred listening to Western genres of music to traditional Huế singing, becoming fans of singers like Françoise Hardy, or Sylvie Vartan, and watching Western movies at cinemas. Thái Kim Lan herself enjoyed traveling through the city alone with her velosolex in fresh air instead of staying at home sewing and embroidering according to her royal grandmother's advice.¹⁷³

Many people of Huế, when asked about their daily activities some 50 years ago, recalled a happy and peaceful time, a simple life, full of traditional norms with slightly modern nuances. In this close-knit and traditional society, family values and reputation played crucial roles in everybody's life. Children formed their outlook and way of living following their parents' and grandparents' advice. On the one hand, the strong bond with family secured a fine continuation of family ethics and Vietnamese tradition, on the other hand, it also definitely restricted the younger generation to broaden their worldview with opportunities to interact with modern life. Visitors from Sài Gòn in these years shared their view of Huế as a small city and its people as closed and limited individuals within the traditional perceptions.¹⁷⁴ Particularly with Western philosophy and literature, knowledge from reference books and lectures by French educated

¹⁷³ Thái Kim Lan, *Phượng trên trời Hải đường dưới đất* [*Phoenix on the Sky, Malus on the Ground*]. [forthcoming].

¹⁷⁴ Trần Dạ Từ, interview by author, Los Angeles, CA, November 24, 2015.

professors and foreign faculty members at the University of Huế, the youth of Huế imbued their life with romantic dreams, living deeply in philosophical discussions of existentialism to satisfy their theoretical ideas. This was a stereotype of students and young men of Huế. To most of the women, even those who had graduated from university and worked as professors and teachers, their daily concerns did not reach far beyond the traditional responsibilities of a wife and mother. They preferred talking about new recipes, stylish fashion, and childcare.¹⁷⁵

Daily Routines

Daily routines of all walks of life were surely different depending on their profession, age, living conditions, family background, and changes of weather conditions or seasons. If a police officer worked harder during public events, a high school teacher was often assigned to travel to a different place to grade the national graduating examinations in the summer. And the city became more bustling and happier at the end of every year when everybody tried their best to accomplish all tasks and prepare for the lunar New Year's Eve, Tết in Vietnamese, often observed at the end of January or early to mid February. Officials finished their year-end reports, shopkeepers bought and sold more goods, housewives made more traditional cakes to sell for some extra income for the biggest holiday of the year.

A typical day of students of the University of Huế could start as early as 5 a.m. About 6 or 7 a.m. they walked to the university on the right bank of the Hương River, then walked back home for lunch at 11 a.m. After the lunch break, they could spend the afternoon at the University again if there were lectures, or at the University libraries, or the French cultural center, the US information service library. Late afternoon they could hang out with friends, visit bookstores on Trần Hưng Đạo and Phan Bội Châu streets, stores and markets, or play sports. They all returned

¹⁷⁵ Nguyễn Thị Thanh Tâm and Đoàn Khoách, interview by author, San Diego, CA, July 8, 2016.

home for dinner then study in the evening until late (about 11 p.m. or midnight).¹⁷⁶ The students of the university from out-of-town worked as preceptors and stayed with their students' families for financial support and free accommodation. The preceptor-students would assisted the children of the house owner, ranged from 1st to 5th or 12th grade of general education, to do their homework, read textbooks in advance, study for exams, etc. until about 10 p.m. The preceptors then studied their own subjects until the wee hours and got up early in the morning to awake their students to review the study materials before going to school.

The city always woke up around 5 a.m. after the curfew, became busy around 6:30 to 7 a.m. when government officials went to work, vendors headed to markets, students walked to school. The day often ended at 6 p.m. when everybody returned home for dinner. The evenings usually stayed pretty quiet, except some neighborhood meetings, political study sessions, or birthday parties. With only one day off per week, the people of Huế often spent Sundays with the family, cooking a big meal, cleaning the house, or visiting their relatives. Once in a while, some well-off families ate out at local restaurants on their special occasions to enjoy Western, Chinese, and Vietnamese dishes, cooked and served by Vietnamese chefs at popular restaurants such as Quốc Tế (51 Phan Bội Châu), Lạc Thành (10 Đinh Bộ Lĩnh), Lư Hương, Công Quán, Đồng Ý, etc.

Sundays were also the day of community services and scout activities. Many children and adolescents in the 1950s and 60s matured into active, responsible, and self-reliant citizens thanks to weekly scout practices of various Boy and Girl Scouts in the city. Under the guide of scout leaders, groups by groups of young students and volunteers cultivated lifelong values, skills, and compatibilities through having fun collecting badges of activities like camping, hiking, learning

¹⁷⁶ Tôn Thất Kỳ, interview; Bửu Ý, interview by author, Huế, February 25, 2014; Phạm Thị Xuân Quế, interview by author, Huế, July 31, 2015; Lê Thành Tôn, interview by author, Los Angeles, CA, July 2, 2016.

how to fix bicycles, etc.¹⁷⁷ Gathering all committed and supportive seeds of the young generation, the Scout members initiated many voluntary projects to building up houses, fix public constructions in the aftermaths of natural disasters, or help the poor and low income families to improve their living conditions.

2.2 Leisure and Social Life

Besides the daily routines of going to work, to school, to the market, cook and sew, read news and listen to radio, the people of Huế had more options to spend at leisure in the 1950s and 60s when Huế became more open and connected with the outside world. Entertainment activities of many people in 1957 – 1962 varied from riding bicycle to a nearby temple to joining big anniversaries on national holidays, from end of school year music performance to opera shows by touring groups, from morning exercise movements to national sports games. Among all these, cinema was probably the most popular leisure activity of the young generation of Huế as elsewhere in the RVN in these years.

There were four **cinemas** in Huế with the most popular Tân Tân at 93 Trần Hưng Đạo street, Khải Hoàn at 94-96 Chi Lăng (former Gia Hội cinema, then renamed Lido since December 24, 1963), Châu Tinh (also on Chi Lăng), and Lửa Hồng (managed by Scout group in Thành Nội district).¹⁷⁸ Every day, especially Saturday and Sunday afternoons, groups of friends (mostly ones in their 20s and 30s) in their formal clothes awaited hours in front of these cinemas to buy tickets. A cinema ticket varied from same price of 6 VND (only Lửa Hồng cinema), or the cheapest range of 10 to 20 VND and higher for second tier at other cinemas. Through movies, the young people of Huế dreamed beyond their small city and narrowed world toward new and

¹⁷⁷ Tôn Thất Kỳ, interview; Nguyễn Thúc Tuấn, interview by author, Huế, July 20, 2015.

¹⁷⁸ There were also cinemas Hưng Đạo, Vietnam film, Morin; yet they might already have closed or not open yet in 1957 – 1962. Information of film industry largely relies on people's memories, hence there might be some conflicting data. I have not encountered any primary sources on the film industry in Huế in 1957 – 1967.

exciting French, American, British, Hong Kong, Taiwanese, and Indian sky, and even their southern land. Movies as romantic as *Et dieu Créa la femme* (*And God Created Woman*, 1956, directed by Roger Vadim), or as horror as *The blood and Roses* (1960, also directed by Roger Vadim), *Je suis un sentimental* (*I am a Sentimentalist*, 1955, directed by John Berry); *Les Heros sont fatigues* (*Heroes and Sinners* or *The Heroes Are Tired*, 1955, directed by Yves Ciampi) starred the world famous actors and actresses like Marilyn Monroe, Brigitte Bardot, Elisabeth Taylor, Sophie Marceau, James Dean, Richard Burton, Anthony Quinn, Alain Delon, etc.¹⁷⁹ Western films with romantic stories with roses and death, and Asian movies full of martial arts and heroic manners, with Vietnamese subtitles, attracted many more audiences than films of the young film industry of the RVN, such as *Bến Cũ* (*The Old Station*, 1953, produced by Thái Thúc Nha), *Chúng tôi muốn sống* (*We Want to Live*, 1956, directed by Vĩnh Noãn), *Hồi chuông Thiên Mụ* (*The Bells of Thiên Mụ Temple*, 1957, directed by Lê Dân), which starred Hoàng Vĩnh Lộc, Lê Quỳnh, Kiều Chinh, etc. Various trailers prior to each movie, colorful programs with big appealing photos of favorite actors (many collected them to sometimes review and decorate their rooms), the waiting time to hang out with friends (and look at beautiful women) and joyful moments when the lights turned off to enjoy the movies with roasted peanuts, then ice cream or sweet soup afterwards with friends, all is still alive vividly in people's mind till today.¹⁸⁰ It was not common for young females and males to go together in the 1950s and 60s, hence public space like cinema often saw groups of only female friends, or only male students, or couples with children, sometimes one mature man, and very rarely a single woman.

¹⁷⁹ Hồ Đăng Định, “Thú đi xem xine ở Huế” in *Huế Xuân Xưa* [*The Old Spring in Huế*]. (California: [s.n.], 2012), 69-77; Nguyễn Lương Tuấn, “Góc Phố Trần Hưng Đạo, Ngã Giữa,” <http://cuuhoctruongnguyenduhue.blogspot.com/2015/08/goc-pho-tran-hung-ao-nga-giua-nguyen.html>; Hoàng Diệp Lạc, “Cinema – ký ức của một thời.” *Sông Hương Journal*, special issue (September 2013), <http://tapchisonghuong.com.vn/tap-chi/c293/n13069/Cinema-ky-uc-cua-mot-thoi.html> (Accessed March, 26, 2017).

¹⁸⁰ Cao Huy Thuần, interview by author, Huế, February 16, 2014; Thái Kim Lan, interview by author, Huế, March 13, 2014; Hồ Đăng Định, interview by author, Huế, August 1, 2015.

If young people were more interested in movies as a hobby of modern life, the older generation of Huế preferred the **traditional and modern opera** (singing and dancing performances), the local “hát bội” and the southern style “cải lương” at theater Đồng Xuân Lâu (Rạp bà Tuần [theater of the governor’s wife] in daily conversation), or a tole roofed temporary theater at Phu Văn Lâu. Here residents often welcomed performers from Sài Gòn – Cải Lương groups named after famous actresses such as Thanh Minh Thanh Nga, Túy Nguyệt, Thuý Lan Mỹ Ngọc, Thanh Nam Thu Ba, Hữu Tâm, Trần Văn Trạch, Kim Cương, etc. As their titles suggested, these performances attracted audiences by making them cry of distressful situations or tragedy life stories such as "A Leaf In The Stream" ["Chiếc lá giữa dòng"], "A Heap Of Love Letters Never Sent" ["Xấp thư tình không hề gửi"], "Longing At The Wedding Feast" ["Tơ vương trong tiệc cưới"], "The Heart Of The Virgin" ["Cõi lòng trinh nữ"], "Wiping Her Tears With His Scarf" ["Khăn chàng em lau nước mắt"], or emphasizing Buddhist commandments such as "Fallen Flower At Buddha's Door" ["Cánh hoa rơi cửa Phật"], "Last Days Following The Buddha" ["Ngày tàn theo Phật"], "A Crazy Person At Buddha's Door" ["Người điên trước cửa Phật"], etc.¹⁸¹

In 1962, while the small theater Đồng Xuân Lâu was at capacity when ticket fare reached about 5,000 VND for each show in June and July, the bigger theater on Phu Văn Lâu square always collected from 10,000 to 50,000 VND each night. With advertisements broadcast by mobile vehicles with loudspeakers running around the city, sometimes both theaters lit up for local audience, as in early July 1962.

¹⁸¹ *Daily Reports of the Police Department on General Situation in the City of Huế in 1962*, TTPH, ACH, no. 361.

Date, 1962	Theater Groups	Title of Plays	Venue	Total Fare collected
June 30	Tuý nguyệt	"The Blind Mother" ["Người mẹ mù"]	Đồng Xuân Lâu	1,900
	Nam Thanh / Thu Ba	"Last Days Following The Buddha" ["Ngày tàn theo Phật"]	Phu Văn Lâu	10,470
July 1	Tuý nguyệt	"The Heart Of The Virgin" ["Cõi lòng trinh nữ"]	Đồng Xuân Lâu	1,760
	Nam Thanh / Thu Ba	"Innocent Beauty" ["Sắc đẹp vô tội"]	Phu Văn Lâu	6,875
July 3	Tuý nguyệt	"Stories of the Hunchback" ["Tâm sự thằng gù"]	Đồng Xuân Lâu	2,060
	Nam Thanh / Thu Ba	"The Beauty from Yên Tha Land" ["Người đẹp đất Yên Tha"]	Phu Văn Lâu	5,760
July 4	Tuý nguyệt	"Criminal of the Queen" ["Thủ phạm của nữ hoàng"]	Đồng Xuân Lâu	1,600
	Nam Thanh / Thu Ba	"Wiping Her Tears With His Scarf" ["Khăn chàng em lau nước mắt"]	Phu Văn Lâu	3,240
July 5	Tuý nguyệt	"Fallen Flower At Buddha's Door" ["Cánh hoa rơi cửa Phật"]	Đồng Xuân Lâu	2,140
	Nam Thanh / Thu Ba	"The Saint of Sea World" ["Thần đèn thủy chúa"]	Phu Văn Lâu	2,180

Traditional opera shows in Huế in 1962. Source: *Daily Reports of the Police Department on General Situation in the City of Huế in 1962*, no. 361.

A great number of **music** performances occurred all year during feasts or annual anniversaries, fulfilling the entertainment demands of local residents. End of school year performances became exciting stages for students to experience artistic creation that launched many beautiful voices and talents of Huế. Nobody could remember how many nights they waited for the "Dạ Lan" night music program of the national radio from Sài Gòn with songs of the "new music" (Tân nhạc) of the twentieth century, with charming melodies and poetic lyrics mingling foreign or prewar music elements by the emerging composers like Phạm Duy, Dương Thiệu Tước, Phạm Đình Chương. As a unique specialty "Huế Singing" rooted in court music offered a distinctive theater and elegant pleasure for the royal elites and curious audiences of the imperial city on the boats slowly floating along the Hương River. Singers of these boats were sometimes invited to sing live on city radio, though happily and excitingly accepted, they did not dare to

inform their parents because of the old traditional prejudice “xướng ca vô loài,” that a singing career was worthless and pretty singers often had a poor fate that was falsely looked down as relating to prostitutes.¹⁸²

Occasionally, Phu Văn Lâu offered its stage for circus and magical groups from Sài Gòn on their national tour (Mạnh Dinh group on June 2 and 3, 1962 or Hương Bình team on July 5, 1962).¹⁸³ Tự Do stadium as well as other sports facilities or parks often also doubled as entertainment venues. Together with a more dynamic atmosphere for music performances, the 1950s and 1960s also witnessed the expansion of a variety of sports, enriching and bustling the tranquil city of Huế.

Modern **sports** from the French colonial period to the republic regime had been regarded as one of the powerful entertainment tools of “nation–building.” In the 1950s, government of Huế built and expanded sports facilities where people of Huế spent more leisure time as practitioners and spectators at sports games and competitions. The range of sports available varied from soccer, volleyball, badminton, table tennis, running, bicycling, etc. attracting hundreds of young inhabitants. The most popular sport of Huế then was certainly soccer, with several teams in each urban districts and fun games of children in all neighborhoods every afternoon. In 1957, Thành Nội district, for instance, had four soccer teams and one volleyball team, and continued to recruit members for basketball and ping-pong team,¹⁸⁴ while in February 1959, Tả Ngạn district had 163 members in five sports teams.¹⁸⁵

Playing sports was one of the most simple and joyful ways to gather Vietnamese and

¹⁸² Senior Singer Minh Mẫn, interview by author, Huế, August 19, 2014; Senior Singer Thanh Hương, interview by author, Huế, August 20, 2014.

¹⁸³ *Daily Reports of the Police Department on General Situation in the City of Huế in 1962*, no. 361.

¹⁸⁴ *Reports of the District of Tả Ngạn and Thành Nội in 1957*, TTPH, ACH, no. 290; *Monthly Reports of the District of Thành Nội in 1959*, TTPH, ACH, no. 240.

¹⁸⁵ *Documentation on Activities of the District of Tả Ngạn in 1959*, TTPH, ACH, no. 999; *Monthly Reports of the Police Department of the District of Tả Ngạn in 1959*, TTPH, ACH, no. 315.

foreigners in one team in the 1950s – 1960s. The Huế sports club – as known among its members with its original French name Le Cercle Sportif – at 5 Lê Lợi road, founded on February 7, 1938 by decree 4751 of Resident Superior Maurice Fernand Graffeuil of Annam (the central region of Vietnam in French Indochina).¹⁸⁶ According to report on December 2, 1957, the sports club was very active as a French style social and sports hangout of 160 members, including 143 Vietnamese, eight French, six Americans, and three Chinese.¹⁸⁷ Students like Bửu Ý still remembered numerous afternoons he had spent at “Le Cercle” watching ping pong, enjoying iced lime juice, and reading French colorful magazines and literature.¹⁸⁸

Of the eleven Vietnamese sports clubs in the city in December 1957, the largest one was the police sports society of 600 members; others had from 35 to 100 members depending on the size of the neighborhoods and the kind of sports.¹⁸⁹ Thanks to the government support, a growing number of city inhabitants practiced various types of sports every morning and afternoon in all three districts. Every day in 1957, from 5:30 a.m. 40 members of sports associations in Hữu Ngạn, from 5 to 7 p.m. 50 young people practiced aerobic exercises at the Tự Do Stadium, and around 4:30 p.m. 50 members of sport associations in Tả Ngạn at Thành Nội sports arena.¹⁹⁰ Sports were also popular in educational institutes: seven schools hired coaches to train 3941 students in April 1959.¹⁹¹ The locals also enjoyed many sports spectacles on special occasions or monthly friendly matches in the city. In 1959, for instance, 6 football matches, 3 basket ball matches, and 1 pingpong in April; 9 football matches, 4 basket ball matches, 9 volley ball matches, 34 tennis matches, and 2 bicycle races in July; 2 football matches in August; 9 football

¹⁸⁶ *List of Social Organizations and Professional Guilds in Thừa Thiên 1957*, TTPH, ACH, no. 308.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁸ Bửu Ý, interview by author, Huế, August 2, 2015.

¹⁸⁹ *List of Social Organizations and Professional Guilds in Thừa Thiên 1957*, TTPH, ACH, no. 308.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁹¹ Report of April 1959. *Monthly Reports of Thừa Thiên Province from May to December 1959*, FRPO, NAC, no. 284.

matches, 3 bicycle races, 2 running, and 1 swimming in September contributed to enrich the entertainment life in the city.

Festivals: From the first days of every year in 1957 – 1962, the city of Huế appeared more festive and colorful with the birthday celebration of President Ngô Đình Diệm on January 3 with many ceremonies, musical shows, sports games, and a running race of the whole central region of the RVN.¹⁹² At the national level, the government and people of Huế celebrated the Woman's Day and Trung sisters on the 6th of 2nd lunar month (with contests for woman such as cooking, sewing, and sports matches),¹⁹³ the labor day of May 1,¹⁹⁴ the double seven of July 7,¹⁹⁵ children festival of the 15th of 8th lunar month,¹⁹⁶ and the national day October 26 with lots of signs, banners, mass meetings, peace prayer ceremonies for the nation and the people, exhibitions, lion dance, music performance, sports games. Of 20 days off with full salaries of government officials, many national holidays and ceremonies commemorated national heroes or people such as Hùng King, General Trần Hưng Đạo, Trung sisters, national martyrs, etc.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹² *Documentation on the City of Huế in 1957*, TTPH, ACH, no. 585.

¹⁹³ *Daily Reports of the Police Department on General Situation in the City of Huế in 1962*, no. 361; *Documentation on Activities of Social Organizations, Political Parties, and Religious Association in 1958*, TTPH, ACH, no. 820; *Documentation on Activities of the District of Tả Ngạn in 1962*, no. 1652.

¹⁹⁴ *Daily Reports of the Police Department on General Situation in the City of Huế in 1958*, no. 301.

¹⁹⁵ *Daily Reports of the Police Department on General Situation in the City of Huế in 1962*, no. 361; *Documentation on Activities of Social Organizations of Thừa Thiên Province in 1962*, TTPH, ACH, no. 1640; *Documentation on Ceremonies of Thừa Thiên Province in 1962*, TTPH, ACH, no. 1581.

¹⁹⁶ *Daily Reports of the Police Department on General Situation in the City of Huế in 1962*, no. 361.

¹⁹⁷ *Documentation of the Provincial Buddhist Association of Thừa Thiên Huế in 1957*, TTPH, ACH, no. 536.



Ceremony to honor Trưng sisters on the 6th of lunar month Two in Huế. Source: Family collection of Nguyễn Thị Thanh Tâm.

Additionally, many professional guilds, social associations, and neighborhoods celebrated and worshiped the saints, Nguyễn emperors, forefather's death day, the heaven on many occasions. In those sacral rites, the most respected man, often the oldest in the community, as the primary high priest (chủ bái) made reports to the ancestors, the Heaven, the forefathers, and prayed peace for the nation, happiness for the people, wishing a fair weather for the new crops, or development of their occupation of jewelry, tailor, etc. The rich history of the nation and the land of Huế added more ceremonies to the list for almost every month of the lunar calendar, including one day in February or August (Worship of Land, “Cúng đất”), May 5 (Killing the Worms, “Đoan Ngọ”) May 23 (Losing the Capital, “Thất thủ kinh đô”). The Buddhists celebrated on April 8 the Buddha's birthday (Phật Đản), and on July 15 (the Ghost Festival, “Vu Lan”). The Vietnamese in Huế also attended their clan's rites and family's annual anniversaries and ceremonies, such as ancestors' death anniversaries (up to five generations) of both paternal and maternal sides. National, communal, clan, family, personal life events, kept all people of Huế busy the whole year long.

Numerous accounts have been written on Huế's lifestyle and cultural traditions of this rich

and nostalgic historical community. From the birth day to funeral, all personal life events had to follow a diverse range of cultural customs and regulations, dos and don'ts, inherited from the ancestors and traditional beliefs. Wedding ceremony, for example, included three basic ceremonies and could be as sophisticated as six or more rites with all kinds of conventions and mores in conversations and prescribed orders, times and places, process, presents, clothes, foods, which could take several months to a year to prepare.¹⁹⁸ Ancestor worship, Confucius, Buddhist or Catholic values influenced the lifestyle and rituals of all rich and poor, notable and ordinary families, including funerals, death anniversaries, housing inauguration, opening ceremony of new business, etc.

While individual ceremonies could be organized in a sophisticated or simple way due to the family conditions, the national ceremonies were well prepared for months with full of events of all kinds. The biggest holiday of the RVN in 1957 – 1962 was the National Day of October 26. In 1958, for example, every day from October 24 to 31, film screenings, music performances, sports games (football, volley ball, basket ball, bicycle race, tennis, badminton, etc.), in multiple venues excited the whole city. Public and private agencies collected donations from charity associations, social organizations, including money, fabric, clothes, blankets, towels, notebooks, cookies and candies, milk, soaps, etc. to present to the poor, orphans, excellent students from low-income families, etc.¹⁹⁹ On October 26, multiple events occurred since early morning. The following was formal procedure of the provincial headquarters.

5:30 a.m.: Peace Prayer Ceremonies at Phủ Cam Cathedral and Diệu Đế Pagoda

6:20 a.m.: Lay wreath on grave of Ngô Đình Diệm's father

6:50 a.m.: visit martyr and Phan Bội Châu shrine (1 flower bouquet)

¹⁹⁸ *Documentation on Activities of the District of Hữu Ngạn in 1961*, TTPH, ACH, no. 1434.

¹⁹⁹ *Documentation on the National Day in Thừa Thiên Province on October 26, 1958*. TTPH, ACH, no. 766.

7:20 a.m.: visit Ngô Đình Diệm's mother to wish her longevity (3 flower bouquets)

7:30 a.m.: All presented at Phu Văn Lâu square

8:00 a.m.: Greet National flag with 21-gun salute, following with mass meeting and marches of military, security, and civilian groups.

(All marching members were in dress uniforms and weapons (without ammunition) for military personnel, and formal clothes for all others, no sunglasses and watches, shining shoes and belts, neatly looking.)

2:00 p.m.: Various delegations visit National Hospitals, Charity Associations, social organizations, etc.

7 p.m.: two lantern procession groups in Hữu Ngạn and Tả Ngạn with lion dance and a boat procession decorated with light and lanterns along the Hương river.

Slogans and banners:

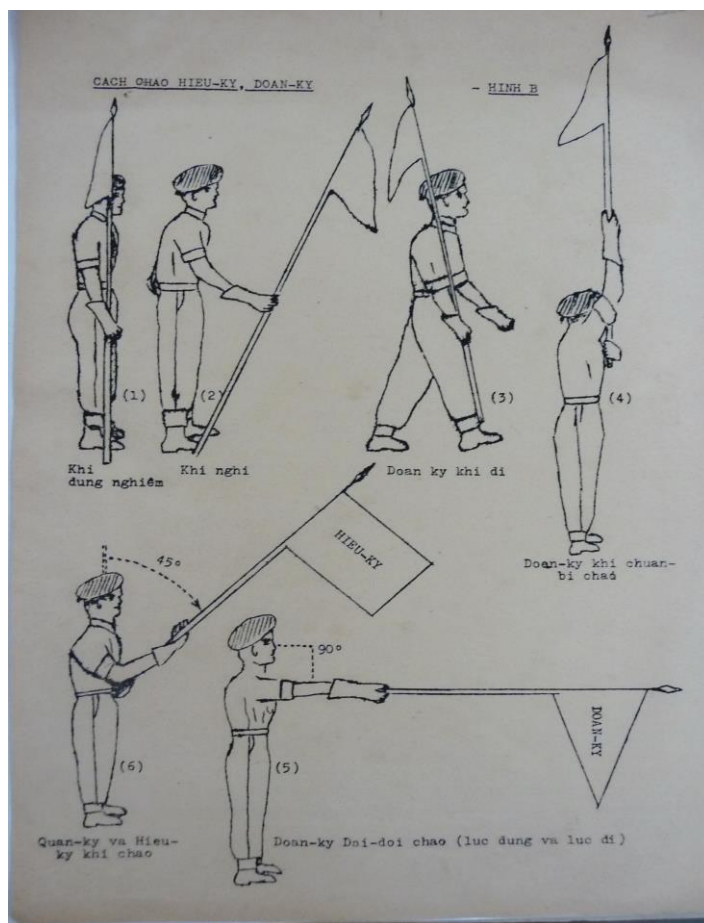
“Celebrate 26 October // Gratitude to President Ngô, forever deeply engraved” [“Đón mừng 26 tháng 10 // Ôn Ngô Tổng thống, đời đời ghi sâu”];

“Happy 26 October // Sweep Out The Feudalists-Colonialists-Communists, build a warm and full life” [“Mừng ngày 26 tháng 10 // Quét Phong Thực Cộng, xây đời ấm no”];

“Exterminating the Việt Cộng and reunifying the territory is defending the Constitution of the RVN” [“Tiêu diệt Việt Cộng, thống nhất lãnh thổ là bảo vệ Hiến pháp Việt Nam Cộng Hoà”];

Happy Celebration of the Republic, remember our Northern countrymen writhing under the yoke of the Việt Cộng” [“Vui Tết Cộng Hoà, hãy nhớ tới đồng bào miền Bắc đang rên siết

dưới ách Việt Cộng”²⁰⁰



Guide to hold high flags and standards at the morning meeting on the National Day, October 26, 1958 in Huế. Source: *Documentation on the National Day in Thừa Thiên Province on October 26, 1958*. TTPH, ACH, no. 766.

Travel and Tourism: With its Royal Mountain and River of Perfumes, Imperial Palace, King Tombs, Huế offered abundant sightseeing sites, tourist destinations for locals and visitors. From 30 minutes of leisure to an afternoon off, residents of Huế could walk or ride their bikes out to enjoy breeze of the river over the large square of Phu Văn Lâu by the citadel, or the lotus smell from the Serenity of Heart Lake Tịnh Tâm, or hike or camp on the hills in the suburb. From the citadel by bike, it took only about 10 minutes to arrive at the antique pagoda Thiên Mụ, less than 30 minutes to Ngự Bình mountain with many old charming temples and the famous

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

“bánh bèo” restaurant (a special cake of Huế made of rice powder, shrimp, and fish sauce), or less than an hour to the King Tombs or Thuận An beach. Some hot summer nights, sleeping on boats along the Hương River with the fresh breeze, folk singing, food and drinks from other vendor boats, became a favorite and unforgettable memories among families and children of Huế.²⁰¹

The feelings were mutual with foreigners. Marybeth Clark, an USAID secretary in Sài Gòn, first visited Huế in the summer 1962, shared the “wonderful world” Huế opened up to her, “we went out in a boat on the river in the evening and talked and joked with the old ladies who came out to sell us food. I walked in the market, and the women there, instead of saying “Madame” as they often did in Sài Gòn, spoke to me in Vietnamese and smiled those wonderful warm Vietnamese smiles.”²⁰² The Purple Forbidden City inside the imperial citadel, Tombs of Emperor Minh Mạng, Tự Đức, Thiệu Trị, Khải Định, Thiên Mụ pagoda, or cruises along the Hương River served as the frequent destinations of numerous tourists to Huế. From RVN government delegations, Heads of 14 provinces in the South (March 3, 1959), to Christian group from Sài Gòn on their way to visit Our Lady of La Vang Church in Quảng Trị Province (April 10, 1959), to all kinds of diplomatic delegations or students, historians, officials, etc. of Europe, Great Britain, Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia, Laos, and other international foundations, associations from the UN, FAO, ECAFE (the UN’s Economy Commission for Asia and the Far East).²⁰³ From 6 to 7 days or some 20 days monthly, the city welcomed groups of 3 to 20 or more who stopped by Huế for only a few hours or a few days, enjoying lunch and dinner at “Quốc Tế” International restaurant, having drinks or snacks at Le cercle sportif, and staying at either Thuận

²⁰¹ Tôn Thất Viễn Bào, interview by author, Huế, February 19, 2014.

²⁰² Marybeth Clark, *Debrief of an AID Secretary in Saigon and IVS Teachers in Hue, Vietnam, 1961 – 1967*, (Hawaii: Asia Training Center, UH/AID, n.d.), 30.

²⁰³ *Daily Reports of the Police Department on General Situation in the City of Huế in 1958*, no. 301; *Documentation on Activities of Social Organizations, Political Parties, and Religious Association in 1958*, TTPH, ACH, no. 820; *Monthly Reports of the District of Thành Nội in 1959*, TTPH, ACH, no. 240.

Hoá or Morin hotel. Their arrival and departure time, destinations, means of transportation, interactions they had, contacts they made, were addressed in detail in police reports.

Worship and Pilgrimages: One of the most popular destinations of both local and foreign visitors to Huế were religious temples for practices, tranquil atmosphere, or simply some fresh scenes after a long day of work or study. In the 1960s, Huế also served as the centre of religion of Vietnamese people, the home of Buddhism, Catholicism, Cao Dai, Protestantism, and Thiên tiên thánh giáo, which enriched Huế's religious diversity and physical appearance with various pagodas, churches, temples, and shrines. In the former imperial capital, religion was taken more seriously than elsewhere in the nation.

Ancestor-worship has served as a core cultural norm of Vietnamese since the birth of the nation. In Huế, ancestor worship and prayer played a pivotal role in spiritual life and daily practices. In every single family, the altar was placed at the most solemn area in the house; ancestors were “invited” to join all big ceremonies, anniversaries, and family reunion meals; and stayed “alive” to support their descendants. In a daily practice, either bowing their heads in front of the altar at home or visiting cemeteries outside of the city, Huế people communicated and prayed to their ancestors for better outcomes of life events, or sudden incidents. Incense, offerings, reading and burning of the petition, ghost money, and paper items were strongly believed to ensure the deceased a happy afterlife.

After a thousand years as the most common religion of the country, self-identified Buddhists constituted up to 80% of population of Huế. Theravada Buddhist values had firmly imbedded in the culture of Huế. In this land of many centuries-old famous pagodas, the tranquil and peaceful atmosphere inside religious places became so familiar with many since childhood and remained as a sacred sphere in their life, as they believed in Buddhism as natural faith of

their lives. While Thiên Mụ pagoda was the second kindergarten of Thái Kim Lan and her cousins,²⁰⁴ Trần Kiêm Đoàn had always thought that everyone must have a Buddha to worship until he entered a local Catholic school to realize there was also such a big Jesus to venerate.²⁰⁵ Many grew up in Buddhist environment keenly believing in Buddhist Dharma naturally as their ancestors did for many generations.

Thừa Thiên provincial Buddhist Church was nevertheless labeled as an association rather than a religion as stated in Decree number 10 signed by Head of State Bảo Đại in August 6, 1950 like other religions (Thiên Tiên Thánh Giáo of Central Region, Evangelical Church, but not Catholic church).²⁰⁶ According to multiple Buddhist records, there were plenty of examples of anti-Buddhist activities since the beginning of Ngô Đình Diệm presidency, such as restricting its power and rights, isolating pagodas, arresting Buddhist monks, deleting the Buddhist ceremonies in the national holiday calendar, encouraging the anti-Buddhist literature, etc. Buddhist grievances rapidly grew during 1960 – 1962 while all pagodas were still packed up the 1st and 15th of every lunar month and daily prayers with recitation and wooden bells still filling the city.

After the revival movement (Phong trào Chấn hưng Phật giáo) in the 1920s – 1930s, Buddhism grew in strength in Huế with the Vietnamese Buddhist Association's Central Region Branch headquartered at Từ Đàm pagoda. Buddhist values, regulations, prayers penetrated into daily life of common people through activities of Buddhist families (Gia Đình Phật tử), publications like *Liên Hoa Journal* (1958 – 1966), education institutions (Bồ Đề and Hàm Long high schools), medical clinics at pagodas (like Từ Đàm) and Buddhist congregations (Tây Lộc congregation), and various charity works. Pagoda of Thiên Mụ (est. 1601), Bảo Quốc (1670), Từ

²⁰⁴ Thái Kim Lan, *Phượng trên trời Hải đường dưới đất* [Phoenix on the Sky, Malus on the Ground].

²⁰⁵ Trần Kiêm Đoàn, “Sen đồng phơi Lửa hạ 1963” (“Lotus Under Summer Fire 1963”). In *1963-2013: Năm mươi năm nhìn lại (1963-2013: Fifty Years Looking Back)*, vol. 3, 111.

²⁰⁶ *List of Social Associations, Organizations, and Professional Guilds with Offices in the City of Huế 1959*, TTPH, ACH, no. 321.

Đàm (1841), and Diệu Đế (1844) all had rich and long history since the Nguyễn Lord and Nguyễn emperors strengthened their power in the new land.

The Catholic Phủ Cam Cathedral and other churches set their footprints in the imperial capital since the French expanded their influence as early as the seventeenth century, attracting more and more believers in 1957–1962. Under the leadership of the Catholic President Ngô Đình Diệm, the RVN regime in the late 1950s and early 1960s favored Catholics in public service promotion. With the construction of Phủ Cam Cathedral and Our Lady of Perpetual Help Church (Đức Mẹ Hằng Cứu Giúp) in 1959 - 1962, Catholicism continued to expand and develop with a firm foundation under the Ngô Đình Diệm regime. Christian schools (such as Pellerin, Jean d’Arc established in 1905, 1906)²⁰⁷, with dormitories, libraries, restaurants with free rice for the poor laborers (only charging food), free medicines for the poors, communal hall for sports practice and music performances, contributed to enriching various fields of life. All year long, Christian community in the Phủ Cam neighborhood, the Our Lady of Perpetual Help, St. Francis Xavier, Tây Linh, Tây Lộc, Jean d’Arc sedulously joined weekly mass and celebrations, as well as national ceremony on holidays. The only Christian holidays that attracted non-Christian practitioners was probably Christmas, when hundreds of common people curiously visited Phủ Cam Cathedral to listen to choirs and view with their eyes numerous colorful neon lights and flowers.

Besides “official” Christianity and the most popular Buddhism, a minority of Huế’s population practiced local religions of different roots and variation. Đại Đạo Tam Kỳ Phổ Độ or Cao Đài (the Great Faith for the third Universal Redemption – Caodaism), founded in Tây Ninh in southern Vietnam in 1926, expanded to Huế in 1931, located their church on 8 Duy Tân

²⁰⁷ Nguyễn, Kim Bình, *Lược Sử Giáo Xứ Phủ Cam (1682 – 1982)* [*Brief History of Phủ Cam Church (1682 – 1982)*] (Huế: [s.n.], 1996), 86.

street.²⁰⁸ They sometimes welcomed their fellows from Đà Nẵng or the south to show respects to eclectic venerable saints of Victor Hugo, Sun Yat Sen, and a 15th century Vietnamese mystic Nguyễn Bình Khiêm. Thiên Tiên Thánh Giáo cult in Huế referred to the worship of the Mother goddess of water and female saint, Thiên Y A Na (Po Nagar) of Cham ethnic people. This indigenous religion attracted hundreds of believers in Huế to their biggest holidays on the 3rd of lunar March at Huệ Nam temple (or Hòn Chén temple) with the “lên đồng” practice. Many laymen of Thiên Tiên Thánh Giáo cult were members of floating villages in Tả Ngạn district.²⁰⁹

The tranquil land of Huế offered the ideal atmosphere for many devout believers to found their own shrines or temples right within their premises for home practice and prayers for blessings and mercies. In Thành Nội district alone there were 10 communal houses (đình), 9 pagodas (chùa), 10 temples (miếu), 9 shrines (điện), 34 small temples (am), 15 worship venues (cảnh) in 10 wards in September 1958,²¹⁰ many of which were centuries old with unique architecture, ceremonies, serving a certain amount of religious families in local neighborhoods.

Beyond spiritual function, religious associations played remarkable roles in relief and aid activities in the city of Huế in the 1950s – 1960s. St. Vincent charity congregation of Francis church opened a free preschool for children those from 1 to 7 years old at 99 Phan Đình Phùng to help poor laborer parents between 6 a.m. and 6:30 p.m. starting from April 7, 1958;²¹¹ Cầu Kho congregation served as an intermediate agency to distribute gifts of the American Catholic church to poor families (February 1959);²¹² or Buddhist congregation Tây Lộc repaired Thái

²⁰⁸ *Daily Reports of the Police Department on General Situation in the City of Huế in 1958*, no. 301.

²⁰⁹ *Daily Reports of the Police Department of the City of Huế in 1957*, no. 289.

²¹⁰ *Documentation on Activities of Social Organizations, Political Parties, and Religious Association in 1958*, no. 820.

²¹¹ *Daily Reports of the Police Department on General Situation in the City of Huế in 1958*, no. 301; *Documentation on Activities of Social Organizations, Political Parties, and Religious Association in 1958*, no. 820.

²¹² *Monthly Reports of Various Provincial Departments in 1959*, no. 316.

Phiên street on March 11, 1959²¹³ and dispersed one ton of rice to 157 poor families on September 18, 1962;²¹⁴ the Evangelical Church distributed rice, corn flour to the poor on June 9, 1962.²¹⁵

2.3 Social Services

Joining the efforts of religious aids societies, **social organizations** played an active role in assisting the poor and families with difficult situations, reportedly constituting more than half of the population. Statistics of four wards in Tả Ngạn district in 1957 showed 60% of the population were the poor.

Wards	Phú Cát	Phú Hậu	Phú Mỹ	Phú Thọ	Total
Poor	8603 (56%)	1460 (79%)	2024 (49%)	1587 (96%)	13674 (60%)
Average	6200	276	1700	50	8226
Middle class	400	110	300	10	820
Rich	15	0	100	0	115
Total	15218	1846	4124	1647	22835

Population categorized by living condition in four wards in Tả Ngạn district in 1957. Source: *Documentation on Activities of the District of Hữu Ngạn in 1957*, TTPH, ACH, no. 649.

As an old Vietnamese saying goes, “the good leaves wrap the bad ones,” the good Samaritans of Huế, regardless of their own difficulties, were willing to share with others their limited resources. Throughout the year, one often saw various efforts to support the poor from the charity institutions, non-profit social organizations, and individuals who were certainly not rich, particularly on special occasions of the year. Sometimes the loudspeaker vehicles of the Department of Information ran around the city to announce that the city was collecting old

²¹³ *Monthly Reports of the District of Thành Nội in 1959*, no. 240.

²¹⁴ *Daily Reports of the Police Department on General Situation in the City of Huế in 1962*, no. 361.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*

clothes and would pick them up at each household for charity purposes.²¹⁶

In each district of the city, various charity associations, relief camps, and medical stations such as Dục Anh, Bảo Anh, Phước Thiện Bảo Sanh, Hàng Đường Relief Camp, and Gia Hội Center for Children and Pregnant Women (Trung tâm Bảo trợ Dục phụ và Nhi đồng Gia Hội), stayed active in 1957 – 1962. They were either sponsored by the state (via the Department of Social Works of the Central Region), or funded by good will of local good Samaritans, or periodically fundraising activities (movie screenings at Nguyễn Văn Yển cinema, May 1958).²¹⁷ These institutions mainly aimed at providing food, medical supplies, daily necessities to the poor, particularly in the aftermath of natural disasters or regularly on occasions of national ceremonies. They built up camps for homeless to stay for free on Triệu Ấu street (Hữu Ngạn district, December 1957), nursing home for disabled veterans in Tây Lộc (Thành Nội district, December 1957),²¹⁸ weekly distributed groceries and medicines (every Sunday in Tả Ngạn district, 1957). They also established preschool and kindergarten to look after and educate up to 320 children for parents to work at daytime (Bảo Anh institute, Thành Nội district, 1959),²¹⁹ awarded scholarship for poor students with excellent records, or opened restaurants with low price meal, orphanages, vocational schools for street kids, etc. The most effective and important community service of charity institutions was relief aid during and after annual storms and floods. While rice, food, fabric, money were instantly distributed to families affected by natural disasters, fundraising fairs for victims of floods and storms were often attended a few months later.²²⁰

²¹⁶ Ibid.

²¹⁷ *Daily Reports of the Police Department on General Situation in the City of Huế in 1958*, no. 301.

²¹⁸ *Documentation on Activities of the District of Hữu Ngạn in 1957*, no. 649.

²¹⁹ *Monthly Reports of the District of Thành Nội in 1959*, no. 240; *Documentation on Activities of the District of Thành Nội in 1959*, no. 988.

²²⁰ *Documentation on Activities of the District of Tả Ngạn in 1962*, no. 1652.

Unlike the case of natural disasters or regular aid where the amount of supplies or money were equally dispersed, some individuals with severely harsh living conditions were considered for special aid from the government. Nguyễn Thị Kim Quy, 35 and a mother of 6, finally received 17,000 VND payment for her soldier husband's death after almost two years. The power line to her house at 15 Tổng Duy Tân were too old that short-circuited and set the her straw and wood frame house and all the money on fire at midnight of January 17, 1962, the total damage was 60,000 VND. The fire was extinguished at 12:35 a.m. of January 18, and only one day later the Head of the Police Department of Thành Nội district sent a request to the Mayor of the city of Huế for some financial aid for her family to prepare for the coming Tết holiday. Meanwhile Bùi Thị Thu, 33 and unemployed, whose disabled husband had left his home after a car accident, had to pawn her house at 14 Phan Châu Trinh to feed her eight kids from 3 to 16. Upon her letter on February 15, 1962, the Hữu Ngạn district quickly responded her with 200 VND on February 19, and the city 2,000 VND two weeks later.²²¹ This amount of money was part of the city's socio-economic budget which also supported 97,300 VND to 415 poor families in Thành Nội, and 8,000 VND for 16 families suffered from house fires on September 6 and 7, 1962.²²²

Charity institutions were only one type of social organization in the city of Huế in 1957 – 1962. The local government categorized its social associations, societies, clubs, guilds into five different groups. The Professional Union (Liên Hiệp Nghiệp Đoàn Thừa Thiên) serving as the umbrella organization of many guilds of tailors, shopkeepers, custodians, bakers, butchers, barbers, vendors, drivers, etc. At the time of July 1957, 47 professional associations were

²²¹ *Documentation on Activities of the District of Hữu Ngạn in 1962*, TTPH, ACH, no. 1653.

²²² *Daily Reports of the Police Department on General Situation in the City of Huế in 1962*, no. 361.

active,²²³ aiming at protecting its members' interests over treatment between boss and workers (workers of the power plant complained about their abundant working hours against labor law in June 1957),²²⁴ or on the market (claiming of 24 footwear shopkeepers at Đông Ba to the city Mayor on July 18, 1962),²²⁵ organizing training programs and study sessions to share successful experiences, visiting members with health or family problems to enhance fraternity and mutual support. The most common problem that restricted activities and full functions of these guilds was shortage of funds. Members of the executive board were, despite their enthusiasm, busy earning their living, which was probably the main reasons for 10 of 35 workers guilds of the professional union of Thừa Thiên province to stop all activities in 1959.²²⁶

The second largest type of social institution was the fraternity, charity, assistance, mutual associations. This category consisted of people with a similar interest of sharing prudential supports to others from the same hometown (either in the northern or southern provinces like Quảng Bình, Quảng Nam or fellows with difficult lives (veterans, alumni of Quốc Học high school). The other 3 categories of organization were groups of political and cultural societies; religious associations; sports clubs. Each of these social organizations had its own regulations elected executives boards, collected membership every several years, and held regular meetings at central offices (usually located at the organization leader's house).

The charity associations and sports clubs, as analyzed earlier, were the most active bodies with daily activities and frequent meetings, while the professional guilds, cultural organizations and mutual associations were less active, mostly because of the financial problems and lack of members' engagement, as they only met each other several times per year. The occasions with

²²³ *Documentation of the City of Huế in 1957*, TTPH, ACH, no. 590.

²²⁴ *Monthly Reports of Various Provincial Departments in 1957*, TTPH, ACH, no. 291.

²²⁵ *Documentation on Activities of the District of Tân Ngạn in 1962*, no. 1652.

²²⁶ *List of Social Associations, Organizations, and Professional Guilds with Offices in the City of Huế 1959*, no. 321.

most attendance were the death anniversaries of the forefathers of professional guilds (of tailors, jewelers); prayer ceremonies of religious associations; or competitions of sports clubs.

Besides institutions founded in order to support their own members, there were also professional associations that both assisted their members and utilized their occupation's advantages to benefit the public, such as the Vietnamese Association of Medicine and Pharmacy branch in Huế. This organ of doctors and pharmacists sometimes organized their own charity activities thanks to its members' willingness and generosity: they prescribed and treated (with traditional medicine) 70 poor patients on June 16, 1958.²²⁷

Healthcare

Joining the urbanization process of the city, the healthcare system of Huế improved its capacity, facilities, and services in all respects for its more and more populated society. In the middle of the twentieth century many Vietnamese still applied traditional and local sayings and experiences from previous generations in treatment, many of which must have inherited from the best doctors of the emperor's family. In their garden houses, many residents planted medical plants, herbs, roots, that could be used to cure common and minor flu, cold, sore throat, toothache, stomachache, bruises, etc. The oriental medicine and therapy with oil, herbs, and leaves (the northern medicine originally from China, and the southern one from Vietnam) were widely practiced and shared among relatives, neighbors, and friends. However this could be abused by some criminals: January 30, 1959, Nguyễn Văn Tâm, under the guise of Professor Tri Tâm who could cure all kinds of deadly diseases with old traditional mythical treatment, was caught for deceiving 4,000 VND of three credulous families in Tả Ngạn districts.²²⁸

²²⁷ *Daily Reports of the Police Department on General Situation in the City of Huế in 1958*, no. 301.

²²⁸ *Monthly Reports of Various Provincial Departments in 1959*, no. 316.

In the meantime, the Western healthcare popularized among common people with French educated doctors, young generations of doctors, medical physicians, and nurses graduated from Medical School of University of Sài Gòn (established in 1946 as a branch of the French Université de l'Indochine). More and more dedicated and enthusiastic students of the newly founded School of Medicine of the University of Huế (est. March 28, 1957) contributed to spread out knowledge of scientific medical treatment. The people of Huế in the 1950s and 60s became familiar with antibiotics and vaccination, visited hospital for surgeries and treatment by French or German doctors, and under the observation of students. Besides the University of Huế, Medical Assistant and Midwife Schools provided short-term training programs for local and regional needs.

With centuries-long and rich history as the capital of the nation, Huế was home of the oldest Western style hospital in the nation – the National Central Hospital of Huế established in 1894. By 1957, the hospital remained the biggest hospital in central Vietnam, going through renovation in 1961, funded by WHO with 100 more beds for children.²²⁹ In July 1957, the hospital admitted more than one thousand patients every day from Huế, Thừa Thiên province, and other provinces in the region for various examinations, and operations.²³⁰ The number varied due to many reasons, for instance, the high temperature of the tropical summer caused more flu and sickness, then some rains helped decrease the number of patients in July 1957.²³¹

²²⁹ "Điều dưỡng và Nhi khoa." ["Nursing and Child Care"], *Thế giới Tự Do* [*Free World*], no. 4, Vol. X. American Information Service, (1961): 30.

²³⁰ *Monthly Reports of Thừa Thiên Provincial Department of Public Works in 1958*, TTPH, ACH, no. 777.

²³¹ *Documentation of the City of Huế in 1957*, TTPH, ACH, no. 590.

1959		April	May	June	July	August
Patients	Adult	12523	10931	11735	13439	15404
	Children	183	160	183	202	197
Checks and minor examination	Adult	42736	38022	42436	42380	44371
	Children	2288	2039	2621	3284	3407
Surgeries	Major	59	67	72	66	71
	Minor	200	225	430	368	599
Eye operations		163	168	137	79	127
X Ray exams		1206	704	927	508	1046
Giving birth		186	183	248	248	333
Antenatal examinations		347	336	410	315	368

Main activities of the National Hospital of Huế in 1959. Source: *Monthly Reports of Thừa Thiên Province from May to December 1959*, FRPO, NAC, no. 284.

Hospital records indicated the currently most common diseases including malaria, chicken pox, typhoid, measles, pertussis, dysentery, and pneumonia, treated with the modern equipment and American and French drugs.²³² The office of social work of the hospital moreover supported the poor inpatients with serious diseases, long-term stays, or ones from out of town with hard living conditions. The office visited and encouraged many patients every day, delivered free newspapers and books, organized entertainment activities like film screenings, and assisted its patients with money to buy medicines and train or bus tickets to return home.

1959	April	May	June	August
Visit (patients)	60	60	100	90
Film screenings organized (times)	2	1	2	1
Newspapers and books distributed (times)	1	3	2	3
Money given for poor patients to return to their hometown (in VND)	2,600	485	600	697
Money given for poor patients to buy medicines (in VND)	10,391	4,523	13,276	15,650

²³² *Request Forms of the City of Huế in 1961*, TTPH, ACH, no. 1216.

Main activities of the Social Office of the National Hospital of Huế in 1959. Source: *Monthly Reports of Thừa Thiên Province from May to December 1959*, no. 284.

The national central hospital of Huế was certainly the best, yet not the only medical facility in town. With minor problems, such as bruises, infected wounds, burns, poisoning, sores and blisters, cold, sore throat, headaches, toothaches, etc. the local patients of Huế could visit the nearby public and private clinics located sparsely in three districts. In 1957 – 1962 these medical facilities, including midwives, medical stations, nursing homes, and doctor’s offices, provided multiple services for local inhabitants. While private doctor offices served mostly middle class and well-off customers, the medical stations offered free treatment and medicines for poor patients and free services for pregnant women.

In 1957 – 1962 the Department of Health of the city of Huế drew special attention to public health, particularly prevention of diseases by vaccinating young children and enhancing people’s awareness of sanitation. The most significant accomplishment was a mass vaccination campaign to prevent three diseases of pertussis, tetanus, and diphtheria for children from two to six month old three times every other month. In addition to study sections in the whole year of 1962, the department sent multiple groups of about 20 to 30 nurses and assistants, sometimes led by the Head of the Department, to all neighborhoods in the city. With many primary schools opening as public venues, hundreds to thousands of children were vaccinated in a day.

Dates in July	2	3	4	6	9	10	11	12	13	14
Children	518	1009	1152	1460	1987	1188	1825	1382	1210	1079

Dates in Sep.	7	8	10	11	13	14	15	20	21	22	26
Children	510	500	306	570	350	492	412	481	555	440	470

Numbers of children (from 2 to 6 months of age) vaccinated against pertussis, tetanus, and diphtheria in 1962. Source: *Daily Reports of the Police Department on General Situation in the City of Huế in 1962*, no. 361.

The Department also organized numerous study sessions to educate people about the

fundamentals of personal hygiene, housing and neighborhood sanitation, such as keeping the public riverbank laundry spots, wells, and water taps clean and clear to avoid mosquitos and flies spreading infectious diseases. The Department of Health, in cooperation with the Police Department, conducted regular inspections of markets, restaurants, bakeries, coffee shops, drink carts, hotels, etc. to examine the product quality, sanitation of the venue and environment health. For example, in the second quarter of 1957, the office in charge of sanitation took samples of the fresh water that the water plant of Huế supplied for the city for 21 bacteria tests and 4 chemical ones; closed temporarily four ice cream shops and one ice cube workshop for their inadequate sanitary condition. On another analysis of four samples of lime juice, one of which, the “Lemonade Sport,” had harmful ingredients for health, the city prosecuted the shop owner, confiscated all products, eliminated the production venue. Particularly thanks to these strong hands, the health care system in Huế in 1957–1962 appeared generally good in the eyes of doctors, professors and students of medical school of the University of Huế like Bùi Minh Đức, Dương Đình Châu, Phạm Thị Xuân Quế, Tôn Thất Kỳ.²³³

Education

If the city of Huế with the biggest hospital of the region attracted a certain number of patients and their family members staying for a short time, Huế as the national education center drew a much larger amount of young people to live with Huế for years, many turning this city their second home for the rest of their life. Thanks to the rapid development of education, the best students of all over places gathered in Huế, continued and enhanced the long tradition and love of study, tutoring and motivating local students of Huế from early grades to better study and serve the community. After graduation, these students in turn dispersed to other schools

²³³ Dương Đình Châu, interview by author, Huế, August 13, 2014; Bùi Minh Đức, interview by author, Los Angeles, CA, November 23, 2015; Phạm Thị Xuân Quế, Tôn Thất Kỳ, interview.

throughout the country, introducing Hué culture to the new lands and remembering the period of youth they had spent with Hué.

In Vietnam, education had always been a prestigious field. The educational system of the RVN in its early years still followed the French system with public and private schools, primary and high schools and colleges with three principal philosophies of humanistic, nationalistic, and liberal education. Education, like most things in Vietnam then, was highly centralized with standard textbooks, national curriculum and exams, and teachers were appointed to their specific schools by the Ministry of Education. In Hué, about 100 schools of all levels recruited thousands of students per year. The following figures clearly showed, among others, the gender imbalance in both professor and student forces in Hué in the late 1950s.

	Schools	Classes	Teachers / Lecturers		Students	
			Male	Female	Male	Female
Public School						
College	5	29	93	6	650	145
High School	4	101	114	48	4300	1698
Pedagogy School	1	3	17	1	111	37
Primary School	11	99	46	62	3910	2533
Mass Education		14	45	1	615	260
Vocational School	1	9	32	0	311	0
Private School						
Religious school						
High School	6	29	41	23	1651	250
Primary School	3	14	4	8	341	197
General schools						
High School	5	47	54	0	2603	245
Primary School	41	93	36	20	1437	1041
Vocational School	3	8	2	3	45	45
Foreigners' schools (Vietnamese Chinese)						
Primary School	1	7	3	3	89	81

Numbers of schools, teachers, and students in Huế at the end of school year 1958 – 1959.

Source: *Documentation on Activities of the District of Thành Nội in 1959*, TTPH, ACH, no. 988.

As Confucian conceptions deeply penetrated the paternal hierarchy of Huế, while the well-off and intellectual or radical families sent all their children to school, the lower middle class and poor families could afford only one or two kids to school as they sacrificed labor to support the family. Usually only the sons continued to study as long as they could, in hope of a higher paying job of much more prestige within the Vietnamese community, which would bring a better future and honor to the families. As the result, the professors of all levels, particularly at university and high schools, were mostly males. While the sex ratio of students at primary school level was not significant (equal or about 1.5 boy for 1 girl), the higher education observed a

larger distance of 5 – 10 male for 1 female student. The case of vocational school was a bit different with neither female professors nor students because they only offered male oriented occupations to train future mechanics, smiths, welders, etc.

While the public institutions and high schools were medium to large size with up to 20-25 classes per school, and the number of classes kept increasing through time, the private and primary schools were functioned at a smaller scale, on average 2 to 3 classes per school, and appeared to be less stable mainly due to the neighborhood's demands. The following chart reflected this situation of change schools and classes in Thành Nội district in four years.

Thành Nội district	July 1958	February 1959	August 1959	March 1960	January 1961
1 Public high school					
Classes	13	17	17	18	19
Teachers	23	23	23	31	37
Students	722	961	961	1046	1100
3 Private high schools (4 schools since September 1960)					
Classes	23	29	29	44	49
Teachers	-	56	61	61	63
Students	1129	1910	2793	2793	2607
4 Public Primary school					
Classes	35	37	39	43	45
Teachers	-	56	56	48	46
Students	2252	2604	2604	3207	3402
Private Primary schools					
Schools	22	26	25	19	-
Classes	56	59	58	48	-
Teachers	-	38	37	29	-
Students	1333	1347	1320	1016	-
1 vocational school					
Classes	-	9	9	11	-
Teachers	21 (+10 specialists)	30	30	31	38
Students	213	321	321	432	460

Numbers of schools, teachers, and students in Thành Nội district in 1958 – 1961. Source: *Documentation of the District of Thành Nội in 1958*, TTPH, ACH, no. 809. *Documentation on Activities of the District of Thành Nội in 1959*, ACH, no. 988. *Documentation of the District of Thành Nội in 1960*, ACH, no. 1189. *Documentation on Activities of the District of Thành Nội in 1961*, ACH, no. 1407.

In the eyes of the locals, education during the first republic in Huế offered comprehensive opportunities and environments for its students to broaden their knowledge and outlook and secure potential well-paying jobs. All studied diligently in hope of the bright future with a degree in pedagogy, medicine, or law; parallel with the great honor it would bring to themselves, their family, clans, and home villages. Many students of this educational system, now in their 70s and 80s, recalled with fond memories the period when they were young and always busy studying. Students from poor families or from out of town tried their best to follow their classmates who had more advantageous language skills (French or Sino language), more time to study, or less financial concern to support their families.²³⁴

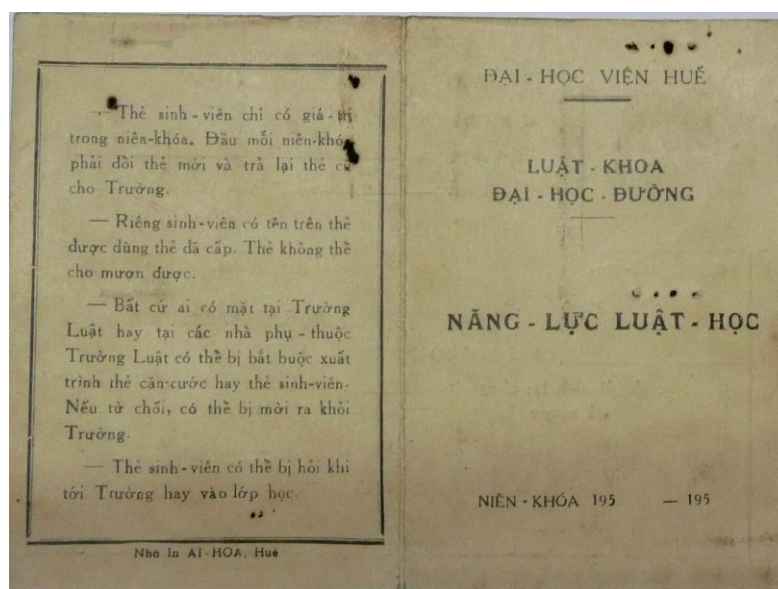
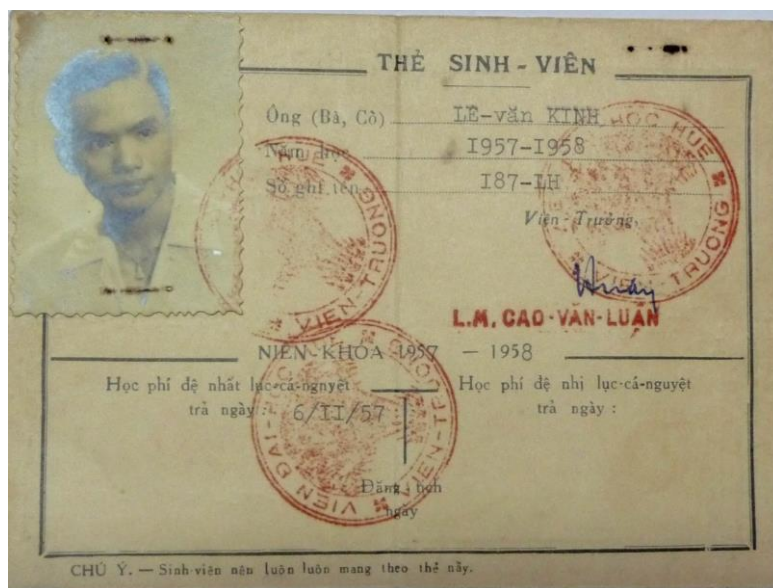
One of the biggest concerns that still impressed all students fifty years later was the extremely competitive examinations which required years to prepare. The national graduation exams at the last years of high school determined further study at the university or an alternative path of learning an occupation. Records of the pass rate showed why these exams haunted many students for years. The higher level the exams were, the lower pass rate was.

Examination		Candidates		Passed		Pass Rate (%)
		Male	Female	Male	Female	
Final high school graduation exam (end of 12th grade) [Tú tài toàn phần / Tú tài II]	1st exam	1396	82	173	26	13.46
	2nd exam	1006	141	233	18	21.88
Semi-final high school graduation exam (end of 11th grade) [Tú tài bán phần / Tú tài I]	1st exam	534	86	153	42	31.45
	2nd exam	391	49	148	17	37.5
Middle school graduation exam (end of 9th grade) [Trung học đệ nhất cấp]	1st exam	2390	765	534	131	21.07
	2nd exam	1219	337	298	90	24.93
Primary school degree		1948	440	1461	335	75.2
Vocational degree	1st exam	54	0	28	0	51.85
	2nd exam	18	0	13	0	72.22

²³⁴ Bửu Ý, Hồ Tấn Phan, Phạm Thị Xuân Quế, interview; Nguyễn Hữu Châu Phan, interview by author, Huế, February 26, 2014; Trần Việt Ngạc, interview by author, Hồ Chí Minh City, August 19, 2015; Trần Kiên Đoàn, interview by author, Sacramento, CA, June 29, 2016.

Numbers of students attending and passing various examinations in the school year 1958 – 1959.
Source: *Documentation on Activities of the District of Thành Nội in 1959*, TTPH, ACH, no. 988.

Based on the exam results, students with higher scores registered to public schools and university, others had to pay for tuitions at private schools, or enter vocational schools. With this classification system, about more than 100 students with passion, latent, diligence entered the University of Huế, the highest educational institution of Huế and the whole central region.



Student card of Lê Văn Kinh, College of Law, University of Huế in the school year of 1957 –

1958. Source: Family collection of Lê Văn Kinh.

Official established in March 1, 1957 by decree number 45-GD, the **University of Huế** [Viện Đại học Huế] welcomed President Ngô Đình Diệm to its opening ceremony on November 12, 1957, opening its doors to 387 students for general and preparatory year courses, including one year speed-up teacher training course. With the support of eight official government assistance programs and 11 foundations of USA, West Germany, France, Britain, Canada, Republic of China, New Zealand for funds, grants, publications, equipment, technical advice, and faculty members,²³⁵ the University rapidly developed in both quality and quantity from number of faculty members, students, to constructions, library and laboratory resources for four colleges of Letters, Law, Science, and Education. The university published its bi-monthly journal *Đại học [University]* with its own university press, established the Institution of Chinese studies (Viện Hán Học, October 8, 1959) and Committee for Translation of Vietnamese historical sources (Ủy ban Phiên dịch Sử liệu, June 1959), the Medical school (1961 for the first class graduating in 1967), as well as expanded its central library facilities, laboratories of language applied psychology, physic and natural science research, and apartment buildings with garages for faculty members. (See Appendix for images of the University of Huế)

Under the leadership of Rector Father Cao Văn Luận, tens of foreign educated professors returned to Vietnam in the late 1950s to lay the foundation of the University of Huế, inaugurate curricula, and introduce new fields of studies and methodologies. The pioneer generation of Lê Thanh Minh Châu and his wife Tăng Thị Thành Trai, Nguyễn Thị Bảo Xuyên and her husband Lê Văn shared their exciting and passionate days and nights in their twenties working together at the university with a great number of dedicated and talented faculties, mostly with M.A. and

²³⁵ *University of Huế*. (Huế: University of Huế Press, 1963), 18-19.

Ph.D degrees from France, USA, Canada, and some from Sài Gòn or Hà Nội, such as Nguyễn Văn Trung, Lê Tuyên, Nguyễn Đình Hoà, Trương Bửu Lâm, Lê Tuyên, Lê Khắc Quyến, etc. and many Catholic priests and French, German, American, Japanese professors such as Erich Wulff, Georges Lefas, Martine Piat, Chen Ching Ho, etc.

Class	Colleges				Institute of Chinese Studies	Total
	Law	Science	Letters	Education		
1957 – 1958	9	2	7	16		34
1958 – 1959	10	16	23	31		80
1959 – 1960	15	18	30	41	8	112
1960 – 1961	19	28	32	50	18	147

Numbers of faculty members of the University of Huế in 1957 - 1961. Source: *Đại học Chi Nam [University Directory]*. (Sài Gòn: Ministry of Education, 1961), 93.

While developing a humanistic and liberal educational environment at the University with textbooks and references in French and English, imported from France, Germany, and America, these Westerners and Westernized Vietnamese also brought to Huế new lifestyles of speaking more French than Vietnamese (and Huế's dialect), eating more bread and butter than rice and fish sauce, driving cars to Đà Nẵng rather than riding bicycles to Huế's outskirts, having parties with foreigners, travelling over weekends, etc. The years in Huế had different impression on these people. With Lê Thanh Minh Châu (General Secretary of the University of Huế, faculty member of College of Letters and Education), the more enthusiastically he worked with his fellows, as closely as with students, the more needs and difficulties of the central region he explored and sought for solutions in lectures.²³⁶ From a different and quite unique background, Nguyễn Thị Bảo Xuyên only agreed to return to Vietnam because her husband was invited to serve as the Dean of College of Education. First time been to the imperial city, Nguyễn Thị Bảo

²³⁶ Lê Thanh Minh Châu, interview by author, Los Angeles, CA, July 9, 2016.

Xuyến feared of everything, even did not know how to address herself in front of her students, and her solution was to always speak French at work, when she taught and learned to teach students only a few years younger than herself. Nguyễn Thị Bảo Xuyến self-limited her life within her work at the College of Letters and Education, her colleagues and friends from similar background, and her family in Sài Gòn.²³⁷

In the Confucian society, where each teacher served as a role model for the younger generation, the teacher's voice was greatly respected, the western philosophies and lifestyles the young professors brought to University of Huế definitely had strong impacts on a certain number of students, the majority of whom were from the countryside or rural towns in central Vietnam and largely alien to the modern world. Largely similar to the professors, the student body of University of Huế grew vastly from the first 387 in November 1957 to 2391 in 1962 – 1963 schoolyear (435 female students).²³⁸

Class	Colleges				Institute of Chinese Studies	Total
	Law	Science	Letters	Education		
1957 – 1958	484	58	67	61		670
1958 – 1959	210	183	179	180		752
1959 – 1960	197	343	310	254	37	1141
1960 – 1961	161	599	365	204	100	1429

Numbers of students of the University of Huế in 1957 - 1961. Source: *Đại học Chi Nam [University Directory]*. (Sài Gòn: Ministry of Education, 1961), 93.

As the university was such a new entity, the first generation of the students went to lectures with the attitude of “elder brothers,” feeling to be closely watched and highly expected

²³⁷ Nguyễn Thị Bảo Xuyến, interview by author, California, July 9, 2016.

²³⁸ Hue University opens 1962-63 Academic Year, October 1962, Folder 13, Box 18, Douglas Pike Collection: Unit 06 - Democratic Republic of Vietnam, The Vietnam Center and Archive, Texas Tech University. <http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=2321813009>. (Accessed 16 May. 2017).

by the society, hence quickly matured themselves to adapt to their new position.²³⁹ Many wore a suit with tie to class, some men attached to the traditional long gown like old mandarin.²⁴⁰ They instantly became independent, increasingly aware of their role to personal, familial, and social development. To many current Vietnamese students, especially ones from the suburban area, enrolling in a higher education institution and keeping high scores through years also guaranteed financial support for themselves. All students of College of Education and best students of other colleges received generous scholarships of the University. After all living expenses, they still saved a great deal of money for books, newspapers, vehicles, cinema tickets, and to support their families. Many students ordered reference books from France, Germany via bookstores in Sài Gòn for their research papers, such as Nguyễn Hữu Châu Phan, a student of History – Geography Department of College of Letters, purchased two books at 842 and 510 VND (plus shipping fee) from France for his essays on Egyptian history.²⁴¹



Honorable Medal for Excellent Students awarded to Bửu Ý, student of College of Letters in 1960. Source: Family collection of Bửu Ý.

With the growth in quantity, in 1961 some students founded their association which

²³⁹ Bửu Ý, *Nước Chảy Qua Cầu*. [*The Flow Under Bridge*] (Hà Nội: Văn Học Press, 2011), 195.

²⁴⁰ Hồ Tấn Phan, interview.

²⁴¹ Nguyễn Hữu Châu Phan, interview.

developed in strength with various activities initiated by representatives of all colleges. They requested from the city mayor some financial support to build up sport facilities (for billiards, pedal to water, canoe, gym), cultural halls with drinks and music to refresh the “isolated life”²⁴² of many members. Probably because of their high ambition, the huge expectation and pressure of family and society on students’ role, plus the traditional close lifestyles of people of Huế, many students chose to focus on studying and not paying much attention to socialize and dynamize activities. That student generation, after 50 years of war, destruction, and refugee, now recalled the college time as one of the best (if not the best) periods in their whole life, when they were living happily with their ideal dreams of youth, literally only “eating and studying,” not worrying about anything outside their world of books. Many stories on student life of the pre-1963 period were full of fond memories of respected professors (specially the very young, nice, and “naïve” foreign professors), beautiful friendship, the hard lectures in foreign languages, study sessions with friends and preceptors until late night, afternoons of watching movies at cinema and beautiful women on Trần Hưng Đạo street, riding bicycles to Thiên Mụ pagodas or Ngự Bình mountain to eat “bánh bèo” rice cake.

Similar memories remained with high school students of the regional oldest and third oldest national high school Quốc Học (established October 23, 1896, boys’ school), and the oldest girls’ school Đồng Khánh (established July 15, 1917). Nurturing the best students for the university and responsible citizens for society with all necessary life skills, the two prestigious schools were famous for their excellent students in the white uniforms like a swarm of butterflies coming out of schools every afternoon, beautiful campuses with French style buildings with big windows and red walls, and big trees with shadows, also many romantic secret love stories and real marriages between many Quốc Học alumnus grooms and Đồng Khánh alumnae brides.

²⁴² *Documentation on Activities of Social Organizations of Thừa Thiên Province in 1962*, TTPH, ACH, no. 1640.

Other coeducational high schools such as Hàm Nghi, Đào Duy Từ, Bình Minh, Nguyễn Du, and many primary schools such as Trần Cao Vân, Đoàn Thị Điểm, Thượng Tứ, Gia Hội, educated thousands of children of the city and its outskirts every year. Some schools opened for their own students during daytime and offered the space for mass education every night.

Mass education (Giáo dục bình dân) was a crucial program that received significant attention of the local government – an “extremely vital” task²⁴³ in their words. In early and middle 1957, the Department of Education conducted many “literacy exams” (khảo chữ, at 60 stations)²⁴⁴ in order to eliminate illiteracy on the city level. Classes were opened free for laborers, cyclo drivers, vendors, floating villagers, and their children.²⁴⁵ Voluntary teachers were members of Scout groups, religious congregations, high school or university students with support of the city and social institutions for electricity and study supplies.²⁴⁶ Thành Nội district in February 1957 with more than 800 illiterate people, had three mass education venues with 40 teachers, 491 students in March 1959.²⁴⁷ Tả Ngạn district in 1962 had some 30 students of one preschool class, two elementary classes to teach reading and writing to 100 students. There were also another class for 30 high school students and four other classes every weekend to tutor students of poor families for various exams, 80 students each, and all free.²⁴⁸

In addition to general education of the Vietnamese, with some extra courses on religion at Buddhist and Catholic schools, the Chinese Vietnamese in Tả Ngạn district opened their own primary school Quảng Hoa at 118 Chi Lăng with their own curricula in Chinese. The local government, implementing the “Overseas Chinese policy” [Chánh sách Hoa kiều] successfully

²⁴³ *Documentation on Activities of the District of Thành Nội in 1957*, TTPH, ACH, no. 643.

²⁴⁴ *Documentation on Newsletters and Bulletins of Thừa Thiên Province in 1957*, TTPH, ACH, no. 619.

²⁴⁵ *Documentation on Activities of the District of Tả Ngạn in 1962*, no. 1652.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁷ *Monthly Reports of the District of Thành Nội in 1959*, no. 240.

²⁴⁸ *Documentation on Activities of the District of Tả Ngạn in 1962*, no. 1652.

forced the school to teach Vietnamese 9 to 13 hours per week, write announcements in Vietnamese with Chinese annotations, hang up President Ngô Đình Diệm in the meeting halls and the principal's office. The city also required Chinese school to follow the general curricula so that their students could attend the national standard exams.²⁴⁹

With the improvement of general education from expanded mass education to the growing university, Huế equipped its own young generation with innovative and advanced knowledge and skills and formed an important and unique part of the population with scholars and students. The new ideologies spread out among a large number of inhabitants, though still on a limited scale in this period, in the long term and out of expectation of their founders and RVN government nurturing the power of resistance, awareness of freedom of speech, human rights, and their role in changing society. Students from other places came to Huế to enter high schools and university, certainly introducing new nuances to town, and inevitably adjusting themselves towards the tone of Huế, following Huế's lifestyles of the teachers they respected, which built foundation for their outlook and personality in the early years of life. Even if they married to a Huế's son or daughter, considered Huế as the second home, or appointed to positions in other places after graduation, Huế surely remained as a key element in their youth and life, a town they would always return and never forget. With the establishment of the university in 1957 and its first graduates spreading out to all over places in the nation since 1960, more than any other fields, education contributed the most to the process of attraction and dispersion in 1957 – 1962 of the city of Huế.

The Press

Given the growing educated population, this educational center of the central region

²⁴⁹ *Activities of the District of Thành Nội in 1960*, TTPH, ACH, no. 243.

surprisingly owned not so rich news media in the whole period of 1957 – 1967. The only daily newspaper that existed in 1957 – 1962, *Citizens* [*Công Dân*] by Lawyer Lê Trọng Quát, released its first volume on July 26, 1959 and lasted for three year. In his some 1000 page memory, the head and editor in chief Lê Trọng Quát spent merely four sentences to claim that the daily *Công Dân* was published in order to direct the public opinion before his running to National Asssembly representative.²⁵⁰ Although its name appeared on several government documents, unfortunately none of the libraries and public and private collections in the world hold any volume of this periodical, hence no further information was known about this first and last daily news in central Vietnam prior to 1975.

No daily news, yet weekly, bimonthly, and monthly periodicals enriched the cultural life with various accounts written by local professors, writers, poets, students, priests, and monks. *Đại học* [*University Journal*, February 1958 – 1964] was the most famous research journal of Huế, published various valuable scholarly articles on philosophy, history, literature, medicine, national issues. Bookstores Trần Hưng Đạo street also sold *Lành Mạnh* [*Healthy*, July 1956 – 1964], *Thế Hiện* [*Expression*, August 1960 - ?], *Rạng Đông* [*Dawn*, 1959 – 1962] focusing more on literature and arts, including with feuilletons, poetry, songs, criticism (sometimes on special themes as love), attracting many local young authors and apprentice students. Religious journals such as *Liên Hoa Nguyệt San* (*Lotus Monthly Journal*, Buddhism, February 1958 – 1966), *Nguồn Sống* (*Living Resource*, Catholicism, 1958 – 1961), *Đức Mẹ La Vang* (*Our Lady La Vang*, Catholicism, 1961 - ?), published and distributed within religious institutions, mainly served the religious communities with sermons, prayers, religion related stories.

In the course of history of the RVN there was more than one reason for the lack of local

²⁵⁰ Lê Trọng Quát, *Việt Nam Đi Về Đâu? Huyền Thoại Và Sự Thật, 1930-2002* [*Vietnam Which Directions to Go? Myth and Truth, 1930-2002*], vol. 2 (San Jose: [s.n.], 2003), 691.

daily news in Huế. This small city where everybody knew each other, with not so dynamic news market, everyday communication among relatives, colleagues, friends, acquaintances, seemingly fulfilled the news hunger of the city residents. The growing popularity of radio, plus the diversity and frequency of radio programs of BBC, VOA, Sài Gòn, and Huế created a new habit for many residents of Huế - listening to the radio at certain time every day. During radio broadcasting hours, the city seemed to become partially quieter, as many people gathered at a radio owner's house, front yard, or garden, or coffee shop to listen, and discuss a new government policy, world news, or a new poem or singer. With the improvement of the transportation system, daily newspapers and journals from Sài Gòn provided Huế with a certain stable amount of news on the regional, national, and global levels. The people of Huế who loved to read and were always hungry for knowledge were reading every column of *Tự Do* [Freedom], *Sống* [Living], *Ngôn Luận* [Speech], *Sài Gòn Mới* [The New Sài Gòn], *Thời Cuộc* [The Times], *Tin điển* [News], *Dân nguyện* [People's Aspirations], etc. yet preferred new ideologies, arguments, analyses of long journal articles from *Sáng Tạo* [Creation], *Bách Khoa* [Encyclopedia], *Văn* [Literature]. With this basis of a series of journals and the foundation of Writers Association, the year 1957 marked the starting point of literature culture of the RVN.²⁵¹

Bookstores on Trần Hưng Đạo street, such as Ứng Hạ, Gia Long, Bình Minh, Minh Chi, Tân Hoa supplied thousands of bookshelves in the city with numerous literature accounts of all kinds. The best sellers of all these years were novels of Tự Lực Văn Đoàn (Self Reliance Literary Group, est. in Hà Nội in the 1930s), which ever since initiated and profoundly influenced ideologies and writing styles of many generations of readers and writers of Vietnam. Writings of Nguyễn Hiến Lê, Giản Chi, poems of Xuân Diệu, Huy Cận (of the New Poetry

²⁵¹ Nguyễn Vy Khanh “*Tạp Chí Bách Khoa Và Văn Học Miền Nam*” [Encyclopedia Journal and Literature in the South] <http://www.namkyluctinh.com/a-tgtpham/nvkhanh/nvkhanh-bachkhoa.pdf> (Accessed March 26, 2017).

Movement, in Hà Nội, 1930s), Ngô Kha, Tô Thuỳ Yên, Võ Ngọc Trác; French philosophical classics and poems of Albert Camus, Jean Paul Sartre, Louis Aragon, Jacques Prévert, Guillaume Apollinaire; and Chinese wuxia (martial arts and chivalry) series by Jin Yong (Kim Dung in Vietnamese) were favorites of many bookworms of Huế. All were delivered to Huế via daily air or train shipments, together with numerous accounts distributed by the local government.

In the period of 1957–1962, the Department of Information received about 50 to 75 thousand copies of state owned and funded news, newsletters, pamphlets, magazines, picturesque, to distribute to local Information offices (Phòng thông tin) to pass on to government officials and local leaders, such as *Cách mạng Quốc gia* [National Revolution], *Sức mạnh và Tự Do* [Strength and Freedom], *Văn nghệ Tiền phong* [Literature Vanguard], *Đời sống Mỹ* [American Life], *The Times of Vietnam*, etc.²⁵² One of the most memorable issues that was widely distributed among families of Huế in 1957–1967 was *Thế Giới Tự Do* [Free World], up to four to five thousand copies every month, with many colorful and big images. This free picturesque magazine of American Department of Information in fact supplied unlimited good materials to make door curtains for many houses.²⁵³ The Department of Information compiled and printed about one to five thousand copies each propaganda materials for various study sessions every month on different topics, such as President’s appeal, “strengthening revolutionary standpoint,” “meaning of the National day,” etc. but first and foremost on anti-communist topics.

2.4 Political Life

In the first years of the RVN, the political life in Huế was not as turbulent and complex as

²⁵² *Monthly Reports of Various Provincial Departments in 1957*, TTPH, ACH, no. 291.

²⁵³ Tôn Thất Kỳ, interview.

the violence in the southern part.²⁵⁴ Huế lost its function as the central political capital of the nation since 1945, leaving the political life as quiet as its people. A large number of people of Huế who had lived under the rule of Emperors for generations, must have been very familiar with the Ngô Đình Diệm's mandarin family. His father Ngô Đình Khả (1850 – 1925) served as a high ranking mandarin, counselor to Emperor Thành Thái, the founder and first headmaster of the National Academy in Huế, his mother Phạm Thị Thân still lived in the family house where President Ngô Đình Diệm had grown up, and his elder brother Pierre Martin Ngô Đình Thục (1897 – 1984) appointed to be the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Huế (1960 – 1963). Ngô Đình Diệm himself spent many years of his youth in Huế as a former mandarin of the Nguyễn Dynasty, visited his mother several times every year as a dutiful son, which contributed to the “political environment” in Huế.

The most controversial and notable member of the president's family in Huế was his younger brother Ngô Đình Cẩn (1911 – 1964) – the de facto ruler of the central region south of the DMZ soon after Ngô Đình Diệm took power in the south. Ngô Đình Cẩn operated his own secret police system, which reportedly arrested, imprisoned, and eliminated many opponents of his brother's government and his own profitable monopolizing smuggling and trafficking trades. His construction of Chín Hàm prison outside of Huế was well known to be “Hell on Earth” of many political activists, communists, and wealthy businessmen of the central region. All his secret forces and activities earned him the reputation of a feudal dictator, a lord of the central region (Lãnh chúa miền Trung) among common people of Huế. Many people did not dare to talk politics, and beware of “the walls have ears” of the current political atmosphere. In the words of American consul John Helble, “Cẩn ran a very authoritarian and ‘tight’ ship. No political dissent

²⁵⁴ Ngô Đình Diệm managed to subdue the armed religious and crime groups of Cao Đài, Hoà Hảo, and Bình Xuyên in the Mekong delta in the mid 1950s.

of any sort was permitted. Most people would not even consider trying to express political dissent in the environment which emanated from Cẩn's authority."²⁵⁵ However, one of his closest associate, once his Chief of staff, Nguyễn Văn Minh, after many chaotic years of the Ngô family and the RVN, honestly and firmly stated that his master (cậu Cẩn) had been heavily misunderstood. It was because many people of Huế did not care, or fully comprehend, that all of Ngô Đình Cẩn's efforts were just to support the national anti-communist national policy.²⁵⁶

With the strong tie with the President's family, Huế unquestionably formed a strong foundation for the newly born republic regime. In 1957 – 1962, legal **political parties** operated actively in Huế were all founded by Ngô family members, from Phong trào Cách mạng Quốc Gia (National Revolutionary Movement), Cần Lao Nhân Vị Cách Mạng Đảng (the Personalist Labor Revolutionary Party), Thanh niên Cách Mạng Quốc Gia (National Revolutionary Youth), Tập Đoàn Công Dân (Citizens' Union), Phong trào Phụ Nữ Liên đới (Women Solidarity Movement), with monthly meetings, recruiting members, camping, entertainment activities.²⁵⁷

In five years in 1957–1962, all of these organizations with “constructive characters”²⁵⁸ constantly developed in strength. According to government reports, number of members of Cần Lao Party and revolution movement increased vastly with a comprehensive system from national to provincial to district and ward unions with thousand members and hundred party cells. In Tả Ngạn district in 1961, for example, 123 party cells, more than 4000 members of National Revolutionary Movement, more than 100 members of National Revolutionary Youth, and more than 5000 members of Republic Youth Union contributed to “support the government to push the

²⁵⁵ John Helble, interview by Thomas F. Conlon, April 5, 1996, transcript, The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project, 51.

²⁵⁶ Nguyễn Văn Minh, interview by author, Los Angeles, CA, July 5, 2016.

²⁵⁷ *Monthly Reports of Thừa Thiên Province from May to December 1959*, FRPO, NAC, no. 284; *Monthly Reports of Various Provincial Departments in 1957*, TTPH, ACH, no. 291; *Documentation on Activities of Social Organizations, Political Parties, and Religious Association in 1958*, TTPH, ACH, no. 820.

²⁵⁸ *Monthly Reports of the Police Department of the District of Tả Ngạn in 1959*, TTPH, ACH, no. 315.

revolution to its ultimate success” [sic.]²⁵⁹. Similarly to Catholics, participating in Cần Lao Party and its branches was an undocumented yet fundamental advantage in military and public service promotion, it was in turn their duty to attend many political study sessions every month.

Anti-communism was the most central national policy throughout history of the RVN in 1954 – 1975. With 31 officers in charge of information and communication at the ward level, 11 musical groups, 18 exhibition halls, 35 information stations, 12 backboards, hundreds of slogans made each month,²⁶⁰ the Department of Information implemented various methods mainly to advocate political policies and propaganda materials of the government. Numerous study sessions and talks were reportedly, yet questionably, well attended. Topics varied from the superiority of the republic, the evil corruption of communism, to democracy and the free world such as “The perfidious policy of living together [with the communists]” (lecturer Suzane Labin, in French, October 14, 1957), or “Preventing the evil conspiracy of the Communists” (March 21 to April 2, 1962), “Aspiration of farmers,” “Resistance principles,” etc.²⁶¹ Sometimes, high ranking NLF officials or northerners crossing the DMZ to seek for freedom in the south were invited to share with people of Huế their views of the different regimes, the miserable lives in the north, and the privileges of living in the RVN under Ngô Đình Diệm’s rule (March 8, June 9, June 22, 1962).²⁶² There were also talks on “Le role de la Presidence Americaine” (“The Role of American President,” in French, by Bernard Brow from the University of Michigan, June 13, 1958),²⁶³ or exhibits of images of Strategic Hamlets in the nation (September 17–22, 1962), of

²⁵⁹ *Documentation on Activities of the District of Tả Ngạn and Hữu Ngạn in 1961*, TTPH, ACH, no. 344.

²⁶⁰ *Documentation on Newsletters and Bulletins of Thừa Thiên Province in 1957*, TTPH, ACH, no. 619.
Documentation on the City of Huế in 1957, TTPH, ACH, no. 585.

²⁶¹ *Daily Reports of the Police Department of the City of Huế in 1957*, no. 289; *Daily Reports of the Police Department on General Situation in the City of Huế in 1958*, no. 301; *Documentation on Activities of the District of Hữu Ngạn in 1960*, TTPH, ACH, no. 1197; *Documentation on Activities of the District of Hữu Ngạn in 1962*, TTPH, ACH, no. 1653.

²⁶² *Daily Reports of the Police Department on General Situation in the City of Huế in 1962*, no. 361.

²⁶³ *Daily Reports of the Police Department on General Situation in the City of Huế in 1958*, no. 301.

120 anti-Communist pictures of students (June 1957), or 61 images of victims of communism fleeing mainland China to seek for freedom (September 13–15, 1962).²⁶⁴ Besides these study sessions with direct anti-communist content, the government organized many entertainment activities for the mere purpose of integrating government policies, announcements, proclamations, declarations, among music performances, or documentary screenings.

1959	Jan 28	Jan 29	Jan 30	Jan 31	Feb 2	Feb 11	Feb 12
Film screening	500	300	426	300	300		
Musical performance						300	300

Attendance of entertainment activities organized by the government on political purpose. Source: *Documentation on Activities of the District of Thành Nội in 1959*, TTPH, ACH, no. 988.

1961	Jan 8	Jan 9	Feb 10	Feb 12	Mar 2	Mar 3	Mar 4	Mar 17
Film screening	500	600			500	600	3000	600
Musical performance			500	300				

Attendance of entertainment activities organized by the government on political purpose. Source: *Documentation on Activities of the District of Thành Nội in 1961*, TTPH, ACH, no. 1407.

In the same efforts to contain communism in Huế, numerous leaflets dispersed by helicopters, slogans drawn on pavements, banners posted along streets, radio programs broadcast daily²⁶⁵ became common in the daily life of the city. The police frequently conducted day and night patrols, examinations at checkpoints, and sudden house search at night for ID cards, travel pass, family statements (tờ khai gia đình) to control strangers and illegal newcomers. They watched people with anti-government and harmful sayings or opinions for anti-communist policy (e.g. 8 people in the land clearance in Phu Văn Lâu area, March 1960),²⁶⁶ and planted

²⁶⁴ *Daily Reports of the Police Department on General Situation in the City of Huế in 1962*, no. 361.

²⁶⁵ *Daily Reports of the Police Department on General Situation in the City of Huế in 1958*, no. 301; *Daily Reports of the Police Department on General Situation in the City of Huế in 1962*, no. 361.

²⁶⁶ *Documentation on Activities of the Police Department in the City of Huế in 1960*, TTPH, ACH, no. 1195. *Documentation on Activities of the District of Tân Ngạn in 1960*, TTPH, ACH, no. 1196.

sympathizers in to social organizations and institutions (July 1957)²⁶⁷ to prevent communists from intermingling into the city. The police confiscated a book of international stamps with 30 communist and 6 Bảo Đại ones (April 8, 1958),²⁶⁸ searching for students who had drawn RVN and communist flags in the restroom of Technical high school (April 11, 1958);²⁶⁹ or collected 12 badges of red flag with yellow star (Communist flag, before dawn April 16, 1958);²⁷⁰ or impounded “Hồ Chí Minh currency bills” (March 22, 1957,²⁷¹ May 23, 1958,²⁷² February 25, 1960).²⁷³

Although none of the people of Huế who shared their stories some 50 years later had any memories of the appearance of communism in their city prior to 1963, the Police Department reported several interactions with the communists (“VC” in their words) and their sympathizers every month. They predicted and prepared to deal with the increasing activities of the VC in the rainy seasons (September 1962) or before important anniversaries of Buddha’s birthday, Labor Day, Hồ Chí Minh’s birthday,²⁷⁴ or after the Independence Palace bombing on February 27, 1962.²⁷⁵ Some months, such as November 1957 the police of Thừa Thiên province arrested 63 suspected VC and supporters in the outskirts of Huế,²⁷⁶ which could have worried many city inhabitants given their close connections and origins from the countryside.

²⁶⁷ *Monthly Reports of Various Provincial Departments in 1957*, TTPH, ACH, no. 291.

²⁶⁸ *Daily Reports of the Police Department on General Situation in the City of Huế in 1958*, no. 301.

²⁶⁹ *Monthly Reports and Minutes of the District of Thành Nội in 1958*, TTPH, ACH, no. 238.

²⁷⁰ *Daily Reports of the Police Department on General Situation in the City of Huế in 1958*, no. 301.

²⁷¹ *Daily Reports of the Police Department of the City of Huế in 1957*, TTPH, ACH, no. 289.

²⁷² *Daily Reports of the Police Department on General Situation in the City of Huế in 1958*, no. 301.

²⁷³ *Documentation on Activities of the District of Tân Ngạn in 1960*, TTPH, ACH, no. 1196.

²⁷⁴ *Documentation on Activities of the District of Tân Ngạn in 1962*, TTPH, ACH, no. 1652; *Monthly Reports of the City of Huế in 1962*, TTPH, ACH, no. 362.

²⁷⁵ The Independence Palace was the official residence of Ngô Đình Diệm and his family. It was argued that the bombing by two dissident Air Force pilots was to assassinate Ngô Đình Diệm and his immediate family, who were all there that morning. One of the pilots’ brother-in-law, Tran Dinh Anh, a bookstore owner and the closest contact in Huế of Thomas Barnes, then disappeared for about two and a half months. It was believed that he had been put in a underground cell and tortured, which resulted in one useless arm, and no more foreign contacts for him. Source: Barnes, interview, 52.

²⁷⁶ *Documentation on Newsletters and Bulletins of Thừa Thiên Province in 1957*, TTPH, ACH, no. 619.

In **the shadow of war**, the RVN's enemy "Việt Cộng" was quite active in the rural, mountainous, and coastal areas just a few kilometers from the center of the city of Huế in 1957–1962.²⁷⁷ Within the city, the sounds of rifles, rusted mortars or unexploded grenades collected when gardening or swimming in rivers,²⁷⁸ became familiar to the people of Huế, many of whom had experienced more or less wartime in the previous decades. Some even used war relics to make daily items, such as turning the cannon bullet casing into a wax lamp stand of the altar (the bullet unfortunately exploded and injured the house owner when he was cleaning the altar, April 2, 1958).²⁷⁹ All male citizens were forced to file military documentation, and individual profiles for residents born from 1924 to 1938 (19 to 33 years old),²⁸⁰ with the exemption of students passed the first exam of national high school graduation exam. Almost every month hundreds of young males in the draft age from all over Thừa Thiên province arrived in Huế to take the train to go south to conduct their compulsory military service, enjoying special music shows or film screenings in their one or two nights temporarily staying in Huế.

Date in 1959	Feb 18	Feb 20	Sep 28	Oct 6	Oct 19
Numbers of male citizens	134	131	88	120	112

Numbers of males of draft age gathered in Huế to take train to go south for military training courses in 1959. Source: *Monthly Reports of the District of Thành Nội in 1959*, TTPH, ACH, no. 240.

Meanwhile hundreds of young females were said to "voluntarily" apply to take semi-military training courses (khoá huấn luyện phụ nữ bán quân sự). It occurred quite frequently with high number of attendance (daily in some months, sometimes up to 585 applicants, Tả Ngạn district, 1962). One of the highest ranking generals of the RVN, Trần Văn Đôn, however,

²⁷⁷ *Monthly Reports of Various Provincial Departments in 1957*, TTPH, ACH, no. 291.

²⁷⁸ *Daily Reports of the Police Department on General Situation in the City of Huế in 1958*, no. 301; *Daily Reports of the Police Department on General Situation in the City of Huế in 1962*, no. 361.

²⁷⁹ *Daily Reports of the Police Department on General Situation in the City of Huế in 1958*, no. 301.

²⁸⁰ *Reports of the District of Tả Ngạn and Thành Nội in 1957*, TTPH, ACH, no. 290.

questioned the quality and attendance of these training courses, arguing only a few active members of the Women's Solidarity Movement showed off the techniques and forces for propaganda and flyers.²⁸¹ The Police Department also reportedly arrested several young men of draft age for draft dodging or desertion, such as visiting their hometown during duty without permits, or cutting off two fingers on the right hand to avoid compulsory military service.²⁸²

Yet the government documents, in their diverse kinds of propaganda, were still full of positive statements of public opinion of Huế that the people were pleased with the government functions, and national development, and fully supported the President Ngô Đình Diệm and the republic regime, with only some rare exceptions. Nevertheless the people of Huế some decades later had very faint memories of political events like writing slogans, attending political study sessions, talks, or mass meetings. The officials of the local government, when interviewed specifically about the political activities, did not recall much of the patrols and control methods of the Police Department, or propaganda of the Department of Information. The heavy political atmosphere certainly directed them to adjust to current situation, as long as they could relatively afford living expenses and send their children to school. The traditional close and personal lifestyle, with strong belief in fate, together with half century traumatic experience of violence, destruction, evacuation, death, and living abroad in political sensitive community of overseas Vietnamese, many factors affected the memories of political issues of the first republic of the RVN, which in turn limited the study of political life of this period.

2.5 Conclusion

The period of 1957 – 1962 in Huế since the establishment of the University of Huế

²⁸¹ Trần Văn Đôn. *Việt Nam Nhân Chứng* [Witness of Vietnam], (CA: Xuân Thu Press 1989), 144.

²⁸² *Daily Reports of the Police Department on General Situation in the City of Huế in 1962*, no. 361.

witnessed certain changes in the process of urbanization, turning this imperial city into a center of attraction and dispersion of central Vietnam. With the consolidation of the administrative system, the government of Huế managed to govern a growing population with many new residents from other places and countries to contribute to the development of the city. The expansion of infrastructure brought new constructions to modernize the city, yet compared to other urban areas in the RVN like Sài Gòn or Đà Nẵng, Huế still looked relatively pastoral. Its economic life was becoming more dynamic with the growth of the markets and commercial streets, yet still looked poor and underdeveloped, mostly relying on imports from other places as local products were insufficient for city consumption. In spite of various life risks, Huế with its elegant and modest people proved to be a humane and secure place to live, with various regular community services and charity and relief activities, especially in the aftermath of incidents and natural disasters. It appeared to be a tranquil and traditional city with plenty of ceremonies and feasts and a diverse and rich spiritual life. The newly born university blew into the city new breezes of Western ideologies and attitudes, awakening an emerging scene of intellectuals and students. The improvement to transportation, healthcare, and especially the educational system played a vital role in connecting Huế with the outside world, bringing excellent human resources and products to Huế, and introducing Huế culture and nuances to other places around the country. Continuing its tradition of hundred years as an imperial capital, not so much as a political and economic one, Huế in the first republic of the RVN assured its role model as national center of education, religion, culture, and the most important city of the central region.

The period of the late 1950s and the early 1960s, in particular 1957 – 1962, in the central region has been neglected in Vietnam Studies and in the war- and event-oriented history. As this chapter has suggested, there was much more to modern Vietnam than “nation-building” or political changes during the first republic. Inhabitants of Huế might be well aware of the national

issues and the war in the nearby rural areas, or other provinces in the country, however, most might have never experienced first-hand the hardship of living between two military lines of fire, or the struggle to find suitable strategies for survival for their family. To ordinary residents living in Hué in 1957 – 1962, the war did not exist in their daily concerns as it did in the surrounding countryside, the metamorphoses underway nonetheless manifested themselves in subtle and ominous ways. The shadow of war was certainly there with or without an awareness of the local residents. They were peacefully living their lives as they wished, not really concerned themselves much about the vast changes looming in their lives in the very foreseeable future, at least until 1963.

Part II

Hidden Currents, Roiled Lives: The Year of 1963

In the period between 1957 through 1967; 1963, or the year of the Cat, was undoubtedly the most remarkable year from multiple perspectives of national and local history and historical studies. On a national level, the regime change in 1963 indicated a turning point in the history of the RVN. The end of the first republic in the southern half of the country resulted in numerous significant legacies for the subsequent development of the RVN and the progression of the Vietnam War. In fact, the political crisis ignited first in the quiet city of Huế, before spreading out to Sài Gòn, Đà Nẵng, and other cities in the RVN.

On a local level, 1963 transformed Huế in all respects. That year marked many significant moments in Huế's history with the Buddhist mobilization, the people's struggle for rights and justice, the maturation of political awareness and social engagement, and the development of community spirit and societal connections. To many individuals of Huế, events in the year 1963 followed them for the rest of their lives, becoming unforgettable and invaluable elements for various memoirs, life stories and recollections. The abundance of resource materials regarding the events in 1963 from different perspectives help enable extensive and accurate research on this particular time and place.

This research project has no desire to investigate the various political changes in Vietnamese history, instead focusing on the diverse impacts 1963 brought to social and cultural life for the citizens of Huế and the personal responses to what they witnessed. This chapter portrays the year 1963, with all of the available details from accessible sources, in the hope of capturing not only the images, sound, smell, and atmosphere of the era, but also the emotions,

spirit, and soul of the people of Huế. Chronologically following events from local perspectives between Tết of 1963 to the next one in 1964, this chapter pauses at certain dates to thoroughly describe the complicated changes in human views or at particular locations in the city. It asks the price of one kilogram of rice, or counts the rainy days in a month, or details some life incidents of both Vietnamese and foreign residents in Huế. This exploration celebrates the happiness of a city wedding, condoles the mourning of families, and shares the anger or sympathies with locals during this turbulent time. By examining 1963 in detail this chapter serves to illuminate the social and cultural history of Huế midway through the city's RVN pre-Tết interregnum.

Chapter 3

3.1 The Calm before the Storm

Near the end of January 1963, the year of the Cat was happily welcomed in Huế. Tết, the Lunar New Year's Eve, was celebrated on January 25, full of traditional customs, delicious dishes, and fun games, many of which had royal roots, and now popularized among ordinary people of Huế. This new lunar year celebration lasted longer than previous years', as the Spring Fair [Hội chợ xuân] opened to the public at Phu Văn Lâu Square on the 8th of Lunar January (February 1, 1963).²⁸³ The fair was well organized, with police regularly patrolling the area to extinguish a fire [booth 28, February 2],²⁸⁴ expelling illegal game players from the Fair (February 2),²⁸⁵ or managing an accident at the lottery [booth Đại Chúng, February 3].²⁸⁶ During these festivities, the people of Huế had daily opportunity to enjoy various performances by famous musical groups of Cải Lương – a modern folk opera originally from the Mekong Delta in southern Vietnam, such as Hữu Tâm, Kim Cương, Trần Văn Trạch bands from Sài Gòn. Thousands of locals must have enjoyed the Spring Fair and musical shows, as the city and each musical groups earned on average 50,000 VND every day from tickets sales.²⁸⁷ The festive atmosphere of the new year continued on February 3 with two grand shows of both modern and traditional music, organized by the Radio Station of Huế to benefit flood relief.²⁸⁸

One month later, on 6th Lunar February (March 1, 1963), in commemoration of national heroines, the Trưng Sisters, and of Vietnamese Women's Day, the city once again bustled with rallies, music, sport games, film screenings, cooking contests, and skill competitions particularly

²⁸³ *Daily Reports of the National Police Department of Thừa Thiên Province in 1963*, TTPH, ACH, no. 1862.

²⁸⁴ Ibid.

²⁸⁵ Ibid.

²⁸⁶ Ibid.

²⁸⁷ According to various daily reports of the National Police Department. Ibid.

²⁸⁸ Ibid.

for women. The radio station also broadcast two special programs interviewing a wide range of women living in Huế, at noon on February 28 and in the evening of March 1.²⁸⁹

As the government of the RVN took advantage of the celebration of the Trung Sisters to promote nationalism, the largest minority group in Huế, the Chinese Vietnamese, also nurtured their communal unity by celebrating their own memorial days. On March 25, 1963, the city council granted permission for the Quảng Hoa Sports Association to celebrate its ninth anniversary at the Guangdong Clubhouse, located at the Guangdong Pagoda, 113 Chi Lăng Street. Approximately 120 people, including the Republic of China consul in Huế and the head of Tả Ngạn District, attended the morning ceremony and the banquet at noon. That night from 8 to 11 p.m., a basketball match between Quảng Hoa Sports Association and the Chinese Student Association from the city of Đà Nẵng attracted about 300 Chinese-Vietnamese and Vietnamese audiences.²⁹⁰

Not until two weeks later did the local government receive a request from the Department of Domestic Affairs in Sài Gòn to clarify the goals of that anniversary of the Quảng Hoa Sports Association and voice concern that the consul's activities had the potential to intervene in Vietnamese domestic affairs. In fact, the April 8th coverage on the Chinese daily newspaper *Thành Công* [*Success*] described the anniversary in Huế as the memorial day for 72 revolutionary martyrs of the Republic of China, without mentioning a word about the Quảng Hoa Sports Association. It took the government of Huế almost two months to investigate the case and report back to Sài Gòn that the Quảng Hoa Sports Association conducted the commemoration with the tacit intention of stimulating nostalgia for their motherland among the Chinese

²⁸⁹ *Newsletters of the Department of Information of Thừa Thiên Province in 1963*, TTPH, ACH, no. 377.

²⁹⁰ *Documentation on the Chinese Vietnamese Community Organizing the Ceremony of the National Day of the Republic of China in Huế in 1963*, TTPH, ACH, no. 225.

Vietnamese community in Huế (i.e. the Republic of China). The government then suggested dissolving the Quảng Hoa Sports Association.²⁹¹

Not far from the Chinese-Vietnamese neighborhood, villagers of four hamlets *Thế Lại Thượng*, *Thọ Hàm*, *Tân An*, and *An Mỹ*, excitedly discussed the future of integrating their hamlets into the city of Huế. Although located geographically close to the center of the city, these hamlets had been under the governance of *Hương Trà* district since the French colonial period. Upon local request, the *Thừa Thiên* province arranged several meetings in March and April 1963 to listen to local opinions and eventually integrated the four hamlets into the *Tả Ngạn* district of the city.²⁹²

Meanwhile the city of Huế, together with other cities and provinces in the RVN, was bustling again preparing for the first anniversary of the national Strategic Hamlet Program on April 17, 1963. According to reports from the *Tả Ngạn* district, 12,000 people attended various political study sessions between April 17 and 18. About 10,000 slogans of all sizes and materials were made and displayed along streets, alleys, and in front of numerous houses.²⁹³ In the *Hữu Ngạn* district, about 150 cloth banners were placed in public, two paper slogans were distributed to each house, and those visiting *Bến Ngự*, *An Cựu*, and *Công* markets on the morning of April 17th were given free banners. Citizens were reportedly “aware of the significance of the Strategic Hamlet Program, hence eagerly joined all activities.”²⁹⁴ Unfortunately information on the statistics, activities, and success of this policy and implementation in the city is very limited. Many banners and slogans may have been flying over the city in mid-April 1963, but the stated numbers of 10,000 slogans or 12,000 in attendance are questionable.

²⁹¹ Ibid.

²⁹² *Documentation on Activities of the Police Department of Tả Ngạn District in 1963*, TTPH, ACH, no. 1885.

²⁹³ Ibid.

²⁹⁴ Ibid.

About ten days later, various banners again flew over many streets of the city, this time to commemorate May 1, Labor Day. “Only laborers in Communist countries stay quiet on this occasion, because they do not have freedom (...) In contrast, in our beloved RVN, the Labor Day is boisterously celebrated every year, and the government always wholeheartedly provide the workers with both material and spiritual support,”²⁹⁵ the Provincial Labor Union wrote in their opening remarks. The Labor Day of 1963 started with a requiem mass at the State Church [sic.] [the Francis Xavier Catholic Church] and Diệu Đế Pagoda at 6:30 a.m., followed by an official ceremony at 9 a.m. and a light banquet at 4 p.m.²⁹⁶

Besides all the ceremonies and anniversaries, the first four months of 1963 witnessed all sorts of different incidents in daily life for the residents of Huế. At 11:30 a.m. on February 4, Mr. Huỳnh Châu, 45 years old, home address 162 Chi Lăng, lost his Mousson brown coat when reading news at the French Cultural Center, 11 Lê Lợi road.²⁹⁷ At 12:20 p.m., on March 6, Mrs. Đặng Thị Năm, 45 years old, was caught purchasing 5 kilogram of pork which had no seal from the Department of Livestock in Tân Thị market on Huỳnh Thúc Kháng street.²⁹⁸ On March 31, a group of students of the Agricultural School were fighting with two young men of 17 and 19 over a girl named Yên on Đinh Bộ Lĩnh Street.²⁹⁹ Around noon on April 6, Cindy Helble, the two year old daughter of the American Consul family, John and Joan Helble, drowned in the duck pond in the back garden of their residence at 113 Lý Thường Kiệt street.³⁰⁰ On April 19, Trần Hữu Xinh, 27, residing on Huỳnh Thúc Kháng street, committed suicide, because he

²⁹⁵ *Documentation on Activities of the Professional Guilds of Thừa Thiên Province in 1963*, TTPH, ACH, no. 1918.

²⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁹⁷ *Daily Reports of the National Police Department of Thừa Thiên Province in 1963*, no. 1862.

²⁹⁸ *Documentation on Activities of the Police Department of Tân Ngạn District in 1963*, TTPH, ACH, no. 1885.

²⁹⁹ *Documentation on Investigations of the National Police Department of the Northern Central Region in 1963*, TTPH, ACH, no. 1786.

³⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

resented his father and a neighbor for insulting him after he was caught red-handed with his mistress while his wife and children were at their home village.³⁰¹

Although these incidents might not be remembered (none of the people I interviewed recalled any kind of slogans, banners, or the making of those during the Ngô Đình Diệm era), or remained an “untouchable” topic after 50 years (the story of Cindy in the Helble’s family today),³⁰² they illustrate a colorful picture of the city during the first republic of the RVN. However, citizens of the city did not realize what was awaiting them in the coming hot summer of 1963.

3.2 May – The Buddhist Flag

May 8, 1963 (15th of Month Four, 2507 by the Buddhist calendar) was Vesak, the Buddha’s birthday, usually one of the two biggest annual ceremonies in the city of Huế with tens of thousands of Buddhists attending.³⁰³ For several weeks prior to the ceremony, many families were busy making Buddhist flags and various silk and paper candle lanterns in all colors, which adorned the city everywhere from the beginning of May. Huế appeared like a forest of Buddhist flags. Altars guarded the front gates of Buddhist homes. There was to be a big procession the morning of Vesak and a special evening program on city radio capturing the main events of the ceremony.

What made 1963 different from previous years was a new ban on public display of religious flags. According to Decree 9195 from Sài Gòn dated May 5, 1963, religious flags should only be displayed within religious spaces, such as pagodas, temples, churches, etc., and

³⁰¹ Ibid.

³⁰² John Helble, e-mail message to author, October 23, 2015.

³⁰³ The other being the annual commemoration of the fall of Huế citadel into the hands of the French on Day 23 of the Fifth Month in lunar calendar.

not in front of houses, on public streets, or along national highways.³⁰⁴ It took the decree one day to arrive in Huế and another to reach the public. About 3 p.m. in the afternoon of May 7, 1963, when everyone was ready for the ceremony to begin the next morning, local police were sent out to every neighborhood to remind each family of the new government order.³⁰⁵ Nguyễn Hữu Đĩnh was hanging flags in front of his house on the city main street when three policemen came and ordered him to take them down. “I was too shocked to do anything. We could not resist, even though I was very indignant.”³⁰⁶ Professor Lê Tuyên, Dean of the College of Literature, was having dinner with Rector Reverend Cao Văn Luận of the University of Huế, when he heard of the government ban. “I was very surprised, and Father Luận was also astonished.”³⁰⁷

Thái Kim Lan, a Department of Literature student at the University of Huế, was at home the late afternoon of May 7 when the local police of the neighborhood stopped by to announce the government order. Everyone grumbled sadly, but none dared to resist. Flags and lanterns along the streets came down, house by house. Thái Kim Lan wondered about this strange ban for a moment, but did not think more deeply about it. She told herself, “So the ceremony would have no fun, I shall study then.”³⁰⁸ She spent the whole evening and next day studying for her coming tests of the exam season.

Around 5:30 p.m. of May 7, while more than 100 students of the 1960 entry class cheerfully attended their graduation ceremony at the College of Education;³⁰⁹ about 40 venerable monks and 300 Buddhist laymen, carrying a Buddhist altar and the banner of the Buddhist

³⁰⁴ *Documentation on the Incidents in Huế during the Vesak Festival in 1963*, FRPO, NAC, no. 8169.

³⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁰⁶ Định Nguyễn, Bài phát biểu trong buổi ra mắt sách *Huế ơi Oan nghiệt* của Bảo Quốc Kiềm tại San Jose, California ngày 31 tháng 10 năm 2010 (Speech delivered on the occasion of *Injustice Huế* book release by Bảo Quốc Kiềm in San Jose, California, October 31, 2010), in *1963-2013: Năm mươi năm nhìn lại [1963-2013: Fifty Years Looking Back]*, vol. 2 (California: Thiên Tri Thục Publications, 2013), 372.

³⁰⁷ Nguyễn Ngu Í, Đại học Huế tranh đấu chống chế độ cũ - Qua hai giờ nói chuyện với giáo sư Lê Tuyên [The University of Huế Struggles against the Old Regime – Two hours talking with Professor Lê Tuyên], in *1963-2013: Năm mươi năm nhìn lại [1963-2013: Fifty Years Looking Back]*, 339.

³⁰⁸ Thái Kim Lan, *Phượng trên trời Hải đường dưới đất [Phoenix in the Sky, Malus on the Ground]*.

³⁰⁹ *Daily Reports of the National Police Department of Thừa Thiên Province in 1963*, no. 1862.

Family [Gia Đình Phật Tử] went to the provincial headquarters to request an explanation on the strange order.³¹⁰ The Buddhist delegation and the city council had a quick discussion resulting in the concession by the Huế government: two vehicles with loudspeakers would run around the city to announce that Buddhist flags were allowed to display as usual.³¹¹ The crowd soon dispersed to return home and finish the last preparation for the next morning ceremony. Yet around the city, different groups of people already started whispering and making comments here and there. The new government ban announced at a sensitive moment right before the most important ceremony of the area's largest religion instantly ignited the whole community.

The evening of Tuesday May 7, 1963 felt like an early summer night. A few hours after sunset people came out to enjoy the cool evening, moving over the lingering heat of the roads and cement roofs of their homes. Walking to Từ Đàm Pagoda with his friends, Erich Wulff, a German doctor and professor of neurological psychology at the University of Huế, sensed the atmosphere of a great festival "like a victory celebration."³¹² Local families visited elaborately decorated pagodas, their children staring at the bright neon lights. At restaurants and coffee shops along the main streets, groups of students, laborers, and retirees huddled, talking enthusiastically.

On the occasion of this big festival, the province shortened the restriction of moving traffic from 1-5 a.m. to 1-4 a.m.,³¹³ so that Buddhists could be present at their meeting venues on time for their great procession. About 6:30am, thousands of Buddhist laymen with flags, banners, bands, and in formal uniforms, concentrated at Diệu Đế pagoda.³¹⁴ Erich Wulff woke up

³¹⁰ *Documentation on the Incidents in Huế during the Vesak Festival in 1963*, FRPO, NAC, no. 8169; *Documentation on Anti-government Activities of Buddhist Association and Students in Huế in 1963*, no. 8529.

³¹¹ *Documentation on the Incidents in Huế during the Vesak Festival in 1963*, no. 8169.

³¹² Erich Wulff, *Vietnamesische Lehrjahre [Teaching Years in Vietnam]*. Nr. 73. (Frankfurt a.M., Germany: Erste Auflage, 1972), 129.

³¹³ *Documentation on Requests and Forms of Thừa Thiên Province in 1963*, TTPH, ACH, no. 1816.

³¹⁴ *Documentation on the Incidents in Huế during the Vesak Festival in 1963*, FRPO, NAC, no. 8169.

late that morning, hence could not observe the first part of the procession. From the top floor of his house he did not notice anything abnormal, just a sea of flags and banners welcoming the Buddhist festival.³¹⁵ In fact he had missed one important episode: when the procession was crossing Gia Hội bridge onto the main streets of Huế, five banners denouncing the government's religious policies appeared from the middle of the crowd "The international Buddhist flags cannot be lowered;" "Down with government policies!" It was about 7 a.m. One of the organizers immediately collected those banners, only to regret his spontaneous action a few minutes later and return them to the holders.³¹⁶ The procession then crossed the river to the other side of the city, stopping twice to display the banners in front of the provincial headquarters and the government official premises, for 15 minutes each.³¹⁷ On arriving late at Từ Đàm Pagoda, Venerable Thích Trí Quang, head of the organization committee, in front of eight thousand people clarified the discussion with the Head of the province the day before, and requested that the banners be raised again so that he could explain "[t]oday is the Buddha Memorial Day [Nghênh Phật], yet spontaneously became such a meeting because you made some banners and did not let us know in advance."³¹⁸ He then delivered an impromptu speech on the persecution that Vietnamese Buddhists had endured from the colonial period until Ngô Đình Diệm's regime. The ceremony proceeded apace with other activities as scheduled. Although people were requested to leave their banners at the pagoda, they spread the word about the religious situation and the morning ceremony out to every corner of the city. From the government perspective, some "extremists" noisily gathered people around the city with rumors about the procession, some music performances, then the cancellation of all shows because of a monk's recent

³¹⁵ Erich Wulff, *Vietnamesische Lehrjahre* [Teaching Years in Vietnam], 134.

³¹⁶ Thích, Trí Quang. *Trí Quang tự truyện* [Tri Quang's Memoir] (Hà Chí Minh City: Tổng Hợp Publishing House, 2011), 104-107.

³¹⁷ *Documentation on the Incidents in Huế during the Vesak Festival in 1963*, no. 8169.

³¹⁸ *Ibid.*

death.³¹⁹ Starting from 4pm, numerous people from all directions flocked to Từ Đàm pagoda, then to the radio station, as everyone knew that the morning ceremony would be broadcast at 8pm.

In the meantime, from 4 to 5:05 p.m., during another effort to celebrate the Buddha's birthday, the Buddhist Congregation of Từ Đàm and Diệu Đế pagodas, with special support of Mr. Lê Trọng Huyện, dispensed 170kg of rice to 158 poor people at his house at 5 Nguyễn Hoàng street.³²⁰ Earlier at 3:45 p.m., Mr. Nguyễn Sĩ Thí, chief of the Thành Nội district post office, unfortunately fell onto the railway track along the Bạch Hổ bridge while driving his scooter and broke his right leg.³²¹ At 6 p.m. the same day, Mrs. Đỗ Thị Bò, feeling feverish and faint in her family's boat on An Cựu river in front of the house at 192 Phan Châu Trinh street, was unable to keep an eye on her one year-old son Văn Việt Luyên. The child crawled out of the hold of the boat and fell into the river. Luckily, his father, Văn Việt Tuyền, came home in time to rescue him, and local police immediately showed up to assist with artificial respiration.³²² While part of the city was talking and whispering about the Buddhist ceremony, these families were busy taking care of their family members at the national hospital of Huế, and many did not recognize what was happening beyond their daily routine, outside their houses, offices, or churches.

In the hot evening of May 8, after his friends went to bed early, professor Erich Wulff decided to spend the night out. On his way to the cinema, he saw people rushing from the direction of Từ Đàm Pagoda towards Lê Lợi road. While standing confused on the street corner in front of the Provincial Headquarters he found one of his students, Tôn Thất Kỳ, who asked him whether he would like to listen to the speech delivered by Venerable Thích Trí Quang that

³¹⁹ Ibid.

³²⁰ *Daily Reports of the National Police Department of Thừa Thiên Province in 1963*, no. 1862.

³²¹ Ibid.

³²² Ibid.

morning “it was scorching hot. The air was heavy and still. (...) One of my students suddenly called me and asked whether I wanted to listen to Venerable Thích Trí Quang’s speech which would be broadcast in a couple of minutes. I decided to join the crowd heading towards the Radio Station.”³²³ Tôn Thất Kỳ, when interviewed years later, denied he proposed this to Wulff: “That night I did not plan on going to the radio station, but my German professor asked me to be his translator, I myself did not want to get into any trouble. I was busy studying, and had no free time. Yet the professor asked me to follow him, how dare I not?”³²⁴ There must be some false recollection here in how these two people met that night. Later both Erich Wulff and Tôn Thất Kỳ joined the crowd heading towards the radio station, mainly out of curiosity. When they arrived, there were already about six thousand people surrounding the area.³²⁵

It was certainly the atmosphere of a festival. In the yard of the station, old and young, male and female, some with their bicycles, patiently waited to hear the special program. Friends and strangers alike enthusiastically talked to each other with some women and children singing cheerful songs. Meanwhile, inside the radio station, the city mayor, the director of the station, and a party of Buddhist monks were negotiating the program to be broadcast. The local government refused to do so as it was beyond their authority to censor the content of the “anti-government” speech delivered before the formal ceremony.³²⁶ For an hour or so, the megaphone in front of the station broadcast only music.³²⁷ Many people who had stayed home and turned on the radios for the special program now also started to flock towards the radio station to understand why there was only non-Buddhist music playing.³²⁸ The crowd could not have

³²³ Erich Wulff, *Vietnamesische Lehrjahre [Teaching Years in Vietnam]*, 135.

³²⁴ Tôn Thất Kỳ, interview by author, Huế, February 20, 2014.

³²⁵ Erich Wulff, *Vietnamesische Lehrjahre [Teaching Years in Vietnam]*, 135.

³²⁶ *Documentation on Anti-government Activities of Buddhist Association and Students in Huế in 1963*, FRPO, NAC, no. 8529; *Documentation on the Incidents in Huế during the Vesak Festival in 1963*, no. 8169.

³²⁷ *Documentation on Anti-government Activities of Buddhist Association and Students in Huế in 1963*, no. 8529.

³²⁸ *Documentation on the Incidents in Huế during the Vesak Festival in 1963*, no. 8169.

imagined the significance of that moment and the force about to be thrust upon them to change the course of history for their nation and hometown.

Starting late afternoon, the police department received constant reports and information from various sources about the gathering at the radio station. More and more city police were sent to reinforce the local officers as a precaution against the rioters. About 8:30 p.m., Major Đặng Sĩ, the Deputy Province Chief in charge of security, received a phone call from the director of the radio station requesting him to relieve the besieged building. Consulting with the governor, Đặng Sĩ received his order verbally and immediately mobilized security guards, military forces, gendarmes, fire trucks, and armored cars to the radio station.³²⁹

However, neither the information broadcast vehicles from the Department of Information nor armored cars and fire trucks were able to approach the radio station. According to detailed reports written a week later by the Police Department, the Central office of the I Corps Tactical Zone, and the Thừa Thiên Provincial Headquarters, the crowd was totally out of control. It was a chaotic commotion of shouting and people jostling to get closer to the radio station. The crowd threw rocks at the government vehicles with some vandals smashing the windows and doors of the building. Other members of the crowd used the loudspeaker to shout out “Victory,” and announce there were several military groups ready to fortify them at Từ Đàm pagoda. Some “extremists” climbed up to the balcony of the radio station and waved the Buddhist flag.³³⁰

One of these “extremists” was a young monk of Bảo Quốc pagoda, Đức Thanh, who some 50 years later renowned as the venerable abbot of this sacred ancient pagoda. This former member of the Children’s National Salvation Association of the Việt Minh found it inspiring listening to the Ven. Thích Trí Quang’s speech and seeing the banners in the morning

³²⁹ Từ Nguyên, “Đặng Sĩ Trước Tòa án Cách Mạng” [“Đặng Sĩ on Revolutionary Trial”], *Lập Trường Journal*, vol. 12, June 6, 1964.

³³⁰ *Documentation on the Incidents in Huế during the Vesak Festival in 1963*, no. 8169.

procession. Sometime in the afternoon he heard rumors of the protest and rode his bike from Bảo Quốc pagoda down to the radio station. While the space in front of the radio station was not so crowded, he climbed up on the podium in the center of the busy intersection between Duy Tân, Lê Lợi road, and the Trường Tiền Bridge to wave a big Buddhist flag. “People were amazed. They found it so strange. Drivers and pedestrians stopped to see what was going on. It got more and more crowded.”³³¹

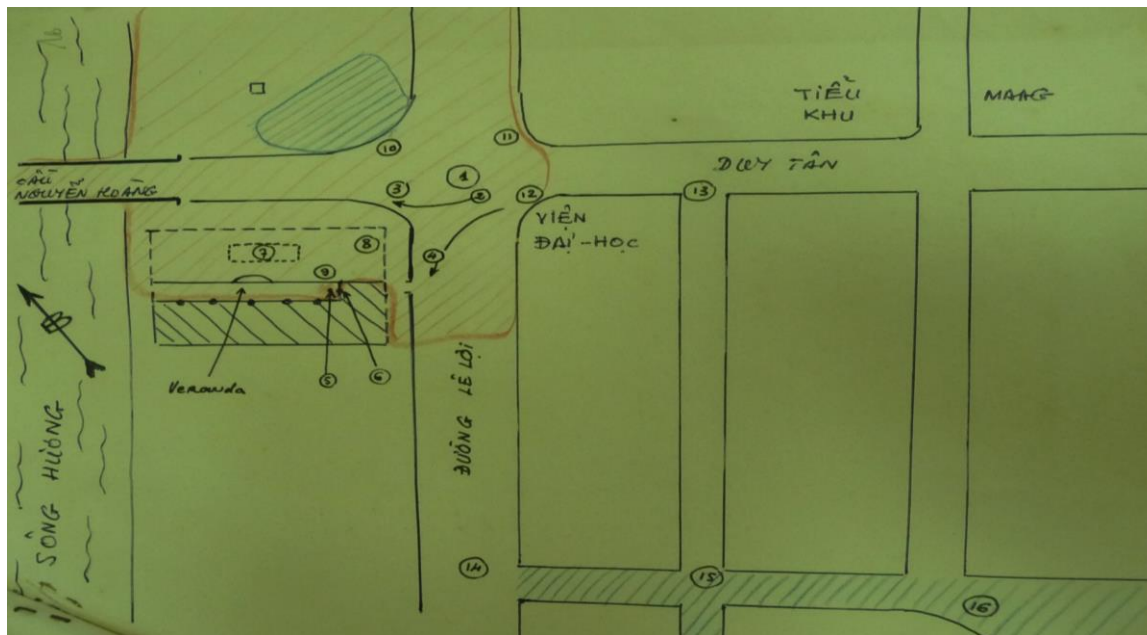


Illustration of Incidents in the afternoon and evening of May 8, 1963. The rectangle on the left was the city Radio Station. No. 1 was the podium where monk Đức Thanh waved the Buddhist flag. Source: *Document on the Incidents in Huế during the Vesak Festival in 1963*, no. 8169.

“Me, I liked it. I was young, and unafraid. I did not think of risk or death. I was overjoyed.” The young monk then carried the flag and climbed up to the balcony of the radio station and placed it there. However, by then an ocean of people packed the yard of the radio station, leaving him without the ability to get down. Fortunately enough, he found a nurse from Bảo Quốc pagoda, Nguyễn Duy Thanh Thiết, standing not very far away and used his help to climb down. “But now what? I started to worry. I could not get out of here. Suddenly I felt like I

³³¹ Đức Thanh, interview by author, Huế, August 22, 2014.

might be dead. When I climbed up I did not think about death, but now I did. Where should I go? Follow whom? Of course, I would follow Ven. Thích Trí Quang. I would rely on him. If he lived I would live; if he died I would die.”³³² The young monk Đức Thanh then joined Ven. Thích Trí Quang in his negotiation with the city mayor inside the radio station.³³³

Around 9:00 p.m., the echoing roar of armored cars from afar became louder and louder as they approached. Five armored cars appeared, one stopping a few steps from professor Erich Wulff and his student Tôn Thất Kỳ. The name of Ngô Đình Diệm’s brother, Ngô Đình Khôi, who had been killed by Việt Minh forces in 1945, painted on one of the cars startled everyone. The crowd was surrounded by police and special force units, under the command of the Deputy Province Chief Đặng Sĩ. Terrified, hundreds of people simultaneously tried to find a way out of the small radio station yard. People stepped on bicycles on the ground to get out, adding to the chaotic roar of fire trucks, the sound of water being sprayed into the crowd and mixing with the screams of the people. The water pressure sprayed onto the crowd was so low that, rather than being scared, the crowd enjoyed the cool water falling on their faces and clothes.³³⁴ There was suddenly an explosive bang in the center of the yard and at the doorstep of the radio station. Five minutes later, tear gas appeared in the middle of the confused clamor following with a burst of gunfire from one of the armored cars to disperse the crowd. Eight civilians, all under the age of 20, were crushed under tank treads; another fourteen were wounded.

Horribly frightened, Nguyễn Đắc Xuân, a student of Education at the University of Huế, ran immediately back to his apartment. “I could not imagine that such horrible violence was possible. The armored car named after Ngô Đình Khôi kept roaring in my mind. Returning to my

³³² Ibid.

³³³ As religious topics remain complicated and sensitive in post-war Vietnam, in his book / memoir on the history of Buddhism in Huế, Venerable Đức Thanh did not mention this fact.

³³⁴ Erich Wulff, *Vietnamesische Lehrjahre [Teaching Years in Vietnam]*, 135.

apartment, closing all the doors, I was still trembling with fear.”³³⁵ Tôn Thất Kỳ also ran home to find his siblings and several friends quietly studying in his spacious home. He yelled at them, even as he was trying to calm down “How come you guys are still studying at this moment?”³³⁶ The monk Đức Thanh went back to his pagoda, rushing to avoid the throngs of people over the Trường Tiền Bridge and onto the other side of the river. He completely forgot that he left his bike behind. Recalling the whole story years later, he smiled at his youthful exuberance “[n]o, I never found my bike again.”³³⁷

The German professor Erich Wulff was able to run to his friend’s house at the end of Lê Lợi road. That night the neighborhood of professors next to the University of Huế was quiet as usual. Erich Wulff entered his friend’s house while the wife was dictating a cassette–tape letter to her family.³³⁸ His friend’s question about the number of the dead and wounded worried him. The doctor thought he could be of some help and immediately walked back to the radio station.³³⁹ The intersection in front of the station now looked like a desolate battlefield with numerous twisted bicycles, shoes, blood, skin, and hair all over the place. All remained there until the next morning when trucks were sent to clean up the site.³⁴⁰

Unlike Nguyễn Đắc Xuân, Monk Đức Thanh, Tôn Thất Kỳ, or Erich Wulff, thousands of people weltered toward the two commercial streets Trần Hưng Đạo and Phan Bội Châu instead of going home after the incident at the radio station. They shouted out pro-Buddhist slogans, jostled against police forces, and playfully took the guns of security guards. Businessmen along

³³⁵ Nguyễn Đắc Xuân. *Từ Phú Xuân đến Huế* [From Phú Xuân to Huế], vol. 2 (Hà Chí Minh City: Youth Press, 2012), 24.

³³⁶ Tôn Thất Kỳ, interview by author, Huế, February 20, 2014.

³³⁷ Đức Thanh, interview by author, Huế, August 22, 2014.

³³⁸ Thanks to her absent-mindedness and not turning the cassette recorder off, the story told by Erich Wulff was recorded immediately after the event happened. In Erich Wulff, *Vietnamesische Lehrjahre* [Teaching Years in Vietnam], 140.

³³⁹ Erich Wulff, *Vietnamesische Lehrjahre* [Teaching Years in Vietnam], 139.

³⁴⁰ Nguyễn Ngu Í, Đại học Huế tranh đấu chống chế độ cũ - Qua hai giờ nói chuyện với giáo sư Lê Tuyên [The University of Huế Struggles against the Old Regime – Two hours talking with Professor Lê Tuyên], in *1963-2013: Năm mươi năm nhìn lại* [1963-2013: Fifty Years Looking Back], vol. 1, 339.

these streets reportedly contributed to the chaos by throwing Buddhist flags and banners from their second floor down to the streets or placing the banners on top of vehicles and driving around.³⁴¹ The police report later stated “[t]he scene could make one believe that they had just liberated the city after a revolution???? Aggressive extremists on the street shouted against the Open Arms programs!?, and libeled the government” [sic.]. The same police report concluded “[t]hese incidents, words, and actions must have emerged from discontented groups among lower class, or with the Việt Cộng’s instigation.”³⁴² On the other hand, the reports from the Buddhists were becoming increasingly popular thanks to the regular broadcasts from various pagodas in Huế and other nearby provinces, confirming strongly “our blood was shed for a religious ideal. The police chief ordered the tanks and armored cars to shoot people. American supplied tear gas, grenades, and rifles were abused for inhuman and unjust actions of unscrupulous actors.”³⁴³

The night did not become quiet until 2 to 3 a.m., after Ven. Thích Trí Quang borrowed a government vehicle with a loudspeaker to drive around the city to persuade the people to go home and continue their actions the next day.³⁴⁴ The night was full of disquiet and concern for the family of Đặng Văn Bí and Tôn Nữ Thị Cẩm at 14 Lam Sơn street (currently 10 Điện Biên Phủ street), because their youngest son, Đặng Văn Công, 13, did not come home that night after going to the radio station. Đặng Văn Công was one of the four children in this family whom Phạm Thị Xuân Quế tutored over four years. The hapless family and the preceptor did not learn the bad news that Đặng Văn Công was one of the eight victims until the next morning.³⁴⁵

³⁴¹ Report of the I Corps Tactical Zone, signed by Colonel Đỗ Cao Trí, May 16, 1963. *Documentation on the Incidents in Huế during the Vesak Festival in 1963*, no. 8169.

³⁴² Ibid.

³⁴³ *Investigation Documentation of the National Police Department of the North Central Region in 1963*, no. 1786.

³⁴⁴ Report of the I Corps Tactical Zone, signed by Colonel Đỗ Cao Trí, May 16, 1963. *Documentation on the Incidents in Huế during the Vesak Festival in 1963*, no. 8169.

³⁴⁵ Phạm Thị Xuân Quế, interview.

Not far out from the city center, the evening of May 8 was full of laughter and cheerful songs at the Buddhist camp for the Young Buddhist congregation. Only after midnight as the camp leaders were preparing to go to bed were they informed of the incident at the radio station. The brief and incomplete information they heard was so shocking that the congregation could not sleep. Early in the morning, “I could not even blow the wake-up whistle,” camp leader Trần Kiêm Đoàn admitted, “the older brothers and sisters lowered their heads, the younger cried their eyes out. I made an announcement that all camp activities were terminated and burst into tears.”³⁴⁶

On the day of May 9, instead of the regular night curfew from 1 a.m. to 5 a.m., the whole city was placed under a new restriction time from 9 p.m. to 5 a.m.³⁴⁷ All regular routines and daily activities were suspended with all markets and shops closed. In addition to city residents, hundreds of people from surrounding suburbs flocked to the main pagodas in Huế. Almost everywhere in the city, between 7 a.m. to 6 p.m. there were gatherings varying in size from hundreds to thousands of people.³⁴⁸ The earliest gathering was recorded at 7 a.m. at the hospital morgue with about 100 people offering their condolence to the unlucky families.³⁴⁹ Then hundreds of people, the majority of whom were young, led by national and Buddhist flags and banners went around the city, shouting cries of “Long live Buddhism,” “Just kill us,” “Down with religious separatism,” “Hail the Buddhist struggle spirit,” and “Down with the grenade-throwers.” Groups of hundreds gathered at different places in the city, culminating in a massive gathering of two thousand people in front of the radio station at 4 p.m.³⁵⁰ All day long, the

³⁴⁶ Trần Kiêm Đoàn, “Sen đồng phơi Lửa hạ 1963” [“Lotus Under Summer Fire 1963”], in *1963-2013: Năm mươi năm nhìn lại [1963-2013: Fifty Years Looking Back]*, vol. 3, 114.

³⁴⁷ *Documentation on Anti-government Activities of Buddhists and Students in Huế in 1963*, no. 8529.

³⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

provincial governor himself drove Venerable Thích Trí Quang around the city to appeal to the people to disperse and wait for further announcements by the pagodas.³⁵¹

On May 10, Venerable Thích Trí Quang visited the Provincial Headquarters at 6 a.m. to request urgent permission for a big gathering at Từ Đàm pagoda later that day in an effort to assuage the Buddhists.³⁵² The news quickly spread, and Buddhist laymen from all associations, families and directions with full Buddhist costume, flags and banners, were present at Từ Đàm pagoda at 10 a.m. Documents from all sources agreed on an attendance of eight thousand.³⁵³ This mass meeting was serious and orderly with participants very well behaved and following the conduct of Venerable Thích Trí Quang. After a mournful day of funerals for the victims on May 11, the city was reported as calm again.³⁵⁴

Yet all officers of the Police Department must have worked extra hard during this period to keep order, assist the people, and write daily reports on the security and social situation of the city, now adding a new column for “religious activities.” The police still had to be ready for all emergency incidents. For example, on May 15 police officers helped to take a 53-year-old pregnant lady to the hospital after she fell down very close to her due date. Unfortunately, she died on the operating table at the hospital.³⁵⁵ The police investigated a variety of fraud, such as deceiving a gold pair of earrings from a seven-year-old girl (May 24),³⁵⁶ or obtaining 1,800 VND by deceiving a soldier’s mother that her son had borrowed the money to buy 100 kg pepper, 10

³⁵¹ Hoàng Nguyên Nhuận, “Phù Đổng 63” [“Magic Power 63”], in *1963-2013: Năm mươi năm nhìn lại [1963-2013: Fifty Years Looking Back]*, vol. 3, 100. See also *Liên Hoa Nguyệt San (Liên Hoa Monthly Journal)* (29 January 1964): 91.

³⁵² *Daily Reports on the City Situation of the National Police Department of Thừa Thiên Province in 1963*, TTPH, ACH, no. 371.

³⁵³ *Documentation on Anti-government Activities of Buddhist Association and Students in Huế in 1963*, no. 8529; *Daily Reports on the City Situation of the National Police Department of Thừa Thiên Province in 1963*, TTPH, ACH, no. 371.

³⁵⁴ *Documentation on Anti-government Activities of Buddhist Association and Students in Huế in 1963*, no. 8529.

³⁵⁵ *Daily Reports on the City Situation of the National Police Department of Thừa Thiên Province in 1963*, no. 371.

³⁵⁶ *Documentation on Investigations of the National Police Department of the Northern Central Region in 1963*, no. 1786.

honey jars, and other products (May 26).³⁵⁷ The city police also inquired into a case reported on May 27 in which a 14-year-old girl was paid 4,000 VND to serve a family for three years, but after only a year, she went home and found another job.³⁵⁸ On May 28, they arrested two boys aged 11 and 16 for altering the date of birth on their birth certificates in order to apply for assistant positions at an American office in Phú Bài.³⁵⁹ From the 24th to 31st during the Marian month of May, they also monitored a series of Pilgrim Virgin household celebrations every night, each of which attracted 150 to 200 local Catholic believers.³⁶⁰

At 10 a.m. of May 30, following up on the controversial case back in March, the Quảng Hoa Sports Association of the Vietnamese Chinese community in Tả Ngạn district held a meeting to announce its President's decision to change the name to Sports and Fitness Association.³⁶¹ In addition to regular meetings of the district council with an average attendance of 500, in the evening of May 31, the local government called for additional study sessions to announce a government proclamation requesting all officials to respect the people's freedom of religion and faith practices and preaching.³⁶² May 31 also observed about 80% of markets in the city closed out.³⁶³ Most the people of Huế were busy again engaging in religious activities at the Tù Đàm pagoda. The city nonetheless never really returned to the same calm as before.

Since May 8, the city witnessed weekly prayer ceremonies for departed souls at big pagodas with hundreds of people in attendance.³⁶⁴ Tù Đàm pagoda became the center of information and headquarters of Buddhist mobilization for the citizens of Huế, suburban people, and a large population of the northern part of the central region of the country. Throughout May,

³⁵⁷ Ibid.

³⁵⁸ Ibid.

³⁵⁹ Ibid.

³⁶⁰ Ibid.

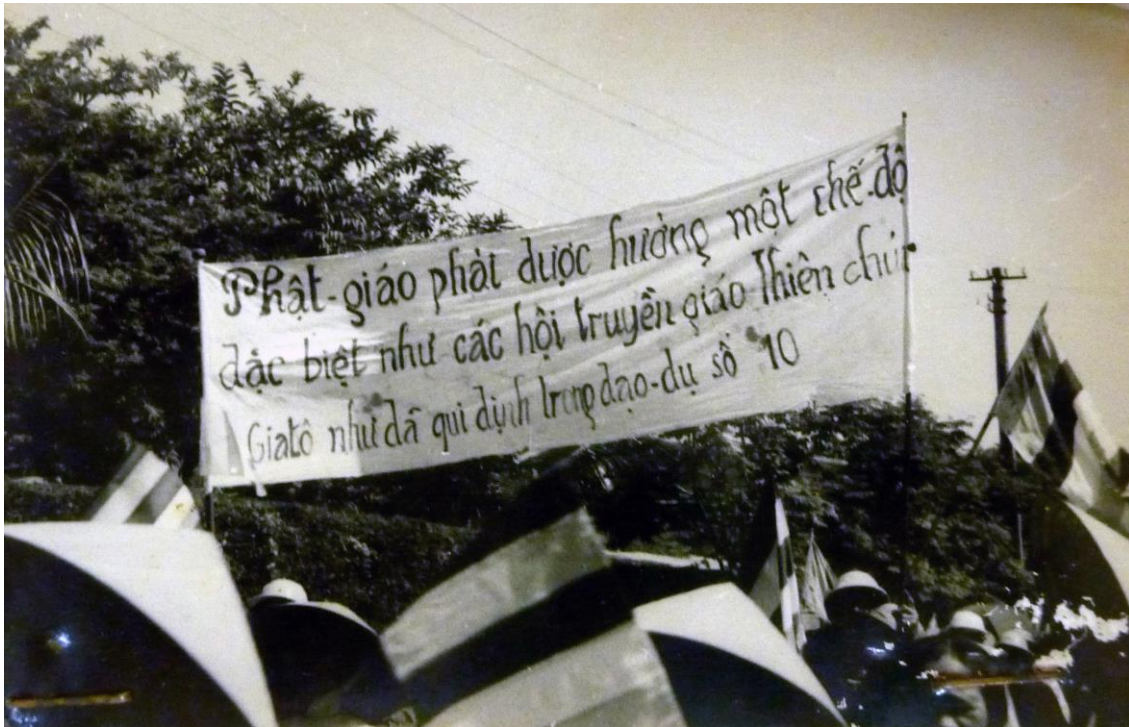
³⁶¹ Ibid.

³⁶² Ibid.

³⁶³ *Documentation on Anti-government Activities of Buddhist Association and Students in Huế in 1963*, no. 8529.

³⁶⁴ Ibid.

Trần Kiêm Đoàn and his friends rode their bikes back and forth to Từ Đàm Pagoda to update the situation. He now realized the awkwardness of his seemingly mundane daily habits. He found riding his old rattling bicycle less annoying than considering what to wear. “Wearing the uniform of the Buddhist Association, I was worried about my safety. Wearing non-Buddhist clothes to Từ Đàm, I had the feelings of an outsider.”³⁶⁵



Banner “Buddhism Must Benefit from Special Regulations like the Catholic Churches as Stated in Decree no. 10.” Source: *Documentation on the Incidents in Huế during the Vesak Festival in 1963*, no. 8169.

Early in the morning on May 30, Thái Kim Lan took an oral exam on neurological psychology in French with Professor Erich Wulff. It was not as difficult as she had expected, but she noticed the inattention and haste of her professor. Two hours later, the two met again at Từ Đàm Pagoda. At 10am, the Buddhist Student Association, of which Thái Kim Lan was the female vice president, joined other groups in a 24-hour hunger strike. By noon, about 70 people

³⁶⁵ Trần Kiêm Đoàn, “Sen đồng phơi lửa hạ 1963” [“Lotus Under Summer Fire 1963”], *1963-2013: Năm mươi năm nhìn lại [1963-2013: Fifty Years Looking Back]*, vol. 3, 116.

volunteered to join the Association and the strike. Bửu Tôn, a prince of the Nguyễn royal family and a medical student of the University of Huế, spoke to many youths in his “mệ” style: “too furious, “moi” [I in French] cannot stand this deceitful injustice any longer. The whole Medical school is about to join us.”³⁶⁶

The next day, as the number increased to more than 200, the hunger strike continued in three rounds. Five people in each row, young and old, students and retired officials, shop keepers and house wives, all patiently sat in the high summer heat in the yard of Từ Đàm pagoda. To a middle class student like Thái Kim Lan, it was not easy to be on a hunger strike. She had to struggle with her empty stomach to become a “hunger-strike heroine.”³⁶⁷ An agile young man from the royal family, Tôn Thất Kỳ identified himself as a “professional hunger striker:” “I found it easy. We did hunger strike, but still had iced lime juice to drink, so it was not that difficult at all.”³⁶⁸ Hundreds of people of all ages, genders, professions, and background suddenly became as close as siblings in one big family, praying to the Buddha for a solution to the current situation. “Hands pressed together, we mumbled prayers from the Buddhist scripture,” Nguyễn Đắc Xuân, a student of Education, shared the mutual feelings with thousands of people attending the mass prayer ceremony at Từ Đàm pagoda, “I learned by heart these prayers since I was a kid, but not until that day did I realize their full meaning.”³⁶⁹ The students also learned the first lessons in how to cope with the security force of the government. Phan Đình Bình, the active general secretary of the Buddhist Student Association, became the first case of arrest. He was put in jail at the police department, and immediately went on a seven-day hunger strike.³⁷⁰

³⁶⁶ Thái Kim Lan, *Phượng trên trời Hải đường dưới đất* [Phoenix in the Sky, Malus on the Ground].

³⁶⁷ Ibid.

³⁶⁸ Tôn Thất Kỳ, interview by author, Huế, February 20, 2014.

³⁶⁹ Nguyễn Đắc Xuân. *Từ Phú Xuân đến Huế* [From Phú Xuân to Huế], vol. 2, 30.

³⁷⁰ Thái Kim Lan, *Phượng trên trời Hải đường dưới đất* [Phoenix in the Sky, Malus on the Ground].

The number of attendance in mass hunger strikes by the monks, members of all Buddhist associations, and especially the students of the University of Huế at Từ Đàm pagoda undoubtedly awakened the city. People from all over flocked to Từ Đàm pagoda to witness with their own eyes this sacrifice and to express their love, respect, and appreciation to the young “heroes” of their city – the students of the two notable high schools Quốc Học and Đồng Khánh, and the University of Huế. “Students back then brought great honor and financial support [thanks to their scholarships] to their families, so their mothers and sisters were greatly offended and hurt when they were starved, beaten or arrested,”³⁷¹ Tôn Thất Kỳ explained fifty years later, his voice thick with emotion. In the yard of Từ Đàm pagoda, seniors held the hands of the students, bursting into tears: “Oh Buddha, why? Pity them! They are so skinny, and they are going to starve themselves;” “Oh dear, look how smart these students are, and they are sitting under this hellish heat,”³⁷² Thái Kim Lan recalled. Many people prayed to the sky, the mother earth, and even prostrated themselves in front of the students. Some tried to secretly offer the students a candy, or some sticky rice. It was probably the first time they witnessed an alternative to the common image of studious and bookish students. The students themselves felt moved and embarrassed because they had not contributed much to the whole struggle. Fifty years later, Thái Kim Lan still felt the warm teardrops of an old lady on her hands on May 31, 1963.³⁷³ The community connections among Buddhists, laymen, and supporters became closer than ever.³⁷⁴

Around 6 a.m. on May 31, Trần Kiên Đoàn and some friends in his neighborhood were arrested by the local authorities for making banners to support the struggle at Từ Đàm pagoda. With hands tied they quietly followed the district officers to the headquarters of the district. Trần Kiên Đoàn suddenly turned back because of a familiar voice screaming and pleading behind

³⁷¹ Tôn Thất Kỳ, interview by author, Huế, February 20, 2014.

³⁷² Thái Kim Lan, *Phượng trên trời Hải đường dưới đất* [*Phoenix on the Sky, Malus on the Ground*].

³⁷³ Ibid.

³⁷⁴ Ibid.

him. He was stunned for a moment; it was his mother. With untidy hair and clothes, his mother kneeled in front of the guards and cried out. “I immediately became froze dumbfounded because of my mother’s sudden appearance. The brutality no longer caused any psychological effects in me.”³⁷⁵ Although she had never expressed a word of political opposition in her whole life while living through many political regimes, his mother later spoke in public to the local authorities, proudly and pithily: “Thank you for releasing my son, but no need to tell me how to teach him. He is a good student. He knows what is right or wrong. You did not do your job well, so we the people have to respond.”³⁷⁶ In the eyes of Trần Kiêm Đoàn, his rustic mother, a typical Vietnamese woman who never left her small closed village, no longer existed. She had become the powerful image of a heroic Vietnamese mother which he had previously only encountered in literature.

During the last days of May, groups of people from all directions appeared surreptitiously, bypassing rows of armored cars, tanks, barbed wire, security guards, army forces, special police, and undercover officials to approach Từ Đàm pagoda and what they regarded as heroes and heroines in the yard of the pagoda. The Buddhist supporters brought with them dozens of bags of rice, sugar, salt, sauces, tofu, sesame, etc. for their fellows to eat after the hunger strikes.³⁷⁷ The intense summer heat of May never felt comfortable in tropical central Viet Nam; but nothing could cool down the struggle fire burning strongly within the Buddhist community in the city of Huế.

³⁷⁵ Trần Kiêm Đoàn, “Sen đồng phơi lửa hạ 1963” [“Lotus Under Summer Fire 1963”], in *1963-2013: Năm mươi năm nhìn lại* [1963-2013: Fifty Years Looking Back], vol. 3, 117.

³⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 119.

³⁷⁷ Thái Kim Lan, *Phượng trên trời Hải đường dưới đất* [Phoenix in the Sky, Malus on the Ground].

3.3 June – The People of the Pagoda

Many people of Huế probably did not notice that it was already a new month. Fifty years later, in emotional memoirs or narratives, they recalled it as the second day of the 48-hour hunger strike at Tù Đạm, or the day before another grand move leading to the unforgettable stormy period between the Buddhists and the RVN government.

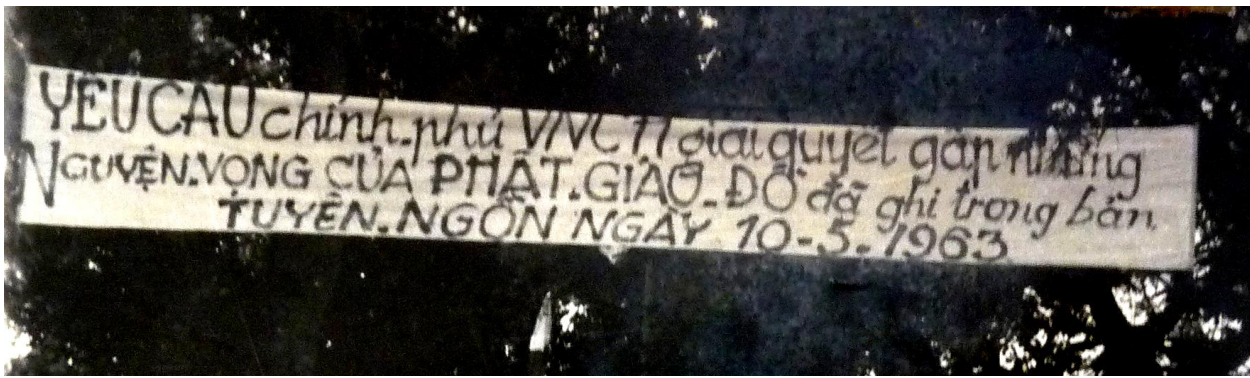
On June 1 at 7:35 a.m., a crowd of venerable monks, members of Buddhist families, congregations, associations, from two directions, Tù Đạm (three thousand people) and Diệu Đế (two thousand) with national and Buddhist flags and five banners (two in Vietnamese, two in English, and one in Chinese language), orderly and quietly marched to the Provincial Headquarter to present two motions: “We Vietnamese Buddhists Ask the Government to Satisfy our Five Aspirations;” “We Ask for a Government Policy based on Equality in Religion and Justice in Society.”³⁷⁸ While group after group of monks and supporters ardently continued their hunger strikes at Tù Đạm pagoda, at 8:30 a.m. the Tiger Cubs Company, First Division of the ARVN, practiced riot control operations in a spacious yard in front of the Thái Hoà palace inside the Forbidden City of the citadel.³⁷⁹ Meanwhile, approximately a thousand people [?] attended the lottery of Vinh Sơn Charity Association to contribute to building the Vietnamese Martyred Saint Church. In a one-hour lottery drawing, a music band was hired to entertain the audience.³⁸⁰ June 1 also marked the transfer of positions of the government representative, provincial governor and city mayor at the provincial headquarters.³⁸¹ The next morning after the formal ceremony, the new leaders delivered speeches for 1500 officials of the province before immediately becoming overwhelmed with a series of challenging dilemmas.

³⁷⁸ *Documentation on Anti-government Activities of Buddhist Association and Students in Huế in 1963*, FRPO, NAC, no. 8529.

³⁷⁹ *Documentation on Investigations of the National Police Department of the Northern Central Region in 1963*, TTPH, ACH, no. 1786.

³⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

³⁸¹ *Ibid.*



Banner: “Request the RVN Government to Immediately Satisfy the Buddhist Aspirations as Stated in the Declaration on May 10, 1963.” Source: *Documentation on the Incidents in Huế during the Vesak Festival in 1963*, no. 8169.

In the morning of the 3rd, while 223 candidates attended the entrance exam to the National School of Commerce,³⁸² about one thousand people congregated at Từ Đàm pagoda from 7 a.m.³⁸³ Incited by rumors of the hunger strike and the death of Ven. Thích Trí Quang, the mob destroyed all obstacles to pass Bến Ngự and Nam Giao bridges, and squeezed through the crowd of military, security forces, guards, tanks, armored cars, barbed wire fences, etc. to reach Từ Đàm pagoda. About 200 people gathered in front of the Provincial Headquarters at 10:30 a.m., another 300 crowded at the Nam Giao Bridge at 11:45 a.m. 100 people growing to over 1000 gathering at the Bến Ngự Bridge by 12 p.m., 300 gathered at the park in front of the Provincial Headquarters at 1 p.m., and hundreds at Bến Ngự Market were all later dispersed by tear gas, smoke grenades, and German Shepherds.³⁸⁴ 57 people fainted, among whom 20 suffered from serious asphyxiation.³⁸⁵ Inside the Từ Đàm pagoda, all the venerable monks were already on three to five day hunger strikes, with the number of voluntary strikers vastly increasing. Even while 93 students had not finished their original strike at 7 p.m., 72 youths and

³⁸² *Daily Reports of the National Police Department of the North Central Region in 1963*, no. 1862.

³⁸³ *Documentation on Some Young Men Provoked the Army Force in front of the Provincial Headquarters and Bến Ngự Bridge in 1963*, TTPH, ACH, no. 492.

³⁸⁴ *Documentation on Anti-government activities of Buddhists and Students in Huế in 1963*, no. 8529.

³⁸⁵ *Documentation on Some Young Men Provoked the Army Force in front of the Provincial Headquarters and Bến Ngự Bridge in 1963*, no. 492.

35 women started another.³⁸⁶ The city was placed under total curfew and the ARVN took charge of the city. However, nothing could dissuade the furious crowd. The next day, June 4, the exact same scene happened all around the city. The people protested and the military force suppressed their displays. According to Buddhist documents, casualties from the two days of protest included 142 wounded civilians among whom 69 Buddhist supporters were seriously injured.³⁸⁷

The 4th of June marked a new period in the Buddhist mobilization of Huế community as the RVN government decided to besiege Từ Đàm pagoda. To the surprise of the locals, they cut off electricity and water supplies for this central pagoda. National special police and secret guards besieged the pagoda day and night with weapons, barbed-wire fences, tanks, and armored cars. Approximately a hundred guards and combat police surrounded main pagodas in the city, such as Báo Quốc, Linh Quang, and Diệu Đế pagoda. About 500 people got “stuck” at Từ Đàm Pagoda when it was suddenly surrounded. When forced to return home a week later, a mixed group of intellectuals (about 7% professors, doctors, nurses, artists, etc.), students (50%), and common people (including shopkeepers, peddlers, tailors, drivers, etc., 43%)³⁸⁸ desired to stay in the pagoda. “In spite of being isolated, and lacking important necessities, we were happy and busy with meeting, discussing, collecting data from foreign radio stations, printing letters and pamphlets, broadcasting news every day. Some found pleasure in playing chess.”³⁸⁹ Neither hunger, armed police, or threats from the government affected their enthusiasm and determination to protect their pagodas and respected monks. “We were really naïve,” stated Tôn Thất Kỳ as he recalled his time at the pagoda, “such big words like ‘fighting for our religious rights’ did not exist in our mind. We considered it a big game, that was it. Having something to cope with was fun. I only thought if I left the pagoda, I would abandon my brothers, it felt like

³⁸⁶ *Documentation on Anti-government activities of Buddhists and Students in Huế in 1963*, no. 8529; Secret Reports of the Central Region to the National Department of Domestic Affairs, June 5, 1963, in *Mật điện đến Trung Nguyên (Secret Decrees to the Central Region)*, FRPO, NAC, no. 1320.

³⁸⁷ *Investigation Documentation of the National Police Department of the North Central Region in 1963*, no. 1786.

³⁸⁸ *Documentation on Anti-government activities of Buddhists and Students in Huế in 1963*, no. 8529.

³⁸⁹ Nguyễn Đắc Xuân. *Từ Phú Xuân đến Huế [From Phú Xuân to Huế]*, vol. 2, 35.

deserting the group.”³⁹⁰ Indeed, together they formed a special social group called, in the words of Hoàng Nguyên Nhuận: “the People of Pagoda.”³⁹¹

As her house was only separated from Từ Đàm pagoda by a three foot row of the tea leave shrub with some human-size holes Mai Thị Trà could observe the hunger strikes, read the banners, and hear all programs broadcast via the loudspeakers of both the pagoda and the government. She could see police and security guards, most of whom were not in uniform, standing, sitting, and wandering around her house or the empty garden and steps across the street. “They were there every day, and did not go home until very late, like midnight. They told us not to let anyone use our garden to enter the pagoda.”³⁹² Finding herself under surveillance, this seven-month pregnant woman did not feel worried, but instead decided to fight for her religion using the strategic location of her house, which immediately became the supply station for both human resources and goods. During the week of the siege in early June, “[t]he pagoda did not lack food, but betel and areca, and cigarettes too. I bought them, or people brought them to me, wrapped into small packages,” Mai Thị Trà recalled her special mission, “I woke up very early, 4:30 a.m. or 5 a.m., before the police came and surrounded the neighborhood again, and came to our back garden. It’s our garden, who could ban us from going in to our garden? I called the names of the intended recipients, then threw their small packages through the fence for the people inside the pagoda. They then picked them up.”³⁹³ While not joining any hunger strikes, this strong willed pregnant woman engaged in the common struggle in her own special way.

During the siege of Từ Đàm Pagoda in wake of the hunger strikes of early June 1963, the government deployed a diverse range of tactics to threaten and intimidate both Buddhists and

³⁹⁰ Tôn Thất Kỳ, interview by author, Huế, February 20, 2014.

³⁹¹ Hoàng Nguyên Nhuận, “Cuộc chơi nửa đời người” [“The Half-A-Life Game”] <http://sachhiem.net/HOANGNN/Hoang13.php> (accessed May 15, 2012).

³⁹² Mai Thị Trà, interview by author, Huế, August 26, 2014.

³⁹³ Ibid.

supporters. The megaphones used by the government officials were cranked up to maximum volume, a continual broadcast loop of insults, threats, and appeals from early morning to late afternoon. On the third day of the siege, local authorities forced the parents and relatives of those inside the pagoda to speak out as agents of the government line. All people were stunned to hear the earnest voices of fathers, mothers and siblings begging their children to return home. After several days of this barrage, haunted by the familiar voices of their fathers and mothers, many of the participants were agitated into a state of extreme anxiety.

The first “dialogue” between parents and children occurred early in the morning on the third day of the siege. Hoàng, a student of Sinology at the University of Huế, was one of the protestors stuck at Từ Đàm Pagoda for several days. His father, fearing the threat of dismissal or harassment because of his position as a government official, was forced to speak on the megaphone to call his son home. Listening to his father’s admonitions from inside the fence, Hoàng was too stunned to speak. While Hoàng’s friends found him reduced to tears, a letter was secretly sent by his father to the monk and student leaders from the back gate of the pagoda. The leaders were happily surprised reading the letter by Hoàng’s father: “Please let Hoàng talk to me, so that I have an excuse to tell the government that I cannot force him to return home.” He further suggested, “[p]lease tell my son that he should not feel sad if I scold him. It is totally fine for him to stay with you at the pagoda.”³⁹⁴

A great number of such distressing conversations between parents and children happened in the following days. It is worth noting that lack of filial piety was taken seriously within Vietnamese traditional family and social hierarchy, especially in a conservative city like Huế. All Buddhist leaders and laymen understood the children’s duty was to obey their parents: once the parents asked them to return home, it was the children’s fault if they kept staying at the pagoda. Despite this intense pressure, the young people were determined to stay, and to return home only

³⁹⁴ Thái Kim Lan, *Phượng trên trời Hải đường dưới đất* [*Phoenix in the Sky, Malus on the Ground*].

when the pagodas were set free.

Although the young people insisted on staying with the struggle, many individuals certainly debated internally and pondered their situation. Would I have to speak to my parents on the microphone tomorrow? Would my mother cry begging me to go home? Would my father see me as an undutiful son? The parents outside the fence also experienced similar anxieties and concerns. They worried if their children, some of whom were for the first time living outside of their family home, would know how to behave, to follow the monks, to help other people. Separated by only a barbed wire fence, parents and children could not hold each other's hands, solely communicating through looks of sympathy and encouragement.

Staying strong to encourage her friends experiencing a variety of emotional circumstances, Thái Kim Lan nearly collapsed when she saw her mother outside the fence. Growing up without a father, her mother meant everything to her. She signaled discretely for her mother to go home and not to worry about her. Later that day, Thái Kim Lan received a small package sent through the back fence. Inside were her toothbrush and face towel. As soon as she found out that Thái Kim Lan was besieged inside the pagoda, her mother had tried every day to send her personal belongings into the pagoda to make sure Thái Kim Lan could make the pagoda home and stay with the struggle as long as she wished. Thái Kim Lan later admitted the Buddhist mobilization in 1963 offered her mother a valuable opportunity to participate and share with her community the ideals of equality and freedom for the city of Huế.³⁹⁵

Growing up in such a small tranquil city, studying at schools for most of their lives, and rarely experiencing danger or challenges, the youth of Huế never previously faced cudgels, tear gases, acid grenades, hunting dogs, and jail. After encountering the Buddhist affair in May, they instantly joined the protests against the government's anti-Buddhist policies, gradually marching

³⁹⁵ Ibid.

into the course of history, which ultimately reached the point of no return. Many Vietnamese students in the 1960s became free from fear and personal desires. As Phạm Văn Minh puts it, “[young Buddhists] were an army of selfless and fearless youth who had thrown away their schoolbooks, and effectively their careers, to become peace activists.”³⁹⁶ Forty years later, Trần Kiêm Đoàn thoroughly admitted, “we young people were, without any hesitation, willing to engage in the struggle regardless of the challenges and dangers waiting for us out there.”³⁹⁷

During the summer of 1963, many residents in Hue witnessed profound changes in family relations fundamentally altering their views on what a traditional family should be. To parents, their children knowing only of schoolbooks, and always in need of their support, suddenly matured, acting beyond the role of students, and independently making their own decisions to stand up for what they believed in as they saw fit. In spite of worries about their children’s safety, the parents were proud of their children’s autonomy in decisions and actions in joining the struggle, defending their religious belief, and invoking national traditions. For the children, their parents remained an unwavering source of support and encouragement for their actions. As a result of the hunger strikes, demonstrations, siege, and arrests, the student population noticed the emergence of new attitudes and characteristics of their parents, things they had never seen in their family before. The traditional families of Huế were consequently forced to adopt heretofore unseen ways of communicating and belonging.

At the commune level, new human relations emerged during these eventful days of strikes and demonstrations in early June. Professors and students, shopkeepers and government officials, royal family members and housewives, were all united around a common belief. Supporting 500 individuals of the pagoda were thousand others of their families, relatives,

³⁹⁶ Quan Nhu Pham Van Minh, *Vietnamese Engaged Buddhism: The Struggle Movement of 1963 – 1966* (Westminster: Văn Nghệ, 2002), 17.

³⁹⁷ Trần Kiêm Đoàn, “Sen đồng phơi lửa hạ 1963” [“Lotus Under Summer Fire 1963”], *1963 – 2013: Năm mươi năm nhìn lại [1963 – 2013: Fifty Years Looking Back]*, vol. 3, 126.

friends, as Tôn Thất Kỳ suggested, “as a man loves a woman, a girl has a boyfriend, their whole extended families would beat the same heart rhythm.”³⁹⁸ They now cared for each other as if they were brothers and sisters in one big family. A great number of people voluntarily spent days at the pagodas and hospitals cooking, washing clothes, and looking after other members of their hometown. Observing the common people around her during her time at Từ Đàm pagoda, Thái Kim Lan wondered what had happened to the famous tactful discretion and reserved shyness of the people in her city. Together with many other commoners she found in herself infused with a new determination to “sacrifice”³⁹⁹ for the rights and justice in the community.⁴⁰⁰ The emerging struggle community envisioned and imagined themselves through lenses of partisanship and violence, but also compassion, encouragement, and sympathy.

Trần Duy, a student of pedagogy, did not regret his decision to remain inside Từ Đàm pagoda. From a Buddhist family, he trusted his parents would not scold him for joining the struggle. Growing up in the countryside, lack of essential living conditions did not bother him. Trần Duy was, however, quietly brooding over his girlfriend, who was a Catholic. After seeing her outside of the fence one morning, he thought she must have been upset because of his stay at the pagoda. Trần Duy wanted to stay with his peers in the pagoda, but his love asked him to leave. At the suggestion of the student leaders, Trần Duy reluctantly left the pagoda to explain to his girlfriend that the struggle had never been against Catholics and Catholicism.⁴⁰¹

After 36 hours of a hunger strike at Từ Đàm pagoda in early June, many people fainted. A rumor spread that venerable Thích Trí Quang was one of them, shaking the whole city. Vendors at Đông Ba market reportedly cried their eyes out and immediately closed the market, heading towards Từ Đàm pagoda. No one succeeded in getting through the police control to

³⁹⁸ Tôn Thất Kỳ, interview by author, Huế, February 20, 2014.

³⁹⁹ Quotation mark by Thái Kim Lan.

⁴⁰⁰ Thái Kim Lan, *Phượng trên trời Hải đường dưới đất* [*Phoenix in the Sky, Malus on the Ground*].

⁴⁰¹ Ibid.

enter the pagoda, except in two cases. Professor doctor Lê Khắc Quyến – Dean of the Medical school of the University of Huế, Director of the Huế Hospital, and the private doctor of president Ngô Đình Diệm’s family – visited monk Thích Trí Quang during those days. The “humane and brave” actions of doctor Quyến was greatly appreciated and in turn inspired the community to continue the strike, destroying the wall between the university academics in a Catholic-dominated regime and the Buddhist masses.⁴⁰²

The second person able to visit monk Thích Trí Quang that day was Queen Mother Từ Cung, mother of Bảo Đại the last king of the Nguyễn dynasty. Wearing a long golden royal dress, with a small pack in hand, she ambled to the pagoda. She brought a piece of precious ginseng used by the royal family for emergencies for the exhausted strikers. Strikers made way for her, many prostrating themselves before her. Some of the people of Huế might have visited the royal palace many times, but rarely could one see the Queen Mother. In the pagoda kitchen during the siege there were a number of royal family members, who instead of having servants cook for them, now cooked to serve hundreds of ordinary people.⁴⁰³ Thanks to the Buddhist mobilization, the curtain between the ordinary masses and the royal family was torn down.⁴⁰⁴

In fact, the barbed wire fences surrounding Từ Đàm pagoda in those days were never very sharp and the distance between people inside and outside the fence became shorter day by day. Sometimes one could see a Buddhist hand inside the fence giving a bowl of fresh green tea to a thirsty policeman. A great number of goods, from cigarettes to personal belongings, were sent daily from outside to the people in the pagoda through these dedicated mailmen, police and guardsmen.⁴⁰⁵ They found various ways to exchange the sympathies and encouragement to the Buddhist supporters. When Trần Kiêm Đoàn was released, the junior official who untied him

⁴⁰² Nguyễn Đắc Xuân. *Từ Phú Xuân đến Huế* [From Phú Xuân to Huế], vol. 2, 31-2.

⁴⁰³ *Liên Hoa Nguyệt San* [Liên Hoa Monthly Journal], (30 November 1963): 52.

⁴⁰⁴ Nguyễn Đắc Xuân. *Từ Phú Xuân đến Huế* [From Phú Xuân to Huế], vol. 2, 32.

⁴⁰⁵ See more *Liên Hoa Nguyệt San* (Liên Hoa Monthly Journal), (30 November 1963): 50-1.

was Đỗ, his partner in English classes at the Vietnamese American Association. “He looked at me with a cold face, but I could see some warm sympathies in his seemingly ignorant eyes.”⁴⁰⁶

People were able to communicate and support each other although they might belong to different “sides.” Từ Đàm pagoda was eventually de-besieged after one week on June 11, the day senior monk Thích Quảng Đức set himself on fire in the middle of a busy intersection in Sài Gòn. This event again incited another series of protests, in both the city and people’s feelings of Huế.

After only one month the city of Huế had changed, physically and spiritually. Many local residents discovered a new face of their city. To Trần Kiêm Đoàn, his hometown now became the city of guardsmen, police, armored cars, trucks, and weapons.⁴⁰⁷ It was also Thái Kim Lan’s observation that there were plenty of police and ARVN soldiers everywhere. They all carried cudgels, rifle with machetes, and grenades dangling belts on the way to Từ Đàm Pagoda.⁴⁰⁸ Several tanks threateningly loomed, big coils of barbed wire were put along the street. An invisible but heavy tension pervaded the sacred tranquil pagodas and dominated the city for months.⁴⁰⁹ For several days, the most common scenes in the traditionally peaceful city were the emptiness of regularly busy streets, demonstrations with banners on important streets, or tension between the government forces and common people in Buddhist temple areas. The Buddhists described their sacred space as warring, hostile desolate battle fields.⁴¹⁰ The atmosphere was silent as the grave, full of indignation and frustration. They strongly resented the government’s cruel suppression and oppressive policies. They easily recognized thousands of leaflets dropped by military airplanes for the purpose of reassuring the people as bad propaganda. They also

⁴⁰⁶ Trần Kiêm Đoàn, “Sen đồng phôi Lửa hạ 1963” [“Lotus Under Summer Fire 1963”], in *1963-2013: Năm mươi năm nhìn lại* [1963-2013: Fifty Years Looking Back], vol. 3, 118.

⁴⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 115.

⁴⁰⁸ Thái Kim Lan, *Phượng trên trời Hải đường dưới đất* [Phoenix in the Sky, Malus on the Ground].

⁴⁰⁹ See also *Liên Hoa Nguyệt San* [Liên Hoa Monthly Journal] (30 November 1963): 46.

⁴¹⁰ *Documentation on Investigations of the National Police Department of the Northern Central Region in 1963*, no. 1786.

found the talk on “current situation of the city” organized by the government on June 6 full of allegations.⁴¹¹ The usual happy smiles of the locals disappeared; they became quiet, anxious, and patient. As Tiểu Dân analyzed on *Bách Khoa Journal* in November 1963, fear covered the whole society, skepticism and reserve replaced sympathies and understanding in community.⁴¹²



Banner “Request to Stop Unjust Terrorist Arrests of Buddhists.” Source: *Documentation on the Incidents in Huế during the Vesak Festival in 1963*, no. 8169.

In the mean time, the city of Huế witnessed the normalcy of daily life. In 20 days from May 24 to June 12, there were 16 petty theft and grand larcenies, 9 bicycle thefts, 14 traffic accidents, 3 suicides, 3 desertions, 2 dog bites, 3 house fires, and one prostitution.⁴¹³ According

⁴¹¹ Ibid.

⁴¹² Tiểu Dân, “Cảm nghĩ về sự cáo chung của một chế độ độc tài” [“Thoughts on the Termination of a Dictatorship”], in *1963-2013: Năm mươi năm nhìn lại* [1963-2013: *Fifty Years Looking Back*], vol. 3, 527.

⁴¹³ Various reports in *Documentation on Anti-government Activities of Buddhist Association and Students in Huế in 1963*, no. 8529; *Documentation on Investigations of the National Police Department of the Northern Central Region in 1963*, no. 1786.

to the report by the Technical Office of the National Police Department on July 2, the general situation in Thừa Thiên province and particularly the city of Huế from June 1 to June 30, was stable in terms of economic, political, cultural, and social development.⁴¹⁴ Since June 18, a series of entertainment activities was planned and instantly implemented for the purpose of distracting the locals from religious activities.⁴¹⁵ The film screening at Thương Bạc square on June 18 reportedly attracted approximately seven thousand people [?].⁴¹⁶ The city government arranged to distribute rice to the poor whose incomes were heavily affected during “the difficult days” in early June. 300 kilograms of rice were supplied to 60 poor families in Thuận Cát Ward on June 4.⁴¹⁷ On June 8, in many distribution venues, each of 1345 families received 5 kilograms of rice.⁴¹⁸ Similar efforts were made to laborers: 20 kilograms of rice to support each family with their precarious living.⁴¹⁹ The Women’s Solidarity Movement presented each victim of the chaos on June 3 at Bến Ngự market who was still staying at the hospital on June 10 with one jar of condensed milk and 2 oranges.⁴²⁰

At 5 p.m. on June 9, 600 students of the National Music and Theatre Academy received awards for their excellent study results.⁴²¹ At 6:30 a.m. on the 10th, the mass requiem was solemnly organized with 1000 attendance for Pope John (Giovanni XXIII) who passed away on June 3, 1963.⁴²² The constructions of the Đông Ba market and the south citadel gate Nhà Đò were blocking traffic and daily activities of local residents. In order to extend the citadel gate, a group of construction workers used grenades and tractors to break the thick walls of the citadel.

⁴¹⁴ *Daily Reports of the National Police Department of Thừa Thiên Province in 1963*, no. 1862.

⁴¹⁵ *Documentation on Anti-government Activities of Buddhist Association and Students in Huế in 1963*, no. 8529.

⁴¹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴¹⁷ *Documentation on Investigations of the National Police Department of the Northern Central Region in 1963*, no. 1786.

⁴¹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴¹⁹ *Daily Reports of the National Police Department of Thừa Thiên Province in 1963*, no. 1862.

⁴²⁰ *Documentation on Investigations of the National Police Department of the Northern Central Region in 1963*, no. 1786.

⁴²¹ *Ibid.*

⁴²² *Ibid.*

Some days on June 4 or June 7, the surrounding neighborhood could hear about 5 to 6 big explosions as early as 6 a.m.⁴²³ The tractor was so heavy that it broke some underground water pipes on June 10, which affected daily life of the neighborhood for a few days.⁴²⁴ About 7:10 p.m. on June 22, a group of seven American and Vietnamese parachuters were having drinks at Lợi Thành restaurant at 7 Trần Hưng Đạo Street and two American soldiers squabbled over some trifles. The local police had to contact the American Military Mission Headquarter while dispersing the Vietnamese crowd curiously watching the rare fight of the white men in their city.⁴²⁵

Vietnamese, Americans, Germans, or Chinese people in Huế, who were participating in protests, hunger strikes, pagoda blockades, or having a drink to cool down the high summer heat, all were swept away with the ups and downs of life normalcy in the month to come.

3.4 July – The Wedding

July of 1963 was another unforgettable month for many people of Huế. The ceremony of “Double Seven” [Lễ Song Thất] commemorated the foundation of the national constitution (7/7/1956) with a series of meetings (50 thousands of attendance), musical performances (3000, and 10,000), film screenings (500), football matches (600), volleyball, bike racing, etc. in two days of July 6 and 7.⁴²⁶ The 9th of July was another festive day with the dress rehearsal of “Feast of Sacrifice and Worship to Heaven” [Lễ Tế Nam Giao] at the Thái Hoà palace inside the Forbidden City.⁴²⁷ The whole population of Huế was by then busy preparing for the important and unique festival of Huế: the day they lost the capital of Huế to the French in 1885 [Ngày thất

⁴²³ Ibid.

⁴²⁴ Ibid.

⁴²⁵ *Daily Reports on the City Situation of the National Police Department of Thừa Thiên Province in 1963*, TTPH, ACH, no. 371.

⁴²⁶ *Daily Reports of the National Police Department of Thừa Thiên Province in 1963*, no. 1862.

⁴²⁷ Ibid.

thủ kinh đô], observed on May 23 in lunar calendar, or July 13, 1963. Many guilds, social organizations had meetings to arrange the prayer ceremonies and other communal activities.⁴²⁸ For instance, after their ceremony at 4 p.m. on July 12, the fabric shopkeepers of Đông Ba market presented 2 square meters of fabric to each poor family in the city.⁴²⁹

Also starting July 2 according to the Buddhist student leader Thái Kim Lan, or mid July according to the secret report number 6997/CSQG–DB–IM of the Police Department of Northern Central Region, signed by major Đào Quan Hiến on September 22, 1963, the General Buddhist Association launched the second term of the struggle, which contained nonstop meetings, prayer ceremonies, talks, “dissident” material distribution, etc. at various pagodas.⁴³⁰ The Buddhist mobilization in fact continued to develop in July with more gatherings, banners, hunger strikes, daily radio broadcast at Diệu Đế and Từ Đàm pagodas.⁴³¹ The rice businessmen – Buddhist supporters stocked up Từ Đàm pagoda with 1000 kg rice in case of being besieged.⁴³² Following the self-immolation of the monk Thích Quảng Đức in June, the suicide to protest against government religious policy on July 7 of the famous writer Nhất Linh – the primary founder and writer of the most powerful literary group of early twentieth century Vietnam Tự Lực Văn Đoàn [Self-Strengthening literary group], again incited the city. On his funeral day, hundreds of his loyal readers of Huế, professors, students, artists, laborers, etc., quietly walked through many streets of the city with flowers, incenses, compassion, grief, and gratitude. The lines kept

⁴²⁸ Ibid.

⁴²⁹ *Daily Reports on the City Situation of the National Police Department of Thừa Thiên Province in 1963*, no. 371.

⁴³⁰ *Weekly Reports of Current Situation of the National Police Department of the Central Region in 1963*, TTPH, ACH, no. 1781.

⁴³¹ *Daily Reports on the City Situation of the National Police Department of Thừa Thiên Province in 1963*, no. 371.

⁴³² *Documentation on Investigations of the National Police Department of the Northern Central Region in 1963*, no. 1786.

lengthening with more and more as passengers, some with their bicycles, joining along the way, regardless the high summer heat and police's surveillance.⁴³³

During the summer of 1963, the struggle of Buddhists and supporters was greatly stimulated and supported by various literary works. The poem “Lửa Từ Bi” (“Compassion Flame”) by Vũ Hoàng Chương, which was inspired by the self-immolation of monk Thích Quảng Đức in Sài Gòn, became very popular immediately after its publication on July 15, 1963 - “Poems burn up with prayers / Prayers for humanity at peace / Forever this everlasting brotherhood” [“Thơ cháy lên theo với lời kinh / Tụng cho nhân loại hòa bình / Trước sau bền vững tình huynh đệ này”]. The poem had a powerful impact on a great number of participants in the RVN. Buddhist supporters and non-Buddhists alike hand-copied or published it over and over in various publications.⁴³⁴ Composer Trịnh Công Sơn, a son of Huế, contributed with his newly composed songs, which soon became very popular. Thái Kim Lan recalled, “we students learned by heart his song ‘Nhìn những mùa thu đi’ (Watch as the Autumns Go) and sang it over and over throughout three months of the struggle.”⁴³⁵

By July, the people of Huế were becoming familiar with the presence of security and limited access to the neighborhoods around main pagodas: police guarded all paths leading to Từ Đàm, checked all means of transportation, and recorded the license plates of all vehicles. Local residents had to show their ID cards to pass through. All this caused further inconvenience for special occasion like the big day of the household of Võ Văn Nam.

On July 27, Võ Văn Nam, a mathematics teacher of Đồng Khánh high school, married Võ Thị Vui, a teacher at a primary school in the city. The two families' joy was tempered with worry on the wedding day, however, because the groom's procession to the bride's household to collect his espoused would pass directly by the Từ Đàm Pagoda. The streets around Từ Đàm

⁴³³ Thái Kim Lan, *Phượng trên trời Hải đường dưới đất* [Phoenix in the Sky, Malus on the Ground].

⁴³⁴ Nguyễn Đắc Xuân. *Từ Phú Xuân đến Huế* [From Phú Xuân to Huế], vol. 2, 36.

⁴³⁵ Bửu Ý, *Trịnh Công Sơn Một Nhạc Sĩ Thiên Tài* (Trịnh Công Sơn- A Talented Composer). (Hồ Chí Minh City: Youth Press, 2003), 22.

were then entirely blocked. “Early that morning I went out to see if it was still blocked. They blocked all paths around here, which way should we go?” – the husband now recalled his anxieties the morning of his big day. All vehicles of their relatives, colleagues, and friends who went to the wedding ceremony were stopped and checked by the police one kilometer away from his house. As a result, “in the end only close friends went with us,” not so many relatives and friends were able to come share the happiness of the two families.⁴³⁶ Instead of passing through Từ Đàm pagoda, the wedding procession had to take a longer way down to Bến Ngự bridge, cross another one on Nam Giao, and turn back to Điện Biên Phủ street. A group of old and young people in traditional wedding clothes, with palanquin [châu án], lanterns, betel and areca trays, two wine amphoras, two geese, traditional cakes, together with a photographer, walked several kilometers extra because of the siege. Hence, the ceremony was a little delayed, but everyone was still very happy.

⁴³⁶ Võ Văn Nam and Võ Thị Vui, interview by author, Huế, June 28, 2015.



Võ Văn Nam and Võ Thị Vui on their wedding day, July 27, 1963, with the bride's traditional dress. Source: Family collection of Võ Văn Nam and Võ Thị Vui, photo of the dress was taken by author.

All the inconvenience was however not the most notable memory of the bride. In two days, at both the bride's and groom's families, their wedding banquets were well prepared by a great cook in the city with fish, squid, chicken, ducks, etc. "We in the city had to make sure that the food looked beautiful, so people would not laugh at us. The rural people need only to be full, but beauty was more important to city people like us," Võ Thị Vui happily recalled her big day. All pigs, geese, and chickens were raised months before; beautiful flowers like roses and lilies were bought from Đà Lạt city; wedding dress and suits in both traditional and western styles were cut at the famous tailor shop Hùng on Trần Hưng Đạo street; tables and chairs were

borrowed from households in the neighborhood.⁴³⁷ That first night of July 27, 1963 the new couple tasted together a piece of ginger and salt, which was believed to wish them a long happy married life afterwards.

1963	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May	Jun.	Jul.	Aug.	Sep.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.
Numbers of Marriages	18	19	23	23	22	12	16	20	15	34	32	37

Numbers of Marriages in Huế in 1963. Sources: *Statistical Yearbook of 1963*. Sài Gòn: National Statistics Institution, 1965.

Võ Văn Nam and Võ Thị Vui’s wedding was only one of the 16 marriages in July 1963 in the city of Huế. Life was still going on with plenty of interesting surprises!

3.5 August – Before the Deluge

Another tense and eventful month in Huế, August 1963, started with a meeting at Tù Đàm pagoda, where the leaders of the Buddhist Student Association delivered a powerful speech analyzing concisely the core of the Buddhist mobilization in the relation with the contemporary politics and national situation of the RVN. “History would frankly criticize anybody who self-awards the patriotic authority to manipulate the nation with mean prejudice of the family’s or party’s interests.”⁴³⁸ The trenchant and incisive words proclaimed to the government the strong determination of the young generation and fostered themselves to unite for “the struggle by compassion and for compassion,” in order “for the Buddhist aspirations to be soon implemented in peace and sympathy.”⁴³⁹ It was the spirit that motivated the Buddhists and supporters to continue their nonstop hunger strikes in the hot days of August 3, 4, and 5. Many monks from

⁴³⁷ Ibid.

⁴³⁸ *Documentation on Investigations of the National Police Department of the Northern Central Region in 1963*, no. 1786.

⁴³⁹ Ibid.

Sài Gòn were wholeheartedly welcomed to Huế to give talks at Diệu Đế pagoda, gathering thousands of people for hours along the banks of Đông Ba river. Hunger strikes to support the Buddhist activities in Hội An (Quảng Nam province), prayer ceremonies for the Buddhist inspirations, daily radio broadcast of open letters, proclamations, reports, etc. at Từ Đàm and Diệu Đế pagoda, kept fanning the struggle flame in early August.⁴⁴⁰

After a regular radio program in the evening of August 7 at Diệu Đế pagoda, about 9:50 p.m., the pagoda announced to approximately 1500 people standing inside and outside the yard “please do not pick any documents up because we do not distribute any document tonight.” 30 minutes later appeared about 20 leaflets from the NLF denouncing the rude oppressive actions of the American – Diệm government, and appealing for the soldiers and people to join in the struggle against the government. A group of people instantly surrounded a young man, named Hoàng Khôi, who was an intelligent security official of the Police Department, blaming him of dispersing the leaflets. The fight resulted in a tumult in front of the pagoda until 1 a.m., and three young men were sent to the hospital. The report by the Police Department accused the Buddhist leaders and rebels of colluding with the Việt Cộng to attack the government official.⁴⁴¹ The Buddhist leaders, in contrast, blamed the government officials for plotting against Buddhists and beating their supporters. A widespread and inconclusive discussion on the reactions of the government quickly fomented the city, and set the background for the unexpected historical incidents in the next few days.

At 2 a.m. on August 13, monk Sa Di Thanh Tuệ, 18, at Phước Duyên pagoda self-immolated to support the Buddhist struggle. Later in the afternoon, the government immediately sent the information broadcast vehicles to all busy streets and populated neighborhoods to warn

⁴⁴⁰ *Documentation on Anti-government Activities of Buddhist Association and Students in Huế in 1963*, no. 8529.

⁴⁴¹ *Ibid.*

the people about a mass suicide movement (!) and not to be credulous public gathering at their wrongful instigation.⁴⁴² The city responded by a storm of furious anger. Hundreds of people gathered on August 14 with a little piece of yellow cloth on their shirts to commemorate and show their great admiration to the brave action of the young monk.⁴⁴³ The next day one thousand of people, enforced by another three thousand students of five high schools after finishing a national exam, packed up the main streets and in front of the Provincial Headquarters.⁴⁴⁴ The crowd jostled in chaos and two police got beaten.⁴⁴⁵ The ARVN and security force were mobilized to keep order. Ten “extremists” were arrested, including four students, one barber, one businessman, one driver, one farmer, one veteran; the youngest was 14 years old, the oldest was 29, five were under 18; and two people from out of town.⁴⁴⁶

While dealing with the incensed crowd, the RVN government representative in Huế welcomed an unexpected special visitor to his office – the American Consul in Huế, John Helble, at 11:30 a.m. on August 15. Three months of tumult must have caught attention of the Americans, and the Consul tried to seek for more information to report to the State Department. All the challenging questions by the Consul, though diplomatically avoided by the Huế leader, implied the secret sources of information that the American consulate was able to collect, but none of the RVN government documentation covered. The American Consul also took some pictures of the street demonstrations with his personal camera.⁴⁴⁷

For the whole week, many streets in the city of Huế shut down. All busy markets again looked like desolate deserts. When people had not overcome the stupefying death of the young monk on August 13, another self-immolation further shocked the city. Upon his multiple

⁴⁴² *Daily Reports on the City Situation of the National Police Department of Thừa Thiên Province in 1963*, no. 371.

⁴⁴³ *Documentation on Anti-government Activities of Buddhist Association and Students in Huế in 1963*, no. 8529.

⁴⁴⁴ *The Disorderly Conduct in front of the Provincial Headquarters on August 15, 1963*, TTPH, ACH, no. 491.

⁴⁴⁵ *Documentation on Anti-government Activities of Buddhist Association and Students in Huế in 1963*, no. 8529.

⁴⁴⁶ *The Disorderly Conduct in front of the Provincial Headquarters on August 15, 1963*, no. 491.

⁴⁴⁷ *Documentation on Anti-government Activities of Buddhist Association and Students in Huế in 1963*, no. 8529.

requests to the Buddhist Association Board, venerable monk Thích Tiêu Diêu, 71, set himself on fire at 4 a.m. on August 16 in the yard of Từ Đàm pagoda.⁴⁴⁸ Tôn Thất Kỳ, Hoàng Nguyên Nhuận, Phạm Thị Xuân Quế, and many others were staying at Từ Đàm that night, staring at the monk's fire for hours until his body fell down.⁴⁴⁹ The live torch immediately inflamed the public anger and struggle spirit then, and became strong inspiration and motivation until now. The government announcement at 5 a.m. of the urgent martial law applied during daytime, after all officials presenting at their offices at 6 a.m.,⁴⁵⁰ could not cool people's feelings down. In this fiery atmosphere, immolation apparently became so simple that many were thrilling to sacrifice themselves to express their discontent to the government. One of the students staying in Diệu Đế pagoda for weeks, Nguyễn Đắc Xuân recalled "self-immolation for the right is not a big deal at all."⁴⁵¹ Buddhist students bought some gasoline drums and woods, piled in pyre-like heaps in the front yard of Diệu Đế pagoda and declared their willingness to immolate for the implementation of the five aspirations of Buddhists.

While some young teachers, doctors, and artists engaged in protests and hunger strikes from the very first day, the majority of the intellectuals, particularly the faculty members of the University of Huế, chose a "wait-and-see" attitude. For weeks, they only communicated in person, afraid of eyes and ears of the secret police which permeated the city. Yet with each day passing, the protests of the common people, the daily program broadcast via the megaphones at Diệu Đế pagoda increasingly aroused them. As professor of law Cao Huy Thuần put it, "The demonstrations went quietly from pagoda to pagoda along the long streets, crisscrossing the city, silently, solemnly, and piously, which moved us to tears – we who dare not follow them,

⁴⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁹ Phạm Thị Xuân Quế, interview. Hoàng Nguyên Nhuận (pen name of Hoàng Văn Giàu), "Ôi thân yêu bóng chùa Từ Đàm" ("Oh Beloved Từ Đàm Pagoda"), <http://giaodiemonline.com/2010/09/tudam.htm> (accessed May 8, 2016).

⁴⁵⁰ *Daily Reports on the City Situation of the National Police Department of Thừa Thiên Province in 1963*, no. 371.

⁴⁵¹ Nguyễn Đắc Xuân. *Từ Phú Xuân đến Huế [From Phú Xuân to Huế]*, vol. 2, 39.

including myself.”⁴⁵² They then reconsidered the so-called “problem of the intellectuals” – their irresponsibility, ignorance, guiltiness, and cowardice when coping with dictatorship. “Fear, of course fear – who would not fear the regime’s repression?” No one could identify who had said the first words, or on what day it started – perhaps when “fervent eyes met other impassioned eyes,” when “no one could swallow this great shame for any longer.”⁴⁵³ Professor Cao Huy Thuần drew attention to the valiant attitude of professor Bùi Tường Huân, Dean of the School of Law, who officially supported the students’ determination and acts, and this in turn inspired other courageous actions of the faculty members of the University of Huế. In order to respond to the government repression, and freely speak out for their people, they first needed to get rid of their positions and rank at the state institution: they must immediately resign. Dean of the College of Literature Lê Tuyên and Dean of the College of Education Nguyễn Văn Trường were the first two professors of the university to resign on August 14, 1963.⁴⁵⁴ By August 17, 45 professors of the University of Huế (over 55 faculty members in total) signed the resignation letters.⁴⁵⁵

On August 15, a Buddhist student delegation met with Rector Father Cao Văn Luận to send two requests to all of the faculty members at all of the colleges. They requested their professors to raise the voice of the intellectuals, and secondly, to immediately intervene in the government’s arrest of some of the student leaders. In order to keep the pressure mounting on the professors, they declared that there would be a student’s self-immolation in front of the university or Diệu Đế pagoda the following day. The students’ determination moved the rector to

⁴⁵² Cao Huy Thuần, “Từ một kỷ niệm xa” [“From an Old Memory”] in *Bồ Tát Quảng Đức, Ngọn lửa và Trái tim* [*Bodhisattva Quảng Đức, The Fire and Heart*], ed. Lê Mạnh Thát (Hồ Chí Minh City: Tổng Hợp Press, 2006), 289-290.

⁴⁵³ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁴ Nguyễn Ngu Í, Đại học Huế tranh đấu chống chế độ cũ - Qua hai giờ nói chuyện với giáo sư Lê Tuyên [The University of Huế Struggles against the Old Regime – Two hours talking with Professor Lê Tuyên], in *1963-2013: Năm mươi năm nhìn lại* [1963-2013: Fifty Years Looking Back], vol. 1, 348.

⁴⁵⁵ Ibid.

tears. The students even proclaimed on August 19 that there would be one student self-immolation for each professor arrested. Seven students from seven colleges volunteered to make the sacrifice.⁴⁵⁶ The situation now extended beyond religion and education fields and individual issue.⁴⁵⁷ The traditional teacher – student relation in Vietnamese Confucian oriented society since then changed, the one directional supervision of teacher to student now turned toward camaraderie with the two groups now working together side by side to fight for religious rights and freedoms.

Because of his implicit support for the students' participation in the Buddhist mobilization, Rector Father Cao Văn Luận of the University of Huế was replaced on August 16, 1963 by the government for which he served and established the university. Within several hours word of the Rector's dismissal had spread across the city, early in the afternoon of August 17, approximately 500 residents of the University of Huế gathered on campus to express their disappointment.⁴⁵⁸ Besides Buddhist students, this meeting brought together many professors, as well as a large number of Catholics, Protestants, and students graduated from Catholic or Western schools. The meeting also welcomed a number of female students who were famous for their nobility and timidity.⁴⁵⁹ Now a new front against the Ngô Đình Diệm's religious policies emerged beyond Buddhists and their laymen – the endeavor by students of all religions and background. Following the meeting, some thousand locals joined the university people demonstrating along many main streets to send their petition to the authority. Since the enthusiastic protesters included of many privileged sons and daughters of the high-ranking government officials of the government, the police did not dare suppress the demonstration in the

⁴⁵⁶ Ibid., 354.

⁴⁵⁷ Ibid., 349.

⁴⁵⁸ *Documentation on Anti-government activities of Buddhists and Students in Huế in 1963*, no. 8529.

⁴⁵⁹ Nguyễn Đắc Xuân. *Từ Phú Xuân đến Huế* [From Phú Xuân to Huế], vol. 2, 43.

same manor they normally would have.⁴⁶⁰ Eight young men from Sài Gòn reportedly went to Huế to enforce the struggle in the central region. According to a government sympathizer, these guys who had managed to fight against security forces in Sài Gòn did not bring any belongings to Huế to easily escape.⁴⁶¹



Banner “We are Forced to Fight for Equal Rights in Religion; We do not Deny any SACRIFICES.” Source: *Documentation on the Incidents in Huế during the Vesak Festival in 1963*, no. 8169.

Every day from August 17 to 18, 19, 20, the people of Huế staged several big demonstrations. Each morning and afternoon, one saw 500 people here, 2000 people there participating in various meetings, gatherings, protests, talks, etc. to raise their voice in hope that the government would change the situation.⁴⁶² The local government noticed the American

⁴⁶⁰ Ibid., 47.

⁴⁶¹ *Documentation on Activities of Students of the National Police Department of Thừa Thiên Province in 1963*, TTPH, ACH, no. 1861.

⁴⁶² *Documentation on Anti-government Activities of Buddhist Association and Students in Huế in 1963*, no. 8529; *Documentation on Activities of Students of the National Police Department of Thừa Thiên Province in 1963*, no.

Consul, the director of the American Information Center, and three foreign journalists collecting news and taking pictures.⁴⁶³ Examinations at the University of Huế could not occur because of some calls for total strikes as well as “there are neither professors nor proctors.”⁴⁶⁴ The University of Huế, once considered the highly respected ideological stronghold of the government and nation, now became “the illicit meeting place of the extremists.”⁴⁶⁵

In the afternoon of August 20, on the way to Diệu Đế pagoda to attend a talk by a senior monk from Sài Gòn, Mai Thị Trà stopped by the central hospital for an antenatal examination. She was forced to stay at the hospital and delivered her second child that evening. Her husband and their two-year-old son were home then.⁴⁶⁶ It was however not a pleasant night for them, as they were awakened very early in the morning.

Since 12:30 a.m. of August 21, 1963, not only Mai Thị Trà’s household next door to Từ Đàm pagoda, but seemingly every corner in the small city of Huế was disturbed by a boisterous noise from areas around Từ Đàm and Diệu Đế pagodas. Family by family, house by house, with the pagodas as the hubs, continuous dins from all available tools: sticks, buckets, basin, iron barrels, and their own voices spread out the urgent news: the national military forces were attacking their pagodas.⁴⁶⁷ This was the D-Day of the nationwide crackdown on Buddhist demonstrators, Operation Deluge.

Until 11:30 a.m., hundreds of soldiers with army weapons seized Từ Đàm and Diệu Đế pagoda in Huế, arrested all the unarmed Buddhist monks, professors, students, and their supporters. The operation at Diệu Đế pagoda unexpectedly took much longer than the one at Từ Đàm, as the first group of soldiers, who consisted of mostly Buddhist sympathizers, did not obey

1861.

⁴⁶³ *Documentation on Anti-government Activities of Buddhist Association and Students in Huế in 1963*, no. 8529.

⁴⁶⁴ *Documentation on Activities of Students of the National Police Department of Thừa Thiên Province in 1963*, no. 1861.

⁴⁶⁵ *Documentation on Anti-government Activities of Buddhist Association and Students in Huế in 1963*, no. 8529.

⁴⁶⁶ Mai Thị Trà, interview.

⁴⁶⁷ *Daily Reports of the National Police Department of Thừa Thiên Province in 1963*, no. 1862.

the command. The pagoda was besieged until the second group of only soldiers originally from the Central Highland arrived.⁴⁶⁸ Buddha statues were torn down, documents and other property belonging to the pagodas were destroyed or taken away. Almost 800 people were arrested.⁴⁶⁹

The horrible feelings of the unforgettable night remained alive with many people of Huế. A year later, a female student recalled her “spiritual delirious state” in the middle of the night of August 20 at Từ Đàm pagoda. Her memory was full of mournful, haunted emotions of panic, fear, the ferocious weapons, the frigid faces, the ragged clothes, the wound, blood, tears, screaming, etc. “I lost my mind, I lost my memories, my feelings. (...) I stupefied, I fainted, and I never wanted to wake up again to see the cruel violent scene.”⁴⁷⁰ Phạm Thị Xuân Quế was wearing her favorite purple traditional long dress, which was torn and stained with blood.⁴⁷¹ Mai Thị Trà’s family was split into three parts: while she and her one-day-old baby were taken care at the hospital, her husband was arrested and held at the Police Department, and their two year old son was left home alone with a servant for several days until his grandmother was able to cross all checkpoints to pick him up.⁴⁷² The city froze again. Daily activities ceased. Streets and markets closed. All means of transportation stopped, except only one special flight from Sài Gòn. The regular train Sài Gòn – Huế was delayed, and its passengers had to stay at the railway station for an extra 24 hours.⁴⁷³

August 21, 1963 marked the end of the Buddhist mobilization in 1963, becoming known as the Day of Disaster [Ngày Pháp Nạn], also the day of awakening for many participants and observers of Huế.⁴⁷⁴ “To me, that day only temporarily concluded our struggle, yet started our

⁴⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁰ Thái Lan, “Hoài niệm 20 tháng 8” [“Remembering August 20”], *Lập Trường Journal*, vol. 22, August 22, 1964.

⁴⁷¹ Phạm Thị Xuân Quế, interview.

⁴⁷² Mai Thị Trà, interview.

⁴⁷³ *Daily Reports of the National Police Department of Thừa Thiên Province in 1963*, no. 1862.

⁴⁷⁴ Thái Lan, “Hoài niệm 20 tháng 8” [“Remembering August 20”], *Lập Trường Journal*, vol. 22, August 22, 1964.

awakening period – when we would fight more strongly on a more powerful scale. We need to engage, and forward!”⁴⁷⁵ insisted Hoàng Văn Giàu on *Lập Trường Journal* one year later. In various memoirs, participants of the mobilization admitted profound changes and development in self-awareness and personal outlook that these three months of summer 1963 brought to their lives.

As an unexpected result of the Buddhist mobilization, many students, including several Catholics, responded by becoming Buddhists.⁴⁷⁶ According to Erich Wulff, if students, officials, and small businessmen, before summer 1963 had only visited pagodas occasionally as encouraged by their mothers or wives, they now joined various Buddhist organizations such as Buddhist Family, Buddhist Student Association, Buddhist Trader Organization, etc.⁴⁷⁷ As Quán Như Phạm Văn Minh put it, “if there was no such thing like the Buddhist upheaval, we could have become some sorts of, in the word of Herbert Marcuse, ‘one-dimensional’ class who were willing to protect the regime, since destroying the current regime also meant demolishing the privileged position of the elites like ourselves.”⁴⁷⁸ To Hoàng Nguyên Nhuận, the leader of the Buddhist Student Association, it was during the mobilization that he did realize the motto for his life: “serving the nation under the guidance of [Buddhist] Faith, and serving the Faith in relation to the nation.”⁴⁷⁹ In essence, many found a spiritual orientation in Buddhist Dharma in the period of tumult.⁴⁸⁰ And thanks to the mobilization, a portion of the local population started to realize the political dilemmas challenging their nation. They hence invoked their national traditions in

⁴⁷⁵ Hoàng Nguyễn Tùy Anh (pen name of Hoàng Văn Giàu), “Nhớ...” [“Remembering...”], *Lập Trường Journal*, vol. 30, November 12, 1964.

⁴⁷⁶ Frances FitzGerald, *Fire in the lake: the Vietnamese and the Americans in Vietnam*. (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 2002), 134.

⁴⁷⁷ Erich Wulff, *Vietnamesische Lehrjahre [Teaching Years in Vietnam]*, 132.

⁴⁷⁸ Quán Như Phạm Văn Minh, “Sáng mai Chim hót” [“Birds will Sing Tomorrow Morning”]. In *1963-2013: Năm mươi năm nhìn lại [1963-2013: Fifty Years Looking Back]*, vol. 3, 409.

⁴⁷⁹ Hoàng Nguyên Nhuận, “Cuộc chơi nửa đời người” [“The Half-A-Life Game”].

⁴⁸⁰ See Wulff, *Vietnamesische Lehrjahre*; Thái Kim Lan, *Phượng trên trời Hải đường dưới đất [Phoenix in the Sky, Malus on the Ground]*; Hoàng Nguyên Nhuận, “Ôi thân yêu bóng chùa Từ Đàm” [“Oh Beloved Từ Đàm Pagoda”], etc.

fighting for justice. Many of them believed this was their moment to discover their identity and patriotism.

Chapter 4

4.1 Seventy One Days in Jail

With nearly one thousand people arrested on the Day of Disaster on August 21, 1963, the hall of the Police Department at 15 Trần Cao Vân became a meeting venue of all “The People of Pagoda,” surprisingly seeing each other again, sharing sympathizing looks and strong determination. “Very cheerful, very happy,” Phạm Thị Xuân Quế recalled her first day in jail, “We had neither fear nor worries. We all had friends around. Brother Vĩnh Kha happened not to stay at Từ Đàm that night and was still free on 8/21. Once realizing everyone else had been arrested, he self-presented to the police to be put in jail with us.”⁴⁸¹

All Buddhists and laymen were quickly separated into different groups and continuously interrogated in the next few days. The majority was released within a week after filling testimony statements and declaration forms, while many others started their journey in prison at the Police Department. Among 279 people were still kept in jail by August 28, the majority of whom were common people and students of the University of Huế. However the most suspicious subjects for the police were government officials (34 of 36), the professors of the University (32 of 38), and the students (70 of 85). Many remained in custody for months.

⁴⁸¹ Phạm Thị Xuân Quế, interview.

Arrests	Before 8/24	By 8/24	By 8/25	By 8/26	By 8/27	By 8/28
Monks	95	88	60	31	31	31
University/High School faculty	38	31	33	33	32 (2 released, 1 arrested)	32
Students	85	81	69	69	69	70
High School students and other youths	292	42	38	30	30	30
Government Officials	36	36	35	34	34	34
Commoners	233	193	188	183	183	82
Total	779	471	423	380	379	279

Number of people arrested from August 24 to 28, 1963. Source: *Documents on Investigations of the National Police Department of Northern Central Region, 1963*, no. 1786.

Additionally, the National Police Department of the Northern Central Region listed 137 government officials who “had actions or words representing weak political standpoints in the period from August 5 to August 28.” 44 officials (group B) cooperated or met with the extremists to denounce the government, implored students and colleagues to organize strikes, or fabricated and distorted the political line of the government. Group C of 28 officials was accused of indirect support of the struggle: spreading counterpropaganda, “often interacting and contacting with doctor Lê Khắc Quyến [a Buddhist sympathizer],” etc. The rest, 65 officials on the list, did not have any obvious attitudes that provided cause for concern, yet they had worked inattentively and reluctantly. Of 15 officials of the national hospital of Huế (seven in group B, eight in group C), five had previous conviction of participating in the liberation force or the Vietnam Independent League [Việt Minh] in the 1940s, one was even a former communist (without seceding).⁴⁸²

⁴⁸² *Documentation on Punishment for Government Officials with Discontent and Reactionary Attitudes in the Period of Buddhist Struggle in 1963*, FRPO, NAC, no. 8528.

One of the student leaders, Hoàng Văn Giàu, who spent 71 days in various prisons, including the Mang Cá Nhỏ [The Petite Gills], which was famous for its harsh treatment, shared his mixture of indescribable feelings in his memoir a year later. Selected to copy prisoners' documentation because of his good handwriting, he found reading other fellows' credulous testimonies disheartened. Yet nine to ten hours of interrogation every day had no impacts on the undisturbed mind of the strong Buddhist. "They probed us as the miser squeezes lemons, and trifled us as a cat plays with a mice. We could only 'avoid' [those questions] because we were aware that our correspondence could be used to not merely accuse us."⁴⁸³ During daytime Hoàng Văn Giàu prayed to Buddha, sang some songs, or tried to sleep to stay calm. He often stayed up all night as the ragged and dirty blankets and nets could not protect him from swarm of hunger mosquitoes.⁴⁸⁴ The stuffier the air felt in the prison cell, the more anguish, desperate, distressful the prisoners experienced every day, so as the lengthy and gloomy rainy season of Huế.

Outside the prison, daily life in the city vastly changed since the end of August. As the new city Mayor, Major Nguyễn Mậu, replaced the three month old Mayor Nguyễn Văn Hà who had lasted just three months at 5 p.m. on August 21,⁴⁸⁵ the city started a period of longer curfews, heavy surveillance, and more arrests, with a series of mandatory political study sessions, and various kinds of propaganda.⁴⁸⁶ Members of the Republic Youth Association expanded their network in all neighborhoods to collect public opinion. 400 members of this association cooperated with the military and security forces to keep order at important intersections.⁴⁸⁷ The

⁴⁸³ Hoàng Nguyễn Tuý Anh, "Nhớ..." ["Remembering..."] *Lập Trường Journal*, vol. 30, November 11, 1964.

⁴⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁵ *Daily Reports of the National Police Department of Thừa Thiên Province in 1963*, no. 1862

⁴⁸⁶ *Weekly Reports of Current Situation of the National Police Department of the Central Region in 1963*, TTPH, ACH, no. 1781; *Documentation on Activities of the Professional Guilds of Thừa Thiên Province in 1963*, no. 1918; *Daily Reports of the National Police Department of Thừa Thiên Province in 1963*, no. 1862.

⁴⁸⁷ *Documentation on Activities of the Professional Guilds of Thừa Thiên Province in 1963*, no. 1918.

central radio station and other broadcasting stations at Đông Ba market and all districts operated daily at full capacity from 6 a.m. to 11 p.m.⁴⁸⁸

While the daytime martial law was still in effect, many vehicles of the Department of Information and the Psychological War Office of the National First Division ran around the city multiple times every day broadcasting announcements on curfew, ban of operation of all means of transportation (except housewives going grocery shopping, or laborers like cyclo drivers going to work), government declaration about a large amount of weapons and explosives found at pagodas by the army forces, etc.⁴⁸⁹ Thanks to these mobile loudspeakers, the locals knew that beginning from August 31, they could go to the central Police Department office to take their belongings and/or bicycles left at Diêu Đế or Từ Đàm over the night of August 20.⁴⁹⁰ Local government requested the parents whose children “left home without any reasons” to search for them to go home and study, or warned the people be cautious with impostors making money by vain promise to release their family members or friends under custody (September 7 and 8).⁴⁹¹

Moreover, staff of the Department of Information placed on public space, walls, power poles, and in front of many houses numerous flyers and slogans. There was even a call for a movement to write slogans and make banners to support the state policies.⁴⁹² Within Thành Nội district only, for example, members of the Republic Youth Association and Residence office displayed 1420 slogans and distributed 3000 leaflets of President’s proclamations and decrees to every household.⁴⁹³ On top of that, airplanes of the ARVN circled around the city twice a day at

⁴⁸⁸ *Daily Reports of the National Police Department of Thừa Thiên Province in 1963*, no. 1862.

⁴⁸⁹ *Daily Reports of the National Police Department of Thừa Thiên Province in 1963*, no. 1862; *Daily Reports on the City Situation of the National Police Department of Thừa Thiên Province in 1963*, no. 371.

⁴⁹⁰ *Daily Reports on the City Situation of the National Police Department of Thừa Thiên Province in 1963*, no. 371.

⁴⁹¹ *Daily Reports of the National Police Department of Thừa Thiên Province in 1963*, no. 1862.

⁴⁹² *Documentation on Activities of the Professional Guilds of Thừa Thiên Province in 1963*, no. 1918.

⁴⁹³ *Ibid.*

9:30 a.m. and 4 p.m. dropping off uncountable propaganda leaflets on the traitors' religious conspiracy to overthrow the RVN government.⁴⁹⁴

Furthermore, the local government organized various political information sessions to explain how the chaos in Huế and other provinces was provoked by the “VIỆT CỘNG” under Buddhist label, why the ARVN searched the pagodas and arrested the monks, or how many new pagodas the RVN government had successfully constructed in the past years, etc.⁴⁹⁵ Many city residents must have been forced to attend these study sessions in late August. On 8/25, the morning meeting reportedly attracted 80 thousand people,⁴⁹⁶ i.e. about 80 percent of the population, while in the afternoon three sections and one special class for monks at Quốc Ân pagoda had the total attendance of 1533.⁴⁹⁷ The number increased to 2874 people (on August 26),⁴⁹⁸ 3710 (August 28),⁴⁹⁹ and 2550 shopkeepers at Đông Ba market (August 30).⁵⁰⁰ Many musical performances, film screenings were also used to announce government proclamations and decrees. The film screenings of “Đất Mẹ” [“Motherland”], “Mùa chiến thắng” [“Victory Season”], “Ánh Sáng Miền Nam” [“Bright Light in the South”], to name a few, attracted hundreds to thousands of local audiences in early September.⁵⁰¹

Additionally, the people of Huế had to participate in another political activity: studying the election procedure of the third National Assembly. Originally scheduled for August 31, 1963, yet strong public opinion must have had influential impacts on the national politics that the election date was delayed for almost a month until September 27. From mid-September, candidates of the National Assembly delivered talks to thousands of people on political systems

⁴⁹⁴ *Daily Reports of the National Police Department of Thừa Thiên Province in 1963*, no. 1862.

⁴⁹⁵ *Documentation on Activities of the Professional Guilds of Thừa Thiên Province in 1963*, no. 1918; *Daily Reports of the National Police Department of Thừa Thiên Province in 1963*, no. 1862.

⁴⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹⁷ *Documentation on Activities of the Professional Guilds of Thừa Thiên Province in 1963*, no. 1918.

⁴⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰¹ *Daily Reports of the National Police Department of Thừa Thiên Province in 1963*, no. 1862.

and election procedure.⁵⁰² Only on September 23, for instance, about 3,370 people, including 1,130 women, attended different sessions, “all people were so eager going to vote that their daily routines and life speed somewhat decreased.”⁵⁰³

It is important to note that all of the above statistics of propaganda documents or numbers of attendance are certainly controversial, as the reporters must have wanted to assure their leaders in Sài Gòn that daily state-organized meetings, study sessions were well attended; that all people of Huế were uniting to support the bright leadership of the President in the anti-communist struggle; and that the local government were making every effort to best serve the regime. Living through the chaos, the common people of Huế up to this point could have become more attentive to politics, yet the numbers of attendance, political study sessions, banners, propaganda leaflets, and so forth, were probably not that high. Interestingly, when asked specifically about any kind of politics-related meetings, rallies, study sessions, talks, banners, etc., none of the people of Huế living inside or outside of the country today recalled any of these activities by the government. The general ignorance of politics the people of Huế might have unintentionally erased part of their memories; yet there were apparently so much more significant narratives to tell about the eventful and tense period than the propaganda that not many people paid any attention to.

September was another remarkable month of students’ actions while all student leaders of the University of Huế imprisoned, their younger brothers and sisters – the high school students – automatically took charge the struggle for rights and justice. Although the Police Department managed to prevent several strike plans of students of High School Quốc Học, Đồng Khánh, National Midwife Female School, and Bồ Đề Buddhist High School, they could not stop the

⁵⁰² *Documentation on Anti-government Activities of Buddhist Association and Students in Huế in 1963*, no. 8529.

⁵⁰³ *Daily Reports on the City Situation of the National Police Department of Thừa Thiên Province in 1963*, no. 371.

young enthusiastic activists from printing flyers, writing letters, composing poems, distributing leaflets, hanging banners everywhere in the city. “We did ponder deeply, and were not incited or forced, that we were grown up, that we were equipped with certain knowledge, and we understood what was the truth and what was the brutality,”⁵⁰⁴ wrote the letter of the Student Buddhist Association to the Rector of Quốc Học High School. They requested freedom to mobilize and organize their activities within their education sphere, to not be threatened and suppressed as the “dangerous prisoners.” They insisted, “if the minimum requests are not satisfied, we would strike.”⁵⁰⁵

⁵⁰⁴ *Documentation on Activities of Students of the National Police Department of Thừa Thiên Province in 1963*, no. 1861.

⁵⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

Dates	Number of people arrested	Office in charge of arrests / reports	Notes
9/10	4 female students	National Police Department	5 female, 3 male students with full evidence
9/11	9 female students, 1 male student, 1 college student	The I Corps Tactical Zone	
9/12	12 students	The I Corps Tactical Zone	
	13 students of the Midwife Female School	Thừa Thiên province	
9/13	11 male students of Quốc Học high school, 1 official	National Police Department	
Evening 9/13	1 female, 10 male students	Thừa Thiên province	
9/14	2 male students of Quốc Học high school, 2 male students of Bán Công high school, 1 male student of General Bách Khoa Education	National Police Department	
9/15	1 student of Bồ Đề Buddhist high school	NA	
9/16	6 students	National Police Department	Including 1 medical student, 1 male student of Quốc Học high school
9/17	5 female students, 1 male student, 2 petite businessmen	National Police Department	

Numbers of strikers arrested in September 1963 in Thừa Thiên province. Sources: *Documents on Activities of Students of the National Police Department of Thừa Thiên Province, 1963*, no. 1861; *Reports of the Director of the Information Department on the Buddhist Affair in 1963*, no. 1837.

Late night before the formal opening ceremony of the new academic year Đồng Khánh female high school, its Rector had an urgent meeting with the local police after receiving intelligence information of a strike plan. They reluctantly decided to delay the ceremony

supposed to take place a few hours later. In stead of one morning event for the whole school, the opening ceremony of 1963-64 school year lasted three days, mornings and afternoons, for each class, so that the students could not take the opportunity to gather in large number and turn it into a grand strike.⁵⁰⁶ The two words “Bãi Khoá” [Strike] constantly appeared in public space, some days in October up to 17 of “Bãi Khoá” were painted on the walls around Bồ Đề school.⁵⁰⁷

These rainy days Huế welcomed the delegation of Robert McNamara and Maxwell Taylor⁵⁰⁸ with a call for demonstration and various documents, slogans attacking the RVN government and appealing to the UN and American government for their struggle, in both Vietnamese and English: “Request the government to release all professors, students, pupils,” “Give all the Buddhists a free hand who have been still imprisoned,” “Request the UN to express the posture in the destruction against Vietnamese Buddhist,” “Prove the Consequence of American aid to Vietnam” [sic].⁵⁰⁹ The struggle now extended in attendance, broadened its sphere of action, and developed its vision. And the local government must respond. More arrests occurred, this time to mostly high school students under 18 years of age.

In addition to hundreds of people still imprisoned, up to September 21, 167 monks, officials, businessmen, and others were arrested and interrogated.⁵¹⁰ The office of the National Police Department, the provincial security force, the I Corps Tactical Zone of Division I put all “extremists” and trouble-makers into jail and pagodas, Buddhists, and their activities under surveillance. A large number of human resources must have been employed to keep order and collect data.

⁵⁰⁶ *Documentation on Anti-government Activities of Buddhist Association and Students in Huế in 1963*, no. 8529; *Documentation on Activities of Students of the National Police Department of Thừa Thiên Province in 1963*, no. 1861.

⁵⁰⁷ *Daily Reports on the City Situation of the National Police Department of Thừa Thiên Province in 1963*, no. 371; *Documentation on Anti-government Activities of Buddhist Association and Students in Huế in 1963*, no. 8529.

⁵⁰⁸ *Documentation on Anti-government Activities of Buddhist Association and Students in Huế in 1963*, no. 8529.

⁵⁰⁹ *Documentation on Activities of Students of the National Police Department of Thừa Thiên Province in 1963*, no. 1861.

⁵¹⁰ *Ibid.*

One of source materials included post, letters, postcards, and private and news telegrams to and from Huế managed by a special “technical office” of the Department of National Police. Of near one million letters of each month in September and October, about 20 to 35 letters were “confiscated and exploited” to investigate the public opinion of Huế.⁵¹¹ For example, one pregnant woman witnessed with her eyes the perfunctory attitude and the poor service of the midwives at the central hospital of Huế, particularly with the poor patients and free medical care receivers.⁵¹² Or a parent complained about one teacher of a fourth grade at Lý Thường Kiệt Primary school who had left the class unattended so the children bullied each other.⁵¹³

1963	Letters		Postcards		Telegrams			
	Checked	Confiscated / Exploited	Checked	Confiscated / Exploited	Private		News	
					Checked	Exploited	Checked	Confiscated / Exploited
Sep 1-30	901,450	35	45	0	8,459	5	25	6
Oct 1-31	956,520	20	16	0	9,690	0	17	5

Monthly Reports of the Technical Office, National Department of Police in the Central Region. Sources: *Documentation on Investigations of the National Police Department of the Northern Central Region, 1963*, no. 1786.

Among the notable information from these monthly reports included foreigners’ opinion. Foreign residents of Huế always attracted special attention of the local government, particularly the Chinese Vietnamese community – the most populated foreign community in Huế. The report of September 10, 1963 recorded a Chinese woman spreading out rumors of ARVN’s attacking

⁵¹¹ *Documentation on Investigations of the National Police Department of the Northern Central Region in 1963*, no. 1786.

⁵¹² Report on September 17, 1963. Ibid.

⁵¹³ Report on October 3, 1963. Ibid.

and destroying pagodas, suppressing Buddhists, and concluded “What a pure fabrication ever!”⁵¹⁴

Nationality	August			September			October		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Belgium	0	2	2	0	2	2	0	2	2
Cambodia	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	1
Canada	1	1	2	1	1	2	1	1	2
China	21	9	30	21	9	30	21	9	30
India	3	2	5	3	2	5	3	2	5
France	25	20	45	25	18	43	25	18	43
Norway	1	0	1						
Switzerland	2	1	3	2	1	3	2	1	3
United States	3	3	6	2	3	5	2	3	5
Total	57	38	95	55	36	91	55	36	91

Foreigners requesting extension of stay. Source: *Documents of Chinese Community in Thừa Thiên Province in 1963*, TTPH, ACH, no. 226; and *Documents of immigration status and extension applications of the Department of National Police of the Northern Central Region in 1963*, TTPH, ACH, no. 122.

Among nearly 100 foreigners of nine nationalities who applied for immigration extension in Huế, almost half were French, with at least six Catholic priests of Thiên Hựu School.⁵¹⁵ One third of immigrants consisted of Chinese, most of whom were businessmen residing on Trần Hưng Đạo, Phan Bội Châu, and Chi Lăng streets.⁵¹⁶ Unlike previous months, the most frequent interactions between Vietnamese and foreigners after the summer were no longer with the German doctor professors at the University of Huế, as they had already been expelled out of the

⁵¹⁴ Ibid.

⁵¹⁵ *Documentation of immigration status and extension applications of the Department of National Police of the Northern Central Region in 1963*, no.122.

⁵¹⁶ *Documentation of Chinese Community in Thừa Thiên Province in 1963*, TTPH, ACH, no. 226.

country for their support for the Buddhist mobilization. Although the number of American civilians was only about 5% of total foreigners, the most trouble makers were American soldiers.

In two months of September and October 1963, there were four incidents relating to American soldiers in the city of Huế, including three cases of assaults and one case of prostitution between a 27 year old Huế woman and Powers Lee from the Armed Forces of the US (September 15).⁵¹⁷ On September 8, an American soldier took a cyclo from his hotel to the Tao Nhân coffee shop, and did not pay for the ride. The old Vietnamese driver patiently waited for him for couple of hours outside the coffee shop, then followed him to the nearby Anh Đào ice cream shop. Until 10 p.m., when the American soldier walked out with two other American friends from the ice cream shop, the cyclo driver asked him for the fare. Not paying the poor Vietnamese driver, the American however ruthlessly beat the old man, held his two legs and pulled him along Phan Bội Châu street.⁵¹⁸ On October 7, on a busy street of Trần Hưng Đạo, in front of the famous Tân Tân cinema, three drunk Americans picked a quarrel with three Vietnamese young men.⁵¹⁹ The next day, two Americans got drunk over their meal at Lạc Thành restaurant on Đinh Bộ Lĩnh street, and threw two chairs out of the window from the second floor down to the street, breaking the awning of this restaurant.⁵²⁰

These affairs with Americans were only a few among various incidents happening in the city. In 23 continuous days from August 21 to September 9, there were 22 petty thefts and grand larcenies, nine bicycle thefts, six disorderly conducts, two desertions, 16 traffic accidents, two dog bites, two deaths of drowning, one food poison, one prostitution, one gambling, two meat smuggling. The first two weeks of October (1-14 October) witnessed nine petty thefts and grand

⁵¹⁷ *Daily Reports of the National Police Department of Thừa Thiên Province in 1963*, no. 1862.

⁵¹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵¹⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵²⁰ *Ibid.* The son of the Lạc Thành Restaurant, now an author of two well-known books about his hometown published in both Vietnam and the US, then paid almost no attention to his parents' business to recall any of the incidents with the foreign customers. Hồ Đăng Định, interview by author, Huế, August 1, 2015.

larcenies, five bicycle thefts, seven disorderly conducts, two suicides, 16 traffic accidents, two dog bites, one fire, three prostitutions, four meat smugglings, and one illegal construction.

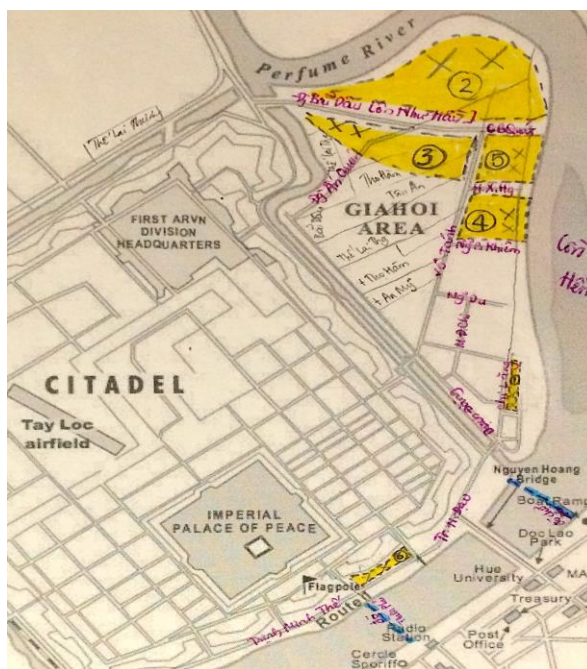
Fifteen courses of army maneuvers and military training were organized for young male and female officials.⁵²¹ Some unintentional rifles fire occasionally interrupted the silent atmosphere of the city. For example from 9 to 10 p.m. of October 22, a big bang followed by a series of gunfire, drums, and tocsin from the alarm practice in Hương Vinh village in Hương Trà district rumbled through a large area of the city of Huế.⁵²²

It was not the only salvo that reverberated around the city in the early 1960s. According to the monthly political reports of the Thừa Thiên province, nine districts outside the city of Huế rarely enjoyed a quiet day. From August 21 to September 20, 51 skirmishes between the ARVN or local armed forces and the NLF (or VC in the original documents) killed eight soldiers (plus three VC), wounded 14 (plus another three VC). And from September 21 till October 20, the total number of skirmishes increased to 72, with 11 dead (plus seven VC), 21 wounded (plus one VC), and one deserter. In two months, there were only eight days with no sound of gunshots in the rural area of the province. To the city inhabitants originally from the countryside regardless of political/military sides, the casualties and frequency of these violent clashes must have worried a large number of people. It is important to note that the casualties of both sides could only reveal that these confrontations were often bloody, yet the numbers of death and wounded remained questionable for the common reasons of the victors' narratives.

In another anti-Communist effort, the government of Huế implemented the Strategy Hamlet national policy since 1962. Reports of six hamlets in Tả Ngạn district in September 1963 provided interesting demographical data for a random proportion of population of Huế.

⁵²¹ Figures collected from various daily reports of the city of Huế of the National Police Department of Thừa Thiên Province and the Central Region in 1963.

⁵²² *Daily Reports on the City Situation of the National Police Department of Thừa Thiên Province in 1963*, no. 371.



Map of six strategic hamlets in Tả Ngạn District in September 1963 (Yellow colored). Source: *Documents on Activities of the Police Department of Tả Ngạn District, 1963*, TTPH, ACH, no. 1885.

Age range	Strategic Hamlet 1		Strategic Hamlet 2		Strategic Hamlet 3		Strategic Hamlet 4		Strategic Hamlet 5		Strategic Hamlet 6	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
Over 51	23	23	60	78	86	144	96	107	48	54	46	64
36 – 50	66	74	72	91	33	117	68	110	50	80	44	60
18 – 35	99	123	96	151	150	233	130	169	52	93	53	114
% Labor force	45,58		40,97		34,44		41,5		37,1		35,8	
13 – 17	72	82	108	125	130	127	79	85	75	70	84	64
% in age range	46,75		46,35		50,58		48,17		51,72		56,75	
8 – 12	28		180		140		263		230		242	
Total	590		961		1160		1107		752		771	

Population of six strategic hamlets in Tả Ngạn District in September 1963. Source: *Documents on Activities of the Police Department of Tả Ngạn District, 1963*, no. 1885.

Depending on the hamlets' location and size, the population varied from about 600 to 1100. From the age scale division to the gender difference, the young population of these 6 hamlets demonstrated an image of a society in wartime. While the boy and girl rate under 18 year of age were relatively equal, the labor force of all hamlets contained a lower portion of male (from 34% to 42%, with the exception of strategic hamlet number 1 of 46%). The strategic hamlet number 1 on Trịnh Minh Thế street, unlike other hamlets locating a bit outside of the city, had higher rate of male in labor force (46%) and in total population (46%). It was probably the better education level and living conditions that the young men in this central thus more “developed” neighborhood had more privileges to avoid compulsory military service.⁵²³

Interestingly, regardless their gender rate difference, from 80% to 99% of the population of all these strategic hamlets practiced Buddhism, and of a more relative statistical figures, their living conditions were quite low. All hamlets lacked basic services and requested the government of Huế to construct or develop infrastructure such as schools, medical aid stations, running water supplies, and public lights, etc.

Religion Percentage	Strategic Hamlet 1	Strategic Hamlet 2	Strategic Hamlet 3	Strategic Hamlet 4	Strategic Hamlet 5	Strategic Hamlet 6
Christianity	3	1	2	1	20	2
Buddhism	97	80	98	99	80	85

Religion situation of six strategic hamlets in Tả Ngạn District in September 1963. Source: *Documents on Activities of the Police Department of Tả Ngạn District, 1963*, no. 1885.

⁵²³ See Chapter 5 for more details on dodging the military services in urban area in the RVN.

Living Condition (%)	Strategic Hamlet 1	Strategic Hamlet 2	Strategic Hamlet 3	Strategic Hamlet 4	Strategic Hamlet 5	Strategic Hamlet 6
Well to do	30	20	20	10	20	20
Sufficiency	40	30	30	30	50	40
Undernourishment	30	50	50	60	30	40

Living conditions in six strategic hamlets in Tả Ngạn District in September 1963. Source: *Documents on Activities of the Police Department of Tả Ngạn District, 1963*, no. 1885.

This season of the year, as the new crop of rice was successful, life in the city apparently felt a bit easier, particularly for laborers who made a precarious living from hard manual labor jobs. The price of rice on the market slightly decreased, especially products from previous crops. And after three months with regular restriction of travelling, the circulation of commodities returned to normal rate, the stable imports and rollback of necessary products also made life more comfortable.

Market Price	White rice, South (kg)	Sticky rice, South (kg)	White rice, local (kg)	Wild rice, local (kg)	White sugar, Premium (kg)	White sugar, Standard (kg)	“White Flower” Condensed Milk (can)	Flour (kg)	Olympia Cement, bagged (50kg)	Gold, 10% tax included (~1.2 oz)
9–10 Sep.	6.6	7.9	6.6	5.7	31	28	17	13	105	6050
16–17 Sep.	6.6	8.1	New crop 7.2; Old crop 7.0	New crop 6.8	28	27	17	13	101	6050

Price of some basic products in September 1963. Source: Various daily reports from *Daily Reports on the City Situation of the National Police Department of Thừa Thiên Province in 1963*, no. 371; *Documentation on Anti-government Activities of Buddhist Association and Students in Huế in 1963*, no. 8529; *Daily Reports of the National Police Department of Thừa Thiên Province in 1963*, no. 1862; *Documents on Investigations of the National Police Department of the Northern Central Region in 1963*, no. 1786.

During these 71 days, the city witnessed various festivities, for example Confucius commemoration at Di Luân Đường inside the Forbidden City on September 28;⁵²⁴ the Autumn worship mass (Lễ Tế Thu, at An Cựu communal house on October 1⁵²⁵); the prayer ceremony on the occasion of birthday of the leader of the Republic Youth Association, Ngô Đình Nhu (Ngô Đình Diệm's brother, at the Accueil Church and Diệu Đế pagoda on October 7);⁵²⁶ or the ceremony of great hero Trần Hưng Đạo (at Trần Hưng Đạo temple, 14 Phan Châu Trinh on October 7);⁵²⁷ as well as many musical performances, film screenings, sports games, etc. Hundreds of government officials, members of various social organizations, guilds, religious groups, etc. together with thousands of children celebrated the traditional mid-Autumn festival, observed on lunar August 15, or October 2, 1963 with lanterns, candles, lion dance, and plenty of traditional mooncakes and sweet stuff. Besides the special ceremony at 7 p.m. on October 2 at Thương Bạc Square⁵²⁸ under the full moon, there were a plenty of present deliveries for poor and excellent students, music performances, outdoor activities in all schools, districts, offices, and charity associations during several days.⁵²⁹

Meanwhile, the city also welcomed outsiders such as an American group from Sài Gòn to make a film on the “Artist of the Imperial Capital” Mai Lan Phương;⁵³⁰ an UNESCO mission to visit many schools, the University, royal tombs, and other tourist destinations in the city (September 11);⁵³¹ the delegation of the Department of Education to attend the welcoming

⁵²⁴ *Daily Reports on the City Situation of the National Police Department of Thừa Thiên Province in 1963*, no. 371; *Documentation on Anti-government Activities of Buddhist Association and Students in Huế in 1963*, no. 8529.

⁵²⁵ *Documentation on Anti-government Activities of Buddhist Association and Students in Huế in 1963*, no. 8529.

⁵²⁶ *Daily Reports of the National Police Department of Thừa Thiên Province in 1963*, no. 1862.

⁵²⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵²⁸ *Daily Reports on the City Situation of the National Police Department of Thừa Thiên Province in 1963*, no. 371.

⁵²⁹ *Daily Reports on the City Situation of the National Police Department of Thừa Thiên Province in 1963*, no. 371, *Daily Reports of the National Police Department of Thừa Thiên Province in 1963*, no. 1862.

⁵³⁰ *Daily Reports of the National Police Department of Thừa Thiên Province in 1963*, no. 1862.

⁵³¹ *Daily Reports on the City Situation of the National Police Department of Thừa Thiên Province in 1963*, no. 371.

ceremony of the new Rector of the University of Huế, Trương Văn Chôm (September 12).⁵³² On the double ten 10/10/1963, the Chinese Vietnamese community celebrated the National Day of the Republic of China with parties, music performances, sport games, film screenings, and so forth.⁵³³

1963	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Real Average Temperature (Celcius)	17.8	20.1	22.1	25.6	28.2	29.5	29.6	28.6	27.8	25.2	24.7	21
Numbers of rainy days	21	15	7	4	10	12	7	13	20	26	18	15

Source: Phú Bài Weather Station observations. From *Statistical Yearbook of 1963*.

As September and October were the high season of rain and storm in central Vietnam, the outdoor activities were sometimes delayed because of the bad weather condition (the musical performance of a group from Sài Gòn on October 7 was one example⁵³⁴). Fortunately several floods and storms this year did not leave serious legacies. Of 20 days of rain in September, when Đập Đá dam was 0.5 meter (ca. 20 inches) under water all transportation was banned to prevent accidents.⁵³⁵ And among 26 rainy days in October, everybody knew in advance thanks to the vehicles with loudspeakers of the Department of Information and somewhat prepared for the big storm entering the city from about 2 p.m. to 5 p.m. on October 17.⁵³⁶ The water level of the Hương river reportedly increased two meters [80 inches] higher than usual on October 19, all means of transportation, including bus, boats, ferries, consequently stopped operating for a day.⁵³⁷ The bad weather however could not interrupt the city to prepare for a coming big event.

⁵³² *Daily Reports of the National Police Department of Thừa Thiên Province in 1963*, no. 1862.

⁵³³ *Ibid.*

⁵³⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵³⁵ *Daily Reports on the City Situation of the National Police Department of Thừa Thiên Province in 1963*, no. 371.

⁵³⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵³⁷ *Ibid.*

Since the mid October, the city became more colorful with decoration, flags, slogans, and banners for celebration of the RVN National Day on October 26. On two days 26 and 27 of October, outdoor talks, demonstrations, as well as lion dance, boat race, football matches, film screenings, attracted numerous people from all over the places.⁵³⁸ On this special occasion to celebrate the Republic (Tết Cộng Hoà), the city of Huế cheerfully inaugurated its first Opera House,⁵³⁹ which was designed since 1959, with 1224 seating capacity, and total 16,034,709.34 VND of construction and furnishing expenses.⁵⁴⁰ An architecture exhibition of the National Tourism Hotel opened to the public starting from October 24; and a “social restaurant” (Quán cơm xã hội) to provide 500 meals of 5 VND per day for students also welcomed its first customers on October 28.⁵⁴¹

Interestingly enough, reports on the National Day celebration on October 26, 1963 show the typical problem of controversial numbers of attendance in government documents of this historical period. About the ceremony at 9 a.m. on October 26 at Phu Văn Lâu Square, the report signed by Director of the National Police Department of the Northern Central Region Nguyễn Thế Thừa dated October 31 stated 50 thousand people presented,⁵⁴² while another report by Director of National Police Department of Thừa Thiên province Lê Văn Dụ signed on October 28 confirmed only 20 thousands of attendance.⁵⁴³ The documents with big numbers loosely estimated without any evidence for the purpose of reporting only great achievements always raise the question of accuracy and reliability of the government documents and archival sources on the RVN in the Vietnam War period.

⁵³⁸ *Weekly Reports of Current Situation of the National Police Department of the Central Region in 1963*, no. 1781.

⁵³⁹ *News and Reports of the National Police Department of the Northern Central Region in 1963*, no. 1788.

⁵⁴⁰ *Documentation on Requests and Forms of Thừa Thiên Province in 1963*, no. 1816.

⁵⁴¹ *Documentation on Investigations of the National Police Department of the Northern Central Region in 1963*, no. 1786.

⁵⁴² *Daily Reports of the Director of National Police Department of the Northern Central Region in 1963*, TTPH, ACH, no. 121; *Weekly Reports of Current Situation of the National Police Department of the Central Region in 1963*, no. 1781.

⁵⁴³ *Daily Reports of the National Police Department of Thừa Thiên Province in 1963*, no. 1862.

While many city residents were enjoying the National Day with a variety of fun activities, a portion of the population seemingly ignored all forms of entertainment. On October 27, the fund-raising board of shop keepers, petite businessmen of the main markets, such as Đông Ba, An Cựu, Bến Ngự, called for donation of clothing, fabrics, towels, shoes, and other necessities to send to Từ Đàm pagoda for the people still remaining in custody.⁵⁴⁴ The prisoners now managed to live with nonstop interrogation, sleepless nights, bloodthirsty mosquitos in the narrow prison cells. They had infinite food supplies, as well as news, games, from families, friends, and donors. The stuffy prison cells were on one hand filled with songs, prayers, candies, cigarettes, friendship, and sympathies, on the other hand thickened with concerns, determination, anguish feelings, “the loss of freedom,” the useless and responsibilities with the nation, some even drafted a testation for families and beloved ones.⁵⁴⁵ The gloomy rainy month apparently lengthened the futile time inside the prison walls.

It rained heavily on October 31 and November 1, 1963. Hoàng Văn Giàu received a basket of oranges and a Salem cigarette packet from his two college friends around noon of October 31. And some time in that afternoon, the prisoners could sense the potential of change via different manners of the guards, and the announcement of an earlier curfew. About 6pm, the winter darkness already covered the city. Hoàng Văn Giàu, not joining any card or domino games with his friends, was sitting at the door of his cell, when his two friends passed by on a velosolex. “They laughed cheerfully, waved at me, made the “V” sign and turned their hands up and down two times.”⁵⁴⁶ It was about 9:30 p.m. Feeling like breathing his last, Hoàng Văn Giàu yet tried to keep calm and not inform his peers until the prayer session before bedtime. The whole prison cell then became excited, everyone went to bed as usual, but not all of them were

⁵⁴⁴ *News and Reports of the National Police Department of the Northern Central Region in 1963*, no. 1788.

⁵⁴⁵ Hoàng Nguyễn Tuy Anh, “Nhớ...” [Remembering...], *Lập Trường Journal*, vol. 30, November 11, 1964.

⁵⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

able to sleep. Hoàng Văn Giàu and a few others stayed up all night, quietly listened to the noisy vehicles running up and down the streets of Huế.⁵⁴⁷

It was November 1, 1963 – the day Ngô Đình Diệm’s regime was overthrown in Sài Gòn. Ngô Đình Diệm and his brother Ngô Đình Nhu were assassinated. The first republic of the RVN collapsed. The history of modern Vietnam turned its page, so did the local history of Huế. It was a rainy and windy day in the city.

4.2 “The Revolution”?

November 1, 1963 marked fundamental changes in the whole RVN – in the word of the people of Huế at the time – the revolution of the nation. The collapse of the Ngô Đình Diệm regime in the eyes of local intellectuals was the great accomplishment of the military force, who had been “over abused beyond their imagination” [sic.] by the government to suppress the people. And although separated from the people and the Buddhists, the military force was aware of the dilemma and rose up in revolt against Ngô Đình Diệm “*for the people and because of the people*” (emphasis from original). For many people of Huế, this was the meaning of the revolution of November 1, 1963.⁵⁴⁸

Since the abdication of the last king of the Nguyễn dynasty, Bảo Đại, in 1945, the small city of Huế once again witnessed another power change in the country. Although this time they did not view the historical event with their own eyes at the Phu Văn Lâu Square inside the imperial citadel, the information of the collapse of the regime, the death of Ngô Đình Diệm and his brother in Sài Gòn provided the people of Huế with multiple indescribable emotions: the pride of their contribution to the revolution, the complete glory of rights and justice, their hope of

⁵⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁴⁸ Nguyễn Tâm, “Chính Phủ Quân Nhân?” [“Military Government?”], *Lập Trường Journal*, vol. 19, July 25, 1964.

the brighter future of the nation, mixed with some anxieties of coming challenges and difficulties.

Hoàng Văn Giàu was released from jail in the morning of November 2 to the warm welcome of the people of Huế. From Hàng Đoát street (Đông Đa street today) to the main office of the Police Department, thousands of people gathered to greet the last prisoners. Hoàng Văn Giàu and his friend K., seemingly the most “dangerous” and “important” prisoners, had the special occasion to meet with the head of the province, the Mayor of the city, Major Trần Văn Mô, who shared empathies and delivered some “very revolutionary thank you notes.”⁵⁴⁹ He noticed the portrait of President Ngô Đình Diệm was no longer hung up on the wall of the main office of the Police Department.

After the meeting, Hoàng Văn Giàu stopped by Từ Đàm pagoda to revisit the office he had spent the summer months with his cohorts. “The wild grass covered the large yard. The burned desks and broken chairs, littered the floors. The two cabinets once full of documents were destroyed. Desolate. Disgraced.”⁵⁵⁰ A strange thought emerged in mind of the just-released prisoner: begging to re-engage in the struggle path that his fellows had progressed in the past months for the rest of his life.⁵⁵¹

During the first days of the revolution, to a certain portion of the population of Huế, never before did they live such a happy time.⁵⁵² People cheerfully greeted and shook hands with strangers as brothers, freely talked about what they (had) really felt and thought in public. The festive ambience pervaded the city in the last months of the year. All November until the lunar new year of 1964, one could have abundant opportunities to attend various parties to celebrate

⁵⁴⁹ Hoàng Nguyễn Tuỳ Anh, “Nhớ...” [Remembering...], *Lập Trường Journal*, vol. 30, November 11, 1964.

⁵⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵⁵² Lập Trường Editors, “Mở một nước cờ” [“Opening a Move”], *Lập Trường Journal*, vol. 11, May 30, 1964.

the victory of revolution, to mark the collapse of the old regime, or to congratulate someone's promotion.⁵⁵³

The atmosphere felt like a big festival of a victory celebration. All daily activities of individual life paused to memorialize the special moment of communal history. Along the main streets, on Trường Tiền bridge, in front of Đông Ba market, people crowded, cheered, cried tears of joy, freedom, and aspirations.⁵⁵⁴ And love. As the revolution was credited to the military force, many people hence loved the ARVN, loved the rifles and the armored cars. They felt grateful for the generals and the military officials.⁵⁵⁵ And hope as well. They surely looked forward to the bright future, they also hoped for a long term stable political situation of their nation. November 1 was considered the day of all beginning – the dawn of a new era.

Immediately after November 1, the ARVN took charge of the city of Huế until the end of December 1963.⁵⁵⁶ The restriction of traveling in the city was not abandoned until December 24.⁵⁵⁷ During these two months, the city was under close control with strict security precautions by the military forces, multiple check points, military officials guarding in front of main government offices and religious places, and mobile security groups patrolling around the city days and nights.⁵⁵⁸ Unsurprisingly, the new era started with a nonstop series of political activities that permeated the daily life of the city. With a certain portion of the population having worked for the local government for nearly a decade, particularly the empire of “the Lord of the Central

⁵⁵³ Nguyễn Đắc Xuân. *Từ Phú Xuân đến Huế* [From Phú Xuân to Huế], vol. 2, 72.

⁵⁵⁴ Ngô Quân, “Mất hút đàng xa” [“Disappearing afar...”], *Lập Trường Journal*, vol. 29, October 29, 1964.

⁵⁵⁵ Lập Trường Editors, “Ý Nghĩa Chính Trị của ngày 1 - XI” [“Political Significance of November 1”], *Lập Trường Journal*, vol. 29, October 29, 1964.

⁵⁵⁶ *Daily Reports of the National Police Department of Thừa Thiên Province in 1963*, TTPH, ACH, no. 366; *Daily Reports on the City Situation of the National Police Department of Thừa Thiên Province in 1963*, no. 371.

⁵⁵⁷ *Documentation on Investigations of the National Police Department of the Northern Central Region in 1963*, no. 1786.

⁵⁵⁸ *Daily Reports on the City Situation of the National Police Department of Thừa Thiên Province in 1963*, no. 371; *Documentation on Activities of the Police Department of Tân Ngạn District in 1963*, no. 1885; *Daily Reports of the National Police Department of Thừa Thiên Province in 1963*, no. 366.

region,” Ngô Đình Cẩn, the community of Huế went through a local political purge in the first two months after the regime change.

In an effort to renovate the government and abolish remnants of the old regime in all respects, elections for new local government on all authority levels occurred on December 1.⁵⁵⁹ The city also witnessed various arrests of former government officials, investigations, and confiscation of houses, stores, storages, for properties and weapons of “lackeys” and supporters of Ngô Đình Diệm’s government and Ngô Đình Cẩn’s lord regime in Huế.⁵⁶⁰ All political sectors of the former regime were disbanded and filed asset disclosures.⁵⁶¹ According to the government decree number 3459-HCTP, social organizations, associations, societies of all kinds, in spite of the deadline of November 25,⁵⁶² called for irregular meetings in early December to re-elect their board committees in order to abolish members loyal to Ngô Đình Diệm’s regime.⁵⁶³ Staff of the Police Department attended all meetings and checked background of all members of the newly elected committees to make sure they had had no previous political convictions, no family member working or having any interactions with the “Việt Cộng,” Việt Minh, or relations with the northern part of the 17th parallel, etc.⁵⁶⁴

According to the Police Department, over the victory of the revolution, many people of Huế were so thrilled that they made numerous slogans and banners to display in their neighborhoods to express their gratitude and support for the new national leader committee, as well as their opposition to the old regime.⁵⁶⁵ Some participants of the Buddhist mobilization,

⁵⁵⁹ *Reports of the Director of the Information Department on the Buddhist Affair in 1963*, TTPH, ACH, no. 1837.

⁵⁶⁰ *Documentation on Activities of the Police Department of Thành Nội District in 1963*, no. 1887; *Daily Reports of the Director of National Police Department of the Northern Central Region in 1963*, no. 121.

⁵⁶¹ *Documentation on Activities of the Police Department of Thành Nội District in 1963*, no. 1887.

⁵⁶² *Documentation on Activities of Social Organizations of Thừa Thiên Province in 1963*, TTPH, ACH, no. 1920.

⁵⁶³ *Daily Reports on the City Situation of the National Police Department of Thừa Thiên Province in 1963*, no. 371.

⁵⁶⁴ *Daily Reports on the City Situation of the National Police Department of Thừa Thiên Province in 1963*, no. 371; *Documentation on Activities of Social Organizations of Thừa Thiên Province in 1963*, no. 1920.

⁵⁶⁵ *Daily Reports on the City Situation of the National Police Department of Thừa Thiên Province in 1963*, no. 371; *Daily Reports of the National Police Department of Thừa Thiên Province in 1963*, no. 1862.

particularly the student leaders, in group of three or four, occasionally with singers, were continuously invited to give talks about the struggle to the locals in many different places in the province.⁵⁶⁶ In the second week of November, about a dozen students, including Thái Kim Lan, Phạm Thị Xuân Quế, Nguyễn Đắc Xuân, to name a few, visited Sài Gòn upon a special invitation and arrangement of the new government under General Dương Văn Minh⁵⁶⁷ to witness with their own eyes the real images of the collapse of the regime, to listen to narratives of the overthrow by the military, and to follow the last steps of the Ngô brothers on their escape route on the morning of November 2, 1963.

Thanks to the liberal spirit of the revolution, even the most ordinary people now eagerly participated in various political study sessions to discuss “our attitudes towards the revolution of November 1, 1963.”⁵⁶⁸ They reportedly communicated their thoughts, questioned the new local authorities, or criticized the officials of the former committee who had threatened them before, etc. Thousands of people attended the public lectures on “the struggle of the people and the army” from May to November 1963 (organized by the students of the University of Huế, November 23, 2500 people of attendance);⁵⁶⁹ on the current situation (by the government representative of the First Corps, November 26, five thousand people);⁵⁷⁰ on the new working environment and regulations (December 4, one thousand);⁵⁷¹ on crimes of the Ngô Đình Diệm’s regime; the duties of citizens; proclamations and decrees of the new government, etc.⁵⁷² The lecture on “Neutrality” by professor Bùi Tường Huân at 3:20 p.m. on December 26, 1963 at the Opera House with the attendance of five thousand government officials, workers, professors,

⁵⁶⁶ Nguyễn Đắc Xuân. *Từ Phú Xuân đến Huế* [From Phú Xuân to Huế], vol. 2, 30.

⁵⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 73-89.

⁵⁶⁸ *Daily Reports of the National Police Department of Thừa Thiên Province in 1963*, no. 1862.

⁵⁶⁹ *Newsletters of the Department of Information of Thừa Thiên Province in 1963*, TTPH, ACH, no. 377.

⁵⁷⁰ *News and Reports of the National Police Department of the Northern Central Region in 1963*, no. 1788.

⁵⁷¹ *Documentation on Activities of the Police Department of Thành Nội District in 1963*, TTPH, ACH, no. 1887.

⁵⁷² *Daily Reports of the National Police Department of Thừa Thiên Province in 1963*, no. 1862; *News and Reports of the National Police Department of the Northern Central Region in 1963*, no. 1788; *Daily Reports on the City Situation of the National Police Department of Thừa Thiên Province in 1963*, no. 371.

students, attacked General De Gaulle's policy on neutralizing the southern part of Vietnam. Following the talk, people shouted out loud the slogans and banners inside and outside the venue, and De Gaulle was burned in effigy.⁵⁷³

During these two months of glorious revolutionary spirit, the Department of Information again operated up to its maximum capacity: public information broadcast vehicles with loudspeakers running around the city every day announcing news, dropping pamphlets, establishing "Public Opinion" mailing boxes (Thư Dân Ý), etc.⁵⁷⁴ The Police Department also paid attention to the daily report procedure. The dispatch of the department on November 22 criticized the vagueness and unreliability as well as exaggeration in reports for the old regime prior to the revolution. It provided an example, "in a skirmish, if the enemy had no casualties, our report stated several enemies had been killed, and they took the bodies away; in contrast, if we lost some weapons and soldiers, we were reported safe and sound."⁵⁷⁵ They requested this situation to stop in order to gain the truth and impartiality, and avoid embellishment and concealment.

Meanwhile, exactly like the previous period, numerous propaganda pamphlets, banners, and slogans were displayed and distributed everywhere in the city. In only one day of December 26, for instance, the Department of Information printed 500 daily news, dispersed 20 thousand pamphlets on "What should be done to regenerate the nation," and ten thousand ones on "Down with plots to neutralize the south."⁵⁷⁶ Broadcasting news, screening films and musical performances to insert news, announcements, government proclamations still proved to be

⁵⁷³ *Documentation on Activities of Students of the National Police Department of Thừa Thiên Province in 1963*, no. 1861.

⁵⁷⁴ *Daily Reports of the National Police Department of Thừa Thiên Province in 1963*, no. 1862.

⁵⁷⁵ *Documentation on Investigations of the National Police Department of the Northern Central Region in 1963*, no. 1786.

⁵⁷⁶ Daily report, Director of Department of Information Phan Du signed December 27, 1963, in *Reports of the Director of the Information Department on the Buddhist Affair in 1963*, TTPH, ACH, no. 1837.

among the most effective methods to attract the common people. Thousands of locals of Huế watched the film “Trai thời loạn” (“Hero in the Chaotic time”),⁵⁷⁷ or musical shows by the Hoa Thủ đô (Flowers of the Capital) Group. The shopkeepers at Đông Ba market presented cyclo and truck drivers with free hats with the line “Supporting the People’s Revolutionary Committee.”⁵⁷⁸

Following the Buddhist mobilization, the power change in RVN in November 1963 definitely affected the social connection and human lives in the city of Huế from 1963 onwards. The people’s political awareness and practices after November 1963 developed. If prior to 1963 they did not dare to discuss the national political situation, or criticize the Sài Gòn and Huế government, they could now speak out in public. Besides religion, politics instantly became the common topic in daily conversations in Huế.⁵⁷⁹ If the Buddhist mobilization ignited the struggle fire, the so-called revolution certainly nurtured further the communal spirit and to some extent nationalism within the society of Huế, which fundamentally changed the course of history of this small city in the years to come.

During this process of changes, the daily life in the city of Huế retained its normality with the common incidents of social activities, family issues, or individual concerns. In 20 days of December from 4th to 13th and from 16th to 27th, the city reports covered 17 petty thefts and grand larcenies, 13 bicycle thefts, nine disorderly conducts, two attempted suicides, seven traffic accidents, two fires, two gambling, one food poisoning, three meat and rice smuggling, six delegation visits, plus various film screenings, music shows, etc.⁵⁸⁰ Compared to similar periods of time in June, September, and October, these figures of social problems, larcenies, disorderly

⁵⁷⁷ *Daily Reports of the National Police Department of Thừa Thiên Province in 1963*, no. 1862.

⁵⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷⁹ *Daily Reports on the City Situation of the National Police Department of Thừa Thiên Province in 1963*, no. 371; *Daily Reports of the National Police Department of Thừa Thiên Province in 1963*, no. 1862; *Documentation on Activities of Students of the National Police Department of Thừa Thiên Province in 1963*, no. 1861; Lập Trường Editors, “Ý Nghĩa Chính Trị của ngày 1 - XI” [“Political Significance of November 1”], *Lập Trường Journal*, vol. 29, October 29, 1964.

⁵⁸⁰ Figures collected from various daily reports of the city of Huế of the National Police Department of Thừa Thiên Province and the Central Region, 1963.

conducts, gambling, smuggling, etc. relatively stayed the same, except traffic accidents seemed to decrease by half. From this standpoint, the picture of daily life in Huế was not affected much by any changes in the aftermath of the revolution.

	May 24 – June 12	August 21 – September 9	October 1–14	December 4–13, 16–27
	20 days	23 days	15 days	20 days
Petty Theft & Grand Larceny	16	22	9	17
Bicycle Theft	9	9	5	13
Disorderly Conduct		6	7	9
Traffic Accidents	14	16	16	7
Suicide / Miss Adventure	3	2	2	2 (attempted suicide)
Food Poisoning		1		1
Desertion	3	2		
Dog Bite	2	2	2	
House Fires	3		1	2
Gambling		1		2
Prostitution	1	1	3	
Meat Smuggling		2	4	3
Illegal Construction			1	

Numbers of incidents in daily life in Huế in 1963. Source: Various daily reports from *Daily Reports on the City Situation of the National Police Department of Thừa Thiên Province in 1963*, no. 371; *Documentation on Anti-government Activities of Buddhist Association and Students in Huế in 1963*, no. 8529; *Daily Reports of the National Police Department of Thừa Thiên Province in 1963*, no. 1862; *Documents on Investigations of the National Police Department of the Northern Central Region in 1963*, no. 1786.

The people of Huế, after all the exciting moments of the big events, still went home and enjoyed the meals with their families, read their favorite novels, and sang some Trịnh Công Sơn's songs. And if they did not lock their bike, it could disappear within five minutes. At 9:40 a.m. on December 10, 1963, Trần Thị Cam, servant of the family of Trần Văn Thắm at 10 Lam

Son street, went to the post office, and left her light blue Sterling bike unlocked in front of the building. Đặng Tâm, 29, a barber at 9 alley 7 of Chi Lăng street, walked the bike away, but was caught red-handed by two undercover police.⁵⁸¹ In contrast, a 17 year old girl, a bike keeper at Tân Tân cinema, honestly handed in to the local police a bike left there for more than a day.⁵⁸² At other occasions, the city learned that a young woman had left her house and was raped on December 26;⁵⁸³ a young man jumped into the river to commit suicide because of his family issues;⁵⁸⁴ a servant cut her fingers for stealing some limes;⁵⁸⁵ some boys climbed up the roof of the city Opera House to watch the musical shows for free;⁵⁸⁶ etc. The city council also organized two prayer ceremonies at Diệu Đế pagoda and the Francis Xavier Church for President John F. Kennedy on December 4 with an attendance of 500.⁵⁸⁷ December 16 marked the award ceremony for the excellent students of the University of Huế of the academic year 1962 – 1963.⁵⁸⁸

Towards the end of December, on the occasion of Christmas and New Year's Eve, a variety of music performances, sports games, film screenings, gift presenting, and prayer ceremonies illuminated the city. The city also made some announcements on the government ban of firecrackers on the occasion of the lunar new year festival,⁵⁸⁹ and issued a reminder for the children not to make firecrackers or to use bicycle tires to make loud noise.⁵⁹⁰ The new year 1964 started with some overnight fun parties at various social organizations, yet also some bad

⁵⁸¹ *Daily Reports of the National Police Department of Thừa Thiên Province in 1963*, no. 1862.

⁵⁸² *Ibid.*

⁵⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸⁷ *News and Reports of the National Police Department of the Northern Central Region in 1963*, no. 1788.

⁵⁸⁸ *Daily Reports of the National Police Department of Thừa Thiên Province in 1963*, no. 1862.

⁵⁸⁹ *Daily Reports on the City Situation of the National Police Department of Thừa Thiên Province in 1963*, no. 371.

⁵⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

news to a few residents of the city.⁵⁹¹ In the middle of the night over to the new year, Nguyễn Văn Trọng, an official of the Tax Department, lost his Mobylette scooter while staying on duty at his office.⁵⁹² Mrs. Nguyễn Thị Hường, a tailor at 76 Tịch Điền sector III, Tây Lộc, Thành Nội district, lost to theft a sewing machine Sanyo Transistor and 1,000 VND. Around the same time, the gold jewelry shop Tuân Quang on 4 Trần Hưng Đạo street was burglarized. Mr. Huỳnh Công Thành, the owner of the shop, reported to the Police Department the first morning of 1964 that he lost in total 12 gold rings (5,000 VND value in total), one gold necklace (300 VND), one coin gold pendant (1,500 VND), two fish shaped gold pendants (1,500 VND), and one sapphire pendant (200 VND).⁵⁹³ The new year in Western calendar was traditionally never considered the New Year Eve for Vietnamese hence these misfortunes were not supposed to follow the families all year long – only until the lunar New Year Eve came – Tết in Vietnamese.

4.3 Let's go shopping for Tết

Every January, when Tết – the New Year's Eve in lunar calendar, the biggest of Vietnamese traditional holiday, felt so close, all households of Huế started to prepare for the festival in different ways. This year, the Tết festival, observed on February 13, 1964, arrived when the revolutionary spirit was still very high, and even the smallest changes could affect the local sensitive society and provoke some public opinions. After an eventful year, everybody now hoped the year of Dragon [Giáp Thìn] would bring happiness and peace for all.

Due to the political change, the economy of Huế went through a transition period when all commercial activities seemed to slow down, and according to some experienced businessmen, “the market of Huế became unpredictable because price often changed without following any

⁵⁹¹ Ibid.

⁵⁹² Ibid.

⁵⁹³ Ibid.

rules or factors.”⁵⁹⁴ Several months prior to Tết, big stores in Huế began to store up all main products such as sticky rice, sugar, flour, fabric, etc.; the market and trade networks became busier than usual. The police in charge of economic sector, consist of regulators, inspectors, auditors, and customs, paid special attention to price of basic products in order to keep the market stable. The economic reports on the local markets of January 4 and 5 by the Police Department, signed by the Director Nguyễn Trình on January 6, 1964 noticed the strong consumption and a bit increase in price of sugar as people started to make cakes and dried candies for Tết.⁵⁹⁵ They also were concerned with the shortage and higher price of flour because the quality flour imported from America was insufficient, and the Korean flour was not qualified to be distributed for bakeries. Although the price of one 50 kilogram bag of flour increased from 850 to 1,100 VND, the bakeries tried their best to provide bread with the same price of 5 VND for one 30 gram loaf.⁵⁹⁶ There was a concern however that if this situation lasted for long, it would “strongly affect the baking business of bakeries and bread vendors in the city during the current rainy season.”⁵⁹⁷

Another product which drew the auditors’ special attention was condensed milk. The sweetened condensed milk “Calbest” was the best-seller on the market of Huế in 1963. In the last month of the lunar year, the scarcity of supplies to the market resulted in the increase in price of this most popular milk while all other brands, including Dime, Nestlé, Bông Trắng (White Flower), remained the same price. The Calbest, distributed by Denis Frères Sài Gòn, originally labeled “Mont Blanc.” Now when switched again from “Calbest” back to its initial name “Mont

⁵⁹⁴ Report on November 29, 30, 1963. *Documentation of Economic Sector of the Police Department in 1963 – 1964*, TTPH, ACH, no. 134.

⁵⁹⁵ Report on January 4, 5, 1964. Ibid.

⁵⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁹⁷ Report on January 6, 7, 1964. Ibid.

Blanc” with a new label and same quality, priced lower than “Calbest.”⁵⁹⁸ The brand and the presentation of the product, rather than their quality, perhaps determined the consumption habit of the people of Huế.

When it came closer to Tết, all necessary goods for daily life experienced some changes in price. In an effort to stabilize the market, city radio station added programs on the fixed “state price” to its daily broadcast.⁵⁹⁹ The inspectors of the Police Department worked harder these days to ensure state regulations were obeyed, prices were publicly displayed, and sale records were transparent and accurate.⁶⁰⁰ They however noticed that the traders, petit businessmen, shopkeepers, and vendors after the glorious revolution, apparently ignored the police, and regular rules of the city. While the price of sugar in this last month of the year increased up to 34 VND per kilogram on the free market, compared to the state price of 27.78 VND,⁶⁰¹ inspectors of the Police Department, had difficulties to force shopkeepers to display the state price. This situation occurred with main products of Tết, including sticky rice for traditional cakes, sugar for the dried fruits and candies, condense milk, and fabric. The public opinion indicated that forcing all shops to display price was too strict, and that the new government were controlling the free market.⁶⁰² The consumers, to this extent, suffered from the increasing prices of the market.

Preparing for Tết also increased supply and demand resources for the “black market” in Huế with more products from other provinces and the American aid programs. When it came closer to Tết, after the peak of the rainy seasons, commercial activities became busier, transportation was packed with more and more people and products to and from the rural outskirts of Huế. Many city dwellers and housewives found Tết a good occasion to earn some

⁵⁹⁸ Report on January 11-19, 1964. Ibid.

⁵⁹⁹ Report on February 3, 4, 1964. Ibid.

⁶⁰⁰ Ibid.

⁶⁰¹ Report on January 22, 23, 1964. Ibid.

⁶⁰² Report on February 10, 11, 1964. Ibid.

extra money to buy ingredients for their family Tết's meals, to have their new long dress cut, or a new pair of shoes made, etc. Nearby markets and some intersections, or along main streets appeared many small vendors with some traditional cakes, some special fruit candies and dried fruits for the Tết tables such as crystalized ginger, dried lotus seeds, young coconut candies, savory cakes made of sticky rice, green bean, and pork, or sweet cakes with different kinds of beans, bananas, sesame seeds, wrapped with banana leaves, or colorful transparent plastic wrap.⁶⁰³

Early February 1964, the Tết markets were filled up with numerous sellers, buyers, and visitors. While cosmetic products were considered luxurious, and only affordable to some well-off customers, basic goods for daily usage of common people lowered the prices for Tết, especially the domestic products, replacing imported cookware, decorative accessories, vases, kids clothing, toys, etc. The last four days of the old year, transportation from Đà Lạt was delayed, so some fresh groceries, such as broccoli, carrot, were insufficient to supply to the market of Huế.⁶⁰⁴ Fresh flowers from Đà Lạt, famous for their beauty and longevity, became scant due to the expensive transportation fees. This actually supported the local flower market: more flowers planted in Thừa Thiên province was consumed in Tết 1964 than that of 1963.

In general, the Police Department with special inspectors, auditors, customs, and regulators, observed that the preparation for Tết of 1964 was normal, with ups and downs of the market, profit and loss of some businessmen or vendors, insufficient supplies or price changes of several products.⁶⁰⁵ The conventional three-day holiday this year longer than usual because of the weekend brought extra happiness to the preparation for the biggest festival of the year.

⁶⁰³ Mai Thị Trà, interview; Nguyễn Khoa Diệu Huyền, interview by author, Huế, January 19, 2014.

⁶⁰⁴ Report on February 10, 11, 1964. *Documentation of Economic Sector of the Police Department in 1963 – 1964*, no. 134.

⁶⁰⁵ Ibid.

While the men were painting the house, decorating front garden and yard with flowers and bonsai plants, and cleaning the neighborhood; the grandmothers, mothers, sisters, daughters, were busy preparing ingredients to make traditional cakes, dried fruits, fancy dishes, or thinking about stylish design for their new long dress or shoes. When the new year really came, the families of Huế cheerfully spent the special holiday with their beloved ones, welcoming family members returning home or visitors from out of town. As the tradition went, people visited the paternal family on the first day, the maternal clan on the second day, and their teachers on the third day of the new year to say happy new year and wish each other the best. Numerous people went to pagodas, churches, and local temples to pray for themselves and their families. Adults presented children with lucky money, young people organized picnics, or biking to the scenic landscape in the suburb of the city, etc.

The core tradition of ancestor worship of Vietnamese culture also made Tết the most important occasion in the year to express gratitude and respect, as well as pray for good luck, health, and happiness for the whole family. During the first three days of the new year, Vietnamese people offered best dishes to their ancestors on the altar to invite them to enjoy the family reunion meals and the new year with their offspring. This tradition, like numerous other cultural norms, was strictly and seriously obeyed in the old imperial capital of Huế. On the altars for the ancestors of every family of Huế, rich or poor, Buddhist or Christian, professors or cyclo drivers, one could always see spiral of smokes from hot dishes through the candles' light and smell the odor of incense and agar wood.

In the living room, adjacent to the ancestors' altar, the people of Huế enjoyed the family reunion meals, or welcomed neighbors, relatives, and friends. In their conversations over the new year, besides best wishes and hope, many must have recalled what had happened in the old year, and particularly after many quiet years and as the result of the recent “revolution,” politics

became an open topic. The city of Huế, while looking a bit brighter with flowers and red decoration – the color of good luck – however remained gloomy at some corners. The families who lost their members for the Buddhist mobilization must have gone through an emotional Tết festival, as it was the first time on their altar of Tết appeared the portrait of their child with white flowers. Traditionally, these families must stay at home, they were not allowed to visit any family to avoid spreading bad luck or the “grey coat destiny” notion to other people.

The Hương river was still flowing quietly, its powerful yet hidden currents seemingly dived again into the bottom, at least for the people of Huế to enjoy their traditional Tết. Now the new year of the Dragon 1964 officially arrived with a potential of more crucial changes after the eventful year of 1963.

4.4 Sub–Conclusion

If the city of Huế before 1963 was known for its tranquility and peacefulness, Huế in this year of the Cat certainly changed due to the Buddhist mobilization. The first quarter of the year quickly passed by with all the normal incidents of daily life like in any other city in Vietnam, yet 106 days of the summer shook the city, and marked a new period in the history of Huế, as well as highlighted Huế and its Buddhist mobilization and aftermaths in the national history.

During the summer of 1963, physically, the quiet city on the Perfume river and old buildings now had palpable undertones which were violent and restive. This imperial city – the cultural symbol of the country with its unique beauty and charm, the intricate and elegant melding of the Forbidden City and French architecture – all this was now festooned with banners and pointed slogans, these concealed in places by barbed–wire fences, armored cars, and their implied threat of violence. While this city of students remained a center of education, the classic image of students in their traditional long dress uniform became dim, replaced now by the

swelling ranks of engaged participants launching hunger strikes and demonstrations. This land of pagodas and its sacred atmosphere for centuries was still a center of religion, but it was now also a center of struggle for the rights and freedoms of religious practice. Day and night in the city, the sounds of recitation and prayers and wooden bells were still there, but seasoned now by screams, yells, chants, and cries, and the wail of police sirens.

Over 106 days that summer, the society of Huế changed at many levels. The Buddhist mobilization provided the population of Huế with a panoply of options in the struggle for rights and justice, and more importantly, of roles to assume in their changing society. In demonstrations for rights and freedoms for Buddhists, students were asserting their claim for free religious practice for themselves and their families, as well as the independence of their own beliefs and life ideals. Of the people of Huế who engaged or partially participated in direct or indirect ways, many for the first time, were inspired to think of their ability to act beyond the limits of traditional social frameworks. Some people at that historical moment felt a transgenerational cultural and moral shame⁶⁰⁶ which extended to the whole nation. They consequently became more mature and brave.⁶⁰⁷ People from all walks of life who joined the Buddhist struggle felt a need for unity, and contributed to the society in tangible ways. As Sallie King stated, the Buddhist movement in the south of Vietnam during the 1960s was “an example of courage, altruism and activist spirituality.”⁶⁰⁸

For decades, since participants in the 1963 struggle have travelled the world expressing their appreciation and deep gratitude for and to those who supported them and their right to exist

⁶⁰⁶ Cao Huy Thuần, Interview by Thời Đại Mới in 2011, “Vài điều căn bản về phong trào Phật giáo” [“Some Basic Points about the Buddhist Movement”], http://tapchithoidai.org/ThoiDai21/201121_CaoHuyThuan.htm (accessed 10/10/2015).

⁶⁰⁷ Tâm Phong, “Nhớ lại cuộc vận động của Phật giáo” [“Remembering the Buddhist Mobilization”]. *Hải Triều Âm Newspaper* 18 (24 August 1964): 10.

⁶⁰⁸ Christopher S. Queen and Sallie B. King. *Engaged Buddhism: Buddhist Liberation Movements in Asia*. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 355.

as a human person, in particular a Vietnamese person, in Buddhist language, to repay their human debt.⁶⁰⁹ The indelible image of the self-immolation of Monk Tiêu Diêu in the yard of Từ Đàm Pagoda, for example, still lives with the students of the 1960s, and remains an inspiration and motivation in worst situations of their lives.⁶¹⁰ Such self sacrifice, self-immolations, hunger strikes and all these won the hearts and minds of many in Huế, elsewhere in the country, and around the world.

While the year of 1963 became a crucial point in many individual's lives, it also marked important changes in family relationship and communal connection. What still stays with many people of Huế until today includes deep sympathies and supports among Buddhists and their families and networks. Some "outsiders" of all the chaos of the city, on the other hand, observed and worried about the new crack within the closed society of Huế. After the summer and especially after November 1963, some residents started to feel more skeptical and circumspect about their friends, classmates, colleagues, and the public, as they became more cautiously attentive to people's standpoints of politics, religions, and the social activities. According to a professor of Law of the University of Huế, Nguyễn Thị Bảo Xuyên, the distance among people only got further in the years to come, and was never able to heal.⁶¹¹

In terms of historiography, in various historical accounts in both Vietnamese and English, the incidents of May 8, 1963 have been commonly depicted as "the Huế radio station affair," "the Buddhist flag affair," "the Buddhist movement against the government," "the affair of the Buddha's Birthday of 1963," and such. Scholars inside and outside the country have been arguing several issues: the President's order forbidding Buddhist flags, Thích Trí Quang's speech on the morning of May 8, the protest at the radio station that evening, and negotiations

⁶⁰⁹ Hoàng Nguyên Nhuận, "Cuộc chơi nửa đời người" ["The Half-A-Life Game"].

⁶¹⁰ Hoàng Nguyên Nhuận, "Ôi thân yêu bóng chùa Từ Đàm" ["Oh Beloved Từ Đàm Pagoda"].

⁶¹¹ Nguyễn Thị Bảo Xuyên, Interview.

between the government and the Buddhists after the events, the role of America in the whole affair, and the role of the Buddhist movement in the overthrow of the Ngô Đình Diệm regime the following November. Scholars of the late 1960s – early 1970s period and more recently have all tried to examine the affair from multiple angles, yet mainly from political-oriented perspectives.⁶¹² Historians of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, who after 1975 wrote and presented their dominant version of the history of the country, have emphasized the political role of the Buddhist movement in bringing about the collapse of the Republic of Vietnam regime in the south.⁶¹³

Even the common labels for these events are not in agreement. The turmoil in the summer of 1963 was called by Buddhist monks and laymen “Cuộc Vận Động Phật Giáo” – the “Buddhist Mobilization” to preserve their religious freedom and respond to the repression of their religious practice.⁶¹⁴ It was the “Buddhist struggle” to its supporters, students, and the local populace.⁶¹⁵ The policy-makers of the Republic of Vietnam government at the time considered it to be the “Buddhist problem.”⁶¹⁶ And from the early 1960s, it was commonly known to international audiences and the American public as the “Buddhist crisis.” Mobilization, struggle,

⁶¹² See Jerrold L. Schecter. *The New Face of Buddha; Buddhism and Political Power in Southeast Asia*. New York: Coward-McCann, 1967; Piero Gheddo. *The Cross and the Bo-tree; Catholics and Buddhists in Vietnam*. Translated by Charles Underhill Quinn. New York: Sheed and Ward, 1970; Robert J. Topmiller, *The Lotus Unleashed: the Buddhist Peace Movement in South Vietnam, 1964 – 1966*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2002; James McAllister. “Only Religion Count in Vietnam: Thich Tri Quang and the Vietnam War,” *Modern Asian Studies*, 42 4 (2008).

⁶¹³ See Lê Cung. *Phong trào Đô thị Huế trong kháng chiến chống Mỹ 1954 – 1975 (The Urban Movement in Huế in the Resistance Against America 1954 – 1975)*. Huế: Thuận Hoá Press, 2001; Lê Cung. *Phong trào Phật giáo miền Nam Việt Nam năm 1963 (The Buddhist Movement in the South of Vietnam in 1963)*. Hà Nội: National University Press, 1999; and other publications by Trần Văn Giàu, Trần Bạch Đằng, Trần Huy Liệu, etc.

⁶¹⁴ See Trí Quang tự truyện [Tri Quang’s Memoir]. Hồ Chí Minh City: Tổng Hợp Press, 2011; *Lập Trường [Standpoint]*, Huế, 1964; Quốc Oai. *Phật giáo Tranh đấu (Buddhist Struggle)*. Sài Gòn: Tân Sanh Press, 1963; Quốc Tuệ. *Công cuộc Tranh đấu của Phật giáo Việt Nam từ Phật Đản đến Cách mạng 1963 (The Struggle of Vietnamese Buddhism from Buddha Birthday Celebration to the Revolution in 1963)*. [S.l.: s.n.], 1964; Monk Thích Nhất Hạnh, *Vietnam: Lotus in a Sea of Fire*. New York: Hill and Wang [1967]; Monk Thích Đức Nghiệp, Vụ tự thiêu của hòa thượng Thích Quảng Đức (*The Immolation of Monk Thích Quảng Đức*), The Burning Monk Thích Quảng Đức, Conference of Vietnamese Buddhist Studies Institute, May 29, 2005, <http://www.thuvienhoasen.org/qdhoithao-03-thichducnghiep.htm> (accessed March 01, 2012)

⁶¹⁵ See memoirs by Thái Kim Lan, Nguyễn Đắc Xuân, Hoàng Nguyên Nhuận, Quán Như, Trần Kiêm Đoàn, etc.

⁶¹⁶ See government documentation of the Republic of Vietnam preserved at the National Archive Center in Huế and Hồ Chí Minh City, Vietnam; Frances FitzGerald, *Fire in The Lake: the Vietnamese and The Americans in Vietnam*.

campaign, problem, crisis, movement, protests, or some combination of the various tags – all this reveals the complicated historiography of Vietnam studies. Divergent views of the Buddhists and their supporters would challenge common interpretation of the Buddhist mobilization of 1963.

Importantly, as this chapter has suggested, the history of the city of Huế in this short yet crucial period did not consist of only the religious incident in May, or the political event in November, particularly as seen through the lens of the residents of Huế. Beyond the Buddhist mobilization and its engaged Buddhists, or students, shopkeepers, and others who got involved some ways or others, a certain portion of the population of 1963 Huế still enjoyed their normal lives without any changes in their routines. Some were busy with their life events like wedding ceremony, or preparation for future plans, or simply studied, worked, had some fun with families or friends like nothing special was really going on in their city. Equal figures of social problems and festivities of the chaotic months compared to the “quiet” ones, together with the atmosphere of confusion, determinations, worries, angers, also happiness and excitement, the diverse colors reveal the hidden parts of the incomplete picture of the local history of the society of Huế.

As Fernand Braudel noted, “sometimes a few anecdotes are enough to set up a signal which points to a way of life,”⁶¹⁷ this snapshot of a mere year in the city of Huế serves to highlight the complexity of ordinary daily lives in wartime Vietnam. These seemingly ordinary narratives are in fact essential in explaining the immense waves of change which would come to roil the city and lead it into further struggles and chaos in the period of 1964–1967. The religious mobilization, soon to be politicized, became an urban movement in the whole central region of Vietnam. The People of the Pagodas would step squarely out of the sacred sphere and contribute to the secession of the city of Huế from the Republic of Vietnam. And amidst all this, the people

⁶¹⁷ Fernand Braudel. *The Structures of Everyday Life: the Limits of the Possible*. Trans. Sian Reynolds. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 29.

in Hué still read their news, sang their songs, and lived their lives under the looming shadow of war.

Part III

Not Quite A War Yet: The Years 1964 - 1967

Huế in the period of 1964 – 1967 was no longer the tranquil city it used to be before 1963. The hidden currents of the events of 1963 now emerged more visibly and kept roiling the lives of the people of Huế in the following years. The Buddhist mobilization which started in Huế and contributed to the collapse of the First Republic in November 1963 set off a period of political instability and declining legitimacy of the government of the RVN. The most notable legacy of the series of religious and political events lay in the changes in the social atmosphere in which frustration, skepticism, and ambivalence intermingled with the wearing anxieties over the war and uncertainty toward the future of the nation.

The people of Huế, Buddhists and non-Buddhists alike, after an eventful year of 1963, still lived their lives with daily concerns of earning money, food and clothes, school works, ceremonies, yet were keenly aware of the political changes on the regional and national level. The frequent coups in Sài Gòn every few months in 1964 – 1965 with no comprehensive policies did not win the Huế people's trust.⁶¹⁸ Even before the arrival of American troops in Vietnam in March 1965, the war naturally entered people's lives in the city by various means, which

⁶¹⁸ The compositions of the cabinet of the RVN changed more than 10 times over a period of a year and a half after November 1963. Political upheavals stirred the RVN with the short existence of the Revolution Military Council, the High National Council, the National Legislative Council, the Council of Notables, the National Salvation Council, with the Young Turks, provisional charters, and complex challenges over authority and political ability, military vs. civilian, Buddhist vs. Catholic, central vs. southern region origins, etc. Below are only key leaders of the RVN governments between the two republic regimes in 1963 – 1967:

11/2/1963: Dương Văn Minh

1/30/1964: Nguyễn Khánh

11/4/1964: Trần Văn Hương

1/26/1965: the Revolution Military Council

2/16/1965: Phan Huy Quát

6/18/1965: Nguyễn Cao Kỳ and Nguyễn Văn Thiệu.

increasingly worried all walks of life. In this atmosphere of frustrations and uncertainty, Huế carried on the spirit of the 1963 revolution to respond to changes in Sài Gòn, showing the political function of the former capital. The struggle movement with multiple struggle forces bubbled through most of 1964 and 1965 and burst into full bloom in the spring of 1966.

This last part of the dissertation, as other previous ones, tries to capture the local history of Huế as it was described, remembered, and told 50 years later. The year of 1964 – 1966 was considered the period of “Turmoil in the central region” (Biến động miền Trung) with continuous anti-government and anti-American movements. Unlike the Ngô Đình Diệm’s era, or the 1963 Buddhists mobilization time, narratives of the period of the 1964 – 1967 were often colored by political sides with complexities and sensitivities added after historical changes in 1968 and 1975. Following the stories of history makers whose lives were now all channeled by politics related activities, the next chapters describe all fields of life of the people of Huế while providing observations and analyses on changes in the people’s awareness, outlook, and their responsibilities for their own and their nation’s destiny. The lack of sources or materials on many non-political aspects limited the ability to keep the historical narratives balanced. In other words, as politics entered daily life of the people, the “social history” of the period is more or less politicized.

The “turmoil of the central region” thus far has appeared in accounts by scholars from Sài Gòn or abroad often under the form of a simple sketch in a big picture of the RVN politics or the Vietnam War. The “insiders” on the other hand were easily felt on to the continuous political arguments on nationalists and communists, pro- and anti-government or NLF with complicated suspicions, accusations, and extreme assessments. This part will neither judge nor tell the “truth” of any sides, instead trying to uncover what happened to the people in the city of Huế at the grassroots level as materials allow. It first focuses on the struggle movement in 1964 – 1966

with investigation of the unique and phenomenal journal published in Huế - *Lập Trường journal* and Huế's distinctive characteristics. It then focuses on the views of Huế people on three significant issues that crucially affected the social life in Huế in this period: America, war, and communism. The next chapter analyzes in further detail the remarkable impacts of the contemporary situation on economic and educational life, as well as its reflection in the literary world with the emergence of female writers of Huế, and in war protest songs of Huế composer, Trịnh Công Sơn. It ends with changes in 1967, especially the last few months of the lunar year to prepare to another Tết festival, with narratives of a few residents in the city of Huế up to the last night of the lunar year before the New Year's Eve at the end of January 1968.

Chapter 5: “Turmoil in the Central Region”

It was certain that Ngô Đình Diệm’s regime had mishandled the Buddhist affair in every way, which ignited the struggle flame in Huế, and even after its collapse, legacies of nine years under the leadership of Ngô Đình Diệm, Ngô Đình Cẩn and their followers still fanning the flame in the city and its people. The frustration of 1963 lingered on, now adding uncertainty and ambivalence of the post-revolution changes, resulted in greater unrest among the people of Huế.

5.1 Aftershocks of the Revolution

Many of the protestors, strikers, and prisoners after November 1, 1963 felt proud of their revolution, of the strength they created by overcoming differences of generation, age, profession, and social class to fight for democracy, freedom, and equal rights.⁶¹⁹ These people with keen awareness of their responsibilities and determinations in social changing, remained active to honor their “brothers” in the community and denounce the evil acts and people of the old regime. Especially in the first half of 1964, Huế witnessed multiple affairs to eliminate the legacies of the Ngô Đình Diệm’s regime.

On January 6, 1964, the Nguyễn Phúc clan association (the Nguyễn Emperor’s family) sent a report to the government complaining about the degradation of construction in the Forbidden City and citadel because Ngô Đình Cẩn had allowed ordinary people to occupy the Emperors’ compounds to stay for a long time, to open classes of the National School of Theater and Music, or take the door of Thái Bình Lâu [Palace of Peace] to use at their army camps, etc. Although they did not directly admit their own distress and disappointment, the royal family members earnestly requested the government to act fast, because the image badly spoiled the

⁶¹⁹ Lê Tuyên, “Đầu Mùa Mưa Gió” [“The Beginning of Storm Season”], *Lập Trường Journal*, vol. 30, November 12, 1964.

unique historic tourist destination of the city and became an eyesore for visitors.⁶²⁰

Under strong public pressure, it took the new government half a year to take leaders of the old regime to court. “The Lord of the Central Region” Ngô Đình Cẩn was sentenced to death and executed in Sài Gòn. Đặng Sĩ, the former deputy province chief on May 8, 1963 was under sentence of death (in fact it was later commuted). Phan Quang Đông – the head of a secret service office of Ngô Đình Diệm government, headquartered in Huế – was also sentenced to death and executed at Tự Do stadium exactly on the first anniversary of the Buddhist mobilization on May 9, 1964. Several thousand people attended the “solemn occasion” to punish the “symbol”⁶²¹ of the old regime. The American consul, John Helble, for unknown reasons, was instructed by the embassy to attend Phan Quang Đông’s execution by firing squad. “This was another “scapegoat” exercise in the atmosphere after the coup that somebody should be blamed for the incident and some action taken that would mollify the people of Hue.”⁶²²

One other aftermath of the Buddhist mobilization to appease the public discontent was compensation for Từ Đàm pagoda after the “Day of Disaster” on August 21, 1963. The documentation exchanges between the I Corps Tactical Zone and Ministry of Domestic Affairs delayed the process until June 1964. Funds were requested to support the loss of pagoda properties including numerous scriptures, Buddhist references and literature, various newspapers in French and English, as well as furniture, transmitters and receivers, amplifiers, loudspeakers, etc. (total 2.3 million VND) and total 728,565 VND in cash. Many individuals lost jewelry, watches, glasses, ID cards, clothes, shoes, mobylettes, bicycles, books, etc. over the night. Thirty two victims with serious wounds and 127 others with minor ones were in need of financial aid to

⁶²⁰ *About Security Situation in Thừa Thiên Province in 1963 – 1967*, FRPO, NAC, no. 15956.

⁶²¹ Lập Trường Editors, “Đặng Sĩ và chế độ cũ” [“Đặng Sĩ and the Old Regime”], *Lập Trường Journal*, vol. 8, May 9, 1964.

⁶²² John Helble, interview, 92. In his testimony, John Helble misremembered the name of the executed person. He stated that was Đặng Sĩ instead of Phan Quang Đông.

assist with hospitalization, rehabilitation, and medicine.⁶²³

The courts and executions, the anniversaries of the Buddhist mobilization in 1964 reminded many people of Huế of the year they raised their voice and more importantly, previous experiences warned them not to ignore politics. Nine years living in a tense political atmosphere under a family dictatorship that limited their ability to speak out was over. The Buddhists became active again politically. Many now showed their opinions towards the former government, aspirations and hopes for the future of the nation. Many became more attentive yet to a certain extent still cautious of political issues, hesitated to wholeheartedly support any generals, councils, parties, or societies.⁶²⁴ Professor Cao Huy Thuần, under a pen name of Cao Lang, observed the loose ungoverned atmosphere in early 1964, in which the public no longer feared the government, they even tended to criticize the government, and any strong reactions of the government could be considered dictatorship. “The government did not really gain authority among the people – government orders were not fully obeyed.”⁶²⁵

The local government of Huế seemed to put great efforts to win people’s hearts and minds in the aftermath of a chaotic year, yet they apparently was not successful. For example, in an attempt to demonstrate the new government’s hard work and achievements, the City Mayor reported their activities in the first six months of 1964 on radio for four times in three days at 7:20 – 8:20 p.m. June 30, 1964, 7 – 8 a.m. and 7:20 – 8:20 p.m. July 1, 1964, 7 – 8 a.m. July 2, 1964.⁶²⁶ The Mayor’s report on the same kinds of activities in the same format as those from the old regime with which they were very familiar actually created a counter-reaction among the large populace. Out of expectation of the local government, the number of roads got maintained,

⁶²³ *Documentation on the Buddhist Struggle Movement in 1964*, TTPH, ACH, no. 88.

⁶²⁴ Various reports from *Monthly Reports of the City of Huế in 1964*, TTPH, ACH, no. 253; *Daily Reports of Department of Informatin in 1964*, TTPH, ACH, no. 136.

⁶²⁵ Cao Lang “‘Chính Phủ Cách Mạng’ Đã Thật Cách Mạng Chưa?” [“Has the ‘Revolutionary Government’ Been Revolutionary Yet?”], *Lập Trường Journal*, vol. 3, April 4, 1964.

⁶²⁶ *Daily Reports of Department of Informatin in 1964*, no. 136.

trees planted, families vaccinated, etc. provoked people's suspicion over the pragmatism and significance of the public services at the time and the impression of the boast of the government.⁶²⁷

At the same time various political parties took advantage of the ungoverned situation to expand their influence in the city. The Patriotic Vietnamese Youth League (Đoàn thanh niên Việt Nam ái quốc), Pure Buddhists of the Central Region (Phật tử Thuần túy miền Trung), and anonymous groups distributed numerous leaflets in order to show their opposition to government policies, to support neutralism, or to challenge the Buddhist activities.⁶²⁸ On February 22 and March 11, 1964, the Vietnamese Nationalist Party (Việt Nam Quốc dân Đảng – VNQDD) placed banners, posters in many streets to appeal for the people's support for anti-dictatorship, anti-communism, neutralism, or unity to save the nation. The government immediately confiscated the banners and posters and invited leaders of the VNQDD to request they obey the national law (i.e. asking for government's permission for their party's activities).⁶²⁹

Non-member of political parties found different means to express their opinions. Shortly after the end of Ngô Đình Diệm's era, the newspaper *Dân ta (Our People)* of Nguyễn Vỹ was suddenly suspended after 13 volumes for no clear reason. According to observation of the police, this newspaper had been well received in Huế as the “organ of the people,” to “show all truth” of a famous revolutionary journalist. The people therefore puzzled until when they would have freedom of speech to be able to “criticize the government's mistakes” to help advance the government system.⁶³⁰ And they did not have to wait for long for a journal to speak out for them.

⁶²⁷ Dân Tôi. “Kết Toán Bán Niên” [“Half Year Report”], *Lập Trường Journal*, vol. 17, July 11, 1964.

⁶²⁸ *Monthly Reports of the City of Huế in 1964*, TTPH, ACH, no. 253.

⁶²⁹ Ibid.

⁶³⁰ *Documentation on Religious Issues of the Provincial Police Department in 1964*, TTPH, ACH, no. 132.

5.2 Lập Trường Journal

In the new era of more openness, the people of Huế started to realize the difficulties and censorship under Ngô Đình Diệm's regime, as well as the crucial role of media on political theater. Especially intellectuals, professors, and students of university, actively contributed to foster their voice by writing columns for newspapers, and publishing their own accounts. In the words of Cao Huy Thuần, "we fought for our rights so we published a journal to support our struggle. Publishing a journal was our way of struggle."⁶³¹ This professor of law, together with two other colleagues at the university Lê Tuyên and Tôn Thất Hanh, published the weekly journal of opinion in the central region, creating the unique phenomenon in journalism in the 1950s – 1975. It was entitled *Lập Trường* (*Position*).



Lập Trường Journal, vol. 8, May 9, 1964.

⁶³¹ Cao Huy Thuần, interview by author, Huế, February 16, 2014.

Every Saturday morning from March 21 to November 12, 1964, many thousands of *Lập Trường* copies from the central office at 17 Lý Thường Kiệt street in Huế were issued to numerous newsstands and bookstores in five provinces in the central region and other provinces in the central highland and the south. *Lập Trường Journal* almost immediately gained a wide and influential readership among articulate intellectuals throughout the nation, especially in Huế and Sài Gòn. Only volume no.2, as 2,000 copies were sold out within a few hours after released in the morning, another 2000 issues were printed in the afternoon. Volume 12 they hit 20,000 prints, and volume 26 60,000. They were welcome in Cà Mau province in the furthest south of the nation, and many institutions abroad in France, USA requested copies for their collections.⁶³² They sold the first issues for 6 VND (since volume 10, readers in the southern area had to pay extra 1 VND for air mail shipping fee). Later when it became one of the (if not the) bestseller journals of the time, some opportunist bookstore owners increased the price up to 9, 10, or 16 VND.⁶³³

Lập Trường Journal served as a powerful organ of a group of intellectuals, old and young professors and student leaders, and attracted a large number of readers with the same ideals, aspirations, and commitment. Self-identifying as the people who were aware of the dangerous circumstances of the nation after the political change in January 30, 1964, they assigned themselves to stand up with the ultimate objective to fortify the people's power to complete the democratic revolution.⁶³⁴ The *Lập Trường* group's pride was notable – the pride for their bravery and courage to take the position of, and on behalf of, the people to reveal the truth, fearless of suppression, and awareness of freedom of speech, of journalism spirit to enlighten, alert, and

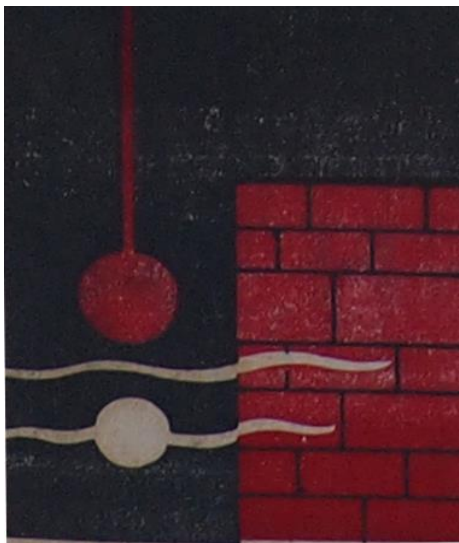
⁶³² *Lập Trường Journal*, vol. 16, July 4, 1964.

⁶³³ *Lập Trường Journal*, vol. 22, August 22, 1964.

⁶³⁴ *Lập Trường Journal*, vol. 3, April 4; vol. 8, May 9; vol. 29, October 29, 1964.

protect the people.⁶³⁵

In doing so, *Lập Trường Journal* constantly provided a wide range of editorials, critiques, columns, analyses, and reviews together with satire, poems, short and long stories focusing extensively on politics. With sharp and critical views of the national issues, political system and contemporary government, the journal reflected and directed the public opinion on multiple contemporary issues, supported or criticized almost all militant generals in Sài Gòn (Dương Văn Minh, Nguyễn Chánh Thi versus Nguyễn Khánh, Trần Văn Hương), consulted the central council in Sài Gòn on how to govern the country, introduced and popularized theories and arguments on various topics, such as parliamentary polity, policies, emergency situations, peace in American honor, education, problems of the countryside, etc. Theories and ideologies were cited from references by French philosophers like Carl Friedrich, M. Duverger, E. Giraud, B Mirkin Guetzgitch, Walter Bagehot, etc.



The icon with a plumb line, the wall, the moon and its reflection on the Hương river identified the position of the journal – a constructive, transparent, bright and strong position – a bridge between the government and the people to honor all Vietnamese people from a cyclo

⁶³⁵ *Lập Trường Journal*, vol. 3, April 4; vol. 8, May 9, 1964.

driver to a shopkeeper lady to an own street vendor, with no political or religious prejudice.⁶³⁶ The authors repeatedly emphasized the people's concerns and anxieties under the threat of war and communism, their skepticism and ambivalence of the revolution, and the urgent need of a comprehensive social revolution with extensive practice of democracy and freedom in daily life.⁶³⁷

Despite appreciating American aids and alliance, the *Lập Trường* group of Huế expressed strong opposition to American intervention into domestic affair of Vietnam. They blamed neutralism of turning the green light for France to come back to colonize Vietnam, of confirming Hà Nội regime had been a legitimate authority, and the clear separation of the two regions of Vietnam nation at the DMZ, which eventually would turn the free southern zone into a economic and ideological market of communism and colonization.⁶³⁸ While separating its function and operation from the University of Huế, *Lập Trường Journal* clearly supported the Buddhist mobilization and its leaders, spending pages on letters of Ven. Thích Trí Quang, situation of Buddhism, and printing special issues to commemorate the Vesak Buddha's birthday (vol. 10, May 23, 1964).

Additionally, in the hysteria of the revolution which was largely believed that Huế ignited and kept on fighting for a year since May 8, 1963, *Lập Trường Journal* apparently tended to simplify the Ngô Đình Diệm's regime in a black and white perspective. Nine years of 1954 – 1963 was generalized as a dark era, everything was dangerous for the revolution, and Ngô Đình Diệm's government was reactionary and treasonous, which resulted in a "politician crisis." Because all alternative perspectives had been disabled, it was an urgent call for national leaders

⁶³⁶ *Lập Trường Journal*, vol. 2, March 28; vol. 3, April 4, 1964.

⁶³⁷ *Lập Trường Journal*, vol. 11, May 30; vol.19 July 25; vol. 25 September 19, 1964.

⁶³⁸ *Lập Trường* Editors, "Vì Sao Chúng Tôi Chống Trung Lập" ["Why do We Protest Against Neutralism?"], *Lập Trường Journal*, no. 14, June 20, 1964.

whom the people trusted to lead the post-revolution country.⁶³⁹

The extensive numbers of politics-related accounts absolutely led to *Lập Trường*'s success beyond the initial expectation of its founders to enlighten and nurture the political awareness (ý thức chính trị) for its readers. The reputation of university professors and the respect and trust they earned in the more and more politics- interested community with high revolution spirit contributed to popularize the journal that quickly and created the *Lập Trường* phenomenon. In several months, more and more new authors sharing their political views and found *Lập Trường Journal* a trustworthy place to discuss politics and other national issues.⁶⁴⁰ In the readers' opinion column of the last issue, Phong Sơn shared his views on significance of politics, the pragmatic and invaluable lessons and experiences of strikes and demonstrations to the progress of social development.⁶⁴¹ Cao Huy Thuần happily admitted on *Lập Trường Journal* in 1964 and 50 years later that since November 1, 1963 the ordinary people of Huế intensely followed political news on a daily basis as attentive as if it was their very own issues, something made an immediate impact on their life.⁶⁴² Together with the increasing popularity of radio, journal like *Lập Trường* contributed to enhance political awareness level of the people of Huế as well as advance nationalism, solidarity, and intellect.⁶⁴³

With its quick success and geographically large dispersion, *Lập Trường Journal* had to emphasize its non-politics-related position for more than one time to avoid all kind of accusation from various directions. Shortly after its release, the journal received multiple anonymous letters

⁶³⁹ C.L. “Chung Quanh Một Cái Ghé” [“To Obtain a Position”], *Lập Trường Journal*, vol. 15, June 27, 1964.

⁶⁴⁰ “Độc Giả Nói Với Chúng Tôi” [“Feedback from Our Readers”], *Lập Trường Journal*, vol. 17, July 11, 1964.

⁶⁴¹ Phong Sơn, “Sự Lớn Mạnh Của Tinh Thần Dân Tộc” [“The Development of Nationalist Spirit”], *Lập Trường Journal*, vol. 30, November 12, 1964.

⁶⁴² Cao Huy Thuần, interview by author, Paris, France, January 12, 2016; Cao Huy Thuần, “Việt Nam và Chính Thể Đại Nghị” [“Vietnam and Parliamentary Polity”], *Lập Trường Journal*, vol. 29, October 29, 1964.

⁶⁴³ *Lập Trường Journal*, vol. 30, November 12, 1964.

threatening to burn down its office, press, and poison its editorial board.⁶⁴⁴ Threats came from Ngô Đình Diệm supporters, Catholic influenced newspapers of *Xây Dựng* (of Father Nguyễn Quang Lãm), *Thăng tiến* (of Father Phan Văn Thắm), also several daily news such as *Tự Do*, *Tranh Đấu*, *Tiếng Vang*. These newspapers with the views from Sài Gòn had very strong criticism against critical views of the *Lập Trường Journal* group. Their front page headlines covered the crisis in Huế, the autonomous government of the central region (*Tiếng Vang* vol. 200, September 2, 1964), challenged the arguments between students and professors of the University of Huế (*Xây Dựng* vol. 199, September 23, 1964), questioned professors and students of Huế by those of Sài Gòn (*Tranh Đấu* vol. 28, October 1, 1964, and vol. 36, October 10, 1964).

At the same time *Lập Trường Journal* stated that there were no such things happening in Huế, that the minority of “betrayal trouble-makers” in Sài Gòn,⁶⁴⁵ in order to reprobate the struggle of the people in the central region, “garbled the situation in Huế estranged people’s forces, based merely on statements of some irresponsible individuals or groups.”⁶⁴⁶ It was probably true that the daily news in Sài Gòn neither had permanent reporters in town nor sent their reporters to Huế, possibly reported merely via indirect sources. And because *Lập Trường Journal* was the only journal published in Huế mainly to support the people’s struggle in the central region, plus the sensitiveness and complexity of political issues in the aftermath of the Vietnam War, reliability and accuracy of media coverage remained questionable.

Yet at least arguing with their colleagues in Sài Gòn did not cause any direct troubles to the publication of *Lập Trường Journal*. With its great popularity, *Lập Trường* was under increasing surveillance by government officials who studied each edition of the well-produced journal for clues to the potential intentions of the Buddhist and intellectual leaders. As Cao Huy

⁶⁴⁴ *Lập Trường Journal*, vol. 8, May 9; vol. 16, July 4, 1964.

⁶⁴⁵ Lập Trường Editors, “Gây Loạn?” [“Rebel?”], *Lập Trường Journal*, vol. 26, October 3, 1964.

⁶⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

Thuần recalled many invitations to coffee or dinners with military generals “they tried to convince us to write in a certain way or to publish this or that. Talking to them was really pressured but we had our power as we were strongly supported by the people and they needed that support.”⁶⁴⁷

Lập Trường Journal was not that advantageous when facing the government’s censorship system. After three months of publication, the Ministry of Information sent three continuous dispatches to request editors of *Lập Trường Journal* to send its copies to Sài Gòn to be censored.⁶⁴⁸ The editorial board decided to fully publish one of the dispatches with a detailed discussion on censorship and their determination to not distort their position. The articles and satire on vol. 6 on April 25 and vol. 13 on June 13, according to the Ministry of Information, insulted the leaders’ reputation, possibly causing complexity and confusion in public opinion, aspersed the society in the South and endangered the current situation by religious division.⁶⁴⁹

The journal eventually had to go through censorship with some issues cut from a few words to paragraphs and up to six pages. However, the RVN’s censorship mechanisms appeared not sophisticated and strict, or the government official did not do a good job. Volume 21 was cut entirely 6 pages from page 5 to page 10, in which the article “About Formalism” by Nguyễn was cut approximately three quarters. The rest of the article still appeared on page 11. It was probably an intention of *Lập Trường*’s editorial board to test the Ministry of Information official at their branch in Huế when they printed the exact article again on the very next issue a week later. The article successfully went through the censorship with the three quarter having cut on volume 21 with several blanks of paragraphs. Interestingly, half of the column having appeared on page 11 of the previous issue was cut this time. This article criticized a popular contemporary social

⁶⁴⁷ Cao Huy Thuần, interview, February 16, 2014.

⁶⁴⁸ *Lập Trường Journal*, vol. 14, June 20; vol. 16 July 4, 1964.

⁶⁴⁹ Lập Trường Editorial Board, “Lại Rắc Rối Với Bộ Thông Tin” [“Again, Trouble with the Ministry of Information”], *Lập Trường Journal*, vol. 16, July 4, 1964.

disease among various social classes from students to leaders of private and government offices, which threatened the development of the nation. The most “dangerous” detail that should have been cut was some anonymous provincial chiefs spending a huge amount of money on welcoming national leaders. Its arguments and writing style was nonetheless definitely not insulting, even not as sharp as many other articles on *Lập Trường*. The next part of this series of articles criticized more strongly and critically the fake government documents and various types of pretended performances to cover up the messy reality was not censored. Neither was the short story on the next page to satirize censorship system cut (*Lập Trường Journal*, no. 24, September 5, 1964).

Not only Vietnamese authority, *Lập Trường Journal* also caught the eyes of foreign political analysts.⁶⁵⁰ Peter Grose of *The New York Times* reported from Huế on June 9, 1964 that *Lập Trường Journal*, edited by militant professors, “has done little up to now except criticize. Its articles speak of the need for national solidarity to defeat communism, yet they challenge present United States policy and denounce Washington’s unlimited support for Premier Nguyen Khanh. (...) The criticism has not extended in such specific terms to the Communist Vietcong or its political organization the National Liberation Front.”⁶⁵¹ The very next issue of *Lập Trường Journal* released on June 13 spent a whole large page on the article’s translation into Vietnamese and *Lập Trường*’s response “*The New York Times* sent their reporter to Huế who only met with the Rector Father Cao Văn Luận of the university, did not have any contact with Buddhists or *Lập Trường* group yet strongly criticized Buddhist and *Lập Trường* force to be influenced by communists.” Cao Huy Thuần then concluded “labeling Buddhists communists means considering 80% of Vietnamese population as communists, then against whom the US fight? I

⁶⁵⁰ The full collection of *Lập Trường Journal* that this research is based on is original from an American CIA official in Sài Gòn.

⁶⁵¹ Peter Grose. “Peril Seen in Vietnam Buddhist Drive,” *The New York Times*, June 9, 1964.

can not understand why they could think and say such stupidity?” [sic].⁶⁵²

Lập Trường's role in changing society in fact went beyond calls for struggle on paper. Its staff participated in the people's demonstrations throughout the week of August 24, as a consequence, volume 23 on August 29, 1964 contained only 8 pages instead of 16. That was the week thousands of people of Huế protested against the Vũng Tàu Charter on August 16, 1964 of Nguyễn Khánh and the Revolution Military Council, requesting the generals leaving political stage and returning to their military positions, and promoting democracy and freedom of press.

During this week, a variety of group of people, including high school and university students, shopkeepers, drivers, tailors, servants, etc. joined in demonstrations along Trần Hưng Đạo, Phan Bội Châu, Huỳnh Thúc Kháng streets (400 in attendance on August 21), comprehensive strikes (August 21), mass meetings (3,500 people in attendance on August 22, 2,000 on August 23, several thousands on August 24, 25, 26). Together with other social groups, the high school students founded their High School Student Struggle Force, the university students established their University Student Struggle Force, and they formed a joint force of Student Struggle Force on August 22.⁶⁵³ Many writers and readers of *Lập Trường* attended and reported the anti-government protests on their journal with timely and critical assessment of the current situation. They even went further to warn people of American conspiracy and the political opportunists under the anti-communist label might ruin the people's struggle.⁶⁵⁴

By the end of September 1964, the editor in chief of *Lập Trường Journal* Tôn Thất Hanh left Huế for Sài Gòn to join the High National Council, directly contributing to the process of implementing democracy in the country. Cao Huy Thuần, the soul of the journal, primary editor

⁶⁵² Cao Huy Thuần, “Vài Hàng Với New York Times” [“Some Comments With the New York Times”], *Lập Trường Journal*, vol. 14, June 20, 1964.

⁶⁵³ Ngô Quân, “Cuộc Đấu Tranh Ở Huế” [“The Struggle in Huế”], *Lập Trường Journal*, vol. 23, August 29, 1964; *About Security Situation in Thừa Thiên Province in 1963 – 1967*, FRPO, NAC, no. 15956.

⁶⁵⁴ *Lập Trường Journal*, vol. 22, August 22, 1964.

and writer under many pen names (Cao Lang, Ba Cao, Thuần Huy) then received a scholarship to study in France. With the two main actors of the journal leaving, plus their hope for the newly born civilian government of Trần Văn Hương on November 4, 1964, the group decided to publish their last issue on November 12, 1964, temporarily satisfying with certain completion of their mission of lighting a torch of struggle and improving political awareness. In his last words to the readers, Cao Huy Thuần stated the most contribution of *Lập Trường Journal* was that in the short time people of the central and southern region viewed Huế with great expectation as a revolution stronghold, a political center.⁶⁵⁵ Huế indeed became a center of struggle in the following years.

5.3 The Struggle Movement

In contrast to the hope of *Lập Trường Journal* group, the struggle against Trần Văn Hương's government began right in November 1964, and culminated throughout the nation in early 1965. The government evidently could not keep order in Huế and prevent the struggle from getting violent.

January 1965 was the peak of struggle against Hương with numerous strikes, demonstrations with thousands in attendance. After the mass meeting of 3,000 people on January 4, 1965, 65 students (nine female) went on a hunger strike while the struggle committee called for Hương's resignation on the radio. The second hunger strike continued the next day with 155 people. Almost all colleges, high schools, primary schools went on strike. Daily protests and strikes again stirred the city of Huế. More students were busy with organizing demonstrations, arranging logistics, preparing for discussions, etc. The student meeting in the morning of January 6, 1965 emphasized the needs of new and more drastic methods such as tonsuring and

⁶⁵⁵ Cao Huy Thuần, "Tạm Biệt Bạn Đọc" ["Farewell My Readers"], *Lập Trường Journal*, vol. 30, November 12, 1964.

demonstrating, quitting school for the rest of the 1964 – 1965 school year, burning Trần Văn Hương's effigy in front of the university, occupying the radio station to broadcast struggle news, destroying American installations in Huế, including the MACV office at Thuận Hoá hotel, the consulate, the USIS cultural center).⁶⁵⁶

Right after the hunger strike ceased at noon January 6, 1965, Buddhist student Nguyễn Đắc Xuân facilitated a meeting on the spot from 12:30 – 1:30 p.m. of about 2000 students, cyclo drivers, shopkeepers and others. They discussed national issues that stated on banners like “Hang up the betrayal of the revolution;” “Behead Trần Văn Hương's group;” “Let the Vietnamese determine Vietnamese affairs.”⁶⁵⁷ While radio programs were broadcast in four languages of English, French, Chinese, and Vietnamese, banners in English appeared among the Vietnamese ones, such as “We go on a hunger strike to request the Resignation of HƯƠNG'S government” and “Our National Sovereignty must be respected” [sic.].⁶⁵⁸

The most notable act during this struggle movement happened on January 23, when protestors demonstrated until they had a gigantic mob of thousands of people. They had previously gone to the American consulate at 4 Đống Đa street to chant anti-American slogans that the American must stop their support of Trần Văn Hương. They then marched past the American cultural center at 8 Lý Thường Kiệt street. The demonstrators smashed the gate, rolled in some gasoline barrels, and set the building on fire which destroyed most of the books and furniture. Fire trucks arrived, yet they feared people's response and did not dare to extinguish the fire. The flame kept burning until noon the next day.⁶⁵⁹

This was the first time an American installation had been burned in the RVN, ironically,

⁶⁵⁶ *Documentation on Anti-government Activities of University and High School Students in January 1965*, SRPO, NAC, no. 29541.

⁶⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵⁹ Nguyễn Đắc Xuân. *Từ Phú Xuân đến Huế* [From Phú Xuân to Huế], vol. 2, 147.

by frequent visitors of this cultural center and students at the university whom the US had supplied with exchange professors and books. While there were complaints among students over the destruction of pure cultural products like book collections and disappointment among Buddhists that the struggle had gone beyond its original non-violent goal, the struggle force proved their power and determination to the RVN government and the US with an extremely strong response. The government of Trần Văn Hương did fall three days later on January 26, 1965. A new government of the military junta came to power. The struggle force immediately ceased all the demonstrations.

Participating in the struggle movement in 1964 – 1965, unlike 1963 mobilization of the Buddhists, newspapers played a crucial role in encouraging the struggle spirit and raising the voice of different people's forces. Joining the effort of the pioneer journal *Lập Trường*, there were *Nhận thức* (*Awareness Journal*, 3 issues, February-May 1964, by Nguyễn Đắc Xuân), *Máu hồng* (*Red Blood*, 4 issues, 1964, by students of medicine), *Lực lượng* (*Force*, August 1964, by the Student Struggle Force), *Tranh đấu* (*Struggle*, September 2, 1964, by the People's Council to Save the Nation), and the combined version *Tranh đấu – Lực Lượng* (*Struggle-Force*, late September 1964), *Dân* (*The People*, September 1964, by the Professor Struggle Force with the main office at Quán Bạ coffee shop).⁶⁶⁰ They promoted the struggle spirit by earnest call, “the Student Force determined to fight until the last breath with the people to overthrow the betrayal dictators and gain freedom, democracy, and justice to our motherland.”⁶⁶¹ By the end of 1965, *Dân tộc* (*the Nation*, the Student Struggle Force), *Sinh viên tranh đấu Huế* [*Struggle of Students of Huế*] joined the daily radio program of “Voice of Students of the University of Huế” to “foster

⁶⁶⁰ Unfortunately almost all of these newspapers were lost or destroyed, no exact publication dates could be identified. See Nguyễn Xuân Hoa, *Lịch sử Báo chí Huế* [*History of Journalism in Huế*]. Huế: Thuận Hoá Press, 2014.

⁶⁶¹ *Tranh đấu* (*Struggle Newspaper*), vol. 11, September 14, 15, 1964. Cited in Ngô Kha, et. al. *Những sự kiện lịch sử trong phong trào đấu tranh đô thị của thanh niên, sinh viên, học sinh Huế, 1954 – 1975* [*Historical Events in the Urban Protest Movement of Youth and Students of Huế, 1945 – 1975*] (Huế: [s.n.], 1989), 35.

the struggle movement, to express the true and determined aspiration of students, and Vietnamese people as well as grievous situation of the current war.”⁶⁶²

5.4 The Struggle Force

“Who were the struggle forces in Huế?” The majority participants of the struggle movement of the early period were certainly the youth of Huế - students of the university and high schools (more boys than girls). The rest included professors, shopkeepers, tailors, barbers, drivers, laborers of all professions. They came from small homes with very simple furniture, little or no running water and electric light, with perhaps only one valuable property like a transistor radio or a motor scooter. Nevertheless, they always appeared in carefully spotless white shirts and trousers, or simple traditional long dresses. Many of them were former participants of previous struggle in 1963, who were either Buddhists, Buddhist practitioners, or sympathizers of the mobilization. There were absolutely cases of people joining in or withdrawing from the struggle movement in 1964 – 1965. In the later period in 1966, they attracted powerful forces around them, including military personnel and police officers. Many of the leaders and participants were strongly influenced by the Buddhist monks, who proved their strength and authority in a large scale since the summer of 1963.

As Huế now defined its political role on the national level, it is crucial to identify the distinguish characteristics of the people of Huế compared to Vietnamese from other places. “When a man from Huế is in Sài Gòn you can spot him in a crowd very easily,” said one Sài Gòn University student. “He talks differently, he walks differently, he eats differently. He even smokes his cigarette differently. I would not exactly call him a snob. He is self-confident, self-

⁶⁶² *About Security Situation in Thừa Thiên Province in 1963 – 1967*, FRPO, NAC, no. 15956.

contained and self-sufficient.”⁶⁶³ John Helble, the American consul in Huế for three years admitted that “it was obvious how different central Vietnam was from southern Vietnam. The people, the economy, the culture, and the thought processes were different.”⁶⁶⁴ Nguyễn Hữu Thông, a Huế scholar, affirmed the distinctive stereotype of his people and the key factors determined such features: the lack of a pragmatic economic ideology, nostalgia for the past, and profound influence of spirituality in daily life.⁶⁶⁵ Geographical and historical roots of the central region in general, and Huế in particular contributed to make this area more conservative in many ways. Without the fertile delta areas, life has always been more difficult and more of a struggle for people here with less mobility and easy communication than the southern area.

Furthermore, the people of Huế took great pride in their rich history and cultural importance as the imperial capital for centuries. The history of the land as the hometown of many famous national leaders and heroes provided the locals with great pride and patriotism, as well as strong feelings of nationalism and regionalism. The people of Huế in the middle of the 1960s followed the long traditions of their “land of many revolutionists”⁶⁶⁶ to do revolution since 1963. According to *Lập Trường Journal*, “after nine years of more severe suffering under Ngô Đình Cẩn’s dictatorship, [the people of Huế] reacted more strongly to the old regime and wholeheartedly dared to live and die for the revolution.”⁶⁶⁷ This helped to explain why the traditionally close and modest people of Huế could have suddenly ignited the revolution leading to the collapse of a regime. The more intensely they were pressed, the more powerfully they exploded in response. In other words, the currents that emerged in 1963 had always been hidden inside Huế, and they kept roiling the Hương River and turned the quiet river into a fierce one in

⁶⁶³ *One Year Later... The Rebirth of Hue*. (Sài Gòn: Joint U.S. Public Affairs Office, [1969]), 2.

⁶⁶⁴ John Helble, interview, 73.

⁶⁶⁵ Nguyễn Hữu Thông, interview by author, Huế, January 15, 2014.

⁶⁶⁶ Cao Lang, “Miền Trung” [“The Central Region”], *Lập Trường Journal*, vol. 27, October 10, 1964.

⁶⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

the stormy flood season.

Under the eyes of an American resident, Huế students were sincerely patriotic: “students were naturally interested in politics, they were interested in their own futures and the future of the country, and most of the students I know were very much concerned about Vietnam as a nation and what was to become of Vietnam.”⁶⁶⁸ Vietnamese history consisted of various resistances against foreign domination, and many must have grown up with strong nationalism nurtured since childhood via heroic literature, poetry, and music. Yet in addition to and intermingling with the great pride, there must be also mixed and ambivalent feelings among some thinking people of Huế, as elsewhere in this small country: the feelings of inferiority in comparison with outsiders as they were now facing with superiority of Western technology. More notably, with the of tradition of decade-long conflicts with the French inherited from previous generations, and their own experiences of demonstrations and strikes, and their achievement to overthrow the government, the people of Huế gained the confidence in changing the political situation in the country. Many devoted their heart and soul into doing what they considered to be patriotic, and what Trần Kiêm Đoàn named “our romantic patriotism.”⁶⁶⁹

The enthusiastic engagement of Huế people into politics and struggle movement in the mid 1960s should have emerged so obviously that several American officials had attempted to interpret it. According to an American official who served as a regional advisor in Huế, the people of Huế “have a different attitude, they consider themselves a little bit better than the southern Vietnamese.”⁶⁷⁰ The USIS representative in Huế in 1964 – 1967 clarified, “[the people of Huế] feel that they know more about how to run the country than anyone else in the country. They have the sincere opinion that whatever they decide is automatically best for the nation – no

⁶⁶⁸ Marybeth Clark, *Debrief of an AID Secretary in Saigon and IVS Teachers in Hue, Vietnam, 1961 – 1967*, 42.

⁶⁶⁹ Trần Kiêm Đoàn, interview by author, Sacramento, CA, June 29, 2016.

⁶⁷⁰ No. 46712, *Debrief of a Prison Advisor (Public Safety) Phuoc Tuy, Thua Thien, ad Gia Dinh, Vietnam, 1960 – 1967*, (Hawaii: Asia Training Center, UH/AID, n.d.), 7.

matter what somebody in Sài Gòn might say.”⁶⁷¹ He went into further details “Among the Hue people, the University students, and some of the professors, feel that they are, if not the chosen people, at least the best qualified people to run the country.”⁶⁷² John Helble explained 50 years after leaving Huế, “the political and administrative control of central Vietnam from Hue and the influence of the University of Hue on intellectual leadership reinforced a sense of modest superiority of some folks.”⁶⁷³

The distinctive attitudes, spirit, leadership skills particularly popular among the intellectuals situated Huế at a special position in the American eyes: “Huế was one of the last places that people were willing to speak out and criticize our policy and the Vietnamese government’s policy.”⁶⁷⁴ In essence, it was the intellectuals who formed a very important and influential segment of the Vietnamese population, “who create and destroy governments (...) a stethoscope that we had been able to use to try to detect the illnesses and complaints.”⁶⁷⁵ The intellectuals in post-1963 with more freedom of press, played a more visible role in channeling the public opinion on politics and national issues. On the journal of Huế *Lập Trường*, they analyzed the pivotal problem of their nation was not communism challenge, but the lack of a powerful national ideology. Ngô Đình Nhu borrowed the “personnalisme communautaire” from an unknown philosopher E. Mounier which focused on one self’s value, only repeated around miscellaneous theory that had not been useful in the conflict with Marxism and Communism. Therefore the foremost national problem was to develop a solid national ideology to confront communism.⁶⁷⁶

⁶⁷¹ No. 9678, *Debrief of a U.S.I.S Representative Hue, Thua Thien Province, Vietnam, 1964 – 1967*, (Hawaii: Asia Training Center, UH/AID, n.d.), 2.

⁶⁷² Ibid.

⁶⁷³ John Helble, e-mail message.

⁶⁷⁴ No. 9678, *Debrief of a U.S.I.S Representative Hue, Thua Thien Province, Vietnam, 1964 – 1967*, 7.

⁶⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁷⁶ Trần Ngọc Quế, “Đi Tìm Một Lối Thoát” [“Looking for a Solution”], *Lập Trường Journal*, vol. 12, June 06,

More than 100 intellectuals, the majority of whom were specialists and more than 60 professors of the University of Huế and Sài Gòn had a three day conference on “Our Responsibility for Current Situation” on August 29, 30, 31, 1965 at the University of Huế, 3 Lê Lợi road, without the attendance of any students or media. On behalf of the organizing committee, professor Lê Tuyên from the University of Huế clarified the conference theme, “in the chaotic situation in all respects of the nation, we are all aware of our positions as responsible citizens, also specialists with professional skills seeking for effective ways to serve the nation, with further preparation for the circumstance of assuming the leadership for the current generation” [sic].⁶⁷⁷

The intellectuals of Huế and elsewhere however were not able to solve the crucial problem of ideology or leadership for the nation. To some certain extent, their powerful arguments and strong determination unintentionally set up an ideal scenario for the national political improvement. The people of Huế were apparently never satisfied with the political theater directed by the Southern militant junta in Sài Gòn. To the outsiders living in Huế, it appeared like the people of Huế were always anti-everything but never pro-anything. In the case of Trần Văn Hương’s government, after so much clamor for a civilian government, and his government seemed to represent all fashion, with himself as a Buddhist, they still protested against the best of all possible government at the time. This made the impression of “the anti-anti-expression in the protests without any pro” on some outsiders of Huế.⁶⁷⁸

With the widespread availability of world news, the popularity of radio, newspaper, and the growing attention toward political changes, the student leaders of the struggle movement could have made an impression of having more political power and prestige than student groups

1964; Nguyễn Tâm, “Vấn Đề Việt Nam” [“The Vietnam Problem”], *Lập Trường Journal*, vol. 16, July 4, 1964.

⁶⁷⁷ Article no. 5288 on September 1, 1965, in *Newsletters of Vietnam News Agency and Excerpts from Hong Kong News on Activities of the Students Association of Sài Gòn and Huế in 1965*, SRPO, NAC, no. 3207.

⁶⁷⁸ Marybeth Clark, *Debrief of an AID Secretary in Saigon and IVS Teachers in Hue, Vietnam, 1961 – 1967*, 47.

in other countries by looking for potential alliance from international supporters. It was an interesting observation of the USIS official in Huế that “they are interested in student demonstrations in the US -- Berkeley and such things as that -- which they consider manifestations of lack of support for our present policy in Vietnam. They wanted to know if the demonstrations meant that the US does not really support the president.”⁶⁷⁹ None of the student participants, when interviewed 50 years later, recalled any contact or relations with the protesters outside of Vietnam.

By the years 1964-1965, it was widely felt in Huế that it would no longer enjoy its tranquility of the pre-1963 period – it was bubbling and would stay boiling for a certain time. Any political changes in Sài Gòn could provoke a demonstration, and nobody could predict the directions the struggle would take. The struggle fever gradually reached its climax in the spring of 1966.

5.5 Turmoil in the Central Region

Together with the second biggest city of the nation Đà Nẵng, located 100 kilometers south of Huế, the political unrest kept fermenting Huế and the central region in late 1965 and early 1966. The demonstration against the Council of Armed Force’s dismissal of the I Corps Tactical Zone commander Nguyễn Chánh Thi provoked a storm of turmoil and dissidence in the city of Huế particularly from March to June of 1966. Discontent of previous years developed further into frustration on a larger scale, the people of Huế protested against the government of Nguyễn Văn Thiệu and Nguyễn Cao Kỳ, the compulsory military service applying to teachers and students, to advocate national self-determination and freedom.

For about 100 days, meetings and teach-ins on the political situation, demonstrations and

⁶⁷⁹ No. 9678, *Debrief of a U.S.I.S Representative Hue, Thua Thien Province, Vietnam, 1964 – 1967*, 11.

parades along streets in the daytime, and vigils at night, market and school strikes succeeded one another without break. Meetings of various groups of people attracted up to 80 thousands people (March 14,16), 25 thousands (March 19), 80 buses and 350 cyclos (March 23).⁶⁸⁰ Radio broadcasts and discussions happened every day; leaflets, banners, slogans were distributed everywhere; letters for the US President Johnson and the people and students of the USA were drafted, declaration in English were read in front of the MACV office. The slogans and banners reflected the core goals of the struggle movement: the first and foremost aspirations of protestors were to request the Vietnamese nation must be determined by the Vietnamese, to oppose the American intervention into Vietnamese domestic affairs and the violation of national rights of autonomy and self-determination; to criticize the US for acting beyond the role of an ally; to dissolve the contemporary government and the National Leadership Committee; to implement democracy, etc.

During this period, various forces were active to promote democracy, revolution, and protect freedom, such as the People's Force to Promote Revolution [Lực lượng nhân dân tranh thủ Cách mạng], Student Force to Promote Revolution [Lực lượng sinh viên tranh thủ Cách mạng] with the Student Martyr Brigade [Đoàn Sinh Viên Quyết Tử], Professor Force to Promote Revolution ([Lực lượng giáo chức tranh thủ Cách mạng, and since March 25, 1966 becoming the Professor Force to Promote Democracy [Lực lượng Giáo chức tranh thủ dân chủ]), People's Force to Fight against Communism and Protect Freedom [Lực lượng nhân dân chống cộng bảo vệ tự do], etc. Many Buddhist congregations, Buddhist families gathered into Reinforce Buddhist Force [Đoàn Phật Tử tăng viện], with 102 first members volunteering to march south to defend pagodas under threat of attack in Đà Nẵng. Groups of youth guarded days and nights in front of

⁶⁸⁰ *Monthly Reports of Thừa Thiên Province from December 1965 to December 1966*, SRPO, NAC, no. 252.

Phủ Cam cathedral ready to ring the giant bell to alert the people in case of emergency.⁶⁸¹

On a typical day of meetings of demonstrations, from early morning thousands of people gathered at either Phu Văn Lâu square, or in front of the university or Diệu Đế pagoda. After greeting the national flag and a moment of silence for national martyrs, they listened to earnest calls, speeches, and explanations of the banners. At the end, representatives of different groups would come to “the stage” up front to express their remarks. These meetings might be followed by parades along the main streets with up to tens of thousands of people in attendance. One of the anthropology professors of the College of Letters at the university of Huế, Lê Văn Hảo, recalled the demonstration on April 2, 1966, when “students had been imparted to me and urged me out into the streets” where some of his elder colleagues did not march but stood on the pavement and called out encouragement words. Some journalists and secret agents took snapshots of the crowd when Hảo and a lecturer at the College of Education were holding a big and heavy banner they had received from two students. One of these pictures was later sent to his 75-year-old father, who was living in Đà Nẵng as an evident message of threat to the family. “I only smiled when my father told me about it,” recalled Lê Văn Hảo.⁶⁸²

⁶⁸¹ *Monthly Reposts of Thừa Thiên Province from December 1965 to December 1966*, SRPO, NAC, no. 252; Ngô Kha, et. al. *Những sự kiện lịch sử trong phong trào đấu tranh đô thị của thanh niên, sinh viên, học sinh Huế, 1954 – 1975* [Historical Events in the Urban Protest Movement of Youth, Students, and Pupils of Huế, 1945 – 1975]; Nguyễn Đắc Xuân. *Từ Phú Xuân đến Huế* [From Phú Xuân to Huế], vol. 2.

⁶⁸² Lê Văn Hảo, “The Path of a Patriotic Intellectual” in *Vietnamese Studies*. ed. Nguyễn Khắc Viện, no. 37. (Hà Nội: XUNHASABA, 1973), 180.



Source: <http://data.vietinfo.eu/News/2013/05/11/186854/thumb.jpg> (Accessed March 26, 2017).

After meetings and demonstrations, for example on March 14, the people of Huế went home to start their day, officials came to the office to work, buses and other public services operated as usual, shop owners opened their stores up to 30%, markets were active again (Đông Ba opened up to 25%, Bến Ngự 80%, An Cựu 50%, Tây Lộc 15%).⁶⁸³ Instead of festive atmosphere of spring time, national anniversaries and public holidays of Spring 1966 like the death anniversary of Hùng King (the 10th of the lunar month Three) or the Day of Schools' Rebellion (April 4) were turned into mass meetings and parades. The students organized press conference with reporters of *UPI*, *BBC*, *NPC*, *Times*, *New York Times*, and daily news from Sài

⁶⁸³ *Orders on Political and Security Situation in Thừa Thiên Province and the City of Huế from March 12, 1966 to July 1966*, SRPO, NAC, no. 15647.

Gòn such as *Quật khởi*, *Chính luận*, *Xây dựng*, *Sống mới*, with 300 students on April 28 to declare their positions and aspirations to the national and international public.⁶⁸⁴

Since mid March 1966, the Student Force to Promote Revolution had seized the city radio station to broadcast struggle news multiple times every day in different languages. “This is the apprehensive voice of the youth feeling the common pain of a weak nation. This is the voice of the students who (...) took the responsibility to save the nation,”⁶⁸⁵ they found it an effective way to appeal for support and encourage the struggle spirit and direct the public opinion in Huế, and attract the attention of the public on the regional and national level. “The voice of the struggle force” issued a steady stream of inflammatory broadcasts, announcing new resolutions, explaining the meaning of “our revolution,” analyzing “the path we are following,” reading letters of support from struggle forces in other provinces (like Quảng Nam, Quảng Ngãi, Đà Nẵng, Nha Trang, Quảng Tín, and Quảng Trị), critiquing the discussion on Huế movement on Sài Gòn’s newspapers or BBC radio, etc. The program at 6 p.m. on April 24 firmly stated, “no individual [i.e. American or RVN leader] has the rights to determine the national destiny - only the people.” The next day April 25 at 6 p.m. they spent time to thank the donors of the struggle movement (5,000 VND from Buddhists of the Buddhist Congregation Kim An, 720 VND from Trần Hưng Đạo temple, 450 VND from one family, 1,500 VND from one shop in Thành Nội district).⁶⁸⁶

As the struggle movement developed extensively, now with their own radio with modern equipment and its technique, they had people to write up incendiary articles to run the station. Marybeth Clark, the English teacher at Đồng Khánh high school, recognized the voice of the announcer of the struggle radio station, “the student announcer with the best English was one of

⁶⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁸⁵ Radio broadcast at noon on April 25, 1966. Ibid.

⁶⁸⁶ Ibid.

my very close friends who had learned some of his English from me but I'm sure he was quite naïve as to the behind the scenes operations."⁶⁸⁷ Besides their strong determination, she also found it interesting to watch all the obvious manipulations, "they would say one thing on the radio one day and the next day contradict themselves, and each time the people would believe even the contradictions."⁶⁸⁸ This might be the consequence of vast and wide spread of nonstop conversations, discussions, rumors of current situation and future plans and actions. The struggle atmosphere pushed many to flow with the effervescence of demonstrations.

In addition to the radio broadcast, different struggle forces published newspapers and made use of them to express their opinions. The fact that there were many groups interested in alternative ideas offered diverse ideological challenges and opportunities for young and enthusiastic writers to sharpen their critical analyses. In the traditional city of poetry and literature, in the rich educational and reading atmosphere that strengthened by the University of Huế, many in their twenties contributed to the struggle media with various critiques, editorials, investigations, and literature accounts. There were *Sinh viên Huế* (*Students of Huế*, organ of the Student Association of the University of Huế, October 1965), *Sứ mệnh* (*Mission*, another struggle newspaper of the university students, early 1966), *Tranh thủ* (*Enlist*, by the People's Force to Promote Revolution, March 1966), *Sinh viên Quật khởi* (*Student Rebels*, by the Student Committee to Promote Revolution and Committee to Rescue Buddhism, June 1966), and *Vì dân Chống Mỹ* (*Anti-American for People*, by the Student Liberation Union – an organization of the NLF, August 1965).

A group of students of pedagogy formed Hồng Sơn Society on Thiên Thai Mountain of Heaven in 1965 and later published *Đỉnh Triều* [*Summit of Ocean Current*].⁶⁸⁹ Another group of

⁶⁸⁷ Marybeth Clark, *Debrief of an AID Secretary in Saigon and IVS Teachers in Hue, Vietnam, 1961 – 1967*, 45.

⁶⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸⁹ Tiêu Dao Bảo Cự, *Về một thời thanh xuân* [About Our Youth Time]

professors and students of the struggle movement (including Lê Văn Hảo, Hoàng Phủ Ngọc Tường, Hoàng Phủ Ngọc Phan, Nguyễn Đắc Xuân, Lê Trân Nam, and others) published a journal called *Việt Nam! Việt Nam!* If the first idea arose at Hoàng Phủ Ngọc Tường's house, the so-called Tuyệt Tình Cốc [Break-away Cave] at Âm Hồn alley, the printing machine and its editorial board had to move permanently to Lê Văn Hảo's home in the university compound to avoid persecution.⁶⁹⁰ This journal of avid participants of the struggle movement, many joined the NLF shortly afterward, for the first time showed the strong opposition to the American presence in Vietnam. In the words of its editor in chief, in the first issue "carried many articles describing society since the illegal presence of the US in South Vietnam and its brazen intervention in its internal affairs."⁶⁹¹

The period 1964 – 1966 witnessed the development in awareness of a number of Huế people from criticism on American intervention into Vietnamese domestic affair with a distant respect to the big ally on *Lập Trường Journal* to the strong anti-American position of the journal *Việt Nam! Việt Nam!*. The intellectuals of the struggle movement in 1966 who played crucial roles in channeling public opinion and leading the struggle movement added alternative features to the urban movement in Huế since the mid 1960s.⁶⁹² And the patriotic and nationalistic people of Huế felt more and more sympathetic with the NLF. Although other groups might not agree with the NLF sympathizers over some national issues, they all were able to coexist in the small city of Huế. While one could sense the presence of the NLF right in the city, nobody could surely tell if someone was working for the NLF. In daily conversations, languages, and news, as well as numerous leaflets distributed at night, more and more city residents became familiar, and

<https://nguyendinhchuc.wordpress.com/2012/05/26/tieu-dao-bao-cu-ve-mot-thoi-thanh-xuan/> (Accessed March 26, 2017).

⁶⁹⁰ Lê Văn Hảo, "The Path of a Patriotic Intellectual," 187.

⁶⁹¹ Ibid.

⁶⁹² Trần Viết Ngọc, interview by author, Hồ Chí Minh City, August 19, 2015.

influenced by the NLF and in the long term, particularly after Spring 1966, many sympathizers were connected by the secret agents in the city and joined the NLF operating in the rural and mountainous areas outside of Huế.

The struggle movement continued to fan the city's turmoil. On May 17, 1966, lieutenant Nguyễn Đại Thức, also a leader of a Buddhist Family congregation in Huế, was shot dead by an American soldier when a US advisor and a Sài Gòn general arrived in Huế.⁶⁹³ Ten days later, tens of thousands of soldiers and civilians led by 300 monks attended the mass funeral, many army and police units gathered into the "Nguyễn Đại Thức Brigade."⁶⁹⁴ A group of university students formed the suicide squadron with flashy orange neck scarves and rifles. The people once managed the strikes and demonstrations, and market shutdown, now manned the main streets with big rock piles. By this time, the struggle forces took virtual control of the town and the people, including the police and army forces of Huế.

With more and more people engaged in the struggle movement, the outsiders or hesitators quickly became alien and subject of suspicious and cautious looks and conversations. In such a small city where everybody knew each other via one relation or another, many people got carried away and involved in the struggle movement to become "normal" as everyone else. Particularly after the death of Nguyễn Đại Thức in May, the pro-Buddhist and anti-American activities reached its peak. With everyone drawing attention to the struggle movement, any little thing could be a spark to light the flame and capture public support. At some points in May 1966, when signs were placed along Lê Lợi road in Huế about Quách Thị Trang – the girl who had been shot by Ngô Đình Diệm's soldiers in front of Bến Thành market in Sài Gòn on August 25, 1963, an American once walked up to one of the signs to see what it was all about. This trivial

⁶⁹³ Liên Thành. *Biến Động Miền Trung: Những Bí Mật Chưa Tiết Lộ, Giai Đoạn 1966 – 1968 – 1972* [Turmoil in the Central Region: Undisclosed Secrets in the period of 1966 – 1968 – 1972]. (California: Biệt Động Quân, 2008), 30-31.

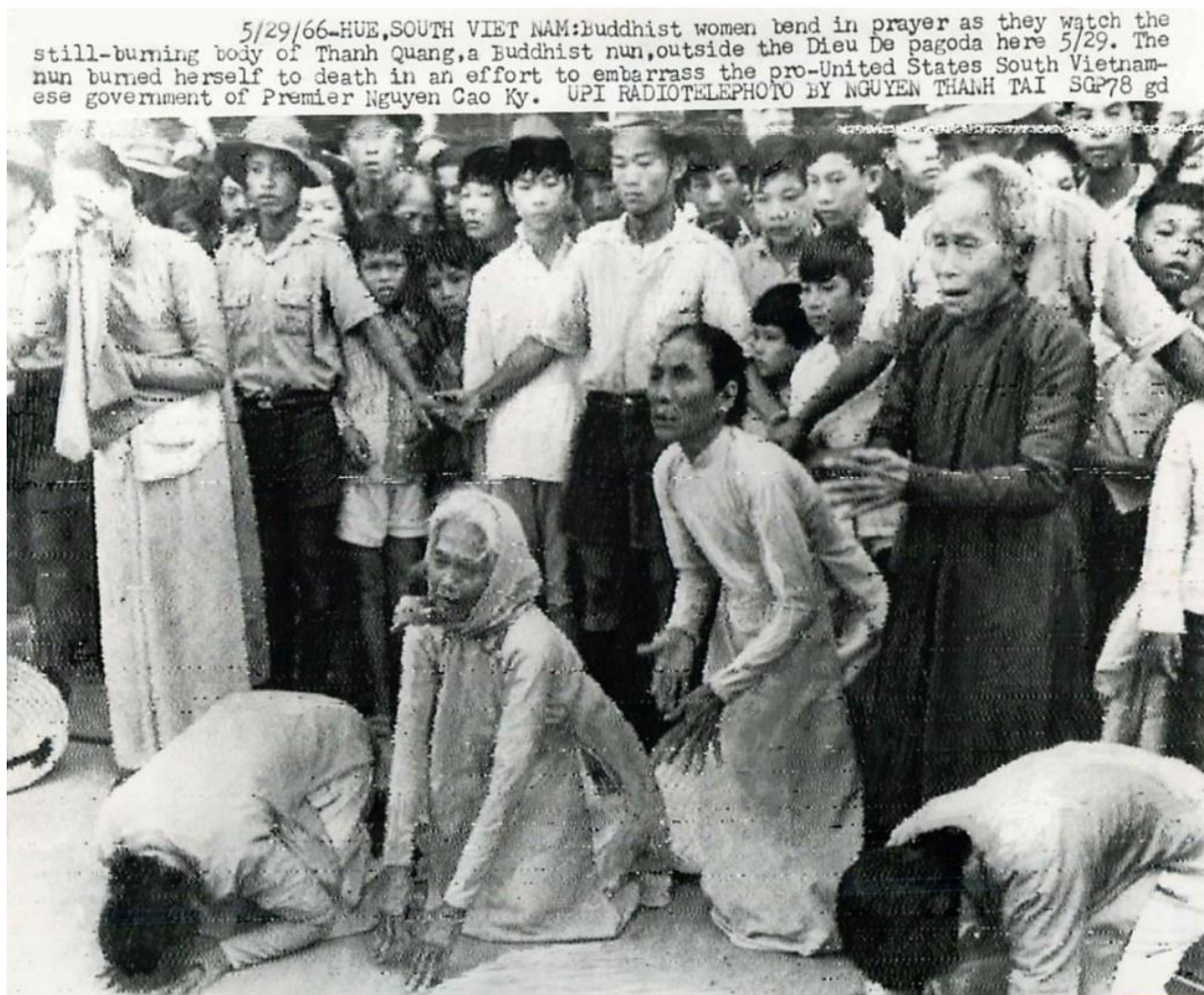
⁶⁹⁴ Lê Văn Hào, "The Path of a Patriotic Intellectual," 184.

action during the struggle days caused an uproar in the city.

In this tense atmosphere, the city largely froze because of the struggle movement. The school year was completely interrupted as no classes were filled up. The police was still the law-enforcement agency, yet no longer kept order contrary to the struggle force. They could not do much more than direct traffic and collect fines from overloaded buses. In the afternoon of May 26, 1966 the US information office was one more time set on fire, the US consulate was then destroyed. Thousands of books, papers, films, and records were consumed by the flame. The very next Sunday on May 29, Buddhist nun Thích Nữ Thanh Quang self-immolated at Diệu Đế pagoda, following by another immolation of a Buddhist student Nguyễn Thị Vân in Thành Nội Buddhist congregation only two days later.⁶⁹⁵ In her letter to the U.S. President, the Congress, and the people of the United States of America, Thanh Quang firmly stated “the irresponsible attitude of the government which you direct, as well as that of American officials in our country, show that you implicitly accept and approve the massacre of bonzes, of the faithful, and of our compatriots.”⁶⁹⁶

⁶⁹⁵ *Orders on Political and Security Situation in Thừa Thiên Province and the City of Huế from March 12, 1966 to July 1966*, no. 15647.

⁶⁹⁶ Documentation on the Situation in 1966, Collection at Từ Đàm Pagoda (Internal Circulation).



Source: <http://data.vietinfo.eu/News//2013/05/11/186854/1368241956.8277.jpg> (Accessed March 26, 2017).

At the same time the local government of Huế tried multiple strategies to establish order. The provincial chief and city mayor Phan Văn Khoa himself declared on the city radio on May 28 that 1) the government would control the radio station and allow the struggle force broadcast only censored program for one hour per day; 2) the struggle force must hand over all illegal weapons, free the road blocks; 3) the struggle force must dissolve all civilian forces who were guarding and operating in Huế; and 4) the government would allow the struggle force to function with pure non-violent and political activities. That night he deployed two infantry battalions and

a convoy of armored vehicles to besiege the radio station.⁶⁹⁷

The struggle force with lots of students inside the radio station did not respond to the City Mayor's command, holding out until the next morning when the city mayor arrived to order his soldiers to withdraw. The central committee of the Thừa Thiên province and the city of Huế then stationed in the central town of the rural district Hương Thủy. They planned to shut down all administrative offices and other facilities in Huế, except for the central post office and the national hospital. On June 1, 1966 after the meeting of the struggle force, a group of struggle people set on fire the American consulate and the consul's residence. They also burned the city mayor's house to ashes (100% properties destroyed), and two other government officials' private houses, plundered an armory for about 500 weapons, ammunition and grenades of all kinds.⁶⁹⁸

At this point, the vast majority of people of Huế had either joined the struggle movement in some ways or others, or were carried away by the public unrest. Reports by the local government admitted "all government officials quit the office, only a few were still on duty." It was the first week of June, the scorching summer was as intense than that of three years earlier when Tù Đạm pagoda had been besieged and the non-stop hunger strikes of the students shocked the city. And an unexpected act of the Buddhists in 1966 had similar impacts.

On June 6, 1966, thousands of Buddhist altars, with pictures and statues of Buddha, incense burners and candles, and trays of offerings were placed right in front of each house in the middle of streets. Many sat around, prostrated themselves, praying for their nation, their religion, and their people. Groups of struggle force "đi trực bàn thờ" or guarded the altar streets, lighted up the incense and candles, and sat down with the people to pray.⁶⁹⁹ Bringing the altars out to the streets – showing the most sacred, deferential respect of each Buddhist family to the public was

⁶⁹⁷ *Orders on Political and Security Situation in Thừa Thiên Province and the City of Huế from March 12, 1966 to July 1966*, no. 15647.

⁶⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹⁹ Nguyễn Xuân Hoa, interview by author, Huế, January 6, 2014.

certainly the last thing the people would choose to do. Many puzzled reluctantly, yet in the tense atmosphere of the struggle of movement, not many people dared to resist. Buddhist practitioners' families with no separate Buddhist altars (combined with their ancestors' altars), or families with non-detachable Buddhist altars (from the wall or the wall-size shelve), even non-Buddhist families had to create Buddhist altars on the spot with a small table or cabinet, a cloth, and Buddha's portrait.⁷⁰⁰ That the Buddhist altars followed the Buddhist force to strike in the streets of Huế was the unique unprecedented scene in the course of history of Huế city, naturally creating a people's fence to detain the steps of the national guards and security force.



Source: <http://vietnamsea.org/vietnamwarsummit/tangnibieutinh-01.jpg> (Accessed March 26, 2017)

While the altars were able to promote Buddhist power to hinder the counter attack of the government, they also affected the residents' mobility and personal events. As the altars blocked all paths in and out the city, passengers but no vehicles could pass through. This suddenly caused an unexpected inconvenience for the family Phạm Thị Xuân Quế stayed with. The day the altars were placed around the city was the wedding ceremony of their daughter whose fiancé's family

⁷⁰⁰ Descriptions in *Mùa Biển Động [A Season of Stormy Seas]*. Nguyễn Mộng Giác. (California: Văn Nghệ Press, 1993); Bùi Minh Đức, Nguyễn Xuân Hoa, interview.

was from out of town. As the wedding had been prepared for long, the family did not delay it. They were forced to change the original plan at the last minute. Instead of going by cars as scheduled, a boat was rented that morning for the procession. Many guests arrived but only a few family members were able to accompany the bride to her new home. For Phạm Thị Xuân Quế and the family, their biggest concern that day was not the Buddhist altars but the boat procession, and plenty of food left over from the wedding banquet. After returning home that afternoon, Phạm Thị Xuân Quế immediately got change and rode her motorbike to Từ Đàm pagoda and enjoyed vegetarian food there.⁷⁰¹



(NY12-June 20)-_BUDDHIST ALTARS BLOCK U. S. TANKS-Buddhist altars draped with multicolored Buddhist flags blocked a U. S. Marine tank column returning to Hue in South Viet Nam last week. A Marine captain conferred with Hue Buddhist leaders and the altars were withdrawn, allowing the column to pass. The altars were set up in a gesture of defiance against the central government.(APWirephoto)(s21120stf/ge)1946

Source: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/13476480@N07/6885242195/in/photostream/> (Accessed March 26, 2017)

⁷⁰¹ Phạm Thị Xuân Quế, interview.

At this point, Sài Gòn sent army and security forces to suppress the struggle movement of the central region with tanks, armored vehicles, planes, arms and ammunition supplied by the US, rumbling around the city the whole day. Once realizing thousand altars blocking all streets leading to the city center and they could not move forward, the national security force, under the command of Colonel Nguyễn Ngọc Loan, put all altars to the pavement to make way. There were stories that after putting Buddha's statues and valuable items on the altars to the pavement in front of each household, they threw the empty altars to the nearby rivers.⁷⁰² The Nguyễn Đại Thức brigade and the struggle forces fought back for several days, but Huế was quickly subdued. The suppression of the struggle movement in Huế occurred with much less deaths and wounds compared to the one in Đà Nẵng earlier.

The last effort to bring the Buddhist altars out to the streets officially ended the “Spring of dissidence” in the city of Huế. Thousands of military personnel and civilians were arrested, some sent to Sài Gòn, some to prisons on Phú Quốc island.⁷⁰³ The rest returned to work with much more ambivalence, skepticism, but no more politics-related conversations in public space. Several active members of the struggle forces were able to escape from the police hunt, and disappeared to the rural areas then to the forest via the secret network of the NLF shortly after June 1966 (Nguyễn Đắc Xuân, Hoàng Phủ Ngọc Tường, Hoàng Phủ Ngọc Phan, Lê Văn Hào).⁷⁰⁴ Schools, markets, stores, and offices opened again after three months. Daily life in the city gradually returned to its normalcy.

It has been commonly known that Buddhist supporters' families followed the calls

⁷⁰² Liên Thành. *Biến Động Miền Trung: Những Bí Mật Chưa Tiết Lộ, Giai Đoạn 1966 – 1968 – 1972* [Turmoil in the Central Region: Undisclosed Secrets in the Period of 1966 – 1968 – 1972]; Nguyễn Mộng Giác, *Mùa Biển Động* [A Season of Stormy Seas].

⁷⁰³ Liên Thành. *Biến Động Miền Trung: Những Bí Mật Chưa Tiết Lộ, Giai Đoạn 1966 – 1968 – 1972* [Turmoil in the Central Region: Undisclosed Secrets in the Period of 1966 – 1968 – 1972].

⁷⁰⁴ Nguyễn Đắc Xuân. *Từ Phú Xuân đến Huế* [From Phú Xuân to Huế], vol. 2, 300-320.

of Venerable Thích Trí Quang and Buddhist leaders at Từ Đàm pagoda to bring their altars to street. In his memoir, Thích Trí Quang however did not want to go into much detail on the 1966 movement, which he considered “difficult to talk about” [sic].⁷⁰⁵ In merely a few fragmentary episodes, Thích Trí Quang stated when he realized that altars were placed everywhere in the city, he could no longer order his supporters to stop insulting the solemn altars of his religion.⁷⁰⁶ This rare event remained controversial in the past decades, so as the goals of the Buddhists, whether Thích Trí Quang was a Communist, and how influentially the Communist or NLF infiltrated the struggle movement.

There were people supporting different ideologies and people carried away by the intense pressure and vast changes of the struggle movements. During the turbulent period of 1964–1966, there were also plenty of students or people not joining any struggle forces. Some of the well-educated people were skeptical and chose to sit back and wait and see what was going to happen. Living through chaotic years with no certain political stability, many learned from real experiences that they should not 100% support any side. Lê Văn Kinh, the owner of Đức Thành embroidery shop on Phan Bội Châu street, might have coffee with friends at Lạc Sơn coffee shop several times in a day to keep updated on the situation. A customer stopping by his shop and leaving with an embroidery product might be an informant delivering some news.⁷⁰⁷ However he neither supported nor fought against any forces. He interacted in the most neutral way to all friends, including active members of the struggle forces, police officers, intelligent agents from Sài Gòn, and NLF supporters. He knew their similarities and differences and adjusted his tones and opinions to survive between multiple firing lines.

After the struggle movement was suppressed in June 1966, Huế once again adjusted to

⁷⁰⁵ Thích, Trí Quang. *Trí Quang tự truyện [Tri Quang's Memoir]*, 202-203.

⁷⁰⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁰⁷ Lê Văn Kinh, interview.

the changing social atmosphere, certainly more intense than the previous situation of 1963-1966 or the period before 1963. Three years later, the social cracks of the post-1963 Buddhist mobilization that Nguyễn Thị Bảo Xuyên observed further divided the community of Huế. Skepticism, uncertainty, weariness, desolation, plus the increasing anxiety of more difficult life after turmoil, blanketed the city of Huế and forced its people to habituate themselves to the new physical and psychological changes.

The local government, now with new non-anti-government elements, tried to keep order in the city with more propaganda, banners, posters, leaflets, documentations, meetings and study sessions, and many visits to reassure and earn the people's trust. Besides uniform reports that "the people strongly trust and fully support the wise leadership of the government"⁷⁰⁸ like the pre-1963 period, the Police Department now sent critical observations and analyses to the government of Huế and Sài Gòn. Monthly reports of the government of Huế denounced "some elements with halfhearted, peaceful, temporized attitudes,"⁷⁰⁹ who spread the perplexity and anxieties among people. The suspicion emerging after the summer of 1963 constantly expanded in the community.

According to circular no. 10091 TT/NA/CP on the province building program for June 1966, the people of Huế were living in fear and perplex atmosphere. The majority of the people did not trust the government.⁷¹⁰ Some citizens reportedly filed a complaint to the national inspection cooperation in Sài Gòn to denounce the financial non-transparency and domineering attitudes with the people of District Chief, Deputy District Chief, and officials of Tả Ngạn district.⁷¹¹ The Buddhists who had fought for religious rights felt insecure because they worried

⁷⁰⁸ *Documentation of Economic Sector of the Police Department in 1963 – 1964*, TTPH, ACH, no. 134.

⁷⁰⁹ *Monthly Reports of the City of Huế in 1964*, TTPH, ACH, no. 253.

⁷¹⁰ *Documentation on Activities of the City of Huế in 1966*, TTPH, ACH, no. 268.

⁷¹¹ *Investigation and Punishment of Several Government Officials in Thừa Thiên Province and the Town of Huế in 1967 – 1968*, SRPO, NAC, no. 6052.

about further suppressions of their religion. The outsiders of the struggle feared of retaliation of the struggle force on their families due to their lack of enthusiasm toward the movement.

Residents from the same neighborhood, colleagues from the same institution seemed not to sympathize with each other. Hồ Hữu Tường, a politician, writer, and journalist, shared his misgivings about the sources of information. As his critical mind did not allow him to rely on Chinese accounts, or French documentations, he doubted writings by journalists who might have taken bribes from the government to fabricate all kind of stories about the dissidents and alternative groups.⁷¹²

It was in this tense political environment that the people of Huế shaped their attitudes toward the Americans, the war, and communism.

5.6 Views toward the Americans

Public opinion in Huế towards the US and its people varied and changed over time, even within the three years of 1964-1967. Throughout the Vietnam War era, Huế never offered home to any American military base – the closest one was stationed in Phú Bài airport area, about 12 kilometers south of the city. With the arrival of American troops in Đà Nẵng since March 1965, the presence of American force visibly increased in Huế, as in any other cities in Vietnam. While the people of Huế appreciated and were grateful to the Americans for coming and helping the Vietnamese government and people to fight communism and maintain good educational and cultural relations, they protested strongly, and violently, against American presence and intervention into Vietnamese internal affairs.

Lập Trường Journal, the very well received and supported journal in the city of Huế in 1964 very strongly criticized the American presence in Vietnam many times, definitely

⁷¹² Hồ Hữu Tường. *Nói Tại Phú Xuân [Speech in Phú Xuân]*. (Sài Gòn: Huệ Minh, 1965), 46.

influencing the public view. The great number of editorials and critiques on *Lập Trường* attacked the American policies that were believed to be unclear and too idealistic, and never pay attention to the Vietnamese.⁷¹³ While Cao Huy Thuần “welcomed General Taylor” to Vietnam, he emphasized that the American should not interfere in the political affairs of Vietnam, and let the Vietnamese people determine their future, “which regime is good, we support; which government went against the people’s aspirations, let us overthrow it.”⁷¹⁴

“Do not force us to consume chewing gum when we only wish to eat betel and areca,”⁷¹⁵ *Lập Trường Journal* reaffirmed their view in another comparison. It was a very powerful idea that *Lập Trường Journal* contributed to develop in the public in Huế that the Americans supported and lifted the individuals in power, and ignored Vietnam’s nation and its people.⁷¹⁶ The people of Huế seemingly found it difficult to understand the concept that the US supported the regime of the RVN as a whole, and tended to simply believe that as the US supported Trần Văn Hương’s government, that meant they supported Trần Văn Hương personally. This was the “basic difference of political philosophy between the Vietnamese of Huế and the Americans” that the USIS official in Huế seemed to put many efforts into correcting misunderstandings of the locals, yet they did not always like what he said.⁷¹⁷

With news on escalating American domination in Vietnam via the radio and press, in parallel with the continuous political turmoil in Sài Gòn, the feelings that the Americans were more and more intruding into Vietnam’s decision making spread strongly among the community in Huế. As analyzed earlier, to the people of Huế whose great pride of the past, regionalism, and nationalism developed more powerfully over the decade, it was understandable that they now

⁷¹³ *Lập Trường Journal*, vol. 17, July 11, 1964; vol. 19, July 25, 1964; vol. 20, August 1, 1964.

⁷¹⁴ Cao Huy Thuần, “Chào Mừng Đại Tướng Taylor” [“Welcome General Taylor”], *Lập Trường Journal*, vol. 15 June 27, 1964.

⁷¹⁵ Cao Huy Thuần, “Giải Pháp 1003” [“Solution 1003”], *Lập Trường Journal*, vol. 20, August 1, 1964.

⁷¹⁶ *Lập Trường Journal*, vol. 7, May 2, 1964; vol. 19, July 25, 1964.

⁷¹⁷ No. 9678, *Debrief of a U.S.I.S Representative Hue, Thua Thien Province, Vietnam, 1964 – 1967*, 3.

became anti-American or at least anti-American-policy in Vietnam. Ironically, many members of the struggle forces, the young, energetic, and active elements, benefited from American educational and cultural aids for years.

When they first established their consulate and the Cultural Information Office (USIS) with the library collection with thousands of books, newspapers, and films, the Americans could never imagine they would all be burned to ashes, two times within just a few years. There were indicative preludes leading to the people's violent actions. The struggle force had told the servants who worked for the American to boycott the American for 48 hours. They told shopkeepers and bar owners not to sell any liquor to Americans for 48 hours.⁷¹⁸ During the struggle period, all the American dependents were evacuated to the MACV compound, then out of Huế. They also decided to move the consulate and the USIS facilities to Đà Nẵng. They continued the AID program in Huế, but pull out all supports for the university in term of teaching and books for the library. The boycott and destruction on the US installation in Huế were nothing than to show how much they disapproved the American policy, as one member of the student force told Samuel Thomsen – the American consul in Huế in July 1964 – July 1966 – that it was “a way for them to demonstrate, express their views to the United States government. They were trying to embarrass, and trying to attract our attention, (...) and bring us to be more critical, and heavy-handed with the governments.”⁷¹⁹

Despite strong disapproval of American interference in the domestic affairs of Vietnam, the personal relations between Vietnamese and permanent American residents in Huế, including the professors at the University, teachers at high schools, and staff members at the cultural office, appeared to be good, in contrast to the violent acts on American facilities and residences. Many

⁷¹⁸ No. 9678, *Debrief of a U.S.I.S Representative Hue, Thua Thien Province, Vietnam, 1964 – 1967*, 6.

⁷¹⁹ Samuel B. Thomsen, interview by Charles Stuart Kenndy, August 26, 1996, transcript, The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project, 41.

residents of Huế expressed their favorable impressions toward the American intellectuals, journalists, and friends met over sports games. They felt free to come visit for informal talks over coffee, soft drinks, fruits or cakes, even wines some nights on various topics, even sharing loneliness among people living far from hometown. The Americans also occasionally came to Vietnamese families, or more often to public places like coffee shops, eateries, or the student union office.⁷²⁰ For both sides, the conversations benefited them not only to learn more about the languages, culture, people, and country, but also the impressions and complaints they might have about each other.

Interacting with Vietnamese friends certainly helped Americans to understand the local concerns and criticism on which American policies had impacts. John Helble, the American Consul in Huế from May 1961 to July 1964, constructed a lighted badminton court at his residence and organized tournaments to facilitate meeting younger people, targeting young bureaucrats and university students. The tournaments (two nights a week for 2-3 months, twice a year) quickly grew to several dozen participants, with sometimes a couple young resident US military advisors. To Helble and the American residents, “such evenings afforded plenty of opportunity to learn more about Huế’s daily life.”⁷²¹ In 1964-1965 both American consul Thomsen and Tony Lake, the vice consul, who also served as the National Security Advisor to the President and had been staff aide to Ambassador Lodge, taught a class at the law school on international relations in English. The consul admitted that it “put us in touch with the real student leaders (...) an attempt by us to get an insight into the student mind.”⁷²²

The personal relations between Vietnamese and Americans in some cases were so satisfactory that puzzled the Americans over whether the Vietnamese really understood the

⁷²⁰ No. 9678, *Debrief of a U.S.I.S Representative Hue, Thua Thien Province, Vietnam, 1964 – 1967*, 3.

⁷²¹ John Helble, e-mail message.

⁷²² Samuel B. Thomsen, interview, 35.

American goodwill. The friendly and sympathetic English teacher at Đồng Khánh high school wondered, “how did the Vietnamese know that we were not the French all over again? How can they know from the blundering way we do thing that we really do not want to take over their country, even though many of them feel that in essence we can if not actually do run the South Vietnamese government.”⁷²³ In fact, *Lập Trường Journal* had answered those questions two years earlier, in its usual critical voice, “the Vietnamese often suspect all foreigners, regardless Chinese, French, or American; the Vietnamese had the rights of being skeptical,” and that the Americans should be cautious, and remember the lessons of the French in Vietnam.⁷²⁴ And they did ponder about the American role in Vietnam in comparison with the French colonization. They questioned if the Americans were their Governor or Protector [Toàn Quyền hay Giám Hộ], “the Americans did what they wanted. American lifestyle. American theory. American declaration. And there was also truth in American style.”⁷²⁵

On deeper analysis, there was certainly complexity and skepticism in American and Vietnamese relations. Many people of Huế, probably more or less influenced by critiques on *Lập Trường Journal* and struggle news on radio felt skeptical about the American intervention, the increasing advisory and supply efforts and conspiracies behind continuous political changes in Sài Gòn. On the other hand, the Americans, especially American soldiers if they had an opportunity to visit the city of Huế, certainly sensed the distinctive characteristic of the people of Huế, especially after the public discontent demonstrated by burning American efforts into ashes after one night. They hence might have well concerned with the students’ (anti-American) response and people’s attitudes of this small city. It was Bửu Ý’s observation that no American walked alone in the street, either they rode a bike or motorbike, or went in groups of two or

⁷²³ Marybeth Clark, *Debrief of an AID Secretary in Saigon and IVS Teachers in Hue, Vietnam, 1961 – 1967*, 10-11.

⁷²⁴ Cao Huy Thuận, “Giải Pháp 1003” [“Solution 1003”], *Lập Trường Journal*, vol. 20, August 1, 1964.

⁷²⁵ Tâm Hoài Tâm, “Nhật Ký Lập Trường Ngày 27 Tháng 7” [“Lập Trường Diary on July 27”], *Lập Trường Journal*, vol. 20, August 1, 1964.

three.⁷²⁶

With the closest military base more than 10 kilometers out of the city, unlike other urban areas in the RVN, the traditional city of Huế did not offer many opportunities for entertainment for Americans. After 1965, Huế did not have snack bars, laundry, car wash, room for rent, tea house, prostitutions, gambling, services for American life springing up like mushrooms after the rain like in other cities. With the pastoral look, and the quick inquisitive looks and various criticism behind their back of American insensitiveness and casualness in public space, Huế probably did not appear so attractive to the young GIs in Vietnam. In such a closed society, the women always wore their traditional long dresses (not Western dress or miniskirts), and the daughters were carefully warned against any interaction with the American soldiers. Becoming a girlfriend or mistress, even based on serious love, would soon become a family dishonor or community scandal.⁷²⁷ The criticism of Vietnamese towards Americans in the city of Huế also expanded in the broader context of the 1960s – when the war against communism that the RVN was fighting with its American ally became more and more evident and intense.

5.7 Views toward the War

The Vietnam War as the Americans have called it for the last 50 years was certainly not the name the Vietnamese used. To the people of Huế, the political characteristic appeared more prominent than military aspect in the current war against communism among their people. In this period, the war was occurring in other remote areas where their countrymen were sacrificing their youth and lives for the nation's freedom and democracy. In their opinion, Vietnam was a steady outpost of the free world in which the US was the leader; therefore they had developed

⁷²⁶ Bửu Ý, interview.

⁷²⁷ Descriptions in short stories, novels by Nguyễn Mộng Giác, Túy Hồng, and various interviews.

the strong ties of honor as two brothers.⁷²⁸ For ten years, Vietnam became a theater of war in the geopolitical calculations of big powers engaged in the Cold War. They had been fighting a war that Vietnamese people had not provoked, declared, nor wanted, only because of its ironic political strategic location on the world map.⁷²⁹ And tragically the intensity of violence in Vietnam was vastly escalating, as *Lập Trường Journal* stated in early 1964, it reached its peak since 1954. In this conflict, they added, “the US must win, otherwise they would lose territory, natural resources, human sources, economic market, etc., which if it were 15, 20 years before, we would use another term: ‘losing a colony.’”⁷³⁰

The life in the city in the 1957-1964 period had no direct images of the war between DRVN, RVN, and the USA. Living in Huế in 1964-1967, the war being not as immediately felt in the city life as in the surrounding countryside, although people could sense it more evidently. The luck of the city residents, as Bửu Kế stated in 1953, that the war disaster was not viewed with eyes but only heard by ears,⁷³¹ seemed to be still true up to about 1967. Nonetheless its metamorphoses underway manifested themselves in subtle and ominous ways.

Since the late 1950s, as shown in chapter 3, the people of Huế became familiar with a great variety of news of intensive skirmishes varying in sizes between the local militia, the ARVN, and the so-called “Việt Cộng,” or the NLF supporters, occurring almost every day in the rural areas only a few kilometers from the city. In the mid 1960s, small conflicts still happened almost every day in the rural districts of Thừa Thiên province, some of which were so close to the city that the urban citizens could hear and see from far. The American consul family used to bicycle around Hue with their daughter on the back of the bicycle, or went swimming in the

⁷²⁸ *Lập Trường Journal*, vol. 8, May 9, 1964; vol. 17, July 11, 1964.

⁷²⁹ Vĩnh Noãn, “Tuơng Lai Nước Việt Sẽ Đi Về Đâu?” [“Which Direction for the Future of Vietnam?”], *Lập Trường Journal*, vol. 30, November 12, 1964.

⁷³⁰ Cao Lang, “Việt Nam và Hoa Kỳ” [“Vietnam and the USA”], *Lập Trường Journal*, vol. 2, March 28, 1964.

⁷³¹ Bửu Kế. *Nếp Nhà* [*Family Customs*], (Huế: Bạch Vân Press, 1958), 135.

Circle Sportif in their leisure time. “At the same time we would see dive bombers dropping their pay loads in the far west towards the mountains.”⁷³² The war gradually entered Huế’s daily life in an increasingly evident way after mid 1964.

To the top leaders of various authorities in Huế, the first time they found evidence of integral PAVN’s operation in the southern part of the DMZ was late June 1964. Two soldiers of the regular units of the PAVN were captured east of Route 1 and north of Huế, along Thừa Thiên - Quảng Trị provincial border. This “final and most significant event in experience in Huế”⁷³³ of the American consul John Helble spread out to the public two weeks later, thanks to the front page editorial of *Lập Trường Journal* on July 11, 1964. *Lập Trường Journal* blamed the communists for unilateral termination of the 1954 Geneva Accords, turning Thừa Thiên and Quảng Trị into the battleground for the first act of official invasion of the RVN by Hà Nội and Beijing. John Helble’s episode was later cited by the Pentagon in February 1965 in the decision making process to change the nature of US military involvement from a training mission to combat status.⁷³⁴

Another encounter that brought the war closer to the people in the city of Huế happened shortly afterward: the Gulf of Tonkin incident. The incident in which the US destroyer Maddox and the PAVN’s torpedo boats were believed to exchange shots on August 4, 1964, had huge impact on the Vietnam War with the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution and the US bombings in the North. Only a few days after the incident, Prime Minister Nguyễn Khánh declared that Huế and other cities could be attacked in revenge for US bombings; and the emergency status was in placed.⁷³⁵ The Department of Transport and Public Works was then ordered to prepare funds, plans, and designs to construct emergency shelters, first inside every government office, then to

⁷³² Samuel B. Thomsen, interview, 33.

⁷³³ John Helble, interview, 93.

⁷³⁴ John Helble, e-mail message.

⁷³⁵ *About Security Situation in Thừa Thiên Province, 1963 – 1967*, FRPO, NAC, no. 15956.

the entire city.⁷³⁶ The local government also dropped leaflets to calm people down. Statements explaining what had happened and the US President's speech on the radio (taken word for word by the USIS official and translated into Vietnamese by the chief of the Vietnamese Information Service) were printed into leaflets and dropped around Huế.⁷³⁷

Following the arrival of American troops in Đà Nẵng in March 1965, Tòa Khâm wharf across the street of the College of Education on Lê Lợi road where the French had landed in Huế in 1885 quickly became the port to receive military personnel, weapons, and supplies for the American military base in Phú Bài area. In order to prepare for the first shipment on April 9, 1965, the front entrance to the College was blocked with barbed wire fence for the whole morning, all students were directed to use the back gate on Đội Cung street. The area in front of the MACV office at Thuận Hóa hotel on Duy Tân street was also fenced with barbed wire and roadblock. No one was allowed to pass through the area, turning this part of the central street connecting the Trường Tiền bridge to Hữu Ngạn district into American-only access.⁷³⁸ Vietnamese had to use alternative roads to approach the bridge since then.

Located right next to the university buildings on the “Road of Students” where the young generation passed by every day to go to school, this blocked street created an obsession of war and reminded the people of Huế of the American presence. It was of course an eyesore to the struggle forces during the turbulent year of 1966. The student force after a meeting in the Spring decided to liberate the street. The students used their hands to remote the barbed wire and fences and put them all aside for the demonstrators to walk through the street occupied by foreigners for a year. Since then besides the romantic names of “Road of the eighteen [years of age],” “Road of the white long dress,” and “Road of flying flamboyant,” Huế now had a product of the anti-

⁷³⁶ Ibid.

⁷³⁷ No. 9678, *Debrief of a U.S.I.S Representative Hue, Thua Thien Province, Vietnam, 1964 – 1967*, 9.

⁷³⁸ Nguyễn Đắc Xuân. *Từ Phú Xuân đến Huế [From Phú Xuân to Huế]*, vol. 2, 152-153.

American struggle: “Road of Freedom.”⁷³⁹

In the 1960s, the anti-war sentiment in people’s views grew in strength in Huế. All the war incidents happening in the short period of time brought more anxieties and uncertainties to the city people. They questioned, “what is war?” and self-answered “ruin, devastation,”⁷⁴⁰ “a meaningless war”⁷⁴¹ “between people in one nation, (...) no winner or loser, only Vietnamese people died.”⁷⁴² They wondered why the people kept fighting and killing each other “for what and for whom?”⁷⁴³ They observed the war in the countryside, “a war with neither enemy nor friend,” resulted in the common attitudes of ignorance: the people no longer concern with killing and destruction,⁷⁴⁴ they just wanted stability and safety for their family to survive. In their view, the war had lasted for a long time in Vietnam – a conflict had continued for 20 years since 1945, succeeding the century-long resistance against the French.⁷⁴⁵

It was a largely well-accepted perspective that none of Vietnamese generations living through the 1960s had ever lived at a time when their country was not involved in some kind of conflict. Even in the relatively quiet years of the late 1950s, there were always the memories of the war with the French and the destruction caused by that war. The prolonged war turned from a resistance against the French colonialism into an ideological conflict between the free world and communism. As a scholar analyzed in deeper detail the persistence of war in Vietnam, “the comprehensive war was neither the adventurous works of mercenaries, nor a dirty duty of unlucky people, but the common disaster frightening everybody,” and “in a warring society like

⁷³⁹ Tiêu Dao Bảo Cự, *Về một thời thanh xuân* [About Our Youth Time]; Nguyễn Đắc Xuân. *Từ Phú Xuân đến Huế* [From Phú Xuân to Huế], vol. 2, 228-231.

⁷⁴⁰ Vĩnh Noãn, “Tương Lai Nước Việt Sẽ Đi Về Đâu?” [“Which Direction for the Future of Vietnam?”], *Lập Trường Journal*, vol. 30, November 12, 1964.

⁷⁴¹ Lập Trường Editor, “Chính Sách Cố Vấn” [“Advising Policy”], *Lập Trường Journal*, vol. 20, August 1, 1964.

⁷⁴² Tâm Hoài Tâm, “Nhật Ký Lập Trường Ngày 23 Tháng 3” [“Lập Trường Diary on March 23”], *Lập Trường Journal*, vol. 2, March 28, 1964.

⁷⁴³ Cao Huy Thuần, “Giải Pháp 1003” [“Solution 1003”], *Lập Trường Journal*, vol. 20, August 1, 1964.

⁷⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁴⁵ Lập Trường Editorial, *Lập Trường Journal*, vol. 9, May 16, 1964; Cao Huy Thuần, “Giải Pháp 1003” [“Solution 1003”], *Lập Trường Journal*, vol. 20, August 1, 1964.

ours in the last 20 years, the humane value and social hierarchy as well as community-life meanings reserved or at least became questionable.”⁷⁴⁶

And this resulted in the “Discontent of young Vietnam” that Gavin Young reported on *Hong Kong Tiger Standard* on October 14, 1965 “The movement is a symptom of a great discontent that has settled on the youth and intellectuals of Vietnam in the face of what they now call ‘the war without a tomorrow.’”⁷⁴⁷ Uncertainty of the present and future widespread among the young people: “what is the future for these young people in a turbulent and war-torn country?”⁷⁴⁸ As every man reaching his twentieth birthday had to enlist in the army, more and more students - the young and active participants of the struggle movement raised the questions of the meaning of going to school and taking all the exams. Some found “no light of belief or hope” in the future, as Nguyễn Đắc Xuân wrote in his diary entry on August 14, 1964.⁷⁴⁹ They would study in school only to leave school to go to war. The great frustration and discontent consequently became part of motivation for the people’s movement in 1964 – 1966 and their acts in the following years. The dissidence spread out to government officials, some of whom reportedly lacked responsibility, distributed anti-war documents and prayers for peace, and spread the disgust and disaffected responses in the society.

The increasing number of men joining the ARVN resulted in the population of Huế in the mid 1960s. On the city level, the number of female was 22% more than that of male citizens, reflecting the situation of a country at war.

⁷⁴⁶ Trần Văn Toàn, *Tìm Hiểu Đời Sống Xã Hội* [Study on the Social Life]. (Sài Gòn: Nam Sơn, 1967), iv.

⁷⁴⁷ Gavin Young, “Discontent of young Vietnam,” *Hong Kong Tiger Standard*, October 14, 1965.

⁷⁴⁸ Marybeth Clark, *Debrief of an AID Secretary in Saigon and IVS Teachers in Hue, Vietnam, 1961 – 1967*, vii.

⁷⁴⁹ Nguyễn Đắc Xuân, *Chứng nhân miền Trung tranh đấu* [Witness of the Fighting Central Region]. Huế: Awareness Journal, 1964, 14.

	Thành Nội		Tả Ngạn		Hữu Ngạn		Huế		Thừa Thiên province	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
	17360	24.999	18.849	29.531	8.395	15.351	44.604	69.881	181.255	233.548
Total	42.359		48.380		23.746		114.485		414.803	
%	41	59	39	61	35	65	39	61	44	56

Population of the city of Huế in 1965. Source: *Dân số Việt Nam theo Đơn vị Hành Chính trong năm 1965 [Vietnamese Population in Administrative Units in 1965]*. Sài Gòn: National Statistics Institution, 1966.

Growing up seeing their brothers, cousins, friends go off to the front to be killed, the thinking students were certainly troubled, and many would now dodge the draft if they could. They either amended the ID cards or birth certificate to be younger or went on diet by taking Diamox to reduce the build-up of fluid in the body so that they would not meet the weight requirements to enlist. Many considered it a means to express their non-acceptance and opposition to war.

It is important to note that the struggle movement with its anti-American and anti-war slogans and pressure for peace contributed to later form the so-called “Third Force” [Thành phần thứ ba] - a political group in the southern part of Vietnam with the anti-RVN, anti-DRVN standpoint, to struggle for peace, independence, and freedom. This group in Huế which gathered people like Cao Huy Thuận who became increasingly disaffected with the RVN government as early as the late 1950s, supported neither the NLF nor the DRVN.⁷⁵⁰ Although the presence of the third force in Huế and in the RVN in general was not prominent until several years later the struggle movement in the central region played a certain role in enhancing the important factors of this third segment in the Vietnam War era.

⁷⁵⁰ Cao Huy Thuận, interview, January 12, 2016.

5.8 Views toward Communism

It was (and still is) undoubtedly not easy for the citizens of the RVN to define “the communist” against whom they fought for many years. Professor of law Cao Huy Thuần admitted his ambiguous fear of communism, which even 50 years later he could not explain.⁷⁵¹ In fact, he attempted to clarify that to his readers on *Lập Trường Journal* on October 3, 1964 “the anti-communist war could be considered as the struggle to take back what used to belong to Vietnam, to the Vietnamese tradition. Vietnamese traditions are freedom, family [tie], [freedom of practicing] religion, and frequent apprehension with the giant in the northern border. Communism goes against these traditions therefore we must resist.”⁷⁵² Moreover the communists deprived the victory of the Vietnamese people in the nine year resistance against the French, and signed the shameful Geneva Accords, which was a great dishonor, a treachery of the ancestors.⁷⁵³

Anti-communism was the top national policy of all governments throughout the course of history of the RVN in 1950s-1975. All the governments seemed to be in consensus with and continue what Ngô Đình Diệm’s government used to do in his era: to label anyone from political opponents to highway bandits and all the forces who opposed the Vietnamese government and the Americans as communists. It also appeared to be an American tendency. The situation in the RVN that there were communists and anti-communist activities created the two layers of suffering for the citizens: they were nervous about the existence of communism and simultaneously worried about potential abuse of the anti-communist policy of the government.⁷⁵⁴

The Sài Gòn government implemented a great variety of methods to propagate, and

⁷⁵¹ Ibid.

⁷⁵² Cao Lang, “Vết Thương Việt Nam” [“The Wound of Vietnam”]. *Lập Trường Journal*, vol. 26, October 3, 1964.

⁷⁵³ *Lập Trường Journal*, vol. 12, June 6, 1964; vol. 17, July 11, 1964.

⁷⁵⁴ Lập Trường Editor, “Phật Giáo Với Cộng Sản” [“Buddhism and Communism”]. *Lập Trường Journal*, vol. 28, October 17, 1964.

enhance the anti-communist awareness and spirit among its people. The effectiveness of their propaganda on the evil, corrupt, and brutal communists on the public opinion in Huế remain understudied, yet some of the descriptions appeared too coarse, seeming stupid and offensive to the intellectuals.⁷⁵⁵ It was probably element of the strong nationalism and resentment toward inadequate governments in Huế's characteristics that the people of Huế might appear more sympathetic with the communists than people in other places. The longer the struggle movement ruled, the stronger the pro-NLF feelings were. Particularly in the later period of the struggle movement, learning from the previous experiences, the NLF and communist supporters took the advantageous opportunities of "internal crisis of the enemy" to infiltrate into various struggle forces to stimulate the people to govern the city.⁷⁵⁶

In 1964 – 1967 living through various struggles and chaos, the community of Huế adopted diverse elements to be able to adapt to any directions the struggle might lead to, either the suppression of the government or the manipulation of the communists. This complexity understandably confused the American residents of the time. While the IVS teacher felt "a substantial proportion of the population of Huế really hates the VC,"⁷⁵⁷ she had the impression that "the struggle force, if not controlled by the communists, at least manipulated by communists to the extent that was necessary for communist control."⁷⁵⁸

The USIS official, however, observed that "as far as being communist is concerned, my feeling was most of them were not. Most of them thought of themselves as being anti-communist."⁷⁵⁹ The government of RVN in Huế, needless to say, blamed the NLF, or the VC in their words, for all the turbulence and violence that had happened in the city. They admitted that

⁷⁵⁵ Cao Huy Thuần, interview, January 12, 2016.

⁷⁵⁶ Lê Duẩn, *Thư vào Nam [Letters to the South]*. (Hà Nội: Sự Thật Publishing House, 1985), 181.

⁷⁵⁷ Marybeth Clark, *Debrief of an AID Secretary in Saigon and IVS Teachers in Hue, Vietnam, 1961 – 1967*, 48.

⁷⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 43.

⁷⁵⁹ No. 9678, *Debrief of a U.S.I.S Representative Hue, Thua Thien Province, Vietnam, 1964 – 1967*, 7.

there were VC operations, propaganda, and stimulation in the city; otherwise the people of Huế would rely on the Americans to fight against the communist invasion. They also looked forward to reinstallation of the American cultural center and information service in Huế that “the students mistakenly overacted” during the struggle period.⁷⁶⁰



Banners “Behead the Communists and Lackeys who Killed our People at Night on August 17, 1966” (left) and “Request the Government to Punish those Labeled Struggle [Force] who Killed our People at Night on August 17, 1966 – Tả Ngạn District.” Source: *Images of the Visit of Prime Minister of RVN Lieutenant General Nguyễn Khánh, American Secretary of Defense McNamara, and Ambassador Taylor to Huế on March 11, 1964*. Collection of Illustrations, NAC, no. 3192.

From the government’s perspective, the people of Huế in general were aware of the communist brutality. Fifteen thousands people attended the meeting and 400 vehicles including buses, passenger vehicles, semi-truck, etc. paraded around the city to denounce the NLF’s attack on the passenger vehicles outside of Huế on July 5, 1967 which killed 17 people, injured 16, and destroyed 3 vehicles. During one of the skirmishes in Thủy Xuân, Hương Thủy rural district only several kilometers southwest of the city on April 3, 1965, the local police shot dead one VIỆT CỘNG suspect who turned out to be Nguyễn Hữu Toàn, a student of the Buddhist high school Bồ Đề. In the morning April 5, 1965, 300 people gathered at the Provincial Headquarters in Huế with the banners “We are not the communists,” “Request the government to solve completely

⁷⁶⁰ *Evaluation on the Political and Economic Situation in Thừa Thiên Province from May 1 to May 15, 1967*, SRPO, NAC, no. 29.

and transparently the student Nguyễn Hữu Toàn's affair." Under the people's pressure, the local government arrested the police and two months later in front of 2000 people, the court declared the punishment for him: he was sentenced to death.⁷⁶¹

Besides showing their goodwill to support the people in the common effort to fight communism, the government fostered their endeavors to keep the order and contain the communist operations in the city. They followed and arrested many suspected communists in the developing urban network of the NLF. On September 9, 1964 they caught red-handed Trương Cát with a bunch of propaganda leaflets on Ông Ích Khiêm street in Thành Nội district.⁷⁶² The police was also aware of existence of some groups with anti-government, anti-American, and pro-NLF and neutrality goals. These communist led groups emerged, became active, and disappeared in different periods and locations, under different labels, such as Hưng Việt [Prosperous Vietnam], Rồng Vàng [Golden Dragon], Hoàng Tộc [Royal Clan], Nhân Dân Xã Hội Phật Giáo [People's Buddhist Society], Lực Lượng Học Sinh Giải Phóng Thành Phố [City Liberation Student Force], Thái Độ [Attitudes], Quaker, etc. They also followed the news media which was published and distributed secretly such as *Thanh Quang*, *Thái Độ*, *Đập Tan*, *Nước Mặn*, *Nhìn Thăng*, etc.⁷⁶³

The increasing insecurity in the rural areas around the city of Huế forced many to leave their ancestor's land to move to the city, which certainly changed the body of urban population and created opportunities for the NLF forces to infiltrate into Huế. The RVN police took close control at immigrants and newcomers to the city. Especially in 1967, the government simplified

⁷⁶¹ According to Ngô Kha, the punishment was life sentence. See *About Security Situation in Thừa Thiên Province, 1963 – 1967*, FRPO, NAC, no. 15956; Ngô Kha, et. al. *Những sự kiện lịch sử trong phong trào đấu tranh đô thị của thanh niên, sinh viên, học sinh Huế, 1954 – 1975* [Historical Events in the Urban Protest Movement of Youth and Students of Huế, 1945 – 1975].

⁷⁶² Report on September 23, 1964. *Daily Reports of Department of Informatin in 1964*, TTPH, ACH, no. 136.

⁷⁶³ *Evaluation on the Political and Economic Situation in Thừa Thiên Province from May 1 to May 15, 1967*, SRPO, NAC, no. 29.

the process to conduct house search to more effectively manage the illegal migrant problem. Instead of sending written reports of the suspected areas to the government, starting from April 1967, they could make a call to the Police Department and immediately organized the patrol to search for the subjects.⁷⁶⁴ Over regular patrols in the city, they found many illegal residents each night.

Date in April	7, 12 a.m.	10, 11 p.m.	11, 12 a.m.	14, 9:30 p.m.	15, 1 a.m.	21, 12 a.m.	24, 10:30 p.m.
Numbers of illegal residents	9	5	14	7	2	15	12

Numbers of illegal residents found in house search in the district of Thành Nội in April 1967. Source: *Documentation on Control of Family Records in the Urban District in the Town of Huế in 1967*, TTPH, ACH, no. 273.

It remained unknown how many of these illegal residents in the city were sympathizers of the NLF force. According to Liên Thành, the Deputy Chief of Special Police Force of the province, intelligence information showed that there were eight communist cells and 80 urban agents secretly operating within the city in the mid 1960s, headquartered in several eateries, coffee shops, stores, and managed by a few professors, students, shopkeepers (bookstore Khánh Quỳnh of professor Tôn Thất Dương Kỳ, private house of professor Lê Văn Hảo).⁷⁶⁵ They also entrenched intelligence agents in the NLF secret network to gain information. On the Hương riverbank in Gia Hội area, crossing from Châu Tinh cinema, there was usually a small boat of a poor old couple selling noodle soup at night. This was a regular meeting location and contact station for the urban NLF network in which the husband was an agent. In fact he was a double agent – his boat was funded by the RVN's Police Department.⁷⁶⁶

⁷⁶⁴ *Documentation on Control of Family Records in the Urban District in the Town of Huế in 1967*, TTPH, ACH, no. 273.

⁷⁶⁵ Liên Thành. *Biến Động Miền Trung: Những Bí Mật Chưa Tiết Lộ, Giai Đoạn 1966 – 1968 – 1972 [Turmoil in the Central Region: Undisclosed Secrets in the Period of 1966 – 1968 – 1972]*, 47.

⁷⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 672.

Chapter 6

The social and cultural life of Hué in 1964 – 1967 certainly changed due to the intense political turmoil in the city. Living in between multiple warring sides, and with insecurity and instability for years, war-weariness, anxieties over the increasing costs of living, and continuous interruptions in school or careers because of non-stop struggles and war incidents added to the daily concerns of the residents. The changes in the nation and people's attitudes toward the war and the future permeated widely and deeply in everyday life, as evidenced in the economic life, lifestyle, education, literature, and music of this period.



Map of the City of Huế in 1967. Source: *Establishment and Appointment of Boundaries of the Urban Districts in the Town of Huế in 1967-1970*, SRPO, NAC, no. 6868.

6.1 Changes in Administration and Physical Environment

In the period of 1964-1967, the city of Huế remained to serve as the center of attraction and dispersion with the population of slightly more than 100,000 making up a quarter of the provincial population. The increase in city population parallel with the decrease in provincial population reflected the tendency of the consequences of turmoil situation in the RVN in general: more and more people from the rural areas moved to the city, and from the central region to southern areas or capital Sài Gòn.

	Thành Nội	Tả Ngạn	Hữu Ngạn	Huế	Thừa Thiên province
1964	37.270	45.236	21.057	103.563	461.880
1965	42.359	48.380	23.746	114.485	414.803

Source: *Dân số Việt Nam theo Đơn vị Hành Chính trong năm 1964 [Vietnamese Population in Administrative Units in 1964]*; *Dân số Việt Nam theo Đơn vị Hành Chính trong năm 1965 [Vietnamese Population in Administrative Units in 1965]*. Sài Gòn: National Statistics Institution, 1966.

With the changes in elements of government after the first republic, the administrative system in the RVN and Huế in particular adjusted to the new situation. Block, wards, strategic zones were all eliminated in February 1964,⁷⁶⁷ and appeared again later under different labels. The city council established in 1953 was replaced by town council (Hội đồng Thị xã) elected on May 30, 1965.⁷⁶⁸ The decree 229-NV dated December 18, 1965 announced new regulations to reorganize the town into districts and zones (khu phố). Following the meeting on February 18, 1966, Chairman of the Central Executive Committee issued degree no. 1455-ND/DUHC dated June 19, 1967 to rename of three districts in the city of Huế, with no changes in territory and population, as following:

⁷⁶⁷ Documentation of Economic Sector of the Police Department in 1963 – 1964, TTPH, ACH, no. 134.

⁷⁶⁸ Establishment and Appointment of Boundaries of the Urban Districts in the Town of Huế in 1967 – 1970, SRPO, NAC, no. 6868.

Thành Nội district becoming		District I
Tả Ngạn	-	District II
Hữu Ngạn	-	District III ⁷⁶⁹

The physical environment of Huế did not change that fast. Huế still looked pastoral, especially in comparison with the bigger cities of Sài Gòn or Đà Nẵng vastly developing in the 1960s. Some new constructions such as the fish market, the Great Hall for College of Science, Thành Nội Branch of National Hospital, Tây Linh primary school and church, girls' primary school in Hữu Ngạn, School of Agriculture Forestry and Veterinary⁷⁷⁰ seemed not to contribute much to urbanize the city in this period. The city also sold at greatly reduced price many pieces of land for various religious congregations to construct their religious temples or expand their cultural centers and social works, such as the United Buddhist Church (9,176m² on Phan Thanh Giản street, Hữu Ngạn district to build stupas and Pali language school in May 1965, 9,040m² in Tây Lộc ward, Thành Nội district to construct nursing home, August 1965),⁷⁷¹ Cao Đài (5,000m² on Duy Tân street to construct their Church, April 1965),⁷⁷² Compagnie de Jesus au Vietnam (Dòng Tên Việt Nam, 4,100 m², Phú Nhuận ward to expand the student center, May 1965),⁷⁷³ Thiên Tiên Thánh Giáo (to build a meeting hall on Chi Lăng street, March 1966).⁷⁷⁴

In juxtaposition with new construction, many residences of common inhabitants were straw-based, and brick houses were not all in good status. The dwelling places on Mai Thúc Loan street in Thành Nội district were examined by a joint committee of government officials

⁷⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁷⁰ *Monthly Reports of Thừa Thiên Province from December 1965 to December 1966*, SRPO, NAC, no. 252.

⁷⁷¹ *Documentation on Construction of Schools, Institutions, Pagodas, and Offices in Thừa Thiên Province (Huế) in 1964 – 1965*, SRPO, NAC, no. 7960.

⁷⁷² *Documentation on Construction of Houses, Schools, Historic Sites, Hospitals, in Huế in 1954 – 1975*, SRPO, NAC, no. 28921.

⁷⁷³ *Documentation on Construction of Schools, Institutions, Pagodas, and Offices in Thừa Thiên Province (Huế) in 1964 – 1965*, no. 7960.

⁷⁷⁴ *Requests to Purchase Land Areas to Construct Offices and Houses of Social Organizations in Huế in 1963 – 1971*, SRPO, NAC, no. 25318.

and engineers on October 2, 1967 in order to best assist its homeowners in improving their living conditions. As the buildings had been built decades ago, apartments were in general too old with broken roofs, wood frames eaten by moths and termites, and walls damaged by floods.⁷⁷⁵

The growth of the city population for various reasons caused more serious housing problem for Huế. Ten foreign and 21 Vietnamese professors at the University of Huế for example were scheduled to teach in the 1964 – 1965 school year, but the University was not able to provide them accommodations while renting or staying at hotels was apparently infeasible in Huế. The Rector sent a request to the Ministry of Education for funding and land to construct one to two buildings for about 40 professor families and loans for other Vietnamese professors to build and renovate their houses.⁷⁷⁶ In November 1965, the university received 12,900m² of land on Hoà Bình street, Thành Nội district, to partially solve the problem for its professors.⁷⁷⁷

There were also land disputes. 42 residents originally from Quảng Bình province (north of the DMZ) had settled in a 17 acre relief camp in Bãi Dâu, Phú Hậu Ward, Tả Ngạn district since the mid 1950s. In early 1964, some native residents requested to regain the land which had been offered to the immigrants for urgent needs according to decree 299-HC/TP/QN/HC dated December 31, 1958. The Quảng Bình people sent a petition to appeal for government and public support which appeared on the daily news *Xây Dựng* [Construction] no. 76 on April 28, 1964 in Sài Gòn. In the aftermaths of the November 1963 revolution, the local villagers took advantage of the public tendency to accuse Ngô Đình Diệm's regime of abusing the legal system to distribute land to immigrants.⁷⁷⁸ This was one of many demonstrations of the public outrage against the old regime, which occurred on many levels and fields of life in the year following the

⁷⁷⁵ *Documentation on Reconstruction and Sell Government Apartments in Nguyễn Biếu and Mai Thúc Loan Street for Government Official in Huế in 1964 – 1969*, SRPO, NAC, no. 23996.

⁷⁷⁶ *Documentation on Construction of Schools, Institutions, Pagodas, and Offices in Thừa Thiên Province (Huế) in 1964 – 1965*, SRPO, NAC, no. 7960.

⁷⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷⁸ *Documentation of Various Ministries on Land Issues in Huế in 1962 – 1966*, FRPO, NAC, no. 22739.

“revolution” in November 1963.

6.2 Economic Life

The Vietnamese economy was most strongly affected by the political changes and war in the 1960s. The massive amount of American supplies in various fields distorted the development and caused many problems for the local economy. American dollars poured in and products with American brand names filled up the Vietnamese market. In the 1960s, American items in Vietnamese market increased in quantity and types of goods from daily products to educational stationeries, from food to fertilizers. In spite of their “aid” labels, the people had to purchase those foreign products at black market prices. If the supplies and transportation system were delayed for any reason, the market price rose. The American aid commodities to Vietnam ranged from corn flour, milk, olive oil, and clothes to mops, rags, and buckets, many of which Vietnam had no use for. This made an impression on local residents that the war in Vietnam had offered a great opportunity for the US to get rid of the surplus of the American market under the label of “aid”.⁷⁷⁹ *Lập Trường Journal* critically analyzed the “disaster” that the American aid was turning Vietnamese economy into a fake one, completely relying on American production and market.⁷⁸⁰

Life became more difficult for city residents, particularly with poor immigrants and laborers from the countryside with precarious living. The increasing prices of all products on the market, most evidently groceries, even vegetables from local farms or gardens, worried all people. Economic reports prepared by the economic section of the Police Department followed closely the ups and downs in prices of basic goods, such as rice, sugar, condensed milk, and gasoline in the city.

⁷⁷⁹ Cao Huy Thuận, “Người Mỹ Và Cộng Sản” [“American and Communism”]; Đào Tiềm, “Chúng Ta Phải Làm Gì Cho Nông Thôn?” [“What Shall We Do for the Countryside?”], *Lập Trường Journal*, vol. 19, July 25, 1964.

⁷⁸⁰ Lập Trường Editor, “Ai Cai Trị Chúng Ta?” [“Who Governs Us?”], *Lập Trường Journal*, vol. 4, April 11, 1964.

1964	April 21 – May 20	May 21 – June 20
White rice, South (100 kilogram)	680	680.47
Sticky rice, South (standard) (100 kilogram)	677.45	709.90 - 720.71
Wild rice, South (100 kilogram)	657.72	672.04
White sugar, Hiệp Hoà (premium) (1 kilogram)	31.11	
White sugar (standard) (1 kilogram)	29.04	
Calbest (a.k.a “White Flower”) Condense milk (1 can)	16.70	16.44 - 16.72 [Miner 16.44, Ziel 16.48, Kim Tiền 16.22]
Fuel (1 liter)	6.44	
Cement (50 kilogram)	103.95	104.00

Price of some basic products in 1964. Source: *Documentation on Collecting Data in Preparation for Monthly Reports Form B of the National Police Department of Thừa Thiên Province in 1964*, TTPH, ACH, no. 452.

In parallel with escalation of war, the difficulty in transportation resulted in shortages of supplies, plus the local struggles with markets and stores closing for partial or entire days, sale prices vastly increased. Writer Tuý Hồng described in late 1965 that it was too expensive to live in Huế when a bunch of vegetable cost 5 VND, or one bulb of garlic or a pepper cost up to 1 VND.⁷⁸¹ Even on the busiest occasion of the year when everybody prepared for the lunar new year festival Tết, high prices restricted people’s consumption. Tết of the year of the Horse at the end January 1966 apparently passed by with fewer festivities as most families were going through hard financial struggles.⁷⁸²

Life became even harder after the political changes and struggle movement of 1966. The government observed that the cost of living was rising relentlessly in the aftermath of the turmoil. Sale prices of rice, fuel, firewood increased up 50% to 90%.⁷⁸³ In April 1966 one had to pay 1,400 VND for 100 kilograms of rice, and 15 VND for one liter of fuel (for cooking and

⁷⁸¹ Tuý Hồng. *Vết thương dậy thì [Wound of Puberty]*, (Sài Gòn: Kim Anh, 1965), 171.

⁷⁸² *Monthly Reports of Thừa Thiên Province from December 1965 to December 1966*, SRPO, NAC, no. 252.

⁷⁸³ *Ibid.*

lighting purposes).⁷⁸⁴ The government responded by a 20% – 30% wage increase⁷⁸⁵ yet it could not improve the situation as the prices level kept rising. The economic situation worsened in the following year of 1967, when the market prices increased 70% within a year,⁷⁸⁶ in spite of great demands from the increasing city population.

1967	Rice (*)	Condensed milk	Sugar	Flour	Gas and Fuel (Shell and Esso stations)
Numbers of stores	177	17	67	71	15
Monthly Demands	1,300 – 1,400 tons	200 boxes	100 – 200 tons	100 tons	800,000 – 900,000 liters

Monthly demands of basic products of Thừa Thiên Province in 1964. (*) Amount of rice was of the city of Huế only. Source: *Documentation of the Department of Economics and Social Work of Thừa Thiên Province in 1964*, TTPH, ACH, no. 147.

The shortage or delay of supplies of regular commodities (sugar, flour, milk) due to transportation problems on the Sài Gòn – Huế railway because of bad weather conditions or military attacks contributed to price increases. The situation worried the leaders of the city, as the lack and delay of supplies continued, “if one day the VC took over the highway, and stimulated the people to stand up for wage increase, given the public discontent already bubbling within the city, they would easily become more frustrating and credulously believe in VC’s propaganda.”⁷⁸⁷ Moreover, they observed that the intellectuals’ disaffection with the government challenging its corruption and financial non-transparency contributed to fuel the public rumor about the leaders’ saving gold or depositing money in oversea banks and the USD was devaluing the Vietnamese currency.⁷⁸⁸

In Huế, the increasing cost of living not only burdened the poor laborers but caused troubles for the people with more comfortable lives as well. Members of the royal family of the

⁷⁸⁴ *Orders on Political and Security Situation in Thừa Thiên Province and the City of Huế from March 12, 1966 to July 1966*, SRPO, NAC, no. 15647.

⁷⁸⁵ *Monthly Reports of Thừa Thiên Province from December 1965 to December 1966*, SRPO, NAC, no. 252.

⁷⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

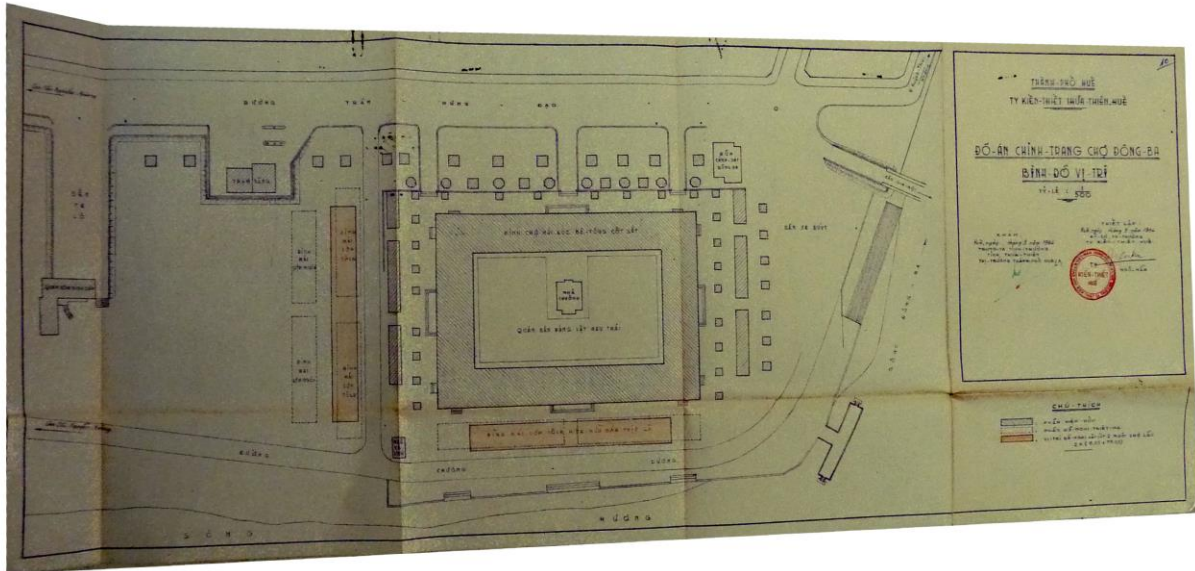
Nguyễn Emperors living in Huế had always received monthly financial aids from the RVN government. The beautiful women who used to live in the queenly style for years, now as the ordinary people, had never been able to enjoy their luxurious life like before 1945. They also suffered more from the increasing cost of living in the turbulent years in the 1960s in Huế. The local government, sympathizing with their difficult circumstances, sent a request to Sài Gòn on their behalf to ask for more assistance from the government. Queen mother Từ Cung (mother of Bảo Đại, the last King of the Nguyễn dynasty), mother of King Duy Tân, Queen of King Thành Thái used to receive 5,000 VND /month up to 1965, other Kings' wives and concubines got from 2,000 to 3,000 VND.⁷⁸⁹ Since June 1, 1966 each of them was given an extra of 1,500 or 750 VND depending on their ranking in the royal family.⁷⁹⁰

In contrast to the increasing cost of living, the commerce of Huế in the mid 1960s expanded to serve a great variety of demands from the growing population. The central market Đông Ba with the old and low marketplace did not look “appropriate within the urban planning of the city.” The local government planned to renovate the entire market in July 1964 at the total expense of eight million VND. Four new zones around of 1,800 m² area with a higher foundation to avoid flood, and a two-story building for groceries on the first floor, and fabric, jewelries, craft products on the second floor, a separate market for flower and fruit and a fish market on the dock to Hương river were also designed to be built in the future.⁷⁹¹

⁷⁸⁹ *Documentation of Various Ministries on Land Issues in Huế in 1962 – 1966*, FRPO, NAC, no. 22739.

⁷⁹⁰ *Documentation on Increasing Financial Aid for Royal Family Members in Huế in 1966 – 1975*, SRPO, NAC, no. 31653.

⁷⁹¹ *Documentation on Remodeling Đông Ba Market in Huế 1964*, SRPO, NAC, no. 7827.



Map of *Đông Ba* Market, designed in 1964. Source: *Documentation on Remodeling Đông Ba Market in Huế 1964*, SRPO, NAC, no. 7827.

Following the American troops' arrival to Vietnamese territory and their excessive services and supplies, like other urban areas in Vietnam, Huế started to form its first black market right on one side of Trường Tiền bridge, a few steps from the central market Đông Ba. The locals called it “chợ trời” – a [under the] sky market – as it did not have a roof to cover the marketplace. This market was in fact a localized military Post Exchange (PX) with a vast array of commodities in the single storefront taken from numerous American supplied cargos or garbage from military bases in Thừa Thiên and Đà Nẵng. Items were often placed on the ground and anyone could become a seller for only time with one item or own a permanent “shop” with various items. As the American consul John Helble observed “you only had to go to the central market on any morning and see US aid commodities which will be resold.”⁷⁹² Here one could find all kinds of American products from spoons, knives, lamps, mops, to flour, cheese, milk, and canned food. Many people, women and men, found various items of their interest that they might use until decades later. Prices of PX were sometimes lower, sometimes not. Mai Thị Trà

⁷⁹² John Helble, interview, 72.

recorded many Saturday afternoons when she went to the PX market to buy imported items, “the Japanese and French products were expensive, so we saved them for special occasions or for guests. The American ones were easy to use and cheaper, so I liked them better.”⁷⁹³



Left: Ceramic dishes made in Japan. Source: Family collection of Hồ Tấn Phan
Right: Metal flatware made in the U.S.A. Source: Family collection of Mai Thị Trà.

6.3 Lifestyle and Consumption, Transactions of Daily Life

If Vietnamese women like Mai Thị Trà impressed with American commodities at the PX, American female residents like Marybeth Clark preferred to live off the PX and go to local markets more often.⁷⁹⁴ It must have been extraordinary experiences for many foreigners living in Huế in terms of cuisine and food. The American consul John Helble’s family had a Vietnamese cook who was well equipped to prepare Vietnamese dishes, and was trained to cook American ones by his wife. During their time in Huế, they once received a 10 kilogram gift basket of a

⁷⁹³ Mai Thị Trà, interview.

⁷⁹⁴ Marybeth Clark, *Debrief of an AID Secretary in Saigon and IVS Teachers in Hue, Vietnam, 1961 – 1967*, 26.

Vietnamese delicacy consisting of round, raw pork balls with spices in them, wrapped in banana leaves, generally eaten with fish sauce. Although they supposed to be consumed raw, in the kitchen of the consul's family, many of those were fried like sausages with eggs for breakfast in the morning.⁷⁹⁵

The most adventurous impression for many foreign visitors of Huế was most likely to eat dog meat. The Rector of the University of Huế from July 1957 to September 1964, Father Cao Văn Luận, who was born and trained for the priesthood in the northern part of Vietnam (where there were more dog eaters than in the South), according to John Helble, “certainly advanced the cause of serving dog to American guests.”⁷⁹⁶ Similar stories were widely spread among American and Vietnamese friends of Father Luận about his “legendary dinners” on a number of occasions at his house.⁷⁹⁷ He took some source of “perverse delight” in allowing the visitor to finish the entire meal. “If the visitor made a mistake of saying, ‘Father, that was a delicious dish. What was that?’ Then Father Luận would slyly smiled and said, ‘Dog.’”⁷⁹⁸

The Vietnamese cooks, in the meantime, shared different views on changes in cuisine with more available foreign ingredients. Most of the women of Huế were trained carefully to become capable and skillful housewives and could very well make a wide variety of soup, vermicelli, meat balls, a wide range of pies and cakes, sweet and savory, preserved fruits, many of national repute. A daily meal of a Huế family was simple, usually consisted of three dishes: a bowl of soup, a plate of vegetable, and a small plate of some fish or pork, with some spicy peppers; sometimes they also served pickled veggie or herbs like fig, and fish sauce. The women of Huế inherited from their mothers and grandmothers, some from royal family, and enriched the Vietnamese cuisine in Huế style with a rich variety of seasonal ingredients, in combination with

⁷⁹⁵ John Helble, interview, 52.

⁷⁹⁶ Ibid., 55.

⁷⁹⁷ John Helble, interview; Nguyễn Văn Minh, interview by author, Los Angeles, CA, July 5, 2016.

⁷⁹⁸ John Helble, interview, 55-56.

spices, cooked to full flavor, presented in different forms and colors. Delicacy in quality, presentation, and eating style was considered an important way to show the family traditions and rank, as well as the housewife's talents.

In the mid 1960s, when American material and cultural products just appeared less than ten years earlier, French culture had been remarkably evident in Huế for some decades, particularly among the middle class and rich families of Huế, from cuisine to languages (names of vegetables and items) to daily products (soap, glasses, cosmetic), not to mention educational system, popular literature and philosophical theories. Yet not until the Americans came did even the common families have opportunities to try Western foods and drinks. Thanks to the diversity and excessive supplies of American commodities, Western food found its ways into Vietnamese markets and dinner tables. Võ Thị Vui found the Western food like pâté or baked goods delicious and cheap.⁷⁹⁹ Mai Thị Trà often bought American cheese, butter, fruits, and canned food: “American apples and oranges were good, canned food was very convenient for rainy days when we could not go grocery shopping, or when our servants were off, those cans saved me plenty of cooking time.”⁸⁰⁰

Cao Huy Thuần's wife shared the same reasons to buy canned fish and peanut butter to eat with bread or plain cookies because it was fast and convenient. And although she did not like most of them, she sometimes bought American sausages, chickens, canned mushrooms, and peas to diversify her family's meals. Some of the products like cheese were sold in large quantity and the weather in Huế did not always allow to preserve them for long. Huế people invented new dishes to consume American food, and it must be the first of its kind, one of them was American cheese cut into small pieces and stewed with soy sauce, to serve with rice.⁸⁰¹

⁷⁹⁹ Võ Thị Vui, interview.

⁸⁰⁰ Mai Thị Trà, interview.

⁸⁰¹ Cao Huy Thuần and his wife, interview by author, Paris, France, January 12, 2016.

American goods also entered daily snacks and drinks. Bread toasted with sugar and American butter became a favorite snack for students in addition to traditional rice cake like “bánh bèo” or Nam Phở noodle soup. The young female liked the sugar canes, cucumbers, papayas, berries, and roasted corn. They especially favored the sweet soup “chè” of various beans, lotus seeds, taros, tapiocas, and coconuts at auntie Thân at Đông Ba market, or on Duy Tân street. And with a little bit more money, people could eat out at restaurants of various sizes and dishes like spicy beef noodle of auntie Rót, noodle house Liên Ích Hiệp, Khê Ký, Lưu Hương, Châu Anh, or rice plate eatery “Hell” (the unique place in town most crowded from 8 p.m. to 2–3 a.m.).

In general, many people in Huế liked drinking green tea flavored with lotus flowers or jasmine, or some local herb or leaf boiled water. Some people like Lê Văn Kinh learned from his grandfather – a former high ranking mandarin of the Nguyễn dynasty – the old fine way of “tea-ism” to enjoy green tea flavored with lotus flowers freshly cut from the Serenity of Heart lake in Thành Nội district, served in tiny cups in early morning.⁸⁰² In the meantime, coke and beer (canned beer 333, Budweiser, Heineken, San Miguel) increasingly became popular beverages in daily life in Huế.

Unlike cuisine, fashion was not Westernized that easily in this closed city. Compared to stylish women in Sài Gòn, Huế women looked old-fashioned, because “they worked and studied hard, they had no time to dress up.”⁸⁰³ Even when miniskirts, dresses, T-shirts, with bright and colorful flowery patterns were popular in other urban areas in the country, the women of Huế were fairly loyal to the traditional long dress in daily life and special occasions. They largely preferred simple, plain, light color, and elegant patterns for their long dresses. Only when the

⁸⁰² Lê Văn Kinh, interview.

⁸⁰³ Minh Chánh, “Bức Thư Vui Của Một Bạn Gái” [“A Happy Letter from a Female Reader”], *Lập Trường Journal*, vol. 1, March 21, 1964.

female students went out for sports games or some exercises they would put on active wear like pants and blouses.⁸⁰⁴ The majority of people wore Vietnamese wooden clogs (guốc) and some sandals. While men got used to Western shoes, women started to put on high heels. Many stores, such as famous tailors and shoes shops on Trần Hưng Đạo and Phan Bội Châu like Hùng, Phạm Uông, Minh Châu, offered both traditional styles and Western catalogs for their young customers to view and select the designs. Tailors and shoemakers then followed the catalogs to measure, and fit the products to their customer sizes.⁸⁰⁵ Young girls simply let their hair fall on their shoulders, while the older women tied it into a bun. Sometimes they had a hairdresser at Mỹ Dung on Trần Hưng Đạo street, or Kinh Đô on Phan Bội Châu street to make their hair more stylish on special occasions. Regardless of sunny or rainy days, the women of Huế wore the traditional conical hat, sometimes the “poem conical hat” which were carefully made with a poem inserted between the two layers of palm leaf.

The simplicity and delicacy shown in cuisine and fashion could also be felt in human demeanors. From intellectuals to shop vendors on the street, the traditional people of Huế were expected to show a proper demeanor of quiet, refined modesty in public. The dignified men and the faithful women might appear to be close and modest, and self-enjoy their rich yet inward sentimental life, which caused difficulties for outsiders to understand and befriend. Traditionally the Huế people followed the paths their parents had identified for them, and shaped their life within Vietnamese culture, Confucian virtues, and Buddhist values. The wife would sacrifice everything for the happiness of her husband and children, and the husband’s first loyalty was to his family.

The people of Huế strongly valued personal relationships, and made every effort to

⁸⁰⁴ Thái Kim Lan, interview.

⁸⁰⁵ Bửu Ý, interview.

maintain the relationship. One would not directly contradict another person, instead saying something neutral that pleased everyone, which could sometimes confuse the opposite person. The most common word in daily conversation in Huế “*dạ*” could carry various, even contrast, meanings that people had to understand within the context, plus the look, the manners to comprehend correctly. Beautiful women of Huế fooled many young men with just this one word answer, which could mean a yes, a no, a “up to you” in responding to the questions of “may I come next time?” or “can I send you letters?”

Love, in essence, came and went in elegant romantic ways, via a poem, an embroidered handkerchief, or a leaf dried in a book. Trịnh Công Sơn, a talented composer of Huế admitted, “it seems my whole generation is like that, loving a strand of hair, a shape, just needing to see each other's faces every day, seeing her through the window frame could make the whole day happy.”⁸⁰⁶ The shy and delicate women who loved collecting flowers, butterflies, and dried them in their notebooks⁸⁰⁷ often avoided the visit of the one-sided lovers. In a rare case, it took the “brave victim” two years to approach the woman he loved.⁸⁰⁸

6.4 Education

Vietnamese were very highly oriented toward education, and this was particularly true in Huế. Money and high ranking in social hierarchy could bring a luxurious and honorable life to the family but the prestige that high degrees or scores of excellent students, or respected teachers to honor the family was considered higher than any other status. As Vĩnh Cao illustrated it, in a community meeting of any kinds, the intellectuals always sat in the front, then came the students,

⁸⁰⁶ “Trịnh Công Sơn: Một Góc Riêng Thuần Khiết Cùng Cuộc Đời” [Trịnh Công Sơn: A Pure Private Corner in Life] interview by *Sài Gòn Giải Phóng* [*Sài Gòn Liberation*], <http://nhacsitruinhcongson.blogspot.com/2008/06/trinh-cong-son-mot-goc-rieng-thuan.html> (Accessed on March 26, 2017).

⁸⁰⁷ Thái Kim Lan, interview.

⁸⁰⁸ Trần Doãn Nho, interview by author, Los Angeles, CA, July 7, 2016.

then the businessmen and shopkeepers. “They were the richer but they were lower in social ranking. They did not dare to raise their voice or to talk in the meeting as they were generally poorly educated.”⁸⁰⁹ On one hand, this inspired many students from and coming to Huế to study harder and harder to change their fate and to earn reputation to their family and home village. On the other hand, this placed heavy burdens on the shoulders of many young citizens to pass all exams to enter the university to become teachers, and shaped Vietnam into a credentialed society.

Most Vietnamese people in general, and the people of Huế in particular, who were born in the first half of the twentieth century could not follow their educational desire without a break. Many had progressed as far as they could in their education until the war interrupted it. The prolonged war, political upheavals and consequently economic instability, restricted the higher education of many students. The students born after 1945 were more fortunate than the previous generation as the University of Huế and more private primary and high schools and mass education were opened to advance the literacy rate of the city.

In the 1960s, the majority of their first generation of faculties of the university, and most of the educators over 30 were educated in France or in the French system. French was still taught in general education as primary (foreign) language, yet it was losing ground to English. With the vastly increasing intervention of American policy and culture, the intellectuals who had laid the foundation for the University of Huế and played powerful role in directing the public opinion in Huế, reacted quite early to the American presence in Vietnam. Their views and solid anti-American position were moreover strengthened and sharpened by their colleagues on *Lập Trường Journal* or through their own experiences via the struggle movement in the year 1964-1966. To outsiders like the voluntary English teacher in Huế Marybeth Clark, it might appear as

⁸⁰⁹ Vĩnh Cao, interview by author, Huế, January 14, 2014.

if they were attempting to hold on to their system, to the old term school that they had been thinking for a long time because many were not able to change, and that meant they would be out of the changing American influenced system.⁸¹⁰

Marybeth Clark might be correct that “many of the professors adamantly opposed anything that smelled of Americanization, and it became a strongly anti-American stand. This resistance to change was particularly strong at the College of the Education. It became a political thing.”⁸¹¹ However it was probably not true that because “[the French educated professors’] political views were very, very closed tied up with their own positions being threatened,” they became anti-Americanism.⁸¹² In the social atmosphere in the 1960s, the Vietnamese professors in Huế, with their high patriotism and nationalism, might be truly looking for an independent path to develop the educational system of Vietnam. Lê Thanh Minh Châu, faculty member of College of Letters and Education at the University of Huế since 1957, wholeheartedly tried to identify the demands of the central region to apply into his lectures, in hope that his students would contribute to improve the situation.⁸¹³ Lê Văn, professor of literature, Dean of College of

Education, stated on the first issue of *Lập Trường Journal* that “our education since the country gained its independence in 1945 was not completely independent and purely nationalistic. It was merely temporary fragmentary and exotic program applied into Vietnam’s circumstance.”⁸¹⁴ Lê Văn critically pointed out the weaknesses and problems of the contemporary educational system which was “very similar” to the French system. In his opinion, it lacked vocational skills, moral and physical education; it valued degrees more than experiences and ability; it dissociated from local situation and demands; it created a tendency for people to

⁸¹⁰ Marybeth Clark, *Debrief of an AID Secretary in Saigon and IVS Teachers in Hue, Vietnam, 1961 – 1967*, 36.

⁸¹¹ Ibid.

⁸¹² Ibid.

⁸¹³ Lê Thanh Minh Châu, interview.

⁸¹⁴ Lê Văn, “Tình Trạng Nền Trung Học Việt Nam” [“Situation of the High School System in Vietnam”], *Lập Trường Journal*, vol. 1, March 21, 1964.

leave the countryside to become public servants in the urban areas, which caused serious troubles for their agricultural country.⁸¹⁵

Up to 1966, Huế increasingly hosted more American cultural installations and educational faculty members. The University and high schools of Huế had more English classes. Their library collections received more books and other reference materials from the US. The US Information Service (USIS) office opened every day to the public. It was pretty well used as a cultural information center for film loans and a distribution of publications; also offered venues for discussion group on meetings on various purposes. The International Voluntary Services [IVS] was a small organization in Vietnam under contract to AID, working much the same way as Peace Corps volunteers, bringing in young college graduates to the English and Science teachers in primarily public high schools. When the American decided to move their consulate and facilities to Đà Nẵng as a consequence of the struggle movement in 1966, they also stopped their English classes for about one thousand high school and university students.⁸¹⁶



Faculty members of Đồng Khánh High School in 1967. Source: Family collection of Nguyễn Thị Thanh Tâm.

⁸¹⁵ *Lập Trường Journal*, vol. 1, March 21, 1964; vol. 2, March 28, 1964.

⁸¹⁶ No. 9678, *Debrief of a U.S.I.S Representative Hue, Thua Thien Province, Vietnam, 1964 – 1967*, 6.

Đông Khánh high school hosted Marybeth Clark (Vietnamese name Thanh Mai) to teach English to multiple classes “the school was very open to doing anything I asked for and tried in every way to make things pleasant for me. (...) From the first the school was so cooperative.”⁸¹⁷ Classes were divided to 15-20 student small groups for better pronunciation and communication practices,⁸¹⁸ the teacher-student relation was very close and friendly. The students liked their benevolent and friendly teacher Thanh Mai so much that “sometimes a group them turned up my house about a half hour before time to go to school and wanted to go to school with me, or they would stop by other time just to visit me.”⁸¹⁹ Marybeth Clark also voluntarily taught a class of English conversation for Đông Khánh high school teachers. A few time the class met in her home with “very informal and enjoyable sessions” over fruits from trees in her yard.⁸²⁰ Via dynamic educational activities, Marybeth Clark was able to maintain good relations with all teachers, including the anti-government ones during the struggle movement. In her view, “all the teacher regardless whatever political feeling might have been or their attitude toward Americans, were always at least very gracious, and often very warm and open and friendly.”⁸²¹

Without such language preparation since high school, many students of the university in the 1960s had troubles with the wide range of abstracts and complicated jargon, in spite of immense efforts of Vietnamese professors to translate and define scientific and professional concepts.⁸²² Tôn Thất Kỳ, a student of Medicine with a better English proficiency than his peers, admitted “although we were good at language, when they spoke we could comprehend only about 70%. If they spoke fast or used local dialects or terms, we could not.”⁸²³ If foreign

⁸¹⁷ Marybeth Clark, *Debrief of an AID Secretary in Saigon and IVS Teachers in Hue, Vietnam, 1961 – 1967*, 32.

⁸¹⁸ Nguyễn Thị Yên, interview by author, Sacramento, June 28, 2016.

⁸¹⁹ Marybeth Clark, *Debrief of an AID Secretary in Saigon and IVS Teachers in Hue, Vietnam, 1961 – 1967*, 33.

⁸²⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸²¹ *Ibid.*, 32.

⁸²² Bửu Ý, interview.

⁸²³ Tôn Thất Kỳ, interview.

language was the problem of Vietnamese students, Vietnamese created barriers for ethnic minority students from the central highlands coming to Huế to attend public primary and high schools. In the school year of 1966-1967 only one of 11 ethnic minority high school students passed the standardized national exam. The local government of Huế requested the Ministry of Education to give 10% extra grade for another seven students to pass, as recompense for their difficulties studying in the same class with the Kinh students and no family supports in the new city.⁸²⁴ Compared to ethnic minority students, the city learners indeed had much more advantages. Cao Huy Thuần, Thái Kim Lan, Bửu Ý, Nguyễn Hữu Châu Phan, and many others had opportunities to get familiar with Western ideologies and references from early years. Bửu Nam followed his older brothers and sisters to read *Crime and Punishment* (a novel by Russian writer Fyodor Dostoevsky, 1866), *L'Étranger* (a novel by Albert Camus, 1942, translated into Vietnamese),⁸²⁵ while Hồ Tấn Phan enjoyed *La Nausea* (Jean Paul Sartre, 1938) and many philosophy classics of Albert Camus, Jean Paul Sartre, Jean-Jacques Rousseau.⁸²⁶

To many of these bookish students, their great immediate ambition was a scholarship which would enable them to study abroad in France, Germany, or America. Cao Huy Thuần, as the oldest son (i.e. the most important heir of the family), after earning his degree in law in Sài Gòn, returned to Huế to be forced to get married. “Similar to many young scholars and students at that time, if I have not come to France to study further, my career has not accomplished yet,” he responded to his mother upon her earnest request “have I not come to France, I would not get married.”⁸²⁷ In his early 30s, Cao Huy Thuần considered himself very young and felt unconfident for having no experience abroad.⁸²⁸ After sharing his thoughts and concerns with his readers via

⁸²⁴ *Documentation on Scholarship for Students of Ethnic Minority Groups in Huế in 1966*, SRPO, NAC, no. 1867.

⁸²⁵ Bửu Nam, interview by author, Huế, January 12, 2014.

⁸²⁶ Hồ Tấn Phan, interview.

⁸²⁷ Cao Huy Thuần, interview, February 16, 2014.

⁸²⁸ Cao Huy Thuần, interview, January 12, 2016.

Lập Trường Journal, he eventually went to France and later was not allowed to return to the RVN after graduation due to his participation in anti-government and anti-war movement in Paris.

Lập Trường Journal in only six month of its existence in 1964 reflected various thoughts and opinions of teachers and students like its professor editorial board. They observed that some high school students “burdened with the thoughts of their nation’s fate,”⁸²⁹ “felt skeptical of the adult’s society, and ambiguous hence hesitated to engage with the future changes.”⁸³⁰ They criticized the university students who even after the 1963 struggle only focused on their professional field and completely ignored other national issues like war, economic and social problems, and absolutely denied participating in politics-related events.⁸³¹ These concerns, uncertainty, ambivalence of the young generation first resulted in degradation of school disciplines. The teacher-student relation was not as valuable as before, many students did not respect but denounced the professors for their involvement in different political groups.⁸³² Skepticism and factionalism ruined relations between colleagues. The problems seemingly worsened during the struggle movement period, following a circle in which the public discontent led to demonstrations, schools then shut down, no study and no exams resulted in more frustration. As a consequence, futility and disappointment developed among professors and students in every educational institution. The most serious problem happened to the University of Huế.

After the struggle movement was suppressed in June 1966, the University of Huế

⁸²⁹ Trần Ngọc Quế, “Học Đường S.O.S.” [“School System S.O.S.”], part 1, *Lập Trường Journal*, vol. 8, May 9, 1964.

⁸³⁰ Trần Ngọc Quế, “Học Đường S.O.S.” [“School System S.O.S.”], part 2, *Lập Trường Journal*, vol. 9, May 16, 1964.

⁸³¹ Hoàng Phủ, “Người Bạn Trẻ Chết Ngoài Đường Phố” [“The Young Friend Dies on the Street”], *Lập Trường Journal*, vol. 24, September 5, 1964.

⁸³² *Lập Trường Journal*, vol. 2, March 28, 1964; Vol. 5, April 18, 1964.

confronted various urgent and significant difficulties. With thousands of professors and students actively leading and participating in the struggle movement, the internal psychological damages were surely far more serious than interruptions in operation of the university. After the rector Bùi Tường Huân (succeeding Father Cao Văn Luận since September 1964) was replaced in 1966 by the young and inexperienced rector Nguyễn Thế Anh, the university got into a great deal of troubles: lack of faculty members (as foreign professors, professors from Sài Gòn no longer came to Huế), students stopped coming to class, lack of equipment and resources, relations among professors, staff, and students broken up, etc.⁸³³ Evaluating the “stalemate” at the university after the end of the school year in 1966, the Ministry of Education delegation proposed to temporarily close all colleges except the College of Education and the Medical School, and moved the rest of classes to Sài Gòn. They also suggested to amend the University regulations and policies, and requested some senior specialists from the Ministry of Defense to manage the faculty members.⁸³⁴

On July 30, 1966, an education commissioner sent a request to the Chairman of Central Executive Committee to rearrange the educational system in Huế, in order to refresh the heavy atmosphere in schools and earn the people’s trust. His first and foremost request was to release many professors and students of the struggle forces having been arrested to timely prepare for the new school year starting in less than two months.⁸³⁵ Besides the majority of professors and students carried away under the pressure of the struggle forces, the minority of opportunists, or alternative opponents or innocents, some professors were considered active leaders of the anti-government movement. Five professors of the University including Bùi Tường Huân, Lê Khắc

⁸³³ *Documentation on Activities of the University of Huế in 1963 – 1969*, SRPO, NAC, no. 30296.

⁸³⁴ *Documentation on the Administration of the University of Huế and Dissolution of Institute of Chinese Studies in 1957 – 1972*, SRPO, NAC, no. 7883.

⁸³⁵ *Documentation on the Administrative status of the Professors and Teachers at Primary Schools, High Schools, and the University of Huế in Relation to the Turmoil in the Central Region in 1966 – 1967*, SRPO, NAC, no. 124.

Quyến, Lê Tuyên, Tôn Thất Hanh, and Nguyễn Kim Sơn, were released on October 29, 1966 with no clarification on their administrative status. Following a top secret order of the Department of Military Security, the Ministry of Education sent a dispatch to all government offices six months later on April 20, 1967, to announce their dismissal of Bùi Tường Huân on March 30, 1967, and labor contract termination with four other professors on March 7, 1967. Their announcement also noted that all five professors would not be allowed to continue working in educational field, and needed to be removed out of Thừa Thiên province, and not be assigned any important or leading positions.⁸³⁶ Similar punishments were applied to other high school teachers, such as the case of Ngô Văn Bằng (arrested on June 27, 1966, released on October 29, 1966, reassigned to teach at a different high school since February 8, 1967), or Lê Phú Lư (teacher at Nguyễn Tri Phương high school reassigned to teach at Tổng Phước Hiệp high school in Vĩnh Long province since February 1967).⁸³⁷

Another problem in the field of education in a country at war was the lack of faculty members and staff due to compulsory military service. Many of the teachers, especially primary school teachers, were drafted and a great number of other teachers with the shortened training program certificates enlisted in the army without a demobilizing date. Moreover, no high school teachers could have opportunities to study abroad to broaden their knowledge and advance their professional skills, because only males completing conscription, or passing the national graduation exams to get the degree before 21 years of ages, or females (who were minority) met the requirements. Together with the discontent of the students reaching draft age only graduated to enter the war, the picture of education of Huế, and some certain extent of the entire RVN in the 1960s did not look bright.

⁸³⁶ Ibid.

⁸³⁷ Ibid.

6.5 Literature and the Female Writers

The social unrest in Huế, as in any other places, found a rich outlet of expression in various types of literature. Similar to the case of journalism, as analyzed in chapter 3, Huế did not offer a fertile land for writers to mature and develop their literary career. The physical and educational environment had launched the young talents of Huế on their path with poetic images and beautiful inspirations, yet their hometown seemed to cramp the career improvement, particularly in the context of immense changes in political and social lives. Many left Huế to the dynamic Sài Gòn to seek for better opportunities for their short stories, novels, or poems to be printed and interactions with great figures of the same passion and perception in the literature world.⁸³⁸

The education-oriented lifestyle and the academic atmosphere dispersed from the university since the late 1950s created a wide and high reading culture in Huế. The youth, in particular students at the university, read and seemingly got interested in everything they could find at the bookstores on Trần Hưng Đạo street. Their love for books spread the reading passion to the surrounding community. The young generation of the mid 1960s had more options than their parents or grandparents to expand their reading materials beyond just the Vietnamese Self Reliance Literary Group (Tự Lực Văn Đoàn) and French literature. Sài Gòn attracted all talented authors; and all kinds of publications from Sài Gòn were sent to all over the country, and distributed to Huế via a network of book collectors or bookstores.⁸³⁹ The literature critics of the post-1963 period strongly blamed Ngô Đình Diệm's regime for its heavy-handed censorship of the press and degeneration of cultural life, which resulted in easy literary taste of readers, hard

⁸³⁸ Trần Thị Thu Vân, interview by author, Los Angeles, CA, November 24, 2015.

⁸³⁹ Lê Thành Tôn, interview.

living conditions of writers, and a relatively poor literature life.⁸⁴⁰ The situation changed remarkably since 1964, marking “the period of explosion”⁸⁴¹ of the RVN literature.

Literary accounts in the 1964 – 1967 period varied with a great amount of publications in a wide range of genres: novel, short story, critique, poetry, drama, philosophy, satire, etc. and increasing presence of Buddhist literature. Many new names emerged and quickly became well known nationwide with some phenomena of thousands of prints within several days. A large diversity of topics was discovered and studied, mirroring the social changes and people feelings, the situation of political instability, escalating war, deteriorating economic conditions, decadent national values, and so forth. In the chaotic time, the “consuming literature,” entertainment fictions or Chinese wuxia martial arts and chivalry series were better received to temporarily escape the depressing reality into the world of fantasies of a luxurious life, a romantic love, and sensualism without any responsibilities or ideals.⁸⁴²

The avid readers of Huế, many considering themselves morally “higher” or “cleaner” than others, however preferred more serious literature of analyses, criticism, philosophy, in which they could broaden their knowledge, discover new ideas, empower their thoughts, and sharpen their arguments. The existential attitude, the reality of war escalation, the increasing cost of living, the sacrifice of soldiers and farmers, the living ambitions and ideals seemed to be more favorable. Even in poetry, the romantic tendency was largely expressed side by side with deep feelings and concerns for the nation and its future.⁸⁴³ The period of 1964-1967 was the heyday of Nguyễn Văn Trung, Võ Phiến, Mai Thảo, Vũ Hoàng Chương, Nguyễn Mạnh Côn, Phan Nhật Nam, to name a few. Their writings, very well received in Huế, enjoyed the freedom to animate

⁸⁴⁰ Lữ Phương, *Mấy Vấn Đề Văn Nghệ* [Some Issues on Literature and Art], (Sài Gòn: Trình Bày Press, 1967), 147.

⁸⁴¹ Công Huyền Tôn Nữ Nha Trang, “Women Writers of South Vietnam – 1954 – 1975,” *Vietnam Forum* 9, Yale University, (1987): 6.

⁸⁴² Sơn Nam, “Bàn về hiện tượng sách báo” [“Discussion on Journalism Phenomenon”] *Đồng Nai Literature Anthology*, vol. 7, July-August, 1966.

⁸⁴³ Various interviews with Bửu Ý, Cao Huy Thuần, Hồ Tấn Phan, Nguyễn Hữu Châu Phan, Thái Kim Lan, etc.

and enhance philosophy, attitudes, criticism in response to the contemporary social situation. Some of them challenged the national long-held traditions in the effort to breakthrough the social old backward restrictions. One of the most remarkable accomplishments was the emergence and engagement of female writers in the RVN literature world.

More interestingly, one of the most dramatic phenomena of the RVN literature in 1954-1975 was the appearance of the Five She-Devils [Ngũ Quái] of five women authors all in their twenties. And three of them were originally from Huế: Nhã Ca, Tuý Hồng, and Nguyễn Thị Hoàng.⁸⁴⁴ Up to 1966, the traditional male-dominated writings and writers still prevailed in Vietnam, female only played an inferior role as a supplement to the male works.⁸⁴⁵ The three authors of Huế, following their elder sister also from Huế Linh Bảo's success in 1953, started to publish their works on some newspapers or journals, and books since the late 1950s. Not until 1966 did these female writers firmly mark their positions in literature with best-seller publications, national literature awards and most-talked about works. These women fiction writers grew up in Huế when it was considered à la mode to read Sartre, Camus, and the phenomenal French female writers Françoise Sagan, which must have contributed to their rebellion against the strictly age-old close traditions deeply derived from Confucianism in Huế. They became the first to touch on many sensitive issues against the contemporary social values and norms in a strong way, and almost immediately became controversial figures. They successfully attracting public attention to the questions of women's role and positions in the changing society, as they "plunged headlong into both feminine [Nhã Ca] and feminist [Tuý Hồng and Nguyễn Thị Hoàng] tendencies in creative writing."⁸⁴⁶

⁸⁴⁴ The other two writers were Nguyễn Thị Thụy Vũ (born in Vĩnh Long province in the south) and Trùng Dương (born in Hải Phòng in the north and moved south in 1954).

⁸⁴⁵ Uyên Thao, *Các Nhà Văn Nữ Việt Nam 1900 – 1970 [Vietnamese Female Writers 1900 – 1970]*, (Sài Gòn: Dân Chủ Press, 1973), 26.

⁸⁴⁶ Công Huyền Tôn Nữ Nha Trang, "Women Writers of South Vietnam – 1954 – 1975," 19.

Nhã Ca (born Trần Thị Thu Vân in 1939 in Huế) first recognized as a poet since 1957, later became much more well known with her war-related novels. In *Đêm nghe tiếng đại bác* [*At Night I Hear the Canons*, 1966], *Người tình ngoài mặt trận* [*Lover on the Front*, 1967], Nhã Ca set her characters in the background of the ongoing war and connected the readers with the current society in the sentimental stories. The war through the lens of this talented writer emerged vividly via various painful episodes with the sounds of cannons, love letters from the front, and all innocent people in a country at war.

Tuý Hồng (born Nguyễn Thị Tuý Hồng, 1937) studied, taught, wrote in Huế before moving to Sài Gòn with her family in 1966. Her works had appeared on many newspaper and journals including *Lập Trường Journal*, before she published in Huế her first volume *Thở dài* [*Sigh*, 1964], and *Vết thương dậy thì* [*Wound of Puberty*, 1965]. Tuý Hồng was then viewed and still remembered as a “brazen” writer who keenly depicted love and sexual desire as of means to liberate women from outmode conventions.⁸⁴⁷ Against the background of Huế society, its people and norms, Tuý Hồng portrayed the frustrated young female victims of the moral and social judgment and prejudice.

Nguyễn Thị Hoàng (born 1939 in Huế) immediately became the most popular name in 1966 when her first and best known novel *Vòng Tay Học Trò* [*The Student's Embrace*] published and reprinted four times within several months. This novel told a romantic love story of a young high school female teacher with her male student in which the woman was older and superior in the romance. It was its characters' innermost feelings and conflicts over such unusual and reversed immoral relationship that appealed to readers of the close social hierarchy of Vietnam.

The three authors of Huế with their freshness in writing contents and styles undoubtedly brought pride to Huế and were very well received in their home town. Although some might not

⁸⁴⁷ Bửu Ý, Tôn Thất Kỳ, interview.

fully like their reflection and criticism of the social reality, many read them simply because they were from Huế.⁸⁴⁸ Their achievements in the world of creative literature in the RVN certainly had impacts on young generation of Huế, many of whom meanwhile participated in the struggles against war, foreign intervention and for peace, democracy, and freedom.

During the social unrest in 1964-1966, a large number of participants of the struggles favored and advocated Buddhist literature accounts on topics like peace and war, fate of the Vietnamese people and social reality, compassion and nationalism. Writings by the avid students with their youth's ideals and responsibilities for the nation like poem "Thư cho mẹ và chị" ["Letter to Mother and Elder Sister," 1962] by Phan Duy Nhân, and many literature accounts in journals like *Hành trình*, *Giữ thơm quê mẹ* were very popular. Buddhist literature by Monk Thích Nhất Hạnh published by Lá Bối publishing house in Sài Gòn in 1964 – 1966 had an especially strong impact on students, intellectuals, military and government officials.⁸⁴⁹ His books even became small gifts people presented each other like a pack of tea or a bunch of flowers on special occasions,⁸⁵⁰ such as *Đạo Phật ngày nay* [*Buddhism Today*, 1964], *Đạo Phật hiện đại hoá* [*Modernizing Buddhism*, 1965], *Nói với tuổi hai mươi* [*Talk to the Twenties*, 1966], *Hoa sen trong biển lửa* [*Lotus in the Sea of Fire*, 1966]. Thích Nhất Hạnh's stories and poems were read over and over again at meetings, teach-ins, vigils during the struggle time, promoting compassion among people, anti-war and pro-peace, such as this poem "Chiến tranh" ["War"]

⁸⁴⁸ Cao Huy Thuận, interview, January 12, 2016.

⁸⁴⁹ Nguyễn Đắc Xuân. *Từ Phú Xuân đến Huế* [*From Phú Xuân to Huế*], vol. 2, 162.

⁸⁵⁰ Võ, Phiến. *Văn Học Miền Nam Tổng Quan* [*Literature in the South*]. (California: Người Việt Books, 2014), 268.

Cho tôi cất cao lời tố cáo cuộc chiến tranh bẩn thủ này	Let me raise the denouncement of this dirty war
Cuộc chiến tranh huynh đệ tương tàn, dã man, thảm khốc	The war between brothers, savage, brutal
(...) tôi nói rằng <i>tôi không công nhận cuộc chiến tranh này</i>	(...) I say <i>I do not accept this war</i>
chưa bao giờ và không bao giờ công nhận cuộc chiến tranh này	I have not and will never accept this war.
“Chiến tranh”	“War” (Emphasis in original version) ⁸⁵¹

6.6 Music and Trịnh Công Sơn

Beyond recitation, poetry and prose set to music attracted even more audiences to listen to songs of peace, love between people, and love for the fatherland. Poems by Thích Nhất Hạnh had strong influences in Phạm Duy’s composition – one of the most salient and influential composer of modern Vietnamese music. Phạm Duy turned Thích Nhất Hạnh’s poem: “Hoà Bình” [“Peace”] into the first song “Tôi Ước Mơ” [“I dream”] of his collection *Tâm Ca* (*Ten Songs of the Heart*, 1965). A verse from Thích Nhất Hạnh’s “Chiến Tranh” [“War”] was developed into Phạm Duy’s song “Kẻ Thù Ta” [“Our Enemy”], the seventh song in the series. Phạm Duy also wrote music for a poem “Đề lại cho em” [“Given for You”] by Nguyễn Đắc Xuân, a Buddhist student of Education, a leader of the struggle movement, and later a NLF member.

The people of Huế in the mid 1960s, like other cities in the RVN, listened to the “pre-war music,” “modern music,” plus the folk genre Huế singing. The modern music immensely developed and expanded its powerful attraction to millions of listeners throughout the country. Nguyễn Đắc Xuân collected various records and music sheets of Phạm Duy, Trịnh Công Sơn, Phạm Thế Mỹ, Văn Phụng. He often had five to seven friends gathering over the weekend to

⁸⁵¹ Thích Nhất Hạnh, *Chấp tay nguyện cầu bồ câu trắng hiện* [*Hand Pressed to Pray for the Appearance of White Doves*], (Sài Gòn: Lá Bối Press, 1965), 17.

play music and sing songs like *Đêm tàn bến ngạ* by Dương Thiệu Tước, *Tình Ca* by Phạm Duy, *Tiếng dương cầm* and *Ô mê ly* by Văn Phụng.⁸⁵² Except temporary breaks during the struggle period, the city radio introduced many local singers to the audiences of Huế such as Hà Thanh, Tôn Thất Niệm, Thanh Hương, etc. French singers like Tino Rossi, Edith Piaf, and Sylvie Vartan were also among the favorites.⁸⁵³

If folk songs, court music, boat-rowing songs, lullabies had become an intergral part of Huế's life for hundred years, Western music was introduced to Huế as one of various French cultural influences in Vietnam. In the mid twentieth century, some people of Huế were familiar with the Western music, musical theories, and praticies, and Western instruments. Established in 1962, the National Music and Theater Acadamy of Huế welcomed students of both Vietnamese traditional music and Western music. Professors from Sài Gòn and abroad were invited to assist with the lack of faculty members, particularly for Western music, which seemed to develop vastly in the 1960s. In the school year of 1966 – 1967, for example 69 over 93 candidates for Music theory passed the entrance exam, 28 of 74 candidates were selected to study Western music (including three students of violin, one viola, one cello, six piano, four clarinet, three oboe, one trumpet, four guitar, and three mandolin), and all five candidates received admission to study Vietnamese traditional music (Vietnamese zither).⁸⁵⁴ The growing popularity of Western music in Huế certainly contributed to advance the local musical taste in the dynamic developing of Vietnamese modern music.

The most notable significance of musical life in Huế in 1964 – 1967 was the extraordinary popularity of Trịnh Công Sơn and his music. A son of Huế, Trịnh Công Sơn

⁸⁵² Nguyễn Đắc Xuân, interview.

⁸⁵³ Senior Singer Minh Mẫn, Senior Singer Thanh Hương, Nguyễn Đắc Xuân, Bửu Ý, interview; Tôn Thất Niệm, interview by author, Los Angeles, CA, July 4, 2016.

⁸⁵⁴ *Documentation on Examination and Admission of the National Music and Theater Acadamy of Huế in 1966 – 1967*, SRPO, NAC, no. 457.

composed hundreds of songs with Huế as the background throughout his career. His early love songs in the late 1950s were inspired by the beautiful Huế women, who walked along the street in front of his house on Nguyễn Trường Tộ street in Hữu Ngạn district (the young woman in song *Diễm Xưa*, or *Diễm of the Past*)⁸⁵⁵ with romantic streets of Huế of flying flamboyant (lyrics in *Mưa Hồng*, or *Pink Rain*). Trịnh Công Sơn made friends with a circle of highly educated friends of Huế, attending various discussions on philosophy such as existentialism, being and nothingness, meaningless of life, poems by Guillaume Apollinaire. Trịnh Công Sơn then composed and “sang philosophy,” recalled Thái Kim Lan.⁸⁵⁶

His composition of the late 1950s to early 1960s as shown in his first collection published in 1965 *Thần thoại quê hương, tình yêu và thân phận* [*Legend of Homeland, Love, and Destiny*] reflected his views toward the contemporary national situation. The love for the land, the people, and their sufferings in daily life, the concern of the fate of people, and sorrow of war were themes that he returned again and again later in his career. But “although he attracted attention with love songs composed in the late 1950s,” as John Schafer argued, “it was his antiwar songs, particularly those collected in *Songs of Golden Skin* (1966), that created the ‘Trịnh Công Sơn phenomenon.’”⁸⁵⁷

⁸⁵⁵ Trịnh Công Sơn, “Hồi ức” [Recollections]. In *Trịnh Công Sơn: Một người thơ ca, một cõi đi về* [*Trịnh Công Sơn: A Singer-Poet, a Place for Leaving and Returning*], ed. Nguyễn Trọng Tạo, et al. (Hà Nội: Music Publishing House, 2001), 178–80. Originally published in *Thế giới Âm nhạc* [*The World of Music Journal*], March 1997.

⁸⁵⁶ Thái Kim Lan, “Trịnh Công Sơn, Nơi vùng ưu tư thành tiếng du ca” [Trịnh Công Sơn: Where Sorrow Becomes Folk Singing]. In *Trịnh Công Sơn: Cuộc đời, Âm nhạc, Thơ, hội họa, suy tưởng* [*Trịnh Công Sơn: Life, Music, Poetry, Painting, Reflections*], ed. Trịnh Cung and Nguyễn Quốc Thái. Hồ Chí Minh City: Literature and Arts Press, 81–104.

⁸⁵⁷ John Schafer, “The Trịnh Công Sơn Phenomenon,” *Journal of Asian Studies*, vol. 66, no. 3 (August 2007): 597.



Trịnh Công Sơn in front of his house on Nguyễn Trường Tộ Street in Hữu Ngạn district, around late 1960s. Source: https://www.tcs-home.org/photos/album-1/hue-khoang-1969/image_view_fullscreen (accessed March 26, 2017).

His next collection released in 1966 – 1967 *Ca khúc Da Vàng [Songs of Golden Skin]* consisted of many war protest songs immediately became popular and sang over and over again, for example *Đại Bác Ru Đêm [A Lullaby of Cannons for the Night]*, *Người Con Gái Việt Nam Da Vàng [Vietnamese Girl with Golden Skin]*, *Ngụ Ngôn Mùa Đông [A Winter's Fable]*, *Gia Tài Của Mẹ [A Mother's Legacy]*. With the war in the background Trịnh Công Sơn's songs emphasized the tragic loss, death and destruction, deep sorrow of the mothers, children, and brothers in what he called “a twenty year civil war” (lyrics of *A Mother's Legacy*). And above all, his songs demonstrated the love between all people - the people of golden skin – and love for their native land Vietnam.

Đại bác đêm đêm dội về thành phố
 Người phu quét đường dừng chổi đứng nghe
 Đại bác qua đây đánh thức mẹ dậy
 Đại bác qua đây con thơ buồn tủi

Every night cannons resound in the town
 A street cleaner stops sweeping and listens
 The cannons wake up a mother
 The cannons disturb a young child

... Đại bác đêm đêm tương lai rụng vàng
 Đại bác đêm đêm như kinh không mang lời
 nguyên
 Trẻ thơ quên sống từng đêm nghe ngóng

... Every night cannon shells create a future
 without life
 Every night cannons like a chant without a
 prayer
 Children forget to live and anxiously wait

... Đại bác đêm đêm ru da thịt vàng
 Đại bác nghe quen như câu dạo buồn
 Trẻ con chưa lớn để thấy quê hương.

... Every night cannons sing a lullaby for
 golden skin
 The cannons sound like a prelude to a familiar
 sad song
 And children are gone before they see their
 native land

... Hàng vạn chuyển xe Claymore lựu đạn
 Hàng vạn chuyển xe mang vô thị thành
 Từng vùng thịt xương có mẹ có em.

... Thousands of trucks with Claymores and
 grenades
 Thousands of trucks enter the cities
 Carrying the remains of mothers, sisters,
 brothers.

Đại bác ru đêm, 1967

A Lullaby of Cannons for the Night (Trans. by
 Cao Thị Như-Quỳnh and John C. Schafer)

With the repetition of “every night,” “the cannons,” “thousands of bombs,” “thousands of trucks,” and when performed, his talented singer Khánh Ly faded out the scenarios, the song delivered powerful messages about the war. He even decribed in detail “claymores” - the only foreign word in all of his songs⁸⁵⁸ – to illustrate the reality of the American war in Vietnam. *A Lullaby of Cannons for the Night*, among many other Trịnh Công Sơn’s songs, served as direct reports on the war and demands for peace, and

⁸⁵⁸ Yoshi Michiko. “Những ca khúc Phản Chiến của Trịnh Công Sơn” [“The Anti-War Songs of Trịnh Công Sơn”]. Original in French, Vietnamese Trans. Diss. Paris 7 University, 1991, 18.

strongly moved the listeners.⁸⁵⁹ One of the young artists in Huế at the time, Bửu Chỉ, admitted, “[h]onestly, it was Trịnh Công Sơn’s antiwar songs in the first few years awakened my awareness of nationalism (...). But later on I keep singing his antiwar songs, since they bring me the feelings of ‘coolness,’ [sự mát mẻ] when I could not continuously stand the violent tensions.”⁸⁶⁰ The RVN government in Saigon later banned his songs as they realized the immense invisible power Trịnh Công Sơn’s songs and performances that persuaded many soldiers of the Army of Republic of Vietnam to evade draft or desert.

Trịnh Công Sơn’s antiwar songs, instead of illogical, metaphysical, philosophical lyrics like in any other types of his songs, conveyed clear images and stories of the Vietnamese people, from mothers, brothers, childrens, to corpses, weapons, and actual battles. The great success of these antiwar songs, according to Yoshi Michiko, most importantly was because Trịnh Công Sơn was able to raise the voice of the war generation as he detailed the daily life of the people living through the prolonged war.⁸⁶¹ He did that without any political intention, but with the wholehearted honesty of a responsible citizen.⁸⁶² The escalation of the war provoked Trịnh Công Sơn to write antiwar songs, to dream for peace, as a means to face the inhumanity and cruelty of the war and express a non-acceptance of the war. Together with his friends like artist Bửu Chỉ, writer Hoàng Phủ Ngọc Tường, poet Ngô Kha, they composed and painted the

⁸⁵⁹ Nguyễn Văn Mỹ and his wife, interview by author, Los Angeles, CA, November 27, 2015.

⁸⁶⁰ Bửu Chỉ, *Về Trịnh Công Sơn và Những Ca Khúc Phản chiến của anh* (Trịnh Công Sơn and His Antiwar Songs). *Trịnh Công Sơn: Cuộc đời, âm nhạc, thơ, hội họa, suy tưởng* (Trịnh Công Sơn: Life, Music, Poetry, Painting, Reflections), ed. Trịnh Cung and Nguyễn Quốc Thái. (Hồ Chí Minh City: Văn Nghệ Press, 2001), 23.

⁸⁶¹ Michiko, “Những ca khúc Phản Chiến của Trịnh Công Sơn” [“The Anti-War Songs of Trịnh Công Sơn”], 14.

⁸⁶² Bửu Chỉ. “Về Những Ca khúc Phản Chiến của Trịnh Công Sơn” [“About the Anti-War Songs of Trịnh Công Sơn”] <http://www.trinh-cong-son.com/buuchi.html> (Accessed March 26, 2017).

antiwar artwork. They dodged the draft (Trịnh Công Sơn), spent time in prison for anti-regime activities (Bửu Chí), joined the NLF (Hoàng Phủ Ngọc Tường) to show their antiwar, anti-government views in the 1960s.

Chapter 7

Just Another Happy New Year...

The government suppression in June 1966 in Huế in fact failed to decimate the struggle movement. The dissident elements kept the city in turmoil in the following year, though on a smaller scale. The people returned to government offices, schools, cinemas, sports facilities, markets, and so forth as in the pre-struggle-movement period with complex nuances and attitudes. After so much chaos and turmoil, life still moved on, the residents once again adjusted to the changing life in the aftermath of the struggle movement with different emotions, thoughts, concerns for their own future and that of their family and the nation.



Special lottery ticket of Tết Festival in 1967. Source: Family collection of Nguyễn Thành.

The year of 1967 in Huế witnessed remarkable changes in different fields which signaled further transformations in the RVN and the war in the following years. In this pivotal year of the Vietnam War in the early phase of the big battle era, in spite of no hot

battles within the town, the war increasingly affected the daily life of the people. Politically speaking, 1967 was the most settled year with the leaders in Sài Gòn trying to stabilize the situation for the ultimate anti-communist war. The US's massive intervention of open-ended increase in ground troops, bombing campaigns in northern Vietnam, added more complexity to the Vietnamese political developments on the national level. After the election for a constituent assembly in September 11, 1966, with the new constitution of the RVN approved on March 18, 1967, the National Assembly elections succeeded by the inauguration of the second Republic of Vietnam at the end of October 1967. During the election period, the people of Huế saw along the streets banners supporting different political parties, presidential candidates, and national assembly representatives. Mass meetings, parades, and music performances were organized to demonstrate the people's opposition to communism (March 11, 1967), to welcome the new constitution (April 1, 1967) and the National Day (November 1, 1967).⁸⁶³

After suppression by the Sài Gòn government in June 1966, the skepticism, uncertainty, frustration, futility, ambivalence covered the city more evidently than ever. Experiences of four years of struggle taught the locals the invaluable survival strategy to live in between various groups of city residents of different political standpoints. The Buddhists – students trust, which had created the power bringing crowds into the streets in the past now shattered. Some students blamed the monks for having pushed for too much and the Buddhist leaders without the students' supports disabled to direct the mob on the large scale. The “current situation” column of the city reports now covered a

⁸⁶³ *Monthly Reports of the City of Huế in 1966*, TTPH, ACH, no. 267; *Monthly Reports of the Town of Huế in 1967*, TTPH, ACH, no. 270.

“special emergency situation” because the Buddhist groups and some active students were abused by the political opportunists to provoke social unrest and destroy the republican regime.⁸⁶⁴

At the end of August, early September, lingering into the end of October 1967, the Buddhists in Huế again organized demonstration, mass prayers, hung up banners at pagodas, distributed leaflets around the city to show their opposition to the decree 23/67 of Nguyễn Văn Thiệu’s government upon the division among Buddhist leaders. A group of 150 monks and nuns gathered at Diệu Đế pagoda at 9 a.m. on September 28 to march to the Provincial Headquarters to deliver their letter with one banner “Down with the Unconstitutional Decree 23/67 of General Thiệu.” The demonstration was not even able to reach the end of the street in front of the pagoda as they were stopped by the police. A government official was then sent to meet with the Buddhist representatives to receive their requests. The monks went home about 9:25 a.m.⁸⁶⁵ Meanwhile another 3000 monks and supporters attended a meeting at Từ Đàm pagoda to express their opposition to the election and the Buddhist leaders in Sài Gòn.⁸⁶⁶

However, the government was not that successful handling the increasing operation of the NLF inside and outside the city. “I have been here for five years, and the situation has never been this bad,” a university student explained to Lee Lescaze of the Washington Post Foreign Service on April 27, 1967 on the demonstrations that eliminated government control of the city “That was the people. Now it is the

⁸⁶⁴ *Monthly Reports of the Town of Huế in 1967*, TTPH, ACH, no. 270.

⁸⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶⁶ Ngô Kha, et. al. *Những sự kiện lịch sử trong phong trào đấu tranh đô thị của thanh niên, sinh viên, học sinh Huế, 1954 – 1975* [*Historical Events in the Urban Protest Movement of Youth, Students, and Pupils of Huế, 1945 – 1975*], 52.

Vietcong.”⁸⁶⁷ In 1967 the NLF immensely increased their activities in the outskirts of Huế; many more violent skirmishes occurred every day. The continuous presence of the NLF in the countryside forced many RVN local government officials of the rural districts to sleep over in their relatives’ houses in Huế, and only returned to their villages early in the morning. Increasing insecurity worried the American community as well. American civilians no longer slept alone in their homes in Huế. At least two men stayed in each house and kept guns and grenades near their beds.⁸⁶⁸ Many more war victims were sent to the National Hospital, many more vehicles carrying coffins covered by national flags running through the city, and the sound of whirling helicopters, bombs, cannons, and all kinds of guns resounded in the town night after night, all aggravated the wearing concerns of the city people. At some point they could also witness artilleries in the town at night.

By 1967, the NLF had developed a secret network of sympathizers within the city. Among the students matured from continuous demonstrations and strikes, many found similarities between their determination to change the situation and fight for independence and democracy for the nation and the missions of the NLF with which they had been familiar via Hà Nội radio, secret newspapers, leaflets, and discussions with friends. Hồ Tấn Phan, whose father and grandfather had been killed during the previous resistance against the French, whose house was burned three times, grew up to become a fine high school teacher with a strong nationalist spirit. He actively engaged in the anti-government, anti-American demonstrations because “[the situation] was unacceptable,

⁸⁶⁷ Lee Lescaze, “Hue Is Fearful Of VC Attack” *The Washington Post, Times Herald (1959 – 1973)*, April 28, 1967.

⁸⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

we must change it to gain independence.”⁸⁶⁹ About 1965, he was hanging out with friends with the similar goals and interests and started to become one of the liaisons in the NLF urban network in Huế.

Like Hồ Tấn Phan, many city residents were contacted by the NLF, expanded their secret network to collect information, investigate the operations of the Americans and government, purchase and send necessary supplies to their “brothers” in the mountains. The network with many members of students, teachers, vendors, shopkeepers, etc. played a crucial role in the political and military theater in Huế since then. Occasionally there were students at the university who disappeared for three or four days at a time. “While they are gone we hear reports of a VC raid. When they return they explain perhaps that their uncle has been sick,”⁸⁷⁰ a student said to *The Washington Post*. Each of them worked secretly and independently, only knowing several people with direct contacts. During these effervescent days, Tô Nhuận Vỹ, an NLF reporter who was in charge of the urban network in Huế, met his future wife, a Đồng Khánh student and a active liaison of the NLF force. They started to compose poems about their love to share difficulties and sympathies besides exchanging intelligence information.⁸⁷¹

It was in 1967 that the local NLF force in the mountainous and rural areas outside of the city of Huế started to direct their resistance against American invasion toward the urban areas. They decided that it was time to approach and attack the town of Huế on a small scale, instead of just dropping leaflets or firing artillery into the town. Thanks to the

⁸⁶⁹ Hồ Tấn Phan, interview.

⁸⁷⁰ Lee Lescaze, “Hue Is Fearful Of VC Attack.”

⁸⁷¹ In Tô Nhuận Vỹ’s three volumn novel *Dòng sông phẳng lặng* [*The Quiet River*] about the NLF activities in Huế in the late 1960s, the main character was name after his wife, Cúc. The novel immediately became very popular right after its first print in 1974 (it was read on Hà Nội radio for days, and made into films). Tô Nhuận Vỹ, interview.

urban network for providing maps, supplies, and information, they sent their best soldiers to cross the Hương river to attack Hương Giang hotel, which was reportedly “one of the entertainment centers of the Americans and the lackeys of the puppet regime.” One Saturday night at the end of May 1967, the hotel on Lê Lợi road on the bank of the Hương river was destroyed by B-40 rockets and artillery shells of the PLAF.⁸⁷² This raid certainly increased the fear already created by nearby attacks, threatening leaflets, and rumors around the city. Daily concerns of the people of Huế now added much more anxieties that potential raids could happen anytime, anywhere in their city. The war appeared to be closer to the people than in the past years.

In parallel with more people from the countryside moving to the city to escape daily gunfire, wealthy families left Huế for Sài Gòn or Đà Nẵng. Many people from high ranking government officials to soldiers prepared to leave their beloved native city.⁸⁷³ Rumors were spread citywide about raids, killing, American responses, the government’s ability and willingness to defend their land. Given the fact that American authorities had moved to Đà Nẵng, it was believed that perhaps one day Huế would suddenly become the front line of the conflict. As one rumor went, the RVN government and the Americans would give two provinces Quảng Trị and Thừa Thiên immediately south of the DMZ to the DRVN as part of a deal. This rumor appeared to have existed since 1963, and because people had heard it many times, it did not “carry much weight anymore.”⁸⁷⁴ The locals had learned to live with the ominous images, sounds, smells of the war in the town.

For months toward the end of 1967, the NLF network in Huế was getting busier

⁸⁷² Nguyễn Quang Hà, *Lửa kinh thành [Fire in the Citadel]*. (Hà Nội: Quân Đội Nhân Dân Press, 2005).

⁸⁷³ *Evaluation on the Political and Economic Situation in Thừa Thiên Province from May 1 to May 15, 1967*, SRPO, NAC, no. 29.

⁸⁷⁴ Lee Lescaze, “Hue Is Fearful Of VC Attack.”

than ever. Some time in December, about 300 university and high school students were secretly warned to prepare for an “upcoming struggle” in Huế.⁸⁷⁵ Many members of the network might have had the premonition that something different was going to occur soon via increasing requests for information and supplies. Hồ Tấn Phan was asked to collect information of numbers, locations, sizes of pharmacies and rice storages in the town. He also bought rice, medicine, radios, and other supplies to send to his fellows in the mountains,⁸⁷⁶ who daily viewed Huế from far, imagining the Hương river, feeling nostalgic for their family, neighborhood, and the friends still going to school. This fostered their endeavors to come back to liberate their hometown one day.⁸⁷⁷

The local government of Huế was surely aware of the increasing activities of the NLF and put every effort into keeping the order and soothing their people’s opinion on the situation. They reinforced the security force while the Americans enhanced their support to the city. The political stability in the whole year plus the massive and increasing supplies and firm support of the ally certainly helped the local government to earn more trust of the people in the anticommunist war. They tried to convince the people that it was just the problem with time on their side to win.⁸⁷⁸

* * *

It was the end of the year of 1967. The people of Huế put all anxieties and concerns aside, temporarily disregarded the ominous war and difficult life, American or Communist threats. Everyone was preparing for another Tết festival to welcome the year

⁸⁷⁵ Ngô Kha, et. al. *Những sự kiện lịch sử trong phong trào đấu tranh đô thị của thanh niên, sinh viên, học sinh Huế, 1954 – 1975* [Historical Events in the Urban Protest Movement of Youth and Students of Huế, 1945 – 1975], 52.

⁸⁷⁶ Hồ Tấn Phan, interview.

⁸⁷⁷ Nguyễn Quang Hà et al. *Huế Những ngày nổi dậy* [Huế – The Upheaval Days]. (Hà Nội: New Publication Press, 1979).

⁸⁷⁸ *Evaluation on the Political and Economic Situation in Thừa Thiên Province from May 1 to May 15, 1967*, SRPO, NAC, no. 29.

of the Monkey, observed on January 30, 1968.

Due to the increasing cost of living, many households in Huế partially restricted their consumption for Tết, yet still put every effort to enjoy the Tết holiday with their family the best they could. As usual all markets became much busier during the last month of the lunar year. Sticky rice, mung beans, banana leaves for traditional cakes, sugar for dried fruits, fabric for new clothes, and flowers for the house brought a festive atmosphere to the town. The people happily expected to welcome family members, visitors, and friends and planned for family reunion meals, visits to ancestors' graves, pagodas, churches, as well as to relatives, friends, and scenic destinations. Children of Huế returning home brought specialties from other places to contribute to the reunion meals or to decorate the house. The airport, train station, and bus stations in Huế in the last days of the old year were crowded all day long with happy passengers returning home for Tết.

Among these hurried passengers, Trần Thị Thu Vân (writer Nhã Ca) left her husband and children in Sài Gòn and returned home to mourn her beloved father whose funeral took place on the last day of the year January 29, 1968 (the 30th of the 12th lunar month).⁸⁷⁹ During the funeral and death ceremony, Trần Thị Thu Vân's family members tied a white crepe mourning band around their head. As tradition went they must stay home to avoid spreading the bad luck to other families in the new year. The days Trần Thị Thu Vân's family was busy with the funeral were seemingly quieter for Huế as people did not hear much of the sounds of cannons, artilleries, and rifles from far resounding into the town as frequently as the previous weeks. They were observing the usual informal ceasefires during Tết.

⁸⁷⁹ Trần Thị Thu Vân, interview.



Trần Thị Thu Vân – Writer Nhã Ca during Tết 1968. Source: Family collection of Trần Thị Thu Vân.

At the end of 1967, the DRVN, NLF, RVN respectively announced their suspension of military attacks against each other during Tết. Via the “liberation radio” which was very popular to the listeners in Huế, the NLF declared on November 17, 1967 to cease fire for seven days from 00:00 January 27 to 00:00 February 03, 1968 while

“at the same time constantly heighten their vigilance, sharpen their fighting spirit, (...) stand ready to shatter all schemes of the US imperialists and their henchmen to commit acts of sabotage and provocation, or to take advantage of the Front’s order, help and create all facilities for the soldiers and personnel of the Sài Gòn puppet administration to return to their families and enjoy the Tết and spring festival.”⁸⁸⁰

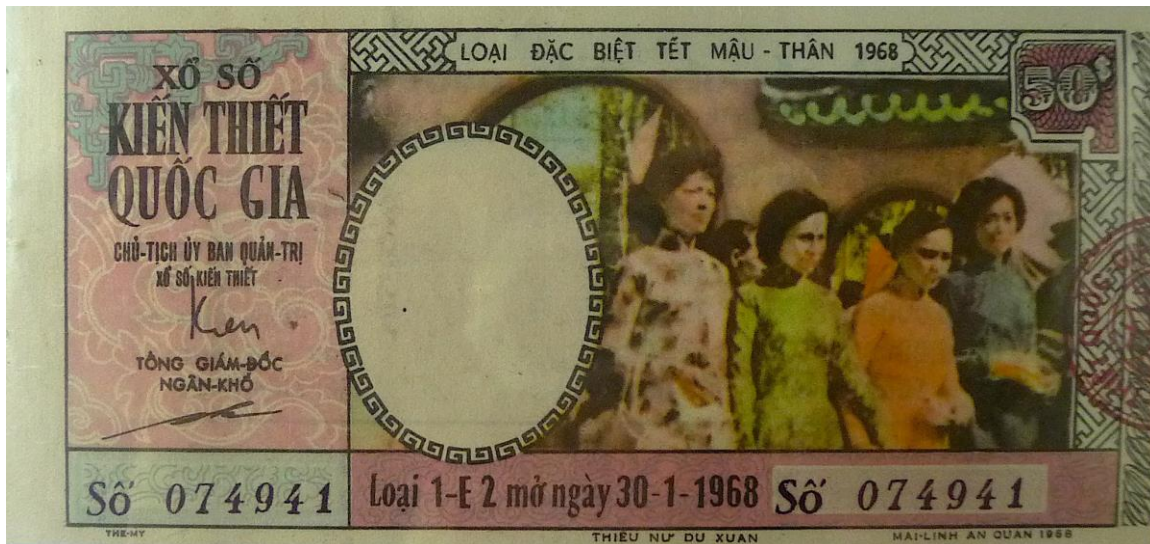
⁸⁸⁰ NFLSV Statement On Truce For Holidays" Hanoi VNA International Service, 20 November 1967, Folder 01, Box 10, Douglas Pike Collection: Unit 02 - Military Operations, The Vietnam Center and Archive, Texas Tech University.

The Sài Gòn government on December 16, 1967 only allowed 48 ceasefire hours starting January 30 to February 1, 1968, while the Americans, alerted by their intelligence information about the NLF operation, and because Tết was never a holiday for the American soldiers, wanted to cancel the truce in the I Corps Tactical Zone, particularly in the two provinces of Quảng Trị and Thừa Thiên. The termination of ceasefire of the US force and ARVN in the I Corps Tactical Zone was in effect since late afternoon of January 29, 1968.

Probably not all the people of Huế paid much attention to the changes of ceasefire hours. With 50% military personnel of the RVN off duty, many families of Huế welcomed their sons, brothers, nephews home to enjoy Tết. There had been warnings for the American inhabitants in the town of Huế that the PAVN might attack at Tết, but everyone apparently assumed that it would be the usual kind of attack – a small force of the PLAF coming in the middle of the night and withdrawing before the sunrise. The three young female IVS members in Huế, one of whom had replaced Marybeth Clark in September 1967, believed so too. Two of them went to Sài Gòn for Tết, the woman staying in Huế, Sandra, opened their house to a friend of hers – a Quaker doctor in Quảng Ngãi – to participate in many Tết season activities and to exchange all the proper greetings and visits with the Vietnamese friends. Both of them had been in Vietnam for only about five months, eagerly discovering for their first time the most important festival of the year for the Vietnamese.⁸⁸¹

<http://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=2131001044> (accessed March 26, 2017).

⁸⁸¹ Marybeth Clark, *Debrief of an AID Secretary in Saigon and IVS Teachers in Hue, Vietnam, 1961 – 1967*, 49-50.



Special lottery ticket of Tết Festival in 1968. Source: Family collection of Nguyễn Thành.

The lunar New Year's Eve of Tết of the Monkey 1968 eventually arrived after all the preparations and expectations in eagerness and happiness. Some people might have turned on their radio to wait to listen to the usual “Spring poem” of Hồ Chí Minh via the Hà Nội radio. The people of Huế celebrated another Tết with traditional cakes, flowers, incense on ancestors’ altar, wishes for longevity for the elderly, and lucky money for the children. The first day of the new year January 30, 1968 passed by with family meals, visits to relatives, neighbors, friends, pagodas, churches, and temples, followed by many kinds of entertainment for both adults and children, such as various types of card games, some of which were originally from the royal family, and therefore very specific to the Huế area, like Đò xăm hường (cards symbolizing highranking mandarins in courts) or Chinese original Mahjong, Mạt chược. Vietnamese people, old or young, rich or poor, believed what happened during the first day of the new year could indicate and shape the whole year’s luck, so they always tried to stay happy, smile, and think of the best on the first day of the lunar new year. Conversations over meals, visits, and games looked

forward to a happier new year.

In the evening of the first day of the new year January 30, 1968, Hồ Tấn Phan, an NLF liason, had a meeting at Nguyễn Đoá's house, an important figure of the urban NLF network. Not until really late that night, at about 11 p.m. did he go home, while many city inhabitants were already sleeping. In his room full of books in Gia Hội area, the teacher Hồ Tấn Phan did not immediately go to bed, but turned on his radio to listen to news.⁸⁸² He was waiting for what he knew would happen to his city very shortly after midnight of the first day of the year of the Monkey, January 31, 1968...

⁸⁸² Hồ Tấn Phan, interview.

Epilogue

On January 31, 1968, from 12 a.m. to 2:30 a.m., a massive wave of PAVN arrived at multiple venues just outside of Huế. At about 2:30 a.m. fire started pouring into the town. Trần Thị Thu Vân woke up in her family's ancestor-worshipping house, with her mother, brothers, and nieces, and her father's new altar still full of incenses and candles. "I do not know when was the first gunfire? In the middle of the night I was suddenly awake with explosions shredding my fragmentary dream. As soon as I rolled off of the wooden plank bed, my ears were ringing with the sounds of guns firing from all directions. What was this?"⁸⁸³

Sandra, the IVS teacher, woke up her doctor friend who shrugged and went back to sleep being accustomed to shelling and fighting in Quảng Ngãi province. But the heavy firing was closer and more intense, and the two women got into the bunker in the house.⁸⁸⁴ Some ARVN soldiers visiting home were able to recognize the nearby explosions and fire of the B-40 rockets, AK-47 automatic rifles, and distant sounds of cannons of the PAVN overwhelming M60 machine guns or M16 rifles of the ARVN. Everywhere in Huế gunfire sounded so close, as if right in front of the street or in the backyard of each house. The people of Huế, after the first moments of surprise, realized what was happening in their city. Many people of Huế quickly understood that it was different from previous attacks as they could hear more clearly some broken conversations of the gunfighters in between intense gun shots: the Northern dialect.

It was the first scene of the Tết Offensive 1968 in Huế.

⁸⁸³ Nhã Ca, *Giải Khăn Sô cho Huế* [*The Mourning Headband for Hue*]. Viet Bao Daily News Inc., 2008, p.31. Translation was partially from *The Mourning Headband for Hue*, trans. by Olga Dror. Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2014, p. 11.

⁸⁸⁴ Marybeth Clark, *Debrief of an AID Secretary in Saigon and IVS Teachers in Hue, Vietnam, 1961 – 1967*, 50.

By the second day of the lunar new year, Huế had immediately become the hot battlefield of the Vietnam War, and in fact endured the longest and bloodiest battle of the Tết Offensive of the PAVN and PLAF into all urban areas under the control of the RVN. In the next 26 days, the PAVN, PLAF, ARVN, and the US Marine Corps experienced one of the most deadly battles of the Vietnam War right in the small town of Huế. Since the first morning the communists “liberated” Huế, they started to take control of the town and formed their provisional government. Lê Văn Hảo, Hoàng Phủ Ngọc Tường, Nguyễn Đắc Xuân, and many others who had disappeared after the struggle movement in 1966 now left the mountains to return to Huế to take charge of their beloved hometown. After about one week of total control, the communist force gradually lost their liberated zone and eventually withdrew back to the mountains at the end of February.

Trần Thị Thu Vân, Trịnh Công Sơn, as well as tens of thousands of other people of Huế, instead of enjoying a happy Tết festival, went through horrible journeys to save their lives. They experienced and witnessed so many haunting and dreadful scenes of death, mass killing, shooting, and destruction during and after Tết. The entire city was shaking, the people shocked with the catastrophic scenes in front of their eyes. So many tragic deaths of their family members, friends, neighbors, and acquaintances in town haunted the survivors for the rest of their lives. Writer Nhã Ca – Trần Thị Thu Vân finished her best-known novel *Giải Khăn Sô cho Huế* [*The Mourning Headband for Huế*] a year later, in her words, in order to light candles and burn incense to contribute to the death anniversary of her city. Composer Trịnh Công Sơn wrote *Bài ca dành cho những xác người* (*A Song Dedicated to all the Corpses*, 1968), among many others, to mourn his people.

Xác người nằm trôi sông, phơi trên ruộng đồng	Corpses float on the water, dry in the fields
Trên nóc nhà thành phố, trên những đường quanh co	On the city rooftops, on the winding streets
Xác người nằm bơ vơ, dưới mái hiên chùa	Corpses lie abandoned under the eaves of the pagoda
Trong giáo đường thành phố, trên thềm nhà hoang vu	On the road to the city churches, on the floors of deserted houses
Xác người nằm quanh đây, trong mưa lạnh này	Corpses lie around here, in the cold rain
Bên xác người già yếu, có xác còn thơ ngây	Next to corpses of the old and weak, lie corpses of the young and innocent
Xác nào là em tôi, dưới hố hầm này	Which one of these corpses is my brother, in the bomb craters and the trenches?
Trong những vùng lửa cháy, bên những vòng ngô khoai	In each burnt area, by the corn and sweet potato fields?

(Translated by Tran Duy Tinh)

Besides thousands of unspeakably horrific stories about Tết, there was a very rare, lucky case of the early teenage girl Trần Thị Minh Hương who slept over at her friend's house the first night of Tết and was later told by some ARVN soldiers to immediately evacuate to the Kiếu Mẫu high school. "I was really young, and did not understand what was going on. Everyone was fearful of gunfire, but we children felt happy to unexpectedly have a chance to stay together in the same place."⁸⁸⁵ Thanks to an abundant supply of food prepared for Tết, the people of Huế were able to survive through 26 days of gunfire in temporary evacuation stations at the College of Education, Kiếu Mẫu high school, or Phủ Cam Cathedral.

The IVS teacher Sandra and her doctor friend from Quảng Ngãi subsisted for a day or two on water from a bottle of boiled tooth brushing water and dried sweet potatoes that had been brought as a Tết present by a Vietnamese friend. Staying in their house with a PLAF gun

⁸⁸⁵ Trần Minh Hương, interview by author, Brussels, Belgium, January 10, 2016.

emplacement in their yard, they eventually had to open their door for the communists to come in and search. Their limited Vietnamese language skills enabled them to communicate with the communist soldiers who answered the women that one of them was from the North and one from Thừa Thiên province. The communist force then took the women away into the mountains, together with other prisoners (both Americans and Vietnamese). They were well treated, provided with enough food and better medicine than what they asked for, but were not released until April.⁸⁸⁶

There have never been reliable figures on the casualties over the Tết Offensive in Huế, even 50 years later. Various sources from alternative sides declare very different numbers that this research has no intention to analyze in detail. Listed here is only one of the sources on the physical and visible damages of Huế, nothing compared with the immense physical and psychological wounds of the community. According to the minutes of the provincial head and city mayor devolution from Phan Văn Khoa to Lê Văn Thân on March 14, 1968, and the series of chronicles of Nguyễn Ngọc of *Vietnam News Agency*, there were approximately 3,500 deaths, 1,200 corpses were found in over 20 mass graves, 1,800 wounded victims of Communists, at least 1,000 people missing; 46,000 homeless people; 115,000 people among the 160,000 population were in need of aid; 1,132 of 1,445 prisoners in the central jail [Trung Tâm Cải Huấn Thừa Thiên] were killed or released by the communists. Material loss was estimated about 372 millions VND. The savage house-to-house fighting quickly devastated 7,600 houses and up to 95% of numerous public buildings including the Provincial Headquarters premises, the central post office, national bank branch, Agricultural development bank, University of Huế, many primary and high schools, etc. Salvos of artillery, mortar, and bombs turned churches, pagodas, shrines into heaps of crushed bricks and tiles. All the city documentation including

⁸⁸⁶ Marybeth Clark, *Debrief of an AID Secretary in Saigon and IVS Teachers in Hue, Vietnam, 1961 – 1967*, 50.

administrative papers, reports, permits, family and individual records, and so forth were missing, destroyed or muddled. Water and power plants were almost completely demolished, many power lines and poles had fallen and broken. A large number of roads, bridges, and ditches were irreparably damaged, and innumerable vehicles were burned. The great pride of the imperial city – the old historic citadel and its Forbidden City – was destroyed. The iconic Trường Tiền bridge was broken into two, becoming the forever unhealable wound of Huế and its people.⁸⁸⁷



Left: The PLAF was attacking the Noontime Gate of the Citadel. Source:

http://www.vietlist.us/Images_History4/VCTanCongHue.jpg

Right: The Trường Tiền bridge after the Tết Offensive as seen from a helicopter. Source:

<http://picssr.com/tags/cautruongtien/page2> (Accessed March 26, 2017).

Similarly, there have been never ending controversies and heated debates in the past fifty years over various issues of this extremely significant event of 1968. Inside and outside of Vietnam, Vietnamese and American Tết participants, witnesses, military professionals, historians, journalists, writers, etc. have argued over the plans, the truce, the mass killing, the butchers, the legacy of the battle in Huế, to name a few. The “Việt Cộng” was blamed for the brutal carnage, the ARVN for the irresponsible preparation before Tết, and the American troops for the wanton destruction of the city. Some individuals who are still alive have been denounced

⁸⁸⁷ *Documentation on Power Transfer of the Provincial Heads and City Mayors of Thừa Thiên Province and the Town of Huế in 1965 – 1974*, SRPO, NAC, no. 9614; *Newsletters of Vietnam News Agency on Activities in Huế in 1969*, SRPO, NAC, no. 3423.

by some people as inhuman butchers and at the same time defended by others. To make it more complicated, they themselves made inconsistent justifications in the past decades. The complexity of the subject, the lack of source materials, and sensitive political atmosphere in the post-war country resulted in many unanswered questions of the 1968 Tết Offensive in Huế – the turning point in the history of the Vietnam War as well as the local history of the city of Huế.

And on the ground of the city of Huế after Tết in 1968, surely not as happily as expected, life went on...

Afterword

Huế's influence on Vietnamese history definitely went beyond the shadow of a former imperial capital even after the royal court of the Nguyễn Dynasty had ceased to play any significant role in the national political destiny. Besides its famous royal architecture of the citadel and Emperors' tombs, Huế was renowned for its intellectual, educational, and cultural features that developed over its hundred-year history as the nation's seat of power. With its royal characteristics Huế became the unique urban milieu in Vietnam up to the present days. Traditions, cultural heritages, and spiritual life remained permanent in Huế in the period of 1957 – 1967, now adding American products and lifestyle.

In parallel with the “nation-building” process throughout the first republic of the RVN, Huế increasingly urbanized itself to serve its growing population thanks to the vast development of the University of Huế. The city might look pastoral, life appeared simple but happy, Huế in 1957 – 1967 remained a peaceful and beautiful place and time in its people's memories, often compared to their beloved quiet Hương River. The Buddhist mobilization in 1963 however changed all aspects of city life. In the eyes of the locals, the tranquil city that they had known, with its Citadel and Forbidden Purple City, the royal tombs, centuries-old pagodas in juxtaposition with modern French-style architecture along the Hương River, now looked more violent and restive. The closed, modest inhabitants of the city were exposed to a wide range of experiences by witnessing and participating in protests, hunger strikes, and self-immolations against the RVN government.

The succession of short-lived governments in Sài Gòn between the fall of Ngô Đình Diệm and the rise of Nguyễn Văn Thiệu had done little to develop any strong feeling of allegiance in Huế. The struggle movement of dissent turned Huế into a complex and formidable

locus of radical political activity. The people of Hué gained their power again as active participants in the national political theater, which became crucial to their political orientation and chosen path in the near future as war and violence escalated. Even though some people were well aware of the national issues and the war in the nearby provinces, or elsewhere in their country, most had not experienced first-hand the hardship of living between two military lines of fire, or struggling to find suitable strategies for survival for their family. The war before 1968 had remained somewhat distant from Hué's doorsteps.

Besides the momentous events in 1963–1966, local residents still lived through the decade of 1957–1967 in periods of day-by-day normalcy. Students were still going to school day after day, shop vendors were earning their living at the markets or along the streets, and housewives were staying at home sewing and cooking for their husbands and children. Lifestyles long taken for granted were suddenly overturned, new and unprecedented attitudes emerged, self-awareness and familial relationships were redefined, and new bonds across divergent social classes were formed, all of these assaulting traditional customs and prevailing social hierarchies. The turbulent hidden currents now roiled the quiet river, turning it into a dangerous river in the flood season.

While another happy new year of the Monkey was welcomed in the city, the Têt Offensive with its dreadful casualties and destruction turned everything upside down. After Têt, the survivors of Hué returned to their offices, schools, markets with a white band over their head, mourning for their family members and their city. To the generation of the 1960s of Hué, Têt 1968, similar to the Fall of the Capital Day of 1885, will never be forgotten as almost every family in the city has death anniversaries on the Têt occasion with no exact date, no graves or only fake ones if dead bodies were not found or identified in mass graves. The tranquil city of

the late 1950s, the Buddhist mobilization city of 1963, the dissident city of 1966, and the city of students in white long dresses, of the imperial past, now became a city of ghosts in 1968.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

Infrastructure in Thành Nội District in 1957 - 1962: Roads needed to be maintained.

	Streets	1957	Jul 1958	Feb - Mar 1959	Oct - Dec 1959	Mar 1960	Sep 1960 (*)	Jan 1961 (*)	1962
1.	Ngô Sĩ Liên	X	X	X	X	X		1/2	
2.	Ông Ích Khiêm	X	X	X	X	X	X, 1/2	X	X
3.	Trần Quý Cáp	X	X	X	X	X	X	1/2	
4.	Lê Văn Hưu	X	X	X	X	X	fixed	X	X
5.	Ngô Đức Kế	X		X	X	X	x	1/2	X
6.	Tăng Bạt Hổ	X		X	Preparing for maintenance				
7.	Tôn Thất Thiệp	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
8.	Lương Ngọc Quyến	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
9.	Triệu Quang Phục	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
10.	Mang Cá	X	X	X	X	X	X	x	
11.	An Hoà	X	X						
12.	Thái Phiên	X	X	X	X	X	X, fixed	1/2	
13.	Trần Nhật Duật	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
14.	Cường Để		X	X	Fixed		x	1/2	
15.	Lê Đình Đản			X	X	X	X	X	X
16.	Ngô Ký			X	X	X	X	X	X
17.	Lê Trung Định							x	X
18.	Nguyễn Biểu								X
19.	Nguyễn Hiệu								X
20.	Kiệt Cầu Đất			X	X	X	x		X
21.	Kiệt Lê Huân			X				x	
22.	Kiệt Trần Bình Trọng			X	X	X			X
23.	Kiệt Nguyễn Thiện Thuật							X	

Roads needed public light

	Streets	1957	Jul 1958	Feb - Mar 1959	Oct - Dec 1959	Mar 1960	Sep 1960 (*)	Jan 196 1 (*)	1962
	Cường Để	X			X	X	X	X	Fixed
2.	Độc Lập	X	X		X	X	X	X	
3.	Hoà Bình	X	X		X	X	X	x	
4.	Lê Trung Đình	X	X						
5.	Ông Ích Khiêm			X	X	X	X	x	
6.	Ngô Sĩ Liên			X	X	X		x	
7.	Lê Văn Hưu			X	X	X		x	
8.	Ngô Đức Kế			X	X	X		x	
9.	Tịnh Tâm			X	X	X		x	
10.	Phùng Hưng			X	X	X		x	
11.	Thái Phiên				X		X		X
12.	Tăng Bạt Hổ				X	X	X		
13.	Triệu Quang Phục				X	X	X	x	
14.	Yết Kiêu				X	X	X	x	
15.	Tôn Thất Thiệp								X
16.	Lương Ngọc Quyến						X		X
17.	Trần Bình Trọng								X
18.	Ngô Kỳ								X
19.	Lê Đình Đản								X
20.	Lương Y								X
21.	Mang Cá						X		
22.	Khu định cư						X		

(*) ½ means the roads were partially in need of being maintained. Source: *Reports of the District of Tả Ngạn and Thành Nội in 1957*, TTPH, ACH, no. 290; *Documentation of the District of Thành Nội in 1958*, TTPH, ACH, no. 809; *Documentation on Activities of the District of Thành Nội in 1959*, ACH, no. 988; *Monthly Reports of the District of Thành Nội in 1959*, TTPH, ACH, no. 240; *Documentation of the District of Thành Nội in 1960*, ACH, no. 1189; *Documentation on Activities of the District of Thành Nội in 1961*, ACH, no. 1407; *Documentation on Activities of the District of Tả Ngạn in 1962*, TTPH, ACH, no. 1652.

Appendix 2



The University of Huế on its opening ceremony in 1957. President Ngô Đình Diệm in white suit in the middle was welcome by the faculty members and students of the university.



The University of Huế's library building (once the Bank of Indochina), 1961.



The reading room in the library of the University of Huế, 1961.

Source: *Images of the University of Huế*. Collection of Illustrations, NAC, no. 1253; *Images of the Visit of the President of RVN Ngô Đình Diệm to the University of Huế*, no. 4749.