

PROCLAMATION OF VICTORY

(Bình Ngô Đại Cáo)

Translation and Annotations of
A Fifteenth Century Vietnamese Document

by

Vũ-đình Đình, Ph.D.

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Prior to the historic speech delivered at Ba Đình Square, Hanoi, on 2 September 1945 by an ascetic-looking, frail and bearded man who represented the Provisional Government of Vietnam to claim independence for the country and declare it a democratic republic,¹ few Vietnamese believed that such a daring political statement could have been possible. Even less realised that more than five hundred years earlier an equally beautiful if not more powerful proclamation was issued by King Lê Lợi (1385-1433) after his victory over the Ming² occupation forces in 1428.³ The following presentation is an attempt to bring this ancient proclamation of victory to a larger English-speaking audience. Besides the translation and annotations, the researcher also tries to place this document in its proper historical context and discusses an important question why present generations of Vietnamese gave full credit to Nguyễn Trãi, who wrote the proclamation at the king's order, while almost completely ignoring Lê Lợi as the major participating player in the issue of the proclamation.

Since 939 Vietnam and China had enjoyed a friendly relationship for several hundred years, except for a brief retaliatory incursion by the Song⁴ army into Vietnam in 1077⁵ and three unsuccessful invasions of the Mongols during the thirteenth century (1257, 1285 and 1288).⁶ Then, by middle of the fourteenth century, major developments in China occurred that affected not only Vietnam but also changed dramatically the geo-political scene of Asia. Zhu Yuan Zhang,⁷ a man of humble origin, joined the Red Turban rebels and worked his way up eventually to become their great leader. For more than fifteen years of arduous struggle against the Mongols, he chased them back to their territorial steppe, ascended the throne and gave himself the title of Hung Wu⁸ (The Brave and Powerful). Earlier, he was named by his men Prince of Wu.⁹ His prowess and determination was well known. Once established, he

¹ Stanley Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, (United States of America: Penguin Books, 1984), pp. 146-63.

² 'Ming' is Pinyin transliteration of the Chinese name [明]. Vietnamese spelling of that name is 'Minh.' From here on Chinese personal and place names will be written in Pinyin with footnotes showing corresponding Chinese characters and Vietnamese appellations. Vietnamese names will be in today's romanised form.

³ Ngô Sĩ Liên, *Đại Việt Sử Ký Toàn Thư* (The Complete History of Đại Việt) Vol. II, (Hà Nội: Nhà Xuất Bản Khoa Học Xã Hội, 1993), pp. 282-3. This is a translation of a manuscript copied from microfilm of a wood-carved print preserved at the Library of the Asian Society in Paris, France. This print is dated 1697.

⁴ Song [宋], Tống in Vietnamese

⁵ Ngô Sĩ Liên, op. cit., Vol. I, pp. 278-9.

⁶ Ibid., Vol. II, pp. 29-62.

⁷ Zhu Yuan Zhang [朱元璋] (1328-1398), Chu Nguyên Chương in Vietnamese; he was born in Anhui [安徽] (An huy) province and reigned from 1368-1398.

⁸ Hung Wu [洪武], Hồng Vũ in Vietnamese

⁹ Wu [吳], Ngô in Vietnamese; the word Ngô in Sino-Vietnamese can be understood either as the name of two states in two periods of Chinese history, the first from 495- 473 BCE and the second from 222-280 CE, or the

instituted strong administrative control, adopted a community-based self-supporting agricultural program, allowed religious and cultural activities to flourish and built a vast army and navy. Upon his death, he was given the honorific name of Ming Tai-zu,¹⁰ (Founder of the Brilliant Dynasty). Although his empire was not greater than the previous Han,¹¹ Tang,¹² Song and Yuan,¹³ he was able to hold the Mongols at bay and pacify the troubled south with frontiers bordering Vietnam or Annam as it was known at that time. The political and cultural influences generated from his and his successors' efforts extended over almost three centuries (1368-1644) and far beyond.¹⁴ When Ming Tai-zu died, a power struggle between members of the royal family ensued. The emperor's fourth son, Zhu Di¹⁵ (1360-1424), who controlled the northern region around present-day Beijing,¹⁶ was unhappy with the designated king, his nephew. A devastating civil war broke out between them and Zhu Di came out a victor, replacing the legitimate king at Nanjing¹⁷ in 1403. He named his reign Yong Le,¹⁸ which literally means everlasting happiness.

While China prospered, the erstwhile praise-worthy Trần dynasty in Vietnam saw the country enter into a state of decline politically and socially. The first six kings of the Trần dynasty had helped make the country strong and defended it successfully against repeated fierce attacks by the Mongols before Trần Dụ Tông (1335-1369) assumed the throne. In the beginning, when still under his father regency, he performed his royal obligations dutifully. But, toward the end of his reign, he led a life of debauchery, built more palaces and fancy fishponds and spent time gambling with well-to-do families in the capital. As a result, rebellions sprung up everywhere in the countryside and Champa, a small kingdom in the south, threatened the security of the capital.¹⁹ His successors, although not as excessive in conduct, were weak and indecisive. Government affairs were left in the hands of a shrewd high-ranking official by the name of Hồ Quý Ly, who was related to the kings on the maternal side. In public, he acted as if he worked on behalf of the kings, but actually he was eyeing the throne. In 1399, after a long period of political manipulation, he got rid of the regent king and a year later forced the young king to turn over the throne to him. A new dynasty, which

Chinese people as a whole. The latter meaning usually has a derogatory connotation and is often used in conjunction with the adjective 'giặc' as in 'giặc Ngô' (the marauding Chinese).

¹⁰ Ming Tai-zu [明太祖], Minh thái tổ in Vietnamese

¹¹ Han [汉], Hán in Vietnamese

¹² Tang [唐], Đường in Vietnamese

¹³ Yuan, [元], Nguyên in Vietnamese

¹⁴ Kenneth Scott Latourette, *The Chinese: Their History and Culture*, (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1965), Vol. I, pp. 225-43.

¹⁵ Zhu Di [朱棣], Chu Đệ in Vietnamese

¹⁶ Beijing [北京], Bắc kinh, in Vietnamese

¹⁷ Nanjing [南京], Nam kinh, in Vietnamese

¹⁸ Yong Le [永樂], Vĩnh Lạc, in Vietnamese; Edwin O Reischauer and John K. Fairbank, *EastAsia: The Great Tradition*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1960), Vol. I, p. 296.

¹⁹ Ngô Sĩ Liên, op. cit., pp. 127-48.

included his son Hồ Hán Thương, began but lasted for not more than six years before the Ming army captured both of them and took over the country.²⁰

At about the same time, in China, Yong Le took control of the throne from his nephew, consolidated power and decided to move the capital from Nanjing to Beijing to secure northern frontiers. As determined and energetic as his father, he built a strong army and an armada of boats of sizes never seen before. In 1405, he launched the first naval expedition under the leadership of Admiral Zheng He²¹ and six successive ones afterward to countries which lay along the rims of the China Sea, South Sea, and the Indian Ocean, such as Champa, Malacca, Indonesia and Sri Lanka to coerce them into submission by diplomacy or if necessary by force. It is believed that his armada's reach extended as far as the African coast.

Vietnam could have been the first port-of-call of Zheng He's fleet, but Emperor Yong Le already had another plan in mind. He wanted to Sinicise the country, which used to be a colony of China before it regained independence. In 1407, when the Ming Court saw the weakness of the Trần kings and under the guise of helping to restore their throne, Emperor Yong Le dispatched an army of foot soldiers and horsemen of more than half of a million in strength to invade Vietnam. This decision turned out to be the beginning of twenty years of a failed policy for China and vast destruction for Vietnam with immeasurable human sufferings.

During the first ten years under Chinese rules, remnants of the Trần dynasty rallied to fight a losing war. Others chose to work with the new rulers. Still there were capable men who, not seeing much of a chance fighting against a formidable enemy, laid low waiting for a better opportunity. Among the latter were two unknown figures, Lê Lợi and Nguyễn Trãi, who emerged in 1418 to lead a successful ten-year war for independence.

Unlike Zhu Yuan Zhang, founder of the Ming dynasty, Lê Lợi was born into a rich family of landowners in the mountainous region northeast of Thanh Hóa Province. His great-grandfather was of a pioneering type who came to a place now famously known as Lam Sơn and found it to be suitable for development. In a few years, he turned the thick forests into tillable lands that attracted many more to come. By the time Lê Lợi grew up, the area, which was previously unpopulated, had now developed into a community of more than a thousand people. Naturally, they all owed allegiance to the Lê family. Recognising their influence and in an attempt to placate a potentially dangerous element, the government appointed Lê Lợi Administrative Chief (Phụ đạo) of Khả Lam district, although he did not hold an academic title.²² According to historical records, he had a strong physique, was intelligent and well read

²⁰ Ibid., pp. 195-9.

²¹ Zheng He [鄭和], Trịnh Hòa in Vietnamese

²² Trần Nghĩa, (Trans. & Ed.), 'Lam Sơn Thực Lục' (Lam Sơn Veritable Records), in *Nguyễn Trãi Toàn Tập – Tân Biên* (Nguyễn Trãi Complete Works – New Edition), (T.P. Hồ Chí Minh: Nhà Xuất Bản Văn Học, 2000), Vol. II, pp. 315-6. The original text printed in 1676 is in classical Chinese and entitled *Trùng San Lam Sơn Thực Lục* (Revised Lam Sơn Veritable Records). This unique copy is preserved at the Hán Nôm Institute in Hà Nội and has not been assigned a catalogued number; Phan Huy Chú, *Lịch Triều Hiến Chương Loại Chí*, (Vietnam Dynastic Encyclopedia), (Hà Nội: Nhà Xuất Bản Khoa Học Xã Hội, 1992), Vol. I, p. 200. This is one of three volumes of the translated works based on various undated written manuscripts in Chinese. These manuscripts are believed to be copies from the original presented to Emperor Minh Mạng by the author in 1821.

in Confucian Classics and military strategies. When under the new rulers, Lê Lợi did not join the royal resistance movement nor did he succumb to the Chinese efforts to buy him over to their side. As time went on, the Ming colonial policies proved to be brutally harsh. Culturally, Chinese administrators were under order to turn Vietnamese into Chinese by requiring Vietnamese to learn their language, gathering Vietnamese religious and cultural books to bring them back to China or burn them, forbidding men to cut their hair short and forcing women to wear pants instead of the favored billowing skirts.²³ Seeing what had happened, Lê Lợi decided to act despite overwhelming enemy forces. With the help of those who shared with him the hatred of the colonial oppressors, he secretly built an army, whose members were recruited from among the ordinary poor peasants as well as the unruly elements that had rebelled against the Hồ regime and foreign occupants. To men of character he treated them well and humbled himself to gain their trust and loyalty. His reputation spread far not only to among his compatriots but also to the neighboring minority tribes and countries like Laos and Champa with whom he entered into friendly relationship to buy horses and elephants for transport and fighting purposes. Toward the end of 1417, news of his military build-up had reached the Chinese regional commanders at Tây Kinh and with the instigation of Lương Nhữ Hốt, a Vietnamese collaborator, a large scale attack on Lê Lợi's camp was in preparation. To deal with the pressing situation, Lê Lợi called a conference of his top aides believed to be about eighteen people at Lũng Nhai where they pledged allegiance to each other, hence 'Lời Thề Lũng Nhai' (The Oath of Lũng Nhai). They named him Prince of Pacification (Bình Định Vương Lê Lợi) to begin the insurrection for national liberation. The date was the second day of the first month of Mậu Tuất (1418).²⁴ Lê Lợi was fully aware of the odds against his forces. Yet, he was willing to face the challenge as he once said, 'Being an honourable person, one should come to the rescue of the country when it is in danger, score successes on the battlefield and leave a name to posterity rather than kowtow to serve the aliens.' (Trượng phu ở đời phải nên cứu nạn lớn, lập công to, để tiếng thơm hàng nghìn thuở, chứ đâu lại sun soe đi phục dịch cho kẻ khác.)²⁵ When the two sides met and fought for the first time the Prince's army proved itself to be a force to be reckoned with. They killed more than a thousand government soldiers and recovered a large amount of weapons. However, the second battle almost ended the movement. A traitor allowed the enemy to strike the Prince's forces from

²³ The atrocities committed in Vietnam by Chinese colonial administrators were widely documented in historical texts. Examples are: Ngô Sĩ Liên, op. cit., Vol. II, pp. 241-2; Ban Nghiênn Cứu Văn Sử Địa (Trans. & Ed.), *Việt Sử Thông Giám Cương Mục – Chính Biên*, (Vietnam Annotated Veritable Records – Official Dynasties), (Hà Nội: Nhà Xuất Bản Văn Sử Địa, 1958), Vol. VIII, p. 774; Shi-shan Henry Tsai, *Perpetual Happiness: The Ming Emperor Yong Le*, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2001), pp. 183-5.

²⁴ Lê Quý Đôn, *Đại Việt Thông Sử*, (General History of Đại Việt), (Tiền Giang: Nhà Xuất Bản Tổng Hợp Đồng Tháp, 1993), pp. 23-4. This is the edited copy by Nguyễn Khắc Thuần of the translation of the *General History of Đại Việt* by Lê Mạnh Liêu based on a hand-written copy in Chinese, which is believed to be published during the latter half part of the nineteenth century.

²⁵ Ban Nghiênn Cứu Văn Sử Địa (Trans. & Ed.), op. cit., p. 773. (This is the translation and annotations of a historical document in Chinese compiled by the History Department of the Nguyễn dynasty and printed in 1884.)

the rear. They captured his wife, his four-year-old daughter²⁶ and many family members of his troops. Demoralised, his followers left him in large numbers. Somehow, he was able to regroup and retreat to his stronghold at Chí Linh. This type of jungle warfare, attack-retreat-attack, continued for about two years before Lê Lợi attained his military superiority.²⁷ For the next eight years, he and his men must have fought a hundred battles, big and small, against the Cham, Laotian and the occupying forces²⁸ to get the Chinese finally to agree to his terms, i.e., total withdrawal of foreign troops and his appointment as king of Vietnam. On the fifteenth²⁹ of the fourth month of Mậu Thân (1428) Lê Lợi ascended the throne, named his reign Thuận Thiên (Heaven Willing), changed the name of the country from Đại Ngu to Đại Việt and gave order to Nguyễn Trãi to prepare the victory announcement for broadcast to the public.³⁰ Below is the translation and annotations of this royal document, which was written in classical Chinese.

²⁶ Women and children captured in battle were brought to Nanjing to be sold as slaves. Later efforts to locate the girl were fruitless.

²⁷ Lê Lợi was known to have employed guerilla tactics, including scorching earth. He also used in combat elephants and firearms that Chinese troops were unfamiliar with. (Albert Chan, *The Glory and Fall of the Ming Dynasty*, (U.S.A.: University of Oklahoma Press, 1982), p. 54; Shi-shan Henry Tsai, op. cit., p.180).

²⁸ Major battles were chronicled in Ngô Sĩ Liên, op. cit., pp. 240-82; Lê Quý Đôn, op. cit., pp. 22-75; Trần Nghĩa, op. cit., pp. 319-59; Quốc Sử Quán, op. cit., pp. 773-832.

²⁹ Historical records seem to agree on the coronation date as the fifteenth except for *Trùng San Lam Sơn Thực Lục*, which gives the date as fourteenth (Trần Nghĩa, op. cit., p. 349).

³⁰ There is confusion about the year of appearance of the proclamation. Historical records and literary texts indicated that Lê Lợi ordered Nguyễn Trãi to draft the victory proclamation upon his ascension to the throne in 1428. However, the editors of *Nguyễn Trãi Complete Works*, Vol. II, p.11, relied on a short statement in *The Complete History of Đại Việt*, which said that 'The king pacified the marauding Chinese, made it known to the public; the proclamation wrote ...' (Đế ký bình Ngô, đại cáo thiên hạ, cáo văn viết ...), to take the position that Nguyễn Trãi drafted the text while he was with the king at Bồ Đề Headquarters in 1427. This contention is untenable for four reasons: (1) towards the end of 1427 Lê Lợi was using Bồ Đề Headquarters as a watchtower to fight Wang Tong who was firmly entrenched in his fortress at Đông Quan; (2) on the first page of the draft, which Nguyễn Trãi submitted to Lê Lợi for preview (*Nguyễn Trãi Complete Works*, Vol. II, p. 13) the date was given as the first year of the reign Thuận Thiên (Thái Tổ Thuận Thiên Nguyên Niên), Thuận Thiên being the name the king gave to his reign upon coronation in 1428; (3) similarly, on the same page Nguyễn Trãi identified himself as Hành Khiển (Chief Administrator), a new title Lê Lợi gave to Nguyễn Trãi in 1428; (4) in the text Nguyễn Trãi cited the name Đại Việt instead of Đại Ngu or Annam, the country's name in use from 1400-1427.

PROCLAMATION OF VICTORY³¹

- 1) In the name of Heaven, I (King Lê Lợi) hold the belief that compassion and righteousness are intended to bring peace and when troops are dispatched to protect the population, their primary mission is to suppress tyranny.
- 2) As to Đại Việt,³² a country of great culture with a long tradition, its mountains and rivers are lawfully delineated.
- 3) In addition, our customs are different from those in the North.
- 4) For hundreds of years, the dynasties of Triệu, Đinh, Lý and Trần had firmly established their independence.
- 5) Like the Han, Tang, Song and Yuan of China they proudly governed their lands.
- 6) Although their strength, their weakness and ours at times differed, men of noble character in our country were never in short supply.
- 7) As a result, Liu Kung,³³ too greedy, was defeated; Zhao Jie,³⁴ too ambitious, was killed;

³¹ This title of the text is given by the researcher. Popularly, the text carries the name ‘Bình Ngô Đại Cáo’ [平吳大告] (Proclamation of the Pacification of the Marauding Chinese) that puzzled a university professor (O’Harrow, Stephen, ‘Nguyen Trai’s Binh Ngo Dai Cao of 1428: The Development of a Vietnamese National Identity’ in *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, Vol. 10, No. 1, 1979, p. 165). I believe that the title was added to the text as late as the middle part of the seventeenth century because, first of all, a royal proclamation normally did not have a title and secondly, the offending meaning of the title did not fit the political climate in 1428, when Lê Lợi and Nguyễn Trãi were still trying to persuade Emperor Xuan De to withdraw his troops and name Lê Lợi king of Vietnam. None of the history books mentioned the name ‘Bình Ngô Đại Cáo’ directly.

To translate a document written in the fifteenth century by a Vietnamese who used classical Chinese is a daunting task. It requires not only knowledge of classical Chinese but also what we called Hán-Việt (Sino-Vietnamese), or Chinese that had been Vietnamised. Lacking knowledge of classical Chinese, I relied chiefly on the efforts of those Hán-Việt scholars who had already converted this text into present-day Vietnamese. In an effort to get close to the so-called ‘original’ version, I consulted six translations by these individuals: Bùi Kỳ, Ngô Tất Tố, Mạc Bảo Thần, Đào Duy Anh, Hoàng văn Lâu and Trần Nghĩa. Into English there was only one translation by Trương Bửu Lâm (Trương Bửu Lâm ‘Nguyen Trai (1380-1442): A Great Proclamation upon the Pacification of the Wu (1428)’ in *Patterns of Vietnamese Response to Foreign Intervention: 1858-1900*, Southeast Asia Studies, Monograph Series No. 11, (Yale: Yale University, 1967), pp. 55-62.

³² Đại Việt is the name Lê Lợi gave to the country after his coronation in 1428. This name existed since 1054 under the reign of Lý Thánh Tông but was renamed Đại Ngu by Hồ Quý Ly in 1400. To China, the country was usually called Annam.

³³ Liu Kung [劉龔], Lưu Cung in Vietnamese; Liu Kung was king of Nan Han, a state south-east of China and adjacent to Vietnam, which he wanted to annex. In 938, his son led an invasion into Vietnam but was defeated at Bạch Đằng River and later killed by General Ngô Quyền who opened up a new era of independence for Vietnam after more than a thousand years of Chinese domination.

³⁴ Zhao Jie [趙濟], Triệu Tiết in Vietnamese; Zhao Jie was second in command of an invasion into Vietnam in 1076 by a Song army of more than 70,000 men. The attack was repelled and Zhao Jie was killed at the battle on Như Nguyệt River by Generalissimo Lý Thường Kiệt. It is widely believed that when confronting the Song army at Như Nguyệt River he composed a poem with these verses: ‘Southern Land is the home of Southern King;/ So was it recorded in the Heavenly Book./ Then, why did you, marauders, dare to invade our land?/ You’ll see how you will be sent home with empty hands.’ and had it read over loudspeakers to dispirit the enemy.

- 8) **Suo Du ³⁵ was captured alive at Hàm Tử Port; and Wu Ma ³⁶ died at Bạch Đằng Sea. ³⁷**
- 9) **These were irrefutable facts that were clearly recorded in history.**
- 10) **Then, the Hồ family with their corrupt policies spurred anger and resentment among the populace.**
- 11) **Taking advantage of this opportunity, a barbaric Ming army invaded and caused havoc in our country.**
- 12) **Worse even were traitors who sold out the country for their personal gain.**
- 13) **They burnt poor citizens under the flames of hell and buried newborn in caves of terror.**
- 14) **They deceived Heaven and duped our people, using all sort of guiles.**
- 15) **They started warfare, causing bitterness and ill will for two decades.**
- 16) **Without mercy and justice, they plundered the land and robbed our resources.**
- 17) **They levied heavy taxes to impoverish the whole nation.**
- 18) **Miners were led into forested mountains to sieve sand for gold, risked being infected with debilitating diseases.**
- 19) **Divers were forced to dive deep to look for pearls amidst danger of attack by sharks and alligators.**
- 20) **With forced labour, they cast nets everywhere to catch kingfishers ³⁸ and set up snares to trap black deer.**
- 21) **They spared nothing even the little creatures or grasses.**
- 22) **Nor did they leave those in distress alone.**
- 23) **They bared their teeth, opened wide their mouths to suck blood to satisfy their insatiable thirst.**
- 24) **They were building palaces after palaces that required an endless number of skilled workers and conscripts.**
- 25) **They drafted young men and women from our villages to meet their demand, leaving no one to attend to badly needed planting and weaving work.**
- 26) **So filthy were their acts that the water of the Eastern Sea was not enough to wash off the smell.**
- 27) **Bamboo of the Southern Mountain did not suffice to count their crimes.**
- 28) **Men and God felt indignant toward them!**
- 29) **Nobody from heaven or on earth would forgive them.**

³⁵ Suo Du [唆都], Toa Đô in Vietnamese

³⁶ Wu Ma [烏馬], Ô Mã in Vietnamese

³⁷ Actually, there is no such name as Bạch Đằng Sea. The author of the proclamation wanted to reflect the fact that Wu Ma was captured alive at Bạch Đằng River and later drowned at sea on the way back to China.

³⁸ In the past, Chinese cherished the metallic blue feathers of kingfishers.

- 30) I rose from the mountains of Lam Sơn to lead the struggle, hiding in the backwoods.
- 31) So angry with the enemy that I felt I could not share with them the same world.
- 32) I hated the enemy so much that I swore not to co-exist with them.
- 33) For more than ten years, I had had so much sufferings and headache.
- 34) Lying on thorns and tasting gall, I did it for not only one day.³⁹
- 35) So angry I forgot to eat.
- 36) Valuable time was devoted to digesting war strategy manuals.
- 37) Studying the past, I discovered the reasons for the rise and fall of nations.
- 38) In many sleepless nights, I dreamt of a day our nation would be saved from the cruel tyrants.
- 39) When I raised the flag of salvation, it was the time the enemy's strength was at its highest.
- 40) Unfortunately, on our side men of character were like the morning stars; and men of talent were like green leaves in autumn.
- 41) For daily chores, helping hands were in great need.
- 42) In strategy discussion, there were few able souls around to consult.
- 43) My goal at all times was to march towards the Eastern Capital.⁴⁰
- 44) Meanwhile, on my left, a chair was always available to receive a top official.⁴¹
- 45) But, the more I tried to look for the man, the more I found it to be difficult.
- 46) I alone was to carry out the mission, rushing as to save a drowning person.
- 47) I was so upset for not being able to kill the entire enemy.
- 48) Meanwhile, I was worrying about the dire situation the country was in.
- 49) For weeks, foods at Linh Sơn were running out.
- 50) Soldiers at Khôi Huyện at a time were reduced to less than five hundred.
- 51) Perhaps Heaven was testing my commitment.
- 52) Thus, the more I had to overcome the difficulties.
- 53) As brothers, people from the four corners of the nation joined me to hoist the bamboo flags.
- 54) Soldiers of all ranks like fathers and sons drank mixed drinks from river water.⁴²
- 55) When to fight with a small number against a larger one, ambush was the tactic.
- 56) When fighting with a weak force against a strong one, surprise attack was

³⁹ Lying on thorns to keep oneself awake and tasting gall to dull the taste for food are legendary ways to focus on the mission rather than waste time over sleep and eating.

⁴⁰ The Eastern Capital is present-day Hanoi.

⁴¹ Traditionally, the seat on the left side of the king is reserved for the highest-ranking official called 'Tả tướng quốc,' which means Minister of the Left.

⁴² The story goes that a Chinese general upon victory was honoured with a bottle of wine. Since there was no way for him to share the honour with his troops with only one bottle of wine he poured the wine into the river and drank water from it together with his men to show solidarity.

to be used.

57) In short, just cause always prevails over tyranny; compassion is the virtue to embrace in place of violence.

58) The battle of Bồ Đằng was like a thunderstorm full of blinding lightning.

59) The encounter at Trà Lân resembled a bamboo forest that had been slashed and put to fire.

60) Our soldiers's spirits were heightened.

61) Our military might was now earning well-deserved respect.

62) Chen Zhi ⁴³ and Shan Shou ⁴⁴ were scared out of their wits at the bad news.

63) Li An ⁴⁵ and Fang Zheng ⁴⁶ were holding their breath, hoping to escape capture.

64) Victory after victory, we followed them in pursuit to take the Western Capital.⁴⁷

65) More troops were mobilized; we recovered our beloved Eastern Capital.

66) At Ninh Kiều, blood flowed like a river, as the stench was spreading for miles.

67) At Tụy Động, dead bodies piled up in the open fields, such an infamy that will never be forgotten.

68) Chen Qia, ⁴⁸ the enemy's brains, was beheaded.

69) Li Liang, ⁴⁹ a blood-sucking mandarin, also lost his life.

70) Wang Tong, ⁵⁰ who was sent to reinforce the legion, caused the war to be more intense.

71) Ma Ying, ⁵¹ who led a rescue effort, raised our fighting spirit even higher.

72) Besieged and exhausted, they had no choice but surrendered.

73) With a superior stratagem and a humane policy, we defeated the enemy without much effort.

74) I had thought that they would change their mind and ambition.

75) Instead, they were secretly plotting further aggression, inviting death and destruction on themselves.

76) Because of the stubborn idea of one person, calamities befell on thousands of others.

⁴³ Chen Zhi [陳智], Trần Trí in Vietnamese

⁴⁴ Shan Shou [山壽], Sơn Thọ in Vietnamese

⁴⁵ Li An [李安], Lý An in Vietnamese

⁴⁶ Fang Zheng [方政], Phương Chính in Vietnamese

⁴⁷ Western Capital or Tây Kinh is the fortress Tây Nhai built by the Hồ family.

⁴⁸ Chen Qia [陳洽], Trần Hiệp in Vietnamese

⁴⁹ Li Liang [李亮], Lý Lượng in Vietnamese

⁵⁰ Wang Tong [王通], Vương Thông in Vietnamese

⁵¹ Ma Ying [馬瑛], Mã Anh in Vietnamese

77) He might have enjoyed a momentous fame, but made himself a laughing stock to the world.⁵²

78) Thus, they urged the baby Xuan De⁵³ to mobilize for war.

79) He sent two bashful generals, Mu Sheng⁵⁴ and Liu Sheng⁵⁵, to add fuel to the fire.

80) In the ninth month of Đinh Mùi (1427), Liu Sheng with his troops entered from Qiu Wen.⁵⁶

81) In the tenth month of the same year, Mu Sheng took another road to approach from Yunnan.⁵⁷

82) In anticipation of the moves, we set up defenses at critical locations to stop the advance units.

83) At the same time, troops were sent to cut off their supply lines to starve them.

84) On the eighteenth, we foiled Liu Sheng at Chi Lăng.

85) On the twentieth, he was beheaded at Mã Yên.

86) On the twenty-fifth, Lord Liang Ming⁵⁸ was killed on the battlefield.

87) On the twenty-eighth, Minister Li Qing⁵⁹ committed suicide when there was no other way to escape.

88) Having an upper hand, we struck hard at the enemy.

89) Checked at both ends, hopeless the enemy turned around to attack one another.

90) More troops arrived to surround the fortresses.

91) The Middle of October was the day of general assault.

92) Brave soldiers voluntarily lined up; talented generals were all prepared.

93) Rivers were drying when elephants scooped up water.

⁵² This statement refers to Wang Tong, who as Administrator and Commander-in-Chief of the Ming forces had wanted to surrender but changed his mind after a Vietnamese collaborator by the name Lương Nhữ Hốt reminded him of the death of Wu Ma. Legend has that Wu Ma was captured alive at Bạch Đằng River and allowed to return to China. However, because he had caused too many deaths to Vietnamese soldiers, General Trần Hưng Đạo had skilled divers accompany him on his boat trip home during which the divers at night drilled holes to the boat to sink it and kill everybody on board.

⁵³ Xuan De [宣德], Tuyên Đức in Vietnamese; the original text belittled Emperor Xuan De who reigned from 1425-1435. During this period China enjoyed a time of peace free of turmoil.

⁵⁴ Mu Sheng [木晟], Mộc Thạnh in Vietnamese

⁵⁵ Liu Sheng [柳昇], Liễu Thăng in Vietnamese; Emperor Xuan De had counted on the veteran general Liu Sheng to rescue Wang Tong as he had been to Vietnam twenty years earlier and had defeated the regent king Hồ Quý Ly and his son Hồ Hán Thương in 1407. Proud of his previous success, he led a small contingent of horsemen to chase the Vietnamese retreating forces but fell into an ambush at Chi Lăng about ten miles from the border. He was killed two days later.

⁵⁶ Qiu Wen [邱溫], Khâu Ôn in Vietnamese

⁵⁷ Yunnan [雲南], Vân Nam in Vietnamese

⁵⁸ Liang Ming [梁銘], Lương Minh in Vietnamese

⁵⁹ Li Qing [李慶], Lý Khánh in Vietnamese

- 94) Mountain stones wore off as swords were sharpened on them.
- 95) At first drum, sea-monsters disappeared; at second drum, vultures were driven off.
- 96) Little ants scattered as great dikes broke; strong winds blew off all dry leaves.
- 97) Commander Cui Ju ⁶⁰ dropped on his knees to beg for pardon.
- 98) Minister Huang Fu, ⁶¹ who himself had his hands tied, surrendered.
- 99) At Lạng Giang and Lạng Sơn, corpses were strewn all over.
- 100) At Xương Giang and Bình Than, rivers were reddened with blood.
- 101) The sky was gloomily overcast.
- 102) So saddened, the moon and sun turned dim.
- 103) The column that came by way of Yunnan was stunned when blocked at Li Hua, ⁶² the entry port.
- 104) Mu Sheng troops broke up and ran for their lives when informed of Liu Sheng being defeated at Cần Trạm.
- 105) Lãnh Cầu brook was full of blood, its water ringing the moaning of wandering souls.
- 106) At Đan Xá fortress, dead bodies piled up like mountains; its plain was covered with blood that had been darkened.
- 107) The two rescue columns were completely wiped out.
- 108) Soldiers at besieged fortresses took off their uniforms to turn themselves in.
- 109) We took rebel generals prisoners, who like hungry tigers wagged tails begging for lives.
- 110) The Mighty God did not kill, I bestowed upon them mercy.
- 111) I provided Ma Qi ⁶³ and Fang Zheng with five hundred boats, who when reaching the sea were still like in a daze.
- 112) Wang Tong and Ma Ying were given some thousand horses to repatriate and as they were leaving their hearts were still beating fast and their legs still trembling.
- 113) They coveted life and feared death, wishing for peace.
- 114) I chose to nourish our troops and permit our people to have more time to recover.
- 115) This ought to be a right and wise course of action, which was unprecedented.
- 116) From now on, our nation will be stronger and more resolute.
- 117) The citizens will see a new life of prosperity.
- 118) The affairs of a nation often go through a period of ebb and flow.

⁶⁰ Cui Ju [崔聚], Thôi Tụ in Vietnamese

⁶¹ Huang Pu [黄福], Hoàng Phúc in Vietnamese

⁶² Li Hua [梨花], Lê Hoa in Vietnamese

⁶³ Ma Qi [馬騏], Mã Kỳ in Vietnamese

- 119) **The sun and the moon naturally go dark and then shine again.**
 120) **The humiliation of a thousand years has now been redressed.**
 121) **It is now time for the nation to enjoy peace and prosperity.**
 122) **We owed this to the blessing of Heaven and our revered ancestors.**
 123) **Oh! A single sword brought success and glory.** ⁶⁴
 124) **Victory is here to celebrate for thousands of years.**
 125) **Peace prevails throughout the nation.**
 126) **Reform is hereby solemnly proclaimed to all four corners of the nation.**

Who is Nguyễn Trãi, author of this ‘Thiên Cổ Hùng Văn’ (National Epic of Millennium)? What role did he play in the war of liberation against the Ming forces? How have Vietnamese politicians, historians, teachers and students been revering him?

Nguyễn Trãi (1380-1442) came into the world unplanned and died a tragic death that Vietnamese historians and researchers are still struggling to find out the root cause of it. ⁶⁵ His father, Nguyễn Ứng Long, was a commoner, brilliant and well versed in poetry. His talent landed him a tutoring job at the home of a retired high-ranking official by the name of Trần Nguyên Đán, who served under several Trần kings during their waning days. Although a descendant of the Trần royal family, he sought alliance with Hồ Quý Ly, the usurper, through marriage in hope of protecting his off-springs. While teaching the young daughter of Trần Nguyên Đán, Nguyễn Ứng Long fell in love with her and had her pregnant against the strict Confucian tradition at the time. He ran away for fear that he might be punished. Trần Nguyên Đán was an understanding person. He saw in this likable young man a bright future and wanted to give him a second chance. He called him back and told him to study hard to pass the tough national examination if he wanted to marry his daughter, or else. He got his doctorate and was accepted into the family. Thus, Nguyễn Trãi was born and raised in a comfortable environment of his grandfather in the capital. When he was growing up his grandfather retired and moved to Côn Sơn, a favorite retirement cove of royal families. Meanwhile, Nguyễn Trãi’s father was offered a low-level position in the government, as he was not a member of the royal family despite his high academic achievement. Disappointed, he returned to his village to teach. Nguyễn Trãi’s mother died young, unfortunately. Not long afterward, his grandfather also passed away. Nguyễn Trãi had to move in to live with his father. It is during this period that Nguyễn Trãi received his formal training from his teacher-father. After Hồ Quý Ly overthrew the Trần kings, he decreed to have a national examination to select hopefuls. Nguyễn Trãi at the age of 20 sat in the exams and proudly earned his doctorate. He was appointed Court Counselor. His father now under the new name of Nguyễn Phi Khanh also accepted a position with Hồ Quý Ly.

⁶⁴ The author meant to compare Lê Lợi to Liu Bang (Lưu Bang), founder of the Han dynasty, who, although coming from a humble origin, gained the throne, with a single sword, thanks to a focussed goal, a life of strict discipline and self-denial and determination.

⁶⁵ Đỗ Đức Hiểu et al. (ed.), *Từ Điển Văn Học* (Literary Dictionary), (Hà Nội: Nhà Xuất Bản Thế Giới, 2004), pp. 1196-2000.

Nguyễn Trãi and his father did not serve long before they were captured by the occupational forces. As a common practice, high government officials were brought to Nanjing where they were either given desk jobs to keep them there or offered a title so that they could go back to work for the new administration. Not much information was available about Nguyễn Phi Khanh after he was deported to China. As to Nguyễn Trãi, legend has it that he was saved by a high official in the Ming forces who recognised his exceptional talent and allowed him to be free under surveillance in the capital. What he was doing for ten years from the time Hồ Quý Ly lost his throne to the day Lê Lợi raised the flag of salvation was not clear. Some believe that he had traveled to China to find ways to save the country as evidenced from his writings in which he described several cities he had purportedly visited. Others say that he had met Lê Lợi and was present at the Lũng Nhai pledge-of-allegiance ceremony but then left without doing anything substantial. One story that was widely supported is that in 1420, two years after Lê Lợi started the liberation movement and had moved out of his stronghold, Nguyễn Trãi came to present Lê Lợi with a 'Bình Ngô Sách' (Plan to Pacify the Marauding Chinese). No record of this plan is available and it will probably never be found. Lê Lợi greatly appreciated his proposed plan and appointed Nguyễn Trãi to a position in Han Lin Yuan (Hàn Lâm Viện). While with Lê Lợi he served effectively as Communications Director in charge of exchange of official letters between the Prince and the Chinese colonial administrators. He also acted as his advisor of military and political affairs. He is widely credited with helping Lê Lợi to win the hearts and minds of people, to apply guerilla and psy-war tactics against the enemy and to conduct subtle diplomacy to persuade the opponents to surrender rather than use forces. Upon victory, he was elevated to the rank of Minister of Interior and allowed to sit in high-level secret meetings to advise the king. Only two years after the country regained independence, troubles in court developed. Two top officials of the court who had spent all their lives fighting the war side by side Lê Lợi since the very beginning were purged. Nguyễn Trãi was also a suspect and arrested. He was later released but not given any important position. Nevertheless, he remained loyal to the king. After Lê Lợi died, he became one of those who helped educate the young king and guided him in the business of government. Since the king was young, power struggles in court were inevitable. Unable to carry out his wishes and to avoid conflict, Nguyễn Trãi retired to his estate at Côn Sơn. When the king grew up and was aware of his heavy responsibility, he recalled Nguyễn Trãi to duty to assist him.

Nguyễn Trãi had a young concubine, who was beautiful and well grounded in poetry and literature. Her name was Nguyễn Thị Lộ. When the young king learnt of her talent, he invited her to the capital and made her Director of Protocol. They quickly became friends. One day, when the king was on an inspection tour of troops near Côn Sơn, he dropped by to see Nguyễn Trãi. On the way back to the capital and with Thị Lộ accompanying him, they camped overnight at Lychee Orchard (Lê Chi Viên) where he suddenly fell ill and passed away. The king's death was kept secret until the royal procession reached the capital two days later. The court accused Thị Lộ of poisoning him and held Nguyễn Trãi responsible for regicide. By law, his entire family was therefore condemned to death. The person who

somehow escaped it was another concubine of Nguyễn Trãi, who was pregnant. She later gave birth to a son, the only remaining off-spring to carry his gene. Literary works and any writings related to Nguyễn Trãi were also ordered to be destroyed.

The death of a fighter for national liberation, a statesman, a thinker and a poet could not have been more tragic. When alive, he was constantly fighting for justice, peace and the welfare of the poor and the needy. In the end, his life was cut short, as he was alone in a world where the king was the law of the land and when power, greed and injustice were the order of the day. Although belatedly, his status and reputation were fully restored 22 years later thanks to King Lê Thánh Tông who realised that he was wrongly accused. Being a lover of poetry himself, the king asked Trần Văn Kiệm to search for the poems in Chinese that Nguyễn Trãi had produced. This collection of poems believed to be about a hundred was lost. However, writings of the nineteenth century historians indicated that the collection was still in circulation at that time. Nguyễn Trãi's intellectual legacy would have been lost forever if it was not for Dương Bá Cung, a man of letters from Nguyễn Trãi village, who loved and respected the man and his works so much that it drove him to spend more than 10 years criss-crossing the country to gather his writings. His efforts resulted in a collection entitled *Úc Trai Tập* (Úc Trai Collection, Úc Trai being Nguyễn Trãi nom de plume) that included more than 105 poems in classical Chinese, 254 rare Nôm⁶⁶ poems and even rarer 75 diplomatic and war correspondences⁶⁷ exchanged between Lê Lợi-Nguyễn Trãi and Emperor Xuan De and the colonial Chinese commanders. Dương Bá Cung did not live to see his brainchild published. Seven months after his death in 1868, his friend had the collection carved on wood, a few paper copies printed from which are now available for study. 'Bình Ngô Đại Cáo' (Proclamation of Victory) is one listed in the Chinese poetic section of this collection.⁶⁸

Lê Lợi has been a hero to generations and generations of Vietnamese for his marvelous achievements. So has Nguyễn Trãi although for different reasons. During the French occupation, which officially began with a treaty in 1884 and ended in 1954 when the astounded huge cannons mounted on the high mountains of Điện Biên Phủ determined the outcome of the war, there was no good reason for the veneration of a Vietnamese hero, who revolted against a foreign power. From the point of view of the Nguyễn kings who ruled the country at that time under the 'protection' of the French Gouverneur Général, Lê Lợi was not the man to talk about either as the Nguyễn ancestors came to the throne under the pretext of restoring the Lê dynasty. It was, then, peacetime. It was time to look to the western horizon to find out how lights could be burnt up side down and learn more about the miracle of Joan of Arc and the life of the ebullient Napoléon Bonaparte. Furthermore, quite similar to the cultural policy of the Ming dynasty, books of value written by Vietnamese were brought to

⁶⁶ A type of script similar to Chinese, but undecipherable to them, designed to transcribe spoken Vietnamese.

⁶⁷ Đỗ Đức Hiên et al, op. cit., p. 1479.

⁶⁸ Two other earlier wood-printed versions of the proclamation can be found in *Lam Sơn Veritable Records* (1676) and *The Complete History of Đại Việt* (1697). A much shorter version without the embellished verses (verses 6-9, 13-15, 18-27, 40-48, 51-52, 55-56, 58-71, 72-107 and 115-122) appears in *Vietnam Annotated Veritable Records – Official Dynasties* (1884). Could this brief version be the text close to the proclamation issued in 1428?

France or retained by the École Française d'Extrême Orient in Hanoi, which controlled access to these materials. Towards the beginning of the twentieth century, as the 'mission civilisatrice' reached full swing, Vietnam serendipitously became the first country in Asia that employed a romanised language as a medium to teach in elementary schools. Newspapers, periodical journals and novels in the new language began to appear. There was a burgeoning interest in the history and culture of the nation. However, little information of substance was made available as the Office of the Gouverneur Général dictated what people could or could not read. Nevertheless, a detailed history of Lê Lợi's ten-year struggle against the Ming occupation was allowed to appear in *Việt Nam Sử Lược*⁶⁹ (Short History of Vietnam) together with the Chinese version of 'Bình Ngô Đại Cáo' and its translation into present-day Vietnamese by Bùi Kỳ.⁷⁰ This seems to be the only major publication at that time dealing with these two historical figures. Another reason, which is indirect but important enough to consider for the paucity of information on Lê Lợi and Nguyễn Trãi, is that there existed only a small number of those who understood Sino-Vietnamese and at the same time had a good command of the new romanised language. In addition, whoever that fell in this category were already drawn into a contentious debate lasting for a decade on whether *The Tale of Kiều*⁷¹ was worthy of a role model for Vietnamese women to read or simply an obscene, trashy piece of literature. There were just not enough grey matters or time for any serious studies of either Lê Lợi or Nguyễn Trãi.

In 1954, acting as referee, the Geneva Conference called for the cessation of the Franco-Vietnamese hostilities and arbitrarily decided to divide the country into two parts: North and South. The seventeenth parallel was used as a dividing line. Each was then left to shape its own future with, of course, the assistance of its allies. While France and America stood on the side of the South Vietnamese, Russia and China sided with the North Vietnamese. In the south, Ngô Đình Diệm, who inherited a power vacuum from the French Expeditionary Forces, was trying to organise his fledgling government and build a defensive force in preparation for the general election as determined by the Geneva Conference. Untimely, he was overthrown and killed by his general officers before he could make any substantive cultural contributions. His successor, a junior general officer with little political experience was busy building his power base while facing a covert military invasion from the

⁶⁹ Lê Thần Trần Trọng Kim, *Việt Nam Sử Lược* (Short History of Vietnam), (Saigon: Ministry of Education, 1971), pp. 217-45. The book is a reprint from the 1941 edition published in Hanoi.

⁷⁰ This was the first translated version of 'Bình Ngô Đại Cáo' from classical Chinese into Vietnamese and was widely taught in high schools. The version left out the first important sentence 'Thừa thiên hoàng hóa, Hoàng thượng nhược bảo ...' (In the name of Heaven, I (Lê Lợi) hold the view that...), causing readers to think mistakenly that whatever statements that were made in the text were the words of Nguyễn Trãi instead of Lê Lợi. Actually, Nguyễn Trãi drafted the text at Lê Lợi's behest.

⁷¹ *The Tale of Kiều* was an epic of 3,254 verses depicting the life of a young talented girl, who voluntarily sold herself into prostitution to save her father from imprisonment due to malicious accusation. She was cheated repeatedly and suffered from one misfortune after another. Yet, thanks to her good karma, she finally was reunited with her family and enjoyed a happy life thereafter. The story was written by Nguyễn Du (1766-1820), who was often lauded as a top Nôm poet seconded by Nguyễn Trãi.

communist North. Since no progress was made on the battlefield and after tens of billions of dollars having been spent and more than 50,000 American soldiers having sacrificed their lives, the United States government and its Congress withdrew support to the South Vietnamese government. No sooner had the American troops left Vietnam than communist soldiers marched south to surround major cities. In 1975, owing to a wrong strategic move by the South Vietnamese the communist forces with heavy tanks and artilleries moved in, causing the largest air and sea evacuation in world history. South Vietnam came into being with half of a million refugees fleeing from north to south and ceased to exist 20 years later with a chaotic exodus of more than half of a million civilians and soldiers to whichever countries that cared to take them in. During its existence South Vietnam did not produce any significant historical materials related to Lê Lợi or Nguyễn Trãi except for the translation of a history book by Lê Quý Đôn entitled '*Đại Việt Thông Sử*' (General History of Đại Việt).

While South Vietnam was still struggling with its own political problems, North Vietnam enjoyed a breather after the Franco-Vietnamese war. It was now able to devote its scanty resources to archaeological and historical researches to find its national identity. Ancient texts on Vietnamese history and literature buried in the archives preserved by the *École Française d'Extrême Orient* or stored in private libraries in France were searched out for translation into present-day Vietnamese. A slew of books and articles based on these newly-translated materials also saw ways into publication. To conduct a pseudo-scientific test to determine the availability of these materials, this researcher surfed the Internet and found three sites writing about Lê Lợi, one of which is the Wikipedia writing and the other two are news reports, and more than a dozen articles on Nguyễn Trãi. From these sources, it is known that Nguyễn Trãi was not only widely revered in Vietnam but also highly regarded overseas as a poet, a guerilla fighter and state-man. In Quebec City, Canada, a memorial bust of Nguyễn Trãi was seen among others in the Poet Alley and in Havana, Cuba, scholars from different countries throughout the world met in a conference to honour him on the 525th anniversary of his death.

The South/Southeast Asia Library listed more than two hundred entries – books and articles – in Vietnamese, English and French on Nguyễn Trãi.⁷² Without access to these entries, a survey of the list shows that the majority of the publications appeared after the French Expeditionary Forces surrendered at Điện Biên Phủ in 1954, which led to the Geneva Conference that decided to divide the country into two parts, North and South, as mentioned earlier. The communist-led government of North Vietnam then needed an image of a national hero in its efforts to unify the country. Lê Lợi could be a good candidate. But, after enthroned as King Lê Lợi he showed to be brutal. Furthermore, until the end of the war, he consistently claimed the title of head of an ethnic Mường minority, whose population was less than ten percent compared to the majority Vietnamese. Nobody fits the mold better than Nguyễn Trãi. He was Vietnamese by ethnicity and a guerilla fighter, who successfully applied psychological warfare against the Ming army. He was a thinker embracing whole-heartedly compassion and

⁷² www.lib.berkeley.edu/SSEAL/SoutheastAsia/NguyenTrai.html

justice at war or in peace. And, above all he was a great literary figure. Besides being the author of the famous Proclamation of Victory, Nguyễn Trãi left behind several rare diplomatic documents persuading the enemy to surrender instead of fighting. He also composed hundreds of poems in classical Chinese and in Nôm language when this new written form of writing was still in its infancy. However, it is reasonable to say that without Lê Lợi the uprising might not have materialized and, even if it did, the war might have dragged on much longer and been more costly.

APPENDIX

The following text in classical Chinese of the Proclamation of Victory is one of several extant varieties. It was taken from *Trùng San Lam Sơn Thực Lục* (重刊藍山實錄)* printed in 1676. Credits for copying the text and transcribing it into Pinyin go to Honghong Dong (Rachel), A. M., Adjunct Professor of Chinese at St. Mary's University, San Antonio, Texas. The author is much appreciative of her invaluable assistance.

平吳大誥 Píng Wú Dà Gào

其辭曰

Qí cí yuē

代天行化之皇上若曰。

Dài tiān xíng huà zhī huáng shàng ruò yuē

仁義之舉，務在安民，

Rén yì zhī jǔ wù zài ān mǐn

吊伐之師莫先去暴。

Diào fá zhī shī mò xiān qù bào

惟我大越之國，

Wéi wǒ dà yuè zhī guó

寔爲文獻之邦。

Shí wéi wén xiàn zhī bāng

山川之封域既殊，

Shān chuān zhī fēng yù jì shū

南北之風俗亦異。

Nán běi zhī fēng sú yì yì

粵趙丁李陳之肇造我國，

Yuè zhào dīng lǐ chén zhī zhào zào wǒ guó

與漢唐宋元而各帝一方。

Yǔ hàn tang song yuán ér gè dì yī fāng

雖疆弱時或不同

Suī jiāng ruò shí huò bù tóng

而豪傑世未嘗乏。

Ér háo jié shì wèi cháng fá

故劉龔貪功而取敗，

Gù liú gōng tān gōng ér qǔ bài

趙嵩好大以促亡。

Zhào xiè hào dà yǐ cù wáng

峻都既矜於鹹子關，

Suǒ dōu jì qián yú xián zǐ guān

馬兒又殪於白藤海。

Mǎ ér yòu yì yú bái téng hǎi

稽諸往古，

Jī zhū wǎng gǔ

厥有明徵。

Jué yǒu míng zhēng

頃因胡政之煩苛。

Qǐng yīn hú zhèng zhī fán kē
致使人心之怨叛。

Zhì shǐ rén xīn zhī yuàn pàn
狂明伺隙，因以毒我民；

Kuáng míng sì xì yīn yǐ dú wǒ mín
僞黨恠奸，竟以賣我國。

Wěi dǎng huái jiān jìng yǐ mài wǒ guó
煽蒼生於虐焰，

Shān cāng shēng yú nuè yàn
陷赤子於禍坑。

Xiàn chì zǐ yú huò kēng
欺天罔民，詭計蓋千萬狀；

Qī tiān wǎng mín guǐ jì gài qiān wàn zhuàng
連兵結讐，稔惡殆二十年。

Lián bīng jié xìn rěn è dài èr shí nián
敗義傷仁，乾坤幾乎欲熄；

Bài yì shāng rén gān kūn jī hū yù xī
重科厚斂，山澤靡有孑遺。

Zhòng kē hòu liǎn shān zé mí yǒu jié yí
開金場則冒嵐障而斧山淘沙，

Kāi jīn cháng zé mào lán zhàng ér fǔ shān táo shā
採明珠則觸蛟龍而絙腰叅海。

Cǎi míng zhū zé chù jiāo lóng ér gēng yāo tūn hǎi
擾民設玄鹿之陷阱，

Rǎo mín shè xuán lù zhī xiàn jǐng
珍物織翠禽之網羅。

Tiān wù zhī cuì qín zhī wǎng luó
昆蟲草木咸不得以遂其生，

Kūn chóng cǎo mù xián bù de yǐ suì qí shēng
鰥寡顛連俱不得以安其所。

Guān guǎ diān lián jù bù de yǐ ān qí suǒ
浚生靈之血以潤桀黠之吻牙；

Jùn shēng líng zhī xiě yǐ rùn jié xiá zhī wěn yá
極土木之功以崇公私之靡宇。

Jí tǔ mù zhī gōng yǐ chóng gōng sī zhī xiè yǔ
州里之征徭重困，

Zhōu lǐ zhī zhēng yáo zhòng kùn
閭閻之杼柚皆空。

Lú yán zhī zhù yòu jiē kōng
決東海之波不足以濯其污，

Jué dōng hǎi zhī bō bù zú yǐ zhuó qí wū
罄南山之竹不足以書其惡。

Qìng nán shān zhī zhú bù zú yǐ shū qí è
神人之所共憤，

Shén rén zhī suǒ gòng fèn
天地之所不容。

Tiān dì zhī suǒ bù róng
予奮跡藍山，

Yú fèn jī lán shān

棲身荒野。
Qī shēn huāng yě
念國讐豈可共戴，
Niàn guó chóu qǐ kě gòng dài
誓逆賊難與俱生。
Shì nì zéi nán yǔ jù shēng
痛心疾首者垂十餘年，
Tòng xīn jí shǒu zhě chuí shí yú nián
臥薪嘗膽者蓋非一日。
Wò xīn cháng dǎn zhě gài fēi yī rì
發憤忘食，每研談韜畧之書，
Fā fèn wàng shí měi yán tán tāo lüè zhī shū
即古驗今，細推究興亡之理。
Jí gǔ yàn jīn xì tuī jiù xìng wáng zhī lǐ
圖回之志
Tú huí zhī zhì
寤寐不忘。
Tù mèi bù wàng
當義兵初起之時，
Dāng yì bīng chū qǐ zhī shí
正賊勦方張之日。
Zhèng zéi shì fāng zhāng zhī rì
奈以人才秋葉，
Nài yǐ rén cái qiū yè
俊傑晨星。
Jùn jié chén xīng
奔奏先後者既乏其人，
Bēn zòu xiān hòu zhě jì fá qí rén
謀謨帷幄者又寡其助。
Móu mó wéi wò zhě yòu guǎ qí zhù
特以救民之念，每鬱鬱而欲東；
Tè yǐ jiù mín zhī niàn měi yù yù ér yù dōng
故於待賢之車，常汲汲而虛左。
Gù yú dài xián zhī chē cháng jí jí ér xū zuǒ
然其得人之效茫若望洋，
Rán qí de rén zhī xiào máng ruò wàng yáng
由己之心甚於拯溺。
Yóu jǐ zhī xīn shèn yú zhěng nì
憤兇徒之未滅，
Fèn xiōng tú zhī wèi miè
念國步之猶屯。
Niàn guó bù zhī yóu zhūn
靈山之食盡兼旬，
Líng shān zhī shí jìn jiān xún
瑰縣之眾無一旅。
Guī xiàn zhī zhòng wú yī lǚ
蓋天欲困我以降厥任，
Gài tiān yù kùn wǒ yǐ jiàng jué rèn
故予益厲志以濟于難。
Gù yǔ yì lì zhì yǐ jì yú nán

揭竿爲旗，氓隸之徒四集

Jiē gān wéi qí máng lì zhī tú sì jí

投醪饗士，父子之兵一心。

Tóu láo xiǎng shì fù zǐ zhī bīng yī xīn

以弱制強，或攻人之不備；

Yǐ ruò zhì qiáng huò gōng rén zhī bù bèi

以寡敵眾，常設伏以出奇。

Yǐ guǎ dí zhòng cháng shè fú yǐ chū qí

卒能以大義而滅兇殘，

Zú néng yǐ dà yì ér miè xiōng cán

以至仁而易強暴，

Yǐ zhì rén ér yì qiáng bào

蒲藤之霆驅電掣，

Pú téng zhī tíng qū diàn chè

茶鱗之竹破灰飛。

Chá lín zhī zhú pò huī fēi

士氣以之益增，

Shì qì yǐ zhī yì zēng

軍聲以之大振。

Jūn shēng yǐ zhī dà zhèn

陳智山壽之徒聞風而褫魄，

Chén zhì shān shòu zhī tú wén fēng ér chǐ pò

李安方政之輩假息以偷生。

Lǐ ān fāng zhèng zhī bèi jiǎ xī yǐ tōu shēng

乘勝長驅，西京既爲我有；

Chéng shèng cháng qū xī jīng jì wéi wǒ yǒu

選鋒進取，東都盡復舊疆。

Xuǎn fēng jìn qǔ dōng dōu jìn fù jiù jiāng

寧橋之血成川，流腥萬里；

Níng qiáo zhī xiě chéng chuān liú xīng wàn lǐ

宰洞之屍滿野，遺臭千年。

Cù dòng zhī shī mǎn yě yí chòu qiān nián

陳洽賊之腹心，既梟其首；

Chén qià zéi zhī fù xīn jì xiāo qí shǒu

李亮賊之姦蠹，又暴厥屍。

Lǐ liàng zéi zhī jiān dù yòu bào jué shī

王通理亂而焚者益焚，

Wáng tōng lǐ luàn ér fén zhě yì fén

馬瑛救鬪而怒者益怒。

Mǎ yīng jiù dòu ér nù zhě yì nù

彼智窮而力盡，束手待亡；

Bǐ zhì qióng ér lì jìn shù shǒu dài wáng

我謀伐而心攻，不戰自屈。

Wǒ móu fá ér xīn gōng bù zhàn zì qū

謂彼必易心而改慮，

Wèi bǐ bì yì xīn ér gǎi lǜ

豈意復作孽以速辜。

Qǐ yì fù zuò niè yǐ sù gū

執一己之見以嫁禍於他人，

Zhí yī jǐ zhī jiàn yǐ jià huò yú tā rén

貪一時之功以貽笑於天下。
Tān yī shí zhī gōng yǐ yí xiào yú tiān xià
遂使宣德之狡童，黷兵無厭；
Suì shí xuān dé zhī jiǎo tóng dú bīng wú yàn
爰命晟昇之懦將，以油救焚。
Yuán mìng chéng shēng zhī nuò jiāng yǐ yóu jiù fēn
丁未九月柳昇自引兵由温丘而進，
Dīng wèi jiǔ yuè liǔ shēng zì yǐn bīng yóu wēn qiū ér jìn
本年十月沐晟亦分途自雲南而來。
Běn nián shí yuè mù chéng yì fēn tú zì yún nán ér lái
予前既選伏卒塞險以摧其鋒，
Yú qián jì xuǎn fù zú sāi xiǎn yǐ cuī qí fēng
後又調奇兵截路以斷其食。
Hòu yòu diào qí bīng jié lù yǐ duàn qí shí
十八日柳昇既為我所攻，
Shí bā rì liǔ shēng jì wéi wǒ suǒ gōng
計墜於支稜之野；
Jì zhuì yú zhī léng zhī yě
二十日柳昇又為我所敗，
Èr shí rì liǔ shēng yòu wéi wǒ suǒ bài
身死於馬鞍之山。
Shēn sǐ yú mǎ ān zhī shān
二十五日保定伯梁銘陣陷而喪軀，
Èr shí wǔ rì bǎo dìng bó liáng míng zhèn xiàn ér sàng qū
二十八日尚書曹李慶計窮而勿頸。
Èr shí bā rì shàng shū cáo lǐ qìng jì qióng ér wèn jǐng
我自迎刃而解，
Wǒ zì yíng rèn ér jiě
彼即倒戈相攻。
Bǐ jí dào gē xiāng gōng
繼而四面添兵以包圍，
Jì ér sì miàn tiān bīng yǐ bāo wéi
期以十月中旬而殄滅。
Qī yǐ shí yuè zhōng xún ér tiǎn miè
爰選貔貅之士，
Yuán xuǎn pí xiū zhī shì
申命爪牙之臣。
Shēn mìng zhuǎ yá zhī chén
飲象而河水乾，
Yǐn xiàng ér hé shuǐ gān
磨刀而山石缺。
Mó dāo ér shān shí quē
一鼓而鯨剝鱷斷，
Yī gǔ ér jīng kǒu è duàn
再鼓而鳥散麋驚。
Zài gǔ ér niǎo sǎn jūn jīng
決潰蟻於崩堤，
Jué kuì yǐ yú bēng dī
振剛風於稿葉。
Zhèn gāng fēng yú gǎo yè

都督崔聚膝行而送歎，
 Dōu dū cuī jù xī xíng ér sòng kuǎn
 尙書黃福面縛而就擒。
 Shàng shū huáng fú miàn fù ér jiù qín
 僵屍塞於諒江諒山之途，
 Jiāng shī sāi yú liàng jiāng liàng shān zhī tú
 濺血赤於昌江平灘之水。
 Jiàn xiě chì yú chāng jiāng píng tān zhī shuǐ
 風雲爲之變色，
 Fēng yún wéi zhī biàn sè
 日月慘以無光。
 Rì yuè cǎn yǐ wú guāng
 其雲南兵爲我軍所扼於
 Qí yún nán bīng wéi wǒ jūn suǒ è yú
 梨開自恫疑虛喝而先已破膽；
 Lí kāi zì dòng yí xū hē ér xiān yǐ pò dǎn
 其沐晟等爲我
 Qí mù chéng děng wéi wǒ
 軍所敗於芹站，遂躡藉奔
 Jūn suǒ bài yú qín zhàn suì lìn jí bēn
 潰而僅得脫身。
 Kuì ér jǐn de tuō shēn
 冷溝之血杵流江水爲之嗚咽；
 Lěng gōu zhī xiě chǔ liú jiāng shuǐ wéi zhī wū yàn
 丹舍之屍山積，野草爲之殷紅。
 Dān shě zhī shī shān jī yě cǎo wéi zhī yīn hóng
 兩路救兵既不旋踵而俱敗，
 Liǎng lù jiù bīng jì bù xuán zhǒng ér jù bài
 各城窮寇率相解甲以出降。
 Gè chéng qióng kòu shuài xiàng jiě jiǎ yǐ chū xiáng
 賊首成擒，彼既掉殘卒乞憐之尾；
 Zéi shǒu chéng qín bǐ jì diào cán zú qǐ lián zhī wěi
 神武不殺，予亦体上帝好生之心。
 Shén wǔ bù shā yú yì tǐ shàng dì hǎo shēng zhī xīn
 參將方政，內官馬騏，等先
 Cān jiāng fāng zhèng nèi guān mǎ qí děng xiān
 給船五百餘艘，既渡海而
 Gěi chuan wǔ bǎi yú sōu jì dù hǎi ér
 猶且魂飛魄喪；
 Yóu qiè hún fēi pò sàng
 總兵王通，參政馬瑛等，
 Zǒng bīng wáng tōng cān zhèng mǎ yīng děng
 又給馬數千餘匹，已還國
 Yòu gěi mǎ shù qiān yú pǐ yǐ huán guó
 而益自股慄心驚。
 Ér yì zì gǔ lì xīn jīng
 彼既畏死貪生，而修好有誠；
 Bǐ jì wèi sǐ tān shēng ér xiū hǎo yǒu chéng
 予以全軍爲上，而與民得息。
 Yú yǐ quán jūn wéi shàng ér yǔ mín de xī

非 惟 計 謀 之 極 其 深 遠,
 Fēi wéi jì móu zhī jí qí shēn yuǎn
 抑 亦 古 今 之 所 未 見 聞。
 Yì yì gǔ jīn zhī suǒ wèi jiàn wén
 社 稷 以 之 奠 安,
 Shè jì yǐ zhī diàn ān
 山 川 以 之 改 觀。
 Shān chuān yǐ zhī gǎi guān
 乾 坤 既 否 而 復 泰,
 Gān kūn jì fǒu ér fù tài
 日 月 既 晦 而 復 明。
 Rì yuè jì huì ér fù míng
 于 以 開 萬 世 太 平 之 基,
 Yú yǐ kāi wàn shì tài píng zhī jī
 于 以 雪 千 古 無 窮 之 耻。
 Yú yǐ xuě qiān gǔ wú qióng zhī chǐ
 盖 由 天 地 祖 宗 之 靈 有
 Gài yóu tiān dì zǔ zōng zhī líng yǒu
 以 陰 相 默 佑 而 致 然 也!
 Yǐ yīn xiāng mò yòu ér zhì rán yě
 於 戲!
 Yú xì
 一 戎 大 定, 迄 成 無 竟 之 功;
 Yī róng dà dìng qì chéng wú jīng zhī gōng
 四 海 永 清, 誕 布 維 新 之 誥。
 Sì hǎi yǒng qīng dàn bù wéi xīn zhī gào
 播 告 天 下,
 Bō gào tiān xià
 咸 使 聞 知。
 Xián shǐ wén zhī

* Trần Nghĩa, (Trans. & Ed.) 'Lam Sơn Thực Lục' (Lam Sơn Veritable Records), in Nguyễn Trãi Toàn Tập – Tàn Biên (Nguyễn Trãi Complete Works – New Edition, Hồ Chí Minh City: Nhà Xuất Bản Văn Học, 2000) Vol. II, pp.284-294.