

# The Last Confucians of Mid-20th Century Vietnam: A Cultural History of the Vietnam Association of Traditional Studies

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## Abstract

The Vietnam Association of Traditional Studies (VATS) took the initiative in promoting Confucian cultural practices in South Vietnam from 1955–1975. The association strove towards collecting, researching, translating, interpreting and circulating classical Sino-graphic documents in order to preserve traditional East Asian culture in relation to up-to-date moral education and practical science. Unfortunately, there is a lack of research material related to the organization during the period after the two halves of Vietnam were reunited in 1975. Thus, the Association's activities after 1975 cannot be discussed. To bridge the gap, this article is based on rare documents mostly collected by the author, describing the history and activities of this Confucian organization, including its establishment (1954), regulations, organizational structure, and membership. This article will also focus on the VATS's Confucian cultural practices, such as (i) publishing as a way to promote Confucianism and traditional morality, (ii) Confucianism and Literary Sinitic education, (iii) public speeches, (iv) organizing the annual commemoration of Confucius' birthday on September 28th, (v) and promoting international cooperation related to Confucianism. These activities demonstrate the organization's attempt at popularizing Confucianism and making it compatible with ideas and practices introduced by modernization and Westernization in the middle of the twentieth century.

**Keywords:** Confucianism, Vietnam Association of Traditional Studies (VATS), South Vietnam (SVN), tradition, cultural practice

## Zadnji konfucijanci v Vietnamu iz sredine 20. stoletja: kulturna zgodovina Vietnamskega združenja tradicionalnih študij

### Izvleček

Vietnamsko združenje tradicionalnih študij (VATS) je v obdobju 1955–1975 sprožilo pobudo za promocijo konfucijanskih kulturnih praks v Južnem Vietnamu. Združenje si je prizadevalo, da bi zbirali, raziskovali, prevajali, tolmačili in širili klasične sinografske dokumente z namenom ohranjanja tradicionalne vzhodnoazijske kulture, pomembne za

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posodobljeno moralno vzgojo in praktično znanost. Žal je raziskovalno gradivo o tej organizaciji za čas po ponovni združitvi obeh Vietnamov leta 1975 zelo pomanjkljivo. Tako o dejavnostih združenja po letu 1975 ni mogoče razpravljati. Da bi zapolnili vrzeli o tej temi, članek temelji na redkih dokumentih, ki jih je večinoma zbral avtor ter opisujejo zgodovino in dejavnosti konfucijske organizacije, vključno z njeno ustanovitvijo (1954), predpisi, organizacijsko strukturo in članstvom. Ta prispevek se osredotoča tudi na konfucijske kulturne prakse VATS, kot so (I) objave kot način spodbujanja konfucianizma in tradicionalne morale, (II) konfucianizem in literarno sinitsko izobraževanje, (III) javni govori, (IV) vsakoletno organiziranje spominjanja Konfucijevega rojstnega dne 28. septembra in (V) spodbujanje mednarodnega sodelovanja, povezanega s konfucianizmom. Te dejavnosti kažejo na poskus organiziranja popularizacije konfucianizma ter na njegovo združljivost z idejami in praksami, ki sta jih modernizacija in približevanje Zahodu uvedla sredi dvajsetega stoletja.

**Ključne besede:** konfucianizem, Vietnamsko združenje tradicionalnih študij (VATS), Južni Vietnam (SVN), tradicija, kulturna praksa

## Abbreviations:

- ACB: Anniversary of Confucius' Birthday (Lễ Thánh đản)  
CHQS: *Cổ Học Quý San* (Traditional Studies Quarterly, periodical of the VATS)  
NGVNS: *Niên giám văn nghệ sĩ và hiệp hội văn hóa Việt Nam 1969–1970* (Yearbook of Artists and Cultural Associations of Vietnam 1969–1970). Saigon: Nha Văn hóa xuất bản, 1970.  
SVN: South Vietnam  
VAC: Vietnamese Association of Confucianism (Hội Khổng học Việt Nam)  
VATS: Vietnamese Association of Traditional Studies (Hội Cổ học Việt Nam)

## Introduction

Many considerable social changes occurred in Vietnam during the middle of the twentieth century. After overcoming the feudalist Nguyễn dynasty and French colonialists to gain independence in 1945, Vietnam again had to carry out a nine-year war of resistance against the French (1946–1954). Immediately thereafter, in the middle of 1954, the country was divided into two halves: the communist North Vietnam and the capitalist South Vietnam (hereafter SVN). An ongoing war between the two Vietnams turned into a “hot spot” in the context of the existing global Cold War after World War II (1939–1945), with support from the

Soviet Union and China going to North Vietnam, and that from the US and its allies going to SVN. The twenty-year war ended on April 30, 1975, when the SVN President surrendered to North Vietnam's Liberation Army, beginning a period of unification and independence for the entire country of Vietnam. Despite all of the political changes in from the 1950s to 1970s, Vietnam was still able to achieve many advances in terms of cultural and social modernization. This was particularly evident in SVN, where cultural exchanges with Europe and the US became much more frequent. New foreign and local theories and ideologies, such as communism, socialism, capitalism, Catholicism, Caodaism, Hoahaoism,<sup>1</sup> and personalism, emerged in the social and political lives of the Vietnamese. These new theories and ideologies shared the same sphere of activity with traditional ones such as Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism, which were becoming less and less relevant in society. This was especially true for Confucianism.

In such a context, the existence of the Association of Traditional Studies (VATS)—a Confucian organization in the city of Huế in central Vietnam—was a re-affirmation of Confucianism in contemporary culture and society.<sup>2</sup> The VATS was at the forefront of Sino-Confucian cultural organizations in Vietnam from 1945 onwards. Based on rare documents related to the VATS collected by the author, this article attempts to sketch an outline of the history of the VATS, concentrating on its establishment, organization, and cultural-academic activities.

## Establishment of the VATS

The VATS was given permission to establish in 1954 by the government of the State of Vietnam (1949–1955).<sup>3</sup> Initially, the association was only able to operate in central Vietnam, centered in Huế, the main city in this region; after 1958, it would operate nationwide.<sup>4</sup> President Ngô Đình Diệm accepted an invitation to be the honorary chairman of the VATS.<sup>5</sup> A ceremony celebrating the VATS's establishment was held in Huế on January 13th, 1955, with 150 attendees from

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- 1 Caodaism is a monotheistic syncretic religion. Hoahaoism is a quasi-Buddhist religion. They were founded in the 1920s and 1930s in southern Vietnam and continue to exist, mostly in the south of Vietnam.
  - 2 On movements to promote Confucianism in South Vietnam 1955–1975, see the first half in Nguyễn 2015a, 30–81.
  - 3 Pursuant to the Decree No. 831-NĐ/CP dated April 28th, 1954 signed by Governor Office of Central Vietnam. Unfortunately this Decree has not yet been found.
  - 4 Due to the Decree No. 471-BNV/NA/P5 dated August 27th, 1958 signed by Minister of Home Affairs Lâm Lễ Trinh under the government of President Ngô Đình Diệm, see NGVNS 1970, 699.
  - 5 Document No. 589-TTP/ĐL dated May 16th, 1956, see CHQS 1956, vol. 1, 11.

various circles agreeing to join as members, including many Chinese residents (La 1956, 155). Its headquarters was located in the Di Luân hall (彝倫堂 Di Luân đường) within the Citadel of Huế, which also later housed the Institute of Sinology (Viện Hán học, under the University of Huế). The Institute of Sinology shared headquarters and staff with the VATS starting in 1959. The official Vietnamese title of the VATS was “Hội Việt Nam Cổ học” (the Vietnam Association of Traditional Studies), and in Chinese it was called “越南古學會”; however, it was often referred to as “Hội Cổ học” (the Association of Traditional Studies) or “Hội Cổ học Huế” (the Huế Association of Traditional Studies). This was until 1969, when its official title was changed to “Tổng Hội Việt Nam Cổ học” (the Vietnam General Association of Traditional Studies),<sup>6</sup> in order to distinguish it from several local branches.

There were 16 members included on the list of founders of the VATS (NGVNS 1970, 713), mostly officials who had already retired or were still serving in the Nguyễn Court or government of the State of Vietnam. They were virtually all educated in the imperial civil service examination system before 1919 or worked for the Nguyễn Court before 1945. They also lived in the former capital of Huế, which was the centre of culture and learning during the Nguyễn dynasty. As such, in Huế there already existed attachments to traditional culture, Sinology, and the Confucianism of the former dynasty. Speaking of the plight of Confucianism in the mid-twentieth century, VATS Chairman Nguyễn Huy Nhu observed that “with the expansion of Europeanization, Confucianism has almost faded away” (Nguyễn 1958, 83–86). Despite their old age, these last Confucian intellectuals stood up and campaigned for the founding of a cultural organization with the aim of “collecting, researching, translating, interpreting and circulating classical Sinographic documents, in order to preserve East Asian traditional culture that was relevant to up-to-date practical science and moral education”, as written in the *Regulations* of the VATS.

## Organization of the VATS

### *Regulations and Rules*

Like other associations in SVN, in order to gain permission for its establishment the VATS had to have a document of *Regulations and Rules*. This was in accord with “Royal Decree No. 10” on the requirements of founding associations, dated

6 Pursuant to the Decree No. 162/BNV/KS/14 dated March 3rd, 1969 signed by Minister of Home Affairs, General Trần Thiện Khiêm, see NGVNS 1970, 700.

August 6th, 1950, signed by Head of State Bảo Đại (Công báo Việt Nam 1950, 434–37). The VATS’s revised *Regulations*<sup>7</sup> (*Điều lệ*) were approved in 1958, including eight chapters and 34 articles. The contents of the regulations were as follows. Chapter 1: “Purpose, Title, and Headquarters” (three articles). Chapter 2: “Time-Limit, Range, and Conventions” (four articles). Chapter 3: “Requirements for Joining, Leaving, and being Expelled from the Association” (three articles). Chapter 4: “Obligations and Interests of Members” (four articles). Chapter 5: “Regulations on Movable and Immovable Property” (three articles). Chapter 6: “Regulations on the Election and Dismissal of Leaders and their Authority” (14 articles). Chapter 7: “Reasons for Disbandment, Regulations on Disbanded Property” (two articles). Chapter 8: “Subordinate Content” (one article).

The *Rules*<sup>8</sup> (*Nội quy*) of the VATS were approved on August 10th, 1959, including 12 articles on issues such as the title of the VATS, the central and branch organizational systems, working subcommittees, and membership fees.

### *Board of Directors*

During the first term of 1954–1955, the Board of Directors included 16 members, with Nguyễn Huy Nhu as chairman (La 1956, 155–56). The next term, 1955–1956, maintained the previous board with three advisors and three controllers (CHQS 1956, vol. 1, 74–75). The board during the third term (1956–1957) included 22 members, with Nguyễn Huy Nhu still serving as chairman (*ibid.*, 7–8). During the fourth term, the board included 19 members, with Nguyễn Huy Nhu continuing as chairman. During the fifth term, there were 17 members, and once again Nguyễn Huy Nhu was chairman (CHQS 1958, vol. 5, 88–89, 90–98). No detailed information on the boards from 1960–1962 has been found, but we know that the chairman was Hồ Đắc Hàm (*ibid.* 1964, vol. 11, 163). At the end of 1963, an irregularly timed General Assembly selected 23 members to be on the board, with Nguyễn Trọng Tịnh as chairman (*ibid.*, 7). In 1969, the board had 19 members, with Phạm Lương Hàn serving as chairman (NGVNS 1970, 714).

The above is an outline of the members of VATS’s Boards of Directors, as found in collected materials. The state of the board during the years 1960–1962, 1965–1968, and after 1970 remains unknown. The abovementioned lists show that there were at least four chairmen: Nguyễn Huy Nhu (1887–1962), a metropolitan laureate (Doctor, *Tiến sĩ*); Hồ Đắc Hàm (1879–1963), a local laureate

7 For the full text of *Regulations*, see NGVNS 1970, 701–8.

8 For the full text of *Rules*, see NGVNS 1970, 709–12.

(Bachelor, *Cử nhân*); Nguyễn Trọng Tịnh (?–?), a junior metropolitan laureate (*Phó bảng*); and Phạm Lương Hàn (?–1970), a baccalaureate. All four of these are on the list of the last laureates in the imperial civil service examinations of the Nguyễn dynasty. As such, they were undoubtedly qualified to head a Sinological–Confucian organization like the VATS during the “epilogue” of traditional Sinology in Vietnam.

### *Members*

Article 11 in the abovementioned *Regulations* listed six kinds of member, each with different roles: (1) Honorary chairman (*Hội trưởng danh dự*): a special category for the President of the Republic of Vietnam. (2) Honorary member (*Hội viên danh dự*): those with a high level of prestige, reputation, morality, and scholarship and are invited by the VATS to join as members. (3) Active member (*Hội viên hoạt động*): those who have made contributions towards the VATS’s organization, operation, and cultural activities. (4) Practical member (*Hội viên thực hành*): those who pay membership fees. (5) Financial member (*Hội viên tài trợ*): those who contribute 1,000 VND (current SVN currency). (6) Generous member (*Hội viên ân nghĩa*): those who contribute 2,000 VND.

According to a member list in CHQS (1956, vol. 1), when it was established in 1954 the VATS had nearly 200 members. In 1958, it had 654, including one honorary chairman, seven honorary members, six financial members, 27 active members, and 613 practical members. The actual number must have been higher, since these were only the number of members recorded in the incomplete seven volumes of CHQS collected by the author. In 1969, the total number of members had reached around 4,000 (NGVNS 1970, 715). Obviously, from 1954 to 1969, the VATS had made impressive strides in increasing the number of members in the central unit in Huế and other local branches.

### *Local branches*

On local branches, Article 31 in the *Regulations* states:

Any province, city, town, or district that has 50 members or more will be allowed to establish a Board of Directors including one chairman, one vice-chairman, one secretary, one vice-secretary, one treasurer, one vice-treasurer, and three to five advisors and controllers. Regulations on the election and dismissal of leaders and their authority are the same as

mentioned above. After establishing the Board of Directors in a province, city, town, or district, request that the chief of that local unit be made honorary chairman in order to represent and support the association. (NGVNS 1970)

Article 31 also states:

One term for each central, provincial, city, town, or district Board of Director lasts one year. The members of the board can be re-elected if agreed to by the General Assembly. (ibid.)

After founding the central unit in Huế, the VATS gradually spread its range of activities by establishing local branches in provinces, cities, towns, and districts in central Vietnam. According to the known materials, besides the general assembly in Huế there were provincial branches in Quảng Trị, Quảng Tín, and Quảng Nam, a city branch in Đà Nẵng, district branches in Phú Lộc, Phong Điền, Vinh Lộc, Quảng Điền, Quế Sơn, Đại Lộc, Duy Xuyên, Tam Kỳ, Hiếu Đức, Thăng Bình, and Điện Bàn, and a ward branch in Cẩm An. These branches were all founded during the period of 1956–1960, under the guidance of the central unit in Huế and complying with the VATS’s *Rules and Regulations*.

## Cultural and Academic Activities of the VATS

### *Research and Publications*

The official periodical by the VNTS, *Cổ Học Quý San* 古學季刊 (CHQS, *Traditional Studies Quarterly*), was published by the Central unit in Huế. According to the *Mục lục báo chí Việt ngữ 1865–1965 (A Bibliography of Vietnamese Magazines 1865–1965)*, the CHQS was active from 1956 to 1962, in total publishing ten volumes (*Mục lục báo chí Việt ngữ 1865–1965* 1966, 50). Although titled “quarterly”, this periodical was usually published every six months, indicating that difficulties were encountered during the publishing process. I have only found seven volumes: volume 1 and 2 (1956), volume 3 (1957), volume 5 and 6 (1958), volume 7 (1959), and volume 11 (1964).<sup>9</sup> Most volumes have 90–100 pages, while volume 6 includes 120 pages and volume 11 has 194 pages. We can determine that the the *Mục lục báo chí Việt ngữ 1865–1965* failed to record all of the CHQS’s published volumes up until 1964 because volume 11 was

<sup>9</sup> Volume 1 (1956) is now archived in the UC Berkeley library, code “DS556.4.C72 1958 v.1 MAIN”; the other six volumes were all personally collected by the author.

not included on its list. The total number of published CHQS volumes remains unknown. Hereafter, this article uses the seven known volumes to analyze the periodical.

The purpose of this periodical is to “Promote Confucianism and develop Vietnamese traditional culture”<sup>10</sup> as written in the declaration on every cover. Chairman Nhu worked as the editor-in-chief while Vice-chairman Nguyễn Hy Thích was periodical director. In volume 11 it was written that the new Chairman Nguyễn Trọng Tịnh filled both of these key roles. A portrait of Confucius was printed on the first page of every volume, showing the reverence of the VATS towards the founder of Confucianism.

The CHQS was a bilingual periodical written in both Vietnamese and Chinese. Volume 1 is divided into two separate parts, the first part being written in Vietnamese and the second in Chinese. This layout “is very inconvenient for readers when they want to compare original Chinese texts with the Vietnamese translations.”<sup>11</sup> Therefore, from volume 2 onwards, these two parts were combined together for each item published.

One of the sources of funding for the periodical came from subscriptions. Volume 1 includes a list of 18 subscribers, with three people contributing 1,000 VND (Trương Như Đĩnh, Nguyễn Kỳ, Nguyễn Văn Thích), four contributing 500 VND (Phạm Đạt, La Hoài, Phạm Lương Hàn, Tôn Thất Đình), and the rest contributing 100–300 VND each (CHQS 1956, vol. 1, 8).

The CHQS includes six columns: Ethics, Philosophy, History, Literary Writings, Miscellaneous, and Appendix. However, not every volume includes all six columns. It is possible to re-classify the content of CHQS into four sections: (1) research and introduction, (2) translation, (3) literary writings, and (4) news.

In section (1), VATS’s authors conduct research and provide introductions to: Confucian theory, the Chinese Hundred Schools of Thought (諸子百家, *bách gia chư tử*), and the history of Vietnam and China. More specifically, the articles focus on: the Confucian Five Constant Virtues, Confucius’ politics, Confucian equalitarianism, Confucius and modernity, the theory of the good nature of humans (volume 1); Mozi’s (墨子) theory of Universal Love (兼愛, *kiêm ái*), Eastern punishments based on rites and education, the Theory of Human Spirit (人靈, *nhân linh*), the Trần dynasty’s defeat of Mongol invaders (volume 2); personalism in Confucianism (volume 3); the political thought of Confucius, the

10 Original text in both Vietnamese and Chinese: “Cơ quan chấn hưng Khổng giáo và phát triển văn hoá cổ truyền của Việt Nam”, “這季刊為振興孔教傳播越南古傳文化之機關。”

11 “Lời khai sự của bản hội”, (VATS’s Notice in CHQS 1956, vol. 2, 7).

principles of *The Classic of Changes*, the Eight Trigrams, King Lê Thái Tổ's defeat of Ming invaders, the meaning of love (volume 5); the political thought of Confucius (continued), loyalty, filial piety, moral integrity, and righteousness in the past and present, Lu Jia's (呂嘉) reaction to the Han dynasty (volume 6); a comparison of ethics and morality in the East and the West in the past and present, theories of the Hundred Schools of Thought based on the Six Arts (六藝, including Rites, Music, Archery, Riding, Writing, and Arithmetic, or 禮, 樂, 射, 御, 書 and 數 in Chinese), Emperor Lí Nam Đế and King Triệu Việt Vương resisting the Liang dynasty (volume 7); Confucius' teachings, principles and theory of Mencius, Confucians' urge to improve, a brief survey of Eastern philosophy, and the gentleman's (君子) viewpoint of prerequisite and position (volume 11). The authors of these articles were key members of the VATS in Huế or at other branches. This included Nguyễn Huy Nhu, Nguyễn Hi Thích, Trần Văn Kiểm, Tạ Thúc Khái, La Hoài, Phan Ngọc Hoàn, Phạm Mạnh Tô, and Nguyễn Hữu Hiệt. Most of these authors had been trained for the civil service examinations.

Section (2) includes several translations meant to introduce the Four Books, the Five Classics, and Vietnamese and Chinese Sinographic writing. Chairman Nhu wrote a translation of the lengthy article "Theories of Yan and Li" (顏李學說) by Liang Qichao 梁啟超 (1873–1927) which was published in volume 2 through volume 7.

For section (3), each volume contains 10–20 works of writing, mostly short poems about topics such as praising Confucianism, Confucius, well-known Chinese and Vietnamese Confucians, the beauty of Vietnam, and the important role of the VATS. Most of these works are written in the form of Literary Sinitic Tang-style poetry with Vietnamese translations; several of them are also written in Vietnamese. Section (4) contains information on the internal activities of the VATS and brief news on culture, politics, Vietnamese society, East Asia, Europe, and the US.

Beside the CHQS by the Central unit in Huế, there was another periodical titled *Cổ học tinh hoa văn tập* (*Selected Writings of Traditional Quintessences*) published by the Quảng Nam Provincial branch. The only known copy of this periodical is now kept in the library of Cornell University, in Ithaca, New York. This special issue was meant to commemorate the inauguration of the Confucius Temple in Quảng Nam province in 1962. The Letter from the Editorial Office in this issue tells us that this branch had published seven volumes before 1962, with two volumes coming out each year. The editorial board included Editor-in-chief Hồ Ngân and Editorial General Secretary Ngô Tấn Huệ, who alternately served as Vice-chairman and General Secretary of the Quảng Nam branch of the VATS. The periodical received the regular cooperation of authors such as Di Lão, Nguyễn Văn Thọ, Huỳnh Như Văn, Phạm Trung Côn, Ngô Tấn Huệ, Thái Can, Phạm Phú



Photo 1: *Cổ Học Quý San* (*Traditional Studies Quarterly*) volume 11, 1964, cover. On the upper right is the round red seal of the VATS written in both Chinese “越南古學總會” and Vietnamese “Tổng-hội Cổ-học Việt-Nam” (Vietnam General Association of Traditional Studies).

Huu, Lam Kiều, Phan Khôi,<sup>12</sup> and Hoài Mai. Among these authors, Nguyễn Văn Thọ (1921–2014) stands out as an eminent researcher in the fields of Sinology and Confucianism. His work includes a book entitled *Khảo luận và phê bình học thuyết Khổng tử* (*Researching and Criticizing Confucius' Theory*) published by the Đà Nẵng City branch of the VATS in 1960.

12 This Phan Khôi has the same name as the well-known scholar Phan Khôi (1887–1959) who lived in Hanoi after 1954.

### *Translation and Cataloguing the Nguyễn Dynasty's Official Documents*

The Committee of Historical Document Translation of Vietnam (Ủy Ban Phiên Dịch Sử Liệu Việt Nam, belonging to the University of Huế) was in charge of translating historical documents from Literary Sinitic into Vietnamese. The main translators were mostly from the Institute of Sinology and the VATS, with Nguyễn Huy Nhu serving as committee chief. The committee collaborated with the well-known scholar Professor Chen Ching-ho (陳荆和, Chen Jinghe, 1917–1995) to collect and translate a number of important historical documents. Some of these translations have already been published, including in 1961 *An Nam Chí Lược* (安南志略, *A Brief History of Annam*) by Lê Tấn (黎崱, 13th–14th century)—a Vietnamese scholar who migrated to China, and in 1963 *Hải Ngoại Ký Sự* (海外紀事, *Records of Overseas Events*) by the Buddhist monk Shi Dashan (釋大汕, 1637–1705). The committee's most significant translated work is a huge set of books entitled *Mục Lục Châu Bản Triều Nguyễn* (*Catalogue of the Official Documents of the Nguyễn Dynasty*, or 阮朝硃本目錄 in Chinese), of which just the two first volumes were published in 1960 and 1962. According to Nguyễn Văn Đăng's new research, by July 7, 1959, the University of Huế had gotten permission to receive and store the entire collection of the Nguyễn dynasty's "Official Documents"<sup>13</sup> which had been archived under suboptimal conditions in the Central Vietnam Institute of Culture (Viện Văn Hoá Trung Kỳ). At that time, the committee was established and Chen Ching-ho was appointed as General Secretary. The first thing that the committee focused on was the arrangement and compilation of a catalogue of the Official Documents. Within two months, the committee was able to inventory 611 volumes belonging to 10 reigns from Gia Long (reigned 1802–1819) to Bảo Đại (reigned 1926–1945). Starting in September 1959, the committee began to catalogue these documents in a unified fashion based on factors including: reign, day, month, year, volume, page, type, origin, abstract, subject, annotation, in both Vietnamese and Literary Sinitic (Nguyễn 2012, 107–18). At present a number of the Official Documents have been lost; the handwritten pages of the catalogue of the committee have been stored in the library of the College of Science in Huế. Compiling the series of books *Mục Lục Châu Bản Triều Nguyễn* (*Catalogue of the Official Documents of the Nguyễn Dynasty*) was obviously a massive undertaking carried out by the Committee of Historical Document Translation of Vietnam. It is notable that the staff of the Institute of Sinology and the VATS played a key role in the work. The vast documentary heritage they left, because of a lack of conditions

13 Official documents, or literally "red-colored texts" (硃本): the administrative texts of the imperial administration formed in the process of state management and operation, these documents are directly commented on by Emperors in red-ink brush.

for printing and publishing at the time, is still now being reviewed and edited for publication.

### *Literary Sinitic and Confucian Education*

Education was one of the key goals of the VATS. A brief report on its activities published in NGVNS (1970) indicates that the VATS frequently held free classes on teaching the *Five Classics* and *Four Books*, the theories of Confucius and Mencius, and teaching Sinographs and Literary Sinitic to pupils, students, and members (NGVNS 1970, 715). According to Advisor La Hoài, the VATS appointed its Vice-chairman, Priest Nguyễn Văn Thích, to be responsible for running these classes. The ceremony to celebrate the start of these classes was held in Di Luân hall on August 20th, 1955 (La 1956, 156). Unfortunately, I failed to find more extensive, detailed records on these educational activities. However, when the SVN government established the Institute of Sinology, a university-level educational and research unit under the University of Huế, in 1959, several key members of the VATS, such as Nguyễn Huy Nhu, Nguyễn Văn Thích, Lương Trọng Hối, Nguyễn Duy Bột, La Hoài, Phan Chí Chương, Hà Ngại, and Phạm Lương Hàn played important roles in teaching Literary Sinitic, Sinology, and Confucianism in the institute.

Besides holding in-person classes, the VATS also organized several educational activities through their periodical. Starting from volume 2, CHQS included a column titled “Việt, Hoa thông-dụng từ-ngữ” (Frequently Used Chinese and Vietnamese Words and Phrases). This column provided explanations of Sino-Vietnamese words, accompanied by their associated Sinographs, readings, and meanings. Volume 2 includes all of “Letter A” of this Sino-Vietnamese word-list (CHQS 1956, vol. 2, 86–95), with “Letter B” included in volume 7 (ibid. 1959, vol. 7, 83–97). Volume 7 also tells us that the author of this column is Chairman Nhu. The last section of CHQS volume 11 is “Ấu học Hán tự giáo khoa thơ – Sách dạy trẻ học chữ Hán” (A Textbook of Sinographs for Children) which notes that this section “starts from volume 10.” Through reading the content of this section, I discovered that it is based on a Chinese character textbook well-known during the first decades of the twentieth century in Vietnam, entitled *Ấu học Hán tự tân thư* 幼學漢字新書 (*A New Textbook of Sinographs for Children*). The *Ấu học Hán tự tân thư* is a Sinographic textbook which was part of the Vietnamese Civil Service Examination Educational Reform Program (chương trình cải lương giáo dục khoa cử Việt Nam) which lasted from 1906 to 1919, when the Civil Service Examination was officially abolished. This woodblock-printed textbook

may have been published in 1908,<sup>14</sup> including four volumes totalling 372 pages. It included lessons on nature, plants, birds, weather (volume 1), ethics, morality (volume 2), Vietnamese geography and politics (volume 3), and Vietnamese history from the time of King Kinh Dương to the Trịnh Lords (volume 4). The difference between the *Ấu học Hán tự tân thư* and the CHQS version is that the *Ấu học Hán tự tân thư* is only written in Sinographs in the form of rhymed lines, while the CHQS adds the reading and meaning of each Sinograph, the meaning of each line, and annotations for rare Sinographs. In summary, the CHQS is based on a Vietnamese textbook of Sinographs published nearly 60 years prior, adding phonetic transcriptions, translations, and annotations to provide readers with a new and up-to-date Sinograph textbook for children.

### *Public Speeches on Confucianism and Traditional Morality*

Giving public speeches on Confucianism and traditional morality was another important function of the VATS. The brief report of its activities published in NGVNS (1970) indicates that the VATS organized public talks on the teachings of Confucian deities in districts, communes, and hamlets. At the headquarters in Huế, they organized large-scale presentations by celebrated foreign and domestic speakers (NGVNS 1970, 715). Based on extant materials, we still know of the following six public speeches (excluding speeches on all anniversaries of Confucius' birthday which will be mentioned below):

On June 15th, 1957, during the ceremony celebrating the founding of the VATS Quảng Nam Provincial branch, Doctor Thái Can, a modern scholar and Vice-chairman of the Quảng Nam Provincial branch, gave a speech on the relationship between tradition and modernity in which he emphasized the importance of traditional knowledge in modern times (CHQS 1957, vol. 3, 78–85).

On March 30th, 1958, Chairman Nhu gave a speech at the VATS General Assembly on the issue of Mencius' theory of good nature and Xunzi's theory of bad nature (CHQS 1958, vol. 5, 90–98).

In 1958 (date unclear), Mr. Phạm Mạnh Tô gave a speech at the VATS's City branch in Đà Nẵng about loyalty, filial piety, moral integrity, and righteousness in the past and the present (CHQS 1958, vol. 6, 35–59).

On September 25th, 1959, the University of Huế hosted a speech at its lecture hall by Priest Nguyễn Văn Thích, VATS Vice-chairman, on the moral philosophy of

14 See *Ấu học Hán tự tân thư* 幼學漢字新書, library call number VHv.1485, in the archives of the Institute of Sino-Nom Studies, Hanoi, Vietnam.

*The Doctrine of the Mean*. This presentation attracted a large audience, mostly intellectuals living in the former capital (*Văn Hoá Nguyệt San* 1959, vol. 44, 1202).

On May 5th, 1963, two guests from Taiwan, Ngô Tử Tâm and Ngô Thiệu Tâm arrived in Huế and were warmly welcomed. They gave a talk at the Di Luân hall on various aspects of Confucianism (CHQS 1964, vol. 11, 163–70). The full text of this talk and the Chinese names of the two guests remain unknown.

On February 3rd, 1964, during the occasion of the VATS's delegation's visit to the district branch in Phú Vang, Vice-chairman Hà Ngại spoke about the meaning of the words "revolution, freedom, and equality" through interpretations of pre-modern Chinese Confucians (*ibid.*, 175–80).

The abovementioned educational activities and speeches were aimed towards re-invigorating the influence of Confucianism on the public, for both children and adults, at events and through publications. These activities demonstrate the VATS's attempts to popularize Confucian cultural and academic practices in society.

### *Organizing the Commemoration of Confucius' Birthday (ACB)*

Sixteen months after being appointed Prime Minister of The State of Vietnam (Quốc Gia Việt Nam, 1949–1955), Ngô Đình Diệm (1901–1963) became the first president of the Republic of Vietnam on October 26th, 1955. Only three months later, on January 9th, 1956, the new president signed *Decree No. 4*, designating fifteen national holidays for the new republic.<sup>15</sup> According to Nguyễn Bá Nghị, Confucian scholars living in the SVN's capital in Saigon proposed that the solar birthday of Confucius be made into a national holiday. President Diệm swiftly approved their proposal by including it in *Decree No. 4* (*Minh Tân* 1964, 12–15). As they did on other significant holidays, citizens of South Vietnam enjoyed an entire day off of work for Confucius' birthday (on less important holidays they only had a half-day off). This was the first time since 1945 that a national holiday was established for Confucius' birthday on September 28th of the solar calendar. Although the official title of the holiday was the "Commemoration of Confucius" ("Kỷ niệm Đức Khổng tử"), people most called it the "Festival of Confucius' Birthday" ("Lễ Thánh đản", literally the "Festival of the Sage's Birthday" in English, "聖誕禮" in Chinese). According to extant documents, the ACB was organized into central and local administrative units, which functioned continuously from 1956 to 1974 until the fall of Saigon in April 1975. The National Ministry of

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15 See *Decree No. 4* and its supplementary content in *Decree No. 59-a* in *Công Báo Việt Nam Cộng hoà* (*Gazettes of the Republic of Vietnam*), (1956, 142, 2724).

Education and the Vietnamese Association of Confucianism (VAC) were responsible for organizing the ACB countrywide, but in the city of Huế and certain other central provinces the VATS was also responsible for its organization.

The organization of the ACB was one of the most significant yearly events held by the VATS. The association requested permission from the local government to take the Di Luân hall as its headquarters and brought the tablets of Confucius and his disciples, including the Four Correlates (四配, *tứ phối*) and Twelve Philosophers (十二哲, *thập nhị triết*), there for worship. Prior to the ratification of the *Decree No. 4* on October 13th 1955, (August 28th in the lunar calendar), the VATS organized a “Commemoration of Confucius’ birthday” in the Di Luân hall in the city of Huế, the former capital of Nguyễn dynasty (1802–1945). The ceremony welcomed more than 500 attendees, including the Government Representative in Central Vietnam, the Commander of Military Zone II, the Director of Central Vietnam’s Department of Justice, the Consul of the Republic of China in Huế, various political, military, and academic elites, students, Chinese residents in Huế, and members of the VATS. The ceremony included: (1) a salute to the flag, (2) an honouring of Prime Minister Ngô Đình Diệm accompanied by military music and the national anthem, (3) Vice-Chairman Hà Ngại’s opening speech, (4) Chairman Nhu’s presentation of incense to the Altar of Confucius followed by four kowtows while an octet (八音) played, (5) three ritual kowtows (三叩) by all participants, (6) Advisor Phạm Lương Hàn’s recitation of Confucius’ biography, (7) the Chairman’s address about the organization of the VATS, and (8) Vice-Chairman and Catholic priest Nguyễn Văn Thích’s explications on the word “culture” (文化) and lecture on Confucianism in Vietnam.<sup>16</sup> This was the first celebration of Confucius’ birthday observed in the country since 1945. For the event, the lunar date of Confucius’ birthday was used, adhering to the Confucian tradition of East Asia. This celebration was a special activity organized by the VATS in Central Vietnam, because in 1955 the ACB had not yet been designated as a national holiday.

Starting in 1965, when the ACB became a national holiday, the VATS cooperated with local government to organize this celebration, most often held in the city of Huế. The date of the celebration also became based on the solar calendar, as is recorded in *Decree No. 4*. Extant materials give evidence of only three ACB events held in 1956 (CHQS 1956, vol. 2, 71), 1958 (CHQS 1958, vol. 6, 101–2), and 1963 (CHQS 1964, vol. 11, 158), during which the ceremony was roughly the same as that of 1955.

16 “Trường thuật Lễ Ki-niệm ngày Thánh-Đản Đức Khổng-Phu-Từ do Hội Cổ-học tổ chức (Relating the ACB Organized by VATS)” (CHQS 1956, vol. 1, 69; also see VATS Chairman’s address (*ibid.*, 70–73)).

### *International Relations on Confucianism*

International relations was a feature which reflected the modernization of the Confucian cultural activities of the VATS. They maintained frequent contact with Taiwan and sometimes with Switzerland.

CHQS (volume 3) included a letter written to the VATS in Sinographs by Mr. Feng Gao (馮鎬), who was Manager of the Overseas Archives Publishing House (海外文庫出版社社長) in Taiwan. This was a letter of thanks for books (possibly volumes of CHQS) given by the VATS's Chairman. Mr. Feng Gao reiterated the important role of Confucianism in the history of China, and asserted that "China and Vietnam are one family and race, share the same language, both followed Confucius and Mencius, and were both descendants of Confucian deities" (中越一家, 兄弟之國, 同文同種, 宗孔宗孟, 均為列聖列賢之裔). He also applauded the foundation of the VATS, and at the end of his speech noted that he was providing the VATS with 20 copies of a brief biography of Confucius, and 20 copies of a book on the "Father of the Nation" Sun Zhongshan 孫中山 (CHQS 1957, vol. 3, 87).

At the end of 1958, accepting the invitation of VAC, Professor Kong Decheng 孔德成 (1920–2008), a 77th-generation descendant of Confucius who held the position of "Confucian Sacrificial Official" (奉祀官) responsible for worshipping Confucius in Taiwan, visited SVN for 15 days from September 22 to October 6, 1958. He participated in several cultural activities including attending the ACB in Saigon, visiting four cities/provinces (Saigon, Vĩnh Long, Huế, Quy Nhon), lecturing on Confucian topics seven times in these locations, holding a press conference, communicating with Confucian associations in Saigon and the other three provinces, communicating with Chinese resident societies, and visiting historic sites in the provinces. In the entire history of Confucianism in Vietnam, this was the first time that there was an official visit by a Confucian Sacrificial Official as a "state visitor" (Nguyễn 2015b). During his trip, Kong Decheng visited Huế from the afternoon of October 1st to the morning of October 3rd. The VATS organized a delegation of over 100 members together with a number of government representatives and Chinese residents to welcome him at Phú Bài airport. After visiting the VATS's Central Vietnam headquarters in Huế, he went to the VATS's headquarters at their Quảng Tri club-house (the Di Luân hall was currently under renovation). In order to welcome Kong Decheng, Chairman Nhu read an address in Sino-Vietnamese. The Secretary General of the Consulate of the Republic of China in Huế then read it in Chinese and the VATS Advisor Nguyễn Dự read it in Vietnamese.<sup>17</sup> The address emphasized the significance of

17 The full text of Nguyễn Huy Nhu's address is found in CHQS (1958, vol. 6, 109–11); for Sinographic part, with a responding poem by Kong Decheng after this trip, see *ibid.*, 112–13 (Vietnamese).

Confucianism to the history and culture of both China and Vietnam, and re-affirmed that the founding of the VATS was meant to re-establish the connection between human nature and social morality. The Chairman expressed his great appreciation for Kong's visit and emphasized the friendly relations between China and Vietnam. Kong then "praised the VATS's enthusiasm for traditional culture which led to its foundation and thanked them for such a warm welcome." Next, the VATS presented Kong with a gift of Sinographic calligraphy and they all cordially had tea together. On the next day, October 2nd, 1958, the VATS sent some of their men together with the Office of Information to lead Kong Decheng to visit historic monuments in Huế. On the same day at 6pm, there was a dinner banquet which included the attendance of the Chief of Thừa Thiên province, the Consul of the Republic of China in Huế, a number of Chinese residents, VAC members, and VATS members.<sup>18</sup>

From January 14–19, 1960, a "Cultural Delegation" accompanied President Ngô Đình Diệm (1901–1963) during his official visit to the Republic of China (Taiwan). This delegation included Trương Công Cừu, Cao Văn Luận, Nguyễn Đăng Thục, Nguyễn Trác, and three key members of the VATS: Nguyễn Huy Nhu, Nguyễn Văn Thích, and Lương Trọng Hối. They visited the Temple of Confucius in Taipei on January 16, where they met and talked with Kong Decheng, the 77th generation descendant of Confucius who had already made a 15-day trip to SVN in 1958 at the invitation of President Ngô Đình Diệm and the VAC. On the next day, they visited the Academia Sinica (中央研究院, Central Research Academy) in Nangang District of Taipei, where they met and talked with Academia Sinica President Hu Shi (胡適, 1891–1962), a leading scholar, and participated in a seminar on education chaired by the Minister of Education of Taiwan. On January 18, the delegation flew to Taichong Province (台中) to visit National Chung Hsing University (國立中興大學) and the National Palace Museum (故宮博物院), accompanied by Kong Decheng and the Province chief (Nguyễn 1960, 2–4, 16).

When Taiwanese Vice President Chen Cheng 陳誠 (1898–1965) made an official visit to SVN in early March 1963, VATS Chairman Nhu wrote him a brief letter in Chinese with a Vietnamese translation, dated March 5th. This letter spoke of book exchanges between Taiwan and the VATS: "Thanks to your nation's cultural organizations, particularly the Foreign Resident Department, we often receive books and newspapers which provide us with reference materials for promoting Confucianism." The end of the letter stressed the need to strengthen diplomatic relations between Taiwan and Vietnam, and mentioned that the VATS gave the

18 "Không-Đức-Thành Tiên-Sinh đến Huế (Mr. Kong Decheng's Visit to Huế)" (CHQS 1958, vol. 6, 108).

Vice President ten copies of CHQS volume 10, which had just been published (CHQS 1964, vol. 11, 171–72).

In early May, 1963, the SVN government sent invitations to visit SVN to two guests from Taiwan: Ngô Tử Tâm, who was both a famous Confucian scholar and painter, and Ngô Thiệu Tâm, who was an acupuncturist. They were also invited by the Institute of Sinology and the VATS to visit the former capital of Huế from May 2nd to May 5th, 1963, to give lectures on the teachings of Confucius and Mencius. After being welcomed at Phú Bài airport on May 2nd, the two guests visited the VATS's headquarters on May 4th. The next day, they gave a lecture on Confucianism at the Di Luân hall. The visit ended with a dinner banquet held by the VATS at its headquarters. The CHQS published eight poetic exchanges (唱和詩) written in Sinographs between the two guests and members of the VATS, following the customs of traditional literati (ibid., 163–70).

In addition to the exchanges with Taiwan mentioned above, the VATS also had some contact with Switzerland's Association of Confucianism. CHQS volume 1 includes a note from the Swiss organization to the VATS Chairman. “[We are] the sole association in the West that explains the beauty of Confucian teachings and applies these teachings in the present day. A copy of our monthly periodical will be sent for free to anyone who needs one. We require no meeting or membership fees. Please join in to help us.” At the end of the note the VATS wrote: “This association sent us four issues of their monthly periodical which we will publish in the next volume (of CHQS)” (CHQS 1956, vol. 1, 76). However, I failed to find any reference to the Swiss journal in volume 2 and 3 of CHQS.

## Comments on the VATS

### *Relationship with Government*

Article 11 in the abovementioned *Regulations* defined an honorary member (Hội viên danh dự) as follows:

This group includes those who have prestige, reputation, morality, and erudition, and are invited by the VATS to provide support in the spiritual sphere, support fine initiatives, or assist the association by means which promote strong development. (NGVNS 1970, 703)

Among the five honorary members inducted in 1956, there were three Vietnamese inductees, the government representative in Central Vietnam Nguyễn Đôn Duyên, Commander of Military Zone II Major-general Lê Văn Nghiêm, and the

Attorney of the Director of the Bureau of Justice in Central Vietnam Ngô Khánh Thực. There also were two Taiwanese inductees, Envoy Jiang Enqi 蔣恩起 and Consul Chen Zhongjun 陳忠君. In 1957, the first two Vietnamese honorary members were replaced by Hồ Đắc Khương and Lieutenant-general Thái Quang Hoàng (CHQS 1957, vol. 3, 5). It is also worth mentioning again that the VATS invited President Ngô Đình Diệm to be Honorary Chairman in early 1956.

A similar phenomenon occurred at the VATS's branches. Article 31 in the *Regulations* states that: "After setting up a branch's Board of Directors in each province, city, town, or district, invite the Chief of the province, city, town, or district to be the branch's Honorary Chairman, representative, and supporter" (NGVNS 1970, 707). Looking at the list of Board of Directors of the Quảng Nam provincial branch, one can find the names of provincial government officers. The Honorary Chairmen were two Provincial Chiefs, Nguyễn Hoà Phẩm and Võ Hữu Thu. Three Provincial Lieutenant Governors Nguyễn Tự, Nguyễn Xuân Ba, Hồ Liêm, and Lieutenant-colonel Nguyễn Đạm were four advisors of the branch. The chairman of the branch was Local Laureate Lương Trọng Hối, who served as a congressman from 1959, whereas the vice-chairman was Chief Justice of the Conciliation Court of the City of Hội An in Quảng Nam province (CHQS 1957, vol. 3, 77–85). District Chief Tôn Thất Chi was also invited and subsequently agreed to serve as Honorary Chairman of the Vinh Lộc district branch of the VATS (CHQS 1958, vol. 6, 114–15).

The above evidence demonstrates that in both the central association in Huế and at other local branches, the VATS attempted to establish strong connections with the government by inviting local political and military leaders to join as honorary members. They also used enthusiastic local officers to contribute to the VATS's operations. This connection existed in both the *Regulations* and in the actual activities of the VATS.

CHQS occasionally published pro-government articles. For example, an article written by Phan Ngọc Hoàn analyzed Confucian quotes associated with "person" (人, *nhân* in Vietnamese) and "position" (位, *vị*) to interpret the word "nhân vị" (人位) in Vietnamese in order to "provide readers with several references that could be of help regarding today's essential subject matter". His interpretations were used in SVN to translate Emmanuel Mounier's "personalism" (*chủ nghĩa nhân vị*), the leading political theory of the SVN government from 1955 to 1963. In his conclusion, Phan expressed his strong belief in the link between the fate of Confucianism and contemporary politics:

These days, the foundation of parliament and the promulgation of the constitution has opened up a new era for the Republic of Vietnam. We

feel optimistic when the words “respecting personalism” are stated in the first paragraph of the constitution. We believe that the Confucian theory of “illustrating virtue and renovating the people” (明德新民) will shine in the world. Let us prepare to toast that day soon to come. (Phan 1957, 48–53)

The policy of attaching the VATS to the government of SVN the Taiwanese Consulate shows that the VATS wanted to take full advantage of support from the SVN government and Taiwanese Consulate in Huế. At the same time, they maintained a close relationship with the local government in every province, city, town, and district. However, compared to the VAC, which was founded later in 1956 in Saigon, the VATS paid less attention to politics. The CHQS published fewer political articles than the *Minh Tân* (Bright and New) and *Sinh Lực* (Vitality), the voices of the VAC.

### *Relationship with National Sinological Education*

Most of the imperial civil service examination laureates who were key members of the VATS were also active lecturers at the Institute of Sinology which was part of the University of Huế. Notable examples include Chairman Nhu, Vice-Chairmen Nguyễn Văn Thích, Võ Như Nguyễn, Hà Ngại, Advisors Phạm Lương Hàn, La Hoài, and Quảng Nam provincial branch Chairman Lương Trọng Hối. The Di Luân hall was headquarters of both the VATS and Institute of Sinology. They also both contributed to the translation of Vietnamese historical documents led by the Commission of Vietnamese Historical Document Translation. The relationship between the VATS and the Institute of Sinology represents a close connection between state institutions and cultural organizations focused on Sinology and Confucianism. A similar situation can be seen in the relationship between the VAC and the Department of Literary Sinitic (Ban Hán văn) of the Faculty of Letters of the University of Saigon. Such close connections may have been a common occurrence in the field of Sinology in SVN from 1955–1975.

### *The Role of Traditional Confucian Scholars*

There are a number of Sinological laureates on the list of the 16 founders of the VATS. Chairman Nguyễn Huy Nhu (1887–1962) was a member of the famous Nguyễn Huy family in Nghi Lộc district, Nghệ An province. He was a Local Laureate in 1909, and a Metropolitan Laureate during the reign of Emperor Khải Định

in 1916 (Ngô 2006, 809). There were only seven Metropolitan Laureates that year (Phạm 2000, 406–11). During his entire lengthy career as a mandarin, he held Sino-logical educational positions such as Prefectural Education Officer (Giáo thụ), District Education Officer (Huấn đạo), and Provincial Education Officer. All of these positions were in Quảng Ninh province. He was also a member of the Imperial Academy. When the Institute of Sinology was founded under the University of Huế in 1959, he was appointed Professor in Literary Sinitic and Director of the Commission of Vietnamese Historical Document Translation. Another founder was Phan Ngọc Hoàn (1893–?), a Local Laureate in 1915 during the reign of Emperor Duy Tân (Cao 2011, 660). Though I failed to find the names of the other founders in the records of laureates, they must have experienced a traditional Literary Sinitic education. Three members at the end of the list, Trần Trọng Ngân, Ngô Đình Sung, Hoàng Đình Khải, were members of the Imperial Academy. At the provincial branch of Quảng Nam, Chairman Lương Trọng Hối (1888–1969) was a Local Laureate in 1918 during the last imperial civil service examination in Vietnam. He worked as a mandarin in several positions for the Nguyễn dynasty for a long period of time before the dynasty came to the end in 1945. Starting in 1959, he served as a congressman in the government of President Ngô Đình Diệm and as Deputy Director of the Institute of Sinology. He was a famous Confucian scholar, politician, poet, and traditional physician in central Vietnam.

There are also many traditional Confucian scholars on the member list of the VATS, such as Ứng Trình, Ứng Bình Thúc Giạ Thị, Bửu Cầm, Hồ Đắc Hàm, Nguyễn Văn Thích, Trần Văn Kiểm, Tạ Thúc Khải, and La Hoài, who together produced a large number of academic and artistic works.

With contributions from traditional scholars with extensive backgrounds in Literary Sinitic, the CHQS periodical often released articles in both Literary Sinitic and Vietnamese. They wrote in a style of Chinese similar to the Confucian classics, not modern Chinese. Diplomatic documents from the VATS written to Taiwan were also written in classical Chinese (Literary Sinitic). Just like premodern intellectuals who came before them, members of the VATS regularly engaged in poetic exchanges with foreign scholars.

### *Diverse Membership: Royals, Women, Buddhists, and Catholics*

Looking at the list of members of the VATS, besides the significant presence of traditional Confucian scholars, there exist four other groups which hold a significant place on the list: members of the royal family, women, Buddhists, and Catholics.

In accordance with naming conventions, members of the Nguyễn royal often have names beginning with Ứng, Bửu, and Tôn Thất. Looking at the membership lists in CHQS volumes 1, 2, 3, and 5, there are 26 individuals with such names. The list includes numerous individuals who were famous scholars in the history of Vietnam. One of these scholars was Nguyễn Phúc Ứng Trình 阮福膺脞, the author of *Luận ngữ tinh hoa ấu học* (論語菁華幼學, *The Quintessences of Confucius Analects for Primary Education*), which was written in Literary Sinitic and printed by woodblock in 1914. Four copies of this work are now archived in the Institute of Sino-Nom Studies in Hanoi (call numbers A.906, VHv.501, VHv.775, VHv.776). He is also the author of *Việt Nam ngoại giao sử cận đại* (*The History of Modern Vietnam's Diplomacy*), written in 1970 and published in Sài Gòn. Another example is Ứng Bình Thúc Giả Thị (1877–1961), whose real name is Nguyễn Phúc Ứng Bình 阮福膺莘. He was a famous poet with a collection of poems entitled *Lộc Minh đình thi thảo* (鹿鳴亭詩草, *Poetic Manuscript of the Hall of Lộc Minh*) (Ứng 2008; Triệu 2008). The collection includes over 200 Sinographic poems and other works written in the Romanized script. Finally, Nguyễn Phúc Bửu Cầm (1920–2010) was a well-known scholar in Sino-Nom studies who made remarkable contributions in education, translation, and research, with around 20 books and 50 research articles to his name. He was a Professor of Literary Sinitic in the Faculty of Letters at the University of Saigon before 1975, after which he moved to the University of Hồ Chí Minh City.

The member list also includes a number of women such as Nguyễn Thị Khanh, Hoàng Nguyệt Quế, and Trần Xuân Huệ Phương. One of the two vice-treasurers in 1969 was Mrs. Nguyễn Thị Tuý. The Phú Lộc District branch also included female member whose name remains unclear (CHQS 1957, vol. 3, 86). CHQS (1957, vol. 2, 57) includes a poem by a Mrs. Lê Thị Bằng entitled “Lấy chồng thời lấy, năm chung chẳng năm” (Agreeing to Get Married to a Man but Disagreeing to Sleep with Him).

From 1955–1975 in SVN, though Confucianism was often treated as a religion, the VATS Confucian organization still welcomed members from Buddhism and Catholicism. The Catholic priest Nguyễn Văn Thích (also Nguyễn Hy Thích) was a founding member, Vice-chairman of the VATS, and one of the most active members in its history. Thích Trí Thủ (1909–1984) was a famous Buddhist monk in central Vietnam and an active member of the the association from the beginning. Priest Trương was an advisor at the Quảng Nam provincial branch, while Priest Nguyễn Văn Tiếp was an advisor at the Phong Điền district branch. This list of members associated with other religions might in fact be longer than the examples mentioned above. This phenomenon of Buddhists and Catholics being

members of the VATS demonstrates a high level of religious acceptance and harmony in the cultural activities of the organization.

## Conclusion

The VATS was established as a bastion for the last Confucians in the history of Vietnam in the former capital of Huế, the centre of the Nguyễn dynasty's cultural and academic activities. During the middle of the 1950's, observing the expansion of Westernization and the decreased influence of Confucianism, they decided to stand up and campaign for the founding of a cultural association with the goal of collecting, researching, translating, interpreting and circulating classical Sinographic documents. This was in order to preserve traditional East Asian culture and connect it with up-to-date moral education and practical science. The association followed the guidelines set forth in "Royal Decree No. 10", dated August 6th, 1950, on the requirements of founding associations. The VATS tried to expand its range of activities from Huế out to many other provinces, cities, towns, and districts. It welcomed all classes of people to join as members, including traditional Confucian scholars, local political and military leaders, members of the royal family, women, Buddhist monks, and Catholic priests. This indicates that the VATS had an open-minded view regarding politics, gender, and religion. No evidence for the existence of the VATS after the unification of Vietnam on April 30th, 1975 was found, so it is possible to provisionally assert that it lasted from 1954 to 1975.

The VATS focused its efforts towards research, publishing, education, giving public speeches, organizing the annual event for the national holiday of the anniversary of Confucius' birthday, and promoting international cooperation in the fields of Confucianism and traditional morality. According to evidence found in the CHQS periodical, the VATS's cultural and academic activities were quite traditional. In terms of how the active members thought, wrote, and acted, they followed the example set by premodern Confucian scholars. The Confucian knowledge they shared with the public was traditional, introductory, and brief in order to be easy to popularize. This indicates that these Confucians stayed far from the New Confucianism movement that developed in East Asia in the 1950s–1970s.

Among the various Confucian organizations in SVN from 1955–1975, the VATS was the first one founded, and together with the VAC played the most significant role of all the groups. Since their goals were largely aligned, these two organizations tried to unify in 1957–1960, but the attempt ultimately failed.<sup>19</sup> In com-

19 On the efforts to unify the VATS and the VAC, see *Sinh Lực* (1957, vol. 17, 104), and *Minh Tân* (1960, vol. 71, 12).

parison, the VAC had more members (around 20,000), a larger range of activity, and more varied publications (periodicals and books). They maintained a closer relationship with the government and organized many more cultural activities. The Confucian knowledge that they published remained closer to the contemporary situation in East Asia and the wider world. In general, the activities of VAC were thus more contemporary than those of the VATS. Meanwhile, the VATS appeared to be much more traditional, carrying out many of the same practices as premodern Confucian scholars, such as explicating Confucian classics, praising examples of morality, engaging in poetic exchanges with friends, and teaching Literary Sinitic and Confucian thought. The VATS often repeated their guiding principle of “reviewing the past and understanding the present” (溫故知新, *ôn cố tri tân*); though they may have succeeded in “reviewing the past”, it is hard to say that they succeeded in “understanding the present”.

In the wider context of East Asia in the 1950s–1970s, there existed numerous Confucian organizations, most of which were active in Taiwan, which also existed in a divided-state situation similar to that seen in Vietnam. The Association of Confucius and Mencius (孔孟學會), founded in 1961, was the most illustrious such association in Taiwan, with a large number of branches. There also existed other organizations like the Chinese Association of the Way of the Sage (中華聖道會), founded by Mao Songnian 毛松年 in 1949, the China Association of Confucianism (中國孔學會), officially established in 1959, the Danshui Association of Confucianism (淡水孔學會), founded in 1948, and Juexiu Palace (覺修宮), founded in 1910 in Taipei but only becoming active starting in 1954. All of these organizations focused on four primary activities: organizing the annual commemoration of Confucius’ birthday on September 28th, publishing periodicals, giving speeches on Confucian theory, and participating in social education (Li 2011). These activities are quite similar to those of the VATS and VAC in Vietnam during the same period of time. In the 1950s–1970s, because SVN and Taiwan shared an anti-communist perspective, they maintained a close relationship in terms of both politics and culture. In the fields of Confucianism and Sinology, the VATS and the VAC in SVN echoed the sentiments of their counterparts in Taiwan. Taiwanese people continued to use Sinographs and Chinese as their script and spoken language, which helped them regard Confucianism as part of their own tradition. On the other hand, SVN shifted to a modern Romanized script, which day by day increased the people’s unfamiliarity with and feeling of strangeness towards Sinographs and Confucian culture. Therefore, compared to organizations in Taiwan, both the VATS and the VAC failed to attract as much attention from society at large.

The existence of the VATS can be regarded as the last flashes of an oil lamp before fading away, as the people gradually shift to using electric lamps. Their

activities were evidence of a continuance of the old more than a rising of the new in Confucian thought. In this way, the VATS was unlike the New Confucianism movement that existed at the same time in East Asia. Nonetheless, the group's activities indicate its valiant, but fruitless attempt at popularizing Confucianism, by bringing it in harmony with the ideas and practices introduced by modernization and Westernization in the middle of the 20th century. However, despite failing to achieve their ultimate goal, the VATS did amplify the voices of the last “pure Confucians” of Vietnam.<sup>20</sup>

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