

Chapter 2

Native Priests in Christian Societies in the Northern Regions of Pre-Colonial Vietnam: The Appearance of a Glocal Elite?

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Introduction

Vietnam has more Christians than any other mainland Southeast Asian country. Today, as in the past, Christians make up approximately ten percent of the total population and play an important role in connecting Vietnam to the Western world. Historically, this has had an important effect on relations with France. Vietnam presented France with an opportunity for colonization during the second half of the nineteenth century, when the local Nguyễn Dynasty was suppressing Christianity. Under the guise of freedom of religion, France carried out a military invasion, in the name of protecting their own missionaries, Vietnamese clergy, and believers.

At that time, missionary activities in Vietnam were carried out by an association of French-speaking lay priests, known as the “Société des Missions Étrangères de Paris (MEP).” Its establishment was largely due to Alexandre de Rhodes, a Jesuit who made a great contribution to propagating Christianity in Vietnam. Considering the continuity and potential of missionary work in Vietnam, where persistent suppression continued, he saw that the key to spreading Christianity was to enlist native clergy as well as European missionaries. He distanced himself from the Jesuits, who were influenced by ideas from Portugal and aimed to establish a non-ordained organization directly supervised by the Pope. In Rome, he attracted supporters on the periphery of the Vatican, and in Paris, he managed to attract many material and spiritual supporters. In 1663, he received permission from Pope Alexander VII and the French government to officially establish the MEP. Up to the present day, this Catholic mission has continued to expand, particularly in Asia.

After the establishment of the MEP, training native clergy became a major goal of all missionary organizations to spread Christianity to local residents. Parish priests held the top positions among such native clergy.

The present study focuses on the role of native priests in the history of Vietnamese missionary work, particularly in a northern region of the country known as Tonkin. This was the main stage in Vietnamese history, placed at the center of Vietnam’s successive

dynasties. From the point of view of Christianity, ever since the Jesuits began their religious missions in the seventeenth century, Tonkin was the place with the most believers and the most systematic development of the church. At its core was the Vicariat Apostolique du Tonkin Occidental (Apostolic Vicariate of Western Tonkin), which was controlled by the MEP. French Missionaries made use of native priests who were familiar with Vietnamese language and values.

Prior research on native priests in the Apostolic Vicariate of Western Tonkin includes books by Marillier and Forest,¹ focusing on the eighteenth century. In Vietnam, this period of time included the Lê Dynasty (1428–1789) and the Tây Sơn Dynasty (1778–1802).² The Nguyễn Dynasty (1802–1945) has been researched by Keith, who deals with the colonial period, from the late nineteenth to early twentieth centuries.³ However, almost no academic studies have dealt specifically with the era spanning the early- to mid-nineteenth century, when Vietnam maintained its independence. Although Ramsay has analyzed this era, focusing on the Apostolic Vicariate of Cochinchina⁴ and extending this research to the whole of Vietnam, there are very few references to native clergy.⁵

¹ André Marillier, *Nos pères dans la foi: notes sur le clergé catholique du Tonkin de 1666 à 1765*, Paris, Eglise d'Asie, 1995; Alain Forest, *Les missionnaires français au Tonkin et au Siam XVIIème-XVIIIème siècles. Analyse comparée d'un relatif succès et d'un total échec*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 1998, III vols.

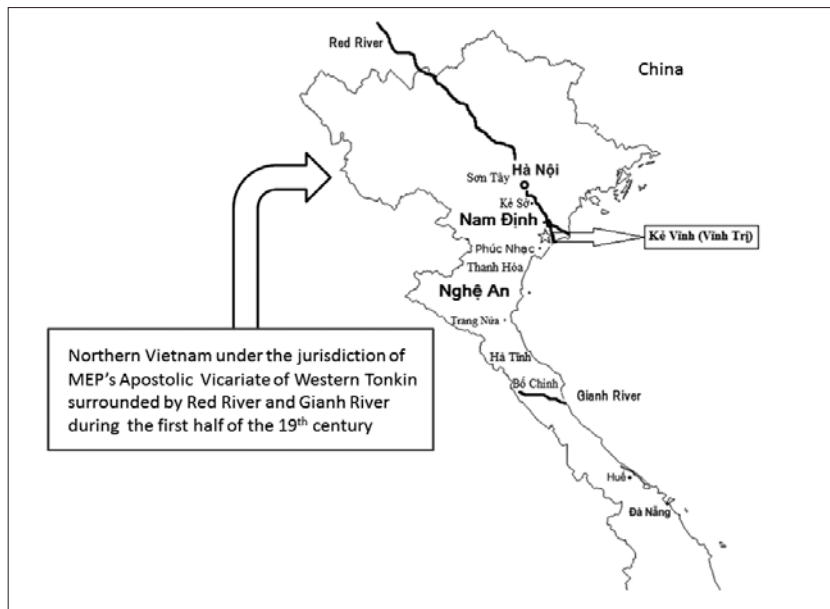
² The following text by George Dutton may provide a useful reference to the Society of Jesus in Tonkin, as well as to the MEP and native priests in the Society of Jesus, which was active between the Lê and Tây Sơn Dynasties. This text describes the life of Philippe Binh, who wished to revive support for the Society of Jesus in Portugal, but passed away without achieving his wish. George Dutton, *A Vietnamese Moses: Philippe Binh and the Geographies of Early Modern Catholicism*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 2016.

³ Charles Keith, *Catholic Vietnam: A Church from Empire to Nation*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 2012.

⁴ Jacob Ramsay, *Mandarins and Martyrs: The Church and the Nguyễn Dynasty in Early Nineteenth-century Vietnam*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2008.

⁵ This may be because Ramsay did not make much use of the abundant archives of the Apostolic Vicariate of Western Tonkin, where the largest Christian society in Vietnam was formed. My analysis has so far focused on the Apostolic Vicariate of Western Tonkin. Initially, I wrote a short article about the Maison de Dieu, a communal living space, where native clergy stayed during the early stages of their education. (Motonori Makino, “Pari Gaikoku Senkyōkai Nishi Tonkin Daibokoku ni okeru ‘Kami no Ie’” (The Maison de Dieu of the Société des Missions Étrangères de Paris in the Apostolic Vicariate of Western Tonkin), *Ajia Chiiki Bunka Kenkyū* (Komaba Journal of Asian Studies, the University of Tokyo) 1, 68–87, 2005.) Next, I published a relatively detailed paper on the “catechists” who lived there together—students and assistants, who helped the missionaries and priests from day to day. (Motonori Makino, “Pari Gaikoku Senkyōkai no Betonamu Senkyō to Katekisuta: 18 seiki matsu kara 19 seiki zenhan ni okeru Tonkin no Kirisutokyo shakai” (The Missionary Work of the Société des Missions Étrangères de Paris and its Catechists in Vietnam: The Tonkinese Christian Community from the End of the 18th to the First Half of the 19th Centuries),

Native clergy played an important role in Vietnamese church activities, combining Vietnamese values and Christianity. This paper aims to shed light on the everyday activities of native priests, who held the highest leadership positions in the parishes, as the top native clergy. It also shows how the training of native clergy, the MEP's aim since its establishment, finally materialized.



1. Native Priests in Tonkinese Rural Society

1. 1. Longer's Reforms

In the Apostolic Vicariate of Western Tonkin, organizational reforms were carried out at the direction of Bishop Longer during the late eighteenth century. These reforms reflected the need to increase the number of native priests, to compensate for the fact that fewer European missionaries were traveling to Vietnam because of the Revolution in France. In addition, the conditions for missionary work had been relatively stable under the Tây Sơn Nguyễn Huệ administration.⁶ Although European missionaries had not been responsible

Tōnan Ajia: Rekishi to Bunka (Southeast Asia: History and Culture) 2006 (35), 3–21, 2006.)

⁶ For more detail, see Motonori Makino, “Taison Seiken-ka ni okeru Pari Gaikoku Senkyōkai Nishi Tonkin Daibokuku, 1788–1802” (The Vicariate of Western Tonkin of La Société des Missions Étrangères de Paris under the Tâyson dynasty 1788–1802), *Tōyō Bunka Kenkyū* (Gakushuin University Research Institute for Oriental Cultures, Departmental Bulletin) 8, 69–101, 2006.

for specific regions beforehand,⁷ the reforms introduced a district system; each district was managed by European missionaries, while the small parishes within them were managed by native Vietnamese priests.

The district over areas within the Apostolic Vicariate was divided up, in accordance with the number of European missionaries. Each missionary became the head of his own district. If there were not enough missionaries, a native priest took that position. Each district was divided into four, six, eight, or ten parishes. Each parish was made up of 10, 15, or 20 *chrétientés*⁸, and was under the direction of a native priest. Thus, the Apostolic Bishop passed on orders to four to five priests under his district and the whole Apostolic Vicariate was brought under the control of missionaries. Each missionary was put in charge of the native priests in areas under his district.⁹

Despite this, the number of priests and missionaries was absolutely inadequate compared to the number of believers. During the period of the late eighteenth to early nineteenth centuries, in poor households, constantly affected by social unrest caused by war and famine, which were frequent occurrences in Vietnam at the time, it was relatively common for parents to entrust their children to people connected with the church, who were expected to protect them and bring them up. There were a huge number of districts. It took two to three days to travel from one district to another, and sometimes as long as seven to eight days. Each district had 3–4,000 believers, sometimes reaching as many as 7,000 or 8,000, and there were even some with 10–12,000. Although the number of believers was only one three-hundredth of the number of non-believers, the number of Christians was increasing.¹⁰

Under Longer's system of management, the district and professional duties of European missionaries were divided up as follows: Lepavec in Xứ Đoài and La Motte in Kẻ Sở taught theology while awaiting to be ordained as bishops; De La Bissachère was in charge of Bái Vàng and Nam Xang; Eyot was in charge of Thanh Liêm, Bình Lục, and Kẻ Trinh, while Leroy was in charge of the Collège Général. Langlois was in charge of three districts of Xứ Thành Ngoại, Tessier was in charge of three districts of Xứ Thành Nội, and Guérard was in charge of the whole area of Nghệ An. Sérard stayed in Bồ Chính,

⁷ A 1766 letter by Bishop Reydellet stated that European missionaries were not responsible for their own individual districts (Archives des Missions Étrangères de Paris (AME) 690, p. 463.).

⁸ Chrétienté was the smallest unit of settlement for managing believers residing in apostolic vicariates. For more detail, see Motonori Makino, "Betomanu zenkindaishi no naka no Katorikku: Shinkō seikatsu kyōdōtai Kuretiante to shinja no kurashi" (The Catholic Community in Pre-colonial Vietnam), *Kirisutokyō Bunka Kenkyūjo Kiyō* (Institute of Christian Culture Bulletin, Sophia University) 28, 3–23, 2009.

⁹ Adrien Launay, *Histoire générale de la Société des Missions Étrangères*, II, Paris, Tequi, 1894, pp. 155–156.

¹⁰ AME 692, p. 358.

supervising six priests in three districts. There were also four institutions that housed the growing population of nuns.¹¹

The number of native priests had to be maintained while the framework was being worked out. Longer began by carrying out consecrations and ordinations over a few days in April 1793. As a result, ten priests, one deacon, two subdeacons, and 26 readers were newly created. There were already 35 priests, but five had almost completely stopped fulfilling their duties for reasons such as age and health problems. The youngest of the new priests was 35, and the oldest was 55.¹²

In 1809, Longer opposed the MEP head office's plan to rebuild the Collège Général. The basis for his opposition was that, although only 21 of the priests trained over the past 100 years at the Collège Général in Siam had come back to Tonkin, within 20 years, the collège in the Apostolic Vicariate of Western Tonkin had created 54 new priests, of whom 45 were serving actively.¹³

After Longer's reforms, there was certainly an increase in the number of native priests, although not necessarily in their quality. As will be discussed later, hierarchical tensions between European missionaries and Vietnamese priests were amplified by the European's strengthened control, combined with the increased number of Vietnamese priests.¹⁴

¹¹ AME 692, p. 546. Longer clarifies his plans to return the Collège Général from Kê Sờ to Kê Vinh. There were, of course, exceptions; Tessier served his district while also working as a parish priest. "For a year and a half, I have been in charge of a parish of 7,000 Christians. It is not our custom for European missionaries to be at the head of parishes: the parish priests are from the country, and we go to visit them and their Christians. However, specific reasons have led the apostolic vicar to give me care of this parish. I have already had the consolation of seeing four churches built there" (*Lettres édifiantes et curieuses, écrites des missions étrangères par quelques missionnaires de la Compagnie de Jésus*, Tome 8, p. 295.).

¹² AME 692, p. 441.

¹³ AME 701, p. 756.

¹⁴ In a report sent to the MEP headquarters in 1830, Marette mentions that, although the native priests were tremendously helpful, they were "machine en jeu" precisely because of the presence of European missionaries. It was therefore always necessary to give them precise instructions (AME 694, pp. 760–761). In a report the following year, he also stated that the main responsibility of European missionaries was to encourage native priests and increase the piety of believers, as well as managing collèges and training native clergy. Even if native priests were exemplary, they faced difficulties that were difficult to overcome without the guidance and encouragement of European missionaries (*Annales de la Propagation de la Foi* (APF) 6, pp. 370–371).

1. 2. Increased Support from France

1. 2. 1. The APF

After the fall of Napoléon, France entered the *Restauration* era; the relationship between church and state that had been damaged during the great Revolution gradually began to be repaired. There was a revival of the human activities that had disappeared during the Revolution and continued wars, and they stimulated a renaissance in religious missions that propagated Catholic teachings around the world. The Association de la Propagation de la Foi (APF) was a charitable organization established in Lyon in 1822 to support overseas Catholic missionary work. The APF published a periodical called *Annales de la Propagation de la Foi*, and distributed the earnings it acquired from French churches and believers who subscribed to this publication to religious missions such as the MEP.¹⁵

As previously shown, from the end of the eighteenth century through the start of the nineteenth century, the MEP Apostolic Vicariate of Western Tonkin struggled with extremely difficult financial pressures; the managers of collèges and séminaires that trained native priests faced a particularly tough situation.

There were two sources of funds in the Apostolic Vicariate of Western Tonkin. Some funds came from missionaries, partly through their traveling expenses; the other source of funds was the alms given by believers. MEP missionaries at the time do not appear to have tried trading, as the Jesuits did. Almsgiving from believers was entrusted to parish priests, supported by catechists, students, and servants at the Maison de Dieu. European missionaries had an annual remittance from the Paris headquarters, as well as personal property, and money sent by their families. These funds were used to train new priests and to support aging or sick priests or believers who were taken into custody.¹⁶ However, fewer new missionaries were sent from Europe and the funds inevitably dried up as the existing missionaries aged.

As they faced these incredibly difficult circumstances, APF assistance had the effect of bringing them back from the brink of extinction. Immediately after the APF began sending money in 1826, Masson expressed gratitude for the immensely important grant, which helped to fund the management of local collèges.¹⁷

1. 2. 2. More priests

After APF support arrived, the number of native priests began to increase. Bishop Longer devoted much effort to this project during his later life, and the Apostolic Vicariate of

¹⁵ For additional details, see: Nola Cooke, “Early Nineteenth-century Vietnamese Catholics and Others in the Pages of the *Annales de la Propagation de la Foi*,” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 35-2, 261–285, 2004.

¹⁶ Marillier, *op. cit.*, Textes, p. 25.

¹⁷ APF 3, p. 433.

Western Tonkin had the largest number of native clergymen in East Asia. The number of Tonkinese priests ordained by Longer himself grew to almost 50; at one point, there were more than 90 priests. By the start of 1830, a plan was in place to increase the number of priests to more than 80.¹⁸

According to a report filed by Bishop Havard in 1831, the Apostolic Vicariate of Western Tonkin had more than 90 native priests, with more than 40 located in parishes from Xứ Đoài to Bồ Chính. There were three deacons and six subdeacons expected to advance to deaconships, as well as a plan to ordain a total of nine priests, as needed. There were also two readers and a total of twenty theology students. Theology graduates went to work converting non-believers, while awaiting ordination. It seems that only those who converted very large numbers of non-believers were eventually ordained.¹⁹ Just before Emperor Minh Mạng's persecution of Christians gathered momentum, the number of native priests in the Apostolic Vicariate of Western Tonkin, which had received economic support, had been growing steadily.

At the start of 1833, Christianity was declared a prohibited religion by Minh Mạng. As the persecution resulting from this policy gathered momentum, each center faced the bitter experience of dissolving its collèges and séminaires; the training of clergy stagnated. The following is a letter sent by the native priest André Linh to the leadership of the APF in 1836:²⁰

You spare no sacrifice for us. The Missionaries who come to visit exposed themselves to all the perils of the storms, and when they came to our beaches their hearts were torn with grief at the sight of the miseries that overwhelm the sheep of the Lord. In the present circumstances, how can any of us express how heavy the cross of ministers of the gospel is among us? And how much we fear that, the Pastors having been struck so, the sheep will be dispersed according to the word of the holy books, without being able to reunite them again! How much we fear that the Religion will be taken away from us, as in Japan! We are like navigators whose ship is broken. We hope in you, O our brothers, help us to tear ourselves away from this wreckage.

Linh warned that the French missionaries had provided support to their own native priests; as the persecution continued, there were fears that Christianity would be abolished in Tonkin, as it had been in Japan. Although the letter was charged with Linh's own candid views and passionate feelings, it was written with the permission of the MEP missionaries

¹⁸ APF 6, p. 37.

¹⁹ APF 6, pp. 404–405. Bishop Havard carried out 19 ordinations in his lifetime: 17 priests, nine deacons, and 16 subdeacons. Moreover, he promoted 16 clerics to readers, and took the tonsure of 19 young men (AME 696, pp. 286–287).

²⁰ AME 695, p. 489.

who were his superiors. He was therefore able to discuss MEP plans, while also requesting more support from the APF. As a priest, Linh was zealously engaged in conversions in Hoàng Nguyễn, Bái Vàng parish; he was famous for converting all 500 residents of the settlement to Christianity in 1846, even though it had previously been an entire community of non-believers.²¹

1. 3. *Social Position and Daily Life of the Native Priests*

What position did native priests hold in Vietnamese society? The next section examines their relationship with the laity in their parishes, as well as their everyday duties.

1. 3. 1. Relationship with the laity

How did the laity in the parishes perceive the priests? The catechists one rung below the priesthood were addressed as *Thầy* (teacher); they earned respect as intellectuals, even from non-believers.²² One of the titles given to priests and missionaries from the seventeenth century onwards was *Thầy Cả* (great teacher).²³ Clergymen who had been granted the sacrament earned respect; they also had a profound knowledge of Western science and classical Chinese ideas, including Confucianism, in addition to Christianity.

²¹ AME 697, pp. 836–837. In addition to Linh’s zealous religious conversion movement in Hoàng Nguyễn, an important event occurred in 1845. Vaccines arrived from France and Bishop Retord vaccinated the first people in Vietnamese history; subsequently, the religious mission spread to the whole of Tonkin. It was said that many parents converged on the mission every day to have their children vaccinated. Bishop Retord encouraged catechists and priests, as well as doctors, to carry out the vaccinations. As half of the infant deaths in this area had been due to smallpox, the vaccination program seemed to offer an opportunity to make a substantial number of conversions. Retord for many years petitioned the MEP headquarters about the future of vaccinations, asking for equipment and missionaries with vaccination skills (AME 697, p. 857).

²² Makino, “Pari Gaikoku Senkyōkai no Betonamu Senkyō to Katekisuta.”

²³ In the seventeenth century, the Marini Jesuits called each other “Padre” in Portuguese, but as the number of Christians grew, they started to be called *Thầy Đạo*. The former way of addressing them was shortened, and the abbreviation *Pha* spread. *Thầy Đạo* was used in a letter addressed to MEP Father Deydier in 1671, when non-Christian priests were beginning to discuss European missionaries. *Đạo* is *dao* 道 in Chinese, meaning way, obligation, or the teaching of Daoism; in Tonkin, its meaning was extended to include religion in general. The other word, *Thầy*, had an even deeper meaning, covering a wide social domain. It could refer to a minister, teacher, man of action with specific sacred skills, *fengshui* master, or fortuneteller. The first Jesuits used the word *Thầy* to refer to catechists; they also used the Chinese language, which was associated with teaching and explanation, *Thầy Giảng*. To refer to themselves, they added a Tonkinese word meaning large or advanced in years, *Thầy Cả*. Deydier felt that *Thầy Cả* was a nicer term because it conveyed the meaning of Reverend Father as well as teacher. This made it possible to emphasize the priest’s dual roles, as both a teacher and a spiritual pastor (Marillier, *op. cit.*, Textes, pp. 60–61).

Moreover, they played a significant role in leading the parishes where believers were able to subsist by mutual support.

Until support arrived from the APF, believers in the parishes supported the priests financially, funding their everyday activities, such as giving and receiving the sacrament in each parish; they also helped pay for the basic necessities of life for students supported by the priests. The priests made a living from the almsgiving of their parishioners.²⁴ A report sent by the MEP headquarters to the APF headquarters in November 1835 clearly stated that each French missionary received a ration of 100 piastres a year, while each French bishop received 200 piastres. The small income they received from chrétientés was set aside for native priests to help them fund the management of the collège and the catechists.²⁵

What was the source of this devotion, which created close bonds of strong faith between believers and members of the clergy?

According to Forest, the migration of Christians was underpinned by certain security guarantees. In chrétientés frequently visited by missionaries and priests, believers could receive the grace of being “family”. If they needed food or clothing during times of peril, they could receive help from the nuns of the “Amantes de la Croix”. Those who worked in agriculture and fishing had peace of mind. Those whose landlord was the church, in the form of missionaries and priests, had security when it came to contracting for the sale of land. Believers were able to obtain mutual aid and relief in worst-case scenarios, in return for contributing to the livelihood of the Maison de Dieu.²⁶

In each chrétienté, there was a leader known as Trùm who managed the believers,²⁷ and organized religious activities when the priest was away. He collected alms and, during times of oppression, sheltered priests and missionaries and looked after students.²⁸ When the parish priests were arrested by government officials or soldiers, groups of female believers sometimes managed to rescue by using force; this strength may have been the result of routine close connections between the parishioners and believers.²⁹

²⁴ Marillier, *op. cit.*, Textes, p. 76.

²⁵ APF 7, pp. 23–24.

²⁶ Forest, *op. cit.*, III, pp. 189–190.

²⁷ Makino, “Betomanu zenkindaishi no naka no Katorikku.”

²⁸ Antoine Dich (Adrien Launay, *Les cinquante-deux serviteurs de dieu, Français-annamites-chinois mis à mort pour la foi en Extrême Orient de 1815 à 1856 dont la cause de la béatification a été introduite en 1840, 1843, et 1857*, Paris, Tequi, 1893, I, pp. 301–303) and Michel Mi, *The martyrs who sheltered Jacques Nam*, are exemplars (AME 696, p. 309). Moreover, Agne Bà De, who was the first female martyr in Tonkin, was a believer who took on leadership, proactively sheltering missionaries, priests, and catechists during times of oppression (AME 697, pp. 687–688).

²⁹ AME 696, p. 758; AME 697, pp. 631–632; AME 709, p. 100. Motonori Makino, “Genchō Minman-ki Tonkin ni okeru Kirisutokyōto josei: Hobaku shisai no kyūshutsu katsudō wo megutte” (Christian Women in Tonkin under the Reign of Minh Mạng: Their Activities in Attempting to

1. 3. 2. Districts in small parishes

Almost all of the native priests were parish priests, controlling a single parish. Within each parish were several settlements of believers, known as *chrétientés*; these were the smallest unit of district.

According to Bishop De Bourges in 1693, in the Apostolic Vicariate of Western Tonkin, native priests and catechists were redeployed every three years, to accelerate the religious conversion of the wider population. However, according to Marillier, who undertook a comprehensive investigation of the personal records of native priests from the seventeenth to eighteenth centuries, they were reassigned to almost exactly the same regions.³⁰ This may have been because it still took a long time to build relationships of mutual trust with believers in the parishes; the process was easier if the same person remained in control.

According to an 1833 report written by the missionary Marette,³¹ the north-western individually controlled district in the Apostolic Vicariate of Western Tonkin was divided into four parishes, each with one parish priest and one curate. Each parish had around 3–4,000 believers, spread across 30 or so *chrétientés*. Marette's district had close to 15,000 believers in 120 *chrétientés*, which could be larger or smaller in scale. Some had as few as 20 people, while the largest had 600. These 120 *chrétientés* had 60 churches, 16 *Maisons de Dieu* where priests lived, and 15 institutions, including parish houses that sheltered priests. Because the priests gave sacraments, they sometimes lodged in the houses of believers in other *chrétientés*. Finally, there were five “*Amantes de la Croix*” convents, each having around 15 nuns. In each parish, there were 30 people who served the priests or believers; other than the four to five catechists, almost all of these were young men.

Ten years later, in 1843, Bishop Retord reported that there were eight European missionaries in the Apostolic Vicariate of Western Tonkin, and 78 native priests (of whom five were imprisoned or in exile and five were unable to serve due to illness or old age).³² There were also four deacons, four subdeacons, nine acolytes, and nine people who had taken the tonsure—two of these had been imprisoned for their beliefs. There were 23 theology students, 140 Latin students, 150 catechists, and 425 servants or students at the *Maison de Dieu*, as well as 29 convents housing 600 nuns. In 48 parishes or districts, there were at least 1,300 *chrétientés*; before persecution, each *chrétienté* had a church. Even the latest figures, he claimed, were lower than the real number of 177,378 believers living there.

Rescue Arrested Priests), *Betonamu no Shakai to Bunka* (Society and Culture of Vietnam) 7, 86–102, 2007.

³⁰ Marillier, *op. cit.*, Textes, pp. 83–84.

³¹ APF 7, pp. 432–433.

³² AME 697, pp. 719–720.

Take one specific example, involving the martyred priest Paul Khoan. Khoan was born in the Phúc Nhạc parish village of Duyên Mậu in 1771. At a young age, he was put in charge of a treasurer in Vĩnh Trị. Khoan had a virtuous character—he tolerated the poor and loathed extravagance. He bought the surrounding land, built a house, and received poor people there. Despite being almost 60 years old when he became the parish priest of Phúc Nhạc, once a month he visited Phúc Nhạc, Đông Biên, and Tôn Đạo, as well as the convent of Yên Mới.³³

In the early nineteenth century, as a result of Longer's reforms and the support of the APF, the number of priests increased in comparison to the previous century. This may be why he reallocated the responsibility for parishes so frequently. Moreover, when new parishes were established nearby, and the number of believers increased, parish priests had to take charge of those new parishes too. Their day-to-day business and duties must have been considerable.

1. 3. 3. Professional duties: Catechist's indispensable assist

There is a record created in 1795 by an unknown author. It is of great interest to researchers because it clarifies the nature of the business carried out in parish chrétientés by priests, the catechists who assisted them, and the students who accompanied them. This text is included below:

When the priests go to administer the sacrament, they usually have with them a catechist and two young men. During the day, the priest receives the Christians who come to visit him. He sorts out their differences, reconciles those who have bad blood between them, and tells them what they must do to extricate themselves from embarrassments that prevent them from receiving the sacraments. During this time, the catechist, with one of the young men, goes to all the Christians to encourage them to come and help carry out the instructions and assist in confessions. In the evening, that is to say at seven or eight o'clock, which is the time when the exercises begin, circumstances being such that they cannot be done during the day, the Christians assemble at the church. Then the priest goes to the Confessional, and the catechist helps to prepare those who want to confess. That is to say, he reads them a list of common sins committed against the orders and helps them examine themselves. Then he exhorts them to consider the final end of man to encourage contrition. Afterwards, the catechist instructs the grown-ups, while the two others teach the catechism, one to young men and the other to children. At around four o'clock in the morning, we pray, after which the priest makes an exhortation and then gives the Mass. When this is finished, everyone goes home. This continues

³³ Launay, *Les cinquante-deux serviteurs de dieu*, I, pp. 5–7.

until the chrétienté has been fully administered, after which the father goes to another.³⁴

The priests spent the whole day visiting people throughout the chrétienté. They had a tightly-packed schedule of things to do. Given this state of affairs, they moved around the parish in a hurry, rushing from one chrétienté to another.

The April 1840 record of the martyrdom of the priest Loan, who was executed despite being 80 years old, reveals how energetically he engaged in parish activities during his lifetime. Each year, at the start of Lent, he encouraged the people at the Maison de Dieu at his parish, as well as nuns and believers, to take part in silent meditation, while he delivered three sermons per day. He was extremely zealous about educating students at the Maison de Dieu, and ten of his students became priests. Moreover, he encouraged the nuns, worked hard to be allowed to baptize the dying children of non-believers, and immediately went to care for anyone who was ill.³⁵

Among his numerous sacraments, which included baptisms and extreme unctions, the most important was confession. Confession is a special authority given only to priests. During visits to the chrétientés, the priest's catechists seem to have proactively encouraged believers to go to confession. Through this the priest gets to know the human relationship of his parish. Moreover, since the clergy themselves were required to confess, priests would periodically help each other undertake confession. For example, an 1828 report written by Masson notes that, although there were priests located far from each other, they came together for mutual confession at least once a month. Masson himself never went for more than six weeks without a confession.³⁶ The ways of giving sacraments did not change very much, even as persecution increased. According to one of Masson's 1835 reports, if there was no church, people would gather at private houses to carry out rites, while priests would hear the confessions of believers from inside their own homes—through a hole in a partition wall or window.³⁷

Catechists assisted busy priests, working as their hands and feet in each parish chrétienté. As I have described this in more detail in another paper,³⁸ I will explain their work in the parishes only briefly here. Their main duties in the parishes involved assisting the priests in giving sacraments and taking care of believers. According to an 1839 report by Murette, priests visiting believers were normally accompanied by one or two catechists and two servants. Catechists gave sermons and listened to confessions when the priest was not there. They taught catechism to adults (students taught it to children) and also taught

³⁴ AME 692, p. 358.

³⁵ Launay, *Les cinquante-deux serviteurs de dieu*, II, p. 60.

³⁶ APF 4, p. 325.

³⁷ AME 695, p. 337.

³⁸ Makino, "Pari Gaikoku Senkyōkai no Betonamu Senkyō to Katekisuta."

young women some of the prayers to chant during lay assemblies at church. They worked as the priest's hands and feet during Holy Communion and gave extreme unction when the priest was unable to do it. Some did physical labor instead of giving spiritual services, but, either way, catechists eased the burden of work for priests.³⁹

They were also responsible for visiting the sick, contacting the priest if a patient was dying so that he could grant extreme unction. When believers who lived far from the priest and did not often meet him were married, the catechists could recognize their marriages, carrying out inspections in case of any difficulty and announcing the postponement of marriages, pending the arrival of a letter from the priest or the priest himself.⁴⁰

During times of oppression, they played a role protecting the priest from danger. In 1837, the catechist Can received instructions from the missionary Retord, and left to warn a native priest called Tuan, whose pursuers were drawing near, that he had been posted to another chrétienté. Sensing danger, Tuan had already fled to that chrétienté to escape danger. In the end, it was Can who ended up being arrested by non-believers.⁴¹

2. Native Priests in a Changing Society

This paper's main object of analysis, Vietnam in the early nineteenth century, coincided with a time of accelerating political change, after the Nguyễn Dynasty unified the nation through military force. It was an era that developed centralized rule by educated bureaucrats, based on a foundation of Confucian thought, under the rule of Emperor Minh Mạng. Accordingly, Christianity had a fringe position in society and was generally treated as a target of persecution. However, the reality was somewhat different. The parish priest gathered tremendous respect from his parishioners. Bringing together the circumstances examined in this paper, the journey to become a native Christian priest was surely an elite course. It seems equivalent to the type of hierarchy that was common in non-Christian societies or agricultural communities, where people rose through the ranks by passing the Chinese higher civil service examinations. In the following chapters, I will focus on the movements of local believers in northern Vietnam who were admitted to the collège or

³⁹ AME 696, pp. 584–585.

⁴⁰ Marillier, *op. cit.*, Textes, p. 207.

⁴¹ AME 695, pp. 937–938. Can was born in 1803, entered the Maison de Dieu at a very young age and, after studying Chinese characters, was recognized for his good behavior, adeptness, and faith and sent to the séminaire. He progressed to the study of theology, but was made the catechist for Retord, who had only just arrived in 1832. He followed Retord during his whole time in Tonkin, sharing his bed, food, and all the joys and sorrows of life. He also nursed him and helped him study the Vietnamese language. After his martyrdom, the church gave him the greatest of eulogies, as an exemplary catechist (Launay, *Les cinquante-deux serviteurs de dieu*, I, pp. 215–229.).

séminaire, as the first step towards ordination as priests.

2. 1. *Native Priests under Oppression*

Under the rule of Minh Mạng, persecution developed on a nationwide scale, following a series of proclamations prohibiting religion. This section explores the changing conditions experienced by native priests in the Apostolic Vicariate of Western Tonkin, particularly after 1833, when the prohibition was first proclaimed.

The order prohibiting religion ordered local government officials of the Nguyễn Dynasty to destroy churches, collèges, parish houses, and the residences of clergy in all districts. As Bishop Havard was no longer able to gather his students in one place, the 60 students of the Latin collège were divided into groups of 12 and entrusted to other teachers. Each was put in charge of distributing food to the surrounding chrétientés. Nevertheless, every morning, three to four classes of students took part in a Mass. It was reported that the European missionaries never went outside their refuge shelters, although the Vietnamese clergy still came and went relatively freely outside.⁴²

As persecution increased, this state of affairs began to change. In a letter dated February 1839, Masson reported a new fear, that believers as well as non-believers would make complaints against the priests, because a system had been introduced to offer financial rewards to those who complained about or arrested native priests. Although the situation had previously been easier for native priests, they now had to become as vigilant as the European missionaries,⁴³ as the following record (made in the fifth month of Minh Mạng 19 (1838) in the *Đại Nam thực lục*⁴⁴) makes clear:

In Quảng Bình Province, Christian missionary 布移渝模靈 and priests of our own country (Vietnam) 武登科 and 阮點 were arrested, and all were executed. Those who arrested the criminals were rewarded with 18 lượng of silver and 15 mản, in addition to a reward of 400 mản. In the provinces of Nghệ An, Hà Tĩnh, and Thanh Hóa, the priests are investigated harshly, regardless of whether they are Western or people from our own country. Along with them, all believers are also arrested, without disturbing popular sentiments.

This was surely a way for people to get rich quick. The 布移渝模靈 here refers to the

⁴² AME 695, pp. 226–227.

⁴³ AME 696, p. 476.

⁴⁴ *Đại Nam thực lục chính biên* 大南寔錄正編 (Chronicle of Greater Vietnam, The True Record of the Great South, abbreviated as *DNTL*), Tokyo: The Institute of Cultural and Linguistic Studies, Keio University, 1975, II (the Period of Minh Mạng), p. 4286.

missionary Pierre Dumoulin-Borie; the native priest Pierre Khoa is referred to as 武登科 “Vũ Đăng Khoa,” while 阮點 “Nguyễn Điểm” refers to the native priest Nguyễn Thế Điểm. According to the record of martyrs, on June 2, 1838, after being arrested with two of his catechists in the Quảng Bình Province settlement of Lê Sơn by a mandarin known as Tú Khiết, they were taken to the Quảng Bình inspection house of Đồng Hới.⁴⁵ Such arrests, carried out for the cash reward, occurred frequently, not just in the Apostolic Vicariate of Western Tonkin but in various other places. They led to a further intensification of persecution, for economic, rather than religious, reasons.⁴⁶

The arrests of parish priests crippled the church. On May 30, 1840, government officials carried out their third siege in a chrétienté in Kê Báng (with about 1,000 resident believers), in the district of the missionary Charrier. They arrested three excellent native priests, two catechists, seven believers, and one non-believer who happened to be there; 15 ritual objects were seized at the same time. Charrier had four priests in his district, with 10,600 believers; before long, three of the priests had been arrested. One of them was Father Thinh of Kê Trình; the others were Father Nghi of Kê Báng and the curate Father Nghan. They were taken to Vị Hoàng, a fortress city in the province of Nam Định.⁴⁷ Nevertheless, the Christian Church did not disappear and the believers continued their activities.

2. 2. *Martyred Priests and Apostate Priests*

The reason the Nguyễn emperors persecuted not only French missionaries but also Vietnamese priests was because they had considerable influence in Vietnamese society.

There are people whose names go down in history. Some make a name for themselves through their distinguished service, while others acquire a bad reputation. When it comes to native priests, both types exist: martyred priests who held fast to their faith, even in the face of death, and also apostate priests, who renounced their faith to save their own lives. Each group has its symbolic figures.

2. 2. 1. Martyred Priest Andrew Dũng-Lạc

Nowadays, St. Joseph’s church, affectionately known as the “Nhà thờ Lớn,” receives a large number of visitors, as a well-known and popular Hanoi tourist attraction. The church, which was built in a neo-Gothic style in 1886, during the French colonial period, has two towers over 31 meters tall. It is a magnificent sight, reminiscent of the Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris. Stepping inside the church, one is filled with an atmosphere so peaceful

⁴⁵ Launay, *Les cinquante-deux serviteurs de dieu*, I, pp. 169–172.

⁴⁶ For additional details, see: Ramsay, *op. cit.*

⁴⁷ AME 697, p. 280.

that it is hard to believe there could be so much hustle and bustle right outside—one is captivated by the beauty of the impressive stained glass (Figure 1).

Continuing the tour, one notices a small altar to the left of the main altar. On this altar is a statue of an imposing man, dressed in a traditional *áo dài*. This is Priest Andrew Dũng-Lạc, who was martyred during the rule of Minh Mạng of the Nguyễn Dynasty in the early nineteenth century. On the glass shelf inside the lower part of the statue rest some of the priest's remains, including his skull. These are revered as holy relics to this day (Figure 2).

In 1988, the then-Pope John Paul II canonized 117 people as saints, focusing on Christians martyred in Vietnam during the Nguyễn Dynasty. Lạc's name was listed first ("Saint Andrew Dũng-Lạc and 116 martyrs"). Lạc was a martyr meriting special mention in the history of the church in Vietnam.

How was he an exemplary martyr? An examination of the historical record reveals his story. On April 19, 1840, the MEP missionary Jeantet wrote a letter enclosing a report, part of which is reproduced below:⁴⁸

Mr. Andrew Lạc was born in a northern province called Bắc Ninh. When he was a child, his poor and destitute parents came to live in the royal town of Kẻ Chợ. The cleric whom the Mission was maintaining in the ancient capital of Tong-King, to care for the Christians who lived there, led the blessed 12-year-old child to Mr. Leroy. Mr. Leroy was the administrator of the community of Kẻ Vĩnh at that time, and principal of the Collège established in this commune. After three years of tests and instructions, he [Lạc] was baptized and entrusted to a priest, in whose house he devoted himself to the study of Chinese letters, making a great deal of progress. At the age of 19, he returned to the community to study Latin. However, the weakness of his health permitted him only to give four years to this study. He returned to the priest who had instructed him and five years later was raised to the rank of catechist. Admitted to the study of Theology at the age of 34, in 1819 he began his course under Mr. Eyot. Bishop Gortyne conferred on him all orders up to and including the Diaconate during the month of September 1822 and ordained him as a priest on March 15, 1823.

Lạc's birthplace of Bắc Ninh is a region situated almost 40 km northeast of Kẻ Chợ (now Hanoi). Although the era between the late Lê Dynasty (which preceded the Nguyễn Dynasty) and the Tây Sơn Dynasty was a time of great upheaval, Kẻ Chợ remained the largest metropolitan political and economic center in northern Vietnam. It is therefore not surprising that this large town experienced an influx of people from struggling agricultural

⁴⁸ AME 697, p. 64.

communities, including Lạc's parents.

People who were involved with the Christian church offered these poor newcomers the basic necessities of life, even educating their children. From the late Lê Dynasty to the early part of the Tây Sơn administration, Nguyễn Huệ ruled the north and Christian missionaries had a relatively stable environment for their work, without any conspicuous oppression.⁴⁹

It is unclear how many children Lạc's parents had, but it was common for families facing harsh economic circumstances to send some of their children to institutions managed by the church, to reduce the number of mouths they had to feed. Those children who showed any talent were set on the path of training for the clergy.

At first, they studied the basics of communal life at the *Maison de Dieu*, which served the main parishes, learning many basic Christian doctrines and prayers. Next, after accumulating knowledge as the servants of parish priests, children who seemed enthusiastic about studying were given the chance to learn Latin at the *collège*. If they were successful, the priests and European missionaries would refer them to study theology at the *séminaire*, with the aim of becoming priests, which took about 40 years. It was a long journey.

From the late eighteenth century through the early nineteenth century, the *collège* and *séminaire* of the MEP Apostolic Vicariate of Western Tonkin were based in large Catholic villages in the Nam Định region, such as Kê Vĩnh (Vĩnh Trì). The regions of Nghệ An and Hà Tĩnh further to the south also had a *collège* and *séminaire*, but they were smaller.

In East Asian countries within the sphere of Confucianism, where the populations used Chinese characters, the Chinese higher civil service examinations offered a way of rising through society; elite intellectuals could use them to leave their agricultural communities for the cities. Except in cases where people achieved success on the Chinese higher civil service examination and moved to a different region to work as a high official in the bureaucracy, it was rare for people to move from a city to a rural area or farm village. Vietnam had the same sort of higher civil service examinations for bureaucrats. However, in the early- to mid-nineteenth century, a Catholic elite was also forming in rural areas of Vietnam through the educational system inside the church. People who showed promise were sent from cities to specific farm villages that were under the strong influence of the church. The Catholic village at the core of this was Vĩnh Trì (Figure 3).

On October 11, 1839, Lạc was arrested by community leaders of his home town in the *chrétienté* of Kê Sông in Bình Lục Province, Nam Định region.⁵⁰ He was arrested for visiting Pierre Thi, the priest in the neighboring parish, to receive penance.⁵¹ He had gone

⁴⁹ Makino, "Taison Seiken-ka ni okeru Pari Gaikoku Senkyōkai Nishi Tonkin Daibokoku."

⁵⁰ AME 696, p. 38.

⁵¹ In 1763, Thi was born to a devout family in Kê So in the Hanoi region. He entered the *Maison de*

with Thi to the house of a believer he was sheltering. On November 15, when the two priests were taken to Kê Chợ, more than 1,000 believers from their respective parishes ran along to see them off; they both shared parting regrets. It is said that his government escort was impressed when Lạc told him a saying from the Analects of Confucius: “The Master said, in the morning hear the *dao*, in the evening die content.”⁵²

Jeantet wrote a letter to the two priests, who were waiting to be executed, explaining that soon they would find eternal rest in heaven among the martyrs. They would be properly rewarded for the suffering they had endured, having persevered until the end. At the height of the investigation, they refused to say anything shameful about the Christian church or to slander anyone. Above all, Lạc accurately wrote down everything that they said, did, and endured, hoping that these records would help to educate Christians in the future.⁵³

In a letter dated November 28, Lạc said that he was grateful to the bishops and missionaries of the Apostolic Vicariate, including Jeantet, for sending their servants to care for them in prison. As Thi had contracted dysentery, he was only bound in light chains, due to his weakened state. Letters collected from Lạc’s friend Truc, the priest for the parish of Kê Non, reported that, during their imprisonment, the two priests were relatively free. They were not in shackles and were only secured with chains. Despite their weakened state, fasting was enforced every Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday.⁵⁴ In a letter dated December 11, Lạc recorded his gratitude to Jeantet and all the people who continued to care about them. He also thanked a woman from Hue, who had donated 60 ligatures to support them during their imprisonment.⁵⁵

On December 20, the execution was swiftly carried out by decapitation. Whether or not they were believers, people scrambled to gather up facial and head hair from the blood pooling around Lạc’s body, as holy relics. As the crowd dwindled, believers from Châu Sơn in Ninh Bình enlisted the help of his servants to carry the body themselves by palanquin to the chrétienté. This cost 2.5 ligatures. They stitched the martyrs’ bodies and heads back together again, covered them with shrouds, and gave them a church burial in the chrétienté in the middle of the night. The next morning, people from the Maison de Dieu, where work had stopped, left as quickly as they could so as not to be caught by the

Dieu at age 11, studied Latin, and in 1796 rose to the status of catechist. His work ethic was recognized and he was called to the séminaire to study theology; on March 22, 1806 he was ordained as a priest. At first, he devoted himself to the parish of Sông Cháy, but in 1833 he was ordained as a priest in Kê Sông. His birth name was Pham Van Thi. Launay, *Les cinquante-deux serviteurs de dieu*, II, pp. 29–36.

⁵² AME 697, pp. 66–67.

⁵³ AME 697, p. 69.

⁵⁴ AME 697, p. 70.

⁵⁵ AME 697, pp. 70–75.

authorities.⁵⁶

Jeantet sent 70 ligatures as a gift of sympathy to poor families unable to find shelter since their home was searched by the authorities after the two martyred priests found. The total cost of this incident amounted to 714 ligatures. The believers provided 376 ligatures;⁵⁷ overall, they paid more than half the total cost. Lạc and Thi were both desperately missed by their local parishioners. Lạc was regarded as an exemplary clergyman, a native priest worthy of honor, who sacrificed himself for his faith.

2. 2. 2. Apostate Priest Jean Duyệt

Wherever there is light, there is always shadow. Among priests too, there were “apostate priests”, who could not endure the pain of persecution and abandoned their personal faith and professional duties. Here I will introduce Father Duyệt, who was also referred to in Jeantet’s reports. What follows is an excerpt from an on-the-spot report written by Apostolic Bishop Retord to address the great oppression that took place in the Apostolic Vicariate of Western Tonkin in 1838.⁵⁸

He who has brought back the horrible scandal of apostasy is the detestable Jean Duyệt. This lousy priest has been delivered from prison as a very honest man, who preferred to obey men than to obey God, on the same day that Messrs. Jacques Nam, Antoine Dich, and Michel Mi were put to death as rogues who preferred to be faithful to God than to men.

Hardly out of prison, he began to wander around demanding his debts, thinking that with his certificate of apostasy, he had nothing to fear in this world. But when he arrived in Ninh Bình, he was once again arrested as a priest, and delivered to the mandarins. In their presence, he met with the Father Khoan and his two disciples and once again renounced his religion and trampled on the cross with his feet, as he was asked to do many times. The good Father Khoan exhorted him with all his power, several Christians made charitable representations to him, and the mandarins themselves scoffed at his cowardice, but it was all useless: peccator cum in profundum peccatorum venerit contemnit.

Some time after, the mandarins, while despising him, set him free again. Because before the law and in the eyes of the tyrant, he really is a faultless man. This unfortunate man, having run around the country attracting the taunts and hatred of

⁵⁶ AME 697, p. 76.

⁵⁷ AME 697, p. 77.

⁵⁸ AME 696, p. 319.

all, went in December of this year to the capital, where the emperor proposed making him a French interpreter, but he did not understand French. We are very much afraid that, having caused shame and sorrow through his cowardice when he was in our midst, he will cause us more misfortune and loss through his mischief or imprudence, by speaking of us to the tyrant, who will enter an extraordinary delirium of fury if he ever learns that he must redouble his efforts to exterminate the Christian religion from his kingdom, where so many priests and Christians remain. But the good God will pity us and nothing will happen to us but by His holy will.

It is reported that the priest Duyệt was arrested and imprisoned twice in Ninh Bình. He trampled on the cross again, disregarding attempts at persuasion from the priest Paul Khoan, an associate who was present during his imprisonment. After his release, he headed for the capital to become a French interpreter for Emperor Minh Mạng. It turns out that the oppressor side also evaluated his ability. In his report, Retord seems terribly worried that Duyệt will tell Emperor Minh Mạng about the situation in the Apostolic Vicariate of Western Tonkin. What was the result of this? Below is another report, written by Retord in July 1839:

You will see in this relation, that the emperor had made him come to the capital of his kingdom to make him his interpreter for the French language. On arriving at Phú Xuân, His Majesty made him present of French books to explain this; but seeing that he could not even read them, the emperor imagined that it was not from lack of knowledge, but from lack of will that he did not read these books. “Cao,” he said to him, “you have been made a priest of the religion of the French, and you do not know their language? How could you have studied their religion? It is because you do not want to serve me; it is because you did not sincerely give up their religion that you do not want to explain their books.”

In the end, this poor apostate did not become any more learned, and the lashes did not infuse him with knowledge. The emperor was eventually convinced of his ignorance, and not knowing what to do with it, sent him back to his country, which made us much calmer. For we feared much that, after having caused us shame by his apostasy, he might yet make us unhappy through his imprudence or malice, by speaking of us to the tyrant. God did not allow him to say anything that could compromise anyone. The emperor’s council did ask him about the European and indigenous priests, but he escaped by evasive and indirect responses that did no harm to anyone. Now he lives withdrawn from his relatives and dismissed from office. He has asked to be reconciled with the church and with God. May he carry

out an effective penitence and a sincere conversion!⁵⁹

Retord was concerned that the “incompetence”, which in all likelihood Duyệt had intentionally displayed in front of the emperor, should end without incident. Duyệt was released and seems to have returned to his hometown; little is known about his life after that. It has been confirmed that Duyệt used the name Phạm Văn Duyệt 范文悅 in the *Đại Nam thực lục* in the eighth month of the 20th year of Minh Mạng’s rule.

If a person of our country who, like Phạm Văn Duyệt 范文悅 or Mai Văn Hiến 枚文賢, has become a Christian, has trampled on the cross once, he returns to his true character and is also immediately released from the imperial court. Now he lives at peace in his own home. There is nothing more wonderful than living a long life. It is clear where pain and joy can be found, and where heaven and hell are located.⁶⁰

According to the words of Emperor Minh Mạng, apostate priests were given a promise: that they would live in comfort for the rest of their lives. What kind of person was the “Mai Văn Hiến” mentioned alongside Duyệt? In materials relating to the Apostolic Vicariate of Western Tonkin, no apostate priests are specifically identified, apart from Duyệt. Could he have been a priest in the neighboring Apostolic Vicariate of Eastern Tonkin, which was under the district of the Dominican order? Or was he a priest in the MEP Apostolic Vicariate of Cochinchina? One further possibility is that he may have been a catechist, rather than a priest, as the following report from Bishop Retord suggests.

He was an old catechist from the parish of Kê Báng named Van-Lieu, aged 75, as weak in character, soul, and spirit as he was in body. For several days, he had been going to his brother doctor in the town of Vĩ Hoàng to flee the persecutors. But it was precisely there that they came to fetch him and arrest him and his brother on the 12th of October 1838. Brought before the tribunal, Van-Lieu did and said all that the great Mandarin wanted. He passed a bill of apostasy and trampled the cross with his feet. Moreover, in order to have more merit in the eyes of the tyrant during his arrest, the mandarin asked him to pretend to be a priest. He consented and identified himself as such in his apostasy bill. After such a fine submission to the will of the tyrant, he had nothing more to fear from him. But while he was still in prison, waiting his deliverance from the emperor, as the price of his infidelity to God, death came to seize him with its terrible hand and probably threw him into the region of tears and

⁵⁹ AME 696, p. 787.

⁶⁰ *DNTL*, pp. 4469–4470. 若夫本國人學成道長范文悅枚文賢一能踏破十字架改邪歸正朝廷立即放釋今現在家安養以終天年何等快樂以比較彼孰苦孰樂孰為天堂孰為地獄不此之思

the eternal gnashing of teeth.⁶¹

In this story, a veteran called Catechist Van Lieu had, after his arrest, drawn up a bill of apostasy in which he claimed to be a priest. However, since he died in jail, the details of this account are not consistent with the “*thực lục*” quoted above. It is still not known who Mai Văn Hiến really was.

Jean Duyệt is now the only apostate priest of the Apostolic Vicariate of Western Tonkin in the Minh Mạng era, whose name is still remembered in the present day. This was a shameful situation for the church. There are very few references to apostate priests, other than Duyệt. Conversely, for the administration, apostasy among the clergy was an ideal opportunity to trumpet the success of their religious prohibition policy, so there were great benefits to keeping it in the records. Such information was intentionally disseminated. In fact, Duyệt’s apostasy had such an impact that it remained in the “*thực lục*”. Treating the apostate Van-Lieu as a priest, rather than a catechist, was also expected to produce good results.

We can surmise from the attitude of both the church and the Nguyễn Dynasty that there may have been, in reality, surprisingly few apostate priests. The number of martyred priests was overwhelmingly high, by comparison. Studies of the martyrdom of Vietnamese native priests in the Apostolic Vicariate of Western Tonkin indicate that Dominique Jean Dat was the first case; he was executed in 1798, during the Tây Sơn Dynasty.⁶² Under the Nguyễn Dynasty, no martyrdoms occurred during Gia Long’s reign; however, they were a common occurrence during the reign of Minh Mạng. The knowledge that a large number of Vietnamese priests were martyred has been transmitted down to the present day. Along with Lạc, those who were connected with him at churches in every region are honored as saints. The training of native clergy by the MEP can therefore be tentatively termed a “success”.

⁶¹ AME 696, p. 339.

⁶² Born in 1765, he lost his father when he was very young and was raised by his mother. His religious piety blossomed early and he overcame his family’s opposition to enter the Maison de Dieu, where he cared for the native priest Loan. His qualities were recognized and he was sent to the collège in 1783. He worked as a catechist for various European missionaries. In 1798, he was ordained as a priest and was sent to work under the missionary Leroy. He was arrested four months after his ordination, on August 25. After his decapitation, believers collected his relics; even some heretic fishermen wanted to soak up his blood to use as a charm. His remains were transported to the Notre Dame church of Phúc Nhạc. Miracles, such as the healing of illnesses, are reported to have occurred at his tomb (Launay, *Les cinquante-deux serviteurs de dieu*, II, pp. 45–54).

2. 3. *Postulants and the Social Context*

Looking at various biographies of martyred native priests, such as Andrew Dũng-Lạc, from the perspective of social class, they seem, on the whole, to have started out in economically challenged households. If such a household had many children, it was not unusual for parents to give multiple children to different foster caregivers. They often chose people involved with the church, as this was a good institution to receive their children.⁶³ In the absence of childhood relatives, considerable numbers of missionaries, priests, catechists, and the like could recognize talent in children and raise them in children's homes attached to churches.⁶⁴ Below is a report written by the missionary Lepavec, who travelled through all parts of the Apostolic Vicariate of Western Tonkin from the late eighteenth to the early nineteenth century.

On all sides people bring us children, giving us the freedom to do what we want with them. The parents fear the pain of seeing them starve before their eyes. I give the girls to the nuns and the good Christians; we send the boys to our priests, reserving the most spiritual and wisest for the collège. This is part of the good that God pleases himself to do through our ministry.⁶⁵

From the church's point of view, there were advantages to raising children as devout Christians from a very early age. Some of them grew up to be some of the most highly respected native priests and nuns.

However, one can easily imagine that there were also many postulants from so-

⁶³ Marillier, *op. cit.*, Textes, pp. 81–82.

⁶⁴ For example, it has been confirmed that the martyred priest Pierre Khoa did not have a family register when he was investigated after his arrest. However, this was not unusual. Originally from Thuận Nghĩa in Nghệ An, he joined the missionary De la Bissachère at the age of five and spent the next 30 years participating in his activities until De la Bissachère's death. In the same way, the martyred priest Thi Diem also came from Yen Du and had no family register in any village. In childhood, he encountered the priest Chieu of Nghệ An and spent about 30 years with him (AME 696, pp. 78–82). In addition, the native priest Jacques Nam, arrested in 1838 in Vĩnh Trị, originally came from Đông Biện in Vĩnh Lộc, Thanh Hóa. Throughout his life, he had no relations and never lived in one place. He became a Christian in childhood, encountered Longer, and was educated little by little while listening to sermons, and gradually becoming familiar with European languages. He received ordination as a Catholic priest and was put in charge of a parish just before Longer passed away (AME 696, pp. 307–308).

⁶⁵ *Lettres édifiantes et curieuses, écrites des missions étrangères par quelques missionnaires de la Compagnie de Jésus*, Tome 8, pp. 289–290. The situation had not changed by the mid-nineteenth century. The missionary Taillandier reported in 1855 that 35 children had been received from non-believers amid the increasing damage caused by famine. Some native priests also received children, as did some nuns and Christian families (AME 709, p. 109.2).

called traditional Christian households, which maintained a strong faith for many years.⁶⁶ For example, the martyred priest Pierre Tuy was born to an influential Christian family in Hanoi Province and studied at the séminaire of Kẻ Vĩnh. He followed Bishop La Motte after his ordination as a deacon, worked in Nghệ An, and, after his ordination as a priest, served as curate in Đông Thành and Chân Lộc and as the parish priest in Nam Dương.⁶⁷ Siblings and relatives raised in such households became priests, catechists, and nuns in great numbers, and many went down in history as martyrs.

Next, I will look at this population by region. There was a huge number of cases in the provinces of Nam Định and Nghệ An. According to a study by Forest, 41 out of 69 native priests ordained between 1668 and 1754 had a confirmed birthplace. Of these, 18 were from Sơn Nam (Nam Định), 11 were from Nghệ An, two were from northern Bồ Chính, six were from Thanh Hóa, two were from Sơn Tây, and one each came from Hải Dương and Kinh Bắc. Thus, both regions of Tonkin were the birthplaces of Catholics.⁶⁸ This was understood by missionaries at the time. In 1784, Father Sérard noted that Nghệ An was the region that produced the most servants (catechists) and priests.⁶⁹

Many of the biographies of priests martyred in the nineteenth century have found that they came from Nam Định and Nghệ An. MEP missionaries were permanently stationed in both regions, where important collèges were located. It was clear that they were strongly connected to the areas where, historically, many Christians had lived.

3. How Were Priests Trained?

What type of educational institutions trained native priests in the Apostolic Vicariate of Western Tonkin, and what was their historical background? What did they consider important when training native clergy?

3. 1. Approaches to Training Native Priests

In all MEP Apostolic Vicariates, including the Apostolic Vicariate of Western Tonkin, students who wished to join the clergy first received a basic collège education that emphasized Latin. Those who received recommendations as outstanding students of high ability from European missionaries or native priests went on to study theology in the

⁶⁶ Forest, *op. cit.*, III, p. 144.

⁶⁷ Launay, *Les cinquante-deux serviteurs de dieu*, I, pp. 205–210.

⁶⁸ Forest, *op. cit.*, III, p. 123.

⁶⁹ AME 691, p. 414.

séminaire. The final goal was to become a parish priest. The collège and séminaire were both established by influential chrétientés at the Apostolic Vicariate. The aforementioned Kê Vĩnh (Vĩnh Trì) was the foremost representative of a chrétienté.

In addition, the MEP also included seminaries known as “Collèges Généraux”, which coordinated native-priest training for the whole East and Southeast Asian region. One was established in Ayuthaya, Siam in the early eighteenth century (it closed in 1767, following the Burmese invasion) and another was established in Penang in the beginning of the nineteenth century. Students who enjoyed the patronage of European missionaries, while fleeing persecution in their places of birth, were sent away as overseas students. They studied day and night in order to join the ministry. These Collèges Généraux primarily functioned as places of refuge, when persecution intensified in areas where the MEP was doing missionary work.⁷⁰ During times of peace, people from all the Apostolic Vicariates sought training there to become clergy.

3. 2. *Collèges and Séminaires*

I will discuss the situation in the Apostolic Vicariate of Western Tonkin era by era, in relation to the collèges and séminaires that were the cornerstone educational institutions for training clergy.

According to Forest’s survey,⁷¹ at the start of the eighteenth century, a collège was built in Kê Đông, Nghệ An Province.⁷² Under the missionary Savary, in 1758, around 30 children aged 9–12 were able to learn Latin. In 1763, Reydellet, who had run Hà Tĩnh Collège with Savary for a long time, returned to the Vicar Apostolic Nééz, and built a new collège in Vĩnh Trì. This was Saint-Pierre Collège, which opened in 1766. Here, the missionary Bricart enrolled 42–43 students and an additional 15 catechists to study theology.

Of the two classes, the first was a fast-track class run by Bricart himself. The students were able to speak and understand a little Latin; as a result, they were able to make themselves understood, one way or another. The second was a basic study class taught by

⁷⁰ During and after the oppression of Minh Mạng’s reign, the Collège Général in Penang became a place of refuge. It was a particularly important study-abroad destination for Vietnamese missionary groups. In 1833, Bishop Taberd of the Apostolic Vicariate of Cochinchina had already made it clear that its goal was to train native clergy in Penang (APF 7, pp. 536–537). In 1839, Father Cuénot also reported that, because the students in their charge had been allowed to continue their studies, they would keep up the pace and be sent to the Collège Général (AME 696, p. 542).

⁷¹ Forest, *op. cit.*, II, pp. 203–204.

⁷² Kê Đông is more accurately termed Hà Tĩnh Province, but at that time the region was broadly seen by the MEP as part of Nghệ An Province.

two Vietnamese assistant teachers. The lectures consisted of basic Latin and Christian doctrine. The students also studied the rules of Latin grammar, while reading and writing in Vietnamese. Latin memorization was essential; the students' goal was to learn enough Latin within three years to more or less understand the language without needing a dictionary, to be able to carry out Roman Catholic rites, and to sing hymns.⁷³

In 1773, Saint-Pierre Collège was damaged, along with similar institutions, during persecutions carried out by the Lê Dynasty Trịnh government; however, the institution was quickly rebuilt by 1778.⁷⁴ A record from 1784 indicates that the missionary Sérard taught theology there to 15 catechists, who were thought to have promising futures. In the first class, 15 students had enrolled more than three years previously; in the second class, more than 40 students had begun taking classes the year before. The main mediators were two students who had returned from studying abroad in Siam.⁷⁵ It is likely that they were assistant professors.

A report from around 1795, during the Tây Sơn Dynasty, noted that there were around 50 students in the collège. At times, there were as many as 60–70. The report states that European missionaries were in charge, while several catechists who were conversant in Latin assisted and managed the classes. The students were generally allowed to enter collège after turning 18 or 19; it was assumed that those selected by the various parish priests would already be able to read and write basic Latin.⁷⁶ During the same era, a collège was also set up in Trang Nứa, Nghệ An Province and, by 1797, more than 30 students were taking Latin classes there.⁷⁷ Each collège in the Apostolic Vicariate seems to have been run successfully.

Theology classes at séminaires, the core of this educational program, officially began in 1792. According to Longer, these classes initially consisted of 20 young, able students.⁷⁸ A 1795 report notes that 19 enthusiastic students with outstanding devotion were enrolled—but were only given permission to enter séminaire when they reached the age of 36–40. The European missionaries responsible for their education believed that native people took longer to self-organize than Europeans and needed to be trained for a longer period of time.⁷⁹

In the early nineteenth century, when Gia Long's reign began the Nguyễn Dynasty, Saint-Pierre Collège was once again relocated from Kê Sở in Hanoi Province, where it had previously been, to Vĩnh Trị. In this new site, the missionaries Tessier and Leroy gave

⁷³ AME 690, p. 464.

⁷⁴ Forest, *op. cit.*, III, pp. 124–125.

⁷⁵ AME 700, pp. 1182–1183.

⁷⁶ AME 692, p. 357.

⁷⁷ AME 692, p. 766.

⁷⁸ AME 692, p. 441.

⁷⁹ AME 692, p. 357.

guidance to students, prior to their ordination as priests.⁸⁰

In 1827, under Emperor Gia Long's successor, the second Emperor Minh Mạng, the Apostolic Vicariate had one séminaire and two collèges.⁸¹ According to a report by the missionary Pouderoux, who entered Cochinchina in 1828 and traveled to Tonkin, "there are two collèges here, called Saint-Jacques and Saint-Pierre, and at Saint-Jacques 40 students study Latin under a Vietnamese priest. However, they are in a fairly destitute situation regarding the necessities of life."⁸²

A letter from Bishop Havard, dated July 10, 1829, states that Kè Vĩnh was the center of the Apostolic Vicariate of Western Tonkin and all of the residents were Christians. There was a grand collège and a séminaire that had been established 15–20 years previously.⁸³ This grand collège must have been Saint-Pierre.

A September 1830 report, written by the missionary Marette, encouraged the 60 students at Saint-Pierre and the 40 students at Saint-Jacques to concentrate on Latin study and to hold general conversations in Latin. At the Saint-Pierre school, the teachers were four sous-maîtres (one theologian who had not yet been ordained, and three catechists who were skilled at Latin). 20 theology students also studied under Bishop Havard.⁸⁴

Below is a similar report, written by Marette during the reign of Minh Mạng, when the policy of suppressing Christianity was proceeding at full tilt. This text is valuable because it is full of specific descriptions of the ways in which native clergy were trained during times of oppression; an extract is provided below.⁸⁵

Around the age of 15, as soon as a young man's character has formed somewhat and he has managed to proclaim the Latin response in the Mass, he accompanies the priest on visits to Christians and continues to educate himself. Two young men serve the Mass in black dress and surplices. Those young men in whom we most readily find the right disposition are introduced to reading and writing the Latin language, and even the first elements of the language, but this is still just a trial. The master is not there, so the priest himself often remains responsible for taking care of them. To ascertain more thoroughly the dispositions of the subjects, they are not accepted to Latin Collège until the age of 15 or 20. Thus, by reserving the study of Latin exclusively for those who aspire to the Priesthood, one avoids wasting time, pain, and money on subjects who are of no use. [...]

Having reached the age of 25 or 30, the servants of the Mission, whether they

⁸⁰ AME 696, p. 326.

⁸¹ APF 4, p. 303.

⁸² APF 5, p. 309.

⁸³ APF 5, p. 316. note.

⁸⁴ APF 6, pp. 84–85.

⁸⁵ AME 696, pp. 582–588.

have studied Latin or not, prepare to be admitted to the rank of catechists, or “Master Preachers”, as we call them in our country. [...]

It is not until they reach 35 or 40 years of age that the Latin catechists are called to the study of theology; many more are set aside, because experienced in the parishes after their Latin studies, they have satisfied expectations. In their desire to reach the goal, some know how to limit themselves to the collège and especially to the séminaire; but sometimes it is otherwise in the open air of the parishes.

After a course of moral theology that lasts about three years in a Tonkinese treatise and under a European teacher, theologians commonly known as “Vénérables Grands Pères of the Old Sir Vieux Monsieur” often return to help the priests for a few years. If they pass this last test, they are suddenly called up at the age of 40 or 45 and sent to work. Subjects incapable of sacred orders, but worthy of being admitted to the clergy, sometimes come to the bishop to remain in the tonsure and the four minor orders. There are only a few of these clerics, here called vénérables maîtres. The priests are decorated with the title of Bisaïeul, unlike the missionaries, who are called Trisaïeux. They are very respected, even in the eyes of the heathens.

It seems that students wishing to enter the collège had to pack in six years of intense Latin study between the ages of 15 and 20. After that, they returned briefly to their parishes, where they assisted the priest in charge of that parish to prove that they had the right disposition. After that, they were called to begin their studies at the séminaire. They would be about 35 or 40 years old at this point. They studied theology for about three years under a European missionary; then, after returning once again to their parish priest to gain practical experience, they were finally ordained, between the ages of 40 and 45. The ordinations had to be authorized by the bishop, so that they could be consecrated as priests. Overall, the journey took a very long time.

3. 3. The Thoroughness of Local Training

Why were MEP missionaries so thoroughly fixated on educational institutions for training clergy in the Apostolic Vicariate of Western Tonkin? Some of the factors are discussed below.

One explanation involves the cultural factor of language. Overseas students returning from the former Collège Général of Siam had concentrated on Latin while studying there and may have forgotten their mother tongue, Vietnamese. Perhaps they looked down on the lifestyle of their homeland. As they engaged in missionary work in various places after returning home, having forgotten how to read and write their native language, they may have neglected local etiquette and thus become, immediately, objects

of scorn in the places where they were proselytizing. This kind of bitter experience could have led the missionary Reydellet to concentrate on teaching students their mother tongue, as well as Latin, in the newly-constructed collège.⁸⁶ The MEP leadership may have held the common-sense notion that local education was indispensable when dealing with issues that involved language and social customs, as such issues form the foundation of missionary work.

Accompanied by a Papal bull, originally announced in 1659, the new Apostolic Vicariate included a special stipulation regarding Latin education. Bishops were given the right to ordain native priests who did not know enough Latin, as long as they could read Latin out loud and recite prayers.⁸⁷

Studying the local languages, written in Chinese characters and Vietnamese Chữ Nôm, ensured a direct connection between their public and private daily lives. In truth, this knowledge was more urgently needed than Latin study. All of the books and religious letters that a Christian owned were written in Chinese letters or Chữ Nôm. Accordingly, learning to read and write Chinese characters and Chữ Nôm was the top priority for the young men serving the religious mission.⁸⁸ Seen from a wider perspective, only a very small amount of Latin was likely to be useful to students who wished to be ordained as priests. By contrast, Chinese characters and Chữ Nôm were required for grassroots missionary work—and were certainly a matter of life and death.⁸⁹ Missionaries who crossed over to Vietnam had to grapple with reading and writing these scripts, in order to communicate with catechists and native priests.⁹⁰ Although intense Latin study in the collège was emphasized up to that point, in reality, mastering Chinese characters and Chữ Nôm was a prerequisite for achieving that goal.

The second factor was the issue of cost. Sending overseas students from the Apostolic Vicariate of Western Tonkin to the Collège Général of Siam put great pressure on the Vicariate's finances. According to Reydellet, the cost of sending four students abroad via Macau in 1764 came to more than one missionary's travel expenses. The same amount could have supported six students in Tonkin for five years. He expressed the view

⁸⁶ Forest, *op. cit.*, III, pp. 141–142.

⁸⁷ Marillier, *op. cit.*, Textes, p. 32.

⁸⁸ In 1797, the missionary Sérard assigned a high value to the native priest Hiep, who had been in charge of Latin language and Tonkin writing classes for about seven to eight years at the Trang Núa collège. These were so systematically managed that they took on 60 students who rivalled or surpassed Europeans (AME 692, pp. 781–782).

⁸⁹ Motonori Makino, “Betonamu senkyō ni mirareru shoki gengo ni tsuite: Iezusukai kara Pari Gaikoku Senkyōkai he” (The Vietnamese Written Languages and European Missionaries: From the Society of Jesus to the Société des Missions Etrangères de Paris), *Chō-ryōiki kōryūshi no kokoromi: Zabieru ni tsuzuku paionia tachi* (Beyond Borders; A Global Perspective on Jesuit Mission History), Edited by Shinzō Kawamura and Cyril Veliath, Sophia University Press, 2009.

⁹⁰ Marillier, *op. cit.*, Textes, pp. 237–238.

that, even if the best students were sent to Siam, when they returned (as mentioned above) they had often become poor students. The cost of training one overseas student could fund ten students in Tonkin, who would be useful to the religious mission.⁹¹

In a 1794 letter to the Macau property administration, Bishop Longer explained the pressing state of the finances of the Apostolic Vicariate of Western Tonkin. A fund of 300 ligatures had been retained for the whole Vicariate and an annual operating budget of around 150 piastres had been set aside for the séminaire. The operating expenses of the collège for the preceding year had exceeded 1,046 ligatures (two payments of 43 sapecs), more than 500 piastres. These funds were used to support over 60 students. In Nghê An, more than 50 students were supported by a fund worth 618 ligatures, over 300 piastres. He stressed that both were falling into financial chaos.⁹² There couldn't have been any surplus for sending students abroad.

From Gia Long's reign in the Nguyễn Dynasty, which was a relatively stable environment for missionary work with no blatant persecution, to the first half of Minh Mạng's reign, the Vicariate's financial standing continued to be strained. In 1817, the missionary Eyot unified the financially-strained séminaire with the Grand Collège, and oversaw both in Kê Vĩnh. He suffered from anxiety because they had to maintain more than 150 young students and their expenses became vast. In addition, they had to prepare items, such as vestments, chalices, containers for the body of Christ, cases of holy oil, and upper vestments, in order to be prepared for future priests.⁹³ Again, in 1826, he gave a similar report to the Paris main office. In the unified collège, there were 27 theology students, 59 Latin students, and five Latin teachers. Aside from this, there were 28 staff members, including catechists and young men who assisted the priests in their work. To support all of these people was a great expense, at a time when people were suffering from disastrous lifestyle pressures, particularly the high cost of rice.⁹⁴

An 1831 report, written by Bishop Havard, painted a similar picture. In it, he claimed that the two collèges of the Apostolic Vicariate had reached a crisis point, with expenses exceeding their ability to pay—a situation that had continued for more than four to five years. In the Grand Collège alone, the purchase price of rice had risen to 2,000 ligatures (with one ligature being equal to three francs).⁹⁵ This was an even more abrupt increase in

⁹¹ Marillier, *op. cit.*, Textes, pp. 245–246.

⁹² AME 701, p. 61. The monetary units in the colonies were approximately as follows: 60 sapecs were one tien, and ten tiens were one ligature. Moreover, 100 ligatures were 15 piastres, which corresponded to one silver bar. See: Noriko Sekimoto, *Hakari to monosashi no Betonamushi: Shokumin tōchi to dentō bunka no kyōzon* (Vietnamese History as Balance and Yardstick: Colonial Administration and Coexistence with Traditional Culture), Fūkyōsha, 2010.

⁹³ AME 694, p. 276.

⁹⁴ APF 3, p. 414.

⁹⁵ APF 6, pp. 402–403.

the price of commodities than has happened during the era of Bishop Longer.

At that time, in the Grand Collège, the bishop was responsible for five classes with 60 Latin students. A large number of students also hoped to enter the collège to become native priests. Havard declared that he could enroll 200 students a month if he had the means to maintain them.⁹⁶ However, given the overwhelming financial situation, he had his hands full maintaining the collège as it was. There was no scope for reaching out to others.

Finally, the third factor was the issue of the hierarchy separating Europeans and Vietnamese in the Apostolic Vicariate. Although the training of native priests was the end goal of the MEP's overseas missionary work, the dominant way of thinking among European missionaries was that the process was only feasible because it was under their control. In previous eras, including the colonial period, French missionaries shared a common perception that Vietnamese people took longer to mature spiritually and intellectually than Europeans; they therefore required lengthy training to become priests.⁹⁷ It seemed too soon to allow Vietnamese priests to run their churches independently.⁹⁸ Vietnamese postulants were believed to require constant, strict supervision by European missionaries.

This does not mean that there was a strict hierarchical arrangement of Vietnamese and European people from the start of the religious mission in Vietnam. In 1670, a synod supervised by Pierre Lambert de la Motte, the Bishop of the Apostolic Vicariate of Cochinchina, established a hierarchy within the churches in which only catechists, priests, and the Apostolic Vicariate bishop were ranked above the laity. French missionaries were only responsible for advice and education; the supremacy of the French people was not specified.⁹⁹ The hierarchy may have clarified as the years went by. In particular, this tendency became stronger after Longer's reforms, as described before.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, a discussion resumed between MEP missionaries at the headquarters and in Macau about founding a Collège Général. The missionaries of the Apostolic Vicariate of Western Tonkin generally opposed this idea. The view that native clergy were immature and frivolous, requiring European governance, was a frequently-repeated cliché among missionaries at the time.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁶ APF 6, p. 405.

⁹⁷ AME 692, p. 357.

⁹⁸ Independent churches run by Vietnamese were only established after the French colonial period came to an end. For more detail, see Keith, *op. cit.*

⁹⁹ Marillier, *op. cit.*, Textes, p. 39.

¹⁰⁰ AME 693, pp. 939–940; AME 694, pp. 95–96, 178; AME 696, p. 582; AME 701, pp. 633–634; AME 701, pp. 734, 798–799; APF 6, p. 371. The first Vietnamese bishops finally arrived half a century later, after French colonial rule began, in 1933. The issue of hierarchy between European and native people in the clergy was very deep-rooted. The first Japanese bishop, Januarius Kyunosuke

Closing Remarks

The professional education of clergy, which began in earnest in the mid-eighteenth century, slowly continued on track, in the places such as collèges and séminaires. By the end of the century, Bishop Longer's reforms had been carried out, increasing in the number of priests and establishing hierarchy around missionaries and priests. Native priests reliably executed the orders of the European missionaries who were their superiors; the priests, in turn, led the catechists and student servants who were their subordinates. This system was completely functional. Although many priests were martyred during Minh Mạng's reign and the persecution of Christians hit full stride, there were almost no apostate priests.

The quality of priests seems to have improved, as they were selected from a larger pool of candidates. According to an 1837 report written by Bishop Havard, European missionaries who were recently arrived from the MEP headquarters in Macau often lacked experience; Havard heard rumors that the native priests better liked than the European missionaries.¹⁰¹ The missionaries' trust in native priests may also have increased during the persecutions of Minh Mạng's reign.

The Opium Wars being waged in neighboring countries impacted the era of Emperor Thiệu Trị (1841–1847), the third emperor who succeeded Emperor Minh Mạng. It was thought that Western countries had been unnecessarily provoked, and so the suppression of Christianity was relaxed. Vietnamese interest in the Western world has also increased. The Apostolic Vicariate of Western Tonkin planned a rapid reorganization.¹⁰² In 1846, following an increase in the number of believers and a corresponding increase in clergy, a separate Apostolic Vicariate of Southern Tonkin was established, which included Nghệ An and Hà Tĩnh Provinces.¹⁰³

Hayasaka, was ordained in 1927. Asian countries generally had to wait until the twentieth century before they began to have "native" bishops. The exception to this was Luo Wenzao, who served as the bishop of Nanking in China in the seventeenth century.

¹⁰¹ AME 695, p. 715.

¹⁰² According to a report written by Bishop Retord in November 1841, one priest and one deacon were appointed during Lent. There were ordinations in July and September, in which one priest, three deacons, four subdeacons, and two readers were created; there were also plans to ordain three more deacons in the near future. Retord had as many as 40 apprentices studying the Latin language; these were educated in four separate villages by native priests. Nghệ An also had six to seven theology students under Masson, and two were ordained as subdeacons in September. Many apprentices studied Latin (AME 701, pp. 1609–1610).

¹⁰³ Motonori Makino, "Genchō Tieuchi-ki Betonamu hokubu ni okeru Kirisutokyō senkyō wo meguru shosō: Pari Gaikoku Senkyōkai 'Minami Tonkin Daibokuku' setsuritsu no haikai ni tsuite" (Aspects of Mission Activities in Northern Vietnam under the Reign of Thiệu Trị Emperor of the

The statistics below provide a snapshot of the Apostolic Vicariate of Western Tonkin in January 1846, on the evening before it was divided. The number of native priests suggests that the clergy had already reached the levels that existed before Minh Mạng's persecutions. Furthermore, an increase in collège institutions suggests that the number of students was growing more quickly than before the oppression.¹⁰⁴

“Personnel of the Apostolic Vicariate of Western Tonkin, January 1846”

Two bishops, nine missionaries, including two pro-vicars general and one willing to return to Europe as procurator of the mission; 87 Annamese priests, many of them very old and frail; three deacons; one subdeacon; four minor orders; seven tonsures, of whom one is in prison and another in exile for the Faith; 23 theologians, nine of whom study with Mr. Masson in Nghệ An, and 14 with Mr. Jeantet in Nam Định. We have 266 Latinist students in eight Collèges.

Under the Nguyễn Dynasty, in the Christian societies of northern Vietnam, there were elite courses that did not involve becoming a government official. They did not require abandoning local cultural traditions. The MEP was fastidious about providing local training to clergy, and tried to avoid clashing with existing social customs, as far as possible. Moreover, with the support of the APF, the local church aimed to avoid diverging from global Catholicism. The local priests trained in this way became a so-called “glocal elite”.

Since the reign of Minh Mạng, the environment surrounding missionary work had become very harsh; conversely, this helped to produce a large number of native priests. A similar phenomenon was seen in Japan in the seventeenth century, when religious prohibitions were enforced by the Tokugawa administration.¹⁰⁵ As Christian communities entered an era of persecution and enforced hiding, their need for Vietnamese priests increased. The support from France also increased. In addition to demonstrating the activity of collèges and séminaires in all regions, the existence of native priests was important for the Vietnamese laity. Through the sacraments represented by the Mass and confession, priests became engaged with the details of daily life. Supported by profound knowledge drawn from both East and West, their moral and social authority may have equaled that of the local government officials who governed these areas.

From the reign of Thiệu Trị to the reign of Tự Đức (1847–83), the martyrdom of

Nguyễn Dynasty: Backgrounds for the Establishment of the Southern Tonkin Vicariate of the Société des Missions Étrangères de Paris), *Tōyō Bunka Kenkyū* 11, 87–119, 2009.

¹⁰⁴ AME 697, p. 871.

¹⁰⁵ Kōichirō Takase, *Kirishitan jidai no bunka to shosō* (Culture and Aspects of the Christian Era), Yagi-shoten, 2001, pp. 19–22.

priests and catechists continued to increase. From the perspective of the church, however, the supply of surplus human resources still compensated for this. Vietnamese priests and catechists soon began to take responsibility for the highly skilled groundwork that enabled negotiations between the Nguyễn Dynasty and the French government. The emergence of “hybrid” intellectuals such as Nguyễn Trường Tộ (1830–71) and Trương Vĩnh Ký (1837–98) is perhaps not so surprising, given the intellectual environment of Christian society at the time.

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Figure 1. Saint Joseph's Cathedral in Hanoi



Figure 2. The altar dedicated to Priest Andrew Dũng-Lạc



Figure 3. Vinh Trj Church in Nam Định Province



Figure 4. French missionaries' tombs at Vinh Trj