

Translator's [i.e., Claude's] conventions

- Vietnamese people, places, titles, books, and terms from Lý Văn Phức's text are romanized in Vietnamese. Chinese people, Chinese places, and the titles of Chinese works are in Pinyin, except where a scholar has an established romanization (Chen Ching-ho, Chan Hing-ho) or a Western name (Claudine Salmon).
- Chinese characters are given at the first mention of each name or term, in the abstract and again in the body. After that, the romanization appears alone. The glossary below lists everything.
- Well-known countries and the author's modern place names are given in English: Burma, Siam, France, Calcutta, Singapore, Melaka, Penang.
- Every quotation from Lý Văn Phức and from the *Đại Nam thực lục* is given in English, followed by the Chinese original in 「 」. Block quotations have the English first and the Chinese beneath. The author's own glosses inside quotations are kept in parentheses.
- The author's notes are Word footnotes, numbered as in the original. I have not put my own notes in the text; my queries are listed at the end.
- Page numbers of the published article are shown in grey brackets, e.g. [47]. The article runs from p. 45 to p. 59 (the English abstract is on p. 44).
- My own notes are in square brackets marked "Tr." They point out errors or unclear readings in the source. The text itself is translated as printed.

Glossary

People

Characters	Romanization	Gloss / notes
李文馥	Lý Văn Phức	Nguyễn official (1785–1849); Right Vice Minister of Revenue in 1830; author of the <i>Tây hành kiến văn kỷ lược</i>
明命帝	Minh Mệnh	Emperor, r. 1820–1840 (also written Minh Mạng)
嘉隆帝	Gia Long	Emperor, r. 1802–1820
紹治帝	Thiệu Trị	Emperor, r. 1841–1847
嗣德帝	Tự Đức	Emperor, r. 1848–1883
成泰	Thành Thái	Reign name (1889–1907)
阮福映	Nguyễn Phúc Ánh	Later Emperor Gia Long
太子景	Prince Cảnh	Nguyễn Phúc Ánh's heir
百多祿	Bá Đa Lộc	Pierre Pigneau de Behaine
阮仲併	Nguyễn Trọng Tĩnh	Co-commander of the Định Dương (reading of 併 tentative)

Characters	Romanization	Gloss / notes
陳震	Trần Chấn	Co-commander of the Định Dương
阮文勻	Nguyễn Văn Quân	Officer on the Định Dương
黎文曇	Lê Văn Đàm	Officer on the Định Dương
陳文禮	Trần Văn Lễ	Co-commander of the Phấn Bàng
阮知方	Nguyễn Tri Phương	Co-commander of the Phấn Bàng; later a prominent general
阮文禮	Nguyễn Văn Lễ	Officer on the Phấn Bàng
謝先生	Mr. Xie	Learned Fujianese long resident in Calcutta, mentioned by Lý (§3.1); Chinese, so Pinyin
鄭永常	Cheng Wing-sheung	Author of the article
于向東	Yu Xiangdong	Cited scholar
陳荊和	Chen Ching-ho	Cited scholar (his established romanization)
李貴民	Li Guimin	Cited scholar (Taiwan-based; he may use another romanization)
蘇爾夢	Claudine Salmon	Cited scholar
成思佳	Cheng Sijia	Translator of Salmon 2020
陳慶浩	Chan Hing-ho	French-based scholar who supplied the manuscript copy
汪大淵 / 蘇繼順	Wang Dayuan / Su Jiqing	Author / annotator of <i>Daoyi zhilüe jiaoshi</i>
謝清高 / 楊炳南 / 安京	Xie Qinggao / Yang Bingnan / An Jing	Narrator / recorder / annotator of <i>Hailu jiaoshi</i>

Places and peoples

Characters	Romanization	Gloss / notes
小西洋	Tiểu Tây Dương	“Lesser Western Ocean”; the Bay of Bengal
明歌鎮 (明哥鎮 in §3 heading)	Minh Ca trấn	Calcutta
孟呀嚀	Mạnh Nha Hô	Name for Calcutta in the <i>Đại Nam thực lục</i> (note 5)
芒歌羅	Mang Ca La	“Foreign” (番音) name for Minh Ca
孟并啦 / 望葛仔	Mạnh Tinh La / Vọng Cát Tử	Names for Minh Ca used by local Chinese (readings tentative)
孟牙里國	Mạnh Nha Lý	Bengal (as a country)
孟牙啦	Mạnh Nha La	Bengalis (§3.2, §3.3)
謨[口+徙]國	Mô Ti	Mughal Empire. The second character is rare (口 beside 徙) and my reading is tentative
下洲	Hạ Châu	Southeast Asian ports generally; after 1819, Singapore
新加坡 / 新嘉坡	Tân Gia Ba	Singapore

Characters	Romanization	Gloss / notes
嗎粒呷 / 嗎啦呷 / 麻六甲	Ma Lạp Giáp	Melaka
檳榔嶼 / 栢榔嶼	Tân Lang Dữ	Penang
麻肥能	Ma Phi Năng	Local (番音) name for Penang
三洲府	Tam Châu phủ	The Straits Settlements
江流波	Giang Lưu Ba	Batavia (Jakarta)
三吧凌	Tam Ba Lãng	Semarang
渤泥	Bột Nê	Borneo (Brunei)
呂宋	Lữ Tống	Luzon (Manila)
緬甸 / 暹羅	Miến Điện / Xiêm La	Burma / Siam (given in English in the text)
廣南	Quảng Nam	The Nguyễn lords' state; also the province
沱瀼汛	Đà Nẵng tấn	Đà Nẵng garrison post
覬港	Hiện Cảng	Đà Nẵng harbor (Tourane)
南洋	Nam Dương	The Southern Seas
廣東	Guangdong	Chinese place, so Pinyin
英咭喇 / 英吉利	Anh Cát Lợi	England, the English
紅毛	Hồng Mao	“Red-Hairs”: the English
閩巴	Xà Ba	The Malays (per the author, note 4)
華即低國	Hoa Tức Đê	Holland (per the author)
蛇容港	Xà Dung cảng	Naval anchorage ten days from Calcutta; the author suggests Sittwe (§3.2, note 6)
胡各利河	Hooghly River	The author's modern transcription; given in English
朋加刺 / 榜葛加 / 明呀喇	Pengjiala / Banggejia / Mínglala	Names for Bengal in Chinese sources (note 5); Pinyin
咕哩噶噠 / 交牙炮台	Gulijiada / Jiaoya fort	Calcutta / a fort on the Hooghly, in the <i>Hailu</i>

Texts

Characters	Romanization	Gloss / notes
大南寔錄	<i>Đại Nam thực lục</i>	Veritable Records of the Nguyễn; 正編第一紀 Chính biên đệ nhất kỷ, 第二紀 đệ nhị kỷ
西行見聞紀略	<i>Tây hành kiến văn kỷ lược</i>	“A brief record of things seen and heard on a journey to the west”; sections 略序 Lược tự, 名號 Danh hiệu
島夷誌略	<i>Daoyi zhilüe</i>	Wang Dayuan's Yuan-dynasty text

Characters	Romanization	Gloss / notes
海錄	<i>Hailu</i>	Xie Qinggao's account (c. 1820)

Ships and weapons

Characters	Romanization	Gloss / notes
定洋號 / 奮鵬號 / 靈鳳號	Định Dương / Phấn Bằng / Linh Phượng	Ship names
西洋船	thuyền Tây dương	Western-style ship
西洋裹銅船	thuyền Tây dương khỏa đồng	Copper-sheathed Western-style ship
火烟船	hỏa yên thuyền	Steamship (paddle steamer)
帶水船 / 帶水人	đái thủy thuyền / đái thủy nhân	Pilot boats / pilots
紅衣 / 震海 / 過山	hồng y / chấn hải / quá sơn	Types of cannon

Offices and institutions

Characters	Romanization	Gloss / notes
戶部(右)侍郎	Hộ bộ (hữu) thị lang	(Right) Vice Minister of Revenue
衛尉 / 副衛尉	vệ úy / phó vệ úy	Commandant / Deputy Commandant of the Guard
該隊	cai đội	Company Commander
協鎮	hiệp trấn	Assistant Garrison Commander
侍讀	thị độc	Academician-in-Waiting
大鎮目 / 鎮目	đại trấn mục / trấn mục	Governor-General / head official
總鎮	tổng trấn	Governor (of Penang)
大兵頭 / 二兵頭	đại binh đầu / nhị binh đầu	“Great Chief of Troops” (Governor-General) / second in command
左右陪	tả hữu bồi	Left and right deputies
公司官	công ty quan	“Company official” (hereditary grantee, as Lý understood it)
汛官	tấn quan	Port officer
三司衙門	Tam ty nha môn	“The three offices”: the courts
大番院	Đại Phiên viện	Supreme Court
布理士司	Bố Lý Sĩ ty	The author glosses this as a court; phonetically it is “police” (see query 13)
狀師司	Trạng sư ty	Attorneys' office
稅館	thuế quán	Customs house

Characters	Romanization	Gloss / notes
把水廳 / 船頭司	Bả Thủy sảnh / thuyền đầu ty	Harbor office (Master Attendant)
儲藥庫	trữ dược khố	Powder magazine

Other terms

Characters	Romanization	Gloss / notes
操演 / 操演水師	thao diễn / thao diễn thủy sư	Exercises, drills / exercising the navy
公務	công vụ	Official business (official voyages)
子午盤	tý Ngọ bàn	Compass
針路	châm lộ	Sailing route by compass bearings
夷情	di tình	Conditions among foreigners
唐人 / 唐音 / 番音	người Đường / Đường âm / phiên âm	Chinese people / Chinese pronunciation / foreign (local) pronunciation
發誓	phát thệ	Swearing an oath (a sworn declaration)
清稅 / 實口 / 出口開文	thanh thuế / thực khẩu / xuất khẩu khai văn	Tax clearance / crew-list certificate / port clearance
利市銀 / 江分銀 / 飯例銀	lợi thị ngân / giang phân ngân / phạn lệ ngân	Gratuity money / river dues / meal allowance
雷鞭 / 運水機	lôi tiên / vận thủy cơ	Lightning rod / pump (dry-dock pump)
阿芙蓉	a phù dung	Opium
碇 / 鐵碇	đỉnh / thiết đỉnh	Mooring anchor / iron moorings (§3.4–3.6)
紅毛鬼 / 髮賊 / 番鬼	hồng mao quỷ / phát tặc / phiên quỷ	“Red-haired devils” / “hair bandits” / “foreign devils”

[45]

A Record of Things Seen and Heard on the Vietnamese Navy's 1830 Exercises in the Tiểu Tây Dương 小西洋

1830 年越南水師前往小西洋操演見聞錄

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Abstract

After Emperor Gia Long 嘉隆 of Vietnam's Nguyễn 阮 dynasty, Emperor Minh Mệnh 明命 (r. 1820–1840) came to the throne. His reign was the high point of Vietnam's construction of copper-sheathed Western-style ships (西洋裹銅船). He regularly sent these ships on official voyages to Guangdong 廣東, Hạ Châu 下洲 (Singapore), Giang Lưu Ba 江流波 (Batavia/Jakarta), Tam Ba Lãng 三吧凌 (Semarang), Bột Nê 渤泥, Lữ Tống 呂宋 (Manila), Ma Lạp Giáp 嗎粒呷 (Melaka), Tân Lang Dữ 檳榔嶼 (Penang), Burma, and elsewhere. In the eleventh year of his reign (1830), Minh Mệnh made a bold attempt. He sent two large Western-style warships to the distant Tiểu Tây Dương 小西洋 (Bay of Bengal) to conduct exercises and to visit Minh Ca trấn 明歌鎮. What was the purpose of this mission? How well did it go? What did it achieve? Drawing on the relevant records in the *Đại Nam thực lục* 大南寔錄, on Lý Văn Phức's 李文馥 *Tây hành kiến văn kỷ lược* 西行見聞紀略, and on other works, this article reconstructs how the mission came about, how it proceeded, and what its members saw and heard. Lý Văn Phức's descriptions show us how the British East India Company ran Minh Ca trấn (Calcutta), and how it managed the port's facilities and taxation.

Keywords: Tiểu Tây Dương 小西洋, Minh Ca trấn 明歌鎮, Lý Văn Phức 李文馥, Western-style ships 西洋船, Emperor Minh Mệnh 明命帝

[46]

1. Introduction

During the Tây Sơn 西山 period (1790–1801), Nguyễn Phúc Ánh 阮福映, a descendant of the rulers of Quảng Nam 廣南, fought a war to restore his house. To defeat the Nguyễn brothers of Tây Sơn, he went into exile in Siam (Xiêm La 暹羅) to ask for troops, and he ordered his heir, Prince Cảnh (太子景), to go to France with the Catholic priest Bá Đa Lộc 百多祿 to seek support.

He also obtained the help of foreign mercenaries in building Western-style warships and cannon for his counteroffensive. Between 1788 and 1801, he several times sent Western employees to Hạ Châu 下洲 (the Nam Dương 南洋) and other places to buy shells, sulphur, saltpeter, and other munitions (Yu Xiangdong 于向東 2012: 125).

After Emperor Gia Long 嘉隆帝 founded his dynasty, he sent no more ships to Hạ Châu on official business (Chen Ching-ho 陳荊和 1990: 75–76). He adopted a policy of letting the people rest and recover, and he stopped building or repairing Western-style warships (*Đại Nam thực lục* 大南寔錄, Chính biên đệ nhất kỷ 正編第一紀, q. 27: 692). Gia Long was succeeded by Emperor Minh Mệnh 明命帝, who reigned for twenty years (1820–1840). This was the high point of Vietnam’s construction of copper-sheathed Western-style ships (*thuyền Tây dương vỏ đồng* 西洋裹銅船), and it had more than thirty Western-style warships (西洋戰船) (Cheng Wing-sheung 鄭永常 and Li Guimin 李貴民 2014: 74).¹ Minh Mệnh regularly sent these Western-style ships (*thuyền Tây dương* 西洋船) on official voyages to Guangdong 廣東 (Macau), Hạ Châu (Singapore),² Giang Lư Ba 江流波 (Batavia/Jakarta), Tam Ba Lãng 三吧凌 (Semarang), Bột Nê 渤泥, Lữ Tống 呂宋 (Manila), Ma Lạp Giáp 嗎粒呷 (Melaka), Tân Lang Dữ 檳榔嶼 (Penang), Burma (Miến Điện 緬甸), and elsewhere. In the eleventh year of his reign (1830), Minh Mệnh made a bold attempt. He sent two large Western-style warships to the distant Tiểu Tây Dương 小西洋 (Bay of Bengal) to conduct exercises. What was the purpose of this mission? How well did it go? What did it achieve?

Drawing on the relevant records in the *Đại Nam thực lục*, on Lý Văn Phúc’s 李文馥 *Tây hành kiến văn kỷ lược* 西行見聞紀略,³ and on other works, this article reconstructs how the mission

¹For discussions of the construction of copper-sheathed ships under Minh Mệnh (including steamships), coastal patrols, the regulation of grain shipping, and related policies, see Li Guimin 李貴民, *Yuenan Ruanchao Mingming shiqi (1820–1840) haijun yu duiwai maoyi* 越南阮朝明命時期(1820–1840)海軍與對外貿易 [The navy and foreign trade of Vietnam’s Nguyễn dynasty in the Minh Mệnh period (1820–1840)] (PhD diss., Department of History, National Cheng Kung University, Tainan, 2013).

²Around the Gia Long period, “Hạ Châu” 下洲 referred generally to the port cities of Southeast Asia. After Singapore was opened as a port in 1819, “Hạ Châu” meant Singapore.

³Lý Văn Phúc, *Tây hành kiến văn kỷ lược* (manuscript copy), “Lược tự” 略序 [Brief preface], p. 1. A photocopy of this book was given to me by the French scholar Professor Chan Hing-ho 陳慶浩, to whom I am grateful.

Note: the “Brief preface” of the manuscript contains the words “in the spring of the canh dần year, I was dispatched” (「庚寅春，奉派」). After the preface come the words “thirteenth day of the eighth month of the eleventh year of Tự Đức” (「嗣德十一年八月十三日。」). “Tự Đức” 嗣德 must be an error for “Minh Mệnh” 明命, because the eleventh year of Tự Đức (1858) was a mậu ngọ 戊午 year, and the next canh dần 庚寅 year fell in the second year of Thành Thái 成泰 (1890). In the photocopy, the characters “Minh Mệnh” are written small beside “Tự Đức” as a correction. I suspect that Lý Văn Phúc (1785–1849) recopied his old material during the Tự Đức reign and wrote the wrong reign name. Not daring, out of reverence, to delete or alter the characters “Tự Đức,” he added “Minh Mệnh”

came about, how it proceeded, and what its members saw and heard. It relies mainly on the descriptions in Lý Văn Phức's *Tây hành kiến văn kỷ lược* to understand how the British East India Company ran Minh Ca trấn 明歌鎮 (Calcutta) (Claudine Salmon 蘇爾夢 2020: 160), and how it managed [47] the port's facilities and taxation. This was a “modern” Western port for its time. Did such facilities make the Vietnamese envious, and did they lead them to improve their own port facilities and tax system? That is the question this article addresses.

2. Emperor Minh Mệnh Sends the Định Dương 定洋 and the Phấn Bằng 奮鵬 to Exercise in the Tiểu Tây Dương

In the eleventh year of his reign (1830), Emperor Minh Mệnh ordered two large, Vietnamese-built, copper-sheathed Western-style ships, the Định Dương and the Phấn Bằng, to sail far to the Tiểu Tây Dương to conduct exercises. “Exercises” (*thao diễn* 操演) here means military maneuvers. They were a comprehensive drill that tested the seaworthiness of the two warships, the physical fitness of their crews, and the firing of the ships' guns, among other things. The Tiểu Tây Dương lies in the Bay of Bengal, and to sail there from Vietnam a ship must pass through the Strait of Melaka. Before this, Vietnamese-built Western-style ships had already sailed abroad to Guangdong, Lữ Tống, Giang Lư Ba (Jakarta), and Hạ Châu (Singapore) (Claudine Salmon [2020]: 159–160). There had also been a mission to carry Burmese envoys home (*Đại Nam thực lục*, Chính biên đệ nhị kỷ 正編第二紀, q. 19: 1733–1735). All of this shows that Vietnamese Western-style ships could sail overseas without difficulty.

According to Lý Văn Phức, the two warships Phấn Bằng and Định Dương, on the eighteenth day of the first month of the eleventh year of Minh Mệnh, “weighed anchor at the Đà Nẵng garrison post (Đà Nẵng trấn 沱灤汛) in Quảng Nam 廣南 (Hiển Cảng 蜆港), and reached that land in the sixth month. Along the way they passed Tân Gia Ba 新加坡, Ma Lạp Giáp (Melaka), Tân Lang Dữ, and other places, and then arrived at the harbor of Minh Ca trấn” (「自廣南沱灤汛(蜆港)起

beside them to correct the error. Lý Văn Phức died in the second year of Tự Đức (1849), at the age of sixty-four. This recopied manuscript was therefore made before his death, or in the first year of Tự Đức (1448). [Tr.: Sic; this should be 1848.]

The original manuscript of the *Tây hành kiến văn kỷ lược* was written on “the thirteenth day of the eighth month of the eleventh year of Minh Mệnh.” He probably compiled it after returning home, putting together the materials he had collected one by one. [Tr.: The ships were still at Calcutta in the eighth month of Minh Mệnh 11 and did not return until the tenth month or later, so this date does not fit compilation after the return home.] When Minh Mệnh first sent ships abroad on official business, he instructed: “This voyage is not for buying goods. It is precisely so that we may know the mountains, rivers, customs, and products of foreign countries. Wherever you go, you must study the compass carefully and record it clearly, so that we may know the bearings” (「此行非為市貨，正欲知外國山川風物。爾等所至，須熟看子午盤，記註明白，俾知方向。」) (see *Đại Nam thực lục*, Chính biên đệ nhị kỷ [Tokyo: Keio University, Yūrindō, 1963], q. 19, cumulative p. 1675). I believe Lý Văn Phức presented his record of the “mountains, rivers, customs, and products of foreign countries” from this voyage to the emperor at the time, but Minh Mệnh seems not to have responded in any way.

梂，六月達其境，途經新咖波、嗎粒呷(馬六甲)、檳榔嶼等地，乃抵明歌鎮治津次。」)(Lý Văn Phúc 1830: 3). The two large ships took almost half a year to reach Minh Ca *trấn* (Calcutta). The voyage seems rather slow, and perhaps they held gunnery drills or similar exercises along the way. The *Đại Nam thực lục* records that in the third year of Minh Mệnh, a mission was sent to return Burmese envoys to “the Burmese border” (「緬甸界首」), and the round trip took only four months (*Đại Nam thực lục*, Chính biên đệ nhị kỷ, q. 24: 1733–1735). [Tr.: The same pages are cited above as quyển 19. One of the two citations is probably mistaken.] No record of that voyage to Burma survives, however.

For the 1830 voyage to exercise in the Tiểu Tây Dương, by contrast, one of the men on board, Lý Văn Phúc, Vice Minister of Revenue (Hộ bộ thị lang 戶部侍郎), left an account of what he saw and heard. The two warships, the Phấn Bàng and the Định Dương, called at the British colonial ports of Tân Gia Ba (Hạ Châu), Ma Lạp Giáp (Melaka), and Tân Lang Dữ. They then left the Strait of Melaka and sailed into the Tiểu Tây Dương (Bay of Bengal) to exercise. After that, they visited Calcutta (Minh Ca *trấn*), the headquarters of the British East India Company’s colonies in Asia, and Lý Văn Phúc recorded in detail what he saw and heard there.

Sending two warships to exercise in the Tiểu Tây Dương was, of course, a new venture in navigation. The Định Dương was commanded by Deputy Commandant of the Guard (*phó vệ úy* 副衛尉) Nguyễn Trọng Tính 阮仲併 and Assistant Garrison Commander (*hiệp trấn* 協鎮) Trần Chấn 陳震. With them were Deputy Commandant Nguyễn Văn Quân 阮文勻, Commandant and Company Commander (*vệ úy cai đội* 衛尉該隊) Lê Văn Đàm 黎文曇, and other officers. The Phấn Bàng was commanded by Commandant of the Guard (*vệ úy* 衛尉) Trần Văn Lễ 陳文禮 and Academician-in-Waiting (*thị độc* 侍讀) Nguyễn Tri Phương 阮知方. Also on board were Company Commander with the added rank of Deputy Commandant (*cai đội gia phó vệ úy* 該隊加副衛尉) Nguyễn Văn Lễ 阮文禮 and Right Vice Minister of Revenue (Hộ bộ hữu thị lang 戶部右侍郎) Lý Văn Phúc. Because Lý Văn Phúc wrote the *Tây hành kiến văn kỷ lược*, later generations can catch a glimpse of what was seen and heard on this voyage. As with other voyages, the *Đại Nam thực lục* does not say what official business this voyage was meant to carry out. Minh Mệnh had, however, given clear instructions for all overseas missions:

[48]

This is not for buying goods. It is precisely so that we may know the mountains, rivers, customs, and products of foreign countries. Wherever you go, you must study the compass carefully and record it clearly, so that we may know the bearings.

「非為市貨，正欲知外國山川風物。爾等所至，須熟看子午盤，記註明白，俾知方向。」(*Đại Nam thực lục*, Chính biên đệ nhị kỷ, q. 19: 1675)

The words “not for buying goods” (「非為市貨」) show that the missions were not simply about trade. Broadly speaking, the “official business” (*công vụ* 公務) on which Minh Mệnh sent Western-style ships abroad had four main purposes: first, conducting royal trade; second, recording compass bearings (*tý Ngọ bàn* 子午盤) for navigation; third, gathering intelligence on conditions among foreigners (*di tình* 夷情) and on overseas lands and things; and fourth, testing the seaworthiness and fighting strength of Vietnamese-built Western-style ships.

In the *Tây hành kiến văn kỷ lược*, Lý Văn Phức states plainly that he was “dispatched with the two large ships Phấn Bàng and Định Dương to the waters of Minh Ca trấn, of the English country (Anh Cát Lợi quốc 英咭唎國) in the Tiểu Tây Dương (Bay of Bengal), to exercise the navy” (「奉派奮鵬、定洋二大船前往小西洋(孟加拉灣)之英咭唎國明哥鎮洋分操演水師」) (Lý Văn Phức: 1). Clearly, “exercising the navy” (*thao diễn thủy sư* 「操演水師」) and learning the sailing route (*châm lộ* 針路) to the Tiểu Tây Dương were the chief purposes of the voyage (*Đại Nam thực lục*, Chính biên đệ nhị kỷ, q. 85: 2623).

This voyage through the Strait of Melaka to exercise in the Bay of Bengal was also the longest ever made by Vietnamese-built Western-style warships. The Phấn Bàng was launched in the fifth year of Minh Mệnh (1824) and the Định Dương in the ninth year (1828). The long voyage to the Bay of Bengal was probably a test by the Vietnamese of their own copper-sheathed ships’ ability to sail great distances, and it was highly significant. Yet the *Đại Nam thực lục* left no record of how the exercises were carried out, and neither did Lý Văn Phức’s *Tây hành kiến văn kỷ lược*. He did, however, leave some maritime material that helps us understand how England, a sea power, governed the port of Minh Ca trấn. Lý Văn Phức says little about the seaworthiness or fighting strength of the two warships. Still, both ships did eventually return to Vietnam, which indirectly proves their capability: they successfully completed the long voyage.

According to Lý Văn Phức, the Phấn Bàng and the Định Dương, on the eighteenth day of the first month, “weighed anchor at the Đà Nẵng garrison post in Quảng Nam (Hiện Cảng), and reached that land in the sixth month. Along the way they passed Tân Gia Ba, Ma Lạp Giáp (Melaka), Tân Lang Dữ, and other places, and then arrived at the harbor of Minh Ca trấn” (「自廣南沱灤汛(赬港)起碇，六月達其境，途經新加坡、嗎粒呷(馬六甲)、檳榔嶼等地，乃抵明歌鎮治津次。」) (Lý Văn Phức: 3). On the way, he recorded the following about the Straits settlements of the English (the Red-Hairs, Hồng Mao 紅毛):

Tân Gia Ba 新加坡 is the name of a *trấn*. The land originally belonged to the country of Xà Ba 閩巴,⁴ and was later annexed by the Red-Hairs. It has now been nineteen years. Shops and dwellings have already been built and wharves laid out, and it has become a great meeting place for ships. [Tr.: The article prints 庸舍, presumably for 廛舍, “shops and dwellings.”]

新加坡，鎮名，其地原屬閩巴國，後為紅毛所併，迄今十有九年，經已設立庸舍，開治津岸，為舟船都會之所。

Ma Lạp Giáp 嗎拉呷 (Melaka) is the name of a *trấn*. The land originally belonged to the country of Hoa Túc Đê 華即低 (meaning Holland) and lay close to the Red-Hairs. Later the Red-Hairs obtained it in exchange for another territory. It has now been fourteen years. Its houses are closely packed, and it is called a small metropolis. [Tr.: The meaning of 與紅毛略連連 is unclear. “Lay close to the Red-Hairs” is a tentative rendering.]

嗎拉呷(馬六甲)，鎮名，其地原屬華即低國(指荷蘭)與紅毛略連連，後紅毛自以別地易之，迄今十有四年，其處屋宇稠密，稱為一小都會。

Tân Lang Dữ 檳榔嶼 is the name of a *trấn* (in the local language [*phiên âm* 番音] it is called Ma Phi Năng 麻肥能). It too was formerly Xà Ba land, and the Red-Hairs annexed it. It has now been more than thirty years. Its markets are more prosperous than those of the two *trấn* above, but in the number of ships that gather there it does not match Tân Gia Ba.

檳榔嶼，鎮名(番音稱為：麻肥能)，亦閩巴故地，而紅毛併之也。迄今三十餘年，其市肆蕃華比前二鎮稱勝，而舟船輳集，則視新加坡弗及焉。(Lý Văn Phức: 3)

[49]

Lý Văn Phức’s dates for when Singapore, Melaka, and Penang became British colonies do not agree with the historical record. Perhaps he wrote down rough information gathered from written conversations or casual talk with local Chinese (*người Đường* 唐人). Counting back from “now”

⁴The character 巴 here is written inside 門 [in the manuscript]. Xà Ba 閩巴 refers to the Malays [Claude added this, but I agree!!]. [Tr.: The original reads only 「巴(門外)」, so this rendering is tentative.]

(the eleventh year of Minh Mệnh, 1830), his dates for the British takeover of the Straits Settlements (Singapore, Melaka, and Penang) are off. In brief, Penang was occupied by the British in 1786, Melaka became a British colony in 1824, and Singapore was opened as a port in 1819. Still, he saw that Penang was then more prosperous than Singapore and Melaka, with many ships gathering there. [Tr.: Lý's own text, quoted above, says the opposite: Penang had busier markets but fewer ships than Singapore.] His description of these “three settlements” (Tam Châu phủ 三洲府) added to Vietnamese knowledge of the Straits Settlements. When the Định Dương reached Minh Ca *trấn*, Lý Văn Phúc wrote:

Minh Ca 明歌 is the name of a *trấn*. In the foreign pronunciation it is called Mang Ca La 芒歌羅. In Chinese pronunciation (*Đường âm* 唐音) it is called Mạnh Tinh La 孟并啦, and some also call it Vọng Cát Tử 望葛仔. It was originally the land of the country of Mạnh Nha Lý 孟牙里. It was later occupied by the country of Mô Ti 謨[口+徙] (the Mughal Empire), and after that it was taken by cunning by the English (the Red-Hairs). It has now been eighty-four years. Its shops stand as thick as trees in a forest, and its ships swarm like ants. The tracks of carts and the hoofprints of horses choke the harbor and fill the streets. It is ten times as prosperous as the three *trấn* above (meaning Singapore, Melaka, and Penang), and it is called a great metropolis.

明歌，鎮名。番音稱為芒歌羅；唐音稱為孟并啦，亦有稱為望葛仔者。原是孟牙里國故地，後為謨[口+徙]國(莫臥兒帝國)佔領，其後又被英吉利(紅毛)智取，至今八十有四年。其市肆林立，舟船蟻聚，車轍馬跡，塞港填街，繁榮比前三鎮(指新加坡、馬六甲和檳城)十倍，稱為大都會處。(Lý Văn Phúc: 4)

Lý Văn Phúc describes Minh Ca *trấn*⁵ (Calcutta) as extremely prosperous: “the tracks of carts and the hoofprints of horses choke the harbor and fill the streets” (「車轍馬跡，塞港填街。」). He

⁵Minh Ca *trấn* is the “Mạnh Nha Hô” 孟呀嚙 recorded in the *Đại Nam thực lục*, the headquarters of the English (英咭喇): Calcutta, in West Bengal, India. Lý Văn Phúc's *Tây hành kiến văn ký lược* (manuscript), “Danh hiệu” 名號 [Names], p. 4, records that the Vietnamese called Calcutta, in western Bengal in the Tiểu Tây Dương, “Minh Ca *trấn*”; in the foreign pronunciation it was called Mang Ca La, and the Chinese called it Mạnh Tinh La or Vọng Cát Tử.

Among Chinese sources, the annotation to the entry “Pengjiala” 朋加刺 in Wang Dayuan 汪大淵 (Yuan dynasty), *Daoyi zhilüe jiaoshi* 島夷誌略校釋, annotated by Su Jiqing 蘇繼頤 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1981), p. 332, says: “This refers to Bengal on the lower Ganges in eastern India, which Ming-dynasty historical records call Banggejia” (「指東天竺恆河下游之孟加拉(Bengal)，即明代史籍載云：榜葛加。」). The entry “Minglala” 明呀喇 in Xie Qinggao 謝清高 (Qing dynasty), dictated, recorded by Yang Bingnan 楊炳南, *Hailu jiaoshi* 海錄校釋, annotated by An Jing 安京 (Beijing: Shangwu yinshuguan, 2002), p. 62, is clearer still: “Minglala is governed by the English. It is several thousand li around and is a great metropolis among the southwestern foreign lands. ... At the harbor mouth there is a fort. Entering the inner harbor and traveling for about two days, one reaches the Jiaoya fort 交牙炮

says it was ten times as prosperous as the Straits Settlements, and he calls it a “great metropolis” (「大都會」). At that time, the Governor (*tổng trấn* 總鎮) of Penang also administered Singapore and Melaka, and the Governor-General (*đại trấn mục* 大鎮目) of Minh Ca trấn had overall authority over Penang, Singapore, and Melaka (Lý Văn Phức: 4). The British East India Company had its headquarters at Calcutta, in what is now the Indian state of West Bengal; the Vietnamese called it Minh Ca *trấn*. Ships entered the Hooghly River (胡各利河) from the Bay of Bengal and followed its long, winding channel inland to reach Calcutta. British colonial power reached out from here to [50] India, Burma, the Straits Settlements, and the coast of China. That, in broad outline, was the structure of British rule.

On this voyage to the Tiểu Tây Dương, the two Vietnamese Western-style ships lay at Minh Ca trấn for two months. In the tenth month of the eleventh year of Minh Mệnh (1831) [Tr.: Minh Mệnh 11 corresponds to 1830, and the ships reached Calcutta only in the sixth month of that year. The author probably means Minh Mệnh 12 (1831).], the first of the large ships returned to Vietnam from Bengal. The whole voyage had taken nearly a year (*Đại Nam thực lục*, Chính biên đệ nhị kỷ, q. 69: 2388). The Phấn Bàng had come back successfully from the Tiểu Tây Dương, but this hard official voyage seems not to have earned any reward from Minh Mệnh, because its companion ship, the Định Dương, had still not returned. The Định Dương was delayed until the fourth month of the following year (1832). It had been caught in a storm and blown into Burmese territory, so that it took a year and a half to get home, and many of its officers and soldiers died of illness (*Đại Nam thực lục*, Chính biên đệ nhị kỷ, q. 73: 2441).

In the end, both ships came home safely from the exercises in the Tiểu Tây Dương. Some officers and men died in service, but this did not weaken Minh Mệnh’s resolve to send ships to the Tiểu Tây Dương. Nine years later, in the tenth month of the twentieth year of his reign (1839), he again sent Western-style ships there on official business (*Đại Nam thực lục*, Chính biên đệ nhị kỷ, q. 207: 4494). This voyage was mainly for trade. To make sure the ships could trade safely abroad, their fighting strength was increased: “For each of the large copper-sheathed ships of various kinds sent on the voyage to the Tiểu Tây Dương, in addition to the ship’s original six *hồng y* 紅衣 cannon

台. After another three or four days, one reaches Guljiada 咕哩噶達. The English officials and troops who garrison Minglala have their seat here” (「明呀喇，英吉利所轄，周圍數千里，西南諸番一大都會也。……港口有炮台。進入內港，行二日許，到交牙炮台。又三、四日，到咕哩噶達。英吉利官軍鎮明呀喇者治此。」). The “Jiaoya fort” is “an important customs fort” (「海關炮台重地」), and “Guljiada” is Calcutta, the capital of British India. Xie Qinggao dictated this account around 1820, having visited Minglala before then.

The Pengjiala, Banggejia, and Minglala of Chinese historical records, and the Mạnh Tinh La and Vọng Cát Tử used by the local Chinese, are what the Vietnamese called “Minh Ca *trấn*.” Clearly, “Minh Ca” is a variant transcription of the same name as Banggejia, Minglala, Pengjiala, and Bengal (孟加拉), and it refers to British Calcutta at that time. The Vietnamese called the waters of the Bay of Bengal the “Tiểu Tây Dương.” Xie Qinggao’s *Hailu* also has an entry for “Xiao Xiyang” 小西洋, but there it means the Portuguese colony of Goa (臥亞/果亞) on India’s west coast, while “Da Xiyang” 大西洋 means Portugal in Europe (see Xie Qinggao, *Hailu jiaoshi*, pp. 87–88).

and ten *chấn hải* 震海 cannon, four *quá sơn* 過山 cannon are to be issued. Each *hồng y* cannon is to have sixty rounds of powder and shot, and each *chấn hải* and *quá sơn* cannon eighty rounds” (「派往小西洋程多索裏銅各項大船，每艘原船紅衣(礮)六輛、震海十輛，增給過山四輛，紅衣每輛藥彈六十發，震海、過山每輛八十發」), and so on (*Đại Nam thực lục*, Chính biên đệ nhị kỷ, q. 207: 4494). [Tr.: The meaning of 程多索 in the quotation is unclear to me.] A year later, the Linh Phượng 靈鳳, which had been sent to the Tiểu Tây Dương on official business, returned safely to Vietnam (*Đại Nam thực lục*, Chính biên đệ nhị kỷ, q. 215: 4625). Unfortunately, no account of this visit to the Tiểu Tây Dương seems to survive. In his twenty years on the throne, Minh Mệnh twice sent Vietnamese-built Western-style ships to the Tiểu Tây Dương. At that time, Vietnam’s technology for building Western-style ships was the most advanced of any Asian country.

3. Lý Văn Phức’s Record of Port Administration in Minh Ca trấn 明哥鎮 (Calcutta)

[Tr.: The heading writes 明哥鎮; the body of the article writes 明歌鎮.]

3.1 Lý Văn Phức’s Impressions of the English and Their Skills

Lý Văn Phức seems to have had no liking for the Red-Hairs (the English). He writes:

The people of that country are mostly crafty and fond of deceit. If they spy an island in a neighboring country where there is a living to be made, they will try every means to take it. They often ask neighboring countries for land. At first they use humble words and offer generous profits, asking for just a small plot of land where they can lodge and trade. Once the request is granted, they gather there in growing numbers, and then they plot to seize the place. Day by day and month by month, they extend it a foot here and an inch there. Then they build forts and gather merchant ships, and their advance cannot be stopped. For this reason the various peoples of the Western Regions often fear and hate them, and commonly call them “red-haired devils” (*hồng mao quỷ* 紅毛鬼) or “hair bandits” (*phát tặc* 髮賊). [Tr.: 刃廣寸增 is presumably a misprint for 尺廣寸增, “extending by feet and inches.”]

國人多狡詐，好欺騙。如窺見鄰邦島嶼，有能為生理者，必千方百計以規取之。常求地于鄰邦，始則卑辭厚利，請得一席之地，以便寄商。既得請，日漸居聚，遂謀據占之，日積月累，刃廣寸增，於是置砲臺、集商船、駁駁乎不可遏。故西域諸戎往往畏而惡之，常稱為紅毛鬼，又稱髮賊。(Lý Văn Phức: 6)

Opium (*a phù dung* 阿芙蓉) is another example. “Consuming it drains a person’s vital essence and blood and squanders his family’s property” (「吃之令人耗其精血，而蕩其家產。」). The Red-Hairs trade in it and sell it to others, yet “from top to bottom in their whole country, not one person is willing to consume it. Such [51] is their cunning” (「通國上下，無一人肯吃之者，其狡類此。」) (Lý Văn Phức: 6).

Lý Văn Phức felt the conduct of the English in Minh Ca trấn most keenly. He regarded the Red-Hairs as “most greedy for profit, and cold and unfeeling” (「最嗜利而冷淡無情」). He points out: “While the official ships were lodged at Minh Ca, if someone on board happened to die of illness and we wished to bury him, we had to pay money for the use of the land, and fees for guides, levies, and wages for laborers. If we wished to cremate him in order to carry him home, the officials sent someone to show us the place and demanded a guide’s fee” (「官船宿明歌時，船內人偶有病故，欲土葬者，須費借土銀，引捐工銀；欲火燒以便帶回者，官令人指示其處，要收嚮路銀。」) (Lý Văn Phức: 7). In short, everything came down to money. This was Minh Ca trấn under colonial capitalist rule.

He gives further examples. “If soldiers from an arriving ship wished to go ashore to cut firewood, or if the smiths wished to set up a temporary forge with their tools and work there, they too had to pay money for the land; otherwise they were not allowed ashore. Even if soldiers wished to go ashore and sit down to make cloth pillows, they had to rent a place to sit and pay money for it” (「如來船兵丁，有要上岸，將薪柴斫作，及冶匠要將冶具權設爐冶辦作者，亦須支費土銀，否則不容上岸。甚至兵丁要登岸地，坐理作布枕，亦須傭借坐處，支費銀錢。」). Again: “On the day an arriving ship turned for home, if it wished to take river sand and earth as ballast, the money paid for it was beyond counting. Otherwise, not a handful of sand or a cupful of earth was allowed” (「來船回舵之日，要取河沙土壓艙者，其支買銀錢，所費無算。不然，一掬沙，一杯土，概不之許。」) (Lý Văn Phức: 7–8).

To the English, such charges were only natural. Borrowing land to work iron, borrowing land to make cloth pillows, and taking mud and sand all made use of the colony’s land, so why should they not be paid for? Lý Văn Phức was indignant because he did not understand the principles by which colonial capitalist administration worked.

Yet he also admired the ingenuity and skill of the Red-Hairs. For example: “They often lay iron across a great river to make a bridge, and beneath the bridge not a single pile or pillar stands in the river. Instead, above the bridge they use many iron bars and iron chains, binding them one after another so that all the bars are linked together. To look at it, it seems to hang in the air with nothing to rest on, yet people and horses come and go across it, and it is firm and unshakable” (「常於長江橫鐵為橋，橋之下全無一椿柱于江者，但於橋上多用鐵條鐵索，歷為維繫，條諸相關。」).

望之則憑空無所倚者，而人馬往來，堅牢不可拔。」) (Lý Văn Phức: 8). This kind of iron chain bridge was a modern invention, and it was already in use in colonial Minh Ca trấn.

He also mentions a “thunder-catching rod” (*lôi tiên* 雷鞭): “On the walls of people’s houses one often sees an iron rod standing upright, about an inch around and perhaps several tens of feet high. When I asked about it, I was told: ‘This iron is made and refined by a special method, and it is used to catch thunder’” (「有收雷鞭者，常於人家牆屋間，見有豎一鐵鞭，周圍一寸高，可數十尺。叩之，云：此鐵，製煉有法，用以收雷。」) (Lý Văn Phức: 8). Lý Văn Phức was especially curious about this novel lightning rod. “I asked closely about the method, but no one was willing to explain it. They only said: ‘This iron was made in our home country’” (「細叩其法，則無肯道之者，但云：此鐵從祖國製來的。」). He then asked a Chinese, who said: “Probably it is refined with lodestone, on the same principle by which a lodestone draws a needle” (「蓋用磁石煉之，亦取磁石引針之義。」) (Lý Văn Phức: 8). This Chinese may have been the Mr. Xie 謝先生 whom Lý mentions elsewhere, a learned Fujianese who had lived there for a long time (Lý Văn Phức: 4). Lý Văn Phức seems unconvinced: “Although this explanation is entirely absurd, it still shows the usual tricks of the foreign devils (*phiên quỷ* 番鬼; meaning the English)” (「雖其說總屬荒唐。然亦可見番鬼(指英吉利)一般伎倆。」) (Lý Văn Phức: 8). Under British rule, Minh Ca trấn had indeed joined the ranks of the modern.

For example, along a hundred *li* of riverbank at Minh Ca trấn, an iron post stood every six or seven feet with a glass lamp on top. The lamps were lit every night and shone as bright as day, so that the place looked like a city of fire (Lý Văn Phức: 22). When the head official (*trấn mục* 鎮目) went out by boat on official business, a steamship (*hỏa yên thuyền* 火烟船) led the way in front, and two or three “escort boats” (「護擁船」) followed behind. Guns were fired when his boat left or entered port. The number depended on the official’s rank: twenty-one shots for senior officials and nineteen for junior ones. Soldiers lined up on the shore, fully armed and in good order, making a stern and imposing sight. Two soldiers guarded the government offices day and night. Each held a musket, and they stood shoulder to shoulder and were not allowed to sit or lie down. When the watch changed, they gave a loud shout as a signal (Lý Văn Phức: 23). The strict, uniform discipline of the soldiers at Minh Ca trấn clearly won Lý Văn Phức’s sincere admiration.

[52]

To measure the weather and the natural world, the English used such instruments as the single barometer (單風雨尺), the single thermometer (單寒暑尺), the combined barometer-thermometer (風雨寒暑尺), the “sky-measuring rule” (量天尺), the “sky-gauging rule” (度天尺), the globe (地球圖), and the “sun-measuring needle” (量日針). To observe the heavens, they had telescopes (千里鏡, 萬里鏡) and microscopes (顯微鏡). To keep time, they had water clocks (滴水壺), large

and small hourglasses (大沙漏, 小沙漏), watches (時辰表, i.e., pocket watches), and striking clocks (自鳴鐘). Their clocks and watches were finely made and rarely wrong. Officials, soldiers, and well-off commoners all carried small watches on their persons to tell the time (Lý Văn Phức: 24). Lý Văn Phức paid special attention to the construction of steamships (paddle steamers), which he found extremely ingenious:

On each side of the ship there is a water-wheel machine. When the ship is under way, it turns and drives the water. In the middle of the ship stands an iron column, hollow inside and round outside. A fire engine is hidden beneath the column. When the ship is under way, a fire is lit, and the smoke blows up out of the top of the column. A wind arises of itself that can drive the machine, so that the ship's movement forward and back is entirely under human control.

船的兩邊，各有水機車，行時運之，可以使水。船之中心，豎有鐵柱一，中通而外圓，暗設火機於柱之下，行時起火，火烟從柱頭吹上，其風自生，可以運機而船之前卻，儘由人力使之矣。(Lý Văn Phức: 28)

Minh Mệnh had already ordered the Armory (Võ khố 武庫) to develop this kind of steamship. On this voyage, the officers of the Phần Bàng and the Định Dương saw one in operation for the first time, at Minh Ca *trấn*. But when Lý Văn Phức tried to find out how it worked, no one could give him a clear answer. Specialized mechanical engineering of this kind was not something ordinary people could understand or explain.

Lý Văn Phức also describes a visit to a “water-moving machine” (*vận thủy cơ* 運水機; a dry-dock pump) by the river. He describes the dock as a basin dug beside the river to hold large ships. The basin opened onto the river, and a gate at its front could be opened and closed. The basin was forty or fifty feet deep, and its three sides were lined with brick in several tens of steps. Its floor was laid with thick planks resting on heavy stones. The steps descended in tiers to form a cradle for the ship, and many crossbeams were laid on the planks to support the hull. Beside the basin stood a building that housed the pump. A deep shaft ran from beneath the machine to the bottom of the basin, and a channel was cut in front of the machine to carry the water out into the river. To drain the basin completely, the pump was set going, and the basin emptied at once.

The ingenious part was this: there was a furnace in the building, and when one or two men burned coal (*thạch than* 石炭) in it, the machine spun as if flying, and the water in the basin rushed up of its own accord. As for the layout of the machine's parts and its finer workings, these were “beyond what the eyes and ears could take in” (「非耳目之所能周者」) (Lý Văn Phức: 28–29). In other words, although he saw it with his own eyes, he could not explain how it worked.

All of these were examples of advanced English skill that Lý Văn Phúc encountered at Minh Ca *trấn* during the voyage to exercise in the Tiểu Tây Dương, and he could not help but admire them. To put it another way, the Vietnamese had used their intelligence to copy Western models and build Western-style warships and cannon, and they seem to have had no trouble sailing overseas. But the West had already entered the age of the Industrial Revolution, and its technology was advancing by leaps and bounds. Steamships were already moving from sailing vessels to iron paddle-wheel ships. This was the start of a new era for humankind, yet the peoples of the East still held fast to tradition. They wanted to imitate and learn, but this was a matter of scientific knowledge and technique, and the will alone could not solve it. Only through specialized study and training could they succeed in building and running such machines.

[53]

3.2 The Deployment of English Officials and Troops at Minh Ca *trấn*

According to Lý Văn Phúc, officials at Minh Ca *trấn* were also graded by rank, from the first to the seventh, but without the Vietnamese division of each rank into principal and subordinate grades (正從). Their monthly salaries were as follows. The Great Chief of Troops (*đại binh đầu* 大兵頭) of Minh Ca, a senior official who held both civil and military authority, received 25,000 dollars (元) a month. His left and right deputies (*tả hữu bồi* 左右陪) received 20,000, the second chief of troops (*nhị binh đầu* 二兵頭) 15,000, and the rest less in descending order (Lý Văn Phúc: 15).

The troops stationed at Minh Ca *trấn* numbered about 46,000. Of these, “three thousand were Red-Hair crack troops, paid sixteen dollars a month each; three thousand were black crack troops, paid eight dollars a month each; and the remaining forty thousand were soldiers held in reserve for miscellaneous duties, paid four dollars a month each. At Tân Lang *trấn* the troops numbered about six hundred, and at the two *trấn* of Tân Gia Ba and Ma Lạp Giáp about two hundred each, paid six dollars a month each” (「紅毛精兵三千人，月各十六元；黑人精兵三千人，月各八元；餘應候雜派之兵丁四萬人，月各四元。在檳榔鎮，兵數大約六百人；在新加坡、嗎拉呷二鎮，兵數大約各二百人，月各六元。」) (Lý Văn Phúc: 15–16). The “Red-Hairs” were white people, that is, the English. The “blacks” (黑人) were the Mạnh Nha La 孟牙啦 and Mô Tỉ people, that is, Bengalis or Indians.

The British garrison in Bengal and the Straits Settlements thus had seven thousand regular troops, Red-Hair and black crack troops together, and forty thousand service troops, most of them Indians or Bengalis. In time of war, militia were also raised from the Xà Ba and deployed (Lý Văn Phúc: 15–16). In other words, in Bengal and the British Straits Settlements, genuinely British soldiers numbered fewer than four thousand; the rest were Indian soldiers and colonial militia. One further

method of making war deserves mention, since it seems to have been a means by which the British Empire expanded. As Lý Văn Phức understood it:

Whenever there is a campaign, they mostly do not send the royal troops, nor do they spend a single measure of grain from the treasury. Instead, an order is issued throughout the country: anyone who can gather a large number of men and, with his own money and strength, capture a city or town shall become the hereditary official of that place, called a “Company official” (*công ty quan* 公司官). The land of the city or town belongs to the royal house. Of the wealth it produces, apart from what is set aside for officials’ salaries and soldiers’ pay, all the rest belongs to the Company. The whole cost of the original campaign is reckoned up and set against the revenue received year by year. Whether this takes seventy or eighty years or more than a hundred, it must be repaid in full before the matter ends. After it has been repaid, a further twenty years is granted as a reward, and only then does everything revert to the royal house.

凡是有征伐，多不用王家兵進往，亦不費府庫中一斗之糧，但下令於國中，有能驅合多人，自出財力，攻取一城一邑者，其人即世襲為此地官，謂之公司官。此城邑土地，則歸王家，而此城邑所出之財貨，除量供官俸、兵餉外，其餘儘屬公司。通照向時兵興之費，為數幾多，視歷年所食之財賦，或七八十年、或一百餘年，要足相償而後已，償清之後，再加賞二十年，然後全歸王家。(Lý Văn Phức: 16)

In other words, the British East India Company kept only limited forces, but it encouraged capable Englishmen to open up new territory and granted them hereditary status as “Company officials.” The land belonged to the Crown, but the wealth produced by the city or town, apart from officials’ salaries and soldiers’ pay, went entirely to the Company. The arrangement lasted seventy or eighty years, or a century, until the military costs of the campaign had been fully repaid. It was then extended for another twenty years as a reward, and only after that were the land and its administration handed back to the Crown. The British East India Company governed colonies on behalf of the British Crown, and it had a set method for everything, including the expansion of territory.

The Great Chief of Troops at Minh Ca *trấn* at that time was one of these hereditary “Company officials,” and “the revenues he draws from this *trấn* have not yet been cleared” (「其所食此鎮的財賦，正令尚未清也。」) (Lý Văn Phức: 16). Minh Ca *trấn* also had some ten-odd warships under its command, gathered [54] at the port of Xà Dung (Xà Dung cảng 蛇容港),⁶ ten days’

⁶In 蛇容港, the character 容 is written with the insect radical 虫 [in the manuscript]. Author’s note: Xà Dung port was ten days’ journey from Minh Ca. Xie Qinggao’s *Hailu* says: “Minglala is governed by the English. It is several thousand li around and is a great metropolis among the southwestern foreign lands. ... At the harbor mouth there is a

journey from Minh Ca. When there was a campaign, the head official summoned and deployed them as needed (Lý Văn Phúc: 29). In short, the Western maritime powers of the time were gradually swallowing up East Asia by whatever means they could, and the countries of East Asia had no power to resist imperialist invasion.

3.3 Courts and Customs Law at Minh Ca trấn

As for the courts, there were three places where the authorities heard lawsuits: first, the Đại Phiên viện 大番院 (a high court); second, the Bồ Lý Sĩ ty 布理士司 (a court); and third, the Trạng sư ty 狀師司 (an attorneys' office). Together they were called the “Three Offices” (Tam ty nhà môn 三司衙門). [Tr.: 布理士 is a transcription of the English word “police.” The author glosses it as 法院, “court.”]

“Whenever there is a lawsuit, each party goes to the attorneys' office and engages a man as its advocate. They set out the facts of the case, and the attorneys each present the case on their client's behalf to the Bồ Lý Sĩ ty. The officials of that office compare the statements in the two complaints and decide who is in the right” (「每有訟者，兩造各詣狀師司，各託一人為訟主。具告以情狀，師官(律師)各為之申理於布理士司。司官對照兩狀情辭，以斷其曲直。」) (Lý Văn Phúc: 17). A party who did not accept the decision could go to the Bồ Lý Sĩ ty for a hearing in which both sides confronted each other. If still dissatisfied, they could have the case referred to the Đại Phiên viện, “for the Đại Phiên viện is the great office where all criminal and legal matters come together” (「蓋大番院乃刑名總匯之大衙門也。」) (Lý Văn Phúc: 17). The courts sat about four times a year to deal with cases.

Lý Văn Phúc mentions that “scriveners customarily receive sixteen dollars, or twenty or thirty dollars” (「代書，例每收銀十六元，或二三十元。」) (Lý Văn Phúc: 17). In other words, people without money could hardly go to law! Recall that a black crack soldier was paid only eight dollars a month. However, the clerks in the departments (科目) of the Three Offices were mostly Mạnh Nha La, Mô Ti, and people of other such countries, and they “each follow the rules of their own former country in judging cases involving their own people, and have never governed them by the laws of the Red-Hairs” (「各從其故國之規例，以審判其國人之案件，未常以紅毛之

fort. Entering the inner harbor and traveling for about two days, one reaches the Jiaoya fort. After another three or four days, one reaches Gulijiada” (「明呀喇，英吉利所轄，周圍數千里，西南諸番一大都會也。……港口有炮台。進入內港，行二日許，到交牙炮台。又三、四日，到咕哩噶噠。」). Gulijiada is Calcutta.

In other words, it was about five or six days' sail from Minh Ca trấn down the Hooghly River to the Bay of Bengal, and another four or five days across the Bay of Bengal to Sittwe in Burma. By then the British had already occupied Arakan and Lower Burma, and keeping a naval force at Sittwe would have helped them make war on Burma. I suspect that Xà Dung port may be present-day Sittwe in Burma. [Tr.: In 1830 the British held Arakan and Tenasserim, which they had taken in the First Anglo-Burmese War (1824–1826). They did not annex Lower Burma (Pegu) until 1852.]

法治之。」) (Lý Văn Phức: 17). This shows that the English governed each people by its own laws. Local people knew only that their rulers had changed; their everyday laws had not changed much.

If someone with a case against him fled and hid, “the officials write out his offense and post it in the thoroughfares for three days to proclaim his guilt; this is called a proclamation notice” (「官為書其狀于通衢三日，以聲其罪，謂之播告文書。」) (Lý Văn Phức: 17). When a case was concluded, “the party found in the wrong is fined by the authorities, the amount varying with the seriousness of the circumstances. Heavy fines are ten thousand dollars, or eight or nine thousand; even light ones are no less than a hundred or so” (「其失理者，官有罰銀，例隨其情節之輕重，以為多少之差。重者罰萬元，或八九千元；輕者亦不下百數。」) (Lý Văn Phức: 18). Because the fines were so heavy, ordinary people did not dare to go to law or to break the law at all.

Lý Văn Phức describes Minh Ca *trấn* as a place where “the taxes levied at customs posts and markets overlook not the smallest sum” (「所征關市之稅，不遺錙銖。」) (Lý Văn Phức: 18). In other words, in every matter of taxation they counted every penny. For example: “In the markets of Minh Ca, even the everyday dealings of the people are all taxed. Along both banks of the river, and in all the thoroughfares and narrow lanes, patrolmen are posted to watch for anyone trading privately. Whenever smuggling comes to light, the person is punished and the goods are confiscated, and many people suffer from this” [Tr.: The article prints 市廛, presumably for 市廛, “markets.”] (「明歌市廛，雖民間日常經紀，莫不有征。其沿河兩岸，與諸通衢、狹巷之處，亦各設有警卒，以察其私行買賣者。間有走漏事發，即罪其人，而入官其貨，人多苦之。」) (Lý Văn Phức: 18). That is, police [55] patrolled every street and lane, and if anyone traded privately to evade tax, the goods were confiscated.

3.4 Procedures for Entering Port and Making Declarations at Minh Ca *trấn*

Lý Văn Phức describes in considerable detail how ships entering the port were managed, and he left a very valuable record for understanding how the port of Minh Ca *trấn* was run at the time. Ships arrived at the port of Minh Ca, that is, the mouth of the Hooghly River, which is Calcutta's (Minh Ca *trấn*'s) outlet to the sea. The harbor mouth was dangerous to enter and leave, so the port officers (*tấn quan* 汛官) kept more than ten pilot boats (*đài thủy thuyền* 帶水船). These kept watch outside the harbor day and night, ready to guide arriving ships in. In the channel into the port of Minh Ca, a buoy was set on the water on each side to show ships where the shallows were so that they could avoid them. Lamp posts were also set up on the shore, so that ships moving at night could use the lights as markers.

When ships reached the anchorage, they found that although Minh Ca *trấn* was a great port, winds and waves were often a problem. The authorities had set out a hundred or so iron moorings (*thiết đĩnh* 鐵碇) for arriving ships to tie up to, which kept them secure. When a ship was ready to leave, the port officer had to assign it eight pilot boats to guide it out, so that nothing would go wrong (Lý Văn Phúc: 18–19). This was a set of facilities and rules for ships entering and leaving the port, and it allowed ships to anchor in good order.

The port of Minh Ca *trấn* had an office for collecting taxes called the “customs house” (*thuế quán* 稅館). Every arriving ship went first to the customs house and submitted a cargo manifest. The customs officers asked whether the ship was secretly carrying any sons or daughters of respectable families, and they required the ship’s master to swear an oath (*phát thệ* 發誓) to this effect. If they had any doubts, they sent men aboard to inspect. The “*thuyền đầu ty*” 船頭司 was in charge of harbor defense and was called the “Bả Thủy sảnh” 把水廳. For every ship entering or leaving, the officers of this office sent pilots (*đái thủy nhân* 帶水人) and pilot boats to guide it. When the ship anchored, they sent men to fasten the mooring lines. If a pilot made a mistake, or an official mooring failed, so that the ship was damaged, the pilot was punished, and the office paid compensation for the damage in full. If the ship’s own ropes failed, the ship bore the responsibility itself (Lý Văn Phúc: 19).

“Swearing an oath” (「發誓」) was the same as “making a declaration” (「申報」). It was an important means of inspecting ships in port, and anyone who lied would be punished. And if an accident happened to a ship moored in port, responsibility had to be established, so that someone was held accountable.

3.5 Port Charges Paid by the *Phấn Bàng* at Minh Ca *trấn*

To describe the port tax system of Minh Ca *trấn* more clearly, Lý Văn Phúc takes the *Phấn Bàng* as an example. He was the only official of the Ministry of Revenue on board the *Phấn Bàng*, so he knew exactly what port charges it paid. He does not mention the *Định Dương*, which came with it, at this point. But since it was also a large ship, it probably paid the same charges.

When the *Phấn Bàng* arrived at the port of Minh Ca *trấn*, pilots guided it into the harbor, and it was charged 520 dollars in all. There was also a meal allowance (*phạn lệ ngân* 飯例銀) of 64 dollars, and the pilot boats that guided it in were charged at 12 dollars a day, for a total of 120 dollars. In other words, ten pilot boats in all led the *Phấn Bàng* into the port of Minh Ca *trấn*. [Tr.: At 12 dollars a day, 120 dollars would equal ten days of pilotage. The text as quoted does not show that ten boats were used.] There were also charges for the men who [56] took soundings, whose wages were 50 dollars; for the “marker lamps on the embankment” (「澤岸之標燈」), meaning the lighthouses on the embankment, 90 dollars; and for the moorings at the anchorage, 25 dollars

each time the ship was moored and each time it was released. If, unluckily, the ship's mooring rope broke and the port staff had to moor it again, another 25 dollars was charged. As for anchorage, from the first day at anchor to the day of departure, the charge was 6 dollars a day, 432 dollars in all.

In other words, the *Phấn Bằg* lay at the port of Minh Ca for seventy-two days, a little over two months. Taking the *Phấn Bằg*'s stay at Minh Ca as an example, this warship paid 1,326 dollars in all, and with the *Định Dương* added, the total was 2,652 dollars. [Tr.: The figures add up: $520 + 64 + 120 + 50 + 90 + 25 + 25 + 432 = 1,326$.] These were only the port charges that the two Vietnamese warships, the *Phấn Bằg* and the *Định Dương*, had to pay to anchor at the port of Minh Ca trấn.

Because this voyage to the *Tiểu Tây Dương* was mainly to exercise the navy, no preparations had been made for trade (Lý Văn Phúc: 19–20). In addition, all the gunpowder a ship carried had to be declared by quantity as soon as the ship arrived. It was then taken ashore at once and deposited for the time being in the “powder magazine” (*trữ được kho* 儲藥庫) run by the Minh Ca trấn authorities; it was not allowed to stay on board. When the ship left, it went back to the magazine to collect the powder and paid a storage fee according to the amount it had deposited. The *Phấn Bằg* deposited just over 1,100 catties (*cân* 斤) of gunpowder and paid just over 34 dollars (Lý Văn Phúc: 20). In other words, the *Phấn Bằg* lay in the port of Minh Ca for 72 days and spent 1,360 dollars in all, including the storage of its gunpowder. The anchorage charges at Minh Ca trấn were set out very clearly, and the English already had a mature system for running the port.

3.6 Port Administration and Enforcement at Minh Ca trấn

Lý Văn Phúc notes that anyone who wished to trade at the port of Minh Ca also had to pay tax. Ballast cargo, for example, had to be classified by type, and whatever could be sold was inspected by the port's customs house and taxed according to its value. In general, the rate was five, seven, or ten percent, all at the discretion of the customs officers; what the rules were, no one knew. After a ship had submitted its cargo manifest, some items, such as fruit, that were taken ashore for the crew's own use rather than for sale were still taxed, though at a somewhat lower rate. Whenever someone was engaged to come aboard to do some job, he too had to be given money, called “gratuity money” (*lợi thị ngân* 利市銀).

When a ship arriving at Minh Ca trấn bought goods from the shops, it had to obtain a receipt from the seller and submit it to the customs house for explanation and inspection. The revenue section (*hộ khoa* 戶科) of the customs house had more than ten clerks. Every item had to be reported one by one and the goods inspected. Then the words of approval (「許以字跡」) were written, and the papers passed to a superior for a final check before the goods could be taken away (Lý Văn

Phúc: 20). The procedure was long but orderly. The Vietnamese may have found it tedious and pointless, but it was the English habit to do things according to regulations. That the customs house had more than ten clerks shows how busy trade at the port of Minh Ca trấn was at that time.

On the day the *Phấn Bàng* left for home, it first had to report its manifest to the customs house. The customs officers sent men aboard to check for any untaxed goods, and the ship's master also had to go to the customs house and “swear an oath” (「發誓」) as a guarantee. Only then was a “tax clearance” (*thanh thuế* 清稅) certificate issued. After that, the ship also had to report a list of the persons leaving port (入(出)口清單) to the *Bố Lý Sĩ* [57] ty, and again appear before the office to “swear an oath,” before a “crew-list certificate” (*thực khẩu* 實口) was issued. Once the documents from these two offices were ready, the ship could present them to the *Bà Thủy sảnh* for inspection. When the office staff had verified them, they issued a “port clearance” (*xuất khẩu khai văn* 出口開文), sent men to release the ship's moorings, and dispatched pilots and pilot boats to guide it out of the harbor, all at the same time. Each of these steps carried a fee, and each took several days of waiting before the departure formalities were complete (Lý Văn Phúc: 20–21).

From this we can see that Westerners attached great importance to “oaths” (「發誓」), “formalities” (「手續」), and “process” (「過程」). In other words, by the early nineteenth century, Westerners had already set up a complete “standard operating procedure” (SOP) for running ports.

Lý Văn Phúc also mentions that a ship's moorings had to be released by men sent by the authorities when it left, and anyone who released them without permission was fined 500 dollars. If a ship had already cast off but did not leave port at once and stayed in the harbor, the officers of the *Bà Thủy sảnh* still charged “river dues of 25 dollars” (「江分銀二十五元」), even though the ship was not moored. And if a departing ship already had its “port clearance certificate” (「出口文憑」) but had to wait in the river for several days because the pilots did not come on time, it was also charged “river dues” (*giang phận ngân* 江分銀) (Lý Văn Phúc: 21). Clearly, Lý Văn Phúc found this rule quite unreasonable. The delay was the pilots' fault, not an attempt by the departing ship to stay longer, so why should it be taxed? It seems that the Vietnamese did not press their case over this flaw.

4. Conclusion

Lý Văn Phúc recorded the voyage of 1830–1831, when he sailed with the *Phấn Bàng* to the Bay of Bengal to exercise the navy and stayed two months at Minh Ca trấn (Calcutta) before returning. This is the longest voyage on record by a Vietnamese-built Western-style warship in the Nguyễn period. Lý Văn Phúc recorded what he saw and heard at Minh Ca trấn, and his very detailed record

helps us understand how the British East India Company governed Minh Ca *trấn* and managed its port.

To Easterners, these methods seemed to take pettiness to an extreme. To Westerners, they were an institutionalized system of governance: every ship entering the port had to follow the rules, pay its taxes, and do everything in an orderly way according to procedure. Under British rule, the port facilities of Minh Ca *trấn* and its methods of colonial governance were gradually moving in a modern direction, and the book records much of this. I believe that Lý Văn Phúc presented his *Tây hành kiến văn kỷ lược* to Emperor Minh Mệnh as soon as he returned. [Tr.: Here the article prints the title as 《西行見聞略記》.] This fit one of the main aims for which Minh Mệnh sent ships abroad: “so that we may know the mountains, rivers, customs, and products of foreign countries” (「欲知外國山川風物」).

But what did Minh Mệnh gain from it in the end? We cannot know. On this voyage to the Tiểu Tây Dương, the Định Dương met storms on the way home, was blown into Burma, and was delayed a year and a half before it returned to Vietnam, and some officers and men died because of the long voyage. None of this dampened Minh Mệnh’s interest in the Tiểu Tây Dương. Nine years later, in 1839, [58] he again sent a Western-style ship to Calcutta in the Tiểu Tây Dương to trade. In the seventh month of 1840 this ship returned safely to Vietnam, proving once again that Vietnamese-built Western-style ships could sail as far as the Bay of Bengal. At the end of that year Minh Mệnh died, and his dream of making Vietnam a great maritime power vanished with him.

Of the four Nguyễn emperors before French colonization, only Minh Mệnh valued maritime policy and had the ambition to take on the sea. He put all his effort into building copper-sheathed Western-style ships, and he sent them to all parts of Southeast Asia, and as far as the Bay of Bengal, on official business such as exercises, trade, and reconnaissance. Under Minh Mệnh, Western-style ships were sent abroad on official business no fewer than 56 times (Cheng Wing-sheung, under review: appendix table). Vietnam seemed to be the great maritime power among the countries of East Asia, but this dream lasted only twenty years.

Minh Mệnh’s successor, Emperor Thiệu Trị 紹治 (r. 1841–1847), did send ships to trade in Southeast Asia, but he had no ambition to make Vietnam a maritime power; his voyages were only the lingering ripples of Minh Mệnh’s policy. He built no new Western-style ships, and even their repair was set aside. By the reign of Emperor Tự Đức 嗣德 (r. 1848–1883), the emperor had no interest in the sea, and Vietnamese shipbuilding skill had declined sharply. This is a great pity.

[59]

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[Tr.: Chinese and Japanese titles are romanized, with English translations in square brackets. The order follows the original list.]

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Open queries

Errors and unclear readings in the source are marked with translator's notes in the text. These choices remain open for you to confirm.

1. **Minh Mệnh or Minh Mạng.** I have used Minh Mệnh throughout.
2. **Uncertain name readings.** 阮仲併 (Tính or Tịnh?), 蛇容 (Xà Dung), 謨[口+徙] (Mô Tỉ; the second character is rare), and Lý's transcriptions 孟并啦, 望葛仔, 麻肥能, and 華即低.
3. **Rank titles.** My English renderings of Nguyễn ranks are approximate. If you have a standard set you prefer, I will switch to it.
4. **Scientific instruments (§3.1).** I translated 量天尺, 度天尺, and 量日針 literally. They are probably quadrants, octants, or sextants and a sundial or gnomon, but the text does not say which.
5. **大番院 (§3.3).** The author glosses it as 高等法院, "a high court." It is probably the Supreme Court of Judicature at Calcutta.
6. **The English title.** I translated the Chinese title. The journal also gives the author's own English title, "Records of Vietnamese Navy's Military Exercises in Bay of Bengal in 1830," which you may prefer to use.