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ESSAYS INTO
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PASTS

Chung-hsing and Cheng-tung
in Text of and on 16c Việt-Nam

John K. Whitmore

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Chung-hsing and *Cheng-t'ung* in
Texts of and on Sixteenth-Century
Việt Nam¹

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The crisis in sixteenth-century Đại Việt began in 1504 with the death of Lê Hiến-tông, son of the major fifteenth-century ruler Thánh-tông. It ended eighty-eight years later as the Trịnh drove the Mạc from the capital of Thăng-long. Though normal times did occur during these years, the main theme was political legitimacy and the struggle for it. Historical texts came to serve the purpose of establishing this legitimacy and reached into the Chinese tradition to satisfy this purpose. For the first time in Vietnamese historiography, the Chinese concepts of *chung-hsing* (Vietnamese *trung-hung*) and *cheng-t'ung* (Vietnamese *chính-thống*) achieved prominent positions.

In Chinese historiography, these two concepts and their differences from each other had by Ming times become fairly straightforward. *Chung-hsing*, "restoration," takes place *during* a dynasty when it has begun to weaken but is then able to re-strengthen itself and continue. Mary C. Wright gave us a good description of this concept in her work on the T'ung-chih Restoration of the nineteenth century. In order to regain the original vitality of the dynasty, the present ruler has to regenerate the moral vigor of the founding with its peace and order. By putting down those "rebels" who challenged the dynasty and by bringing propriety (*li*) back to the realm, the ruler and his able officials enable the dynasty to maintain its control of the country. In order to re-establish this propriety in the realm, the ruler has to find such able officials to serve him. These officials, imbued with the proper (Neo-Confucian) philosophy, provide the sinews to bring back what had existed before.²

¹ On its twentieth anniversary, I wish to dedicate this paper to the Seminar on Chinese and Comparative Historiography, Yale University, 1970-1971 (Yale Seminar for short), and to the late Arthur F. Wright who allowed my participation in it.

² M. C. Wright, *The Last Stand of Chinese Conservatism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1963), pp. 43-67; J. K. Whitmore, *Transforming Dai Viet, Politics and Confucianism in the Fifteenth Century* (forthcoming), chap. 4, Part B.

Cheng-t'ung, "legitimate succession," on the other hand, takes place *between* dynasties and represents the flow of proper authority through all of China's imperial history. Here we have the restoration of legitimate authority *after* the disruption of such authority had brought an end to the previous dynasty. The new dynasty picks up the mantle of legitimacy by bringing peace, unity, harmony, and virtue back to the Chinese realm and takes its place in the proper line of succession. The concept of *cheng-t'ung* absorbed Neo-Confucian orthodox concepts and became the subject of much writing in later centuries. As such, it stressed the moral continuity of certain dynastic families as opposed to the illegitimacy of others.³

In the discussion below, I shall examine the uses of these two concepts in Vietnamese texts and attempt to reconstruct Vietnamese historiographical efforts relating to the sixteenth century.

I. Chung-hsing (Trung-hưng) and the Mạc

The difficulty in studying the first third of the sixteenth century lies in the question of how to separate the history (the "facts") from the historiography (the interpretation). The main source for the history of the times, that section of the *Đại Việt Sử Ký Toàn Thư* (Complete book of the historical records of Đại Việt) which covers the years 1428–1527, is also the chief text that needs to be analyzed. Few sources exist apart from the *Toàn Thư*, and we are left with a form of circular thinking—our interpretation of the text relies on the history as we understand it, which in turn depends on the text for its data. I shall try to deal with this conundrum by first presenting an outline of the history separate from the interpretation of the *Toàn Thư* by relying where possible on other existing sources, then coming back to examine the interpretation in the text itself.

The sources I shall use for the reconstruction of the historical framework over the first half of the sixteenth century are of two types. The first are manuscripts, almost all cited in the existing text of the *Toàn Thư*, while the second are inscriptions from steles commemorating the successful examination candidates, a number of the texts also cited in the *Toàn Thư*. These documents provide us with a sense of the highlights of the times as seen by contemporary Vietnamese, and from them I have put together the following historical background to the text of the *Toàn Thư* as it covers these years.

In the first decade of the sixteenth century, during the years when the crisis had its beginning, the literati of Việt Nam had a strong sense of what the previous four decades had bequeathed to them. The rule of Lê Thánh-tông (1460–1497, particularly his Hồng-đức period, 1470–1497) and his son Hiến-tông (1497–1504) had left a legacy of strong bureaucratic government, literati-officials, and Neo-Confucian philosophy for the succeeding generations of Đại Việt.⁴ One of these literati was Vũ Quỳnh, a well known scholar of the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries who served

³ Yale Seminar; see also Hok-lam Chan, *Legitimation in Imperial China, Discussions under the Jurchen-Chin Dynasty* (1115–1234) (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1984), pp. 21–43, 125–31.

⁴ Whitmore, *Transforming*, chap. 5, and "The Tao-dân Group: Poetry, Cosmology, and the State in the Hồng-đức Period (1470–1497)," *Crossroads* 7, 2 (1992): 55–70. See also the royal tomb inscriptions from 1460 to 1505; Émile Gaspardone, *Les Stèles Royales de Lam Sơn* (Hà Nội: Impr. d'Extrême-Orient, 1935), Pl. VI–XII, and *Annuaire du Collège de France (Annuaire)* 48–52 (1948–1952).

under and outlived both rulers. He apparently compiled the original chronicle of their reigns.⁵ His thoughts on the two well describe their legacy as it existed in the early years of the century. Thánh-tông was, in Quỳnh's eyes, intelligent and accomplished in all matters. Among the major achievements noted by Quỳnh, he specifically singled out the examination system. Thánh-tông was the first Vietnamese ruler to hold examinations every three years. The result was a greater number of talented officials (including Quỳnh) than in any prior era. In governmental affairs, Thánh-tông set matters right "so that [those who came after] could clearly follow [what he had established]." Overall, Quỳnh concluded, Thánh-tông's "model and the merit of [his] Restoration (*chung-hsing/trung-hưng*)" stood out, even in comparison with Chinese history. Unfortunately, Quỳnh claimed, this great king fell victim to intrigue among his wives.⁶

Hiển-tông was intelligent and generous, according to Quỳnh, well appreciated by his father. The son was personable and interacted encouragingly with his officials. Thus, Hiển-tông maintained his father's system and ran it well. As Quỳnh noted, the new ruler

would often say, 'Our Sainted Ancestors [the Lê] [*Thánh-tổ*] originated the civilized world [here]; Our Father [Thánh-tông] reformed inside [the country] and rejected [the barbarians] outside. The model has been set, [and] we have nothing at all to change! [We] have only to observe the established laws, expand [them], and make them glorious and great in order to display the virtue of our ancestors.'⁷

Our next independent text, Nguyễn Dực's *Hồng Thuận Trung Hưng Ký* (Record of the restoration of the Hồng-thuận period, 1509–1516), described the impact of the years after Hiển-tông's death. Uy-mục-đế (1505–1509) "lost virtue," the result being despotism and control of the royal clan. Buffalo boys and fishmongers gained power. "Wolfish factions" and bribery ruled the day. Even the mountainous areas of Thái-nguyên and Tuyên-quang, stripped of trees for houses, had no wood to control the springs, and the coastal provinces of Nghệ-an and An-bắc could not store fish because of the great demand for salt. All this shook the throne. "Heaven-sent portents were often seen; the people hated [it] and cried out. [Truly], his loss [of the throne] was fitting!"⁸

Another lack of Uy-mục-đế's Doan-khánh period was his failure to erect inscriptions commemorating the examinations of 1505 and 1508 and their successful graduates. This fact was remedied by his successor, Tương-dực-đế, who ordered the National College (*Quốc-tử-giam*) repaired and the steles set up. The inscription drafted by his official Đỗ Nhạc for the occasion tells us what proper Vietnamese kings ought to be doing.

⁵ E. Gaspardone, "Bibliographie annamite," *Bulletin de l'École Française d'Extrême-Orient* (BEFEO) 34 (1934): 76–77; see note 22 below.

⁶ *Đại Việt Sử Ký Toàn Thu* (TT), ed. Chen Ching-ho (Tokyo: Tokyo Dai-gaku, 1984–1986), vol. 2, p. 746.

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 634–5.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 789; Gaspardone, "Bibliographie," pp. 80–81.

The Emperor [uses] intelligence to act as a ruler [and] shrewdness outside the country. [He] extends Lê Lợi's great accomplishments [and] Thánh-tông's civilized rule.

The king, by encouraging study, sought to raise learning and virtue to higher levels. "Thus, how well (we) can see the will (of the king) to honor and encourage (learning)."⁹

Tương-dực-đế then held his own examination in the proper year (1511) and immediately set up an inscription for it. In it, the official Lê Tung opened by declaring, "Heaven brought the Restoration. (This is) the year for the examinations." Peace and prosperity depended on selecting suitable talent, as the Chinese (Han, Tang, and Song) had done.

At the beginning of the dynasty, Lê Lợi used military might to establish the empire [and] literary teaching to bring peace and prosperity. [He] began the National College [and] from this time learning was renewed.

Thái-tông continued the great works [of his father] [and] glorified the former ways. [He] began the Neo-Confucian examinations and in this manner [our] civilization energetically instructed our people.

Nhân-tông [also] maintained the former ways, following the established pattern, [and] nurtured much talent [so that] the literary spirit was greatly encouraged.

Thánh-tông reorganized the monarchy [and] reformed the orthodoxy. Esteeming literature [and] revealing the Way, learning thrived. In a long life, [he] stimulated the people to be good. True Neo-Confucians appeared in succession.

Hiến-tông carried on [his father's] great accomplishments [and] glorified the sources of teaching. Using good and virtuous men, much talent came forward.

At this time, His Majesty, complying with the meeting of Heaven and Man, soothes the people of the land. In the classroom, [he] expounds on the Way [and] honors Neo-Confucian refinement.

The inscription went on to note that this was the first examination of the Restoration period, thus indicating that Tương-dực-đế was restarting the tradition begun by his grandfather, Thánh-tông. In Tung's terms, "Talented men form the basic element of the state," and "The examinations are the rules of the dynasty." He then stated that, if chaos should come again, the wicked would be warned by this stone to set themselves right. Toward the end he exclaimed, "How great is the inheritance!"¹⁰

At the center of Tương-dực-đế's efforts to reconstruct the state and government of Đại Việt stood the *Trị Bình Bảo Phạm* (Precious model of good government). Once

⁹ TT, vol. 2, p. 802.

¹⁰ Trần Hàm Tấn, "Étude sur le Văn-Miếu de Hà-nội," BEFEO 45, 1 (1951):104 (#11); Cao Viên Trai, *Lê Triều Lịch-Khoa Tiến-Sĩ Đề Danh Bi Ký (Bi Ký)* (Sài Gòn: Bộ Quốc-Gia Giáo-Dục, 1961), vol. 1, pp. 155-71; Nguyen Trieu Dan, *A Vietnamese Family Chronicle, Twelve Generations on the Banks of the Hat River* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1991), pp. 137, 161-67.

more, in the introduction, we have a recitation of the dynasty's progress into the sixteenth century, a recitation which justified the effort being made. This time it included Uy-mục-đế's failings.

Lê Lợi began the enterprise, establishing learning and encouraging agriculture, so that all parts of the kingdom achieved a good life.

Thái-tông carried on [his father's] works, educating and nourishing the people so that all the countries achieved peace.

Thánh-tông continued the prior ways, perfected the relationships and institutions [of the country], [and] made the great proclamation on the source of [proper] customs.

Hiển-tông dedicated himself to the earlier greatness, advancing toward wisdom and peace [and] making proclamations to refine good habits.

Enduring brilliance and harmony, becoming virtuous everywhere, the great result is good government—in this lies prosperity!

Coming to Uy-mục-đế, court members interfered in the government, the maternal side seized power, laws and restrictions annoyed and embittered the people, rules led to trouble and revolt, agriculture went into decline, customs degenerated daily—truly [the times] deserved pity!

All this had to be changed back again—the teaching, the laws, human feelings, governmental affairs—"in order to continue Heaven's mandate." The purpose of the book was to compile the articles needed for good government and moral customs. It stressed loyal subjects, a royal clan, and powerful families acting properly, officials doing their duties, impartial selection for office, and good students. The Hồng-đức period of Lê Thánh-tông formed the background for the text.¹¹

While Trương-dực-đế worked with his government, he also ordered histories to be compiled. The old official and scholar Vũ Quỳnh put together the *Việt Giám Thông Khảo* (A penetrating examination of the mirror of Việt) in twenty-six chapters covering Vietnamese history from the beginning to Lê Lợi. It was praised as "a model as good as the (Chinese) Classics and Histories." The king then ordered the Imperial scholar Lê Tung (who had composed the 1511 inscription) to prepare an abridged version of Quỳnh's work in a single chapter. At the beginning of the result, entitled *Việt Giám Thông Khảo Tổng Luận*, Tung commented that his ruler "continued the good works of his ancestors." A scholarly man, Tung noted, the king consulted his grandfather's (Thánh-tông's) great compendium, the *Thiên Nam Dụ Hạ Tập* (Collection of the Leisures of the South of Heaven), in order to understand the books and regulations of the previous century. He also read a collection of his father's (Prince Tân's, Thánh-tông's second son), the *Lạc Uyển Du Nhân* (Leisures in the Garden of

¹¹ Phan Huy Chú, *Lịch Triều Hiến Chương Loại Chí*, trans. (Hà Nội: Sử Học, 1961), vol. 4, pp. 43–44; Gaspardone, "Bibliographie," p. 41; TT, vol. 2, pp. 789, 798(quotations)–800(9); Insun Yu, *Law and Society in Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century Vietnam* (Seoul: Asiatic Research Center, Korea University, 1990) p. 23.

Pleasure), to grasp the abstruse basis of kingship. At the end of his *Tổng Luận*, Tung stated, "Today His Majesty has restored the great heritage of Lê Lợi (and) continues his laws." Tung's conclusion summarized his ruler's feelings for what he had accomplished:

... the widespread model of our dynasty can be clearly seen. From it [our] learning has become even more excellent, [our] territory even more extensive, [and] [our] administration even more eminent. [It] is that by which [one] determines moral nature in Heaven and Earth, establishes the ultimate in the moral obligations, sets the mandate among the people, [and] inaugurates the Great Peace over myriad generations. With it, by bringing prosperity and stability to the state and by giving the people a place to sleep, the great accomplishments of the [prior] kings will last as long as Heaven and Earth.¹²

Tương-dực-đế, however, was killed within two years of this statement. Yet, five years after his death, the memory of his Restoration remained and the effort to bring back the institutions of the Hồng-đức period continued. In the chaos that led to the king's death, no inscription had been set up to honor the graduates of the examination of 1514. In 1521, his successor Chiêu-tông ordered a stele to be erected for the examination. In the inscription commemorating the event seven years earlier, the honored official Vũ Duệ, a merit subject (*công-thần*), minister of Civil Service, and Imperial scholar, recalled that the order of the graduates had been set "in accordance with the dynasty's regulations." Revolts, however, had delayed the erection of the stone. But "Now that His Majesty (Chiêu-tông) has raised troops (putting down the rebellion), (and) gloriously restored the old ways," the stone could be set up. Indeed, Duệ proclaimed, "no previous age can compare with this dynasty" in terms of selecting and encouraging scholars. "The model is widespread and admirable." Tương-dực-đế, Duệ reminded his readers, had established the Restoration, "meritoriously and brilliantly bringing back the eminent (achievements), . . . renewing literature and government." Duệ also noted that ruler's dedication to Neo-Confucianism. To such a king we owe much, he stated, and if we do not fulfill what we owe, we shall be much to blame and the future will suffer! In addition, the scholar Đặng Minh Khiêm, another of Thánh-tông's graduates, seems to have put Vũ Quỳnh's (and Lê Tung's) historical work into poetic form, the *Việt Giám Vịnh Sử Thi*. Chiêu-tông also ordered him to rework the major historical chronicle, the *Đại Việt Sử Ký*.¹³

The first quarter of the sixteenth century thus saw in Đại Việt a series of rises and falls of central power. This central power had initially been achieved in the previous century by Thánh-tông and maintained at the beginning of this century by his son Hiến-tông. Their survivors, like the old officials Vũ Quỳnh and Lê Tung, were keenly aware of the heritage brought forward. This heritage was tied to Thánh-tông's Hồng-đức period, and all the efforts to bring peace and prosperity back to the land were linked to resurrecting and restoring this heritage to greatness. Tương-dực-đế had explicitly declared his ascension to the throne to be a Restoration (*chung-hsing/trung-*

¹² Gasparone, "Bibliographie," pp. 76-78, 112; Chú, vol. 4, p. 47; TT, vol. 1, pp. 83-94 (quotation, pp. 93-94).

¹³ *Bi Ký*, vol. 1, pp. 172-86; *Tuyển Tập Văn Bút Hà Nội* (Collected Inscriptions of Hà Nội) (Hà Nội: Khoa Học Xã Hội, 1978), vol. 1, pp. 75-80, 165-69; Tấn, "Văn-Miếu," p. 104 (#12); TT, vol. 2, pp. 814-15; for Đặng Minh Khiêm, see Chú, vol. 1, pp. 98, 250-51, 296; vol. 4, p. 89; Gasparone, "Bibliographie," pp. 108-9.

hung), and his efforts were strongly remembered a decade later, as Vũ Duệ showed us. Duệ's monarch Chiêu-tông had had his own restoration, but the Lê dynasty was in the final decade of its (initial) life. Mạc Đăng Dung (1483–1541) had also lived through the chaos of the century and was rising to power. Indeed, the 1521 inscription had perhaps been compiled at his behest, and Dung was undoubtedly as desirous as any to restore what the Lê kings had achieved earlier. I have argued elsewhere that Dung and his Mạc family were Confucian,¹⁴ and I interpret Dung's activities in his climb to the throne as being aligned with the now established orthodoxy. Basically, for Đại Việt to regain its strength and power, it had to return to the Hồng-đức achievements. This was Dung's goal.

In 1527, Dung seized the throne, ending the Lê dynasty, and became king. Two years later, in the proper year, he too held examinations and immediately erected a stele to celebrate the successful candidates. While naturally emphasizing his own role in the affair, Dung did acknowledge what had come before. The inscription began with the statement, "This marks the beginning of the civilization of the empire." There followed a precise description of the examination process and then a vow taken to uphold the Confucian culture which the "eminent kings" of earlier Việt Nam had established, following those of the Han, Tang, and Song dynasties in China. Mạc Đăng Dung was now where Lê Lợi had been a century earlier—he was the Founder and, as we have seen, such a one "brought peace, developed the culture, and honored talent." Specifically, Dung declared that he rebuilt the educational system and "renewed" the examinations. In essence, this founder saw himself picking up where the Lê had left off. Indeed, the inscription declared that these institutions were now "fully the equal of those of old."¹⁵

Seven years later, in 1536, the Mạc explicitly noted their continuity with the Lê. In that year, they restored the stele for the examination of 1502 and erected one for the examination of 1518. Nguyễn Văn Thái composed the inscription for the latter and began by noting "the kings' established system of government," which was linked to the examination system and the selection of scholars. He then turned to an interesting theme. In the old days, Thái claimed, officials of one dynasty went on to serve the succeeding one—this had occurred in the transitions from Yu to Hsia, Hsia to Shang, Yin (Shang) to Chou, Chou to (feudal) Song, and indeed all the way to the establishment of the modern Song. As he stated, "This method of gaining officials thus began with Shun and the Chou, flourished during the modern Song, and is used widely today!" Here we have the Mạc, faced with the problem of officials remaining loyal to the Lê and refusing to serve the new court, arguing, in an inscription for a Lê examination, that throughout (Chinese) history continuity had been maintained from one dynasty to the next in the form of officials serving both. Drawing on antiquity and modern history, Thái claimed this to be the norm, not the exception, and stressed that the recent Song (when Neo-Confucianism had originated) had used it heavily.

¹⁴ J. K. Whitmore, "Mạc Đăng Dung," *Dictionary of Ming Biography* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976), vol. 2, pp. 1029–35. Trần Quốc Vượng disputed this characterization of the Mạc at the conference; see his "Popular Culture and High Culture in Vietnamese History," *Crossroads* 7, 2 (1992): 5–37. Nguyen Trieu Dan's *Family Chronicle*, pp. 161–240, provides a history of the sixteenth century as seen from the perspective of his family (from Kim Bài village, Thanh-oai district, Sơn-nam province) and his literati ancestors who served the Mạc.

¹⁵ *Bi Ký*, vol. 1, pp. 197–209; *Văn Bút*, vol. 1, pp. 80–84, 170–73; Tấn, "Văn-Miếu," p. 104 (#14), 114–17; Dan, *Family Chronicle*, pp. 186–87; Lê Quý Đôn, *Đại Việt Thông Sử (TS)*, trans. (Hà Nội: Khoa Học Xã Hội, 1978), pp. 269, 341.

Now the Mạc dynasty, based on "what (earlier) kings had achieved," "esteemed Neo-Confucianism and re-established the Way. (The Mạc kings) put together again the system of learning and renewed the institutions for gaining talent, extending the (established) model." They looked back at the steles marking the earlier examinations, as noted, repairing what was damaged and erecting new ones where needed. In the process, Thái noted that Lê Thái-tông had started examinations in 1442, but that thereafter they were repeated only every five or six years—"No system had yet been established." Only in 1463 under Thánh-tông, he stated, did the Vietnamese, "following the *Hui Tien* of the Ming [the *Ming Hui Yao?*]," set the pattern of triennial examinations with the proper years. This, of course, was the system followed by the Mạc, beginning in 1529.

The Mạc thus set themselves firmly in the institutional pattern originated by Lê Thánh-tông seventy years earlier. This inscription of 1536 told the Vietnamese two things. First, that the Mạc had ended the period of chaos which had begun after Hiến-tông and had re-established Thánh-tông's form of government, that is, the Hồng-đức model. Second, that the successful candidates of the 1518 examination, a Lê examination, had gone into office, were still serving throughout the government (now Mạc rather than Lê) in a variety of capacities, and were advancing into high office (so the inscription claimed). The Mạc theme was continuity, in both institutions and personnel.¹⁶ Tương-dực-đế's goals of Restoration had finally been achieved, but by the Mạc and not the Lê. This Restoration was one of government model, not of family and dynasty.

These years also saw the development of what we might call the standard Mạc view of history. In 1553 there appeared the first example of Vietnamese geography in the up-to-date Chinese style, the *Ô Châu Cận Lục* (Recent record of Ô Châu), a work on the then southern (now central) portion of Việt Nam (Thuận-hoa) by Dương Văn An. Its introduction provides a summary sense of how the Mạc had come to interpret the recent past of Đại Việt.

In Lê Chiêu-tông's reign [1516–1522], the dynasty was beset with weakness and disaster, so that skilled and talented men slowly began to leave, as stars in the morning and leaves in autumn. In essence, Heaven did not continue the [proper] seasons, Earth did not continue the generations, [and] the people no longer prospered. . . . Thus, when Heaven's will had gone, the soil went bad, the fields cracked, [and] war appeared; when Heaven's will comes [back], hillocks become solid ramparts, rubble becomes resplendent palaces, barbarian land becomes civilized. . . . [With] the Mạc dynasty, the wise are established; Heaven and Earth are cared for; truly it is a time of prosperity. Heaven's will has returned. . . .¹⁷

Thus the Lê decline began after Tương-dực-đế's Restoration, and it was reversed by the Mạc. The barometer of the dynasty and its success was talent—if it faded away, the dynasty was doomed, but, if one could gather it together, a new dynasty was in order.

The same years, basically the 1540s, also seem to have produced other major texts. The earlier texts had shown the Mạc as the inheritors of Lê Thánh-tông's

¹⁶ Tấn, "Văn-Miếu," p. 104 (#s 10, 13); *Bi Ký*, vol. 1, pp. 187–96; *TT*, vol. 2, p. 818.

¹⁷ Dương Văn An, *Ô Châu Cận Lục*, trans. (Sài Gòn: Văn Hóa Á Châu, 1961), p. 8; see also Chú, vol. 4, pp. 120–21; Gaspardone, "Bibliographie," pp. 84–85.

institutions. Re-establishing the bureaucratic structure and bringing order back to the realm not only benefitted the central power of the Mạc, it also legitimized them in the view of the population (at least that population of the Red River Delta around the capital). The central text for the Mạc appears to have been the *Hồng Đức Thiệu Chính Thư* (Book of good government of the Hồng-đức period) whose title fully designates its purpose. This text marked the explicit revival of Thánh-tông's model and the "virtuous government" that both strengthened the Mạc and provided their legitimacy. In this work, the Mạc collected laws from Thánh-tông's reign, while providing their own emphases (for example, focusing on land rather than proper relationships). Though no introduction exists to the work, several new laws added in 1540 seem to indicate that it was compiled in that year.¹⁸

At the same time, the Mạc faced another problem which had not concerned the Lê kings since Lê Lợi. The new rulers had to gain recognition as a legitimate dynasty from the Chinese emperor in Beijing, and the Ming had been sensitive from the beginning of their dynasty to any question of usurpation. Indeed, just such an issue (the Hồ dynasty) had been a key rationale in their conquest of Việt Nam in 1406–1407.¹⁹ Ever since their defeat there a hundred years before, the Chinese had kept out of Vietnamese affairs, aided by the continuity of the Lê dynasty. Now, however, the Lê dynasty was gone and the Ming had to come to terms with the Mạc. The confrontation was slow in arriving. By 1540, the Mạc had begun to plead their case with the Ming ruler. In their argument, the Mạc stressed the chaos that had come to Việt Nam following Trần Cảo's revolt in 1516 as well as their claim that, after going into decline, the Lê line had reached an end. (The Lê pretender, the Mạc stated, was an imposter.) Mạc Đăng Dung had stepped in to save a bad situation and had, through his labors, brought peace. The Mạc task was to set matters right again (employing the Confucian phrase *cheng ming*, in Vietnamese *chính danh*, rectification of names). Only if the throne could apply the proper standards across the land would unity return to Việt Nam.²⁰

The questions before us now are the authorship and the timing of the section of the *Đại Việt Sử Ký Toàn Thư* covering the years 1428–1527. This text, called the *Thực Lục* (in Chinese *Shih Lu*), came to be included in the seventeenth century edition of the *Toàn Thư*, but the answers to the above two questions have remained vague.²¹ I am arguing, first, that the Mạc dynasty was responsible for writing this text and, second, that the form taken by the text reflects the means by which the Mạc strove for legitimacy. By placing the *Thực Lục* within the context set forth above, we may gain a better sense both of the context and of the Mạc purpose. First, however, we need to take into consideration a point made by Lê Quý Đôn in the mid-eighteenth century and repeated by Phan Huy Chú in the early nineteenth. Émile Gaspardone made no

¹⁸ J. K. Whitmore, "Social Organization and Confucian Thought in Vietnam," *Journal of South-east Asian Studies* (JSEAS) 15, 2 (1984): 305–6; Yu, *Law*, pp. 23–24.

¹⁹ J. K. Whitmore, *Việt Nam, Hồ Quý Ly, and the Ming (1371–1421)* (New Haven: Yale University Southeast Asian Studies, 1985), chap. 5.

²⁰ Chú, vol. 4, pp. 147–49; Whitmore, "Mạc Đăng Dung," vol. 2, pp. 1033–34; Dan, *Family Chronicle*, pp. 177–80, 209; Chan, *Legitimation*, p. 25.

²¹ TT, vol. 1, p. 69; TS, pp. 20, 23; Chú, vol. 4, p. 48; Gaspardone, "Bibliographie," pp. 58–61; Ching-ho A. Chen, *On the Various Editions of the Đại-Việt Sử-Ký* (Hong Kong, 1976), pp. 4, ii; Phan Huy Lê, "Đại Việt Sử Ký Toàn Thư, tác giả, văn bản, tác phẩm," in *Đại Việt Sử Ký Toàn Thư*, trans. (Hà Nội: Khoa Học Xã Hội, 1983), vol. I, pp. 27–33, 37, and also in *Nghiên Cứu Lịch Sử* 210 (1983): 33–35, 38.

mention of it, and it does not appear before the eighteenth century as far as I know. Đôn stated that Ngô Sĩ Liên, compiler of the *Toàn Thư* up to 1428, also wrote the *Tam Triều Bản Ký* (Record of the Three Reigns) covering the beginning of the Lê dynasty up to 1459 (Lê Lợi, Thái-tông, Nhân-tông). Then Vũ Quỳnh picked up where Liên left off and wrote the *Tứ Triều Bản Ký* (Record of the Four Reigns) from 1460 to 1509 (Thánh-tông, Hiến-tông, Túc-tông, Uy-mục-đế). Đôn suggested, however, that the history from Tương-dục-đế to the (temporary) end of the dynasty was written in the seventeenth century.²²

All we know of historical work under the Lê after Vũ Quỳnh and before the Mạc is Phan Huy Chú's note that Đăng Minh Khiêm was ordered by Chiêu-tông (1516–1522) to rework the *Đại Việt Sử Ký*.²³ Since Chú made reference to events of the time in relation to Khiêm's work, it is possible that the old scholar, known for his rigor, had compiled materials on his age. Nevertheless, we have no indication that it was he who brought together the chronicles of Liên and Quỳnh and wrote the third section to complete the *Thực Lục*. Instead, let us take the writing in the *Toàn Thư* on the Lê, 1428–1527, and consider it a unit compiled by the Mạc historians around 1540 (certainly after the inscription of 1536 which was cited therein). Such a work is what a normal dynasty would have written on its predecessor, and the Mạc surely considered the Lê an extinct dynasty (as we shall see). The term *Thực Lục* used for the text on this hundred year period is a Chinese term applied by the contemporary Ming to its court records: this fits well with the pro-Ming sentiments of the Mạc. What can the organization of the text tell us?

The *Thực Lục* falls into three parts, matching the division noted by Lê Quý Đôn: 1428–1459; 1460–1509; 1509–1527. The pivots in this structure are the two Restorations, Quang-thuận (1460) and Hồng-thuận (1509). Each was marked by two works quoted in the text, and these are the only places so marked. The Restorations were important to the development of the text, reinforcing the sense given by the quoted sources. For the first Restoration, the senior official Phan Phu Tiên supported what had taken place in the earlier reigns, while the Record of the Restoration (*Trung Hưng Ký*) took the opposite tack, strongly condemning the prior reign.²⁴ This Restoration marked the pivot between the earlier aristocratic style and Thánh-tông's modernist reforms which constructed the model followed later. The second Restoration was marked by the texts we have seen earlier—the *Trị Bình Bảo Phạm* and the *Trung Hưng Ký*, both of which excoriated the prior reign of Uy-mục-đế and called for the resurrection of the earlier institutions. Where the first Restoration was a success, the second, as we have seen, did not succeed except to keep alive the idea of reviving the Hồng-đức institutions.

The first section, from the founding of the Lê dynasty in 1428 to 1459, perhaps originally written by Ngô Sĩ Liên, contains seven comments. Five of them merely mark the reigns (1428, two for 1433, and two for 1442), one is attributed to an historian (*sử thần*) (perhaps Liên?) in 1433, and one is by Vũ Quỳnh in 1442 which we shall examine below. The first five comments are straightforward. On the founding of the Lê (discussion of North vs. South, China vs. Việt Nam), there is a mention of

²² TS, pp. 20–21; Chú, vol. 4, p. 50; Lê, "Toàn Thư," pp. 30–33. The *Tam Triều Bản Ký* may have been the *Thực Lục* referred to in the "Rules" of the *Toàn Thư* as having been compiled in Thánh-tông's reign; TT, vol. 1, p. 69.

²³ Chú, vol. 1, pp. 98, 296.

²⁴ TT, vol. 2, pp. 634–5; Whitmore, *Transforming*, chap. 3, Part E.

Lê Lợi “renewing” the land. On Lê Lợi’s death, he was credited with “the founding work of an extensive plan,” while continuing what had gone before and dealing with foreign relations. (To what extent did this portrait match that desired by Mạc Đăng Dung? Did Dung see his own career paralleling Lê Lợi’s?) In 1442 Thái-tông’s reign earned a comment (“Great changes were taking place”; again foreign relations), but the other comment raised a question: Why was the great Nguyễn Trãi executed? (A question still unresolved.)²⁵ These were straightforward comments on the early events of the dynasty. The significance of this first section for the Mạc historians appears to have been minor, serving mainly to prepare for the narration of the actions and achievements of Thánh-tông in the following section. Lê Lợi was of no special interest to these historians, except as a parallel for Mạc Đăng Dung, and their treatment of the Lê founder seems rather cut and dried.

The 1433 comment of the “historian,” on the other hand, appears to be a strident defense of what Lê Lợi had had to do to drive out the Ming and establish the Lê state. Could this have been the moralist historian Ngô Sĩ Liên caught between his (and his ruler Thánh-tông’s) Neo-Confucian theories and the harsh realities of the Dynastic Founder, his ruler’s grandfather? If this were the case, then it would represent a remaining fragment of Liên’s underlying text, the *Tam Triều Bản Ký*.²⁶ But why was Vũ Quỳnh, also an “historian,” identified, as he was in the three comments to be examined in the second section, and not Liên (if it were he)? Perhaps the Mạc historians felt closer to Quỳnh and the Hồng-thuận Restoration than they did to the earlier period. In any case, Quỳnh’s comments made up the defining elements of the newly established model, and it is his text, the *Tứ Triều Bản Ký*, which is supposed to underlie this section.

Certainly, Quỳnh’s comments set the interpretation for this section and his writing may well have served as the basis for it. Of his three comments, one was early (for Thái-tông in 1442), and the other two formed the crux of the matter—for Thánh-tông in 1497 and Hiến-tông in 1504, both of which we have already quoted. These three comments set up the heritage that was so eagerly sought in later decades. The first described the young Thái-tông’s climb out of a situation dominated by powerful ministers. The king’s high intelligence helped to begin the system of government that strengthened the state. The second was the longest and the key comment in the *Thực Lục*. Already mentioned above, it went into some detail on Thánh-tông’s ascension, noting the first Restoration, and described the *heritage that he left*. The third comment, also noted above, was on Hiến-tông and his continuation of his father’s work. Quỳnh, in these comments, was quite impressed by the characters of the three rulers from their youth on—Thái-tông as a ten-year-old boy with no support, Thánh-tông not meant for the throne and unhappily coming into a chaotic situation, and Hiến-tông a favorite of his father’s and able to handle his officials well. These three, grandfather, father, and son, were responsible for the model which the later rulers sought to restore, Thái-tông laying the foundation, Thánh-tông constructing the model, and Hiến-tông maintaining it.²⁷

The only other material inserted into the text of this section were tomb inscriptions for Nhân-tông and Thánh-tông and one comment after the death of

²⁵ *TT*, vol. 2, pp. 550, 565, 607–8.

²⁶ *TT*, vol. 2, p. 565. O. W. Wolters’ recent work on the commentary of Ngô Sĩ Liên (forthcoming) may help resolve this question.

²⁷ *TT*, vol. 2, pp. 608, 746, 777.

Hiển-tông. The inscriptions involve Thánh-tông's reign and were covered by Quỳnh's comments.²⁸ The comment from 1504 is more aptly seen as the opening statement for the third section.

"Hiển-tông . . . was not long on the throne, alas, how regrettable!" This was the first of seven comments injected by the compilers of the *Thực Lục* into the third section, and it set the tone for the other six. The second comment was linked to the second Restoration and castigated Uy-mục-đế. ("He brought his destruction on himself and truly deserved it!") Then, on Tương-dực-đế's death in 1516, the commentator tore into him as well for numerous crimes, sexual and moral, saying that he was called "King Hog." "Signs of great danger appeared!" Next the commentator ripped into Trịnh Duy Sản, Tương-dực-đế's killer, stating that the later deaths of Sản and his son Nhạc were well deserved. Then, in looking at the years 1517–1518, the conclusion of two comments was that the Lê dynasty was finished:

[For] the Lê dynasty, in the Quang-thiệu period (1516–1522), external bandits were not pacified [and] powerful ministers battled and killed each other. . . . The decline of the throne started from this time!

From the time Trần Cảo entered the capital and the ancestral temple was destroyed, from the time Sơn-tây revolted and the capital emptied, one knew that the Lê dynasty would not rouse [itself]!

The last comment for the years 1516–1518 looked at Trần Chân's victory over Trần Cảo, the re-establishment (Restoration?) of the Lê, and the dynasty's final disintegration. The commentator prefaced his discussion with the statement, "Mankind has three (basic relationships); in practice they are one. Ruler, teacher, and father—how do they differ?"²⁹

This Confucian sentiment lies behind the interest in Restoration which was demonstrated earlier. Besides the above comments, the historians also selected portions of the examination inscriptions for the third section. These inscriptions, from 1511, 1521, and 1536, have already shown us the strong contemporary interest in bringing back the institutions of the Hồng-đức period.³⁰ Yet the comments made explicit the failure of Tương-dực-đế's effort, as well as attempts thereafter to get the Lê dynasty back on its feet.

In the text of the *Thực Lục* itself were also included three documents attributable to the Mạc. At the end of 1517 (early 1518), Mạc Đăng Dung submitted a memorial to the throne (which was included in the text at considerable length). In it Dung referred to the Confucian "three principles [those noted above] and five virtues" and spoke of the disasters of Uy-mục-đế and Tương-dực-đế. Certainly the comments echoed this statement. Then in late 1525 an Imperial edict went out, undoubtedly on Dung's instructions. It too summarized the development of the dynasty to that point:

Lê Lợi created the institutions [and] saved the living from water and fire.

²⁸ *TT*, vol. 2, pp. 635–36, 747, and note 4 above.

²⁹ *TT*, vol. 2, pp. 777, 789, 810, 812, 814–15 (quotation), 819–20 (quotation).

³⁰ *TT*, vol. 2, pp. 802, 814–15, 818.

Thái-tông established learning [and] brought prosperity [to the land]. [He] was the root, the great source [of what was to come]. Profoundly humane, [he] generously enriched [the Land].

Thánh-tông brought peace to the land [and] pacification outside it, [both] suppressing with force and sheltering with civilization.

Hiển-tông carried on the ritual—How he manifested the model! How he continued the brilliance!

These rulers handed down their heritage . . . However, in the Hồng-thuận (1509–1516) and Quang-thiệu (1516–1522) periods, the state fell into many troubles. . .

Men like Trần Cảo and Trịnh Tuy tore up the countryside. This Lê king, Cung-hoàng-đế, promised to set matters right. Mạc Đăng Dung stood at his side.

Yet, within two years, Dung had determined that he was the one to resurrect Đại Việt to its former glory. Officials, including the Imperial scholar Nguyễn Văn Thái who nine years later would compile the 1536 inscription, called on Dung to take the throne and in so doing discussed the Lê once again:

Lê Lợi took the opportunity to change a dynasty, receiving extensive support. The succeeding kings carried on his heritage through Heaven's will and men's good wishes. [But] at the end of the Hồng-thuận period (1515–1516), there was much trouble—Trần Cảo . . . Trịnh Tuy. . . The hearts of men and Heaven's will abandoned [the Lê]. At this time, all under Heaven no longer belongs to this house [which] has no virtue. . . Heaven's will and men's hearts are restored to him who has virtue,

and Mạc Đăng Dung was such a man.³¹

These three Mạc statements within the text and the extratextual comments carry the same message and reinforce each other—the Lê dynasty had lost support, and it was time for another family to step forward. The repetition certainly clarified the message. This third section noted both the efforts to reclaim what had been lost and their failure. The final comment provides the ultimate Mạc judgement on the (first) century of Lê rule. Gaspardone noted that the author of the summary comment may have been Tông Lệnh Vọng, a Mạc graduate of 1583. If so, the *Thực Lục* reached its final form under the Mạc only toward the end of their rule. This summary (itself an abridgement of Vọng's work?) took a new approach to the Lê kings, balancing their strengths and weaknesses. After the disaster of the Ming occupation, Lê Lợi drove the Chinese out in a difficult, decade-long campaign. He brought peace, subdued external threats, and did great deeds, *but* there was much bloodshed and at times he acted cruelly (without humaneness). His son Thái-tông was a Confucian, started the examinations, chose and listened to men of ability, and cared for his people, *yet* he drank, chased women, and did not leave a designated heir. Nhân-tông, though young, kept the peace and carried on the prosperity with the help of his mother, *but*

³¹ *TT*, vol. 2, pp. 815–17, 831–32 (quotation), 834–35 (quotation); Dan, *Family Chronicle*, pp. 171, 197.

events overtook him. For Thánh-tông, on the other hand, there were no "buts," only praise for his magnificent accomplishments.

Thánh-tông was enveloped with internal difficulties, [yet] the people honored [him] [and] [when] he took the throne, [he] took charge of all matters. [He] established the administration, set up the bureaucracy, designated the rites, used able and honest men, pacified the country, expanded [its] borders, seized [the Cham king] Tra Toan, dispersed the Lao, had contacts with the Ryukyus, [and] killed Cam Công. Barbarians in all directions surrendered [to him], [and] all regions followed [his] direction. For 38 years, there was peace and order in the land. How great it was!

Thereafter, Hiến-tông ruled wisely, but not long, and Túc-tông died young. Then came the bad times—Uy-mục-đế was an unscrupulous tyrant, Tương-dực-đế seized the throne, Chiêu-tông suffered revolts, and Cung-hoàng-đế passed the throne on to the Mạc. "How could it have been otherwise?!"³²

Another aspect of the times reflected in the *Thực Lục* was the Vietnamese relationship to China. The initial two comments of the first section touched on the relations between the two countries in the early years of the Lê dynasty. Despite the expected claims of closeness in the Mạc tributary messages to the Ming, the first comment stressed the separation of North and South. Chinese cruelty had led to Vietnamese suffering, but Vietnamese unity had repelled the invaders. Thereafter, however, there was a strict necessity for peace and harmony to exist between the two on a filial basis (as dictated by none other than Lê Lợi himself). "There are to be no problems between North and South." This matched the Mạc approach one hundred years later. In addition, the Mạc mentioned their "distinguished lineage" in their message to the Ming. As noted in the *Thực Lục*, this lineage (true or concocted for the Chinese?) went back to the acclaimed Vietnamese scholar Mạc Đĩnh Chí of over two hundred years earlier and continued through the major collaborator of the Ming colonial period, Mạc Thúy, to Mạc Đăng Dung. The message was of a commitment to Chinese aims.³³

The *Thực Lục* thus fits well as the Mạc history of the preceding Lê dynasty. Downplaying the early decades, it emphasized Mạc concerns (the greatness of the Hồng-đức model) and made an effective argument for the end of Lê attempts to carry on this model. It made reference to "the Lê dynasty" in a way that Lê historians would not have done, and it built up Mạc Đăng Dung's career to the point where he was the logical choice to take the throne and to undertake the chief concern of the age—reconstructing the Hồng-đức model. While we have no separate record of the Mạc historians and when they compiled the *Thực Lục*, the internal evidence suggests that the completion occurred after the inscription of 1536 and that it may have reached its final form later in the century. Lê Quý Đôn's note that Ngô Sĩ Liên and Vũ Quỳnh put together chronicles of the first three and the next four reigns respectively seems to fit the completed version. If so, the Mạc historians integrated these two chronicles into a single text, adding the final section on the decline of the Lê and the rise of their founder. Certainly, the structure of the *Thực Lục* fits this idea, and it allowed the Mạc historians to build up the concept of Restoration.

³² *TT*, vol. 2, p. 835; see also Gaspardone, "Bibliographie," pp. 60–61.

³³ *TT*, vol. 2, pp. 550, 565 (quotation), 784(4); Chú, vol. 4, p. 149; Dan, *Family Chronicle*, p. 170.

The Mạc purpose was not so much a dynastic history, as such, as a continuation of the *Toàn Thư* in which they showcased what Thái-tông had begun, what Thánh-tông had achieved, and what Hiến-tông had all too briefly preserved. Lê Lợi was heroic but otherwise of little consequence, and the first three decades of the dynasty served primarily as the stepping stones for the great changes of the Quang-thuận and Hồng-đức periods. The text downplayed much of importance (the law code?) which occurred in the 1430s and 1440s, and we are only just beginning to work out this problem. What it described was personal strengths and progress, young rulers striving to achieve the modern Ming accomplishments in Vietnamese form. The years from Hiến-tông to Mạc Đăng Dung saw failure and loss of progress until Dung could step in and pick up the torch again. "Restoration" was the theme of the age, not renewing a decrepit dynasty, but bringing back and restoring the progress toward the modern as the Hồng-đức period had so well defined it.

II. *Cheng-t'ung* (*Chính-thống*) and the Trịnh

The Lê return to the throne of Đại Việt, backed by the Trịnh and Nguyễn families, stretched from the 1530s to the 1590s. After the final success of the great Restoration of 1592, concerns other than history occupied the increasingly dominant Trịnh for over half a century. The first texts of the seventeenth century which provide an historical view appeared in 1653 when, in a burst of governmental activity, steles were erected for the twenty-five examinations held under Lê auspices from 1554 to 1652.³⁴ Besides being perhaps the largest single inscriptional project in Việt Nam since the Buddhist age, these steles provide us with the opportunity to gauge the Trịnh approach to earlier Lê history. The curious point is the variety of historical approaches taken by the authors of these inscriptions. While all refer to the Restoration of 1592, they covered the preceding history in three different ways: 1) by referring inclusively to "the line of kings" (*Thánh-tổ Thần-tông*); 2) by starting with Lê Lợi and then referring inclusively to the remaining kings (*Liệt-thánh hoàng-đế*); or 3) by making individual comments king by king (Lê Lợi, Thái-tông, Nhân-tông, Thánh-tông, and sometimes Hiến-tông), but with two exceptions: one inscription with a reference just to Thánh-tông, and one inscription using the reign names, Đại-bảo, Thái-hòa, and Hồng-đức, instead of the kings' posthumous titles. The twenty-five inscriptions were composed under the general editorship of one scholar, Dương Tri Trách, a major colleague of Phạm Công Trứ (see below), with seven other scholars each responsible for the compilation of three to five separate inscriptions.

Six inscriptions fall into the first, all inclusive category, nine into the second category of Lê Lợi and others, and ten into the third, dealing with individual rulers after Lê Lợi. Thus no single historical formula was imposed on the project, and what determined the choice among the three is difficult to say. The emphasis of the first fell on the Lê and Trịnh rulers who had set up the particular examination, having received a (vague) tradition passed down by (unnamed) kings. The second emphasized Lê Lợi as founder, whose tradition was carried to the present examination by a series of (unnamed) rulers. The third saw a development up to Thánh-tông (and Hiến-tông) whose great achievements the Lê/Trịnh rulers inherited.

³⁴ Tấn, "Văn-Miếu," pp. 104-5 (#s 15-39); *Bi Ký*, vol. 1, pp. 210-61; vol. 2, pp. 3-220; vol. 3, pp. 3-28. For Dương Tri Trách, see K. W. Taylor, "The Literati Revival in Seventeenth Century Vietnam," *JSEAS* 18, 1 (1987): 7, 9, 10, 13.

Just six years later, in 1659, a Vietnamese Catholic wrote a summary of his country's history in his own language for the missionary Father Marini using the new romanized script. While we know nothing of the writer's background, his view of the Vietnamese past seems to have been fairly standard for the mid-seventeenth century. The section dealing with the Lê paid much more attention to Lê Lợi and his exploits than to the achievements of his successors. Indeed, *Thánh-tông* was not mentioned by name, though his accomplishments were neatly summarized. Then came the troubles and the Mạc, followed by an extensive account of the Lê conquest.³⁵ In 1664, an Imperial edict which referred to the inscriptions also stressed Lê Lợi, followed with the phrase *Liệt-thánh hoàng-đế*, the Mạc usurpation, and the great Restoration, "Heaven-sent."³⁶ It is no wonder, then, that when the Lê/Trịnh literati began a few years afterward to compile the *Tục Biên* as the latest addition to the *Toàn Thư*, they chose to stress continuity over achievement. Under the direction of Phạm Công Trứ, these scholars put aside the first and third of the historical formulae to be found in the 1653 inscriptions and concentrated on the second, Lê Lợi linked to the Restoration of 1592. The theme of this text was *cheng-t'ung*, political legitimacy through time. In the "Rules" for the composition of the *Tục Biên*, we see the attempt to connect Cung-hoàng-đế's reign (1522–1527) with that of Trang-tông (1533–1548) and to ignore as much as possible the Mạc. (Indeed, Ming historians had sought to do exactly the same with the Yüan dynasty in China, connecting the Ming directly back to the prior Chinese dynasty of the Song). This was done "in order to honor orthodox succession (*cheng-t'ung/chính-thống*) and condemn usurpation." Trang-tông marked the Lê succession in 1533. "Even though he was not able to unify the country, we still call it *cheng-t'ung* in order to demonstrate that the true lineage of kings forms the Great Unity (*đại-thông*)." Trung-tông and Anh-tông followed, and the historians saw their reigns "continuing the *cheng-t'ung* so as to show the continuity of the state being transmitted (through time)."³⁷

Wishing to concentrate on the Lê/Trịnh period, these historians, it would seem, adopted the *Thực Lục* as a whole. The latter served the dynastic purpose since it glorified the Lê (at least up to 1504), and, even though the text did not concentrate as much as they might have liked on Lê Lợi, it certainly established him as the origin of the great enterprise. It also served the hidden agenda of the literati who adopted it by stressing the bureaucratic developments in Đại Việt.³⁸

Within the *Tục Biên*, the Lê edict of 1593 proclaiming success against the Mạc set the pattern for Lê/Trịnh historiography:

[Lê Lợi] gained the support of Heaven and the consent of the people, the first [of his line] to receive the mandate. [He] brought righteousness, suppressed cruelty, [and] developed a high level of legitimacy [as well as] the model which established the state, widely and for a long time.

³⁵ Bento Thiện, "Lịch Sử Nước Annam," in Đỗ Quang Chính, *Lịch Sử Chữ Quốc Ngữ, 1620–1659* (Sài Gòn: Ra Khơi, 1972), pp. 107–29, 139–50.

³⁶ *TT*, vol. 3, p. 976(2).

³⁷ *TT*, vol. 1, p. 69; Gaspardone, "Bibliographie," pp. 61–63. For the political context, see Taylor, "Literati," pp. 1–23, esp. 13–14, and on the Ming historians, see Chan, *Legitimation*, p. 130.

³⁸ Taylor, "Literati," p. 14.

Thái-tông continued this and taught it, propounding it to the commoners.

Nhân-tông glorified the works of his predecessors, showing their virtue.

Thánh-tông brilliantly established the law and the administration and developed [Vietnamese] civilization for generations.

Hiển-tông examined the rules and regulations, adjusting them to the realm.

[These kings] maintained the established government with great care. The passing generations carried on the great accomplishments, developing [them] and helping all to achieve legitimacy [so that] those who came later could continue it each generation.

[Yet] from the Quang-thiệu (1516–1522) and Thống-nguyên (1522–1527) periods, matters began to fall apart [and] the evil minister Mạc Đăng Dung seized the throne. Nevertheless, the *cheng-t'ung* of the prior rulers continued; the good feelings toward them held by the people had not been exhausted. . . .

Then, thanks to the Trịnh, the Lê achieved their great Restoration, and the king, Thế-tông, pledged "to continue the earlier achievements and to maintain them."³⁹ Note the emphasis given above to Lê Lợi and how Thánh-tông's achievements, though acknowledged, were given short shrift.

The Lê/Trịnh historians merely added Đăng Bính's three comments to the *Thực Lục* in order to bridge the *cheng-t'ung* gap (1527–1533) and set the whole affair right. Bính's purpose was to counter directly the Mạc claim to have succeeded the Lê. In effect, he was capping the Mạc comments, and hence there was no need to delete the latter. Bính began in his first comment by stating, "The *Bản Ký* said that the Mạc replaced the Lê, (while all it did) was show clearly the usurpation of the throne and the murder of the king." In his eyes, everyone had just played it safe, stood around watching, and let it happen, when one loyal and righteous man could have blocked the Mạc and resurrected the dynasty. The proper relationship of king and subject did not exist, only time-serving, greedy bureaucrats "like dogs." Finally, in the Quang-thiệu (1516–1522) and Thống-nguyên (1522–1527) periods, this caused the fall of the Lê. Bính then turned to his main theme in the second comment: he castigated the Mạc for claiming *cheng-t'ung* from the Lê to themselves. "(The Mạc) cannot record it as *cheng-t'ung* since to describe usurpation as such is wrong!" Only when the Lê rose again (in 1533), even without the unification of the country, did *cheng-t'ung* again exist and with it the proper relationship between king and subject. Bính wrapped it all up in his long final comment. "The Mạc were rebellious subjects of the Lê," and the Lê, when they rose once again in 1533, "established *cheng-t'ung* again, it being essential to show the proper relations between king and subject, that is, to reconnect righteousness."

Why was it that the Mạc seized the country, but could not establish *cheng-t'ung*? It was because the Mạc were subjects. How is it that the Lê kept *cheng-t'ung*, even

³⁹ TT, vol. 3, p. 898.

though they took the throne and hid in a neighboring country [Laos] without one inch of soil or a single person? Because the Lê were kings!

Thus, a king will maintain *cheng-t'ung*, the royal succession, even if some one grabs his land, and his reign will be recorded in the main section of the history because it "conforms" (*thuận*) to Heaven. On the other hand, for any who seize the throne, no matter what their fame, there is no *cheng-t'ung*, no *thuận*, and they are relegated to the appendix.

Bính did allow that, in certain situations, a subject could take over the Vietnamese throne, and provided several examples where it was permissible—basically, if *thuận*, then *cheng-t'ung*. "In each case, (the claimant found himself) in a situation in the country where no person was master, or where the officials begged (him to take over), or where a princess abdicated the throne, and the people honored him and Heaven bestowed the empire on him." The Mạc case was not like this, in Bính's mind. Mạc Đăng Dung had been an admirable official; where did he go wrong? He became greedy. The analogy from Chinese history employed by Bính was Wang Mang 1500 years earlier—in both cases usurpation had only lasted so long. Basically, the proof of evil lay in its final destruction (as had happened also to Hồ Quý Ly). *Cheng-t'ung* for the Mạc was out of the question; the Lê *cheng-t'ung* precluded it. Bính closed with the following poem:

The Lê throne has risen again and the old has returned.
Lam-sơn will again see the old royal tower.
The way of kings and ministers—together they are excellent.
The government joyfully watches the greatness of 10,000 countries.⁴⁰

Here is the Lê/Trịnh theme in a nutshell: Lê Lợi (his home in Lam-sơn) and the 1592 Restoration.

A decade later, in 1676, this theme was explicitly embodied in two texts produced by the scholar Hồ Sĩ Dương, one of those who worked on the *Tục Biên* with Phạm Công Trú. First was a new edition of the *Lam Sơn Thực Lục* (Veritable record of Lam-sơn), that description of Lê Lợi's trials, tribulations, and triumphs over the Ming, followed by the *Trung Hưng Thực Lục* (Veritable record of the Restoration), a description of the Lê/Trịnh Restoration of 1592. (The latter is also known as the *Lê Triều Trung Hưng Công Nghiệp Thực Lục*, Record of the Meritorious Acts of the Restoration of the Lê Dynasty.) Here we have a repeated and explicit emphasis on the Founding and the great Restoration. In Dương's introductions, he mentioned the theme of establishing legitimacy and stated that the purpose of the works was "to make clear the *cheng-t'ung*." The *Trung Hưng Thực Lục* was hence a sequel to the *Lam Sơn Thực Lục*, which it mentioned in its introduction. Dương also credited the Trịnh with "glorifying the way of (legitimate) succession," and he followed the full logic of the Lê/Trịnh argument by going directly from Hiến-tông to Mạc Đăng Dung and blaming the resulting evil on Dung. But Dương also took a step away from the Lê/Trịnh emphasis—Thánh-tông now received greater attention. The introduction to the *Trung Hưng Thực Lục* mentioned this king and his *Thiên Nam Dự Hạ Tập*, and the text,

⁴⁰ TT, vol. 2, pp. 836, 837, 841–42 (quotations). Gaspardone, "Bibliographie," pp. 61–62, believed that Đăng Bính might have been Nguyễn Đăng Bính.

as it built up to the 1592 Restoration, gave twice as much play to him in the summary of the earlier reigns as it did to Lê Lợi.⁴¹

In the mid-eighteenth century, Lê Quý Đôn set out to write a history of this first century of Lê rule, but he chose the standard national history form favored in China, a topical style, over the chronological *biên-niên* style used in the *Toàn Thư*. This choice pulled Đôn away from the *cheng-t'ung* question and allowed him to deal with the Mạc separately in their own section (negative as it was). In effect, Đôn gave the Mạc a full treatment of their dynasty, all ten rulers, though in another guise. The text was to have three parts: the *Bản Ký*, ruler by ruler from Lê Lợi to Cung-hoàng-đế; the *Chí*, essays on different topics according to the *Sung Shih* (the history of the Song Dynasty); and the *Liệt Truyện*, biographies of significant people, good and bad (the Mạc among the latter). In the first section, critical of the *Thực Lục*, Đôn wanted to cover each ruler, but all we have are his two chapters on Lê Lợi. Of the *Chí*, only the bibliographical chapter remains. The most valuable part is the third, the biographical section, providing good coverage on many important individuals.⁴²

Yet, for all the new approach, Đôn was concerned with *chính-giáo*, the moral aspect of politics, and naturally maintained the Lê/Trịnh line on the Mạc. His comment on Mạc Đăng Dung's ascension to the throne painted it as negatively as possible:

Đặng Dung feared that, in their hearts, the people remembered the former [Lê] kings. [He] could have made changes, [but] [he] had to comply with the regulations of the Lê dynasty [so as] to comfort the officials [and] control the people. In order to blind the world, [he] sought out the descendants of the merit subjects and the powerful families, posing as [someone] summoning [them for the good of the country], when in reality it was essential [for Dung] to check and restrain [these] families. . . . Đặng Dung wished to gain the hearts of the people, so [he] honored all the virtuous and righteous of the past [like Vũ Duệ . . .]. He sent officials to maintain the palaces at Lam-sơn [the Lê home], carried out the Spring and Autumn sacrifices each year, [and] four times sacrificed at the [Lê] imperial tombs. All this was by a man pretending to righteousness in order to comply with the hearts of the people!⁴³

Lê Quý Đôn in this description calls to mind Shakespeare's portrayal of Richard III. All the good Dung did became evil in Đôn's eyes. In fact, Đôn confirms a view of the Mạc striving to retain the Hồng-đức institutions and acting honorably in that

⁴¹ Chú, vol. 4, pp. 117, 121–22; Nguyễn Trãi, *Lam Sơn Thực Lục*, ed. by Hồ Sĩ Dương, trans. (Sài Gòn: Tân Việt, 1956); Hồ Sĩ Dương, *Trung Hưng Thực Lục* (Paris, Société Asiatique, HM 2146) and (EFEO Microfilm, A.19); Gaspardone, "Bibliographie," pp. 79–81, and *Annuaire* 55(1955): 244–45; 56 (1956): 291–92. Another text which may be examined for the Lê/Trịnh historical view is the *Thiên Nam Ngũ Lục* (Chronicle of the South of Heaven). Written to counter folk history, the text dips into many aspects of rural thought; see Huỳnh Sanh Thông, "Folk History in Vietnam," *The Vietnam Forum*, 5 (1985): 66–80.

⁴² TS, pp. 19–23, 27–29; Chú, vol. 4, pp. 49–52; Gaspardone, "Bibliographie," p. 25.

⁴³ TS, p. 266 (quotation); Yu, *Law*, p. 23; Dan, *Family Chronicle*, p. 171. On Lê Quý Đôn and *chính-giáo*, see A. B. Woodside, "Conceptions of Change and of Human Responsibility for Change in Late Traditional Vietnam," in *Moral Order and the Question of Change*, ed. D. K. Wyatt and A. B. Woodside (New Haven: Yale University Southeast Asian Studies, 1982), pp. 125–26.

tradition. Because he could not deny what the Mạc had achieved, Đôn could only ascribe their activities to the evil desires that usurpers hold by definition.

Though Đôn had wished to provide descriptions of the reigns following Lê Lợi's, he did not do so (as far as we know), and we are left with a Lê/Trịnh historiography featuring *cheng-t'ung*, Lê Lợi, and the Restoration of 1592.

Finally, in the nineteenth century under the new Nguyễn dynasty, the Vietnamese applied the term *cheng-t'ung* in what had become its standard contemporary usage in China. Phan Huy Chú entitled the first chapter in the biographical section of his major encyclopedia, the *Lịch Triều Hiến Chương Loại Chí* (Institutions of the Dynasties) of 1820, "Đòng chính thống các đế vương" (Legitimate descent of the rulers). The chapter lays out the succession from the legendary Kinh Dương Vương, descendant of the Chinese God of Agriculture Shen Nung, through all the Vietnamese kings to the final Lê and Trịnh rulers. The Hồ and the Mạc received subsections, referred to as *Nhuận* (in Chinese *chủn*), meaning out of the regular sequence.⁴⁴

III. Chung-hsing and Cheng-t'ung in Đại Việt

Vietnamese texts from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries used these two Chinese concepts to make sense of the political chaos and changes which took place in sixteenth-century Đại Việt. Both concepts allowed the political powers to connect with earlier institutions and to claim legitimacy from the connection. Yet, by adjusting these concepts to the Vietnamese political reality, the scholars of Đại Việt changed them considerably.

Chung-hsing, "Restoration," in China meant a dynasty resurrecting itself. In sixteenth-century Đại Việt, this was the meaning of the term as employed by Trương-dực-đế in 1509, and certainly the *Thực Lục*'s use of it for 1460 and 1509 also fit this meaning. The texts of the 1509 Restoration of Trương-dực-đế are linked to the Mạc texts via the inscription for the 1514 examination erected in 1521. All call for, or celebrate, the resurrection of the Hồng-đức institutions. The Mạc rulers based their strength and their legitimacy on this resurrection which they, unlike their immediate predecessors, achieved. Though the Mạc did not use the term *Chung-hsing*, they capitalized on its earlier usage and followed through on its claims. The textual continuity from 1509 through the 1530s is more meaningful than the change in dynasty. Thus, the *atmosphere* of Restoration dominated the times as well as the Mạc aims, and it was the institutions that required resurrection, not the family. Restoration in this context came to mean the form of government rather than the strength of one family's control, and it applied from one dynasty to another, not just within one dynasty.

Nevertheless, one key element of the Chinese concept remained—the emphasis on getting educated talent to serve the government. As the *Ô Châu Cận Lục* stressed, if the talent disappeared ("like stars in the morning"), the dynasty was in trouble. If one could gather such talent, then Heaven's will was his. It was no coincidence, then, that the examination inscriptions bore witness to what was happening at large. The examinations were at the center of the effort to gain such talent. The inscriptions stressed Thái-tông's introduction of them, Thánh-tông's full establishment of them, their role in the Restoration of 1509, and their revival under the Mạc. These examinations and their subsequent inscriptions stood at the heart of the activities and the history of the times. This continuity formed the foundation for the model itself.

⁴⁴ Chú, vol. 1, pp. 154–81; Chan, *Legitimation*, pp. 31–32.

On the other hand, *cheng-t'ung*, "legitimate succession," had come by the sixteenth century to mean the linking of (legitimate) dynasties in one long train of history. Yet, consciously or unconsciously, the Lê/Trịnh scholars returned to the original meaning of the term in the Han dynasty of China. They had established a Restoration in the classic sense, chasing out the Mạc as the Han had Wang Mang, and came to use *cheng-t'ung* in a more narrow genealogical rather than the broader political sense. The term originally meant the bloodline, progression from king to king within the dynasty itself, rather than from one dynasty to another. By returning to the original meaning, the familial connection was emphasized rather than the achievements of any one ruler (at least after Lê Lợi). In the process, the historians denied the Mạc all access to the line of legitimacy.⁴⁵

One aspect of the later Chinese discussion on *cheng-t'ung* did appear in the Lê/Trịnh presentation of it. This was the question of whether *cheng-t'ung* required total control geographically (that is, unification) of the country. Put briefly, could morality alone constitute *cheng-t'ung*, so that a dynasty still surviving, even with little or no territory, maintained the continuity? or to stand in the *cheng-t'ung* did a family need to control the entire realm? Ou-yang Hsiu had, in eleventh-century China, noted that *cheng*, the moral element, and *t'ung*, unification, did not necessarily come together. Either one could serve as the basis for legitimacy.⁴⁶ The Yuan, Ming, and Ch'ing dynasties in China had all gained legitimacy through conquest and unification, and the Lê/Trịnh historians, as we have seen in Đãng Bính's discussion, were aware of the emphasis on political unification in the discussion of *cheng-t'ung*, though they denied its necessity. After all, "he was the king!" and his subjects, they claimed, still held him in their hearts.

The textual consequences of how the Vietnamese handled these two concepts may also be seen. The Mạc, in writing the *Thực Lục*, spent more time describing the origins of the institutions which they were restoring than the origins of the Lê dynasty itself. Lê Thánh-tông and his Quang-thuận and Hồng-đức periods were of greater significance to them than were Lê Lợi and his heroics. Indeed, the significance of the term Hồng-đức in later ages may owe much to the Mạc. On the other hand, the Lê/Trịnh emphasis on dynastic continuity meant greater stress on Lê Lợi's dynastic founding and less on the achievements of his successors. The seventeenth-century historical texts reflected this, and we should be grateful that the Lê/Trịnh historians did not just trash the *Thực Lục* and write an entirely new history of the years 1428–1527. Perhaps, though, we need to keep in mind Keith Taylor's point on intellectual continuity from the fifteenth century to the seventeenth—the literati were constructing their own history and the *Thực Lục* formed the keystone for this effort.

⁴⁵ Chan, *Legitimation*, pp. 22, 32, 39.

⁴⁶ Chan, *Legitimation*, pp. 38–39, 128.