



CENTER FOR CULTURAL AND SCIENTIFIC ACTIVITIES
VĂN MIẾU - QUỐC TỬ GIÁM



TEXTS OF THE DOCTOR LAUREATES' STELAE AT
VĂN MIẾU - QUỐC TỬ GIÁM
THĂNG LONG - HÀ NỘI

Hà Nội - 2024



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On the occasion of the 3rd Vietnam Book and Reading Culture Day (2024) held at Van Mieu - Quoc Tu Giam, with the consent of the Center for Cultural and Scientific Activities of Van Mieu - Quoc Tu Giam, Information and Communications Publishing House has published the e-book **“Text of the doctor laureates’ stelae at the Van Mieu - Quoc Tu Giam Thang Long - Ha Noi”** based on the printed book published in 2002, in order to further introduce the cultural and historical values of Van Mieu - Quoc Tu Giam relics to domestic and foreign readers.

This is one of the books in the Electronic bookshelf about the Van Mieu - Quoc Tu Giam published by Information and Communications Publishing House.

We would like to respectfully introduce it to our readers!

Foreword



Văn Miếu - Quốc Tử Giám (Temple of Literature - National University for the Training of Royal Mandarins) is one of the most significant and representative historical and cultural sites of Hà Nội, capital city of Việt Nam. Established in 1070, *Văn Miếu* was designed as both a centre for the worship of Confucius and a school for crown princes. The University itself (*Quốc Tử Giám*) was established in 1076. During its 700 years of operation this educational institution turned out thousands of talented civil servants, including such important personalities as historian Ngô Sĩ Liên, mathematician Lương Thế Vinh, erudite scholar Lê Quý Đôn, and statesman and diplomat Ngô Thì Nhậm.

More than 900 years have elapsed since its inception, years which have witnessed many natural and man-made disturbances in Việt Nam. Yet throughout this long period, the imposing traits of *Văn Miếu - Quốc Tử Giám*, manifested through its ancient architecture and relics, have been preserved for posterity. Today they testify to the existence of a thousand-year-old civilization in Việt Nam. Prominent amongst the relics are 82 stone stelae mounted on tortoises, which record the names of the 1,307 doctoral laureates (*Tiến sĩ*) who passed the 82 royal exams between 1442 and 1779.

The typical stele inscription has the following content: praise for the Emperor's merits; reasons for, and mode of organizing the royal exam; names of the court mandarins placed in charge of the exam; and names of the winning doctoral laureates.

The practice of establishing stone stelae at Văn Miếu - Quốc Tử Giám served a variety of purposes:

1. Talented people were perceived to be important to the task of building the nation and safeguarding its independence, sovereignty and power, so it was believed that they must be respected and that there should be a policy to foster and use their talents in an appropriate way: *"Virtuous and talented men are the essence of the State's vitality. If this vitality is strong, the State will be powerful and prosperous. If it is not, the State will weaken and be reduced to low standing. Therefore, clear-sighted monarchs always attach importance to educating talent and selecting Confucian scholars for the Mandarinate, and regard the fostering of the State's primordial vitality as an urgent task."* (inscription for 1442 exam)

2. The stone stelae served as a reminder of the duty of the Tiến sĩ, who had been appointed to different positions in the Court: *"Those in His Majesty's entourage should propose good policies to the Court; those put in charge of law enforcement must ensure the transparency of governance. Local administrators must highlight the virtues of superiors and pay attention to the concerns of inferiors. Those who govern people have the duty to ensure that everyone has a decent life and in this way the foundations of the nation are strengthened"* (inscription for 1463 exam). Posterity will extol the virtues of such men and follow their examples. At the same time, the stone stelae also serve as a warning: *"Yet, among the laureates there may be persons who fail to maintain their will and mettle; their words may be contrary to their deeds; they may be occupied only with the pursuit of money and titles, or with thoughts about gains and losses; they may pretend to be*

upright and honest, whilst inwardly they are cowardly and snobbish; they may act contrary to what they have learned. Once they have secured a good career, they may deviate from the right path to the extent that their reputation becomes damaged and their conduct is dispicable. People will always sneer at such individuals. The public will criticize them heavily for thousands of years. Should they be cautious about this?" (inscription for 1715 exam)

3. The stone stelae also give advice for posterity: *"The benefit of the stone stele is that in future it will be read in the context of what is known of the real lives of the laureates. Good examples can then be followed, whilst bad examples will be used as warnings to others. Obviously, this stele is not merely a decoration. It is of great importance in the task of encouraging Confucian-educated people over a period of thousands of years, and strengthening the foundations of the nation."* (inscription for 1602 exam)

The 82 doctoral laureate stelae at Văn Miếu - Quốc Tử Giám constitute a stone-carved history of Confucian education in Việt Nam, which experienced its heyday between 1442 and 1779. During this period, the educational infrastructure was expanded from the capital city to the regions, extending to provinces, prefectures, districts and villages across the nation. All strata of society, whether wealthy or poor, aristocratic or ordinary, could go to school and sit for exams. Yet although students were numerous, the number of laureates attending civil service exams was small: the 82 available stone stelae report that while there were more than 200,000 winners of the interprovincial exams (*Cử nhân*), only 1,307 candidates became doctoral laureates (*Tiến sĩ*) through the royal exams which were held in the Royal Palace. So schooling was considered the way to perfect oneself

both morally and intellectually, so that one would have the capacity to attain a variety of different ambitions in life.

From the doctoral laureate stelae we can learn about the purpose of the education system in days gone by, the modes of organizing interprovincial and royal exams and the honors and favors granted by the Court to the *Tiến sĩ*.

The stelae inscriptions were composed in ancient Hán script by famous Confucian scholars nearly 300 years ago. They have been translated into the Vietnamese language by Associate Professor Ngô Đức Thọ (PhD in Philology) and his colleagues at the Hán-Nôm Institute. In this volume an initial 20 stele inscriptions have been translated into English.

It is hoped that this book will give readers an insight into what is without doubt one of the most fascinating dimensions of Việt Nam's rich cultural heritage.

Hà Nội, 18 October 2002
**Director of Hà Nội Service
of Culture and Information**

Dr Nguyễn Viết Chức



Rector and educational officials

Royal exam in the year of Nhâm Tuất

Reign title: ĐẠI BẢO III (1442)



he Great Emperor Thái Tổ Cao, founder of our dynasty, was innately wise and brave. He annihilated cruel and barbarous enemies and saved the people from misery. His was indeed a great cause.

Having restored the peace through his brilliant military exploits, the Emperor began to think about the need to promote civilization, to rally talented people in order to achieve political reform. For this purpose, he ordered the construction of schools in prefectures across the country and of a National University for the Training of Royal Mandarins (*Quốc Tử Giám*), based in the capital city. He himself selected gifted children from aristocratic and commoners' families for enrolment in such Departments as *Nhập thị*, *Cận thị* and *Ngự tiền*, and in the afore-mentioned University. He decreed that authorized mandarins should enrol children of morally upright families in the prefectural schools, recruit teachers, and print teaching and learning materials. Thus did he expand the soil in which talent could be nurtured and cultivated.

Concerning the employment of civil mandarins, the candidate was required to answer questions about the studied Classics or to write a rhymed essay, or to write a discourse on a topic set by the Emperor himself. Appointment was based on the qualifications of the candidate. Although such exams were not yet called *khoa thi Tiến sĩ* (Doctoral Laureate-selecting exams), the procedure for test-based selection and recruitment of civil mandarins was generally in place by this time and constituted an important means of highlight-

ing Confucianism. With the accession of this dynasty there indeed began an everlasting piece.

Our present Emperor, Thái Tông Văn, continues the great cause of his ancestors, which is directed towards taking care of human lives and civilizing the people. He considers respect for Confucianism a matter of prime importance and regards the discovery of talent and respect for wise mandarins as good strategy. He has made the introduction of exams to select Confucian mandarins the primary task in his governance. It is through such exams that a king can initiate the cause of embellishing his kingdom, restoring or expanding his reign, reforming politics, even conducting daily governance and ensuring that fine customs and practices are instilled in the lives of civil society. As almost all the past Emperors did the same, peace reigned during their dynasties. Our late Great Emperor, Thái Tổ Cao, instituted the procedures for mandarin-selecting exams, but he had no time to put them into practice. The time has come for His Majesty now to continue what has already been started in order to honor the previous dynasties and to encourage the generations to come. Therefore, in the year of Nhâm Tuất, under the reign title of Đại Bảo III (1442), His Majesty ordered that admission to royal exams held in the capital should be opened up to all Confucian-educated men. However, the number of people subsequently examined numbered only 450. After four tests, a total of 33 persons were selected. The mandarins in charge submitted the list of their names to the Emperor. His Majesty ordered that these candidates should be present in the Royal Palace on the fixed day for the final exam.

Chief Examiner Lê Văn Linh (title: *Thượng thư tả bộc xạ*) and Supervisor Triệu Thái (title: *Ngự sử đài thị ngự sử*), together with other mandarins taking charge of the exam, carried out their

assigned tasks to the best of their ability. On the 2nd day of the 2nd lunar month, His Majesty sat in Hội An Palace and set the topic for the required essay. The next day, a panel of judges (*độc quyền*) composed of academician Nguyễn Trãi (title: *Hàn lâm viện thừa chỉ học sĩ, Trung thư quốc sử sự*), Deputy Clerk of the Court Office Nguyễn Mộng Tuân (title: *Trung thư sảnh Trung thư thị lang*), Head of the Emperor's Office Trình Thuần Du (title: *Nội mật viện tri viện sự*), and Professor of the National University for the Training of Royal Mandarins (*Quốc Tử Giám*) Nguyễn Tử Tấn (title: *Quốc Tử Giám bác sĩ*) submitted the essays to the Emperor. His Majesty considered the essays thoroughly and rated the successful candidates as follows:

First class:

- Nguyễn Trục became *Trạng nguyên* (1st-grade laureate)
- Nguyễn Như Đổ became *Bảng nhãn* (2nd-grade laureate)
- Lương Như Hộc became *Thám hoa lang* (3rd-grade laureate)

Second class:

- Trần Văn Huy and six other persons

Third class:

- Ngô Sĩ Liên and 22 other persons

On the 3rd day of the 3rd lunar month the ceremony of publicizing the laureates was held so that the Confucian scholars could know the honors granted to them. His Majesty conferred on them various honorary titles to distinguish them from commoners, bestowed on them decorative ceremonial costumes and headwear, invited them to a Royal Banquet held in the Royal Garden¹, and granted them horses to carry them back to their homeland. Confucian scholars and the population of the capital city gathered outside the Royal Palace to

¹ Behind the Kính Thiên Palace. It was where Royal Banquets were held.

admire the laureates and lauded His Majesty for his rarely-seen veneration of Confucianism.

On the 4th day 1st-grade laureate Nguyễn Trục and his colleagues submitted their text of thanks to His Majesty. On the 9th day they presented themselves before the Emperor to bid him farewell before going home. This was the first exam held under our dynasty, and it is still praised by Confucian-educated people for the great honors which were bestowed on the successful candidates. Since that time other exams have been organized in accordance with the established procedures.

Our present Great Emperor (Lê Thánh Tông) restored the dynasty¹ and reformed politics, and has thereby achieved far-reaching fame. He attaches particular attention to the way in which mandarins are selected; he observes the rules set by the previous dynasties, while establishing new procedures in order to perfect them. Thus, the ceremony of publicising the names of doctoral laureates must now be followed by the setting up of stone stelae to immortalise these individuals. What a beneficial and praiseworthy idea!

Realizing that there had been no stone stelae for the laureates of previous royal exams held since the time of Đại Bảo III, Minister of Rites Quách Đình Bảo, by order of His Majesty, demanded that the names of all previous laureates should be inscribed on high-quality stone stelae. He also requested His Majesty to replace the titles *Trạng nguyên*, *Bảng nhãn* and *Thám hoa lang* with the title *Tiến sĩ cập đệ* (1st-class doctoral laure-

¹ This was after the revolt of July 1460 by Nguyễn Xí and Đinh Liệt which sought to dethrone Lê Nghi Dân and replace him with Lê Thánh Tông.

ates), and the title *Phụ bảng* with the title *Đồng tiến sĩ xuất thân* (3rd-class laureates), as required by the present rules¹. His Majesty approved the request and ordered me, Thân Nhân Trung, to compose the text for inscription on the stone stelae.

I respectfully followed His Majesty's edict with great delight. The setting up of stone stelae does indeed seem to be the best way of maintaining and promoting the policy of the previous emperors to seek new talent and respect the wisdom of sages in developing the art of governance. It is also an excellent method of cultivating people's skills and promoting Confucianist education. Though rustic and shallow, I dare not disobey His Majesty's Edict. Thus I respectfully submit to His Majesty the text I have written for the stelae inscriptions as follows:

Virtuous and talented men are the essence of the State's vitality. If this vitality is strong, the State will be powerful and prosperous. If it is not, the State will weaken and be reduced to low standing. Therefore, clear-sighted monarchs always attach importance to educating talent and selecting Confucian scholars for the Mandarinates, and regard the fostering of the State's primordial vitality as an urgent task. Since Confucian scholars are so important to the nation, they have always been held in great esteem; they are honored with titles, distinctions and dignities. Yet this alone is not enough! Their names have also been made known at Swallow Tower² and their dignities

1 Royal exams were known as *Minh kinh bác học* during the Lý dynasty and *Thái học sinh* during the Trần and Hồ dynasties. Starting from the year of Đinh Mùi (1247) under the reign of Trần Thái Tông (reign title: *Thiên ứng Chính Bình* XVI), doctoral laureates were classified into three classes. The first class included three grades - *Trạng nguyên*, *Bảng nhãn* and *Thám hoa lang* (or *Thám hoa*). This stone stele was set up in 1484 when the Minister of Rites requested the Emperor to officially institute such titles.

2 At Từ Ân Pagoda in Trường An (China) royal capital. Under the Tang dynasty the names of doctoral laureates were engraved on this tower.

announced on the Dragon-Tiger Board¹, not to mention at Royal Banquets. The Court has done everything possible to glorify the talent it has discovered through the royal exams.

Our clear-sighted Great Emperor wishes to preserve forever the fame of the doctoral laureates. Therefore, His Majesty has ordered stone stelae to be set up at the entrance to the Thái Học (Great Learning) House as examples for Confucian-educated men to admire and follow, so as to perfect themselves and to become enthusiastically ready to serve the Court. Obviously, His Majesty's decision is not intended to promote any formalism or artificiality. Let the doctoral laureates think carefully about their honors. A student of low status from a thatched school has suddenly become a person who receives many favors from the Court. How will he repay his debt to His Majesty?

Let's examine the names of the laureates of this exam. Many of them have contributed their talent and knowledge with a view to achieving better governance, and as such they have already been valued highly by the Court for many years. However, there have also been corrupt mandarins who have degraded themselves by living a life of greediness and immorality. Maybe this is because they did not have any opportunity to see this stele. If they had seen it, their sense of benevolence would have been stirred and evil thoughts would have been cleansed from their minds. So, this stone stele has several helpful purposes: it is a mirror whereby the wicked can assess what they have done and rectify their misdeeds and also a source of encouragement to benevolent people; it is a story of the past and an expectation for the future; it is an instrument for training

¹ A board used for publicising the names of doctoral laureates under the Tang dynasty.

Confucian-educated people and for reinforcing the nation. This practice initiated by our previous Emperors is of great value. People who look at this stele should grasp its deep significance.

Composed by academician Thân Nhân Trung¹ (title: *Phụng trực đại phu Hàn lâm viện Thừa chỉ Đông các đại học sĩ*) according to His Majesty's edict.

Written on the stele by Nguyễn Tùng (title: *Cẩn sự lang Trung thư giám chính tự*).

Engraved by Tô Ngại (title: *Mậu lâm lang Kim quang môn đãi chiếu*).

The stele was erected on the 15th day of the 8th lunar month of 1484 under the reign title of Hồng Đức XV.

1st-class laureates, three persons:

- | | |
|---------------|---|
| Nguyễn Trục | - Thanh Oai district, Ứng Thiên prefecture |
| Nguyễn Như Đổ | - Thanh Trì district, Thường Tín prefecture |
| Lương Như Hộc | - Trường Tân district, Hạ Hồng prefecture |

2nd-class laureates, seven persons:

- | | |
|----------------|---|
| Trần Văn Huy | - Bất Bạt district, Thao Giang prefecture |
| Hoàng Sần Phu | - Vĩnh Ninh district, Thiệu Thiên prefecture |
| Nguyễn Hộc | - Thạch Hà district, Hà Hoa prefecture |
| Vũ Lâm | - Kim Động district, Khoái Châu prefecture |
| Nguyễn Hữu Phu | - Đan Phượng district, Quốc Oai prefecture |
| Phạm Cư | - Thượng Phúc district, Thường Tín prefecture |
| Trần Bá Linh | - Vũ Giàng district, Từ Sơn prefecture |

3rd-class laureates, 23 persons:

- | | |
|----------------|---|
| Ngô Sĩ Liên | - Chương Đức district, Ứng Thiên prefecture |
| Nguyễn Duy Tác | - Tiên Lữ district, Khoái Châu prefecture |
| Nguyễn Cư Đạo | - Gia Định district, Thuận An prefecture |

¹ Thân Nhân Trung (1419-1499) was the Minister of the Mandarinate and Rector of the National University for the Training of Royal Mandarins (Quốc Tử Giám) under the reign of King Lê Thánh Tông. He was a native of Yên Ninh village, Yên Dũng district (Bắc Giang). He became a 3rd-class doctoral laureate in 1769 under the reign of Lê Thánh Tông (reign title: Quang Thuận X).

Phan Viên	- Thạch Hà district, Hà Hoa prefecture
Nguyễn Đạt	- Thanh Đàm district, Thường Tín prefecture
Bùi Hựu	- Chương Đức district, Ứng Thiên prefecture
Phạm Như Trung	- Thanh Lâm district, Nam Sách prefecture
Trần Đương	- Đông Yên district, Khoái Châu prefecture
Ngô Thế Du	- Kim Hoa district, Bắc Giang prefecture
Khúc Hữu Thành	- Thiện Tài district, Thuận An prefecture
Lê Lâm	- Bất Bạt district, Thao Giang prefecture
Nguyễn Thiện Tích	- Bình Hà district, Nam Sách prefecture
Nguyễn Nghị	- Thanh Lâm district, Nam Sách prefecture
Trịnh Thiết Trường	- Yên Định district, Thiệu Thiên prefecture
Trần Bàn	- Quế Dương district, Từ Sơn prefecture
Nguyễn Quốc Kiệt	- Đông Ngạn district, Từ Sơn prefecture
Nguyễn Mỹ	- Vĩnh Lại district, Hạ Hồng prefecture
Trịnh Khắc Tuy	- Vĩnh Ninh district, Thiệu Thiên prefecture
Nguyễn Địch	- Đại An district, Kiến Hưng prefecture
Bùi Lôi Phủ	- Phú Xuyên district, Thường Tín prefecture
Lê Cầu	- Phúc Lộc district, Quốc Oai prefecture
Lê Hiễn	- Thanh Lâm district, Nam Sách prefecture
Nguyễn Nguyên Chấn	- Thanh Lâm district, Nam Sách prefecture

Royal exam in the year of Quý Mùi

Reign title: QUANG THUẬN IV (1463)



ur Great Emperor has been on the throne for four years. Opportunities for the literati are as brilliant as the Khuê constellation and talented people are as numerous as gathering clouds. The grand royal exam attracted 1,400 Confucian students who sang the song *Lộc minh*¹ and competed with one another at the examination site; 44 of them became laureates.

On the 16th day of the 2nd lunar month, His Majesty sat on the veranda of his Palace and posed questions about the fundamentals of sovereign governance. He appointed Nguyễn Lỗi (title: *Kiểm hiệu tư đồ Bình chương sự, Đô đốc đồng bình chương sự Đông đạo chư vệ quân*) to be the Chief Examiner, and the Rector of the National University for the Training of Royal Mandarins (*Quốc Tử Giám*) Lê Niệm to take charge of the exam.

The next morning academician Nguyễn Như Đổ (title: *Tả ty môn hạ sảnh, tả gián nghị đại phu Tri Bắc đạo quân dân bộ tịch sảnh, Hàn lâm viện thừa chỉ học sĩ*), academician Nguyễn Vĩnh Tích (title: *Hàn lâm viện thừa chỉ học sĩ Tri Đông đạo quân dân bộ tịch*) and the Rector of the National University for the Training of Royal Mandarins (*Quốc Tử Giám*) Nguyễn Bá Ký submitted the exam papers to the Emperor. His Majesty read all of them and rated the winners according to different classes; Lương Thế Vinh became the 1st-grade doctoral laureate of the 1st class (*Tiến sĩ cập đệ*).

1 A poem in the *Kinh Thi (Book of Odes)* which describes how a deer calls its friends to the pasture. It was put to music and used for Royal Banquets under the Zhou dynasty.

On the 22nd day, His Majesty sat in Kính Thiên Palace and ordered the names of the laureates to be publicized. The responsible mandarin of the Ministry of Rites posted the Golden Board with the laureates' names on it at the Đông Hoa Gate. His Majesty bestowed on the laureates ceremonial costumes and treated them to a Royal Banquet to show his particular respect and favors to them. Yet 22 years have elapsed since then and a stone stele has only just been set up. This is a shortcoming in our system of State rites.

Nowadays, His Majesty¹ thinks that talented men are the essence of the nation's vitality, which must be built up and fostered; and that the regime - which must be adequate, clear and perfect - constitutes the most beautiful feature of the State. His Majesty ordered a mandarin from the Ministry of Public Affairs to set up a stone stele at the Thái Học (Great Learning) House, and I, Đào Cữ, to write a text to be inscribed on it.

I dare not disobey the edict of His Majesty, despite my shallow knowledge. So, I respectfully present the following text for inscription:

Talented and virtuous men emerge only after primordial energies have been gathered. When a genuine monarch ascends the throne, talented and wise people are given the opportunity to become useful to the Court. Let's cite two examples: during the dynasties of the Chinese kings, Nghiêu and Thuấn², talented sons of the Nguyễn and Khải families, were appointed to deal with the mandarins, chiefs of vassal counties. Under the reign of King

¹ Lê Tương Dực – reigned 1510- 1516

² Yao and Shun.

Thành Chu (Cheng Zhu), brilliant men were venerated and promoted to high rank; so the county was peaceful and the people followed fine customs and practices. Clearly, the governance of a country must be based on distinguished people.

The Emperor-founder of our dynasty, Thái Tổ Cao, achieved great military exploits and devoted his life to promoting civilization. Hardly had He put down his arms when He initiated the policy to rally talented men, to promote civilization and to encourage skilled people throughout the country.

The Emperor Thái Tổ Văn continued the cause of gathering heroes. He instituted exams to discover talent and invite genuine Confucian scholars to take part in governance. What brilliant achievements were recorded during His reign!

The Emperor Nhân Tông inherited this glorious tradition from the previous kings. He used Confucian doctrine for his governance and kept to the established procedures of selecting Confucian mandarins in order to strengthen the nation's vitality.

Our present Emperor has a great mandate to restore the kingdom. His Majesty's military exploits, achievements in governance, benevolence and humanity resound throughout the country. His great cause of enlightenment is being promoted; the primordial energy of the nation has become immense. How great is the effort to promote culture! How broad is the great reform of Confucian education! Talented men have sprung up. Both persons "who soar high in the sky like kites" and those who live the lives of "ants bustling about a mound of earth" aspire to become "*bằng* birds hovering in the sky to display their beauty". Many of these individuals wanted to test themselves in this, the first royal exam-

ination to take place in the period of national renaissance. The exam has brought many distinguished people to prominence and these have now been appointed by the Court to different positions. Some have taken charge of rites and music; others are responsible for literature; others are guarding the national borders or are chief mandarins of far-flung regions. They are as numerous as fish and cicadas. The hexagram *Thái* in *I Ching* (The Book of Changes) says “Pulling the *alang* grass out of ground, one gets its roots”¹. *Kinh Thi* (The Book of Odes) says “The Zhou dynasty gathered many talented mandarins because the king was skilled in using men.” Is it true that Heaven has granted our Emperor an everlasting civilization?

The regime and its brilliant civilization must be recorded for posterity on a stone stele set up at the *Thái Học* (Great Learning) House to become a code of norms for our good dynasty, to honor Confucian scholars and to encourage generations to come.

The Confucian scholars whose names are inscribed on this stele must act in accordance with the credit given to them, they must perfect themselves according to the example set by Văn Hiến. They must not follow the bad example set by Công Tôn in study. Their standards of morality must be like those pursued by Triệu Duyệt Đạo; they must be as upright as Phạm Cảnh Nhân. Those in His Majesty’s entourage should propose good policies to the Court; those put in charge of law enforcement must ensure the transparency of governance. Local administrators must highlight the virtues of superiors and pay attention to the concerns of inferiors. Those who govern people have the duty to ensure that everyone has a decent life and in this way the foundations of the nation

¹ Figurative meaning: promotion of ordinary persons to higher positions through exams.

are strengthened. All of their efforts should merit the Court's favors and demonstrate their aspirations to support His Majesty and the nation, so that their renown can last forever, so that in future those who see this stele will say, "Here are persons loyal to the country, who have rendered good service to the people. They are frank and righteous in discussion over how to highlight the doctrines of sages; they keep to the required standards of morality and they have recorded many achievements." Otherwise, the visitor to this stele would say, "This man is cowardly or feeble-minded; that man is immoral", and so forth. You doctoral laureates should be mindful about how public opinion may regard you.

His Majesty has a profound intention to set up stone stelae in order to express his sincere praise, encouragement and great expectation. This reflects His Majesty's wishes to have genuine Confucian scholars in support for his governance and to preserve this heritage for many generations to come. Viewed in this context, the inscribing of doctoral laureates' names on stone stelae is an act which is beneficial to our nation and a blessing for thousands of generations of its divine offspring.

Composed by academician Đào Cũ¹ (title: *Hiển cung đại phu Hàn lâm viện thị giảng Đông các hiệu thư*).

Written on the stele by Nguyễn Tùng (title: *Cẩn sự thị lang Trung thư giám chính tự*).

Engraved by Tô Ngại (title: *Mậu lâm lang Kim quang môn đãi chiếu*). The stele was set up on the 15th day of the 8th lunar month under the reign of Hồng Đức XV (1484).

1 Đào Cũ (1449-?) came from Thuận Khang commune, Siêu Loại district (presently Thuận Thành district, Bắc Ninh province). He won the title of doctoral laureate (3rd class) in 1466 at the age of 18, under the reign of King Lê Thánh Tông. He was promoted to the rank of Minister of the Interior and concurrently put in charge of Sùng văn quán tú Lâm cục. He composed many literary works.

1st-class laureates, three persons:

- Lương Thế Vinh** - Thiên Bản district, Nghĩa Hưng prefecture
Nguyễn Đức Trinh - Thanh Lâm district, Nam Sách prefecture
Quách Đình Bảo - Thanh Lan district, Tân Hưng prefecture

2nd-class laureates, 15 persons:

- Phạm Lỗ** - Đường An district, Thượng Hồng prefecture
Nguyễn Tài - Tứ Kỳ district, Hạ Hồng prefecture
Dương Văn Đán - Đông Ngạn district, Từ Sơn prefecture
Nguyễn Tường - Tân Phong district, Tam Đới prefecture
Lê Đình Tuấn - Tế Giang district, Thuận An prefecture
Đào Bạt - Bình Hà district, Nam Sách prefecture
Đỗ Hán - Thanh Miện district, Hạ Hồng prefecture
Phạm Ngữ - Nghi Xuân district, Đức Quang prefecture
Nguyễn Ký - Chí Linh district, Nam Sách prefecture
Vũ Nhữ Nhuế - Thanh Lâm district, Nam Sách prefecture
Hoàng Bồi - Phúc Lộc district, Quốc Oai prefecture
Đình Thúc Thông - Gia Viễn district, Trường Yên prefecture
Vũ Hữu - Đường An district, Thượng Hồng prefecture
Nguyễn Đình Liêu - Đông Ngạn district, Từ Sơn prefecture
Lưu Công Ngạn - Thủy Đường district, Kinh Môn prefecture

3rd-class laureates, 26 persons:

- Nguyễn Đình Khôi** - Quế Dương district, Từ Sơn prefecture
Nguyễn Tông Tây - Thiên Lộc district, Đức Quang prefecture
Phạm Tử Nghi - Thanh Oai district, Ứng Thiên prefecture
Nguyễn Bá Kỳ - Chương Đức district, Ứng Thiên prefecture
Chu Lộc - Đường An district, Thượng Hồng prefecture
Đỗ Bá Lược - Từ Liêm district, Quốc Oai prefecture
Đào Bảo - Phù Vân district, Thường Tín prefecture
Phạm Bá Ký - Thanh Oai district, Ứng Thiên prefecture
Trần Văn Thiện - Đông Sơn district, Thiệu Thiên prefecture
Nguyễn Xuân Dương - Hoàng Hóa district, Hà Trung prefecture
Phạm Lương - Tiên Du district, Từ Sơn prefecture

Đào Tuấn Khanh	- Thượng Phúc district, Thường Tín prefecture
Nguyễn Tông	- Thanh Oai district, Ứng Thiên prefecture
Đào Văn Hiến	- Tứ Kỳ district, Hạ Hồng prefecture
Lê Nghĩa	- Bình Hà district, Nam Sách prefecture
Phạm Nại	- Chương Đức district, Ứng Thiên prefecture
Nguyễn Cấu	- Tân Phúc district, Bắc Giang prefecture
Cái Phùng	- Thiên Thi district, Khoái Châu prefecture
Phạm Phổ	- Bình Lục district, Lị Nhân prefecture
Dương Đức Nhan	- Vĩnh Lại district, Hạ Hồng prefecture
Nguyễn Công Định	- Thanh Lan district, Tân Hưng prefecture
Hạ Cảnh Đức	- Yên Lạc district, Tam Đới prefecture
Nhữ Văn Lan	- Tân Minh district, Nam Sách prefecture
Nguyễn Cư Trung	- Cẩm Giàng district, Thượng Hồng prefecture
Nguyễn Văn Chính	- Đông Yên district, Khoái Châu prefecture
Nguyễn Như Trác	- Kim Thành district, Kinh Môn prefecture

Royal exam in the year of Tân Sửu

Reign title: HỒNG ĐỨC XII (1481)



he year of Tân Sửu under the reign title of Hồng Đức (1481) is the 54th year if calculated from the date of the establishment of our dynasty, or the 22nd year if reckoned from the time of its restoration¹. His Majesty has organized 11 royal exams so far.

The year of Tân Sửu's exam held at the Ministry of Rites attracted 2,000 participants who had passed inter-provincial exams. Of these only 31 became laureates. How thorough the selection process was!

The concerned mandarins and other personnel made all the necessary arrangements for the final round. His Majesty sat in the Principal Palace and set the topic for the required essay. The next morning His Majesty decided on the winners and rated them according to different classes and grades. Thus, the 1st-class laureates were Phạm Đôn Lễ (1st grade), Lưu Hưng Hiếu (2nd grade) and Nguyễn Doãn Dịch (3rd grade). The rest became laureates of the 2nd and 3rd classes. His Majesty bestowed on them corresponding favors as stipulated by the set rules. Those recruited to the Royal Academy were promoted to higher ranks. His Majesty also ordered the Minister of Public Affairs to set up a stone stele at the National University for the Training of Royal

¹ The Lê dynasty was founded by Lê Lợi, who ascended the throne in 1428. It was restored in 1460 with the enthronement of Lê Thánh Tông, following an unsuccessful coup d'état by some court mandarins in 1459.

Mandarins (*Quốc Tử Giám*), and instructed me, Trọng Ý, to compose a text for inscription on the stele.

I respectfully present the inscription as follows:

It is very easy to understand the words of hard-working teacher Văn Vương, who said: “Everybody is talented”.....“so why don’t we cultivate them?”¹. Our Emperor is a great advocate of the policy of encouraging talented men and promoting civilization. The poem *Vực phúc* highlights benevolence; the poem *Tinh nga* is concerned with teaching. They are different in content but they share common relevance.

Confucian-educated men today are lucky to have a far-sighted monarch. They have opportunities to distinguish themselves in literary circles and to enhance their intellect through learning. Availing themselves of these valuable opportunities, they follow “the rays of the sun and of the moon” in their journey along the path to glory; with their names inscribed on a stone stele they become like heroes. What a great honor to have!

However, a name can sometimes conceal reality. “Good” is the opposite to “bad”. So, when a name corresponds to its genuine content, it will be good; if not, it will be bad. So, those whose names are inscribed on this stone stele are naturally required to perfect their moral standards, and to develop their intellect through literary study, so as to remain genuine doctoral laureates of a royal exam who will never betray the Court’s trust and never squander the opportunity to make use of their knowledge. They must not be like Công Tôn, a pseudo-scholar who

¹ From the *Book of Odes*.

cheated people with his policies of reform; they must not follow Trại Lang's advice which caused nothing but harm to the system of civil exams.

This stone stele set up at the Thái Học (Great Learning) House is designed for mandarins and literati to read carefully, admiring the good conduct it presents and obtaining inspiration from it. Thus does the inscribed become radiant, with great significance in relation to the fundamentals of governance and the promotion of a civilized mode of life. In this context I could not refuse to compose an inscription for this stele on the grounds of my shallowness and rusticity.

Composed by academician Nguyễn Trọng Ý (title: *Hiển cung đại phu Hàn lâm viện thị thư kiêm tú lâm cục tư huấn*).

Written down on the stele by Phan Trung (title: *Mậu lâm tá lang Trung thư giám điển thư*).

Engraved by Tô Ngại (title: *Mậu lâm lang kim quang môn đãi chiếu*)
The stele was set up on the 15th day of the 8th lunar month under the reign of Hồng Đức XV (1484).

1st-class laureates, three persons:

Phạm Đôn Lễ - Ngự Thiên district, Tân Hưng prefecture

Lưu Hưng Hiếu - Vĩnh Ninh district, Thiệu Thiên prefecture

Nguyễn Doãn Dịch - Thanh Oai district, Ứng Thiên prefecture

2nd-class laureates, eight persons:

Ngô Văn Cảnh - Yên Dũng district, Lạng Giang prefecture

Vũ Khắc Minh - Cẩm Giàng district, Thượng Hồng prefecture

Lưu Ngạn Quang - Đông Sơn district, Thiệu Thiên prefecture

Nguyễn Duy Trinh - Từ Liêm district, Quốc Oai prefecture

Phạm Hùng - Thiên Bản district, Kiến Hưng prefecture

Hoàng Bá Dương - Thanh Oai district, Ứng Thiên prefecture

Bùi Sư Lục - Thanh Lâm district, Nam Sách prefecture

Lê Đức Thiệu - Đường Hào district, Thượng Hồng prefecture
3rd-class laureates, 29 persons:

Nguyễn Minh Thông - Đông Ngạn district, Từ Sơn prefecture
Đàm Đình Phương - Đan Phượng district, Quốc Oai prefecture
Phạm Chuyết - Cẩm Giàng district, Thượng Hồng prefecture
Vũ Nguyên Trinh - Đường An district, Thượng Hồng prefecture
Lê Cầu - Thanh Lâm district, Nam Sách prefecture
Nguyễn Tôn Miệt - Kim Hoa district
Nguyễn Nhân Bị - Vũ Ninh district, Từ Sơn prefecture
Nguyễn Văn Tú - Bạch Hạc district, Tam Đới prefecture
Vũ Nghi Huỳnh - Cẩm Giàng district, Thượng Hồng prefecture
Nguyễn Đổ - Đan Phượng district, Quốc Oai prefecture
Nguyễn Thái - Thọ Xương district
Khổng Cư Lỗ - Lập Thạch district, Tam Đới prefecture
Thân Tông Vũ - Yên Dũng district, Lạng Giang prefecture
Lê Công Truyền - Giáp Sơn district, Kinh Môn prefecture
Phạm Tử Hiền - Thụy Anh district, Thái Bình prefecture
Nguyễn Tất Thông - Vũ Giang district
Nguyễn Tử Loa - Chí Linh district, Nam Sách prefecture
Nguyễn Đình Tuấn - Lương Tài district, Thuận An prefecture
Nguyễn Nhân Lễ - Hoàng Hóa district, Hà Trung prefecture
Phan Ứng Toàn - Thạch Hà district, Hà Hoa prefecture
Lưu Di Quyết - Tế Giang district, Thuận An prefecture
Lê Tứ - Tế Giang district, Thuận An prefecture
Đỗ Bá Linh - Cẩm Giàng district, Thượng Hồng prefecture
Ngô Khắc Tuấn - Trường Tân district, Hạ Hồng prefecture
Thang Nghĩa Phương - Đông Ngạn district, Từ Sơn prefecture
Lê Đức Trung - Yên Dũng district, Lạng Giang prefecture
Nguyễn Oanh - Gia Lâm district, Thuận An prefecture
Phan Dư Khánh - La Giang district, Đức Quang prefecture
Lê Duy Hàn - Hoàng Hóa district, Hà Trung prefecture



Candidates of the civil service examination looking
at their results on the boards

Royal exam in the year of Tân Mùi

Reign title: HỒNG THUẬN III (1511)



s Heaven has blessed our nation with a new period of renaissance, a large *Tiến sĩ* (doctoral laureate) examination was held in the Spring of the year of Tân Mùi under the reign title of Hồng Thuận III (1511). According to established practice, the Ministry of Rites invited Confucian students to the capital city for the contest. As a result, 47 candidates passed the exam. On the 17th day of the 4th lunar month, His Majesty¹ set the topic for the required essay in the final round of the exam, which dealt with the fundamentals of governance. Duke Lê Quảng Độ (title: *Suy trung tán trị minh kính khiêm cung công thần, Đặc tiến khai phủ kim tử vinh lộc đại phu, Bình chương quân quốc trọng sự, Thống quốc chính thái tử, Thái sư Thiệu quốc công thượng trụ quốc*) and Minister of Public Affairs Trình Chí Sâm (title: *Phụng trực đại phu, Công bộ thượng thư, Tư chính thượng khanh*) were appointed as Chief Examiner; Vice-Minister of the Interior Phạm Hạo (title: *Gia hạnh đại phu, Hộ bộ tả thị lang khuông nghĩa doãn*) was appointed the Supervisor; and Vice-Minister of the Mandarinate Đặng Minh Khiêm (title: *Lại bộ tả thị lang, triều liệt đại phu, Tu thận doãn*) and other concerned mandarins were put in charge of the services relating to the exam.

The next morning, Minister of Rites Nguyễn Bá Nhậm (title: *Phụng trực đại phu Lễ bộ thượng thư Tư chính thượng khanh*), minister-rank Advisor and Procurator Nguyễn Thì Ung (title: *Phụng trực đại phu thượng thư, Ngự sử đài đô ngự sử, Tư chính thượng khanh*) and minister-rank academician Đỗ Nhạc (title:

¹ King Lê Tương Dực (reign title: Hồng Thuận, 1509-1516).

Phụng trực đại phu thượng thư, đồng các đại học sĩ, nhập thị kinh diên, tư chính thượng khanh) submitted the exam papers to His Majesty, who rated the laureates after having read their papers thoroughly. Subsequently, Hoàng Nghĩa Phú and two other persons became 1st-class doctoral laureates; Bùi Doãn Hiệp and eight other persons 2nd-class doctoral laureates; and Trần Doãn Minh and other 34 other persons 3rd-class doctoral laureates.

On the 4th day of the 5th lunar month, His Majesty¹ sat in the Kính Thiên Palace and ordered the names of the laureates to be announced by megaphone. All of the court mandarins stood in ceremonial dress to welcome successful candidates. Furthermore, according to His Majesty's Edict, the Ministry of the Mandarinate granted them honors: the Ministry of Rites had the Golden Board inscribed with their names and hung in front of the Thái Học (Great Learning) House; and the laureates were also granted ceremonial costumes and treated to a Royal Banquet accompanied by an orchestra.

Duke Nguyễn Văn Lang (title: *Dương vũ hiệp mưu đồng đức hiệu trung khai quốc công thần Đặc tiến kim tử vinh lộc đại phu, Tán lý hiệp thuận, Khai phủ nghi đồng tam ty Bình chương quân quốc trọng sự Phụ quốc thừa tướng thượng tể thái phó Nghĩa quốc công, thượng trụ quốc*) was ordered by His Majesty to undertake repairs to the National University (*Quốc Tử Giám*), and to build new stela houses on its eastern and western sides. Also in accordance with His Majesty's orders, Minister of Public Affairs Duke Nguyễn Bá Lân (title: *Tá lý công thần, Đặc tiến kim tử vinh lộc đại phu, Công bộ thượng thư chưởng bộ sự tri Hiến Phúc điện Uy quận công thượng trụ quốc*) supervised the erection of a stone stele inscribed with the names of the exam laureates. As for myself, Lê

¹ King Lê Tương Dực.

Tung, I was requested to compose the following stele inscription.

All things are created by the universe with the help of the four seasons. Any Emperor who wants to govern all the corners of the world in peace must seek the support of talented men. Thus, the Yu dynasty thrived because it did not neglect even those talented people from the countryside. The Zhou dynasty was able to live in prosperity and peace thanks to the presence of many talented mandarins. The kings of succeeding dynasties such as the Han, Tang and Sung all regarded the recruitment of talented men and sages into government as a task of prime importance in ensuring that their kingdom remained in peace.

Concerning our dynasty, I think that founder-Emperor Thái Tổ Cao pacified the country by military means. Thereafter he sought to strengthen the peace through education. For this reason he had the National University built as a means of promoting education.

Continuing his cause, the Emperor Thái Tông Văn improved the established rules and procedures and instituted royal exams. Thus, civilization became yet more brilliant.

Following the policies and strategies of previous sovereigns, the Emperor Nhân Tông Tuyên preserved the established rules and regimes and fostered talented people as a reserve force for the Court. Confucian education was vigorously developed.

The Emperor Thánh Tông Thuần rectified the shortcomings of the regime, improved governance and developed the education system. He attached great importance to literature, Confucian doctrine and high educational standards in the fostering and nurturing of talent. Hence, many genuine Confucian scholars came to prominence during his reign.

The Emperor Hiến Tông Duệ is known for his many recorded achievements. He also expanded the education system and recruited many men of virtue and talent.

As for our present Emperor, His Majesty is supported by Heaven and the people in his task of governing the nation. He goes regularly to the National University to teach Confucian doctrine, expressing his great admiration for it. The Court exam in the year of Tân Mùi was the first to be held in the period of Restoration¹. I think that talented men constitute the primordial vitality of the nation, so we should nurture them. Royal exams are part of the regime of our dynasty, so they need first and foremost to be developed. The careers of many great men start with royal exams. The Tang dynasty thrived under the reign of Trinh Quán thanks to the help of Phòng (Huyền) Linh. The Sung dynasty was able to keep its governance as steadfast as Thái Sơn mountain, thanks to the presence of Hàn Kỳ. Successive monarchs all managed to identify talented men to work in government through the system of royal exams, which was of great importance.

Our far-sighted Emperor has devised a plan to put those who have been successful in this exam to work in government. In this way they have been promoted to various posts in the Royal Academy and various ministry agencies. His Majesty's favors to them are very generous. The practice of recording the names of royal exam laureates in books and on stone stelae is aimed at preserving their fame for posterity and making their achievements known for thousands of generations to come.

¹ Uy Mục (1505-1509) was a cruel king who killed his grandmother, brothers and uncle. Lê Oanh, son of Lord Cẩm Giang vương Lê Sùng, led his troops from Thanh Hóa to Thăng Long to dethrone Uy Mục. This event is what historians refer to as the 'Restoration' under the reign of Hồng Thuận.

The Confucian scholars whose names are now seen on this stone stele are very lucky indeed. If they try to perfect their morality in order always to remain loyal, upright, honest and industrious, and worthy of the title they won as royal exam laureates and highly-valued noblemen, future generations of students of the Thái Học (Great Learning) House will point to their names and praise their capabilities and achievements. Good people will draw inspiration from them too. But if any of these laureates turns out to be “stones” rather than “gems”, “hawks” rather than “phoenixes”, are cowardly or seek only their own personal advantage, people will sneer at them and may even make comments such as: “This man has an evil educational background like Công Tôn Hoàng”, or “This man acts at variance with the teachings of the Classics like Vương An Thạch”. Evil-doers should draw lessons from this for themselves. This stone stele thus contains both praise of and a warning to Confucian-educated men.

The strategy to discover and promote men of virtue and talent which has been pursued by previous kings is great and wise. Today His Majesty gives great prominence to the task of identifying and utilizing talent. His policy in this field has been devised in order to stimulate the birth of talented men and to promote the Court’s efforts to employ talents. Ultimately, all efforts will be directed towards ensuring peace and prosperity for thousands of generations.

Composed by Minister of Rites, Rector of the National University for the Training of Royal Mandarins (*Quốc Tử Giám*), academician Lê Tung¹

¹ Lê Tung (real name Dương Bang Bản) came from An Cư commune, Thanh Liêm district (presently Thanh Liêm district, Hà Nam province). After winning the title of 2nd-class doctoral laureate at the age of 33 (in the exam in the year of Giáp Thìn, under the reign of Hồng Đức XV, 1484), the king conferred on him the royal family name Lê and gave him the title Tung. Lê Tung was promoted to the rank of Minister of Rites, was head of the diplomatic mission to the Ming court of China and also worked as Rector of the National University. He was a famous historian who wrote the General Introduction to the book *Complete History of Đại Việt*.

(title: *Đặc tiến kim tử vinh lộc đại phu thiếu bảo Lễ bộ thượng thư, Đông các đại học sĩ, Quốc Tử Giám tế tửu tri kinh diên sự Đôn Thư bá trụ quốc*).

Written on the stele by Ngô Ninh (title: *Triều liệt đại phu Trung thư giám Trung thư xá nhân tu thận doãn*).

Engraved by Nguyễn Huệ (title: *Lễ bộ tả thị lang hành kim quang môn đãi chiếu tri thượng bảo giám các cục sự*).

The stele was set up on the 15th of the 3rd lunar month under the reign of Hồng Thuận V (1513).

1st-class laureates, three persons:

- | | |
|------------------------|---|
| Hoàng Nghĩa Phú | - Chương Đức district, Ứng Thiên prefecture |
| Trần Bảo Tín | - Nghi Xuân district, Đức Quang prefecture |
| Vũ Duy Chu | - Sơn Minh district, Ứng Thiên prefecture |

2nd-class laureates, nine persons:

- | | |
|-------------------------|---|
| Bùi Doãn Hiệp | - Phù Vân district, Thường Tín prefecture |
| Nguyễn Hy Tái | - Đông Ngạn district, Từ Sơn prefecture |
| Lê Tư | - Đường An district, Thượng Hồng prefecture |
| Nguyễn Duy Tường | - Yên Lãng district, Tam Đôi prefecture |
| Mai Bang | - Quế Dương district, Từ Sơn prefecture |
| Đào Khắc Cần | - Thủy Đường district, Kinh Môn prefecture |
| Phan Chính Nghị | - Nghi Xuân district, Đức Quang prefecture |
| Phạm Vĩnh Toán | - Gia Phúc district, Hạ Hồng prefecture |
| Nguyễn Dục | - Tiên Du district, Từ Sơn prefecture |

3rd-class laureates, 35 persons:

- | | |
|--------------------|---|
| Trần Doãn | - Minh Bình Hà district |
| Lê Bá Khang | - Đông Sơn district, Thiệu Thiên prefecture |
| Thái Kính | - Thiên Lộc district, Đức Quang prefecture |
| Trần Bích | - Hoành Duy Tiên district, Lị Nhân prefecture |
| Ngô Sĩ Kiện | - Thanh Trì district, Thường Tín prefecture |
| Đào Xuân Vi | - Thanh Lâm district, Nam Sách prefecture |
| Dương Khải | - Vũ Ninh district, Từ Sơn prefecture |
| Đàm Sâm | - Văn Lãng district, Tam Đôi prefecture |

Nguyễn Ý	- Giao Thủy district, Thiên Trường prefecture
Kiều Văn Bá	- Phúc Lộc district, Quốc Oai prefecture
Nguyễn Quang	- Tiên Du district, Từ Sơn prefecture
Nguyễn Thị Khắc	- Lập Thạch district, Tam Đới prefecture
Ngô Cương Trung	- Yên Phú district, Từ Sơn prefecture
Trần Viết Thứ	- Thạch Hà district, Hà Hoa prefecture
Nguyễn Hữu Quan	- Lương Tài district, Thuận An prefecture
Nguyễn Huyền	- Thanh Oai district, Ứng Thiên prefecture
Nguyễn Vô Định	- Gia Định district, Thuận An prefecture
Nguyễn Bạt Tụy	- Lương Tài district, Thuận An prefecture
Ngô Đình Trực	- Đông Ngạn district, Từ Sơn prefecture
Phạm Nguyên	- Đường An district, Thượng Hồng prefecture
Tạ Đình Huy	- Duy Tiên ¹ district, Lị Nhân prefecture
La Thế Nghiệp	- Thuận Hựu district, Hà Trung prefecture
Đào Trung Hòa	- Lương Tài district, Thuận An prefecture
Đoàn Văn Thông	- Quảng Đức district, Phụng Thiên prefecture
Nguyễn Thái Hoa	- Thanh Lâm district, Nam Sách prefecture
Quách Thu Ứng	- Tiên Lữ district, Khoái Châu prefecture
Nguyễn Tuệ	- Thanh Oai district, Ứng Thiên prefecture
Nguyễn Mậu Thuật	- Chí Linh district, Nam Sách prefecture
Nguyễn Thu	- Thiện Tài district, Thuận An prefecture
Lê Vô Cương	- Yên Lãng district, Tam Đới prefecture
Nguyễn Văn Đàm	- Kim Thành district, Kinh Môn prefecture
Vũ Phi Hổ	- Hoàn Hô district, Hải Đông prefecture
Lương Đức Mậu	- Đường Hào district, Thượng Hồng prefecture
Nguyễn Mạo	- Kim Bảng district, Lị Nhân prefecture
Nguyễn Kiều	- Đông Yên district, Khoái Châu prefecture

¹ Known in the early Lê dynasty as Thanh Đàm district, its name was changed to Thanh Trì district during the reign of Lê Duy Đàm (1573-1600). Today it is the Thanh Trì district of Hà Nội.

Royal exam in the year of **Kỷ Sửu** Reign title: **MINH ĐỨC III (1529)**



His Majesty has been on the throne for three years now. A new period of civilization has begun. This large royal exam drew 4,000 Confucian scholars, who came to the capital singing the *Lộc minh* poem, ready to compete with one another. Twenty seven candidates passed the first round.

On the 18th day of the 2nd lunar month, His Majesty sat on the Palace verandah and set the topic for the required essay about the fundamentals of governance. Duke Mạc Kim Phiêu (title: *Thái bảo Diêm quốc công*) was appointed as Chief Examiner. Minister of Military Affairs Marquis Mạc Ninh Chỉ (title: *Binh bộ thượng thư Khánh Khê hầu*) and other concerned mandarins took charge of related services for the exam.

On the following day the examiners, Minister of Rites and academician Count Nguyễn Thanh (title: *Lễ bộ thượng thư Đông các đại học sĩ Văn Đàm bá*) and Minister of the Mandarinate and Rector of National University Count Đinh Trinh (title: *Lại bộ thượng thư Quốc tử Giám tế tửu Bình Lễ bá*) submitted the exam papers to His Majesty. The laureates were rated as follows:

1st-class laureates: Đỗ Tông and two other persons

2nd-class laureates: Nguyễn Văn Quang and seven other persons

3rd-class laureates: Nguyễn Hữu Hoán and 15 other persons

On the 24th day His Majesty sat in Kính Thiên Palace and ordered the names of the laureates to be announced by mega-

phone. The Ministry of the Mandarinate granted them honors. The Ministry of Rites had the Golden Board inscribed with their names and hung in front of the Thái Học (Great Learning) House. The laureates were also presented with different sums of money according to their ratings. On the 27th day they received from His Majesty ceremonial costumes and hats. On the 28th day they were invited to a Royal Banquet held at the Ministry of Rites. On the 7th day of the 3rd lunar month they were again presented with money and then escorted back to their native villages.

Furthermore, His Majesty ordered the Ministry of Public Affairs to prepare a stone stele and ordered some mandarins to compose a text for inscription.

Thus, while complementing our system of Confucian education, we respectfully present the following text:

When the primordial vitality of a nation reaches a state of harmony, brilliant men will emerge. It is not by chance that clear-sighted monarchs meet virtuous and talented subjects; such meetings are predestined and result from communion between the concerned parties and the universe. The idea of organizing exams to search for talented men was born during the reign of Hữu Ngu¹ after his consultation with the *nhạc mục* mandarin. The procedures for talent-seeking exams were elaborated during the reign of Thành Chu. The Han and Sung (in China) and all the clear-sighted kings of Việt Nam have made Court exams the ladder for men of talent to climb in pursuit of their careers.

Concerning our present dynasty, we think that the Great Saint²

1 King Shun in China.

2 Mạc Đăng Dung (reign title: Minh Đức III, 1527-1529)

has more innate goodness than ordinary men. He seized the opportunity to pacify the country by military means. He has promoted education in order to cultivate talent. He has repaired schools in order to nurture people who are eager to acquire knowledge, he has issued regulations on education to ensure order in this field and to highlight humanity, and he has renovated the format of the royal exams. As a result, the procedures for royal exams and for favor-granting are now clearer and more complete.

Confucian scholars are indeed fortunate to have a clear-sighted king, to benefit from the fine education system of our country, to be listed as heroes and to enjoy the favors bestowed on them as royal exam winners, such as the procession to escort them back to their native villages or the immortalization of their names on stone stelae. So they should be grateful to His Majesty for his favors and devoted in their work, as well as maintaining high moral standards by persistently cultivating loyalty, uprightness and honesty and carrying out great causes. Let them follow such examples as Lã Văn Dươg, who contributed much to ensuring good governance, peace, prosperity during his time, thanks to his perseverance with the right path in self-perfection; or Hàn Ngự Công, whose good advice to the king contributed to the peace and stability of the nation. Such men deserve to be praised as genuine royal exam laureates. Becoming like them, our laureates will not betray His Majesty's efforts to institute the regime of royal exams, nor will they fail to avail themselves of what they have learned. Furthermore, their brilliant careers and great causes will make this stone stele radiant.

If among them there are persons who fail to match their fame with their real capacities or who degrade themselves in

morality and action, or who behave in a way which is contrary to what they have been taught, such persons will dishonor our system of education and examinations and this stone stele alike. Doctoral laureates must always warn themselves of such possible outcomes.

Alah! The law of the universe is present inside everybody and can readily be perceived. Saintly teachings conveyed to commoners will become clearer over time. This stone stele standing at the Thái Học (Great Learning) House is designed to demonstrate His Majesty's admiration for Confucian doctrine, for highlighting the Court's great regard for education in the first days of its existence. It is also intended to inspire people and nurture the mettle of Confucian scholars, enabling them to live up to the current requirements of the education system. When gathering here to read this stele, future Confucian students will definitely be inspired by it; they will draw encouragement from the system of royal exams and try their utmost - in gratitude for His Majesty's favors - to contribute to the task of keeping the nation prosperous for ever and the country stable for thousands of years. In this respect, the benefits of this stone stele are by no means insignificant.

Composed by Minister of Rites and academician Duke Nguyễn Thì Ung (title: *Đồng đức công thần đặc tiến kim tử vinh lộc đại phu Lễ bộ thượng thư thái tử thái bảo đông các đại học sĩ thiếu bảo Thông quận công thượng trụ quốc*) and by Nguyễn Cư Nhân¹ (title: *Phụng trực đại phu đông các hiệu thư tư chính thượng khanh*).

¹ Native of Ông Lâu commune, Thiên Tài district (now Ông Lâu commune, Phú Lương commune, Gia Lương district, Bắc Ninh province). He resided in Lương Xá commune (now Lương Xá hamlet, Phú Lương commune of the same district). He became a doctoral laureate of the royal exam held in 1518 (reign title: Quang Thiệu III, the year of Mậu Dần), under the reign of Lê Chiêu Tông. He was promoted to the Mạc court to the rank of Minister and was President of the Academy.

Written on the stele by Nguyễn Ngạn Chiêu (title: *Thông chương đại phu Trung thư giám chính tự tư chính khanh*).

Engraved by Nguyễn Tấn (title: *Thông chương đại phu kim quang môn dãi chiếu tư chính khanh*).

This stele was set up in the winter solstice of the year of Kỷ Sửu (12th lunar month of 1529; reign title Minh Đức III).

1st-class laureates, three persons:

- Đỗ Tổng** - Lại Ốc commune, Văn Giang district
- Nguyễn Hăng** - Vũ Lăng commune, Thượng Phúc district
- Nguyễn Văn Huy** - Vĩnh Cầu commune, Đông Ngạn district

2nd-class laureates, eight persons:

- Nguyễn Văn Quang** - Bình Sơn commune, Đông Ngạn district
- Trần Thụy** - Ngọc Bộ commune, Thái Bình district
- Phạm Huy** - Mặc Khê commune, Thanh Lâm district
- Đặng Lương Tá** - Đặng Xá commune, Thạch Thất district
- Nguyễn Hoảng** - Đức Thắng commune, Hiệp Hòa district
- Nguyễn Doãn Dịch** - Hoàng Vân commune, Hiệp Hòa district
- Phí Thạc** - Hương Ngải commune, Thạch Thất district
- Nguyễn Chiêu Khánh** - Yên Sở commune, Đan Phượng district

3rd-class laureates, 16 persons:

- Nguyễn Hữu Hoán** - Xuân Áng commune, Quang Phúc district¹
- Nguyễn Dịch Giáo** - Thượng Cốc commune, Gia Lộc district
- Lê Thực** - Ngọc Bộ commune, Văn Giang district
- Hoàng Khắc Thận** - Đại Lý commune, Thuận Lộc district
- Lê Tảo** - Phúc Khê commune, Từ Liêm district
- Nguyễn Quý Lương** - Địa Linh commune, Phụ Dực district
- Nguyễn Đức Ký** - Đan Nhiễm commune, Văn Giang district
- An Khí Sử** - Nhĩ Độ commune, Nam Xương district
- Vũ Ngung** - Đoàn Lâm commune, Gia Lộc district

¹ In fact it was Tiên Phúc district which came into being in the years of the Hoàng Định reign (1600- 1619); by mistake during the engraving the ideogram Tiên became the ideogram Quang.

Chu Tam Dị	- Phù Lưu commune, Đông Ngạn district
Phan Tế	- Nguyễn Xá commune, Thạch Thất district
Đinh Thụy	- Tùng Quan commune, Đông Yên district
Phạm Kinh Bang	- Thị Trung commune, Thanh Oai district
Lương Nhượng	- Nội Trà commune, Yên Phong district
Nguyễn Dương	- Trà Lâm commune, Siêu Loại district
Nguyễn Quang Tán	- Vọng Nguyệt commune, Yên Phong district

Special royal exam in the year of Giáp Dần Reign title: THUẬN BÌNH VI (1554)



oyal exams for the selection of mandarins are the procedures established by monarchs who want intelligence-based governance. Broad utilization of virtuous and talented men is a policy that has been followed consistently since ancient times.

I think that the Emperor Trung Tông Vũ of our dynasty had great intelligence, virtue and humanity. He had a profound hatred for the Mạc usurpers who had revolted against the established regime. So he always sought the help of talented subjects to support his cause. Thus, with the support of Thế Tổ Minh Khang Thái vương¹, he showed his heroic spirit, drawing up a scheme to recover the throne. At that time valiant generals and commanders on the front were numerous, while close advisors and strategists at headquarters were few.

In the year of Giáp Dần (reign title: Thuận Bình VI), the Emperor instituted a special type of royal exam (*Chế khoa*). He himself set the topic for exam papers, which was centered on the fundamentals of governance, past and present. Various mandarins were appointed as Chief Judge, Secondary Judge and Supervisors, and together they selected 13 winners from amongst the exam participants. According to His Majesty's rating, Đinh Bạt Tụy and four other people became the 1st-class laureates and Chu Quang Trứ and seven other persons became the 2nd-class laureates. His

¹ See appendix

Majesty bestowed on them ceremonial costumes and treated them to a Royal Banquet. All the laureates proved to be adept in politics. They joined the common effort to devise policies and strategies for governance. Myriads of men of talent emerged, enough to service several dynasties.

Nowadays, His Majesty shows his concern about everything. Yet, topping the list of his concerns is the question of how to recruit men of virtue and talent for the task of governance. He is supported by Thanh vương¹ (title: *Đại nguyên suý thống quốc chính thượng phụ*) in restoring the regime and developing legislation. Tây Định vương² (title: *Nguyên suý Chưởng quốc chính*) has been appointed as Prime Minister and he manages the Court and takes charge of external affairs. Mandarins of virtue and talent are as numerous as the gathering clouds. A royal examination is held every three years. As our dynasty is now experiencing a period of prosperity, many mandarins are selected from the royal exams.

Deeply aware of the exploits, causes and achievements of brilliant men from the past, His Majesty³ wishes to immortalize their names on a stone stele. Therefore he has ordered us, members of the Royal Academy, to compose a text for inscription on it.

1 Trịnh Tráng was conferred this title by King Lê Thần Tông in 1629. In the 6th month of the reign title of Minh Mạng XXI (July 1840), Minh Mạng ordered that all of the titles of the Trịnh lords must be erased from all inscriptions. Nowadays, we can see such erasures on the stone stelae at the Temple of Literature, which date back to the Restored Lê dynasty. Exceptions are the titles of Trịnh Kiểm (Minh Khang đại vương, Minh Khang thái vương) and Trịnh Tùng (Thành Tổ Triết vương) because these lords had lived before conflict between the Trịnh (in the north) and the Nguyễn (in the south) broke out officially with the first operation in 1627 against the Nguyễn, led by Trịnh Tráng.

2 See appendix

3 King Lê Thần Tông; 21 stone stelae were established during the reigns of Lê Thần Tông and Lord Trịnh Tráng.

We respectfully present the following text:

Everything created by Heaven and Earth relies on the four seasons to grow. Any monarch who wants to keep the peace everywhere must rely on many men of virtue and talent for governance. Such brilliant people can be found only through contests.

We think that the founder-Emperor of our dynasty, Thái Tổ Cao, availed himself of the opportunities offered by time and relied on humanity in the exercise of military affairs. He tried his utmost to keep the peace across the nation, to win the hearts of intelligent and talented men, and recorded great achievements for posterity.

Continuing the cause of his ancestors, the Emperor Trung Tông Vũ restored and developed the dynasty. Out of his respect for Confucian doctrine, he established the first examination in the period of national renaissance.

The Emperors Anh Tông Tuấn and Thế Tông Nghị followed established regulations and also introduced the special royal exam (*Chế khoa*). Great men, great Confucian scholars and mandarins all started their career by taking this exam. Their causes and merits were so magnificent that they can hardly be recorded in full. Even today they command the admiration of many people.

In general, mandarins always dwell on loyalty and justice, always trying their best to foster in themselves righteousness, honesty and industriousness. They seek to remain loyal and devoted doctoral laureates and to be highly-valued noblemen, so that they are not ashamed when comparing their present conduct to past examples of perfect morality. However, there may be some mandarins who have the “outward appearance of gems” but turn out to be “stones”, or who “speak with the voice of the phoenix but are covered with the feathers of the hawk”, or who are

wicked cowards or toadies insensible to the reproaches of posterity.

So this stone stele is expected to stand steady for thousands of years. The public will judge the rights and wrongs. We should be cautious about this.

Edited by Minister of Rites and academician Duke Dương Trí Trạch (title: *Dục vận tán trị công thần đặc tiến kim tử vinh lộc đại phu Lễ bộ thượng thư kiêm Hàn lâm viện thị giảng tham chương Hàn lâm viện sự Bạt quận công thượng trụ quốc*).

Composed by academician Nguyễn Đăng Cảo (title: *Hàn lâm viện đãi chế*).

Written on the stele by Đỗ Soạn (title: *Trung thư giám hoa văn học sinh*) from Thái Lạc commune, Văn Giang district.

Engraved by Đỗ Công Vị (title: *Trung thư giám hoa văn học sinh*) from Thịnh Quang ward, Quảng Đức district.

This stele was set up on the 16th day of the 11th lunar month of 1653, under the reign title of Thịnh Đức I.

1st-class laureates, five persons:

- Đinh Bạt Tụy** - Bùi Khổng commune, Hưng Nguyên district
- Nguyễn Văn Nghi** - Ngọc Bôi commune, Đông Sơn district
- Nguyễn Sư Lô** - Bọt Thái commune, Hoàng Hóa district
- Phan Tất Thông** - Hạ Thành commune, Đông Thành district
- Đỗ Danh Đại** - Cổ Đôi commune, Nông Cống district

2nd-class laureates, eight persons:

- Chu Quang Trứ** - Nam Hoa Thượng commune, Thanh Chương district

1 Nguyễn Đăng Cảo (1619-?) came from Hoài Bảo commune, Tiên Du district (now Hoài Bảo hamlet, Liên Bảo commune, Tiên Du district, Bắc Ninh province). At the age of 28 he became 1st-class laureate (3rd grade) in the court exam of 1646 during the reign of King Lê Chân Tông (reign title: Phúc Thái IV). He later became 1st laureate of the Đông Các contest. In 1659 he was promoted to the rank of Đông các đại học sĩ. However, he was removed from this post after three years for displeasing the court.

Nguyễn Chiêu	- Yên Việt Thượng commune, La Sơn district
Lê Văn Hiếu	- Châu Tuyết commune, Nông Cống district
Biện Hoàn	- Hoa Duệ commune, Kỳ Hoa district
Nguyễn Công Dự	- Văn Lâm commune, Quảng Xương district
Vũ Hoán	- Hồng Khê commune, Duy Tiên district
Nguyễn Sần	- Dịch Vọng commune, Từ Liêm district
Nguyễn Đức	- Nỗ Bạ commune, Thanh Trì district

Royal exam in the year of Nhâm Thìn

Reign title: QUANG HUNG XV (1592)



Heaven has entered a period of renaissance and civilization has assured its reign over the universe.

I respectfully think that the clear-sighted Emperor Thế Tông Nghi, by Heaven's mandate, made great efforts to bring prosperity to the nation, to improve politics, to maintain social order and to hold men of virtue and talent in great esteem, and during his reign many great achievements were recorded. Thành Tổ Triết vương¹ and Minh Khang Thái vương² wholeheartedly supported the royal dynasty in governance. They urged His Majesty to look for men of virtue and talent. Thus, when in Thanh Hóa³, His Majesty organized one exceptional royal exam (*Chế khoa*) and six civil mandarin exams (*Tiến sĩ*). The exam recorded on this stele was the fourth of the six civil mandarin exams. It was held in the spring of the year of Nhâm Thìn, under the reign title of Quang Hung XV, attracting Confucian scholars from across the nation. The names of the laureates were reported to His Majesty.

In the final round of the exam, held in the courtyard of the Royal Palace, His Majesty sat on the verandah of the palace and set the topic for the required essay. He also appointed the Chief Examiner, Secondary Examiner and Supervisors. He read carefully all the essays and rated the successful candidates. Thus, Trịnh Cảnh Thụy and Ngô Trí Hòa became a doctoral laureates of the 2nd class, and Ngô Trí Tri became a doctoral laureate of

1, 2 See appendix.

3 The native land of the Lê kings.

the 3rd class. Their names were announced by megaphone and a Golden Board posted at the Thái Học (Great Learning) House by mandarins from the Ministry of Rites so that other Confucian students would be aware of the results. His Majesty then bestowed on the laureates dignities to distinguish them from commoners, and ceremonial costumes to glorify them; they were treated to a Royal Banquet in the Quỳnh Lâm Royal Garden at His Majesty's favor, and were granted a wooden decorated board inscribed with their names for the processions escorting them home. Thus, the Master's Doctrine was revitalized and the Confucian forest became green again. Confucian students and the population of the capital city crowded around to admire the laureates; everyone felt very happy to live in peace and prosperity under this dynasty. There was also a good omen for prosperous times ahead: amongst the successful candidates were a father and his son¹.

The laureates of this examination are all learned and talented people. They have contributed to politics in different ways, including the development of good strategies for the Court or the creation of beautiful literary works. They have helped to "make the sun and the moon shine" again, enabling His Majesty to shower his benevolence on commoners, and contributing to the great cause of national renaissance. Thanks to their efforts, the Mạc usurpers have been defeated and the citadel has been retaken. Spring reigns again over the universe and the nation has been reunited. The merits of these laureates are remarkable, and there should be a stone stele to record them. So it is time for us to complete what was started by the previous kings as a manifestation of the high esteem afforded to education and civilization.

1 Ngô Trí Tri and Ngô Trí Hòa.

Alah! His Majesty¹ is a clear-sighted monarch of the same virtue as King Shun². He persistently follows the right path when inviting men of virtue and talent to take part in his governance. His Majesty is assisted by Thanh vương³ (title in 1629: *Đại nguyên súy thống quốc chính sư phụ*), who has pacified the country, and by Tây Định vương⁴ (title in 1652: *Nguyên súy Chuông quốc chính*), who leads the Court in the conduct of State affairs. All royal subjects, both military and civil, offer their wholehearted assistance. Therefore all goes smoothly. Talented people discovered through the royal exams have been appointed to various different positions. The Court is abundant in sages.

In the sunshine they hail His Majesty and express their great loyalty to him. This is a miracle because it is the Saintly Doctrine which has formed, educated and nurtured such mandarins. Yet, there are specific methods of “forming” and “nurturing” talented people. Though dependent on the times, civil mandarin exams are held according to set procedures in order to identify men of talent, and stone stelae are set up to inscribe their names and afford them fame and fortune. The establishment of stone stelae testifies to the existence of legislation concerning this practice under our dynasty. However, after the throne was taken back by His Majesty, this old practice was not restored immediately. Consequently there was a period in which there were no stone stelae. So how did we highlight the importance of Confucian exams as embellishment for the present and encouragement for the future? His Majesty ordered the names of the laureates of this exam to be inscribed on a stele of good stone, with a text written by me. Now, such a stele has already been set up

1 King Lê Thần Tông.

2 In ancient China.

3, 4 See appendix

at the entrance to the Thái Học (Great Learning) House, which is designed to promote the achievements of our regime.

We are rustic and shallow and do not have enough words to present such a great cause. Yet, we think that His Majesty has granted favors to men of talent, thus demonstrating his concern for Confucian education and ethics and determination to implement fine practices and rules as examples for future generations to follow. We all feel extremely grateful to Him and happy to carry out His Golden Edict. We respectfully submit to His Majesty the following text for inscription.

Royal exams have been introduced by His Majesty to recruit talented people, not as a mere formality. Candidates for such exams should wish to be promoted to different positions in their career but not to seek fame and fortune. This is because the politics of a State cannot be established without men of talent. Meanwhile, talented people cannot be promoted without examinations. During the Thành Chu reign, it was a practice to recruit men of virtue and talent through written recommendations. Hence, the practice of seeking recommended men. During the Tang and Sung dynasties the royal exam was labeled as the “Tiger and Dragon Board” or the “Contest of Military and Literary Generals”. Thus, all clear-sighted and ingenious monarchs in the past relied chiefly on talented people when they wanted to establish a reign based on intelligence. Consequently, great importance was always attached to court exams. And in general, ambitious Confucian students and men of letters who aspire to have their fame immortalized all start their career by taking royal exams. The reasons why royal exams are held are obvious.

Regarding our present dynasty, the founder-kings tried their best to establish the regime and preserve their achievements; they

were concerned about how to recruit men of talent, so they introduced the procedures for *Tiến sĩ* (doctoral laureate) exams and instituted the practice of inscribing the names of laureates on stone stelae as “mirrors or divination turtles” for hundreds of generations and as standards for thousands of generations to live by. These kings were very far-sighted.

Since the restoration of the dynasty, royal exams have been held regularly. Now it is time to set up stone stelae in order to record the names of the laureates.

We respectfully think that His Majesty has restored and developed the dynasty. While attaching importance to Confucian education, he has introduced incentives whose effect is as miraculous as natural phenomena such as thunder and lightning, and has instituted royal exams like workshops for forging gifted men. In the past there were swift-shaped towers for inscribing the names of royal exam laureates. Nowadays, His Majesty uses stone stelae resting on stone tortoises for the same purpose. Obviously, His Majesty also has a high regard for the method of discovering talents through exams and exposing the “glow of phoenix feathers” by means of stone stelae set up in the compound of National University for the Training of Royal Mandarin (*Quốc Tử Giám*). His respect for Confucianism seems to be more than in the old times. The persons whose names are found on this stele are so lucky and so glorious.

Let's consider the participants in this royal exam who have become great mandarins. There was a father and his son¹ who sat for the exam at the same time, just like Trọng Yêm and his son

¹ Ngô Trí Tri and Ngô Trí Hòa.

Thuần Nhân¹, who sat for the exam at the same time; there are subjects loyal to the king like Tắc, Khiết, Dao and Quì²; and there are learned and erudite persons who can be regarded as “the *thi* grass and tortoise shells”³. Some candidates have now become the “stone pillars” of the Court, thanks to their bravery and dauntlessness; they have gained fame far and wide for their brilliant exploits and this fame will now be immortalized.

However, sometimes there are laureates who fail to match their fame through their deeds; on the outside they look like gems, but in fact they turn out to be ordinary stones; their actions are contrary to what they have learned; what one sees in them is at variance with their supposed good reputation. In such cases, the answer to the question of whether or not they are truly men of virtue and talent, whether or not they are righteous, and whether or not they are wrongdoers, is totally clear. How can scratches on a gem be concealed? Consequently, how can such people avoid the long-lived criticisms of the public?

Clearly, this stone stele has many purposes. Good people will find it a source of inspiration to themselves, whereas evil people can draw from it useful lessons. The stele is also a judgement about the past and advice for posterity; it will be an instrument for ethically training Confucian scholars and mandarins over hundreds of thousands of years to come, so that our nation can develop sustainably through time. In this sense His Majesty’s action is not casual. Those who happen to read this stele must grasp its profound meaning.

1 Under the Sung dynasty.

2 Under the reign of the Yu-Shun kings in China.

3 Objects used for divination and cited as allusions to good teachers.

Edited by academician and Minister of Rites Duke Dương Trí Trạch (title: *Dực vận tán trị công thần đặc tiến kim tử vinh lộc đại phu Lễ bộ thượng thư, Hàn lâm viện thị giảng tham chương Hàn lâm viện sự Bạt quận công thượng trụ quốc*).

Composed by academician Nguyễn Văn Lễ¹ (title: *Quang tiến thân lộc đại phu Hàn lâm viện hiệu lý Lao Giang nam*).

Written on the stele by Nguyễn Tuấn Đắc (title: *Đặc tiến kim tử vinh lộc đại phu Trung thư giám điển thư Gia Thụy tử*) from Thụy Khuê, Từ Liêm district, Quốc Oai prefecture.

Engraved by Nguyễn Quang Độ (title: *Quang tiến thân lộc đại phu kim quang môn đãi chiếu kiêm triện thích thái thừa Quế Lan nam*).

The stele was erected on the 16th day of the 11th lunar month of the reign of Thịnh Đức I (1653).

2nd-class laureates, two persons:

Trịnh Cảnh Thụy - Chân Bái commune, Yên Định district

Ngô Trí Hòa - Lý Trai commune, Đông Thành district

3rd-class laureates, one person:

Ngô Trí Tri - Lý Trai commune, Đông Thành district

¹ Nguyễn Văn Lễ (1605-?) came from Dương Trai commune, Hương Sơn district, Hà Tĩnh province. He won the title of 2nd-class doctoral laureate in the exam held in 1650 (the year of Canh Dần, reign title: Khánh Đức II) when he was already 46 years old. Under the reign of King Lê Chân Tông he was Vice Minister of Justice (1665, title: Lao Giang nam); then he became Vice Minister of the Interior (1669, title: Lao Giang tử). He is the author of the texts for the stone stelae for the royal exams held in 1592, 1595, 1604 and 1640).



Examination field where the interprovincial exam was held

Royal exam in the year of Nhâm Dần

Reign title: HOÀNG ĐỊNH III (1602)



It is because of Heaven's goodwill that talented people are born to serve this world. Royal exams have been introduced by kings to discover good men for the mandarin.

In my respectful opinion Emperor Kính Tông Huệ continued the great cause and merits of previous dynasties, ruling the State in a way which highlighted the great virtue of Heaven. During His reign Thành Tổ Triết vương¹ and Thế Tổ Minh Khang Thái vương² devotedly served the nation. The Court's activities were put in order and triennial royal exams were established to "cast nets to fish for talents".

On this occasion His Majesty ordered Duke Trịnh Đồng (title: *Thái phó Vĩnh quận công*) to be Chief Examiner; Minister of the Mandarin, Marquis Lê Trạc Tú (title: *Lại bộ thượng thư Văn Dươg hầu*) to be Secondary Examiner; and Vice Minister of the Interior, Count Phạm Văn Lan (title: *Hộ bộ tả thị lang Cẩm Xuyên bá*) to be Supervisor. Confucian students were summoned to the capital city for the exam and from among them 10 persons were successful.

After the final round of the exam, which was held in the courtyard of the Royal Palace, His Majesty rated the laureates as follows: Nguyễn Đăng and another person won the title of 2nd-class doctoral laureate; and Nguyễn Cung and seven other per-

1, 2 See appendix

sons became 3rd-class doctoral laureates. The favors granted to them were generous, although at that time it was not possible to erect a stone stele in their honor. The wishes of past kings can only be realised when Confucian doctrine is venerated by a clear-sighted monarch.

I respectfully believe that His Majesty is continuing the effort of his forebears; he favors literature and preserves tradition. With the help of Thanh vương¹ (title: *Đại nguyên suý thống quốc chính sư phụ*) in maintaining saintly virtues and peace, His Majesty authorized Tây Định vương² (title: *Nguyên suý Chương quốc chính*) to help him with the establishment of royal exams for the recruitment of mandarins. In this present golden age of literary development, talents are numerous. The Minister of Public Affairs has been ordered to set up a stele in their honor and we are requested to compose a text for inscription.

We dare not refuse on the grounds of our shallowness and rusticity, so we respectfully present the following text:

In governance, nothing is more important than talent. Yet, talent must be promoted through the holding of contests.

Royal exams for selecting doctoral laureates (*Tiến sĩ*) came into being under the dynasty of Thành Chu. The subsequent dynasties of Han, Tang and Sung all followed the established procedures. Clearly, the method of discovering talent has been in existence since ancient times.

In my respectful opinion, the Emperor-founder of our

1, 2 See appendix

dynasty, Thái Tổ Cao, displayed the military powers of a saint in defeating enemies and rebels. Hardly had he ascended from his war chariot when he set to work building the national education system in order to foster talent, a goal which formed the basis for the long-lasting peace and prosperity of the nation.

The Emperor Thái Tông Văn was an intelligent monarch who had the responsibilities of parenthood. He encouraged people to study and established the system of Confucianist exams. The Emperor Nhân Tông Tuyên respectfully rectified his shortcomings and pacified the country with justice and humanity. He restored social order and previously-established legislation. Thanks to his efforts, education was further promoted. The Emperor Thánh Tông Thuần continued the cause of his predecessors and became both ruler and teacher for population. He also promoted royal exams and as a result talented people emerged. He ordered that the names of laureates be written down in books or inscribed on stone stelae, that their merits be made radiant in historical records and that they be made examples for future generations to follow.

From reign to reign, successive kings perfected the established procedures. Despite vicissitudes, sometimes so grave that the dynasty was threatened with collapse, our nation managed to overcome hardships and was revitalized.

The Emperor Trang Tông Dụ had the foresight to consider the literati as support for his governance, and he too pursued a policy of bringing together men of talent and virtue. The Emperor Trung Tông Vũ followed his predecessors and further championed their cause, attaching great importance to the task of diffusing Confucian doctrine.

The brilliant and gallant Emperor Anh Tông Tuấn rallied his troops to quell an uprising. With the help of Thế Tổ Minh Khang Thái vương, he saved the day and restored peace. Motivated by the desire that his reign could continue to thrive, he upgraded the system of talent-seeking exams.

The Emperor Thế Tông Nghị re-established the dynasty, saved the people and pacified all four corners of the earth. He expanded the education system, displaying great consideration for skilled men and giving them prospects for promotion. With the help of Thành Tổ Triết vương in ruling the country and searching for talented people, he restored the *Tiến sĩ* (doctoral laureate) exams with a view to recruiting more supporters for his cause of national development. The sun and the moon once more shone with brilliance, the number of talented people mushroomed, and with great change came a veritable national renaissance.

The Emperor Kinh Tông Huệ inherited the ethos of his ancestors, so he also expanded the education system. Assisted wholeheartedly and ably by Thành Tổ Triết vương, he organised civil mandarin exams and introduced a broad recruitment procedure aimed at attracting talented and clever people. As a result, genuine Confucian scholars flocked to the Court, which very quickly became replete with men of talent and virtue, supporting the Emperor in the task of governing the country and maintaining the peace. Yet, having restored the peace the Emperor had no spare time to consider the setting up of stone stelae in honor of these individuals.

I respectfully think that His Majesty regards Confucian doctrine to be of paramount importance in the task of developing the nation. Thus he has ordered that the royal examinations must be

recorded on a stone stele in order to highlight the achievements and innate virtues of today's laureates for the encouragement of future generations.

However, persons whose names are recorded on this stele may either become loyal and righteous mandarins or degrade themselves. Their good deeds or wrong-doings will reflect either credit or discredit on this stele and will be subjected to public judgment for thousands of years.

The benefit of the stone stele is that in future it will be read in the context of what is known of the real lives of the laureates. Good examples can then be followed, whilst bad examples will be used as warnings to others.

Obviously, this stele is not merely a decoration. It is of great importance in the task of encouraging Confucian-educated people over a period of thousands of years, and strengthening the foundations of the nation.

Respectfully edited by Minister of Rites, academician, Duke Dương Trí Trạch (title: *Dực vận tán trị công thần đặc tiến kim tử vinh lộc đại phu Lễ bộ thượng thư, Hàn lâm viện thị giảng tham chương Hàn lâm viện sự Bạt quận công thượng trụ quốc*).

Composed by academician Khương Thế Hiền (title: *Hàn lâm viện đãi chế*).

Written on the stele by calligrapher Văn Nham tử Trần Xuân (title: *Đặc tiến kim tử vinh lộc đại phu Trung thư giám điển thư*) of La Chàng commune, Thiên Thi district, Khoái Châu prefecture).

Engraved by Nguyễn Quang Độ (title: *Quang tiến thân lộc đại phu kim quang môn đãi chiếu, triện thích thái thừa*).

This stele was erected on the 16th day of the 11th lunar month under the reign of Thịnh Đức I (1653).

2nd-class doctoral laureates, two persons:

- Nguyễn Đăng** - Đại Toán commune, Quế Dương district
Nguyễn Văn Lễ - Phúc Triền commune, Đông Sơn district

3rd-class doctoral laureates, eight persons:

- Nguyễn Cung** - Hà Liễu commune, Chí Linh district
Lê Dực - Châu Xuyết commune, Nông Cống district
Nguyễn Dung Triêm - Hạ Yên Quyết commune, Từ Liêm district
Nguyễn Nghiêu Thần - Đan Nhiễm commune, Văn Giang district
Nguyễn Hữu Tác - Nghiêm Xá commune, Thượng Phúc district
Bùi Văn Bưu - Nghiêm Xá commune, Thượng Phúc district
Nguyễn Chính - Thịnh Liệt commune, Thanh Trì district
Nguyễn Tự Cường - Tương Đăng commune, Thanh Lâm district

Royal exam in the year of Nhâm Thìn

Reign title: KHÁNH ĐỨC IV (1652)



n the spring of the year of Nhâm Thìn under the reign title of Khánh Đức IV, His Majesty issued an edict on the organisation of a royal exam at the Ministry of Rites for Confucian students across the nation. There were more than 2,000 participants. Having examined thoroughly their literary abilities, the responsible mandarins selected the winners of the first round: Nguyễn Đình Chính, Hồ Sĩ Dương and seven other persons.

On the 29th day of the 4th lunar month, they took part in the final round held in the courtyard of His Majesty's palace. His Majesty sat on the verandah of the palace and set the topic for the required essay. He appointed Duke Trịnh Tương (title: *Thiếu phó La quận công*) to be the Chief Examiner; and academician and Minister of Justice Duke Dương Trí Trạch (title: *Hình bộ thượng thư, Hàn lâm viện thị giảng tham chương Hàn lâm viện sự Bạt quận công*) and Vice Minister of the Mandarinate Marquis Nguyễn Quang Minh (title: *Lại bộ tả thị lang Mỹ Thọ hầu*) to be the Secondary Examiners. His Majesty also ordered Vice Minister of the Interior, Count Nguyễn Văn Trạc (title: *Hộ bộ hữu thị lang Diển Thọ bá*), Vice Minister of Rites, Count Nguyễn Sĩ Chính (title: *Lễ bộ thị lang Văn Phú bá*), and Vice Procurator Count Lê Kính (title: *Ngự sử đài phó đô ngự sử Diển Thọ bá*) to be the Supervisors. Some other mandarins were assigned to various tasks related to the exam.

The next morning the essays of the examinees were submitted to our clear-sighted Emperor who, after thorough consideration, rated the

laureates. Thus Phùng Viết Tu and another person became 2nd-class doctoral laureates; and Hồ Sĩ Dương and six other persons became 3rd-class doctoral laureates. The rating was decided shrewdly.

On the 8th day of the 5th lunar month, His Majesty sat at the entrance to Kính Thiên Palace, and by his order the names of the laureates were announced using a megaphone. All of the Court mandarins in ceremonial dress congratulated the laureates on their success. One mandarin from the Ministry of Rites, who was accompanied by an orchestra, carried the Golden Board with the laureates' names on it to the Thái Học (Great Learning) House for display. On the 3rd day of the 7th lunar month, the Ministry of the Mandarinate, on behalf of His Majesty, bestowed on the laureates honors and ceremonial costumes, and treated them to a Royal Banquet accompanied with music and songs. On the 10th day the doctoral laureates came to the Court to bid farewell to His Majesty before they were escorted home in a grand procession. Indeed, the Court did them a great honor.

Up to now stone stelae have been set up for the exams held from the year of Giáp Dần under the reign title of Thuận Bình in order to highlight the previous dynasty's codes of honor. On this occasion I am ordered by His Majesty to compose the inscription for the stone stele about the exam held in the year of Nhâm Thìn.

Realizing that I myself was one of the laureates of this exam and given my status in His Majesty's entourage; I dare not disobey His order on the grounds of my shallowness and rusticity. So, I respectfully present this text.

I often hear that a saintly emperor will undertake a great cause when he is assisted by brilliant subjects. Men of talent will display

their abilities when there are clear-sighted monarchs for them to serve. The meeting of a clear-sighted monarch with a distinguished subject is predestined; it cannot be accidental. Yet, men of talent and virtue, with no exception, have to start their career by taking exams. Let me cite some illustrations. During the Yu dynasty, which opened the gate of its citadel to welcome talented people, the first ideas of royal exams came into being. The Zhou dynasty developed the system of royal exams when selecting gifted men for promotion. The Han dynasty organized *Minh kinh* and *Hiền lương* exams. The Tang dynasty held *Hoành từ* and *Tiến sĩ* exams. All kinds of exams were organised for the purpose of discovering talents.

In my opinion, the sovereigns of our dynasty, when enthroned, all showed their respect for Confucian doctrine; they all “cast their nets to catch talents”. Thus, the procedures of royal exams have existed for many years. Of late the Court fell into disorder because of the usurpation by the Mạc. Fortunately, by Heaven’s mandate His Majesty has taken back the throne and the royal exams have been selected as one of the ways of ensuring a peaceful restoration. There are several types of exam, but the doctoral (*Tiến sĩ*) exam is the one most frequently organised.

I respectfully think that His Majesty, as the brilliant inheritor of the throne with the great wisdom of a saint, regards the recruitment of men for governance as an urgent need. So His Majesty decided to organize a large-scale royal exam in the year of Quý Hợi, i.e. four years after his enthronement, in the year of Kỷ Mùi. Unfortunately, turmoil prevented the exam from being held.

¹ This refers to the royal exam held in 1623 during the reign of King Lê Thần Tông and Lord Trịnh Tùng. A case of fraudulence was discovered shortly after the final round, so Lord Trịnh Tùng did not permit the names of the laureates to be published. Meanwhile Trịnh Xuân suddenly staged a coup d'état. Lord Trịnh Tùng escaped to the Thanh Xuân Pavilion and died there of sickness.

Ever since the year of Mậu Thìn, royal exams have been restored in accordance with the established rules, producing doctoral laureates of various classes and degrees. Just as the Thái hexagram in *I-Ching* (Book of Changes) says, “Picking the *alang* grass out of the ground, one gets its roots”¹, so many mandarins of great fame and dignity have launched their careers by taking the royal exams. And during His Majesty’s reign the number of mandarins originating from royal exams has been the highest ever. This achievement is attributed to the Thanh vương² (title: *Đại nguyên suý thống quốc chính sự phụ*). Fervently loyal to the nation, he has kept our kingdom in peace, devised a long-term policy of governance and led the dynasty to prosperity. Mention should be made also of Tây Định vương³ (title: *Nguyên suý Chương quốc chính*), who leads the Court in dealing with daily affairs; he has used military force to pacify the country and set up regulations on talent-seeking exams. This exam was the second to be held under the reign title of Khánh Đức.

The doctoral laureates of this exam have been granted great honors by the Court. Now, their names are recorded on a stone stele together with an inscription. We can say that the current mode of selecting talents and the current way of awarding and encouraging them are the most comprehensive ever. The procedures will serve as a fine and complete model for subsequent exams.

The Confucian court mandarins who were born during the reign of our clear-sighted Emperor and whose names have been engraved on stone stelae should realize the honor they have been granted. Yet, at the same time, they should also think how they can match their

1 Meaning that many talents can be discovered through a single exam.

2,3 See appendix.

dignities with their real capabilities, nurturing their honesty, uprightness, righteousness and loyalty. They should always seek to raise their moral standards and show devotion to their assigned duties. They should make use of their literary ability to contribute to Court policy and strategy; transform the knowledge they have gained from the Classics into benefits for commoners, and contribute good ideas which can strengthen the nation's sustainability. Let me cite some examples. In his capacity as Prime Minister, Phùng Huyền Linh led society to prosperity during the reign of Trịnh Quán of the Tang dynasty. With the help of Hàn Dũ, the Song dynasty kept the country as secure as Thái Sơn mountain. If you, doctoral laureates of this exam, follow such examples, you will never betray the Court's deep trust; your aspirations to use your knowledge to help the nation will be translated into reality; your fame and causes will be immortalized on bronze caldrons and urns, on silk and bamboo¹; you will look all the more brilliant on this stone stele. If any of you fails to match his actions with his title and thus degenerates from an honest and upright person into a corruptor, he will become a disgrace to the system of exam-based mandarin promotion. He will be a "scratch on a gem" and will be subjected to public criticism for thousands of years. Should this be regarded as a grave admonition?

The purpose of this stone stele set up at the Thái Học (Great Learning) House is not to demonstrate His Majesty's veneration for Confucianism or to boast about beautiful literary works. The stele is intended chiefly to encourage people, fostering the morale of the mandarins, and supporting education to the utmost.

Future Confucian students, when seeing and reading this stele, will be inspired to greater efforts to gain success in royal exams and

¹ Writing materials

to help His Majesty and the people so that our nation will be kept in peace, stability and prosperity for thousands of years.

Composed by academician Nguyễn Đình Chính (title: *Cẩn sự lang Hàn lâm viện hiệu thảo*) and edited by academician and Minister of Rites Duke Dương Trí Trạch (title: *Dực vận tán trị công thần đặc tiến kim tử vinh lộc đại phu Lễ bộ thượng thư, Hàn lâm viện thị giảng tham chương Hàn lâm viện sự Bạt quận công*). This stele was set up on the 16th day of the 11th lunar month under the reign of Thịnh Đức I (1653).

2nd-class laureates, two persons:

Phùng Viết Tu - Đình Luân commune, Gia Lâm district

Phạm Chất - An Bài commune, Đông Thành district

3rd-class laureates, seven persons:

Hồ Sĩ Dương - Hoàn Hậu commune, Quỳnh Lưu district

Nguyễn Văn Tín - Uông Hạ commune, Thanh Lâm district

Thân Toàn - Phương Đỗ commune, Yên Dũng district

Uông Nhuệ - Kim Lan commune, Cẩm Giàng district

Nguyễn Công Bật - Khang Cù commune, Tây Chân district

Nguyễn Đình Chính - Bát Quận commune, Quảng Xương district

Lê Đắc Toàn - Bình Hồ commune, La Sơn district

Written by Gia Thụy tử Nguyễn Tuấn Đặc (title: *Đặc tiến kim tử vinh lộc đại phu Trung thư giám điển thư*) from Thụy Hương commune, Từ Liêm district

Engraved by Quế Lan nam Nguyễn Quang Độ (title: *Quang tiến thân lộc đại phu kim quang môn đãi chiếu kiêm triện thích thái thừa*).

Royal exam in the year of Bính Thân

Reign title: THỊNH ĐỨC IV (1656)



Heaven has blessed our nation with a new period of renaissance and prosperity.

With the great mandate from Heaven, the Emperor Thân Tông Uyên continued to reign over this kingdom. With the support of Văn Tổ Nghị vương¹ he recorded great achievements and expanded his governance. He authorized the Viceroy (*Phó vương phủ*), a man of virtue, to improve the conduct of State affairs. Displaying his great interest in education and respect for Confucian doctrine, the Viceroy made efforts to develop the education system and to organize exams aimed at recruiting talented people in accordance with the established formalities. His Majesty sat on the throne for 15 years and five royal exams were held during his reign. The examination presented in this stele inscription was the third of those five exams. At that time the Khuê and Bích constellations shone brilliantly, and so did the talents of those participating.

The exam was held in the last month of Spring of the year of Bính Thân. It attracted no fewer than 3,000 participants, yet only six of them passed the first round.

On an auspicious day the six first-round winners were invited to the Royal Palace for the final round, in which they were required to write an essay before being assessed. The Emperor appointed the Chief Examiner, Secondary Examiner and

¹ See appendix

Supervisors. A mandarin was then ordered to read the essays aloud and the Emperor himself rated the winners. Nguyễn Đình Trù and five other examinees became 3rd-class doctoral laureates and their names were announced by megaphone and placed on a Golden Board hung in front of the Thái Học (Great Learning) House. The laureates were presented with ceremonial costumes, treated to a Royal Banquet and invited to visit the capital city on horses. After that they were solemnly escorted back to their home towns. The Court's favors were very generous. Yet until now no stone stele has been set up in their honor.

I respectfully think that in addition to inheriting the great cause of the predecessors, His Majesty¹ also shows great love for Confucianism. With the wholehearted assistance of An vương² (title: *Đại nguyên súy tổng quốc chính thượng sư*) he has recorded great achievements and promoted the doctrine of the Saint Master. His Majesty has visited the "Gate of Wisdom" at the National University for the Training of Royal Mandarins (*Quốc Tử Giám*) to consider the stone stelae established here during previous dynasties. Eager to restore this old practice, His Majesty has ordered the setting up of the 21 outstanding commemorative stone stelae. The Bính Thân royal exam is the first of the 21 examinations which will be commemorated in this way.

I am assigned with the task of composing a text for inscription. This is a great honor for me, so I dare not to refuse on the grounds of my shallowness. I respectfully present the text as follows:

Heaven gives us talented people. These talented people aspire

¹ King Lê Dụ Tông (1705-1729).

² See appendix

to meet clear-sighted monarchs who, in turn, seek out talented individuals with a view to putting them to work in governance in accordance with Heaven's wishes. The outcome of this situation depends on how talent-seeking procedures are implemented.

Since the practice of recommendation was abolished, the system of royal exams has been developed vigorously. Though government officials are recruited in many different ways, the royal examination is the only true means of identifying talent.

Our dynasty has presided over a new period of prosperity. Past emperors established procedures for selecting military generals, civil mandarins and other men of talent. Favors granted to them by the Court were generous and the formalities offered full opportunities for promotion. In this way, the Court's capacity to recruit people of excellence was greater than in the previous dynasties.

The royal examination in the year of Bính Thân produced six laureates who could rival past "Tiger" and "Dragon" men in ability. The top laureate was able to expound upon taught doctrines and promote the teachings of sages and Masters. The second laureate was able to contribute to designing policies and strategies and thus became the pillar of the Court. Some laureates were assigned the task of governing certain regions, while others were appointed as military commanders. Their exploits and good deeds are recorded in historical documents and have been praised by the people.

Today His Majesty has asked that their names and achievements be inscribed on stone stelae, so that future Confucian scholars can treasure our education system and grasp the significance of the talent-seeking exams. His Majesty's intentions are indeed profound.

When coming to this place of sages, people will be able to immerse themselves in the enlightenment of our dynasty by looking at these stone stelae and reading the inscriptions. They will try their best to equal the good examples and draw lessons for themselves from bad examples set forth here; and they will seek to perfect themselves according to the laureates' standards of morality, so that they too can contribute to the task of designing great strategies and policies, implementing His Majesty's legislation, ensuring peace and prosperity for the dynasty and reinforcing the foundations of the nation to guarantee stability for thousands of years. Given the significance of the stelae, the inscription of doctoral laureates' names on the stones has great implications for governance and civilization.

Composed by **Bùi Sĩ Tiêm**¹ (title: *Cẩn sự lang Hàn lâm viện hiệu lý*). Edited by academician **Duke Nguyễn Quý Đức** (title: *Tá lý công thần đặc tiến kim tử vinh lộc đại phu tham tụng Lại bộ thượng thư, Đông các đại học sĩ thiếu phó Liêm quận công*).

This stone stele was set up on the 2nd day of the 3rd lunar month of 1717 (reign title: **Vĩnh Thịnh XIII**).

3rd-class laureates, six persons:

Nguyễn Đình Tru - Nguyệt Áng commune, Thanh Trì district

Lê Vinh - An Hoạch commune, Đông Sơn district

Vũ Trác Lạc - Mộ Trạch commune, Đường An district

¹ **Bùi Sĩ Tiêm** (1690-?), native of Kinh Lũ commune, Đông Quan district (now Đông Hưng district, Thái Bình province). At the age of 26 he became the 2nd-class doctoral laureate in the royal exam held in the year of Ất Mùi, under King Lê Dụ Tông (reign title: **Vĩnh Thịnh XI**, 1715). He was promoted to the rank of *Thái thường tự khanh*. In February 1731 (reign title: **Vĩnh Khánh III**), in response to Lord Trịnh Giang's enquiry about current State affairs, **Bùi Sĩ Tiêm** submitted a 10-point petition which frankly criticised the corruption which had been undermining the Court. However, this irritated Lord Trịnh Giang and consequently **Bùi Sĩ Tiêm** was dismissed and forced to retire to his native land. After his death, during the Cảnh Hưng reign, Lord Trịnh Doanh restored his reputation and posthumously conferred on him the honour of Marquis. **Bùi Sĩ Tiêm** was the author of the stelae inscriptions for the royal exams held in 1656, 1670, 1700 and 1715.

Vũ Đăng Long - Mộ Trạch commune, Đường An district
Hoàng Đức Đôn - Mậu Tài commune, Phú Vinh district
Vũ Công Lượng - Mộ Trạch commune, Đường An district

Written on the stele by Nguyễn Đình Cẩn (title *Thị nội thư tả bộ binh phiên*).

Engraved by Nguyễn Đình Huy (title *Kim quang môn dãi chiếu triển thích thái thừa cần sự lang Quang Học điện tự thừa Liêu Tường nam*).

Royal exam in the year of Canh Thân

Reign title: VĨNH TRỊ V (1680)



Confucian education is very beneficial to the policy of governance, and so is the system of examinations which is designed to recruit talented people.

Concerning our dynasty, we think that the Emperor Hy Tông Chương was innately strong-willed and has seized excellent opportunities whenever they have arisen. He has been assisted by Hoàng Tổ Dương vương¹, who has improved the conduct of State affairs and carried out a policy of enlightenment for the common people as well as establishing a system of exams with the aim of searching for new talent. In the year of Canh Thân (under the reign title of Vĩnh Trị V), a royal exam (first round) was held for Confucian students. A Chief Examiner, Secondary Examiner and Supervisors were appointed for the exam, which involved 2,000 candidates. After the fourth part, Nguyễn Côn and 18 other persons were picked out. Then in the second round, which was held in the Royal Palace, the Emperor considered the exam papers and rated the laureates himself. Phạm Công Thiện and another individual became 2nd-class doctoral laureates (*tiến sĩ xuất thân*); and Nguyễn Côn and 16 other persons won the title 3rd-class doctoral laureate (*đồng tiến sĩ xuất thân*). Their names were announced using a megaphone and placed on a Golden Board hung by the Ministry of Rites at the entrance to the Thái Học (Great Learning) House. The laureates were granted ceremonial costumes and silver flowers, and invited to a Royal Banquet. The Emperor's favors were indeed generous.

¹ See appendix

These laureates were subsequently appointed to different posts according to their abilities. Their work benefited the nation at the time and has been beneficial up to this day.

Today His Majesty possesses a great inheritance from the past. He is assisted by An vương¹ (title: *Đại nguyên soái thống quốc chính sự thượng*) who follows the established rules and has boosted the king's reign, devotedly attending to all State affairs, particularly the continued promotion of Confucian doctrine. The Ministry of Public Affairs is assigned the task of setting up stone stelae for royal exams which have not yet been commemorated in this way, and we have been ordered to compose inscriptions for them.

We are the concerned persons who are required to perform the specified duties towards His Majesty. So we dare not disobey the Edict on the grounds of our shallowness. We respectfully present the following text.

Talent-seeking exams have a long history. Among them, the *Tiến sĩ* (royal doctoral laureate) exam has produced the most talented people. In our country of Việt, the Lý and Trần dynasties also established such exams as an instrument for their intelligence-based governance. However, for various reasons, royal exams were not held as regularly in those days as they have been under our dynasty.

In the early days of our dynasty, the founder-Emperor Thái Tổ Cao issued an Edict on the fostering of talent. Thereafter successive kings established royal exams in order to select civil mandarins. During the Thuận Bình, Gia Thái and Chính Trị reigns,

¹ See appendix

despite the turmoil in the country, special exams (*Chế khoa*) were held in order to identify brilliant people. From the start of the Quang Hung reign up to the present day, peace has reigned across the nation; the *Tiến sĩ* exam has been restored and is now held every three years according to established regulations and procedures. Numerous talented men have been discovered and their names are recorded in full in the book “Records of Exam Laureates” (*Đăng khoa lục*). However, the exams held since the year of Canh Thân are still without stone stelae. Today His Majesty is determined to promote education and civilization and eager to praise examples of good conduct. Thus he has ordered the setting up of stone stelae on which the names of royal exam laureates will be inscribed, designed for posterity to admire. What a wonderful practice! It demonstrates His Majesty’s respect for Confucian doctrine and his concern to continue embellishing it. Like decorations made from gold and gems, which can help enhance noble and brilliant features, the stone stelae are intended to glorify the past and illuminate the present.

Let’s have a look at the names of the doctoral laureates (*Tiến sĩ*) on this stele.

One would describe an upright *Tiến sĩ* like this: “This man is not ungrateful to His Majesty’s favors and does not betray what he has been taught.”

And one also would comment on a corrupt *Tiến sĩ* like this: “This man only discredits the royal exam and is a stain on the stone stele.”

Clearly, this stone stele is not intended for decoration. It will help perfect people’s personal qualities. In this regard, it is of great significance for education and civilization.

Composed by academician Nguyễn Nham (title: *Cẩn sự tá lang Hàn lâm viện hiệu thảo*).

Edited by Duke Nguyễn Quý Đức (title: *Tá lý công thần đặc tiến kim tử vinh lộc đại phu tham tụng Lại bộ thượng thư, Đông các đại học sĩ thiếu phó Liêm quân công*).

2nd-class laureates, two persons:

Phạm Công Thiện - Bảo Triện commune, Gia Định district

Nguyễn Công Thuộc - Thượng Yên Quyết commune, Từ Liêm district

3rd-class laureates, 17 persons:

Nguyễn Côn - Nguyễn Xá commune, Thạch Thất district

Hoàng Xuân Thì - Trường Cát commune, Nam Đường district

Nguyễn Hưng Công - Tiên Thành commune, Đông Thành district

Phạm Công Phương - Liêu Xuyên commune, Đường Hào district

Nguyễn Quang Thành - Thạch Cáp commune, Sơn Vi district

Nhữ Tiến Hiền - Hoạch Trạch commune, Đường An district

Nguyễn Công Phụ - Lễ Xuyên commune, Đông Ngạn district

Nguyễn Quang Thọ - Quảng Bá ward, Quảng Đức district

Thái Danh Nho - Hoa Phẩm commune, Nghi Xuân district

Trịnh Minh Lương - Chân Bái commune, Yên Định district

Đình Đình Thụy - Yên Khê commune, Yên Khang district

Nguyễn Tông - Nguyệt Viên commune, Hoàng Hóa district

Hà Công Luận - Phúc Khê commune, Thanh Lan district

Lê Sĩ Cẩn - Cổ Đồi commune, Nông Cống district

Phạm Hữu Dung - Ngọc Cục commune, Đường An district

Vũ Đình Thiệu - Mộ Trạch commune, Đường An district

Nguyễn Quang Lân - Yên Lãng commune, Yên Lãng district

Written on the stele by Trịnh Thế Khoa (title: *Thư tả công văn phiên*) from Hạ Thanh Oai commune, Thanh Oai district.



Doctor laureates' stelae at Văn Miếu - Quốc Tử Giám

Royal exam in the year of Ất Mùi

Reign title: VĨNH THỊNH XI (1715)



ur Great Emperor, with the Heavenly mandate to rule over Southern territory, has been on the throne for 11 years now, assisted wholeheartedly by An vương¹ (title: *Đại nguyên súy thống quốc chính thượng sư*).

In the spring of the year of Ất Mùi, the Ministry of Rites organized a royal exam for Confucian scholars in accordance with the set regulations. His Majesty ordered Duke Trịnh Thực to be the Chief Examiner (title: *Trung quân đô đốc phủ đô đốc Trạc quận công*), Count Nguyễn Đăng Liên (title: *Bồi tụng binh bộ thượng thư Thọ Lâm bá*) to be the Secondary Examiner, and Phạm Công Trạch (title: *Bồi tụng lễ bộ hữu thị lang*) and Nguyễn Đương Hồ (title: *Bồi tụng hình bộ hữu thị lang*) to be the Supervisors. Other mandarins were responsible for various exam-related services.

The first part of the exam was held on the 10th day of the 3rd lunar month, with 2,500 participants. After the fourth part, 20 excellent candidates were selected. The responsible mandarin wrote down their names on a board, which was then carried by military personnel on an elephant to the Quảng Văn Pavilion outside the Đại Hưng Gate. Confucian students thronged to this place, cheering loudly. They all expected that many men of talent would be discovered through the final exam.

The 20 winners of the fourth part of the exam gathered in the

¹ See appendix

courtyard of His Majesty's Palace on the 11th day of the 6th lunar month. His Majesty set the topic for the required essay about the fundamentals of State governance.

The next morning the Chief Examiner submitted the essays to the Emperor. His Majesty rated the winners: Bùi Sĩ Tiêm and Nguyễn Quý Ân became 2nd-class doctoral laureates; Phùng Bá Kỳ and 17 persons became 3rd-class doctoral laureates.

The names of the laureates were announced using a megaphone. Mandarins from the Ministry of Rites had the Golden Board hung on the gate of National University. Then His Majesty bestowed on the laureates ceremonial costumes and treated them to a Royal Banquet held in Quỳnh Hoa Royal Garden. His Majesty's favors for royal exam winners were as generous as those granted by the previous kings. Furthermore, he ordered the setting up of a stone stele inscribed with the names of the laureates, as stipulated by the regulations. What a great honor for the laureates!

To my great delight, I was ordered by His Majesty to compose a text for inscription on the stele. I dared not refuse on the grounds of my shallowness and rusticity, so I respectfully present the inscription as follows:

Trees grow luxuriantly where there are gemstones; springs have cool and transparent water if they contain pearls. A nation will prosper on a solid foundation if it has men of talent and virtue as numerous as trees in the forest. If a king has no means to foster, discover or select talented people, or to treat them with favors and justified rewards, he will be unable to rally talents, just like the ancient saying "When pulling the *alang* grass out of the

ground, we get its roots". How else could he have a Court crowded with talented and sagacious mandarins?

Let's recall the Yu dynasty, which was supported by pools of sages, or the Zhou dynasty, which was assisted by armies of talented people. The reason for the prosperity of those dynasties is obvious, and so is the fact that to date no subsequent dynasty has surpassed them.

In my opinion, our dynasty has been maintained by successive Great Emperors and has elaborated adequate laws and regulations. It is required that mandarins must be identified through exams; the strength of the nation must be based on the proper utilization of virtuous and talented people; good strategies and tactics must be carried out and their authors must be rewarded generously; virtuous elderly people should be granted favors; persons who try to perfect their standards of morality must be treasured. Obviously, through its policy of respecting sages and fostering talent, our dynasty has surpassed the ancient kings. Furthermore, it is only under this dynasty that the practice of setting up stone stelae to immortalize royal exam laureates has been established. What a wise way to encourage Confucian scholars and to promote civilization!

Alah! His Majesty devotedly promotes civilization and education, wholeheartedly respects Confucian scholars and highlights Confucian doctrine in an attempt to continue the cause of his predecessors. His Majesty realizes that good persons are the core of the nation, and men of talent and virtue constitute the foundations of the State; they are of importance to State governance so they should be nurtured. Therefore, His Majesty ordered stone stelae to be set up to record the names of the laureates of all the royal exams held up to now.

In such a context, the winners of this exam are lucky and should be even more delighted than their colleagues were in the past. They are obliged to keep themselves pure, upright and honest. Their position in the Court must be based on their righteousness and loyalty; their support for the sovereign must be based on virtue and humanity. By doing so they can achieve resounding fame and a distinguished career. Future generations will point to their names and praise their good deeds.

Yet, among the laureates there may be persons who fail to maintain their will and mettle; their words may be contrary to their deeds; they may be occupied only with the pursuit of money and titles, or with thoughts about gains and losses; they may pretend to be upright and honest, whilst inwardly they are cowardly and snobbish; they may act contrary to what they have learned. Once they have secured a good career, they may deviate from the right path to the extent that their reputation becomes damaged and their conduct is dispicable. People will always sneer at such individuals. The public will criticize them heavily for thousands of years. Should they be cautious about this?

Alah, stone stelae are not designed to please the eye of the public, but to convey advice for the sake of posterity. Clearly, their function has great importance for human civilization. Persons who look at them should grasp their underlying significance.

Composed by academician Bù Sĩ Tiêm¹ (title: *Cẩn sự lang Hàn lâm viện hiệu lý*).

Edited by Duke Nguyễn Quý Đức (title: *Tá lý công thân đặc tiến kim tử vinh lộc đại phu tham tụng Lại bộ thượng thư, Đông các*

¹ See the inscription for the royal exam held in 1656.

dại học sĩ thiếu phó Liêm quận công).

The stele was set up on the 2nd day of 3rd lunar month of reign Vĩnh Thịnh XIII (1717).

2nd-class laureates, two persons:

- Bùi Sĩ Tiêm** - Kinh Lũ commune, Đông Quan district
Nguyễn Quý Ân - Thiên Mỗ commune, Từ Liêm district

3rd-class laureates, 18 persons:

- Phùng Bá Kỳ** - Vĩnh Mỗ commune, Yên Lạc district
Nguyễn Nham - Phùng Xá commune, Thạch Thất district
Cao Dương Trạc - Phú Thị commune, Gia Lâm district
Đỗ Đình Thụy - Yên Lãng commune, Lôi Dương district
Dương Bật Trạc - Cổ Lễ commune, Nam Chân district
Ngô Nhân Hân - Cẩm Chương commune, Đông Ngạn district
Nguyễn Công Thái - Kim Lũ commune, Thanh Trì district
Nguyễn Tuyền - Mao Điền commune, Cẩm Giàng district
Nguyễn Đức Ánh - Phật Tích commune, Tiên Du district
Trần Ân Triêm - Yên Lâm commune, Yên Định district
Lương Lâm - Tào Sơn commune, Ngọc Sơn district
Lê Hoàn Viện - Bát Tràng commune, Gia Lâm district
Hoàng Đăng Xuân - Đại Lý commune, Thuận Lộc district
Đình Nguyên Hanh - Kim Lan commune, Gia Lâm district
Nguyễn Đình Quĩ - Nguyệt Áng commune, Thanh Trì district
Nguyễn Phùng Thì - Hoa Lâm commune, Nam Đường district
Nguyễn Kiều - Phú Xá commune, Từ Liêm district
Lê Cẩn - Nam Hoa Đông commune, Thanh Chương district

Written by Ngô Bảo (title: *Thị nội thư tả thủy binh phiên tướng sĩ lang phó sở sử*) of Gia Thị commune, Gia Lâm district.

Engraved by Nguyễn Đình Huy (title: *Kim quang môn đãi chiếu triện thích thái hàm tự thừa Liêu Tường nam*).

Royal exam in the year of Tân Sửu

Reign title: BẢO THÁI II (1721)



ig nets are cast” to catch excellent people in the forest of Confucian scholars. The names of royal exam laureates are engraved in stone to glorify Confucianism, but not for decorative purposes.

We respectfully think His Majesty has assumed his reign in accordance with Heaven’s mandate. He is assisted by An vương (title: *Đại nguyên súy thống quốc chính sự thượng thượng phụ uy minh nhân công thánh đức*¹), who makes a whole-hearted contribution to governance. Civilization has been promoted far and wide; Confucian students are numerous. Many education opportunities exist for people to reveal their abilities. And according to the established regulations, a royal exam is held every three years.

Thus, a royal exam (first round) was held in the 10th lunar month in the Winter of the year of Tân Sửu. Duke Trịnh Quế (title: *Phó tướng thiếu bảo Thự quận công*) was appointed as the Chief Examiner; Rector of the National University for the Training of Royal Mandarins (*Quốc Tử Giám*) Duke Trương Công Giai (title: *Bồi tụng Công bộ thượng thư kiêm Quốc Tử Giám tế tửu Lý quận công*) was appointed as the Secondary Examiner; Acting Vice Minister of the Mandarinate Marquis Phạm Khiêm Ích (title: *Bồi tụng Hình bộ hữu thị lang quyền Lại bộ hữu thị lang Thuật Phương hầu*) and Vice Procurator Marquis Nguyễn Huy Nhuận

¹ Title of Lord Trịnh Cương in 1720 (reign title: Vĩnh Thịnh XVI).

(title: *Ngự sử đài phó đô ngự sử Nghĩ Xuyên hầu*) were appointed as Supervisors. Other mandarins were assigned to a variety of different tasks relating to the exam.

About 3,000 candidates sat for the exam. Yet only 25 persons successfully passed the first round. The rules of the exam were elaborate and rigorous.

The second round was held the following month in the Royal Palace. The topic for the required essay was the fundamentals of governance. On the morning after the exam, the responsible mandarin submitted the essays to His Majesty who considered them carefully and rated the doctoral laureates. Thus, Ngô Sách Hân became a 1st-class doctoral laureate; Trương Thì and two other persons 2nd-class doctoral laureates; and Nguyễn Đức Đôn and 20 other persons 3rd-class doctoral laureates. Their names were announced to the public by megaphone and listed on a Golden Board hung by the Ministry of Rites in front of the Thái Học (Great Learning) House. People thronged to see the laureates, saying that the exam had been the most successful since the dynasty was restored.

The official ceremony in honor of the laureates was organized the following Spring. His Majesty granted them ceremonial costumes, invited them to a Royal Banquet to admire silver flowers, and presented them with bars of silver bullion. His Majesty also ordered houses to be built for them and conferred on them different titles according to their grades in the official rating. His Majesty's favors were indeed generous. Furthermore, He ordered that their names should be engraved on a stone stele set up at the National University. I was assigned with the task of composing a text for inscription.

I am lucky enough to have born under this dynasty. It is my duty to work with a pen-brush, so I dare not to disobey His Majesty's edict on the grounds of my shallowness. I respectfully present the following text.

Literature is a shared possession. Exams are the instrument used by the Court to select men of virtue and talent, and were invented in ancient times.

All of the well-known and prosperous dynasties of the past were supported by talented people, who began their careers by taking examinations. New regulations were later introduced to select excellent students via literary contests. Thus, the *Tiến sĩ* (doctoral laureate) exam was born. The talented men who achieved fame through such exams proved capable of using their knowledge to glorify their dynasties and illuminating the philosophy of life. Therefore, successive dynasties have set great store by the system of royal exams.

I respectfully think that Heaven has already blessed our nation with a new period of prosperity and the Khuê constellation has presided over the establishment of intelligence-based governance. Talented people are considered to be national treasures and an efficient system for identifying them has been established.

Since his enthronement His Majesty has concerned himself with ways to recruit virtuous and talented men. The regulations for awarding and promoting talented individuals are very precise and the honors granted to them are very generous. This demonstrates His Majesty's immense admiration for and encouragement of talent. The practice of inscribing the names of royal exam laureates on stone stelae is the means whereby existing procedures

are completed and fine traditions are highlighted as an example for future generations to follow.

The Confucian scholars whose names are recorded on this stone stele must preserve their dignity, remain deeply grateful for His Majesty's favors, and be loyal, honest and righteous when becoming Court mandarins. They must base their assistance to their sovereign on virtue and benevolence. Mandarins should bear in mind the words of this stone stele so that they strive to bring benefits to the population and to guarantee the people longterm and satisfying livelihoods. They must be dauntless when performing their duties as "stone pillars" for the dynasty. They must keep the kingdom as steadfast as Thái Sơn Mountain. If they can achieve this, their good reputation and merits will live for ever from generation to generation.

Among them there may be persons who degrade themselves or whose capacities fail to match their reputation. These individuals will be regarded as "stones" rather than "gold"; their shortcomings can hardly avoid rigorous public criticism which may last for thousands of years. In this regard, this stone stele is designed for both glorification and warning; its benefits to civilization and our way of life are great indeed.

Composed by academician Đoàn Bá Dung¹ (title: *Hoàng tín đại phu Hàn lâm viện thị độc tri thị nội thư tả hộ phiên*).

Edited by academician Hồng Hạo (title: *Hiển cung đại phu Đông các học sĩ*).

¹ Đoàn Bá Dung or Đoàn Quang Dung (1681-?), native of Phú Thị commune, Gia Lâm district (now Gia Lâm district of Hà Nội). He won the title of doctoral laureate at the royal exam held in the year of Canh Dần (1710, Vĩnh Thịnh VI). He was promoted to the rank of Minister of Rites with the title of Duke (Phụ quận công).

This stele was erected on the 22nd day of the 10th lunar month 1724, under the reign title of Bảo Thái V.

1st-class doctoral laureates, one person:

Ngô Sách Hân - Tam Sơn commune, Đông Ngạn district.
Eligible Confucian student (Nho sinh trúng thức).

2nd-class doctoral laureates, three persons:

Trương Thì - Nhân Mục Cù commune, Thanh Trì district.
Winner of the 3rd part of an interprovincial exam (Sinh đồ).

Nguyễn Trác Luân - Bình Lao commune, Cẩm Giàng district.
Winner of the 3rd part of an interprovincial exam (Sinh đồ).

Nguyễn Tông Khuê - Phúc Khê commune, Ngự Thiên district.
National University student.

3rd-class doctoral laureates, 21 persons:

Nguyễn Đức Đôn - Vĩnh Cầu commune, Đông Ngạn district.
Confucian student (Nho sinh).

Giang Sĩ Đoan - Vũ Nghị commune, Thanh Lan district.
National University student.

Trần Mai - Vị Hoàng commune, Mỹ Lộc district.
National University student.

Trịnh Bá Tương - Phú Thị commune, Gia Lâm district.
National University student.

Trần Xuân Yển - Yên Lạc commune, Thanh Lâm district.
National University student

Nguyễn Đăng Giai - Hương Trện commune, Gia Định district.
National University student

Đặng Công Mậu - La Nội commune, Từ Liêm district.
National University student

Từ Trọng Đình - Phương Quế commune, Thượng Phúc district. Eligible Confucian student (Nho sinh trúng thức).

- Ngô Đình Chất** - Tả Thanh Oai commune, Thanh Oai district. Eligible Confucian student (Nho sinh trúng thức).
- Vũ Nhân Chiêu** - Minh Lễ commune, Tứ Kỳ district. National University student.
- Trần Đình Thu** - Liêu Xá commune, Đường Hào district. Residence registration in Báo Thiên, Thọ Xương district. National University student.
- Nguyễn Huy Mãn** - Phú Thị commune, Gia Lâm district. National University student.
- Trịnh Ngô Dụng** - Vân Chùy commune, Hiệp Hòa district. In charge of education for the district (Huấn đạo).
- Trịnh Đồng Giai** - Ngọc Hoạch commune, Yên Định district. National University student.
- Nguyễn Ngọc Huyền** - Bội Thái commune, Hoàng Hóa district. Invited participant (Tham nghị).
- Vũ Kiều** - Ngộ Dương commune, Kim Thành district. Winner of the 3rd part of an interprovincial exam (Sinh đồ).
- Nguyễn Công Hoàn** - Du Lâm commune, Đông Ngạn district. Eligible Confucian student (Nho sinh trúng thức).
- Hồ Sĩ Tân** - Hoàn Hậu commune, Quỳnh Lưu district. In charge of education for the district (Huấn đạo).
- Nguyễn Xuân Vịnh** - Yên Phú commune, Đường Hào district. National University student.
- Nguyễn Viêm** - Mỹ Xá commune, Phụ Dục district. District mandarin (Tự ban).
- Đỗ Hy Thiệu** - Văn Trung commune, Bạch Hạc district. National University student.

Written on the stele and engraved by Nguyễn Đăng Toàn (title: *Trung thư giám hoa văn học sinh*) from Thanh Oai commune.

Royal exam in the year of Tân Hợi

Reign title: VĨNH KHÁNH III (1731)



It is a great pleasure to see that our kingdom is as great in its longevity as the Cờ constellation, and that our civilization-based governance is as brilliant as the Khuê constellation.

With Heaven's mandate His Majesty¹ has changed the course of fate, grasping the importance of the Càn hexagram². He is assisted by Uy vương (title: *Đại nguyên súy thống quốc chính thượng sư*³) in the conduct of State affairs, particularly in identifying and recruiting men of talent. In the 10th lunar month of the winter of the year of Tân Hợi, His Majesty approved the Ministry of Rites' proposal to hold a royal exam (first round). Duke Trịnh Bật (title: *Phó tướng Đề đốc Phương quận công*) was appointed as the Chief Examiner; academician Duke Nguyễn Hiệu (title: *Bồi tụng Lễ bộ thượng thư tri Hàn lâm viện sự thiếu bảo Nông quận công*) was appointed as the Secondary Examiner; and Marquis Phạm Đình Kính (title: *Bồi tụng Lễ bộ tả thị lang Lại Trạch hầu*) and Vice Minister of Public Affairs Earl Ngô Đình Thạc (title: *Công bộ hữu thị lang Huy Luân bá*) were appointed as the Supervisors. After the fourth part of the exam, Nguyễn Bá Lân and 11 other persons were the winners (first round).

The second round was held in the following month. Đỗ Huy

1 King Lê Duy Phường (1729-1732).

2 In I-Ching (*Book of Changes*).

3 Title of Lord Trịnh Giang (10th lunar month, 1732).

Kỳ and other candidates won the title of doctoral laureate of different grades. His Majesty ordered the setting up of a stone stele to immortalize their names.

1st-class laureate:

Đỗ Huy Kỳ - Thử Cốc commune, Thụy Nguyên district.
Invited participant (Tham nghị).

2nd-class laureates, three persons:

Trần Danh Ninh - Bảo Triện commune, Gia Định district.
Eligible Confucian student (Nho sinh trúng thức).

Nguyễn Nghiễm - Tiên Điền commune, Nghi Xuân district.
National University student.

Quản Đình Du - Hoa Cầu commune, Văn Giang district.
National University student.

3rd-class laureates, eight persons:

Nguyễn Bá Lân - Cổ Đô commune, Tiên Phong district.
In charge of education for the district (Huấn đạo).

Nguyễn Thị Lượng - Phùng Xá commune, Thạch Thất district.
National University student.

Mai Thế Chuẩn - Thạch Tuyền commune, Nga Sơn district.
Winner of the 3rd part of an interprovincial exam (Sinh đồ).

Mai Danh Tông - Cao Lãm commune, Sơn Minh district.
District chief (Tri huyện).

Trần Danh Lâm - Bảo Triện commune, Gia Định district.
Eligible Confucian student (Nho sinh trúng thức).

Phạm Nguyên Ninh - Đông Ngạc commune, Từ Liêm district.

Trần Lê Lân - Tam Lộng commune, Lôi Dương district.
District chief (Tri huyện).

Dương Công Chú - Lạc Đạo commune, Gia Lâm district.
District chief (Tri huyện).

The stele was erected under the Lê dynasty in the seasonal section of Gia Bình (12th lunar month of 1732; reign title Long Đức I). The inscription was composed by academician Duke Phạm Khiêm Ích (title: *Tham tụng Lại bộ thượng thư, Đông các đại học sĩ thiếu bảo Thuật quận công*).

1 Phạm Khiêm Ích (1679- 1741), native of Bảo Triện commune, Gia Định district (now Phương Triện hamlet, Nhân Thắng commune, Gia Lương district, Bắc Ninh province). He lived in Kim Sơn (now Gia Lâm district, Hà Nội) and became 1st-class, 3rd-grade laureate (thám hoa) in the royal exam of Canh Thìn (1710, reign title: Vĩnh Thịnh VI) under King Lê Dụ Tông. He was subsequently appointed as academician of the Đông Các Institute. In 1726 he headed a diplomatic mission to the Qing court of China. After this he became 1st-class winner of the Đông Các exam and was promoted to the rank of Minister of Rites. He submitted to the then king his book *Thăm trị nhất lãm* about the philosophy of governance and was promptly appointed as Minister of the Mandarinate (title: Á bảo Tả lý công thần) and concurrently Governor of Thanh Hóa region. Later he was promoted to the rank of Thái tử. He died in Thanh Hóa.

Royal exam in the year of Quý Sửu

Reign title: LONG ĐỨC II (1733)



We are aware that talented men are the pillars on which the improvement of State governance is based. When the Court wishes to promote education and civilization, it must exhort good deeds and good reputations. Is this the basis for the practice of inscribing doctoral laureates' names on stone stelae?

We respectfully think that Heaven has given His Majesty a mandate to carry on the great cause initiated by previous kings. He channels sunlight to all the parts of the globe and educates people while caring for human life. Supported by Uy vương¹ (title: *Đại nguyên súy thống quốc chính thượng sư*), who shares the same moral standards, His Majesty conducts State affairs and improves the practice of governance. He seeks new talents everywhere. Thus, in the Spring of the year of Quý Sửu, in the 3rd lunar month, a royal exam (first round) was held to attract Confucian students from all over the country. His Majesty appointed Duke Nguyễn Minh Châu (title: *Đô đốc phủ tả đô đốc chưởng phủ sự thiếu bảo Siêu quận công*) to be the Chief Examiner; Marquis Phạm Đình Kính (title: *Bồi tụng Lại bộ tả thị lang nhập thị kinh diên Lại Trạch hầu*) to be the Secondary Examiner; and Earl Đỗ Lệnh Danh (title: *Bồi tụng Hộ bộ hữu thị lang Xuân Trì hầu*) and Vice Minister of Justice Nguyễn Trọng Thường to be the Supervisors. Other concerned mandarins took charge of various affairs related to the exam.

¹ See appendix

The participants in the exam numbered 3,000. Nguyễn Hồ Quýnh and 17 other men were successful. After the second round of the exam held in the Royal Palace, the following Confucian scholars became doctoral laureates:

- Nhữ Trọng Đài (1st class, 2nd grade)
- Trần Trọng Liêu and Nguyễn Hồ Quýnh (2nd class)
- Nguyễn Kỳ Nhậm and 14 other men (3rd class)

Their names were announced at the Palace by megaphone and a Golden Board with their names on it was hung at the Thái Học (Great Learning) House. They were granted ceremonial costumes and headwear and were treated to a Royal Banquet. Honors were bestowed on them in accordance with the established rules and practices, including the engraving of their names on a stone stele. I, Nguyễn Quán Giai, was ordered by His Majesty to compose the inscription for it.

Following His Majesty's order I am immensely delighted to submit the following text.

The royal exam has been highly valued through successive dynasties, and so has the practice of setting up stone stelae in honor of doctoral laureates.

We think that since the establishment of our dynasty successive Emperors have shown respect for men of talent and educated people. The practice of inscribing the names of doctoral laureates of royal exams on stone stelae was introduced in the year of Giáp Thìn under the reign title of Hồng Đức. In the year of Canh Dần, under the reign title of Vĩnh Thịnh, stone stelae were set up to be dedicated to the royal exams held from the year of Canh Thìn (reign title: Quang Hưng)

onwards. This practice has now become a fine custom. Thus, there is nowadays a forest of stone stelae next to the Thái Học (Great Learning) House; the good reputation of the laureates pervades the blue water current nearby and radiates like *thái thường* flags fluttering in the open air. The incentives and awards given by this dynasty to the laureates, as well as its merits in education and training, far exceed those of the past.

Those Confucian scholars who are showered by His Majesty's favors and are deeply indebted to him for his generosity must consider how they can repay such a debt. To do so they must show dignity and mettle worthy of high valuation like gems or gold; their loyalty must be as solid as stone and iron. They are required constantly to perfect their moral standards and to adhere strictly to the principles of *tứ tri*¹ and *tam pháp*². They must present themselves at the Court as righteous, faithful and generous men; they must support the reign with humanity and justice; they must become cornerstones for the Court and keep the country as steadfast as Thái Sơn mountain. Given the credit they have gained from the royal exams, they should strive not to betray what they have been taught and to avoid conduct of which they would be ashamed, so that their names become immortalized in solid stone. If among them there is any person whose actions fail to live up to his words, and whose reputation does not match his true capacity, such a person will be like a gem with an obvious and indelible scratch. People will point to his name and criticise him. The sharpness of the public's tongue is a reason for the doctoral laureates to be cautious. In this respect, this stone stele is aimed not only at honoring them but also at conveying to Confucian

1 Literally "four knowings". Dương Chấn was a mandarin in Han dynasty China who was famous for his honesty. One night a man came to him with a bribe and said: "Please accept this gift, it's night-time now and nobody will know about it". Dương Chấn refused, saying "I know, you know, Heaven knows and Earth knows. How can you say nobody will know about this offering?"

2 Literally "three virtues" which are required from a good mandarin - honesty, cautiousness and industriousness.

students a message of encouragement. Given its relevance to education and civilization, this stele is of great benefit to all.

Composed by academician Nguyễn Quán Giai (title: *Trung trình đại phu Hàn lâm viện thừa chỉ*).

Edited by Duke Phạm Khiêm Ích (title: *Đặc tiến kim tử vinh lộc đại phu tham tụng Hình bộ thượng thư, Đông các đại học sĩ tri Hàn lâm viện sự thiếu bảo Thuật quận công*).

This stele was set up on the 19th day of 12th lunar month 1734 (reign title: Long Đức III).

Written on the stele by calligrapher Nguyễn Viết Giai (title: *Trung thư giám hoa văn học*) from Phú Thị commune, Gia Lâm district).

Engraved by Hoàng Quang Trạch, head of Gia Đức commune, Thủy Đường district.

1st-class laureate, 2nd grade:

Nhữ Trọng Đài - Hoạch Trạch commune, Đường An district.
In charge of education for the district.

2nd-class laureates, two persons:

Trần Trọng Liêu - Văn Giáp commune, Thượng Phúc district.
In charge of education for the district
(Huấn đạo).

Nguyễn Hồ Quýnh - Thịnh Quang ward, Quảng Đức district.
Eligible Confucian student (Nho sinh
trúng thức).

3rd-class laureates, 15 persons:

Nguyễn Kỳ Nhậm - Lê Xá commune, Chương Đức district.
Eligible Confucian student (Nho sinh
trúng thức).

Trần Công Hán - Cổ Am commune, Vĩnh Lại district.
District chief (Tri huyện).

Phan Như Khuê - Yên Trung commune, La Sơn district.
Government official (Viên ngoại lang).

- Vũ Đình Dung** - Thịnh Quang ward, Quảng Đức district. Native land Phùng Xá commune, Thạch Thất district. Government official (Viên ngoại lang).
- Nguyễn Bá Quýnh** - Hoa Lâm commune, Nam Đường district. Eligible Confucian student (Nho sinh trúng thức).
- Trần Mô** - Di ái commune, Đan Phượng district. National University student.
- Nguyễn Huệ** - Tiên Điền commune, Nghi Xuân district. District chief (Tri huyện).
- Trần Đồng** - Đan Phượng Thượng commune, Đan Phượng district. Winner of the 3rd part of an interprovincial exam (Sinh đồ).
- Đỗ Thành Doãn** - Lan Xuyên commune, Đông Yên district. Eligible Confucian student (Nho sinh trúng thức).
- Trần Hiền** - Vân Canh commune, Từ Liêm district. Local official (Điển hàn).
- Trương Nguyễn Điều** - Xuân Canh commune, Đông Ngạn district. Residence Hàn Lạc commune, Gia Lâm district. Government official (Viên ngoại lang).
- Nguyễn Hành** - Nguyệt áo commune, La Sơn district. National University student.
- Nghiêm Bá Đình** - Tây Mỗ commune, Từ Liêm district. Local official (Tự thừa).
- Trần Danh Tiêu** - Yên Sở commune, Đan Phượng district. Winner of the 3rd part of an interprovincial exam (Sinh đồ).
- Nguyễn Huy Thuật** - Phú Thị commune, Gia Lâm district. Local official (Điển bạ).

Royal exam in the year of Bính Thìn

Reign title: VĨNH HỮU II (1736)



It is delightful to see that our nation is enjoying peace and that an opportunity has been created for our civilization to develop.

His Majesty continues the great cause initiated by the previous kings while highlighting Heaven's mandate. Supported by Uy vương¹ (title: *Đại nguyên súy thống quốc chính thượng sư*), His Majesty follows the practice of selecting men of virtue and talent. In the 3rd lunar month of the year of Bính Thìn, he approved the proposal of the Ministry of Rites concerning the organization of a royal exam (first round). Duke Trịnh Diễn (title: *Phó tướng tá đô đốc Cảnh quận công*) was appointed to be Chief Examiner; Marquis Ngô Đình Thạc (title: *Bồi tụng Công bộ thượng thư Huy Lâm hầu*) to be Secondary Examiner; and Count Dương Lệ (title: *Bồi tụng Lại bộ hữu thị lang Gia Lạc bá*) and Vice Minister of the Interior Count Phạm Minh (title: *Hộ bộ hữu thị lang Đông Thọ bá*) to be Supervisors. After the fourth test, Nhữ Đình Toàn and 14 others became laureates. The second round of this exam was held in the following month. Trịnh Huệ and some others became laureates of different classes. His Majesty ordered their names to be immortalized on a stone stele.

The stele was erected in the 3rd lunar month of 1738 under the Lê dynasty (reign title: Vĩnh Hựu IV).

¹ See appendix

Composed by Duke Nguyễn Đình Thái¹ (title: *Đặc tiến kim tử vinh lộc đại phu bồi tụng Lại bộ tả thị lang, kiêm Đông các hiệu thư Kiêu quận công*), doctoral laureate of the royal exam in the year of Ất Mùi.

1st-class laureates, two persons:

1st-grade laureate:

Trịnh Huệ - Sóc Sơn village, Vĩnh Phúc district.
Place of residence: Bất Quân commune, Quảng Xương district. Government official (Lang trung).

3rd-grade laureate:

Nguyễn Quốc Hiệu - Phú Thứ commune, Duy Tiên district.
National University student.

2nd-class laureate:

Lê Sĩ Bàng - Nội Thiên Lộc commune, Thiên Lộc district.
National University student.

3rd-class laureates, 12 persons:

Lê Sĩ Triêm - Nội Thiên Lộc commune, Thiên Lộc district.
In charge of education for the district (Huấn đạo).

Vũ Phương Đề - Mộ Trạch commune, Đường An district.
District chief (Tri huyện).

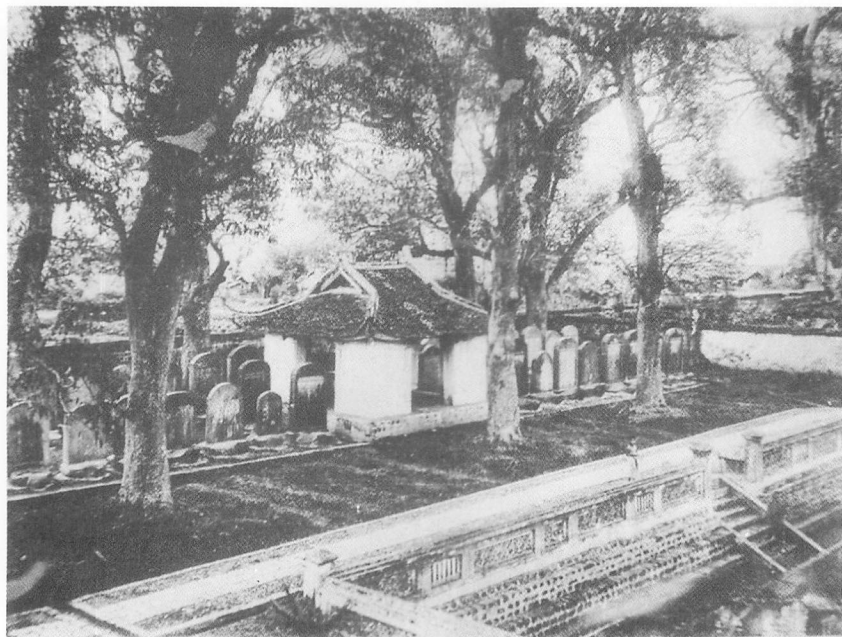
Đồng Doãn Khuê - Hùng Sơn commune, Đại Từ district.
National University student.

Đào Xuân Lan - Hà Mi commune, Nông Cống district.
National University student.

Trần Bá Tân - An Hoạch commune, Đông Sơn district.
Later, his name was changed into Huy Bật.

¹ Nguyễn Đình Thái (1684-1758) or Nguyễn Công Thái was a native of Kim Lũ commune, Thanh Trì district (now Đại Kim commune, Thanh Trì district, Hà Nội). He became a doctoral laureate in 1715 (reign title: Vĩnh Thịnh XI) at the age of 32. After winning the Đông Các contest in 1728 (reign title: Bảo Thái Mậu Thân) he was promoted to the rank of Vice Prime Minister, Minister of the Mandarinate.

- Nhữ Đình Toàn** - Hoạch Trạch commune, Đường An district.
Local official (Tự thừa).
- Vũ Đình Quyền** - Yên Thái ward, Quảng Đức district.
Eligible Confucian student (Nho sinh
trúng thức).
- Trần Danh Tân** - Bồng Trì commune, Gia Định district.
18 years old.
- Nguyễn Bá Tuân** - Đa Hòa commune, Đông Yên district.
National University student.
- Mai Trọng Tương** - Cao Lãm commune, Sơn Minh district.
Eligible Confucian student (Nho sinh
trúng thức).
- Nguyễn Thế Giai** - Nhân Lý commune, Thanh Lâm district.
Eligible Confucian student (Nho sinh
trúng thức).
- Nguyễn Tông Mại** - Yên Đỗ commune, Bình Lục district.
National University student.



General view of doctor laureates' stelae
at Văn Miếu - Quốc Tử Giám

Royal exam in the year of Quý Hợi

Reign title: CẢNH HUNG IV (1743)



ince our saintly education system considers the recruitment of talented people to be an urgent need, examinations must be organised to facilitate this. Any king who values benevolence highly must inevitably observe the established rules and rites. Is this the reason why procedures for erecting stone stelae have been promulgated?

We respectfully think that His Majesty, whose intelligence is superhuman, has been presented with a golden opportunity to produce talented people who can put the universe to right. With the help of Minh vương¹ (title: *Đại nguyên súy Thống quốc chính thượng sư thượng phụ*), who is of the same virtue, His Majesty has carried out reforms in all areas while paying attention to the task of adequately deploying talented people and devising strategies to keep society at peace.

In the 10th lunar month of the year of Quý Hợi, a royal exam (first round) was held for the winners of the provincial contests which had taken place across the nation. His Majesty ordered Duke Trịnh Trạ (title: *Suy trung dực Vận công thần tả hòa quân doanh đô đốc phủ tả đô đốc phó đô tướng đại tư đồ Thư trung công*) to be the Chief Examiner; Duke Nguyễn Huy Nhuận (title: *Tham tụng Hộ bộ thượng thư nhập thị kinh diên Tri Quốc Tử Giám thái tử thái bảo trí sĩ phục dụng phụng thị ngũ lão Triệu quận công*) to be the Second Examiner; Count Phạm Đình Trọng (title: *Ngự sử đài phó đô ngự*

¹ See appendix

sử Dao Lĩnh bá) and Lê Hoàn Viện (title: *Sơn Tây đẳng xứ tán trị thừa chính sứ ty thừa chính sứ*) to be the Supervisors, and other mandarins to be responsible for related services.

About 2,000 candidates took part in the exam. After the fourth test, Nguyễn Hoàn and six other persons were selected.

In the final round of the exam held in the 12th lunar month, His Majesty himself set the topic for the required essay on major issues related to governance.

The next day the responsible mandarin submitted the essays to the Emperor. His Majesty considered them thoroughly and rated the winners. Thus, Phan Kính became a 3rd-grade doctoral laureate of the 1st class; Trần Văn Trứ became a doctoral laureate of the 2nd class; and Lê Hoàng Vĩ and four other persons became doctoral laureates of the 3rd class. The laureates were announced using a megaphone and their names were placed on the Golden Board. His Majesty bestowed on them ceremonial costumes and treated them to a Banquet in the blossoming Royal Garden. What great favors! His Majesty also ordered the Minister of Public Affairs to set up a stone stele in their honor at the National University for the Training of Royal Mandarins (*Quốc Tử Giám*), and instructed me, Bạch Phấn Ứng, to compose the inscription.

I think that the Court has various ways to select talents, but the most reputable and reliable way has since old times been the *Tiến sĩ* (doctoral) royal exam. In the early period of the establishment of their dynasties the previous Emperors also used men whose talents had been discovered through examinations. The great merits of the laureates are embedded on bronze urns and caldrons; their far-sighted strategies and tactics are still radiant. It

is still entirely justifiable to use such terms as “Dragon-Tiger Board”, “Contest of Military Generals” or “Contest of Literary Generals” in connection with the royal exams.

The careers of everyone of great talent in the service of the nation were launched in this way. Thus in the past clear-sighted kings always attached great importance to royal examinations. In the early period of Hồng Đức reign, for example, the dynasty tried its utmost to highlight beneficence, to earn its fame through the practice of venerating Confucianism, immortalizing the names of distinguished people and establishing regulations on royal exams. However, this present dynasty of His Majesty offers yet more opportunities for brilliant Confucian scholars to compete with one another as carp ride on waves, vying with one another in front of the *vũ môn* gate. The policy of absorbing talent into State governance has reached its peak during this dynasty, becoming superior to that carried out by hundreds of previous kings over a thousand years.

I am sure that the numerous Confucian mandarins which this kingdom has produced will be keen to repay their great debt of gratitude to His Majesty in an appropriate way. Furthermore, this is the first exam which has involved His Majesty’s direct supervision and his meeting with the participants of the exam was not accidental; it was predestined. So, the doctoral laureates are obliged to make themselves transparent, to perfect their standards of morality, to assist our benevolent Emperor by exercising their virtues, and to help people with their knowledge. They should become like pure gold or gems, so that those who hear their names will believe them to be genuine treasures of the nation. Let them become human unicorns and colorful phoenixes that can be seen as good omens of a prosperous dynasty. Their names and causes

must be inscribed on stone stelae and bamboo bars or written on silk¹, and must be radiant in the historical records. In this way they will deserve the fame they have gained at the royal exams and the dignities conferred on them by the Court. If they fail to do so, their value as gems will be equivalent to nothing but ordinary stone. How could they hide their shortcomings on this stele, an object which attracts thousands of eyes and thousands of pointing fingers? So, they should be cautious about this.

This stone stele is of no small significance because it concerns our very civilization. It is designed to strengthen the foundations of Confucian education, to boost the morale of Confucian scholars and to stimulate them to perfect their moral standards.

Composed by academician Bạch Phấn Ứng (title: *Trung hiến đại phu Hàn lâm viện thừa chỉ*).

Edited by Duke Nguyễn Công Thái (title: *Đặc tiến kim tử vinh lộc đại phu suy trung dực vận công thần Tham tụng Lễ bộ thượng thư kiêm Đông các hiệu thư Kiêu quận công*).

This stele was set up on the 12th day of the 10th lunar month of the reign of Cảnh Hưng V (1744).

1st-class laureate (3rd grade):

Phan Kính	- Lai Thạch commune, La Sơn district. National University student.
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2nd-class laureate:

Trần Văn Trứ	- Từ Ô commune, Thanh Miện district. Eligible Confucian student (Nho sinh trúng thức).
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¹ Silk was used for writing on in ancient times.

3rd-class laureates, five persons:

- | | |
|-----------------------|---|
| Lê Hoàng Vĩ | - Đan Sĩ commune, Thanh Oai district.
National University student. |
| Nguyễn Hoàn | - Lan Khê commune, Nông Cống district.
Prefecture chief (Tri phủ) |
| Phạm Sĩ Thuyên | - Trung Lập commune, Đường Hào district.
District chief (Tri huyện). |
| Lê Doãn Giản | - Đại Mão commune, Siêu Loại district.
Confucian student (Nho sinh). |
| Lê Doãn Giai | - Ý Bích commune, Thuận Lộc district.
National University student. |

Written on the stele by Lê Hữu Tấn (title: *Tiến công thứ lang lễ bộ tư vụ sánh tư vụ*)

Engraved by Lê Nguyễn Diệu, winner of the 3rd part of an inter-provincial exam from An Hoạch commune, Đông Sơn district

Royal exam in the year of Nhâm Thìn

Reign title: CẢNH HUNG XIII (1752)



Fourteen years have elapsed since the restoration of our dynasty¹. Peace has reigned everywhere and our nation has been consolidated.

His Majesty's reign began in accordance with the Thái hexagram², and he has maintained the throne in accordance with the virtues specified in the Kiền hexagram³. He has been assisted by Minh vương⁴ (title: *Đại nguyên súy Thống quốc chính thượng sư thượng phụ*), making civilized governance more brilliant.

In the winter of the year of Nhâm Thân the first round of the royal exam was held, attracting many Confucian scholars who had passed the inter-provincial exam. Duke Đặng Đình Trứ (title: *Đô đốc thêm sự trí sĩ khởi phục ngũ lão Vinh quận công*) was the Chief Examiner; Marquis Trần Danh Ninh (title: *Nhập thị bồi tụng phó đô ngự sử Bảo Lĩn hầu*) was the acting Secondary Examiner; and academician Earl Dương Công Chú (title: *Bồi tụng Hàn lâm viện thừa chỉ Đạo Phái bá*) was the Supervisor. After the fourth part of the first round, Lê Quý Đôn and five other persons became winners.

The second round was held in the 12th lunar month. Lê Quý Đôn and other participants became doctoral laureates of different grades. His Majesty ordered a stone stele to be set up to immortalise their names.

1 From the reign of King Lê Trang Tông (1533-1548) to the reign of King Lê Ý Tông (1735-1740) prior to the Cảnh Hưng reign.

2, 3 From I-Ching (*book of Changes*).

4 See appendix

Composed by academician Marquis Nhữ Đình Toàn¹ (title: *Nhập thị bồi tụng Hình bộ tả thị lang tri Hàn lâm viện sự*), doctoral laureate of the Bính Thìn royal exam.

Edited by Minister of the Interior and academician Duke Nguyễn Công Thái (title: *Tham tụng thiếu bảo ngũ lão Hộ bộ thượng thư, Đông các hiệu thư Kiêu quận công*).

This stele was erected in the 2nd lunar month of 1753 (reign title: Cảnh Hưng XIV).

1st-class laureate:

Lê Quý Đôn

- Diên Hà commune, Diên Hà district.
Eligible Confucian student (Nho sinh trúng thức).

2nd-class laureate:

Đoàn Nguyễn Thục

- Hải Yên commune, Quỳnh Côi district.
Eligible Confucian student (Nho sinh trúng thức). Native land Đại Hạng commune, Văn Giang district.
Former name Đoàn Duy Tĩnh.

3rd-class laureates, four persons:

Nghiêm Vũ Đăng

- Kỳ Nhai commune, Thanh Lan district.
Winner of the 3rd part of an interprovincial exam (Sinh đồ).

Nguyễn Diêu

- Hoàng Xá commune, Thư Trì district.
National University student.
Former name Nguyễn Xuân Huyền.

Tạ Đình Hoán

- Đại Định commune, Thanh Oai district.
National University student.

Nguyễn Xuân Huy

- Qui Đông commune, Lương Tài district.
Prefecture chief (Tri phủ).

¹ Nhữ Đình Toàn (1703-1774), native of Hoạch Trạch commune, Đường An district (now Thái Học commune, Bình Giang district, Hải Dương province). At the age of 34 he became a doctoral laureate in the royal exam of 1736, held in the year of Bính Thìn during the reign of King Lê Ý Tông (reign title: Vĩnh Hựu II). He was subsequently promoted to the rank of Deputy Prime Minister of Military Affairs. When retired he was granted the title of Quốc lão (National Patriarch).

Royal exam in the year of Quý Mùi

Reign title: CẢNH HUNG XXIV (1763)



According to tradition, only the names of great meritorious men are inscribed on bronze bells or stone stelae as a manifestation of acclaim and encouragement. As for the fresh laureates of this royal exam who have just started their career, their names are also recorded on the stone stele set up at the Thái Học (Great Learning) House. Our rules and regime in this field are indeed splendid and generous.

I respectfully think that His Majesty continues the cause of the previous Emperors to make their virtue more radiant. He is assisted by Minh vương¹ (title: *Đại nguyên súy Thống quốc chính thượng sư thượng phụ*), who has established the present political system on the basis of the Confucian philosophy of the “Golden Mean” (living in moderation) and promotes recorded achievements with clear-sightedness. Commander-in-Chief Tỉnh Quốc Công² (title: *Khâm sai tiết chế các sứ thủy bộ chư quân kiêm Chuông chính cơ Thái úy*) is authorized to take charge of all State affairs involving men of virtue and talent. Since His Majesty’s enthronement seven royal exams have been held. In the spring of the year of Quý Mùi, an exam was held, drawing Confucian students from all over the country. Duke Trịnh Kiều (title: *Phó tướng trung kinh quân doanh đô đốc thêm sự thụ phủ sự Khanh quận công*) was appointed as the Chief Examiner; Trần Huy Bật (title: *Nhập thị bồi tụng Hình bộ thượng thư hành ngự sử đài đô ngự sử Bái Xuyên hầu*) as the Secondary Examiner; and Count Lê Trọng

1, 2 See appendix

Thứ (title: *Nhập thị tả chính ngôn Hộ bộ hữu thị lang trí sĩ khởi phục Diên Phương bá*) as the Supervisor. Other concerned mandarins took charge of related services for the exam.

The list of five winners of the first round, headed by Nguyễn Duy Thức, was issued in the 4th lunar month. The second round was held in the Royal Palace in the 6th lunar month. Duke Hà Tông Huân (title: *Thiếu bảo Bình bộ thượng thư Quốc Tử Giám tể tửu trí sĩ khởi phục phụng thị ngũ lão Huy quận công*), academician Count Lê Quý Đôn (title: *Nhập thị thêm sai phủ liêu Hàn lâm viện thừa chỉ kiêm bí thư các học sĩ Dĩnh Thành bá*) and Governor of Kinh Bắc region Trần Văn Trứ submitted the exam papers to His Majesty. Vũ Cơ and some other candidates became 3rd-class doctoral laureates. They were granted ceremonial costumes and escorted to their home villages in the 7th lunar month. According to established procedures, His Majesty ordered the setting up of a stone stele for the inscription of their names. I was ordered to compose the inscription. Thus, I respectfully present the following text.

Any regime of governance must rely on men of talent. Gifted people are so numerous, yet they need to be nurtured, educated and utilized, so that their abilities can be exploited. The kumquat in Giang Phố, the grapefruit in Vân Mộng, the apple and the pear in Thường Sơn and Đông Quận - all owe their good quality to the local soil. Yet, talent is not the same. Gifted and intelligent people can be found in both big towns and remote villages, in both aristocratic families and rural poor households. Meanwhile, the education and recruitment of such people depends much on the attitude of the supreme ruler..

Our nation is now experiencing a period of prosperity. Confucianism is highlighted and its Classics and rites have been dif-

fused throughout the country. Civil mandarin exams are held every three years, with the interprovincial exam in Autumn and the royal exam in Spring. The exam rules are very elaborate, while the favors bestowed on laureates are very generous. The expanded education system and the equitable use and promotion of talent are facts which are recorded in our history. A great number of Confucian scholars and students have emerged. They train and perfect themselves to become clear-sighted men. Generals, officials and rulers are drawn from this group. They are needed for governing the nation, managing the economy and society. Our country has lived in peace and prosperity for more than a hundred years now, thanks to the support of men of virtue and talent. Their merits are very great.

In the time of previous prosperous dynasties, the monarch has always been both Sovereign and Master. Education has been upgraded and expanded.

As for the royal exams, the winners are those whose essays can be taken as examples, thanks to their correct approach and fine, concise language. As a rule, the *Nội các* mandarin sets a range of topics for such an essay and His Majesty himself picks out one of them. The Cabinet (*Thượng thư sảnh*) submits the finished essays to His Majesty, who considers them thoroughly before rating the winners. Clearly, talent is selected in a most careful manner. Fresh doctoral laureates are appointed to key positions, assigned the task of governing various regions, sometimes even promoted to the post of provincial governor. Obviously, the training and deployment of human resources is a very important matter. It is written in the Book of Odes:

*Let's look at the foot of Hăn mountain,
Where hô and trăn trees are so luxuriant.*

*Noble men are simple and well-disposed towards others,
May men of virtue be always lucky!*

Talented people are *hộ* and *trần* trees of the nation. In the philosophy which governs the use of talented men, nothing is more precious than being well-disposed to others. Superiors should be well-disposed towards inferiors; inferiors should be well-disposed towards superiors. When there is obvious impetus and a stimulus, talent will sprout. Thus, it is because Wen Wang was well-disposed towards his subjects that the Zhou dynasty won the hearts of many brilliant men; the Court was able to recruit great men in different ways, older people were ready to help those younger than themselves. Achievements were recorded step by step. It is difficult to gauge the efforts and contributions of great saints!

From now on it will be the same: Confucian scholars who are nurtured by the Court will go to visit the capital city while reciting the rhymed essay “Jumping Fish”, or will throng to the capital city to sit for royal exams while singing the poem *Lộc minh*. There will be myriads of Confucian scholars, enough for thousands of years’ service to ensure the long-lasting peace and prosperity of the country. Stone stelae can hardly record all their names. In their turn, Confucian scholars and mandarins driven by feelings of gratitude for the Court’s generous favors and by a sense of respect for their honor must carefully perfect their morality and preserve their dignity, so as not to damage their good reputation as laureates of the royal exams or to betray the efforts of their educators.

Composed by academician, Count Lê Quý Đôn (title: *Đặc tiến kim tử vinh lộc đại phu nhập thị thiêm sai phủ liêu Hàn lâm viện thừa chỉ, bí thư các học sĩ, Quốc sử viện sự Dĩnh Thành bá*).

Edited by academician Nguyễn Hoàn (title: *Triều liệt đại phu nhập thị thêm sai, hữu tư giảng đông các đại học sĩ hành Phụng Thiên phủ doãn*).

This stele was erected on the 2nd day of the 12th month of the year 1763 (reign title: Cảnh Hưng XXIV).

Written on the stele by Trần Đình Khoa (title: *Ngự sử đài đô lại thủ bạ đồng tri châu*) coming from An Lạc commune, Thanh Lâm district.

Engraved by Lê Văn Lộc coming from Nhuệ hamlet, An Hoạch commune, Đông Sơn district.

3rd-class laureates, five persons:

Vũ Cơ - Ngọc Lặc commune, Tứ Kỳ district.
Government official (Viên ngoại lang).

Nguyễn Duy Thúc - Vọng Nguyệt commune, Yên Phong district. District chief (Tri huyện).

Hoa Quý Khâm - Cổ Nhuế commune, Từ Liêm district.
In charge of education for the district (Huấn đạo).

Phạm Dương Ứng - Cổ Vũ ward, Thọ Xương district.
Native land: Hoa Đường commune, Đường An district. Eligible Confucian student (Nho sinh trúng thức).

Nguyễn Lệnh Tân - Phù Lê commune, Thụy Nguyên district.
In charge of education for the district (Huấn đạo).

Royal exam in the year of Mậu Tuất

Reign title: CẢNH HUNG XXXIX (1778)



oday our nation enjoys lasting peace and great prosperity. His Majesty has inherited the far-sighted strategy implemented by previous monarchs and benefits greatly from their blessing. He is supported by *Tĩnh vương*¹ (title: *Đại nguyên suý thống quốc chính thượng sư*) in the conduct of State affairs, the expansion of his reign and the promotion of civilization. In the spring of the year of Mậu Tuất, a royal exam (first round) was held, attracting participation by Confucian scholars who had won the inter-provincial heats. Duke Trịnh Miên (title: *Phó đô tướng thự phủ sự thiếu phó Nghiêm quận công*) was the Chief Examiner; Vice Minister of Military Affairs Marquis Vũ Miên (title: *Nhập thị hành tham tụng Binh bộ tả thị lang Liên Khê hầu*) was the Secondary Examiner; and academician Phạm Bá Ưng (title: *Đồng các học sĩ*) was the Acting Supervisor.

After the fourth part of the exam Ninh Tồn and three other persons were selected. The second round was held in the following month. Nguyễn Duân and other participants became 3rd-class doctoral laureates. His Majesty ordered a stone stele to be set up in order to immortalize their names.

3rd-class laureates, four persons:

Nguyễn Duân - Phật Tích commune, Tiên Du district.
*Tứ trọng laureate*².

¹ See appendix.

² *Tứ trọng*: at the National University a “small test” (*tiểu tập*) was held every month for newly-recruited students and a “big test” (*dại tập*) was held every quarter for students who had passed the 3rd or the final 4th rounds of the inter-provincial exam. Those who succeeded in all four “big tests” of the year could be recommended by the Panel of Judges to the Ministry of the Mandarinate for promotion to different positions in the government.

- Chu Doãn Mai** - Dục Tú commune, Đông Ngạn district.
District chief, 39 years old.
- Phạm Trọng Huyền** - Dũng Quế commune, Ý Yên district.
33 years old.
- Ninh Tồn** - Côi Trì commune, Yên Mô district.
Tứ trọng laureate in the year of Canh Dần.
In the year of Ất Mùi, he was promoted
to the rank of *Thiên sai Tri công phiến,*
Hàn lâm viện Hiệu thảo, Quốc sử toàn
tu; 35 years old; the 1st winner of the first
round of a royal exam (Hội nguyên).

This stele was set up in the spring of the year of Canh Tý (1780;
reign title: Cảnh Hưng XLI).

The inscription was composed by Duke Nguyễn Hoàn (title: *Hữu*
tư giảng tham tụng quốc lão phụ đức công thần Lại bộ thượng thư,
tri Đông các, trí sĩ khởi phục thái tử Viện quân công), doctoral
laureate of the Quý Hợi royal exam.

Appendix

Kings and Lords mentioned in the texts of the doctor laureates' stelae

1. Thái Tổ Cao hoàng đế	: King Lê Thái Tổ	(1428-1433)
2. Thái Tông Văn hoàng đế	: King Lê Thái Tông	(1433-1442)
3. Nhân Tông hoàng đế	: King Lê Nhân Tông	(1442-1459)
4. Thánh Tông Thuần hoàng đế	: King Lê Thánh Tông	(1460-1497)
5. Hiến Tông Duệ hoàng đế	: King Lê Hiến Tông	(1497-1504)
6. Trung Tông Vũ hoàng đế	: King Lê Trung Tông	(1549-1556)
7. Thanh vương	: Lord Trịnh Tráng	(1623- 1657)
8. Tây Định vương	: Lord Trịnh Tạc	(1657- 1682)
9. Anh Tông Tuấn hoàng đế	: King Lê Anh Tông	(1557-1573)
10. Thế Tông Nghị hoàng đế	: King Lê Thế Tông	(1573-1599)
11. Thành Tổ Triết vương	: Lord Trịnh Tùng	(1570-1623)
12. Minh Khang Thái vương	: Lord Trịnh Kiểm	(1545-1569)
13. Kính Tông Huệ hoàng đế	: King Lê Kính Tông	(1600-1619)
14. Thế Tổ Minh Khang	: Lord Trịnh Kiểm	(1545-1569)
15. Trang Tông Dụ hoàng đế	: King Lê Trang Tông	(1533-1548)
16. Thần Tông Uyên hoàng đế	: King Lê Thần Tông	(1649-1662)
17. Văn Tổ Nghị vương	: Lord Trịnh Tráng	(1623-1657)
18. An vương	: Lord Trịnh Cương	(1709-1729)
19. Hy Tông Chương hoàng đế	: King Lê Hy Tông	(1676-1705)
20. Hoàng Tổ Dương vương	: Lord Trịnh Tạc	(1657-1682)
21. Uy vương	: Lord Trịnh Giang	(1729-1740)
22. Minh vương	: Lord Trịnh Doanh	(1740-1767)
23. Tĩnh vương (Tĩnh Quốc Công)	: Lord Trịnh Sâm	(1767-1782)

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