

sey, I happened to observe the driver of a Fiat decorated with two American flag decals, arguing vociferously with an imperturbable station attendant. When the attendant walked off, the driver came over to the car I was in and announced exasperatedly in what sounded like a Swedish accent: "I never heard anything like it in my life. He won't sell me gas because I have a foreign car!"

It was not far from Mahwah, New Jersey, where the Ford assembly plant recently had laid off many workers. The station attendant doubtlessly had made a connection between domestic unemployment and foreign imports. His response may have been on the simple side, but it was logical. If the economic downturn worsens, such simple logic may take on serious political consequences.

**Lawrence Nevins**

*Historian and writer on international affairs.*

## EXCURSUS IV

### The Soul of Vietnam Lives

In predicting the "loss" of Hue, the former imperial capital of Vietnam, the *New York Times* of March 20, 1975, called it "the Soul of the Country." As a native of Hue myself, I believe this to be true. Most Vietnamese like to think of Hanoi as the brain of the country, of Saigon as its stomach, and of Hue definitely as its soul. Hue in fact is the embodiment of our national character. As Malcolm W. Browne, an old Vietnamese hand, has described it: "It is the place of history and learning," where "its women are reputed to be the most beautiful and its men the shrewdest." This may be only generally and subjectively true. But Hue is also a "place that has produced fierce soldiers and towering political and military leaders over the centuries." In short, Hue is the image of the turbulent, the heroic, the romantic, and the gracious Vietnam. Its history is a blend of revolutions and traditions, of *Tinh* (feelings) and *Ly* (reason).

It all started over nine hundred years ago when the population and pressures from China forced the Vietnamese to move farther to the South for better land and for more secure territories. The move was called *Nam Tien*, the March to the South. It began in 1069 and ended only in the late nineteenth century. To pursue the *Nam Tien* successfully, the emperors of Vietnam relied both on brave generals and beautiful princesses. We had plenty of both. In 1306 Emperor Tran Anh Ton married his younger sister to Jaya Simhavarman III, the ruler of the southern land of Champa. In

return, the Champa monarch offered the Vietnamese court two provinces: O and Ly, which were renamed Thuan and Hoa or Thuan Hoa. Hue is the shortened and slightly distorted version of Thuan Hoa. This marriage of convenience provoked a strong protest among intellectuals, who composed poems to lament the fate of the princess and to criticize the emperor. But "national security" finally prevailed.

In 1558 a quarrel developed within the reigning family in Hanoi, then called Thang Long (Ascending Dragon), founded in 1010 as the nation's capital. Lord Nguyen Hoang was exiled to the South to be governor of Thuan Hoa. In 1601, wandering west of Hue, he noticed a hill emerging from the landscape in the form of a dragon turning its head to the center of the city. He was told by people living in the area that in the nighttime a mysterious lady dressed in a red gown would visit the hill and announce that "an emperor will be born from this auspicious land." Nguyen Hoang decided to secede from the North, found a dynasty (the Nguyen), and make Hue the capital. He ordered a temple to be built in honor of the "mysterious lady." The temple, called Linh Mu (Holy Lady), has since become Hue's celebrated landmark and also its oldest Buddhist pagoda.

In 1744 a small cultural revolution took place. By royal decree trousers replaced skirts in women's dress. This was the genesis of the well-known elegant *Ao Dai*, the traditional costume of Vietnamese women. The same year Hue was "lost" to the Tay Son, a dynasty which rose from a peasants' uprising. In 1802 Nguyen Phuc Anh, a descendant of Nguyen Hoang, unified the country, which in fact had been divided since the sixteenth century at almost the present 17th parallel. He restored the Nguyen dynasty, became Emperor Gia Long, rebuilt Hue as the national capital. The city spread on both banks of the Huong (Perfume) River. An artificial hill was erected, the Ngu Binh (Imperial Screen), to protect the town from bad spirits.

From 1884, when Vietnam became a colony of France, whose representatives resided in Hanoi and Saigon, Hue continued to be the domain of Vietnamese emperors, who enjoyed a semiautonomous status. Humiliated by Western foreign invaders, Vietnam's scholars, poets, artists flocked into Hue, hoping to keep it as the last bastion of Vietnamese traditional culture. They brought with them their aristocratic way of life: dinner parties on floating sampans on the Perfume River, "poetic gamblings" on moonlit nights. An exclusive school for children of mandarins, the Quoc Hoc (National Studies) Academy was created by Ngo Dinh Kha, the "chancellor of the empire" and father of the late President Ngo Dinh Diem. Ironically enough, Ho Chi Minh, Pham Van

Dong, Vo Nguyen Giap, and Ngo Dinh Diem himself all attended the Quoc Hoc, which is now Hue University. I myself studied there.

On August 23, 1945, at the height of the Vietminh Revolution led by Ho Chi Minh, the people of Hue and its suburbs, supported by armed revolutionary units, rose up and took power. I was then a staff officer of the new Vietnam Liberation Army in Hue. On August 25 a delegation from Hanoi arrived in the capital to receive from Emperor Bao Dai, the last of the Nguyen monarchs, the acts of his abdication: the dynastic seal and the sword. Bao Dai became Citizen Nguyen Vinh Thuy and for a few months was an advisor to Ho Chi Minh. Significantly enough, the delegation was made up of three men of different backgrounds: Tran Huy Lieu, a former founder of the Vietnamese Nationalist Party (he is now dead), Nguyen Luong Bang, a veteran Communist (now Vice President of North Vietnam), and Cu Huy Can, a well-known poet, who had attended Quoc Hoc (now Vice Minister of Culture in Hanoi). For the first time in centuries the Vietminh Red Flag with a Golden Star replaced the traditional Yellow Flag of Vietnamese monarchy and flew over the city.

In December, 1946, after bloody fighting between the French and the Vietminh, Hue was reoccupied by the French. The town was left in a state of devastation and desolation that moved a poet to complain:

No tree left on the Imperial Screen:  
birds perch on bare earth,  
No passenger on the River of Perfume:  
songstresses weep at the empty sky.

Hue regained its melancholy splendor in 1954 when the first Indochina War was over, to be destroyed again during the 1968 Tet Offensive. Personally, it was a great tragedy for me: One of my nephews and my younger brother, a published poet, were killed by a direct U.S. bomb hit on our family home. Later their names appeared on the Saigon list of "Viet Cong victims."

Hue was "lost" again on March 26, 1975, when three flags (The Flag of National Reconciliation, the " Viet Cong" Flag, the Saigon Flag) flew over the former imperial capital. Some Hue people have left, others remain, among them the eighty-six-year-old Queen Mother Tu Cung, Bao Dai's mother. In the next few years perhaps only one flag will fly over Hue. But no matter what happens, Hue is never "lost" and will remain basically the "special, wonderful city" it has always been. The brain of Vietnam may be changing, its stomach may be shrinking, but its soul will stay and transform itself with the evolution of Vietnam history. This confidence and optimism are reflected in a popular Hue song:

Here is the River, there is the Mountain:  
they are still the same,  
Our land is as beautiful as brocade,  
why then worry, my love?  
Right now, we are going to rebuild our  
future  
To provide a tree for the bird and a sampan  
for you to cross the River.

**Tran Van Dinh**

*A native of Hue and former diplomat; teaches politics at the Institute of Pan-African Studies, Temple University.*

## QUOTE / UNQUOTE

### Elastic Institutions

The leadership elite is back in control of day-to-day affairs, even in the universities, but what they have lost, in terms of both self-confidence and a mandate, will not be easy to replace. It can be said of a number of American institutions—as the British political scientist Harold Laski said of the American presidency—that they are surprisingly elastic. These institutions can expand quickly to meet new challenges, but they can also shrink, particularly when there is no broad agreement about what they should be leading us toward. The shrinkage of leadership is both the best evidence and worst symptom of disagreement about a national purpose.

—Thomas Griffith, "Reshaping the American Dream," *Fortune*, April

### Tippling the Common Market

...in the south of France centering around Montpellier....[t]he great French-Italian wine war, precipitated by a torrent of cheaper, Italian wines flooding France, has led to riots, roadblocks, the turning back of incoming wine tankers and the spilling of imported wines into canals and streets.

The weeks of violence and a surge of protectionism have shaken the Common Market....Italy now is taking France to the Common Market court on charges of violating the treaty that guarantees the free flow of goods among the nine member nations....

Meanwhile, southern French peasants have occupied Montpellier's Saint-Pierre Cathedral with the bishop's blessing, to dramatize their protest....