Religion and Ritual in the Royal Courts of Dai Viet

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PREFACE

In May 2009, as visiting professor of the Southeast Asian Studies Programme, the National University of Singapore, I conducted a workshop entitled "Religion and the State in Southeast Asia: Past and Present". It was also sponsored by the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, the Department of History, and the Asia Research Institute. Focused on the *structural* connections between religion and the state, historical as well as current, it represented the world's major religions found in the region. Because of the enormity of the subject and the modest nature of the workshop, however, it strove to be more of a reflective exercise that posed certain questions regarding the situation in Southeast Asia than anything else.

Taken from approximately a dozen papers and commentaries presented over two days at the workshop, the four papers contained herein are just a glimpse of it. And although few in number, they nevertheless represent the workshop's diversity, particularly a spectrum of the pertinent religions, states, disciplines, and periods of study. The corpus includes, respectively, two historical treatments (Myanmar and Vietnam) by Michael Aung-Thwin from the University of Hawaii and John K. Whitmore from the University of Michigan, and two "modern" ones (the Philippines and Malaysia) by Julius Bautista and Maznah Mohamed both from the National University of Singapore.

Most other discussions concerned with this subject have tended to address ways in which the state has "dealt with" religion. That is, religion is regarded as a "problem" which the state has to somehow "resolve". Even when Religion is not regarded as a "problem", it is still considered an appendage of the state, a mechanism to "pacify the masses" (in Weber's terms) or to manage some of its social and moral responsibilities. This approach, of course, is a state-centered one that gives "agency" to it rather than to religion.

Our workshop could have turned that perspective around and pursued a religion-based approach giving "agency" to it instead. But because most of those who participated were country rather than subject specialists, with language expertise for conducting original research in usually one country, our expertise was better served with a country-approach than a religion-approach that crossed boundaries but required competence in several major languages, both indigenous and "classical".

Another (perhaps inadvertent) reason for privileging the state is that, except in theocracies such as Tibet prior to its integration into the Peoples Republic of China, it is rare to find a situation where religion dominates the state the way it used to in the past, especially during the last two centuries when the state has more often than not dominated religion. Thus, our familiarity with periods closer to the time in which we live have been given agency, which I have elsewhere called "present-centrism". In the previous several decades, however, and in certain Islamic and Theravada Buddhist countries, religion has reared its head again and made attempts to reassert its traditional position vis a vis the state in the most politically conspicuous ways, some of it, admittedly, aggravated by external political interference.

In any case, the reason for religion's "staying power" is the way in which it has been structurally embedded since early times in society, particularly in its economic, but also social, administrative, political/ideological, and legal institutions. Whereas the Theravada Buddhist Sangha and Roman Catholic Church in Southeast Asia once held and still hold considerable wealth in the form of tax-exempt landed property (and was therefore a major

land owner), Islam in the Island World appears to have had extensive economic links to communities of trade and commerce instead.

And while Islam's "structure" seemed to have been autonomous, dispersed and relatively un-integrated, Theravada Buddhism and Catholicism were entrenched as large, "national" ecclesiastical organizations that, at times were almost states within states, sometimes competing but most of the time cooperating with the state at many different levels.

That structure provided all sorts of administrative and social functions that otherwise would have fallen on the state, such as rural education and literacy, keeping demographic census records (of births and deaths), maintaining social justice at the village level, and ensuring that local cultural activities and festivities were performed. Monasteries were also homes for the aged, orphans, the destitute, the hungry, the lonely, and the outcaste. Religion also established standards for moral behavior of people from all walks of life, in the provinces as well as the centers, and were part of the daily lives of most of the people in psychological and other personal and intimate ways that the state could not be.

Religion also provided legitimation ideology for the state politically until modern times. Although that became less and less necessary as states managed to create their own secular ideological raison d'être independent of religious ideas and sanction, the state still needed religion for purposes of moral legitimation, while religion needed state patronage in the form of economic largesse and its tax-exempting authority.

Despite the unparalleled growth and development of the power of the nation-state during (at least) the past two centuries throughout the world, the state's attempts to "control" and limit the power and influence of organized religion did little to alter that symbiotic relationship. To be sure, the scope and character of that "embeddedness" has changed with the history of each country. Nonetheless, it continues to be very much a part of the modern nation-state, so that the relationship itself remains intact and important even in some of the most "secular" of societies where religion and state are deliberately and legally separated.

The question that is most often raised with regard to their relationship, then, is (not surprisingly) a binary one: the "balance of power" between them. In past centuries, that balanced was expressed in various ways that ranged from outright battles (as in Japan between the *samurai* of the Shogun and those of the Sangha), to doctrinal disputes (between Pope and King in Medieval Europe) as well as contested rituals of religious "purification" (in Theravada Buddhist countries).

In modern times, that balance takes on more "modern" forms, using modern techniques and mechanisms (such as the polling booth, electronic media, and well-organized, financed, and publicized protests) along with often pointed ideological rejection or acceptance of "modern" ideologies such as communism, capitalism, nationalism, and democracy to suit their respective interests.

Other than direct confrontation (militarily or in ritual form), another way the relative balance of power between religion and state is revealed is the manner in which its "head" is selected. Who appoints the head of the "church" in societies with a national ecclesiastical organization: is it the state or the clergy who selects him? If it is the latter, is ratification by the state a requirement? If there were no official appointment procedures or ratification, then who controls the *legitimation rituals* of such ceremonies? In medieval Europe, the Pope (or his

representative) crowned the king in a very public manner that made clear the church's (at least ideological) power over the state. In pre-colonial Theravada Buddhist Southeast Asia, although it was just the opposite—the king appointed the head of the Sangha—it was nonetheless equally clear who appointed whom.

In the Islamic areas in Southeast Asia without such an ecclesiastical organization; how are the various and dispersed religious heads (*Imam*) selected? Did the state (at the provincial or other local levels) have any role in it? Indeed, did the Islamic states of pre-colonial and independent Southeast Asia even recognize the Caliphate as the supreme authority of Islam, or did local *Imam* consider themselves independent and autonomous interpreters of the Koran?

Then there are those states in Southeast Asia without an overwhelmingly influential religious sector, such as today's Vietnam and Singapore. In these cases, the modern state is avowedly secular and the separation between it and the religion is explicitly written into their Constitutions or implied by the state's definition of itself. The nature of the relationship between religion and state in these societies clearly favors the state. But even in them, potentially explosive situations exist, especially when religion and politics are combined, sometimes inadvertently but other times deliberately encouraged and financed by outside forces for political reasons.

Often the relative power of religion in these modern states is revealed by the official place of religion in the state; that is, its *legal* status. Besides religious law meant for the clergy and social norms regarding their behavior and certain tax laws that exempt religious property and people serving the religion, the sector of the state to which religion is assigned in the various national Constitutions is instructive. In Thailand, for example, the Sangha is officially located in the *Ministry of Education*, whereas in Myanmar, it is in the *Ministry of Religion*. That in itself is rather revealing.

Similarly, where the Catholic Church is legally "placed" in the official organizational scheme of the Philippines and East Timor should tell us how powerful they are. Where in the modern Constitutions of Malaysia and Indonesia is Islam "located", or is the issue avoided? Where do the various religions of capitalist Singapore and Socialist Vietnam officially "belong"? Perhaps as important, how are their roles in the nation-state defined by these placements? What does it tell us about religion's power or lack thereof vis a vis the state?

It appears that in societies where religion is *strong*, it tends to define and legitimate the character of the state, shape its conceptions of leadership and authority, and influence the direction in which the state should go. Conversely, in societies where religion is *weak*, the state tends to define and legitimate the character of religion, determine its raison d'être, and control most of its activities. In the latter, religion can indeed become a "pacifying" arm of the state, while in the former the state can become the political (and sometimes military) arm of religion, although there is no evidence of the latter in Southeast Asian history.

Strong or weak, the history of the relationship between religion and the state in Southeast Asia, more often than not, seems to have been a rather cozy one, even if at certain times they were open adversaries. The reason for this "alliance" is that each was indispensable to the other in innumerable ways.

Finally, one of the "religions" neglected by the seminar (as most workshops and seminars on religion usually do) is supernaturalism (or to use the catch-all term, "animism") that probably under-girds all the mainstream religions in Southeast Asia. But however emotionally and psychologically important "supernaturalism" may have been (and may be) in terms of the everyday life of most of the people, it is officially unrecognized in the modern Constitutions of any Southeast Asian nation, as far as we can tell. Thus, its relationship to the state is simply not as crucial politically as that of the mainstream religions.

Yet, in most cases, because supernaturalism's beliefs (to a greater or lesser degree) have been historically integrated into the mainstream belief systems of Southeast Asia in any case, in practice this "unofficial" belief system has not been excluded entirely. Indeed, the way in which the state even today has co-opted supernaturalism is instructive: in Myanmar, signs are placed on select trees warning people who cut them down that the guardian *nat* (spirit) will be displeased by such behavior--just in case the law is not easily enforceable.

Our main hope here is that these four essays and the questions they raise will contribute some insights, or provoke more in-depth, comparative studies of Religion and the State, not only as it existed and exists in Southeast Asia, but the broader Asia region, and perhaps even other parts of the world.

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Religion and Ritual in the Royal Courts of Dai Viet

INTRODUCTION

Taking religion simply as the interrelation of the natural and the supernatural, what then has been the place of the state in this relationship? Ritual stood at the crux of the state's religious position, bringing together the physical elements of religion, the belief system of the state's elite, and the cosmos as they perceived it.

The intersection of state and religion in the lands of Southeast Asia saw the integration of cosmos and region (macrocosmos and microcosmos to return to an earlier dichotomy) in which the political structure of the state meshed with the conceived structure of the universe. The point at which these two joined was the ritual carried out by the ruler and his/her ceremonial specialists and was meant to enact the cosmic in the local. In Geertzian terms (Geertz 1980), this produced the 'Theatre State' and the 'Exemplary Centre,' but this ritual was much more than mere spectacle; it was the building of the whole, the oneness of creation, however localized.

In the charter age of the region, ninth to fourteenth centuries, such ritual tended to be undertaken in, on, or around the great monuments and was the key point of interaction between state and religion, even as the economics of the religious community helped to stabilize the polity. It formed the umbrella over and bound together the multiple scattered localities of the mandala. In the early modern era, with its more tightly administered polity, the focal point was more likely to be the texts and an ideology spread into society that dominated the state/religion intersection. (Lieberman 2003) Yet court ritual continued in its effort at cosmic integration and expression. In the modern age, it would seem that ritual and ceremony have still been necessary, however disconnected from cosmic themes. There is a continued desire for a 'oneness,' but now it is nationalism that is employed politically to gain the unity (Day 2002).

Returning to premodern ritual, what was the relation of such ceremony to belief, either royal or personal? It would appear that the cosmic nexus of the ritual did not necessarily require the belief of all persons in the realm to embrace it. Physical participation more than personal religious conviction seems to have been required as a submission to the throne and its connection to the cosmos. In turn, did this change through time and space?

I shall examine this proposition in the ritual and religious situations of the different dynasties of Dai Viet (northern Vietnam, 11th-18th centuries)(Whitmore 2008). What we see, I believe, was not a single dominant belief system and its concomitant ritual focus in the royal courts. Rather it was the continuous accumulation (to borrow Keith Taylor's [2004] term) of a variety of elements of different belief systems, from the local to the capital, that were shaped and reshaped according to specific individuals and situations (i.e., people, places, and times). While some elements disappeared, the accumulation of others continued through the centuries. Certain times saw the effort to 'purify' the varied elements, but such efforts never totally dominated the Vietnamese scene, and the accumulation of varied elements went on in local society.

While this accumulation proceeded, in the villages and among court personnel, male and female, state ritual carried on by the religious specialists of the royal courts maintained the place of each court in both the cosmos and the realm. For about 500 years, from the tenth century into the fifteenth, this ritual was mainly indic in origin (Buddhist), while for the next 500 years, from the fifteenth century into the twentieth, it was sinic (Confucian). Yet this simplifies the situation of Dai Viet. Let us go through the different dynasties, each operating from a different base and with its own religious pattern.

THE LY

The formation of Dai Viet occurred over the space of a hundred years, from the 960s to the 1060s, as competition among the varied localities in the Red River delta and outside it led to the dominant position over the mandala of the Ly family in the center of the delta (Whitmore 2006a). Initially, the spirit cults of the localities coexisted with the Buddhism of the temples. When Ly Cong Uan (Thai-to, r 1009-28) brought the capital back to the present location of Hanoi (Thang-long) a millennium ago, he did so by joining with the Buddhist establishment of the central delta. Gradually, through his reign and those of his son and grandson (Thai-tong, r 1028-54, and Thanh-tong, r1054-72), the Ly polity developed a ritual pattern that defined itself within the mandala both spatially and cosmicly (Taylor 1976).

In the progress from being the central locality to becoming the dominant power, these three Ly rulers redefined their spiritual and ritual position (Taylor 1986). Thai-to began the integration of local cults and the Buddhist temples as he attached both to the throne. Thai-tong developed the community of Buddhist temples further, building the Chua Mot Cot (Single Pillar Pagoda) as he linked the spirit cults more tightly to the political control in the form of the blood oath of allegiance. Thanh-tong took the ritual position of the throne to a new level as he established the royal cult of De-thich (Indra, King of the Gods) and Phan-vuong (Brahma) in the 1050s. At the same time, he built what may be seen as the central temple of Dai Viet, the *thap* (tower) of Bao-thien (Reporting to Heaven), in Thang-long.

Thus, in the midst of the localities' spirit cults and the numerous temples of the Buddhist community, these first Ly kings constructed a ritual pattern that gave them spiritual dominance over the localities of the mandala and made the Throne the focal point of the Earth/Heaven connection. The belief system that formed the background for this royal cult was a Mahayana Buddhism followed by the communities of monks that called for a simplicity of life and a recognition of its impermanence (Nguyen 1997).

This pattern of royal thought may be seen in the late eleventh century work *Bao Cuc Truyen* (Declaring the Ineffable)(Taylor 1986). In the five tales from this work to be found in the fourteenth century *Viet Dien U Linh Tap,* we see a complex mix of earlier sinic authority figures, spirits of the localities, and Buddhist monks, a fascinating blend of the previous millennium's accumulation on the local scene. A variety of Buddhist trends of thought (Pure Land, Chan [V. Thien], etc.) existed among the many temples of the land. There existed a pull between the royal court's religious observation and that of the individual seeking spiritual redemption, as was so well illustrated in the poems of Doan Van Kham (1080s-1100) (Taylor 1992). There also existed the *nho* (Ch. *ru*) scholars who were specialists in the classical texts, presumably including ritual. (Taylor 2002)

Inscriptions of the twelfth century show the interrelationship of these different strands of thought and the throne (*Epigraphie* 1998), all the while the royal cult of blood oath, spirit cults, and De-thich (Indra) continued. These stelae tended to be from Buddhist temples and so reflect that belief system. A royal inscription of 1121 (#15) by Ly Nhan-tong (r1072-1127) was strongly Buddhist. Regional temple inscriptions, like that by Ly Thuong Kiet in the south (c.1100)(#11), linked themselves to the capital within the Buddhist context, as did that of a mountain community like the 1107 inscription of the Ha family to the north (#12). Yet these inscriptions also made reference to Chinese classical writings, and, in the 1159 funerary inscription of the chief minister Do Anh Vu (#19; Taylor 1995; 2002), we see only such classical allusions and no reference to Buddhism at all. Chinese descriptions from the 1170s also did not deal with Buddhism in Dai Viet, though they may have been screened from the true nature of the Vietnamese monarchy by the sinic-style diplomacy of the Vietnamese (Whitmore 1986). Nevertheless, Buddhism remained the broad religious context of the state in Dai Viet, and the royal ritual of oath, spirits, and Indra bound the localities together within the mandala and the realm to the cosmos.

THE TRAN

As the Ly dynasty was establishing its Buddhist realm in the midriver section of the Red River delta, the growing prosperity of Dai Viet caused the economic and demographic development of the coast to the east in the lower delta (Whitmore 2006a; 2008). Into this underpopulated region came immigrants down the southeast coast of China, among them the Chen (Viet. Tran) who became a local naval power. Controlling the coast early in the thirteenth century, the Tran contested Ly power upriver, intermarried with the royal family, and took the throne in Thang-long. Not moving the capital to their base near the coast, the new royal family maintained the royal court with its oath and cult to De-thich in the broad Buddhist context of the central delta.

Yet, while this royal cult continued through the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries at the core of Dai Viet rule, while the inland Buddhist community remained strong, and while the many local spirit cults maintained their influence, the new dynasty from the coast had access to schools of thought in China. In particular, two new trends appeared, one Buddhist, the other classical (i.e. 'Confucian'). These two schools of thought ran parallel to each other, the first in the royal family, the second in the administration at large, attached to the entourages of the aristocracy, through the thirteenth century. In the following century, these two trends each would provide a possible answer to the growing crisis of the age.

The Tran royal clan had strong personal affinities with the school of Chan (Viet. Thien) Buddhism (Nguyen 1997; Wolters 1988). The first ruler Thai-tong (r1225-77) as a young king placed on the throne by his uncle dearly desired a Buddhist existence in a temple. Gradually, through the thirteenth century, the royal clan member turned Buddhist devote Tue Trung developed Thien thought in Dai Viet, focusing on the unity of time and space and personal transmission from teacher to disciple. Yet the Tran rulers did not see their Buddhist thought precluding the wisdom of 'the Sages' (that is, the rulers of antiquity). There was a strong sense that the two belief systems complemented one another. Simultaneously, the throne was bringing scholars of classical texts into administrative positions in both the capital and the countryside for the first time. One of the Tran princes, Ich Tac, founded the first school of classical thought in Dai Viet.

The Mongol invasions of the 1280s cemented the authority of the Tran princes in the governance of the realm. These invasions also had a direct impact on state and religion among the Vietnamese. The wars led Dai Viet and Champa to the south, long rivals, to join their efforts in successfully defeating the Mongols. As a result, the Tran ruler, the strong Thien Buddhist Nhan-tong (r1279-1308), visited Champa and its Buddhist temples. Returning home, the Vietnamese king became the first patriarch of the new Truc-lam (Bamboo Grove) sect, strongly involving the aristocracy. The next two kings, Nhan-tong's son and grandson (Anh-tong, r1293-1320; Minh-tong, r1314-1357), carried on this school of Thien thought and developed it into an integrative orthodoxy for the entire realm. Through the first third of the fourteenth century, these kings worked to counter the increasing socio-economic stresses and strains in the realm by pulling the varied strands of local belief (spirit and Buddhist) for the first time into a unified pattern of thought. Minh-tong's vision of the dharmabody of the realm fused time (past, present, future) and space (the localities) in the Buddha nature of all (Wolters 1988). The throne, the Buddhist community, and the realm were served and protected by the local spirit cults, as described in the *Viet Dien U Linh Tap* (Secret Powers of Viet) of 1329 (Taylor 1986b). This integrative vision was then put into writing in the *Thien Uyen Tap Anh* (Eminent Monks of the Thien Community) in 1337 (Nguyen 1997). At the core of this court activity, there remained the royal cult of oath and Indra and the special significance of the Bao-thien Thap (Tower). In certain ways, this integrative effort at a time of particular stress resembled that of Jayavarman VII at Angkor in the late twelfth century.

Yet, by the late 1330s, Minh-tong had begun to realize that this Buddhist effort was not accomplishing its integrative purpose (Whitmore 1996). Through the middle of the fourteenth century, social crisis grew across the countryside, and the king shifted course. Turning away from Thien Buddhism, Minh-tong looked to the growing community of coastal scholars of the classical texts. He brought the renowned teacher and scholar Chu Van An from the latter's thriving school into the capital. (Wolter 1996) For the next quarter century, including the remainder of Minh-tong's reign, An set the intellectual tone of Thang-long. His teaching seems to have adopted the Tang dynasty thought of Han Yu and to have emphasized the classical beliefs of China, its antiquity (Bol 2008). The focus on this antiquity as providing answers for the difficult present countered the Thien timeless sense of the dharmabody. As this sinic school of thought developed from the first generation to that of Chu Van An's students, there was also the change from Chinese antiquity to the formulation of one in Dai Viet, called Van-lang. These scholars both urged the adoption of the ancient Way of the Sages (Restoring Antiquity: Viet. *Phuc Co*; Ch. *Fu Gu*) and argued against Buddhist involvement in the state.

As the social problems deepened in the countryside, these scholars for the first time composed poems on their troubled times as they continued their efforts to influence the court and the aristocracy (Wolters 1986; Whitmore 1987). The Buddhism, in an as yet unexplained way, began to fade from policy delineation in Thang-long, even as the royal ritual of oath and Indra continued to all appearances.

THE HO

A critical point of change came with the rise in power of Champa to the south and its capture of Thang-long in 1371 (Whitmore 2009b). During the final third of the fourteenth century, the polity and society of Dai Viet went through a major crisis as the social ills were combined

with constant invasions by Champa. The Vietnamese defenders had little success in holding off the invading armies, and the lowland civilization saw a significant transformation in its mythological foundation. Power came into the hands of the chief minister Le Quy Ly, also of Chinese descent, but from the south of Dai Viet (Thanh-hoa province)(Whitmore 1985).

As Quy Ly survived the military catastrophes and developed control over the royal court, he began to adopt the new belief system of the scholars (Whitmore 1996). As seen in the chronicle *(Dai) Viet Su Luoc* (Brief History of Dai Viet), as well as in the accumulated mythic tales of the *Linh Nam Chich Quai* (Strange Tales From South of the Passes), the Vietnamese antiquity with its eighteen Hung Kings became the foundational myth of the land in these years. These texts linked Van-lang to the Zhou dynasty in China and its seminal action figure the Duke of Zhou. In the 1390s, Quy Ly pushed this brand of classical thought and established a cult centered on the Duke of Zhou, with Confucius next to him as the primary teacher.

This fourteenth century Vietnamese school of classical thought reached its peak when Quy Ly (r1400-07) took the throne of Dai Viet for his own family, now named Ho, and strove to reformulate the land in a classical format (Whitmore 1985). Dai Viet became Dai Ngu (Ch. Da Yu), an allusion to the origins of Chinese civilization, and the new king wished to emulate the Sage Rulers of that original period, especially Shun. In the process, Quy Ly completely changed the royal ritual, bringing it in line with the new belief system of the contemporary Ming dynasty. Buddhism had no part in his ceremony, and the Ly/Tran pattern of blood oath and Indra came to an end. The new ritual was the modern Ming sacrifice to Heaven in the Southern Suburbs (Nam-giao; Ch. Nan-qiao). This the Ho family performed at an altar to the south of their new capital of Tay-do in Thanh-hoa (Western Capital, as opposed to Dong-do, Eastern Capital/Thang-long).

The early 1400s thus marked the culmination of the shift away from the Buddhist ritual and belief system of the charter age in Dai Viet to the beginnings of the new classical ritual and belief system that would be so significant for the remaining four centuries of Dai Viet. In both the belief system and the ritual, the concept of Heaven (Thien; Ch. Tian) changed for the state. Previously, Heaven had been the realm of the gods and goddesses with Indra as their king on top of Mt. Meru, and the royal cult celebrated and connected the earthly king with the celestial one. Now the Vietnamese ruler adopted the scholars' view of a more abstract Heaven that encompassed the cosmos and nature, and in the Nam-giao the ruler became the link between this abstract Heaven and mankind. His behavior and how he and his administration influenced society around him affected how Heaven dealt with mankind. In the process, the state, rather than the monarch himself, became much more essential to the relation between the natural and the supernatural.

THE LE/MAC

The Ming dynasty defeat of the Ho family and its two decade (1407-27) occupation of Dai Viet interrupted the religious development of the royal court in Thang-long (Whitmore 1985). The Vietnamese forces that in turn defeated the Ming and took power to become the new dynasty, led by Le Loi (Thai-tong, r1428-33), came from the distant southwest mountains (Ungar 1983). The new royal court and aristocracy represented a break from the prior Ly and Tran courts of the Red River delta. The new Le court brought the mountain tradition of the blood oath and blended it with the oath of allegiance from earlier centuries. Otherwise no

royal cult emerged. While prayers for rain involved Buddhist temples, an ideological void appeared. In a debate between older, more traditionally oriented senior officials (particularly Nguyen Trai) and younger officials no doubt educated in the new schools of the Ming episode, the latter's preference for the modern Ming pattern of music and ritual slowly began to emerge in the Le court in Thang-long during the 1430s. (Whitmore 2006b)

The transformation of the state in Dai Viet from the regional mandala style of the earlier centuries to the sinic bureaucratic state of the contemporary Ming dynasty took place in the 1460s, led by the unexpected young ruler Thanh-tong (r1460-97). (Whitmore 2006c) One of the first steps in this transformation was to re-establish the Nam-giao sacrifice to Heaven led by the emperor. This ritual was central to the activities of the state as guided by the scholar-officials now recruited by the new triennial sinic examinations. Simultaneously, the state was advocating values associated with the *ru* (Viet. *nho*) in China (Confucianism) and sought thus to purify local customs. At the same time, aristocrats and court women continued to pursue Buddhist practices, and villagers followed Buddhism and their local cults.

The sinic Hong-duc model established by Thanh-tong (from the name of his second reign period) depended on the court (the throne and the aristocracy) accepting the values of the scholars and utilizing them to administer the state and perform the necessary ritual. The first third of the sixteenth century saw competition among aristocratic clans, especially the Trinh and the Nguyen, that destroyed this model and its accompanying ceremony. The new Mac dynasty (1528-92) that displaced the Le appears to have restored Le Thanh-tong's model and with it the core ritual of the Nam-giao. (Whitmore 1995; 2006b) Unfortunately, the records for this period are weak. We do know that in the villages scholars composed texts for Buddhist inscriptions and organized *tu van* ('This Culture of Ours') associations to enhance their classical values. (Nguyen 2002; Woodside 2002)

THE TRINH/NGUYEN

Through the sixteenth century, two aristocratic families, the Nguyen and another Trinh clan, supported the defeated Le back in the southwest mountains of Thanh-hoa province. After sixty years they were able to drive the Mac from Thang-long, before competing between themselves. (Taylor, 1987; 1993) The Trinh won and dominated the Le, the latter reigning while the former ruled Dai Viet in the north. The defeated Nguyen took refuge in their base on the southern border and began to develop a new, expanding realm there. From 1600, both aristocratic regimes led by the two lords (*chua*), fell back on earlier belief patterns. (Cooke 1998; Dror & Taylor 2006) Military in nature, they relied on loyalty and the oath of allegiance, within broader Buddhist and spirit cult patterns, to cement their followings. The Bao-thien Tower in Thang-long (Whitmore 1994) and the Thien-mu (Heavenly Mother) Temple in Phu-xuan (Hue) seem to have been the focal points for the two belief systems. The beliefs and ritual of the earlier scholarly regimes faded greatly in significance.

The second half of the seventeenth century brought major changes to these belief systems in both regions, as each responded to their specific shifting situations. For the Trinh in the north, this was their failure to defeat the Nguyen and fully unify Dai Viet. For the Nguyen in the south, it was the expansion of their joint Vietnamese and Chinese (*Minh-huong*) society through the old Champa lands (of present day central Vietnam) into the Khmer territory of the Mekong delta. The choice made by each region was linked to that part of China with

which that region had more extensive contact: for the north, Beijing and inland China; for the south, the southeast coast of China and the South China Sea.

In the 1650s and 1660s, the Trinh lord Tac (r1653-82) in his effort to strengthen and reunify Dai Viet brought the scholars back into significant roles in the government. (Taylor 1987) Two centuries after Le Thanh-tong, the government returned to a sinic bureaucracy and the Confucian values of the literati. With this model there reappeared the Nam-giao sacrifice to Heaven and the conception of the emperor as the ritual focal point between Heaven and Earth. Yet now the emperor did not rule, and so it appears that the Trinh lords tended to downplay his role in ritual affairs. (Whitmore 2006b) Nevertheless, the scholarly Confucian values were spread more deeply into northern society, even as personal belief in Buddhism, the Holy Mothers cult, and the new Christianity thrived. (Taylor 2002; Dror 2007; Tran 2005) While the Trinh were still unable to defeat the Nguyen and unify the land, the north prospered under the new administrative system, and the scholarly (*nho*) cohort there was successful both in their own land and on embassies to the Qing court in Beijing (Kelley 2005). Gradually, the scholarly presence in both the court and the villages deepened the existence of their value system and rituals in Vietnamese society.

For the Nguyen in the south, the problem was to develop a belief system that could encompass their increasingly heterogeneous society. As the extent of their realm expanded further south in the *Nam-tien* (Southern Advance), the Nguyen lords in Phu-xuan (Hue) acted to broaden and strengthen their authority and legitimacy over the localities, old and new. To do so, they tapped into the developing maritime network that linked Guangzhou on the southeast coast of China, Nagasaki in Japan, and Hoi-an in central Vietnam not only commercially but also in religious terms. (Wheeler 2008) Inviting Chinese Chan (Viet. Thien) Buddhist monks who traveled this network, particularly Da Shan of Guangzhou, the Nguyen lords in the 1690s had themselves and their aristocracy inducted into this authoritative form of Buddhism. This act allowed the Nguyen rulers to establish a more uniform belief system over the existing mélange of local Buddhist and spirit beliefs. The effort was strengthened by the growing number of Minh-huong (ethnic Chinese) communities and their temples (Mazu, Guandi, Guanyin) being set up in the expansion of the southern realm.

Through the middle of the eighteenth century, the two realms tended to go in a similar direction, though each with its own regional variant. In the north, the Le/Trinh regime, despite much tension between the two families, continued the sinic Confucian bureaucratic system established in the prior century. (Whitmore 1999) Its ritual focus remained the Nam-giao sacrifice to Heaven, and its official belief system the Classics and their examinations. Two major scholarly clans, the Phan Huy and the Ngo Thi, appeared and intermarried. They produced a number of the major participants in the grand events of the second half of the century. Another scholar, Le Quy Don, (1726-1784), emerged as the major intellectual of his age. Such literati partook in the embassies and rituals of Dai Viet's diplomatic exchanges with the Qing dynasty in China. (Kelley 2005) They gained much in their visits to Beijing and their exchanges there with other East Asian literati, both Chinese and Korean. This occurred even as Buddhism and Roman Catholic beliefs continued strongly in the court and the countryside (Dror 2002), and scholars like Ngo Thi Nham wrote on Buddhist as well as Confucian topics (Woodside 2002).

At the same time, in the south, the links of the Nguyen realm with the ports of Southeast China brought local Vietnamese society into increasing contact with immigrant Chinese scholars. (Zottoli 1999) The entrepot of Ha-tien far to the southwest, adjacent to the Khmer

realm, became a scholarly as well as a commercial center as the Cantonese Mok (V. Mac) family there gradually joined the Nguyen regime against the Thai. Other scholars of Chinese descent appeared in the growing Sino-Vietnamese society of Gia-dinh around Saigon just above the Mekong delta. During the 1740s, the Nguyen lord Phuc Khoat (r1738-65) sinicized his court in Phu-xuan (Hue), changing official dress and the administrative structure, as he declared this court equal to and independent of the Le/Trinh court in the north. What became a southern school of sinic government and thought, chiefly developed by Minh-huong scholars, would strongly shape the approach of the Nguyen claimant during the Tay-son wars, Phuc Anh, late in the eighteenth century and his regime in the newly unified Vietnam of the early nineteenth century.(as the Gia-long Emperor, r1802-19).

The northern and southern schools of Vietnamese Confucian thought and action came together in the first quarter of the nineteenth century as Nguyen Anh was able to reconquer the south from the Tay-son and take the north from them to found his own dynasty (1802-1945). (Dutton 2006) Strongly influenced by the southern school and its Minh-huong scholars, the Nguyen rulers acted to establish a contemporary Qing-style realm, as they shifted the capital and ritual centre from Thang-long (now Hanoi) in the north to their own central base of Hue. (Woodside 1971/1988) The best examples of this were the construction of the new capital Hue in the pattern of Beijing (including the site of the Nam-giao sacrifice to Heaven) and the new law code based almost entirely on that of the Qing. When the northern official Phan Huy Chu (1782-1840, descendant of both the Phan Huy and Ngo Thi scholarly clans, compiled and presented his major compendium of the literati lore of old Dai Viet, including its rituals, the Nguyen court paid it scant attention. While increasingly Confucian in orientation under the second ruler, the Minh-mang Emperor (r1820-40), and emphasizing the Nam-giao ritual, Vietnam saw Buddhism continue as a strong element in the beliefs of the aristocracy, especially the women. (Cooke 1997)

THOUGHTS ON STATE AND RELIGION IN DAI VIET

What we see in the relation of religion and state through the eight centuries of Dai Viet, with its capital at Thang-long, was a shifting pattern that changed as the dynasties themselves changed. The continued accumulation of approaches to the supernatural among elements of Vietnamese society meant differing possibilities of choice not only between what we term 'Buddhism' and 'Confucianism,' but also within each of these broad fields of belief. Contacts with the outside brought new possibilities of belief to the Vietnamese and new variants of ruling belief systems for the royal courts. Ritual stood at the crux of power and belief, of man and the cosmos, and seems to have had a shifting relation with the belief systems of aristocracy and individual. The efforts both to embody the integration of political and cosmic power and to provide 'theater' for the populace at times blended more with the elite ideology, at times less. The main lesson of religion and the state in Dai Viet would appear to have been its changing nature as the royal courts sought to establish their political regimes in ways that integrated the cosmic and the popular for the betterment of the realm.

At no time before the twentieth century does there appear to have been any structural or institutional religious order that could stand either for or against (collude or collide with) the government. Individual institutions, the many temples, shrines, or study halls, did exist and interacted with central and local governments in varied ways. What seriously needs to be studied is the economic tradition of the religious communities (as it has been for Myanmar; Aung-Thwin 1985). Beginning in the tenth and eleventh centuries and going through the

eighteenth (Tran 2004), we need to estimate how the temples developed economically and how their development interacted with the state. Over the centuries, despite the changing ideological pattern of the varied royal courts, these temples continued to receive donations of different sorts, including land or its produce. How did the upkeep of the temples occur? What kinds of manpower were attached to them? These remain to be examined.

The question remains: What relations existed among the royal cults, the ideologies of the aristocracies, and personal and popular beliefs? Initially, as elsewhere in the charterage of Southeast Asia, the Ly royal cult of the blood oath and Indra was meant to spread its protective umbrella over the Buddhist temples and the localities with their spirit cults. The Chinese-descended Tran maintained the Ly royal cult even as it brought in the schools of Chan (Thien) and of classical thought. Eventually, Tran monarchs, followed by the Ho, attempted to apply these schools of thought in correcting the ills of the realm. The Ho, followed by the Le and the Mac, chose the sinic Confucian system and the Nam-giao. Yet, where the Ly and the Tran had had *nho* thought existing adjacent to the dominant Buddhism, the Le and the Mac had Buddhism (and later Roman Catholicism) also thriving in the personal sphere. At the village level, through all these centuries, local cults and temples continued to develop in their dynamic situations, influenced to a greater or lesser degree by the changing belief systems of the courts, the changing aristocracies, and the different sets of literati.

In part, the pattern of religion, ritual, and royal court in Dai Viet matched that of Southeast Asia in general. (Lieberman 2003) First came the charter pattern of the monumental Hindu-Buddhist polities whose royal cults were meant to shelter and encompass the religious variety of the many localities. These polities were based in the mid-river segments of their valleys. Then, with the Asian trade surge of the eleventh to fourteenth centuries, coastal forces (from east, Van-don in Dai Viet, Thi-nai in Champa, to west, Ayudhya, Pegu, as well as Majapahit on Java) led to shifts in power and the entrance of new religious patterns across the region. With the breakup of the charter polities and the increasing importance of international trade, the new pattern of the religions of the book (Theravada Buddhism, Islam, Confucianism, and eventually Roman Catholicism) with their stricter universal codes of morality spread across Southeast Asia with results lasting to the present day. In this early modern era, an increasingly secular literati acted to bring 'legibility' (recording human and material resources) and increased administrative capacity to their realms. This included legal codes and historical chronicles with their religious contents to regulate and define their respective realms. (Whitmore 2009a)

Interestingly, the southern realm of Vietnam (that would become the Nguyen dynasty) in the eighteenth century had its choice between two belief systems, Mahayana Buddhist (Thien) and Confucian. Gradually, the latter became the favored system, as Nguyen Anh, the future Gia-long Emperor, put aside the Buddhist (as well as the Roman Catholic) possibility to focus on the contemporary Qing administrative and ritual model. Overall, we need to examine much more the complexities of the relations between religious belief and practice among individuals at all levels and those of the royal court and state.

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