

Phan Huy Chu, *Hai trinh chi luoc*, "Recit sommaire d'un voyage en mer (1833)" (An account of a travel by sea), translated and presented by Phan Huy Le, Claudine Salmon, and Ta Trong Hiep. Cahier d'Archipel 25. Paris: Association Archipel, 1994. 228 pp.

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Travel accounts have long enabled scholars of Southeast Asia to glean data on the customs, daily life, and habitat of pre-modern Southeast Asians. These accounts have generally stemmed from two sources: Chinese scholars on ambassadorial or tributary missions to Southeast Asia from the tenth to the fifteenth centuries, and European travelers and missionaries on trade routes during the so-called "age of commerce," from the fifteenth to the eighteenth century. Rarer are travel documents that trace the journey of Southeast Asians to other parts of the region. For this reason, the manuscript, expertly translated and annotated by Phan Huy Le, Claudine Salmon, and Ta Trong Hiep, written by the Vietnamese scholar Phan Huy Chu (1782–1840), which recounts a trip that he took to Batavia in 1833, is an important contribution to the body of Southeast Asian travel literature. Originally written in *Chu Han*, or Chinese characters, this edition is the first translation of Phan Huy Chu's account both into a Western language and into *Quoc Ngu*, or the romanized Vietnamese writing system. The manuscript is currently held in the Han-Nom Institute in Hanoi, Vietnam. Presented here in three languages, French, *Quoc Ngu* and the original *Chu Han*, this bilingual translation makes it available to French and Vietnamese scholars.

Phan Huy Chu was born in the village of Sai Son in the province of Ha Tay, twenty-six km south of Hanoi. He descended from a family line of scholars known as the *Dong Van Phan Huy*, or the "Phan Huy literary lineage." The Phan Huy genealogy is said to go back as far as the Late Le dynasty of the sixteenth century. Members of the Phan Huy family were practicing musicians and singers who, under the Le Code of Law, were considered outlaws, a situation that prevented them from taking the mandarin exams which would allow them to hold high political positions. In the eighteenth century, after some of the Phan Huy family members had been recruited to sing for the royal court, discrimination against the Phan Huy was lifted and they were able to take part in the royal examinations. The first laureate was Phan Huy Can (1722–1789) who received a doctorate in 1754. Phan Huy Can was Phan Huy Chu's grandfather. Phan Huy Ich (1751–1822) was Phan Huy Chu's father.

Phan Huy Ich received his doctorate in 1775. He was given a variety of assignments in Thanh Hoa and accepted roles ranging from judge to legal inspector and military advisor. During the Tay Son rebellion he earned Nguyen Hue's trust and was named first secretary in the new government's Ministry of Finance. He was later assigned the office of diplomatic relations with China. He is also known as the author of a number of important texts, namely *Lich trieu dien co* ("Institutions of Different Dynasties") and the translation of the *Chinh phu ngam dien am* ("The Plight of a Warrior's Wife"). Influenced by his father, Phan Huy Chu developed an early taste for studies. Yet, he was more interested in studying for the sake of study than in taking the mandarin exams. After receiving poor results on the mandarin exams in 1807, Phan

Huy Chu spent the next ten years compiling an encyclopedia of Vietnamese geographical and administrative resources. Having earned a reputation as an intellectual, in 1820 he was called to the court of Minh Mang to present his encyclopedia. He was given the post of Minister of Interior and subsequently Attaché at the Office of Diplomatic Relations. He was sent on two successful missions to China in 1824 and 1830. His mission to Batavia in 1832 was his third and last.

Phan Huy Chu's views were not always received favorably by the Emperor who accused him of using his trips for his own scientific curiosity rather than as a service to the emperor. Indeed, in his account of his journey to Batavia, the *Hai Trinh Chi Luoc*, he seems to pay closer attention to the topographical details of the landscape and his view of the coast from his ship than to the social and political situation in Batavia. His observations of the island of Pulau Condore, the Gulf of Siam, the Malay peninsula, and the port of Singapore leading up to Batavia provide for very interesting reading. As a scholar and an encyclopedist, he took note of the geography and ethnography of each site with minute detail. Still, these notes did not contribute very much to the body of information that would have forwarded the emperor's agenda. The emperor had ordered his emissaries to take note of Western activities in these sites. The Nguyen Dynasty, faced with increased pressure from the French to allow them economic access to Vietnam's resources and establish a protectorate, was keen to learn more about European political intentions in Asia. Phan Huy Chu was thus sent to Batavia to observe European activity there and not to take note on the habits and customs of the locals.

The most interesting passages in Phan Huy Chu's *Hai Trinh Chi Luoc* are indeed those that comment on the ability of the Dutch to control Batavia. He praises the sophistication of the horse carts used by the Dutch and elegance of the decoration on art objects and paintings. He concludes that the Dutch must not be influenced by the Chinese in their artistic abilities. On the other hand, he finds Dutch writing incomprehensible and ugly. He likens it to worms. ("les formes de l'écriture ont l'apparence de vers de terre," p. 65; "giong hinh con giun," p. 166) He praises their inventiveness in devising such things as paper money and approves of the order that reigns in Batavia. He describes the streets being watched by militia at night and comments on their cleanliness. Yet, he also believes that in spite of these "talents," the Dutch remain barbarians, as evidenced by their inability to read Chinese and their ignorance of Confucius and the teachings of the Chu. ("Aussi, bien qu'ils excellent dans toutes sortes de talents, ils restent des barbares," p. 67; "nen tuy ho tai kheo tram thu, cuoi cung van bi liet vao hang Man Di vay," p. 167)

What impression Phan Huy Chu's text made on the emperor is not described in the book's excellent introduction. Minh Mang's gradual demotion of Phan Huy Chu and the reduction of his responsibilities is mentioned, but a detailed explanation of the exact nature of Phan Huy Chu's relationship to the emperor and his position in the court is not offered to readers, nor is it necessary. The introduction is meant to provide a background to Phan Huy Chu's life and a summary of his intellectual pursuits. The book offer readers three versions of Phan Huy Chu's text and a minimal explanation of its historical context. Readers who wish to understand the intellectual atmosphere of the court, the policies toward the French that were devised based on reports such as those provided by Phan Huy Chu, or to read a more thorough analysis of Phan Huy

Chu's contribution to diplomatic history under the Nguyen will need to look beyond this book. Scholars interested in travel literature and Vietnamese historical texts, however, will be much aided by this annotated translation of his *Hai Trinh Chi Luoc*.

The goal of the translation project initiated by Archipel seems to be fourfold. First, it offers French students of Vietnamese history access to Vietnamese historical texts without having to shuffle through the *Han-Nom* archives in Hanoi and/or translate texts on their own if they are not proficient in Han writing of Vietnamese. Secondly, it offers Vietnamese students a chance to read a *Chu Han* text in *Quoc Ngu* and benefit from the French version with its annotations. Thirdly, it offers scholars of Indonesian history an opportunity to encounter views of colonial Batavia from the perspective of a visitor from another region of Southeast Asia. Lastly, it provides scholars with a model of the kinds of collaboration available between Southeast Asian and European scholars. The book is an example of a joint research and publication effort between three scholars: an Indonesianist, a Vietnamese historian, and a *Chu Han* expert. Phan Huy Le, Claudine Salmon, and Ta Trong Hiep did an excellent job of pulling their skills together and should be commended for their work. It should encourage scholars to look into Southeast Asian texts, whether travel literature or accounts of another nature, in their original language, and to make them available to students of Southeast Asia in all fields.

