

CHAPTER 13

STORIES FROM MR. NGÔ HÙNG DIỄN'S READINGS

Mr. Ngô Hùng Diễn practiced the art of physiognomy for nearly fifty years, starting from an early age. He rarely disclosed the readings and the identities of the people he read to third parties. Most of the following stories were recounted directly to the author by those who had their futures read, or are eyewitness accounts. All agree they benefited considerably from his guidance, be it in averting misfortunes, choosing the right career paths or courses of action, or even attaining inner peace and happiness. His method of neutralizing the impending dangers was unique – sometimes bordering on mysticism. He was particularly noted for his candor and unambiguity and simply said what he ‘saw’. Mr. Diễn never charged for his services, in cash or in kind.

The stories below highlight the basic features of Mr. Diễn's unique art of physiognomy. They also provide glimpses of his worldview, character and integrity.

STORIES FROM MR. DIỄN'S DAUGHTER

Winning a Jackpot is not Necessarily Bad Luck

Mr. Diễn had a friend who won a jackpot of one million Vietnamese dong - equivalent to 300 taels or 400oz of gold. The man had been a

successful real estate investor, so he knew how to invest the winnings. He bought three houses, all at good locations on busy streets. He opened a barbershop in one, a jewelry store in another, and rented out the third one. After a few years, he went bankrupt. He came to ask Mr. Diễm if winning a jackpot was bad luck. Mr. Diễm said: “Far from it! One must be very lucky indeed to win a jackpot! However, since the jackpot’s money comes from millions of people, the winner should take only one-half and give the other half to charity to secure the good luck.”

The Dead and the Living Belong to Two Separate Worlds

Mr. Diễm dropped in on his friend at lunch one day. On his dining table he saw an extra bowl of rice and chopsticks. The man explained to him: “I’ve just lost my only son. I miss him day and night. Whenever I have a meal, I always want my dead son to join me.” Mr. Diễm said to the man that since his son was dead, he should stop doing that, because the dead and the living belong to two separate worlds. Since the man was a Buddhist, he suggested he go to a Buddhist temple to pray for his son instead, so that his soul could be with Lord Buddha. The man followed Mr. Diễm’s advice and found inner peace.

The Lament of Owners Evicted from Their Houses

When the Ngô Đình Diệm Government of South Vietnam launched the Thủ Đức University Village project, Professor Cương of the National Institute of Administration met the criteria for receiving a piece of land and a loan to build a villa. When the construction was completed, Professor Cương and his mother-in-law invited Mr. Diễm over to the new villa for advice. Mr. Diễm said: “The villa is beautifully built. But you and your wife should come over here only on weekends and holidays.” He warned further that they must not stay overnight at the villa. Since they could not use the villa as they wished, Professor Cương and his wife decided to sell it. They therefore consulted Mr. Diễm. Without hesitation, Mr. Diễm said: “Sell it. This land is not good because it is imbued with the lamentations of the former house owners who had been evicted and

forced to sell their homes to the government at a very low price and move away from their ancestors' tombs." Reassured, Professor Cuong and his wife sold the villa. However, a few years later, the price of the villas in the University Village doubled, and then tripled. Professor Cuong was so disappointed that he stopped visiting Mr. Diễm. A couple of years later, however, Professor Cuong and his wife resumed their visits. His mother-in-law later confided: "When we still had the villa, each time Professor Cuong came to visit, he would hear some kind of sad music and singing from the bathroom. He knew it could not possibly have come from the neighbors because they were quite a distance away. That was one of the reasons why Professor Cuong decided to sell the villa." She added: "Over the last five years, the two subsequent owners of the villa died prematurely. Their astrology signs were the same as Professor Cuong's. Only then did Professor Cuong overcome his displeasure with Mr. Diễm's advice and happily resume his visits. "

Naming is a Serious Matter

Mr. Diễm explained that naming a child or naming a business corporation, sports team, theater or restaurant is a serious matter. The name at least should fit the physiognomy of the child or of the key people in charge of the organization. For example, a robust child should not have a puny name. A boy named after a national hero should be fairly smart, or it will make him a laughing stock.

Now Mr. Diễm's niece was married and had two daughters, named Yên Hà and Thu Huyền. The couple had not consulted Mr. Diễm when they chose the names. One day Mr. Diễm asked his niece: "Do you know the meanings of the names of your children? *Yên Hà* means something related to eternal life after death; and *Thu Huyền* means hatred." In fact, the couple started having conjugal problems right after the birth of Thu Huyền. They became estranged like enemies. Wishing to leave her husband, the niece came to consult Mr. Diễm. He told her not to leave her husband because whoever initiated the separation would bear all the consequences. "Your husband will leave you and your children anyway," he added. Just as

he predicted, two years later her husband, who had been having an extramarital affair, filed for divorce. After the divorce, the wife lived by herself in Vietnam. Yên Hà got married after 1975, but six months into her marriage, she was killed by one of her girlfriends. Thu Huyền now lives in Canada. Each of their fates oddly corresponds to the hidden meanings of their names: Yên Hà, to her death and Thu Huyền, to her parents' divorce.

Karma between Husband and Wife

Mr. Diễm used to take a ferry from his home town to visit his friends in Hải Phòng Province. The trip used to take about two hours. One day on the ferry, he was attracted by the special physiognomy of one young ferryman. He told the young man: “Young man, you are going to stop working as a ferryman very soon. You will live in a big villa. You will also have servants. You will enjoy a life of luxury into your old age. The ferryman only smiled, presumably thinking the stranger was pulling his leg. One day a French couple was on the ferry. All of a sudden, the husband got up, lost consciousness, and would have fallen into the river if the ferryman had not been quick enough to catch him. Before leaving the ferry, the couple gave the ferryman their address and told him to come over to their house. When the ferryman came, they gave him a job as a butler in their villa. Not long after that, the husband died of heart attack. The French widow then married the ferryman. She supported his Vietnamese wife generously and allowed him to visit her as often as he wished. This story was the talk of the town in Hải Phòng for many years.

Mrs. Trần Lệ Xuân, Sister In-Law of Former President Ngô Đình Diệm of South Vietnam

Before 1953, Mr. Diễm used to live in Hải Phòng. One day the wife of the Chief of Hải Phòng Province came to see him without notice. She found Mrs. Diễm chopping firewood in the kitchen. Thinking she was a servant, she asked her rudely whether Mr. Diễm was at home. Mrs. Diễm pointed her fingers upstairs; the visitor went upstairs without a word of thanks. Mr. Diễm was in his shirt and briefs, sitting on the edge of his bed and smoking his water pipe. Taking him for a

male servant, she raised her voice to ask: “Is Mr. Diễm home?” He answered calmly: “Madam, he is not home.” She said: “Ok! When he gets back, tell him the wife of the Provincial Chief of Hải Phòng came to see him.” Mr. Diễm said: “Yes, Madam.” A few days later, she came back. She again saw the same man. She asked: “Did you tell Mr. Diễm about my visit?” He replied: “Madam, I forgot.” She reproached him: “I asked you very clearly and yet you still forgot. Can you remember this time?” Again, he replied: “Yes, Madam”. She realized some time later that the man she had talked to was Mr. Diễm himself. From his reputation, she had expected him to be a serious-looking elderly man, with a beard and completely white hair, rather than the bizarre-looking person she saw. One day Mr. Diễm ran into her at a friend’s dinner party. When he came home, he told his wife about the encounter: “She conducted herself as a real dignified lady. She was very clever. She greeted me in a very natural manner, in spite of what had happened before. She said: ‘Sir, your reputation has long preceded you and it is such an honor and privilege to meet you today.’ She pretended she had never set eyes on me before. In doing so, she manifested great wisdom.” In time, the two families became close friends. She and her husband paid frequent visits to Mr. Diễm. One of their children was later appointed as South Vietnam Ambassador to the US. She had two daughters and the younger one was named Trần Lệ Xuân. Mr. Diễm foretold her future as follows: “This girl has a dominant forehead and beautiful eyes, with a powerful look. She will marry a very prestigious and eminent man. Remember, after her marriage, she has to stay beside her husband’s family all of the time. Otherwise, her whole family in-law will face a grave danger.” Trần Lệ Xuân was married to Mr. Ngô Đình Nhu, a younger brother and the closest political counselor of President Ngô Đình Diệm of South Vietnam. While she was in the US on an official campaign to ‘Detoxify the Opinion of the US and European Countries’ of the alleged dictatorship and corruption of President Ngô Đình Diệm’s regime, both President Ngô Đình Diệm (her brother in-law) and her husband (Mr. Ngô Đình Nhu) were assassinated in the coup d’état that took place on 2nd November, 1963.

Not Meant to be Husband and Wife

A younger sister of the Chief of Hải Phòng Province had a beautiful daughter whose fiancé left home to join the Vietnam Revolutionary Front against the French colonial rule. One day Mr. Diễm went to Hanoi and stopped by the Chief's sister's house. She showed him the picture of her daughter's fiancé. After looking at the picture, Mr. Diễm said: "This gentleman and your daughter are not meant to be husband and wife." Shortly after that, her fiancé wrote a letter asking her to cancel their engagement and suggesting that she marry someone else. At that time, an engagement was as serious a commitment as the marriage itself. Annuling an engagement was extremely rare, and therefore damaging to the family's public status. The girl became mentally ill. It took her a long time to recover. Later she was introduced to a medical doctor, who had just come back from training in France. They got married and lived happily ever after.

An 'Old' Woman but Still Unmarried

A daughter of a 'high society' family was still unmarried at the age of 30. At that time, she was considered too 'old' for marriage. Her family asked Mr. Diễm for advice on her marriage prospects. He said: "Her wedding ceremony will be very special, just like that of a princess." The parents of the girl looked at each other. They were not very happy, thinking it was too good to be true. However, not long thereafter, a matchmaker was able to find her the youngest son of a high-ranking mandarin. On the wedding day, in order to please the mandarin, the wives of his subordinates organized and ran the wedding as lavishly as if it were for a princess, complete with a congratulatory message from the King himself.

Predestined Affinity

This is a story of one of the four bridesmaids at the wedding of Mr. Diễm's daughter. She was the most beautiful of the group. However, she had what physiognomists call 'crying eyes' and looked extremely sad. Women with such eyes are believed to have an unlucky marriage. Contrary to the expectations, she was happily

married and her husband adored her. They had one son and two daughters together. The only blessing they lacked was that they lived in poverty and hardship. Her husband was a journalist by the name of Hoàng Ly. He wrote under the pen name of *Thánh Sống* (Living Saint). Mr. Hoàng Ly told his wife: “I know Mr. Diễm, a famous physiognomist. Before I married you, he told me that on such and such a date I would meet a tall, thin, slender girl with big, sad eyes. He even sketched her portrait on a piece of paper for me and then said: ‘You and this girl have a mutual affinity from past lives.’”

“However, since I had no intention of getting married, I did not pay much attention to the prediction. On the foretold date, I even decided to stay at home. However, a close friend showed up and asked me to go out for a walk with him. He took me towards the City Hall of Hanoi. Suddenly, he said to me: “You are getting on in age. You should get married. Let me be your matchmaker. I know a pretty girl from a very good family.” I said nothing. We soon came to the house of a civil servant, behind the City Hall of Hanoi.”

“You weren’t at home when we arrived. Later when you came back, your father asked you to serve us tea. When I saw you, the image of the girl that Mr. Diễm had described and sketched flashed across my mind. You looked exactly like the girl in the sketch. From that moment on, I wanted to marry you.” Mr. Hoàng Ly died in 1987. His wife still lives in Saigon with their children.

Compatible Physiognomies of A Husband and Wife

This story is about a couple who were both close friends of Mr. Diễm’s daughter. The woman recounted her story: “This is my second marriage. The first lasted eight years without being able to have a child. We were very unhappy. My parents-in-law often dropped hints that their son should get a concubine so that she could produce a child to carry on the lineage. My husband did not like the idea. One day we heard about Mr. Diễm and went to see him to ask whether we would ever have a child. He said: ‘Of course, you two will have children, lots of children. However, for that to happen, both

of you will have to change your physiognomy. Presently, Mister, you are tall and thin; you have to change to short and plump, with a short neck like a turtle's. And you, Madam, you must slim down your present shape. After those changes, you both would have children.' When we heard that, we became even more depressed. Indeed, we dismissed it as a joke. One can change from fat to thin or vice versa, but how can one change from tall to short, and besides, with a turtle's neck? We were very disappointed. My in-laws continued to nag, so I often went back to my parents' home in Kiến An Province for comfort. One day, while on my way there, I was caught in a sudden rainstorm, I took shelter under the veranda of the nearest house I could find. A man soon came along to take shelter in the same house. His name was Phúc. We started talking. I told him what I was going through. He also told me about his family's situation, which resembled mine. He had been married for 4-5 years, but had not been able to have any children. His wife was also very unhappy. When I took a closer look at him, I was startled to find that he looked exactly like what Mr. Diễm had described: plump and with a short neck. For a while, he looked deep in thought. Then he looked up and asked me to forgive him for what he was going to say: 'I think we two have a predestined affinity. I propose that you divorce your husband and that I divorce my wife, so that we can get married.' I went back home and talked with my husband: 'We love each other, but I'm suffering so much from your parents' grumbling for my not being able to bear you a child. Here's a man whose physiognomy fits Mr. Diễm's description and who wants to marry me. Please let me go so that I can marry him. This may well be our fate. It will enable me to have children while you can marry a woman who can produce children for you and make your parents happy.' At first my husband did not agree, but his family talked him into it. On Mr. Phúc's side, his wife consented right away. So, Mr. Phúc and I got married shortly thereafter. We now have 10 children together. My ex has three children from his new wife." Everybody in Hải Phòng knows the story of 'Mr. Fat Phúc'.

Attempting to Avert the Early Death of a Newlywed Bride

Mr. Diễm used to excuse himself from going to any party where he had to put on a suit and tie. However, his friends were surprised one day to see him in full dress at the wedding of a mutual friend's son. The groom's house was located near the Thủ Đức Reserve Officers' School. After the banquet, the parents of the groom asked Mr. Diễm about the bride. He was hesitant at first but eventually said in a low voice: "Her physiognomy is not good. She may die in the next 100 days. Please don't tell her about this. You two should treat her well, so she can be happy even if she has to die young." The parents begged Mr. Diễm to show them a way to change the situation. He said: "I'll do my best. You must follow my instructions to the letter, though. In the next three months, you will encounter an old woman who has run out of money while traveling. She will come to you for help. You must treat her extremely well, invite her into your house and offer her good meals at your family dining table. And listen to this carefully: tell your son and his wife to offer the woman their bed for the night. Remember everything I've said and do not forget any small detail."

Two months later, the parents came to see Mr. Diễm very early in the morning. They looked weary and exhausted. They told him that they had followed his instructions strictly. The night before, an old lady had indeed turned up and asked if she could spend the night at their place. She was going to see her son who was a student at the Thủ Đức Reserve Officers' School. They invited her in and offered her a meal and a place to sleep as Mr. Diễm had suggested. However, she died in the middle of the night. Immediately Mr. Diễm asked: "Where did she sleep?" They said they gave her a folding bed and let her sleep in the outbuilding. Mr. Diễm sighed but said nothing. Sometime after Mr. Diễm's death, the same couple came back to see Mr. Diễm. They did not know he had died. They were met by Mr. Diễm's student, Mr. Quyên. They told him that not long after the old lady's death, their daughter-in-law had also passed away from a common cold. Only then did they realize that they had not followed Mr. Diễm's instructions exactly. Mr. Quyên told them he was aware of their situation because Mr. Diễm had told him about it and said one

could not divulge God's plans. He had wanted to save their daughter-in-law but he could not disclose to them that the old lady had to sleep in the young couple's bed to 'stand in' for her. Mr. Diễm had also said, Mr. Quyên added, that one could not escape karma, good or bad. Charity might work miracles, but it took time, mind, heart and soul.

A New Job for A Judge

A judge, Mr. S., had a beautiful wife. She recounted the following story about her husband when she and her husband visited Mr. Diễm for a reading in 1974. Mr. Diễm told her husband: "Mr. S., I see you're going to change jobs soon. For many years, your new job will involve wood." The couple left Mr. Diễm's in disbelief. Her husband told her that even if he had to change jobs, there would be many other jobs he could take. He could not see himself working as a carpenter. In the event, with the collapse of South Vietnam in 1975, Mr. S. was sent to a rehabilitation camp at the edge of a forest. Like his fellow prisoners, he had to cut wood in the forest and make tables and chairs.

Love before Marriage

Another judge, Mr. C., lived in Hải Dương Province. He was a very good friend of Mr. Diễm, who used to pay him visits and even stay at his place for weeks. The judge had three daughters. The eldest was married to a medical doctor while the two younger ones were still single. Mr. Diễm foretold the second daughter's fortune as follows: "She will meet somebody at a place full of water and they will fall in love before marriage." The judge was greatly concerned because love before marriage was unthinkable, especially for a well-bred family like theirs. Traditionally, the marriage had to go through a matchmaker to ensure the social statuses of the two families were compatible. Following the prediction, the judge would not let his two daughters go anywhere by themselves, not even to the market. One day a wealthy noble family in Hải Dương came to ask the second daughter's hand in marriage to their son. The judge and his wife happily consented. The young couple had been together for one year

and had just had their first child when Mr. Diễm came to visit. The judge told Mr. Diễm: “You were wrong with your predictions. My daughter got married through a matchmaker. She did not know her husband before marriage, let alone fall in love.” Not totally convinced, Mr. Diễm said: “She must have met him before, at a place full of water, in order for them to be husband and wife.” The judge summoned his daughter and asked her to tell the truth. To reassure her, he said: “What was done cannot be undone. Just tell me the truth.” The daughter cried. She asked for his forgiveness and confessed that everything had happened exactly the way Mr. Diễm had foretold. She met her husband accidentally at a time when the river level was rising, amid the crowd who had come out to watch the spectacle. Instead of getting angry, the judge burst out laughing. Turning to Mr. Diễm, he said: “There you are. All this time we thought you got it wrong!”

Phong Thủy

Mr. Diễm was also very well-known for his profound knowledge of Phong Thủy. His school of Phong Thủy was based on the combination of the vitality of the property, the harmony of various objects belonging to and surrounding the property, plus other aspects of the land and its scenery. More importantly, the Phong Thủy of the property and the physiognomy of the intended users and owners must be compatible.

The Small Pagoda of the Buddhist Nun Hải Triều Âm

There is a story about the Phong Thủy of a small pagoda owned by a Buddhist nun, Hải Triều Âm. Back in 1972, she and Mr. Diễm visited several places to look for a suitable site for her temple. One day as they were about to cross the Đại Ninh Bridge - some forty kilometers from Đà Lạt Province - Mr. Diễm asked the driver to stop the car. He surveyed the land for a while and said: “This land will be a gold mine in future. It is a good place for spiritual practice too; its vitality is more suitable for women than men.” At that time, Đại Ninh was just a worthless tract of land in Phú-An Village, with just a handful of inhabitants. After crossing the bridge, they got out of the car again

and walked along a dirt road veering left. When they came to what the nun thought was a beautiful piece of land, she asked Mr. Diễm whether it was suitable. He said it was a 'killing' land. Instead, he picked a site further in the woods. Colonel Chu Văn Sáng, a close friend of Mr. Diễm, then asked a carpenter in Đà Lạt to build the pagoda for the nun according to her wishes - a very small wooden octagon since she was planning to do her Buddhist practice by herself. (Little did she know she would have nearly three hundred resident disciples.)



Mr. Diễm named the pagoda Sacred Light. As it happened, a Buddhist monk later built a pagoda on the 'killing' land, ignoring Mr. Diễm's prediction. One day, Mr. Diễm ran into him when he visited Đà Lạt. He said to the monk: "Now that you have done it, you can continue with your practice here for the time being. But remember this: when you see these two trees die, you've got to move away immediately." The monk could not understand why Mr. Diễm should have picked the two particular trees in front of the pagoda, which were still in their growth phase. Sometime later both trees died at the same time. Remembering Mr. Diễm's warning, the monk moved out. A young man was found murdered there one day and the pagoda is left uninhabited to this day.



Big Ego Despite Spiritual Practice

The Venerable Thích Tâm Châu consulted Mr. Diễm when he was planning to build the Vietnam National Pagoda on a piece of land on Trần Quốc Toàn Street in Saigon. Mr. Diễm said: “This land is ‘killing’. It is not suitable for a pagoda. It’s more suitable for public storage.” As an alternative, he suggested two other sites. (One is now the New Port of the Saigon/Biên Hòa junction, while the other in Thị Nghè is now a landmark of Saigon.) The monks did not take Mr. Diễm’s advice seriously. Venerable Tâm Châu said airily: “Buddha can reside anywhere.” Mr. Diễm’s daughter, who told the story, thought what he said made sense and the land looked perfect to her. She asked her father why he advised against it. He explained: “Whether you are poor or rich, you still have to choose the best spot in the house to worship Lord Buddha. It cannot be in the bedroom or in the outhouse. If they push ahead with the project, blood will spill with each brick that is laid.” Indeed, the construction of the pagoda had hardly started when problems began. As the tower was being built, a series of multi-story houses went up along the street in front of the pagoda. A bitter conflict arose between Venerable Tâm Châu’s

supporters and the people building the multi-story houses. The multi-story houses were destroyed and the pagoda project was put on hold for many years. The place has since been renovated to provide a simple place of worship, but nothing worthy of the name 'Vietnam National Pagoda', as originally envisaged.

Mr. Mai Thọ Truyền

During the time of President Ngô Đình Diệm, the Xá Lợi Pagoda, which belonged to the Nam Việt Buddhist Studies Association, became a focal point of conflict among the Buddhists. The Association Chairman, Mr. Mai Thọ Truyền, sought advice from Mr. Diễm. Mr. Diễm said: "The land is good but the main gate is obstructed by the Gia Long Girl High School and the big Buddha statue in the front yard, which has been painted white. To correct the problem, you have to build a secondary gate that exactly replicates the main gate. The original main gate should be locked and opened only on ceremonial days, while the new gate should be used for everyday business. The Buddha statue should be gold-plated because a white statue is only for decoration." Mr. Mai Thọ Truyền followed the advice faithfully. Since the major factional fights among the Buddhists in 1964, no other clashes have occurred.

STORIES FROM EX. MAJOR TRẦN QUANG DUẬT

Seven Years in Prison without Charges

After every military operation, Major Duật would visit Mr. Diễm. One day after an operation he asked him to read his future. Mr. Diễm replied: "You'll be in prison for at least seven years." Major Duật wanted to know what the cause would be. Hesitantly, Mr. Diễm replied: "There will be no accusation or charge." Major Duật was even more puzzled but dared not ask further. As Mr. Diễm had predicted, following the collapse of South Vietnam in April 1975, Major Duật was sent for "mental reeducation" from one camp to another in the north. He was kept in confinement for a total of seven years and two months. When the rehabilitation began, no one knew how long it was going to be. Some speculated it could vary from three months to one year or to three years maximum. However,

based on what Mr. Diễm had told him, Major Duật told the other prisoners that it would last at least seven years. And he was right. Serendipitously, the prediction had prepared him psychologically for the long ordeal.

“If You Kill Him, I Will Not be Able to Pay My Karmic Debt”

One day Major Duật went to Chợ Lớn, a business district of Saigon, to have lunch with Mr. Diễm. In the middle of lunch, a man walked into the restaurant and sat at a table next to them. He stared at Mr. Diễm and, without rhyme or reason, swore insolently. He did not look insane or drunk. Major Duật, who was in his military uniform, was very annoyed. He would have smacked the man if Mr. Diễm had not stopped him. Mr. Diễm said: “He looks like he is about to die. He will probably die at your slightest touch. You will only bring problems upon yourself. Also, my physiognomy indicates that I will be sworn at today. If you hit him, you will go to prison while I won’t be able to pay back my karmic debt to him.” They then ignored the man and carried on their conversation as if nothing had happened. The man left the restaurant before long. When they had finished their lunch and were leaving, they saw a big crowd gathering around a car which had been involved in an accident. The same man was lying flat on the ground - dead in a pool of blood.

STORIES FROM MR. TRẦN XUÂN KÍNH

At first I did not have the privilege of knowing Mr. Diễm although both my parents knew him well. I’m happy to share with you some of his prophecies or predictions of several events. Mr. Diễm was no ordinary fortune-teller. When he observed people, he saw their strengths and weaknesses. If the person was the subject of his predictions, he would tell him what he ‘saw’, without any evasion. Mr. Diễm never worried about displeasing the person he read and never cared how the person took his predictions.

Dying from Medicine

My wife and I ran into Mr. Diễm one day when we visited my brother-in-law. As soon as Mr. Diễm saw my wife, he said: “Lucky

for you! You almost died from the medicine you took!” We were taken aback because we had told no one about it. A week earlier, my wife had been to a quack doctor to get some contraceptive medicine. We already had six children and my wife did not want to have any more. The medicine caused a massive hemorrhage and she would have died if she had not been taken to hospital in time.

Stay Away from the Man with a ‘Killer’ Physiognomy

I knew a military guard at the Independence Palace where I was employed as a judo instructor. He fell in love with a high school girl who walked past the Palace every day on her way to and from school. Marie Curie was the name of her high school. Her house was diagonally across from the Palace, on Alexandre de Rhodes Street, to be precise. She firmly and repeatedly rejected his advances. One afternoon, he stalked her as she went to visit a relative on Tụ Đức Street in Đa Kao. He blocked her and asked her yet again to marry him. She must have rejected him and was shot dead on the spot. He then turned himself in and was instantly locked up in a military prison. He looked like a well-bred youth and was probably from a middle-class family. One day, I showed his picture to Mr. Diễm, telling him I was going to choose this young boy to be the head of my Judo classes. Looking at the picture, Mr. Diễm said: “Stay away, stay away! He has the physiognomy of an assassin.” I did not dare to tell Mr. Diễm about the incident that had already happened.

The Presidential Palace Will be Destroyed

One day Mr. Diễm and his student were at my brother-in-law’s house, along with his other friends. One of them randomly said: “Sir, you predicted years ago that the Presidential Palace would collapse. That has happened. The left aisle of the Palace caved in as a result of the bombs dropped by two pilots, Nguyễn Văn Cử and Phạm Phú Quốc.” However, Mr. Diễm said: “It’s not quite finished yet. The Palace will be completely destroyed.” Everybody was surprised to hear that. True to Mr. Diễm’s prediction, the Palace was completely destroyed three years later. It was rebuilt during the time of the Second Republic of South Vietnam.

Wearing a Military Uniform When Off Duty Will Bring Death

Mrs. Diệu Hạnh, a maternal grandchild of Magistrate C. in Hai Duong, owned a pharmacy in Đa Kao, Saigon. She married Captain B. in her thirties. Her family brought him to Mr. Diễm to have his fortune told. After a good look at him, Mr. Diễm said: “What I am about to advise you is extremely important. It’s a matter of life and death, to be sure. From now on, when you go on a long-distance mission, remember not to wear yellow colored clothing of any kind, or you’ll be burnt to death.” Captain B. answered: “How can I not do that since it is the color of my military uniform?” Mr. Diễm replied: “There’s no problem as long as you are in the military. You only have to avoid that when you change to civilian work.” Not long after that, Captain B. was promoted to be Chief of Staff of Mr. Nguyễn Tất Ưng, Minister of Rural Development. Captain B. and his wife followed Mr. Diễm’s advice strictly. He would avoid wearing anything with a hint of yellow, not even his gold wedding ring. He put on civilian clothes when he went to work. One day Captain B. had to accompany the Minister to Quảng Ngãi to attend the graduation ceremony of the Rural Construction cadres. He inadvertently forgot Mr. Diễm’s advice and put on his ceremonial military uniform, a yellow gabardine. After the ceremony, the delegation left Quảng Ngãi on an Air Vietnam plane. As soon as the plane took off, it was shot and burst into flames. The crew and the whole government delegation on board were killed instantly, including Chief of Staff, Captain B.

One Cannot Die a Violent Death if One Does Not Bear that Karma

My wife’s younger sister, who was desired by many, was much liked and thought highly of by Mr. Diễm. She was a second year student at the Saigon Pharmacy Faculty. He predicted she would not be a pharmacist, but would pursue a career that would make her ‘ride the clouds and the winds frequently’. Everybody was worried, thinking by that he meant she would become a drug addict. He laughed and elaborated; “This girl is very lucky! Don’t worry. I only mean she will travel abroad frequently and of course she cannot do that on

foot.” My sister-in-law just listened quietly, without thinking too much about the prediction. It sounded too good to be true to her because at that time it was very difficult to travel abroad unless one was well-connected. In the event, she passed the coveted Air Vietnam recruitment tests and dropped out of the pharmacy faculty just as Mr. Diễm had predicted. She was assigned to international flights and started to travel abroad frequently. However, Air Vietnam had a lot of accidents at that time. She and her family were rather concerned about her safety. Mr. Diễm reassured them: “Not to worry. She doesn’t have the physiognomy of dying in the air.” One day my sister-in-law invited a good friend, Mr. Quyển, over for supper. He was about to go for career training in the United States. He was Mr. Diễm’s favorite disciple. In consideration of Mr. Diễm’s friendship for my sister-in-law, Mr. Quyển accepted the invitation, in spite of his very busy schedule. He indicated, however, that he would not be able to come until around 5:00 PM on 13th September, 1974. The proposed time and date happened to clash with my sister-in-law’s flight schedule. Early on the morning of the day in question, my sister-in-law went to the office to request a change, but her request was rejected. Just as she was about to leave the office to go home to get ready for her flight, Miss Nhân walked in. They chatted and Miss Nhân agreed to stand in for her. Around 2:00 PM, just as my in-laws were preparing the dinner, news broke out that the plane had been hijacked and blown up in mid-air. There were no survivors. We learned only later that Miss Nhân was a neighbor of Mr. Quyển. The week before the accident, she tried to see him three times and each time she waited until late at night. She never had a chance to see him. If she had, the outcome might have been different.

This Land Is Very Bad

My sister-in-law always took Mr. Diễm’s advice very seriously. In 1972 she bought a piece of land in Tân Sơn Nhất, and she asked Mr. Ban (a famous Phong Thủy master in Vietnam) and Mr. Diễm to have a good look at it. Mr. Ban courteously asked Mr. Diễm to give his opinion first. Mr. Diễm said: “This land is very bad. You should not stay here because in some more years it will be a dwelling place of

people who are more evil than demons.” As the area was close to her workplace, my sister-in-law begged Mr. Diễm and Mr. Ban to find a way to correct the Phong Thuý, so that she could live there. Following their suggestions, she built her house with its back to the street, not facing it like everybody else’s.

To Avoid the Death Karma

Mr. Diễm often came to Mr. Dương’s house to worship “Cửu Thiên Huyền Mẫu” (the Supreme Sacred Mother). My wife and I also went to worship there. One day Mr. Diễm said to me: “Your complexion looks very bad. You should pay your respects to the Goddess and ask her to save you.” On one occasion, after paying homage to the Supreme Sacred Mother, I asked Mr. Diễm for a reading. He said: “Your bad luck is very grave. You could die from a gunshot.” Then he advised me how to counter that: “On the 3rd, 6th, 9th, 13th, 16th, 19th, 23rd, 26th and 29th of the next lunar calendar month, you have to eat alone, sleep alone, and go to the cemetery in the evening alone, bringing with you dried shrimps, dried squids, pickled shallots and beer. There you must find the tomb of a young girl and invite her to join you for the meal. Then, tell her about your destiny and ask her to save you.” Seeing a ring with green jade on my little finger, he advised me to take it off right away and replace it with a ruby-colored ring on my middle finger. I did as I was told; I had inherited the green ring from my father. Mr. Diễm also saw that I wore a necklace with a boar’s tusk to protect me from a fire accident. He told me to ask my sister-in-law, who was a flight attendant, to take it across the oceans nine times. That would help reduce my bad luck when I wore it again. He continued: “You are very hot-headed. You should never get into a dispute or fight with anybody, even if someone hits you. If you fail to follow my suggestions, the level of danger is unpredictable. You could even lose your life.” I was dumbfounded. While on the way home, I went over every little detail of his advice in my mind. I changed my ring and asked my sister-in-law to take my necklace across the oceans. I took food and alcohol to the Mạc Đĩnh Chi Cemetery where Miss Nhân was buried. She had just died from a plane accident, having substituted for my sister-in-

law. No harm came to me and I got a bit more confident. One day when I went to render my respects to the Goddess, I ran into Mr. Diễm. He shook his head, saying even though my complexion had got a bit brighter the fatal sign was still there. He said: "Karma! Karma! Just continue to do what I've told you."

His prediction proved right later on. One day as I was returning home from a tennis session, a friend came by, wanting to take me out. He proposed we go for a vapor-bath and massage since I told him that I was tired. I accepted his invitation. In the bathroom, my friend turned on the vapor half way. Just then a small man walked in and turned the vapor up to maximum. My friend could not bear the intense heat and turned it down. The two got into an argument and then blows. I tried to keep them apart, but the other man thought I was helping my friend. He punched me on the face but missed. Then he ran out to get his Colt 45 and shouted to his friends to join him. A whole detachment of paratroopers came rushing into the bathroom, asking: "Who hit the captain?" They surrounded us. Pointing his gun at my temple, the captain said: "This bastard!" The paratroopers immediately grabbed me. One locked my arms, another struck me, and another poked his gun into my back. Remembering Mr. Diễm's advice, I did not resist, just letting them beat me up. In fact, I would not have been able to do much anyway since my arms were locked and I was being held at gunpoint. Suddenly a loud voice rang out: "Who are you guys beating up?" I looked up and recognized the person at the same time as he recognized me. He was a paratrooper major, an old acquaintance of mine. The major said: "You guys have made a mistake, beating up one of us! Let go of him right away and apologize." He asked me how I could have been so tolerant, letting the kids bully me like that. I did not tell him why. Those soldiers had just returned from combat and were so drunk that they could not be reasoned with. The major told everybody to go upstairs. As a gesture of apology, he ordered a bottle of Remy Martin.

Your Husband Has a Nose as Big as General De Gaulle's

Our family had absolute faith in Mr. Diễm. My sister-in-law was over thirty years old and did not even have a boyfriend, even though she had many admirers. She always stayed at home, after school or after work, occupying herself by growing plants and flowers, or else decorating her house. One day she asked Mr. Diễm what her future husband looked like. He answered with a smile: “He has a nose as big as General De Gaulle’s.” My sister-in-law stayed single. In April 1975, she and several members of my wife’s family escaped to the United States. My family could not get out. Later when I arrived in the United States under the Humanitarian Operation (HO) program, I met her husband, whose nose is indeed almost as big as General De Gaulle’s. It was none other than Mr. Diễm’s favorite disciple, Mr. Quyên.

STORIES FROM MR. NGUYỄN PHƯỚC BỬU HẠP

My First Encounter with Mr. Diễm

I met Mr. Nhượng at a friend’s party. He introduced himself to me as the Chairman of the Nha Trang City Council. In the course of our conversation, he told me we were actually relatives. A few days later, he paid me a visit and told me that he knew Mr. Diễm, who had a reputation for foretelling the future. He suggested that I go to see him. As a businessman, he added, Mr. Diễm could give me valuable advice. I had never consulted a fortune-teller before and had little faith in it. However, I accepted Mr. Nhượng’s suggestion and met Mr. Diễm for the first time in 1960 or 1961. At 7:00 AM, Mr. Nhượng arrived at our house to take my wife and me to Mr. Diễm’s place, in an alley off Hiền Vương Street, facing the Saint Trần Temple. As we knocked on the door, Mrs. Diễm pulled up the woven lattice that served as the curtain on the main entrance and invited us all in. Mr. Diễm was lying on a plank bed with a mosquito net over it. He had his back to us. When he heard us come in, he turned to look at us. We greeted him and he mumbled something but turned and went back to sleep. We stayed until nearly 9:00 AM but Mr. Diễm showed no sign of getting up, so we decided to leave and return the following morning. The next morning, Mr. Nhượng again came to fetch us. Again Mr. Diễm was still in bed when we arrived. This time

he was fully awake. He looked at us, got out of the bed, and went into the bathroom where he stayed a considerable length of time. While we were waiting, Mr. Nhượng folded the blanket, took off the mosquito-net, and put both away in another room. He looked comfortable, as if he were in his own home. Finally, Mr. Diễn emerged from the bathroom. He asked his wife to make us some tea.

He glanced quickly at me and then, as he poured the tea, said: “You took so much trouble to come and see me, so please allow me to say three things. If correct, it means we have mutual affinity and that we will have many opportunities to see more of each other in future. If I am wrong (he smiled slightly), it is normal to make mistakes and there is nothing to be ashamed of, right, Mr. Nhượng? It simply means there’s no affinity between us.”

After the preamble, Mr. Diễn made the three observations: “First, I see your house has a front and a back garden, both with lots of green trees. Second, you are a first-born, but not from your father’s first wife. Third, you suffer from a back pain.”

He continued: “It is highly unusual for a house to have those features in Saigon.” I told him he was right on all counts. My house fit his description amazingly. My father had several wives and I am the first-born child of his third wife. My back pain started when I was 9-10 years old. I fell off a papaya tree and lost consciousness. When I regained consciousness, I felt a stabbing pain in my back. It has persisted ever since then. For a while, it was getting worse although I’d tried different physicians and different treatments. Later a doctor at the Grall hospital in Saigon showed me how to do physical therapy and the pain had eased somewhat.

After chatting for a while, Mr. Diễn said: “I want to make another observation about you - just for fun. You have many siblings. Your brothers are well educated and hold important government posts, but you are the only one with a university degree.” I told him he was absolutely correct. There were five brothers: one died prematurely,

one was a Governor, one worked as a Customs Inspector, and the youngest was an Air Force officer. I was the only one to have a university diploma.

After that first encounter, every Thursday, we would pick him up from his house and bring him to our place for lunch. He would stay with us until late in the evening. We often took him out for supper before Mr. Nhuận came to take him to watch Vietnamese Classical Opera on Võ Di Nguy Street in Phú Nhuận. He told Mr. Nhuận that the actors wore make-up and masks, and dressed up to represent different broad personality types: loyalist, flatterer, majestic/powerful and coward. They corresponded to some of basic categories in physiognomy.

One day when I took Mr. Diễm to Cinema Rex, we ran into my cousin. Mr. Diễm warned me about her physiognomy: “Too bad! She is such a beautiful lady, but will die prematurely.” I asked him why. He said that her eyes were over-exposed which means she would die outside her home. Later on, my cousin came to the United States as a refugee. At the age of 53, she flew to the Netherlands to visit her son and died there in an accident.

A Bastard Named ‘Ba Cá’

Mr. H. was a former classmate of mine. His wife had heard about Mr. Diễm, but did not know how she could get to see him. When she found that we knew him, she showed up one day at our house and begged us to take her to see Mr. Diễm. She promised not to insist if he said no. We sensed that there must be something extremely important she wanted to see Mr. Diễm about, because she was normally calm and unruffled. My wife spoke to Mr. Diễm and he agreed to see her. During the reading session, Mrs. H. asked my wife to stay in the room with her, in case she might overlook or forget what Mr. Diễm said. As soon as Mrs. H. sat down, Mr. Diễm took a quick look at her and, stuttering a little, said: “Ex-ex-excuse me! Why don’t you kick that jerk out? If you let him continue harassing you, your life will be full of pain and misery.” Mrs. H. burst into

tears as soon as he finished saying that. “Sir, I have suffered so much from this man. I’ve tried to avoid him many times, but he will not let me go. Please tell me how I can do that.” Mr. Diễm answered: “That’s all I can do. You’ve got to have the determination and sort that out yourself. Nobody can help you.” His name was *Ba Cá*. He made a living by seducing rich women. He would take pornographic pictures and use them to blackmail the women. In Saigon, many wealthy, prestigious ladies from good families were ruined by him. Even when he moved to the United States, he continued to harass and extort Mrs. H. He only stopped after she told her children what he did. Apparently her children had given him a harsh lesson.

You and Your Husband Must Live apart for 10 Years or He Will Die Prematurely

I have a niece, named Ms. B.T. Her father was Chairman of the Inspection Department in Saigon. She was a pharmacist, married to Dr. C., a medical doctor and professor at the Huế Medicine Faculty. Both worked in Huế, but often dropped by to see us when they came to Saigon. On one occasion they turned up when Mr. Diễm was having lunch with us. Since they had no problems then, they did not ask Mr. Diễm any questions. After they left, Mr. Diễm said to me: “If luck is with them, something will happen that will separate them for ten years. Otherwise, the husband will die prematurely.” In 1974, Huế University sent Dr. C. for training in the United States for two years. The subsequent fall of South Vietnam in 1975 separated them until 1985 when she and their children were able to join him in the U.S. They had been apart for about ten years.

A Major Consequence from a Minor Matter

Mr. H. was a wealthy pharmacist and Deputy Chief of Quảng Trị province. He had six children. One day in 1967, a friend asked Mr. Diễm to read his physiognomy. After a quick look, he said: “You are running a big business in Quảng Trị. You should liquidate everything. Also, you should sell your present house, in the alley. It is not good for you. Get a new house on the main street.” They did not take Mr. Diễm’s advice seriously. During the 1968 Tet Offensive,

Quảng Trị was razed to the ground. Mr. H's pharmacy and drugs warehouse went up in flames. Fortunately, before the fall of South Vietnam on April 30, 1975, they were able to send their first four children as refugees to the United States. After the fall, Mr. and Mrs. H. and their two remaining children tried to escape in a boat, but their boat sank in high seas. There were no survivors. Arguably, if they had moved out of their house and liquidated their business, the misfortune might have been avoided.

The Chief of Quảng Ngãi Province

One day Colonel Sáng, accompanied by a military friend, came to my house to see Mr. Diễm. Since he was having a nap, I asked them to wait in the living room. Hearing Colonel Sáng's voice, Mr. Diễm came out of the bedroom and invited both of them to enter. They had not even sat down when he said – looking at Colonel Sáng's military friend: "Please listen to what I am about to say. You should look for a room away from Saigon to rent as soon as you leave here. The more isolated, the darker and the more overcast your room is, the better. You should stay there alone for 48 hours. Do not talk to anybody, nor turn on the light, nor do anything that makes a loud noise. You must not tell anybody of your whereabouts, not even your family or close friends. If you don't strictly follow my advice, you will face serious consequences. If you fulfill my suggestions, come back in two days and we will talk again." Two days later, Colonel Sáng and his military friend came back to see Mr. Diễm. After a good look at the man, Mr. Diễm said: "Please go back to that room for another two days, then come back to see me again." Two days later, the man came back. Mr. Diễm looked at him very carefully and said: "Very good, very good! Now you can go home. When everything is settled, please come back for a chat." That evening, I took Colonel Sáng and Mr. Diễm out for supper. During supper, Mr. Diễm told Colonel Sáng: "Currently there is a false accusation being leveled against your friend. It could destroy all that he has achieved and even lead to his imprisonment. I made him go to 'prison' twice." Startled by the revelation, Colonel Sáng said: "Sir, you're absolutely right. It is incredible that you knew what you have just said! My friend is a

Colonel, Chief of Quảng Ngãi Province. His secretary had accused him of sexual harassment as part of a plot to remove him from office by an influential politician who wanted this job for his supporter, another Colonel. If convicted, he will lose everything he has and go to prison.” Two months later, the Provincial Chief was tried but cleared of all the charges. However, the military authority still forced him into early retirement. I asked Mr. Diễm why he had invested so much time in this Colonel. He explained: “When I heard his voice from my room, I knew he was not a bad person, so I wanted to help him.”

A Physiognomy with ‘Destructive Ears’

One day, Mr. Nhung and I showed Mr. Diễm newspaper photos of 30 colonels who were candidates for promotion to the rank of Generals. Mr. Diễm glanced quickly at the pictures and commented: “Ten of them will never make it.” I asked how he could be so sure, from looking at the blurred pictures. He explained: “I only have to pick out those with ‘destructive ears’. The rank of General is the highest in the armed forces. One can never get there with ‘destructive ears’.” Such a feature makes one look weak and cowardly. A few days later, Mr. Nhung brought Mr. Diễm the latest issue of the *Military Weekly*. Only nineteen of the thirty candidates were promoted to the rank of General. Mr. Diễm had spotted twenty - from grainy photographs!

The Secondary Residence of President Nixon

President Nixon chose a house in Oceanside, California, as a secondary, getaway residence. It is a very big house with a bizarre architecture, with many doors and arches around the house. It looks beautiful. When I showed Mr. Diễm a picture of the house, he commented: “From the perspective of Phong Thủy, this is a very bad house. It could even take the owner’s life away.” I shared that information with Dr. Phước who knew many Republicans in the United States. In the event, President Nixon was forced to resign following the Watergate scandal.

A 'Burnt to Death' Physiognomy

One of our neighbors, Mr. Thành, often dropped in to see us. One day he came when Mr. Diễm was there. After he left, Mr. Diễm said to me; "Tell him to stay away from fire." I passed the information to him. One day when his wife was cooking, the kitchen suddenly caught fire (possibly because they had stored gasoline there). Mr. Thành rushed in to save his wife, but both were burnt to death. This incident happened during 1985-1986. In 1975, I had heard he and his wife had decided not to emigrate. Their eldest daughter now lives in California.

A 'Living Abroad' Physiognomy

During 1935-40, many Vietnamese applied to go to work in New Zealand, New Guinea or New Caledonia, near the island of Tahiti. The French government had preliminarily selected more than 50,000 persons, both men and women. They had to go through health clearances and criminal record checks. At the time, Mr. Diễm was working for the Hanoi Security Bureau and handled the files of all the applicants. For his own reference, he made discrete marks on each of the files while the applicant was being examined by the medical personnel. He tried to predict whether or not the applicants would be accepted or rejected. It turned out that his predictions were nearly 100% correct. The misses could probably be attributed to bribery or some other reasons. When I asked him how he could be so accurate, he said: "Since the applicants had to undress during the medical exam, I had a chance to read the physiognomy not just of the face but of the whole body. Therefore, it's hard to go wrong."

The Wife's Physiognomy is 'Too Good'

After General Nguyễn Cao Kỳ had been Prime Minister for three years, the Americans decided that Vietnam needed a well-educated civilian Prime Minister. General Nguyễn Văn Thiệu was still President at the time. The mass media singled out Professor Nguyễn Văn Bông, who had a Ph.D. and was Director of the National Institute of Administration, as a favorite. I asked Mr. Diễm whether he knew Professor Bông. He said he had seen his wife a few weeks

earlier and found that her physiognomy was 'too good'. He went on to explain: "Because of that, Professor Bông's physiognomy has to be compatible with hers if he is to become Prime Minister. Unless he is Prime Minister in the next few days, he will die, although I don't quite know how that will happen." No sooner had General Trần Thiện Khiêm been selected as Prime Minister than Professor Bông was assassinated - with dynamite.

Classical Vietnamese Opera Physiognomy

I never heard Mr. Diễm make any negative comments about President Thiệu. I asked him whether there was any other General who was capable of replacing him. Humorously, he said the following:

1. General Dương Văn Minh: Incompetent, worthless, incapable of saving the country. Whatever he touches will go wrong.
2. General Nguyễn Chánh Thi: Stupid, with no brains, and worthless.
3. General Hoàng Xuân Lãm: A yes-man, no personal viewpoints, good for nothing.
4. General Ngô Quang Trưởng: Ok if he were taller and more handsome, like General Hoàng Xuân Lãm. Instead, his body looks withered, his face is dark-purple, and he is on the verge of becoming an alcoholic. His only virtue is a clear conscience. As he is not even a capable General, he can never be a capable President.
5. General Nguyễn Khoa Nam: No comments because I have never seen him.
6. General Nguyễn Khắc Bình: Very manipulative and scheming with an eye only on making money. His eyes are constantly shifting, rather like those of his patron, President Thiệu. He is cowardly and cannot be trusted.
7. General Nguyễn Văn Toàn: Tall and alluring, but his nose is too small, which means lack of talent, lack of intelligence and lack of courage. Not as strategic as President Thiệu.

Mr. Diễm did not think much of any of those Generals. His overall view was that from top to bottom, we only had classical Vietnamese opera physiognomies. It was the same in the north as in the south. That explained the misery our country was going through.

President Gerald Ford

A few months before Mr. Diễm passed away, *The Time Magazine* showed pictures of four candidates short-listed to replace Vice President Agnew who had been indicted for tax evasion. Pointing to the picture of Mr. Gerald Ford, Mr. Diễm remarked: “If he is picked as Vice President, he will soon become President because he has the physiognomy of a ‘usurper’. But our country (South Vietnam) will suffer because he will abandon us.”

“Some Việt Cộng Will Lie Down Right Here!”

When Mr. Diễm was still alive (he died in April 1974, one year before South Vietnam fell), he suggested to me several times that I should use my connections to move my family abroad. He also advised me not to concern myself too much about my wealth here.

On one occasion I asked Mr. Diễm what he thought about the general situation in Vietnam. He said: “Some Vietcong will lie down right here (pointing his finger at the bed he was sitting on).” I took his advice seriously and decided to find ways to get out of the country, not worrying too much about my wealth and properties. With that attitude, my wife and I as well as our seven children were all out of Vietnam before April 30, 1975.

The Destruction of Châu Thới Mountain

In 1962, the American military was planning to develop Biên Hoà Airport into an international airport. I was then an engineer specially assigned to Tân Sơn Nhất Airport. The Public Works Department assigned me to manage the project. The American engineers soon finished both the conceptual and engineering designs. The estimated budget ran into hundreds of millions of US dollars - equivalent to billions of dollars now. It was a huge project.

When I first arrived at Biên Hoà, I was troubled by the fact that thousands of tombs would have to be removed, including royal tombs of many of the high-ranking mandarins of the Nguyễn Dynasty. This area, juxtaposed between hills and mountains, had a superb view of the Châu Thới Mountain, which looked like a natural screen.

The mountain had been quarried since 1956 to provide materials for the construction of the Biên Hoà Highway. And now, thousands of tombs would have to be excavated and relocated. From a Phong Thủy perspective, I feared that this “roughing up” of the mountain would have grave consequences.

I invited Mr. Diễm over to Biên Hoà. After looking at the area, he made this comment: “The breaking up of the Châu Thới Mountain will inevitably upset the Phong Thủy of this region. Families with tombs in ‘thriving positions’ will suffer the most.” Then he continued: “I thank you for having brought me here to witness such beautiful scenery. Unfortunately, soon nothing will be left.” Asked about the possible consequences, he answered: “The consequences will be huge, not limited to the families with the tombs.” He said no further.

The following year – 1963, I saw the deaths of President Ngô Đình Diệm, Mr. Ngô Đình Nhu, and Mr. Ngô Đình Cẩn. Reverend Ngô Đình Thục also led a miserable life until his death. Numerous bitter events happened to the family of President Diệm. Deaths and sorrows cast their shadows on the South until 1975 and indeed long thereafter.

A Story about “Glued-On Hair”

One day while Mr. Diễm, Mr. Nhượng and I were having fish rice gruel in Chợ Cũ, Saigon, a secretary who worked at the Nam Đô Bank walked in and sat at the table next to ours. When she saw me, she immediately stood up to greet me. She was pretty and polite. Her hair was especially long and silky-black. Mr. Diễm said to me: “Take

a good look at her hair and see whether there is anything special about it.” I studied her hair carefully and said that her hair looked silky, long and black. Mr. Diễm answered: “In physiognomy, her hair is known as ‘glued-on hair’. People with such a feature tend to die prematurely.” He told me how to identify ‘glued hair’. I have since seen several people with ‘glued hair’, both in men and in women.

The House Shakes as If Resting On Fingertips

Around 1960-61, the owner of the Bạch Tuyết Cotton Enterprise, who knew me, wanted to sell me two lots of land near his company. They were situated on both sides of the road leading to his factory. The plot on the north side was large, while the land on the south side was slightly smaller. As I was preparing the purchase documents, my engineer ‘boss’ asked me to cede the north portion to him. I had no choice but to oblige, thus I was left with only the smaller plot on the south side. My boss subsequently built a huge villa on his plot while I built three modest villas on mine. On the last day of the Lunar Calendar year, when the concrete foundation for my three villas was completed, I let my workers take a break until after the New Year. The cost of the land and the concrete foundation came to about 2 million Vietnamese piasters per villa. The estimated cost for each villa upon completion would be around 6-7 million. Right on New Year’s Eve, a friend of mine, Mr. Ngô, who was a successful and wealthy newspaper owner, came to see me. He told me he wanted to buy one of the villas from me - the one at the intersection. We agreed on a price of 7 million piasters when completed. Mr. Ngô said: “I want to sign the paper right away. I will pay you 7 million piasters and I will build the villa my way.” I could hardly believe my ears. All of a sudden, I was 5 million piasters richer. Seeing my hesitation, he urged me to sign the sales agreement. The payment and the transfer would be settled the following year.

Three months later, the construction of all four villas was completed. The two villas, one belonging to my boss and one belonging to Mr. Ngô, looked much bigger and more beautiful than mine. One day I took Mr. Diễm to the site. He walked onto the balcony to have a good

look outside. Then he went to the front and to the back to study the villa of my boss and that of Mr. Ngô. He then told me: “Lucky you! It looks like your house is situated in the palm of the hand, soft and warm. The houses around you are sitting on the tips of the fingers, wriggling and moving. Neither of them will have peace.”

I saw Mr. Ngô the next day and shared Mr. Diễm’s observation with him. Knowing Mr. Diễm personally, Mr. Ngô asked him to visit his villa to suggest corrections. Once on the site, Mr. Diễm asked: “Under whose name is the house registered?” Mr. Ngô told him that it was under both his name and his wife’s name. He toured the house, both inside as well as outside, and then offered his recommendations:

1. Have a well dug at the back of the house;
2. Double the height of the living room ceiling relative to other rooms and install beautiful crystal light fixtures there;
3. Have the front of the house painted dark-yellow; and
4. Close the main entrance door and open another one.

Three months later, Mr. Ngô’s father died in the house, in spite of the corrections made. At the funeral, Mr. Diễm asked Mrs. Ngô under whose name the house and the land was registered. She said it was registered under Mr. Ngô’s father. Mr. Diễm then said: “My God! He was nearly 70 years old. You could have saved all those corrections. They would do more harm than good.”

My boss later rented out his villa to several Americans, but each one only stayed a few months and left. Later he put the house up for sale, but unsuccessfully.

Mr. Nguyễn Phước Bửu Hạp’s Physiognomy

During the more than ten years that I spent with him, Mr. Diễm gave me occasional readings. For instance, he told me that I had the physiognomy of a person with status, wealth and nobility. He warned me, however, not to get involved in politics. Doing so could bring me death. Therefore, I always consulted him when making decisions with any political implications. He was very pleased to see my

determination to keep out of politics. Below is a summary of his general advice to me, based on my physiognomy:

1. Avoid working with a short, dark-brown-skinned person. Such a person could 'stab me in the back' and 'eat' me up.
2. I will die from asphyxiation. When we came to the United States in 1975, we opened a fish market. We had a big freezer with a door that often jammed, so mindful of his advice I would use a piece of wood as a doorstopper for fear of being locked inside.
3. Wear clothes with light brown, indigo-blue or a light blue color. Avoid white clothes.
4. On Sundays, I should make bets at horse races. I should bet big and not fear losses. As I was not fond of gambling on horses, I gave my money to a friend to do it for me. I lost quite a lot of money, but never questioned why Mr. Diễm had suggested that. Many years later, a student of Mr. Diễm told me the reason: I was too successful in my business and needed to lose some money.
5. My house should ideally have a lawn in front and face east.
6. All my seven children will be successful. They are good-looking and their physiognomies are good. Life will be good to them and the same applies to their parents. Mr. Diễm once told me that from the children's physiognomy one could tell about their parents' life.
7. Occasionally Mr. Diễm would remind me: "You are rich and noble. Your physiognomy is compatible with sudden success, but sudden success could bring sudden failure as well. I'm glad for you that you are a Buddhist at heart. Please go to pagoda often and pay respects to 'Cửu Thiên Huyền Mẫu' (the Supreme Sacred Mother). Bear in mind that money comes and goes. I know you understand what I mean. Emigrate abroad when you can. You may be able to rebuild your fortune".

After he passed away in 1974, I could have sold some of my estate but was hesitant because my businesses were still doing well. But

when I decided to sell, I could find no buyer. As a result, I left Vietnam almost empty-handed.

Prince Charles

When Mr. Diễm saw the picture of Prince Charles, he commented: “His ears are cocked up and his pharyngeal bone is bulging out. These features will prevent him from becoming King, but will allow him to have an easy life, without significant achievements. Usually a bulging pharyngeal bone is a feature of a laborer, not of a king. If he becomes King, the British constitutional monarchy will likely come to an end.”

Mrs. Nguyễn Cao Kỳ Had Plastic Surgery

In early 1965, my family and three other friends travelled to Japan. By chance, we stayed in the same hotel as Prime Minister Nguyễn Cao Kỳ's wife. We later learned that she was there for cosmetic plastic surgery.

Not long after we returned to Saigon, Mrs. Kỳ asked my wife to invite Mr. Diễm to our place to read her future. On her plastic surgery, Mr. Diễm told her: “It's too bad that your plastic surgery has destroyed your noble physiognomy. It will affect your husband's political success. He may last another year at the most.” Things turned out as he had predicted. Mr. Kỳ's power began to decline towards the end of that year.

Mr. Diễm used to say that each person has his or her own physiognomy. Corrections could be sought for extreme features. Otherwise, consequences can be expected with respect to the specific changes in the physiognomy. For instance, a Vietnamese woman with a round, kind face who has plastic surgery to resemble an occidental model with an angular face, big eyes, elevated nose and thick lips should expect to face drastic changes in her life.

Mr. Th

Mr. Diễm was very close to the Th's family. I got to know Mr. Th when he opened a pharmacy in Huế. He belonged to the younger generation of Phan Văn Giáo, Governor of Central Vietnam. Mr. Th was very gentle and wise, totally devoted to his friends and willing to help anyone in need. When he came to Saigon, he started a pharmaceutical laboratory and an import company. I asked Mr. Diễm about his family and he said: "In their situation, we need to understand 'like physiognomy, like destiny'."

I also asked about Mr. Th's physiognomy. Mr. Diễm said: "He has a lot of luck. He will also have many opportunities to work with the ruling politicians." I asked Mr. Diễm about their villa, which was being built and was as grand as a palace, on Phan Thanh Giản street. He replied: "He won't be able to live there." In fact, Mr. Th had been diagnosed with throat cancer while the villa was being built and had been abroad several times for treatment. I asked Mr. Diễm whether he would survive. He answered: "His fate dictates that he will die in the air." As Mr. Diễm had predicted, Mr. Th died on board the plane while he was going abroad for treatment. Mr. Diễm also said that the physiognomies of both Mr. Th and his wife showed that they only tried to make money, but harmed no one. Therefore, their children would inherit their fortune and establish themselves abroad. In 1975, the whole family emigrated to the United States. Mr. Th's children were all successful academically. Twenty years later, the whole family went back to Vietnam and re-established a pharmaceutical laboratory and an import company that was larger and more influential than before. Presumably, the family had done a lot of good deeds to change Mr. Diễm's prediction about their future.

Mr. and Mrs. H.

Mrs. H. knew Mr. Diễm when she was still in Hanoi. She and her husband moved to Saigon after the Geneva Agreement was signed. They emigrated to France with their children not long after that. In 1960, one of Mrs. H.'s friends in Saigon came to see Mr. Diễm and asked on her behalf whether Mrs. H.'s family could make a trip to Vietnam. He advised against it, but Mrs. H.'s family went to Saigon

all the same, thinking that it should be all right since it was just a short visit. Mrs. H. visited Mr. Diễm while she was in Saigon. Mr. Diễm said nothing. A few days later, her son died in an explosion caused by the Vietcong in the Ngân Đình Restaurant in Bạch Đằng Port in Saigon. After the funeral, Mr. and Mrs. H. asked Mr. Diễm whether they should stay in Saigon or go back to France. He said: "Mrs. H. can stay but Mr. H. has to leave right away. Otherwise, he will become as poor as a servant, and might even be abandoned by his wife and children."

Mrs. H. could not persuade her husband to go back to France. He insisted on staying a while longer. Three or four months later, Mr. H. met and got infatuated with a lady who owned the Mỹ Phụng Dancing Hall. He spent lavishly on her. He practically lived at her place, doing the laundry, washing dishes, and cleaning the floor. His wife and children could not stop him from seeing her and had to disown him in the end. When he ran out of money, his mistress threw him out of her house. His wife had returned to France to take care of their restaurant. His children would not help him. Out of pity, Mrs. H. later returned to Saigon and took him back to France. Nobody knows what happened to him after that.

STORIES FROM MRS. DƯƠNG THỊ TƯỜNG

The Owner of the Jewelry Store

In 1945, a lady who owned a jewelry store asked Mr. Diễm to foretell her future. At the end of the reading, he smacked his lips and said: "There will be a time when you will temporarily be a prostitute." Upon hearing that, she got upset and rude. Mr. Diễm cut his reading short and left. When the war started, a lot of people left Hanoi, including that lady. She returned to Hanoi later, completely broke. Her family had depleted all their resources and she was forced to earn a living from prostitution. Later when she met Mr. Diễm again, she knelt down before him and begged his forgiveness. Mr. Diễm said: "My heart goes out to you. I'm the one who should apologize to you."

Mr. Năm, the District Chief

While in Hanoi, Mr. Năm brought his two 'sons' to see Mr. Diễm. After introducing them to Mr. Diễm, Mr. Năm asked him to foretell the futures of the two sons. Mr. Diễm said: "But you've got no sons." Embarrassed, Mr. Năm left abruptly. He came back the following day to apologize and told Mr. Diễm the truth. The two boys were actually the children of his second wife. He had adopted them as his own, but wanted to keep it secret. Mr. Diễm suggested sending them away for studies, rather than keeping them at home, but their mother would not agree. Not long after that, Mr. Năm was assassinated by the Việt Minh. Mr. Diễm cited that as an example of 'antagonism' between a father and his children, which could happen even if they are adopted, the children in this case having 'destructive features'.

Avoid Crowds

Mr. Diễm once saw an acquaintance of my family, Mr. Bình. Reading his future, he said: "You have the fate of sudden death in a crowd, so you should avoid all crowds. Do not even get near to them." On 14th July of that year, a fair was held in Hanoi to celebrate the French National Day. Among other events, the program included the game of climbing a greased pole. Mr. Bình was in the crowd watching the event when the pole suddenly snapped and fell on him. He was killed on the spot.

The Little Girl Called Dung

One day when Mr. Diễm came to our house, he saw a young girl called Dung playing in the courtyard. She was about 15-16 years old, went to a French high school, and looked pretty with her fair skin. After chatting with other family members for a while, Mr. Diễm asked the mother of the girl to call her in. He looked at the girl quickly and told her mother: "This little girl is about to meet a slender, tall guy who has a pale white complexion and looks like a bamboo tube. She absolutely must keep away from him. Otherwise, her life will be miserable and she will live like a beggar." He then went to describe other features of the man: "This guy looks like a limping ghost. I don't know whether your daughter can avoid this

fate, though.” Six months later, the girl brought home her boyfriend, named Quân. Everybody was alarmed to see him because he looked exactly like what Mr. Diễm had described. However, nobody dared to take any drastic measures. They let her continue the relationship, but cautioned her against getting pregnant. Unfortunately, the worst happened. She got pregnant and eloped. When the family emigrated to the United States in 1975, Dung was left stranded in Saigon. For many decades, she lived in misery, like a beggar. All the money her younger sister sent her from the United States was confiscated by her boyfriend to pay for his whoring. She tried to leave him several times but did not succeed because he threatened to kill her. It was not until 1995 that Dung managed to leave Quân; he got another wife. By then Dung looked haggard and old, like a 60-year old woman. Mr. Diễm had foretold that she would not be able to get rid of Quân until she was at least 30, and that she would meet an unmarried man about ten years her junior. He described him as having deep eyes, a darkish complexion (neither white nor black), and a puffed-up chest when standing. Dung indeed met a man of that description, by the name of Hoàng, and married him. Hoàng was a famous guitarist in Saigon. They had three children together, two girls and one boy. A few years later, her sister sponsored Dung’s family to emigrate to the United States. At first, Dung and her two daughters worked in a nail salon store, and later they opened two nail salon stores of their own. Meanwhile, Hoàng continued his musical career, performing at American and Vietnamese functions. Dung and her family were devout Buddhists. Her son specializes in drawing Buddha images. Dung’s family lives in reasonable comfort; all her children have graduated from university. It took her 20 years to pay off her ‘debt of karma’ to Quân. Both Quân and the son Dung had left behind became drug addicts. Quân died in poverty shortly after Dung moved to the United States. The son is still living in Saigon; he is married and has one son.

A Predestined Relationship

Mrs. Đức Lợi was a lottery ticket wholesaler. She earned millions of Vietnamese piasters weekly, which she had to split with the

'officials' in the Lottery Department, which issued the tickets, and the Procurement Department, which issued invitations to bids. Once she was implicated in a leak scandal and sought advice from Mr. Diễm. He said: "It's very difficult for you to get away this time. However, if you are arrested, you will be freed on 28th December. Then, on 1st or 2nd January, you will have a very special visitor, who is taller than Mr. Nguyễn Cao Kỳ (the former South Vietnam Vice President who was about 6 feet tall), and who has a head that is as round as a papaya, with big eyes and a forehead with three distinct horizontal wrinkles on it. This gentleman is kind and gentle, and will treat his wife lovingly. You will marry him and lead a very happy life." Mrs. Đức Lợi did not pay much attention to the prediction since she was 50 years old and had no intention of getting married again. Her husband was stuck in Hanoi when she left for the south in 1954. Just as Mr. Diễm had predicted, Mrs. Đức Lợi got arrested and then released on 28th December, pending trial. On 2nd January, Mr. Tô Văn, an investigative reporter, came to interview her in an attempt to defend her because he knew that she had been innocently caught up in infighting between two or three officers on the tender committee. One thing led to another. Mrs. Đức Lợi and Mr. Tô Văn got married and lived together into their old age. After Mr. Tô Văn passed away, Mrs. Đức Lợi still talked fondly about their relationship.

STORIES FROM MR. TRẦN VĂN HẢI, *nom de plume* 'TỪ THỨC'

Thẩm Hoàng Tín, Mayor of Hanoi

The mayor of Hanoi, Thẩm Hoàng Tín, was of Chinese origin. His parents came from Chaozhou and made their home in Hanoi. When he was young, his parents sent him to study in France. Upon obtaining his diploma in pharmacy, he returned to Vietnam and practiced in Hanoi. He had a drug store called Cửa Nam. He also had a laboratory, a pharmacy and another drug store. Mr. Thẩm Hoàng Tín divorced his first wife, who was half-Chinese. She had borne him three children. He then married the widow of Mr. Thanh, a District Chief in Hanoi. When they married, she was still studying at

the Pharmacy Faculty in Hanoi. After she obtained her diploma, she took charge of all Mr. Tín's businesses so as to free him to get involved in politics.

Mr. Tín was later appointed Mayor of Hanoi, an honorary post with no salary. He gained a reputation for being incorruptible and hard-working. He loved spending time with the intellectual and political elite. He harbored an ambition to become Premier of North Vietnam one day, replacing Premier Nguyễn Hữu Trí, who was a fellow member of the Đại Việt Bureaucracy. Mr. Tín dressed elegantly in expensive clothes, his moustache trimmed in a Clark Gable style. Even though he was only 40 years old, he carried a cane like a French gentleman. He talked slowly and had a proper demeanor. Southern Vietnamese who saw him in Hanoi called him 'Monsieur Impeccable'.

Mr. Tín enjoyed the company of physiognomists and astrologists. He would ask to meet any fortune-teller who was known to be good, regardless of their fees. Since Mr. Tín was a close friend of mine and knew that I was close to Mr. Diễm, he inevitably asked me to invite Mr. Diễm over to his place. I took Mr. Diễm to his house a few times. However, Mr. Tín was reluctant to ask for a reading, while Mr. Diễm, for his part, also did not volunteer. So for a while, they just used to chat about things in general.

On one occasion, as we were leaving, I asked Mr. Diễm whether he had had a good look at Mr. Tín and, more specifically, whether Mr. Tín had any chance of advancing politically and possibly becoming the Prime Minister of North Vietnam. Mr. Diễm just smiled and said that he needed to study Mr. Tín a little more.

One day at the Mid-Autumn Festival, we decided to go to Mr. Tín's home after supper to partake of moon cakes, drink lotus-scented tea and admire the full moon. There were about twenty guests gathered on the flat roof top, including engineer Lê Văn Ngô, poet Huy Kinh, and lawyer Nguyễn Văn Huyền. Mrs. Tín did not get home until

around 10:00 PM. Joining the party, she asked Mr. Diễm to give her an honest reading. All echoed her request. After some hesitation, Mr. Diễm said in a measured voice: “Since Mrs. Mayor asked, I will oblige. I must warn you that I am no expert. I’ve only studied it in my free time, from friends and other sources. You must forgive me if I make any mistake.” He looked at Mrs. Tín and then commented: “Your physiognomy enables you to bring good fortune to your husband and children and to make money easily. However, you will have more than one husband in your life. (Mrs. Tín had been married twice, first to the late District Chief Thanh and then to Mr. Tín.) She then asked whether she and Mr. Tín would be together for the rest of their lives, to which Mr. Diễm answered: “Certainly, you two will lead a happy life together and be blessed with wealth, reputation and successful children. But you will die before your husband, even though he is older than you. This may happen when you reach 60. It seems to be your fate, but I may be wrong. Just concentrate on taking care of your health. Don’t work or worry too much. Be kind, do good deeds, and give alms. All these can add to your longevity. Destiny can be overruled by virtue.” With that, Mr. Diễm stopped talking. Meanwhile, Mr. Tín still dared not ask him for a reading. As Mr. Diễm was leaving, he said to Mr. Tín: “If we have a chance to meet again, I’ll do a reading for you.”

About a month later, we went to visit Mr. Tín at his house one Sunday afternoon. We sat and drank coffee in the living room. After a little while, Mr. Diễm said: “Your wife and your friends are not here, so I’ll do a reading for you today. I’ll be very frank with you, so please forgive me if I say anything that does not please you. You have not had a smooth conjugal life. Your first marriage did not work out, and even if you have no intention of leaving your second wife, it will still happen when she passes away at around 60 years of age. You will have a third wife, but still your marriage will not be smooth. She will have been married two or three times before she meets you. She is a woman of pleasure who will ruin anybody’s fortune. She will live a long life and have the physiognomy of a widow, which means you will die before her. You have the

physiognomy of a crane, with a slim body, small bones and dry appearance. You can never put on weight, even if you eat very nutritious food with tonics. A person with a crane physiognomy usually becomes a monk. However, you are a crane that violates religious commandments. In addition to having two or three wives, you will have a dozen mistresses. Your future is not that of a crane flying in the sky, but rather one that has been chased into the woods, featherless and flightless, or ‘*un oiseau déplumé*’ (a French term for a bird whose feathers have been plucked). You will be impoverished, your children will not be successful and they will have little education. You will be unhappy and have to move far away and die alone abroad.” Noting the visibly saddening expression on Mr. Tín’s face, Mr. Diễm smiled and tried to cheer him up by saying: “What I’ve said might not come true. I often make mistakes. You only have to conduct yourself with kindness. Do good deeds. Our destiny can be changed by our virtue.”

After the Geneva Treaty was signed, Mr. Tín’s family did not move to South Vietnam. When the Việt Minh took over Hanoi, Mr. Tín was considered a reactionary intellectual and sent to a Rehabilitation Camp. He was later freed and allowed to teach medicine and pharmacy at the Hanoi University. Meanwhile, Mrs. Tín, wrought with endless worries and responsibilities, developed heart disease and died before she was sixty. Mr. Tín married his third wife. There was nothing left of his businesses (I am not sure whether it had anything to do with his third wife). None of his friends knew much about her background. His children joined the Việt Minh. None had any notable academic or social achievements. After the collapse of South Vietnam on 30th April, 1975, Mr. Tín and his third wife moved to Saigon and were allowed to emigrate to France, where he died shortly after due to an illness. The last photo of him can still be seen at the altar of the Luru Son Pagoda in a Paris suburb. His life ended exactly as Mr. Diễm had predicted: poor and denuded like *un oiseau déplumé*.

Engineer Lê Văn Ngô

Born in South Vietnam, Mr. Lê Văn Ngô went to France to study when he was young. He obtained a diploma in thermal engineering (*ingenieur de chauffage* in French) and was nicknamed ‘oven engineer’ by his friends. He was a fighter in the trade union in France. His wife was French and they had one daughter and two sons. He came back to Vietnam in 1946 and lived on Richaud Street, which was later renamed Phan Đình Phùng. He was stout and had a sonorous voice, but was short-winded and would get short of breath after very little exertion. He became politically active and joined the Ministry of Labor of the Nguyễn Phan Long government. Mr. Lê Văn Ngô was highly regarded by Hoà Hảo Protectors of the Law, Phạm Công Tắc, and Bình Xuyên leader, Major General Bảy Viễn. He was considered honest, upright, loyal, and modest.

Mr. Diễm shared the same view about Mr. Lê Văn Ngô, with whom he had a close relationship. He considered him an upright, albeit impatient, person, and respected him for his kindness and loyalty. He once said to him: “Your chin is wide; your jaw bones are big and protrude too much; your forehead is narrow and short; your Chinese astrology sign is a horse; your name means horse and your teeth are big like a horse’s. You have a lot of features resembling those of Mussolini. A person with a wide chin and broad jaw is prone to sudden, serious and even lethal accidents. To reduce the risk, you must avoid wearing short-sleeved shirts and sporty shorts that make you look like a member of the military. Put on long-sleeved shirts with a light-colored tie and vest, so as to reduce the effect of the ‘killing physiognomy’. Your wife bears a ‘noble’ physiognomy even though she is old and looks sickly and ugly. You should not leave her for adulterous relationships. The day you are separated from her, your bad luck will begin and you may have a fatal accident. Never go into the woods or deserted areas, because you are likely to have accidents there.”

Later Mr. Lê Văn Ngô threw in his lot with General Bảy Viễn, leader of the Bình Xuyên militia, a big and powerful anti-Communist religious sect. They crossed the Saigon River on a campaign to fight

Ngô Đình Diệm. They lost the battle and retreated to the Sát Forest. The French sent in a helicopter to rescue General Bảy Viễn, and his two deputies, Lai Hữu Sang and Lai Hữu Tài. Both later emigrated to France as refugees. The remaining followers, including Trần Văn Ân, Trịnh Khánh Vàng, Hồ Hữu Tường, and Lê Văn Ngô were left behind by the French, and were subsequently taken prisoners in the Hoàng Diệu operation, led by General Dương Văn Minh. They were tried by a military tribunal and sentenced to death. However, President Ngô Đình Diệm did not want any of them dead, so he exiled them instead to Con Island (now Côn Đảo). They were later freed by General Nguyễn Khánh after Ngô Đình Diệm was overthrown on 2nd November, 1963. Mr. Trần Văn Ân was then made Minister of the ministry responsible for the “Open Arms” policy to welcome the communists from the North to return to the South, while Mr. Lê Văn Ngô was made General Inspector. When Nguyễn Khánh’s government collapsed, Mr. Lê Văn Ngô moved in with his son-in-law, Dr. Trần Lữ Y. (Mr. Lê Văn Ngô’s eldest daughter had married Dr. Tran Louis, who later changed his name to Trần Lữ Y, when he went to France for training. Both husband and wife returned to Vietnam and Dr. Trần Lữ Y was made Minister of Health in Nguyễn Văn Thiệu’s government.) Sometime later Mr. Lê Văn Ngô visited his wife and children in France. He fell ill and died there.

Mr. Diễm’s predictions for Engineer Lê Văn Ngô proved accurate. The day his religious group began to fight President Diệm, Lê Văn Ngô forgot Mr. Diễm’s advice. He sent his wife and three children to France so that he could focus on his job of fighting Ngô Đình Diệm. If his wife and children had been in the Sát Forest with him, the whole family could probably have been rescued by the French Military Intelligence Office (Deuxième Bureau) from the siege in the Sát Forest, since his wife was a French national,

Mrs. Vương Ngọc Tổng

Mrs. Tổng’s parents, who were Chinese, immigrated to Vietnam where they ran a small business. At the age of 18, Mrs. Tổng was

married to the French Ambassador. She was beautiful, with a fair complexion, big eyes, silky black hair, a well-proportioned body and a bright smile.

She was the second local woman in Bắc Hà to marry a Frenchman of high status, wealth, and reputation. The first woman, Mrs. Cung Thị Phiêu, whose husband was a rich French nobleman, had been given the title of Mrs. Bé Tý by the Huế Imperial Court. Mrs. Tống had a big house, secured by a steel wire fence, on Hàng Bạc Street in Hanoi. She had a collection of valuable antiques and she also kept exotic animals and birds. She held an open house for the general public on Thursdays.

Through her husband's position and influence, Mrs. Tống and her parents were able to enrich themselves. People nicknamed her *Lady Tống* or *Lady Ambassador*. She was very sociable and particularly fond of fortune-telling. She counted us among her close friends. Even though she was in her early fifties, she still looked gorgeous and was elegantly dressed. Nobody could tell she was Chinese as she spoke fluent Vietnamese. She was given honors by the Huế Imperial Court for her work in helping flood victims. When her husband died, the French government sent her condolences.

One day we brought Mr. Diễm with us when we visited Lady Tống. We stayed until the evening and had supper with her. At her request, Mr. Diễm read her fortune. He first looked at her and said: "In consideration of my friends' and of your own request, I'll do a reading for you. Since I'm not doing this for money, I'll tell you what I see, with no distortion. Feel free to correct or interrupt me." Mrs. Tống nodded her head and said: "Please do. I treat these friends as my close friends. Allow us to include you in our circle as well." Mr. Diễm then began his prediction: "Your physiognomy brings you wealth and high status, and lots of houses although not so much land. You are blessed with a happy life from youth to old age. Unfortunately, you don't have children, or to be precise, you give birth but you cannot raise any. (Indeed, Lady Tống had given birth

twice but both babies died.) You have a big black mole under your left breast, with a long hair growing on it. You also have one under your right breast, but it's red." Mrs. Tống nodded and confirmed he was one hundred percent correct. Mr. Diễm continued: "Those constitute precious features in your physiognomy. Another precious feature is that your genital hair is 20 to 25 centimeters long. Sometimes you have to tie it up into a bun when you wash yourself." Choked with laughter, Mrs. Tống bowed to him with her hands put together, saying she was in awe of him because his readings were so exact. She added: "I have consulted hundreds of astrologists and physiognomists, but none was able to read me as precisely you have done. My heartfelt admiration to you! Please allow me to venerate you as Master of Physiognomy."

Mr. Diễm smiled and went on: "You don't believe in God. You do not practice any religious rites, nor do you follow any religion. However, in future, you will devote yourself to a religious life. Many people will come to worship in the Holy Place in your home, including Mrs. Cung Thị Phiêu, the wealthy lady in Hanoi." Indeed, based on the merits and influence of these two ladies, Đại Đạo Tam Kỳ Phổ Độ (The Great Faith for the Third Universal Redemption) conferred the title 'Co-religionist Ladies' on them both as the co-heads of the Holy Place in Hanoi. True to Mr. Diễm's prediction, not long thereafter, Mrs. Tống sold all her properties and donated the money to the Cao Đài Temple in the South and asked to join them in spiritual practice for the rest of her life. She passed away at the age of 73 in An Hội (Bến Tre) where there was a temple, which was part of Mr. Nguyễn Ngọc Tường's branch.

Important Personalities

Mr. Nguyễn Văn Tâm was a well-known Southerner. During the French rule, he was a mandarin and then became the District Chief of Cai Lậy (Mỹ Tho). He gained fame as a leading anti-Communist fighter and was considered an archenemy by the Communists, so that when he was captured he received especially harsh treatment. He was beaten up and had zinc wires driven through his hands. During

the government of Prime Minister Trần Văn Hữu, he was first appointed Minister of Public Security and then Governor of North Vietnam. When the Trần Văn Hữu government fell, he became Prime Minister and Minister of Public Security.

A mutual friend, Mr. Phạm Tá, who was trained as a fabric dyer in France, introduced Mr. Diễm to Prime Minister Nguyễn Văn Tâm at the home of his mistress, Mrs. Giỏi. Reading Prime Minister Tâm's fortune, Mr. Diễm went straight to the point. Without the slightest hesitation, he said: "Prime Minister, you have got the physiognomy of a tiger. You're untouchable. In the woods, your enemies cannot harm you. Even if you were captured, you would be set free. In your life, you will have only one accident. There will be no second. Your destiny brings you an important position and fame, wealth and longevity. However, you will not die in the woods like the tiger, but in a cold place, one that is snowy and foggy. Your children will be blessed with success and fame. One thing to remember is that you must hold only cash, no real estate, or else you'll lose it all. You'll live in plenty until the day you die." Not knowing whether or not to believe it, the Prime Minister left and offered Mr. Diễm a box of Manila cigars and two bottles of whisky as a gift. Mr. Diễm only accepted the cigars.

Mr. Ngô Đình Diệm returned to Vietnam from the United States to assume the position of Prime Minister. At the time, Mr. Tâm's son, Nguyễn Văn Hinh, who was French-born and was married to a French woman, was fast-tracked from Colonel in the French army to Brigadier General and Chief of Staff of the Vietnamese Army. Prime Minister Ngô Đình Diệm, who did not like the French, did not approve of Mr. Hinh's appointment. As the conflict grew between the two rivals, Brigadier General Hinh and his men plotted to overthrow Mr. Diệm. Meanwhile, the United States put pressure on the French government to force Mr. Hinh to return to France. His father, former Prime Minister Tâm, also had to move to France with his son. As Mr. Diễm had predicted, former Prime Minister Tâm died in a cold place with snow and fog – France. His real estate was confiscated. The government of Ngô Đình Diệm also prosecuted his

mistress, Mrs. Giỏi, confiscating all her properties and putting her in prison for corruption and abuse of her master's power.

The Story of 'The Turtle'

There was a hill to the left of the Thống Nhất Palace (renamed by Hanoi after 1975, its previous name being the Độc Lập Palace). A pavilion was built on the hill during the colonial rule. French officials used to go there to listen to the band of the *Regiment d'Infanterie Coloniale*, playing from 8:00 to 11:00 PM on Saturday evenings.

The locals believed that the tail of a fierce 'red dragon' used to lie beneath the hill. Every time it moved or wriggled, political storms and troubled times would break out. No one knew whether or not the French colonists had consulted a geomancer before they built the pavilion. But it was believed the din made by the French trumpeters and drummers had scared the dragon away - phantoms, ghosts, and wicked deities dreaded the sound of gongs and drums – so that during some eighty years of French rule, the people were able to enjoy peace and stability. But now that the pavilion was demolished and the music stopped playing, many lived in fear of troubled times and non-stop crises ahead, as manifested by the coup d'état, which led to the collapse of Ngô Đình Diệm's government and the assassination of President Diệm and his brother and advisor, Ngô Đình Nhu.

When Mr. Nguyễn Văn Thiệu assumed power as President, he invited Mr. Diễm to the Độc-Lập Palace, apparently to discuss how to address the situation. His men must have told him about Mr. Diễm's accurate predictions about Bình Xuyên leader, Bảy Viễn, former Prime Minister Nguyễn Văn Tâm, and Major General Lê Nguyên Khang. (Mr. Diễm had been advising Commander of the Marines, General Khang as he rose through the ranks from Lieutenant to Commander) and General Khang had great confidence in Mr. Diễm and followed his instructions, with satisfactory results. President

Nguyễn Văn Thiệu and his family similarly valued Mr. Diễm's advice.

Therefore, when President Nguyễn Văn Thiệu sent for Mr. Diễm for advice, many naturally wanted to know what transpired. Rumor had it that Mr. Diễm advised the President to build 'The Turtle' on the hill to quell the red dragon and to prolong his tenure. Some went so far as to say that after the construction of the turtle, the political situation in South Vietnam became relatively stable. Whoever was behind the idea, it was agreed, had to be a great Phong Thủy master, not least because the design of the Duy Tân Square - built on the hill - embraced all the essential Five Elements, namely metal, wood, water, fire, and earth as follows:

- Metal was incorporated in the stairs of reinforced concrete, and with half a tael of pure gold powder, sprinkled inside the belly of the turtle;
- Wood was represented by the trees planted as part of the landscaping of the Square;
- Water was present in the lake to provide cool air to people sitting by the lake;
- Earth was present around the lake where Japanese young grass grew all year round; and
- Fire was represented by the red lamp, which was kept alight at all times inside the mouth of the turtle.

After 30th April, 1975, the turtle was destroyed by dynamite placed in its mouth, presumably by someone who wanted to release the dragon to stir up political crisis in Vietnam. However, nothing of a similar nature has happened in the last 30 years, possibly because the Square was built solidly. Renamed Thống Nhất Palace, it is no longer the Presidential Palace, but a public museum.

Mr. Diễm passed away in April 1974, one year before the North captured Saigon. In addition to family and friends, many figures of authority, both military and civilian, attended his funeral, together with many artists, such as Kim Cương, Thẩm Thúy Hằng and Thanh

Nga. Mrs. Nguyễn Văn Thiệu and her personal secretary Bùi Đình Nam also came to offer gifts and respects before his coffin. As he had wished, Mr. Diễm was buried in the cemetery of the Phước Hoà Pagoda in a modest tomb.

Even today nobody knows what advice or instructions Mr. Diễm gave to President Nguyễn Văn Thiệu. Suffice it to say that he was held in high esteem by the President and his family. It should also be noted that the President granted no privileges or special benefits to Mr. Diễm's family and friends. All his life, Mr. Diễm never expected anything in return for his help and services.

The 'Xích Thố' Horse

Mr. Diễm met Mr. and Mrs. LTC before the Geneva Treaty was signed. At the time, Mr. LTC was Director of the Customs House in Hải Phòng. His family was blessed with wealth and a good name. His eldest brother, Mr. LTT, was Cabinet Director for the Chief of State of Bảo Đại. His second brother was the Presiding Judge of the Saigon Court of Appeals during the Presidency of Ngô Đình Diệm. His younger brother, Mr. LTR, was a medical doctor, while his youngest brother was a successful businessman.

When Mr. LTC moved to South Vietnam, he became a Cabinet Director in the Interior Department and his political life rose like a kite in the wind. With lots of money, he purchased a beautiful, big villa on an immense piece of fenced-in land on Hồng Thập Tự Street, with a full view of the Tao Đàn Gardens. To celebrate the acquisition, Mr. LTC invited many guests, including Mr. Diễm, to a house-warming party. When most of the guests had left, except for Mr. Diễm and some other close friends, Mr. LTC invited them to the living room for tea and cigars. After a few rounds of tea, he asked Mr. Diễm whether he had made a good purchase. The way he asked it was clear that he was expecting Mr. Diễm to give only compliments. Mr. Diễm did not answer right away. Taking a few more puffs on his cigar, he slowly rose to his feet and made a tour of the house, going through each room. He also examined the front and the back yard,

taking a look from outside and inside the house. Then he came back to his seat, sipped some more tea, and lit another cigar. Everybody was on tenterhooks, but no one dared say a word. Mr. Diễm finally spoke: “This house is like the ‘Xích-Thố’ or Chi Tu Ma (Red Hare Steed) that warlord Cao Cao (one of the main characters in the Chinese historical novel, *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*) gave to Guan Yu. It was very selective about its owner. The owner had to be talented, virtuous, uncorrupted, righteous and loyal, like Guan Yu, in order to be able to control it. If you’re the right person, your political life will take wings, like the ‘Xích-Thố’ steed that could gallop hundreds of miles a day. Otherwise, you’ll only end up like warlord Cao Cao.” Upon hearing those comments, Mr. LTC, who harbored an ambition to be a Minister, clapped his hands and said: “Thank you, Sir! So you agree that I’m lucky to have purchased this villa.”

Let’s take a moment briefly to go over the story of the ‘Xích-Thố’ horse from the *Romance of Three Kingdoms*. Originally, its owner was warlord Lü Bu, who was a talented and good-looking man and was called ‘Lữ Phụng Tiên’. Lü Bu was an adopted son of warlord Dong Zhuo, who was an adversary of warlord Cao Cao. The latter was a scoundrel and used an extremely beautiful woman, Diao Chan, in a plot to get Lü Bu and Dong Zhuo to kill each other over her. The plot worked, Lü Bu murdered Dong Zhuo and won Diao Chan, who in turn killed him with poison. Cao Cao became the owner of the ‘Xích-Thố’ horse. He was very fond of it although it threw him off its back several times and almost killed him. At the time, Cao Cao had a prisoner called Guan Yu. Cao Cao tried in vain to tempt Guan Yu to abandon his sworn brother, Liu Bei, and work for him. When that failed, Cao Cao offered Guan Yu the ‘Xích-Thố’ horse as part of a scheme to have the horse throw him off and kill him. However, things did not turn out as he had planned. On the contrary, the sacred horse helped Guan Yu to escape from Cao Cao.

All present were familiar with the story and knew what Mr. Diễm implied – cautioning him in an indirect manner. He would have been blunter in his younger days.

At the beginning of the First Republic, the Great World Casino of Bãy Viễn stayed open and Mr. LTC visited it frequently. He often lost millions of piasters. The more he played, the more he lost. In the end, he had to sell the villa (to lawyer Lê Quang Liêm) to cover his losses. When the United States provided aid to South Vietnam, the Interior Department, which he oversaw, was made responsible for organizing invitations to public tenders. There was a big bid and Mr. LTC, pressed for money, ordered his men to find an intermediary to whom he could illicitly sell the documents. His plan got exposed and he was arrested, tried and sentenced to imprisonment. Thanks to his brother, who was the Presiding Judge of the Saigon Court of Appeals, he received a lenient sentence of only six months in jail (at the Chí Hòa Prison). He was dismissed from the position of Cabinet Director of the Interior Department and he and his family had to move to a small house, where he later died.

‘High-Ranking Beggar’

Among Mr. Diễn’s acquaintances was a journalist, Hoàng Ly, who was half Vietnamese and half French. He lived with his father who, as the watchman of the City Grand Theatre, was allowed to live in its basement. Mr. Diễn used to visit him there and they had a very close friendship. Every time they were together, Hoàng Ly would beg Mr. Diễn to read his future. He was so poor that he had a hard time feeding his children. Mr. Diễn kept deferring, year after year. In 1955, Hoàng Ly moved to South Vietnam and worked first for the *Dan Chung* newspaper and then for the *Song* newspaper of Chu Tu, where he wrote the *Mách Nước* (Super Advisor) and *Thánh Sống* (Live Saint) columns. He became even poorer when he became addicted to opium and fell ill.

One day Mr. Diễn paid him a visit, bringing him a kilo of oranges and some pocket money. He was greatly moved. He held Mr. Diễn’s hand and implored him to foretell his future. He was in his forties and was still so needy. Mr. Diễn had been putting it off for years, but at Hoàng Ly’s strong insistence, he did not have the heart to deny the request any longer. He said: “You want me to do the reading for

you, but do you want me to tell you the truth or not? If it does not turn out the way you like, will you be upset at me and blame me?" Excited with joy, Hoàng Ly sat up and said in one breath: "Please tell the worst. It will not upset me. Everybody has his own destiny. Everything comes from one's own karma. I write the column *Thánh Sống* (Live Saint), showing people the way, so I understand that very well."

Upon hearing that assurance, Mr. Diễm replied: "Very well. Your fate can be summarized in three words: 'high-ranking beggar'. A beggar is a beggar. He is poor and never has enough money to eat, to save or to buy a house or a piece of land, and can only rent a place in a small alley. However, as a high-ranking beggar, you will always be able to rub shoulders with distinguished persons who treat you as a guest of honor, continuously invite you to their parties, and offer you good quality clothing and shoes as gifts. Therefore, when you go out and put on those nice things, you're seen as a person who lives comfortably, enjoying himself. Nobody knows that when you get home, you only have cold rice for your meal and lament about your poverty." Mr. Diễm then ended by saying: "It's all down to karma."

Talking about karma, it is likely that, because Hoàng Ly was in charge of the *Thánh Sống* (Live Saint) column, people assumed that he was not interested in fortune or fame, and that he despised money and preferred to lead a free and frugal life, traveling here and there. His friends included high-ranking people who were fond of his writing but did not dare to invite him to work for them. Occasionally, they would offer him money or valuable gifts or take him to expensive restaurants or places. He remained poor, unbeknown to others. He was unquestionably a 'high-ranking beggar'.

Hoàng Ly remained totally penniless until his death. On his deathbed, Hoàng Ly praised Mr. Diễm in the presence of others: "With only three words, he described my fate and my life exactly. He is indeed a 'Live Saint'. Me? I'm only a 'Dead Saint'."

The Millionaire Alpha Kim Thịnh

Before 1975, all in Saigon knew of millionaire Alpha Kim Thịnh, who traded gold on Tu Do Street, the most fashionable street in Saigon.

Mrs. Kim Thịnh is said to have come from North Vietnam. She was poor when she was young, married two or three times, and still had to settle down. She first moved south and then to Laos where she met her present husband when she was in her thirties. He was also a northerner and had moved to Laos to run an opium house. Despite working really hard, they remained poor, so they decided to move back to Saigon and concentrate on trading goods between Saigon and Laos. Their merchandise was transported by the Malpuech Bus Service, which belonged to a Frenchman named Malpuech. Thanks to the latter's help, their business took off.

Apparently, they first met Mr. Diễm at the Nhàn Lạc Cư tea/opium house in Dakao, Saigon. During the French rule, people were allowed to smoke opium, just like cigarettes or cigars. Most of these stores were owned by Chinese, who won the contracts from the government. Servers would fill smokers' pipes with the opium that they bought. Non-smokers could also frequent the stores by purchasing one 'ngao' (the smallest dose) of opium, which the server would smoke for them, while they lay down listening to the storyteller or just slept overnight, without having to pay for a room.

The Kim Thịnhs asked Mr. Diễm to read their future. He said: "Madam, you have the physiognomy of a millionaire. You will build up the fortune on your own. You will live and run a business in a four- or five-story house on the most fashionable street in the country, like Catina Street (later called Tụ Do Street). You will no longer need to sell opium but will instead switch to selling gold. You will both become rich and famous in Vietnam. Your children will all be successful. Then both of you will start changing: your interest will turn to Buddhist temples and you will have a very big pagoda built where you will practice Buddhism in your old age before you pass away. Your husband will be infatuated with a niece whom he will

marry and with whom he will have three or four children. You will die before him. When you die, the fortune will go with you. Your husband and his second wife will lead a very impoverished existence. Then he will die quietly, without anybody remembering him as an ex-millionaire and owner of a well-known gold store on a well-known street.” The couple did not take his predictions seriously since they were already middle-aged and were only beginning to live comfortably. They saw no possibility of becoming rich and famous.

In the event, Mr. Diễm proved correct. Mr. and Mrs. Kim Thịnh did become successful in their trading business with Laos. They purchased a lot of land on Catina Street, on which they built a five-story house and started selling gold and brand-name watches from France and Switzerland. They became billionaires and hired one of Mrs. Kim Thịnh’s nieces to look after the house. As Mrs. Kim Thịnh began to spend more and more time visiting the pagodas, her niece blossomed out of her puberty and began to catch Mr. Thịnh’s attention. When she became aware of the development, Mrs. Kim Thịnh tried to stop that, but in vain. Mr. Kim Thịnh showed no consideration for her, while her niece totally ignored her admonitions altogether. Not wanting to make a fuss about it, Mrs. Kim Thịnh invested a lot of money in building a big beautiful pagoda in Gia Định. When her niece became pregnant, Mrs. Kim Thịnh quietly moved out into the pagoda and devoted her life to spiritual practice as a Buddhist nun. After 30th April, 1975, the Alpha Kim Thịnh store, like all other business establishments in South Vietnam, was confiscated by the government under the “Industry and Trade Reconstruction” law. Mr. Kim Thịnh and his young wife had to move out of the house empty-handed and rent a small house in an alley in Trương Minh Giảng, Phú Nhuận, in the Gia Định municipality. Mr. Kim Thịnh died not long after Mrs. Kim Thịnh passed away. They were buried near each other at the Giác Hải Pagoda, Gò Vấp, in Gia Định. Their tombs were modest, like any other tomb among the thousands belonging to the poor. Nobody knew those were the tombs of the owners of the Alpha Kim Thịnh Gold and Watch Store, who were once fabulously rich. Their

children were forced by the government to go for 'rehabilitation'. Nobody knew of their whereabouts, or whether they are dead or alive.

King of Barbed Wire

Before 1954, Mr. Hoàng Kim Quy was a great businessman with a global reach, based in Hanoi. After graduating from a famous top-ranking French university (called the Higher School of Commerce) that specialized in training leaders in economics, finance and commerce, Mr. Hoàng Kim Quy returned to Vietnam and started his own business. He had no interest in working for French companies or for the colonial government.

In 1952, the tide of the war began to turn against the French. Many people sold their properties in the north and moved to South Vietnam. The Descours and Cabaud Company, a big company that specialized in selling agricultural and construction equipment, was also put on sale before the owners moved back to France. Not many people had the resources to buy it, and those who could did not want to, because of the prejudicial political and military sentiments towards the French. Mr. Hoàng Kim Quy decided to make the purchase and changed the company's name to Hoàng Kim Quy Company. Unfortunately for him, he lost everything when the French withdrew from North Vietnam after the Geneva Treaty. After migrating to South Vietnam, he opened an office on Hàm Nghi Street in Saigon, keeping alive his dreams of becoming rich. However, from 1954 to 1963, he barely survived financially from day to day. The hardship took its toll, and he looked much older than his age.

Mr. Hoàng Kim Quy then asked Mr. Đỗ Quang Giai, the ex-Mayor of Hanoi, to invite Mr. Diễm over so that he could consult him how to rebuild his fortune. Knowing Mr. Đỗ Quang Giai well, Mr. Diễm accepted the invitation and met Mr. Hoàng Kim Quy for lunch. After the meal, everybody was served tea. Mr. Hoàng Kim Quy then asked Mr. Diễm to read his future. Mr. Diễm commented right away: "It is

not hard to read your physiognomy because it is very clear to see. I'll say what I see, but please do not reproach me if I'm wrong." Then he continued: "You've achieved a high academic degree and you can advance quite far working for others. However, you'll be even wealthier in business. If you choose to trade in iron and steel, you'll become very rich and earn a national reputation as a 'King of the Domain'. If you go into textile, cereals or rice, you'll go bankrupt. The same applies to hotels and restaurants. That is all I have for you; take it or leave it."

Mr. Hoàng Kim Quy quickly begged him for more guidance, so Mr. Diễm continued: "In your middle age, even if you have made hundreds of millions that will only be the start of your financial bloom, as it's not even your 'lucky time' yet. Your wealth will grow as you get older, until you become a billionaire. With lots of money in your hands, your position and fame will also soar like a kite in the wind. You'll frequent the Chief of State. Your reputation will spread across the country as well as across the borders. You'll be given a warm reception everywhere you go. Wealth and power will be yours. Unfortunately, your son will ruin you. Life is not perfect: you gain in one thing and lose in another. To sum up, your life can be likened to a rose plant in bloom, extremely radiant. When you are about to reach your seventies, however, a windstorm will come and take everything with it - flowers and leaves. You'll have nothing left. You'll find yourself like a fish on the chopping block or a bird caught in a trap. First imprisoned, then sick, you will die alone, without your wife, your children, your grandchildren, relatives or friends by your side. You're the 'King of the Domain' while you're alive, but the 'Lonely King' on your deathbed, with no trumpet, no drum or nobody to mourn you." Mr. Diễm stopped at that point and smacked his lips before continuing: "What I said will only happen in the distant future. The physiognomy is made up of the mind and the heart. Do kind deeds and help the poor. This might turn bad to good. It's all up to you."

Years later Mr. Hoàng Kim Quy became Senator and got very close to President Nguyễn Văn Thiệu. He was authorized to be the sole procurer of barbed wire for the military of the Republic Vietnam and the Allied Forces. He was nicknamed the “King of Barbed Wire” and made as much money as there are “leaves in the forest” or there is “water in the ocean”, to borrow Mr. Diễm’s expressions.

After April 30th 1975, Mr. Hoàng Kim Quy suffered the same fate as many other great businessmen of his time. Most had their fortunes confiscated. Some were sent to prison, while others were sent to labor camp for rehabilitation, in line with the “Industry and Trade Reconstruction” policy of the new government. His son, Hoàng Kim Lan, fled abroad, unscrupulously leaving his father behind. Hoàng Kim Quy was imprisoned in Phan Đăng Lưu, where he was subjected to extreme hardships. One morning he did not show up when everybody gathered to go to labor. He was found dead in his cell.

Mr. Hoàng Thụy Năm

Mr. Hoàng Thụy Năm was the Chief of Vĩnh Ninh Province during the time that Mr. Nguyễn Văn Tâm, the gray tiger of Cai Lậy (Mỹ Tho), was the Governor of the North. He came from a family of military officials but he was a very modern, open-minded and transparent person. His younger brother, Doctor Hoàng Thụy Ba, followed the Communists. After the Geneva Agreement, Mr. Hoàng Thụy Năm migrated to the south and was named Colonel by President Ngô Đình Diệm and became a delegate for the Republic of Vietnam’s government on the International Commission for Supervision and Control of the Cease-Fire (ICSCCF). His mother and his brother remained in Hanoi. When his mother died, with the intervention of ICSCCF, he was allowed to return to Hanoi to mourn her death.

Upon his return to the south, even though he was still a Colonel in the ICSCCF, rumor circulated in the Độc Lập Palace that he had leaked national secrets to his brother, Doctor Hoàng Thụy Ba. One

weekend evening, as his driver was driving him back to the house he had built in an orchard for his mistress in Dĩ An, Biên Hoà, his car was blocked and he was taken away. Two days later, his corpse was found floating in the Nhà Bè River with a gunshot wound on his face. The Southern Government blamed the Vietcong for his murder. However, many believed that it was the Counselor Ngô Đình Nhu, the younger brother of President Ngô Đình Diệm, who gave the order.

Mr. Diễm had had a close friendship with Mr. Hoàng Thụy Năm when he was in Hanoi. In his fifties, the latter still behaved in a distinguished way when he went out. He got a girlfriend half his age, who accompanied him everywhere. He half-jokingly referred to her as Mr. Diễm's girlfriend. Mr. Diễm was aware of that but never said anything, thinking that his friend simply did not want to gain a bad reputation. However, because of that, Mrs. Diễm was nearly sued for making a scene due to her misplaced jealousy. The story illustrates Mr. Diễm's devotion to his friends.

While they were in Hanoi, Mr. Hoàng Thụy Năm once asked Mr. Diễm to predict his future. Mr. Diễm commented: "You're in your good time now, so there is nothing worth mentioning. However, a problem lies two years from now. An accident can happen if you do not watch what you say and if you are in an area of dense vegetation, woods or mountains." Mr. Nam begged him to elaborate, so he continued: "Your bad time will be coming in two years' time. Try to devote yourself to a spiritual life, do good deeds and recite prayers. This can help you avoid disastrous accidents. If you are not able to renounce your successful life and withdraw to a simple life-style, you'll probably not be able to escape your karma."

Mr. Hoàng Thụy Năm apparently forgot Mr. Diễm's instructions. He was a Colonel for ICSCCF; he built a house for his mistress in an area of dense vegetation in Dĩ An, Biên Hoà, where he spent his weekends. This was an area that few people dared stay or wander about in at night because the Vietcong were very active in that

region. He met a tragic fate, as predicted by Mr. Diễm, although his murderer was never discovered.

STORIES FROM LỬA SỎNG NEWSPAPER

7TH November, 1955

WHAT A FORTUNE-TELLER SAYS TO THE LEADER OF BÌNH XUYÊN

(Translation with minor adaptations)

“Lê Văn Viễn, you are a bandit! To establish yourself, you have committed many evil acts:

1. Opening the Bình Khang brothel;
2. Selling opium;
3. Opening Đại Thế Giới Kim Chung Casino; and
4. Others.

“You are going to lose everything you have. All your men will desert you when you are down. You will die without your wife and your children at your side. You will die by a gun shot on your nape with your face down at a place that is very far from here.”

Around the Geneva Conference on Vietnam, there was a fortune-teller from Hanoi who went to Saigon to visit his friends. He had a long-standing reputation in the north as a ‘ghostly foreteller’, for his talent in reading people’s past, present and future – when the mood took him. He was very poor, but he never charged money for his readings. He looked like a vagabond, with hair hanging down over his eyes. He was unkempt, untidily dressed and sometimes wore shoes without socks. He looked more like an artist than a conventional fortune-teller. If he did not want to talk, nothing would make him do so, even if he was the guest of honor at a party. Whenever he was in the mood, he would talk regardless whether or not he was asked for advice. When this ‘artist fortune-teller’ talked, he gave people shivers because of his assertive style which showed little or no restraint, nor respect for social protocols.

Before he went to South Vietnam in 1953, he used to go back frequently to his native village in Hưng Yên Province. One day on the way home with his friends, they were stopped at one of the main gates to the village by guerillas of the Việt Minh forces, to check their ID. As their papers were being checked, the 'artist fortune-teller' observed each and every member of the guerilla. After he and his friends were allowed to pass through, he told his friends: "All those people will die soon. There's absolutely no way that can be avoided." The checkpoint was some 15 km from the battlefield between the French and the Việt Minh forces. The next day news broke out that all the Việt Minh guards were wiped out by the French troops during their early morning operations in the village - as the fortune-teller had predicted.

Another instance involved a well-respected widow of a Provincial Chief. She was having a chat with her friends one day, including the fortune-teller. She asked him for a reading, but he declined. At her insistence, he flippantly said: "Once in your life, you had sex in the water with a man who was not your husband." Everybody was startled by the revelation. The lady's face turned from red to purple. She denied it vehemently. However, as everybody was leaving, she asked the fortune-teller to stay. She admitted to him that before she got married to her late husband she went swimming with her boyfriend and they did make love in the water just as he had said.

Yet another instance involved Mr. Hoàng Trọng Phu, nicknamed 'Uncle Thiều Hà Đông' or just 'Uncle Thiều', who was a very powerful man. Having heard of the fortune-teller's reputation, he invited him over to his palace. He greeted him warmly and showed him the greatest of respect, in the hope that he would foretell his future. However, after he stayed as a guest of honor for more than a month, the fortune-teller told him one morning that he was leaving. Courteously, 'Uncle Thiều' saw him off at the door. Much as he wanted his fortune read, he still did not have the courage to ask. A member of Uncle Thiều's family, who had walked the fortune-teller a little further, said to him: "Sir, 'Uncle Thiều' is a devoted fan of

yours. He had invited you over with the hope to hear a few words from you, but he did not have the courage to ask.” The fortune-teller replied, almost in a whisper: “What is there to say? There’s nothing left!” He then quickly walked away. A few days later, Japanese forces instigated a coup d’état against the French rule (in North Vietnam). Mr. Hoàng Trọng Phu’s power and fortune went down with the coup.

Indeed, stories about the fortune-teller’s extraordinary occult powers and ‘ghostly predictions’, spread far and wide in Vietnam and beyond. Therefore, when he moved to Saigon, many people in high places naturally wanted to reach him for readings. Among others were Prime Minister Nguyễn Phan Long, and Major General Lê Văn Viễn (also known as Bảy Viễn), who headed the anti-Communist Bình Xuyên militia. It was public knowledge that General Bảy Viễn funded the operations with financial resources from crimes.

Having heard of the reputation of the ‘artist fortune-teller’, whose real name was Mr. Ngô Hùng Diễn (Mr. Diễn), General Bảy Viễn told his right-hand man, Mr. Lê Văn Ngô and two other important men, to invite Mr. Diễn over for a dinner party one evening. Unable to resist their persistence, Mr. Diễn accepted the invitation. As General Bảy Viễn’s guest of honor, Mr. Diễn was treated with great respect by all present at the meeting. (The only key persons missing were Messrs. Lai Hữu Tài and Lai Hữu Sang, who were in charge of the National Police and the Capital Security Police, respectively.)

At the end of the dinner party, General Bảy Viễn had Lê Văn Ngô invite Mr. Diễn to a secret room for a ‘martini and soda’ and a more intimate chat. There were about ten Bình Xuyên leaders around the table, each looking fierce enough to devour alive anyone who dared offend them. After the first drink, the ‘artist fortune-teller’ still titled Bảy Viễn politely as General Bảy. After the second drink, he downgraded that to just Mr. Bảy. After the third drink, he simply called him ‘you’ and began to talk non-stop as if he was reading off a

prepared script. “You bear the physiognomy of a bandit, a robber. You’ve achieved big things just because of luck! In order to establish yourself, you’ve committed many evil acts: opening the Bình Khang brothel, selling opium, opening the Đại thế Giới Kim Chung Casino. You have committed many other evil acts, besides these. Since you live from day to day and have no vision for tomorrow, without virtue, you will not last long.”

General Bảy Viễn explained: “I have thousands of soldiers to feed. They have to rob if I don’t give them money from those businesses.” Nervous and frightened, Lê Văn Ngô signaled to the drunken fortune-teller to stop, but to no avail. He was in full flow and could not be stopped. He continued the tirade: “You’re surrounded by crafty and cunning people. They sponge off you in good times, but will abandon you in bad times. When your misfortune comes, it will land right on your doorstep.”

General Bảy Viễn calmly asked: “Is there a way out?” Mr. Diễn paused for a moment as he swept his eyes over every feature of the general’s face. He then said: “You have to start acting virtuously, right away! You must replace all your key men because they will be the ones who will harm you.” General Bảy Viễn pressed further and asked what he must do next. The fortune-teller shook his head and answered: “I know nothing about politics or the military. But I can tell you this. In order to maintain your position, you need to have a really competent and virtuous advisor in charge.” Bảy Viễn stared at him and asked: “Tell me who could be such a person?” The fortune-teller mentioned a name, but it did not seem to make any impression on General Bảy Viễn.

General Bảy Viễn remained skeptical. He firmly believed his position was as solid as a rock, and he had plenty of money and many followers. As if he could read the general’s mind, Mr. Diễn felt sorry for him and said in a low voice: “You have a very peculiar physiognomy. If you come to your senses and get a good advisor, you can become a hero and savior and earn eternal fame. But if you

continue this way, you'll leave behind a rotten reputation for thousands of years! It'll be happening soon!" General Bảy Viễn did not say a word, but still looked unconvinced. As he sat there pondering, everybody else at the table nervously kept drinking.

To lighten the atmosphere, one of General Bảy Viễn's strongmen asked the fortune-teller to read his fortune. Mr. Diễm smiled and said: "In your life, you will face seven death sentences. In fact, you already have six. The last one will come soon." Astonished, the strongman confirmed that he indeed had already had six death sentences on him. He begged the fortune-teller to tell him more, but the latter did not oblige, as if he had not heard the request.

When the party broke up, General Bảy Viễn and Lê Văn Ngô walked the fortune-teller to the door. As he said good-bye, the fortune-teller looked at Bảy Viễn's face for a full second. As he was about to leave, General Bảy Viễn and Lê Văn Ngô plied him with more questions. Finally, deciding that whatever he said was not going to make any difference, the fortune-teller said: "An important event closely related to the Bình Xuyên army will happen soon. If you choose to sacrifice yourself, you'll become a national hero and save a lot of lives. Otherwise, you'll lose everything you have and leave behind a bad name in the minds of people for thousands of years." He paused for a brief moment, as if to allow the message to sink in, before he continued: "You will lose all your fortune and reputation. You will be deserted by your own men when calamity strikes. You will die from a bullet shot into your nape, with your face down on the ground at a place, very far from here, without your wife and children at your side." The fortune-teller then walked away.

Many heard about Mr. Diễm's reading of General Bảy Viễn's fortune. The words still rang in the ears of those who were at the party that evening. Although nothing seems to have changed immediately within Bình Xuyên, the 'ghostly predictions' have since gradually come to pass, on which I shall not elaborate.

Nobody can escape the karmic law. Let's wait and see what will happen at the end of Bảy Viễn's life – he is presently a fugitive in France. It is possible that the total failure of the Bình Xuyên army will prompt Lai Hữu Tài and Lai Hữu Sang to see Bảy Viễn as an obstacle to be gotten rid of. On the other hand, Bảy Viễn could lose his mind over the loss and turn against the two brothers, who could in turn shoot Bảy Viễn “on his nape”. (Remarks: this article was written in 1955.)

Ode To Quyen Tran

There is a man who walks among us
who graciously shares his wisdom,
generously gives his time.

Many are delighted with his
wonderful joy of life.

He guides and inspires all of us, with
his kind heart and intuitive nature.

A depth in his soul seems to
have no bounds.

His spirit casts a special glow
that shines in the darkest world.

He has a certain ease and patience
about him, that is soothing to all
he encounters.

Quyen Tran is this man of
many virtues, and, with his presence,
the world is simply a better place.



Jane Halley