



**Panel's title : The Republic of Ngô Đình Diệm: Birth, Rituals, and Nationalism.**  
**Titre du panel :** La République de Ngô Đình Diệm : Naissance, Rituels, et Nationalisme.

**Coordinator (Affiliation, University...) :** Nguyễn Thị Diệu, Department of History, Temple University, Philadelphia, PA, USA.

**Language :** Français / English

**Topics :** (Arts, History, Literature, Philosophy, Political Science, Vietnam)

**Panel presentation :**

The Republic of Vietnam, founded in 1955, has attracted an intense scholarly scrutiny dominated by North American works which focus on the question of the Vietnam War. Our panel, though addressing the same political phenomenon, stresses the socio-cultural and individual angle. **Ninh Xuan Thao** takes us to the final year of the State of Vietnam. **Nguyen Thi Dieu** opens a window into the Diệm-imposed rituals of commemoration of the Republic's first anniversary that reflected a certain conception of the Vietnamese nation. **Pascal Bourdeaux** introduces the Vietnamese sculptor, Paul Nguyen Van The, author of the Trung Queens statue, and discusses the artist's familial archives. **François Guillemot** addresses the suicide of the novelist, Nhat Linh, contextualizing it within the framework of non-Communist nationalism. **Nguyen Phuc Anh** presents the Vietnamese priest-philosopher, Luong Kim Dinh, who articulated a much contested and largely forgotten civilizational formulation.

**Résumé du panel :**

La République du Vietnam fondée en 1955 a fait l'objet d'une intense recherche dominée par les spécialistes Nord-Américains qui ont examiné ce phénomène politique principalement sous l'angle du conflit américain. Notre panel traite du même phénomène politique mais adopte une approche qui privilège le socio-culturel et le singulier. **Ninh Xuan Thao** nous fait revenir à la période charnière de « la dernière année d'existence de l'Etat du Vietnam (1954-1955).» **Nguyen Thi Dieu** montre comment les rites imposés par le régime Ngô lors de la célébration du premier anniversaire de la République reflètent une certaine vision de la nation vietnamienne. **Pascal Bourdeaux** nous parle du sculpteur Nguyen Van The, auteur de la statue des Reines Trung et présente les archives familiales ; **François Guillemot** revisite la question du suicide de l'écrivain Nhat Linh dans le contexte d'"un nationalisme non-communiste." **Nguyen Phuc Anh** évoque Luong Kim Dinh, prêtre-philosophe vietnamien, auteur d'une formulation civilisationnelle originale aujourd'hui méconnue et oubliée.

**Key words :** République du Viêt-Nam (1955-1963) ; nationalisme ; Luong Kim Dinh ; Ngô Đình Diệm; Nguyen Van The ; Nhat Linh.

**Participants :**

. **Ninh Xuân Thao**, PhD, University of Bordeaux Montaigne.

**Communication's title :** "Ngô Đình Diệm and southern Vietnamese politico-religious sects: Repression and political unification, 1954-1955."

**Titre de la communication :** "Ngô Đình Diệm face aux « sectes politico-religieuses » (1954-1955): réprimer pour unifier le Sud-Vietnam."



**Language :** Français.

**Presentation :**

From the 1920s, the French Cochinchina experienced dramatic political upheavals by movements labeled by the colonial regime as “politico-religious sects”, including Caodaism, Hòa Hảo, and Bình Xuyên. When Vietminh started calling for shoots for independence against the French, those forces moved to the camp of ex-emperor Bảo Đại and supporting the solution of his return. After becoming Prime Minister of the State of Vietnam, Ngô Đình Diệm, however launched a severely repressive policy on those sects. This paper aims to investigate the role of Ngô Đình Diệm’s cabinet in term of political, administrative, military, and religious implementation during the last stage of the State of Vietnam (1954-1955) before the emerging of the independent Republic of Vietnam.

**Résumé :** A partir des années 1920, période de grands bouleversements du régime colonial en Indochine, ce que les Français ont qualifié de « sectes politico-religieuses » émergent en Cochinchine : les Caodaïstes, les Hòa Hảo et les Bình Xuyên. Après le déclenchement de la guerre d’indépendance entre le Vietminh et la France, toutes ces forces se sont ralliées à la solution supportant le retour politique de l’ex-empereur Bảo Đại. De 1949 à 1954, alors que ce dernier était Chef de l’Etat Associé du Vietnam, ces sectes se sont transformées en forces politico-militaire régionales. Devenu Premier Ministre de l’Etat du Vietnam, Ngô Đình Diệm va alors lancer une politique répressive et antisectes. Cette communication essaiera d’expliquer les buts politique, administratif, militaire et religieux du gouvernement de Bảo Đại lors de la dernière année d’existence de l’Etat du Vietnam (1954 – 1955) qui aboutira à la naissance d’un état indépendant et unitaire, la République du Vietnam.

Mots clés : Ngô Đình Diệm ; sectes politico-religieuses ; le Sud-Vietnam.

. **Nguyễn Thị Diệu**, Department of History, Temple University, Philadelphia, PA, USA.

**Communication's title :** “Birth of a Nation, October 26, 1956: Rituals, Heroes, and Patrimony under the Republic of Ngô Đình Diệm.”

**Language :** English.

**Presentation :**

Most studies of the early Republican period conceive the Diệm regime as a stepping-stone of the U.S. nation-building efforts, citing Diệm’s political approach as being influenced by Western and specifically American democratic concepts and by his association with U.S. advisors. Such studies assumed that the regime existed within this bubble isolated from the past and from the society that it aimed to rule and shape. Our study, by contrast, contends that the regime was intrinsically rooted in the enduring Vietnamese pre- and colonial history and in the post-1954 socio-political milieu, the defining components of which were intrinsically woven into the fabric of the Ngô nation. In its early years, the Republic of Vietnam (1955-1963), led by the Ngô family and their supporters, attempted to define itself as a nation uncontestedly heir to its pre-colonial past while it was actually being conditioned by an increasingly all-encompassing anti-Communist and pro-Catholic patrimonialism. The 1956 first anniversary commemoration of its October 26 National Day, the focus of the present analysis, provides valuable insights into what essentially defined the Ngô nation, an entity far different from what its American godfathers had envisioned.



*Key words* : rituals ; heroes ; Ngô ; nation-building; patrimony; Catholicism.

**Pascal Bourdeaux**, Histoire, Maître de conférences de l'École Pratique des Hautes Etudes.

**Communication's title** : “Nguyễn Paul Văn Thê or the unknown modernity of a monumental art.”

***Titre de la communication*** : “Nguyễn Paul Văn Thê ou la modernité tue d'un art monumental vietnamien.”

**Language** : French.

**Presentation** :

At the beginning of the 1960s, Saigon, known formerly as the “Pearl of Indochina” started to change its physiognomy by substituting the political and symbolic attributes of the colonial power with those of the new independent State, the Republic of Vietnam. The civil and military administrations were nationalized, the religious and secular education systems were ideologically reoriented, so as the founding myths of the Nation were reinvented. To do so, the new State and the Ngô Đình Diệm regime solicited the support of a young generation of intellectuals but also artists to define a new Vietnamese art modernity, notably in architecture and sculpture. Among these artists, Nguyễn Paul Văn Thê was the one who created and erected a huge statue of the Trung Sisters at the heart of the city ; he also contributed actively with Ngô Việt Thụ to renovate the Independence Palace (formerly known as Palais Norodom). This panel is the good opportunity to recount the biography of an artist as brilliant as he is unknown and to explain how the private archives preserved by the family could contribute to a better understanding of the political, cultural, and religious history of modern Vietnam.

**Résumé** :

Au début des années 1960, Saigon, ex-perle de l'Indochine française, tend à se décharner de son passé colonial et à se parer des nouveaux attributs politiques et symboliques que l'édification d'un nouvel Etat indépendant, la République du Vietnam, exige. L'administration civile et militaire est nationalisée, l'éducation laïque et religieuse réorientée, les mythes fondateurs de la Nation revisités. Pour ce faire, l'Etat sollicite l'engagement de jeunes intellectuels et artistes qui vont être les acteurs d'une modernité vietnamienne multiforme, notamment architecturale et monumentale. Parmi ceux-là, on compte Nguyễn Paul Văn Thê, auteur de l'imposante statue des sœurs Trung (en lieu et place de la statue Rigault de Genouilly) du temps de la présidence de Ngô Đình Diệm et contributeur actif dans la rénovation du Palais de l'Indépendance (ex Palais Norodom). La communication sera l'occasion de relater la vie d'un artiste aussi brillant que méconnu et d'évoquer, à travers la richesse d'une documentation privée que sa descendance a su préserver, les perspectives de recherche dans les domaines de l'histoire politique, culturelle et religieuse du Vietnam contemporain.

**Mots clés** : architecture ; archives ; modernité ; monuments ; Ngô Đình Diệm.



. **François Guillemot**, Institut d'Asie Orientale, CNRS / ENS de Lyon.

**Communication's title :** “Disappearing to live on in memory: the voluntary death of the writer Nhat Linh.”

**Titre de la communication :** “Disparaître pour survivre à l'histoire : la mort volontaire de l'écrivain Nhat Linh.”

**Language :** Français.

**Presentation :**

1963 was a milestone for the Republic of Vietnam. As the Ngo Dinh Diem regime entered a major confrontation with the Buddhist movement, another drama played itself out in Saigon. On July 7, the renowned writer Nhat Linh Nguyen Tuong Tam committed suicide. With this radical protest, he thus avoided a court appearance resulting from a failed coup. This tragic signature of his opposition to the authoritarian regime also marks a turning point in the internal fracture within non-communist nationalism. This communication discusses the challenges of his disappearance and explores the torment that haunted the writer in the final years of his life. Finally, the impact of this act is located in the political context of a violent power in decline. Through Vietnamese documentation and archives, I attempt to elaborate the possible interpretations of this act, both personal and political.

**Résumé :** 1963 est une date charnière pour la République du Viêt-Nam (Sud). Alors que le régime de Ngo Dinh Diem est entré dans une confrontation majeure avec les forces bouddhistes un autre drame se joue à Saigon. Le 7 juillet, l'écrivain renommé Nhat Linh Nguyen Tuong Tam se suicide. Signe radical de protestation, il évite ainsi de comparaître au tribunal dans une affaire de coup d'Etat raté. La signature tragique de cette opposition au régime autoritaire marque aussi une étape clé dans la fracture interne au sein du nationalisme non-communiste. Cette communication revient sur les enjeux de cette disparition et le tourment qui habite l'écrivain dans les dernières années de sa vie. Enfin, l'impact de cet acte est replacé dans le contexte politique d'un pouvoir violent en déclin. Il s'agira de tenter de saisir à travers les documents et les archives vietnamiennes quelles sont les lectures possibles de cet acte à la fois personnel et politique.

Mots clés : République du Viêt-Nam (1955-1963), nationalisme, Nguyen Tuong Tam, suicide, mémoire.

Key words : Republic of Vietnam (1955-1963); nationalism; Nguyen Tuong Tam (Nhat Linh) ; suicide; memory.

. **Nguyễn Phúc Anh**, Anthropology, Tokyo Metropolitan University.

**Communication's title :** “Lương Kim Định's Nationalistic and Ethnocentric Adaptation of Structuralism in *The Structure of Việt Learning*.”

**Language :** English.



### **Presentation :**

This paper will demonstrate how under the First Republic, philosopher Lương Kim Định (1914-1997), trained in France and influenced by the likes of Claude Levi-Strauss, adapted and adopted structuralism as a theoretical framework to explain the fundamental principle of *Việt Nho* in his work, *Cơ Cấu Việt Nho*/The Structure of Việt Learning. *Việt* refers to "the Hundred Yue" who, according to Kim Định, were the proto-Han-Chinese who populated China and Vietnam. *Nho* refers either to the ancestor of the Hundred Yue, who created the Việt's "social structures" or the "social structures" themselves. The priest-philosopher places *Việt Learning* at the center of the entire East Asian region, arguing that other cultures in the area were merely extensions of the structures. He introduces the methodology of "obscure history" to find social structures through the reinterpretation and comparison of myths, legends, and folklore from diverse traditions. This, he believed, would demonstrate the commonality between cultures and reveal social structures hidden in human subconsciousness. This paper critically examines the implications of Kim Định's methodology and his understanding of structuralism, arguing that his nationalistic and ethnocentric conceptualization of social structure is self-contradictory since it suggests all human societies share common structures while considering *Việt Learning* superior to all other world traditions.

*Key words* : Claude Levi-Strauss ; folklore; *Yue/Việt* ; "obscure history"; structuralism.