

This is an English paraphrase of a transcript from Vietnam



Genealogy of Maternal Heritage: Ngo-Xuan



Moral compass of Integrity and Honesty

In any era, under any horizon,
whether in glorious success or unsulliable indigence,
the descendants of **Ngo-Xuan** would always be able to maintain
a family strait,

of the two characters **Integrity** and **Honesty**
as moral compass for their paths of life.

During the bright and happy spells
or amid the dark and despairing ruts,

Integrity and **Honesty** would always be the moral compass
of the **Ngo-Xuan** descendants.



Grandfather: Ngo-Xuan-Dinh

Qualified for mandarin during the reign of Tu-Duc

Accepted commission as district chief of Tho-Xuong

That included the thirty-six streets

of the ancient capital Ha-thanh

Next promotion to prefecture chief of Van-Dinh

When French raiders invaded motherland

Immediately resigned from public administration

Returned to the placidity of hometown

Opened school to develop disciples

Many signed up for the golden roster

To follow the teaching profession of the Senior Scholar

Ancestor of eight generations of the Ngo clan.

Born and lived through the reigns of three different kings Minh-Mang (1820-1841), Thieu-Tri (1841-1847) and Tu-Duc (1848-1883), Grandfather¹ passed the mandarin exam² during the Tu-Duc reign, accepted government commission as the district chief³ of Tho-Xuong, which included all 36 streets of Ha-thanh⁴, then became the prefecture chief⁵ of Van-Dinh. But when Vietnam came under the colonial rule of France, he immediately resigned from the mandarin, then returned to Nam-thanh⁶ to open an academy and successfully developed many famous people, among his remarkable students were Bui-Bang-Doan, Ngo-Giap-Dau, as well as his own highly-achieving progenies. Grandmother⁷ often mentioned that Grandfather's integrity as a mandarin was rare and admired by his regional citizens and that just a few days after he resigned and left Van-Dinh, the region was burned and destroyed by a gang of outlaws⁸; his successor as regional-chief was killed. Grandmother said that happened because of the blessing of our ancestors⁹; the granduncles surmised that the integrity of Grandfather kept others from wanting to harm him; the grandaunts asserted that was the fortune of having the family tomb at the goose's head location¹⁰; a pebble stuck at the goose's neck made him resign, kept him from the glorious attainment of the four-parasol ranking¹¹ but from all disasters as well.

Grandfather passed away on the 27th day of the 7th month in the Oriental-calendar¹² year. Grandmother, whose maiden name was Pham-Thi-Doan, passed away on the 11th day of the first month in the Oriental-calendar year. Their graves were located on the Con Tôm (The Shrimp) knoll in the Loc-Hoa village, My-Loc district, Nam-Dinh province. Grandparents were survived by their four sons Bich-Gian, Nhat-Thanh, Bo-Doanh, Qui-Tan and two daughters Thi-Gian, Thi-Vinh.



Mr. Ngo-Bo-Doanh

That of extraordinary nature

Fragrance just as distinguished

Similar to lotus flower

So it is reckoned.

_____ *Final words: "Tran Mong nhat chu" (Poem about the "Terrestrial Dream" orchid in Chinese¹)*

_____ *Distinguished ancestor Ngo-Bo-Doanh*

(Translation of the above poem from Chinese to Vietnamese)



Born in 1877, passed the mandarin exam² in 1906, a few years later he entered the Hau-Bo Institute for a two-year training, then between 1912-1913 accepted an instructor position at Tu-Ky (Hai-Duong). After several years in the teaching profession, Mr. Bo-Doanh was advanced into government administration, became the district chief³ of Dai-Tu, then Tien-Hai, Thu-Tri, Van-Giang, etc. then worked as a commerce commissioner in many provinces before retiring in 1935. In the years in education, Uncle was always happily and enthusiastically performing his duty therefore he was not only wholeheartedly respected by his students but also was greatly admired by the Confucian scholars in the district and nearby regions. But after entering government

administration, his passion for duty seemed to decreased significantly, perhaps because in this field, there were many hidden and intricate affairs unsuitable for Uncle's extremely righteous nature.

Very lenient with the citizens, however, Uncle dealt heavy-handedly with the bully gangs because they often interfered illegally with administrative affairs. With his superiors, Uncle maintained enough professional courtesy but avoided all obsequious and sycophantic behaviors that were very popular in the government of that era. That was probably why he remained around the district chief level, not able to advance to the provincial governorship nor even promoted to prefecture chiefhood. In retirement, Uncle only had a small house and yard in the hamlet of Khoai-Dong, Nam-Dinh, then later relocated to Hanoi to be near his children, most of whom settled there.



Aunt's maiden name was Bui-Thi-My, a Hanoi native. Uncle and Aunt had five sons named Nguyen-Thuc, Trong-Phuong, Thuc-Dung, Qui-Dam, Au-Duyen and six daughters named Phuong-Thuc, Thuy-Dien, Bao-Thoa, Kim-Xuyen, Luc-Tram, Bao-Hoan, most of whom had many offsprings, making up the most populous and wealthy Ngo-Xuan branch owing to a solid family education.

A long life of eighty-one years, still alert and discerning, suddenly one day feeling exhausted, Father ordered all descendants in the family to gather around him then read four verses

That of extraordinary nature

Fragrance just as distinguished

Similar to lotus flower

So it is reckoned. ()*

Finished reading, Father closed his eyes eternally, bringing to the Realm of the Sages¹⁴ a free, comfortable soul. That was the 29th day of the sixth month of the Year of the Cock (1957). Mother passed away on the 5th day of the 6th month of the Year of the Dog (1958).

Reading over and over the four verses Uncle left at his final moment of life, his nephew wrote the following contemplative lines: Truly were a symbol of an extraordinarily righteous and clean life, they also reflected the hearts and careers

of the Ngo-Xuan descendants who had a seven-generation ancestral grave at the mythical goose head location¹⁰.

(*) While living, Mr. Ngo-Bo-Doanh liked to grow orchids. At his last moment, he compared himself to a Tran-Mong orchid. Then reviewing his clean life, he thought the Terrestrial Dream bloom was not any less than a lotus flower, living near the mud yet not malodorous like mud.

_____author: Ngô-Đình-Tuấn, June 16, 1978.

Annotation

¹**Grandfather** : The maternal genealogy's author was one of my maternal granduncles, Mr. Ngô-Đình-Tuấn, so the word "Grandfather" in the paraphrase, as employed from that author's point of view, referred to my generation's maternal great-great-grandfather.

²**Mandarin exam** : During the late 19th century, Vietnamese government officials were selected from the qualifiers of mandarin (public administrator) exams which were publicly held every four years.

³**District chief** : During the French domination and occupation between the mid-19th century and mid-20th century, Vietnam was divided by the French into 3 sections: the colony of Cochinchina and the 2 protectorates of Annam and Tonkin. These territories were administratively divided further into 31 provinces (tỉnh), then into prefectures (phủ), then into lowland districts (huyện) or highland districts (châu), then into cantons (tổng), and then into villages (xã). A district chief is the governor of a district. See map 1:



Map 1: The sections and provinces of Vietnam in the late 19th century.

⁴**36 streets of Ha-thanh** : Ha-thanh is, now, Hanoi, the capital city of Vietnam. The city was renowned for its 36 streets where, in each one, members of the same guild used to live together, and the streets were named after the guild's trade. For examples, the Silverware Street, the Silk Street, etc.

⁵**Prefecture chief** : During the French domination and occupation between the mid-19th century and mid-20th century, Vietnam was divided by the French into 3 sections: the colony of Cochin-China and the 2 protectorates of Annam and Tonkin. These territories were administratively divided further into 31 provinces (tỉnh), then into prefectures (phủ), then into lowland districts (huyện) or highland districts (châu), then into cantons (tổng), and then into villages (xã). The prefecture chief is the governor of a prefecture. See Map 1.

⁶**Nam-thanh** : A major city in the north of Vietnam, that is now called Nam-Dinh.

⁷**Grandmother** : The maternal genealogy's author was one of my maternal granduncles, Mr. Ngô-Đình-Tuấn, so the word "Grandmother" in the paraphrase, as employed from that author's point of view, referred to my generation's maternal great-great-grandmother.

⁸**Gang of outlaws** : The second half of the 19th century was a tumultuous, transitional era of Vietnam in which rebels and criminals were well-organized, influential, violent, and rampant.

⁹**Blessing of our ancestors** : This accords with an ancient Vietnamese belief that those who died would become supernatural beings who could aid in their living loved ones' endeavors.

¹⁰**Fortune of having the family tomb at the goose's head location** : This accords with an ancient geomancy (feng shui) belief that the burial site of a clan's ancestors could affect its fate and fortune. Choice locations are topographies that resemble auspicious symbols such as dragons, pearls, money bags, etc.

¹¹**Four-parasol ranking** : This implies a top government position because when a high-ranking Vietnamese official traveled during that era, his attendants would carry parasols to shade him, and the number of parasols corresponded to the rank level. A four-parasol mandarin status was equivalent to province chief (quan Tổng-Đốc).



PIX 293105: A Vietnamese province chief was shown in an old French postcard. He traveled in a palanquin and was shaded by four parasols.

¹²**Oriental-calendar** : This calendar system is based on the phases of the moon and is different from the western calendar which is based on the earth's revolution around the sun. The differences between the calendars' time periods causes the first day of the year in the O.C. (oriental calendar) to occur on different dates each year on the western calendar. For recent examples:

Vietnamese Year of the Horse will begin on February 12, 2002, then the following

Vietnamese Year of the Sheep will begin on February 1, 2003, then the following

Vietnamese Year of the Monkey will begin on January 22, 2004, then the following

Vietnamese Year of the Rooster will begin on February 9, 2005, then the following

Vietnamese Year of the Dog will begin on January 29, 2006, then the following

Vietnamese Year of the Pig will begin on February 18, 2007, and so on ...

To determine an Oriental Astrological Sign use this [calculator](#).

The oriental-calendar system is complex and hard to calculate so to determine a western calendar time counterpart, most people refer to its commercially-produced book forms which are widely available from oriental merchants around Vietnamese new years.

O.C. calendar dates are often used in old genealogy records in reference to ancestors' dates of demise, and their significance is elaborated in the next item, the "[death anniversary \(giỗ\)](#)".

¹³**Death-anniversary** : Called "giỗ" (pronounced as "zô"), this veneration ceremony of an ancestor on the anniversary of his or her demise was among the most ancient and prevalent of Vietnamese traditions. On the anniversary of an ancestor's decease, the descendants would hold a family gathering, usually at the eldest son's place, to enjoy a nice meal together and to reminisce family history for the benefit of the younger or new members. Because of its significance with the anniversaries, ancestors' death dates are an essential element of Vietnamese genealogy, even more important than the birthdates. The [oriental-calendar](#) was traditionally used to determine the death-anniversary dates but many families are using the Western calendar for simplicity nowadays.

¹⁴**Realm of the sages** : An Oriental euphemistic expression for heaven or the other world.