

# *Cung lục Ngự chế Bắc tuần thi tập* Poem Collection by King Khải Định and Thought of Reformist Ideology

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**Abstract:** *Cung lục Ngự chế Bắc tuần thi tập* is a collection of poems by King Khải Định (1916-1925) of the Nguyễn Dynasty. The poems were composed during the king's patrol in northern Vietnam and were discovered at the residence of the Duke of Phong Quốc in Vĩ Dạ, Huế City. Although the work has been mentioned in the national history of the Nguyễn Dynasty, it has not been fully printed yet. As a result, this work is not included in the archive of Sino-Nôm ancient books at the Institute of Sino-Nôm Studies, or in any other archives. The collection represents King Khải Định's literary and historical contributions during his patrol in northern Vietnam in 1918. It holds significant literary and historical values, as it reflects the political and social realities of the country during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century under French colonial rule. It particularly showcases the king's awareness and sense of responsibility towards the nation. This article aims to identify the author's text, as well as highlight the typical content and value of the work *Cung lục Ngự chế Bắc tuần thi tập*.

**Keywords:** *Cung lục Ngự chế Bắc tuần thi tập*, King Khải Định, modernization.

**Subject classification:** Sino-Nôm studies.

## 1. Introduction

The kings of the Nguyễn Dynasty had a tradition of conducting patrols to the North, during which two notable sets of *Cung lục Ngự chế Bắc tuần thi tập* (恭錄御製北巡詩集) were created. These included the engravings by King Thiệu Trị and the manuscripts by King Khải Định. However, the latter's poetry has not received as much attention in comparison to the works of earlier kings. Regarding the northern patrol, an administrative officer named Par R. Orband documented and published his observations in the French book "Voyage De S.M. Khải Định dans Le Nord-Annam et Au Tonkin" in the *Bulletin des Amis du Vieux Hue*, third issue of 1918. Phạm Quỳnh, the editor-in-chief of *Nam Phong*

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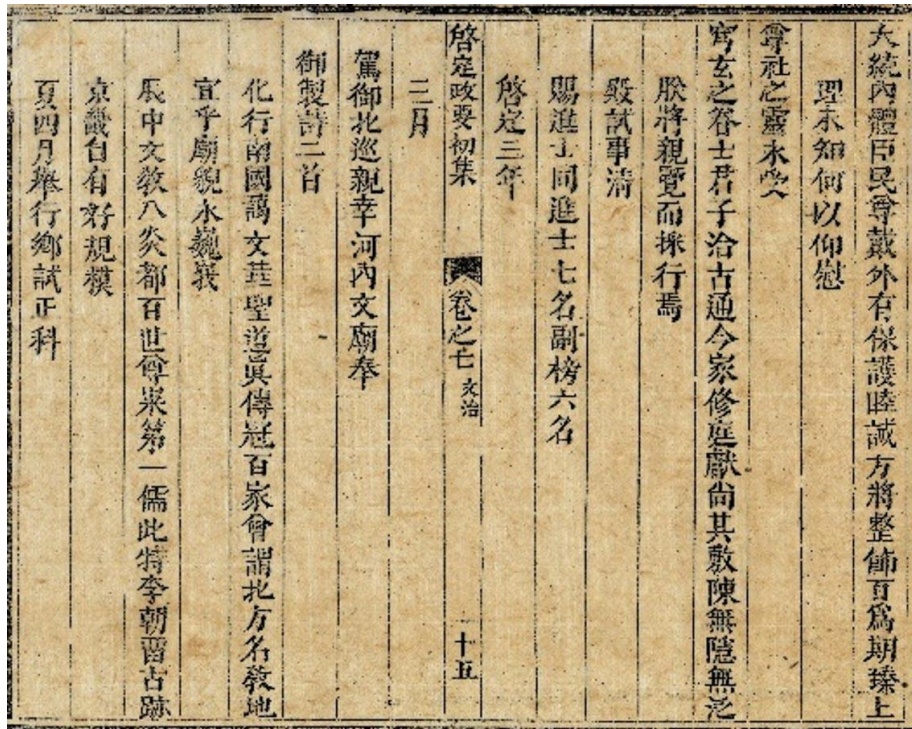
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magazine, recorded the official dispatches between King Khải Định and the French representative's mandarin. An article titled *Về việc ngự giá Bắc tuần* (On the matter of the northern patrol) was published in *Nam Phong* magazine's Vietnamese version on 11 May 1918. The magazine's version in Chinese characters also published the 44 Chinese character poems written by the king in issue No. 12 of the same year. The subsequent historical records include *Đại Nam thực lục, đệ thất kỷ* and *Đồng Khánh Khải Định chính yếu*, which chronicle the journey of King Khải Định. These documents mention that King Khải Định composed a collection of 44 poems known as *Bắc tuần thi tập*. However, the work has received little study and research thus far.

*Cung lục Ngự chế Bắc tuần thi tập*, which translates to "Respectfully copying the King's collection of poems on the northern patrols", is a manuscript preserved at the Phong Quốc Công's residence in Vĩ Dạ Ward, Huế City. The digitized version is held by the General Library of Hồ Chí Minh City and the Huế General Museum, coded 77. This handwritten manuscript consists of 24 sheets, containing 44 poems written in Chinese characters by the king during his northern patrol, with more information than that recorded in *Nam Phong* magazine's version in Chinese characters. The article utilizes literary and analytical methods to analyze the texts, along with field surveys and theoretical approaches, to clarify the relationships between various elements. It explores the connection between the imperial poetry and official histories, steles, and other Sino-Nôm documents. By examining *Cung lục Ngự chế Bắc tuần thi tập* of King Khải Định, the study discovers that the king ordered the engraving of steles along the route he patrolled, which now serve as the foundation for analyzing the entire content of the poems. Following the Confucian tradition of poetry writing in Vietnam, the depiction of oneself and the scenes along the road represents the development of King Khải Định's poetic wandering compared to previous kings, particularly Thiệu Trị. Furthermore, the article delves into the characteristics of modernization in King Khải Định's poetry through an in-depth analysis of the changes brought about by the contemporary era and civilization.

Previously, some research and analytical works explored the shift from tradition to modernity, exemplified by revolutionary figures such as Phan Bội Châu, Phan Châu Trinh, and President Hồ Chí Minh. Additionally, scholars like Trần Trọng Kim and editor Phạm Quỳnh of *Nam Phong* adhered to the path of reform. However, American scholar David G. Marr, in his work "*Vietnamese Tradition on Trial (1920-1945)*", discussed the changing landscape between tradition and modernity through various characters and events, focusing on Vietnam's traditions and its people, but neglecting the thoughts of monarchs, including King Khải Định. This article is based on a collection of Chinese poetic texts written by Khải Định, a king who lived during the French colonial period, to explore his clearly expressed ideas, which always emphasized the desire for a strong country and prosperous people. His thoughts encompass both traditional and modern ideas, notions of autonomy and colonialism, as well as reformation and feudalism.

## 2. Poetry text and author



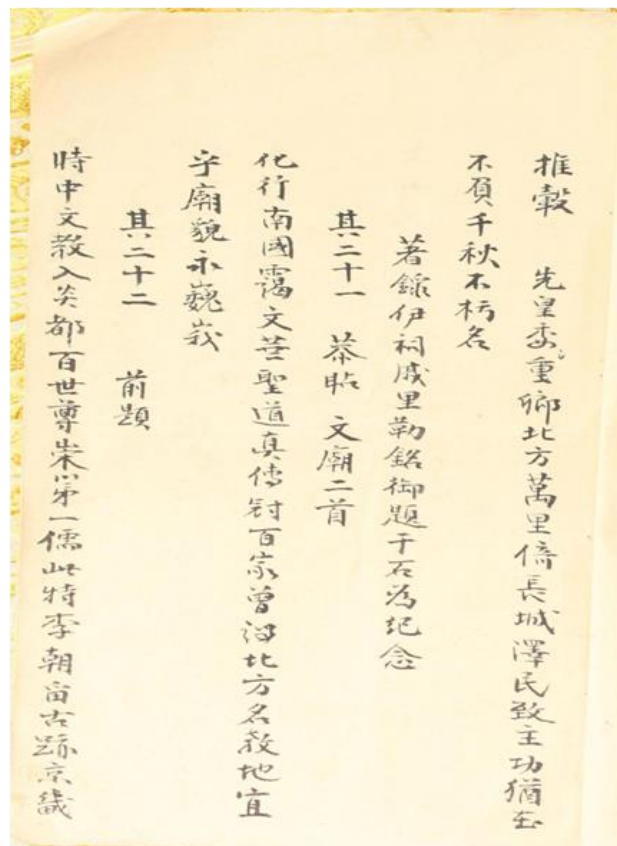
The poem in the Temple of Literature engraved on *Khải Định chính yếu sơ tập*, volume 7

*Ngự chế Bắc tuần* are poems written by the Nguyễn kings while on patrol from Huế to the North. This collection of northern patrol poetry is often associated with King Thiệu Trị (1841-1847), as he had the volume *Ngự chế Bắc tuần* printed and widely introduced. Consequently, *Cung lục Ngự chế Bắc tuần thi tập* was discovered was initially believed to be the work of King Thiệu Trị. And, due to the absence of this text in ancient bibliographic collections, it has not been extensively studied or introduced. Notably, there are articles such as “Digitalization of many Sino-Nôm documents in Huế, Hà Tĩnh” by Lam Điền, published in Tuoi Tre Newspaper on 28 September 2013, and “The Northern Patrol by King Khải Định” by Thơm Quang, which discuss the king’s patrol and his poetic compositions. Nevertheless, these articles are not directly related to the text *Cung lục Ngự chế Bắc tuần thi tập*. The title of the text itself, *Cung lục Ngự chế Bắc tuần thi tập*, translates to “Respectfully copying the King’s collection of poems from *Ngự chế Bắc tuần*”. The copy was made by Tôn Thất Phú, hence the addition of “respectfully copying”. The claim that this collection of poems belongs to King Khải Định is based on records from the Nguyễn Dynasty’s history. The book “*Đông Khánh Khải Định chính yếu*” documents King Khải Định’s northern patrol in 1918. The locations mentioned in the poems, such as the provinces of Quảng Trị, Quảng Bình, Hà Tĩnh, Nghệ An and Thanh Hóa, the Temple of Literature in Hanoi City), Lạng Sơn,

Nam Định and Hưng Yên provinces, and Hải Phòng City, correspond well with the places where the king patrolled.

The specific events of King Khải Định's northern patrol and the titles of the poems are also recorded in the national history of the Nguyễn Dynasty, *Đông Khánh Khải Định chính yếu*. It states: "During the journeys and in places to rest, the King composed 44 poems, including one for the *Trùng Nguyên* tombs (...). The local authorities were instructed to carve them into stone for preservation."

The 44 poems mentioned in the main text of *Đông Khánh Khải Định chính yếu* align with the 44 poems in the *Cung lục Ngự chế Bắc tuần thi tập* collection. Notably, the poem 恭謁文廟 (Sightseeing of the Literature Temple), composed by King Khải Định during his visit to the Temple of Literature, is included in the book *Cung lục Ngự chế Bắc tuần thi tập* (Poem No. 21) and in the book *Đông Khánh Khải Định chính yếu*, book 7, sheet number 15, section on Confucius thought (*Văn trị*).



The poem in the Temple of Literature on the book *Cung lục Ngự chế Bắc tuần thi tập*

The poem 恭謁原廟感題, which is titled "When Visiting *Nguyên miếu* (lit. original temple/temple of the origin) Temple of the Nguyễn Dynasty in Thanh Hóa", is the 11<sup>th</sup> poem in this collection. It is also copied in the *Đông Khánh Khải Định chính yếu*.



Furthermore, there is currently a stone stele in Đâu Gổ cave in Quảng Ninh, engraved with a poem by King Khải Định. The poem is titled 覽綠海奇觀石峒賜名五彩祥雲峒, and it is included in the book *Cung lục Ngự chế Bắc tuần thi tập* (poem No.36). It is also recorded in *Đông Khánh Khải Định chính yếu*.



Two poems at the Temple of Literature are copied from the book *Cung lục Ngự chế Bắc tuần thi tập*.

Inscription of King Khải Định's poem in Đâu Gổ cave (Author's photo) and King Khải Định's poem on the cave in the book *Cung lục Ngự chế Bắc tuần thi tập*.

In addition, the history book *Đại Nam thực lục* of the Nguyễn Dynasty also states: “poems were composed during the northern patrol for the mandarins (44 poems). At the beginning of the northern patrol, all the scenic spots received attention, and local officials ordered them to be carved into stone. When the king returned, the officials gathered and distributed them to demonstrate their immortality” (Quốc sử quán triều Nguyễn, 2012: 202).

Furthermore, in the series *Đại Nam thực lục*, the king’s instructions to his court servants were recorded as follows: “Although my northern patrol lasted only a few days, I visited many places that were also seen by the people who escorted me. However, most of the court servants haven’t had the opportunity to see these beautiful scenes with their own eyes. Therefore, I have written 44 poems for them to read and experience” (Quốc sử quán triều Nguyễn, 2012: 202).

It is highly likely that *Cung lục ngự chế Bắc tuần thi tập* copied poems were composed by King Khải Định and collected by his secretary during his northern patrol in 1918. This is a valuable document as it relates to the event when King Khải Định patrolled the North and composed the poem *Ngự chế* (lit. “composed by the monarch”) mentioned in official history. Fortunately, this manuscript was copied and has been circulated.

### 3. Content and value of poetry book

King Khải Định’s trip to the North in 1918 began in Huế and was continued through central provinces such as Hà Tĩnh, Nghệ An, and Thanh Hóa. Then he visited Hanoi, Hải Phòng, and Quảng Ninh. During his patrol, the king composed 44 Chinese poems in the style of Tang Dynasty’s poetry, each clearly mentioning the name and location where he visited. Some notable places he visited include production facilities, scenic spots, and historical sites in Quảng Trị; Đồng Hới city and Luỹ Thầy city in Quảng Bình; Hà Tĩnh (bordering Laos); the ancestral tombs of the Nguyễn Dynasty in *Gia Miêu Ngoại Trang*; Phố Cát Temple in Thanh Hoá; Văn Miếu, the *École française d'Extrême-Orient* (EFEO), and the Opera House in Hanoi; the provinces of Sơn Tây; Bắc Ninh and Bắc Giang; the caves of Kỳ Lừa, Nhị Thanh, Tam Thanh, and Đồng Đăng city in Lạng Sơn; Hải Dương Province; Hải Phòng; Hạ Long city; and the bay of Bái Tử Long.

The schedule of King Khải Định’s northern patrol, as recorded in the book *Đồng Khánh Khải Định chính yếu*, coincides with the notes in the collection of poems *Cung lục Ngự chế Bắc tuần thi tập*, specifically as follows (lunar calendar):

On the ninth of the third month of the year, the king himself departed from Huế to Quảng Bình, Hà Tĩnh, and Nghệ An. In those provinces, the delegates stopped to set up services at the palace.

The king himself visited the Hà Trai Department, observed how elephants were captured, and toured the Quý Quan plantation.

On the 13<sup>th</sup>, the king himself arrived in Thanh Hóa.

On the 14<sup>th</sup>, the king himself visited the Tomb and Temple.

On the 15<sup>th</sup>, the king himself paid homage to the reign in the Palace in Thanh Hoá.

On the evening of the 16<sup>th</sup>, the king himself arrived in Hanoi, taking the Governor's office as a palace. The Governor led the French officials to host a welcome party for the king.

Early the next morning, the royal rites were presented. The people of *Bắc Kỳ* (Tonkin) offered congratulatory banners. Thereafter, the king himself visited the bronze statue of the Governor General Paul Beau.

He saw the exhibition of agriculture, industry, and trade.

He went to the Supreme/Great/Profound/Erudite Learning Hall (太學) to attend the inauguration ceremony(成禮).

He visited the Temple of Literature and the temple for worshipping the late Duke of Vĩnh Quốc.

He attended the military parade.

He went to Sơn Tây to see the big farm of a landlord.

He went to the Northern High Court.

On the 20<sup>th</sup>, the king himself went up to Lạng Sơn to patrol the army post, climb Kỳ Lừa mountain to observe the cave of Nhị Thanh, and visit the road of Đồng Đăng and the cave of Tam Thanh.

On the 22<sup>nd</sup>, the king himself went to Hải Phòng. The French dignitaries, mandarins, and trade unions held a welcome party at Hải Phòng City Hall. He also visited manufacturing workshops and caves and estuaries in Cẩm Phả.

On the 24<sup>th</sup>, he returned to Hanoi, visited the EFEO, the Museum, and the Tonkin Chamber of Commerce.

On the 26<sup>th</sup>, the king himself visited Nam Định. The French dignitaries and mandarins held a welcome party at the palace. The king himself patrolled the barracks and Vị Hoàng River wharf and visited the silk factory.

On the 27<sup>th</sup>, the king himself left Nam Định, stopping to rest in Nghệ An.

On the 28<sup>th</sup>, the king himself stopped to rest in Quảng Trị.

On the 29<sup>th</sup>, early in the morning, he went to a Catholic organization named Phước Môn. That afternoon, the king returned to Huế (Võ Hương An, 2016).

Therefore, the content of the poems includes praises on the majestic scenery of the country and the famous landscapes that the king visited.

When King Khải Định came to the border of the two provinces of Hà Tĩnh and Quảng Bình, overwhelmed by the majestic mountains, he was inspired to write the poem 過橫山 (Passing the Hoàng Sơn Mountain) with the sentence: 一帶天重入海開, 天南巨鎮是橫山 (A mountain range of thousands overlapping sea mouths, the Great Mountain of the southern area is Hoàng Sơn Mountain). The verse is intended to describe the rolling hills of

Hoành Sơn, their majestic nature, and the important geographical position - it was a strategic location in ancient times.

When he came to West Lake (Hanoi), he wrote poem No. 16, Exhibiting West Lake 遊覽西湖, with the sentence: 勝境如懸一畫圖, 樓台觀寺半臨湖 (The scenery is so beautiful, the castles, pagodas, and shrines by the lake all resemble a painting). There are many legends surrounding the lake, such as those of pagodas like Trần Quốc, Kim Liên etc.

In the provinces which the king patrolled, he would always stop to set up court at the palace, commanding the local officials to use the funds provided by the dynasty. If the local people wished to donate money, they should be allowed to do so without any disturbance. People should not be forced to donate, and officers who violated this regulation would be severely punished. Measures were taken at the provincial, district, and commune levels to minimize disturbances in welcoming the king, ensuring the safety of the people in accordance with the king's will, and promoting a sense of duty among the entire country.

During their visits to the North, the kings of the Nguyễn Dynasty, including King Khải Định, would make a point to serve at the Nguyễn Temple in Thanh Hóa, where their ancestors were worshipped. King Khải Định composed a poem titled 恭謁原廟感題 (The poem written on serving Nguyễn ancestors' temples, article 11 in the collection of *Cung lục Ngự chế Bắc tuần thi tập*). The content of the poem is as follows:

肇造貽謀厥後昌，千秋靈秀地鍾祥。  
江朝九曲灣環水，山拱三重左右岡。  
青史人猶傳義氣，玄城天為報忠良。  
鴻基世世相承紹，於萬斯年國脈長。

This poem praises the merits and virtues of the ancestors who established the imperial lineage, passing it on for many generations and contributing to the country's prosperity. It also expresses the hope that the ancestors will protect the country and ensure its strength, particularly in the face of French colonial invasion.

Furthermore, Par R. Orband had interactions with Tôn Thất Hân, head of the Privy Council, who introduced the history of the *Nguyễn miếu* (原廟) in Thanh Hoá, documenting the specific sacrifices made by King Khải Định while offering incense. Of particular value were his translation of the text into French and his architectural drawings of the ancestral temples. However, he did not record King Khải Định's poetry praising his ancestors (Orband, 1918: 183-198).

King Khải Định also visited the Temple of Literature in Hanoi and composed two poems that extolled the virtues of Confucius and Vietnam. In poem No. 21, he stated that “化行南國萬文垂, 聖道真傳冠百家” (the teachings of Confucius have spread throughout the country, and everyone respects Confucius). He further emphasized that “辰中文教入炎都, 百世尊崇第一儒” (Confucius' teachings have reached every corner, and he is revered as the foremost scholar). King Khải Định placed great importance on the country and held deep respect for Confucianism and education. During that era, Vietnamese people still



adhered to Confucianism and took part in civil service examinations. Intellectuals respected the monarchy and advocated for reforms, such as Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh and Trần Trọng Kim, who blended Confucian thought with new societal ideals in their papers at *Nam Phong* magazine and other books. King Khải Định reaffirmed the country's commitment to the Confucian tradition.

In preparation for his patrol to the North, King Khải Định consulted the official patrol records of Kings Minh Mạng and Thiệu Trị. While Vietnam was a French colony during King Khải Định's reign, the court still existed, and he inherited the literary and political ideas of previous kings. Therefore, he retained an intention to implement Confucian theories in governing the country. Throughout the preparation process, the king had several interactions with the Governor-General, and his ideas were translated into Romanized Vietnamese, or *quốc ngữ*, by Phạm Quỳnh and published in the latter's *Nam Phong* magazine (Phạm Quỳnh, 2018: 259-29). This would make the people empathize with the king and would promote the Vietnamese civilization.

#### 4. King Khải Định's ideology on modernization

When visiting the Temple of Literature in Hanoi, King Khải Định wrote two poems praising the virtues of Confucius and advocating for ruling Vietnam in harmony with Confucian ideas. He attached great importance to Confucianism and education. The king also visited the EFEO and wrote poems to promote the development of a new culture.

Table 1: Places Visited by King Khải Định and Poems Composed

No.	Name	Order
1	Visiting Quảng Trị 抵廣治東阿羅哥降火車升電車	No.2
2	Visiting the <i>École de Médecine de l'Indochine</i> 覽醫院學場	No.15
3	Visiting the exhibition hall 覽閣巧場	No.17
4	Visiting the Court of Appeals of Tonkin 駕幸上審院	No.18
5	Visiting the College <i>École Supérieure</i> 覽高等學場	No.19
6	Visiting the International Committee of the Red Cross 覽紅十字會薦技求濟	No.23
7	Visiting the Far East printing firm 覽遠東印機所	No.26
8	Visiting Cẩm Phả coal mine 駕幸錦坡覽煤礦	No.37
9	Visiting Nam Phong newspaper and composing a poem 覽南風報館表賜詩一章	No. 38
10	Visiting the library of EFEO 覽遠東書院	No.39
11	Visiting the Exhibition Hall <i>Exposition des arts et des industries annamites</i> 覽本國技藝賽會	No.40

The king also visited universities, medical schools, factories, and other modern and progressive facilities. These places were constructed and equipped with modern technology, including the railways. The king would often patrol the North using the railway system. After surveying 11 points of modernization, he wrote a poem.

In poem No. 2, King Khải Định and French Governor-General Sarraut visited the medical school. Regarding the event, the king wrote poem No. 15, titled “Visiting the Medical School”. In this poem, he expressed his views on Western and Asian medicine, emphasizing that Western education prioritizes the study and practice of medicine. He argued that Western medicine emphasizes pragmatism, follows rules, and employs feasible methods. In contrast, he criticized Asian studies for lacking proper arrangement, generalization, and promotion of methods.

In poem No. 19, King Khải Định believed that French scholarship at that time was the best in Europe. He felt that more talented individuals should be discovered for the colleges of Vietnam. The king had confidence that students would acquire practical skills in these institutions, ultimately bringing modernity to the country.

Poem No. 23 mentioned the Red Cross, an international organization founded in Switzerland in 1863, primarily aimed at assistance to and cure for people. The French established a branch of the Red Cross society in Hanoi. On March 18<sup>th</sup>, the French Red Cross in Hanoi organized a fair in the square in front of the Opera House, extending even into the Opera House itself. At 5pm, Sarraut and the king visited the booths and observed games, the prizes for which were cash. They did not forget to praise Mrs. St Chaffray, the chair of the organizing committee. King Khải Định employed the Chinese characters 仁 and 俠 (meaning “human” and “generous”, respectively) ingeniously to illustrate the society’s presence in Vietnam.

In poem No. 37, King Khải Định described his patrol of Hải Phòng city to visit a mine, the location of which is now part of Quảng Ninh Province. He acknowledged that the terminology for chemicals originated from Europe while Vietnam had a long history in the mining industry. European bases and branches established in Vietnam were highly developed, with the mines providing abundant resources. By emphasizing the word “chemistry”, King Khải Định expressed his hope for Vietnam’s progress in the field.

In poem No. 38, King Khải Định also attached great importance to journalists and magazines, stating that they would foster people’s wisdom and promote evolution in Vietnam. He hoped that journalists would train people in the new era. He used the Chinese characters 扶鼎 to illustrate the responsibility of journalists to the country, while using the characters 獲麟 to refer to Confucius compiling 春秋 (the Spring (春) and Autumn (秋)) book, evaluating journalists as being very benevolent.

In poem No. 39, King Khải Định referred to his visiting EFEO, a museum housing many European works. *Đại Nam* (The Great [Country in the] South - the name of Vietnam

at that time) was learning from the West for civilization and progress. He felt that the books in the library were very valuable, serving the development of the country.

During his northern patrol, King Khải Định was highly interested in advanced science and technology to help develop the country. However, the country was under French colonial rule at that time, so King Khải Định could not help but pay attention to the cause of defending the country, specifically the military parades of the imperial army. In fact, during the French colonial period, military power was held by the French, and King Khải Định did not have many opportunities to review the army. During this military parade, the king wrote poem No. 24, entitled “覽河城大演兵陣” (Reviewing the Military Parade) as follows:

陣圖操演列奇兵，仗炮模鎗盡敏精，馬壯人強強如此，逆虜且莫肆狂行。

Meaning: The battlefield is full of cavalry; Weapons and guns are highly sophisticated; Soldiers are strong and armed with bullets; The enemy is weak and should not dare to rebel.

King Khải Định inspected modern weapons demonstrated by the soldiers. Although the king wrote a poem praising the soldiers’ mighty spirit, he knew that sovereignty did not belong to the monarchy, but he also hoped to have an army like his predecessors. In fact, King Khải Định had no power to govern the country.

Together with the French Governor-General A. P. Sarraut, King Khải Định embarked on a cruise by waterway from Hải Phòng to Quảng Ninh, to Đầu Gỗ Cave. The king stopped there to write the poem “覽綠海奇觀石峒賜名五彩祥雲峒偶得五言排律十二韻” (Wrote one poem of 12 rhymes for sightseeing stone wonders of *Lục Hải* that have five colors of auspicious clouds). The poem has the following introduction: “One early morning in the spring of the year of the Horse (1918), I went on patrol to the North, accompanied by Governor-General Albert Pierre Sarraut from Hải Phòng. We sailed to see *Lục Hải* (Hạ Long), up to the Lục Đầu River, and stopped to see this wondrous stone cave. At the entrance of the cave, I named the cave *Ngũ Thái Tàng Vân* (five-colored auspicious clouds)”. During this sea journey, King Khải Định personally visited the majestic northeastern coast of Vietnam. At the same time, he gained a greater awareness of the importance of the sea. In King Khải Định’s poems, he used a lot of many modern concepts, as shown in Table 2.

The term “civilization” was mentioned twice, and “evolution” was mentioned three times. This suggests that King Khải Định placed special emphasis on these concepts and had a strong desire for the country to progress towards modernization and development. The repetition of the word “chemistry” can be seen as an indication that he viewed Western science and technology as the means to achieve modernization.

In summary, King Khải Định employed ancient poetry in Chinese characters to express new ideas and demonstrate foreign influences, while also incorporating numerous modern concepts into his poetry. This showcases his adoption of a modern approach, which differed greatly from King Thiệu Trị, who composed solely classical ancient poetry.

Table 2: Modern Concepts Used by King Khải Định in Poetry

No.	Concept	Title of the poem	Appearances
1	Civilization 文明	No.40 Visiting the Exhibition Hall <i>Exposition des arts et des industries annamites</i> 覽本國技藝賽會 No.44 End note remarks 回鑾留題	2
2	Evolution 進化	No.19 Visiting the University of Indochina 覽高等學場 No.40 Visiting the Exhibition Hall <i>Exposition des arts et des industries annamites</i> 覽本國技藝賽會 No.44 End note remarks 回鑾留題	3
3	Chemistry 化學	No.26 Visiting the Far East printing firm 覽遠東印機所 No.37 Visiting Cẩm Phả coal mine 駕幸錦坡覽煤礦	2
4	Western philosophy 西哲	No.39 Visiting the library of EFEO 覽遠東書院	1
5	Five continents 五洲	No.39 Visiting the library of EFEO 覽遠東書院	1
6	Asia 亞洲	No.23 Visiting the International Committee of the Red Cross 覽紅十字會薦技求濟	1

## 5. Conclusion

Phạm Quỳnh, editor-in-chief of *Nam Phong tạp chí* magazine, commented on Khải Định's *Ngự giá Bắc tuần* as follows: “The King’s patrol in the North follows the customs of previous kings. Patrols imply assessing the social status of a region. Over the past forty years, the people of Tonkin, who grew up under French supervision, have made significant progress. Due to the imperial court’s delegation of authority to the Protectorate government in the North, efforts for expansion were economically and socially successful. His Majesty desired to examine the outcomes personally, and during his ten-day visit to Tonkin, he traveled extensively to witness the spectacle of development and the level of civilization” (Phạm Quỳnh, 1918: 297). Phạm Quỳnh, an intellectual advocating for reform, holds the limited and non-revolutionary belief that the French were responsible for creating civilization and progress in Tonkin.

The collection of poems, *Cung lục Ngự chế Bắc tuần thi tập*, serves as a poetic diary precisely documenting King Khải Định’s itinerary during his patrol in the North. It is currently preserved in Huế and remains a rare document that enriches the Sino-Nôm

treasure, yet it is not part of the Sino-Nôm heritage archives in Vietnam. The places visited by the king and the poems composed during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century differed greatly from those associated with King Thiệu Trị in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. The locations now included typical sites and things linked to the advancement of science and technology, such as universities, factories, ports, trains, and ships. That shows the king's desire for the development, prosperity, and civilization of the country.

The poetry collection simultaneously reflects political thoughts, defends the nation, sympathizes with the hardships and difficulties faced by the people in the areas the king visited, and expresses concerns about the destiny of the country. It also portrays the king's participation in military parades and patrols on islands and seas, as if affirming the independence and autonomy of *Đại Nam*. Although the poems were composed during the patrol, they possess a distinct poetic artistry that showcases the king's knowledge and creative talent. The collection holds both literary and political value, encompassing numerous Confucian cultural and historical ideas. Additionally, it serves as an important historical source documenting the state of the country and society at that time.

An American scholar, Keith Taylor, assessed King Khải Định as follows: "He was the son of Dong Khanh, who reigned from 1885 to 1889. Like his father, he willingly collaborated with the French, and from then on, the monarchy ceased to be a concern for colonial authorities" (Taylor, 2013: 496). By examining Khải Định's collection of poems written in Chinese characters alongside historical documents in *quốc ngữ* and French, it is likely that the king consistently held modernization views. He hoped for the country to become wealthier and stronger, and his anti-French sentiments have yet to be discovered. The work *Ngự chế Bắc tuần thi tập* demonstrates Khải Định's continuous contemplation between tradition and modernity, thus warranting further study and wider introduction.

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