

## VIET-CHI POST No 26

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### ABOVE THE OCEAN

Series of letters from Master Phan-Hoang

(non-edited text)

*Trời dài đất rộng, đi thật, sống thật, ghi vội, gửi về...*

*Cánh Thư Phan-Hoàng*

**ĐẦU SÓNG NGỌN GIÓ**

**Thư Số 14: THANH-PHO HOSEN**

### Letter 14 : THE TOWN OF HOSEN

(continued from Letter 13)

LETTER 14

After visiting Kamakura the next day I came back to Fujisawa to take the same train to Hosen the town of the Great Buddha Statue. This station is a small station, no entrance hall, but today a huge number of passengers are getting in and out hastily. A sea of people invades the main street, going in both directions. I don't want to get lost again but I am not willing either to follow the crowd. Anyway I wish to visit other temples and explore the place before coming to the site of Great Buddha. Most people come here just to see the Great Buddha Statue and take some pictures to show to friends when they are back home. I am coming here not for seeing the Statue of Buddha, but to meet with Buddha. So I have all my time to wait until he is available J.



At this waiting moment, I saw a sign, in Latin alphabet, which seems to be in Vietnamese and that said "Café CHA CA". Wow! All my past life came back in a second. The term "CHA CA" is a very well known name of a Vietnamese speciality of fish and also it could be the surname of a famous Catholic Bishop, the missionary Eveque d'Adran, in Vietnam about two centuries ago. In hope to gain more Vietnamese souls for his Catholic Mission and convert the ruling class to Catholicism, Bishop of Adran helped the warlord Nguyen-Anh in an internal war against the King Quang-Trung and his successor. In the end Nguyen-Anh won and became King Gia-Long. He rewarded Bishop of Adran with large gifts and power. According to some historians, Bishop of Adran, called in Vietnamese as CHA CA, had importantly contributed to open the door of Vietnam for the French Colonization, which lasted almost a century. I have no final opinion on this matter, but I remember very well the large tomb of CHA CA, which was at the side of the road close to the Saigon Airport I often used to go home after work, more than 47 years ago. Maybe now, someone among his admirers, could open in the town of Hosen, a Vietnamese restaurant bearing his name?

In Hanoi, as I can remember, a very long time ago -I left this city in 1954- there

was, at the street LA-VONG, a restaurant famous for the speciality of CHA-CA. This speciality is not simply costly but it is only for good “gourmet” to appreciate it. It’s an art eating CHA CA. The persons taking order from customers in this famous restaurant did never write down what customers ordered, and they never mixed any plate or missed any bill while they were providing recommendations to many customers. That was amazing. For many years travelling around the world, enjoying meals at all kind of restaurants, I never see that again. Until two years ago, at the town of Ofir in Portugal, the group VOVIET TRAN-SU, brought me, one nice evening after a hard training session, to a restaurant located right at the shore of the ocean and full of people. The lady who took the orders there, suddenly made me recall of the famous Restaurant CHA CA in Hanoi. She did the same way while talking to a lot of people. Surely at our next Summer Training Sessions we will come back, again and again, to this nice restaurant in Ofir. I should also tell you that next to my university, UQAM, in Montreal, in the 80’s there was also a Vietnamese restaurant of CHA CA. The quality of the food was really good, I enjoyed it. But it could never make us compare it to the well-known CHA CA restaurant in Hanoi. One day, a colleague asked me why I have chosen to come and teach at UQAM, with a smile I quietly said because there are good Vietnamese restaurants here, especially for CHA CA, we need to eat well if we want to work well J. I said that to my nice colleague because there is a Vietnamese saying which I would not agree with, that said: “AN DE SONG, KHONG SONG DE AN” –Eating in order to live, not living in order to eat. What a kind of hypocrisis, I thought.

When I entered this Cafe-restaurant CHA CA in Hosen, I tried hard to detect who were Vietnamese and who were Japanese among the people who run this business. It’s hard to know. All the three of them looked somehow Vietnamese and in the same time somehow Japanese. I ventured a phrase in Vietnamese –“anh em manh gioi” that means “How are you”-, no one seemed to understand. They all were Japanese! The food was very good but not Vietnamese at all, neither the café-restaurant! Everything in this place was Japanese, purely Japanese. Its name CHA CA is a Japanese term, it is for “Green Tea” in English!



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Phan-Hoang, January 2009.