

*Ever since the beginning of time, man's will has
quite often triumphed over destiny*
Nguyễn Du

CHAPTER 1

MR. NGÔ HÙNG DIỄN AND I



Mr. Ngô Hùng Diễn

INTRODUCTION

To most people, physiognomy is just an assortment of traditional beliefs that are unscientific and not to be taken too seriously. However, in Asia, many people still use it as a rough guide for choosing spouses, friends, business partners, helpers, and even leaders. At its elementary level, people tend to associate certain physiognomic features with given personal attributes. For example, if a person is short or is crossed-eye, then he or she must be untrustworthy. Clear-colored pupils are considered signs of high intelligence. However

physiognomy is not that simple. As the saying goes, oversimplification sometimes has serious consequences.

Many books have been written on the subject, but most focus on the forms of the facial features, known as facial physiognomy. This book, apart from the forms of the facial features and of the whole body, also takes into account the voice, color, and countenance of the person. These are supplemented by physiognomy laws to make physiognomy become a truly empirical natural science. This book is to present, in depth, what I learned from Mr. Diễm, who was undisputedly the greatest physiognomist of his times in Vietnam and beyond. Indeed, it would not be an exaggeration to compare Mr. Diễm's innate ability in arts and sciences to that of Nguyễn Bình Khiêm, Nostradamus, Mozart, Beethoven, Picasso, Leonardo da Vinci, Shakespeare and Einstein in their respective fields. All were gifted to a degree that can only be ascribed to genius, having perfected their knowledge to a surreal level.

Mr. Diễm did not reveal in any detail when and from whom he acquired his skill. When pressed by friends, he would just smile and say: "There's nothing much to learn, really. I only know enough to talk about it among friends." According to those who knew him well, he was already famous even when he was very young. He started with palm reading and moved on to physiognomy. His subjects included some very well-known and powerful figures of his times. Some of these are mentioned in Chapter 13, although in some instances their names are not given in full in order to protect their identity. The anecdotes, case studies, and eyewitness accounts are intended to showcase Mr. Diễm's abilities. They came from various sources: those who had their futures read by Mr. Diễm, eyewitnesses as well as Mr. Diễm's family members and close friends.

I spent a total of nine years of my adult life studying physiognomy with Mr. Diễm, largely sitting in on his actual readings of other people; He would supplement this with photographs and drawings;

He also took me to movies and traditional operas where he would point out special features of the characters on the screen or stage.

To help the reader identify physiognomic and other relevant features, this book provides hundreds of images and illustrations. However, a word of caution is in order. In applying the knowledge to real life situations, it is important to exercise a sound logic. Some knowledge of the principles of Yi Jing, Yin–Yang, and the Five Elements is obviously helpful.

MR. NGÔ HÙNG DIỄN AND I



I had long heard about Mr. Diễm's reputation and wanted to see him but was unable to do so because he only read for friends and acquaintances and accepted no money for his readings. I was not able to see him until the summer of 1965 when a mutual friend took me to Mr. Diễm's house at Hiền Vương Street in Saigon for a reading. His wife took us directly to his bedroom where only his friends could see him.

Mr. Diễm had just woken up from his afternoon nap and was taking a shower. His small bed was covered with a sedge mat. At the top of the bed was a hard, concave rattan pillow, commonly found in North Vietnam. At the other end of the bed was a light cotton blanket, neatly folded. There were three wooden chairs for visiting friends, placed against the wall opposite the bed. His wife brought in a tray with three cups of hot tea and placed it on an empty chair.

A little while later, Mr. Diễm walked in through the side door, combing his hair. When he saw us rising to our feet to greet him, he

said: “Please sit down. Please sit down. Please sit down. I am very sorry. It’s too hot. I had to take a shower.” Taking a cup of hot tea from the tray, he sat down on the bed and invited us to help ourselves along.

When my friend introduced me to him, he merely said “yes” to each of my friend’s sentences as if he were only half listening. He did not look at us. His eyes fixed on a cigarette that he was rolling. After my friend finished talking, Mr. Diễm told him he could go home and leave me with him. Slightly surprised, my friend got up, mumbled a few inaudible words, and walked out of the room.

Mr. Diễm had the habit of addressing all his friends as *toi* and *moi*, which are French words for you and me. This form of address was very common in his time. He addressed all others as *sir*, regardless of their social standing.

Perhaps because I was introduced to him by a close friend or maybe because he saw me as someone who he could be friends with, but he used *toi* and *moi* with me right from the start. I found that rather flattering.

He slowly took a few puffs on his cigarette and then asked me again what my name was. As he asked the question, I could see a stream of soft light emitting from his eyes, which enveloped me with a feeling of warmth and comfort. I felt safe and as if under a spell. We then exchanged a few words about the weather.

During that first meeting, he told me five things:

First, if I got married before 25, my wife and I would be separated either by divorce or death before I reached 28. Later, even if I remarried, I would end up either having a wife and no children, or having children and no wife.

Second, I might have a fatal accident in the street at dawn, possibly from a falling object.

Third, there would be a period during which I would be separated from my children for up to 10 years. Throughout that time, there would be no way for me to see my children.

Fourth, at around 35, I would begin working for an international financial organization. This would be preceded by a similar job in what was equivalent to a council.

Fifth, if I survived the aforementioned accident at dawn, I would live until I turned 80 years old. My life would be comfortable, neither rich nor poor. My career and achievements would also be neither high nor low.

I thanked him for the predictions. Fifty years on, the five predictions he made have materialized almost completely.

First, I got married when I was 25. At 26, we had a daughter. The baby died after only seven days. My wife was fine. When I was 27, we had a son. My wife had a massive internal hemorrhage lasting almost two hours. She passed away in a famous gynecological hospital in Saigon. Her delivery had been performed by Dr. Trần Đình Đệ, MD, PhD. My son was fine. I remarried. Just as Mr. Diễm had predicted, I could only either have a wife and no children or children and no wife, but I could not have both simultaneously.

Second, when I met Mr. Diễm in 1965, I was a 28-year-old teacher. My wife came from a very rich family whereas I came from a very poor family. We signed a pre-nuptial agreement so as to keep separate accounts and assets. Right after my wife's death, her family gave me a very hard time. They made all kinds of false accusations in order to take my son from me. As an escape, I frequently went to play cards at friends' houses. As Saigon was under curfew, from midnight to 5:00 AM every day, sometimes I had to stay overnight at

my friends' houses. In those days, trees were not well maintained in Saigon. There were frequent reports of deaths from falling branches. It could have happened to me. However, thanks to Mr. Diễm's warning, I exercised extra caution when walking home at dawn.

Third, I was concerned about this prediction at first, but later it slipped out of my mind. In 1974, I went to the United States for training in agribusiness development and management. In 1975, South Vietnam fell to the Northern Communist regime. My children were left stranded in Vietnam until 1983 when we were finally reunited in the United States. Most families in similar circumstances were reunited after only two or three years, but I had to wait nine years.

Fourth, I wanted to change my profession right after I graduated from the University of Education and the University of Sciences even though at that time in Saigon, math teachers could make lots of money coaching national-test preparation classes on the side. In addition to my regular public school teaching job, I put in just enough hours in private tutoring to adequately support my parents and four younger siblings. I used the remaining free time to study English and martial arts, to practice Qi Gong and Tai Chi, and to attend graduate school. I graduated as a valedictorian with a Master's Degree in Political Sciences and Business Administration. I was offered a part-time position with the National Economic and Social Council. I went to work as a member of the advisory staff for the National Economic Development Fund in the following year. Then in 1974, I went to the United States for a one-year program in Agribusiness Development and Management, which I completed in 1975. Thereafter, I worked as a Financial Planning and Management Officer at the International Finance Corporation, the private arm of the World Bank Group in Washington DC. I retired in 2001 after more than 24 years of service.

Fifth, in line with Mr. Diễm's predictions, I worked my entire life as a specialist. In 2003, I had a serious illness but was cured very

quickly. Now at 77, I still live my life according to his philosophy so that my body, mind and soul are at peace. I still practice various martial arts as much as I can to keep fit. With the help of modern health care, I can reasonably expect to live to the predicted age of 80 or thereabouts.

I wrote this book on Ngô Hùng Diễn's method of physiognomy in the hope that his unique and extraordinary knowledge can contribute to the Science of Physiognomy as well as help those who are seeking inner peace and balance in their lives.

Now back to my first meeting with Mr. Diễn. He read me for half an hour. While doing so, his face looked serene, as if in a deep trance. I dared not ask him any questions as I did not want to interrupt his train of thoughts. After making the fifth prediction, he stopped, rolled and smoked another cigarette. He sipped his tea, smacked his lips a few times and then moved on to a different subject as though he had said nothing.

He asked me whether I was free that afternoon. When he learned that I was, he asked me to go to the movies with him. He said the Đa-Kao Movie House - at the top of the alley where his house was - was showing two very good movies. One of them was *L'Homme à Deux Visages*, featuring Fernandel, a well-known French comedian. We walked to the movie theater from his house. After about five or ten minutes, he suddenly asked me: "Do you want to learn physiognomy?" I told him that I loved physiognomy very much, but found the pictures and descriptions in books difficult to understand and apply in real life. I told him I had been able to use my sixth sense to help me gain a lot of useful insights about people I had to deal with. When I asked him why he wanted to know whether I was interested in physiognomy, he smiled and said: "You have Yin-Yang eyes." Then he added: "You tend to trust people very easily, so some knowledge of physiognomy could be helpful."

During the movie, he showed me how to observe Fernandel's forehead and the muscles on his cheeks. He said Fernandel had a square and flat forehead. People with that kind of forehead, he added, are intelligent, talented and famous. If the upper part of the forehead were slightly tilted to the back like a 'leaning wall', he would be a leader. He showed me how to identify cheek muscles that run from the tail of the eye down to the cheek. They look like waves in the ocean, strong and beautiful, and are therefore called a 'Watery Line'. People with 'Watery Line' cheeks tend to achieve success mainly through their talent, rather than good luck. He pointed out the special features of the other actors as well.

From that day on, I would often go to his house, or to the place where he was reading, so he could share a few tips and pointers with me. When we both had time, we would go to eat phở, the famous Vietnamese noodle soup, and find a cool place to sit, drink beer and talk. I learned a lot at those meetings. The more I learned, the more I discovered that the field was very profound and complex but interesting. It made me marvel that the omnipotent God had endowed human beings with so many mysteries, wonders and extraordinary talents. The great depth and complexity of the human mind and soul are yet to be fully explored and comprehended. I devoted much time and efforts studying physiognomy with Mr. Diễm, while trying to understand and learn his mindful way of living at the same time.

On the afternoon of that first meeting, after the movie, we sat at a street-side food stand drinking beer. The place was full of people who were quenching their thirst with cold beer in the hot and humid weather. That night I invited him to dinner. He accepted and said any kind of food was fine for him. I found out later that he was not at all fussy over eating. He would compliment any food he ate. He usually drank a Beer 33 or a root beer with his meal. I took him to Chez Albert, a decent French restaurant with fairly good food. After dinner, I took him home.

On the way home, I felt extremely grateful to him. He had given me the friendship and understanding that I very much needed. He also portrayed my life in a few bold strokes, without cumbersome details. I felt a big sense of relief as if someone had removed the heavy burden of sorrow and grief I had accumulated and shouldered since my wife's death. In 1974, out of the blue, I received a letter from my father-in-law, who had moved to France. We had not been in touch for three years. The letter was seven pages long. He cleared up a lot of past misunderstandings between us, suggesting we should forget the past and move on. In 1985, two years after my son joined me in the US and graduated from high school, we went to France together to pay our respects at the graves of my parents-in-law.

During my time with Mr. Diễm, I devoted my best efforts to learning and understanding all I could from his knowledge of physiognomy and from his life. I hoped I would be able to help others with the skill, in the form of words of comfort to help them regain balance and perspective in their lives. To a certain extent, I have fulfilled that wish. In the tradition he had set, I have been helping others *gratis*, free of charge.

Mr. Diễm passed away on April 5, 1974.

Exactly thirty days before his death, I went to his house very early in the morning. He had stopped by my house the night before and left word with my father that he needed to see me the next day. When I arrived at his house, there were already several people waiting to see him. He asked me to tell his wife to go out and apologize to the visitors and tell them that he could not see any of them that day because of a previous appointment. As soon as the last visitor had left, he turned to me and said: "Let's go."

While walking to my car, I asked him whether he fancied chicken *phở* at Hiền Vương Street. He nodded. After the meal, I took him to Chợ Lớn district. Having parked the car, we walked leisurely along the street, lined with shops on either side, selling all sorts of

interesting and beautiful goods. Around noon, we went to a Chinese restaurant for lunch. After lunch, I took him to my house so he could have a short nap. He had a habit of taking a siesta in the afternoon. After the nap, he would enjoy a cup of really hot green tea, especially with peanut candy. I had both that day. We stayed indoors and talked until late afternoon. The weather having cooled down, we went to a food stand by the riverside in Saigon, where we had some beers and talked. After dinner, we went to a movie. We did not head home until after 10:00 PM. As we passed by the movie house in Đa Kao that we had gone to the day that I first met him, he told me to stop by a street-side food stand where we had more beer. It was the same one we stopped at after the movie nine years earlier.

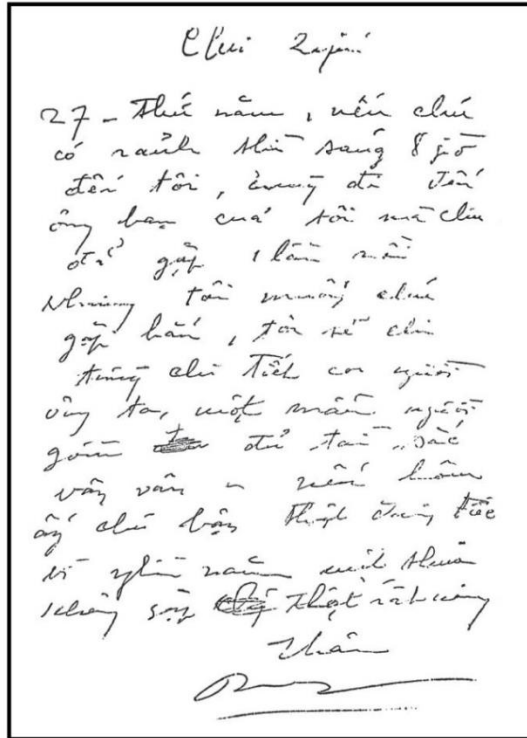
After sitting for a while, he said: “As of now, you have seen a lot of different features that a physiognomist should know; I have told you everything I know. If there’s still anything in your reading that you cannot explain, don’t panic. Just think and the answer will come to you.” I looked at him while he was talking and shuddered to see that his face was covered with death warning signs. We stared at each other in silence for a long time. After sitting a little while longer, he wanted to leave. I took him home to his room and left. On my way home, I was very sad since I knew that the time had come to say goodbye to my beloved teacher.

I went back to his house very early the next morning. He had a fever from liver infection. He refused to go to hospital for treatment, even though he had a lot of friends in the medical field. From that day until his death, I would go to his house every day and sit beside him late into the night. He was calm and talked normally. He would not take pain-killers unless he had strong bouts of pain. On March 30th, he fell into a coma. We discussed among a group of people close to him and his family, and decided that it was best to take him to the hospital for pain relief, so that he could pass away comfortably. On the afternoon of April 5th, 1974, he passed away peacefully. At the funeral, his family gave me the honor of offering him the first bowl

of rice. Tens of thousands of mourners including many public figures had thronged the streets through which the hearse passed.

EXCERPTS FROM LETTERS

Letter from Mr. Ngô Hùng Diễn, asking me to stop by so we could go together to visit a person with rare features:



Dear Quỳnh,

27 – On Thursday, if you are free, please meet me at my house at 8 am. Together we will go to visit a friend of mine whom you have met once before. I want you to meet him again so that I can show you many details of his features, as an example of someone with all the talent, beauty, etc. ... If you are busy that day, it would be very regrettable since this is a once-in-a-blue-moon chance. Missing this chance will be a great pity.

Diễn

Letter from Mrs. Ngô Thị Dẫn and Mr. Trương Đình Giản, Mr. Diễm's daughter and son-in-law, regarding this physiognomy book:



Dear Quyến,

"... We hear that starting in July 2001, you are retiring and will devote all of your time to writing a book about Ngô Hùng Diễm's art of physiognomy. We both think that from 1965, only you always accompanied my father everywhere, received instructions from him on special features which you comprehended thoroughly... My parents loved you as their own son, and we loved you as our own brother. We very much hope you will be able to complete the book soon."

Letter from Mr. Nguyễn Phước Bửu Hạp, an engineer: Mr. Diễm's comments about three people who were very close to him and wanted to study physiognomy:

Dear Quyến,

"...As I told you once before, once I asked Mr. Diễm about the three people who were very close to him and wanted to study

physiognomy, Mr. V, Mr. H, and you. He said: “Mr. V is tight-lipped, so I don’t know how much he has learned; Mr. H lacks calmness and does not weigh the consequences of what he says.” And this is what he said about you: “I think Quyến has the determination, he can go far.”

MR. NGÔ HÙNG DIỄN’S BIOGRAPHY

Mr. Ngô Hùng Diễn was born on March 13, 1905 (or the 8th day of the 2nd month in the year of the Snake in the lunar calendar), at Phong Cốc village, Hà Nam district, Yên Hưng county, Quảng Yên province, North Vietnam.

He passed away at 8 PM on April 5, 1974 (or the 13th day of the 3rd month in the lunar year of the Tiger), at the General Republic Hospital in Saigon, South Vietnam, aged 70. His funeral viewing took place at Xá Lợi temple, on Bà Huyện Thanh Quan Street, the 3rd district, Saigon, and he was buried at 9 AM on April 9, 1974, at Phước Hòa cemetery, An Nhơn commune, Gò Vấp district, Gia Định province.

Mrs. Ngô Hùng Diễn’s maiden name was Phạm Thị Thắm. She was born in 1910 in Đồng Trụ village, Đăng Cương commune, An Hải, Kiến An, North Vietnam. She passed away in 1994, aged 84.

Mr. and Mrs. Ngô Hùng Diễn had only one daughter, Mrs. Ngô Thị Dẫn, born in 1930. Her husband was Mr. Trương Đình Giản, born in 1926. They both lived with Mr. and Mrs. Diễn following their marriage in 1951.

Mr. Ngô Hùng Diễn went to school in Quảng Yên city and Hải Phòng city. He held a high school diploma. Apart from a number of temporary jobs, his two main jobs were with a bank in Hải Phòng (as a specialist) and later with the Shell Company in Hanoi. He was with the latter until March 9, 1945 when the Japanese overthrew the French regime. He stopped working thereafter, living a wandering life until the end of 1953, when he moved to Saigon at the invitation

of Architect Võ Đức Diên. Mr. Ngô Hùng Diễm lived in Saigon until he passed away in 1974.

Some Highlights of His Life:

According to Mr. Diễm's son-in-law, Mr. Trương Đình Giản, throughout his stay with Mr. Diễm, Mr. Diễm lived a very simple life. Mr. Diễm looked more like an artist than a physiognomist. He dressed plainly, even when he was a guest of honor at functions or when he met with high-ranking guests, including the country's top leaders like Emperor Bảo Đại, Chairman Hồ Chí Minh, President Ngô Đình Diệm, President Nguyễn Văn Thiệu, Vice President Nguyễn Cao Kỳ, General Cao Văn Viên, or Prime Minister Trần Thiện Khiêm.

Engineer Nguyễn Phước Bửu Hạp also said Mr. Diễm wore simple clothes, mostly gifts from friends. Whether he was at home, out with friends or at a party, he only wore a short-sleeved light brown shirt with three pockets, a pair of light grey pants, and a pair of open-back brown leather sandals. He never wore dress shoes or a tie. He had a light brown briefcase with no straps, which he carried with him all the time, day or night wherever he might be. In it he kept a small calendar to jot down appointments, a pen, a pack of cigarettes, a matchbox, a few toothpicks, a small comb and miscellaneous items. When he went out, he would carry the briefcase under his arm. When he was older, he also wore reading glasses, with a brown frame and brown eyeglasses. He was over 1.75 meters tall, fair, thin, with a square face, and soft thin hair hanging over his forehead. Before entering anyone's house, he would raise his hand and smooth out his hair 5 to 7 times. Sometimes, he would comb his hair with the comb from his briefcase. He was simple and tidy, but never sloppy.

Mr. Diễm spoke with a very calm, reserved, and soft tone. I never saw him get angry at anyone. There were times when I saw his face turn red with anger, but he always managed to keep his cool, laugh and shrug it off. He said that if there was anything one could let go, one should do so. There was no point in fighting. During a reading,

he would be very subtle and careful in his choice of words. He would avoid talking to or, more precisely, creating difficulties for a third person. If the subject could not understand or follow his advice, he just let things be.

At home or outside, he ate whatever food was offered to him. He was always complimentary about the food he ate, never criticizing it. He ate more if he liked it and less if he did not. He savored his food. If offered cookies and candies at the end of the meal, he would ask whether he could take some home to his wife and grandchildren.

When he was young, he lived a very carefree life. He drank white liquor, a very strong drink made from rice. According to his wife, he stopped drinking hard liquor of his own free will. He only drank a glass of red wine or beer with meals. He only ate or drank whatever he was offered and never demanded anything. If offered snake wine, he would just take a little sip. He was partial to strong green tea. He could drink it continuously, cup after cup, if someone kept pouring it. After each sip, he would smack his lips to savor its taste and aroma. He chain-smoked whether alone or with company. He would never decline any cigarette he was offered. His favorite brands were ‘Craven A’ or ‘Camel’. Unless he was offered these, he would roll a cigarette himself, using his own mixture of shredded tobacco leaves.

Some people compared Mr. Diễn to a computer. Such was the speed at which he read someone’s future. He barely looked at the subject a few seconds to grasp all the details of his or her physiognomy that were necessary to provide accurate readings and also to be able to promptly answer any specific questions the subject might ask him, sometimes with many additional comments. For that reason, many called him a ‘physiognomic angel’, a title he politely declined. “Please tell them not to call me that. It would adversely affect my longevity. Only those in heaven possess magic powers. Even Kongming (Zhuge Liang in *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms*) and - Nguyễn Bình Khiêm, who possess great talents, were not called that.”

He always reminded his friends that when they plucked the leaves of or pruned a tree, they should do so gradually and not strip the tree bare in one go. One day while on his way to a friend's house, he saw the gardener in the back yard prune a frangipani tree so bare that its sap was bleeding profusely. He quickly told his friend to wrap the tree up with a piece of cloth. He said that trees were like humans or animals. Although they could not cry or yell, they felt the pain as much as we did. He was compassionate to the highest degree.

Another friend, Mr. Trần Văn Hải, wrote about Mr. Diễm's life as follows: When Mr. Diễm gave someone a reading, he only singled out a few key points, not covering everything. During the session, whoever happened to be sitting there would be allowed to stay if they so wished. He never asked anybody to leave. A very special point about his character was that throughout his life – all the way up to the time of his death - he never said anything bad about anybody. When people who disliked him got angry with him, he would keep calm and not react. He was quick to acknowledge his faults, weaknesses, or lack of knowledge. He never wanted to offend anyone, not even a child. He addressed his friends with the pronoun “*toi*” and all others *sir*, regardless of whether they were prime ministers or taxi drivers. He was wholeheartedly honest, righteous, compassionate and loving, always wishing others well and never thinking of his own wealth or fame. He was intelligent, brilliant, and full of wisdom. He had a broad and deep vision, a deep understanding of life. He could distinguish, at a glance, good from bad, generous from tight-fisted, and virtuous from wicked. He never bragged, or claimed he was talented or intelligent. He always praised others and considered them good enough to be his teachers and guides.

Throughout his life, whether traveling with friends far and near, he never had a dime in his pocket. Whenever friends invited him out, he went, and when friends offered him food, he ate. He never asked anybody for anything. He did physiognomy readings for thousands,

even tens of thousands of people, but never once asked for money or for any favor of any kind.