

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to extend my deepest gratitude to the organizers of the competition, the esteemed panel of judges, and all readers who have accompanied and listened to the story we have strived to tell through each page.

For us, this competition has not only been an academic challenge but a journey to relive our nation's history through a fresh lens — where the spirit of Đinh Bộ Lĩnh is no longer a distant legend, but a living lesson for our generation today.

Every word in this publication is the result of countless hours of research, rewriting, and editing. It may not be perfect, but if somewhere within these lines, you — our reader — find something that makes you pause, reflect, or feel inspired, then our journey has truly found its meaning.

We believe that heritage is not only what is recorded in history books, but what we choose to preserve and renew every day.

Through the story of “Đinh Tiên” — from a boy wielding a flag of reeds to a nation-founding leader — we hope to send a message to today's youth:

No matter where you come from or what circumstances you grow up in, you can choose your own way to rise, to define yourself in a crowded and noisy world.

Thank you for walking with us to the very last page.

We hope that the journey with “Đinh Tiên” — from the flag of reeds of the past to the story of Gen Z today — will inspire you to live boldly, think deeply, and walk far on your own path.

Sincerely,

Gia Linh.

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01

A FLAG THAT WAITS FOR NO WIND

A journey that doesn't wait for the perfect time – it begins when we dare to step forward.





AN IMPERFECT... CHILDHOOD

ĐÌNH BỘ LĨNH – A CHILD RAISED AMIDST CHAOS

FROM RUINS, HE IGNITED AN EXTRAORDINARY JOURNEY.

BORN AMIDST DIVISION

In the Year of the Monkey, 924, during the turbulent post-Ngô era when Vietnam was fragmented by warlords, a boy surnamed Đình, given name Hoàn, was born in Kim Lự village, Đại Hoàng prefecture, now Gia Viễn – Ninh Bình.

His father, Đình Công Trứ, once held the position of Prefect of Hoan Châu but passed away when Hoàn was still young.

His mother, Đàm Thị, a diligent woman, brought him back to her homeland (Gia Thủy, Nho Quan) and relied on his paternal uncle, Đình Thúc Dự, nearby.

According to the “An Nam chí lược”: “Đình Bộ Lĩnh, from Hoa Lư, Giao Châu. His father Công Trứ was a general under Dương Đình Nghệ. During the Five Dynasties period, Dương Đình Nghệ marched to govern Giao Châu and appointed Công Trứ as Prefect of Hoan Châu. After Ngô Quyền killed Kiều Công Tiễn, Bộ Lĩnh and his father returned to Ngô Quyền, who reinstated Công Trứ’s position. Upon Công Trứ’s death, Bộ Lĩnh inherited his father’s title.”

WAR GAMES – LEADERSHIP STARTS IN THE FIELDS

Without the classic lessons of military strategy, without dragon robes or jade seals – his childhood was made of grass fields, buffalo-herding peers, and a strange belief in his own role as a “general.”

He organized mock battles, proclaimed himself leader, used reed flowers as flags, and drilled the village children in the fields.

A mere game — yet the seed of a commanding spirit.

“Hoàn often played war games with other children, using reed flowers as flags. Any child who did not follow him would be beaten. The villagers called him a child with great ambition.” — Đại Việt sử ký toàn thư, Volume III, translated edition, p.149

This seemingly impulsive action was, in fact, an early manifestation of organizational thinking, leadership ability, and belief in a mission — foundations that would later help him unify the country.





IMPERFECT, BUT NEVER YIELDING

Without classic military education, without royal robes or seals – his childhood was shaped by reed fields, buffalo-herding friends, and a fierce conviction in his own destiny as a leader.

He orchestrated war games, proclaimed himself commander, and used reeds as flags to drill his “troops.”

“Hoàn often played war games with other children, using reed flowers as flags. Any child who did not follow him would be beaten. The villagers called him a child with great ambition.” — Đại Việt sử ký toàn thư, Volume III, translated edition, p.149

What seemed impulsive was actually an early sign of leadership thinking, the ability to organize, and an unwavering belief in his role — the very foundation upon which he would later build a unified nation.

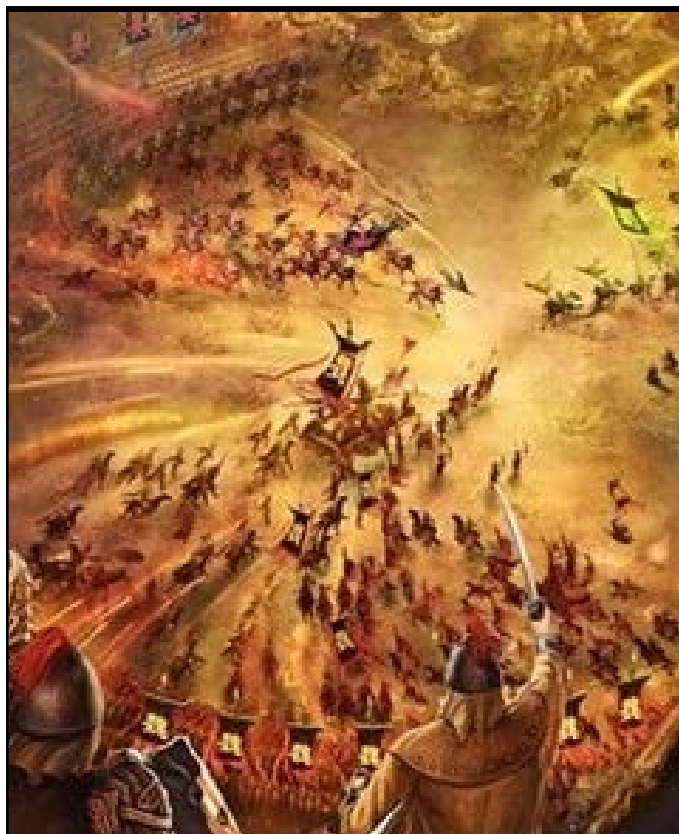




GROWING UP AMIDST CHAO GROWING UP AMIDST CHAO

MATURITY IS MANDATORY

ĐINH BỘ LĨNH DID NOT HAVE A PEACEFUL CHILDHOOD — BUT THAT VERY HARDSHIP BECAME THE FOUNDATION THAT FORGED HIS SURVIVAL INSTINCTS. IN A TIME WHEN WAR BLURRED THE LINES BETWEEN CHILDREN AND ADULTS, HE NOT ONLY SURVIVED BUT ALSO EARLY ON SHAPED THE MINDSET OF A LEADER.



WHEN GAMES TAKE ON THE COLOR OF SURVIVAL

When he returned to his mother's homeland in the Hoa Lu region, Đinh Bộ Lĩnh did not grow up in a world filled with laughter. It was the era of the "Twelve Warlords" — a time when the country was fragmented, and violence erupted everywhere. In that environment, even childhood games reflected the brutal reality: instead of carefree play, young Đinh organized the "Reed Flag Drills" — exercises of deploying troops and commanding friends acting as soldiers. Many historians believe that this was not simply a child's game, but a way for Đinh Bộ Lĩnh to learn how to control the situation. He did not just imagine — he acted as a true leader, even though he was still a child.

A WORLD THAT SPARED NO WEAKNESS

According to the Đại Việt sử ký toàn thư, the time when Đinh Bộ Lĩnh grew up was the period after the fall of the Ngô dynasty.

The weakness of central authority allowed local forces to rise and rule their own territories, resulting in a situation of "each region with its own king."

In such a context, even a child could not afford to be naïve.

"While the warlords fought each other and the people suffered hunger and confusion, not knowing whom to follow, Đinh Bộ Lĩnh was the only one able to gather the hearts of the people."

— Đại Việt sử ký toàn thư, Volume III, Social Sciences Publishing House, 1993, p.124

His keen observation from a young age helped him recognize the root of division: people's hearts were scattered, trust was fragmented.

UNABLE TO CHOOSE PEACE — BUT ABLE TO CHOOSE HOW TO GROW

The special point in Đinh Bộ Lĩnh's story is this: he could not choose his circumstances, but he chose how to face them.

From his early years, he showed abilities far beyond his age: organizing friends, staging strategic games, and commanding the respect that made others "revere and appoint him as their leader."

Although official historical records do not detail every action of his childhood, both local legends and records from Hoa Lu consistently depict the image of a "different" child — one with vision, leadership thinking, and no fear of hardship.

Historical Perspective — Maturity comes not from age

"In times of turmoil, hardship becomes the iron mold that forges people. It is not the adults, but those who can see the course of events and unite the hearts of the people who are worthy to be true leaders."

— Prof. Trần Quốc Vượng, quoted from Historical Figures Viewed Through the Spirit of the Era, 2003

REED FLAG

“REED FLAG DRILLS” WERE NOT MERELY CHILDREN’S PLAY — THEY WERE ĐÌNH BỘ LĨNH’S FIRST LESSONS IN BUILDING PRESTIGE, ORGANIZING FORCES, AND CULTIVATING LEADERSHIP THINKING. SIMPLE FOLK IMAGE CARRIED THE SIGNS OF A GREAT MIND.

PLAYING AS IF REAL — AND “REAL” ENOUGH TO REFLECT UPON

In a sense, the reed flag exercises were an early form of military thinking, where Đình Bộ Lĩnh learned how to organize resources (people), maneuver situations (tactics), and more importantly: learn how to make others willingly follow him.

The folk tales of Hoa Lư recount: “When staging mock battles, young Bộ Lĩnh would use a reed flower as a battle flag, commanding troops as if in real warfare. Children from all over the area competed to be soldiers under his command.” — Quoted from local records, Department of Culture and Information of Ninh Bình, 2001 Not everyone was accepted, and not everyone could hold a central role — it was precisely this sense of exclusivity that created the feeling of real power.

PLAYING TO TEST, TO LEARN, AND TO POSITION ONESELF

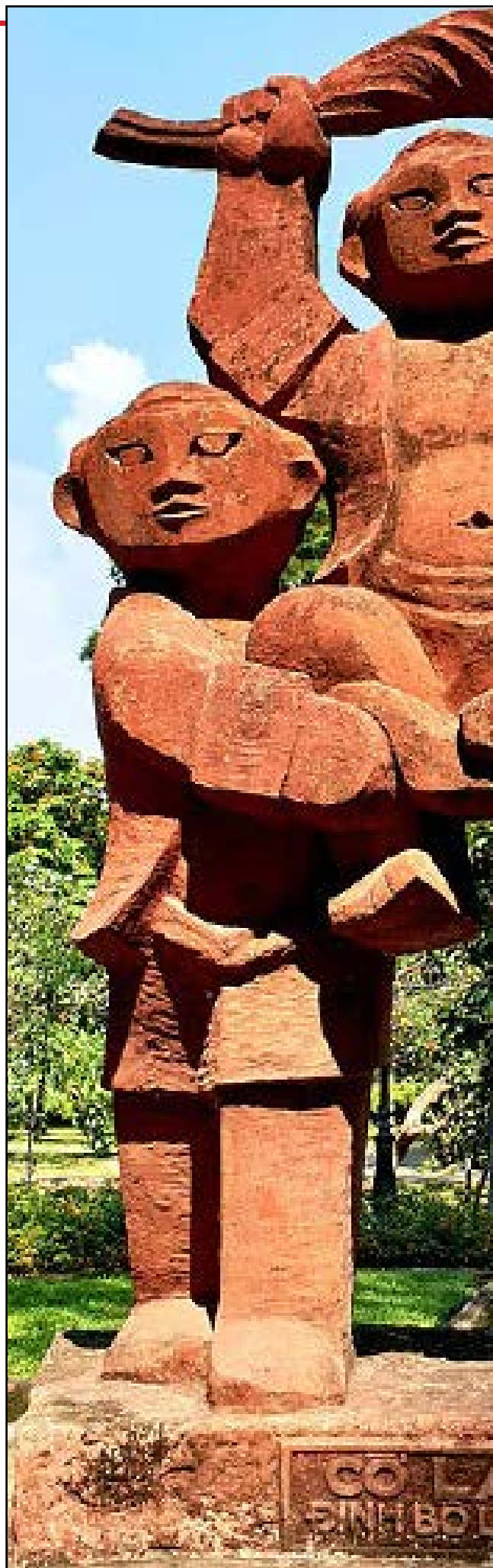
From a modern perspective, the “reed flag drills” could be seen as an early form of role-based thinking — where children use imagination to simulate interactions with the world.

Đình Bộ Lĩnh was not just playing for fun — he was unconsciously rehearsing for the greatest role of his life: to unify the land, lead the nation, and usher in a new era.

Today, education specialists call this “role-based design thinking” — where children use imaginative play to test different ways of engaging with the world.

Amazingly, Đình Bộ Lĩnh did this over 1,000 years ago. And he did not just try — he lived true to that role until the end of his life. Without resources, without books, without inherited power — Đình Bộ Lĩnh still created a “playground” to build his reputation and leadership skills.

For him, the reed flag was not just a childhood memory. It was the “first flag” on his journey to unify the nation.





LEADERSHIP THINKING COMES FROM SELF-ASSERTION

Đinh Bộ Lĩnh was not handed power — he built it from the trust of those around him.

Unlike traditional leadership based on brute force or noble lineage, Đinh Bộ Lĩnh won people’s loyalty first through his actions, then through his words.

His tendency to “punish those who disobeyed” may seem aggressive, but it was actually a lesson in discipline and organizational structure — things severely lacking in the fractured society of that time.

REED FLAG — A “REAL-LIFE GAME” AMIDST CHAOS

In the early 10th century, Vietnam had just gained independence from the Southern Han, only to fall into chaos under the rule of twelve warlords.

It was a time unsafe for anyone, even children. In the rugged mountains of Hoa Lư, a fatherless boy living with his mother transformed soft reeds into imagined weapons, staging “mock battles” with other village children.

It was not merely a game — it was a way for Đinh Bộ Lĩnh to embody the image of a leader in the minds of those around him.

“The children honored him as their commander, obeying his orders as soldiers would. If any disobeyed, he would beat them with reeds until they bled — yet none harbored resentment.”— Quoted from Đại Việt sử ký toàn thư, Volume III, Social Sciences Publishing House, 1993, p.124

CHILD’S PLAY OR EARLY LESSONS IN POLITICS?

A CHILD WITHOUT AN ARMY, YET ABLE TO RALLY AN ENTIRE VILLAGE. A FRAGILE REED FLAG THAT LAID THE FOUNDATION FOR AN IMPERIAL FUTURE. LEADERSHIP DOES NOT BEGIN FROM A THRONE — IT BEGINS THE MOMENT YOU DARE TO ENVISION YOURSELF UPON IT.



THE FLAG

THE MINDSET: “WITH VISION COMES INFLUENCE”

From a boy playing the game of “proclaiming himself king” to the one who unified Vietnam after the chaos of the Twelve Warlords, Đinh Bộ Lĩnh’s journey started by recruiting belief before wielding real power.

In today’s world, where many young people are building startups, communities, or creative careers, his story reminds us of a timeless truth: you don’t need authority to start influencing — you only need a vision and the courage to spark something meaningful.

And perhaps, just like that humble reed flag long ago, all you need is a simple symbol to ignite the spirit of leadership in others.





LESSONS FROM WARTIME FOR A GENERATION OF SELF-STARTERS

You can lead others if you believe strongly enough in your cause and create something that makes others want to join.

Just like modern-day entrepreneurs and creators, your impact comes from faith, perseverance, and your ability to inspire — not from an assigned title.

Đình Bộ Lĩnh didn't wait for recognition to act — he acted first, and it was through action that recognition came.

THE BEGINNING OF A TRUE FAITH



NO CROWN, NO THRONE — ONLY HIMSELF

Without royal lineage, without an army, and without any appointed title, Đình Bộ Lĩnh — a boy growing up during the chaotic 10th century — began his leadership in an unexpected way: leading a “troop” of children, holding reed flags, and staging mock battles in his village.

According to folk legends from Hoa Lu, every time a child joined him, he would “promote” them to a general or soldier, organize coronations, and drill the “army.”

With no official authority, he still managed to inspire loyalty — a kind of influence that, today, we call “influence without authority.”



VIETNAM AFTER NGÔ QUYỀN – A HISTORICAL LENS

“IF YOU WERE BORN IN AN AGE WITHOUT MAPS,
WOULD YOU DARE TO DRAW YOUR OWN PATH?”



CRACKS

DEEPENING

INTO ...

In 944, after Ngô Quyền — the king who ended over a thousand years of Chinese domination — passed away, the Đại Việt court plunged into succession turmoil.

Dương Tam Kha usurped the throne, forcing Ngô Xương Ngập to flee.

Even when Ngô Xương Vãn later regained power, the royal court remained deeply divided, leading to severe weakening of central authority.

THE TWELVE WARLORDS – A NATION FRACTURED

By the mid-10th century, Vietnam entered an era known as the “Period of the Twelve Warlords” — a time when local lords seized power and ruled autonomously.

From Thái Bình and Phong Châu to Từ Liêm and Đỗ Động Giang, regions fell under the control of self-proclaimed “warlords” who recruited soldiers, collected taxes, and governed independently.

The nation resembled a patchwork quilt, lacking any central force strong enough to reunify it.

As recorded in the Việt Sử Lược:

“When the two Ngô clans weakened, people’s hearts turned away; local chiefs rose to rule their territories, declared themselves warlords, raised armies, and no longer obeyed the central court.” (Việt Sử Lược, Volume I, Institute of History, 2005, p.82)

LEARNING THE PATH FOR A LARGER QUESTION

Amidst the chaos, a child in Hoa Lu “proclaimed himself king” with nothing more than a reed.

What seemed like child’s play happened at precisely the right time — when no one else dared to dream of reunification.



THE IDEAL OF UNITY

A DREAM OF A WHOLE NATION

"AMONG THE FRAGMENTS, SOME SEEK REFUGE. OTHERS SEE THE SHAPE OF A NEW ORDER."

AMIDST THE CRACKS – THE SEED OF WHOLENESS

No one chooses the circumstances of their birth, and Đinh Bộ Lĩnh was no exception.

Born around 924 as the son of Đinh Công Trứ, a minor governor of Hoa Lư (modern-day Ninh Bình), he lost his father early and moved with his mother to her hometown in Gia Viễn.

While others grew up amid palaces and rituals, Đinh Bộ Lĩnh's childhood was forged by war, division, and the helplessness of adults against chaos.

Yet, within that chaos, a dream of a united country slowly took shape in his young mind.

WHEN PLAYING WITH REED FLAGS WAS THE FIRST STEP TOWARD LEADERSHIP

The image of Đinh Bộ Lĩnh playing "reed flag drills" is not mere folklore — it is officially recorded in the Đại Việt Sử Ký Toàn Thư, Vietnam's foremost historical chronicle:

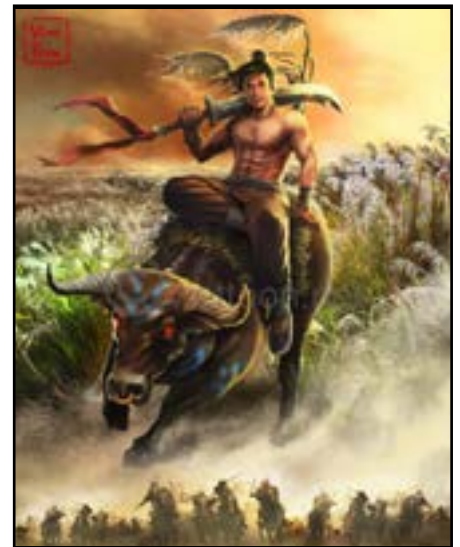
"As a child, he would often use reeds as flags, ride on the backs of other children, appoint others as generals or soldiers, form battle arrays, and command with kingly authority." Đại Việt Sử Ký

Toàn Thư, Volume I, Social Sciences Publishing House, 1993, p.121)

Importantly, these games were not played in a peaceful society — but amidst the rise of warlords.

While adults were busy building walls to protect their territories, a child imagined an army — organized, disciplined — where he was not just a flag bearer but a leader of unification.

Perhaps, unconsciously, that play was already a nascent vision of a united nation — a raw but prophetic "leadership training."



While warlords like Trần Lãm, Kiều Công Hãn, and Ngô Xương Xí each carved out their own territories, the young Đinh Bộ Lĩnh refused to align with any side.

Instead, he quietly built his forces in Hoa Lư, winning over talented generals, recruiting soldiers, and focusing not on creating a 13th faction, but on merging all the existing ones. He persuaded rather than conquered, forming alliances wisely — notably with Trần Lãm, who later handed over his troops.

The biggest difference: while others sought land to defend, Đinh Bộ Lĩnh saw a country to unite.



A WHOLENESS MINDSET: CHOOSING THE NATION, NOT A FACTION

This was not just a tactical move — it was a profound vision for unity.

“A great general is one who knows when not to fight. Bộ Lĩnh did not win by numbers — he won by vision.” — (Nguyễn Khắc Thuần, *The Lineage of Vietnamese Kings*, Education Publishing House, p.72)



IN CHAOS, A LEADER NEEDS NOT JUST STRENGTH — BUT INSIGHT

Đinh Bộ Lĩnh’s success wasn’t due to having the strongest army, but because he understood:

Division was not just a symptom — it was the fundamental sickness of a nation without a shared ideal.

If everyone fought merely to grab a piece of the map, the cycle of civil war would never end.

Thus, he didn’t just defeat the warlords — he integrated them into a new structure. Many surrendered generals were later respected and given important positions. He wasn’t just building a new kingdom — he was rebuilding the concept of one nation.



FROM A VISION TO REALITY – THE BIRTH OF ĐẠI CỎ VIỆT

In 968, after nearly a decade of quelling the Twelve Warlords, Đinh Bộ Lĩnh proclaimed himself emperor under the reign title Đại Thắng Minh Hoàng Đế, and named the country Đại Cỏ Việt.

This was the first time after centuries of Chinese domination that Vietnam had its own national title, independent of Chinese models.

This naming was more than symbolic — it was a bold declaration of wholeness:

Vietnam was one, and Vietnam was grand. What he chose was not just kingship — but a new order: no region higher than another, no warlord ruling within a fragmented land.



FOR A CHILD, CHAOS WAS A GAME.

For a Leader, It Was a Chance to Redraw the World.

The “reed flag drills” were not played during peace — but amidst turmoil.

Perhaps because he grew up inside chaos, Đinh Bộ Lĩnh developed a unique instinct: the ability to see order within disorder.

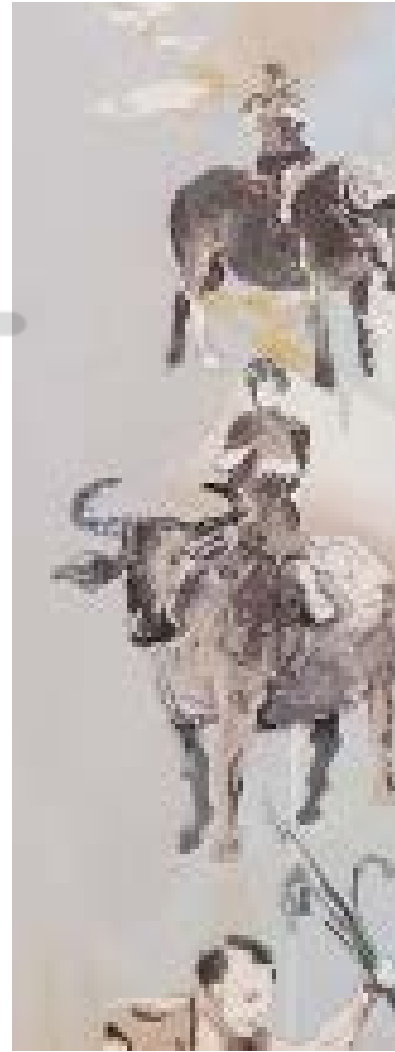
What made him great was not being born to be king.

It was that, in a world of petty kings, he alone saw another way.

02



UNIFICATION IS MORE THAN VICTORY



Sometimes, a headwind is simply a way to test the strength of a great sail.





THE FLAG FROM HOA LƯ

WHEN FAITH BEGAN TO SPREAD

AMONG ROCKY CLIFFS AND WINDING RIVERS, A CHILD WHO ONCE PLAYED WITH GRASS FLAGS STIRRED THE FIRST WINDS OF A GREAT IDEAL. IT WAS NOT BORN FROM A THRONE, BUT FROM TRUST AND UNITY THAT SPREAD ACROSS THE SOUTHERN SKIES.



HOA LƯ – WHERE DREAMS FEARED NO MOUNTAINS

When the country fell apart after the Ngô dynasty, the North descended into chaos, divided among twelve warlords. Amid this turmoil, a seemingly forgotten land became the center of a historical transformation: Hoa Lư, now located in Hoa Lư district, Ninh Bình province.

“Hoa Lư is in a strategic position, with Mount Hoàng Sơn acting as a screen to the north and the Hoàng Long River winding around the south. Its terrain was ‘advantageous for both attack and defense.’”

(The Complete Annals of Đại Việt, Primary Records, Volume I, by Lê Văn Hưu)

Instead of choosing fertile plains or bustling trade hubs, Đinh Bộ Lĩnh chose rugged mountains and meandering rivers as the foundation of his cause. This secluded and strategic location allowed him to build his forces, maintain his troops, and most importantly – cultivate trust among his first followers.

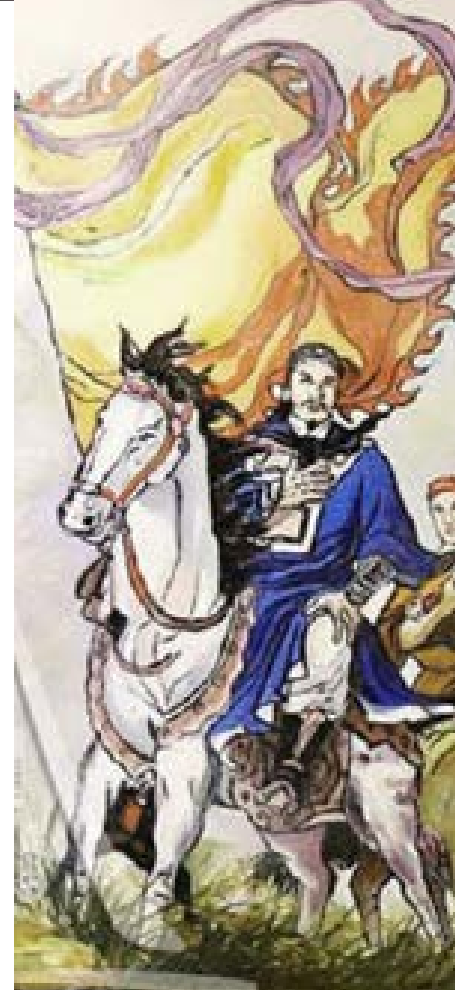
BUILT ON THE HEARTS OF THE PEOPLE, NOT WAR HORSES

What set Đinh Bộ Lĩnh apart was not merely military strength, but his profound understanding of people. His earliest followers—Nguyễn Bặc, Đinh Điền, and Trịnh Tú—were not won over by sheer power, but by his ability to inspire a shared ideal within them.

“Đinh Bộ Lĩnh had an impressive appearance, excelled at using people, and knew how to place trust at the right moment. As a result, his soldiers admired and followed him.”

(A Brief History of Vietnam, Volume II, translated by the Institute of History, 1993, p.78)

This trust was not cultivated through grand speeches, but by living among the people—sharing meals, hiding from enemies together, and enduring hunger and cold side by side. The people of Hoa Lư followed him not because he was nobility, but because they saw in him someone like themselves—only more daring.



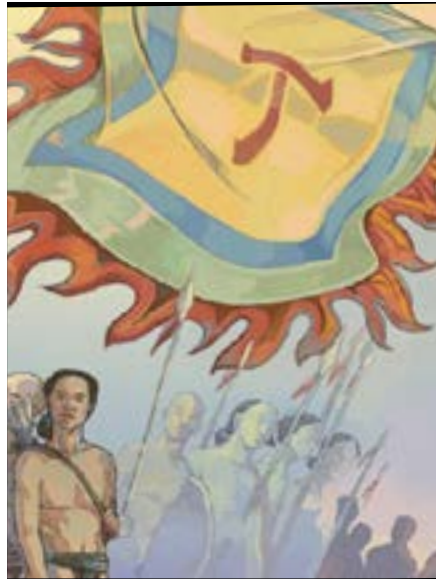
THE SILK FLAG – A SOFT BUT STRONGER FAITH THAN STEEL

The image of young Đinh Bộ Lĩnh and village children playing mock battles with grass flags might have seemed merely a childhood game—but it later became the first political symbol of gentle leadership.

Like those grass flags of old, the revolutionary banner from Hoa Lu was not raised by the power of guns, but by a promise of a unified future.

“From the moment he raised troops in Hoa Lu, Đinh Bộ Lĩnh never claimed he would be king. He simply said: ‘I will not endure division; I will reunify the country into one whole.’”

(Excerpt from A Brief History of Vietnam by Trần Trọng Kim, Culture and Information Publishing House, 2005, p.63)



AN UNCONVENTIONAL STRATEGY: ADVANCING STEP BY STEP, CONSOLIDATING EACH GAIN NGƯỜI

Instead of waging a widespread campaign and annihilating all opposition, Đinh Bộ Lĩnh chose a targeted approach—securing forces and winning hearts. Each time he conquered a region, he did not destroy its structures but preserved them, placing trusted people in charge to ensure stability and prevent popular backlash.

According to The Complete Annals of Đại Việt, after defeating warlord Nguyễn Siêu at Tây Phù Liệt (modern-day Thanh Trì, Hanoi), Đinh Bộ Lĩnh personally went to reassure the populace and restored local irrigation systems, thereby winning trust and stabilizing the region.



Here, you don't just see ancient stone walls or age-old temples. You can also stand where Đinh Bộ Lĩnh once declared himself emperor, gaze toward the Hoàng Long River, and imagine a time—amidst chaos—when a child first raised a banner with all his heart.



HOA LƯ – WHERE HISTORY STILL WHISPERS IN THE WIND



Today, Hoa Lu belongs to Trường Yên commune, Hoa Lu district, Ninh Bình province. It was the first capital of Đại Cồ Việt under the Đinh and Early Lê dynasties (968–1010). Though no longer a political center, the historic imprints and ancient cultural spaces remain largely intact.



The entire relic complex covers nearly 300 hectares, nestled among towering limestone cliffs that form a natural fortress.

PROCLAIMING HIMSELF EMPEROR

WHEN ĐÌNH BỘ LĨNH ASCENDED THE THRONE, HE WAS NOT MERELY BECOMING A KING; HE WAS THE FIRST TO ASSERT THE NATION'S RIGHT TO SELF-DETERMINATION.



VIETNAM'S FIRST ASSERTION OF SOVEREIGNTY

HISTORICAL CONTEXT: FRAGMENTATION AND CHAOS AFTER THE FALL OF THE NGÔ DYNASTY

Before Đinh Bộ Lĩnh's reign, Đại Cồ Việt was fragmented and unstable. After the Ngô dynasty's collapse in 944, no singular power held true authority. The nation's standing was precarious, as powerful warlords controlled separate territories, threatening long-term division. The land languished without a unifying center.

Through victories over these warlords, Đinh Bộ Lĩnh gradually built a formidable force, secured military dominance, and earned the respect of both the people and local officials. Yet declaring himself emperor was a pivotal move in restoring and rebuilding the nation.

PROCLAIMING HIMSELF EMPEROR – ĐÌNH TIÊN HOÀNG AND THE FIRST DECLARATION

In 968, after reunifying the country, Đinh Bộ Lĩnh did more than just triumph militarily—he demonstrated visionary leadership. He proclaimed himself emperor and founded the Đinh dynasty. This decision carried political weight and marked a historic turning point.

“Đinh Bộ Lĩnh proclaimed himself as Đinh Tiên Hoàng, founding a distinct national dynasty and affirming the country’s sovereignty and future development.”

(A Brief History of Vietnam by Trần Trọng Kim)

The act of declaring himself emperor was revolutionary. To the people of Vietnam at the time, it was a bold affirmation of the nation’s independence. Đinh Tiên Hoàng was effectively saying, “We are a sovereign nation,” free from any foreign rule. It was the first step toward building an independent, self-determined national identity.

ĐÌNH TIÊN HOÀNG’S VISION: PRIORITIZING THE NATION, REJECTING FOREIGN DOMINATION

When Đinh Bộ Lĩnh declared himself emperor, he wasn’t just establishing a regime; he laid the foundations of a strong national culture—one that celebrated internal strength over external dependency. Throughout his reign, he instituted firm administrative and military policies, fortified independence, and developed relations with neighboring countries.

More crucially, Đinh Tiên Hoàng earned the people’s trust. He was not only a warrior but a visionary leader, guiding the country toward a future free from foreign influence.

THE NATIONAL DECLARATION: THE DEEP MEANING BEHIND BUILDING AN AUTONOMOUS NATION

Đinh Bộ Lĩnh’s decision to proclaim himself emperor wasn’t just political maneuvering—it was a strategic manifesto: “We are a nation, and we have the right to self-determination.” This planted the seeds for Vietnam’s long-standing independence and created a model for a sovereign nation free from external dominance.

In the next section, we will revisit the nation’s development following Đinh Tiên Hoàng’s enthronement, exploring the challenges, strategies, and critical decisions that shaped his reign.

THE LEGACY OF THE “EMPEROR PROCLAMATION”

For the first time in Vietnamese history, the country was officially recognized as an independent nation, led by a self-proclaimed emperor. This laid a critical foundation for future dynasties to continue strengthening national sovereignty.

Đinh Tiên Hoàng not only proclaimed himself emperor at a pivotal historical moment but also left behind a profound lesson in resilience and far-sighted leadership. Faced with division and chaos, he did not act on impulse; instead, he proactively reshaped the nation and fostered a generation of strong leadership.




ĐẠI CÔ VIỆT

A DREAM GREATER THAN A MAP



In 968, Dinh Bo Linh ascended the throne as emperor, founding the Dinh dynasty and laying the foundation for the nation of Dai Co Viet. Choosing the name “Dai Co Viet” was not merely about asserting independence; it also reflected a deep aspiration toward greatness, transcending the limitations of a young country. The name “Dai Co Viet” not only conveyed the scale of the nation but also embodied the ambition for an autonomous civilization, free

from the shadow of neighboring powers. “Dai” (Great) in Dai Co Viet signified the grand ambitions of the newly founded nation, striving to grow and assert itself on the international stage. “Co” denoted strength and authority – a clear affirmation of the nation’s status. Through this name, Dinh Bo Linh demonstrated a vision that transcended the present, shaping a nation capable of confronting and competing with powerful empires in the region, symbolizing the hope and belief in a bright



WHEN A NATION IS BUILT FROM NOTHING, THE FIRST THING TO ESTABLISH IS NOT MERELY AN ARMY, BUT TRUST. AND FROM THAT TRUST, THE FIRST TITLES – ENCAPSULATED IN THE WORD “VIET” – WERE BORN AS A RESOLUTE DECLARATION: THIS IS A NATION OF THE VIET PEOPLE, BY THE VIET PEOPLE, AND FOR THE VIET PEOPLE.

and independent future. During his reign, Dinh Bo Linh chose Hoa Lu – a mountainous, rugged area in today’s Ninh Binh Province – as the capital of Dai Co Viet. This was no random choice. Hoa Lu not only offered geographical advantages, surrounded by steep limestone mountains that made it easy to defend the new dynasty from external threats, but also possessed strategic elements crucial for consolidating Dinh Bo Linh’s power.

Hoa Lu became known as the first political and military center of Dai Co Viet. It was where Dinh Bo Linh began constructing the state apparatus, organizing meetings, and most importantly, concentrating military forces to counter threats from rival warlords and foreign invaders. Moreover, Hoa Lu served as the place where Dinh Bo Linh strengthened alliances with generals and built a strong army, demonstrating a strategy that combined intellect and might. With its rugged terrain, Hoa Lu became a solid fortress and a strategic springboard for expanding and protecting Dai Co Viet during its early stage. It was here that crucial political and military strategies were formulated, greatly contributing to the dynasty’s stability and enabling territorial expansion.

HOA LƯ



A DECISION SHAPED BY HISTORY AND GEOGRAPHY

BEFORE THE GLORY OF THANG LONG, THERE WAS HOA LU – THE FIRST CAPITAL CHOSEN BY THE NATION'S FOUNDING EMPEROR. IT WAS NOT A RANDOM DECISION; IT WAS A STRATEGIC CHOICE ROOTED IN THE TREACHEROUS TERRAIN AND A BOLD STATEMENT AFFIRMING THE NEWLY GAINED INDEPENDENCE.



HOA LU – THE NATURAL FORTRESS OF A YOUNG NATION

Surrounded by towering limestone mountains, Hoa Lu formed a natural defense system. Every route leading into the capital could be easily monitored and defended against surprise attacks. The Hoang Long River running through the area facilitated waterway transportation, making it convenient for moving supplies and connecting with neighboring regions. Therefore, in a time when the young nation still faced risks of rebellion and reconquest,

Hoa Lu was the optimal choice to protect the royal court and strengthen central authority. “Hoa Lu is a strategic land: to the north, there is Tam Diep; to the south, Cuu Chan; to the west, Truong Yen; and to the east, Hoang Long. It is a place to establish an imperial enterprise, guard against the North, and command the South.” (Dai Viet Su Ky Toan Thu, Chronicle of Emperor Dinh Tien Hoang)

IN AN ERA OF CHAOS, WHERE SHOULD A NATION BE BORN?

After unifying the 12 warlords, Dinh Bo Linh faced a monumental question: where should he establish the capital of the first independent state after more than a thousand years under foreign domination? The choice was not just geographical – it was a political declaration, laying the foundation for the emerging national identity.

He chose Hoa Lu – a land nestled among mountains and rivers, part of Dai Hoang district (now Hoa Lu District, Ninh Binh Province). The decision was not merely sentimental or based on his homeland, but a calculated combination of history, geography, and strategic necessity.

THE FIRST POLITICAL AND MILITARY CENTER OF DAI CO VIET

Under Dinh rule, Hoa Lu became the first capital of a centralized feudal state in Vietnam. The city featured palaces, temples, fortified walls, military barracks, and treasury stores – laying the groundwork for later capital cities like Thang Long.

Under the Early Le dynasty, Le Dai Hanh continued to use Hoa Lu as the capital, further solidifying its historical role in maintaining independence and repelling northern invasions.



HOA LU TODAY – THE ECHOES OF A BEGINNING

Today, the ancient capital of Hoa Lu is a special national heritage site, part of the Trang An Scenic Landscape Complex, recognized by UNESCO as a World Cultural and Natural Heritage Site.

Visitors can explore the temples of Dinh Tien Hoang and Le Dai Hanh, where many artifacts and architectural features bearing the marks of the first two dynasties remain. Bronze statues and engraved steles commemorating the early emperors still serve as reminders of a difficult but proud era of nation-building.

In Hoa Lu, the limestone mountains still stand as they did a millennium ago – witnesses to a decision that changed history, the birthplace of the Vietnamese notion of an independent nation.





BUILDING A DYNASTY NOT JUST BY THE SWORD – REFORMS AND STATE-BUILDING

FROM AN EMPIRE BORN AMID CHAOS

When Dinh Bo Linh proclaimed himself emperor, Dai Co Viet did not yet have a functioning bureaucracy, legal system, or administrative framework. It was a land freshly emerged from turmoil, where territories had been fragmented by warlords. In this context, building a state apparatus – even a rudimentary one – was essential to preserving the fragile unity. Dinh Bo Linh understood: force alone could not sustain a nation. A country needed more – laws, systems, and legitimate authority beyond military power.

ESTABLISHING GOVERNANCE – THE FIRST STEPS TOWARD

As the first to proclaim himself Emperor in Vietnamese history, Dinh Bo Linh created the first high-ranking offices such as Dinh Quoc Cong (Duke of National Governance), Ngoai Giap (Outer Counsel), Noi Hau (Inner Marquess), and conferred the title of Prince upon his son – a system echoing Chinese models but localized to suit the newly independent country's needs. Though still rudimentary, this structure marked the first step toward transforming Dai Co Viet from an idea into a tangible administrative and organizational entity.

BUILDING ADMINISTRATION FROM ASHES – WHEN A STATE BEGINS WITH PEOPLE

After unifying the 12 warlords, Dinh Bo Linh was not only a king – he was the founder of the nation's first system of governance. Vietnam had never before had a truly centralized administrative model after a thousand years of foreign rule. He began with what might seem simple: redefining the names of authority.

Instead of adopting Chinese titles such as “Grand Marshal,” “Prime Minister,” or “Chancellor,” he localized them: Nguyễn Bắc was made Dinh Quoc Cong, Le Hoan became the Commander of the Ten Routes, Dinh Dien served as Ngoai Giap, and Nguyen Quoc held the post of Inner Counsel. This was a deliberate assertion



BUILDING ROYAL SYMBOLS – FROM RITUALS TO RELIGION

Dinh Bo Linh minted the first coins (Thai Binh Hung Bao), established ancestral temples, and developed court rituals, showing a clear effort to embed royal authority into the social consciousness. By utilizing religious and ceremonial symbols (worshipping heaven and ancestors), he reinforced the image of the emperor not just as a political leader but as the “Son of Heaven” – divinely chosen. This was a major advance from the time of the Ngo dynasty, which had still clung to nominal titles conferred by China.

of national identity – showing the resolve to be something new, not a mere replica of the northern empire.

TITLES AND REWARDS – STRENGTHENING LOYALTY

A noteworthy aspect of Dinh Bo Linh’s state-building strategy was the use of rewards and titles to bind his loyal generals. His followers such as Nguyễn Bặc, Đinh Điền, and Lê Hoàn were granted power and noble titles, forming a new leadership class.

Though this could risk later decentralization, at the time it was a wise strategy: consolidating loyalty among those who had fought alongside him, while building a political and personal foundation for authority.

THE LEGACY – INDEPENDENCE BEYOND BORDERS

Although the Dinh dynasty was short-lived, its impact – from the national name to the administrative system – became the foundation for subsequent dynasties like the Early Le, Ly, and Tran. They inherited and expanded upon this model, but the roots of a uniquely Vietnamese centralized monarchy remained.

Titles such as “Commander of the Ten Routes,” “Duke of National Governance,” and “Outer Counsel” are still cited today as proof of a pivotal moment in history – when the Vietnamese first began to see themselves as an independent nation.

“The people of old began their governance with proper titles. When titles are right, the nation (is stable.”
(Confucius, The Analects)

LAW AND PUNISHMENT – CREATING AUTHORITY THROUGH FEAR

Folklore still recounts that Dinh Bo Linh cast a great bronze cauldron filled with boiling oil, placed caged tigers in the court, and harshly punished wrongdoers – especially corrupt officials. This was not mere intimidation but an attempt to establish social order and prevent a relapse into the lawlessness of the warlord era.

The punishments, though severe, were necessary in a context where there was no clear legal system. Dinh Bo Linh used strict discipline to create the authority of law – which previously had been merely the will of individual warlords.





DIPLMACY WITH THE TONG – CHOOSING A SOFT APPROACH TO MAINTAIN INDEPENDENCE

WHEN YOU'VE JUST ESTABLISHED A NATION, IS THE FIRST THING YOU SHOULD DO TO FIGHT FOR ITS SURVIVAL – OR TO ENGAGE IN DIALOGUE TO PROTECT IT? ĐÌNH TIÊN HOÀNG CHOSE THE LESS BLOODY PATH, BUT NO LESS RESOLUTE: DIPLOMACY TO MAINTAIN THE INITIATIVE.



In 968, Đinh Bộ Lĩnh declared himself emperor and established the kingdom of Đại Cồ Việt. However, just a few years later, in 960, the North saw the rise of a new power: the Song dynasty, which emerged after the fall of the Later Zhou and unified China once again. This shifted the political landscape rapidly – and placed Đại Cồ Việt in a precarious situation: a newly independent nation lying to the south of an empire seeking to expand its influence.

The first thing the Song dynasty did was not to send troops – but to bring Đại Cồ Việt back into the tribute system. To the Song, southern states like Vietnam and Champa were viewed as “tributary states.” But for Đinh Bộ Lĩnh, this was not merely a formal issue – it was a strategic opportunity.

What’s noteworthy is that after the tribute ceremony, the Song did not send forces to control or intervene in Đại Cồ Việt’s internal affairs. They bestowed the title “Prince of Jiaozhi” on Đinh Bộ Lĩnh, an honorific title that had ceremonial significance but did not impose colonial policies.

From a modern perspective, we can consider this a “symbolic gesture to maintain sovereignty”: accepting nominal submission but retaining full autonomy in practice. This approach later became a model of “soft diplomacy” that many Vietnamese dynasties inherited and applied flexibly over nearly 1,000 years of relations with China.

Diplomacy is not a sign of weakness. In the case of Đinh Bộ Lĩnh, it was a choice by a leader who understood that the nation had just been formed, and internal stability was not yet secure, thus avoiding early confrontation with a large empire. He used diplomacy to buy time, stabilize domestic governance, and indirectly give the Song no reason to invade.

This “softness” is a different form of strength – not from the military, but from the ability to understand the world and act in line with the context. It is the poise of a leader who knows their limits and turns them into an advantage.



FACING INTERNAL TURMOIL – WHEN POWER CANNOT CONTROL EVERYTHING



A NEWLY ESTABLISHED DYNASTY: IS THE FOUNDATION FIRM ENOUGH?

When Đinh Bộ Lĩnh declared himself emperor in 968, founding the Đinh dynasty and naming the country Đại Cồ Việt, it was a significant turning point in history. However, geographical and nominal unity did not equate to absolute political stability. The dynasty had just been established, the bureaucracy, governance structure, and the people’s loyalty had not yet had enough time to firmly root. The rapid transformation – from a local warlord to the emperor of a nation – also created a gap in trust and control. Those who were once influential in the regional power struggle, or close allies during the conquests, now had to adapt to new roles in a centralized power structure.

ĐINH LIỄN AND THE RIFT IN THE ROYAL FAMILY

The event where Đinh Liễn – the eldest son and the one who had been sent as an envoy to the Song – killed his younger brother, Đinh Hạng Lang (who was made crown prince by the king), is a painful example of internal strife. On one hand, it highlights the instability in establishing a clear succession order. On the other hand, it reflects the unavoidable reality in early dynasties: when rules are not clear, power can be determined by bloodshed.

Đinh Tiên Hoàng did not depose Đinh Liễn, partly because of the need for a capable successor, and partly because of the limits of his power – at some point, even a king cannot control his own children.



THE LEGACY LEFT AFTER

After the king and crown prince were killed, the court fell into crisis. Lê Hoàn – who was then the General of Ten Paths – seized power to protect the country from northern invasion, establishing the Early Lê dynasty. However, the legacy of Đinh Tiên Hoàng was not just a short-lived dynasty. He was the first to lay the foundation for an independent monarchic state – with a clear sense of national identity.

“Đinh Tiên Hoàng declared himself emperor, established the national title, set up court ceremonies, appointed officials... he was the first to open the independence of the Vietnamese state after a thousand years of foreign rule.” – Đại Việt sử ký toàn thư, Đinh Dynasty.

Power can be obtained through strength, but it cannot be sustained without trust and a sustainable governance mechanism. Đinh Tiên Hoàng wrote his name in history as the one who began an era of independence – but also as a testament to the limitations of power if not accompanied by effective political governance. And that is a lesson still relevant today.



ASSASSINATION WITHIN THE ROYAL PALACE – AN EVENT THAT SHOOK THE DYNASTY

In 979, a major incident occurred: both Đinh Tiên Hoàng and his son Đinh Liễn were assassinated by an internal official named Đỗ Thích – a low-ranking court official. The reason for the assassination, as recorded in history, was that Đỗ Thích dreamed of becoming the king (as chronicled in Đại Việt sử ký toàn thư). Although the reason may seem strange, the truth is that the Đinh court had lost control over potential internal threats.

A dynasty that lasted only a little over a decade, collapsing due to internal turmoil, demonstrates that sometimes the danger does not come from external enemies, but from the gaps in internal organization and the consolidation of power.

WHEN POWER CANNOT GO AS DEEP AS TRUST

The sudden collapse of the Đinh dynasty raises a profound question: Can a country endure if its power is based only on force without establishing a mechanism of consensus and internal trust? Despite his military talent and ability to unite the country, Đinh Tiên Hoàng could not overcome the limitations of a young dynasty. He could make regional warlords bow down, but he did not have enough time – or resources – to make them loyal in the long run under a new system.



THE FATEFUL NIGHT

DEATH AT THE HANDS OF ĐỖ THÍCH

One knife ended a young dynasty. Đinh Tiên Hoàng and Đinh Liễn fell during the night, not on the battlefield, but within the royal palace itself. Who was the assassin? And what really killed the dream of a long-lasting dynasty?

ONE NIGHT, TWO DEATHS, AND THE COLLAPSE OF AN ENTIRE DYNASTY

In 979, the Đinh court was shaken by an unprecedented incident: both Emperor Đinh Tiên Hoàng and Crown Prince Đinh Liễn were assassinated in the night. The perpetrator was a seemingly insignificant figure: Đỗ Thích – a low-ranking official in the court.

According to Đại Việt sử ký toàn thư, Đỗ Thích dreamt of becoming the king. Upon waking, he believed it was a divine omen and hatched a plan. Under the cover of night, taking advantage of his turn to guard the palace, he sneaked in to assassinate both father and son while they were asleep. That seemingly absurd reason – “dreaming of becoming king” – triggered a series of events that changed the fate of the nation.



THE CONSEQUENCE: WHO TOOK THE POWER?

After the assassination, the court fell into crisis. The king was too young (Đinh Toàn was only six years old), so the court temporarily entrusted power to Lê Hoàn to act as regent. He later became emperor, founding the Early Lê dynasty and continuing the defense of the young nation's independence from the North.

The question arises: If not for that sudden death, could the Đinh dynasty have withstood? Or was this transfer of power inevitable, no matter how it happened?



WAS THE DEATH THE LAST STRAW?

The deaths of Đinh Tiên Hoàng and the Crown Prince were not merely the end of two lives – they were the breaking point for a still young dynasty, which had already shown signs of internal cracks. Not long before, Crown Prince Đinh Liễn had killed his younger brother, Đinh Hạng Lang – who had been named as the heir by the king. This was a shocking event that undermined the legitimacy of the royal power. Internal instability, conflicts between factions, and the fragility of the governance system created a foundation too unstable to withstand any shocks.

In this context, Đỗ Thích was not just a murderer – he became a symbol of the inevitable collapse.



WHO WAS ĐỖ THÍCH? – A DREAMER OR A PAWN IN A LARGER GAME?

There is not much information about Đỗ Thích in official history. He was not a high-ranking official, not from a prominent family, and had not been mentioned in previous military achievements. This makes the assassination even more puzzling. Could someone really act on a dream alone? Or was he a pawn manipulated by some deeper power? Modern historians still debate the possibility of someone pulling the strings behind the scenes, as the assassination opened the way for Lê Hoàn – then the General of Ten Paths – to seize power, and later become emperor. However, there is no concrete evidence of a conspiracy from Lê Hoàn or any other faction. Therefore, the assassination remains in the murky area of history, leaving many theories but no definitive conclusion.



CONCLUSION – DEATH WAS NOT CAUSED BY A SINGLE BLADE

History is never written by just one person. Đỗ Thích may have held the knife, but he was not the only one who caused the fall of Đinh Tiên Hoàng. It was the accumulation of internal instability, unclear succession laws, and the distance between the newly established royal power and the local forces.

This event closed one chapter but opened another in Vietnam's history – a chapter without Đinh Tiên Hoàng, but still bearing his vision and actions.

THE VACANT THRONE AND THE CRISIS OF SUCCESSION

AFTER THE SUDDEN DEATH OF ĐÌNH TIÊN HOÀNG AND CROWN PRINCE ĐÌNH LIỄN, THE COUNTRY NOT ONLY LOST ITS LEADER BUT ALSO FACED A DANGEROUS POWER VACUUM. IN THIS CRISIS, ONE PERSON STEPPED FORWARD: LÊ HOÀN. BUT WAS THIS AN UNAVOIDABLE, FORCED CHOICE, OR WAS IT PLANNED FROM THE START?

A

t the end of 979, the deaths of Đinh Tiên Hoàng and his son, Crown Prince Đinh Liễn, shocked the court. The only remaining successor was Đinh Toàn, who was only six years old at the time. A child who was not old enough to wield a sword, let alone command an army or manage state affairs. The throne was left... without a ruler. This situation placed Đại Cồ Việt in a very fragile position. Internally, royal factions were unsettled, and externally, there were threatening eyes from the north. The court needed someone with enough authority to steer the nation. And Lê Hoàn, the General of the Ten Directions, trusted by Đinh Tiên Hoàng, was chosen.

According to the Đại Việt Sử Ký Toàn Thư, Empress Dowager Dương Vân Nga and many high-ranking officials appointed Lê Hoàn as the Regent to manage the country's affairs. When the Song forces prepared to invade the South, Lê Hoàn officially ascended the throne, marking the beginning of the Early Lê dynasty. This event sparked debates for centuries. Some claimed he seized power, while others argued that it was the only option to maintain the country's stability. But looking at the context, the truth is: there was no one left in the Đinh dynasty who could step in. Lê Hoàn did not seize the throne; instead, he filled a power vacuum so that no one else could claim it.

A CRISIS OR AN OPPORTUNITY FOR TRANSITION?

In times of chaos, the collapse of a dynasty often leads to two paths: either it falls apart, or it is restructured. Lê Hoàn's case exemplifies restructuring. Under his reign, not only did he quell internal turmoil, but he also defeated the Song forces at Bạch Đằng in 981, asserting Đại Cồ Việt's independence. The transition from the Đinh to the Lê dynasty was thus a tragic event but also an opportunity for reconstruction. From a young and chaotic empire, Đại Cồ Việt moved into a more politically stable phase—at least for a time.

The events of 979 highlight a fundamental truth: History does not wait for someone who is of the right age or stature. It chooses those who are capable. Lê Hoàn stepped into that gap—not without controversy, but undeniably capable of guiding the country through a dark period.

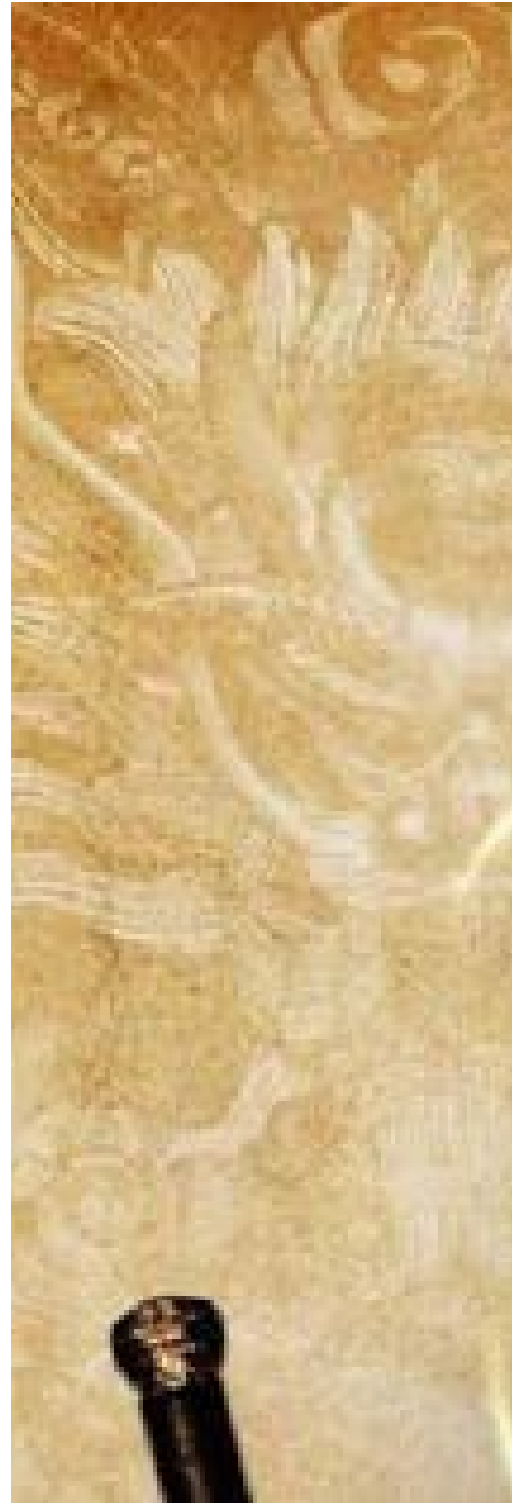
The vacant throne did not remain empty for long. And sometimes, a person is chosen not because they want to be, but because they cannot refuse.



03

GEN Z & THE LESSONS FROM “ĐÌNH TIẾN”

Not everyone is born with leadership qualities – but anyone can learn how to lead.





HERITAGE BRAND REVIEW AWARD

STARTING FROM ZERO



IN AN ERA WHERE FAME IS LINKED WITH POWER, AND WHERE NOBLE BIRTHS OFTEN DETERMINE SUCCESS, ĐINH BỘ LĨNH – A BOY RAISED IN A RURAL AREA DURING A TIME OF TURMOIL – TOOK HIS FIRST STEP WITH SOMETHING THAT FEW COULD SEE: THE MINDSET OF CREATING VALUE BEFORE EARNING A TITLE.

THE STRATEGY OF SELF-IDENTIFICATION

**THE SILENCE
OF “LOW
STARTING
POINTS”**

Historical records don't mention much about Đinh Bộ Lĩnh's childhood, but those brief lines open up a strong image. According to the Đại Việt sử ký toàn thư, after his father passed away when he was very young, his mother took him to live in her hometown in Hoan Châu, an area now part of Nghệ An, before returning to Hoa Lư.

Without political backing, without royal blood, he grew up in a time when “rebels rose like bees, and the people never had a peaceful day” – as written by Ngô Sĩ Liên (Toàn thư, bản kỷ quyển I). This was not a launching pad. It was a complete zero. And because of this, every step he took from there was the result of a choice.

While many are born to be generals or kings, Đinh Bộ Lĩnh assigned himself that role – even when no one believed he deserved it. From this starting point, his self-positioning mindset became clear: “If there are no existing conditions, then create them.”

If you live in a chaotic era, where everyone is busy claiming their own share, the way to be recognized is to become the one who can create stability. He didn't choose the role of a soldier, nor did he choose to be a general – he chose to be a king. And no one forced anyone, other children willingly accepted that role.

At that time, Đinh Bộ Lĩnh didn't yet have real power. But he had something even more elusive: trust from others.

This mindset of “self-proclaiming one's position” didn't stem from arrogance, but from a deep intuition that: to be recognized, you must act as though you already possess it.

Đinh Bộ Lĩnh didn't rush to conquer lands. He took gradual steps to persuade the powerful forces. He didn't choose to attack Trần Lãm – one of the twelve strongest warlords – but befriended him, and in return, Trần Lãm handed over military authority and land in Bồ Hải Khâu.

This wouldn't have happened if he didn't have a clear personal branding strategy. He didn't align himself with any warlord, nor did he present himself as part of the power struggle. He painted an image of a visionary outsider – someone ready to restore order.

**“WHO AM I
IN A TIME OF
CHAOS?” – WHEN
PRESENCE
BECOMES A
STRATEGY**

**CHANGING
THE WORLD
BEGINS WITH
CHANGING
ONESELF**

Many of the twelve warlords were local leaders who rose to power due to family influence or military upheaval. Đinh Bộ Lĩnh, on the other hand, remained calm, wise, and quietly built his forces through connections and trust.

In a time when “resistance” was the norm – when everyone wanted to fight for their own share – he didn't compete. He positioned himself as the one who would “gather up” what remained after everyone was exhausted from fighting.

From an orphaned boy in a chaotic time, Đinh Bộ Lĩnh created a distinct identity that no one could mistake – one of perseverance and consistency in personal vision. He didn't fight to become a king, he didn't shout to be heard, he didn't scramble for titles – he silently became the person everyone needed.

That's the lesson for today's youth – when you start with nothing, it doesn't mean you have no value. The important question is not “What do you have?”, but “Who do you want to become?”

LEADERSHIP IN A WORLD WITHOUT THRONES



In popular memory, Đinh Bộ Lĩnh was the child who played war games with reed branches. He didn't have a sword, didn't have a horse, but his enthusiasm was so contagious that even his friends believed they were participating in a real battle. They crowned him king, assigned roles, and arranged formations. People called it "play," but if you look closely, it was the most basic leadership exercise that history recorded.. Unlike many children at the time who only played war games for fun, Đinh Bộ Lĩnh knew how to create a structure, assign roles, give orders, and make others willingly follow. A child – with nothing in hand – but one who could inspire those around him. The essence of a leader begins here: you don't need power, just the ability to lead.

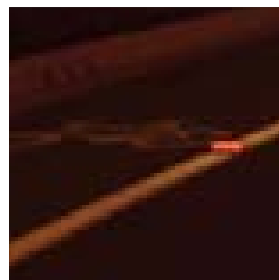
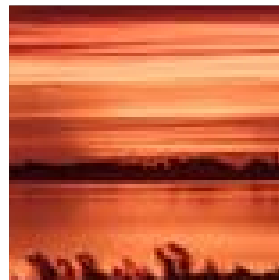
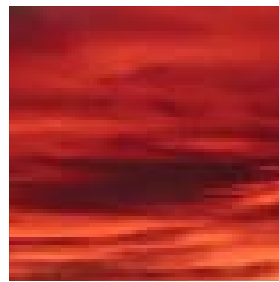
NO THRONE, NO ROYAL DECREE —
ONLY REED FLAGS AND FAITH. YET
FROM THAT, A LEADER EMERGED.



FROM REED FLAGS TO GROUPS – THE ESSENCE IS STILL CONNECTING PEOPLE

Imagine that scene – the children in Hoa Lu chasing after reed flags, chanting “Victory forever.” Today, it’s similar to you starting a project with no salary, or leading a team to prepare a presentation. No titles, no authority – what keeps everyone together is the value you create.

Đinh Bộ Lĩnh didn’t persuade his friends with rewards. He made them believe in the game, believe in their role in it, and believe that they were doing something great together. This is what Gen Z can learn in the digital age: When you form a social activity group, When you run a startup team, When you manage an online community, You don’t need power to lead – you need real connection. And that connection doesn’t come from orders, but from the feeling that: “We are doing this together because it matters.”



WHO ARE YOU IF NO ONE RECOGNIZES

No throne, no title – but Đinh Bộ Lĩnh was a leader even before anyone recognized him. And true recognition came, not from titles, but from impact.

In a world filled with voices and choices, Gen Z today sometimes feels small and insignificant. But in those moments when no one calls your name, you can start doing something to make people remember it.

No one crowns you as a leader? Then lead in your own way: Ask the questions no one has asked, create the space others want to be a part of, inspire a vision others want to build together.

Đinh Bộ Lĩnh started with imagination – and ended with a nation. You can start like that too – from your small group, from a conversation, from a new idea. Leading is creating influence. And you already have that ability – even if no one recognizes you yet.



THE MAP MINDSET – SEEING ORDER IN CHAOS

Vietnam’s history once had a time with no common name, no recognized leader. This was after Ngô Quyền’s death – the era of the 12 warlords, where each region was a small, self-governing entity, coexisting and fighting for power. People lived with a defensive mindset, full of suspicion, and were constantly at war to protect their land. But amidst this division, a young orphan named Đinh Bộ Lĩnh saw an opportunity to gather the scattered pieces and form something recognizable: a nation.

He didn’t just look at the map geographically. He saw it through an instinctive lens – that if people could believe in something greater, they could live together. “The map mindset” here is not just about identifying locations, but daring to establish an order. An order that never existed, but could become real if someone believed enough to act.

GEN Z AND THE OPEN WORLD – WHERE DO YOU STAND ON THE MAP?

Today, Gen Z holds tools that Đinh Bộ Lĩnh couldn’t have dreamed of: Google Maps to guide you anywhere, social media to connect with anyone. The world is more open than ever, but at the same time, we face a new crisis: a crisis of self-positioning.

Who are you among thousands of “content creators,” “designers,” “startup founders” emerging every day? What values do you pursue, and which story do you stand by in this explosion of voices? In the flood of information, a personal ideal – if not clear enough – can easily be drowned, swept away, or disappear.

That’s when the map mindset needs to return – not to locate yourself on the world map, but to see yourself as a vital piece in a bigger puzzle. This mindset doesn’t come from a geographical map, but from your inner vision.



THE MAP MINDSET &



THE NEW MAP GENERATION – THE VIETNAMESE DREAM IN A GLOBAL WORLD

Today, Vietnam is no longer a nation in formation but one that stands firm. But Gen Z's Vietnamese dream is being rewritten in completely new ways: a young person in Huế can start a startup with friends in Germany, an artist in Saigon can inspire a community in Japan.

In that world, Vietnam is not just a "place" – it becomes a spirit, a mobile identity. And Gen Z is carrying that spirit globally, continuing to draw the Vietnamese map in a way never seen before.

SELF-IDENTIFICATION IN THE AGE OF OVERABUNDANCE: THE LESSON FROM THE UNCHOSEN ONE

Đình Bộ Lĩnh wasn't born into a family of political power. He wasn't invited by the warlords to become king. But what set him apart from the ordinary was the choice: he chose to be the one to connect the scattered points, to rename a lost land.

You may not be the one with the most followers, not the most famous in your class or the best in your field. But you can be the one to ask the right questions: Where are we going? And why does it matter?

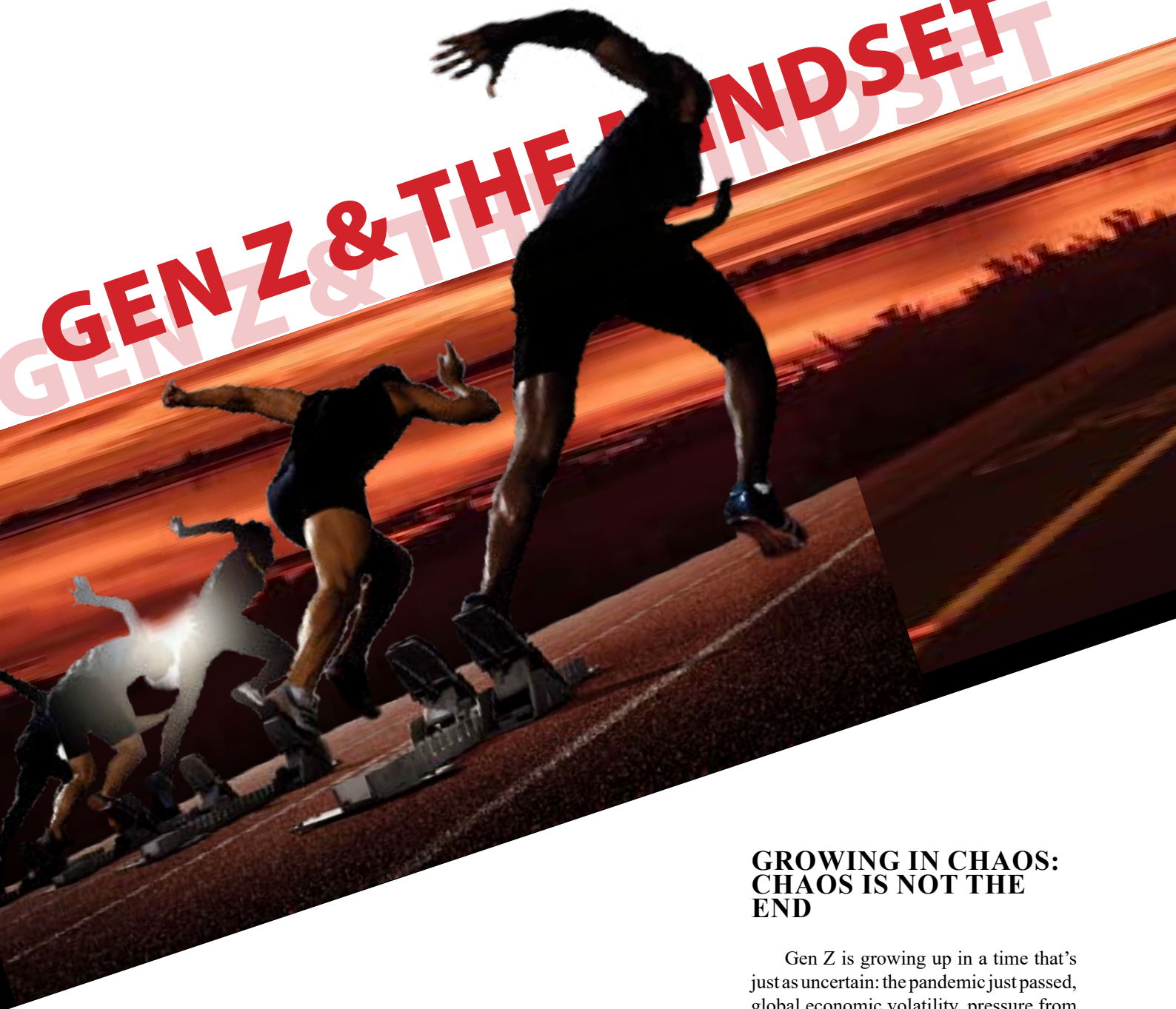
In an era where everyone wants to be seen, those who dare to position themselves as connectors, as community builders, quietly constructing the structure, are the ones who truly shape the order.

A DREAM WITHOUT BORDERS

ĐÌNH BỘ LĨNH ONCE DREAMED OF A UNITED COUNTRY AMIDST DIVISION. WHAT ABOUT YOU, GEN Z – WHAT ARE YOU DOING TO MAINTAIN THE CONNECTION BETWEEN THE VAST WORLD AND YOURSELF?



GEN Z & THE MINDSET



THE MAP OF YOUTH: WHEN THE START ISN'T PERFECT

Đình Bộ Lĩnh was an orphan from a young age. His mother took him to her maternal homeland in Hoa Lư, a remote area far from the center, nearly forgotten amid the chaos after Ngô Quyền's time. If we look at his starting point by today's standards, he had nothing to call an "advantage": no family lineage, no wealthy background, no protective power.

Not everyone gets to choose where they begin. But anyone can choose how they view that beginning. In a chaotic world, the ability to see yourself not as a "victim" but as a "creator" is the starting point for all transformation.

GROWING IN CHAOS: CHAOS IS NOT THE END

Gen Z is growing up in a time that's just as uncertain: the pandemic just passed, global economic volatility, pressure from media, comparison, expectations, and uncertainty about the future. They were born with access to limitless information but are simultaneously thrown into a whirlpool of "collective disorientation."

But from Đình Bộ Lĩnh's perspective, adversity is not an end – it's the environment for growth. He didn't wait for the times to change to take action. He grew with it, in it. And through resilience, observation, and the courage to form alliances from scratch, he transformed the chaos of the country into a unified order.

What can Gen Z learn from this? That when everything around us is unstable, that's when we learn to stabilize from within – mindset, values, direction. No clear map? Draw your own.

TO OVERCOME ADVERSITY

NOT EVERYONE IS BORN INTO FAVORABLE CONDITIONS. BUT FROM ADVERSITY, ONE CAN GROW FASTER – AND BE STRONG ENOUGH TO CHANGE THEIR ERA.

SURVIVAL SKILLS IN AN UNCERTAIN WORLD

One of the essential survival skills for Gen Z today is adaptive thinking – learning quickly, reacting flexibly, and extracting strategies from failure. That’s also what Đinh Bộ Lĩnh demonstrated: he didn’t have an army at first, but he had an understanding of people – knowing who could be trusted, who could join forces, who needed to be outsmarted, and who had to be subdued by force.

For Gen Z, the working environment is no longer the same as before: a stable job for life is a luxury. But the mindset of the survivor – not the most skilled, but the one who maintains composure and knows who they are amidst change – will take you farther by being different..

No one matures through easy things. But how we look back at the difficult moments will determine how we move forward. Đinh Bộ Lĩnh’s journey isn’t the story of a winner – it’s the journey of a child once seen as weak, but who chose not to stay in that role.

Gen Z is the same. You don’t have to win everything. But if you dare to grow from chaos, keep your heart calm despite what’s going on outside, then step by step, you are already beginning to conquer your own era.

“In chaos, the person who doesn’t lose their way – is the one who will redraw the map.”

GROWING UP IN A TIME OF CHAOS ISN’T TO BECOME TOUGH, BUT TO BECOME DEEP



**IN CHAOS, A BOY
PICKED UP A REED
FLAG.**

**NOT BECAUSE HE
KNEW HIS DESTINY,
BUT BECAUSE HE
REFUSED
TO STAND STILL.**