

DeWald Erich

Modernity at large at the ‘Great Fortnight of Huế’, 1933-1939

While the Huế fair it was intended to be a showcase for the colonial project undertaken in central Vietnam, a boon to local merchants and a marketing tool for metropolitan and international firms, it was also a chance to show off the ‘imperial capital’ and to experience the ‘modern’ city of central Vietnam. The fair began in earnest in 1934, and two years later the fair attracted tens of thousands of visitors from Indochina, southeast Asia and the French empire. The great majority of these visitors were Vietnamese, some of whom had come to buy and to sell their wares. Many came for other purposes, though. In 1936, two other attractions drew visitors to the city: the ‘Olympic Games’ of Huế, a number of whose events took place in the newly completed, 10,000-seat city stadium, and the Nam Giao ceremony, performed for only the second time under Bảo Đại’s reign. It was these three very different events—fair, sporting event, ritual—that drew a variety of different participants, spectators and tourists, the diversity of whose experiences reflected the diversity of the emerging ‘modern’ cityscape of Huế in the late 1930s.