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LI TANA

Between Mountains and the Sea: Trades in Early Nineteenth-Century Northern Vietnam

In 2006, leading Vietnamese economist Võ Trí Thanh remarked that contemporary Sino-Vietnamese trade “is more frequent than the domestic trade between northern and southern Vietnam.”¹ An observation by a Chinese economist working on contemporary Guangxi Province (southern China) adds more details to this picture. According to this scholar, 90 percent of Guangxi’s overseas trade is with Vietnam, and of this trade, 90 percent takes place at the border region.²

Are these patterns century-old, or have they just emerged as a new phenomenon in the tide of globalization? If it is the former, what was the magnitude of the Sino-Vietnamese trade compared to the domestic trade between northern and southern Vietnam in the nineteenth century? Moreover, what role did the mountains, which run all the way along the Sino-Vietnamese border, play in this trade relation? This essay attempts to piece together the available data on Sino-Vietnamese trade of northern Vietnam in the early nineteenth century with a focus on its upland region. This essay shares and develops the views expressed in the works of Oscar Salemink, Sarah Turner and other scholars on northern uplands, in particular their rejection of the “urban-rural,” “advanced-backward,” “civilized-barbarian,” lowland-highland dichotomies. But building upon these works, this essay also tries to determine what proportion of overland and maritime trade made up the Nguyễn revenue,

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and to understand the interactions among various peoples living between the mountains and the sea.³ The data seems to suggest that, contrary to the view that this upland region was remote and consequently isolated, the upland region (outer provinces) near the Sino-Vietnamese border formed an important, even crucial, portion of the overall revenue of Nguyễn Vietnam in the early nineteenth century.

Bustling Market Towns among the Mountains

My examination of the overland trade at the northern border is based on an 1813 manuscript of regulation on the tax stations in the country [*tuần ty thuế lệ*].⁴ This rather comprehensive document lists the names and locations of the major tax stations in northern Vietnam and the percentage of tax to be levied on commodities. To give tax officers a guideline of the prices of commodities in different regions, the document lists the prices of over three-hundred commodities in the delta region, or the five inner provinces [*nội ngũ trấn*], as well as the prices in the mountainous provinces, or the six outer provinces [*ngoại lục trấn*]. This document is thus useful for evaluating the degrees of commercialization in early-nineteenth-century northern Vietnam and the regional differences between the Red River Delta and the outer provinces near the border. It also enables us to compare the available commodity prices in Canton (Guangzhou) and other Southeast Asian ports of the early nineteenth century and see how Vietnam compared with its Southeast Asian neighbors in terms of commercialization.

Two other primary sources complement this document of tax regulations. One is the printed “Administrative Statute of Đại Nam” [*Đại Nam hội điển sự lệ*],” and the other a Hán-Nôm manuscript of a similar nature: “Taxpayers, Cultivated Land, Products, and Tax Regulation of the Country” [*Thông quốc định điền sản vật thuế lệ*].⁵ Both contain data of land tax, head tax and the details of tax stations from early to mid-nineteenth-century Vietnam. Together, the three sources show a somewhat more commercial upland region at the early-nineteenth-century Sino-Vietnamese border than the bamboo hedge of the Red River Delta and its world of peasants.⁶ Although the Chinese mining boom in the area had declined by this time, frequent economic exchanges and increased population had created a chain of market townships along the rivers from the north. At this seemingly remote periphery of both

Hán and Việt civilizations, there existed a group of bustling market towns in the early nineteenth century. This forms an interesting contrast to the five inner provinces of the Red River Delta where there existed only one city, Hà Nội, and a township, Phố Hiến, while in the upland six outer provinces there were twenty-four market towns or trading settlements [*phố*].⁷ Although possibly smaller in size than Phố Hiến of the Red River Delta, these upland townships functioned much in the same way as the commercial centers around Phố Hiến. This finding raises questions on the conventional hierarchical map of the Vietnamese landscape, in which Việt people are believed to have lived in the more cultured and urbanized centers while the “backward” forest peoples lived in remote mountain peripheries where nothing much happened.

While we have little information on these townships, the commodity pricelist of 1813 above provides some clues about their nature and their residents. First, the cost of daily life seemed to be higher in these townships and nearby areas than in the delta. At the markets of these outer six provinces, for example, pigs and ducks were 20 percent to 60 percent more expensive, chickens were four times more expensive and the cost of eggs doubled that of the delta.⁸ A good quality mat cost twice as much as it would on a delta market.⁹ This all seems to suggest that compared to the delta a limited number of people were making a living from farming and sideline household production. Conversely, more people relied on market supply for their daily life. While many residents of these townships might have been Chinese migrants, it is hard to imagine that these rather frequent economic exchanges did not involve the Nùng, the Tày and other peoples in the area. The red cotton blankets traditionally produced by the uplanders, for example, cost 30 to 40 percent less at the markets of the outer provinces than they did in the delta, suggesting easier access and more interactions between the Chinese, Vietnamese and the local Nùng and Thổ peoples.¹⁰ Lead and processed opium were also considerably cheaper in this region, most likely because it was close to the production area of Yunnan.¹¹ As Chiranan Prasertkul observed in his study on the cross-border trade in the Yunnan region, very few of the groups inhabiting these frontier lands actually existed based on fully self-sufficient economies.¹² His work portrays the frontier world as something more than a geographic

TABLE 1: Prices of Commodities in the Delta and Outer Provinces in the Year 1818
in *Quan* (Strings of Coin)

Products/Goods		Province	Amount	Units	Quan
betlenut, dry	干榔	Delta	10000	piece	32.0
betlenut, dry	干榔	Cao Bằng	10000	piece	20.0
betlenut, red jade	赤玉槟榔	Delta	100	can	25.0
betlenut, red jade	赤玉槟榔	Cao Bằng	100	can	19.5
birds' nests	燕窝	Lạng Sơn	1	can	50.0
birds' nests	燕窝	Sơn Nam	1	can	40.0
blanket, red flower	红花毯	Delta	1	piece	8.0
blanket, red flower	红花毯	Tuyên Quang	1	piece	5.0
ceramic, tea cups	北茶盏	Delta	10	piece	15.9
ceramic, tea cups	北茶盏	Lạng Sơn	10	piece	15.6
ceramic, wine cups	北酒杯	Delta	1000	piece	10.0
ceramic, wine cups	北酒杯	Lạng Sơn	1000	piece	7.8
cloth, blue, from Jiangxi, Jian District	吉安蓝布	Cao Bằng	1	bolt	3.3
cloth blue, Teochiu	潮州蓝布	Delta	1	bolt	2.5
cloth, blue, Teochiu	潮州蓝布	Cao Bằng	1	bolt	2.7
ducks	鸭	Cao Bằng	1	piece	0.4
ducks, big	大鸭	Delta	10	piece	2.5
fan, bamboo	竹扇	Delta	100	piece	1.2
fan, bamboo	竹扇	Hung Hoá	100	piece	2.0
firework, Teochiu	潮州炮	Delta	100	can	15.9
firework, Teochiu	潮州炮	Lạng Sơn	100	can	18.2
ink, huizhou	徽墨	Lạng Sơn	10	can	13.0
ink, huizhou	徽墨	Delta	10	can	13.2
mat, good	好席	Cao Bằng	100	piece	80.0
mat, good	好席	Delta	100	piece	40.0
needles, Teochiu	潮州针	Lạng Sơn	10000	piece	13.0
needles, Teochiu	潮州针	Cao Bằng	10000	piece	13.2
pigs, big	生猪 大项	Delta	1		8.0
pigs, big	生猪 大项	Cao Bằng	1		9.0
opium, processed	阿番膏	Thái Nguyên	1	can	65.0
opium, processed	阿番膏	Delta	1	can	96.0

conglomeration of mutually isolated societies. It was a sort of functional unit, integrated by a crucial cohesive force.

While the cost of foodstuff for daily consumption, such as rice, eggs and chicken, was much higher in the six outer provinces, the cost of Chinese commodities, even exotic food, was often the same as in the delta. Cao Bằng stands out as such an example. In general, the Cao Bằng price index was higher than the rest of the outer provinces and much higher than the delta, but medium-quality Chinese silk and silk fabrics were often cheaper than they were at the delta markets, suggesting cheaper transport costs. That Chinese products were cheaper at the border townships could only have been possible if the goods came directly to the border region, instead of having been transported from the delta up to the mountainous provinces. Chinese commodities thus occupied an important place in these townships, providing some necessities for everyday life, such as ceramic tea cups, wine cups, cotton fabric from Teochiu and China's hinterland of Jiangxi Province, bronze pots, dry fruits, colored paper sheets, and so on. In other words, the six outer provinces of the early nineteenth century seem to have been situated more in the Chinese commercial realm than in the Việt world.

The prosperity of this region started in the mid-eighteenth century, when mining at the border areas was in full swing. Alexander Woodside points out that the output of two of the largest copper mines in this area throughout the second half of the century averaged from 220 to 280 tons per annum, making it one of the largest copper-complexes of Asia.¹³ Some mines hired as many as ten-thousand Chinese workers, and the miners paid taxes directly to the local Nùng chiefs.¹⁴ As the Lê king described in a letter to the Qing Emperor Qianlong, “[s]o many people gathered together at the Tống Tinh mining site that it became a town; there one finds food stalls and restaurants, tea houses and medicine shops, and it is prosperous indeed.”¹⁵ There was even some room for cultural life: in Cao Bằng, ink from Huizhou and Nanjing and several types of writing paper were cheaper than they were in the delta. Entertainment could also be easily found. An officer from Taiwan recorded in 1835 seeing two singing girls in Lạng Sơn who sang and danced gracefully, and “returned the guests beautiful smiles when they threw gold coins to them.”¹⁶ The singing girls [曲妹; *ả dào*] were expensive, according to a Chinese officer who visited the outer provinces in 1883, “because Việt officers were allowed to call

singing girls.” The two girls he saw, who were from the delta area, wore amber earrings instead of gold and gems (as Chinese women usually did), and dressed in narrow sleeved tops with long skirts. They were thus refreshing to the officer’s eyes, who commented that they were “as beautiful as the girls in [Chinese] paintings.”¹⁷ No black teeth were mentioned.

Việt women were actively involved in trade. While we have no pre-nineteenth-century records on this for the six outer provinces, as we do for the late-eighteenth-century delta and southern Vietnam or Cochinchina (Đàng Trong), the Chinese officer who visited in 1883 reported that “trade is carried out by women, and even the wives and daughters of high officers sit at the markets with scales in their hands. [For instance,] Prime Minister Nguyễn Văn Tường’s wife sells oil, and the daughter-in-law of the Governor Lương Huy Ích sells opium, and both became rich.”¹⁸

The population boom and increased trade volume changed the nature of this region quite dramatically. Before the wave of Chinese mining occurred, Chinese sources on Guangxi-Vietnamese trade indicated that Việt export items were more valuable than those that Guangxi could offer for exchange. A local gazette of the 1720s reported as follows:

Taiping Prefecture [of Guangxi] is at the end of the border . . . and the items being traded here were nothing but cotton fabrics, silk, rice, and salt. Other items, such as silver, copper, lead, tin, cinnabar, mercury, and gems were all from Jiaozhi, and not produced locally.¹⁹

Mining brought more Chinese to this region and along with them, increased trade volume in the later eighteenth century. According to Fukangan, the Governor General of Guangdong and Guangxi, in 1791 the same Taiping Prefecture was frequented by traders from Shaozhou, Huizhou, Chaozhou (or Teochiu), and Jiayingzhou of Guangdong Province, and trade items became increasingly focused on Chinese manufactured goods from Guangdong.²⁰

The tributary system should be considered within this broader context of trade. While one assumes that tributary trade would have acted as an important driver for trade between China and Vietnam, close examination of the map of market towns yields an interesting observation: very few such towns were located along the tributary route from Hà Nội to the southern pass in Guangxi. The travel log by Cai Tinglan of 1835 mentioned above also seems to

confirm this. He wrote that the route from Bắc Ninh to Lạng Sơn was sparsely populated and little activity was to be found there.²¹ In other words, tributary trade did not seem to be the most important or most dynamic commerce between China and northern Vietnam, something that made Vietnam different from Siam in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The existence of Sino-Vietnamese border trade involved more multifaceted internal and external trading systems than the simple “tributary model.”

This is not to say that tributary trade was unimportant. A Nguyễn regulation of 1833 concerning private cargos allowed for officers on missions to China gives us some idea of the quantity of tributary trade that occurred. According to this regulation, the main envoy was allowed five chests of his own cargo, and his two deputies four chests each. The eight attachés and interpreters [*hành nhân*] were altogether allowed twelve chests, and the nine men of their entourages could share another five chests.²² The reason for this regulation was that previous tributary missions had taken so much of their own cargos that they were, in Emperor Minh Mạng’s words, “several times the volume of the official goods they brought back.”²³ But this regulation did not seem to work. In 1837, the officer of Guangxi reported that when the last Vietnamese delegation was passing through Guangxi, its members carried so much of their own cargos that they hired four to five thousand laborers in each courier station to carry their goods.²⁴

Tax stations were often located next to or in these townships. In 1820, the revenue from these houses in the outer provinces formed 39 percent of the Nguyễn’s total income from this sector, as shown in Table 2 below.²⁵

We assume that the above figures from the tax stations along the border reflect more or less the taxed volume of Sino-Vietnamese trade at the townships. This becomes more striking when compared with northern Vietnam’s maritime revenues of 1825 and 1826. According to the *Catalogue of the Nguyễn Archives* [*Mục lục Châu bản Triều Nguyễn*], Vietnamese ports collected 18,849 *quan* of taxes in 1825 and 28,269 *quan* in 1826.²⁶ At this time, there is no doubt that there was serious underreporting of the number of junks visiting the Mekong Delta.²⁷ As such, the two figures given by the *Catalogue of the Nguyễn Archives* should be more appropriately seen as the revenues collected in northern and central Vietnamese ports. In other words, the combination of two

TABLE 2: Taxes Collected From Tax Stations in 1820 and 1844 in *Quan*

Province	Amount collected in year:		Tax
	1820	1844	Increase/Decrease
Hà Tĩnh	3005	33000	998%
Nghệ An	6084	34500	467%
Thanh Hóa	15734	39000	148%
Nam Định	7500	44300	491%
Hưng Yên	78320	105000	34%
Sơn Tây	86150	110000	28%
Hải Dương	14510	24000	65%
Bắc Ninh	10900	17000	56%
Tuyên Quang	11800	26000	120%
Quảng Yên	8270	19000	130%
Thái Nguyên	13147.5	17775	35%
Hưng Hoá	85100	72000	-15%
Lạng Sơn	14500	13000	-10%
Cao Bằng	9064.75	7897.5	-13%
Total	364085.25	562472.5	54%

years' worth of maritime revenues from the northern ports roughly equated that of the trade tax collected from a single tax station, Bào Thắng of Hưng Hóa Province, in 1820.²⁸ Presuming that the above figures are reliable, the value of overland trade in the early 1820s would be somewhere between five to seven times greater than the maritime trade of northern Vietnamese ports. This was lower than contemporary Burma, where the value of overland trade ranged from 67 percent to 117 percent of the value of trade at Rangoon in the early 1820s.²⁹ Putting these figures side by side helps us to form a basic idea of the proportion of overland and maritime trade revenues for Burma and northern Vietnam, as well as the commercial vitality of the southwest Chinese border areas of the time and its impact on the demographic, economic and social changes in this region.

Before moving on to the next section I would like to discuss one trading item that appeared in the eighteenth century and became the leading export commodity from Vietnam to Longzhou port in China in the nineteenth century: the wild yam [*củ nâu*], which produces a brown color that was used

for dyeing clothes. This was a new fashion trend. The Việt kings of the twelfth century were recorded as having dressed in yellow tops and purple robes while wearing gold pins in their hair. Ordinary men wore black. Women favored green dresses and black skirts.³⁰ By the nineteenth century bluish-brown, or *thanh cát*, became the dominant clothing color of the Việt people in the Red River Delta. A leading scholar at the time, Phạm Đình Hổ, commented:³¹

Previously officers wore *thanh cát* clothes when they were on duty and black when they were not. Ordinary people wore undyed clothes. Nowadays everyone wears *thanh cát* color while black and undyed colors have disappeared. The color of *thanh cát*, according to Lê Quý Đôn, was obtained from dyeing the fabric first in indigo then in the liquid of dye yam [*củ nâu*] and alum.³²

But the delta area did not produce the yam that everyone needed for his or her clothing. As this yam occurs naturally in thickets and secondary forests, it was only found in the outer provinces of Cao Bằng, Hưng Hóa, Tuyên Quang, and especially Thái Nguyên.³³ Only the one province of Sơn Tây produced the dye yam, but only in Đoan Hùng Prefecture, which bordered Tuyên Quang. It is not surprising that the price of *củ nâu* in the delta was 2.8 times more expensive than in the uplands in 1813. Nùng and Tày peoples collect and trade this item with China and the Red River Delta to the present day.³⁴

Trade: Internal or External?

It is not always easy, however, to differentiate between overland and maritime commerce for Vietnam in this area, as an eighteenth-century Guangdong officer put it:

Jiangping is the only land connection between Guangdong and Annam, and in theory, it should be easy to control the people who sneak in and out. Yet the land of all Guangdong ends at the sea, from Chaozhou at the east to Lianzhou at the west, which ranges 3000 *li*. Those people trade overseas and the poor who live on water transportation are countless. . . . the small boats, if they cannot go far to other foreign countries, as long as the wind is blowing in the right direction, can go to Annam with no difficulty, and it is extremely hard to know whether those who left came back or not.³⁵

This observation implies that small-scale or peddlers' trade in this area was probably not under the surveillance of either the Chinese or Vietnamese governments. This would explain the rather small percentage (around 2 percent

of all north-central provinces) of trade taxes collected from the coastal province of Quảng Yên, as compared to those from other outer provinces. This unaccounted maritime trade could be considerable.

Rice is one example of a trading item not accounted for by China and unreported in Vietnam. It was the most important maritime trade item from the delta, although in theory it was never to be exported. The emperor Minh Mạng, for instance, was reportedly nervous about any news of famine in Guangdong and Guangxi, as it meant that more rice would be shipped out from his domain. In 1826, he ordered the officers to check the routes carefully as soon as he received news of a famine in the Qin and Lian prefectures of Guangxi.³⁶ The gap in prices between the two areas was indeed huge: while rice in northern Vietnam in 1826 was about one silver tael per picul, traders could realize four to five taels in famine-stricken Guangxi.³⁷

It is hard, though, to check whether the rice was being exported or traded within the country. Quảng Yên, for example, was a stepping stone between China and Vietnam, and between the land and the sea. A trip to the delta could start there, and whether the ships were coming from China or within Vietnam was anyone's guess. Chinese traders coming by land would come with their cargos to the market towns at the border of Quảng Yên, after which they would hire junks to transport their goods and passengers to trade in Quảng Yên, Hải Dương and Hà Nội.³⁸ The French noticed this in the 1880s during the Sino-French War (1883–1885). They reported that “the whole coast” around Tiên An District of Quảng Yên was open to loading and unloading for junks. During the war the Chinese transported troops and arms by sea to Tiên An, then to Lạng Sơn by land, using the road connecting Tiên An and Lạng Sơn.³⁹ If they had rice on board on their way back (which was highly likely, given the gap in the prices of rice between the two places), it would be impossible to tell whether the rice was going to China or Vietnam. Due to this widespread practice, and in order to tell Vietnamese ships apart from the Chinese ones, Minh Mạng made a special order that no Vietnamese ship be built in the style of the Chinese junk, so that rice could not be easily smuggled out.⁴⁰ Yet things were much more complicated than what the emperor in Huế could imagine. Chinese junks were allowed, once they came to the ports and paid taxes, to act as a shuttle service, transporting cargos and taking passengers on

the rivers within the country.⁴¹ The same situation occurred in Đàng Trong, where a Hainanese in the 1820s was said to have built eighteen junks in the Mekong Delta and twelve berths at the ports along the coast. His junks traveled between these ports, carrying both people and cargo, and made a fortune.⁴² The Chinese might have been the only group of people who were able to provide such services, given their commercial drive, their junk capacity, their ability to pay monetary taxes, and their readiness to bribe the officers.⁴³

Tax revenue was the reason the court permitted the Chinese to undertake such enterprises. As Woodside points out, in the 1760s, mining taxes alone were paying the costs of the government of the Lê-Trịnh state in northern Vietnam.⁴⁴ This situation becomes even more striking when the income from tax stations and trade taxes collected from Chinese shops in the mining country are included.⁴⁵ It might not be an overstatement to say that from the mid to late eighteenth century, the Vietnamese court lived more on taxes from the six outer provinces than from that of the five delta provinces.⁴⁶

This makes northern Vietnam comparable to its southern neighbors in Siam and the Malay states during the same period, but the geographic proximity between northern Vietnam and the Chinese empire made the complexities of “internal” and “external” far more problematic. It became impossible to tell “internal” from “external” when, in the late nineteenth century, the “great tin” [大錫], the single most important major export of Yunnan, was taken by mule or human porter to Gejiu, where it was transported downstream by the Red River to Hải Phòng, then shipped to Hong Kong.⁴⁷ Henri d’Orléans suggests by the 1890s that some items of English and French manufacture (needles and metal buttons) were entering Yunnan via the Red River valley, together with cotton. Opium from Yunnan certainly entered Tonkin via the Red River caravan trail, and tobacco from Canton may have reached this remote region of southwest China via the circuitous overland link through Vietnam. According to Carol Benedict, when the bubonic plague invaded Yunnan in 1857, it spread along the two Sino-Vietnamese trading routes, one to Longzhou by 1866, and the other to Beihai in 1867.⁴⁸ Interestingly, it was not spread via inland routes within China’s territory but went first down to Vietnam then up to Guangxi through routes within Vietnam. This makes it easier to understand why, as late as the twentieth century, Sino-Vietnamese border trade was not included in

bilateral agreements between the two countries: both countries regarded it as an extension of their own domestic trade.

One remark in particular requires emphasis: the above information and discussion are focused on the areas between the Kỳ Cùng and Lô rivers. When the townships and tax stations are marked on a map, it shows that almost all of them were located within this area. Only two townships were found on the right bank of the Red River, and there was none on the left bank. This certainly does not mean that there were no trading activities on the left bank of the Red River. Rather, it points to areas where the Vietnamese sphere of influence had faded and stopped in the mid-nineteenth century.⁴⁹ It is interesting to note that the Vietnamese state's sphere of influence in this region seems to have shrunk by the early nineteenth century. According to Lê Quý Đôn, during the mining boom of the second half of the nineteenth century, there had been quite a few Vietnamese tax stations in the Black River area.⁵⁰ If so, the presence of Chinese mining activities in that region might have actually helped to draw Vietnamese political power into the largely Tai speaking country, but that power faded after Chinese mining activity failed there in the early nineteenth century. If this is so, the scant points of interaction between the left bank of the Red River and the Black River on the Vietnamese map suggest that a different and distinctive set of market networks connected northern Vietnam to Yunnan. This distinction points to different trade networks, distinct ethnic affiliations with trade and variable degrees of Chinese and Vietnamese influence.

Maritime Trade and the Teochiu Networks

The maritime dimension was always important for Vietnam, a country whose peculiar shape ensures that no place is over two-hundred kilometers from the sea. Even "overland" trade was largely connected by sea, which linked both overland and river transportation. Some commodities could only have arrived by sea. For example, sappan wood, a product of Siam and its south, appeared on our 1813 list as cheaper on the Red River Delta markets than it was in Canton.⁵¹ Pepper, again not a local product of northern Vietnam, was cheaper there than it was in Terengganu and Bangkok during the same period.⁵² Both of these products could have only been brought from the south directly to northern Vietnam by sea.

The tax regulation clearly lists some items from Teochiu, recording them as Teochiu blue or white cotton cloth [潮州蓝布, 潮州白布], Teochiu fire-works [潮州炮] and Teochiu needles [潮州针]. Cloth from Teochiu was 25 percent cheaper than that from Jian District, Jiangxi Province. White sugar presents another link to Teochiu; it was one of the key products of Teochiu in the nineteenth century. At Canton export market in 1810 it cost 6.5 tael per picul; on the market of the Red River Delta in 1813 it was 2.94 tael per picul; and on the border markets of An Quảng it was half of the Canton export price of 1810.⁵³ Although the cheap sugar could have been from Cochinchina, as John Crawford reported in 1821–1822, the fact that the price of sugar at the border province, An Quảng, was lower than that in the Red River Delta suggests that this sugar probably came directly from Guangdong.⁵⁴

The Teochiu network thus stands out as probably one of the most important trading networks of northern Vietnam in the early nineteenth century. Benefitting from “one of the busiest and best harbors in Guangdong” by this time, traders from Teochiu may well have played a dominant role in northern Vietnam’s commerce.⁵⁵ The published *Catalogue of the Nguyễn Archives* for the years 1825–1826 attests to their significance. According to this source, half of the junks visiting Vietnamese ports in 1825–1826 were from Teochiu while the other half were from Hainan. There were but three junks from Canton and none from Fujian.

An important point here is that in contrast to the trade between Vietnam and China, trade between northern Vietnam (Đàng Ngoài) and southern Vietnam (Đàng Trong) did not appear to be as smooth and frequent, judging from the prices at the northern markets. For example, Đàng Trong’s local products, such as elephant tusks, bird’s nests and shark’s fins, were by no means cheaper on Đàng Ngoài markets than they were in Canton.⁵⁶ Lacquer from Cambodia and cinnamon from Quảng Nam were more expensive on Đàng Ngoài markets than they were in Canton, suggesting a limited degree of integration between nineteenth-century northern and southern Vietnam.

To what extent, though, was the economy of the south important to the north, and vice versa? They were no doubt both important to the capital of the country, located in the central region and requiring rice and labor from both the Red River Delta and the Mekong River Delta. Apart from this, with

TABLE 3: Chinese Junks Visiting Vietnam, 1825–1826

Year	Teochiu	Hainan	Unidentified	Empty Junk	Canton	Leizhou
Year 1825						
Nam Định	10	5		1	3	
Quảng Nam	1		1			
Gia Định	2	5				
Bình Định		1 (shipwreck)				
Total	13	11	1	1	3	0
Year 1826						
Nam Định	9	4	12	2	3	
Quảng Nam	1					
Gia Định		3			1	
Bình Định		1				
Nghệ An	2	2	4			2
Thanh Hoá	2					
Quảng Ngãi					1	
Huế			3			
Total	14	10	19	2	5	2

the two regions separated by over one-thousand five-hundred kilometers and producing similar products (rice, salt, betel nuts, and silk), how much incentive was there for exchange? This explains the comment made by the contemporary economist quoted at the beginning of this paper. Our Water Frontier Project certainly suggests that the more important markets and trade partners of Nguyễn Cochinchina were in southern China, the Gulf of Siam and the Malay Peninsular, rather than in Đàng Ngoài with the Việt people. This was partly because in the seventeenth to eighteenth century, until the fall of the Nguyễn, the two regions did not trade much directly. Missionary reports often state that the Nguyễn forbade its people to go from Cochinchina to Tonkin (Tongking), though the Chinese were allowed to do so.⁵⁷ This situation changed when Nguyễn Ánh united the country in 1802, after which between 140 and 180 vessels were sent yearly from central to northern Vietnam (Bắc Thành) to carry rice back to the capital area.⁵⁸ Yet this maritime transportation was a government-sponsored activity for official purposes. We have yet to find ample evidence for economic exchange between the two regions other than that carried out on the local and regional levels. Whether or to what extent there was a national market created under the nineteenth-century Nguyễn dynasty remains to be explored.

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ABSTRACT

This article attempts to piece together the available data on Sino-Vietnamese trade of northern Vietnam in the early nineteenth century with a focus on its upland region. This essay shares the views expressed in the works by Oscar Salemink, Philip Talor, Sarah Turner and other scholars on northern uplands, and in particular their rejection of the “urban-rural,” “advanced-backward,” “civilized-barbarian,” lowland-highland dichotomies. But building upon these works, this essay also tries to determine what proportion of overland and maritime trade made up the Nguyễn revenue, and to understand the interactions among various peoples living between the mountains and the sea. The data seems to suggest that, contrary to the view that this upland region was remote and consequently isolated, the upland region (outer provinces) near the Sino-Vietnamese border represented an important and even crucial portion of the overall revenue of Nguyễn Vietnam in the early nineteenth century.

KEYWORDS: *northern uplands, Sino-Vietnamese trade, early nineteenth century, Chinese*

Notes

1. “中越貿易比南北貿易更密切” [Closer Trade Relations in Central Vietnam than in the North and South], *Yazhou Zhoukan* [Asia Weekly], May 28, 2006.
2. Personal communication with Professor Pan Jine, research fellow of the Institute of World Economy, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, October 2004, Beijing.
3. Philip Taylor, *Cham Muslims of the Mekong Delta: Place and Mobility in the Cosmopolitan Periphery* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2007); Oscar Salemink, “Lowlander-Highlander Relations in Vietnam: A Critical History,” in *Montane Choices and Outcomes: Contemporary Transformations of Vietnam’s Uplands*, eds. Jeff Romm, Nghiem Phuong Tuyen, and Thomas Sikor (Singapore: Singapore University Press, forthcoming); Sarah Turner, “Borderland and Border Narratives: A Longitudinal Study of Challenges and Opportunities for Local Traders Shaped by the Sino-Vietnamese Border,” *Journal of Global History* 5, no. 2 (June 2010): 265–287.
4. *Tuần ty thuế lệ* [Regulations for Tax Stations], Shelf No: A.978, Hán-Nôm Institute, Hà Nội, Vietnam.
5. In *Nam Bắc các hạt châu phủ huyện xã thôn* [Villages and Hamlets of Districts, Prefectures of the North and South], Shelf No: VHv.1720, Hán-Nôm Institute, Hà Nội, Vietnam.

6. Charles Wheeler, "Re-thinking the Sea in Vietnamese History: Littoral Society in the Integration of Thuận-Quang, Seventeenth–Eighteenth Centuries," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 37, no. 1 (February 2006): 123–153.
7. Even if we included all the market streets in Hà Nội (19), the number was still less than in the mountain region. The names of nineteen streets are found in Nguyễn Vĩnh Phúc and Trần Huy Bá, *Đường phố Hà Nội: lịch sử, văn vật, thắng cảnh* [Hà Nội Streets: History, Artifacts and Scenery] (Hà Nội: Hà Nội, 1979), 516–537. This book used an early nineteenth century source: *Bắc thành địa dư chí* [Gazette of Northern Vietnam]. I have counted the names with "phố," "phường" and "hàng" in them and arrived at 19. There were more *phố* in the early-nineteenth-century northern highland area: 10 in An Quảng, 8 in Tuyên Quang, 36 in Lạng Sơn, 25 in Cao Bằng, and 1 in Thái Nguyên. See *Tên làng xã Việt Nam đầu thế kỷ XIX* [Vietnamese Village Names of the Early Nineteenth Century] (Hà Nội: Khoa Học Xã Hội, 1981), 78–95. A count in Yumio Sakurai's book gave 24 *phố* in the six outer provinces. Some of these *phố* in the outer provinces would have been larger in size than the *hàng* (single streets) in Hà Nội. See Yumio Sakurai, *Betonamu sonraku no keisei* [The Formation of Vietnamese Villages] (Tokyo: Soubunsha, 1987), 155–157.
8. One big duck in Cao Bằng was 0.40 *quan* while in the delta it was 0.25 *quan*; ten big chickens were one *quan* in the delta while they were 0.40 *quan* in Cao Bằng.
9. It was forty *quan* per one hundred mats in the delta while in Cao Bằng it was eighty *quan* and in Lạng Sơn it was ninety *quan*.
10. In the delta it was eight *quan* per piece while in Thái Nguyên and Hưng Hoá it was six *quan*, and in Tuyên Quang it was only five.
11. The first record of opium cultivation in Yunnan dates to 1736. See Carol Benedict, *Bubonic Plague in Nineteenth-Century China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 51.
12. Chiranan Prasertkul, *Yunnan Trade in the Nineteenth Century: Southwest China's Cross-Boundaries Functional System* (Bangkok: Institute of Asian Studies, Chulalongkorn University, 1989), 33.
13. Alexander Woodside, "The Relationship between Political Theory and Economic Growth in Vietnam, 1750–1840," in *The Last Stand of Asian Autonomies*, ed. Anthony Reid (London: MacMillan, 1997), 259–260.
14. Lê Quý Đôn, *Kiến văn tiểu lục: Lê Quý Đôn toàn tập* [Jottings about Things Seen and Heard: Lê Quý Đôn Complete Collection] (1777) (Hà Nội: Khoa Học Xã Hội, 1977), 414.
15. "送星厂内随聚成市，饭店酒楼，茶坊药铺，极为繁凑" [File of the Grand Council], quoted from *Gudai zhong yue guanxi shi ziliao xuan bian* [Excerpts of Primary Sources on Ancient Sino-Vietnamese Relations] (Beijing: Press of Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, 1982), 654.

16. Cai Tinglan, *Hainan zashu* [Miscellaneous Notes on the Places at the South of the Sea] (Taipei: Taiwan Wenxian Congkan no. 42, 1959), 39.
17. Tang Jingsong, “Qingying riji” [Journal of a Volunteer for Battle], in *Zhongguo jindai shi ziliao congkan: Zhongfa zhanzheng* [Primary Sources on Modern China: Sino-French War], vol. 2 (Shanghai: Shanghai People’s Press, 1957), 85.
18. Tang Jingsong, “Qingying riji,” in *Zhongguo jindai shi ziliao congkan*, 85. Opium was an important item from China and by the late nineteenth century, opium became the most important item from Mengzi to Vietnam.
19. Gan Rulai ed., Section “Shihuo” [Economy], [雍正] 太平府志; *Taiping fuzhi* [Taiping Gazette] (printed 1726).
20. “Report of Fukangan 福康安” to Qianlong Emperor, *Ming Qing shiliao* [Archival Material of the Ming and Qing dynasties], Series G (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1987), 404.
21. Cai Tinglan, *Hainan zashu*, 20.
22. *Đại Nam thực lục Chính biên* [Primary Compilation of the Veritable Records of Imperial Vietnam], year 1833, tome 85 (Tokyo: Keio Institute of Linguistic Studies, 1973), 2624. This would only make nineteen people in the delegation, although the 1717 Qing regulation for the size of the Vietnamese delegation was three envoys and twenty entourages. See *Việt sử thông giám cương mục* [Text and Explanation Forming the Complete Mirror of the History of Vietnam], tome 35 (Taipei: The National Library of Taiwan, 1969). Liam Kelley gives the number of the delegation as thirty-two, which shows variations in each delegation. See Liam Kelley, *Beyond the Bronze Pillars: Envoy Poetry and the Sino-Vietnamese Relationship* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2005), 66.
23. The famous scholar Phan Huy Chú was one of the officers found guilty of this. See *Đại Nam thực lục Chính biên*, vol. 2, tome 79, 2541.
24. *Qing Xuanzong shilu* [Chronicles of the Qing Xuanzong], tome 295, quoted from *Gudai zhongyue guanxishi ziliao xuanbian* [Sources on Ancient Sino-Vietnamese Relations] (Beijing: Zhongguo Shehui Kexue Chubanshe, 1982), 503.
25. *Khâm định Đại Nam hội điển sự lệ* [Official Compendium of Institutions and Usages of Imperial Vietnam] vol. 4 (Huế: Thuận Hóa, 1993), 443–449.
26. *Mục lục Châu bản Triều Nguyễn* [Catalogue of the Nguyễn Archives] (Hà Nội: Văn Hoá, 1998), xlii–xliii.
27. For overseas trade of southern Vietnam, see Li Tana, “The Late Eighteenth Century Mekong Delta and the World of the Water Frontier,” in *Vietnam: Borderless Histories*, eds. Nhung Tuyet Tran and Anthony Reid (Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2006), 147–162.
28. It was no coincidence that the Chinese troops of the Black Flags chose Bảo Thắng as their base to fight the French in the 1880s.

29. Victor Lieberman, *Strange Parallels: Southeast Asia in Global Context, c.800–1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 170.
30. See Fan Chengda, *Guihai yuheng zhi jiaobu* [Records on Biology and Peoples in Guangxi], in the mid-twelfth-century edition of addendum by Qi Zhiping (Nanning: Guangxi Minzu Chubanshe, 1984), 52.
31. Phạm Đình Hồ, *Vũ trung Tùy bút* [Essays in the Rain], in *Collection Roman et Contes du Vietnam écrits en Han* [Collection of Novels and Tales of Vietnam Written in Han], series 2, vol. 5 (Paris: École Française d'Extrême-Orient/Student Book Co. Ltd., 1992), 45.
32. Lê Quý Đôn, *Vân đài loại ngữ* [Classified Talk from the Study], tome 9 (Sài Gòn: Tủ Sách Cổ Văn, 1973), cxlviii.
33. *Đông Khánh địa dư chí* [The Descriptive Geography of Emperor Đông Khánh], vol. 1 (Hà Nội: Thế Giới, 2002), 681, 748, 832, 836, 841, 842, 845, 847, 881, 883, 885, 888, 892, 899, 1004, and 1005.
34. Thirty kilos of *củ nâu* can exchange from forty to sixty kilos of rice. See Lê Minh Giang, "Community Forest Management – A Case Study of Tay people at Tat Village, Tan Minh Commune, Da Bac District, Hoa Binh, Vietnam" (master's thesis, Swedish University of Agricultural Science, 2004), 39.
35. "Report of Wang Anguo, the Guangdong Governor to Qianlong, January 1744." See "Junji Chu Lufu Zouzhe [Copied Files of the Grand Council]," File No: 7773: 7, National Archives of Beijing no. 1.
36. *Đại Nam thực lục Chính biên*, vol. 2, tome 29, 1790.
37. *Mục lục Châu bản Triều Nguyễn*, xxxiii. It was an average 1.3 *quan* per *phượng* (30 kg) of silver; *quan* ratio was 1 tael; 2.65 *quan* in 1813. See the pricelist.
38. *Đại Nam thực lục Chính biên*, year 1831, tome 70, 2405.
39. Archives du ministère français des Affaires étrangères [Archives of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs], *Mémoires et documents. Asie* [Memories and Documents. Asia], January 26, 1887, vol. 63, p. 98; quoted from Xiao Dehao and Huang Zheng, eds., *Zhongyue bianjie lishi ziliao xuanbian* [Historical Sources on the Sino-Vietnamese Borders] (Beijing: Shehui Kexue Chubanshe, 1993), 1135.
40. *Đại Nam thực lục Chính biên*, year 1833, tome 78, 2516.
41. For example, see *Mục lục Châu bản Triều Nguyễn*, year 1825, 151.
42. Li Tana, "Late Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Century Mekong Delta in the Regional System," in *Water Frontier: Commerce and the Chinese in the Lower Mekong Region, 1750–1880*, eds. Nola Cooke and Li Tana (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 2004), 76.
43. Knaap's research on shipping in eighteenth-century Java shows that the average Chinese shipments carried about 931 piculs of rice; the average Javanese load was about 261 picul; and the average Malay load 180 picul. See Gerrit Knaap,

- Shallow Waters, Rising Tide: Shipping and Trade in Java around 1775* (Leiden: KITLV, 1996), 113.
44. Woodside, "The Relationship between Political Theory," 259.
 45. Lê Quý Đôn, *Kiến văn tiểu lục*, 414; "From the 71 Chinese shops [the local Nùng chief] Kỳ collected no less than 300 bars of silver [a year]."
 46. As Table 1 indicates, in 1820 the six outer provinces contributed 39 percent of the trade revenues collected from tax stations. This share decreased markedly by the 1840s, particularly from the two most important provinces of Cao Bằng and Hưng Hoá.
 47. See Andrew D. W. Forbes, *The Haw: Traders of the Golden Triangle* (Bangkok: Teak House, 1997), 75.
 48. Benedict, *Bubonic Plague in Nineteenth-Century China*, 61.
 49. See the figure of tax stations in 1844.
 50. Lê Quý Đôn, *Kiến văn tiểu lục*, 363–365.
 51. 1.58 taels per picul in the Red River Delta, and in Canton it was 2 taels per picul in 1792. See H. B. Morse, *The Chronicles of the East India Company Trading to China, 1635–1834*, trans. Ou Zonghua, 2 volumes (Guangzhou: Zhongshan University Press, 1991), 519. Even in Bangkok it could be as dear as 3 taels in the 1810s. See William Milburn, *Oriental Commerce*, vol. 2 (London: Black, Parry & Co., 1813), 442. Sappanwood was found in late-nineteenth-century Hưng Hóa. See *Đông Khánh địa dư chí*, vol. 1, 753. It did not seem available though in the 1810s.
 52. Milburn, *Oriental Commerce*, vol. 2, 323, 442.
 53. Sucheta Mazumdar, *Sugar and Society in China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 1998), 55. Morse gave a lower price for 1835. See Morse, *The Chronicles of the East India Company*, vol. 4 and 5, 350.
 54. A picul of white sugar was two dollars (=1.44 tael) in Sài Gòn. See John Crawford, *Journal of an Embassy to the Courts of Siam and Cochin China* (OUP Australia, Oxford in Asia Hardback Reprint, 1987), 520.
 55. Ye Xianen, ed., *Guangdong haiyun shi, gudai bufen* [A History of Guangdong Shipping, Ancient Period] (Beijing: Renmin Jiaotong, 1989), 186–187.
 56. Bird's nest: 15–18 tael per can; in Batavia of the 1810s, it was 13–14 tael. Elephant tusks at the Tonkin markets was 45–60 tael per picul, while in Canton it was 37 tael per picul in 1792. Shark's fin was 22.64 tael per picul in Tonkin; in Canton in 1836 it was 15 tael per picul.
 57. I am grateful to Nola Cooke for this information.
 58. For examples of imperial grain transportation, see *Mục lục Châu bản Triều Nguyễn*, Gia Long reign and the first five years of the Minh Mạng reign.