

**'THE INNER REGION': A SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC  
HISTORY OF NGUYEN VIETNAM IN THE SEVENTEENTH AND  
EIGHTEENTH CENTURIES**

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A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
of the Australian National University

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To my parents

**Declaration**

Except where otherwise indicated  
this thesis is my own work.

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September 1992



## ABSTRACT

The seventeenth and eighteenth century Nguyen kingdom was known as **Dang Trong** to Vietnamese at the time, and Cochinchina by the Westerners. It was a state built in today's central Vietnam, separate from the royal Le government which was controlled by the Trinh rulers in the Red River delta and down to Nghe An. This thesis intends to examine **Dang Trong** in this period in the context of Vietnamese southward expansion, the military character of the Nguyen regime, its taxation system, the social structure, relations between Vietnamese migrants and uplanders, and particularly the involvement in overseas trade. Successful localisation of Vietnamese migrants in this period seems to be the reason why **Dang Trong**, a state weaker than the Trinh in every sense, not only survived on the former land of Champa, but obtained three fifths of the land of present-day Vietnam in merely two hundred years.

The Nguyen experiment seems to suggest a different image of Vietnam, opening a door to an alternative world in which diversity was tolerated, indeed taken advantage of, for Vietnam's own development.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

When I first came to Australia in 1988, I was as anxious and nervous as could be: my English was limited, so was my knowledge of Vietnam. I came from China, a country that had been isolated for a long time, both from other parts of the world and, tragically, from Vietnam. Thus to me, coming to Australia was the most precious chance in my life.

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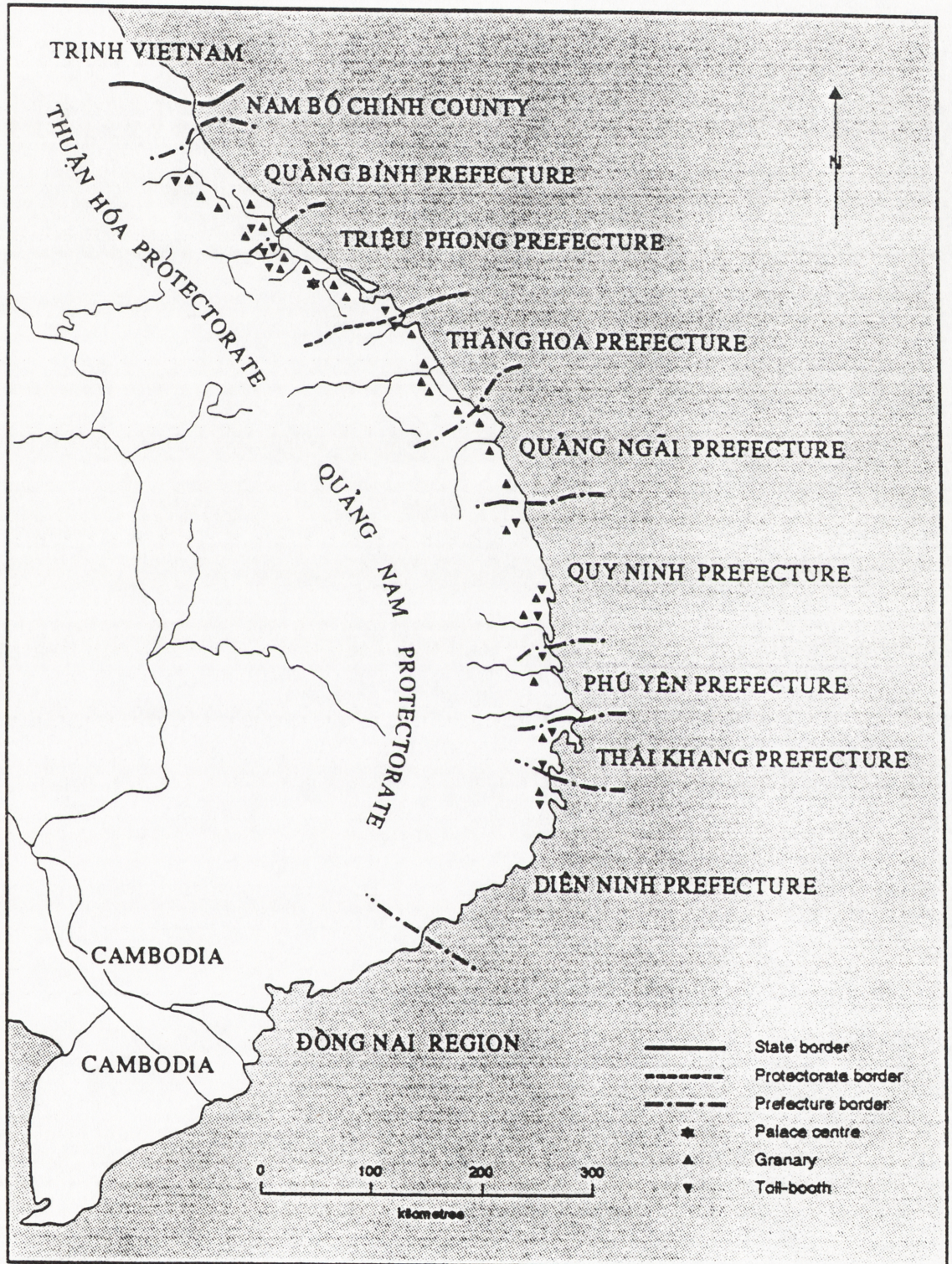
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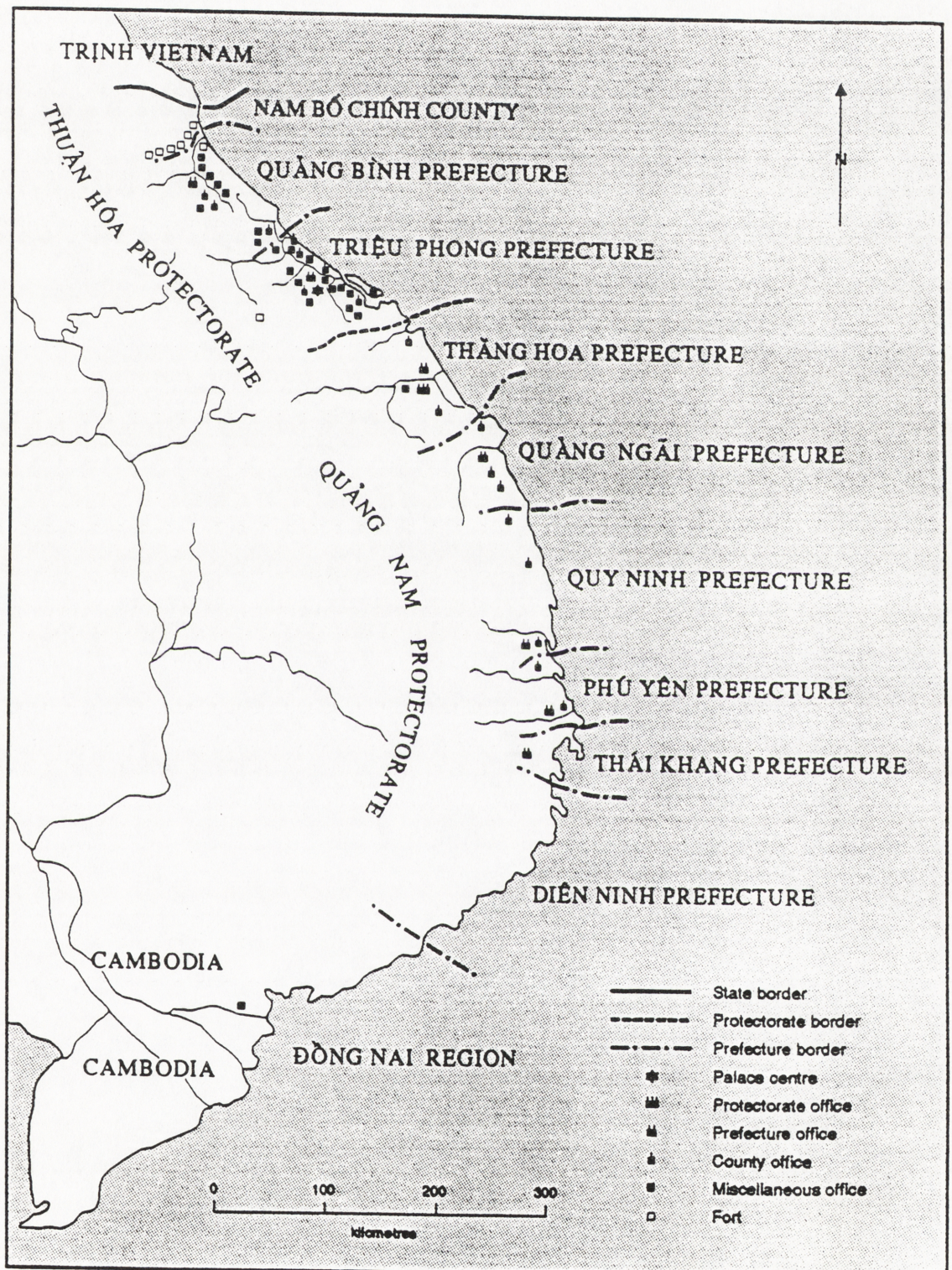


Map 1 - Southern Vietnam c.1690 - Granaries and Toll-booths



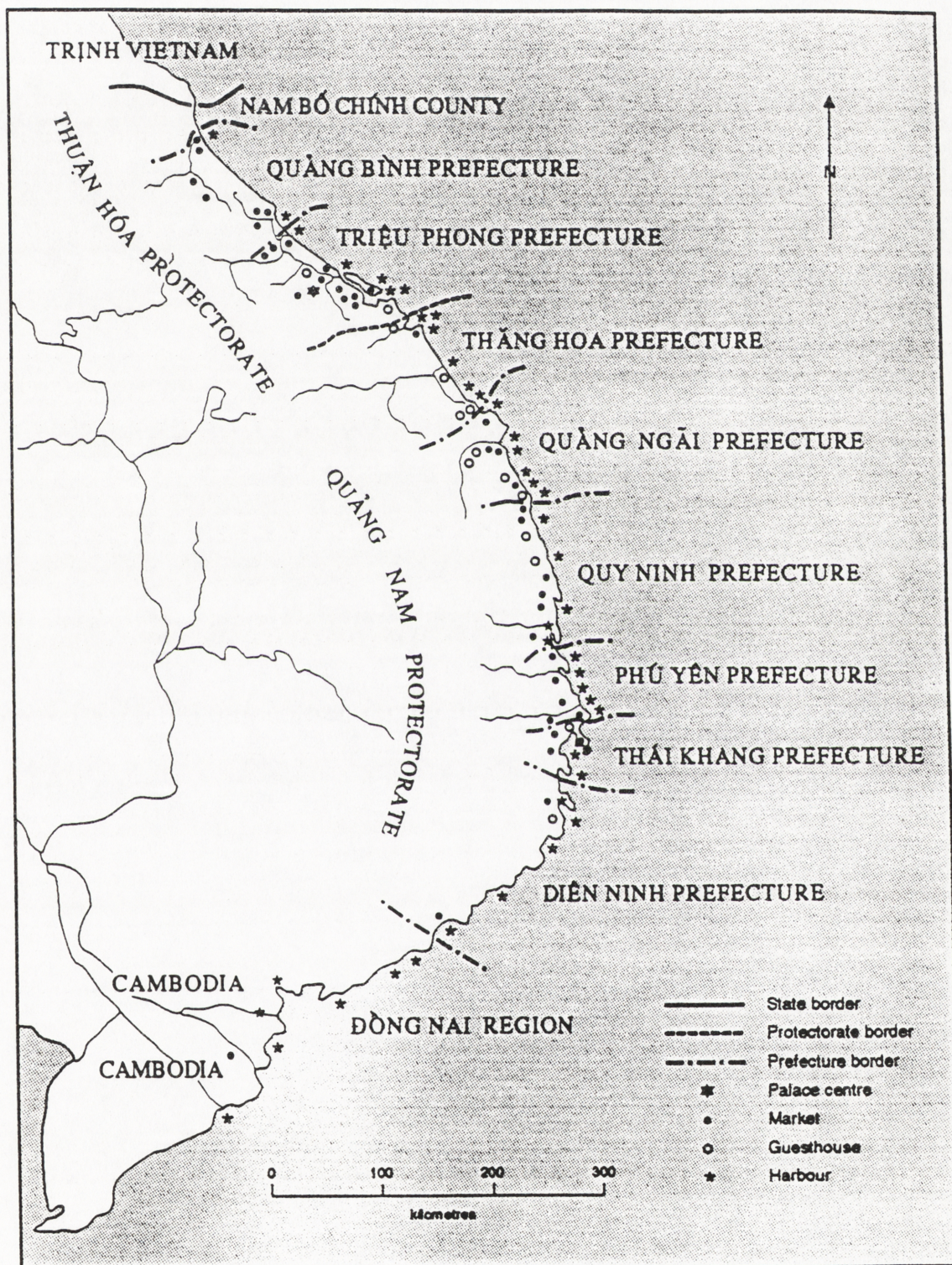


Map 2 - Southern Vietnam c.1690 - Offices and Forts





Map 3 - Southern Vietnam c.1690 - Markets, Guesthouses and Harbours





## INTRODUCTION

It is never easy to pinpoint exactly where, when and how a significant historical chance takes place. But in the Vietnamese case, we can point to a year and an event which brought Vietnam almost half of its present area through a family decision to leave the capital.

When Trinh Kiem usurped the power of the Le dynasty in 1546, the formerly allied Trinh and Nguyen families were set to become enemies. Nguyen Hoang, foreseeing the trouble to come, is said to have asked Nguyen Binh Khiem, a famous seer and scholar, what to do. Nguyen Binh Khiem pondered for a long time and replied: "Hoanh Son nhut dai, van dai dung than (The Hoanh Son mountain area would be suitable to live for thousands of generations)". Nguyen Hoang then asked his sister, the wife of Trinh Kiem, to persuade her husband to send him away as military commander of the distant frontier region of Thuan Hoa. Nguyen Hoang's gambit was successful. The year was 1558.

Trinh Kiem only wanted to get rid of an enemy. He failed, and gave Nguyen Hoang a kingdom instead. A chain of events happened which changed the whole of Vietnamese history in particular and Southeast Asian history in general.

The Nguyen were far weaker than the Trinh in almost every way. The north had a well established state system, which allowed the Trinh to control three or four times more land than the Nguyen, and to maintain ~~an~~ armed forces three or four times as large. What is more, the Trinh ruled the land occupied for many centuries by Vietnamese and governed its own people, while the Nguyen kingdom was established on the former lands of Champa, an Indianized kingdom which had a brilliant culture and a remarkably different tradition from that of the Vietnamese. Yet not only did the Nguyen survive, and defeat seven campaigns by the Trinh, but they also pushed their borders deeper south, as far as the Mekong delta. Was it by chance that forces in a new environment survived, and even won victories, while those that remained in familiar surroundings lost?

I became interested in the phenomenon of new political forces rising in the southern direction and successfully challenging the political centre in the north. This did not begin or end in the late 16th century. If we mark the important events that took place from the beginning of the 15th century to 1802 on the Vietnamese historical map, we will find that the location of each event moves progressively southward. Le Loi rose in Thanh Hoa, south of the Red River delta,

in the early 15th century; Nguyen Kim's uprising against the Mac, in the Thanh Hoa and Nghe An area, occurred in 1533; Nguyen Hoang began to set up his power base in Quang Tri in 1558; the Tay Son rose in Quy Nhon in 1771; and Nguyen Anh established his base in the Gia Dinh area in the 1780s.<sup>1</sup> All these events were part of the larger process of **Nam Tien**, the Vietnamese southward expansion.

This gradual move expansion to the south kept creating a frontier where Confucian scholarship, even though became the dominant ideology in the north from Le Thanh Ton's reign, was basically unknown and not appreciated. This seems to suggest a promising periphery where new political forces could develop themselves. The Nguyen which we are going to explore in this thesis provided such a context for Vietnamese history.

From the 17th century, the Red River delta ceased to be the only center of Vietnamese civilisation; a completely new picture unfolded. Another center - Hue - appeared in addition to Thang Long; another economic area, Thuan-Quang, emerged in addition to the Red River delta. They formed no simple extension of the old economic area. Rather, we see a new region developing, with a different cultural background and people functioning in quite different circumstances. As the southern Vietnamese recognised in the new names they gave these two regions - the "inner region" (**Dang Trong**) to their own, and the "outer region" (**Dang Ngoai**)<sup>2</sup> to the north - clear differences now existed that amounted to two different ways of being Vietnamese. The difference between the two terms indicated clearly that while the two regions were distinct, for southerners they were also equal.

This was a dramatic and fundamental change in Vietnamese history, its significance comparable to Vietnam's securing its independence from China in the 10th century. At first sight, it may seem merely the story of the political survival and flourishing of a family which had lost power at court in Thang Long; in its nature, however, it involved the flourishing of a new state system and a new

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<sup>1</sup> Ta Chi Dai Truong discusses this in his Lich Su Noi Chien o Viet Nam, Van Su Hoc, Saigon, 1973, p.38.

<sup>2</sup> The two terms appeared in Alexandro de Rhodes's Dictionarium Annnamiticvm, Lvsitanvm, et Latinvmope, Typis, & Sumptibus eiusdem Sacr.Congreg, Rome, 1651, p.201. These terms were likely coined by the southerners in the 1620s.

culture.<sup>3</sup>

Though these changes in two centuries no doubt played a constructive role in Vietnamese culture, they did create disruptions within communal solidarity which were unacceptable to the 19th century Vietnamese literati who wrote the official history of those two centuries. As David Marr has pointed out, Vietnamese:

historians often are asked to balance the elements of continuity in their story against the elements of change, to delineate the persistence of traditional symbols and attitudes from the apparent acceptance or development of new concepts and values among the people being studied.<sup>4</sup>

The unorthodox, or non-Confucian elements of **Dang Trong** society, such as slavery, or contacts - even marriage alliances - between the Nguyen and the Cham, the Japanese, and the Khmer, all paid the historiographical price for achieving such balance in the 19th century, perhaps just as had occurred with non-Confucian elements in the official history written in the 15th century.<sup>5</sup>

The Nguyen regime has not fared much better in the hands of modern Vietnamese scholars either. The reason for this is obvious: national unity and resistance to aggression have been two themes central to the modern Vietnamese experience, but unfortunately the Nguyen experiment contradicted them both. First, the Nguyen regime destroyed national unity for two hundred years, and second, Nguyen Anh defeated the "heroic" Tay Son movement with the help of "Western colonialists".

Possibly because of this, there has been a tendency among official Hanoi historians to downgrade the history of **Dang Trong**. The Nguyen kingdom is usually represented merely as a local variant of the Confucianised Le regime and culture, without any great differences from **Dang Ngoai**.<sup>6</sup> Only one "Dai Viet" in the 17th and 18th centuries, with general "Vietnamese characteristics", tends to

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<sup>3</sup> From 1600, Nguyen Hoang had decided to go it alone, without reference to the court; his descendants pursued this vision with remarkable consistency.

<sup>4</sup> David Marr, Vietnamese Anticolonialism, 1885-1925, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, London, 1971, p.4.

<sup>5</sup> As a MS kept in the Han-Nom Institute of Hanoi says: "In the second year of Ming Mang (1820) the emperor ordered the **Quoc Su Quan** (Historical Board of the Kingdom) to compile the history of the kingdom, with all the styles, the ways of expression and the facts to be weighed and adjusted before it is recorded". See Han Cac Tap Luc, p.18. Surely many records were rejected in this process of weighing and adjusting.

<sup>6</sup> For a Confucian image of the Trinh in the north, see Keith Taylor, "The literati revival in seventeenth-century Vietnam", Journal of Southeast Asian Studies, no.1, vol.XVIII, 1987.

be discussed.<sup>7</sup> However, this thesis argues quite the opposite: not only did two Dai Viets exist at the time, but the southern one possessed special and distinctive characteristics which greatly enriched Vietnamese culture in the long-term. In this thesis, therefore, I have tended to focus on change rather than continuity, and on differences rather than similarities, in order to bring out **Dang Trong's** significance to Vietnamese history.

Numerous Vietnamese scholars have traced the political history of the two centuries of Vietnamese division, whether in French or Vietnamese.<sup>8</sup> Some Western historians have also sketched the political history of Vietnam during these years.<sup>9</sup> There is no need to replicate here what they have already done. Instead, and following my own interests, I have decided to focus much more closely on certain economic, social and cultural features of **Dang Trong** society that I believe sustained its long political success against all the odds.

One further point should be mentioned. For too long this region has only been known by its European name of Cochinchina. Later French usage has caused some confusion about this. As Arousseau and Lamb point out, Cochinchina referred to the central part of today's Vietnam before the middle of the 19th century, then to the south after it.<sup>10</sup> The first time that we find the name Cochinchina being used is probably by Tome Pires in 1515. The kingdom he referred to as **Cauchy** or **Cauchy Chyna** was simply Vietnam.<sup>11</sup> While Arousseau

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<sup>7</sup> This attitude can be found among foreign scholars as well. See, for instance, Insun Yu's Law and Society in Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century Vietnam, Asiatic Research Center, Korea University, Seoul, 1990.

<sup>8</sup> For example, Le Thanh Khoi's Le Viet Nam, Les Editions de Minuit, Paris, 1955, and Histoire du Vietnam des origines a 1858, Sudestasia, Paris, 1981; Phan Khoang, Viet su Xu Dang Trong, Khai Tri, Saigon, 1969; and Ta Chi Dai Truong in Lich su noi chien o Viet Nam, Van Su Hoc, Saigon, 1973.

<sup>9</sup> Joseph Buttinger, The Smaller Dragon, Praeger, New York, 1958; Jean Chesneaux, Contribution a l'histoire de la nation vietnamienne, Editions Sociales, Paris, 1954. Keith Taylor's "Nguyen Hoang and the beginning of Viet Nam's southward expansion" is the most recent important contribution to the understanding of the Nguyen history. In Southeast Asia in the Early Modern Era, ed. Anthony Reid, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, forthcoming.

<sup>10</sup> L. Arousseau, " Sur le nom de 'Cochinchine' ", BEFEO vol. 24, 1924, pp.563-556; A. Lamb, The Mandarin Road to Old Hue, Chatto & Windus, London, (1970) p.12. Lamb identifies Cachao, a Portuguese geographical term, with Hanoi. He guesses that Chiao Zhi was the basis of Cachao. However, it is more likely Cacciam (or **Ko Chiem** in Vietnamese), where the governor of Quang Nam lived at the time, today's Thanh Chiem village. See Pham Dinh Khiem, "Di tim dia diem va di tich hai thanh co Quang Nam va Phu Yen dau the ky 17" (In search for the two old cities of Quang Nam and Phu Yen in early 17th century), Viet Nam Khao Co Tap San, Bo Quoc Gia Giao Duc, Saigon, 1960, vol.1, p.83. Manguin argues that Cachao was in Quang nam in his Les Portugais sur les cotes du Viet-Nam et du Campa, p.185.

<sup>11</sup> The Suma Oriental of Tome Pires, The Hakluyt Society, Lessing-Druckerei-Wiesbaden, 1967, p.114: "The kingdom is between Champa and China."

suggests that the Portuguese obtained the word from the Malay word **Kuchi**, some others suggest that the word **Cochin** might have come from Japanese pronunciation for the same Chinese word, **Chiao Zhi**. Nevertheless, since the Japanese did not begin substantial trade with Cochinchina until the late 16th century, Arousseau's point might still stand.

This thesis uses **Dang Trong** or Cochinchina interchangeably, since both refer to the same region in the 17th and 18th centuries. What interests me is not the best name of the area so much as the fact that it has always pointed to a "new land" in Vietnamese history.<sup>12</sup> It is on this new land that this study focuses exclusively.

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<sup>12</sup> This is similar to the term "south" in Vietnamese history. The term "south" in Vietnam has changed along with the Vietnamese southward movement. Thuan Hoa, which is in today's central Vietnam, was first regarded as 'south' when the **nam tien** began, because it was south of the former southern border of the Dai Viet. Dai Nam Thuc Luc Tien Bien (hereafter Tien Bien) 1559: "Flood in Thanh Hoa and Nghe An, many people there fled to the south." The 'south' here is referring to the Thuan Hoa and Quang Nam areas. The term 'center' seems not to have appeared until the 19th century. It followed Minh Mang's administrative reorganisation of 1831 that created Trung-Ky, though Gia Long had informally created a "centre" by setting up the Bac Thanh and Gia Dinh Thanh administrations.

## CHAPTER 1 THE NEW LAND

### The physical setting

For much of its history, this new land was inhabited by Chams. Champa, essentially a long, narrow strip of territory, situated between the mountains and the sea, had two distinguishing characteristics. First, the Truong Son mountains (or the Annam Chain) with their rich forest cover, ran the whole length of the country, gradually declining in height from north to south. Second, the mountains were divided horizontally by several fast moving rivers and numerous spurs of the Chain. The land formed a number of narrow basins, with little geographical continuity. Physically the whole kingdom appears to have consisted of a number of isolated settlements, as is suggested by the grouping of ancient monuments in different valleys without any connecting link between one another. Zhu Fan Zhi, a Chinese traveller's book of the 13th century, supports this. In volume one it describes Champa as having 11 vassal states, which would be best understood as separate settlements. It is amazing that the Nguyen ever managed to establish a unified state for several centuries, in "the world's least coherent territory", as Gourou later put it.<sup>1</sup>

In fact, districts of Champa mentioned in the Cham inscriptions appear to be the main natural divisions of the country. They were Amravati, Vijaya, and Panduranga.

The first two contained relatively large areas suitable for cultivation. Amravati,<sup>2</sup> present day Quang Nam, features a rich plain of almost 1,800 sq.km, watered by the Song Thu Bon (the 'Great River' in Cham inscriptions) and its several tributaries. Vijaya, in central Champa, corresponds to the bountiful Binh Dinh plain, with a total area of 1,550 sq.km. It is bounded by two distinct mountain ranges, with two valleys watered by the rivers Song Da Rang and Song Lai Giang. The third, Panduranga, represents the southern part of the country. It

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<sup>1</sup> Gourou, The Peasants of the Tongking Delta, Human Relations Area Files, New Haven, 1955, Vol.1, p.3.

<sup>2</sup> Ming Annuals translated this place as A-mu-la-bu, while Zhu Fan Zhi called it Wu-ma-ba.

consists of three valleys<sup>3</sup> which are easily accessible from one another. It was perhaps for this reason that it contained Kauthara (today's Nha Trang area), a different region, or even a state according to the Chinese books written from the 8th century to the 10th century.<sup>4</sup>

The Hai Van Pass in between Hue and Da Nang forms a climate frontier: to the north of it, the climate type is a mixture of tropical and subtropical, with a distinct winter lasting from 3 to 5 months. To the south, the climate has a typically intertropical character.<sup>5</sup> In contrast to the northern portion of Truong Son, which is narrow and rugged, the southern portion widens and forms a plateau area, known as Tay Nguyen, or the Central Highlands. It covers approximately 20,000 square miles, 100 miles wide and 200 miles in length. These uplands served as a place of refuge, where peoples defeated by militarily superior groups could flee and retain some autonomy. This happened first to the so-called **Moi** peoples, driven inland by the Cham; and then to many of the Cham who retreated there under pressure from the Vietnamese.

### The Nam Tien before the Nguyen Lords

Some Vietnamese historians have suggested that all of Vietnamese history before the 19th century can be summarised in two <sup>Phrases:</sup> **Bac cu** (resistance to the North, which means China here) and **Nam tien** (expansion to the South). If the **Bac cu** was aimed at insuring Vietnamese survival, then the **Nam tien** was necessary for their development.

The **Nam tien** was a long process. Less than fifty years after Vietnam gained its independence from China in 939 A.D., Le Hoan of the Early Le dynasty launched the first attack on his neighbour, Champa, in 982. He seized 100 Cham ladies of the royal harem and an Indian Bhiksu, and, in the progress, started the Vietnamese southward movement. It would take the Vietnamese seven centuries to swallow Champa, during which the Vietnamese and the Cham fought many

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<sup>3</sup> The 3 valleys are: Nha Trang, watered with the Song Cai; Phanrang, watered by the Song Dinh, running from the Lam Vien plateau to the sea; and the Phan Ri and Phan Thiet area, watered by the Song Luy and Song Cai.

<sup>4</sup> Zhu Fan Zhi as Bin Tung Long, Ling Wai Dai Da Vol.2 as Bin Tua Ling, Song Shi Vol. 489 (history of Song dynasty) as Mountain Bin Tou Lang, Xin Tang Shu (new version of the history of Tang dynasty) Vol. 43 as Ben Tuo Lang.

<sup>5</sup> Vietnam - Geographical Data, Hanoi, 1979, p.34.



battles.<sup>6</sup> A few land-mark events deserve attention here.

In 992, Le Hoan sent 30,000 men to build a road from today's Cua Sot (in Thach Ha county, Ha Tinh province) to the Dia Ly prefecture of Champa (today's Quang Binh province). This was the first official land route opened between Vietnam and Champa. Over time this Vietnamese road enabled generations of Vietnamese to move south, away from the densely populated north. From then on the direction of Vietnamese expansion was clear. Not coincidentally, nine years later, the Cham abandoned their newly vulnerable capital, Indrapura (in Tra Kieu of today's Duy Xuyen county, Quang Nam province).

Next, in 1069, Champa was defeated by the Vietnamese and forced to give up three prefectures (today's Quang Binh and part of Quang Tri). Six years later, in 1075, Ly Nhon Ton, the 4th king of the Ly dynasty, instructed Vietnamese to migrate to the newly occupied land.

Then in 1306, Tran Nhon Ton sent his daughter Huyen Chan, to marry the king of Champa, Che Man. The two prefectures given in bride-price enabled the Tran dynasty to expand its power into today's Thua Thien province.

Finally, Le Thanh Ton attacked Champa in force in 1471, capturing and holding the capital, Vijaya.

Not only do these events help pinpoint the different stages of the Vietnamese southward movement over a period of five centuries, but they also represent the different means by which the *Nam tien* was carried out: communication, migration, marriage alliance and war. All of these strategies were adopted later by the Nguyen lords as well.

The south has always beckoned to Vietnamese. Countless folksongs described the mixed feeling of eagerness and of fear concerning going to the new land.

Lam trai cho dang nen trai,  
Phu Xuan cung trai,  
Dong Nai cung tung.  
(To act like a man, you have to be a man,

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<sup>6</sup> The territory of Dai Viet was invaded by the Cham several times in this period, such as: in 1076 when Cham and Khmer forces joined in a coalition with the Chinese to attack Vietnamese; in 1371 and 1378 when the Cham king, called Che Bong Nga by the Vietnamese, or A-ta-a-zhe by the Chinese, led a Cham army to invade Thang Long and burn the city. The Cham threat was so bad for the king of Dai Viet that in 1381 he moved the statues around his ancestors' tombs from Thang Long to today's Hai Duong province. However, the death of Che Bong Nga in 1390 ended the heyday of the Cham.

You should see Phu Xuan, you should be in Dong Nai.)

The south also had an enormous potential for development:

Ruong dong mac suc chim bay

Bien, ho lai lang ca bay dua boi.

(Birds fly to their hearts' content across the fields,

Fish race in droves in the immense sea and lakes.)

In practical terms, too, it was also the only place to which Vietnam could hope to expand, as the famous 18th century mandarin Nguyen Cu Trinh explained: "There is no way to go to the west, and it is too hard to cross to the north, therefore we should do our best to advance to the south."<sup>7</sup>

This expansion to the south became the real motive force of Vietnamese history. Although several significant events occurred in the north, and there were important institutional changes over time, none matched the push south for long term importance. For hundreds of years, only a few important events happened in Thang Long, once the political center and social model for all Vietnam. The power struggles, wars, famines, and even the glorious victory that Nguyen Hue won over the Qing, were nothing new. As the Tay Son commented, Thang Long had "run out of the energy of a king".<sup>8</sup> Thang Long (Ha Noi) was a historical setting, a great work finished in ancient times. It was in the south that there existed an arena for new trends and new heroes.

Not that Vietnam was unique in this. Its frontier was not the only one that kept moving in mainland Southeast Asia during these centuries. The Burmans moved from the north to the south, then the Thai advanced from east to west. We might say the whole area was on the move. As H. Benda comments: "The phenomenal flow of peasants into the delta lands of mainland Southeast Asia constitutes one of the most important periods of the social and economic history of modern Burma, Vietnam and Thailand".<sup>9</sup> But it was not only peasants who migrated, as the next section shows.

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<sup>7</sup> Nguyen Cu Trinh, *Sai Vai* (A dialogue between a monk and a nun), quoted from Nguyen Dang Thuc, "Hai trao luu di dan Nam tien" (Two waves of the Vietnamese southward expansion), Viet Nam Khao Co Tap San, vol.6, 1970, p.170.

<sup>8</sup> "Tieu het vuong khi" in Vietnamese. This sentence appeared in a letter sent to Qian Long emperor by Nguyen Hue in August 1789. Quoted from Hoa Bang, Quang Trung Nguyen Hue, Anh Hung Dan Toc, Bon Phuong, Saigon, 1958, p.224.

<sup>9</sup> H. Benda, "The Structure of Southeast Asian History", Journal of Southeast Asian History, Vol.3. No.1, 1962, p.132.

## The pioneers

The far southern land began life as the place where the Later Le dynasty banished its criminals. Lich Trieu hien chuong loai chi says that from 1474 (three years after Vietnamese power reached Cape Varella), the Le government decided to send criminals to the former region of Champa. If the crime was lighter, one was sent to Thang Hoa (Thang Binh area of Quang Nam), or to Tu, Nghia area (Quang Ngai) for worse crimes, while Hoai Nhon (Quy Nhon, today's Binh Dinh) served as the furthest area for punishment.<sup>10</sup>

It was also traditionally a refuge for Vietnamese political refugees. After the Ming invaded Dai Viet in 1407, Tran Gian Dinh, the son of former king Tran Nghe Ton (r.1370-72), rose against the occupiers. During this time, his supporters moved actively between the area of Thanh Hoa and Hoa Chau (part of today's Quang Dien county, Thua Thien province). Hoa Chau was also the base for Tran Qui Khoach, king of the short-lived Later Tran (**Hau Tran**) dynasty (1407-1413). In fact, when Le Thanh Ton enumerated the crimes that the Chams had committed before he attacked Champa in 1471, one of them was harbouring Vietnamese criminals.<sup>11</sup>

Given this background, it was natural for Nguyen Binh Khiem to suggest that Nguyen Hoang go south. But he did not go alone. The Tien Bien records many mandarins and their families following Nguyen Hoang to the Thuan Hoa area in 1558. Many **huong khuc** and **nghia dung** (retainers of rich families, usually with arms) came too. No doubt many of them moved with the intention of seeking a brighter future in the new land, rather than avoiding something dangerous as was the case with Nguyen Hoang.

We should mention briefly that there was another elite group, besides the Nguyen family and their followers, who went to the south and settled there permanently. They were loyal subjects of the Le. One family history in Quang Nam relates that their ancestor was a high officer of Le Duy Tri, brother of Le Kinh Ton (1600-1619). When Le Kinh Ton was forced by the Trinh to hang himself in 1619, Le Duy Tri and his followers escaped to Dong Son county, Thanh Hoa. From

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<sup>10</sup> Lich Trieu Hien Chuong Loai Chi, Hinh Luat Chi, Nha in Bao Vinh, Saigon, 1957, p.531.

<sup>11</sup> Dai Viet Su Ky Toan Thu (hereafter Toan Thu), Vol.2, p.680.

there in 1623 they moved to Thanh Chau village, Dien Ban county, Quang Nam.<sup>12</sup> The Tien Bien, too, says that some high-ranking officials of the Le went to the south with Nguyen Hoang in 1558, as well as several families from the Nguyen home county in Thanh Hoa.<sup>13</sup>

As for those Vietnamese who came to the south earlier in response to Ly Nhon Ton's 12th century migration call, it is unfortunately hard to find any traces of them. Certain village names in Quang Binh and Quang Tri may hint at their history, however. According to Phan Khoang, some village names in today's Minh Linh area, written in the O Chau Can Luc as "xa Phan xa", in Nom actually meant **Nha Phan** (Phan families), while "xa Ngo xa" was actually **Nha Ngo** (Ngo families). If so, these names would suggest that the early migrants lived mainly by descent groups or clans.<sup>14</sup> Curiously, similar village names cannot be found in the northern part of the Minh Linh region, though the reasons are unclear. Cadiere argues that when the Vietnamese came down from the north in the 12th century they did not stop in the northern part of Bo Chinh, but went directly to Lam Binh (Le Thuy area in Quang Binh) because the land there was more fertile. Bo Chinh was not opened until the Le Thanh Ton reign, Cadiere adds.<sup>15</sup>

Although evidence of the **Nam Tien** in the 12th century is vague, its history after Le Thanh Ton's victory over the Chams in 1471 is much better recorded in some family histories in the Quang Nam and Quang Ngai areas. For instance, an inscription on a tablet of the Tran family in Cam Thanh village in the Hoi An area says:

In the Hong Duc period (1470-1497) our ancestor was recruited from Thanh Hoa to fight in the land of the Cham, together with his family. Because he performed well in battle, he was allowed to stay in the Quang Nam area. Discovering a big river which was close to the sea [most probably the Thu

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<sup>12</sup> Family history of a Le in Thanh Chau village, Thanh Chau Tong, Dien Ban county, Quang Nam province. Quoted from Nguyen Chi Trung "Buoc dau tim hieu ve qua trinh hinh thanh khoi cong dong cu dan Hoi An" (The first step in understanding the process of establishment of residential community of Hoi An), roneo, 1988, p.33.

<sup>13</sup> 19 of 22 1st rank officials of the Nguyen originally came from Tong Son county, in Thanh Hoa. They included: Nguyen Huu Dat, general of the Nguyen; Nguyen Cuu Kieu, general of the Nguyen; Truong Phuc Phan, general of the Nguyen, grand father of Truong Phuc Loan as well as half (5) of the Nguyen queens before 1802. Other top officials who also came from Thanh Hoa families included Nguyen Huu Tien, general of the Nguyen, from Ngoc Son county, Thanh Hoa province; Dao Duy Tu, high-rank official of the Nguyen, also came from Ngoc Son county, Thanh Hoa province. See Liet Truyen Tien Bien.

<sup>14</sup> Phan Khoang, Viet Su Xu Dang Trong, p.54.

<sup>15</sup> Cadiere, L., "Geographie historique du Quang-Binh d'apres les annales imperiales", BEFEO, vol.2, 1902, p.66.

Bon river], he gathered people to come and set up the village here. This tablet was set up on January 10, 1498.<sup>16</sup>

This inscription shows that some Vietnamese soldiers stayed in the newly-occupied land when the war was over, although we cannot guess their numbers since the sources do not agree on the size of the army.<sup>17</sup>

Meanwhile, some peasants in the north did not miss their chance to get a piece of the new land following military victory. One family history in Cam Nam village in Hoi An, belonging to the Hoang family, says:

Our ancestor was a northerner. In the Hong Duc period, since our king captured the king of Champa, our ancestor took advantage of the favourable situation down here to establish himself.<sup>18</sup>

The sources mentioned above also indicate that although the Quang Nam area officially fell into the hands of the Vietnamese in 1402, they did not really control it before 1471.

Even though some Vietnamese moved from the north to the south between the 12th and the 15th centuries, they were only settled in scattered groups. The Chams never stopped trying to get their former lands back, nor did the Le dynasty officially seek to expand further. For Le Thanh Ton, the land that the Vietnamese seized in 1471 apparently was meant to be the last taken. When the war was over he ordered his men to inscribe on the Thach Bi mountain, near Cape Varella, a notice to say that this was the fixed land and final border between the Cham and the Vietnamese: "If the Chams pass it, their army is bound to be defeated and the kingdom extinguished; if Vietnamese pass it, their commanders and soldiers will die instantly."

The establishment of the Nguyen lords in 1558 marked a watershed in the Nam tien process. From then on the Nam tien became a substantial movement. From this point, Vietnamese moved like a river, flowing slowly but continuously across the Vietnamese-Cham border towards the south.

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<sup>16</sup> Nguyen Chi Trung, "Buoc dau", p.32.

<sup>17</sup> According to the Toan Thu, 700,000 soldiers went to fight the Chams. The Kham Dinh Viet Su Thong Giam Cuong Muc (Text and explanation forming the complete mirror of the history of Vietnam), however, says the army only had 167,800 soldiers before 1471. Although Le Thanh Ton recruited more troops to fight against the Chams (260,000, according to the Toan Thu), the whole army probably never numbered higher than 200,000. Most would have returned north afterwards. However, even 5,000 remaining behind would have had significant demographic and political consequences.

<sup>18</sup> Nguyen Chi Trung, "Buoc dau", p.33.

Because of the shortage of manpower, the Nguyen welcomed people who came from other places. Arrivals did not pay taxes in the first 3 years of residence; the land they developed by themselves was considered private land. Also, before 1669, the government's tax collection was crude, with many places never knowing what the tax was.<sup>19</sup> All of these factors certainly attracted people from the north.

Some aspects of the *Nam tien* need further detailed consideration. One is the role of Thanh Hoa and Nghe An: these two provinces were crucial to the history of the *Nam tien*. First, they provided new settlers. During the disastrous periods of the late 16th century and mid-18th century, half of the famines in Vietnam occurred in these two areas. Because the areas were geographically proximate, they became the jumping off point for Vietnamese *Nam tien*.

Second, many individuals who played a major role in the history of the Nguyen period came from the Thanh Hoa and Nghe An areas. Both Dao Duy Tu, the mandarin who advocated setting up the two great walls in Quang Binh, and Nguyen Huu Tien, one of the two most famous generals of the earlier Nguyen lords period, came from Thanh Hoa. Among those who came from Nghe An were the ancestors of Nguyen Dang De, a famous mandarin in the Nguyen Phuc Dieu period (1691-1725), and Nguyen Cu Trinh, another famous mandarin in the Nguyen Phuc Khoat (1738-1765) period.<sup>20</sup> It is also well known that the ancestors of the Tay Son brothers came from Nghe An.

Another aspect deserving greater exploration is the role of family groups. The Vietnamese tradition of strong extended family ties played an important role in emigration southwards by encouraging settlers to come by descent groups or clans rather than as individuals or nuclear families. A tablet set up by a Le family in Cam Pho village of Hoi An says:

It is said that our ancestors came here shortly after the Gia Ngu emperor (Nguyen Hoang) opened up the Thuan, Quang area. They came from the north, yet we do not know which province precisely. They came with three other clans, the Hoang, the Tran and the Nguyen clans.<sup>21</sup>

This trend produced some village names by surname, as discussed above.

Few families came directly from the north to the deep south. A typical example

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<sup>19</sup> See Chapter 5.

<sup>20</sup> *Tien Bien*, p.251.

<sup>21</sup> Nguyen Chi Trung, "Buoc dau", p.35.

would be the family of Doan Huu Trung, (head of an 1866 rebellion) of Phu Vang county, Thua Thien province. According to his family history, his ancestors originally moved south from either Thanh Hoa or Nghe An during the Le dynasty. They first moved to Quang Binh and set up a village called Chuon, where they stayed for a "long time". Then they moved further south to Thua Thien. The village they set up here was called **Chuon Ngon** (the branch of Chuon), and the Chuon village in Quang Binh was renamed **Chuon Goc** (the root of Chuon).<sup>22</sup> We find many similar cases showing how the Vietnamese expanded gradually from the north to the south, then deeper south. Another example is the family of Pham Dang Hung, a high official of the Gia Long reign, as recorded in the Dai Nam Liet Truyen Chinh Bien. His ancestor brought the whole family from the north after Nguyen Hoang set up his power in Thuan Hoa. They first stayed in Vu Xuong county (in today's Quang Tri province), then moved further south to Huong Tra county (in Thua Thien). His great grandfather then moved the family further south to Quang Ngai, after which his grandfather moved them even further to Gia Dinh.<sup>23</sup>

The south was always contained dreams of a better life, a permanent outlet for Vietnamese. By comparing the Dai Nam Liet Truyen Tien Bien (Collection of the primary compilation of biographies of the **Chua Nguyen** period) and the Dai Nam Chinh Bien Liet Truyen So Tap (First collection of the primary compilation of biographies of the Nguyen dynasty), we can see that the core members of the Nguyen lords government were mainly from Thanh Hoa, whereas the core members of the Nguyen Anh government were the people whose families moved from the central part to the south. Even the royal Le, one family who may not have shared the dream, found themselves involuntarily part of the **Nam tien**. In 1833, after the Le Duy Luong revolt, Minh Mang ordered their removal from Thanh Hoa to Quang Nam, Quang Ngai and Binh Dinh, to a lonely exile in which they were forbidden ever to communicate with each other.<sup>24</sup> The Vietnamese linguist, Le Ngoc Tru, for example, is descended from this forced relocation.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Danh Nhan Binh Tri Thien, Vol. 1, Press of Thuan Hoa, Hue, 1986, pp.128-129.

<sup>23</sup> Dai Nam Chinh Bien Liet Truyen So Tap, Vol.5,p.1071.

<sup>24</sup> See Nguyen Huyen Anh, Viet Nam Danh Nhan Tu Dien (Biographical dictionary of Vietnam), Khai Tri, 1967, p.123.

<sup>25</sup> "Family history of the scholar Le Ngoc Tru (1909-1979)", edited by a Vietnamese scholar, Da Lan (Nguyen Duc Du), who kindly gave me a copy in 1990.

## Population change in Vietnam from the 16th to 18th centuries

When discussing the population of Tongking, Gourou asked:

Does distant emigration assure an outlet to this swarming peasantry? The question is important and merits close examination, but in this realm again the scarcity of statistics prevents giving precise answers.<sup>26</sup>

Although scholars are agreed that the Vietnamese moved southward "vigorously" or "exclusively", they seem to hesitate about judging how significant immigration was as a factor in the overall growth rate of the southern population. When discussing the growth rate of the population of Cochinchina from 1901 to 1936, Smolski claimed that immigration accounted for only 1.2% of the total growth of the population.<sup>27</sup> Gourou said that in the 1920s there was

an over-all population reduction [from the Red River delta moving to the south] of 15,000 persons per year, when the excess of births over deaths is at least 65,000 and very probably holds at a figure approximating 100,000.<sup>28</sup>

Even so, one fifth to one ninth of the excess of births over deaths immigrating to another place would mean a lot, for the old, densely populated Tongking, and especially for the newly opened, thinly populated Cochinchina. In 1417 the population in the Thuan Hoa area was recorded as only 2.3% of the total population of Dai Viet. According to the Ngan Nam Tche Yuan (Records on Annam), there were only 3,602 families and 10,400 Vietnamese living in the Thuan Hoa area in that year. Yet in 1847 the dinh bo gave a total of 1,024,388 taxpayers in the country. When divided these figures into two groups according to former Dang Trong and former Dang Ngoai they were:

<b>Dang Trong</b> (Quang Binh to its south)	444,992
<b>Dang Ngoai</b> (Ha Tinh to its north)	579,396 <sup>29</sup>

This shows that by the first half of the 19th century about 55% of the total population lived in the older Vietnamese land, and 45% lived in the newly occupied land. We can see how close these two figures are to each other. In a few hundred years the Vietnamese had produced another Vietnam, both in terms of territory and manpower.

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<sup>26</sup> Gourou, The Peasants, Vol.1, p.256.

<sup>27</sup> See Ng Shui Meng, The Population of Indochina, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore, Field Report Series No. 7, 1974, p.30.

<sup>28</sup> Gourou, The Peasants, Vol.1, p.265.

<sup>29</sup> Nguyen The Anh, "Quelques aspects économiques et sociaux du problème du riz au Viet Nam dans la première moitié du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle", BESI, XLII, 1+2 1967, p.16.



Probably because the demographic sources of this period are so few and unreliable, no one has attempted a detailed study. I, too, would prefer not to take the risk. However, available sources suggest that, although hard figures are few, there are numerous statements that provide a basis for comparison with the few figures that I believe to be reliable. Because the issue is so historically significant, I will hazard a longer examination.

One common explanation for Vietnamese expansion southward is population pressure on limited agriculture land. But the immediate causes which drove large numbers of people to the south were famine and war. Ironically, big waves of emigration only happened when the population was decreasing, or in danger of decreasing.

Two disastrous periods between the 16th and 18th centuries were mainly responsible for the increase in the number of refugees. The first happened in the second half of the 16th century. From 1559 on, the years 1561, 1570, 1571, 1572, 1586, 1588, 1589, 1592, 1594, 1595, 1596, 1597 and 1608 saw refugees being mentioned over and over in the Toan Thu in a striking way. Here is one example in 1572:

Nghe An harvested nothing this year, what is more, pestilence broke out. Half of the people died. People fled either to the south, or to the northeast.<sup>30</sup>

This in 1594:

The harvest in several counties around Hai Duong area is very poor, people are so hungry that they eat others. A third of the population has died of starvation.<sup>31</sup>

This was perhaps the longest period of disaster in Vietnamese history, with civil war raging for several decades and 14 disaster years out of 49 years for agriculture. Never before in Vietnamese history had there been so many refugees mentioned repeatedly in such a short time. In fact, refugees had never been a problem in Vietnamese history prior to this period.

The Vietnamese population at this time must have been at a low point. In addition to those who died from starvation and pestilence, the war between the Le and the Mac took a heavy toll. There were more than 40 major battles between 1539 and 1600, with the area from Thang Long to Thanh Hoa often the scene of these confrontations. A Vietnamese scholar estimates that "several hundred thousand

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<sup>30</sup> Toan Thu, Vol. 3, p.867.

<sup>31</sup> Toan Thu, Vol.3, p.902.

young men died" in the period.<sup>32</sup> Some extracts from the Toan Thu illustrate his words:

[in 1555] The bodies of the soldiers of the Mac stuffed the Lai river [in Thanh Hoa], so the water turned red. The Mac sent several tens of thousands of soldiers to this battle and almost all of them died.

[in 1581] The heads of more than 600 Mac soldiers were chopped-off in this battle.

[in 1589] The heads of more than 1,000 Mac soldiers were chopped off.

[at the end of 1591, in the battle where the Le recaptured Thang Long] The heads of more than 10,000 Mac soldiers were chopped off. Residents rushed out of the city, because all strived to be the first to get on board junks[to cross the river], so that many junks sank, and about one thousand people drowned.

[in the beginning of 1592, still in the battle of recapturing Thang Long] The heads of several thousands Mac soldiers were chopped off.

(in February 1593) decapitated several thousand.

(in May 1593) decapitated 10,000.

(in 1595) decapitated 600.

(in 1596) decapitated 2,298.

Even allowing for some exaggeration on the part of the victors, it seems likely that the Vietnamese population decreased during this period, when numerous natural disasters coinciding with the persistence of war.

In contrast to the miserable situation in the north, the Thuan Hoa area was relatively peaceful. Although the Mac tried to attack Thuan Hoa in 1571, Nguyen Hoang defeated them successfully. Both the Toan Thu and the Tien Bien say that the area "had no thieves and people did not close their doors at night, while many foreign ships came to trade here".<sup>33</sup> It was naturally a haven for refugees coming from the north. The Tien Bien mentions that twice refugees flooded into the Thuan Hoa area, in 1559 and 1608. The Toan Thu often records people fleeing from their homes during this period, "either going to the south, or toward the northeast." Both of these areas were less populated.

The late 16th century saw the first big wave of Vietnamese migration. As a historical event, it was similar to the Chinese larger scale emigration from the north to the Yangtze River delta in the Tong Jin dynasty (4 century A.D.). Before this period the number of people migrating to the south had been rather sporadic; but now

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<sup>32</sup> Truong Huu Quynh, Che Do Ruong Dat o Viet Nam (The land system in Vietnam), Nha Xuat Ban Khoa Hoc Xa Hoi, Hanoi, 1983, Vol. 2, p.16.

<sup>33</sup> Toan Thu, Vol.3,p.868. Tien Bien, Vol.1, p.23.

their motives were much stronger and their aims more definite. If Thuan Hoa had seemed an insecure, uncertain area in some respects before, the establishment of the Nguyen government now reconfirmed the right of Vietnamese to be there, and hence greatly encouraged migration.

The 1730s and 1740s marked the second wave of migration. The Kham Dinh Viet Su Thong Giam Cuong Muc (hereafter Cuong Muc) reports that in 1730 the inhabitants of 527 villages in the north fled their homes to live in an unspecified new location. However, the trend had appeared long before this. There was a big famine in 1681,<sup>34</sup> and three years of bad harvests in Thanh Hoa in the first five years of the 18th century. Famines followed in 1712, 1713, 1721 in other regions of the north. In 1726 and 1728, the Trinh state had to take 200,000 quan from the treasury to relieve the misery of people in Thanh Hoa and Nghe An. Matters were further complicated by another flood in the Red River delta in 1729, and widespread pestilence in 1736.

The 1740s brought even worse conditions. In a report to the government in the mid-18th century, Ngo Thi Si, a famous scholar, said that

there used to be 9668 villages in the Red river delta, among them 1070 villages were gone, which was about the number of villages in 1 tran [area, there were 4 tran in the Red River delta at the time]. In Thanh Hoa there used to be 1392 villages, but 297 of them were gone. In Nghe An there used to be 706 villages but 115 of them were gone.<sup>35</sup>

It seems likely that at least 15% of the villages disappeared. The main reason why people fled in this case was to escape anti-Trinh rebellions. The Cuong Muc says that the situation was better in Vu Tien, Thu Tri, Kien Xuong and Chan Dinh counties (in today's Thai Binh province). Yet, according to the history of a Le family branch, because of the fighting, even in so-called "better places" like the above-mentioned counties, "hundreds of families fled, one dau (23 litres) of rice cost several hundred dong (cash), there were only 6-7 people left in one village, [and] some villages had only 4-5 people left."<sup>36</sup>

The problem of Vietnamese refugees was also mentioned several times between 1738 and 1743 in the Qing Shi Lu (Annals of the Qing Dynasty). According to this source, at first some Chinese bought Vietnamese (as slaves?) in the year 1738.

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<sup>34</sup> See Japanese source Kai-hentai for some accounts on this famine. Kai-hentai, comp. Hayashi Shunsai, Toyo Bunko, 1958-59, Vol.9, pp.342-344, 417-418.

<sup>35</sup> Ngo Gia Van Phai, a MS kept in the Han-Nom Institute, Hanoi, Vol.5.

<sup>36</sup> Quoted from Truong Huu Quynh, Che Do Ruong Dat o Vietnam, vol.2, p.129.

Then the Annals discussed repeatedly the problem of Vietnamese refugees who crossed the Sino-Vietnamese border to China in June and August 1742, then February and April 1743, together with the problem of Chinese buying Vietnamese youths. One report even claimed that "since the war [the rebellions in the north], 9 out of 10 houses are empty in Annam."<sup>37</sup>

A report of a canton in Nghe An province called Vo Liet Xa, written in 1780, gives a detailed description of the tendency of people to flee. It says that the government of the Le tried to register the taxpayers in 1722 so strictly that people in the canton, both rich and poor, fled away. As a result the old and weak people who remained in the canton had to be added to the list; the number of the soldiers that the canton had to provide remained the same, which brought a heavier burden to the canton and caused more to flee. In 1740, the canton was ordered to provide 53 soldiers, of which 36 had to be sent back because they were not up to standard. Families were detained and beaten by the officers so that the father would come back and the son be drafted; if the elder brother returned, the younger one went in his stead. Yet the village still could not meet the demands of the government. Many who were drafted into the army escaped as soon as they were registered. In one case more than 20 clans in the canton fled. In 1774, when the northern army went south, another 20 men from the canton had to go with it. Those 20 did not come back when the army returned to the north. Between 1776 and 1779 every harvest failed, while another pestilence broke out as well, allegedly leaving less than half of the people in the canton alive.<sup>38</sup>

Let us turn now to the size of a typical Vietnamese village. In 1931 Gourou considered Tongking villages typically ranging from 500 to 2,100. The most densely populated 97 villages in Ha Dong and Ha Nam Ninh held 4,000 to over 5,000 inhabitants in each village.<sup>39</sup> Villages in Thanh Hoa and Nghe An were not as large as the latter, so I have assumed their size to be between 500 to 2,000 inhabitants. The report of Vo Liet village, discussed above, attests to this calculation, stating that the village was supposed to provide 87 men to the army. According to the rule of the Le, in the Thanh Hoa and Nghe An areas one out of every five *dinh* had to go into the army. We should also remember that in a traditional Vietnamese

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<sup>37</sup> Momoki Jiro, Dai shin Jitsuraku chutonana kiji (Ta Qing Shi Lu zhong Dong Nan Ya Guan Xi Ji Shi), Tonan ajia shigaku-kai kansai reikai, Tokyo, 1984, Vol.1, p.63.

<sup>38</sup> A MS in the Han-Nom Institute, with a title 'Than Ba', shelf number VHv 2493, Hanoi.

<sup>39</sup> Gourou, Vol.1, p.162.

village, the former heads of the village, former mandarins and people who had passed the civil exams were exempt from military service. There were 44 people in these categories in Vo Liet village. A village which sent 87 men, then, probably had about 440 dinh (taxpayers) or more. For a village which had about 500 men in it, the total inhabitants would number around 2,000, or more, if we remember that the number of men in a village were usually more than the registered number, and women and children were not counted.

It is striking to learn that 15% of such villages were abandoned between the 1730s and 1750s. The Cuong Muc says:

From the years of Vinh Huu(1735-1739), the whole area was in chaos, especially in Hai Duong where people planted nothing and all the stored rice had been eaten. Conditions in the Son Nam area were slightly better, and thus the roads were congested with starving people trying to go there. The price of rice was so high that 100 cash was not enough to buy one meal. People had to eat wild herbs, snakes, or even rats. The land was strewn with bodies of those who had starved to death. Only 1 out of 10 people survived this famine. Although Hai Duong used to be the most densely populated area, now in some villages only 3 to 5 families were left.<sup>40</sup>

The Toan Thu entry for 1754 said that the government had to waive all taxes between 1742 and 1754<sup>41</sup> because a large number of people had either died or fled. The government could not collect taxes from anywhere, even if they wanted to do so. Besides proving how bad the situation was during those 13 years, the declaration shows the intention of the government to collect taxes from 1754 on. I doubt if this was successful, because according to the Cuong Muc, in the same year there was a famine in the Cao Bang area, with the government having to provide money for relief. Then there was a big drought in the Red River delta in 1756. And according to the Toan Thu, in 1757 there was another big famine and epidemic in 11 counties of Son Tay, where "the people who survived numbered only 1 or 2 out of 10".<sup>42</sup>

The records discussed above provide some basis for a discussion of population change in Vietnam from the 16th century.

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<sup>40</sup> Cuong Muc, Vol.7, p.3523.

<sup>41</sup> Toan Thu, Vol.3,p.1140; see also Cuong Muc, Vol.8, p.3675.

<sup>42</sup> Toan Thu, Vol.3, p.1145.

## A hypothesis

Table 1 Vietnamese population figures in the north (from 757 A.D.)

Year	taxpayers	sources
757	78,350	<u>Tong Dian</u>
Dinh&T Le(10th century)	5,006,500	<u>Dia Du Chi</u>
Ly	3,300,100	"
Tran	7,004,300	"
Ho(1408)	5,200,000	<u>Ming Shi Lu</u>
Ming(1417)	450,288	<u>Ngan-nan tche yuan</u>
1430	700,940	<u>Dia Du Chi</u>
1539	1,750,000	<u>Ming Shi Lu</u>
1713	206,315	<u>Cuong Muc</u>
1733	311,670	<u>Dia Du Chi</u>

What can we say about those diverse figures? The fact that they stand alone, without any other sources to compare them to, already creates a problem almost impossible to solve, even without anomalies like five million taxpayers in the 10th century. If we multiply that by five, we get 25 million, or more than the census of 1972 for North Vietnam. After researching the Vietnamese population in the Red River delta extensively, Gourou said sadly: "It would be better to entitle this chapter, 'On the impossibility at present of writing the history of the settlement of the Tonking Delta'". When struggling with the question of the Vietnamese population in past centuries, I found that I had to fight against my own inclination, six decades later, to adopt Gourou's title and give up too.

Yet, is there another way, other than the so-called "census", from which we can establish a relatively firm basis to estimate the Vietnamese population in the past? By going over the sources, I found one characteristic of Vietnamese historical geography that might help. This is the importance of the village. Unlike China, in which the **hu** (household) and **kou** (register) were always emphasised, in Vietnam the **xa** (village) was always the important unit, probably reflecting the importance of the **xa** in Vietnamese heritage.<sup>43</sup> Is it merely a coincidence that we now have

<sup>43</sup> There was almost always a fight between the government and the **xa** whenever a census was taken by the government. See the description by the Vu Liet canton discussed above, and the Toan thu. Two officials tried to be tough on the issue in different periods: one was Nguyen Cong Khang, who tried to issue a restrictive registration rule in 1722, only to be attacked by officials in the government and to cause many people to flee from their villages. He was ordered to kill himself in 1733. The other was Le Quy Don in 1770, who again made "people gnash their teeth in hatred", as described in the Toan Thu. His enemies urged the government to sack him. So a compromise was worked out and the census that year was "slightly less than that of the years of the Bao Thai (1720-1728)". This again proved that the so-called "census" in the 18th century was but the results of many compromises between the Vietnamese villages and the government. It is interesting to see that whenever the government tried to tighten its control, people fled. Villages fought constantly to reduce their register numbers on the government list,

nothing but a few fancy figures about the population provided by Nguyen Trai in his Dia Du Chi, while almost every historical geography book gives the numbers of the villages in different periods ?

I have therefore attempted to review all the records which give numbers of villages that might be relevant to population changes.

First I found that the villages in early 15th century Vietnam were quite small. According to the Toan Thu, in 1433

the large **xa** with more than 100 residents had 3 chiefs; in the medium-sized **xa**, with more than 50 residents, there were 2 chiefs; and in the small **xa** with more than 10 residents, 1 chief.

"Resident" here means only men recorded on the government controlled registers, which could probably be more accurately understood as the **dinh** (taxpayers) of each household. It suggests that biggest villages at that time were about 100 households, or perhaps 500 people.

The Thien Nam Du Ha Tap, dated 1483, suggests a rapid population increase in villages during the previous 5 decades:

The office of **xa** chief shall be established according to the number of households in the **xa**. It is decreed that in a **xa** of more than 500 households there shall be 5 chiefs; those with more than 300 shall have 4 chiefs; those with more than 100 shall have 2 chiefs, and those not exceeding 60 families shall have one chief.<sup>44</sup>

The strengthening of government control over registration procedures may account for some of this; but, at the same time, the population increase is obvious.

The numbers of villages itself saw a rapid growth too. In 1490, when the Toan Thu gave 7,950 villages in the whole country, it also made the following statement about the division of villages into smaller units:

If a **xa** has more than 500 households, and that excess number of households reaches 100, then these 100 households can separate from the village to form a small **xa**. When they apply to do so, the officials should give them permission, to make our map look better.<sup>45</sup>

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which reminded me of the well-known Vietnamese proverb: "Phep vua thua le lang" (the law of the king loses out to village custom). Perhaps census procedure lost out because officials at the time knew they were far from the truth anyway, whereas the figures of villages were relatively accurate?

<sup>44</sup> Quoted from Sakurai, "The change in the name and number of villages in Medieval Vietnam", Vietnam Social Sciences, No.1+2, 1986, p.131.

<sup>45</sup> Toan Thu, Vol.2,p.736.

This indicates that population increased quickly enough in the villages for separation to become a general issue in the country; but the Le government took the division of villages seriously and would not let a village be formed with less than 100 households. It tends to confirm Gourou's 1930s observation that a village with 500-2000 residents (say 100-400 households) was the most common one in the north not only then but going back four centuries.<sup>46</sup> The rule of the Le might have established the basis for the size of Vietnamese villages in later centuries.<sup>47</sup>

My next step was to list the total numbers of villages from the 15th century to the early 19th century, to see if they increased or decreased. Here is the result.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> It is more than likely that this rule referred mainly to the Red River delta, the area where the population increased most quickly. The interesting point is that the most densely populous area today probably was not fully opened until the Le dynasty. Le Thanh Ton started to carry out the *Don Dien* policy (having garrison troops or peasants open up wasteland to grow grain) and set up 42 units of *don dien* in 1481. Although it is still not clear where the units were established, historians tend to think that it was in the Thai Binh area, one of the most densely populated areas today. Gourou says that many villages in Thai Binh record were established in the 15th century. The *Lich Su Viet Nam* states that the history of many villages in the seaside districts indicates they were established from the 15th century. Several land records of Thai Binh area indicate that the private land there in the 18th century was only 23% of the total land. According to Nhan Van Dinh, Quan Phuong village in Nam Dinh province was opened from 1512. (*Nam Phong*, April 1931, pp.385-398.) The fast growing population in the 15th century might very much be due to population growth in those areas.

<sup>47</sup> This size certainly has its own reasons, such as distance from the fields, etc.

<sup>48</sup> Sakurai suggests that village numbers decreased rather than increased in the 15th century. See Sakurai Yumio, *Betonamu Sonraku no keisei* (The forming of Vietnamese village), Soubunsha, Tokyo, 1987, pp.144-166. His idea is as follows: while Nguyen Trai's *Dia Du Chi* gives 9728 villages in 1435, there were only 7090 villages in 1490. After a textual study on *Dia Du Chi*, I tend to think that although Nguyen Trai did write a work called *Dia Du Chi* in 1435, the evidence indicates that both the *Dia Du Chi*, and the *Dia Du Chi Can An* (the commentary of the *Du Dia Chi*) were changed by several authors throughout the 15th, 16th, 17th, 18th and 19th centuries. To begin with, the main administrative divisions the *Dia Du Chi* applies such as "Son Nam", "Kinh Bac", "Son Tay", "Hai Duong", "Cao Bang", and "Hung Hoa", do not appear before 1469. Most of the county names listed in the *Dia Du Chi* were newly changed in the 17th century. This book, in my opinion, is a work heavily modified between the mid-17th century and early 18th century. As a result, the work that Nguyen Trai had done was only left as an outer form. I intend to discuss this source in a separate article.



Table 2 Numbers of Vietnamese village, 15th-19th century

year	number of villages	sources
1417	3385	<u>Ngan-nan tche yuan</u> <sup>49</sup>
1490	7950	<u>Toan Thu</u> <sup>50</sup>
1539	10228	<u>Yue Qiao Shu</u> <sup>51</sup>
1634-43	8671	<u>Dia Du Chi</u> <sup>52</sup>
1730s(?)	11766	<u>Ngo Gia Van Phai</u> <sup>53</sup>
1750s(?)	10284	<u>Ngo Gia Van Phai</u> <sup>54</sup>
1810	10635	<u>CTTXDBL</u> <sup>55</sup>

Can we relate the growing village numbers with a growth of population? At first I thought it was impossible, because there is no way to tell how many big villages of 500 households existed, nor how many small ones with 100 or even 60 households. Then I found this in the Toan Thu, dated 1419: "Setting up the li system. Every 110 households are to be formed as one li. In every year a chief of the li, together with 10 taxpayers within the li are to do the corvee."<sup>56</sup> This means that 10% all taxpayers performed the corvee each year, under the assumption that each household had one taxpayer.

If we look at the system below the county level from the Tang dynasty onward, we will find that the li system was actually a continuation of a taxation system from ancient times. The Ngan-nan tche yuan says that Qiu He, the governor in 618 A.D., set up units under the county as big and small villages and big and small **xiang** (townships): 10 to 30 households represented a small village, 40 to 60 a big one; 70 to 150 households formed a small township, 160 to 540 as a big one. Probably because of an increase in population, Zhao Chang, the Tang governor the late 8th century omitted the difference between the big and small townships, by giving the general designation as **xiang** (township). It is said that between 864 and 866 A.D. there were 159 townships in northern Vietnam. In 907, Khuc Thua Hao, the Vietnamese governor, changed the **xiang** into **giap**, and added 155 onto

<sup>49</sup> Ngan-nan tche yuan, Imprimerie d'Extreme-Orient, Hanoi, 1932, p.60.

<sup>50</sup> Toan Thu, vol.2, p.736.

<sup>51</sup> Li Wen-feng, Yue Qiao Shu, first published in 1540, mimeographed ed., n.p.ca. 1950, vol.14, p.8.

<sup>52</sup> Uc Trai Tap, Phu quoc vu khanh dac trach van hoa, Saigon, 1972, vol.2, p.735.

<sup>53</sup> Ngo Gia Van Phai, a MS kept in the Han-Nom Institute, Hanoi, Vol.5.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> Ten Lang xa Viet Nam dau the ky XIX, Khoa hoc Xa hoi, Hanoi, 1981, pp.25-121.

<sup>56</sup> Toan Thu, Vol.2, p.517.

the former 159, making 314 **giap** altogether in early 10th century Vietnam.<sup>57</sup> All of this had one main aim: collecting taxes.

According to Nguyen The Anh, Vietnamese society was built up on the basis of the organisation of **xa**. He says that

the government did not deal directly with the people in the villages, rather they looked upon people as a part of the community of the **xa**. The government did not expect people to pay taxes or corvee directly to it, rather, they put the village in that position; the government itself did not need to know how the taxes and the corvee were divided among the people in the villages.<sup>58</sup>

From the point of view of Vietnamese population history, the number of taxpaying units may be even more meaningful than the figures of **dinh**, the individual on government registers. The **dinh**, as Alexander Woodside puts it, was only "the numbers of adult males between 18 and 59 years of age who were unfortunate enough to be known to the tax collectors".<sup>59</sup> Whenever the numbers of **dinh** were given, they were often either unbelievably high, or unquestionably too low, as the table above shows. On the other hand, the number of villages were relatively consistent throughout the centuries, therefore providing a more reliable basis for the study of the Vietnamese population history.

But how do we estimate the average size of the Vietnamese village? To calculate the population from the number of villages a magic figure is needed. I have chosen to use the term **li** (meaning 110 households) for the following reasons. First, although it was a rule of the Ming occupation, the statement of the Toan Thu about the size of the village in 1490, as cited above, suggests that an average of 110 households per village would be a reasonable guess. Second is the observation of Gourou in 1931 that, in the 6639 villages he listed, there were 2100 villages with 500 to 2100 inhabitants. Despite the mean population of the villages being 910 inhabitants, as a result of population increase from the late 19th century, they still showed traces of the former village size.

To check how accurate (in rough terms) this size might be, I also tried a calculation from another 19th century source. According to the Ten Lang Xa Viet Nam dau the ky 19 (Name of villages in the 19th century), a book which lists the villages

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<sup>57</sup> See Ngan-nan tche yuan, p.60; Xin Tang Shu, Vol.90; Jiu Tang Shu, Vol. 183.

<sup>58</sup> Nguyen The Anh, Kinh Te va Xa Hoi Viet Nam duoi cac Vua Trieu Nguyen, Trinh Bay, Saigon, 1968, p.21.

<sup>59</sup> Alexander Woodside, Vietnam and the Chinese Model, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1971, p.158.

of the north down to Nghe An in 1809, 11 villages were depopulated in Nam Xuong county of Son Nam. These villages formerly had 1123 taxpayers, or an average of 102 in each village.<sup>60</sup>

By comparing the figures of the **dinh** (taxpayers) in the early Le dynasty and the numbers of villages in each province recorded in the Hong Duc Ban Do, we can be fairly sure that the numbers of villages corresponded to the population, as Table 3 indicates:

**Table 3** Number of villages in each province in the 15th century

province	number of xa	tax payers	
		taxpayers	per xa
Hai duong	1316	110,000	84
Son Nam	1951	140,000	71
Son Tay	1453	100,000	68
Kinh Bac	1070	100,000	93
Thai Nguyen	653	20,000	30
Tuyen quang	282	18,000	63
Hung Hoa	257	18,000	67
Thanh Hoa	1091	100,000	91
Nghe An	876	50,000	57
Lang son	223	11,200	50
Cao Bang	273	11,200	41
Total	9445	578,400	
Average per xa			61

There was an average of 65 taxpayers in each village, according to the table above. The Dia Du Chi said that there were 311,670 registered in 1733, but 32,676 of them were free from tax and corvee, i.e. about 10% of those registered. It is reasonable to assume that 20-30% people in the village escaped being registered successfully. All these bits of information support the hypothesis of 110 households.

### Conclusion

The hypothesis that pre-colonial villages in northern Vietnam averaged 110 households, with 5 persons per household, gives the following results:

<sup>60</sup> Ten Lang Xa Viet Nam dau the ky 19, Nha xuất bản Khoa Học Xã hội, Hanoi, 1981, p.57.

**Table 4 Estimated population in north Vietnam from 15th to 19th centuries**

year	number of xa	households	population	annual growth rate
1417	3385	372,350	1,861,750	
1490	7950	874,500	4,372,500	0.50%
1539	10228	1,125,080	5,625,400	0.22%
1634-43	8671	953,810	4,76950	-0.07%
1730s	11766	1,294,260	6,471,300	0.13%
1750s?	10284	1,131,240	5,656,200	-0.29%
1810	10635	1,169,850	5,849,250	0.16%

The accuracy of those figures clearly leaves much to be desired. Yet this table roughly reflects the fall and rise of Vietnamese population between the 15th and 19th centuries. We can see how it corresponds with the accounts discussed above. For instance, when giving the figure for 1638, one author said that because of the separation of **Dang Trong**, the villages in **Dang Ngoai** between 1634 and 1643 numbered only 8671.<sup>61</sup> But if we subtract the number of the villages in Thuan Hoa and Thang Hoa (755) from 10228 villages in 1539, there are still 803 villages missing, not to mention the additional villages that would have been created during the 100 years. This fall indicates a 441,650 loss of population in the late 16th century, while the figure for the 1750s probably incorporates losses in the early 18th century.

It is a pity that we do not have any figures for the late 17th century. Yet from those of the early 17th and early 18th centuries we see that there was an increase in numbers. This suggests a rise of population in the 17th century. From the Le Trieu Chieu Lenh Thien Chinh (a collection of instructions of the Le government), it is recorded that the government forbade people from engaging in cock fighting, chess playing and gambling in the years 1649, 1662, 1663, 1664, and 1698. Such entertainments may have been a sign of a healthy society, since we find no such record throughout the 16th century. Also, according to Truong Huu Quynh, a Vietnamese historian who specialises in the land regulation, the most detailed land tax system in Vietnam from the 16th to the 18th centuries was published in 1625 and 1664.<sup>62</sup> It seems unlikely that any detailed tax regulation would be established in years of turmoil or famine.

Unless new sources appear, I believe that the curve of Vietnamese population in the north from the 16th to 18th centuries has two rises and two falls. This contrasts

<sup>61</sup> Dia Du Chi, p.735.

<sup>62</sup> Truong Huu Quynh, Che Do Ruong Dat o Vietnam, Vol.2, p.118.

the north from the 16th to 18th centuries has two rises and two falls. This contrasts with the table that McEvedy and Jones provide for Vietnamese population in the Atlas of World Population History, which suggests a steady growth from 2 million in 1500, to 3 million in 1700, and 4 million in 1800. I conclude that the population rose rapidly to 4-5 million in the late 15th to early 16th centuries, but then lost about 10-15% in the late 16th century. There may have been a steady recovery in the 17th century, but another fall in the first half of the 18th century. All of this ensured that the long-term population growth in the north showed only a very small increase. In other words, it fluctuated around 5-6 million from the 15th to 18th centuries

### Population changes in the south

The region under Nguyen control can be divided into three areas, according to the different periods in which they began to be occupied and secured by Vietnamese. The first is the Thuan Hoa area, which became part of Dai Viet in the 14th century. Then came Quang Nam, Quang Ngai and Quy Nhon, lands of the Vietnamese in any real sense only after Le Thanh Ton in 1471. The remaining land of today's southern Vietnam, from Phu Yen to the Mekong delta, was obtained by the Nguyen from 1611 to 1758. We will look at population growth in those three areas respectively.

First let us glance at the poor data we have for the Thuan Hoa area:

**Table 5 Number of villages & taxpayers in Thuan Hoa, 1417-1770**

year	xa	dinh	sources
1417	116	10,400	<u>Ngan-nan tche yuan</u> <sup>63</sup>
1555	688		<u>O Chau Can Luc</u> <sup>64</sup>
1770	1436	126,857	<u>Phu Bien Tap Luc</u> <sup>65</sup>

I tend to think that both the figures for **xa** and for taxpayers in 1770 are reliable. Because the Thuan Hoa area has the longest history of Vietnamese occupation in the south and was the Nguyen capital, it was under the direct control of the government. In 1770 the government could only count the numbers of villages

<sup>63</sup> Ngan-nan tche yuan, p.62.

<sup>64</sup> Duong Van An, O Chau Can Luc, translated into modern Vietnamese by Bui Luong, published by Van Hoa A Chau, Saigon, 1961, pp.21-24.

<sup>65</sup> Le Quy Don, Phu Bien Tap Luc (hereafter Phu Bien), Phu Quoc Vu Khanh Dac Trach Van Hoa, Saigon, 1973, vol.3, p.105b.

in Thuan Hoa rather than other places. According to the information above, taxpayers averaged 88 per village in 1770, still quite close to the average figure for taxpayers in the northern villages.

Therefore it would seem that the hypothesis we used for the population of the north is also applicable to the Thuan Hoa area. Using the formula  $[\text{LN} (P_1 / P_0)] / t \times 100 = r$ , the population growth in the Thuan Hoa area would be:

**Table 6 Estimated population in Thuan Hoa, 1417-1770**

year	xa	estimated households	estimated p	A growth rate
1417	116	12,760	63,800	
1555	688	75,680	378,400	0.56%
1770	1436	157,960	789,800	0.15%

This table suggests a relatively high population growth in the late 15th century in the area. The influence of migration can be seen clearly, although the number of villages in 1417 may be lower than the true figure.

The later period of the Nguyen in Thuan Hoa saw a slower increase in population. This is easy to understand, since the arable land here is poor in quality and limited in scope. Le Quy Don said in 1774 that in Le Thuy and Khang Loc counties there was only 5-6 sao (about 0.2 hectare) land per person on average, barely enough for people to survive on. Even so, the established annual growth rate here from 1417 to 1770 was about 0.3%, as shown by the figures above, which is higher than the rate of the north in the same period. Perhaps the real meaning of the table is to suggest the most rapid population growth in the Thuan Hoa area was between 1471 and the first half of the 17th century, that is during the early Nguyen period. If so, the main reason for this growth could only be immigration. After that the growth tended to stabilise.

#### **Population growth in the area from Quang Nam southward**

The data for Quang Nam are poor, but we can get an idea of the population of Quang Nam at the time by looking at Le Quy Don's Phu Bien Tap Luc. It estimates that the taxpayers for the Mekong delta in 1769 were 24,933, and that taxpayers for the whole area from Quang Nam southward totalled 165,060. That means the taxpayers of the Mekong delta were only 15% of the total figure, the rest being from the region Quang Nam to Binh Thuan. According to the Chau Ban Trieu Nguyen (Vermillion books of the Nguyen court) in 1805:

area	taxpayers
Quang Nam	21,737, excluded 20,241 Minh Huong Chinese;
Quy Nhon	6,067
Quang Ngai	340 <sup>66</sup>

Although the figures for Quy Nhon, and especially Quang Ngai seem too low, there is no doubt that Quang Nam was the most populous area and had a high growth rate in the Nguyen lords period.

Both the data and historical records show that the Mekong delta did not become populous with Vietnamese before Nguyen Anh went to the region. Its flourishing period began in the late 18th and the early 19th centuries.

It is no coincidence that for the whole period of the Nguyen not a single figure survives for the villages south of Quang Nam. Unlike villages in Dang Ngoai, which were tightly knit, almost closed communities rather than a natural division, villages in the south were loose and unstable. Villagers kept moving, as might even the village itself. The sense of community, of belonging to a special place, grew up quite late in the south.

Chinese immigrants account for a considerable percentage of population growth during the Nguyen lord period. Johan van Linga's report in 1642 said that "there reside at least about four to five thousand lazy Chinese" in Hoi An alone.<sup>67</sup> In 1679, about 3,000 Chinese soldiers who had escaped from the Qing came to Da Nang, and were sent then by the Nguyen to open up land in Cambodia, which is today's Bien Hoa and My Tho. In 1697 the Nguyen set up the Thanh Ha and Minh Huong villages in these two areas, and thereafter registered those people. More common were the people who came spontaneously from Fu Jian and Guang Dong provinces. According to the registration records of the Minh Huong village in Hoi An, in three years during the 1740s there were 35-40 people each year who immigrated mainly from Fu Jian, most of them unmarried young men of about 20 years of age.<sup>68</sup> Koffler says that there were at least 30,000 Chinese in Cochinchina in 1744.<sup>69</sup> In 1921, 156,000 Chinese were counted in the Mekong delta alone,

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<sup>66</sup> Chau Ban, Vol. 1, Trieu Gia Long (the files of the Gia Long reign) kept in the National Archives No.2 in Ho Chi Minh City.

<sup>67</sup> W.J.M.Buch, De Oost-Indische Compagnie en Quinam, Amsterdam, 1929, p.122.

<sup>68</sup> MS, kept in The Hoi An Relics Management Board, Hoi An.

<sup>69</sup> Koffler, "Description historique de la Cochinchine", Revue Indochinoise, Vol.15, 1911, p.460.

compared to 7,000 in Annam, and 32,000 in Tongking.<sup>70</sup>

### The population of the Cham and highlanders

No accurate figure for the population of Champa exists, except for some fragmentary records. Song Shi says that the country had 38 districts and less than 30,000 families in the Harivarman III period(1074-1080).<sup>71</sup> Ming Shi Lu says that in 1450 Vietnamese robbed the country and brought 33,500 people back to Vietnam.<sup>72</sup> These sources suggest that Champa was a rather thinly populated country. In face of the Vietnamese expansion to the south, the Cham retreated southward step by step, some moving up to the mountains and living with other peoples there, some staying in Binh Thuan until the establishment of the Nguyen dynasty. Finally in 1822, Po Chong, the last king of Champa, left for Cambodia, where many Cham had already gone. No matter how many they were, it seems that the Cham were not registered before the Tay Son period. The king of Thuan Thanh only paid tribute to the Nguyen each year.

"All the hill tribes together probably did not make up more than just a few hundred thousand people wandering in that vast expanse of mountains and forests", Ng Shui Meng assumed when talking about the population of the highlanders in Indochina.<sup>73</sup> In 1827, Cam Lo prefecture recorded that 10,793 highlanders became taxpayers when the Moi people registered for the first time.<sup>74</sup> The Phu Bien says that the land in Phu Xuan village of Binh Son county and Phu Khuong village of Chuong Nghia county, Quang Ngai province, was so good for farming that it was called "small Dong Nai". The Nguyen set up 72 villages here to "collect the people from the mountains to plant rice"<sup>75</sup>. No doubt the Nguyen did gradually force a number of the mountain peoples to become registered over a 200 year period. Yet, like the Cham, the people of the Thuy Xa (Water kingdom) and Hoa Xa (Fire kingdom) seem not to have been registered during the Nguyen

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<sup>70</sup> Hua Qiao Zhi, Yue Nan (The guild book about the overseas Chinese, Vietnam Volume), Taipei, 1958, p.46.

<sup>71</sup> Song Shi (The History of the Song), Vol.489.

<sup>72</sup> Ming Shi Lu (Annuals of the Ming dynasty), Vol.205.

<sup>73</sup> Ng Shui Meng, The Population of Indochina, p.13.

<sup>74</sup> Nguyen Van Sieu & Bui Quy, Dai Viet Dia Du Toan Bien (A geographical book of Dai Viet), Vol. 3, MS, kept in the Han Nom Institute, Hanoi. The term Moi, as used by the Vietnamese, refers mainly to the peoples who lived in the mountain areas of present-day central Vietnam.

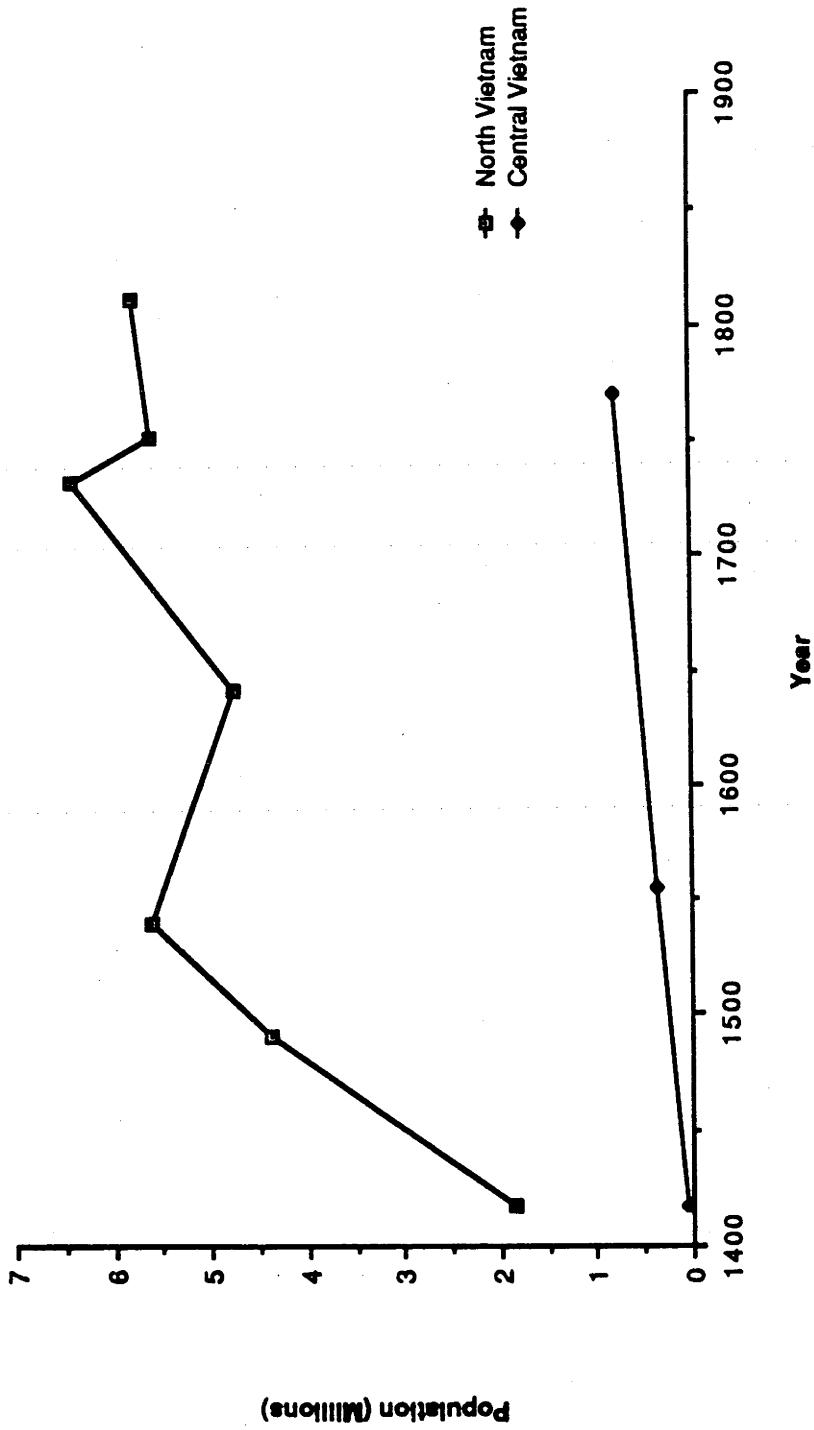
<sup>75</sup> Phu Bien, Vol.2, p.83.



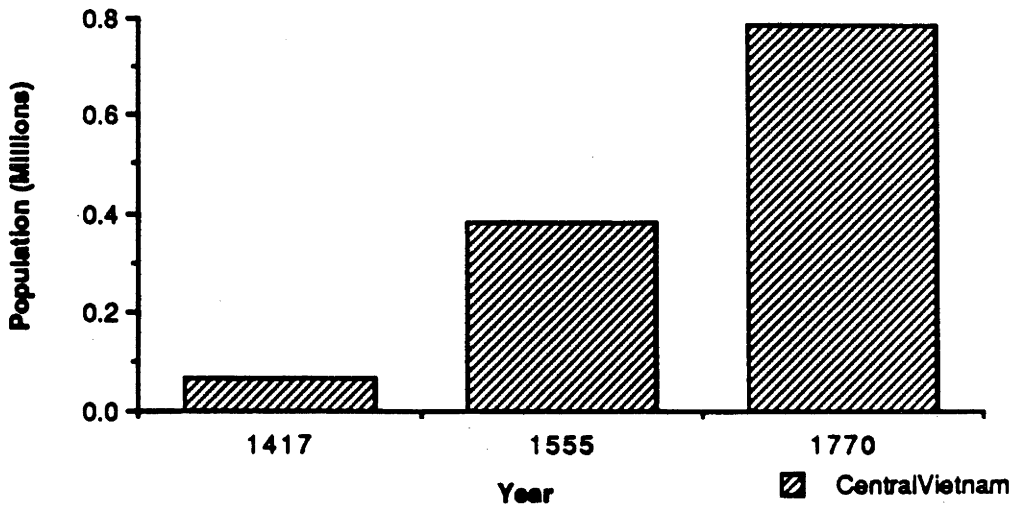
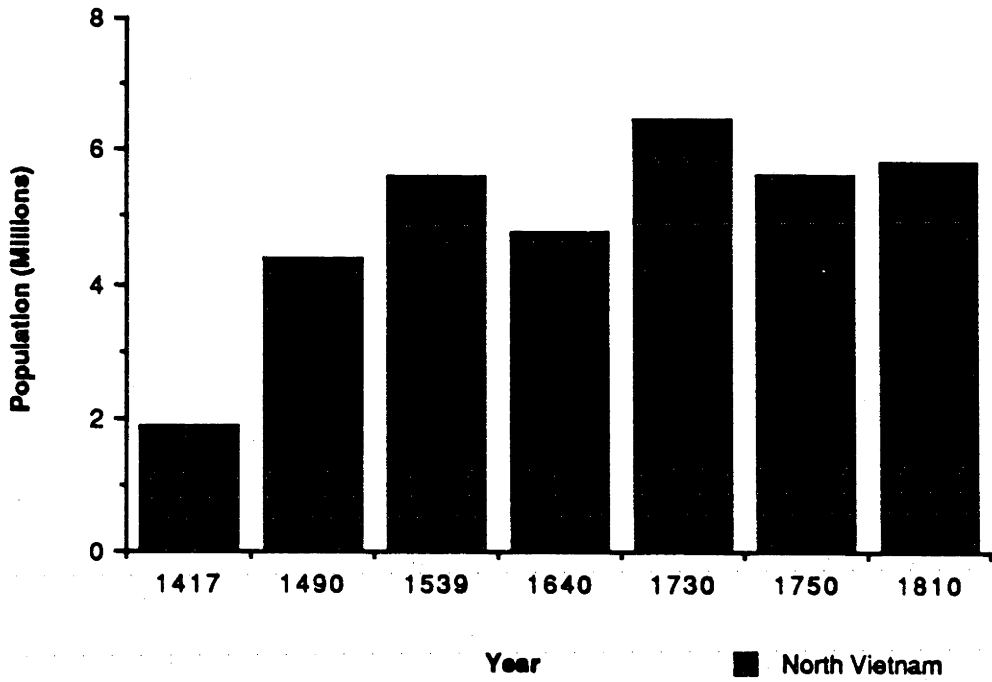
lord period. The Phu Bien says that each "kingdom" had several hundred people, and inhabitants paid whatever they liked to their king each year.

According to the Dai Nam Nhat Thong Chi, in the 1810s the taxpayers of Phu Yen totalled 7,651, Khanh Hoa 5,000, and Binh Thuan 9,200, though these figures probably refer only to the population of the plain rather than the highland. Although Crawford said in 1822 that the "Moi" still formed the bulk of the population in Dong Nai, "which is their original country", he might have been referring to Cambodians rather than to the uplanders.

Although they had nothing to do with the tax collectors until the Tay Son, as we shall see, these peoples would nevertheless play an important role in the history of the Nguyen. They were the main source of slaves to open up Dong Nai; they supported the Tay Son; and many important products which made CochinChina famous to the outside world may well have originated with them. Including in the highlanders makes the complex picture of Nguyen history all the more intricate, even though our sources about them are much more limited.



**Figure 1. Vietnamese Population in Northern and Central Vietnam during the 15th to 18th Centuries**



**Figure 2. Growth of Vietnamese Population in Northern Vietnam (top) and Central Vietnam (bottom) during the 15th to 18th Centuries**

## CHAPTER 2 THE DANG TRONG ARMED FORCES

**Dang Trong** was organised as a military regime, and it was particularly so in the 17th century. The king of the country was the highest commander of the armed forces, or rather, only as commander-in-chief could one become the king. As Choisy recognised in 1685, Cochinchina had been established and maintained on a military basis.<sup>1</sup>

The whole country was under the control of military officers. The word **Dinh**, literally meaning battalion, was used as an administrative term throughout the whole period of the Nguyen rulers. It continued through the Gia Long era, and the first 10 years of Minh Mang's reign. It thus served the regime for about 300 years. The country was divided into 12 **dinh**, and the governor of each **dinh**, called **tran thu** (protector), was always a military officer. The most important posts of the Nguyen were always held by military officers until the early Nguyen dynasty in the 19th century.<sup>2</sup>

Indeed, for the Nguyen a military system was certainly the most convenient and probably the most effective way to rule this new land. Basically a migrant country, everything in **Dang Trong** was in a state of flux: people, villages, even the capital itself. The only thing under firm government control was the army. Thus one of the basic policies of the Nguyen was to recruit as many men as possible in the country as soldiers. Da Shan, a Chinese monk who came to Cochinchina in 1694, recounted how a handsome house was built for him by 1,000 soldiers: "They shouted as they worked for three days and nights, until a house with five rooms was erected... Then I was told that the craftsmen in the country were all soldiers."<sup>3</sup> There is no doubt that the palace of the king and many temples were built by soldiers too. A list naming some soldiers in Hoi An in 1741 indicates that they belonged to the sections of firearms crafting, dye-works and

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<sup>1</sup> L'abbe de Choisy, Journal du voyage de Siam, Facsimile republished with an introduction by Maurice Garcon, Editions Duchartre and Van Buggenhoudt, Paris, 1930, p.254.

<sup>2</sup> This is different from the north, where there is a proverb saying: "**Quan van that pham da sang, quan vo tu pham con mang guom hau**," which means that a civil officer who is in the 7th grade will be better-off, while a military officer is still nothing, even he is in the 4th grade.

<sup>3</sup> Da Shan, Hai Wai Ji Shi, in Chen Ching-ho, ed., Shi qi shi ji Guang Nan Xin Shi Liao (A new source about Quang Nam in the 17th century), Committee of Series of Books of China, Taipei, 1960, Vol.1, p.22.

shoe-making respectively.<sup>4</sup> By keeping such men in the army, the Nguyen regime met its basic requirements, if it did little for economic efficiency.

It is interesting to note that the term "**Quan dan**" (army and people) was constantly used in the Tien Bien, especially in the early period, when referring to the people; in the north only "**dan**" or "**bach tinh**" were used.<sup>5</sup> It must have been difficult for the Nguyen government to talk about the "**quan**" (army) without "**dan**", and vice versa, because they were almost one.

While no figures survive for the population as a whole, or for villages in the Thuan Hoa area, except for 1767, we have amazingly detailed information for each military unit under the Nguyen in 1653. For instance,

The Left-central Army and Right-central Army, 14 **thuyen**,<sup>6</sup> 700 soldiers in each; the Inner Navy 58 **thuyen**, 6,410 soldiers; the **doi**<sup>7</sup> of the Front Navy, Back Navy, Left Navy and Right Navy have 5 **thuyen** in each, and 500 soldiers in each **doi**; 8 **co**<sup>8</sup> of the Left-Inner, Right-inner, Front-inner, Back-inner, Left-gun, Right-gun, Front-gun and Back-gun, each **co** has 6 **thuyen**, with 2,100 soldiers ...

It runs on and on like this, with military precision, finally totalling 22,740 soldiers for the regular troops in the country.<sup>9</sup>

The Trinh-Nguyen war which lasted for half a century strongly impacted on **Dang Trong** society. First of all, it further reinforced the importance of the armed forces of the country and brought forth the question of modernising the armed forces, which numbered only a quarter of those of the Trinh.

The Nguyen's sense of being in a critical moment at the time can still be felt in the sources today. The descriptions about preparations for war in the Tien Bien, the letters sent to the Japanese government, or the relations between the Nguyen

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<sup>4</sup> Ba Phu Ngo, 1741, MS, kept in The Hoi An Relics Management Board, Hoi An.

<sup>5</sup> When the northerners used **binh dan** (soldiers and people), it always referred to a financial matter rather than to the people. See Toan Thu, Vol. 3, p.952 and p.958.

<sup>6</sup> The smallest unit of the Nguyen army, with 30 to 100 soldiers.

<sup>7</sup> An unit of the army consisting of 3 to 5 **thuyen**.

<sup>8</sup> An unit higher than **doi** but lower than **dinh**, the highest unit.

<sup>9</sup> In Viet Su Xu Dang Trong, p.469, Phan Khoang suspects that this is only the figure for troops in the capital area (**Chinh Dinh**), but see the figures given by Choisy in 1679 (30,000), Journal, p.256, and Vachet in the 1670s (40,000), Taboulet, Vol.1, p.66, all referring to troop numbers for the whole country.

and Macao, all shown the Nguyen's main concern: money and arms. This urgent need of the Nguyen for arms directly stimulated the overseas trade of Cochinchina, especially in regard to artillery and galleys. We will consider them in <sup>turn</sup>.

## Artillery

Artillery had been known in Vietnam from at least the 14th century. Thus the Ming Shi (History of Ming) claimed the Chinese learned how to build cannons, called **shen ji** (magical machine), from Vietnamese when they invaded Vietnam in 1407. The emperor ordered an artillery battalion established to practise with the new weapon.<sup>10</sup> However, this account seems erroneous, since cannons built in 1372 and 1378 have been unearthed in this century in north China; artillery was also used in 1281 when Kublai Khan attempted to invade Japan.<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless the possibility exists that the Chinese might have learned the technique of building a certain kind of cannon from the Vietnamese. Certainly Che Bong Nga, the greatest king in Cham history, was killed by a volley of Vietnamese cannon fire when the Cham army invaded Dai Viet in 1390. It is also said that Ho Nguyen Trung, son of Ho Quy Ly, was very skilled with firearms, so that the Ming used him to make them. Also, Chinese and Vietnamese names for cannons bear some similarity: Vietnamese called cannon **than cong** (magical power) in the 17th century,<sup>12</sup> while **shen ji** in Chinese would be **than co** in Vietnamese. By the early 17th century, then, firearms were no novelty to the Nguyen.

We do not know exactly when the Nguyen got their first cannon; nor does any source clearly discuss where the Nguyen artillery came from. However, its likely provenance can be deduced, given that Japanese Red-seal ships were usually forbidden to export firearms;<sup>13</sup> while Chinese traders found it hard to get access

<sup>10</sup> Ming Shi, reprinted by Zhong Hua Shu Ju, Beijing, 1974, Vol.92, pp.2263-2264.

<sup>11</sup> Liu Xu, Zhong Guo Gu Dai Huo Pao Shi (A history of cannon in ancient China), Shanghai Ren Min Press, Shanghai, 1989, p.53.

<sup>12</sup> Thanh The Vy, Ngoai thuong Viet Nam, Nha Xuat Ban Su Hoc, Hanoi, 1961, p.102.

<sup>13</sup> Parker correctly noted this in his The Military Revolution; yet his claim that "they carried no guns at all" was not correct. In 1628 a Red-seal ship, which had 470 crew led by Hamada Yaheiji carried several cannons and 200 muskets to Taiwan. They were arrested precisely because of this by the Dutch Governor-General in Taiwan. See Qi Jia Lin, Tai Wan Shi (History of Taiwan), Zili Wanbao Press, Taipei, 1985, Vol.1, p.17. The original source it used is Beziehungen der niederlandischen Ostindischen Kompanie zu Japan in siebzehnten Jahrhundert, p. CXXII.

to artillery. By default, it seems likely that the Nguyen artillery came mainly from Macao.<sup>14</sup>

Firepower played an important role in **Dang Trong's** early life. Indeed, Borri actually suggests that it was possession of firearms which helped Nguyen Phuc Nguyen (r.1613-1635) make up his mind to

have the government and rebel from the King of Tunchim: Whereunto he was not a little emboldened, when he saw himself suddenly furnished with divers pieces of artillery recovered and gotten out of the ship-wreck of sundry ships of the Portugals and Hollanders, which were afterwards gathered up by those of the country.

According to Borri, the army of Cochinchina soon became expert in firearms:

The Cochinchinese being now so expert in the managing of them, that they surpass our Europeans: For indeed they did little else every day, but exercise themselves in shooting at a mark. Whereupon they became so fierce and so glorious, and to have so great an opinion of their own valour, that as soon as they perceived any of our ships of Europe to come towards their ports, the king's cannoniers presently presented them with defiance.<sup>15</sup>

According to the Tien Bien, the Nguyen cannon inflicted heavy losses on the Trinh army in the first confrontation in 1627. This source says that when the Nguyen built the **Luy Nhat Le** (one of 2 great walls built in Quang Binh to defend the country against the North) in 1631, a cannon was set every 4 meters along the 12,000 meter wall, with a battery a huge cannon at every 12 to 20 meters. "Ammunition", it added, "was so abundant that the depots were like mountains".<sup>16</sup> The account exaggerates the number of cannons, of course, yet there can be no doubt of their important role. Boxer, for instance, has noted that "neither the Siamese nor the Burmese ever developed their artillery into a really effective arm, and the Indochinese country which made the best use of this weapon was Annam, or Cochinchina,"<sup>17</sup> although he may be referring to both the Trinh and the Nguyen.

The Nguyen may well have been proudest of their artillery:

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<sup>14</sup> Before 1660, Dutch-controlled Taiwan might have provided another source of firearms for the Nguyen. However, Nguyen relations with the Dutch generally remained poor, so they had little chance of obtaining arms from Taiwan. Instead, the Nguyen used the Portuguese, both to buy artillery and to establish local foundries.

<sup>15</sup> Borri, Cochinchina, London, 1633, republished by Da Capo Press, New York, 1970, p.H3.

<sup>16</sup> Tien Bien, vol.2, p. 20.

<sup>17</sup> C.R.Boxer, Portuguese Conquest and Commerce in Southern Asia 1500-1750, Variorum Reprints, London, 1985, pp.VII 165-166.

The king has twelve hundred cannons, all of bronze, among which there is much field artillery of different calibres, bearing the coats of arms of Spain and Portugal, but especially four culverins, nineteen feet long, bearing the coat of arms of Cochinchina, which are utterly beautiful... The dates when these cannons were founded are from 1650 till 1660.<sup>18</sup>

One of the few encounters with a happy ending between the Nguyen lords and the missionaries concern of the purchase of arms. In 1658, Marquez, a Jesuit missionary, received 10,000 taels of silver from **Chua Hien** (1648-1687) to buy firearms in Macao. The journey took so long that at last **Chua Hien** lost patience in the spring of 1659. No doubt thinking that Marquez had taken the money and run away, he ordered the churches in the country destroyed. Yet at that very moment the ship to Macao finally came back. **Chua Hien** was so glad that he immediately rushed to his ship and ordered a 3 gun salute to be fired to welcome her back. Then he happily stroked the cannons, as if he could already see them destroying Trinh forces. He also ordered the churches which had been confiscated to be returned to the missionaries, who now were also free to carry out their work in the country.<sup>19</sup>

Cadiere, Maybon, and Le Thanh Khoi all suggest that a Portuguese named Joao da Cruz had set up a foundry to cast guns in Thuan Hoa in 1615.<sup>20</sup> After a careful study, however, Manguin concluded that Joao da Cruz did not reach Cochinchina until 1658.<sup>21</sup> This seems more accurate. In 1651, he says, the Nguyen sent 5,000 **kati** (3,000 kg.) of copper to Macao and asked the Portuguese there to build cannons for them.<sup>22</sup> This would seem a lot of trouble, had da Cruz actually been in Hue during that time.

Nevertheless, as early as 1631, according to the Tien Bien, a factory with 80

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<sup>18</sup> "Description of Cochinchina", section "The Artillery". Although this "Description" had been attributed to Poivre, two references indicate an author other than Poivre. Here I will call the work "Description" afterwards. In Li Tana & Anthony Reid, Southern Vietnam under the Nguyen, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore/ECHOSEA, The Australian National University, forthcoming,

<sup>19</sup> Phan Phat Huon, Viet Nam Giao Su (A history of Catholicism in Vietnam), Khai Tri Press, Saigon, 1965 Vol. 1, p.165.

<sup>20</sup> Cadiere, "Le Mur de Dong-hoi", BEFEO, Vol. VI, p.125 n; Maybon, Histoire moderne du pays d'Annam, 1592-1820, pp.97-99; Le Thanh Khoi, Le Viet-Nam, Editions de Minuit, Paris, 1955, p.246.

<sup>21</sup> Manguin, Les Portugais sur les cotes du Vietnam et du Campa, 1972, pp.205-206.

<sup>22</sup> Manguin, ibid., 1972, pp.202-203.



craftsmen existed to build cannons in Thuan Hoa.<sup>23</sup> It was situated in a Hue district called **Phuong Duc** (district of casting). French scholars have assumed that **Phuong Duc** had some connection with Joao da Cruz; but if Manguin is right, as I believe, then the name of **Phuong Duc** might have appeared earlier than 1658, possibly in relation to the factory the Nguyen set up in 1631. Certainly Joao da Cruz did live in **Phuong Duc** when he was in Hue. The missionary Louis Chevrui, for instance, visited Joao da Cruz's home in Hue in 1664, and described its location in **Phuong Duc**,<sup>24</sup> noting that "the king was going to see one of the furnaces which was next to his house". Da Cruz did well from his work, earning 500 ecus (1,500 francs) per year, plus some money for his family, Chevrui added.<sup>25</sup>

The Portuguese technique of casting weapons was adopted quickly, so that more cannons were probably made by Vietnamese themselves in the later period. In 1653 the Nguyen artillery already boasted at least 4 units, with about 1,000 men.<sup>26</sup> The Tien Bien reported that a former cattle-trader named Linh set up a factory in Quang Ngai for building ordnance, together with a factory for building war galleys. When he rebelled with arms he had made himself in 1695, it created quite a headache for local commanders.<sup>27</sup>

It seems that between 1630 and 1665 the Nguyen were able to build up their military superiority, mainly by means of artillery. In 1642 the Nguyen had 200 cannons, according to Johan van Linga, while in 1750 they had 1,200. Even allowing for some inaccuracies in the figures, this is a considerable increase. But the basic question remains of how valuable these cannons were to the Nguyen in battle. For the whole of the 17th century they seem to have been very useful indeed. Many historians regard the Nguyen's superior artillery as one of the main reasons they maintained their independence, given an army only half or even a

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<sup>23</sup> Tien Bien, Vol.2, p.41.

<sup>24</sup> [deleted]

<sup>25</sup> Launay, Histoire de la mission de Cochinchine 1658-1823, Documents historiques, Paris, 1923, Vol.1, p.16. According to Manguin, da Cruz died in 1682 in Hue. His son Clement lived in his house in **Phuong Duc**, but we do not know whether he continued to build firearms for the Nguyen.

<sup>26</sup> Tien Bien, Vol.4, p.4. This suggest only about 100-200 cannons.

<sup>27</sup> The revolt was only finally put down with the help of the mountain-dwelling Moi. See Tien Bien, Vol. 7, p.11.

quarter of that of the Trinh.<sup>28</sup>

No travellers who visited Cochinchina talked about the region without mentioning the army. Even men who never visited the area heard such impressive stories that they recorded them. For example, in his Travels and Controversies, Friar Domingo Navarrete felt moved to write of an army he had never seen:

The soldiery of this kingdom is the best in all those parts, is well-disciplined, and the king keeps 40,000 men at court who most days shoot at a mark and those that aim best are rewarded with pieces of silk. I have several times heard Spaniards and Portuguese say they are all excellent marks-men... This is the reason they have always the better in their continual wars with the king of Tunquin, tho this last exceeds the other in all respects, not only in numbers of men, but in wealth, and the multitude of elephants he carries to war. They have also many light galleys, with which they do wonders in the great river that runs up to the court.<sup>29</sup>

This contrasts sharply with an observation made by Poivre in the 1740s, about 70 years after the Trinh-Nguyen wars had ended: "The Cochinchinese did not know how to make the cannons useful, each cannon had not got 6 shots to fire and most of the cannon balls were not of the right calibre."<sup>30</sup> Confirmation of this report came when the Tay Son rose against the Nguyen. In the early part of the rebellion, the Nguyen's formerly valued artillery pieces do not even seem to have been used in battle.<sup>31</sup> By then it may have been, as in other Southeast Asian countries, that cannon in **Dang Trong** had become "more a means of boosting morale and expressing the supernatural power of the state than of destroying the enemy", to borrow Reid's words.<sup>32</sup>

## Galleys

Vietnamese possibly might have used galleys quite early: the ship which killed

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<sup>28</sup> See Le Thanh Khoi, Le Viet Nam, p.251; D.G.Hall, A History of South-east Asia, Macmillan & Co Ltd, London, 1968, p.415. In fact, the Trinh's artillery was not bad. In the battle of 1672 against the Nguyen, the Trinh used a kind of firearm called "a mother has a hundred sons", "with the force of a thunderbolt, destroying everything it aimed at", according to Le Quy Don. See Phu Bien, Vol.1, p.33a.

<sup>29</sup> Edited by J.S.Cummins, The Travels and Controversies of Friar Domingo Navarrete, 1618-1686, The Hakluyt Society, London, 1962, Vol.2, p.381.

<sup>30</sup> "Description", section "The Artillery".

<sup>31</sup> Curiously, there is no record of artillery being used in the conflicts between the Nguyen and the Khmer in the late 17th century either. One of the reasons might be that the Nguyen had not enough, if any, mobile field artillery to use.

<sup>32</sup> A.Reid, "Europe and Southeast Asia: The military balance", Occasional Paper No.16, James Cook University of North Queensland, 1982, p.4.

Che Bong Nga, the Cham king in 1390, for instance, may have been a galley. Certainly by the 15th century, Vietnamese had galleys, as a 1428 entry in the Toan Thu shows. In that year it reported every galley was armed with one very large **hoa dong** (a firearm with barrel built of bamboo or wood, filled with powder), plus ten big, ten medium and 80 small ones.<sup>33</sup> These firearms indicate a clear division of labour already existed on the galleys, while other entries suggest tactics for sea battles were also being worked out in Vietnam by the 15th century. In 1465, Le Thanh Ton promulgated nine ways for fighting at sea and 31 disciplines for members of his navy.<sup>34</sup> When Le Thanh Ton's armed forces invaded Champa in 1469, the Toan Thu boasted that his 250,000 men travelled on 5,000 galleys. Indeed, the desire to confront Champa, with its sea war traditions and naval forces, might well have stimulated the establishment of a Vietnamese navy in the 15th century. It was this navy which formed the basis for the later naval developments under the Trinh and the Nguyen.

Europeans like Poivre, whose national navies ranged the world's oceans, did not think highly of the Cochinchinese fleet because it was "always hugging the coast".<sup>35</sup> But this distinguishing characteristic of Vietnamese navies<sup>36</sup> reflected their historic role. Both Trinh and Nguyen found it convenient to transport troops and supplies by water, and both wanted to use their galleys on major rivers, if only to guard their entrances. Thus, according to Alexandre de Rhodes, the Trinh regularly stationed 68 galleys at the mouth of the Ca River alone, while the Nguyen berthed several hundred in the entrance of the Nhat Le river during war time.<sup>37</sup> In **Dang Trong**, too, geographical realities played a part in developing a coastal fleet. As the visiting Buddhist monk, Da Shan, noted in 1695,

the towns here often back onto mountains and face the sea... There is no way to go between two prefectures. Wherever one goes into one seaport, there is one prefecture; if one wants to go to another prefecture, it is necessary leave the port one is in, sail on the sea, alongside the mountains

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<sup>33</sup> Toan Thu, Vol.2, p.555.

<sup>34</sup> Toan Thu, Vol.2, p.654. Three of the nine ways of fighting were proposed by an officer called Le Han Dinh in 1465. Le Thanh Ton accepted them and ordered his navy to practise them twice in 1467 in different places, but none proved successful. Le Thanh Ton then asked the officer to lead the practice himself. When it was not successful either, Le Thanh Ton dismissed him from his post. See Toan Thu, Vol. 2, p.660. Therefore there should be 6 ways of fighting in reality.

<sup>35</sup> "Description", p.73.

<sup>36</sup> "**Quan thuy ven bien**" (coastal navy), as modern Vietnamese historians have labelled them. Nguyen Viet, Vu Minh Giang, Nguyen Manh Hung, Quan Thuy trong Lich Su Chong Ngoai Xam (The navy in the history of opposing invasion), Quan Doi Nhan Dan, Hanoi, 1983, p.271.

<sup>37</sup> Quoted from *ibid*, p.271.

and go into the other port.<sup>38</sup>

The Nguyen war fleet, like its artillery, was mainly built up during the years of war. Although there was another type of boat which could carry 100-150 tons of cargo, it was the galley which became the characteristic trademark of the **Dang Trong** navy. Da Shan left us a description of the Cochinchinese galley:

There is one officer sitting at the prow, and a helmsman standing at the stern. On the galley there are 64 oars, and a red shelf with a dragon on it is set at the middle of the galley. On the shelf they put a piece of wood which is used as a watchman's clapper, a soldier beating it to mark cadence. All the sailors follow its time to turn either to the left or the right, without any mistake... The galley is long and narrow like a dragon, with its head raised.<sup>39</sup>

The size of the galleys seems to be similar between north and south. The Le Trieu Hoi Dien (Codes of the Le dynasty) says that large galleys were 65 **thuoc** (26 m) long and 10 **thuoc** wide in Tongking,<sup>40</sup> and Pierre Poivre gave similar dimensions for those of Cochinchina.<sup>41</sup> Some Vietnamese historians have suggested that during this period galleys in the north had more characteristics of river craft (**giang thuyen**), while galleys in the south were more suitable for the sea (**hai thuyen**).<sup>42</sup> While the idea is interesting, it needs further substantiation.

As for their numbers, estimates vary. Borri said in 1618 that the king of Cochinchina "had always more than a hundred galleys well furnished in good readiness, each galley had 6 pieces of cannon, well furnished with musket-shot". And "being become to be powerful at sea, as well as he [the Nguyen ruler] was by his artillery at land, it was easy for him to accomplish his design against the king of **Tunchin** his lord".<sup>43</sup> Bowyear in 1695 said the king of Cochinchina already had 200 big galleys (50-76 oars?) and 500 small galleys (40-44 oars each).

On the other hand, Abbe de Choisy, in 1685 or 1686, reported only 131 galleys,<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Hai Wai Ji Shi, Vol.3, pp.31-32.

<sup>39</sup> Hai Wai Ji Shi, Vol.3, pp.32-33.

<sup>40</sup> Quote from Quan Thuy, p.296.

<sup>41</sup> "Description", section "The Navy".

<sup>42</sup> Nguyen et al, Quan Thuy, p.295.

<sup>43</sup> Borri, Cochinchina, p.h5.

<sup>44</sup> Choisy, Journal, pp.255-256. He said that the governors of 3 provinces had their own galleys: 30 in **Dinheat** (**Dinh Cat**), 17 in Cham Province (**Dinh Chiem**), and 15 in **Niaroux**

each containing 2 helmsmen, 3 officers, 6 firemen, 2 drummers, and 60 oarsmen. The number of soldiers was no doubt higher during war time. Certainly the number of royal galleys seems less than the figure reported by the Dutch in 1642, which claimed the king had 230-240 galleys, each manned by 64 men, including both rowers and soldiers. This report added that every galley was equipped with a firing piece, mostly fire 4,5, 6 or 8 lb iron shot, and 2 ordnances.<sup>45</sup> Besides firearms, spears and long grappling hooks were also used as weapons on galleys. Thus, Chapman describes soldiers in Cochinchina as often holding a long hook, which might reach 15 to 20 peds (5-6.4 m), obviously used to grapple the enemy's galley in order to board and fight. Dutch ships may have suffered more from these weapons than from the firearms on the Cochinchinese galleys in the 1640s.

It seems that the navy of Cochinchina usually had more soldiers in each basic unit than did the army. According to the Tien Bien in 1653, the basic military unit significantly called a **thuyen**, or boat, had 30 to 60 soldiers. The **Noi-Thuy** (Inner Navy)<sup>46</sup> had 58 **thuyen**, or 6410 soldiers, while the Forward, Rear, Left and Right navies had 20 **thuyen**, or about 2,000 soldiers. The only exception was the **Left Thuy-co** (Navy), with 5 **thuyen**, or 200 soldiers.<sup>47</sup> While **thuyen** in the army meant only the basic unit, in the Nguyen navy it most likely meant a galley, thus giving each naval **thuyen** up to 100 men, including oars and soldiers.

Nevertheless, the difference between the navy and the army under the Nguyen lords might not have been as clear cut as in later periods. Because of the geography of Cochinchina, the army often relied on galleys (or ships) for transport, so that soldiers also learned galley skills. According to Da Shan, "after the men were trained as soldiers the court sent each one of them to learn a skill. After this, they were sent to different galleys (**thuyen**) to be drilled".<sup>48</sup>

By the 18th century, the Nguyen navy, and very likely the army too, was not as powerful as in the 17th century. A decline occurred towards the end of the Trinh-

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(Nha Trang?).

<sup>45</sup> Buch, p.122.

<sup>46</sup> Very likely the navy which garrisoned the capital area. The Dutch source (see Annex 2) says that in the sea battle between the Nguyen and the Dutch in 1643, there were 50-60 Nguyen galleys. These may well have been the **Noi-Thuy** - Inner navy.

<sup>47</sup> Tien Bien, Vol.4, p.55.

<sup>48</sup> Hai Wai Ji Shi, Vol.1, p.23.



Nguyen war, and because the later kings took much less interest in military matters than their ancestors. Nguyen Phuc Khoat typified this characteristic attitude of later Nguyen rulers. Poivre commented about his galleys that "they seem to be designed more for pleasure than business, they are a work of art and good taste."<sup>49</sup> He added:

At the bow is a poop or chamber seven or eight **pieds** [around 2.5 metres] in height and as much in width, which has 4 doors which slide open and shut... At the prow is an elephant's head which looks true to life... I have seen the prince return from fishing with all his galleys. They went like the wind and were a delightful sight.<sup>50</sup>

### The elephant troop

Elephant troops were important both in Cochinchina and in Tongking. Cadiere, looking back nostalgically on the tradition of keeping an elephant army in Cochinchina, put together a list of place names in the area from Quang Binh to Quang Nam associated with the elephant troop. Names like **Con Voi, Tau Voi, Muc Tuong, Tuong Khe**, and many others, suggest the importance of the elephant troop at the time.<sup>51</sup>

During the Trinh-Nguyen war, the official numbers of elephants on each side, like those of soldiers, were always inflated to impress. While A.De Rhodes in the 1650s said Tongking had 300 elephants, P.Tissanier, who was there between 1658 and 1663, asserted that there were 500 elephants. Tavernier, on the other hand, assures us that in 1643 the Trinh had 700, while Samuel Baron trumped them all by reporting that the Trinh had 3,000 to 4,000 elephants before 1685. Of these competing claims, De Rhodes probably came closest to the truth, if still somewhat exaggerated. The Toan Thu says that in 1610 the Trinh had about 1,000 galleys and 100 elephants.<sup>52</sup> It would have been difficult to increase the number of elephants rapidly in Tongking since few could be found wild in that region.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> "Description", section "The Navy".

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid*, section "The Navy".

<sup>51</sup> BAVH, 1922, p.44.

<sup>52</sup> Toan Thu, vol.3,p.928. The number of galleys seems unlikely to be true, unless small craft being included.

<sup>53</sup> Nowadays in northern Vietnam there are only three provinces - Lai Chau and Son La in the northwest, Nghe Tinh in the center - that claim elephants. Although there must have been elephants traded between Vietnamese and Thai or Muong peoples in the northwest, relations in the 17th and 18th centuries between Vietnamese and those upland peoples does not appear to have been closer than relations with Lao on the Vietnamese-Lao border.

This meant that, in the north especially, Vietnamese had to get elephants from others. There were 3 ways to do so: by war, tribute, or trade. Thus elephants appear to have been the main spoils seized by Vietnamese in wars with the Lao, or the Cham. Tay Nam Bien Tai Luc (Records of the southwest border) contains the numbers of elephants captured from some battles with Lao and Cham in the 15th century. According to the Toan Thu, from about 1700, the **Bon Man**, Lao people living upstream on the Ngan Sau and Ngan Pho Rivers (in today's Xieng Khoang province of Laos), also paid regular tribute to the Trinh, mainly in the form of elephants. Before this date the Trinh could probably only get elephants by trading with those people.

Some letters written in 1787,<sup>54</sup> during the Tay Son period, confirm that the Lao-Viet border was one place where elephant trading took place. Thus we find one letter written by officials in Quy Hop prefecture asking Vietnamese at the border to buy three elephants, two of which were for the government. Another letter, probably written by the same officer in Quy Hop to a higher officer in Nghe An, says that because of the floods that year it was hard to go to Lac Hon (Savanaket, Laos), so he had sold his family property to buy a young elephant to send to him [the officer in Nghe An] soon.<sup>55</sup>

Cochinchina, on the other hand, enjoyed the great advantage of producing many elephants locally. Almost every area bred elephants, except Quang Nam. This abundant supply makes credible a Dutch report saying that the king of Cochinchina owned 600 war elephants in 1642. Even so, this was probably much less than the Cham kings of the 14th century, if we can believe Odoric de Pordenone. At the time of his visit to Champa in 1323, he claimed the king had 14,000 tame elephants.<sup>56</sup>

As we mentioned previously, the early kings of Cochinchina acted more as military commanders than as rulers, devoting most of their time to drilling their army, their galleys, or their elephants. Da Shan has given us a picture of the

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<sup>54</sup> Found by Tran Van Quy in 1974, together with other 300 documents in the former Quy Hop prefecture, Nghe Tinh province, extending from the early 17th century to the 19th century.

<sup>55</sup> I am very grateful to Mr. Tran Van Quy, who found these letters in 1974, for letting me read his copies of this correspondences. The originals can be found in the National Archives No.1, Hanoi.

<sup>56</sup> Odoric of Pordenone, Cathay and the Way Thither, reprinted by Kraus Reprint Ltd., Nendeln, 1967, Vol.2, p.164.

king with his elephant troop.

One day a eunuch came and told me that the king [Nguyen Phuc Chu, 1691-1725] was going to drill his elephant troop the next day and would not be back for 2 weeks. He asked if I would like to see how he drilled his elephant troop...The king was sitting on an elephant which was taller and larger than any other, with his guards around him. Ten elephants with red lacquer saddles stood in the western part of the arena. The saddles were like bucket seats and could hold 3 soldiers.<sup>57</sup> The soldiers sitting inside had red and gold helmets on their heads and green flannelette uniforms on their bodies. The **xiang nu**<sup>58</sup> held hooks and stood by the elephants.

In the east part of the ground stood 500 soldiers with knives, spears and guns in their hands. The soldiers were one or two li [1000 metres] away from the elephants. As soon as the signal was given the soldiers ran towards the elephants and fired, but the elephants stood still. Then the bronze drums began beating, the **xiang nu** poked the elephants' flanks. The elephants then charged forward furiously towards the soldiers who all started running to escape from them. The elephants bowled over some soldiers, and other soldiers riding the elephants then jabbed the poor soldiers[underfoot] with hooks and spears, causing them to bleed. Some could not even get up. This battle enabled the court to distinguish the best and the worst elephants. The promotion and punishment of the officers and soldiers were also based on the results of the battle.

Then the king told me that each elephant was surrounded by 50 soldiers during a battle, and the country greatly benefited from the elephant troop both in the war against Tongking and the war against the Cham.<sup>59</sup>

The Tay Son also had a large elephant division with 300 animals. Interestingly, some of its leaders were women. Bui Thi Xuan, a female general, commanded the elephant unit; while one of Nguyen Nhac's wives was reputedly famous for her ability at drilling elephants. So powerful was the unit that in 1797 Nguyen Anh acknowledged that "when fighting on land our enemy relied on nothing but elephants". To counter them he announced that, henceforth, "whoever could kill an elephant and the soldiers sitting on it would win 50 **quan** cash, and be promoted one grade."<sup>60</sup> After defeating the Qing in 1789, Nguyen Hue ordered some large galleys to be built which could carry an elephant unit, to be ready to fight in China.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> A Dutch account described it as "a small house in which can sit 4 men and their drivers with firearms". See Buch, *De Oost-Indische Compagnie*, p.122.

<sup>58</sup> Slaves leading the elephants, whom Borri called *Nayre*, possibly "*nai ro*", savage elephant-keeper.

<sup>59</sup> *Da Shan*, Vol.2, p.26.

<sup>60</sup> *Tien Bien*, Vol. 9, p.443.

<sup>61</sup> Ngo Thi Chi, *Hoang Le Nhat Thong Chi*, Ecole Francaise d'Extreme-Orient, Paris, Taipei, 1986, p.242.

## The Communication and Transportation Forces

The conflicts between the Dutch and the Nguyen in the 1640s suggest that Nguyen had a well organised communication system. From the sea, they received reports regularly from a special team called the **tuan hai** (patrol on the sea). In addition, they had lookout towers along the coast.<sup>62</sup> Later, the Tien Bien says that in 1672 the Nguyen set up a string of communications posts from Bao Vinh district of Hue to Ho Xa (along the Ben Hai river in Quang Tri). The posts operated by water (maybe both river and sea), with 16 stops. Each stop had 4 boats and 24 men (soldiers?). From Ho Xa the post by land began, presumably for security reasons. There were 17 stops on land, to the border itself, called **sa phu luy** in Quang Binh. For each stop 4 horses were provided by the government. By this system Nguyen orders could be sent to the front rapidly, and intelligence reports received as well.<sup>63</sup>

According to the Tien Bien, transport by land was as follows:

there were 2 units called **xe 1** and **xe 2** respectively, each **xe** had 50 soldiers. The government gave each **xe** 37 oxen and 74 carts, every cart pulled by 2 oxen (?), each soldier looking after 7 carts, each cart could carry 1,200 bat (600 litres).<sup>64</sup>

No direct information is given about how supply by sea was accomplished, but the Tien Bien says that in 1667 **chua Hien** personally supervised a project of dredging the port of Ho Xa in order to transport rice there.<sup>65</sup> For a state like **Dang Trong**, transportation by sea was no doubt the most important means. Da Shan mentioned several junks carrying rice. He also said that there were 64 soldiers on his galley, but no cooking utensils, and he worried about how they would be fed until he found there were certain stops along the coast where food was ready to feed travellers like him and the soldiers.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> We can easily see what they were like from a Japanese painting in the early 17th century, called "Scroll of the Chaya's ship trade to Cochinchina", now kept in the Jomyo temple in Nagoya; also from a drawing of ships on the Faifo River (Thu Bon river), of Barrow's book.

<sup>63</sup> See Tien Bien, Vol.5, p.76.

<sup>64</sup> Tien Bien, Vol.5, p.75. The numbers here do not seem right: both for the oxen and carts, and for the number of soldiers. If indeed one soldier look after 7 carts, 50 soldiers should have looked after 350 carts rather than 75. Also, 37 oxen were not enough to pull 37 carts, not to mention 74 carts, if 2 oxen were used for one cart, according to the text.

<sup>65</sup> Tien Bien, Vol.5, p.73.

<sup>66</sup> Hai Wai Ji Shi, Vol.4, p.2.

No information is given about transportation before 1667. Possibly it was not so important in the early years of the war, but became so when the number of soldiers increased. It seems that had the war between the Trinh and the Nguyen carried on, transportation would have become a big problem not only for the Trinh, who came a long way to fight, but also for the Nguyen, who badly needed of manpower to carry out the supply tasks.

### The Provincial Army

Throughout this chapter we have referred to the **chanh binh**, the regular troops. They were not the only soldiers, however. Each province recruited troops for its own region, which were called **tho binh** (local troops), or **thuoc binh** (subordinate troops). These units reportedly were several times larger than **chanh binh** units. It seems likely the Nguyen kept most men in the country in this "tho binh", rather than in the regular armed forces, since **Tho binh** received no pay, either from the central or local governments. Members did win exemption from paying taxes, however. Most of them probably acted more as militia, police, porters, or labourers than as soldiers.

The main exception lay in their role in repressing local revolts or disturbances by minority groups and bandits. The existence of militia units helped the loosely-organised local administration maintain order and security. And, no doubt, these units also served to forestall the people themselves from joining rebellions by co-opting most of the young men as soldiers.

Most soldiers were ethnic Vietnamese. But according to the Nam Ha Tiep Luc, a manuscript kept in the Han-Nom Institute of Hanoi, the Nguyen did use some uplanders in their armed forces, a practice caused probably by the small population in the lowland areas:

there are some soldiers rounded up from the mountains. As for those people who used to be uplanders or from the tributary countries who were forced to be slaves, their future descendants would never be allowed to be registered people [but soldiers?].<sup>67</sup>

Finally, we should note that the Nguyen also permitted the Cham king to have a small army. The Phu Bien said that in Dinh Binh Thuan a certain number of soldiers existed who were guards of the **phien vuong** (chief of a vassal state) of

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<sup>67</sup> Nam Ha Tiep Luc, Vol.1.

the Cham. The soldiers themselves were Cham. They received no pay, nor were they registered as **dinh** (taxpayers).

### **On recruiting soldiers and the soldiers' life**

The Nguyen law for recruiting soldiers was very strict. Vachet said in about 1671 that "a man will lose his head, if he is found trying to avoid being a soldier".<sup>67</sup> Also according to him, if an officer in charge of collecting soldiers accepted one not up to standard, he too would lose his head.<sup>68</sup> Da Shan described how the procedure was carried out:

Every March and April the army officers went to the villages to round up soldiers. They captured all the fit men over 16 years old, tied them to bamboo yokes and took them to the army. The yoke was like a ladder but slightly narrower... They could not go home to live with their families until they were 60 years old. Their families were only allowed to visit them and bring them some clothes. This situation meant that all of the men left in the villages were either old or disabled. It also encouraged parents to send their sons to become Buddhist monks when they were still teenagers out of fear that they would otherwise be captured by the army.<sup>70</sup>

From this point of view, soldiers were treated almost like slaves or prisoners. Thus the Tien Bien in the 1631 entry tells us about Nguyen Huu Tien, a general under the early Nguyen lords. Apparently he often drilled the army at night, and if any soldier failed to obey an order properly, the chief of his unit would be beheaded instantly. Yet General Tien was never punished for this, because Nguyen Phuc Nguyen(1613-1635) said:"If a soldier was not up to standard, what was wrong with killing him?" He then promoted General Tien, in order, so he believed, to maintain discipline in the army.<sup>71</sup>

However, Vachet shows another side to military life. According to him, the Nguyen allowed a soldier to cohabit with his wife, as long as he had only one, while an unmarried soldier had to cook for himself, a miserable fate compared to his married fellows. Officers, of course, suffered no such restrictions. Each soldier had a small dwelling, with a bedroom, a kitchen and a small personal garden. All these separate dwellings, each identical to the other, were connected by palings.

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<sup>64</sup> Taboulet, La Geste Francaise en Indochine, Maisonneuve, Paris, 1955, Vol.1, p.67.

<sup>68</sup> Quoted from Quang Nam Qua Cac Thoi Dai (A history of Quang Nam), Co Hoc Tung Thu, Saigon, 1974, Vol.1, p.97.

<sup>70</sup> Da Shan, Hai Wai Ji Shi, p.23. This can't be true; but there is nothing in the source to indicate whether Da Shan observed the round-up, or reported what he was told occurred. The latter is probably the case.

<sup>71</sup> Tien Bien, vol.2, p.21.

Opposite one row there was another row of houses which were exactly alike, the two 15 meters apart from each other. More spacious accommodation for officers stood at the end of each row. The barrack rows themselves were surrounded by uninhabited wilderness.<sup>72</sup>

Choisy's account seems to confirm that a soldier's wife could live with him while he was serving in the army. He said that "almost all the soldiers in Cochinchina were married, but they could hardly support their own wives".<sup>73</sup> It would hardly be surprising if they did live with their families, since they had their own land to cultivate, and "when there was a war they were soldiers, but when they were not needed as soldiers they worked for the state".<sup>74</sup> Also, if most fit men served in the army and could not go home until they were 60 years old, it would be a great drain on population growth, in a country where manpower was badly needed.

This way of life differed greatly from that of soldiers in **Dang Ngoai**. No contemporary sources suggest that a Trinh soldier could have his wife live with him, at least not for regular troops. Indeed, one of the best known classics of Vietnamese literature, Chinh Phu Ngam, describes the sad lot of a soldier's wife, separated far from her husband. The government may not have prohibited a soldier from bringing his wife with him: yet his family's role and way of life was very much fixed on the village, and it would have been hard for them to move as dependants of soldiers. Also, unlike the soldiers of **Dang Trong**, northern soldiers in **Dang Ngoai** did not serve a lifetime in the army. All these made a difference.

The Nguyen apparently paid attention to military uniforms. Vachet said that "at every New Year the officers and soldiers received their new uniforms from the government. There were different colours for different units, yet all of them were in silk".<sup>75</sup> And according to the Tien Bien, the annals which recorded the military affairs of the country in much more detail than other issues, the army had 4 sets of uniforms: one for a clear day, the second for a rainy day, the third for battle, and the last for usual wear. One fine day in 1709, when the king was reviewing

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<sup>72</sup> Taboulet, La Geste Francaise, vol.1,p.66-67.

<sup>73</sup> Choisy, Journal du Voyage de Siam, p.257.

<sup>74</sup> Da Shan, Hai Wai Ji Shi, p.23.

<sup>75</sup> Taboulet, La geste francais, p.67.



his troops, he was angry to find some soldiers wearing the 4th kind of uniform rather than the first. As a result he punished the chiefs of the divisions of the Inner-Left, ~~Inner~~-Right, Inner and Outer armies respectively.<sup>76</sup> Choisy, too, observed in 1685 that the dress of soldiers in Cochinchina was "magnifique", whether for war or for daily wear: every army had its own decoration, some with red satin, some purple and some yellow.<sup>77</sup>

In contrast to Poivre, who held that **Dang Trong** soldiers "were poorly fed and even more poorly paid",<sup>78</sup> most other sources reported that soldiers were comparatively well off. An investigation of "Quinam" conducted in 1642 by the Dutchman Johan van Linga, for example, noted that the salary of a soldier was 10-12 Spanish reals, 360 pounds rice and 2 cangas (an amount of coarse black or white cotton cloth) per year.<sup>79</sup> According to the same source, a married taxpayer between 18 and 50 years [should be 60 years] paid 11 reals money per year. If this is correct, in the 17th century one taxpayer supported one soldier. Thus if the soldiers actually received 10-12 reals per year (8.5 **quan**), it would represent quite a lot of money.<sup>80</sup>

Vietnamese sources also confirm that soldiers in Cochinchina were paid well. Nam Ha Ky Van, a manuscript written by Dang Trong An in the early 19th century, said that salary for a soldier in the Nguyen army before the Tay Son was

1 **hoc** rice and 1 **quan** money per month, enough for a family of several members to live. What was more, there was a strict rule forbidding officers to collect any money from the soldiers. Therefore many people preferred to be soldiers instead of taxpayers.<sup>81</sup>

This is supported by the statement of Nguyen Cu Trinh, a famous mandarin in the Vo Vuong reign, who in 1751 denounced the high salary of soldiers as one of three evils in contemporary society.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Tien Bien, Vol.8, p.6.

<sup>77</sup> Choisy, Journal du Voyage de Siam, p.257.

<sup>78</sup> "Description of Cochinchina, 1749-50", in Li Tana & Anthony Reid, Southern Vietnam under the Nguyen.

<sup>79</sup> Buch, De Oost-Indische Compagnie, p.121.

<sup>80</sup> Choisy said that the soldiers received their pay at the beginning of each month: 5 livres (5 francs) money, 1 boisseau of rice, and some fish sauce. See Journal du Voyage de Siam, p.257.

<sup>81</sup> Nam Ha Ky Van, kept in the Han-Nom Institute of Hanoi, shelf number VHv.2663.

<sup>82</sup> Tien Bien, Vol.10, p.142.

His criticism seems apt. Seeking to explain the stunning collapse of the formerly mighty kingdom of **Dang Trong**, the scholar Pham Nguyen Du (1739-1787) concluded that the Nguyen fell because they squeezed the people too hard in order to maintain the military.<sup>83</sup> With this in mind, we might almost say that the Nguyen first won their land, and then nearly lost it, on account of their armed forces.

Military matters certainly dominated most of **Dang Trong's** internal history, and even helped bring about its end. But in the 18th century, we see some signs of change within the administration that suggest the Nguyen had begun to move away from a mainly military regime towards a more civil style of government. We will finish this chapter by glancing at this development.

### **The Beginnings of a Civil Government?**

In the 18th century, the sources show the Nguyen regime beginning to change from a military machine to a more obviously civil type of government. We see it first in the Nguyen rulers' insistence in styling themselves as kings.

Da Shan said that in 1675 Nguyen Phuc Chu already called himself "king" (**Dai Viet quoc vuong**); but we only hear of this in the Tien Bien in 1744, when it mentions Nguyen Phuc Khoat's claim to be "King of Dai Viet". However, the Tien Bien seems rather confused about this development. It says that until 1744 the Nguyen had used a seal carved with the characters **Tong Tran Tuong Quan** (garrison general), and only then had one made with the words **Dai Viet Quoc Vuong** inscribed on it.<sup>84</sup> Yet the same source says, in the entry for 1709, that Nguyen Phuc Chu already owned a personal seal carved with the characters **Dai Viet Quoc Nguyen Vuong Vinh Tran Tri Bao**.<sup>85</sup> As the first royal seal, it adds in a footnote, it became a treasured heirloom passed down to Nguyen Anh.<sup>86</sup> It can be seen in an inscription at the Thien Mu temple, built in Hue in 1715.

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<sup>83</sup> Nam Hanh Ky Dac Tap, Vol.1. MS kept in the Han Nom Institute of Hanoi.

<sup>84</sup> Tien Bien, vol.10, p.136.

<sup>85</sup> Tien Bien, vol.8, p.113.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid, p.113.

But evidence from another temple inscription, this time from the Ha Trung temple, strongly suggests that a third royal seal existed, different from both those of 1709 and 1744. This tablet, set up in 1729, contained the words **Dai Viet Quoc Vuong Tri An**, making it most probably the seal of Ninh Vuong (Nguyen Phuc Tru, r. 1725-38). If this is correct, it proves that the Nguyen claimed to be kings, rather than commanders-in-chief, long before 1744, because each ruler from Nguyen Phuc Chu onwards had his own royal seal.

The concept of the **dinh** which, as we saw at the start of the chapter, designated provincial offices as "battalions", was also beginning to lose its precise military meaning by the 18th century, at least as it was used in the Phu Bien. The idea of dividing territory into units called provinces (**tin**h), which was finally put into effect in the 19th century, can be traced back to the 18th century subdivision of **dinh** into **phu** (or prefectures), a purely civil term of Chinese origin long in use in the north.

And finally, while generals remained the most important figures in the early Nguyen government, after the Trinh war ended, they found certain civil mandarins starting to challenge their administrative dominance. In the 18th century, men like Nguyen Dang De and Nguyen Cu Trinh (and their relatives) reached much higher office than any civil mandarins could have hoped for a century before. Although relatively slow in coming, the rise of civil officials in government was inevitable once the earlier regime stabilised in peace.

Even in the early years, when the military government only really used civil officials as administrative assistants to army officers, the Nguyen had found they could not keep the state machinery functioning adequately without clerks and civil officials. The recognition of their important role came in 1646, when the Nguyen established the first civil examinations in **Dang Trong**. With the end of the war, and the development of the Nguyen administration, civil officers like the **ky luc** (in charge of personnel matters) or the **cai ba** (revenue official) became more and more involved in making and carrying out policy. Their involvement in turn generate a demand for more civil mandarins. Whereas from 1645 to 1693 only seven examinations had been held, resulting in a mere 140 graduates, three examinations held in the years 1694 and 1695 produced 285 graduates for the Nguyen administration.<sup>87</sup> This sudden influx of civil mandarins strengthened their position within the government, so that a struggle for influence seems to have

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<sup>87</sup> Tien Bien, vol.7, pp.99-101.

slowly begun between the two sides at court - the military and nobles on one side, and the commoners and civil mandarins on the other.

We can see traces of this conflict in certain incidents recorded in the sources. For example, in 1689, when Nguyen Huu Hoa, son of the famous general Nguyen Huu Dat of Tong Son county origin, was appointed to command an army to fight the Khmer, a civil officer, Hoa Tin, was also sent with him. Later, however, Hoa Tin accused Nguyen Huu Hoa of corruption. The general had accepted gifts from the Khmer, he claimed, and for that reason had not pushed his military advantage and lost the chance of defeating the enemy. The accusation angered the **Chua** so much that he stripped Nguyen Huu Hao of all his posts. Similarly, it was no coincidence that in 1755, when general Thien Chinh was sent to fight the Khmer again, Nguyen Cu Trinh went with him as his assistant. But the whole sorry story of 1689 repeated itself, right down to Thien Chinh losing all his posts as well.

At least one civil mandarin, Nguyen Khoa Dang, even dared confront the Nguyen's own noble relatives. The Tien Bien highly praised his courage for "making a stand against the nobles".<sup>88</sup> At the time, Liet Truyen Tien Bien says, many nobles led lives of luxury on money borrowed from the state, that they had no intention of returning. One of the ruling **chua's** own sisters was among the worst offenders. Nguyen Khoa Dang arranged to have her sedan chair stopped in the street one day and publicly shamed her by asking her to pay her debts. Significantly, when she denounced him to her brother, **Minh Vuong** refused to reprimand Nguyen Khoa Dang, and instead gave her the money to pay back the treasury. Seeing this, other nobles began to repay their loans as well.<sup>89</sup> In **Minh Vuong's** reign Dang rose to the unprecedented position of **noi tan kiem an sat tong tri quan trong su** (officer in charge of Law and having the right to know all important civil and military matters in the state) in 1722. But his life depended on royal protection. Hated by the nobles, Dang was murdered in 1725, right after the death of **Minh Vuong** (Nguyen Phuc Dieu) by Nguyen Cuu The, a general of Tong Son county origin.

But as these examples show, the influence of civil mandarins depended on the **chua's** favour and support. Although they never stopped manoeuvring to seek

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<sup>88</sup> Liet Truyen Tien Bien, vol.5, p.259.

<sup>89</sup> Liet Truyen Tien Bien, vol.9, p.259.

advantage against their opponents,<sup>90</sup> the Tay Son rebellion cut short their efforts to move **Dang Trong** towards a more civil-dominated administration. Even without this, however, it is impossible to say whether they would have succeeded, or what sort of administration might have evolved. Cochinchina was not a southern Tongking; too many other factors were different foremost among them the Nguyen state's unique economic base which the next chapters shall examine.

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<sup>90</sup> For example, in 1765, when Truong Phuc Loan became influential in the court after **Vo Vuong** dead, civil mandarins suggested the famous mandarin Nguyen Cu Trinh be brought back from the Mekong delta to head the Personnel Office, and Nguyen Quang Tien, another civil officer, be appointed as head of the **Han Lam Vien** (Imperial Academy).





**Figure 3** The drawing is called "Picture of Araki Sotao's ship going overseas", from Kawajima, *Tokugawa shaki no kaigai boekika* (Merchants in the Tokugawa period), p.26. It combined a Red-seal licence issued by the Tokugawa government to Araki, which allowed him to trade from Japan to Cochinchina, in 1622. As the Araki flag shown above left seems to be an inverted VOC flag, it seems likely that the Araki family had adapted it for their own purposes. Araki Sotao married a daughter of Nguyen Phuc Nguyen (1613-1635) in 1619. He was given a Vietnamese name by the Nguyen and regarded as a noble in Cochinchina.



### CHAPTER 3 THE FOREIGN MERCHANTS

The traditional attitude of Vietnamese authorities towards trade in general, and overseas trade in particular, had not been encouraging. Zhu Fan Zhi, a Chinese travellers' book published in the 13th century, summed up the characteristic attitude of Dai Viet towards trade in a sentence: "This country does not trade [with foreigners]."<sup>1</sup> Rekidai Hoan (Precious Documents of Successive Generations), a collection of documents and letters exchanged between Ryukyu<sup>2</sup> and other Asian countries, records almost no contact in the 15th century<sup>3</sup> between Ryukyu and Vietnam, making it one of only two regions in Asia not within Ryukyu's trading circle. (The other was Luzon.) Siam and Malacca, on the other hand, appear constantly in this source, suggesting strong trade connections with the outside world in the 15th century, something Tome Pires confirms.

Yet if we compare the Rekidai Hoan of the 15th and the 16th centuries with the Kai-hentai, of the 17th and 18th centuries, a fascinating development becomes obvious: the numbers of ships (or junks) trading with **Dang Trong** in the early 17th century now exceeded those for Siam and Cambodia, putting the Nguyen state at the head of the Japanese list for mainland Southeast Asian countries.

Cochinchina was born at the right time, in an "age of commerce".<sup>4</sup> We can say quite safely that it was commerce that enabled the new Vietnamese state to become rich and strong enough in a few short decades to secure its independence from the north, and to fund its expansion to the south. It is doubtful whether, without trade, **Dang Trong** could even have survived, despite an abundance of natural resources, given its difficult situation. It lacked manpower, money, established foreign relations and many other things, as well as being founded in a new land wrested from another people and culture. Overseas trade became the crucial factor in the speed of **Dang Trong's** development. Nothing else could have built up this manpower-short land rapidly enough to resist a country which

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<sup>1</sup> Zhu Fan Zhi, Zhong Hua Shu Ju, Beijing, 1956, Vol.1, p.1.

<sup>2</sup> Ryukyu, now known as Okinawa, was famous in Asia for its trade from the late 14th century to the early 16th century.

<sup>3</sup> There is one exception: an official letter sent by Ryukyu to Annam in 1509, a letter very different in style and with gifts much richer than those to other Southeast Asian countries. It is more like a contact between the two governments rather than a trade relationship. See Atsushi Kobata and Mitsugu Matsuda, Ryukyuan Relations with Korea and South Sea Countries, Atsushi Kobata, Kyoto, 1969, p.185.

<sup>4</sup> For the term, see Reid, Southeast Asia in the Age of Commerce 1450-1680, Yale University, New Haven and London, 1988.



doubled or tripled Cochinchina's resources in almost every way. For other Southeast Asian countries the question of overseas trade may only have been a matter of whether they were rich or poor. For early Cochinchina, it was a question of life or death.

The year of 1600 can be regarded as the watershed for overseas trade in Cochinchina. Before 1600, when Nguyen Hoang finally gave up hope of winning power in the north, trade was carried on more or less freely, but without and government attention or interference. During this period, Cochinchina traded most with the Portuguese in Macao from the 1550s, and with of Red Seal Ships (known as **shuin-sen**) from Japan in 1592.<sup>5</sup> The main trade items in the 1590s seem to have been lead and saltpetre, with the port of Cochinchina acting as an entrepot. A report written by Xu Fu-yuan, the governor of Fukien in the 1590s, says:

The **fulangji** (Portuguese) in Macao trade the most of lead and saltpetre among other overseas traders... Lead and saltpetre are abundantly produced in Cambodia, there are lead and saltpetre in Siam too. The Japanese yearly send ships to **Jiaozhi** (Cochinchina) and Luzon to trade these items and carry them away.<sup>6</sup>

Japan needed these items because of its war with Korea between 1596 and 1598. The same report counted 10 ships going overseas from Satsuma each year: 3 to Luzon, 3 to Cochinchina, 2 to Macao, 1 to Cambodia, and 1 to Siam. As this list indicates, **Dang Trong** was already becoming a popular destination by the end of the 16th century.

Trade with Cochinchina also benefited from the changed policy on overseas trade of the Chinese government. After navigation and trade to Southeast Asian countries was permitted in 1567, many Chinese junks went to trade in the South Seas. According to the Quan Zhe Bing Zhi Kao, a decade later in 1577, 14 junks from Fujian carried copper, iron and porcelain to Thuan Hoa to trade.<sup>7</sup> These and other indications all suggest that regular commercial relations between

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<sup>5</sup> In 1567, Ming Mu-zong(1567-1572) decided to renounce the traditional policy of **cun ban bu xia hai** (even a small piece of plank would not be allowed to float on the sea), but only navigation and trade to Southeast Asian countries were permitted and trade with Japan was still strictly prohibited. Under such circumstance, the de facto rulers of Japan, Toyotomi Hideyoshi then Tokugawa Ieyasu encouraged the Japanese merchants to trade with Chinese by sending Red Seal Ships to Southeast Asian ports.

<sup>6</sup> Ming Jing Shi Wen Bian (A Collection of reports to the emperors in the Ming Dynasty), Photomechanical printed by Zhu Li Press, Hong Kong, ? Vol. 400, p.4334.

<sup>7</sup> Cited from Chen Chingho, "The Chinese street in Hoi An and its trade in the 17th to 18th centuries", Xin Ya Xue Bao (New Asia Journal), Vol.3, No.1, Hong Kong, 1960, p.279.

Nguyen **Dang Trong** and her various neighbours had begun some time between the 1550s and the 1570s at the latest.

The turning point came in 1600, however, when Nguyen Hoang returned from the north determined to try to set up the best possible relations with overseas trading countries. Concerned at northern hostility, he judged that his own rule, and the Thuan Hoa and Quang Nam areas, were under threat unless he could secure the much-needed resources and supplies from somewhere else to meet the coming dangers. Encouraging trade with foreign merchants provided a solution to his predicament; and the Japanese Red Seal ships were a means already at hand. The Japanese trade gave **Dang Trong**, and its Nguyen rulers, hope for the future. Let us consider this vital connection.

### The Japanese

The Red Seal ships were not the first official contact between Japan and Cochinchina. That honour fell to a Japanese pirate, Shirahama Kenki. The first Japanese to be mentioned in the Tien Bien,<sup>8</sup> Kenki was ironically mistaken for a Westerner when, in 1585, he "came to the **Cua Viet** (Port of Viet) with 5 large ships and plundered the coast. His majesty (Nguyen Hoang) ordered the 6th prince to lead more than 10 galleys immediately to the port. The prince destroyed 2 of the pirates' ships, and Kenki fled in dismay. Very much pleased, His majesty said: How brave my son is! Thenceforward, the pirates quieted down."

Curiously, Kenki's name appeared again 16 years later, in a letter sent by Nguyen Hoang to Ieyasu, the first Tokugawa shogun, in 1601. In 1599 Kenki's ship had been wrecked in the Thuan An seaport. "Not knowing that Kenki was a lawful merchant", the letter explained, "our magistrate at Thuan Hoa got into a fight with the ship's crew and thus lost his life by mistake". As a result, the generals gathered troops to kill Kenki for revenge. When Nguyen Hoang returned from the north in 1600, he found Kenki was still held in the country, as no ship had gone to Japan that year. Kenki stayed in Cochinchina until 1601.

Nguyen Hoang may possibly have mistaken Kenki for a merchant sent by the Tokugawa government; or he may have seen his presence as a convenient pretext that allowed the Nguyen to make overtures of good will to Japan, under the guise of wanting "to continue [our good] relations according to previous examples", as

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<sup>8</sup> Tien Bien, Vol.1, p.24.

Nguyen Hoang's letter discreetly phrased it.

The Tokogawa reply made it clear that Kenki was no official envoy: "Those wicked men who committed murder deserved punishment by your people, while the magnanimity you showed to the sailors deserved our deep gratitude". The letter also informed the Nguyen ruler about Red Seal Ships,<sup>9</sup> saying: "In the future, ships visiting your country from our country are to be certified by the seal shown on this letter, and ships not carrying the seal should not be deemed lawful".<sup>10</sup>

Regular trade between the two countries then started. Between 1601 and 1606 letters also passed between Nguyen Hoang and Tokugawa Ieyasu every year. Nguyen Hoang appeared to be the more eager partner, however, and was the one who took the initiative.<sup>11</sup> His attitude surely encouraged Japanese to come to **Dang Trong**. The Trinh in **Dang Ngoai**, on the other hand, did not make official contact with the Japanese government until 1624, and then only in a half-hearted way.<sup>12</sup> The Red Seal trade was very significant with Nguyen Cochinchina, as Table 1 below reveals.

This table also shows considerable Japanese confusion before 1609 about what to

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<sup>9</sup> The Tokugawa government started to provide legitimate merchants with sailing licenses known as *shuin jo* in 1592. But not all ships going overseas had red seal patents. From 1603 the control tightened, the government required all Japanese ships sailing overseas to have *shuin jo*. For details see Innes, R, The Door Ajar: Japan's Foreign Trade in the 17th Century (Ph.D dissertation), University of Michigan, 1980.

<sup>10</sup> Tsuko ichiran Compiled by Hayashi Akira et al. Kokusho Kankokai, 1912-13, Tokyo, Vol.171, p.483; for the English translation, see Kawamoto Kuniye, "The international outlook of the Quang Nam (Nguyen) regime as revealed in Gainan Tsuusho", paper for the International Symposium on the Ancient Town of Hoi An, 1990.

<sup>11</sup> There were 8 letters from Nguyen Hoang, and two gifts sent separately to Tokugawa government by him in these 6 years. The letters sent from Tokugawa's side were six. See Tsuko ichiran, pp.481-487. According to the same source, amazingly, there was a large black Cochinchinese ship with 1200 people (?) on board, bringing with them gifts to Tokugawa, including a tiger, an elephant, and 2 peacocks, arriving at Nagasaki in 1602. See *ibid*, p.483.

<sup>12</sup> The first letter sent by Trinh Trang (r.1624-57) to the Japanese king in 1624 reads: "... Last summer captain Tsunogura, your country man, lead two ships to trade in our country. Since we are interested in getting in good terms with your government rather than those small traders, we asked for information about your country from them..." Although the letter ended with good will gestures, the Trinh's attitude towards overseas trade remained remarkably different from the Nguyen in the **Dang Trong**. The second letter sent by the Trinh in 1627 even shows a demeaning attitude towards the Japanese king: "Ten bolts of silk issued to the Japanese king". It is not surprising, therefore, that 1628 the Japanese government prohibited Japanese merchants from going to Tongking. See Tsuko ichiran, Vol.172, pp.493-496. According to Dutch sources, in 1641 again there was news that the Japanese government would prohibited Chinese junks from going to Japan, which helped the VOC to make up their mind to invest in Tongking, because the prices of Tongking goods would be up in Japan. See Dagh register gehouden int Casteel Batavia, Chinese trans. by Guo Hui, Taiwan Sheng Wen Xian Wei Yuan Hui, Taipei, second edition, 1989, Vol.2, p.331.

**Table 1 NUMBER OF JAPANESE SHUIN-SEN TO SOUTHEAST ASIAN COUNTRIES (1604-1635)**

	Annam	Tongking	Thuan Hoa	Cajian	Cochin China	Champa	Cambodia	Siam	Luzon
1604	4	3	1	1		1	5	4	4
1605	3	2				1	5		4
1606	2	1				1	3	4	3
1607	1					1	4	4	4
1608	1					1	1	1	
1609		1			1		1	6	3
1610	1				3		1	3	2
1611	2				3			1	2
1612		1			3			2	1
1613		1			6		1	3	1
1614		1			7		2	3	4
1615					5		1	5	5
1616		1			4				1
1617		2			5			1	1
1618		3			7		2	1	3
1619		3			1				1
1620					5		1		2

	Annam	Tongking	Thuan Hoa	Cajian	Cochin China	Champa	Cambodia	Siam	Luzon
1621		1			2		1		4
1622					1			2	2
1623		2			2	1	2	3	1
1624		2			2			1	2
1625		1					1	2	
1626								1	
1627					1		1	2	
1628		2			2		2	3	
1629					1		1	1	
1630								1	2
1631		1			1		1	1	
1632		2			3		4		2
1633		3			2		1	1	
1634		3			2		2		
1635					1		1		
Total	14	36	1	1	70	5	44	56	53

Sources: Iwao Siichi, Shuisen Boeki-shi no Kenkyu, Ko Bun Do, Tokyo, 1958, p.107.

call the region under Nguyen control. "**Cajian**" is probably **Cacciam** (Cham province), or the Vietnamese **Ke Chiem**, meaning "the Cham's place". Both refer to Quang Nam. The name "Annam" here mainly refers to Hung Nguyen county, Nghe An, according to Iwao Seiichi. But not always, for a letter sent by Nguyen Hoang to the Tokugawa government in 1605 identifies at least one ship, supposedly taken by Hunamoto Yabeiji to Annam, which went to Cochinchina rather than Nghe An. It may be that the way Nguyen Hoang styled himself as "Lord Thuy Quoc, supreme military commander of Annam" was the source of this Japanese confusion over "Annam". As late as 1611, we still find both "Annam" and "Cochinchina" on the list, showing a continued Japanese hesitancy about what to call the region. From 1612 on, however, the name "Annam" disappears completely, either because Hung Nguyen county could not compete with Hoi An, or because the Japanese adopted the name "Cochinchina" for the Nguyen region from the Portuguese, or both.<sup>13</sup>

Not coincidentally, the name "Champa" also disappears from the list from 1609, the year that Cochinchina make its first appearance. In the next 27 years, Champa appears on the list only once more, in 1623. The decline of Champa's trade seems to have been a direct result of the flourishing of Hoi An in the first decade of the 17th century.<sup>14</sup> Other countries' commerce also suffered from the rise of Cochinchina, in particular Japanese trade with Cambodia, Siam and Luzon. For four years they remained relatively popular destinations, but then their share of the Red Seal trade fell dramatically, especially in the ten years after 1611.

What initially drew the Japanese to **Dang Trong** was silk. They could get silk easier here because Japanese residents in the main port, Hoi An, could collect raw silk in advance of their ships' arrival. This activity became so important in the local market that the price of silk in Cochinchina at this time came to depend on the movement of the Red Seal Ships.<sup>15</sup> Local silk producers in Cochinchina divided their crop into 2 classes, according to the expected time of Japanese

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<sup>13</sup> This also shows that the name Cochinchina cannot have come originally from Japanese.

<sup>14</sup> Almost all scholars are inclined to think that the revenue of Champa mainly came from the mountains and the sea. Therefore trade was extremely important to the Cham. The 14th and 15th centuries Arab and Persian geographers often mention that Champa produced the best aloes wood. According to Dai Nam Nhat Thong Chi, the best aloes wood is produced in the Khanh Hoa. By 1653 the Nguyen set up the Binh Khuong prefecture in Khanh Hoa area. After that, although Chams still sent one ship to Batavia in 1680, and two ships to trade at Malacca in 1682, the good old days of Cham trading was over.

<sup>15</sup> Iwao Seiichi, Shuin-sen to Nihon-machi (Red Seal Ships and the Japanese Street), Kei Bun Do, Tokyo, 1966, p.117.

arrival: "new silk", which was harvested from April to June, in time for the Japanese to buy; and "old silk", which was harvested from October to December. Because the junks usually had to leave Cochinchina before 20 July,<sup>16</sup> this silk crop was too late for the Japanese, and had to await their return in the following April. This "old silk" therefore only fetched about 100-110 taels per picul (about 60 kg), while the "new silk" brought 140-160 per picul. Prices could go even higher. For example, the VOC records noted that silk cost a high 180-200 tale per picul in 1633 when 2 of its ships arrived in Cochinchina that year, because two Japanese junks had just bought 400,000 reals worth.<sup>17</sup>

There were various reasons for Cochinchina's popularity with Japanese merchants. Paramount among them was probably the chance to trade with China, though Innes believes that "this factor alone could not explain why Japanese sailed to distant Central Vietnam rather than Manila or Macao".<sup>18</sup> Whatever the reason, these circumstances gave the **Dang Trong** authorities a golden opportunity just when they needed it most, and the pragmatic Nguyen were smart enough to grab it with both hands.

That the early Nguyen rulers took a personal interest in encouraging trade is shown in a letter to Kato Kiyomasa in 1611 from Nguyen Hoang. In the letter, Nguyen Hoang wrote that a ship bound for Siam had been carried to Cochinchina by a storm. But as Hoang himself put it,

I heard that Siam was in a chaos and I could not bear to let the ship get into trouble, so I invited them to stay here to trade and treated them with sincerity. Since the ship is now going to leave, I am sending you some small gifts. If you feel well inclined towards us, please send the ship back to our country next year.<sup>19</sup>

The involvement of the Nguyen rulers, beginning with Nguyen Hoang, was important in keeping favourable relations with Japan. Nguyen Hoang took the initiative with an extraordinary gesture in 1604, when which he adopted Hunamoto Yabeiji, a merchant and the first envoy of the Tokugawa government

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<sup>16</sup> Thanh The Vy, Ngoai Thuong Viet Nam hoi the ky 17,18 va dau 19 (The Vietnamese merchants in the 17th, 18th and early 19th centuries), Su Hoc, Hanoi, 1961, p.165.

<sup>17</sup> Buch, De Oost-Indische Compagnie en Quinam, p.24. I am very grateful to Prof. A.Reid, who kindly translated and summarized Chapter 2 and Chapter 3 of this book for me. My information about the relations between the Nguyen and the VOC mostly come from his work and Ms.Ruurdie Laarhaven.

<sup>18</sup> Innes, The Door Ajar, pp.59-62.

<sup>19</sup> Minh Do Shi, MS, kept in the Institute of History, Hanoi.



to Cochinchina, as his son. He followed up with two letters to the Japanese government, announcing he had adopted Hunamoto, and asking the Japanese authorities to send him back to Cochinchina again with his ship.<sup>20</sup>

Nguyen Hoang's son, Nguyen Phuc Nguyen (1613-1635), tried to improve relations even further. In 1619, he married a daughter to Araki Sotao, another Japanese merchant. Given a Vietnamese name, the new son-in-law became a noble in Cochinchina.<sup>21</sup> These personal contacts did help to bring ships to Cochinchina. Of 84 Red Seal Ships sent to Annam<sup>22</sup> and Cochinchina from 1604 to 1635, Hunamoto and Araki commanded 17 between them.<sup>23</sup>

In this period the Nguyen rulers involved themselves actively in trading. In a letter written in 1634 from Nguyen Phuc Nguyen to Toba (a Japanese merchant), another adopted son, we see the king asking Toba to bring 1,000 taels of silver to buy goods (mainly luxury items, such as "50 bowls made of half gold and half silver, 50 plates, the same quality", etc.). Then again in 1635, he sent Toba 300 lang (11,340 grams) of raw silk and asked that he buy goods for him in Japan to the value of the silk.<sup>24</sup> In November 1633, Joost Schouten reported to Hendrick Brouwer, the Governor General of East India, that early that month three Japanese junks had come to trade in Ayutthaya from Cochinchina, one of them being "sent by the king and some high officials of Cochinchina, intending to invest in the business of deerskin".<sup>25</sup> The Dagh Register gehouden int Casteel Batavia Vant also says that in 1634 3 Japanese junks came to Siam from Cochinchina, one of them sent by the king, hoping to sell their cargoes to either "Moors" or Chinese.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Minh Do Shi, MS, kept in the Institute of History, Hanoi; see also Kamashima Mocojiao, Shuinsen Boeki-shi, Kojin Sha, Tokyo, 1942, p.579.

<sup>21</sup> The Nagasaki Shi, a book edited in Japan in the 18th century, says there was a marriage contract made with a piece of beautiful paper. See Nagasaki Shi, Nagasaki Bunko Kanko Kai, Tokyo, 1928, p.427. No Vietnamese source at the time seems to mention such a marriage at all.

<sup>22</sup> Since we can not identify which went to Nghe An and which to Cochinchina, we have to include all of them.

<sup>23</sup> Iwao Siichi, Shuinsen, p.185.

<sup>24</sup> Kamashima, Shuinsen Boeki-shi, Kojin Sha, Tokyo, 1942, pp.506-507.

<sup>25</sup> Iwao Seiichi, Shuin-sen, p.264.

<sup>26</sup> Dagh Register gehouden int Casteel Batavia Vant, Chinese translation by Guo Hui, Vol.1, p.117.

If before the war (starting in 1627), the Nguyen were already making many goodwill gestures to the Japanese government, then, after the war broke out their letters became far more anxious. In each of the 4 letters sent to the Japanese in 1628, from the king down to the merchants, the Nguyen asked that they trade with Tongking. This request recurred repeatedly until 1635, the last year of Japanese overseas trading. For the Nguyen, commerce at that time involved much more than making money - it had become a matter of survival.

The Japanese seem to have encountered few problems with the people of Cochinchina. In Wakan Sanzai Zui, which lists Southeast Asian countries in different categories, we find Tongking and Cochinchina grouped together with Korea and Mongolia as **ikoku** (different countries); while Champa, Siam and other Southeast Asian countries are classed with the Dutch, Indian and Arabic peoples as **gaii** (remote barbarian countries).<sup>27</sup> People in Cochinchina may have regarded Japanese in much the same way. According to Buch, when a Dutch ship was wrecked near Champelo Island on 26 November 1641, the 82 Dutch on board were taken prisoners by the Nguyen in Cochinchina and were held in a Japanese camp in Faifo (Hoi An), under the authority of the chief of the Japanese there.<sup>28</sup>

All these factors made Cochinchina Japan's most important trading partner in the early 17th century. So desirable was the Cochinchinese trade in the 1610s and 1620s that some Japanese merchants apparently forged Red Seal licences to go there in the 1620s,<sup>29</sup> while others presented gifts in the hope of obtaining Red Seal licences for trade with **Dang Trong**.<sup>30</sup> According to the diary of the English merchant Richard Cocks, in 1617 he sold a Red Seal licence on behalf of William Adams issued for Cochinchina, plus a junk, to a Chinese for 1200 **taies** (1200 taels of silver).<sup>31</sup> The Chinese kept the junk but sold the licence to a Japanese called Semidono, who in turn sold it to his captain for 300 **taies** (300 tael of silver). When the Tokugawa government discovered the transaction, it took Adams

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<sup>27</sup> Wakan Sanzai Zue (A large Japanese-Chinese dictionary), first published in 1713, reprinted in 1929, Nihon zuihitsu taisei kanko kai, Tokyo,, p.10.

<sup>28</sup> Buch, De Oost-Indische Compagnie, p.78.

<sup>29</sup> Iwao Seiiji, Goshon-sen boeki-shi no kenkyu (A study on the Red Seal Ships), Ko Bun Do, Tokyo, 1958, p.87.

<sup>30</sup> Cocks Diary on 3 November 1618: "There was three Japons of Langasaque with presents to get out **goshons** for Cochinchina". Diary of Richard Cocks, White & Co., London, 1883, Vol.2, p.92.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, Vol.1, p.333.

to court for it.<sup>32</sup> Fortunately the matter did not come before the Emperor, or it would have cost men their lives. Cocks accounted for it as follows:

These matters are come to light for means of seeking out the truth of sturs[sic] which happened in Cochinchina with Japons against Chinas, whereof the King of Cochinchina advized the emperor of their unruliness; so that it is thought no **goshons** will be given out for that place this year.<sup>33</sup>

During this period, one-quarter of all Japanese Red Seal ships traded with Nguyen Cochinchina. We know that silk was the most prized commodity that they sought. Despite this, it only amounted to a small percentage of the silk imported into Japan. According to a 1635 report of the VOC in Japan, silk imports totalled 440,000 **jin** (220,000 kg) that year, of which 100,000 **jin** (50,000 kg) came from Tongking and only 50,000 **jin** (25,000 kg) from Cochinchina. Moreover, according to Nicolaes Couckebacker, the head of the VOC in Firando, most of this 50,000 **jin** of silk had been carried by Chinese traders from Guang Dong and other Chinese ports.<sup>34</sup>

What other products did the Japanese import from Cochinchina, then? Silk was only one of several luxury items the Japanese sought from the Southeast Asian region, as the following list shows:

Tongking -	Yellow silk, spun silk fabric, damask silk, thin damask silk, <sup>35</sup> <b>ba xi</b> (a kind of thin, hard wearing woven silk, used for making trousers) <sup>36</sup> , cardamom, cinnamon, <sup>37</sup> <b>yukin</b> (a kind of sweetgrass used to dye cloth);
Champa -	Calambac, sharkskins, cotton (made of kapok);
Cambodia -	Deerskins, lacquer, ivory, wax, honey, black sugar, buffalo horns, rhinoceros horns, betel, <b>shaulmoogra</b> seeds, pepper, sharkskins, peacocks' tails, cotton, <b>yukin</b> ;
Siam -	Brazilwood for dyeing, deerskins, sharkskins, buffalo horn, lead, tin, Indian cinnabar, camphor, kapok, elephant tusks, rattan, coral, aloes-wood;
Patani -	Pepper, sharkskin, elephant tusks;
Cochinchina -	Yellow silk, spun silk fabric, damask silk, longzhao, aloes-

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, Vol.2, p.94.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, Vol.2, p.94.

<sup>34</sup> Quoted from Iwao Seiichi, Shuin sen Boeki-shi no Kenkyu, pp.253-254.

<sup>35</sup> There were two kinds of such products, the one produced in Tongking called "Tongking linzi" was smoother and thicker than that of Japan. See Wa kan san sai dzu ye, Vol.1, p.355.

<sup>36</sup> Iwao wrote as **ba xi** here. I suspect there are 2 kinds of woven silk here: **ba** and **you**, **xi** was mistaken as **you**. According to Wakan Sanzai Zue, **you** which was produced in Tongking was the best. See ibid, pp.357 and 358.

<sup>37</sup> Wakan Sanzai Zue: "There were many cinnamon trees in these mountains, and the cinnamon of this country [Tongking] enjoyed the reputation of being of the first quality; but since the two countries [Tongking and Cochinchina] have been at war, a large number of trees have been burned and destroyed, so that there is at present quite a limited supply of cinnamon." Vol.1, p.216.

wood, calambac, ba, sharkskins, black sugar, honey, pepper, gold, rattan.<sup>38</sup>

The table suggests that products from Cambodia and Siam were generally worth more than those from Cochinchina. Deerskin, mainly from Siam, probably made an important difference here. We know that, apart from silk, deerskin formed a staple item purchased by the Japanese Red Seal Ships. Originally this trade did not benefit Cochinchina. But after some Japanese came to live in Hoi An, the situation improved. A letter to the VOC, in November 1633, from Joost Schouten, head of the Dutch factory in Ayuthia, reported that early that month a Japanese junk had arrived from Cochinchina, loaded with about 100 tons of goods to trade for deerskins.<sup>39</sup> This was not the only junk reported sailing from Cochinchina to buy deerskins here. A few months before, in May 1633, a Japanese junk from Cochinchina had also bought 10,000 deerskins in Siam. Before it could sail back to Cochinchina, however, a fire broke out in the Japanese street in Ayuthia and most of the deerskins were burnt.<sup>40</sup> This seems to have begun a trend towards Japanese junks out of **Dang Trong** buying deerskins in Siam for transshipment to Red Seal ships trading with Cochinchina. This shift may well account for the decline in the number of Red Seal ships going to Siam (as shown in the Table above). Certainly deerskin became one of the goods exported from Cochinchina to Japan in the 1640s. According to the Dagregister des Comptoirs Nangasaque, almost every ship from Quang Nam took deerskins to Japan from 1641 to 1648, sometimes up to 8,800 skins in one junk.<sup>41</sup> So heavy was the Japanese demand that when the VOC in Batavia sought 50,000 skins from Siam in 1641, they could not fill the order because the Japanese and Chinese from Cochinchina had bought up so much beforehand.<sup>42</sup>

The lucrative coin trade also greatly attracted the Japanese to Cochinchinese trade; but we will leave our discussion of that until the next chapter.

Finally, too, we should mention that Hoi An, the major port of Cochinchina, itself was part of the attraction for Japanese merchants. This well regulated entrepot

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<sup>38</sup> Iwao Seiji, Shuin sen boeki-shi no kenkyu, pp.241-242.

<sup>39</sup> Quoted from Iwao Seiichi, Shuinsen-boeki-shi no kenkyu, p.119.

<sup>40</sup> Iwao Seiichi, Shuin-sen, p.264.

<sup>41</sup> Daghrester des Comptoirs Nangasaque, Japanese translation with title Nagasaki Oranda shokan no nikki, by Murakami Naojiro, Iwanami Shoten, Tokyo, 1938.

<sup>42</sup> Dagregister gehouden int Casteel Batavia, Chinese translation by Guo Hui, Vol.2, p.318.

allowed Japanese to buy Southeast Asian and Chinese goods very conveniently, without very high duties. In this respect it resembled a number of other Southeast Asian ports, like Malacca, Patani and Banten, whose hinterlands produced only a limited amount of goods.

According to Borri, Japanese junks often brought silver to the value of four or five million to Cochinchina.<sup>43</sup> Iwao Seiichi, too, concluded from certain Dutch sources that each Red Seal ship carried capital of the value of 400 **kan** (400,000 copper coins) minimum in the early period, to 1,620 **kan** (1,620,000 coins) in later times. From this it seems undeniable that the Red Seal trade with Japan stimulated a real economic boom in early 17th century Cochinchina. As a result, the Nguyen could afford the advanced arms that helped them to fight off the north. **Dang Trong's** existence as a separate Vietnamese state, therefore, grew directly from its successful commercial and economic development in these crucial decades.

The Japanese, though important, were not **Dang Trong's** only trading partners at the time, however. The next sections consider the others, beginning with the Chinese.

### The Chinese

Chinese trade with Cochinchina only really became possible on a regular basis when Ming Mu-zung lifted the ban on overseas trade to Southeast Asia in 1567. Information for the late 16th and early 17th centuries is patchy. Cochinchina may have been a relatively popular destination, according to an entry in the *Daghregister* for 1631-1634. In 1631, it recorded five Chinese junks left China for Batavia, five for Cochinchina, five for Cambodia, two to Patani, two to Siam and one to Singora (Songkhla).<sup>44</sup>

As Hoi An's role as an entrepot grew, so did its attractiveness to Chinese merchant shipping. Table Two, which gives the number of Chinese junks from Southeast Asian countries to Japan between 1647 and 1720,<sup>45</sup> shows a large

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<sup>43</sup> Borri, *Cochinchina*, p.1 2.

<sup>44</sup> *Daghregister*, Chinese trans. vol.1, 1631-1634, p.66.

<sup>45</sup> Contrary to the general impression that most Chinese junks were from Canton and Fujian, at least 90% of Chinese junks engaged in the Japan-Cochinchina trade were junks from Ning Po. See *Kai-hentai*.

Table 2 NUMBER OF CHINESE JUNKS TO JAPAN FROM SOUTHEAST ASIAN COUNTRIES (1647-1720)

	Tongking	Quangnam	Cambodia	Siam	Patani	Malacca	Jakarta	Bantam
1647-1650	7	11	4		1		4	
1651-1660	15	40	37	28	20		2	1
1661-1670	6	43	24	26	9	2	12	
1671-1680	12	40	10	23	2		31	1
1681-1690	12	29	9	25	8	4	18	
1691-1700	6	30	22	20	7	2	16	1
1701-1710	3	12	1	11	2	2		
1711-1720	2	8	1	5			5	
<b>total</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>203</b>	<b>109</b>	<b>138</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>3</b>

Sources:

For the period 1647-1674, see Iwao Seiichi, "Kinsei Nitshi-boeki ni kansuru Suryoteki kenkyu", *Shigaku-zatshi*, vol.62, no.11, p.19; for the year 1647, I also used *Daghrester des Comptois Nangasaque*, Japanese translation by Murakami Masajiro, Iwanami Shoten, Tokyo, 1938 for reference.

For the period 1674-1720, my main source is *Kai-hentai*, ed. by Hayashi Shunsai, Toyo Bunko, Tokyo, 1958-59. However, I added some figures missed in *Kai-hentai* from *Tosen Shinko Kaitoroku Toijin Fusetu Gaki Wappu Tomecho* (Material for a study of Chinese merchants sailing to and from Japan in the Edo period), ed. by Osamu Oba, the Institute of Oriental and Occidental Studies, Kansai University, Kyoto, 1974.

proportion (about 30%) of them departed from Quang Nam. Taken together with Table 1, which showed one-quarter of all Red Seal ships having traded with Cochinchina, these figures reinforce the importance of Cochinchina to China-Japan trade in the 17th century. Its produce, and its entrepot function, enabled the **Dang Trong** economy to prosper for at least one hundred and fifty years, until the mid-18th century.

So lucrative was this trade that, according to some Dutch sources, high Japanese officials tried to invest in the Cochinchina trade through Chinese merchant middlemen, after the official "closed-door" policy was implemented. These sources claim that in 1637 the Japanese received a profit of no less than 15,000 taels of silver from the Chinese merchants involved, making the Japanese very enthusiastic about trade this way. When three junks came to Firando in that year, Nicolaes Couckebacker, the VOC director there, had intended to hinder their trade but was stopped by high officials, both in Firando and Nagasaki, because it was against their own interests.<sup>46</sup>

But this situation did not last indefinitely. The Japanese government moved to reduce trade links in 1689, when it limited the number of Chinese junks allowed to 70 per year. Cochinchina came off relatively well when the government set the quotas for junks from Southeast Asian countries: it got three, while Jakarta, Cambodia and Siam got two, and Tongking merely one.<sup>47</sup>

In 1715 the Japanese government decided that 70 Chinese junks were still too many, and cut the number to a mere 30 per annum. Only one junk from each Southeast Asian country was allowed per year, with cargoes from Tongking and Cambodia set at 200 **kan**, while those from Quang Nam, Siam and Jakata topped the list with 300 **kan**.<sup>48</sup>

Yet Table Two does not give the whole story of Chinese trade with Cochinchina. Taiwan might also have played an important role in the 17th century.

According to Dutch sources, in 1665 the ruler of Taiwan, Coxinga (Zheng Cheng

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<sup>46</sup> Daghregister in Batavia, Chinese translation, Vol.2, p.248.

<sup>47</sup> Iwao Seiichi, "Kinsei nisshi boeki ni kansuru suryoteki kosatsu" (A study of the Chinese and Japanese trades", Shigaku-zatshi (Journal of History), Vol.61, No.11, p.107.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid*, p.108-109.



Gong), sent 24 trading junks to Southeast Asia, 4 of which went to Quang Nam.<sup>49</sup> Kai-hentai (a Japanese record of overseas traders to Japan from 1644-1724), also says that 3 junks from Taiwan bought rice in Cochinchina to resell in Taiwan in 1683.<sup>50</sup> Another Dutch source of 1661 records a reference to Taiwanese junks trading a variety of goods, including rice, saltpetre, sulphur, tin and lead, with Southeast Asian countries including Cochinchina.<sup>51</sup>

Cochinchina's trade greatly benefited from its geographical position. Buch points that

the reason why so many traders from China annually sail to Quinam lay in the situation that they found here a centre for trade with various nearby countries and places. Pepper was brought here from Palembang, Pahang, and neighbouring areas, camphor from Borneo, sapanwood, ivory, **serong bourang**, gumlac, and their **lankiens** [cloth?], coarse porcelain and other wares. With what remained, they bought further Quinam pepper, ivory, cardamom etc., so that their junks mostly returned full to China.<sup>52</sup>

From the Japanese records of Kai-hentai, we see that some Chinese junks from Hoi An sailed to Cambodia, and traded there before going on to Japan.<sup>53</sup> Some went another way around, so that from Cambodia they went to trade in Hoi An, and then to Japan. On other occasions junks which intended to go from Siam to Japan had to stop in Hoi An to wait for the wind for a year, then left,<sup>54</sup> while most of the junks sailing from China to Hoi An, traded there then left for Japan.

The late 17th century and early 18th century brought even better conditions for the Chinese traders, which laid the foundation for Chinese domination of the trade of southern Vietnam in the following two centuries. Chen Chingho points out that there were 3 main reasons for this. First, the cease fire between the Trinh and the Nguyen in 1672 brought peace for a century for both sides, until the Tay Son rebellion broke out. When no longer threatened by the war (and thus desperately in need of aid), both regimes became less tolerant towards European merchants, creating the opportunities for the Chinese to play an intermediary role

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<sup>49</sup> Quoted from Cao Yong He, Taiwan Zao Qi Li Su Yan Jiu (A study of early history of Taiwan), Taipei, 1979, p.377.

<sup>50</sup> Kai-hentai, Toyo Bunka, Tokyo, 1958, Vol.1, p.392.

<sup>51</sup> Cao Yong-he, Taiwan Zao Qi, p.378.

<sup>52</sup> Buch, Oost-Indische Compagnie, p.68.

<sup>53</sup> Kai-Hentai, Vol.16,p.1154-1155.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid, Vol.33,p.2579.

between the two sides. Second, at this time the Chinese commercial companies of Canton, represented by the **shi san hang** (the 13 lines of business) co-operated actively, and effectively, especially the **Cong Hang**, so that their junks "began to provide European ships with Vietnamese products, and at the same time, to provide Vietnam with the Chinese goods and European products which she needed".<sup>55</sup> Third, the 1715 regulation of overseas trade which cut the number of Chinese junks trading with Japan to 30 and the amount of trade to 6,000 **kan** (600,000 taels of silver), as mentioned above, impacted on **Dang Trong's** trade as it caused many junks which had frequented Japan to head for Southeast Asian ports.<sup>56</sup>

In 1695 Bowyear had estimated that there were at least 10 to 12 Chinese junks coming from Japan, Canton, Siam, Cambodia, Manila and Batavia to trade in Hoi An each year.<sup>57</sup> After the 1715 regulation of Shotoku, the number of Chinese junks trading in Cochinchina by the 1740s-1750s had increased to 80 each year, not including ships from Macao, Batavia and France.<sup>58</sup> These figures support that half or more of the Chinese junks barred from Japan turned to Hoi An instead.

Quang Nam's rich merchandise certainly attracted Chinese traders. According to a 18th century Cantonese named Chen:

It is only 6 days and nights from Guangzhou to Thuan Hoa and Quang Nam by sea... It only takes 4 days and nights and one **geng** [24 hours is 10 **geng**] to Son Nam [the main port of Tongking], but the goods that could be carried back are nothing but rice and from Thuan Hoa only pepper. Whereas the goods that can be brought from Quang Nam are so abundant that it seems nothing cannot be obtained from there, it is superior to all other ports of Southeast Asia. The goods come from Thang Hoa, Dien Ban, Quy Nhon, Quang Ngai, Binh Khang and Nha Trang, being carried by ships, boats and horses, by land and by sea, gathered in Hoi An. That is why Chinese like to come to buy goods and carry them back. The goods here are so abundant that even a hundred big ships cannot carry them out of here.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Chen Chingho, Historical Notes on Hoi-An, Center for Vietnamese Studies, Southern Illinois University at Carbondale, Monograph Series IV, P.26.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid, pp.25-26.

<sup>57</sup> Lamb, The Mandarin Road to Old Hue, Clarke, Irwin & Co.Ltd, Toronto, 1970, p.52.

<sup>58</sup> Koffler, "Description historique de la Cochinchine", Revue Indochinoise, 1911, Vol.16, p.585.

<sup>59</sup> Phu Bien Tap Luc, Vol.4, p.34b.

There was a difference between the trade of Western merchants and Chinese traders in Cochinchina. Western cargoes were usually too expensive for the common people, so that their main profit lay in buying rather than selling. On the other hand, according to merchant Chen, Chinese goods "sold out very quickly, [with] nothing left". This situation must have encouraged more Chinese traders to the **Dang Trong** market.

However, another reason for the success of Chinese trade in Cochinchina lay in the Nguyen's more open policy towards China. Traditionally the Vietnamese rulers in the north had tried to keep Chinese merchants at a distance from the Vietnamese, especially from its capital. In 1149, Ly Anh Ton had opened Van Don (Van Hai island) as the port of trade, and for several hundred years it was the main place of Chinese trade, until Pho Hien was set up on the same basis in the 17th century.

The Nguyen behaved quite differently when they realised the necessity of trade, if **Dang Trong** was to survive in its early years. They decided to use the Japanese and the Chinese to their own advantage. Not only did they let them live and trade in Cochinchina, but they also employed them as government officers. Both Japanese and Chinese ships often carried cargoes and letters from the Nguyen rulers to Japan or Batavia. In 1673, prince Dien even wrote to Wei Ju Shi, a Chinese merchant who had once been in Cochinchina before staying in Japan, seeking to borrow 5,000 taels of silver.<sup>60</sup> Beside the cargoes brought by Japanese traders, mentioned earlier, it was reported in 1688 that a Chinese junk transported a cargo for the king of Quang Nam,<sup>61</sup> while another Chinese junk brought a letter from chua Nghia (Nguyen Phuc Tran, 1687-1691) asking the Japanese government to cast coins for Cochinchina.<sup>62</sup> The approach was successful: "The king receives a great revenue out of this faire [between Chinese and Japanese], by his duties and imposts, and the country an unspeakable gaine."<sup>63</sup>

It is interesting to note that during this period the common people of **Dang Trong** also joined in overseas commerce, for probably the first time in

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<sup>60</sup> Quoted from Chen Ching-ho, "Seventeenth and Eighteenth century China Town and its trade in Hoi An", Xin Ya Xue Bao, No.1, Vol.3, p.298.

<sup>61</sup> Kai-hentai, Vol.1, p.854.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid, vol.2, p.1034.

<sup>63</sup> Borri, Cochinchina, p.I 2.

Vietnamese history. According to Hai Fang Cuan Yao, in 1611, 73 people intending to trade with China were captured at sea by the army, near Wenzhou. Later they were joined by another 25 people. All claimed to be from Ha Dong county, Thang Hoa prefecture of A Nam, which was surely "Annam".<sup>64</sup> This valuable piece of information is the only source we have to confirm that ordinary Vietnamese sometimes became privately involved in overseas trade, even if only occasionally. In early 17th century Cochinchina, however, it seems likely that they were not alone, and that many more people engaged in overseas trade than at any time before - or possibly after.

### The Westerners

According to Manguin, the first Portuguese contact with the port of Champa and the Vietnamese was in 1516, and the first official contact with Champa coast occurred in 1523.<sup>65</sup> Relations were often irregular. Lamb says that from about 1540 the Portuguese began to visit Fai-fo regularly,<sup>66</sup> but it is not at all clear if the name of Fai-fo had appeared as early as the 1540s. Indeed, it seems unlikely that regular trade could have begun before the 1550s, when the Portuguese took Macao. Even so, they were surely the earliest Westerners to come to Cochinchina.

Though by 1584 there were already some Portuguese living in Cochinchina,<sup>67</sup> Portuguese trade with Cochinchina seems very secondary to the Macao-Japan trade in the early 17th century. For the Portuguese, it only became important from 1640, when they lost the Japanese trade and so turned to mainland Southeast Asia, Macassar, and Larantuka-Solor-Timor. For the Nguyen, trading with the Portuguese only really mattered when the Trinh war broke out, since cannons formed the most important trade item between them. According to Boxer, the Nguyen rulers were "very anxious to secure [guns] from the Bocarro's celebrated gun foundry at Macao, which functioned between 1627 and 1680 and

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<sup>64</sup> Wang Zai Jin, Hai Fang Cuan Yao, Vol. 10.

<sup>65</sup> Pierre-Yves Manguin, Les Portugueses sur les cotes du Viet-Nam et du Campa, Ecole Francaise d'Extreme-Orient, Paris, 1972, p.3.

<sup>66</sup> Lamb, The Mandarin Road to Old Hue, p.19; Birdwood, Report on the Old Records of the India Office, W.H.Allen & Co., Limited, London, 1891, p.175.

<sup>67</sup> Manguin, 1972, p.186.

produced what were acknowledged to be the finest bronze guns in the East."<sup>68</sup>

It is interesting to note that the foundry at Macao was founded in the same year as the war between the Nguyen and the Trinh broke out, and the period of its existence almost coincided with the years of war between the two (1627-1672). Since "the bronze and iron cannon which were cast there [Macao] found a ready market all over the East",<sup>69</sup> the Nguyen and the Trinh were very likely two big buyers of these cannons, if not the two major ones. The goods that the Portuguese brought from Cochinchina, according to Antonio Bocarro, Chronicler-in-Chief of the State of India, were "yellow silk, very good and cheap, some eagle-wood, and sometimes calambac, though very rarely, and a little benzoin - all this local produce - and a lot of copper which is brought there by the Japanese".<sup>70</sup>

Boxer also believes that, "though fundamentally hostile to the propagation of the Christian faith in their territory, the Nguyen more or less connived at the presence of Roman Catholic missionaries largely with the object of obtaining guns and gunners from Macao".<sup>71</sup> While there <sup>may</sup> have been some relationship between guns and the presences of Jesuit missionaries, the Nguyen also used them in other ways, as we see from Nguyen Thanh Nha's list of Jesuits employed by the Nguyen rulers in the court, generation after generation. In 1686 Chua Hien used his power to force Bartholomeu da Costa, who had been his doctor and was leaving for Europe, to return from Macao to his post as Chua Hien's doctor. Nguyen Phuc Chu employed Antonio de Arnedo to teach him mathematics and astronomy in 1704 and De Lima in 1724. Vo Vuong (Nguyen Phuc Khoat, r.1738-1765) similarly employed Neugebauer and Siebert, who died in 1745, and then Slamenski and Koffler in their place. In 1752 he employed the Jesuits Xavier de Moteiro as a geometrician, and Jean de Loureiro as a doctor.<sup>72</sup> That Europeans worked officially in the court, even if only as doctors, was something quite new in Vietnamese tradition. In China only the Mongols (Yuan dynasty) and Manchus

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<sup>68</sup> Boxer, Portuguese Conquest and Commerce in Southern Asia, 1500-1750, Variorum Reprints, London 1985, p.VII 167.

<sup>69</sup> Boxer, Portuguese India in the Mid-Seventeenth Century, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1980, p.46.

<sup>70</sup> Boxer (edited and trans.), Seventeenth Century Macau, Heinemann Educational Books Ltd, Hong Kong, 1984, p.37.

<sup>71</sup> Boxer, Portuguese Conquest, p.VII 167.

<sup>72</sup> Nguyen Thanh Nha, Tableau economique du Viet Nam, Editions Cujas, 1970, p.203; see also C.B.Maybon, Histoire moderne du pays d'Annam, pp.140-141; Pham Phat Huon, Viet Nam Giao Su, Vol.1, p.166.

(Qing dynasty) ever employed Westerners in the court, while in Vietnam the Nguyen rulers did so until the Gia Long reign (1802-1819).

In the early 17th century, the Dutch <sup>sought</sup> ~~traded~~ trade opportunities in Cochinchina, or Quinam as they called it at the time. The first attempt was probably made in 1601, when Jeronimus Wonderer and Albert Cornelis Ruyll, two Dutch merchants employed by the VOC, spent at least 2 months trying to establish trade relations and to buy pepper in Cochinchina. Although they were given an audience by the **chua**, whom they called the "king", they seem not to have had a pleasant time there.<sup>73</sup>

In 1609 the VOC established a factory at Firando in Japan. They too saw the possibility of making a profit by importing silk to Japan, but as they could not get it directly from China, they turned their attention to Tongking and Cochinchina. The VOC sent 4 ships from Firando to **Dang Trong** between 1613 and 1617, with little or no success. Even more, according to Buch, the journey in 1614 cost a Dutchman's life, when he was implicated with an English merchant who had offended the Nguyen ruler. Both he and the Englishman<sup>74</sup> were executed.

The Dutch had not lost interest, however. In 1622, a Dutch agent in Firando estimated that the total value of Chinese goods yearly sold in Japan was 1,008,000 reals, 2/3 in silk, and 1/3 in silk cloth. The prospect of huge profits existed, so the Dutch never gave up hope of being able to grasp the opportunity in Cochinchina.<sup>75</sup> Finally, they established a lodge in Faifo in 1633. Their venture capital seems to have been quite small - 625 reals and 150 picul of lead -<sup>76</sup> in comparison with 400,000 reals that two Japanese Red Seal ships brought to Cochinchina in the same year. In 1634 they imported a large amount of capital; but because the Japanese dominated the local economy they could invest only 37,403 of the 57,287 gulden they had brought.<sup>77</sup> The high point for the Dutch-Cochinchina trade was 1636, mainly on account of the profitable coin trade to be

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<sup>73</sup> "The trials of foreign merchant. Jeronimus Wonderaer's letter from Vietnam", translated by Ruurdje Laarhoven, in Li Tana & Anthony Reid, Southern Vietnam under the Nguyen, forthcoming. For a discussion on the "king", see Annex One.

<sup>74</sup> Peacock, whom we will talk about later.

<sup>75</sup> Buch, p.18.

<sup>76</sup> Buch, p.26.

<sup>77</sup> Buch, "La Compagnie des Indes Netherlandaises et l'Indochine", BEFEO, 1936, p.133.

discussed in the following chapter.

From 1633 to 1637 two Dutch ships a year visited Cochinchina, usually sailing from Firando through Taiyuwan (An Ping port in Taiwan) to **Dang Trong**, before heading for Batavia.<sup>78</sup> But they failed to make headway against the Japanese in their principle interest, the purchase of silk. While the silk market was controlled by Japanese living in Hoi An, silk was in short supply in **Dang Trong** because local Japanese residents there often travelled to silk growing areas (mainly Thang Hoa and Dien Ban counties in Quang Nam) to buy up a whole crop in advance.

Dutch failure to penetrate the Cochinchinese silk market led them to turn to Tongking, as we see from the Daghregister. In February 1636, the Dutch began to investigate the possibility of trade in Tongking, where it was said that 1500 to 1600 piculs of raw silk and 5000 to 6000 bolts of silk fabric were produced each year, at reasonable prices.<sup>79</sup> After the **Grol's** first voyage to Tongking in early 1637,<sup>80</sup> the Dutch began to turn their main attention to Tongking. In 1641 they became more determined when they heard that Japan might prohibit Japanese junks from going to Tongking, in which case the price of Tongkingese silk might rise on the Japanese market.<sup>81</sup>

Dutch persistence paid off, and silk from Tongking increased in proportion to the total amount of silk that the VOC transported to Japan from 1635 to 1655, as Table 3 shows:

**TABLE 3 DISTRIBUTION OF THE VOC TRANSPORT OF SILK TO JAPAN 1635-1668 (1,000 GLD.)<sup>82</sup>**

From	Taiwan	%	Batavia	%	Tongking	%	Total
1635-1640	9,228	87	399	6	966	9	10,630
1641-1654	1,611	23	1,827	26	3,538	51	6,981
1655-1668	64	1	5,920	67	1,687	19	8,827

<sup>78</sup> See Daghregister, Chinese translation, Vol.1, pp.126, 137, 190 and 202.

<sup>79</sup> Daghregister, Chinese translation, Vol.1, p. 153, 160-161.

<sup>80</sup> For this voyage, see J.M.Dixon, trans. from French, "Voyage of the Dutch ship 'Grol'", Transactions of the Asiatic Society of Japan, Vol.XI, reprinted by Yushodo Booksellers Ltd., Tokyo, 1964, pp.180-215.

<sup>81</sup> Daghregister, Chinese translation, Vol.2, p.331.

<sup>82</sup> Klein, P.W., "De Tonkinees-Japanse zijdehandel van de Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie en het inter-aziatische verkeer in de 17e eeuw", W.Frijhoff & M.Hiemstra (edited), Bewogen en bewegen, Tilburg, 1986, p.171. I am grateful to Prof.Reid for translating this source for me.



The period 1641-1654 was not only a golden time for buying silk cheaply in Tongking, but also for selling it at a profit in Japan. The VOC often made 250% or more on these transactions. From 1636 to 1668 the VOC's average annual profit from silk was 119% from China, 183% from Bengal and 186% from Tongking,<sup>83</sup> thanks to the low silk price in **Dang Ngoai**.<sup>84</sup>

The closed door policy of the Japanese government in 1635 should have given the Dutch a better chance in **Dang Trong**, but this did not turn out to be the case. From 1638 until the death of Nguyen Phuc Lan (chua Thuong, r.1635-1648), Dutch relations with CochinChina were poisoned (for the reasons discussed in Annex Two). Around 1650, however, the new ruler Hien Vuong (chua Hien), eager for peace with the Dutch Company, sent a message to that effect through Binggam, the head of the Chinese in Batavia.<sup>85</sup> The VOC responded by sending Willem Verstegen to CochinChina and a treaty was agreed on 8 December 1651. It allowed the Dutch once more to exercise "free and frank" trade, "not to be inspected, [and to be] free from the payment of the import and export duties which the Chinese, Portuguese and other peoples must pay".<sup>86</sup> But the treaty never worked, leading the Dutch to close their factory in Faifo for good in 1654.

Silk also attracted the English to early CochinChina. Richard Cocks, for example, wrote: " ... it is certain there cometh twice as much silk yearly to CochinChina [from China] as there doth to all three places of Bantam, Pattania, and Syam, and wants not other good pieces of stuffs".<sup>87</sup> Yet there was hardly anything between England and CochinChina that can be called trade in the 200 year history of the Nguyen, only tragic stories one after the other.

The first English effort at commercial relations with CochinChina occurred in 1613. Tempest Peacock and Walter Cawarden, two merchants sent by Richard

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<sup>83</sup> *Ibid*, p.170. My calculation from figures in the article.

<sup>84</sup> It is interesting that in Tongking, as in Indonesia, the VOC found it easier to cooperate with states not interested in commerce, and thus less competitive with Dutch interest.

<sup>85</sup> According to the Vietnamese, it was the Dutch who took the first action. See Bien Nien Lich Su Co Trung Dai Viet Nam the (annals of Vietnam, the Ancient and Middle Ages), Social Sciences Publishing House, Hanoi, 1987, p.314.

<sup>86</sup> A.Reid, "The end of Dutch relations with Quinam, 1651-2", in Li Tana & Anthony Reid, Southern Vietnam under the Nguyen, p.34.

<sup>87</sup> Danvers, F.C. and Foster, William (eds), Letters Received by the East India Company from Its Servants in the East, Sampson, Low, Marton & Co., London, 1896, Vol. 4, p.17.

Cocks, chief of the newly established English East India Company factory at Firando, went on a trading venture to Faifo, on a Japanese junk called "Roquan".<sup>88</sup> They carried with them a letter written by King James I to the ruler of Cochinchina, plus 720 pounds sterling, and "a thousand pesos in rials of 8" (about 800 sterling?). They never returned. At first everything seemed to be going fine, the king bought some of their goods and treated them well. Then suddenly something went wrong. Peacock was murdered, and Cawarden's fate remained a mystery - according to the earlier sources, like Cocks' diary and Adams' report. Later writers like Maybon & Hall<sup>89</sup> reversed this, saying Cawarden was murdered and Peacock's fate remains a mystery. Either way, it was a fateful beginning.

The accounts given by the Dutch and the English at first both blamed each other. The Dutch version held that an English man had caused a Dutchman be executed by the "Quinamers", as "the king of Quinam failed to realize how offended to each other Dutch and English were".<sup>90</sup> The English, however, thought that "the king of Cochinchina did this in revenge for some injuries offered him per the Dutch certain years past".<sup>91</sup>

In an attempt to get the money reimbursed from Cochinchina, Cocks sent Edmond Sayer and William Adams to Faifo in 1617. Lamb comments on this journey that "they appear to have failed to get any money both for the goods brought in 1613 by Cawarden and Peacock and for their own cargo".<sup>92</sup> In fact Adams said that his voyage to Cochinchina had been a loss, of 800 taies at least.<sup>93</sup>

Another English attempt to create a base of operations for the China trade on

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<sup>88</sup> Cocks, Diary, Vol.2, p.264, Cocks to Wickham, 1 April 1614.

<sup>89</sup> See C.B. Maybon, Histoire Moderne d'Annam, Paris, 1919, p.65; D.G.Hall, A History of South-East Asia, London, 1961, p.358. It seems that a Japanese who had been their host and the "young king of Cochinchina" were responsible for the murder. According to a footnote in The Log-Book of William Adams, Mangosa, a Japanese who was described as being "covered with all iniquity" by the Portuguese, was Peacock's host when he was in Cochinchina. He fled when Adams and Sayer came to Cochinchina in 1617, almost lost his life at sea, then became a Christian. On his return to Cochinchina, he was put to death by the king, probably in 1621, being suspected of having raided the coast. See The Log-Book of William Adams, 1614-19, pp.291-92, n.2.

<sup>90</sup> Buch, p.12.

<sup>91</sup> The Diary of Richard Cocks, Vol. 2, p.268, Cocks to Richard Wickham, 25 July 1614.

<sup>92</sup> Lamb, The Mandarin Road to Old Hue, p.15.

<sup>93</sup> Cocks, Diary, Vol.1, p.293.

Pulo Condore also ended in death. The accounts given by the English and the Vietnamese disagreed with each other both on the cause and the date of the event. The English version claimed that Allan Catchpole, president of the factory of the English East India Company, "got some Maccassers to serve for soldiers, and help build a fortification, and made a firm contract with them to discharge them at the end of 3 years". For some reason he reneged on the contract at the end. So the "revengeful and cruel" Maccassers killed almost all of the English in 1705.<sup>94</sup>

According to the Tien Bien, however, the killings happened in 1703 rather than 1705. If this is correct, it means that the murders had nothing to do with the contract, which had not yet expired. The Tien Bien says that 15 Javanese (or Malays) had been recruited by Truong Phuc Phan, a Nguyen general, who had ordered them to pretend to serve the English in order to find a chance to kill them. And, it adds, the Nguyen rewarded the Javanese for their deed.<sup>95</sup>

While there is no other evidence to support the date given by the Tien Bien, some English sources strongly support <sup>the allegation</sup> that the deaths could not have happened in 1703. According to The Chronicles of the East India Company Trading to China, 1635-1834, the Catherine, a ship of the English Company, arrived at Pulo Condore on July 5th, 1704. On her departure, "the President and Council ordered 4 chests to be landed from her for the use of the factory".<sup>96</sup> This "president" could not be anybody but Allen Catchpole, who obviously was alive in 1704. This was confirmed by another 5 ships - the Kent, the Eaton, the Loyal Cooke, the Herne, and the Stretham enroute to China in 1704, all calling at Pulo Condore for orders in late July 1704.<sup>97</sup>

Although Allen Catchpole was blamed for making a "bad choice for a colony" in Pulo Condore, for a time the English Company's ships did call there regularly for orders and to exchange commercial intelligence. But after the competition between

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<sup>94</sup> Alexander Hamilton, "A new account of the East Indies", in John Pinkerton, A General Collection of the Best and Most Interesting Voyages and travels in All Parts of the World, London, 1811, vol.8, pp.480-481.

<sup>95</sup> Tien Bien, Vol.7, pp.106-107.

<sup>96</sup> Morse, H.B., The Chronicles of the East India Company Trading to China, 1635-1834, Oxford at the Clarendon Press, 1926, vol.1, p.130.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid, p.137. There is a seven years gap between 1705 and 1711 in the extant records of the English trade in China, presumably the records of 1705 were destroyed when the Maccassers fired the fort in Pulo Condore.

the "old" and "new" Companies had increased prices in India and oversupplied the market in England, the English Company sent no more ships from India to England, or from England to China, but only ships from India to China to "allow time for the Indian markets to return to normal conditions and for stocks in England to be reduced". All such ships stopped at Pulo Condore for directions from the President and Council.<sup>98</sup>

### The Southeast Asians

That trade links existed between **Dang Trong** and other Southeast Asian countries should not be neglected. Though not well documented, these links seem to have played a small but significant role in Cochinchina's trade. But historically their most important feature was probably that they were two-way relations. For the first time in history, numbers of Vietnamese set out on trading voyages with the full blessing of their government, while neighbouring kingdoms were able to trade with a Vietnamese state without having to disguise their commercial relations as "tribute" to the emperor.

Trade with Manila began in 1620, and reached its peak at the end of the 1660s, when four **Dang Trong** junks per years sailed there.<sup>99</sup> During this period, **Dang Trong** junks also voyaged regularly to Batavia. In 1637, for instance, the *Dagregister* recorded one junk, loaded with Cambodian rice, arrived in Batavia. It also noted that the junk, owned by the king and high officials (presumably of **Dang Trong**), would ship 150 last (or 300 tons) from Cambodia to Cochinchina.<sup>100</sup> This particular trade was not unusual at the time: in 1636, sources repeatedly mentions rice exported from Cambodia and Siam to Cochinchina.<sup>101</sup> The Nguyen rulers also traded directly with Siam, too. In 1632, for example, we hear of a junk dispatched by them to Siam that carried 10,000 tael of silver as capital.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> *Ibid*, pp.127-128.

<sup>99</sup> Bertin, J., Bonin, S., & Chaunu, P., Les Philippines et le Pacifique des Ibriques, Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes, Paris, pp.60-62.

<sup>100</sup> Dagregister, Chinese translation by Guo Hui, vol.1, p.198.

<sup>101</sup> Jan Dirksz Gaelen, "Journeal ofte voornaemste geschiedenis in Cambodia", in Hendrik Muller, De Oost-Indische Compagnie in Cambodia en Laos: Verzameching van bescheiden van 1636 tot 1670, The Hague, Nijhoff, 1917, pp.61-124.

<sup>102</sup> Journal of Brownuershaven and Sloterdijk in 1633, quoted from Iwao, pp.263-264.

Trade was not restricted to royal families and high officials. The Kai-hentai gives us a tantalising glimpse of much wider participation when reporting the comment of some Chinese merchants in Siam: "We are familiar with Guang Nan people who from time to time visit Siam, where we have seen them".<sup>103</sup>

Certainly Cochinchina's neighbours came in greater number. Bowyear actually gave the list of countries and the products they brought to Cochinchina:

From Siam, petre, sapan, lac, necarie, elephant's teeth, tin, lead, rice.  
 From Camboja, camboia, bejamin, caridamons, wax, lac, necarie, coyalaca, and sapanwood, dammar, buffalo's hides, deer skins and nerves, elephant's teeth, rhinosceros' horns, etc..  
 From Batavia, silver, brimstone, petre, coase **bastaes**, red and white, vermillion.  
 From Manila, silver, brimstone, sapan, cowries, tobacco, wax, deer nerves, etc..<sup>104</sup>

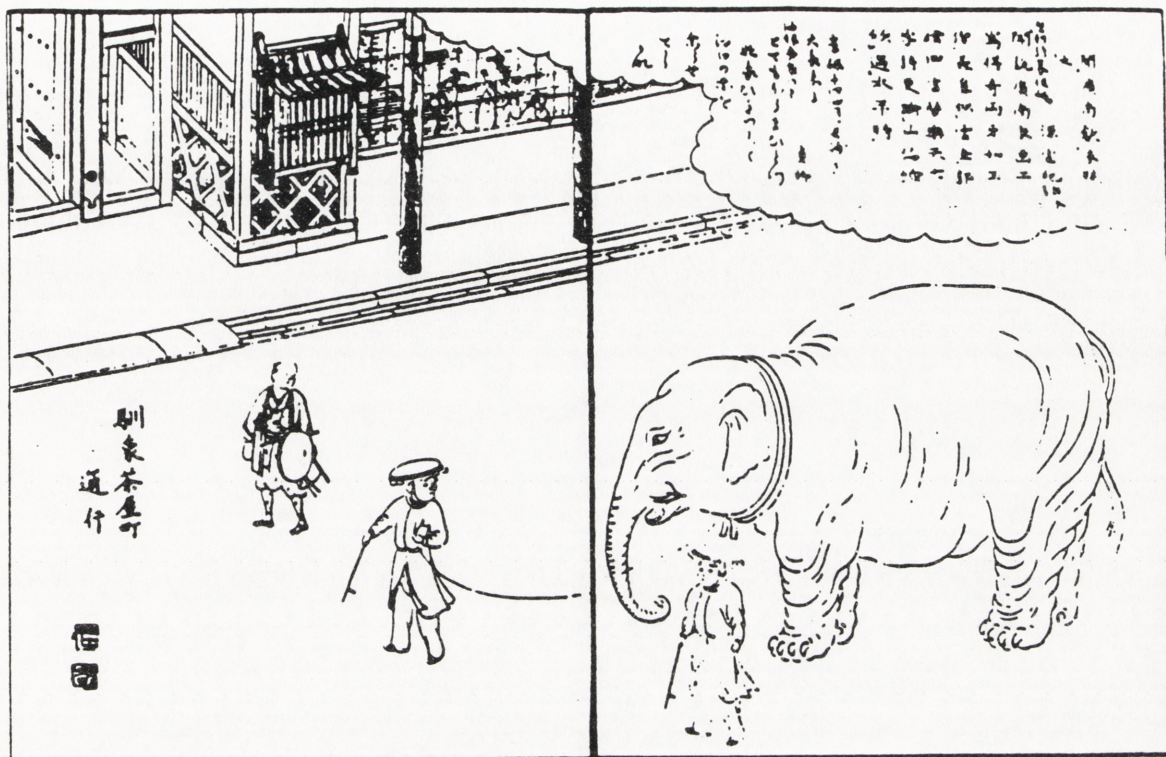
The presence of Vietnamese traders tends to be overwhelmed by the dominant role of Japanese and Chinese merchants and middlemen at the time. Yet fragmentary as the sources are, they do indicate an attempt by 17th century **Dang Trong**, encouraged by its Nguyen rulers, to follow the Cham example and develop its own commercial relations with its Southeast Asian neighbours. Though an old practice among the Cham, it represented a new phenomenon to the Vietnamese, and was one more factor in helping make the 17th century the most prosperous trading era in traditional Vietnamese history.

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<sup>103</sup> Kai-hentai, vol.20, p.1589.

<sup>104</sup> Lamb, The Mandarin Road, p.53.





馴象茶屋町通行の図

**Figure 4** This drawing is called "Picture of tamed elephant being led along Chaya Street", from Oishi Shinjahuro, *Edo to chiho bunka* (Local culture in Edo period), p.156. A poem "On the elephant presented by Quang Nam", can be seen in the picture. This elephant was carried first to Nagasaki and then to Nagoya by a Chinese junk from Quang Nam in 1728. The two people who leading the elephant were from Quang Nam.

## CHAPTER 4 MONEY AND TRADE

Uniquely in Vietnamese history, 17th and 18th century **Dang Trong** became a society in which most normal transactions were carried out with currency, rather than in kind. Money and trade were essential to the existence, let alone the prosperity of this state. This chapter examines these vital economic factors which made Cochinchina unlike any other Vietnamese society in history.

### Key export and import items

One of the most interesting characteristics of the Cochinchinese trade in the early period was that it exported many of the items it had previously imported. As we mentioned in the previous chapter, Cochinchina acted as an entrepot. An example of the range of trade goods occurs in the manifest of a junk that went from Cochinchina to Japan in 1641:

satin, roothout, black sugar, sharkskin, sittouw, Quang Nam raw silk, poris cocos, deerskin, pepper, nutmeg, buffalos' horn, wax, sitcleed, white panghsij, pelingh<sup>1</sup>, camphor, red gielem, **ruzhen**, calambac, rhinoceros horn, aguila wood, quicksilver, Cambodian lacquer, **conincx hockin**, gold brocade, velvet, tin.<sup>2</sup>

From this list we can recognize that deerskin is probably from Siam, lacquer from Cambodia, camphor from Brunei, and **conincx hockin** (most probably a kind of silk fabric) from Fujian. Nutmeg must have been brought to Cochinchina from Banda Island in eastern Indonesia. Gold brocade, too, was not produced in Cochinchina or Tongking, and according to Wakan Sanzai Zue, a 17th century Japanese dictionary, velvet was produced in Netherlands, Canton, Tongking and Fujian, but not in Cochinchina.<sup>3</sup> As for silk fabric such as white panghsij, pelingh, red gielem, **ruzhen**, although sources say that most were produced in China<sup>4</sup> and Tongking (particularly pelingh), they might also have been produced in Cochinchina. Yet the quantity recorded here (4,800 **fan**) still seems far too much to have come from Cochinchina alone.

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<sup>1</sup> **Peling** here is most probably **peh ling** in the dialect of Chang Zhou and Quan Zhou areas, meaning "white ling", a kind of fine silk, most commonly in white, but sometimes red or blue.

<sup>2</sup> Daghregister des Comptoirs Nangasaque, Japanese translation by Murakami Masajiro, Iwanami Shoto, Tokyo, 1938, Vol.1, pp.32-34.

<sup>3</sup> Wakan Sanzai Zue, reprinted in 1929 by Nihon zuihitsu taisei kanko kai, Tokyo, Vol.1, p.359.

<sup>4</sup> See "The Japanese" in chapter 3.



In this manifest at least one third of the goods taken to Japan were not locally produced in Cochinchina. This was to be expected since, in the early 17th century especially, what mattered most in encouraging Cochinchinese trade was its entrepot role derived from its favourable geographical position at a time when direct trade was not allowed between China and Japan. As Antonio Bocarro, Chronicler-in-chief of the State of India, recognised in 1635: "The kingdom of Cochin-China is only the aforesaid distance from Macao, and there are always pinaces [boat] available for navigating to different countries."<sup>5</sup> This lucky situation made Hoi An so prosperous that its population almost entirely depended on commerce to live. As the Cantonese trader, Chen, mentioned by Phu Bien, remarked with approval: "There [was] nothing that cannot be obtained from there [Hoi An]." This abundance characterised trade in Cochinchina in the 17th to 18th centuries, and helps explain why its main port was regarded as "superior to all other ports of Southeast Asia". As the Phu Bien described it, "there were so many hundreds of kinds of goods displayed in the markets of Hoi An that one could not name all of them".<sup>6</sup>

Like Champa before it, then, Hoi An flourished as a regional entrepot. But also like Champa, almost from the start, it still exported some local products, chief among them calambac and gold. Calambac, a precious eaglewood only be found in some Southeast Asian countries, had previously been the most famous and precious product of Champa. In 1600, calambac was described as follows: "It is black and contains oil, and is worth 50 cruzados a catty among the Portuguese, while in its own kingdom it passes weight for weight with silver".<sup>7</sup> Naturally it became an important item for export in Cochinchina from the 17th century. Some Chinese traders found it worthwhile to wait up to a year to buy enough calambac to take to Japan<sup>8</sup> because:

this calambac where it is gathered is valued at 5 ducats (about 5 reals or 4-5 taels<sup>9</sup>) the pound, yet at the port of Cochinchina it yields more, and is scarcely to be had under 15 ducats the pound. And being transported to

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<sup>5</sup> Boxer, C.R. Seventeenth Century Macau, p.27.

<sup>6</sup> Phu Bien, Vol.3, p.35a.

<sup>7</sup> Quoted from C.R. Boxer, The Great Ship from Amacon, Centro de Estudos Historicos Ultramarinos, Lisboa, 1963, p.195 n 24.

<sup>8</sup> Kai-hentai, Vol.3, p.1804.

<sup>9</sup> Boxer, C.R. The Great Ship from Amacon, Appendix, pp.336-338.



Japan, it is valued at 200 ducats the pound.<sup>10</sup>

However, this product was always a tiny percentage of the cargoes, and from the records of the late 17th century we see increasing complaints about the supply of calambac running out.<sup>11</sup>

In both Asian and European travel accounts gold always topped the list of products of Cochinchina (as formerly with Champa). Like silk, gold was cheap in winter in Cochinchina, indicated that prices in **Dang Trong** fluctuated according to commercial season.<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, the amount of gold exported was never large. Gold was produced in Phu Vang county (in today's Thua Thien province), and Thang Hoa prefecture (Quang Nam), Quy Nhon and Phu Yen, with Thang Hoa the most productive. When Truong Phuc Loan became influential in 1765, a man bought a mountain in Thu Bon Nguyen to pan for gold. "It was said that the gold he brought to Hoi An to sell to the foreigners was not less than 1,000 bars (1 bar of gold = 200 quan copper money) each year." This statement seems greatly exaggerated, particularly for the later period of the Nguyen, because the gold tax in the 1770s was only from 340 taels to 880 taels annually. In the 1630s and 1640s, however, Cochinchina's own commodities began to take a larger place in its foreign trade. By supplying China and Japan with locally produced goods, as well as re-exporting the goods of other countries, Dang Trong's economic position was greatly strengthened. The first important locally-produced commodity that emerged onto the Cochinchinese market at that time was sugar.

Silk had never been the main bulk product of Cochinchina. An investigation made by Johan van Linga in 1642 listed the merchandise which could be obtained in Cochinchina annually as:

100 picul of silk, 50 to 60 piculs of aguila wood, 40 to 50 catty of calambac, 100 picul of pepper if it is a good year, and 300 to 400 picul (18,000 to 24,000 kg) of black sugar.<sup>13</sup>

If we can believe this source, then black sugar was probably the commodity which

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<sup>10</sup> Borri, Cochinchina, p.d2.

<sup>11</sup> See Kai-hentai, records from 1686 onward.

<sup>12</sup> Dumont, a French merchant sent to Cochinchina by Dupleix in 1748 said in his report that price of gold here in winter was much lower than that in summer, and it would bring 100% profit buying gold here and selling it in Guangzhou. See Taboulet, La geste francaise en Indochine, Librairie d'Amerique et d'Orient, Paris, 1955, Vol.1, p.121.

<sup>13</sup> Buch, p.121.

increased most quickly by bulk in Cochinchina. The table below shows the quantity of sugar that Chinese traders transported to Japan in 1663.<sup>14</sup>

**Table 1 SUGAR IMPORTED TO JAPAN IN 1663**

Origin	number of junks (in jin: 1 jin = 0.5kg) :	white sugar	black sugar	sugar candy
Siam	3	142,000	45,400	
Cambodia	3	12,300	71,400	2,200
Quang Nam	4	30,260	122,000	150
Tongking	1	42,000	23,000	900
Taiwan	3	50,800	37,000	1,700

Comparing information from this table with the van Linga report, we can see that the amount of black sugar exported from Cochinchina (61,000 kg) more than doubled in twenty years. Its production was obviously stimulated by overseas trade and seems to have grown very quickly. Nearly a century later, in 1750, Poivre said that China alone imported more than 40,000 barrels of white sugar each year from Hoi An,<sup>15</sup> and about 400% profit could be obtained from it.<sup>16</sup> In 1822, Crawford said that 20,000-60,000 piculs (1,000 to 3,000 tonnes) of sugar were sent to China from Hoi An each year, and another 5,000 piculs (250 tonnes) were sent to the European settlements in the straits of Malacca.<sup>17</sup> Sugar production seems to have suffered in the Tay Son period, according to Macartney, "on account of the ruined state of the country for a long period of time little more sugar was manufactured than answered home consumption; and the Chinese junks, disappointed in their loading, ceased to come in search of more."<sup>18</sup> Even so, the Macartney embassy was able to buy some sugar for under 4 pence a pound, with some even cheaper, at a penny a pound.

In contrast to sugar, silk production does not seem to have increased much over the centuries. At the end of 1636 the Dutch proposed to get 400-500 piculs of silk

<sup>14</sup> Nishikawa Joken, Zoho ka-i tsushoko, Kyoto, Rakuyo Shorin, 1708. Quoted from Zhong Guo Hai Yang Fa Zhan Shi Lun Wen Ji (Essays on the history of China's maritime development), Research Institute on Three Principles, Central Research Institute, Taipei, 1986, p.148.

<sup>15</sup> Taboulet, La Geste francaise, Vol.1, p.138.

<sup>16</sup> "Memoires divers sur la Cochinchine", Revue d'Extreme-Orient, 1883, Vol.II, p.329. But in another place the author said that the profit of sugar was 100%, see *ibid*, p.360.

<sup>17</sup> Crawford, Journal of an Embassy from the Governor-General of India to the Courts of Siam and Cochinchina, reprinted by Oxford University Press, Kuala Lumpur, 1967, p.474.

<sup>18</sup> "Macartney's letter to Dundas", The Mandarin Road to Old Hue, p.176.

and silk products a year from Cochinchina, but they were not successful and had to take other things instead.<sup>19</sup> Although according to Johan van Linga the 100 piculs of silk produced in Cochinchina in 1642 might have been below the true figure, the Dutch never put the total at more than 200 piculs.<sup>20</sup> In 1822 Crawford gave the silk production of Cochinchina as about the same: 200 piculs from Hoi An (which must have been from Thang Hoa and Dien Ban counties), and 60 piculs from Hue.<sup>21</sup> Yet it is also true that silk was common in Cochinchina in both Borri's account in 1618 and in Crawford's description in 1822. When scholars talk about the silk of Vietnam in the 17th century, they seem to be preoccupied by the abundance of silk in the north and may tend to overestimate production in Cochinchina.

Precious wood was another locally-produced staple item for export. The Phu Bien said that "there used to be plenty of old tropical trees around the Hue area, with many tree trunks measuring ten arm spans around."<sup>22</sup> It remained so until 1774, when the army of the north descended on Hue. According to Le Quy Don, more than 30,000 soldiers and servants camped there for a year, and the wood they used for cooking was "nothing but Medang and Thingan, [though] sometimes they used precious wood such as **trac** and **giang huong**, which filled a whole house, for cooking", he wrote.<sup>23</sup> The abundance of wood was also mentioned by Poivre: "Cochinchina has rose wood, iron wood, sapan wood, cannelle, calambac, sandal, and generally all kinds of fine woods which you can find in India."<sup>24</sup> This statement might explain why even precious wood was cheap before the 1770s. According to Phu Bien, Cantonese traders could buy 100 **can** (50 kg) of ebony wood for 6 mace (10 mace = 1 **quan**), the same quantity of lacquer wood for 1 **quan**, and cypree wood for 1.2 **quan**. It was also said that for 30 **quan**, one

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<sup>19</sup> Buch, "La Compagnie des Indes neerlandaises et l'Indochine", BEFEO, 1936, p.155.

<sup>20</sup> Daghregister gehouden int Casteel Batavia, entry November 1636: "The Japanese residents, Chinese and several local people in Cochinchina in 5 junks are going to Japan in July [1637?]. Before leaving, they might be able to buy 12,000 to 13,000 **can** (6000 to 6,500 kg) new silk and bring it with them". See the Chinese trans. by Guo Hui, Vol.1, p.183. This figure (12,000 to 13,000 **can**) is close to the figure given in 1642, hence might be the crude amount of silk production in Cochinchina in the first half of the 17th century.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, p.476.

<sup>22</sup> Phu Bien, Vol.6, p.211b.

<sup>23</sup> Phu Bien, Vol.6, p.208a.

<sup>24</sup> Poivre, "Memoires divers sur la Cochinchine", p.328.

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could buy enough of the best wood to build a 5-room house.<sup>25</sup> According to Bowyear, "such plenty of timber of all sorts that the Spaniards from Manilha have sent hither to build their galleons".<sup>26</sup>

Another commodity popular with the Chinese was dry fish. It was even cheaper than sugar in Cochinchina. According to Michel Chaigneau, remembering the early 1800s, 1 ta (50 kg) of dry fish could be purchased at 2 piastres in the lower Mekong delta, while the same quantity of sugar was 3 to 4 piastres. The dried fish could then be sold in Macao for 12 piastres.<sup>27</sup>

Although the Dutch and Zheng (Coxingga) of Taiwan did sometimes buy rice from Cochinchina in the 17th century, rice never became a main export from here before the late 17th century, when the Mekong delta began to cultivate rice in large quantity. In fact, until the late 17th century Siam was reportedly exporting rice to Cochinchina.<sup>28</sup> It is likely that the Mekong delta did not begin to produce large enough rice surpluses to sell elsewhere until the early 18th century at the earliest. Even then, most of it was sold within the country rather than overseas. But by 1789, when there was a famine in Siam, we find Nguyen Anh giving his permission to sell 8,800 **phuong** (264,000 litres) of rice to the Siamese.<sup>29</sup> Around this time rice was so abundant in the Mekong delta that Nguyen Anh used it to encourage Chinese traders to bring iron, steel, lead and sulphur to the Gia Dinh area. The junks were divided into 3 grades:

Grade 1: for the junks which brought 100,000 **can** (50,000 kg) of the four strategic goods, rice was tax-free, and up to 300,000 **can** (150,000 kg) could be carried away;

Grade 2: for the junks which brought 60,000 **can** of the 4 special items, 220,000 **can** of rice could be taken;

Grade 3: for the junks which brought 40,000 **can** of the 4 special items above, 150,000 **can** rice could be exported.<sup>30</sup>

There were also many everyday items on sale in Cochinchina. Phu Bien names 51: silk, cotton, herbal medicines, gold or silver paper, joss sticks, gold and silver thread, color dyes, clothes, footwear, glass, fans, writing brushes and ink, needles,

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<sup>25</sup> Phu Bien, Vol.6, p.205b.

<sup>26</sup> Lamb, p.55.

<sup>27</sup> M.Chaigneau, "Notice sur la Cochinchine", BAVH, avril-juin 1923, p.273.

<sup>28</sup> As mentioned in the previous chapter.

<sup>29</sup> Chinh Bien, Vol.4,p.349.

<sup>30</sup> Chinh Bien, Vol.4, p.350.

all kind of chairs, leadware and copperware, porcelain, earthenware, tea, and all kinds of dried foods and sweets.<sup>31</sup> While in the 17th century luxuries formed an important part of overseas trade in Cochinchina, by the 18th century items of daily use for the common people formed the bulk of trade items. Poivre actually lists the same sorts of goods that could be brought from Europe: "Hardwares, glass, cotton in bright colors such as red."<sup>32</sup> Borri added that goods which amused women sold particularly fast:

Combs, needles, bracelets, beads of glass to hang on their ears, and such other trifles and womanish curiosities. And I remember that a Portuguese having brought from Macao into Cochinchina a box full of needles, which could not have cost him above thirty **ducats**, got above a thousand, selling them for a **real** a piece in Cochinchina, which had not cost him above one pence a piece in Macao.<sup>33</sup>

No hard evidence about northern revenues enables us to compare the living standard of Tongking to Cochinchina. Yet anecdotal evidence suggests there must have been a big difference between the two. As a northerner, Le Quy Don unintentionally showed his envy when he described the people of Cochinchina as "accustomed to fancy things":

The officials, no matter how high or low their position, all lived in ornamented buildings, with gauze and satin as curtains and mosquito nets. Their pots were made of copper, their furniture of **trac**. Cups and trays were made of china, and saddles of gold and silver. Dresses were made of brocade and coloured silk, and mats of very good quality rattan. They showed off and competed with each other for richness and distinction. The common people also wore satin shirts with flowers and damask trousers as their daily wear. To be dressed in plain cotton was considered a disgrace. The soldiers all enjoyed sitting on mats, with incense burners in their hands, having good tea with silver or china cups. Everything came from China, from spittoons to chinaware, even the food. For every meal they had three big bowls of rice. Women all dressed in gauze, ramie and silk, with embroidered flowers around a round collar. People here looked upon gold and silver as sand, millet and rice as mud; their lives could not be more extravagant.<sup>34</sup>

Not only does the information above suggest the higher living standard and different values of Cochinchina, but it also indicates that a change had taken place in the 18th century: **Dang Trong** had moved from being mainly an entrepot to a consumer market itself.

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<sup>31</sup> Phu Bien, Vol.4, p.35b.

<sup>32</sup> Poivre, "Memoires", p.335.

<sup>33</sup> Borri, Cochinchina, p.I 2.

<sup>34</sup> Phu Bien, Vol.6, p.227b.

Overseas trade was so important that the number of ships or junks which arrived in Cochinchina set the standard for a good or bad year. In Hai Wai Ji Shi, Da Shan quotes the thanks of of **chua**, Nguyen Phuc Dieu, (1691-1725) because Da Shan had prayed for "favourable weather and a fruitful year" for Cochinchina. The measure of the year's fruitfulness, according to the **chua**, was "that whereas only 6 to 7 junks and ships had been coming yearly, about 17 came that year (1695), bringing the state more than enough money for its use".<sup>35</sup> For the first time in Vietnamese history, prosperity of the state depended on merchants, not only farmers.

### Duties and charges

In Phu Bien we read that arrival and departure taxes on different ships were as follows (in **quan**):

TABLE 2 DUTIES ON ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE

ships from	Tax on arrival [in <b>quan</b> ]	Tax on departure
Shanghai	3,000	[not mentioned]
Canton	3,000	300
Fujian	2,000	200
Hainan Island	500	50
Europe <sup>36</sup>	8,000	800
Macao	4,000	400
Japan	4,000	400
Siam	2,000	200
Luzon	2,000	200
Palembang	500	50
Ha Tien	300	30
Son Do <sup>37</sup>	300	30

Many of these amounts are quite substantial, especially the duty levied on the larger European ships. But when did this regulation first come into effect? The Tien Bien claims that it had existed from the early days of the Nguyen regime. This seems unlikely, as the places named in the regulation itself indicate it could not refer to any time before the early 18th century. The name Shanghai, for

<sup>35</sup> Da Shan, Hai Wai Ji Shi, Vol.3, p.24.

<sup>36</sup> It seems to mean any European-rigged ships.

<sup>37</sup> Prof.Chen Chingho suggests that Son Do was Chantaboun, a port close to the Siam-Khmer border. See "Shi qi ba shi ji zhi hui an tang ren jie ji qi shang ye" (The Chinese Town and its trade in Hoi An in the 17th and 18th centuries), Xin Ya Xue Bao, No.1, Vol. 3, p.310. Yet might this **Son Do** instead be Pho Hien, a city in **Son Nam Ha** (province in the lower Red River delta), and the most important port of Tongking in the 17th and 18th centuries?

instance, did not become known in the overseas trade until the late 1680s. Another place name, Ha Tien, did not exist until 1714.<sup>38</sup> However, we know that the Tien Bien entries copied ones from the Phu Bien, and that this piece of information appeared in the Phu Bien as well. The Phu Bien sourced it to a Nguyen officer in the 1770s. From this it seems more than likely that the regulation started from no earlier than the mid-18th century.<sup>39</sup> According to Borri, in the early days there may have been no duties and charges in Cochinchina. "The king of Cochinchina does refuse no nation to enter", and leaving it "free for all sorts of strangers".<sup>40</sup> Yet Edward Saris, who travelled along with William Adams in the 1610s, stated that "the king desires much a piece of ordnance of brass and that if we did bring him a brass piece of **demi couluren** [a cannon with a calibre of about 4.5 inches] or a sacker [smaller than a **demi-culverin**, formerly much used on ships], we should not bring or pay more duties".<sup>41</sup> These accounts suggest that small customs duties may have been necessary for foreigners trading with Cochinchina, but that visitors who brought particular gifts might be exempted.

By the late 17th century, this had clearly changed. For example, according to a proposal Bowyear made to the Nguyen in 1695, the English would pay 500 taels in customs for a ship which came to Cochinchina to trade.<sup>42</sup> This offer also suggests that the Nguyen might not have maintained a fixed rule on taxes paid by foreign ships at the time. In the 1750s the tax charged to European ships was up to 8,000 quan. When a Dutch ship, the Tulpenburg, came to Cochinchina in 1752, it paid 8,000 quan as an arrival tax.<sup>43</sup> And when a French ship from Pondichery came in 1753, the Nguyen asked 8,000 piastres, instead of 4,000 which they had promised in 1752.<sup>44</sup>

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\* See Chen Chingho, "Notes on the 'Ha Tien Tran Hiep Tran Mac Thi Gia Pha'(Mac family genealogy)", Bulletin of the College of Arts, National Taiwan University, No.7, 1956, p.89. Chen Ching-ho gives several possible dates for when Mac Cuu began to pay tribute to the Nguyen and the name Ha Tien came into being. I choose to believe the date 1714, given by the Mac's genealogy and Dai Nam Nhat Thong Chi, rather than 1708, which is given by the Tien Bien.

<sup>38</sup> Chen Chingho points this in his "The Chinese town of Hoi An", p.310.

<sup>40</sup> Borri, Cochinchina, p.12.

<sup>41</sup> C.J.Purnell ed., The Log-Book of William Adams, 1614-19, p.294. The notes in brackets are given by Purnell.

<sup>42</sup> The Mandarin Road, p.50.

<sup>43</sup> Buch, "La Companie des Indes nederlandaise et l'Indochine", BEFEO, Vol.XXX VII, p.153.

<sup>44</sup> Launay, Histoire de la mission de Cochinchine 1658-1823, Vol.2, p.354.



It seems certain that ships or junks had to pay other tax on cargoes, in addition to those mentioned above. An early source says that the tax in Cochinchina in the late 17th century was less than 3-4%; taxes on arrival and departure were considered "tres petite".<sup>45</sup> A biography of Khong Thien Nhu, the *cai phu tau* (officer in charge of overseas trade) in the late 17th century, basically confirmed this by saying that, when a ship arrived, its cargo was weighed and charged at 5-10%.<sup>46</sup> But in the 1750s this tax seems to have been increased as well. According to Kirsop, the tax was now 12% of the cargo.<sup>47</sup>

It is worth speculating for a moment whether there may have been a connection between these increases in overseas trade taxes and the 18th century inflation.<sup>48</sup> If the tax increases did follow the inflation, they could have helped to cause a further drop in overseas trade. Certainly when the Tay Son asked Chapman to pay 7,000 *quan* for a large two masted ship and 4,000 for a smaller one, a rule obviously derived from the Nguyen tax regulations, he complained that it "would deter any merchants from sending their vessels".<sup>49</sup> A decline in the number of ships and junks from overseas might have pushed the Nguyen to drop the arrival and departure taxes in the early 1770s, as Le Quy Don reported. "In 1772 and 1773", he wrote, "the two taxes were together reduced to 2,100 *quan*". For the majority of overseas ships that was a substantial reduction,<sup>50</sup> and suggests it may have been an emergency measure by the Nguyen government to re-stimulate the overseas trade which had been so important to their revenue.

According to *Phu Bien*, the total state revenue of Cochinchina between 1746 and 1752 fluctuated between 338,100 *quan* and 423,300 *quan* a year. The tax from overseas trade was 38,000 *quan* (16 junks) in 1771, falling to 14,300 *quan* (12 junks) in 1772. Looking at these figures alone it might seem that overseas trade was not so important for Cochinchina's state revenue. But the important point here is that the total revenue figures were from 1746 to 1752, when the numbers of ships and junks arriving yearly in Cochinchina was between 80 (according to

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<sup>45</sup> *La Geste Francaise en Indochine*, Vol.1, p.86.

<sup>46</sup> "Tieu truyen Khong Thien Nhu", a MA kept in the Hoi An Relics Board, Hoi An, Vietnam.

<sup>47</sup> Robert Kirsop, "Some account of Cochinchina", in A.Dalrympie, *Oriental Repertory*, East India Company, London, 1808, pp.242-243.

<sup>48</sup> For a longer discussion see below.

<sup>49</sup> Lamb, p.99.

<sup>50</sup> He did not mention what happened to the junks which used to pay less than 2,100 *quan*.

Koffler who was in Cochinchina from 1744 to 1753), and 60 (according to Poivre who was there in 1749-1750).<sup>51</sup> The average duties for one junk, calculated according to the regulations mentioned above, was about 2,000 **quan**. If we suppose that 70 junks came to Cochinchina yearly, a figure which seems reasonable for the 1740s-1750s, then the taxes that the Nguyen collected from those junks would have been about 140,000 **quan**, or about one-third to one-fourth of total revenue. It is also likely that the fluctuations recorded in state revenue largely reflected on the number of junks coming each year. We can also assume that the tax on overseas trade was even more important to the Nguyen regime in its early days, when domestic production was less developed, as was the taxation system for agriculture, local trade, and minority peoples.

### The tonnage of shipping and volume of trade

From the late 16th century to 1635, the main trade in Cochinchina was carried out between the Chinese and Japanese. According to Iwao Seiichi, the average transport tonnage of Red Seal ships was 270 tonnes.<sup>52</sup> With an average of 2-3 Red Seal ships<sup>53</sup> coming to Cochinchina per year, the volume from the Japanese side would be 600 tonnes on average, with at least an annual value of 250,000 taels of silver.<sup>54</sup> As for the Chinese side, the volume of trade by junks from Cochinchina was between 4000 taels and 19,000 taels per junk. In 1637, for example, it was said that 4 junks from Quinam arrived in Nagasaki with cargoes worth a total of 75,000 taels (162,750 fl.). That would mean about 18,750 taels per junk.<sup>55</sup> If 4 Chinese junks came yearly, itself a quite conservative estimate,

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<sup>51</sup> 74 Chinese junks and one Portuguese ship had been at Faifo in 1749, before the arrival of Poivre.

<sup>52</sup> Iwao Seiichi, Shuin-sen boeki-shi no kenku, p.120.

<sup>53</sup> This number of Red Seal ships is nevertheless not the full story. According to a report in 1628, at least one Japanese ship had been going to Cochinchina every year without a Red Seal licence. See Iwao, *ibid*, p.87.

<sup>54</sup> Iwao estimates that the value of goods transported on a Red Seal ship was on average 500 **kan** (50,000 taels of silver). See Iwao, Shuin-sen, pp.269. Innes, however, thinks that this estimate should be doubled and multiplied by the number of vessels operating each year. See Innes, The Door Ajar, Vol.2, p.386. According to Dutch sources, in 1633 two Japanese Red Seal ships came with the equivalent of 400,000 reals (300,000 taels of silver) of capital. See Buch, O.I. Compagnie en Quinam, p.24. Borri's account seems to confirm the latter: he said that the annual trade between Japanese and Chinese in Hoi An valued "four or five millions in silver". See Borri, Cochin-China, p.I.

<sup>55</sup> Buch, p.67. An entry of Daghregister des Comptoirs Nangasaque in September 1645 says that one junk from Quang Nam arrived with a cargo worth 9 chests of **gold coins**. If it means **real** gold coins, the value would be 90,000 taels of silver. If it means "currency", and a chest of silver in the 17th century was 1000 taels silver, then it might have been 9,000 taels of silver. The latter seems more likely.

then the goods brought in would have been at least 350 tons, valued at around 75,000 taels of silver per year.<sup>56</sup>

Though not well documented, there must have been quite a number of vessels coming to Cochinchina from other Southeast Asian ports during this period as well. For example, The Log-Book of William Adams mentions that in May 1617 three ships from Manila arrived in Tourane.<sup>57</sup> One entry of Ed.Saris journals from 1617 to 1618 also says that in that same month a Japanese junk came from Cambodia.<sup>58</sup>

Throughout the 17th century an unknown but possibly considerable amount of trade in rice occurred between Cambodia, Siam and Cochinchina, before the Mekong delta was able to produce enough rice to feed the population in the Hue area. That would add another thousand tons (or more) and ten thousand taels to the tonnages and values quoted above. If we include Portuguese and Dutch ships, the volume of trade before 1640 in Cochinchina might well have been at a level of 600,000 taels of silver annually.

As for the volume of goods transported from and to Cochinchina after the Japanese closed door policy came into effect, Dagregister des Comptoirs Nangasacque records 22 junks from Cochinchina between 1641 and 1648, with cargoes estimated at about 100,000 jin (50 tons) to 150,000 jin (75 tons).<sup>59</sup> This estimate is supported by the records of To ban ka motsu cho, which lists the cargoes of 2 junks which came to Japan from Cochinchina in 1712. The tonnage of both of them were about 120,000 jin (60 tons).<sup>60</sup>

This tonnage of 60 tons therefore can be taken as the average tonnage of junks from Cochinchina. From 1641 to 1680 an average of 4 junks came from Cochinchina to Japan per year, which would suggest a total of 240 tons of trade in volume (or 60,000 taels of silver in value), conducted by Chinese merchants in

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<sup>56</sup> Innes estimates that the value of Chinese cargoes carried by junks to Japan was on average 500-1500 taels per junk before 1620, 6,000 taels per junk between 1623 and 1629, and after 1629 it reached a level of 3,000 kan (300,000 tael of silver) annually. Innes, pp.390-391.

<sup>57</sup> The Log-Book, p.233.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid, p.294.

<sup>59</sup> Dagregister des Comptoirs Nangasacque, Japanese translation by Murakami Masajiro, Iwanami Shoten, Tokyo, 1938.

<sup>60</sup> To ban ka motsu cho, Nai kaku bun ko, Vol.2, Tokyo, 1970, pp.944-949; pp.1058-1068.

the China-Cochinchina-Japan trade. A larger number of smaller-size junks travelled back and forth between China and Cochinchina, maybe up to 10 annually,<sup>61</sup> with a total cargo tonnage of 120 to 200 tons, and a value of 100,000 taels of silver.

Macao traded more frequently with **Dang Trong** in the second half of the 17th century, when the Portuguese regarded Cochinchina as an alternative market after the Tokugawa closed its doors in 1639. According to Manguin, 4 ships came to Cochinchina in 1651, and more in 1650.<sup>62</sup> At least one or two ships came from Macao each year, with a carrying capacity of less than 300 tons each,<sup>63</sup> to a value of 100,000 taels.<sup>64</sup>

Another 700 tons can be added for the junks sent by Zheng in Taiwan, probably from 2 to 4 junks annually between the 1660s and the 1680s, with one junk averaging 235 tons in weight<sup>65</sup> and 90,000 taels of silver in value.<sup>66</sup>

A considerable amount of trade must have been carried out between Cochinchina and other Southeast Asian countries throughout the 17th and 18th centuries, as has been suggested in Chapter Three. At least two junks could have come yearly to Cochinchina, either from Siam, Manila or Batavia.<sup>67</sup>

Thus from the 1640s to the end of the century, an annual average of 2,000 to

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<sup>61</sup> Hai Wai Ji Shi, Vol.3, p.24.

<sup>62</sup> Manguin, Les Portugais sur les cotes du Viet-Nam et du Campa, p.201.

<sup>63</sup> Boxer: "The ton here used as a unit of capacity and not of weight. European writers of that period [the 17th century?] meant by a shipping ton a space available for cargo of about 60 cubic feet." See Boxer, The Great Ship from Amacon, p.13. He also says that an occasional vessel of 400 to 500 tons came from Indochina in 1637, under Portuguese command.

<sup>64</sup> Innes, p.383.

<sup>65</sup> Copie-dagregister des Casteels Zeelandia op Tayoan, 27 Feb. to 9 November, 1655 says that 4 junks went to Quang Nam in March 1655. Quoted from Cao Yong He, Taiwan Zao Qi Li Shi Yan Jiu (A study of the early history of Taiwan), Lian jing chu ban shi ye gong si, Taipei, 1981, p.377. According to Kai-hentai, Vol.8, p.392, 3 junks of Zheng went to Quang Nam in 1683. Calculating from the 3 junks which arrived in Nagasaki from June to July 1641, the volume of transport per junk of the Zheng was 235 ton. See Dagregister des Comptoirs Nangasacque, Japanese translation, Vol.1, pp.3-5,9-11, 16-17.

<sup>66</sup> For the value of Zheng's junk, see Lin Ren Chuan, Ming Mo Qing Chu Si Ren Hai Shang Mao Yi (Private trade in the period of the end of Ming and the beginning of the Qing dynasty), Press of Normal University of Hua Dong, Shanghai, 1987, p.267. Lin's calculation was based on Zheng's demanding restitution from the Dutch, which might have been higher than the junk's real value.

<sup>67</sup> See Les Philippines et le Pacifique des Iberiques, pp.60-61; J.C. van Leur, p.213.

2,500 tons of cargo may have been transported, with an estimated value of 580,000 taels.

In 1715, the Japanese government limited the total volume of foreign trade to 3000 **can** (300,000 taels silver) per year; of this amount, 300 **can** (30,000 taels of silver) was assigned to Cochinchina, which means that up until the early 18th century the volume of trade between Japan and Cochinchina was worth at least 60,000 taels of silver, with the likelihood that it was much more in the late 17th and early 18th centuries.

In the late 17th century Taiwan stopped sending junks to **Dang Trong**. However, the number of junks from China seems to have increased from the early 18th century, when most could no longer trade in Japan due to the import quota policy of the Japanese government. In this period the number of their junks to Cochinchina rose to 60-80, while the tonnage of shipping might have increased to 420-500 tons. The Dutch sent ships occasionally, and Macao regularly sent one ship to Cochinchina.<sup>68</sup> In 1753, according to Bennetat, the following Western ships arrived to trade: 1 Dutch ship; 2 Macao ships; plus the French ship sent from Pondichery, on which Bennetat himself was travelling.<sup>69</sup> Thus in all the total tonnage of shipping in the first half of the 18th century might have fluctuated from 1500 tons to 3000 tons, with a value of 400,000 to 450,000 taels, depending on whether Western ships came or not.

### Copper and coins

On any list of import items to Cochinchina, we find that coins were always among the most desirable items. From a table Iwao Seiichi gives in Shuinsen boeki-shi no kenkyu, we know that coins were one of the main items exported to Tongking and Cochinchina from Japan in the early 17th century.<sup>70</sup> The basis of this trade rested on the attempts of the Japanese government to unify its national currency. From the 15th to the mid-16th centuries the Japanese had imported coins called Eiraku-tsuho (the original Yung-lo coin) from China, while official Chinese coins also mixed with private castings from both Japan and China (called bita-sen in Japanese). In 1608, as part of its attempt to standardise

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<sup>68</sup> "Description of Cochinchina, 1749-50", in Southern Vietnam under the Nguyen, section "Portuguese Trade in Cochinchina".

<sup>69</sup> Launay, Histoire de la mission de Cochinchine, Vol.2, p.354.

<sup>70</sup> Iwao Seiichi, Shuinsen boeki-shi no kenkyu, p.241.

Japanese currency, the government prohibited the circulation of Eiraku coins.<sup>71</sup>

Banning these coins at home provided Red Seal ship merchants with an opportunity to make huge profits by trading them in Cochinchina. As Table Two in Chapter Three showed, there was a remarkable increase in Red Seal Ships to Cochinchina from 1610, hinting at a close connection between these two facts, something that VOC records support. In 1633, the VOC brought 930 strings of Eiraku coins (called "Ierack" or "Erack" by Dutch) to Cochinchina, and 360 strings in 1634, after which this "Ierack" vanished from the list of VOC coins-brought to Cochinchina.<sup>72</sup> The Dutch bought the coins at a 10% discount, 25 years after they had been prohibited. For the Japanese, they must have been even cheaper. The peak period for the Japanese merchants to carry Eiraku-tsuho coins to Cochinchina therefore might have been between 1610 and 1630. This trade must have encouraged the Japanese to come to Cochinchina.<sup>73</sup> The Dutch said in 1636 that **shuinsen** merchants like Hirano Tojiro had made enormous profits on transporting coins to Cochinchina.<sup>74</sup>

The VOC brought coins to Cochinchina, because it knew that "coins were badly needed in Quinam, [as] the king of Quinam asked us to buy all the old coins in Japan and bring them there for casting cannons".<sup>75</sup> In 1634 the VOC brought nothing to Cochinchina but coins.<sup>76</sup> Table 3 shows the numbers and types of coins bought from Japanese traders in strings (**quan**) of nominally 1,000 pieces (in reality 4% less: 960 pieces)

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<sup>71</sup> Takizawa, T., "Early currency policies of the Tokugawa's, 1563-1608", Acta Asiatica, No.39, 1980, p.22.

<sup>72</sup> A. van Aelst, "Japanese coins in southern Vietnam and the Dutch East India Company, 1633-1638", Newsletter of the Oriental Numismatic Society, No.109, Nov-Dec. 1987 (n.p.).

<sup>73</sup> Although Japanese coins were regarded as export items rather than capital by the Japanese.

<sup>74</sup> General Missiven van Gouverneurs-General en Raden aan Heren XVII der Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie, Vol.1, p.513. Quote in Innes, The Door Ajar, Vol.2, p.586.

<sup>75</sup> When one of the VOC ships failed to buy goods in Cochinchina in June 1633, "the king [of Cochinchina] regretted that the Japanese had taken all the goods this time, but if the Dutch returned in November with copper coins, coarse pottery and iron pots, they could trade it for gold and raw silk". Here the king used "zenes", the special term for Japanese coins, which proves that the Japanese had been transporting their coins to Cochinchina. This may have been the origin of the Dutch coin trade to Cochinchina. See Buch, De Oost-Indische Compagnie en Quinam, p.25.

<sup>76</sup> Dagregister gehouden int Casteel Batavia, Chinese trans., Vol.1, p.126.

**Table 3**  
**TYPES OF COINS BROUGHT INTO COCHINCHINA BY THE VOC (1633-1637)<sup>77</sup>**

year	type	Iarack	Saccamotta	Mito	Nume	Tammary	Unspec	Total
1633		930	15,420	-	-	-	-	16,530
1634		360	9,724	-	-	-	-	10,084
1635		-	41,625	-	-	-	-	41,625
1636		-	5,385	-	5,250	-	2,865	13,500
1637		-	-	2,505	-	510	21,260	24,275
	total	1,290	72,154	2,505	5,250	510	24,125	105,834
	taels <sup>78</sup>	968	60,005	2,380	4,988	485	24,125	92,951

In its early days the VOC seemed less enthusiastic about the coin trade in Cochinchina, because the profit margin was quite low: in 1634, only 14 to 14.5 taels of silver per 15,000 coins could be gained, almost non-profitable for the Dutch.<sup>79</sup> This might have been due to the large amount of coins brought in by the Japanese.<sup>80</sup> After 1635, however, the Dutch became more motivated because in 1636 Japanese coins sold in Cochinchina at 100 to 115 taels, even to 120 taels, per picul.<sup>81</sup> The purchase price in Japan was no more than 1 tael per string, but the Dutch re-sold the coins in Cochinchina at 10.56 taels per string. It is not surprising therefore, that the Dutch soon called the coin trade "the most profitable item" in Cochinchina.<sup>82</sup>

<sup>77</sup> A van Aelst, (n.p.).

<sup>78</sup> This is my calculation, according to the following prices given by A van Aelst:

"Ierack":	0.75 tael per string;
"Saccamotta":	0.80-0.85 tael per string;
"Mito":	0.95 tael per string;
"Nume":	0.95 tael per string;
"Tammary":	0.95 tael per string;
Unspec:	1 tael per string.

Innes gives the amount of 42,000 kan which was brought by the VOC from 1633 to 1638. See Innes, The Door Ajar, Vol.2, p.586.

<sup>79</sup> Thanh The Vy, p.152. See also the Daghregister, Chinese translation, Vol.1, p.128.

<sup>80</sup> Even though, in 1634 the Japanese merchants asked the Japanese government to prohibit the Dutch exporting coins to Cochinchina. See Daghregister gehouden int Casteel Batavia, Chinese trans. Vol.1, p.114.

<sup>81</sup> Daghregister gehouden int Casteel Batavia, Chinese trans. <sup>by</sup> Guo Hui, Vol.1, p.173.

<sup>82</sup> Daghregister, Chinese translation by Guo Hui, Vol.1, p.197. The Dutch in 1636 even decided to cast coins in Japan to the amount of 180,000 to 200,000 guilders (about 323,000 taels) to sell in Cochinchina, but did not seem to put in practice. See *ibid*, p.181. In 1638 Chua Nguyen Phuc Lan (r.1635-48) would only buy coins at 0.8 quan per string, while the Dutch had brought them at 1 quan per string. See Thanh The Vy, Ngoai thuong, p.152.

Besides the Dutch, Chinese traders exported large quantities of Japanese coins to Cochinchina. In September 1637, for example, 4 Chinese junks brought to Cochinchina 4,500 to 5,000 taels of *schuit* silver, 2 million *zenes*, and 600 piculs of iron from Japan.<sup>83</sup> We also know that the main items carried from Japan to Cochinchina by junks of Zheng (Coxinga) and Chinese junks afterwards were gold, silver and copper, or copper coins. "Between 1659 and 1684, the *bakufu* even permitted the Nagasaki city elders to operate a mint that produced copies of old Chinese coins for the export market".<sup>84</sup> Surely a large amount of these coins went to Cochinchina.

But once in **Dang Trong**, where did these coins go? Were they cast into cannons or bullets, or used as currency in Cochinchina? Both were possible. According to the *Dagregister*, in 1636 a Chinese junk shipped Japanese coins to the value of 30,000 taels of silver from Nagasagi to Cochinchina. Because their quality was bad, the *chua* (Nguyen Phuc Lan) purchased them for casting into cannons.<sup>85</sup> This suggests that good coins were used in circulation. I strongly agree that "these Japanese coins were no occasional guests but an everyday part of life" of Cochinchina.<sup>86</sup> The circulation of these coins first met, and then further stimulated, the demands of trade in 17th century **Dang Trong**, whose long-distance links were vital to its existence, and to the trading economy on which it depended.<sup>87</sup> Imported coins made up for a deficiency in existing currency, so that the lack of state coinage did not hinder the rapid development of Cochinchina in the early 17th century.

In fact, a large amount of currency became one of the advantages of trade in Cochinchina. As Richard Cocks said, "[silk] is brought [to Cochinchina] at a reasonable rate that many times [the Chinese] make 3 for 1 profit, but all or most part is done with ready money".<sup>88</sup> Coins in common circulation made possible

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<sup>83</sup> Buch, *De Oost-Indische Compagnie en Quinam*, p.67.

<sup>84</sup> Innes, *The Door Ajar*, Vol.2, p.587.

<sup>85</sup> *Dagregister*, Chinese translation, Vol.1, p.174.

<sup>86</sup> A.van Aelst's article, p.2.

<sup>87</sup> In the collection of ancient coins possessed by Thai The Sung in Hoi An, there is a Japanese coin with the letters **Khoan Vinh** (**Kwan-Ei Tsu-Ho**, cast 1626-1859). The VOC transported over a 100 million of these coins to Cochinchina between 1633 and 1638. See A.van Aelst, and Neil Gordon Munro, *Coins of Japan*, Yokohama, 1904, pp.111-112.

<sup>88</sup> *Letters Received*, Vol.4, p.16.



rapid economic transactions. That explains why in 1688, during a time when fewer and fewer Japanese coins were being brought to Cochinchina, Chua Nghia dispatched 4 letters (one to the king of Japan and the other three to officials in Nagasaki) and gifts to the Tokugawa government, via a Chinese junk travelling to Japan, asking that coins be cast on his behalf.<sup>89</sup>

Although in the early 17th century the Chinese had brought large amounts of silk to trade with the Japanese in Cochinchina, silk ceased to be a staple import item when direct Sino-Japanese trade became possible in the late 17th century, and Cochinchina produced its own silk. Coins from China then became an important item. Bowyear said in 1695 that "from Canton is brought cashes, of which they make a great profit".<sup>90</sup> It may have been particularly so in the late 17th century, when from 1684 the weight of the **Kang Xi** coin was reduced. While in 1688 in China one tael of silver was equal to 1400 to 1500 copper coins, in 1697 it was valued at 3030 of the lighter coins.<sup>91</sup> Those 3030 coins would then have been worth 5.05 **quan** coins in Cochinchina, where gold was valued at about 13 **quan** for a tael or even less.<sup>92</sup> Thus, when the proportional value of gold to silver in China was 1:10, exchanging Chinese coins for gold from Cochinchina could bring 288% profit.<sup>93</sup> However, when the silver price fell and the copper price rose in 18th century China, shipping coins became unprofitable.

If we examine Cochinchina's trade in the 17th and 18th centuries, we will find that not only were progressively fewer coins being imported, but copper was also becoming increasingly expensive. While the price of copper was 20 **quan** per picul in 1695,<sup>94</sup> it had doubled by 1750,<sup>95</sup> and in the 1770s it was up to 45 **quan** per

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<sup>89</sup> Kai-hentai, Vol.15, pp.1036-1045.

<sup>90</sup> Lamb, The Mandarin Road to Old Hue, p.52.

<sup>91</sup> Peng Xin Wei, Zhong Guo Huo Bi Shi (A history of Chinese coinage), People's Press, Shanghai, 1958, p.567.

<sup>92</sup> Poivre said that before 1750 gold was valued at 130 **quan** for 10 taels, in an expensive year 150 **quan**. See "Voyage de Pierre Poivre en Cochinchine", Revue de l'Extreme Orient, vol.3, 1885, p.430.

<sup>93</sup> Before 1710 the official proportion of gold and silver was 1:10, but in reality the English bought gold at 9.85 tael silver of 94 touch, in 1700. See Morse, H.B., The East India Company Trading to China, Vol.1, p.69.

<sup>94</sup> Lamb, p.52. The text says "tael" which means **quan**. See *ibid*, p.53:"Their tael is accounted by cashes... 600 the thousand or tael."

<sup>95</sup> Poivre, "Memoires", p.336.

picul.<sup>96</sup>

In 1750, the official price ratio between silver and copper in China was 1:57,<sup>97</sup> while in Cochinchina it was 1:50, dropping to 1:44 in the 1770s.<sup>98</sup> This disparity meant that it remained profitable for Chinese to trade copper in Cochinchina. But even so, most of the copper that the Chinese brought might still have come from Japan. Until 1712, the official price ratios between silver and copper in Japan had been 1:99, but in the late 17th century it rose to 1:112.<sup>99</sup> This represented almost one-third of the price of copper in Cochinchina. Since copper was valued more highly than copper coins, it was natural for people to melt the coins down into copper, as the Phu Bien shows. But this exacerbated the coin shortage, and made copper even more expensive.

In addition to Japanese and Chinese coins, there were some locally made coins circulating in Cochinchina in the 17th and 18th centuries. They included some coins made by the Mac, stamped with the characters **Thai Binh** and **An Phap**, which circulated presumably in the early Nguyen period. The Phu Bien, too, said that each **chua** Nguyen casted some coins when he acceded to the throne. These coins copied the **Thai Binh** (meaning 'great peace') coins of the Mac. But they were not produced in substantial amounts, being more to celebrate the succession than to circulate as coinage.<sup>100</sup>

In fact, although coinage was seen by East Asian rulers as one attribute of kingship, up to the late 17th century coins from Japan and China circulated so widely in **Dang Trong** that creating their own currency did not interest the Nguyen. Perhaps Nguyen Phuc Tru (r.1725-1738) was the first **chua** before Nguyen Phuc Khoat (r.1738-1765) to try to cast coins truly out of the country's

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<sup>96</sup> Phu Bien, vol.4, p.21a.

<sup>97</sup> Peng Xin Wei, p.571.

<sup>98</sup> According to Poivre, 1 tael of silver in Cochinchina in 1750 was worth 2 **quan**. Poivre, Journal, p.406.

<sup>99</sup> Nihongo Nagasaki, Yashikama Kobun Kan, Tokyo, 1964, pp.216-218.

<sup>100</sup> There are 9 **Thai Binh** coins in Albert Schroeder's Numismatique de l'Annam, one of zinc and others of copper. Two **An Phap** coins, both made of copper, are put into the category of "monnaies incertaines" by the author. See Albert Schroeder, Numismatique de l'Annam, reprinted by Trismegiste, Paris, 1983, pp.493,499. So far no work seems to have been done to enable us to tell the difference between the **Thai Binh** coins cast by the Mac in the north and these by the Nguyen in the south.

need for currency, but he soon had to stop because it was too expensive.<sup>101</sup>

It was no accident that the Nguyen tried casting their own coins in 1725. We noted previously that the Nguyen had unsuccessfully asked the Japanese to cast coins for them in 1688. Fortunately, at the time coins fell in China, so large numbers were transported from there in the late 17th century. As Bowyear's narrative shows, those coins filled the gap to a certain degree.<sup>102</sup> But the early 18th century started badly for the Nguyen. The price of copper, and therefore of coins, went up in China, and from the 1710s Japan started limiting the export of copper. Coins became urgently needed in Cochinchina.

### **The demand for currency in the 18th century and its reasons**

Other important factors made the problem of currency more pressing. In the first place, **Vo Vuong** (Nguyen Phuc Khoat) was perhaps the most ambitious and extravagant of Nguyen rulers. Both the conflicts between Cochinchina and the Khmer in the 1750s, as well as his construction of Hue, particularly the palace in the 1740s and 1750s, must have cost huge amounts of money and labor.<sup>103</sup>

Secondly, population growth played an important role, both directly and indirectly. We know that Thuan Hoa did not produce enough rice to feed the capital and the army stationed there, so that from the early 18th century on a large amount had to be transported to Thuan Hoa from the south, from the Mekong delta particularly. Until 1714, the government ordered people who owned boats to transport rice to Thuan Hoa twice a year. They earned tax-exemption for their trouble, as well as receiving some money for boat maintenance and for the rite of praying for a good wind. But many people disliked these arrangements because, according to the Tien Bien, "trade often [brought] much more profits, and therefore, although there were many boats, few were willing to transport rice to the capital".<sup>104</sup> Less of a problem when the capital area was underpopulated, it became serious in the 18th century, causing the Nguyen to change the rules of rice transportation in 1714. In order to encourage transport, the government now

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<sup>101</sup> Phu Bien, vol.4, p.21b.

<sup>102</sup> Lamb, p.52.

<sup>103</sup> Le Quy Don said that in two years of 1770 and 1771 alone, more than 7,000 kg of brass and 2,300 kg of tin was used for decorating the Nguyen palace. See Phu Bien, Vol.4, p.20b.

<sup>104</sup> Tien Bien, vol.8, p.119.

offered to pay for rice in cash according to boat size and the distance covered.<sup>105</sup>

This event marked the start of a major transition in **Dang Trong** in the 1710s. Previously the country had been under a military form of government, which now, in the 18th century, the Nguyen rulers found hard to maintain. The early labor force in Cochinchina had very likely worked for no pay at all. When the Tien Bien described the huge project of building 2 forts in Quang Binh in 1630 and 1631, it used the word "levy" to describe how labor was recruited.<sup>106</sup> But from 1714 that clearly changed. In that year not only was transported rice paid for in cash, but the Nguyen also decided to pay the people who worked for the mail posts in the provinces.<sup>107</sup> In addition, many taxes in 18th century Cochinchina were now levied in cash rather than in kind, while buying a government post also <sup>now</sup> required a large cash bribe, in contrast to the north, where people still paid rice to buy posts in 1739.<sup>108</sup> All these changes increased the demand for currency.

### Zinc coins<sup>109</sup>

Between 1746 and 1748 the Nguyen cast 72,396 **quan** of coins. This represented 70% less than the quantity brought in by the Dutch alone in the 17th century. But, unlike the 17th century imports, the 18th castings led to a disastrous inflation, not so much on account of the material (zinc) as the weight and amount of the coins.

According to Poivre, one picul of zinc produced 48 to 50 **quan** coins in Cochinchina.<sup>110</sup> This may well be the figure of the later period of casting. According to information given by Le Quy Don, "the price [of zinc] was 8 **quan** per picul, beside the costs for charcoal and craftsmen, there were still 20 **quan**

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<sup>105</sup> Tien Bien, Vol.8, p.119.

<sup>106</sup> Tien Bien, Vol.2, pp.38,40. Da Shan also said that "when the people did corvee, they brought their own food with them". See Hai Wai Ji Shi, Vol.3, p.3. Choisy said in 1695 that people in Cochinchina had to provide over half their labour when required. Choisy, *op.cit.* p.254.

<sup>107</sup> Tien Bien, vol.8, p.119.

<sup>108</sup> Phan Huy Chu, Lich Trieu Hien Chuong Loai Chi, "**Quan Chuc Chi**", p.320.

<sup>109</sup> There has been considerable confusion about the term "tutenague" for several centuries. In Annex 1 we consider the problem in more detail. Here we refer to zinc coins, as "tutenague" was essentially that metal.

<sup>110</sup> Poivre, Journal, p.430.

left".<sup>111</sup> He did not mention what charcoal and craftsmen cost in the 1740s, but did say casting in Hue in 1774 cost 8 **quan** per picul. As it seems unlikely that costs in 1774 were higher than in the 1740s, I think that the figures given by Le Quy Don came from the Nguyen records of the 1740s. If so, the amount of **quan** cast from each picul of zinc should be 36. That yields a profit 125%, and gives a real value for the coin of 44% of its face value. In this case the weight of each coin would be 2.3 grams. If what Poivre said was true, then the weight of one zinc coin was only about 1.7 grams.

In either case, the zinc coins weighed only half, or one third of the **Kang Xi** coins, which had been circulating in Cochinchina in the meantime and weighed from 5 grams to 7 grams.<sup>112</sup> This difference mattered more to people in Cochinchina than whether the coins were made of copper or zinc.

If Poivre was correct, and assuming the price of zinc and other costs remained the same in 1749, then the Nguyen government would have made about 200% or more in profit by casting every picul of zinc into coins. If so, the face value of a zinc coin was more than twice its real value.

This provided a great incentive for private casting. While it is hard to determine how many coins were cast privately in the late 1740s, we can make a guess about the numbers of foundries. According to Phu Bien, the value of the coins cast by the government in the three years of 1746, 1747 and 1748 was 72,396 **quan**. Based on what we know from China, if one foundry cast 583,200 coins per year,<sup>113</sup> it would have required about 25 foundries to work 3 years to cast 72,396 **quan** in coins. Le Quy Don says that "in a short time more than 100 private foundries were established".<sup>114</sup> This suggests that the coins cast privately might have doubled the number of those officially cast (presuming that private foundries would have been much smaller), and increased the specie circulating in society in the late 1740s to about 200,000 **quan**. Ironically, it was these private coins

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<sup>111</sup> Phu Bien, Vol.4, p.21b.

<sup>112</sup> Peng Xin Wei, Zhong Guo Huo Bi Shi, p.567.

<sup>113</sup> In late 14th century China, the production of the foundries for casting coins in different areas were the same, each producing 583,200 coins per year. Although this sounds like a bureaucratic standard, it does indicate the capacity of the casting at the time. The technique of casting did not improve much in China, and presumably in Cochinchina also, until the late Qing dynasty when a machine for casting was introduced to China from the West. See Peng Xin Wei, pp.478-479.

<sup>114</sup> Phu Bien, Vol.4, p.22a.

which made the face value of zinc coins close to their real value.

Zinc, cheap in value and abundant in quantity, may have seemed just what the Nguyen needed in the early 18th century. Yet it was a two-edged sword. At the same time that it ensured enough currency for economic activity, it also provided the opportunity for others to exploit private casting. Realizing this, the Nguyen government made some weak efforts to issue copper coins, in order to stop the casting and circulation of the bad coins. But it was very costly,<sup>115</sup> and the good money was quickly driven out by the bad.

In hindsight, the 1740s attempt at coin castings brought disastrous results and ultimately undermined the regime. It is hard to fault the Nguyen's desire to begin to mint their own money, even if in zinc. Given the needs of a growing economy for increased supplies of currency, at a time when it was difficult even to keep up previous levels, they had little choice but to make their own. The Nguyen's problem was their ignorance of the extent to which their coinage would be acceptable to people and society at large. But their greed compounded this ignorance. It was the Nguyen government which started to cast thinner, lighter and therefore lower quality, coins, a decision that made private casting possible, indeed almost inevitable.

### **The inflation**

Poivre says in 1749: "The commerce in this country is becoming a real mess because they introduced a new sort of zinc coin... this situation cannot last for long, but I do not know when it will end."<sup>116</sup> According to Le Quy Don, everyone wanted to keep good money and spend bad money, so that even regions like Gia Dinh, where people had never bothered to store rice, would not sell their rice on the market. In the 1770s even women and children buying trifling things had to pay in silver,<sup>117</sup> a metal hardly used in CochinChina. Under these circumstances, local trade could not avoid declining.

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<sup>115</sup> Le Quy Don said that the price of copper was 45 quan per picul. If the cost of casting was 8 quan per picul, and 40 quan coins could be cast out of one picul, then it would cost 1 quan of money to cast 0.75 quan coins, and the real value (if the face value did not increase) would be 130% of the face value.

<sup>116</sup> *La geste française en Indochine*, Vol.1, p.124.

<sup>117</sup> *Phu Bien*, vol.4, pp.22-23.

Nor could overseas trade escape. Indeed, this was possibly the most severely affected sector. Robert Kirsop says in 1750 that after zinc coins were introduced, the price of gold in Hoi An rose from 150-190 **quan** per bar to 200-225 **quan**, while rent in Hoi An also increased remarkably.<sup>118</sup> The price of pepper leapt to 14 **quan** a picul in 1750, and in 1749 it reached 15-16 **quan** for a time, compared to the usual price of 10 **quan**.<sup>119</sup> The price of zinc also increased. According to the same source, zinc cost 13-14 **quan** per picul, in contrast to 8 **quan** when the Nguyen began casting in the 1740s.<sup>120</sup>

The currency-related inflation may also explain why the numbers of overseas junks decreased in the 1760s and early 1770s. While 60-80 junks came yearly in the 1740s and early 1750s, only 16 came in 1771, falling to 12 in 1772 and 8 in 1773.<sup>121</sup> The big drop probably first occurred in the 1760s. Overseas trade fell quick victim to this inflation, and it seems never to have recovered after the 1770s.

This was a serious loss to the Nguyen, who had long relied on foreign trade as a vital factor in the local economy. They responded by tightening their control over the mountain regions and the uplanders, hoping to make up in the west their losses from the east. As we will see in Chapter Five, they enjoyed some success in the short term, but only at the ultimate cost of stirring up the Tay Son rebellion, which brought **Dang Trong** to an end.

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<sup>118</sup> Robert Kirsop, "Some accounts of CochinChina", A. Dalrymple, Oriental Repertory, Vol.1, p.249.

<sup>119</sup> Poivre, Journal, p.418.

<sup>120</sup> Phu Bien, p.21b. This piece of information again proved that it came from Nguyen records of the 1740s.

<sup>121</sup> Phu Bien, Vol.4, p.32a.

## CHAPTER 5 THE NGUYEN TAXATION SYSTEM

In his discussion of the 18th century Mekong delta, Le Quy Don quoted the Nguyen tax records as: "In Tan Binh there are 3000 taxpayers and more than 5000 rice fields. ...In Dinh Vien there are more than 7000 taxpayers and 7000 pieces of rice fields."<sup>1</sup> This tells us that agricultural land in the delta was recorded not by its size, or its degree of fertility, but simply as plots of earth. In other words, it reveals that the Nguyen were more concerned about taxpayers than about land, for this was the only information the Nguyen had at the time about the taxes of the Mekong delta.

This situation also was quite likely the case for the area from Quang Nam to Phu Yen in the 17th century. The earlier Nguyen taxation system mainly concentrated on the head tax, while the land tax on the whole was quite crude. The basic assumption behind this seems to have been that most peasants were land owners. Only with the gradual development of big land ownership did the land tax become increasingly important. We will begin, therefore, by considering the head tax system.

### Head taxes

In the 17th century taxes paid by Cochinchinese were high, according to every available report by foreigners. The Japanese Fransisco, for example, said in 1642 that a married man paid 11 reals a year,<sup>2</sup> which would be about 8.5 **quan**. Vachet, who stayed in Cochinchina for 14 years from 1671, gave a similar figure of 5000 cashes (8.3 **quan**) a year.<sup>3</sup> Choisy gave a slightly lower tax burden in 1687, saying taxpayers paid 5 to 6 ecus (4.5 to 5.4 **quan**) a year.<sup>4</sup>

It is impossible to cross-check these claims against Vietnamese sources. In its

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<sup>1</sup> Phu Bien, Vol.3,p.112a.

<sup>2</sup> Buch, De Oost-Indische Compagnie en Quinam, Amsterdam, H.J.Paris, 1929, p.121.

<sup>3</sup> Taboulet, La geste francaise en Indochine, Librairie d'Amerique et d'Orient, Paris, 1955, Vol.1, p.63.

<sup>4</sup> Choisy, Journal du voyage de Siam fait en 1685 et 1686, Maurice Garcon, Paris, Duchartre et Van Buggenhult, 1930, p.254. He mentioned on p.253 that 600 cashes = 1 ecu and 10 sols, therefore 1 **quan** = 0.9 ecu at the time.



entry of 1632, the Tien Bien gives a maximum of only 2 **quan** for the head tax which, if correct, would make the figures reported by foreigners in the 17th century 4 times greater than the real amount. However, if we compare the text of the Tien Bien to that of the Phu Bien, we discover that the former simply copied the latter. This means that the alleged head tax regulation of 1632 in the Tien Bien was actually a regulation of the 1760s, or even the early 1770s. Unfortunately, no other Vietnamese source discusses 17th century taxes. But because the figures given by different sources generally agree with each other, we will accept them. They reveal two interesting things about taxes in 17th century **Dang Trong**. First, they were heavier than in the 18th century.<sup>5</sup> And second, the only tax foreign observers recorded was the head tax. This supports our contention that the head tax represented the main tax in 17th century Cochinchina, as does the situation of the uplanders, whom we will consider separately later.

In calculating taxes from figures in the Tien Bien, it appears that in the 18th century the average taxpayer in Thuan Hoa paid 1.21 **quan**, while those of Quang Nam and further south paid 1.47 **quan**.<sup>6</sup> These rates do not seem very high. Yet cross-checking with the Phu Bien, which served as the main source of the Tien Bien, reveals a discrepancy between the numbers of registered people, and of those who paid taxes to the government. In Dien Ban, for instance, we find 29,705 people registered in 1769, but only 16,995 of them paying taxes to the government. To come closer to the real average, it is necessary to divide the tax total by the number of actual taxpayers, not the number of registered inhabitants. The table below gives a better idea about the taxes levied on each taxpayer in 1769:<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Koffler said that in the 1740s and 1750s a man aged between 18 and 70 paid 5 florins (4.25 **quan** or 5 **quan**) a year. Koffler, "Description historique de la Cochinchine", Revue Indochinoise, 1911, Vol.15, p.570.

<sup>6</sup> Tien Bien, Vol.11, pp.154-155.

<sup>7</sup> My calculations from data in the Phu Bien (Hanoi edition), pp.178-183.

**Table 1** Taxes levied on each taxpayer in Quang Nam protectorate, 1769

	registers	taxpayers	% average per taxpayer	(quan)
Dien Ban	29705	16995	57%	4.07
Thang Hoa	19980	12696	63%	4.15
Quang Ngai	22246	8711	39%	3.78
Quy Nhon	24227	10815	45%	8.62(4.46 or 3.49) <sup>8</sup>
Phu Yen	6804	4439	65%	4.25
Binh Khang	5102	3414	66%	2.69
Dien Khanh	3057	1806	59%	3.25
Binh Thuan	13995	13129	93%	1.67

This means that about 40% people in the areas above paid no taxes to the state, although 85% of state revenue came from the same areas.<sup>9</sup>

The head tax made up more than half of a taxpayer's dues. Table Two shows its dominant position for the Thuan Hoa and Quang Nam areas.<sup>10</sup> The head tax also included several minor imposts, which can be summarized as money for corvee and gifts (**the dieu**). Table Three records **the dieu** in Thuan Hoa and Quang Nam. It seems likely from this evidence that these elements of the head tax might not have increased much over the years. (See Table Two and Table Three)

### Land Taxes

In contrast to the north, the Nguyen applied a unitary land tax to communal and private land alike. The table below compares the land taxes under the Trinh and the Nguyen, using the southern **thang** as the standard:

<sup>8</sup> Phu Bien (Hanoi edition) gives 61685 **quan** and 20 cashes for Tan Lap Thuoc, where taxpayers totalled 4210. Having checked the taxes paid according to different categories in this area from the same source on pp. 169-170, I thought that it might be wrong either in 16685 **quan** and 20 cashes (which would be 3.96 **quan** per person, closer to the description of the text) or 6168 **quan** 5 **tien** and 20 cashes (giving 1.46 **quan** per person rather than 14.6 **quan** per person, as the first figure suggests). The problem arises because Phu Bien had never been printed before this century and such mistakes are easy when copied by hand. However, it is possible that the text was correct, if one looks at the taxes collected from the uplanders in Thuan Hoa, where sometimes from 15 to 70 **quan** were collected from a single family.

<sup>9</sup> According to Phu Bien (Hanoi edition), in 1774, the secondary taxes from Thuan Hoa and Quang Nam totaled 76467 **quan**, with 62545 **quan** from Quang Nam areas. The main taxes collected from Quang Nam in 1769 was 241,995 **quan**, plus 56.68 bars of gold (101,164 **quan**). From Thuan Hoa in 1773 was 153,600 **quan**. The Tien Bien put the two figures in different years into the entry of 1769. See Tien Bien, Vol.11, pp.154-155.

<sup>10</sup> When analysing the Tay Son's taxes in the north, Nguyen Duc Nghinh includes the taxes on new rice and transportation into **tien dung** (head tax). See Nguyen Duc Nghinh, "Tu may van ban thue duoi trieu Quang Trung va Canh Thinh" (On some tax records of the Quang Trung and Canh Thinh periods), NCLS, no.5, 1982. I therefore will include these two taxes of the Nguyen in this section, and compare them with those of the north.

Table 2 COMPARISON OF HEAD TAX OF THE NORTH AND THE SOUTH (THUAN HOA AND QUANG NAM) IN THE 18TH CENTURY (in quan)

	Thuan Hoa	Quang Nam	North	guest resident	Thuan Hoa	Quang Nam
taxpayer (20-60 years old)	2.95	2.6 + 0.3	1.2	taxpayer (20-60 years old)	1	1.2
candidate of soldier	2.35	2.25 + 0.3		candidate of soldier	0.7	1
taxpayer 18-20 years old	1.65	1.3 + 0.3		taxpayer 18-20 years old	0.5	0.6
old	1.85	1.4 + 0.3	0.6	old	0.5	0.6
disabled	1.33	1.1 + 0.3	0.3	disabled	0	0.4
farmhand 1st	0.8	2 + 0.3		farmhand	0	?
farmhand 2nd		1.75 + 0.3				
farmhand 3rd		1.1 + 0.3				
poor	0.3	0.3 + 0.3		poor	0	0
other	0.2	0.2 + 0.3		other	0	0

Notes:

The figures of Hoa and Quang Nam include head tax (*tien sai du*) and additional imposts and taxes such as transportation fee (*tien cuoc*) and money for tasing new rice (*tien man*). They all due to the central government in Hue and levied per individual taxpayer. The second set of figures of taxes collected from Quang Nam (*tien that vuc* 0.1 quan, and presentation money 0.2 quan) seems to be special local taxes whose procedes went directly to the officials when the taxes were collected.

Sources: For Thuan Hoa and Quang Nam, see *Phu Bien Tap Luc* (Hanoi edition), Vol.3, 158-163.

For the North, see Nguyen Duc Nghinh, "Tu may van ban thue doi trieu Quang Trung va Canh Thinh" (on some tax documents in the Quang Trung and Canh Thinh periods), *NCLS*, No.5, 1982.

**Table 3 THE DIEU (CORVEE AND MONEY FOR GIFTS TO THE KING) IN THUAN HOA, QUANG NAM AND THE NORTH (18TH CENTURY) (in dong, 600 dong = 1 quan)**

	north	Thuan Hoa	Quang Nam
taxpayer 20-60 years old	360	210 +12?	222
candidate of soldiers	360		192
taxpayer 18-20 years old	360	150?	162
old	180	150	162
disabled	0	135	132

Sources: For Thuan Hoa and Quang Nam areas, see Phu Bien Tap Luc (Hanoi edition), Vol.3, pp.158-164; For the North, see Dai Viet Su Ky Toan Thu, Vol.3, p.1055.

Table 4 Taxes on communal land (in southern *thang*)<sup>11</sup>

NORTH	1728	1740 <sup>12</sup>	SOUTH (1669?-1774) <sup>13</sup>
1st grade	116.6	60	40
2nd grade	93.3	48	30
3rd grade	70.0	36	20

Taxes on private land (in southern *thang*)

NORTH	1728	1740	SOUTH (1669?-1774)
1st grade	35.0	18	40
2nd grade	23.3	12	30
3rd grade	11.6	6	20

The relatively heavy tax on private land in the south reflects the fact that private land represented a high proportion of the total land. Even in Thuan Hoa, the longest settled Nguyen base area which also contained the most communal land, about half was in private hands. In newly developed areas the proportion rose considerably. In the Mekong delta, as shown at the beginning of the chapter, the Nguyen never even knew the area of land under cultivation nor the classification of the fields, let alone whether they were private or communal. Knowing the number of taxpayers signified more to the Nguyen than the amount of rice collected in land tax.

This is reflected in the low land taxes in the far south. In the 1770s, in Tan Binh (now Saigon), Phuc Long (now Bien Hoa), Quy An and Quy Hoa (now My Tho), "planting one *hoc* of rice could yield 100 *hoc*, [of which] only 4-10 *hoc* of rice [had] to be paid as land tax". Another example comes from Tam Lach and Ba Canh, in today's Vinh Long province. According to the same source, "planting one *hoc* could harvest 300 *hoc* rice, and the land tax was only 2-4 *hoc*[for a piece of land]".<sup>14</sup> In short, land taxes ranged from 10% to as low as 0.6% of the

<sup>11</sup> Northern figures here are from Nguyen Duc Nghinh, *op.cit.* p.38. The measure used in the north was *bat*. According to Le Quy Don, 1 *bat* in the north equals 1 *thang* in the south. See *Phu Bien*, Vol.3, p.92b.

<sup>12</sup> I would regard the taxation rule of 1740 in the north a special case, or a response of the Le-Trinh to the disastrous period of the early 18th century.

<sup>13</sup> When did this land taxation system appear in the south? The *Tien Bien* said that it was in 1669. But if we compare the text of the *Tien Bien* with *Phu Bien*, we see it merely copies a taxation rule of the 1770s, and tells us nothing about the early Nguyen land tax. We will return to this point later.

<sup>14</sup> *Phu Bien*, Vol. 3, p.112b.

harvest. Only under such circumstances could large quantities of rice be sold and transported from the distant Mekong delta as a profitable commodity.

### The additional land taxes paid in Quang Nam<sup>15</sup>

According to Le Quy Don (in the Saigon edition), for every 1000 **thang** of paddy produced a peasant had to pay land tax of 20 **thang** of milled rice and 60 **dong** (cents, one string of coins contains 600 **dong**) in Thuan Hoa. But the proportion of cash required in land tax in most parts of Quang Nam and further south was much higher than in Thuan Hoa. In Quang Nam in 1769, for example, every 1000 **thang** of paddy attracted 120 **dong** in tax, or double the cash paid in Thuan Hoa.

When did the heavier taxation rule for the Quang Nam protectorate begin? According to Le Quy Don, "people said that **tap thue** (mixed taxes) of Quang Nam appeared only after Truong Phuc Loan came to power".<sup>16</sup> Loan achieved pre-eminence as regent in 1765, after Vo Vuong's death. But evidence from the Hanoi edition suggests that these steep tax increases might not have followed immediately. The Hanoi edition records that for every 1000 **thang** of unmilled rice, 20 **thang** of milled rice and 180 **dong** taxes were paid in Quang Nam.<sup>17</sup> That is to say, 1 **thang** of milled rice attracted 9 **dong** of tax, triple that of Thuan Hoa. But if we look at the figures of paddy rice and **dong** paid in Quang Nam and its south in 1769, we will find that it was not the case in that year:

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<sup>15</sup> I have not discussed the **quang dien trang** and **quang don dien**, the land for the Nguyen ruling family's use, because they were not included in the total revenue. Also, they do not seem to have changed much in the 1760s, and all are discussed simply and clearly in Phu Bien.

<sup>16</sup> Phu Bien, vol.4, p.2a.

<sup>17</sup> Phu Bien (Hanoi edition), p.164.

**Table 5** Figures for paddy rice and **dong** paid from Quang Nam in 1769

area	rice (thang)	dong	proportion
Dien Ban	25805	164145	1:6.36
Thang Hoa	53689	383508	1:7.14
Quang Ngai	22382	100740	1:4.5
Quy Nhon	41125	317228	1:7.71
Phu Yen	8285	49059	1:5.92
Binh Khang	5628	35572	1:6.32
Dien Khanh	5616	26324	1:4.68
Gia Dinh (Tan Binh)	12154	11636	1:0.96 <sup>18</sup>

From this it seems that the "triple regulation" most probably happened after 1769.

Beside giving the additional land taxes of 9 cashes paid with 1 **thang** of rice, mentioned above, the Hanoi edition of Phu Bien specifies some other taxes that also formed part of the land taxation system. The list provides perhaps the most detailed outline of increasing levies in the 200 years of the Nguyen regime or, indeed in Vietnamese history, and exposes the rapacious nature of official taxes at the time. The taxes were as follows:<sup>19</sup>

- a. 4 **thang** of rice and 120 **dong** for every 1000 **thang** of rice as the officials' salary, and another 60 **dong** for the officers to buy betel;
- b. 300 **dong** for shouldering 1000 **thang** of paddy rice into the granaries;
- c. 150 **dong** and 2 **thang** of rice presented to the officials when the peasants paid every 1000 **thang** of rice;
- d. money for keeping the granaries, 35 **dong** for every **mau** of land;
- e. **tien thap vat**, 5 **dong** for every 1/10 **mau** (0.66 a) land;<sup>20</sup>
- f. money for sewing the sacks for holding rice, 60 **dong** for 1 sack;
- g. money for keeping the oil lamp in the granaries: in every **quan** money paid by a taxpayer, 18 **dong** were to be paid for an oil lamp.

Interestingly, the Phu Bien only notes the regulation without listing the money collected per area, as it usually does. This would support our view that these regulations, as well as the rule of 9 **dong** paid with 1 **thang** of rice, came out

<sup>18</sup> The low proportion of Gia Dinh area might be due to the commutation of some taxes levied in cash into payment in rice. At the same time, it showed that the tax collection in the remote areas was not yet formalized.

<sup>19</sup> Phu Bien (Hanoi edition), pp.164-165.

<sup>20</sup> The Nguyen dynasty kept this levy, but only at 3 cashes per **mau**, which was 6% of the levy in the early 1770s. See Nong Thon va Nong Dan Viet Nam Thoi Can Dai (Countryside and Peasants of Vietnam in the modern Period), Social Sciences Press, Hanoi, 1990, p.99.

after 1769.<sup>21</sup> It is most likely that they could not be implemented successfully because they exceeded both the taxpayers' capacity to pay, and tax officers' ability to collect. Instead, Nguyen taxation regulations after 1769 offer the best documentary insight into the immediate causes of the Tay Son rebellion, which erupted in 1771.

### The Taxation System Changes

The increase in taxes after 1769 mostly involved additional land taxes. Head taxes only seemed to increase slightly.

This seems odd from a financial point of view: if the rise in taxes was due to a reduction in income from other sources like, for example, a decrease in overseas trade, why did not the Nguyen simply increase the head tax? This appears a more direct and efficient method of addressing the problem, rather than going to the trouble of introducing a new and more complex system.

Part of the answer might lie in the Nguyen government's awareness of the remarkable differences between land owners, especially in Quang Nam and points south, which encouraged the court to collect taxes according to property size. In Table Two we saw that Quang Nam recorded three grades of farmhand compared to only one in Thuan Hoa. Although it is possible that not all were real farmhands,<sup>22</sup> it still seems likely that a large number of peasants in Quang Nam fell into this group, and that a significant difference in the size of properties existed there.

It is still hard to understand why so many people preferred to be hired hands in areas with relatively abundant land. Perhaps the most likely answer lies in the way taxes were levied in Quang Nam and places further south for a long time. While Le Quy Don claimed that taxes collected from Quang Nam were heavier

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<sup>21</sup> A regulation concerning woven mats paid with rice in Quang Nam would seem to confirm this. In the earlier report, Le Quy Don said that with every 1000 *thang* of rice, 5 mats were to be paid, together worth 0.2 *quan*. However, later he said that in Quang Nam, 4 mats were collected with each 1000 *thang* of rice, each mat worth 0.2 *quan*. In other words, for every 1000 *thang* of rice, the equivalent of 0.8 *quan* of money was paid, rather than 0.2 *quan* as he stated before. However, if we look at the list of money that Quang Nam paid for mats in 1769, it is clear that it paid according to the 0.2 *quan* rule, not the 0.8 *quan* one. It seems therefore that this rule, as well as the additional land taxes we referred to above, most likely appeared after 1769.

<sup>22</sup> At least in Dien Ban county, according to *Phu Bien*, 10 in every 100 taxpayers could be regarded as farmhands and hence pay the taxes that farmhands paid. This means they were actually owner-peasants. Did this represent a compromise between the state and local governments?



than those from Thuan Hoa, Table Two shows that the three head taxes levied on the main taxpayer (**trang**) in Quang Nam were actually lower than those from Thuan Hoa. Heavier land taxes accounted for the part that people from Quang Nam south paid over and above that collected from Thuan Hoa. But if a peasant in Quang Nam chose to be a farmhand, he paid between 35% to 75% of the dues of a **trang** taxpayer. If he owned some land as well, and providing the land tax remained low, he could still expect to be able to support himself and his family. Thus it seems that the early Nguyen tax system played an important part in stimulating the growth of big landownership from Quang Nam south, one of the characteristic features of the **Dang Trong** economy.

Contrary to the idea that large landownership grew out of an earlier period of small landownership in the Nguyen era, Huynh Lua, a Vietnamese student of the southern land system, believes that although many poor peasants went south to become small landowners, there were also some rich families who moved down with their servants, animals and other belongings.<sup>23</sup> Such people were certainly in a better position to survive and to prosper rapidly in the new land. As we have noted from Le Quy Don, in the 18th century Mekong delta, 50-60 slaves and 300-400 oxen owned by a single family. This represents a large economic unit, in terms of traditional Vietnamese agriculture. Big landownership in Quang Nam may not have involved such large units as in the Mekong delta, but it was still significant. To allow such people to pay only several **quan** per head, and to permit taxpayers to evade part of their fiscal responsibilities by becoming their farmhands, meant a great loss of revenue to the government.<sup>24</sup> To guarantee state revenue, therefore, the amount of land became an important standard.

As we have noted, head taxes mattered most to the early Nguyen. The Tien Bien in its entry of 1632 says: "Set the taxation rule according to the rule of Hong Duc (1470-1497)".<sup>25</sup> This rule basically required 0.8 **quan** per taxpayer per year, although we know **Dang Trong's** taxes were heavier than this. The point is that it was not until nearly 40 years later, in 1669, that the Tien Bien mentioned

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<sup>23</sup> Discussion with Huynh Lua in Saigon, 2 August 1990.

<sup>24</sup> The fact that a large number of peasants existed in the Quang Nam protectorate might have been the result of both the government's heavy head tax or the development of large landownership in these areas.

<sup>25</sup> Tien Bien, Vol.2, p.41. In its footnote it copied the rule of Phu Bien, which was the rule of the 18th century.

land tax: "Measure the cultivated land and set the land taxation rule."<sup>26</sup> This was more than one century after Nguyen Hoang came to Thuan Hoa. It goes without saying that before this date there must have existed some land taxation system in the Nguyen's base area around Thuan Hoa. But it was only after 1669 that a the land taxation system became elaborated and formalised. An entry from 1687 in the Tien Bien supports this conclusion by recording that the government "excused people from paying the land tax which [had] increased in 1669". But as we saw, the entry of 1669 did not mention such an increase but a formalisation. It is logical to assume, therefore, that the existing land tax was increased when the 1669 measurement of land had been completed.

It is possible that this may have marked a turning point, after which the Nguyen began to reduce the head tax gradually, as suggested by the foreign accounts cited previously. Nevertheless, it still apparently remained the most important part of state revenue, as the tables presented above suggest. They show that the key to the Trinh fiscal system in the north was the land tax, while under the Nguyen it was the head tax, at least until the reign of Vo Vuong (1738-1765).

Yet this is slightly misleading. Land taxes became more important in the north only a century earlier than in the south. Almost at the same time that the Nguyen began to measure land and set the taxation rule of 1669, the Trinh in the north published an extremely thorough land taxation regulation. This 1672 regulation marked the completion of a shift from head tax to land tax in **Dang Ngoai**. This trend appears clearly in the 1803 taxation rules of the Nguyen dynasty. While rice taxes from Quang Binh to Dien Khanh remained the same as those of the 18th century, additional land taxes were levied at 1.8 **quan** per **mau** of land. If a peasant had 2 **mau** of land, which could have been quite common in the south in the 19th century, he had to pay 3.6 **quan** in land tax. Meanwhile, the highest head tax for a taxpayer between 20 and 55 of age was only 1.6 **quan**.<sup>27</sup> These figures illustrate well the reversal in the tax system which saw a comparative decline in the head tax and rise in importance of the land tax.

A similar trend occurred in the taxation system in China over many centuries.

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<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*, Vol. 5, p.73.

<sup>27</sup> *Dai Nam Thuc Luc Chinh Bien De Nhat Ky* (Chronicle of Greater Vietnam, Period of Gia Long, Part 1), The Oriental Institute, Keio University, Mita, Siba, Minato-ku, Tokyo, Japan, 1968, Vol.20, p.324.

Beginning with the Tang, a series of changes were made to the Chinese tax system. They all pointed towards making land taxes and taxes collected on the property of the individual taxpayer increasingly important, while taxes levied on the person or household became less significant. This policy reflected the development of big land ownership, and the reality of many peasants losing their own land. The **tan ding ru mu** policy of the Qing dynasty (collect taxes according to the amount and quantity of land a taxpayer owned) took the final step in this transformation.

### **Taxes collected from uplanders**

Looking at the distribution of the revenue of the Nguyen in 1774, we find that by the early 1770s the tax on international trade represented a minor part of the total. Taxes collected from other sources had become more important, especially those collected from the uplanders. This section examines those taxes.

The Tien Bien says that in 1697 'evil barbarians'(ac man) robbed the taxpaying barbarians (thue man) in Phu Vang county, Thuan Hoa,<sup>28</sup> clearly indicating that some uplanders already paid taxes to the Nguyen in the late 1690s. Nevertheless, the numbers registered by the Nguyen as taxpayers probably remained quite limited at that time.<sup>29</sup> Hickey's view that tributary relations began between the rulers in Hue and the Kings of Fire and Water during the Vo Vuong reign (r.1738-1765) seems correct.<sup>30</sup> I suspect further that it happened in the later part of the reign, as it was also about that time (1761) that the Nguyen extended their authority into the highlands of present-day Savannakhet province in Laos.<sup>31</sup>

Certainly the 1750s and 1760s do seem to be the era when the Nguyen began to tighten their control over the uplanders. The Tien Bien contains repeated references to uplanders during these years. In 1774, for example, we find a list of secondary taxes collected by the Nguyen on fishing, local trade, uplanders, and

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<sup>28</sup> Tien Bien, Vol.7, p.102.

<sup>29</sup> Tien Bien says in the entry 1711 that Nam Ban and Tra Lai, two tributaries in Phu Yen, reported to the Nguyen that because their people did not pay taxes to them it was hard for them to pay tribute to the Nguyen; they asked the Nguyen to send an army to intimidate the people into paying taxes. The Nguyen did so and set up a taxation rule in the hope of guaranteeing tribute from these areas. Nevertheless, these uplanders cannot be regarded as taxpayers to the Nguyen.

<sup>30</sup> Gerald Cannon Hickey, Sons of the Mountains, New Haven and London, Yale University, 1982, pp.158-160.

<sup>31</sup> Tien Bien, Vol.10,p.149.

so forth, which shows that the taxes raised from uplanders accounted for a high percentage of total revenue by them.

### SECONDARY TAXES OF THE NGUYEN IN THE LATE 18TH CENTURY

total secondary taxes (1774)	81,748 quan (76,467 quan in money + 14 bars and 8 lang in gold = 2816 quan <sup>32</sup> + 145 bars in silver = 3625 quan) <sup>33</sup>	
	(in quan)	%
tax on gold (1769)	15,190	18.58%
tax on fishing (1768)	11,403	13.94%
tax on ferry (1768) and port transit	10,658	13.04%
tax on overseas trade (1773)	3,200	3.91%
tax on domestic junks (1768)	2,639	3.23%
tax on markets (1768)	2,601	3.18%
taxes on edible birds' nest (1768)	773	0.95%
tax on salt producing land from Thuan Hoa	221	0.27%
tax collected from the uplanders (1768)	38,728	48.67%

This list gives us an idea of the main sources of Nguyen secondary taxes. Principally they came from overseas trading, from the gold tax, and from taxes levied on trade with uplanders. Tax collected from trade on local markets in the Vietnamese lowlands hardly rated. These secondary taxes thus mainly originated at either side of the map: overseas trade to the east, or from the sea; and the uplanders to the west, or from the mountains. Of the two, the eastern side was more important before the 1750s. From the 1750s on, however, the decline in overseas trade, concomitant with increased Nguyen control over the uplanders, saw the proportion of revenue raised in the west rise significantly. By 1771, the revenue generated from uplanders about equalled the amount of taxes collected from overseas trade.

<sup>32</sup> According to Le Quy Don, one bar of gold = 200 quan. *Phu Bien*, Vol.4, p.25a.

<sup>33</sup> According to Le Quy Don, in 1728 one bar of silver = 17 quan money. *Phu Bien*, Vol.3, p.98b; in 1766 it rose to 25 quan. See *ibid*, pp.125a-125b.

But the amounts noted above do not form the whole story. Uplanders were also liable for taxes in kind, such as rhinoceros horn, elephant tusks, bees' wax and honey. These precious commodities significantly increased the value of their tax payments. For instance, in 1768 alone they paid 10 elephant's tusks and 9 rhinoceros horns, together worth several thousand **quan** in cash.

Furthermore, uplanders seem to have been more heavily taxed than Vietnamese peasants. Even in Thuan Hoa, the Nguyen base area, where people were usually treated better than those of Quang Nam, the uplanders missed out. Here they owed head tax not only for the male taxpayer, but also his wife. Considerable sums were involved. According to the Phu Bien, in Yen-dai district in 1774 uplanders paid taxes as follows:<sup>34</sup>

First grade: from 60 to 70 **quan** per family (33% for New Year's money, 67% for tax);

Second grade: about 52 **quan** per family;

Third grade: from 15 to 45 **quan** per family.

Thus even the poorest taxpayer in the mountains had to find 15 **quan** per year, three or four times as much as lowland Vietnamese taxpayers, even before we add the extra impost levied on these areas.

Taxes on the uplands formed two distinct levies: a tax on merchants going to trade with uplanders; and head taxes extracted from the uplanders themselves. The weight of taxation seems to have varied quite markedly between districts. At one extreme might fall Yen-dai district, whose 11 taxpayers, according to Le Quy Don, contributed a total of 434 **quan** and 210 **dong**. This averaged out at 39.45 **quan** per taxpayer. In other mountain districts the tax burden, though still comparatively high, was nevertheless far less crushing. In Yen-neo, for instance, 31 taxpayers contributed 395.9 **quan**, or an average of 12.8 **quan** each.<sup>35</sup> Among the tribes of the mountainous interior of Quang Dien county, 40 taxpayers contributed an equivalent of 230 **quan** in rattan, or an average of 5.75 **quan** per taxpayer. Although much lower than Yen-dai, these amounts still represented two and three times respectively the average taxes of lowlanders. Thus though the rates of taxation might vary, it still remained as a generally true that uplanders bore a disproportionate share of the Nguyen tax burden by the 1770s.

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<sup>34</sup> Phu Bien, Vol.4, p.8a. Regarding the year the taxes were collected, the Saigon edition says that it was the year of Giap Ti (1744); I suspect this should be Giap Ngo (1774). The Hanoi edition confirms this. Phu Bien, Hanoi edition, p.209.

<sup>35</sup> Phu Bien, Vol.4, pp.8b-9a.

Fortunately Le Quy Don listed taxes collected from three districts of uplanders in Khang Loc county, Thuan Hoa in 1768 as well as 1774, which allows us to compare the two years:<sup>36</sup>

district	1768 (quan)	1774 (quan)	increase %
Yen-dai	230.2	434.33	88%
Yen-neo	280.9	395.9	41%
Cam-ly	68.9	102.4	49%

When overseas trade flourished, before the 1750s or even the 1760s, the Nguyen tax collectors may not have paid special attention to the uplands. The tax levied on trade between the Vietnamese or Chinese and uplanders may have been relatively informal and loosely organised, in keeping with the Nguyen's limited control over the uplanders. But in the late 1760s things changed.

According to Le Quy Don, the Nguyen previously had collected 10 **quan** taxes per year from a district of Ta Trach in Huong Tra county, all paid in rattan. In 1769, however, the tax collected from this district equalled 47 **quan** and 197 **dong**, thanks partly to the efforts of the eunuch who levied taxes on merchants trading with the uplanders in the district.<sup>37</sup> This five-fold increase may also have reflected the impact of additional land taxes after 1769, as well as the growing number of uplanders who became taxpayers between 1769 and 1774.

The process of tightening control was not sudden. Phu Bien charted its main steps, starting in 1741, when Vo Vuong ordered his subjects to list all the taxes between 1738 and 1740 which had been collected, plus those officially levied but not paid. Interestingly enough, nearly 25 years later, when the government ordered another such report drawn up in 1765, they discovered many taxes still remained unpaid. The problem was addressed directly 4 years later, when "a complete taxation rule was set up and the numbers became detailed and clear."<sup>38</sup> The process of extending Nguyen control over the mountain peoples peaked in this year, but did not end with it. In retrospect, the "detailed and clear rule" of 1769 marked a turning point of the regime, since it was probably one of the most

<sup>36</sup> For the first group, see Phu Bien, Vol.4, pp.8b-9a; for the second group, see *ibid*, pp.11b-12a.

<sup>37</sup> Phu Bien, Vol.4, pp.10a-10b.

<sup>38</sup> Phu Bien, Vol.4, pp.40a-40b. Interestingly, hardly any information about taxes after 1769 collected from Quang Nam south appears in Phu Bien.

important underlying causes for the outbreak of the Tay Son rebellion, and the subsequent collapse of the Nguyen state of **Dang Trong**.

But as one more element of the taxation system played a major role in triggering the revolt and bringing down the state, we will conclude by considering it.

### The pay system of the Nguyen

In **Dang Trong**, unlike the Le state arrangements in **Dang Ngoai**, official remuneration formed an integral part of the taxation system. Although a salary system for officials had existed in the north from the 13th century, the Nguyen adopted quite a different practice during their 200 year regime. Nguyen officials were allocated taxpayers to support them, whose number varied according to the importance of an official's post. While the main salaries of Trinh officials in the north remained land plus cash,<sup>39</sup> the only source of salary for Nguyen officials became the people under their individual control.

But the story did not end here. Since the officials received taxpayers (**nhieu phu**)<sup>40</sup> from the government, the Nguyen later decided that their officials ought to contribute to the government as well. At least in the later period, besides taxing ordinary people an amount recorded as state revenue, the Nguyen also collected money from their own officials, as a form of private revenue. Thus an official had to pay money for his certificate, his seal, for gifts to the king on his birthday and New Year's Day, for betel to the officials above him, and even to the maids in the palace. Officials who wanted to be promoted also had to outlay a huge sum, according to Phu Bien. When four men applied to be promoted in 1766, they paid as follows:

for applying to be **ky phu** (secretary of the prefecture): 540 **quan** and 372 cashes to the king; 117 **quan** and 181 cashes to the officials in the government; 360 cashes for them to buy betel; when that money was presented to the officials, another 8 **quan** and 180 cashes was paid for the officials' children. A total of 664 **quan** and 186 cashes was paid for this position.

for applying to be **ky huyen** (secretary of county): 223 **quan** and 80 cashes to the king; 48 **quan** 155 cashes to the officials and 360 cashes for them to buy betel; when that money was presented to the officials, another 5 **quan** and 120 cashes was paid for the officials' children. A total of 277

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<sup>39</sup> The amount of cash given varied, while salary land was tied to specific position. See Phan Huy Chu, Lich Trieu Hien Chuong Loai Chi, Nha In Bao-Vinh, Saigon, 1957, pp.224-232.

<sup>40</sup> There were a certain number of people who were given to the officials as **nhieu phu**. Those people did not pay their taxes to the government but rather directly to the officials they belonged to.

**quan** and 105 cashes was paid for this position.

for applying to be **cai tong** (head of a district): 165 **quan** and 135 cashes were paid.

for applying to be **duyen lai** (lower official in county office): 82 **quan** 270 cashes.

The sale of public office appeared even in earlier records. For example, Da Shan, the Chinese monk who visited Cochinchina in 1695, noted that anyone applying for the post of **cai phu**<sup>41</sup> had to pay 10,000 taels of silver (about 20,000 **quan**) within 10 days of his application.<sup>42</sup> According to Bowyear, when an **Ung Ai Coy Boe** (**ong nghe Cai Ba**, customs officer) committed "crimes relating to the dispatch", very likely corruption, he was put into jail. It cost him 50,000 taels to get out and become **Cookey Thoo** ( ? **ky luc tau**), a customs official again.<sup>43</sup>

A remarkable increase occurred in the 18th century in the cost of official certificates, if we compare 17th and 18th century figures. Before 1707, there seemed to be no such thing as a certificate for each officer. But according to the Tien Bien, from that year every officer needed to purchase a certificate, or he would be regarded as a taxpayer.<sup>44</sup> Certificate payments ranged from 1.5 to 13 **quan**, according to the official position. Initially this rule might have sought to reduce personnel numbers, but its long term result was to foster corruption.

Let us take the people mentioned above, who bought their posts, as examples. These men were authorized to collect annually from their own **nhieu phu**:

<b>ky phu :</b>	5 <b>quan</b>
<b>ky huyen:</b>	3 <b>quan</b>
<b>cai tong:</b>	3.5 <b>quan</b>

They in turn owed the government:

post	for bang and betel	<b>hau phu</b>	king's birthday and New Year's Day
<b>ky phu</b>	10	1 15 bowls rice	3
<b>ky huyen</b>	4	0.8 12 bowls rice	2
<b>cai tong</b>	4	0.8	2

<sup>41</sup> This should be **cai phu tau**, the post in charge of supervising overseas trade.

<sup>42</sup> Da Shan, Hai Wai Ji Shi, Vol.5,p.27.

<sup>43</sup> Lamb, The Mandarin Road to Old Hue, pp.48-49.

<sup>44</sup> Tien Bien, Vol.8, p.110.



## 12 bowls rice

These sums represented about 3 times their official incomes, excluding the money they had to pay to obtain new certificates (1.5 **quan** to 4 **quan** for the various posts),<sup>45</sup> and the cost of their seals (from 1.3 to 1.9 **quan**). This seal money, Le Quy Don informs us, went to the maids and lower officials in the palace of Hue.<sup>46</sup>

Unlike the system in the north, heads of villages<sup>47</sup> under the Nguyen had to pay the head tax too. While they received 1.8 to 2.7 **quan** from their **nhieu phu** per year, they had to pay a head tax of 2.35 to 3.45 **quan** per year to the state, as well as 1 **quan** for certificates and money for gifts at the king's birthday and New Year's Day. All this was in addition to a 47 **quan** payment necessary to secure the post in the first place. Given this, it is amazing to see that the post appeared quite attractive at the time. So many people paid for these positions that, in the 1770s, a single village often boasted about 17 **tuong than** and 20 **xa truong**.<sup>48</sup>

We noted already the great discrepancy between what these people spent for their posts in comparison with their official incomes. Obviously they did not expect to recoup their investment from their meagre incomes. The only way to make up the deficit was to extract it from the people under their control.

The practice of selling positions created a disastrous excess of officials. In 1769, 278 officials crowded Thang Hoa prefecture alone. Given that the taxpayers here totalled 14,349, this meant there was one official for every 52 taxpayers.<sup>49</sup> This extraordinary burden was triple that of Qing dynasty taxpayers in China, where the bureaucratic machine reached the most elaborate level in Chinese history.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Phu Bien, Vol.3, pp.124-135.

<sup>46</sup> Phu Bien, Vol.3, p.124b.

<sup>47</sup> Here we include both **Tuong than** and **xa truong**. These two positions were similar, both acting as heads of a village, mainly collecting taxes from the village.

<sup>48</sup> Phu Bien, Vol.3,p.122a.

<sup>49</sup> Phu Bien, Vol.3, pp.123a-123b. Perhaps only under the Socialist Republic of Vietnam in the 1980s does it reach such proportions again.

<sup>50</sup> In the early Ming dynasty the proportion of officials to registered people was 1:2299, in the early Qing dynasty it was 1:911. In **Dang Trong**, however, if there was one taxpayer in a 5 member family, the proportion of officials to taxpayers was 1:182. See He Bo Chuan, "Guan duo zhi huan" (A disaster of redundant officials), Guang Jiao Jing Yue Kan, Hong Kong, December 1988, p.47.

If we add the office of Quang Nam and the central government in Hue to the 9 Nguyen prefectures, we arrive at minimum 3,000 high and low officials in **Dang Trong** in the 18th century. In the office of **tau vu** (overseas trade) alone, there were 175 officials. It was said that Ninh Vuong (Nguyen Phuc Tru, r.1725-1738) intended to reduce the numbers of officials in 1725 when he succeeded to the throne,<sup>51</sup> but nothing seems to have happened.<sup>52</sup>

Such a move was not in the interest of the Nguyen rulers, at least in the short-term, since it meant fewer officials to run tax collections and less money from officials for the government. If each officer paid an average of 9 **quan** per year to the government, a quite conservative calculation according to the examples above, this would total 27,000 **quan**. This amounted to more than the gold tax of 1769 mentioned earlier in this chapter, or one-third of the secondary taxes of the whole country. Yet none of this appears on the tax record, because all these funds went straight to the Nguyen family and the palace staff, rather than to state revenue. Money received from its officers was thus an important source of income to the Nguyen.

Naturally, all this money, plus the money the officials themselves lived on, could only come from the people. As Poivre reported in 1749:

a man who according to the law and his condition need pay the King only three **quan** a year will pay six by dint of harassment from the mandarins. It is their income and that of their officers.<sup>53</sup>

Le Quy Don remarked bitterly in the 1770s: "While the government got one third [of the money collected from people] the other two thirds went to the officials' pockets."<sup>54</sup> When the government increased taxes by 10% or 20%, the actual amount of money paid might have doubled. But if the government started to press its claims to the maximum, there could be very little left for its officials, who in turn became even more desperate to squeeze the people. The salary system which intensified the confrontation between state and people, therefore,

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<sup>51</sup> Tien Bien, Vol.9,p.126.

<sup>52</sup> Tien Bien, Vol.9, p.126.

<sup>53</sup> "Description of Cochinchina", in Li Tana & Anthony Reid, Southern Vietnam under the Nguyen, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies/ ECHOSEA, The Australian National University, forthcoming.

<sup>54</sup> Phu Bien, Vol.4, p.1b.

must rank as one of the main causes of the collapse of the Nguyen.<sup>55</sup>

Thus it should not surprise us that as soon as his government could afford it, Gia Long in 1810 established a salary system. The king paid his officials from 5 **quan** to 400 **quan** per year, according to their posts, plus rice from 16 **phuong** (480 litres) to 300 **phuong** (9,000 litres) per year. In 1818 and 1839 Gia Long and then Minh Mang further increased official salaries. In addition, they borrowed a practice from Qing China and began to pay a special salary to prefects and district magistrates on a sliding scale, commencing one month after they went to their posts. This salary was called **duong liem** (to nourish incorruptibility).<sup>56</sup> This introduction of a salary system represents one of the most important innovations of the early Nguyen dynasty, and one which may well have grown out of Gia Long's reflections on the failure of the previous system of the **chua** Nguyen.<sup>57</sup>

Taxes and the taxation system played a role in the outbreak of the Tay Son. The very first thing Tay Son rebels did after they came down from their Western Mountain base in 1773 was to capture the granaries in Can Duong and Dam Thuy, and kill the taxation officer Dang and all members of his family.<sup>58</sup> It can hardly be coincidental that the key figures, and place of this event, were all related to taxation.

It would be hazardous to say that the Tay Son was caused by any one or two of the factors we have discussed in this chapter; they all played a role. But once the Nguyen regime collapsed, it fell entirely to the ground.

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<sup>55</sup> Another difference between the Trinh (or the traditional way) and that of the Nguyen lay in the treatment of former officials. While under the Trinh those people were tax-exempt, under the Nguyen they were not. The taxes they paid were about equal to the taxes of a **hang quan** (second class of taxpayers, who were preparing to go the army).

<sup>56</sup> Gia Long To Le (A collection of the rules of Gia Long reign), a MS in the Han-Nom Institute, Hanoi; for a discussion of the salary system during the Nguyen Dynasty, see Alexander B. Woodside, Vietnam and Chinese Model, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1971, pp.79-80.

<sup>57</sup> This may be one example of the influence of **Dang Trong** on early Nguyen Dynasty government and administration in 19th century Viet Nam. Nola Cooke has discussed several others in her thesis, "Colonial Political Myth and the Problem of the Other: French and Vietnamese in the Protectorate of Annam", Ph.D thesis, ANU, 1991, Chapters 2 and 3.

<sup>58</sup> The Liet Truyen Chinh Bien So Tap, Vol. 30, pp.319-320. Missions on the Grand Plateaus describes the climate among the uplanders as "always highly stormy" when the Vietnamese tax collectors came. See Dourisboure, P. & Simmonet, C., Vietnam: Mission on the Grand Plateaus, trans. Albert J.LaMothe, Jr., Maryknoll Publications, New York, 1967, p.244.

## CHAPTER 6 VIETNAMESE AND UPLANDERS

Agriculture was usually considered as 'goc', the root or foundation of traditional Vietnamese societies. Various Vietnamese dynasties took as their guiding principle the policy of preventing any initiatives, especially trade, liable to threaten this agricultural base. Already under the earliest independent dynasties like the Early Le and the Ly, we find kings carrying out the important (and typically Confucian) ritual of royal ploughing, as by Le Hoan in 987, or Ly Thai Ton in 1038. In the two centuries of **Dang Trong** history, however, no such ritual enactment was recorded. The Chua Nguyen were far more likely to see national prosperity in terms of the numbers of ships or junks arriving annually to trade, as we saw for Nguyen Phuc Dieu in Chapter Four. But while overseas trade became the central pillar of the Nguyen economy, most of the 'domestic' items involved came not from lowland Vietnamese villages but from the mountains. In sharp contrast to the traditional Northern pattern, in **Dang Trong** the two rather alien fronts of mountain and sea dominated over agriculture. We find this unique arrangement reflected in two important rituals, the **mo nui** (opening up the mountain) and the **cau gio** (praying for a good wind from the sea). The first may have existed in the region for centuries, while the second was common Chinese practice in coastal areas. Although ritual prayer for a good harvest **ky hoa** also existed, it did not predominate over the other two.<sup>1</sup>

In keeping with this particular orientation, the 19th century Vietnamese concerns of **son phong** (a line of defence against mountain) and **hai phong** (a line of defence against the sea) never appear in 17th and 18th century **Dang Trong** sources. Rather, **Dang Trong's** primary concerns lay first with the Trinh north, and then with the Cham and Khmer south. Both the sea to the east and the mountains to the west presented opportunities and advantages, rather than problems to the Nguyen. Nguyen Hoang himself recognised this strategic truth in his dying words:

While to the north we have Hoanh Son mountain and Gianh river which are hard to cross, and in the south we have Hai Van Pass and Thach Bi<sup>2</sup> mountain which are equally good in terms of defence, gold and iron

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<sup>1</sup> Vu Minh Giang says that in the An Khe region in Quy Nhon "cau hue" (= ky hoa) is still held on the tenth of the second lunar month every year. It usually involved both Vietnamese and the minority peoples from the mountains, who would take it as an important chance for trade. See Vu Minh Giang, "Tay Son Thuong dao, can cu dau tien cua cuoc khoi nghia" (The upper trial, the first base for the uprising), in *Tay Son Nguyen Hue*, p.132.

<sup>2</sup> In Phu Yen, close to Cape Varella. This mountain was considered to be the southern border of Dai Viet in the late 15th century.

produced from the mountains [west], and fish and salt from the sea [east], make this region exactly what a hero needs to show his talents.<sup>3</sup>

In other words, for the Nguyen the resources of the west and the east could be managed to deal with the problems of the north and the south. This chapter examines some of the ways in which Nguyen Hoang's successors put his words into effect.

### The Strategy of the Nguyen Towards the Highlands

Good relations between the Nguyen and the uplanders played a crucial role in the Nguyen's well-being, both politically and economically. Central to this was the important consideration that the Vietnamese did not form the dominant majority in the area as they do today. They were but one of the main peoples, and lived on land which had formerly belonged to others, in the early period of **Dang Trong** especially. Facing the hostile Trinh to the north, the Nguyen could not afford to make other enemies who would attack from the flank or the rear. This strategic assessment underlay early Nguyen policies towards the highlands.

We also see this intention from the marriages arranged in **Dang Trong's** early days. In 1619, for example, Nguyen Phuc Nguyen married one daughter to Araki Sotao, a Japanese merchant, and in the following year another to King Chetta II of Cambodia.<sup>4</sup> Hickey reports that about the same time, too, another Nguyen court lady was sent to marry Po Rome, the most renowned king of the last phase of the Cham state from 1627 to 1651.<sup>5</sup> That this marriage took place suggests the Chams remained a potential threat to the Nguyen in the early 17th century, or at least a group whose cooperation was still considered important.

Rather than making a vain attempt at defending themselves against the sea or in the mountains, the hard-pressed Nguyen sought alliances instead. Although none of the marriages above is recorded in the Nguyen chronicle, one entry of the Tien Bien of 1621 confirms this basic policy towards other peoples in the region:

In [lunar] April, rulers of Ai Lao [Laos] and Luc Hoan [Savannakhet region] permitted their soldiers to cross Hieu Giang river to rob our people who

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<sup>3</sup> Tien Bien, Vol.1, p.29.

<sup>4</sup> Although this woman later brought a large piece of Khmer land to the Vietnamese, initially the marriage was perhaps more out of consideration for defence than offence.

<sup>5</sup> Hickey, Sons of the Mountains, Yale University Press, New Heaven and London, 1982, p.89.

lived on the border. [Nguyen Phuc Nguyen] ordered Ton That Hoa to pacify them. Hoa laid an ambush on the main routes and asked the traders to do their business there to lure [the Lao]. The barbarians came just as we had expected and were all caught by our soldiers. His Highness wanted to make a show of conciliation with favours and trust towards the remote peoples, so he ordered them to untie [the Lao], and give them food and clothes, and to try to make them see reason. The barbarians were all abashed and convinced. They have never rebelled since then.<sup>6</sup>

In the following year the Nguyen set up Ai Lao Dinh (Ai Lao camp) on the Hieu Giang river and recruited about 600 soldiers there. This route became the most important trading route between Vietnamese and Lao.

This incident set the tone for relations between the Nguyen court and uplanders in the 17th and 18th centuries. During this period in **Dang Trong**, highlanders only participated in five anti-Nguyen rebellions. Part of the reason for this surely lay in the policy of conciliation rather than control. In these years it seems that the Nguyen wisely tried to avoid becoming involved in troubles they could not hope to manage successfully. Certainly they tried to remain aloof from major conflicts in the mountains, as their reaction to the Le Duy Mat rebellion indicated. Le Duy Mat, a descendant of the imperial Le, rebelled against the Trinh in the 1750s and 1760s. In 1753 the Trinh asked the Nguyen for permission to use the Tran Ninh road to attack Le Duy Mat, while in 1764 Le Duy Mat, from his Tran Ninh base, asked the Nguyen to join an attack on the Trinh. Both requests were denied on strategic grounds.<sup>7</sup> In 17th and 18th century **Dang Trong** the Nguyen preferred to push to the south with steady determination, while keeping peace with the west as best they could. There was a distinct difference between the Nguyen's way of dealing with the Khmer and with the Lao. While in late 1714 the instruction of the Nguyen to the two generals from the Hue court towards a Khmer civil war was to be "determined to gain victory and pacify the remote peoples", the response to a civil war in Laos several months later was only to send an "envoy to show friendship and watch the situation there".<sup>8</sup> From the 1720s on, the Nguyen showed an increasing interest towards the south, so that even the north was not their concern any more.

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<sup>6</sup> Tien Bien, Vol.2, p.33.

<sup>7</sup> See Tien Bien, Vol.10, p.143, p.149.

<sup>8</sup> Tien Bien, Vol.8, pp.120-121.

## Trading routes and items

Trade is perhaps the most ancient relationship between lowlanders and uplanders in this region, existing long before the Vietnamese came down from the Red River delta. However, when the Vietnamese population grew and overseas trade expanded, highland-lowland trade was equally stimulated. New trading locations sprang up for exchanges which became increasingly more regular.

Figures 5 and 6 on p.142-143 give a rough idea of how Vietnamese in **Dang Trong** related to uplanders, Lao and Khmer in the Nguyen period. In contrast to the traditional pattern of Vietnamese in the north, where contacts with other peoples came mainly in the form of tribute, the interaction between Vietnamese and uplanders in **Dang Trong** had a more important economic dimension, just as the contacts between uplanders and Chams had done in the history of Champa in the previous centuries.

The most important trading route in early **Dang Trong** ran through the upper reaches of the Ai Lao Pass, from the Mekong river to the coast near Quang Tri. Focussed on the town of Cam Lo, the route went down to Cua Viet port, and up to Lao Bao, and was the busiest trading route in the Thuan Hoa area. Phu Bien describes the route according to the number of days it took to traverse:<sup>9</sup> travelling west, from Lao Bao, it took two days to reach Tchepone, and in another three days Muong Vinh.<sup>10</sup> According to Breazeale and Smukarn, depending on the rainfall, the rapids of the Bang Hieng (or Bang Hian) could be navigated by small boats during part of the year.<sup>11</sup> From there one could easily reach Savannakhet to the west, or Khemmarat to the southwest, or Mukdahan to the northwest. This was most likely also the route for Vientiane to send its "tribute" to Hue.<sup>12</sup> According to Tien Bien, Vietnamese traders often:

brought salt, fish sauce, dried fish, iron wares, copper pots, silver hairpins

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<sup>9</sup> Phu Bien, vol.2, p.69a.

<sup>10</sup> This Muong Vinh either referred to Muong Phine in the Bang Hieng river basin or the Bang Hieng river basin in general.

<sup>11</sup> Kennon Breazeale and Snit Smukarn, A Culture in Search of Survival, The Phuan of Thailand and Laos, Monograph Series 31, Yale University Southeast Asia Studies, New Haven, 1988, p.2.

<sup>12</sup> It is worth pointing out that the Lan Sang (Laos) kingdom flourished at the same time as the Nguyen, especially under Souligna-Vongsa (r.1637-1694). For Laos it was important to maintain alternative relations with Siam, Cambodia and the two Vietnams. This "tribute" was probably not seen as such in Laos.

and bracelets<sup>13</sup> with them up along this route to the uplanders and inhabitants of Lao settlements, to trade against rice, chicken, oxen, hemp, wax, rattan and cotton cloth woven by uplanders. When the trading was done, the traders hired elephants to carry the goods back to Cam Lo. The uplanders and Lao also brought goods to sell in Cam Lo... It is said that sometimes they drove as many as 300 oxen to trade at one fair and the price of an ox was only 10 **quan** [222 grams of silver in the 1770s] at the most, while an elephant was worth two **thoi** [756 grams] of silver.<sup>14</sup>

From Ai Lao Pass southward to Kontum the terrain becomes more difficult, so that here trade was restricted to exchanges between lowlanders and nearby uplanders. Highlanders traded precious woods, rattan, wax, honey, oxen, cinnamon (from western Quang Nam), areca and gold. Thus we find in the family history of Chau Tien Loi, a Chinese merchant in Hoi An in the mid-18th century, that part of his business was buying wood from uplanders to sell on the coast.<sup>15</sup>

Perhaps only the An Khe area, from where the Tay Son rose, could be compared favourably with Cam Lo in terms of its important trading position, with its linkages to Bahnar, Jarai, Choreo and other peoples in the Quy Nhon, Quang Ngai and Phu Yen regions. Hickey suggests that the Ba river valley was a likely route of entry into the mountains.<sup>16</sup> This observation is confirmed by the name **Deo Mang** for An Khe. In the Bahnar language it means "passing door", that is, a gateway between the plain and the mountains.<sup>17</sup> It is indeed a pass for the route between Strung Treng-Pleiku-Binh Dinh and Quy Nhon. French missionaries in the 1840s mentioned that the route led to the uplands and "terminated at the An Son [An Khe] market, the gathering-place of customs officials and Annamese hangers-on".<sup>18</sup> According to Navelle, who visited the Kontum area in late 1884, An Khe still remained the last Vietnamese post.

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<sup>13</sup> Silk was carried to sell in Laos as well, according to Borri. See Cochinchina, p.D.

<sup>14</sup> Phu Bien, Vol.4, pp.4b-5a.

<sup>15</sup> A MS family history now kept by Chau's descendants Chau Quang Chuong and Chau Dieu Cu, Hoi An. My gratitude to Mr. Chau and his family for kindly allowing me to read this valuable source when I visited Hoi An in July 1990.

<sup>16</sup> Hickey, Sons of the Mountains, p.116.

<sup>17</sup> Tay Son Nguyen Hue, Ty Van Hoa va Thong Tin Nghia Binh, 1978, p.48. This could be compared to a Rhade name **Tvea Phreah Nakor** (meaning "The Gate of the Capital"), which marked the frontier between the Cambodian kingdom and the highlands. See Hickey, Sons, p.141.

<sup>18</sup> Pierre Dourisboure and Christian Simmonet, Vietnam: Mission on the Grand Plateaus, trans. Albert J.LaMothe, Jr., Maryknoll Publications, New York, 1967, p.13.



Beyond it lay only uplanders' country.<sup>19</sup>

Due to its position, An Khe remained a commercial centre of Quy Nhon for several centuries.<sup>20</sup> Beside calambac, ivory and other luxuries, many everyday items of Vietnamese consumption such as betel nut came from here. Thus Nguyen Nhac, one of the Tay Son brothers, began as a trader engaged in the betel trade with uplanders. An Khe must also have been a center for trade among various upland peoples. According to Dourisboure, a French missionary who arrived in the highlands in 1851, in this region almost all the other mountain peoples got their iron tools and weapons from the Sedang, who had access to iron deposits, while the Rengao and western Bahnar wove cotton for cloth. And the Bahnar Alakong in the east would trade with the Vietnamese for salt, perhaps the most essential item purchased from Vietnamese by uplanders.<sup>21</sup> A Vietnamese folk song in the Quy Nhon area reflects the commercial reality:

**Ai ve nhan voi nau nguon,  
Mang le gui xuong, ca chuong gui len.**

(Whoever is going to see the uplanders please remind them,  
[if] forest products are carried down, sea products are carried up.)

The favourable position of An Khe perhaps accounts for why a Bahnar leader, Kiom,<sup>22</sup> from the An Khe area was designated "chief of the Mois" by Hue in the 1840s. "This arrangement permitted the Vietnamese roving merchants to benefit from a trade network that already existed among the highlanders of the region".<sup>23</sup>

It is still not clear how calambac and other luxury goods reached overseas ships or junks in **Dang Trong** in the 17th and 18th centuries; but presumably the trade involved the Cham. Certainly commercial links between the Cham and uplanders had existed for centuries, and Cham access to calambac may well explain

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<sup>19</sup> E.Navelle, "De Thi-Nai au Bla", *Excursions et Reconnaissances*, 13, No.30, 1887, pp.218-39. Quoted from Hickey, *Kingdom in the Morning Mist*, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 1988, pp.67-68. Curiously enough, this place has figured as a refuge more than once in history. See Hickey, *ibid*, p.61.

<sup>20</sup> Several communication lines link the coast to the highlands, the most important of which is today's Highway 19 from Quy Nhon to Pleiku.

<sup>21</sup> *Mission on the Grand Plateau*, p.67.

<sup>22</sup> Or Kiem in other sources. It is said that he originated the village called Plei Bong Mohr at the intersection of Pleiku-Kontum highway. See Raymond Le Jarriel, "Comment la mission Catholique a servi la France en pays Moi", *BAVH*, No.1, 1942, p.41.

<sup>23</sup> Hickey, *Kingdom in the Morning Mist*, p.64.

why Champa's trade continued for some time after Hoi An established its favourable position in overseas trade in the early 17th century.<sup>24</sup> The best calambac reportedly came from Khanh Hoa area, close to Phan Rang, the last remaining trading port of Champa. Cornelis van Neyenroode, head of the Dutch factory in Firando, recorded in 1623 that two Red Seal ships were sent to Cambodia, three to Taiwan, two to Cochinchina and another two to Tongking, and "one ship to Champa, which carried the king's investment to buy calambac there".<sup>25</sup> The Kai-hentai repeatedly mentions junks going to Champa and waiting for calambac to be loaded. Aymonier, too, describes the Roglai people trading calambac<sup>26</sup> with the Cham as late as the 19th century. According to this source, there was a Cham dignitary in the Phan Rang valley called **po-gahlao** (lord of eaglewood) who organised the search for eaglewood during the dry season.<sup>27</sup> After making offerings to the Cham kings, regarded as the "protectors of eaglewood", the Cham proceeded to the villages of Roglai where village heads would assemble bands of men to help them search for the precious wood.<sup>28</sup>

It also seems that at least one or two secondary traders acted as links between

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<sup>24</sup> "This plant - oh, wonder of wonders!" This is how the Rhade describe calambac. See Gabrielle Bertrand, The Jungle People, trans. by Eleanor Brockett, Robert Hale Ltd., London, 1959, p.45.

<sup>25</sup> Originele Missive van Cornelis van Niewroode uyt Firando in dato 20 Dec.1623 [Kol.Archief 995], quoted from Iwao Seiichi, "The capital and trading port of Champa in its last period", Toyo gaku, No.2, Vol.39, 1956, p.128. Sources indicate that before the 17th century much international trade was carried out with Champa. Champa's declining trade in the early 17th century was very much caused by the rise of Hoi An, which in turn hastened the decline of Champa.

<sup>26</sup> Poivre: "One should know that there are three sorts of eaglewood. The first is called **khi nam** [**ky nam**], the heart of the aloe tree which is so resinous that a fingernail can be inserted into it as into wax. It is very dear [...] it is calembac wood.

"The second sort is called **tlam hieong** [**tram huong**], in French Calembouc. It appears almost as resinous as the other, but it has more wood and consequently is lighter and harder. However when it is thrown into water, it does not float on the surface and this is the surest sign for recognizing it. It is brown in colour with many small black spots due to the resin which gives this sweet and pleasant odour which makes it sought after by Orientals for disinfecting their houses and making up their perfumes. This second sort is worth from 7 **mach** to 1 **quan** up to 1 **quan** and a half a **livre**. There is considerable profit in taking it to Suratte, Gedda, Moka, Bassora, etc.

"The third sort is eaglewood proper. The country people call it **this hieong** [**tien huong**]. It is whiter, lighter, less resinous than the other two sorts. It sells for 30 to 40 **quan** a **pic** depending on the year. The three sorts are the same tree more or less ripe and more or less resinous." See Poivre's Journal, pp.432-433. Here I used the translation by Kristine Alilunas-Rodgers in "Description of Cochinchina, 1749-50", in Li Tana & Anthony Reid, Southern Vietnam under the Nguyen, p.91, footnote 33 for "Eaglewood". According to Dai Nam Nhat Thong Chi, the best **ky nam** was produced in Khanh Hoa, while that found in Phu Yen and Quy Nhon was inferior. See Dai Nam Nhat Thong Chi, Vol.2, pp.1281-1282.

<sup>27</sup> Yet, according to Gabrielle Bertrand in the early 20th century, "lord of eaglewood" referred to a man who resold eaglewood, whereas **thuoc lai** applied to those who were in charge of collecting. See The Jungle People, p.46.

<sup>28</sup> Hickey, Sons of the Mountains, p.117.

mountain collectors and coastal exporters. Periodic markets might have been another important source.

Trading between Vietnamese and upland peoples in 17th and 18th century **Dang Trong** was much more important than would be imagined today. So important were mountain products in **Dang Trong's** economy that Vietnamese ritualised the process of trade in a ceremony called "**di nguon**" (literally "to go to the source or spring", but better understood as "to go and collect precious things in the mountains").<sup>29</sup> Perhaps because of the hardship and mystery involved in finding precious perfumes, the Cham goddess **Po Nagar** (**Thien-y A-na** in Vietnamese) came to be seen as the guardian of perfumes.<sup>30</sup> This belief seems to have been adopted by the Vietnamese from the Chams and uplanders, along with the technique of finding perfumes. Nguyen Khai records that as late as the 1980s Vietnamese eaglewood-collectors still made offerings to the **Ba** ("The Lady") before they started their journeys, and when arriving at the foot of the mountains they would hold the ceremony of **khai son** (opening the mountain),<sup>31</sup> perhaps just as their ancestors had done in the 17th and 18th centuries. Stein observed that beside statues of local gods or goddess in a Hue temple there stood a goddess called **Co Bay**, with the dark, naked breasts of a highland woman. She grasped a tree branch in her right hand and a small bottle in her left, which, according to the temple shaman, was for "holding perfume".<sup>32</sup> Vietnamese worshipped some local gods and goddess such as "**Thuong ngan chu ong**". Stein translates the phrase as "Messieurs de la Rive superieure", and all of the gods were considered to be of local origin, i.e. different from Vietnamese gods.<sup>33</sup>

As these examples indicate, just as they adopted aspects of economic life from the uplanders, Vietnamese equally absorbed and adopted some of the latter's religious beliefs. This pluralism of belief became an important feature of southern culture, which would repeatedly play a role in the politics of 19th and 20th century Vietnam.

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<sup>29</sup> Ta Chi Dai Truong, Than, Nguoi va Dat Viet, Van Nghe, California, 1989, p.257.

<sup>30</sup> See Rolf Stein, "Jardins en miniature d'Extreme-Orient", BEFEO, XLII, 1942, pp.74-75.

<sup>31</sup> Nguyen Khai, Mot Coi Nhan Gian Be Ti (A small world), Nha Xuat Ban Van Nghe Thanh Pho Ho Chi Minh, Saigon, 1989, pp.26-27.

<sup>32</sup> Stein, "Jardins", p.71.

<sup>33</sup> Stein, "Jardins", p.69.

## The Slave trade

Cham and uplanders engaged in the slave trade long before the establishment of **Dang Trong**, but Vietnamese soon joined them. Several sources indicate Vietnamese involvement, by the 18th century at least. According to Poivre, for instance,

I asked the king to give me at least several savages or slaves to be craftsmen (because the slaves in this region are only those barbarians who were caught by Cochinchinese from the mountains). The king answered that it was not difficult, but he suggested I wait until the next year, and he promised me that he would supply me with as many slaves as I wanted by then. He added that this year I could only manage to buy two kinds of slaves: one kind was uncivilised since they were only caught lately and were not well trained and could therefore do nothing useful, the other kind were the ones who had become familiar with this region and trained in certain techniques. But soon after I bought them they would escape, because they desperately wanted to go back to their wives and children.<sup>34</sup>

Clearly the **chua Nguyen** was familiar with slavery, suggesting that it was quite common in Cochinchina at the time. Other evidence from 17th and 18th century Vietnamese sources also support this conclusion.

One example is the inscription on a tablet established in 1697 by a Nguyen official, Nguyen Duc Hoa, in today's Phu Hoa village, Tam Ky prefecture, Quang Nam. It concerned the 43.69 **mau** of land he had set aside to pay to keep joss sticks and candles burning in his family temple. The tablet listed the restrictions governing this allotment and the slaves (**huong hoa no**<sup>35</sup>) who were designated to cultivate it. The rules included:

- a. Slaves were to live in separate quarters, with the smartest male and female among them as their heads.
- b. Future generations of the official's family were not allowed to seize these slaves for their own purpose; with anyone who disobeyed to be expelled from the family.
- c. If the slaves tried to escape, the family had the right to recapture them and sell them elsewhere.<sup>36</sup>

This inscription also shows that, apart from **huong hoa no**, common slaves, both men and women, existed in 17th century Cochinchina. Particular families might own quite large numbers of slaves. Nguyen Duc Nghinh suggests that 40 or 50 slaves were necessary to plant 45 **mau** (3 ha.) of land. Slavery also developed in

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<sup>34</sup> Poivre, *Journal*, p.439.

<sup>35</sup> Meaning slaves in charge of keeping joss sticks.

<sup>36</sup> A MS in the Han-Nom Institute, Hanoi, shelf number 20922-20923. For analysis of the inscription, see Nguyen Duc Nghinh, "**Nhung no ti phuc vu cho viec tho cung**" (Slaves used in the making of offerings), *NCLS*, No.197, 1981, pp.80-83.

the Mekong delta in the 18th century, as Le Quy Don recorded in Phu Bien:

The Nguyen ruler also let those people gather **moi** people from the highlands and sell them as slaves to the rich. These slaves married each other and produced more children to work and produce more rice. There may have been 40-50 rich families in these places [and] ...some owned 50-60 slaves and 300-400 oxen per family.<sup>37</sup>

The Phu Bien also suggests that the opening of fertile lands in Binh Son and Chuong Nghia counties owed something to uplander slavery. It says that the Nguyen initially established 72 settlements there, managed by farmers recruited from the mountains. In this context, however, the word "recruited" should be understood in its wide sense, including people bought or captured and enslaved.<sup>38</sup>

This sort of uplander slavery also left traces in the language in **Dang Trong**. In Vietnamese "toi" means servant, as do **toi con**, **toi doi**, **toi to**, but only **toi moi** means "slave, bondman".<sup>39</sup> Since in the north the Vietnamese word for uplanders was **Man** rather than **Moi**, **toi moi** must be a trace left by the slavery system in **Dang Trong**, in particular the Vietnamese use of slaves from upland regions.

Vietnamese sources generally indicate that slaves were used mainly in agriculture, to supplement manpower shortages in underpopulated **Dang Trong**. But some could also be found at the **chua's** court. According to Poivre, a princess usually had 20 to 30 attendants, a few soldiers, and some "petits sauvages esclaves".<sup>40</sup> He also mentioned repeatedly how politically powerful a "favorite black subject of the king, who was a Cambodian, or rather, a Laotian" was in the court.<sup>41</sup>

So accepted was the trade in uplanders that the court taxed it at the same rate as the trade in elephants, according to the Phu Bien. Given this, it seems reasonable to assume that the two -elephants and slaves - fetched roughly equal prices here. If so, a slave, like an elephant, would have cost two bars of silver,

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<sup>37</sup> Phu Bien, Vol.6, p.243.

<sup>38</sup> Phu Bien, Vol.2, p.82b.

<sup>39</sup> Bui Phung, Tu Dien Viet-Anh (A Vietnamese English dictionary), Truong Dai Hoc Tong Hop Ha Noi, Hanoi, 1978, pp. 1135-1136.

<sup>40</sup> Poivre, Journals, p.429.

<sup>41</sup> Poivre, ibid, pp.466, 474.

or about 40 **quan** in the 1770s,<sup>42</sup> less expensive than one **ta** (a picul) of copper. The Phu Bien claimed that slaves in the Mekong delta were much cheaper than in the Thuan Hoa area surrounding the capital. A dark-skinned, curly-headed slave cost only 20 **quan** here, or half the probable price in the Thuan Hoa area. Fairer slaves cost even less again, only 10 **quan**.<sup>43</sup>

Two reasons may account for the differing prices. First, the price might have depended on the slave's distance from home. As elsewhere in the world: "Once enslaved, a captive near home was less valuable than one far from home, simply because he or she might escape".<sup>44</sup> If that was the case in 18th century **Dang Trong**, dark-skinned slaves might have come from the remote mountain areas, while the fairer ones might have hailed from areas closer to the coast, where intermarriage had occurred between Vietnamese and upland peoples. Alternatively, the difference in price might have reflected varying degrees of Vietnamisation. This is suggested by a monograph of Thu Dau Mot, published in 1910, which described the Stieng people as mainly divided into two groups, one living around Hon Quan (today's An Loc region), and the other in Bu Dop, both to the north of today's Song Be province. The first group, although dark skinned like a negrito type, were more Vietnamised; the second, paler skinned, like Malays or Chams, nonetheless appeared less "civilized" in Vietnamese eyes.<sup>45</sup> Of course, both factors may have operated together.

Whatever the reason, the low price of slaves explains why a family could own 50 to 60 in the Mekong delta in the 18th century. Certainly slave labour seems to have been an important factor in the development of large scale rice production in the Mekong delta in the period of early settlement by Vietnamese. It continued to exist right up to the 19th century, with Silvestre reporting slavery in the

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<sup>42</sup> Phu Bien, Vol.4, pp.5a-5b. This is the highest price we have for the price of slave in the 18th century. Yet it is lower than the price given by Zhu Fan Zhi, a Chinese book on 12th and 13th century Southeast Asian countries. According to this source, a male slave was worth 3 taels of gold. In the 1770s this amount of gold would equal to about 54 to 60 **quan** of copper coins.

<sup>43</sup> Phu Bien, Hanoi edition, p.345. The Saigon edition of the Phu Bien does not have the price at all. A MS kept in the Institute of History, Hanoi, gives different prices: "The one who is dark with curly hair [which] means [this slave] being one of the **Moi** race, costs 20 **quan**; if the one is fair and fat, he is a **Kinh** (Vietnamese), he then would cost 50 to 60 **quan**. For 100 to 10 (110?) slaves the cost would be more than 1,000 **quan**."

<sup>44</sup> Philip D.Curtin, "Migration in the Tropical World", Immigration Reconsidered, ed. Virginia Yans-Laughlin, Oxford University Press, 1990, p.26.

<sup>45</sup> See "Monographie de la province de Thudaumot", BSEI, No.58, 1910, p.28.

region to the north and northeast Saigon in particular.<sup>46</sup> Truong Vinh Ky even identified a slave market, called "Cay da thang Moi", close to Thuan Kieu street in northeast of Saigon.<sup>47</sup>

French missionaries who visited the central highlands in the 19th century seldom failed to record the slave trade in this region. Some pointed out that "the slave trade consisted primarily of lowlanders hunting down the 'savage' populations of the interior, selling them into slavery".<sup>48</sup> Yet uplanders also joined in, with Kon Trang, a Sedang village in the Bla river area, said to function as a centre for Sedang, Rengao, and Lao slave traders, who often went up the tributaries of the Mekong river to purchase slaves.<sup>49</sup>

Vietnamese were also caught by uplanders as slaves. Hickey mentions that Kiom, the Bahnar leader mentioned above, also "reputedly was involved in the slave trade", capturing uplanders and Vietnamese and taking them to the Mekong River valley to sell in the Lao markets.<sup>50</sup> Sometimes Vietnamese slaves were sold directly to the Haland and Jarai by Sedang bandits.<sup>51</sup> This phenomenon was said to have existed further north in the Cam Lo area in the 19th century as well. French archives mention Vietnamese being kidnapped and sold as slaves in the Lao region between Attapu and Nakhon Phanom.<sup>52</sup> This kind of trade must have been carried on in Cochinchina and along its western border before and after the appearance of Vietnamese in the region.

It is not surprising that slavery was contrived in a frontier region where the institution was common among the local people and manpower was desperately

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<sup>46</sup> M.Silvestre, "Rapport sur l'esclave", Excursions et Reconnaissances, No.14, 1880, pp.95-144. Quoted in Hickey, Sons of Mountains, p.211.

<sup>47</sup> Truong Vinh Ky, "Souvenirs historiques sur Saigon et ses environs", Excursions et Reconnaissances, No.23, 1885, pp.24-25. He said that this market was in the Cho Dieu Khien (Dieu Khien market). Dai Nam Nhat Thong Chi (Gazeteer of Imperial Vietnam), which was finished editing in 1882, about the same time as Truong Vinh Ky's article, mentions Cho Dieu Khien without one word on a slave trade. See Dai Nam Nhat Thong Chi, Luc Tinh Nam Viet, Nha Van Hoa, Phu Quoc Vu Khanh Dac Trach Van Hoa, Saigon, 1973, Vol.1, p.27a.

<sup>48</sup> Hickey, Sons of Mountains, p.210. He mentions too that in the 1880s "Vietnamese and Chinese merchants trading with villagers in the mountainous zone from Quang Nam to Binh Thuan also purchased slaves which were then sold in Annam".

<sup>49</sup> Hickey, Kingdom in the Morning Mist, p.65.

<sup>50</sup> Hickey, Ibid, p.64.

<sup>51</sup> Hickey, Sons of the Mountains, pp.279-280.

<sup>52</sup> Kennon Breazeale & Snit Smukarn, A Culture in Search of Survival, p.86.

lacking among the Vietnamese.<sup>53</sup> The ethnic mix itself may also have encouraged it: slavery enables a stronger group to absorb a weaker one. It is interesting, however, that while 17th and 18th century Vietnamese sources gave the price and tax of trading slaves openly, slavery was treated as something non-existent in 19th century sources, such as in the Tien Bien. This reflects a deeply changed idea about the model of society.

### Side By Side

In the 18th century, Vietnamese lived much closer to other ethnic groups than they do today. Figure 5 and 6 indicate this intermingling quite clearly, as does the location of the various **nguyen** (see discussion below).<sup>54</sup> Vien Cau **nguyen**, for instance, lay only 62 li (31 km.) from today's Vinh Linh county, while Thu Bon **nguyen**, the site of a 17th and 18th century gold strike, was 59 li from Que Son county in Quang Nam. Others were even closer, like Nha Trang **nguyen** in Dien Khanh, which was 27 li (13.5 km.) from Phuoc Dien county, or Cu De **nguyen**, a mere 10 li (5 km.) from Hoa Vang county.<sup>55</sup>

In the early period of **Dang Trong**, uplanders and Vietnamese may well have lived in even closer proximity, since not all uplanders of today were necessarily uplanders in previous times. The Chut people for instance, who live in Quang Binh, said that their ancestors used to live in the coastal area of present Bo Trach and Quang Trach counties, but because of piracy they moved to the mountainous region in the west. The Bahnar people who live in the hill region from Quang Ngai to Phu Yen area, according to Dang Nghiem Van, a Vietnamese ethnologist, are possibly the Mada people mentioned in Cham inscriptions, who at that earlier time lived in the coastal area of Quang Ngai.<sup>56</sup> As a Chinese sources Xiamen Zhi (Local Records of Xiamen) points out: "The local people here

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<sup>53</sup> Although slavery had been abandoned by Vietnamese in the Red River delta since the Tran dynasty, it may well never have disappeared along the shifting border between Vietnamese and Cham. O Chau Can Luc, written in the 16th century, mentions some Vietnamese villages in Hai Lang county (in Quang Tri province) that still engaged in the slave trade. See Duong Van An, O Chau Can Luc, Van Hoa A Chau, Saigon, 1961, p.46.

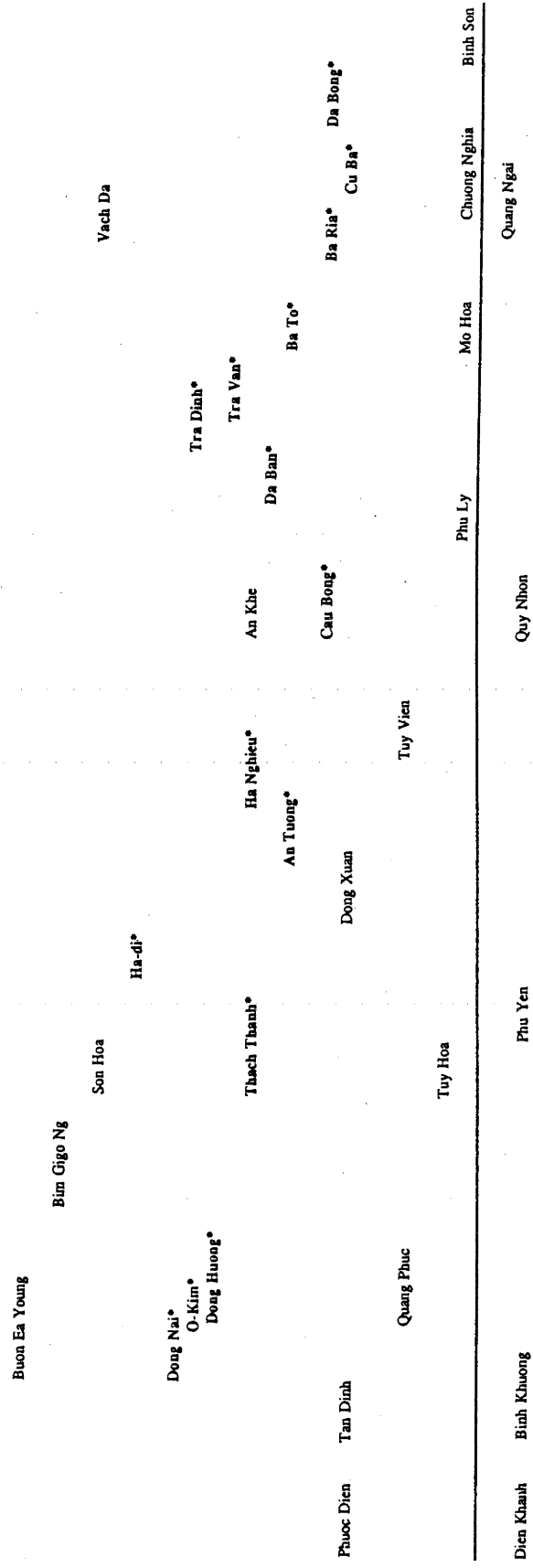
<sup>54</sup> Although the territory of **Dang Trong** forms one of the most ethnolinguistically complex areas of the world, for our purpose here we consider the non-Vietnamese peoples as a single undifferentiated group.

<sup>55</sup> Dai Nam Nhat Thong Chi, pp.879, 686, 687, 1265.

<sup>56</sup> See So Tay ve cac Dan Toc o Viet Nam (A handbook on peoples in Vietnam), Nha Xuat Ban Khoa Hoc Xa Hoi, Hanoi, 1983, pp.31,40.







**Figure 6 Distances of Nguyen from the Coast Between Quang Ngai and Dien Khanh**

[Cochinchina] are mixed with the barbarians".<sup>57</sup> This may be seen as one of the most distinctive characteristics of **Dang Trong**. This is suggested, too, by a term from the Quang Binh area, "**Moi bien**", which designated people who lived by fishing on the sea.<sup>58</sup> The word **Moi** here may be regarded as an indication that either the Cham or other fishing peoples resided in the region for some time after the arrival of Vietnamese.

The upland villages in bold type on Figure 5 and 6 all paid taxes to the Nguyen in the 18th century. It is likely, therefore, that these peoples corresponded to those called "**Moi thuoc**" (Dependent **moi**), in contrast to the "**Moi hoang**" (Wild **moi**). How did they come under the control of the Nguyen? Surely geography was one reason; but their need for trade with the coast, occupied by the Vietnamese, might have been another. Interestingly, we find another word "**Moi buon**" (Trading **Moi**), which referred to uplanders who had commercial relations with the Vietnamese, presumably including uplanders who paid taxes to the Nguyen. The peoples with such contacts with Vietnamese most probably lived mainly in the lower hill regions, in contrast to the **Moi cao** (High **Moi**). Even so, some minority peoples seem to have escaped Vietnamese penetration and control successfully, despite living in very close proximity to Vietnamese settlements. Thus, Christian Simonnet reports two tribes, the Die and the Khatu, that remained untouched until the 1950s, even though their territories lay no more than 18 miles due west of the city of Da Nang. The Khatu's reputation of being "the blood hunters" suggests that they were too ferocious for the Vietnamese to have wanted anything to do with them.<sup>59</sup>

The inhabitants of these **nguyen** (same derivation as **nguồn**) need not always be understood as "uplanders", or "montagnards" to the French. The word "**nguyen**", appearing in the Nguyen Hoang period, means "origin",<sup>60</sup> in the sense of places where rivers originate. While **nguyen** might in many cases refer to the mountains where rivers arise, in other instances mentioned in the Dai Nam Nhat

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<sup>57</sup> Xiamen Zhi (Local Records of Xiamen), *Zhong guo fang zhi cung shu* (serials of Chinese local records), No.80, first printed in 1839, reprinted in 1967, Cheng Wen Press, Taipei, p.151.

<sup>58</sup> See Ngo Duc Thinh, "**Vai net ve su phan bo va ten goi hanh chinh cua cac lang xa o Quang Binh truoc Cach mang Thang Tam**" (Some notes on village administrative names in Quang Binh before the August Revolution), Nong Thon Viet Nam trong Lich Su (Vietnamese countryside in the history), Nha Xuat Ban Khoa Hoc Xa Hoi, Hanoi, 1977, Vol.1, p.403.

<sup>59</sup> Vietnam, Mission on the Grand Plateaus, p.245.

<sup>60</sup> Chinese derivation.

Thong Chi, minority peoples did not always live in mountains. Rather, they lived along river banks or in valleys, as noted by Ngo Duc Thinh for Quang Binh.<sup>61</sup> These were the people first in contact with the Vietnamese, who came to know and record them. The word **nguyen** therefore might have referred to areas upriver in general, while in practice the **nguyen** acted as intermediaries between Vietnamese and more remote highlanders.<sup>62</sup>

When Vietnamese immigrants came they always occupied land along the river first. Villages therefore usually followed the rivers in shape, being long and narrow.<sup>63</sup> Hence, it seems likely that, in early **Dang Trong** at least, Vietnamese might have lived physically quite close to other peoples, despite the different agricultural systems whereby one plants dry rice, the other wet. As the Vietnamese population grew the preferred land along rivers and the coast was exhausted, despite the still relatively sparse population in the 17th and 18th centuries. The lands next occupied were valleys, and then the land along major roads, whose existence suggests that population density had risen in the region.

In general the process of Vietnamese occupation seems to have occurred peacefully. According to Ta Chi Dai Truong, a practice called "**Le cung chu dat cu**" (making offering to the former lord of the territory) was quite common among the Vietnamese. One such ceremony held in 1879 in Cho Lon was said to have lasted for seven days and seven nights.<sup>64</sup> While carrying it out people would "rent land" from the former lord, understood as a spirit, by paying 1500 **quan** in money made of gold or silver paper, and with a promise they would offer a pig every three years to the former lord. Hopefully the "former lord" would be satisfied, and allow the Vietnamese quietly to expand further, presumably along the valleys.

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<sup>61</sup> Ngo Duc Thinh, "Vai net", p.402.

<sup>62</sup> In this context, it is interesting to note that south Vietnamese coined the term "**ngui Thuong**" or "**ngui Thuong Du**" in the 1960s (?), which can be translated accurately as "peoples who live upriver", although **Thuong/Ha** does not always refer to upriver/downriver. This term seems to be a direct continuation of the idea captured in the word **nguyen**.

<sup>63</sup> By contrast, villages in the north are relatively round or square, surrounded with bamboo and usually possessing a small main entrance. As Vietnamese scholars put it, a village in the north is an almost closed community, while in the south it is an open one. See Ngo Duc Thinh, "**Vai net ve su phan bo va ten goi hanh chinh cua cac lang xa o Quang Binh**", pp.401-403; Nguyen Cong Binh, **Le Xuan Dien and Mac Duong, Van Hoa va Cu Dan Dong bang Song Cuu Long** (Culture and residents in the Mekong River delta), Nha Xuat Ban Khoa Hoc Xa Hoi, Saigon?, 1990; and **May Dac Diem Van Hoa Dong Bang Song Cuu Long** (Some characteristics of the culture of the Mekong Delta), Vien Van Hoa, Hanoi, 1984.

<sup>64</sup> Ta Chi Dai Truong, **Than, Nguoi va Dat Viet**, p.281.

Sometimes the process would not be so easy, as reflected in a similar ceremony involving **Chua Ngu** (local spirits). In this ceremony, the **Chua Ngu**, with a blackened face to resemble a "**Moi**", would "**la het doi dat**" (cry out asking for the land back). A Vietnamese shaman would then appear. Alternately using intimidation and bribery, he tried to persuade the **Chua Ngu** to give up the land in a set-piece bargain which always ended with the Vietnamese paying some money in return for the land.<sup>65</sup> It is said that up to the 1920s a big ceremony of **Ta Tho** (buying land) happened annually in Quy Nhon.<sup>66</sup> It is striking that similar ceremonies concerning land ownership were reported in almost all the former territory of **Dang Trong**, always with Vietnamese on one side and the "**Moi**" on the other. No one knows when the practice began in Cochinchina, but no doubt it reflected the worrying of the Vietnamese that they had offended the "former lord" of the land, and therefore sought non-retaliation from the spirits.

If some lands were "bought" with ceremonial money, others were definitely paid for in blood, especially that of uplander children, numbers of whom became sacrificial offerings in the 17th and 18th centuries. For example, according to Le Quang Nghiem, when some Vietnamese immigrants came to fish on a small island called Hon Do in Khanh Hoa, they felt so threatened by local devils in their first four months that they moved away. But the favourable conditions attracted others who believed (perhaps at the suggestion of local people<sup>67</sup>) that performing a ritual human sacrifice each year would enable them to stay and exploit the area peacefully. So in Lunar March of every year a child of five or seven years of age would be bought from the mountains and burned alive, with the corpse thrown into the sea afterwards. This custom persisted until the late 19th century, when a pig had replaced the child.<sup>68</sup> A similar practice was said to have occurred in Hon Mot and Hon Nhan regions in Khanh Hoa as well, where Vietnamese ritually sacrificed an uplander child to **Nhang Dang**, a Cham expression for devil.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Ta Chi Dai Truong, Than, Nguoi va Dat Viet, pp.280-284.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid*, p.287.

<sup>67</sup> It is said that many occasions in the highland region need human sacrifice. Dourisboure records that a young slave was to be sacrificed when a new house was built. See Dourisboure & Simmonet, Vietnam: Mission on the Grand Plateaus, trans. Albert LaMothe, Maryknoll Publications, New York, 1967, p.243.

<sup>68</sup> Le Trong Nghiem, Tuc tho cung cua ngu phu Khanh Hoa (Rites in the fishing region of Khanh Hoa province), reprinted by Xuan Thu, Los Alamitos, California, ? year, pp.115-122.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid*, pp.128-131. The reason why Vietnamese used upland children for sacrifice is not clear. Was it because those children from upland were seen as more effective intermediaries for spirits native to the area? Or simply because they were easy to obtain for such purposes?

A ceremony in Ham Hoa village, Quang Ninh county, Quang Binh province suggests that sacrifice was used in other aspects concerning land. An old way of delimiting the area which belonged to the village was carried on till the 1920s, it was said, being taken seriously as a grand ceremony. When it started, a virgin girl (origin unstated) would have been sacrificed (cut into two pieces), and a young man in the village would have run around the land of the village carrying the dead girl. The trace of the blood of the girl would become the sacred border of the village.<sup>70</sup>

Despite the various contacts between Vietnamese and others in the region, the two sides remained quite distinct. While intermarriages between Vietnamese and Cham descendents might have occurred quite commonly, very few indeed have been recorded between Vietnamese and uplanders. This may have reflected Vietnamese ideas about the mountains or forests as virtually forbidden regions, incapable of settlement because of **chuong khi** (miasma or unhealthy air), a conviction which helps to explain why Vietnam mainly expanded south rather than west. A similar sort of exclusionary feeling existed among the uplanders regarding Vietnamese. As far as the mountainous hinterland of **Dang Trong** is concerned, the Vietnamese remained outsiders, strangers to the new land.

Yet as we saw in previous chapters, Vietnamese could be very flexible in a new land and a new environment. The next chapter develops this thesis by considering in more detail the ways Vietnamese in **Dang Trong** were influenced by pre-existing local cultures in the evolution of a Vietnamese state, taking on many differences from their northern cousins and ancestors.

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<sup>70</sup> Ngo Duc Thinh, "Cac quan he so huu", pp.388-389.

## CHAPTER 7 LIFE IN DANG TRONG: A NEW WAY OF BEING VIETNAMESE

In the 17th and 18th centuries, the land the Vietnamese occupied in their **nam tien** was not empty. As they pushed south, Vietnamese in **Dang Trong** came into close contact with local peoples of distinctive and different cultures, foremost among them the Cham. Although this process of Vietnamese expansion has often been portrayed as the simple replacement of one culture and civilisation by another, in fact something quite different occurred. Vietnamese immigrants freely adopted and adapted many aspects of Cham culture in a long process of selective borrowing of the new and discarding of the old. This resulted in the localisation of Vietnamese society and culture in **Dang Trong**. This fruitful interaction ended by creating a new way of being Vietnamese, a different sense of Vietnamese identity, rooted in the social, cultural, and physical environment of the new southern state.

In **Dang Trong**, then, the hallmark of this period can be summed up in the term **dia phuong hoa** - localisation. **Viet hoa**, or the Vietnamisation of the local people, only really happened much later. But official 19th century court sources give us no sense of this significant process. Compiled by trained Confucian literati, works like the Tien Bien, tried to give the impression that nothing new had happened in the south, that no local or unorthodox elements had been absorbed by **Dang Trong** Vietnamese. They insisted that nothing had changed at the core of Vietnamese life here which, as 19th century examination laureates, they discussed mainly in Confucian Chinese terms. Yet the Sinic political and cultural orthodoxy that this later view tried to impose on **Dang Trong's** history and society was quite wrong. The localised Nguyen state was, almost by definition, highly unorthodox.

This process of localisation, and the growth of a special sense of Vietnamese identity here, posed a great challenge, and was a real trial. Never before had Vietnamese culture been put into such a diverse background, often in the numerically weaker position, to seek its survival and development. It was no easy task, and its success no foregone conclusion. Political survival required that the Nguyen elite make themselves appear distinct from their own ancestral people in the north. This need shows through in the different names the Nguyen gave to the same official posts, their different pay system, different style of dress and so on. But perhaps most significant of all, we find it when Nguyen Phuc Khoat proclaimed himself king in 1744, and proudly declared: "our country rose and

developed from **O Chau**" (that is, from Thuan Hoa).<sup>1</sup> He did not say from Thanh Hoa, where the Nguyen themselves and many high officials originated, but chose instead the distinctively local region of **O Chau**. The Nguyen had a two-fold task here if they were to survive: they had to build a separate and distinct polity; and they needed to develop a more homogeneous society from the various peoples under their rule. For most of **Dang Trong's** history, these two aims turned out in practice to be complementary, thanks to the localisation of the Vietnamese population.

This chapter examines in detail some of the diverse elements involved in this localisation process. Almost every facet of Vietnamese life in **Dang Trong** was touched in some way by the different physical and cultural challenges posed in the south. From the many possible examples, we have chosen to focus mainly on two: the unorthodox emphases that developed in **Dang Trong** religious life and cultural values; and the evolution of Vietnamese material life and culture here. In this chapter, we look mainly at the local peculiarities of **Dang Trong** life that reflected heavy Vietnamese cultural borrowing from the Cham, though some other sources are also considered. Finally, the chapter finishes with a new look at the causes of the Tay Son rebellion. This revolt, the most successful in pre-colonial Vietnamese history, brought about the collapse of **Dang Trong** and paved the way for Vietnamese unification in 1802 under the Nguyen dynasty. The causes of this famous revolt belong in a chapter devoted to Vietnamese localisation in **Dang Trong** because, as we will argue, the Tay Son began as a purely **Dang Trong** phenomenon, a direct product of the **dia phuong hoa** (Vietnamese localisation) in the south.

### Religions and values

A clear sense of regional identity developed during the 17th century in **Dang Trong**. Up until 1600, the first chua, Nguyen Hoang, had been content to see his domain as a frontier or border region.<sup>2</sup> In the late 16th century, for example, the Tien Bien proudly claims that:

at the time the Le emperor had exhausted the resources of the country in the war [against the Mac], [Nguyen Hoang] collected taxes from the Thuan

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<sup>1</sup> Tien Bien, Vol.10, p.136.

<sup>2</sup> Keith Taylor suggests that the reason that Nguyen Hoang stayed in the north for seven years between 1592 and 1600 was that he "had ambitions of supplanting the Trinh and uniting all the Vietnamese lands under his hand". See Keith Taylor, "Nguyen Hoang and the beginning of Viet Nam's southward expansion", in Southeast Asia in the Early Modern Era, ed. Anthony Reid, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, forthcoming.



Hoa region to support the court, so the capital relied on the [Thuan Hoa] region.<sup>3</sup>

But from the early 17th century on we find a sense of being a separate country beginning to develop. This turning inward and local consolidation implied two meanings: that the south was a state like the north (or that Dang Trong equalled **Dang Ngoai**); and that the Nguyen could become a local, not a foreign, regime in the eyes of the local peoples. This latter required Nguyen authority to acquire moral legitimacy, which to a large extent happened within a Buddhist context. Buddhism flourished in **Dang Trong** under official patronage, providing an alternative ideology, offering moral and spiritual support and protection to all immigrant Vietnamese, from the Nguyen down.

There were two main reasons for Buddhism becoming the dominant religion in **Dang Trong**. The first arose from the culture shock involved from firsthand Vietnamese encounters with Cham civilisation; and the second reflected Nguyen political needs. We will consider them in turn.

When Vietnamese moved down the coast to the region later known as **Dang Trong**, they discovered for themselves the strange yet fascinating Cham culture that had always attracted Vietnamese in the past, despite being presented to them as the culture of the defeated. Cham music had been popular in the Ly dynasty in the 10th century; Cham clothing was loved by Vietnamese women in the Cham-Viet border area as late as the 15th century; while Vietnamese could only marvel at the magnificent Cham towers, for which Vietnamese architecture had no equivalent. Vietnamese immigrants, who had left their native places far behind and now often lived in small groups on former Cham lands, must have found Cham culture both peculiarly beautiful and disturbingly alien. In an insecure psychological borderland, Vietnamese were attracted to, and at the same time tried to escape from (or possibly subdue), the foreign culture that had preceded, and often still surrounded, them.

In this new situation, the Nguyen rulers needed to provide something different from Cham beliefs to bolster the Vietnamese immigrants spiritually and psychologically. Confucianism could not be used - its basic premises conflicted directly with the Nguyen position as a rebel and separatist regime.<sup>4</sup> But the

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<sup>3</sup> Tien Bien, Vol.1, p.24, entry of 1589.

<sup>4</sup> It was not until 1697 that the Nguyen built a Confucian temple, almost one and a half centuries after the Nguyen had come to the south.

Nguyen could not risk going too far and seeking a solution totally different from northern Vietnamese tradition. Under these circumstances, Mahayana Buddhism provided a solution appropriate to Nguyens' needs. Buddhism reinforced Vietnamese ethnic identity, and calmed immigrants' anxieties without calling the legitimacy of the rulers into question.

With its many gods and spirit entities, Mahayana Buddhism echoed the polytheism of the Cham. The Tien Bien repeatedly records in its early period how Buddhist temples were often built particularly on the old ruins of Cham temples. Sometimes Cham temples were deliberately moved elsewhere by the Chua's order, and a Vietnamese temple built on the site.<sup>5</sup> Poivre observed in 1750 that there were about 400 Buddhist temples in Hue alone.<sup>6</sup> Added to this, Barrow reported in 1792 the existence of many smaller Buddhist shrines:

On the skirts of every little grove of trees near Turon bay small boxes of wood of baskets of wicker work were either suspended from or fixed among the branches, some containing images made of various materials.<sup>7</sup>

That this religion was by no means a pure Buddhism gave it a more inclusive appeal. For instance, the most famous temple in Hue, the Thien Mu, bears the name of a Taoist goddess, yet it had a Buddhist function, with traces of the local legends thrown in. Overall, it revealed a strong syncretism at work. Po Ino Nagar, Cham's great goddess, also became Vietnamized as Thien-Y-A-Na, which in turn became further simplified as Ba Ngoc or Ba (Our Lady).<sup>8</sup> At this time, too, we find Catholicism becoming popular among the common people, despite the hostility of the Nguyen regime. According to Dao Duy Anh, around 1680-82, there were 600,000 adherents of the foreign Catholic religion in Dang Trong, or triple the number in the much more heavily populated Dang Ngoai.<sup>9</sup> The common people also worshipped far more eclectically in the south than the north. As one of Poivre's companions recalled:

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<sup>5</sup> Tien Bien, entries 1602, 1607, 1609, 1667, 1721.

<sup>6</sup> Poivre, Journal, p.381. Today Hue has several hundred temples and is called the "capital of Buddhism". See Thanh Tung, Tham Chua Hue, Hoi Van Nghe Thanh Pho Hue, 1989, p.3.

<sup>7</sup> John Barrow, A Voyage to Cochinchina, Oxford University Press, 1975, p.330.

<sup>8</sup> See Nguyen The Anh, "Texts related to the Vietnamization of the Cham deity Po Nagar", Paper given on SEASSI Symposium on Vietnamese History, Cornell, July 1991. A story about a statue unearthed in Quang Nam is revealing. This statue of Ba, presumably a Vietnamese version of Po Ino Nagar, was found to enclose another statue, which contained apparent Muslim features. This statue is now kept in Hoi An.

<sup>9</sup> Dao Duy Anh, Viet Nam Van Hoa Su Cuong (An outline of history of Vietnamese culture), Xuat ban Bon Phuong, Saigon, 1961, p.223.

Mountains, forests, rivers, the memory of ancestors, respect for the dead and especially spirits are subjects of worships...There is a god for each man's fancy. Some worship a tree, others a stone, etc; it would thus be difficult to determine what sort of idol worship predominates in Cochinchina.<sup>10</sup>

In the north in the mid 17th century the Trinh were busy trying to show their orthodox credentials by "purifying society". In **Dang Trong**, however, such a policy would not have been possible, even if the Nguyen had wanted to do so, because the society itself was too diverse for even the appearance of orthodoxy, from its innumerable gods, goddesses, spirits and genies right through to the ethnic composition of its human population.

As Le Quang Nghiem points out,

living on the former land of Champa, Vietnamese immigrants were under the [immediate] influence of Cham culture. In an environment which was full of effective magic power, poisons and incantations, they made themselves to adopt Cham customs and rites.<sup>11</sup>

He says that, even early in this century, Vietnamese in former Dang Trong provinces used to invite Cham shamans to hold a ceremony called **cung Dang** (offerings to **Dang**, or "the devil" in Cham). Cups, plates, chopsticks and spoons could not be used in the rite, but only banana leaves, signalling a Cham or local origin.<sup>12</sup> Phu Bien, too, records that ritual ceremonies such as **khai son** (opening the mountains), **cau gio** (praying for good winds) and **ky hoa** (praying for good harvests) were held on the order of the local government and funded officially.<sup>13</sup>

But politically speaking, this was still not enough. The Nguyen did not simply have to survive with this diversity; they also had to ensure their dominant role in society. In this they were wise enough to give themselves and their regime a strong local colour. In Wolters' view, in Southeast Asia "the king's status was unique only because it was a religious one".<sup>14</sup> The actions of the 17th century Nguyen would tend to confirm this generation, for they quickly claimed to be

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<sup>10</sup> "Description of Cochinchina, 1749-50", section on "Idol worship".

<sup>11</sup> Le Quang Nghiem discusses worship to **Lo Luong** (**yon**i in Cham, meaning female genitals) and **Bo Do** (**linga**) among the Vietnamese in Khanh Hoa. Le Quang Nghiem, Tuc tho cung cua ngu-phu Khanh Hoa (Rites in the fishing region of Khanh Hoa), reprinted by Xuan Thu, Los Alamitos, California, nd, p.110.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*, pp.73-75.

<sup>13</sup> Phu Bien, vol.4, pp.9a, 10b, 11b, 25b, 41a.

<sup>14</sup> Wolters. O.W., History, Culture, and Region in Southeast Asian Perspectives, Singapore, 1982, p.19.

**thien vuong** (king of heaven),<sup>15</sup> in the cases of Nguyen Hoang, Nguyen Phuc Tran, and Nguyen Phuc Khoat, or **chua Sai** (Buddhist Priest Lord), in the case of Nguyen Phuc Chu. Da Shan, the Chinese Buddhist monk mentioned in previous chapters, observed in 1695 that the palace of Nguyen Phuc Chu was decorated with Buddhist flags, hangings, wooden fish, and inverted bells, just as a Buddhist temple.<sup>16</sup> By doing so, the Nguyen announced that they combined the powers of religious and imperial authorities in **Dang Trong**. They not only located Vietnamese national and cultural identity in the ruling family, they also showed the local peoples that they embodied the highest authority in the region. In the process, they drew a sharp line between themselves and the Trinh of the north, who still accepted the Confucian concept that the emperor could only be the son of heaven, not heaven itself.<sup>17</sup> Whether intentionally or not, the Nguyen's acceptance of the local trappings of divine rulership echoed what neighbouring kings in Champa and Cambodia had been doing for centuries.

It was a successful experiment. This non-Confucian pattern worked so well in **Dang Trong** that it helped provide an alternative for Vietnamese, a new social space - an intersection of the styles of their neighbours and themselves - in which Vietnamese could develop in non-traditional ways. It proved that Vietnamese society, even as late as the 17th and 18th centuries, could live, and indeed flourish, outside a Confucian or Chinese framework. Just how far from northern tradition **Dang Trong** moved is illustrated by the story of the Tay Son general in Nghe An, who poked fun at **xa tac**, the god of land and crops and thus an important Confucian deity, saying: "A dog is more useful than **xa tac**!"<sup>18</sup> The Tay Son general was not being consciously iconoclastic: rather he was ignorant. **Xa tac** had been basically unknown in **Dang Trong** for the whole of the Nguyen period. According to Ta Chi Dai Truong, **xa tac** temples did not appear here until the Minh Mang reign, when the court tried to unify Viet religious expression in

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<sup>15</sup> According to Viet-Nam Khai Quoc Chi Truyen (An early history of the Nguyen period, but written in a style of novel), both Nguyen Phuc Tan and Nguyen Phuc Tran were called Nam Thien Vuong (southern king of heaven) by the Khmer. See Viet-Nam Khai Quoc Chi Truyen, Collection Romans & Contes du Vietnam ecrites en Han, Vol.4, Ecole Francaise d'Extreme-Orient and Student Book Co.Ltd, Paris-Taipei, 1986, p.300. Surely it could not be the words in Khmer, yet it confirmed the Nguyen's way of calling themselves.

<sup>16</sup> Da Shan, Hai Wai Ji Shi, in Shi Qi Shi Ji Guang Nan zhi Xin Shi Liao, edited by Chen Ching-ho, Zhong Hua Cong Shu Bian Sheng Wei Yuan Hui, Taipei, 1960, p.15.

<sup>17</sup> Ta Chi Dai Truong, Than, Nguoi va Dat Viet (Deities, people and the land of Viet), Van Nghe Press, California, 1989, pp. 220-223.

<sup>18</sup> Viet Dien U Linh Tap (Anthology of the spirits of the departed of the Vietnamese domain), "comments to the 'xa tac'", made by Cao Huy Dieu in early 19th century. Trans. into Vietnamese by Le Huu Muc, Nha Sach Khai Tri, Saigon, 1961, p.218.

the late 1820s.<sup>19</sup> This incident indicates the tremendous difference in religious beliefs between **Dang Trong** and **Dang Ngoai** after two centuries of separation. Old values from the north had lost their meaning, while things totally unknown or heretical to the northerners, like the Cham goddess Po Ino Nagar, became meaningful to the people of **Dang Trong**. Beliefs and practices like Buddhism, which had been criticised for centuries by Confucian scholars from the Tran to the Le dynasties, developed into the leading religion, at the level of both in official policy and popular belief in **Dang Trong** society.

Changes in values affected other aspects of society, such as the role of the village. The village had been crucially important in traditional Vietnamese society. It combined social, economic, and religious functions in one, reflecting the way in which the Vietnamese peasantry had been tied to their land for centuries. However, only in the land-scarce Red River delta and the Thanh Hoa, Nghe An regions did Vietnamese villages fully approach their ideal type, responding to the need for periodic land redistribution. Also in these long settled and relatively immobile villages, as Dao Duy Anh points out, people's social positions were quite fixed, with the only variations commonly available depending on academic degrees won in the Confucian examinations, or their former official posts. However, the situation was different in the newly-opened areas, particularly from Quang Nam southward. Given relatively abundant land, moving was quite common among Vietnamese families and clans. Sometimes a whole village would move to another place. Any relation to the land established on such a basis could hardly be a closely knit and fixed one.

This sort of easy mobility clashed directly with the primacy of the collectivity - a basic Confucian idea about community life, emphasising the group's existence rather than the significance of the individual. The individual only mattered in terms of fixed relationships within the community. In other words, an individual became less than a person if he or she did not belong to any social group like a village. Ironically, it was such people who formed the main stream of the Vietnamese immigrants to the south. As one Vietnamese scholar described it, the south was a land for "those who did not have the right to live on the older

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<sup>19</sup> Ta Chi Dai Truong, Than, Ngoai va Dat Viet, p.235.

opened land".<sup>20</sup> Hickey, too, points out:

With the new village [of the south] therefore being established by lower status people rather than the patricians of the traditional society, a certain amount of esoteric knowledge concerning the old ways was inevitably lost. ... By the same token, however, the pioneers were less bound by the highly restrictive social ranking and the behaviour expectations of the older society, so they were free to innovate, an essential feature of their successful adjustment (and survival) as they moved continually southward.<sup>21</sup>

Under such circumstances, people tend to be more open and spontaneous. As Taylor describes Nguyen Hoang: "He dared to risk being pronounced a rebel, because he had found a place where this no longer mattered".<sup>22</sup> It was a much larger world, giving people a greater sense of freedom - freedom to choose the place they preferred and the way they wanted to live. This remarkable immigrants' way of thinking also shows through in many other aspects. We will finish with one example, their generosity towards others, including strangers.

Possibly because of the hardship they had encountered as migrants, people in **Dang Trong** were easily "touched with compassion" when someone cried **doi** (I am hungry) at their doors, according to Borri. But by the same token, they would ask anything they liked from a stranger, and expect a prompt and liberal response, just as they would do for him. As Borri recalled:

A Portuguese merchant, nothing liking this strange custom, seeing himself every day importuned to give whatsoever good thing he had, was one day disposed to carry himself in like manner toward them, and so coming to a poor fisherman's boat, and laying hands on a great pannier full of fish, he says unto him in the language of that country, **sin mocay [xin mot cay? xin mot cai?]**, give me this. The good man without further discourse gave him the pannier as it was, to carry away, which the Portuguese carried to his house accordingly, wondering at the liberality of the poor man.<sup>23</sup>

## Material Culture

Some of this liberality, of course, may have reflected the comparative wealth of early **Dang Trong**. The scattered population was not dense, while food and

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<sup>20</sup> Quoted from Huynh Lua, "Qua trinh khai pha vung Dong Nai-Cuu Long va hinh thanh mot so tinh cach, nep song va tap quan cua nguoi nong dan Nam Bo (Process of the opening of the Mekong delta and the making of some characteristics and customs of the peasants in the south)", May dac diem Dong bang Song Cuu Long (On some characteristics of the Mekong Delta), Vien Van Hoa, Hanoi, 1984, p.121.

<sup>21</sup> Hickey, "The Vietnamese village though time and war", The Vietnam Forum, Yale Southeast Asia Studies, No.10, 1987, p.18.

<sup>22</sup> Keith Taylor, "Nguyen Hoang", p.29.

<sup>23</sup> Borri, op.cit., p.E6.

resources were abundant and easy of access. It made possible a pattern of life resembling their Southeast Asian neighbours, rather than their Vietnamese compatriots in the north, and encouraged them to adopt and adapt aspects of the material life of other peoples in the region.

Examples are numerous. For instance, until the late 18th century most of the common people's houses in Cochinchina stood on poles, just as in other Southeast Asian countries. "Their houses are so constructed that they can be opened up below to let the water pass through, and for this reason they are always perched on huge stilts".<sup>24</sup> Perhaps more importantly, as Reid points out, this style helped "to ensure that the house could be bodily moved if required".<sup>25</sup> The shrines (small boxes) on trees which we mentioned above seemed to follow the same principle.

Moving from houses to ships, we find a Malay type of boat, **ghe bau**, which was widely used between the 16th and 19th centuries in **Dang Trong**. It was almost certainly borrowed from the Cham, as the region of its use extended from Hoi An south to Thuan Hai, the area where the Cham used to live. Some Vietnamese scholars suggest that not only the techniques involved but also the words **ghe** and **bau** were borrowed from the Malays. They point out the similarity of Vietnamese word **ghe** and Malay **gai** (rope or stay to hold mast), and suggest that **bau** was a corrupt pronunciation of Malay **prahu**.<sup>26</sup> Certainly Barrow's observation of the vessels in the Tourane region would support this. He noted they were "of various descriptions: many of them, like the Chinese **Sampans**, covered with sheds of matting,... and others resembling the common **proas** of the Malays, both as to their hulls and rigging".<sup>27</sup>

Turning to farming tools, some Vietnamese historians have noticed clear Cham influences on them, especially on the Vietnamese plough. The plough used by Vietnamese in the Red River and the Ma River deltas is not strong at its sole, possesses a small tongue, and light enough for one draft animal to pull. This kind of plough is suitable for earth which is not compacted, and where the grass is not

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<sup>24</sup> Rhodes, Alexandre de, Rhodes of Viet Nam: The Travels and Missions of Father Alexandre de Rhodes in China and Other Kingdoms of Orient, trans. By S.Hertz, Newman Press, 1966, p.44. Da Shan, Hai Wai Ji Shi, Vol.2, p.4. Barrow, A Voyage, p.301.

<sup>25</sup> Reid, A., Southeast Asia in the Age of Commerce, 1450-1680, Vol.1, p.62.

<sup>26</sup> Nguyen Boi Lien, Tran Van An and Nguyen Van Phi, "Ghe bau Hoi An - Xu Quang" (Ghe bau junks in the Hoi An-Quang Nam area), paper given on the International Symposium on the Ancient Town of Hoi An, March 1990, pp.2-3.

<sup>27</sup> Barrow, A Voyage, p.319.

thick. It matched the characteristics of the land in the north - cultivated for thousands of years by a dense population - and can only be seen north of the Gianh River, the border between **Dang Ngoai** and **Dang Trong**. When Vietnamese came down from the north, the land they discovered was thick with grass and hard to farm. It was for this reason that the Vietnamese adapted the Cham plough and improved it for their own use. The plough used by the Cham farmers was strong, especially at its sole. Vietnamese added a **nang** (follicle) to adjust the angle, in the process making it into a new style of plough. Strikingly, all the names for parts derived from the Cham plough retained Cham names, such as **Poh Lingal** for the colter, **Iku** for the handle, **Thru** for the tongue; while the parts associated with the **nang** have Vietnamese names only, like **to nang** or **te nang**. This kind of plough travelled south to the Mekong delta with immigrant Vietnamese peasants. There the plough was strengthened further, making it suitable for marshland.<sup>28</sup>

Apart from these examples, the influence of Cham culture was so ubiquitous that it has often survived in the customs of central Vietnam up to present: from eating raw food (**an goi**), to the way they wrapped their hair into a piece of cloth (**doi khan**),<sup>29</sup> to burial in Cham style graves, although the Vietnamese themselves do not necessarily know the non-Vietnamese origin of these customs.<sup>30</sup> One of the borrowed Cham customs which has disappeared today, but which was a significantly non-traditional feature of Dang Trong life, was the use of the elephant. Under Cham influence, Dang Trong Vietnamese used elephants in many more ways than they did in the north. One of these new uses was as a form of entertainment. Although the Vietnamese army did have elephant troops in earlier history, and elephants were used in royal ceremonies, elephant catching and fighting did not seem to be forms of entertainment as they were for Cham kings. The Cham way of catching elephants was described by a Spaniard in 1595:

The fifth [festival is when the king goes hunting elephants, taking with him nobility and chief men of his kingdom, and they take along their female elephants, together with 500 or 600 Indians with their fibre nets, which are cords of rattan, and they surround the hill where the elephants are, which

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<sup>28</sup> Ngo Duc Thinh and Nguyen Viet, "Cac loai hinh cay hien dai cua dan toc o Dong Nam A" (Types of ploughs in Southeast Asia), Tap Chi Khao Co Hoc (Journal of Archaeology), No.4, 1981, pp.55-56. For further discussion on Khmer plough, see Dang Van Thang, "Nong cu truyen thong o Can Duoc" (The traditional tools of agriculture in Can Duoc), Can Duoc, Dat va Nguoi (Land and people in Can Duoc), So Van hoa - Thong tin Long An, 1988, pp.135-136.

<sup>29</sup> This Cham way of decorating their hair is recorded in Xing Jue Sheng Lan, written in the 15th century by Fei Xin. See Xing Jue Sheng Lan, Zhong Hua Shu Ju, Beijing, 1954, p.3.

<sup>30</sup> The graves around the Hue area are quite different from both north and south Vietnam. I am grateful to Prof.Do Van Ninh, who kindly pointed out to me that they are exactly in old Cham style.



follow after the former into a little space which they have very strongly stockaded for this purpose, and there they keep them for some days until they are tamed.<sup>31</sup>

Da Shan, the Chinese monk who travelled to Cochinchina in 1694 described exactly the same technique used by the people in **Dang Trong**, no doubt adopted from the Cham. The festival of hunting elephants by the Cham king was further developed by the Nguyen rulers to amuse foreigners. According to Barrow,

one amusement that the sovereigns of Cochinchina usually entertain foreign ambassadors was an excursion into the forests to hunt elephants, on which occasion they usually celebrate the royal feast of elephants.<sup>32</sup>

Poivre described in 1750 how the king and high officials and people were well amused to watch 12 tigers killed by 40 elephants in one day.<sup>33</sup> Crawford and Finlayson observed the same kind of fight in 1822. This practice was similar to that of the Siamese and the Malay, as Reid has observed.<sup>34</sup> This would have seemed strange and barbarous to the king and mandarins in the north at the time.

The Cham way of punishing criminals with elephants, which had been recorded in Chinese sources since the 6th century, was adapted by the Nguyen as well. This practice was always carried out publicly. According to Borri,

The order being this: that first he [the elephant] shall seize on him [the criminal], take him and strain him with his trunk, and hold him so cast him up with violence, and receive him again on the point of his teeth, that by the heavy fall of his weight he may gage himself thereon, and that then he dash him against the ground, and that in the end he tread him under his feet.<sup>35</sup>

Elephants remained in use well up to the early 19th century. According to White, they were also employed in fire fighting:

To prevent the fire from spreading, the adjacent houses are prostrated by means of the elephants, one of these powerful animals being sufficient to level with the ground any common building in the country; sometimes, however, two are required. The mode of effecting this is by pushing with their heads against the object to which they are directed by their drivers,

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<sup>31</sup> Boxer, C.R., "A Spanish description of the Chams in 1595", Readings on Asian Topics, Scandinavian Institute of Asian studies monograph series, 1969?, pp.41-42.

<sup>32</sup> Barrow, A Voyage, p.290. Poivre confirmed that people in Dang Trong eat elephants. See Journal, p.472.

<sup>33</sup> Poivre, Journal, pp.471-472.

<sup>34</sup> Reid, Southeast Asia in the Age of Commerce, Vol.1, pp.184-185.

<sup>35</sup> Borri, Cochin-china, p.H1.

by which its total demolition is speedily effected. His excellency [i.e. Le Van Duyet] was in great humour, and laughed heartily while he directed the attention of our party to the summary operations of his elephants, who were throwing down several houses.<sup>36</sup>

Cham influence also affected Nguyen official practices, especially the form of taxation. As we saw in Chapter Five, Nguyen officials did not get salaries from the government, but were given control over the revenues of a certain number of taxpayers. This Cham practice was also found in Laos at the time, as the Nam Chuong Ky Luoc (Records on Lan Chang) confirms<sup>37</sup>. In the north, on the other hand, the Tran dynasty had started to pay its officials as early as 1236 A.D. We thus can see an interesting contrast: while an official in the **Dang Ngoai** in the 17th and 18th centuries would be found guilty if he took any of the taxes he collected, his counterpart in **Dang Trong** saw it as the legitimate way to make his living. In this as in many other things, the Nguyen must have found that taking on local colour was not only convenient but also generally to their own advantage.

Certainly localisation was the greatest strength of the movement that brought the Nguyen state down, the Tay Son (literally western mountain). The next sections consider the causes of this famous rebellion within its proper historical context, as a product of and reaction to local **Dang Trong** history; the chapter ends with a discussion of the Tay Son as an outstanding example of Vietnamese localisation in their new southern land.

### Shortcomings of Current Explanations of the Tay Son

Several hundred books and articles have been published on the Tay Son in Vietnam since the beginning of this century. Almost all focused on Quang Trung (Nguyen Hue), regarding him as the most brilliant figure in Vietnamese history. As leader of a peasant rebellion, he was superior to Hong Xiu Quan, leader of the 1850s Tai Ping Tian Guo in China. As a general who beat the foreign invaders he was better than Ly Thuong Kiet and Tran Quoc Tuan in the Ly and Tran dynasties. As a king who promoted **Nom** characters he was regarded as being as culturally progressive as Ho Quy Ly in the 15th century. And as an

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<sup>36</sup> John White, A Voyage to Cochin China, Oxford University Press, Kuala Lumpur, 1972, p.320.

<sup>37</sup> Nam Chuong Ky Luoc, kept in Ecole Francaise d'Extreme-Orient in microfilm. . "the officials have no salaries. They live on their taxpayers who were given them according to their ranks by the king".

ethnic Vietnamese he even provided the best example of rallying the minority peoples to fight against feudalist rulers. In short, Quang Trung, as a symbol of the Tay Son, fulfilled various needs of nationalist as well as Marxist historiography, and embodied all the best qualities needed by the Vietnamese revolution in recent decades.<sup>38</sup>

Certainly the Tay Son appealed to modern nationalists for numerous reasons. Since the 1860s Vietnam had been forced to face the question of whether it could exist as an independent country, and needed all the heroes it could find to muster its national forces to meet the situation. As a result, however, the Tay Son, and Nguyen Hue in particular, became mythologised, or turned into symbols. Such political myths and symbols tell us more about the needs of the people who developed them than they do about the historical figures they praise. The Tay Son cannot be understood historically in this way. While Vietnamese scholars devoted almost all their pages to extolling the Tay Son rebellion's superiority, very little attention was given to the Nguyen. As a consequence, the more the Tay Son's greatness was discussed, the more mysterious its dramatic rise and fall became. Such scholarship failed to realise that the Tay Son's strength grew out of, and reacted to, two hundred years of Nguyen rule. Nguyen history in **Dang Trong** took such a different course from that of the north that to try to understand the Tay Son according to outside models risks failure, or worse. Some examples of current explanations of the causes of the Tay Son will illustrate the problem.

Nguyen Hong Phong, Van Tan and other Marxist historians in the north suggest that the Tay Son broke out because of the landholding system. Nguyen Hong Phong claims that the Tay Son's aim was to "share the land equally among the people".<sup>39</sup> This comment might explain many peasant rebellions in the world, but unfortunately not the Tay Son. According to Phu Bien, in 1769 the arable land of Quy Nhon was 72600 mau, with 15733 taxpayers, hence averaging 4 mau land per taxpayer in Quy Nhon, whereas in the Thuan Hoa region the average was

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<sup>38</sup> See, for instance, Jean Chesneaux's comment on the Tay Son: "The rise of ...the Tay Son once more confirms the fact that peasant insurrection was the driving force in the political development of feudal Vietnam. It was peasant insurrection which succeeded in maintaining Vietnamese independence by repulsing the Machus under the banners of the Tay Son ... Peasant insurrections had constantly strengthened the tendencies making for the unity of Vietnam." The Vietnamese Nation, Malcolm Salmon trans. Current Book Distributors, Sydney, 1966, p.44.

<sup>39</sup> Nguyen Hong Phong, "Van de ruong dat trong lich su che do phong kien Viet Nam" (The land question in the history of Vietnam's feudal system), NCLS, no.1, 1959, p.54.

only one **mau** per taxpayer.<sup>40</sup> Yet the rebellion happened in Quy Nhon rather than in Thuan Hoa. With conditions of abundant land but relatively scarce manpower in the south, land was not a major problem, and it could not be the cause of such a big rebellion. Perhaps for that reason, the Tay Son rebellion did little or nothing about the landholding system subsequently, much to the regret of some Hanoi historians, who have suggested that it was the basic reason for the fall of the Tay Son.<sup>41</sup>

Nor did famine cause the Tay Son rebellion. Rather, it happened at a time of prosperity.<sup>42</sup> When the Trinh army invaded **Dang Trong**, they obtained 1,400,000 **bat** (700 kilolitres) easily from the first granary they reached.<sup>43</sup> The cash they later obtained from the Nguyen central storehouse was 300,000 **quan** (about 176,471 taels of silver in 1774) in excellent coins.<sup>44</sup> The worst famine in **Dang Trong's** history, which Nguyen Luong Bich presents as a convenient explanation for the Tay Son,<sup>45</sup> happened in October 1774, when the transport route between Gia Dinh and Hue was cut because the Tay Son rose in Quy Nhon. In other words, the famine was a result rather than a cause of the Tay Son upheaval.

So, if there are serious objections to the standard Vietnamese accounts of the causes of the Tay Son movement, how do we explain it? I believe we need to look at it as a product of **Dang Trong** society, as a special case rather than simply the most successful example of a common phenomenon of peasant rebellion. We will conclude with a quick overview that places the movement in its proper historical context, as the direct but unexpected result of **Dang Trong's** own spectacular growth, and as an example of successful Vietnamese localisation in the new southern land.

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<sup>40</sup> Phu Bien, vol.3, p.105b.

<sup>41</sup> Nguyen Luong Bich, "Nguyen nhan thanh bai cua cach mang Tay Son" (The reasons of the success and the fall for the Tay Son revolution), Van Su Dia, no.14, 1958.

<sup>42</sup> Official historians of the Nguyen court in the 19th century deliberately created this confusion by saying: "It was during a bad harvest year that the bandits [meaning the Tay Son] rose." See Dai Nam Chinh Bien Liet Truyen So Tap, vol.30, biographies of the Tay Son, p.1331. If we look at the Tien Bien, however, no such records of natural disasters appear either in 1770 or 1771.

<sup>43</sup> Phu Bien, vol.1, p.46b.

<sup>44</sup> Phu Bien, vol.4.p.21a.

<sup>45</sup> Nguyen Luong Bich, Quang Trung Nguyen Hue, Quan Doi Nhan Dan, Hanoi, 1989, p.10.

## Nguyen Dang Trong and causes of the Tay Son

By the mid-18th century, the Nguyen state system was becoming a victim of its own success. To begin with, the principal administrative divisions of the Nguyen needed adjustment by the 18th century. The kingdom was basically divided into two protectorates: Thuan Hoa, containing the land from Quang Binh, its northern border, to Hue; and Quang Nam, comprising all the remaining territory south to the Mekong delta. This division had existed from the Hong Duc reign in the 15th century, when the Vietnamese seized the land north of Cape Varella. It had worked reasonably well till the mid-17th century. In the late 1670s, however, the Mekong delta was increasingly drawn into the orbit of the Quang Nam protectorate. From then on it began to develop rapidly as a rice producing area.<sup>46</sup> In reality, the Nguyen kingdom now comprised at least three distinctive regions: land taken from Champa in the late 15th century (Thuan Hoa to Quy Nhon); land taken from the Cham from the mid-17th century (Phu Yen to Binh Khang); and Dong Nai (the Mekong region) which only came under Nguyen rule from the late 17th century. However, the huge and expanding area south of Thuan Hoa all came under the governing authority of Quang Nam. This impractical system only created institutional and administrative problems for the distant Nguyen court in Hue.

It also reflects the inadequate administrative control of the Nguyen in 18th century Dang Trong in general, as a consequence of its own rapid southward expansion. The chronicles of the Nguyen show that during the 1750s Khmer affairs and their confrontation with Siam became the main concerns of the Hue court. But Nguyen eagerness outstripped the regime's administrative capacity. Not only was **Dang Trong** long and narrow, with its capital far to the north, but also a small Cham state still existed between it and the Mekong delta. In these circumstances, it was difficult for Hue to supply any real, practical help for frontier affairs.

As a result, while the Mekong delta brought a treasure trove to the Nguyen, it also increasingly came to prove to be a trial to the Nguyen regime in the 18th century. In the 17th century, the machinery of government had proved sufficient to run the relatively compact territory of older **Dang Trong**. But expansion to the Mekong delta, and particularly the difficulties presented by the semi-

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<sup>46</sup> The subordination of the Mac (different from the Mac of 16th century northern Vietnam) in the early 18th century brought Ha Tien under the Nguyen's protection.

independent Mac Cuu fiefdom in the Ha Tien region, created a whole new situation for which this form of government was poorly adapted. In addition, the Nguyen found themselves in direct confrontation with the Khmer and the Thai. The cultural world of the Mekong delta was itself almost another universe from the longer settled regions of Thuan Hoa and Quang Nam, and could not be successfully governed for long simply as an extension of the older Nguyen territory. In fact, the whole **Dang Trong** administrative system needed to be re-organised if it was to deal with the Mekong delta; and to accomplish this a vigorous regime was needed. While some reforms did happen in the 1740s, in general the task was beyond the 18th century Nguyen. When pushed too hard, the whole system was thrown out of its normal orbit into unprecedented instability.

The Nguyen reacted to the difficulties resulting from their expansion of power to the far south by increasing their demands on certain crucial areas of older **Dang Trong**. In particular, this brought serious consequences for the provinces neighbouring Dong Nai, the Quy Nhon area especially. The region from Quy Nhon to Binh Thuan had to bear a disproportionately heavy burden for the Nguyen's southern and western expansion in the mid-18th century. In the 1760s and the early 1770s, the manpower and wealth of this region was repeatedly called on by the Nguyen. Taxation rules here became stricter, and special arrangements were made to collect taxes from Phu Yen in 1758, and from Quy Nhon in 1772.<sup>47</sup> When the uplanders (**Da Vach**) attacked Quang Ngai peasants in 1770, Hue sent called on soldiers recruited from Quy Nhon and Phu Yen to repress the revolt. Even more striking, in 1772, a whole year after the Tay Son had risen in Quy Nhon, the Nguyen still directed 10,000 soldiers and 30 galleys from the neighbouring regions of Binh Khang and Binh Thuan to go and fight against the Siamese in Ha Tien.<sup>48</sup>

Pressure on Quy Nhon also came from its northern direction. Population growth in Thuan Hoa, perhaps also in the Quang Nam region in the 18th century, demanded more rice be transported from the Mekong delta.<sup>49</sup> This made the transport route between the center and the south more and more important. But even this weighed more heavily on Quy Nhon. According to the Phu Bien, in

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<sup>47</sup> Tien Bien, vol.11, pp.148, 158.

<sup>48</sup> Tien Bien, vol.11, p.158.

<sup>49</sup> See discussion on currency demand in Chapter Four.

1768 Quy Nhon supplied about one-fifth of the 341 boats levied by the government to transport rice from the Mekong delta to Thuan Hoa. The numbers of boats per region were as follows:<sup>50</sup>

place	numbers of boats
Trieu Phong	40
Quang Binh	10
Nam Bo Chinh	10
Quang Nam	60
Quy Nhon	93
Phu Xuan	44
Dien Khanh	32
Binh Thuan	45
Gia Dinh	7

All this suggests that, as an intermediate region, Quy Nhon had to bear great demands on its manpower as well as its wealth, from both northern and southern **Dang Trong**, as a consequence of Vietnamese southward expansion.

Another factor made things worse. The Nguyen decided to get involved in Khmer affairs, in order to obtain more land, just at the time when their overseas trade began to decline from the late 1740s. Needing resources for this ambitious, new undertaking, the court stepped up pressure on mountain peoples to help make up the revenue shortfall from the decline in overseas trade. The east and west had served the Nguyen well in the past, so their main attention had been given first to the threat from the north, and then to expansion to the south. The relatively peaceful relations with the uplanders for two centuries had encouraged the Nguyen to take the west for granted. As a result, they pushed the uplanders to the limit.

In this sense, the Tay Son movement can be regarded as a conflict between the centre and the expanding periphery. It began more like a provincial rebellion, rather than a peasant revolt.<sup>51</sup>

New taxation demands also affected Vietnamese peasants. As suggested in Chapter Five, one of the immediate causes of their participation in the Tay Son revolt seems to have been the additional land taxes imposed on Quang Nam from

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<sup>50</sup> Phu Bien, vol.4, p.41.

<sup>51</sup> For instance, when the Tay Son movement erupted, Nguyen Khac Tuyen, the provincial governor in Quy Nhon, as well as Dang and Luong, two tax collectors (do trung) sent by the central government, were said to have escaped. Interestingly, Nguyen Khac Tuyen escaped easily, but Nguyen Nhac continued to chase Dang and Luong, "killed Luong, and exterminated the entire family of Dang". See Chinh Bien Liet Tuyen So Tap, vol.30, p.1332.

the 1750s. An even heavier one was implemented in 1769, on the area from Quang Nam to Dien Khanh, which demanded a 55% increase in rice and 75% in cash.<sup>52</sup> The later Nguyen dynasty biography of Tay Son leaders argued that the Tay Son broke out as a result of the imperious and despotic activities of the Regent, Truong Phuc Loan.<sup>53</sup> At first glance, court affairs might seem distant from the ordinary people who joined the Tay Son rebels, except that "people said that the miscellaneous levies collected from the Quang Nam region started when Truong Phuc Loan came to power".<sup>54</sup> Loan's demands were the spark that set the dry tinder of popular unrest alight here. But what fanned the flames afterwards was the existing taxation system. When the people were squeezed to the extreme, it left little for most of the Nguyen officials themselves to live on. The great dilemma of the Nguyen remuneration system for officials was thus exposed: while it had been convenient and effective for the Nguyen in good times, in the difficult times of the mid-18th century meeting the needs of the officials could only make things worse for the government. The same can be said about the Nguyen army. Their demands aggravated the already tense situation between the Nguyen and its taxpayers.

On top of all this, in the mid-18th century the Nguyen regime itself was in a process of transition, changing from a military machine into a civil government. In the 18th century, the Nguyen regime seems to have reached a new position where it needed to adjust to the unprecedented conditions brought about by its own growth: the territorial over-expansion, a shift in the revenue balance from overseas trade to agriculture, and the political imbalance and manoeuvres between court factions, all grew out of the nature of the Nguyen polity. These stresses and changes all required innovative government responses, which the Nguyen failed to provide. We will never know whether the Nguyen might have found adequate solutions in time, for the Tay Son rose precisely at this moment.

Other rebellions had happened before in **Dang Trong** without seriously threatening the government. What made the Tay Son movement so strong? Where did it find the energy, the drive, and the determination that helped push it to a previously unimagined level of success? First and foremost, and especially in the early years, the movement benefited from its close involvement with the

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<sup>52</sup> See Table 7 in Chapter 5.

<sup>53</sup> Dai Nam Chinh Bien Liet Truyen So Tap, vol.30, p.1331.

<sup>54</sup> Phu Bien, vol.4, p.2a.



uplanders. While the Nguyen themselves drew advantages from their contacts with the local peoples, and from adopting and adapting elements of their cultures in the early days, ironically this same process also helped create the enemy that almost destroyed them. The Tay Son movement itself was a direct product of Vietnamese localisation. The Tay Son were ethnically mixed, and emerged in the region most influenced by the mixing of cultures.<sup>55</sup> What had originally made the Nguyen so powerful now made the Tay Son unbeatable. This dynamism gave the Tay Son a tremendous energy which, under Nguyen Hue's leadership, no one could resist, not the Nguyen, not the Trinh, nor the Siamese, nor the Chinese.

As we have argued, the Tay Son movement began as a southern phenomenon. To a very considerable extent, it can be understood in the 1770s as little more than a local attempt to displace the equally southern Nguyen regime, and to rule **Dang Trong** in its stead. Local characteristics played an important part in attracting and keeping the Tay Son's followers, many of them uplanders, in its early years. We will finish with a survey of some of these features.

#### **The Tay Son as a product of Dang Trong localisation**

The Tay Son emerged in a region of mixed cultural influences, and drew on a variety of sources for their strength, not the least of which were local legends and myths.

One of the most important of these concerned the existence of a sacred sword that conferred invulnerability on its owner. Similar legends about a sacred sword existed among the Khmer, Jarai, Bahnar, Mnong, and other upland peoples; and the supposed ownership of such a sacred sword by the King of Water in the highlands prompted the Khmer king to send him gifts every year.<sup>56</sup> This sword was so powerful that it would enhance the owner's prestige and guarantee his supernatural power to succeed in any battle. More important, it was a symbol of sovereignty. Leclere cites chronicles describing in 1613 how Soryopor, the Khmer

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<sup>55</sup> There is a striking similarity between the environment of the Tay Son and that of Lam Son, the place from which Le Loi rose and founded the Le dynasty. According to Gaspardone, Lam Son was very much a frontier region in the 15th century. He says that the village of Lam Son "situated in between plain and mountain in the Annamite-Muong area", and "in the 15th century, Tho Xuan was a barbarous region, infested with wild animals" where Vietnamese, Muong and Tai peoples mixed. In fact he says that the area of Lam Son was more Muong in appearance than Vietnamese. Quoted from John Whitmore, The Development of Le Government in Fifteenth Century Vietnam, Ph.D thesis, University Microfilms, Inc., Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1970, p.4.

<sup>56</sup> Hickey has discussed those legends in detail in his Sons of the Mountains, pp.126-136.

ruler "took the sacred sword and sat under [a] sacred parasol" to take the oath of royal office.<sup>57</sup> Hickey says that Cham rulers would give Cham vassal chiefs "a Cham saber and seal and the Cham title of **botao** or **potao**", which means "lord" or "master", and in some contexts was tantamount to "king".<sup>58</sup>

It is therefore easy to understand why Nguyen Nhac claimed to possess a "sacred sword" in the early period of the Tay Son. This rebellion has been so studied from the political point of view that its local and religious aspects have been largely overlooked. No mention has been made about this sword in important scholarly works on the Tay Son.<sup>59</sup> Yet according to the Nguyen dynasty's Chinh Bien Liet Truyen So Tap (First collection of the primary compilation of biographies of Imperial Vietnam), Nhac:

obtained a sword one day when he was passing An Duong Son mountain.<sup>60</sup> He claimed that it was sacred and deluded people with the sword. Many people believed in him.<sup>61</sup>

The degree of Tay Son localisation appears more clearly if we consider this in conjunction with Nguyen Nhac's title. At least one contemporary source records Nhac styled himself "king of heaven".<sup>62</sup> There is a distinct possibility that the real local word behind the two Chinese characters was **potao**, meaning "lord" or "master", or sometimes "king". In other words, Nhac claimed for himself the local title the Nguyen had tolerated or accepted from indigenous peoples in the south. Nor did Nguyen Nhac choose Quy Nhon, Hue or Hoi An as his capital, but decided instead to enlarge the city of Do Ban, the old capital of the Cham

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<sup>57</sup> Leclere, Histoire du Cambodge, p.337.

<sup>58</sup> Hickey, Sons of the Mountains, p.117.

<sup>59</sup> See Hoa Bang, Quang Trung Nguyen Hue, Xuat Ban Bon Phuong, Saigon, 4th edition, 1958; Ta Chi Dai Truong, Lich Su Noi Chien o Viet Nam, tu 1771 den 1802 (A history of civil war in Vietnam, 1771-1802), Van Su Hoc, Saigon, 1973; Nguyen Luong Bich, Quang Trung Nguyen Hue, Nha Xuat Ban Quan Doi Nhan Dan, Hanoi, 1989.

<sup>60</sup> The An Duong Son mountain, according to Dai Nam Nhat Thong Chi, is in the south of Tuy Vien county, in the Ba river valley in Quy Nhon. It is said that Sedang and Bahnar peoples here are good at casting swords. It would not have been difficult to obtain a sword from such a region. See Cuu Long Giang & Toan Anh, Cao Nguyen Mien Thuong, Vol.2, pp.284 and 309.

<sup>61</sup> Dai Nam Chinh Bien Liet Truyen So Tap (First collection of the primary compilation of biographies of Imperial Vietnam), 1841, reprinted by the Keio Institute of Linguistic Studies, Mita Siba, Minato-ku, Tokyo, 1962, Vol.30, p.1331.

<sup>62</sup> Hoang Le Nhat Thong Chi, Collection Romans & Contes du Vietnam ecrite en Han, Ecole Francaise d'Extreme-Orient & Student Book Co.Ltd, Paris-Taipei, 1986, p.62.

kingdom in Quy Nhon.<sup>63</sup> Nothing could have been more effective than all this to symbolize the Tay Son's native characteristics.

Beside Vietnamese residents in the Tay son area, local minorities formed an important part in the basic force of the Tay Son in its early period (Chinese traders did not join the Tay Son until 1773). They included the Bahnar from Phuong Kieu nguyen, Bahnar (?) from An Tuong nguyen, and a group of Cham in Phu Yen, isolated from the Cham king in Thuan Thanh and led by a female chief named Thi Hoa. According to Phuong Dinh Dia Du Chi (A geographical record written by Nguyen Van Sieu during Tu Duc reign), the Cham king (in Thuan Thanh ?) also presented his treasure (regalia?), which had passed from generation to generation, to Nguyen Nhac.<sup>64</sup> Added to this we should mention the well known story that Nguyen Nhac had a second wife, a Bahnar, who was good at taming elephants.<sup>65</sup> True or not, it implies a close relationship between the Tay Son and the local peoples.

Another locally significant aspect of the Tay Son is also shown by their use of the red color on their banners. This has been much misunderstood. According to the literati of the Nguyen dynasty in the 19th century, who understood it in light of the Zhou Yi (The Book Of Changes), red was the colour of the south. Yet Ta Chi Dai Truong suggests that this colour should not be understood by reference to the Zhou Yi, that is, from within a Confucian framework. Rather he believes the Tay Son had a strong sense of being western, as shown in prophecy "Tay khoi nghia, Bac thu cong" (rebel from the west and succeed in the north). Therefore, red to them was "a colour of the deity in the west, a colour of mountains, of the hidden supernatural".<sup>66</sup> Chapman observed that Nguyen Nhac's clothes were "distinguished by being red, which colour no subject is allowed to use in dress or equipage".<sup>67</sup> This was very different from that of the north, where yellow was the

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<sup>63</sup> Minh Do Su, Vol.14: "This town is about 30 li(9.321 miles) in circumference. In the town there are old Cham temples, stone elephants and lions". According to Phan Huy Le, however, this town is only 7400 m (14.8 li, or 4.598 miles) in circumference. See "Di tích thành Hoang De (The ruins of the Imperial City)", in Tay Son Nguyen Hue, Ty Van hoa va Thong tin, Nghia Binh, 1978, p.150.

<sup>64</sup> Nguyen Van Sieu, Phuong Dinh Dia Du Chi, quoted from Lam Giang, Hung Khi Tay Son (The vigor of the Tay Son), Son Quang Press, Saigon, 1968, p.15.

<sup>65</sup> Vu Minh Giang, "Tay Son Thuong dao, can cu dau tien cua cuoc khoi nghia" (The upper trail of Tay Son mountain region, the first base for the uprising), in Tay Son Nguyen Hue, pp.134-135.

<sup>66</sup> Ta Chi Dai Truong, Than, Nguoi va Dat Viet, p.234.

<sup>67</sup> Chapman's narrative, in Lamb, The Mandarin Road to Old Hue, p.101.

royal colour as in China. Ta Chi Dai Truong comments: "It is clear that the influence of the mountain region, the religions of the minority peoples, penetrated and became the dominant ideology of the Tay Son in its early period".<sup>68</sup>

In fact "western" was how people referred to the Tay Son at the time, whether in **Dang Trong** or **Dang Ngoai**. The most common term on Nguyen Anh's side for the Tay Son was "Tay tac" (bandits from the west). In the north the terms were "Tay nhan" (people from the west), or "Tay trieu" (the Western dynasty). The word **Tay** underlines the most distinctive characteristics of the Tay Son. Different from the Nguyen, who had kept their attention mainly on in the north and south, the Tay Son showed a particular interest in the west. In 1791<sup>69</sup> the Tay Son general Tran Quang Dieu attacked Vientiane with an army of 10,000 soldiers.<sup>70</sup>

We see the "western" or uplander connection in the strategic trail in Quang Ngai which helped the Tay Son make a successful attack on Phu Xuan in 1785.<sup>71</sup> According to Dai Nam Nhat Thong Chi, "the local people here said that this trail was opened by Tran Quang Dieu, the Tay Son general".<sup>72</sup> The main source of labour for building this so-called "thuong dao" (upper trail) came from ethnic minority peoples, according to the Quang Ngai Tinh Chi.<sup>73</sup> Again in 1786 Nguyen Hue used the trail to attack Thang Long. A Vietnamese scholar even suggests that "the famous Ho Chi Minh trail [within the territory of Vietnam] was only part of the trail built under the command of Tran Quang Dieu in the 18th

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<sup>68</sup> Ta Chi Dai Truong, Than, Nguoi va Dat Viet, p.234.

<sup>69</sup> About the date of this attack sources do not seem agree with each other. Hoa Bang's book says that it was in 1791. History of Laos says it was in 1788. Nien Bieu Lich Su Co Trung Dai Viet Nam (A chronological table of Vietnam) says it happened from lunar June to October 1790, and Siam chronicles agree with this date. Meanwhile, the Quy Hop documents contain several letters between Lao and the Tay Son which suggest an attack at least happened between 1792 and 1793. It seems that two attacks may have been made by the Tay Son on Vientiane. See Hoa Bang, Quang Trung, p.262; Maha Sila Viravong, History of Laos, Paragon Book Reprint Corp. New York, 1964, pp.109-110; The Dynastic Chronicle, Bangkok Era, the First Reign, translated & edited by Thadeus & Chadin Flood, The Center for East Asian Studies, Tokyo, 1978, Vol.1, pp.170-171; Tran Van Quy, "Tu lieu lich su ve quan he Viet-Lao phat hien o Quy Hop-Huong Khe Nghe Tinh" (On the Vietnamese-Lao relations according to the documents discovered in Quy Hop-Huong Khe region, Nghe Tinh province), mimeograph, pp.9-12.

<sup>70</sup> A Thai source, however, says that Vietnamese had only 3000 soldiers. See The Dynastic Chronicle, pp.170-171.

<sup>71</sup> Le Trong Khanh, "Ve nhung con duong hanh quan cua Nguyen Hue" (on the march routes of Nguyen Hue), Tay Son Nguyen Hue, Nghia Binh, p.335.

<sup>72</sup> Dai Nam Nhat Thong Chi, Vol.2, p.784. It says that the trail runs from Binh Dinh (Quy Nhon) to as far north as Nghe An.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid, p.337.

century".<sup>74</sup> Tay Son identification with the west may have prompted scholars in the north at the time to call Nguyen Nhac "man tu" (barbarian chief)<sup>75</sup>, and Tay Son soldiers "man binh" (barbarian soldiers) or "man khau" (barbarian bandits).<sup>76</sup> It also helps explain why they referred to Nguyen Hue as Che Bong Nga, after he attacked Thang Long in the late 18th century just as Che Bong Nga, the greatest Cham king, did in the 14th century. While this close identification with the west may have seemed strange and barbarian to northern scholars at the time, it worked to strengthen the Tay Son's position in **Dang Trong** rather than weakening it.

To conclude, we can see from this and earlier chapters that historical circumstances placed Vietnamese people in 17th and 18th century **Dang Trong** in a special position. They were given the chance to develop greater cultural flexibility, to create new traditions rather than mainly perpetuate the old, as in the north. Vietnamese society here looked for and responded to the possibilities and challenges from new directions and foreign peoples. This represented one of the few chances history gave the Vietnamese to reinterpret their tradition in a fresh and lively way. The localized Vietnamese identity they developed in response seemed to successfully answer the challenges of the new environment. As a result, another Vietnamese society emerged in the new southern land, demonstrably Vietnamese but nevertheless different from the one which had been built up for centuries in the Red River delta.

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<sup>74</sup> Lam Giang, Hung Khi Tay Son.

<sup>75</sup> Luu Cong Dao, Thanh Hoa Vinh Loc Huyen Chi (Records about Vinh Loc county, Thanh Hoa), a MS kept in the Institute of Han-Nom, Hanoi.

<sup>76</sup> Hoang Le Nhat Thong Chi, pp.101, 120.

## CONCLUSION

Seventeenth and eighteenth century **Dang Trong** has a unique place in Vietnamese history. It successfully acted as the engine of change in Vietnam for well over two centuries, pulling the national centre of gravity, whether in cultural, economic or political terms to the south. First of all, it was vital to the success of the southern movement (**Nam Tien**). Without the establishment of the Nguyen state here, it is impossible to say how far south the Vietnamese would have ultimately been able to push. But after the creation of a new southern state, we find an end to the seesawing battles between Vietnamese and Chams that had marked the previous centuries. From the foundation of **Dang Trong** on, every Vietnamese advance became definite and final. We can only speculate whether this would have been possible without the Nguyen state; or whether Champa as a kingdom would have disappeared as completely as it did. Nguyen Cochinchina was not only central to the process of southern expansion, it was also its most spectacular product.

Nguyen **Dang Trong** was unique in Vietnamese history, yet, interestingly, we do not find many real innovations in its political, economic or cultural spheres. Instead, in its greatest period of achievement, the 17th century, we see over and over that **Dang Trong's** vitality and vigour arose directly from the pragmatism and flexibility of its immigrant Vietnamese population. Local Vietnamese adopted and adapted whatever aspects of indigenous (or foreign) cultures and traditions they believed useful. Almost as important, they showed themselves willing to discard or downgrade aspects of those older Vietnamese customs and traditions, still significant in the north but no longer so relevant in the new southern land.

One of the most notable examples of this process was the way the Nguyen took over, and built on, the overseas trade that Champa had carried out for centuries before. The weak agricultural base in 17th century **Dang Trong** could hardly sustain a desperate struggle with the superior forces of the Trinh north, compelling the early Nguyen to flout the practice of all previous Vietnamese states and allow fairly free trade. Although this was unusual in itself, what quickly followed was previously virtually unknown: the Nguyen themselves became enthusiasts for foreign trade, and foreigners. They lost no time in seizing the chance to make Cochinchina the crucial link between Chinese and Japanese trade, with the result that 17th century Cochinchina become Japan's number-one trading partner, and a major player in wider Asian commercial relations. Cochinchina's independent existence, and the Nguyen's own power and wealth

rested largely to this overseas trade, a situation unique in all pre-colonial Vietnamese history. By following the Cham example, 17th century Cochinchina found the resources and the vitality to undergo a great period of expansion in population, wealth, and land, despite having to fight a hundred years war with the north. This was an extraordinary achievement, both in itself and by comparison with Vietnamese history in general.

**Dang Trong's** economic base drew a clear line between itself and all other pre-colonial Vietnamese states, characterised as they were by an almost purely agricultural economy. Administratively, too, Nguyen Cochinchina differed from most other Vietnamese kingdoms by remaining for most of its existence a military regime whose officials were paid according to Southeast Asian practices, not Chinese precepts. As outsiders in a strange land, the Nguyen initially had little choice but to rule through their armed forces, the best organised and controlled agency of the state. This source of power reinforced the practical and pragmatic outlook that characterised Nguyen rulers in the 17th century especially. They placed the most emphasis on protecting the power and wealth of the state by whatever means necessary, most of them highly unorthodox from a northern or Confucian point of view. Being themselves in the rebel or "illegal" position gave the Nguyen a sense of freedom, and the courage necessary to choose to try anything workable, irrespective of whether it matched or flouted standards of Confucian propriety or orthodoxy. For the first time, a Vietnamese government employed Japanese and Chinese as government officials, and gave Westerners court posts, if only as physicians or scientific advisers. For most of its existence, too, the ruling elite remained military based. Even when civil examinations were introduced, their graduates never rose above clerical assistants to these officers until well into the 18th century. The need to legitimise their authority locally also led the Nguyen far from Confucianism, to encouraging polytheistic Mahayana Buddhism as an official religion and presenting themselves as "kings of heaven" more akin to their neighbouring rulers than to the Le emperor in the north. **Dang Trong** Vietnamese went much further still, embracing a degree of syncretism and adopting whatever local customs and beliefs that might help them survive and prosper among the new spirits of the south. Cham and uplander rituals and customs flourished as late as the 20th century among Vietnamese in this area.

Overall, the dynamic and flexible Nguyen rulers in this period matched the developing society of **Dang Trong** by being more open to external opportunities and more extrovert in character than their Trinh counter-parts in the north.

**Dang Trong** was a migrant country stretched on a long and narrow piece of land between the mountain and the sea, whose southern border always beckoned to individuals, clans, and whole villages who wanted to try their luck in a new region. The mountains to the west and the sea to the east also attracted Vietnamese to try their luck as merchants and traders. Nothing could have been more different than the pattern of life in the north, which consisted mainly of cultivation in region between these largely alien and dangerous fronts. The south meant a diversity of options. It provided space to manoeuvre, and to allow the growth of new economic, social and cultural elements far from the narrow Confucian expectation of the north. Their acceptance of being part of the larger world of Southeast Asia enabled Vietnamese immigrants to borrow, blend, and absorb extensively from the cultures of the Cham and other peoples in the region. As a result, along with the southward expansion, Vietnamese themselves became localised. This is not to say that Vietnamese in **Dang Trong** became "non-Vietnamese", or lost their identity. Rather, they created here another way of being Vietnamese, one which grew from their willingness to experiment, to adopt and naturalise whatever was useful in their new environment, regardless of its origin. The south posed its own challenges, and their solution would led the immigrant Vietnamese here far from their immediate past in the Le Confucian model back much closer to their Southeast Asian roots. Many characteristic traits of southerners, such as their curiosity and tolerance towards new things and new ideas, their more open and spontaneous character, their unwillingness to be fettered by history and tradition can all be traced back to the influence of these two centuries.

The **Dang Trong** we have examined here suggests that the Chinese model and Confucian system operating in the north during these two centuries was paralleled by a different, and vigorous, model and system in the south, one that corresponded to the needs and challenges of the new environment. In a few short decades, Cochinchina became richer and stronger than Tongking (although not strong enough to topple the Trinh), despite being a newly-opened region. Both the economic condition of the people and the comparative openness of the society in **Dang Trong** contrasted favourably with the so-called "central government" of the Le kingdom. These advantages encouraged the Vietnamese to continue their **Nam Tien** (southward expansion), and finally to expand their power to the Mekong delta. They also played a significant role in the Tay Son's defeat of the northerners a century later. The dynamic south gave Vietnamese immigrants a chance to rediscover themselves and in the process filled them with the vitality necessary for their development. Locality was the strength of **Dang Trong**, and



its influence shaped the culture of the south - and most Vietnamese history until the imposition of French colonialism. This vitality may once again play a central role in the future development of Vietnam.

## Annex One On the "king" of Cochinchina, the names "Quinam" and "Guang Nan Guo"

From the earlier accounts Westerners have given about Cochinchina, the "king" appears to have been a mysterious figure. According to the Tien Bien, until 1626 the Nguyen capital was in Dang Xuong county (in today's Quang Tri province), more than 150 km away from Hoi An (Faifo). This would have taken about 5 days' return journey at the time.<sup>1</sup> When Bowyear paid a visit from Faifo to Sinoa<sup>2</sup> in 1695, it took him 5 days for a one-way trip. But in a letter written by Jeronimus Wonderaer, a Dutch merchant who visited Cochinchina in 1602, we find the following: "After midday, I learnt that I was summoned by the king at about 3 or 4 o'clock in the afternoon."<sup>3</sup> William Adams came to Faifo on 22 April 1617, but on 24 April he had already been visited by the Japanese interpreter of the king, who "bade me very welcome and told me that the king was very glad that there were English come again."<sup>4</sup>

Actually the letter written by the Dutch merchant we noted above itself suggests where this "king" was. It was written in Tachem, which might refer either to **Dai Chiem**, the seaport which Hoi An (Faifo) faces; or **Thanh Chiem**, the residence of the governor of Quang Nam, who was a Nguyen prince. The latter seems more possible, judging from the statement. Also, when talking about the death of Peacock, Richard Cocks wrote that "it was done by the young king and the old king knowth nothing of". The "young king" was therefore more than likely the prince who often resided in Quang Nam. The confusion about the "king" among the foreigners seems to have continued until quite late. We find that, for instance, in a Dutch story from 1652 which recounted how, having arrested and humiliated the 5 Dutchmen remaining in Cochinchina,

the king took for himself the lakens and **perpetuanen** ... evaluating and

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<sup>1</sup> A report by Johan van Linga in 1642 about Quinam, says that it took 1 day and 1 night sailing from Thoron (Tourane) to Senua (2 km southeast of today's Hue), the capital. The distance is only half of that from Hoi An to Dang Xuong.

<sup>2</sup> Sinoa, or Senoa, should refer to **Shunhua**, a Chinese pronunciation for Thuan Hoa. It might have been taken by Westerners from the Chinese traders in **Dang Trong**. Maybon referred to it wrongly as Thanh Hoa. See Charles Maybon, Histoire moderne du pays d'Annam, 1592-1820, Librairie Plon, Paris, 1920, reprinted by Gregg International Publisher Ltd., Westmead, England, 1972, p.60 n.

<sup>3</sup> "The trials of a foreign merchant. Jeronimus Wonderaer's letter from Vietnam, 1602", translated by Ruurdje Laarhoven, in Li Tana & Anthony Reid, Southern Vietnam under the Nguyen, Documents on the Economic History of Cochinchina (Dang Trong), 1602-1777, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore/ECHOSEA, The Australian National University, forthcoming, p.8.

<sup>4</sup> The Log-Book of William Adams, 1614-19, edited by C.J.Purnell, London, 1916, p.290.

paying for them according to his pleasure, without listening to any arguments against this ... Despite all this the king has sent with our people at their departure another 500 tael of silver to buy him here in Batavia some lakens, perpetuanen and other things which are acceptable to him.<sup>5</sup>

The "king" here was either a son of chua Hien, or perhaps the top mandarin in Hoi An.

The reason that the "young king" or high mandarin, was so powerful was because he issued the Cochinchinese "Red Seal" to ships from overseas. We find this reference explicitly in the Journals of Ed. Saris, who went to Cochinchina along with Adams in 1617: "I should have his [the king's] **goshuin** or his Choep which is his seal to come with shipping yearly or to settle a factree in any part in his dominions and that he would protect me."<sup>6</sup> The existence of **goshuin** is supported by the Dong Xi Yang Kao (A study of Southeast Asian countries) written in 17th century China. It says:

The governor of Quang Nam is above all the small countries in the area, even stronger than Tongking. Xin-chou (Qui Nhon) and Ti-yi (De Di seaport, in Phu Yen province) all pay tributes to Quang Nam. The ships which come to Xin-chou and Ti-yi to trade have to spend several days to go to Quang Nam to pay tribute there. The governor of Quang Nam also gives wooden plates to the traders. When passing the wooden plate, people always salute [the plates] first then go, no one dares to make a noise. The fame of Quang Nam is really impressive.<sup>7</sup>

Judging from the accounts above, the main difference between the **goshuin** of Japan and of Cochinchina was that the Japanese **goshuin** was given to the ships which went overseas, while the wooden plates in Cochinchina were given to the ships which came from overseas.<sup>8</sup>

We know that Nguyen Hoang came to be the garrison commander of Thuan Hoa in 1558, but that Quang Nam did not come under his power until 1570. Since until 1600 Nguyen Hoang never gave up hope of gaining power in the Le court in the north, it seems from the Tien Bien at least, that he did not pay much attention to Quang Nam until 1602. When he visited Hai Van pass in that year

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<sup>5</sup> "The end of Dutch relations with Cochinchina, 1651-2", translated by Anthony Reid, in Southern Vietnam under the Nguyen, p.37.

<sup>6</sup> The Log-Book, p.104.

<sup>7</sup> Tong Xi Yang Kao, Zhong Hua Shu Ju, Beijing, 1981, p.20.

<sup>8</sup> According to the Phu Bien Tap Luc, people in Cochinchina had to have a certain certificate too if they wanted to go the Mekong delta to trade. But they got that certificate in Thuan Hoa. See Phu Bien, Vol.2, p.90a.

he realised it was like the throat of Thuan Hoa and Quang Nam, and quickly sent his 6th son to govern Quang Nam.<sup>9</sup> The first **chua's** son, Nguyen Phuc Nguyen, who governed Quang Nam became ruler after his father. But the position enjoyed quite independent power, and the garrison could easily dream of independence. Thus Anh, the sixth son of Nguyen Phuc Nguyen, and the garrison commander of Quang Nam plotted rebellion in 1633, with help from several Japanese living in Hoi An. When they were discovered by Nguyen Phuc Nguyen, it was drowned in blood, with 1,000 people executed by the Nguyen government.<sup>10</sup>

Quang Nam, and its special political and economic position in the early 17th century might be why Cochinchina was called **Guang Nan Guo** (the kingdom of Quang Nam) by the Chinese, and **Quinam** by the Dutch. A map drawn in 1655 by Martino Martini called the whole area of Cochinchina as "Gan Nan", and put "Quinam" in the place of Hoi An.<sup>11</sup> The Dutch name of the country as "Qui Nam" most probably derived from the city of Qui Nam. The overseas trade of Quang Nam was so well known that other parts of the country were neglected by the foreigners; while the governor in Quang Nam was so powerful and independent that this "young king" was almost regarded as a king in his own right.

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<sup>9</sup> Tien Bien, Vol.1,p.21.

<sup>10</sup> Phan Khoang, Viet Su Xu Dang Trong, Khai Tri, Saigon, 1969, p.191.

<sup>11</sup> Egon Klemp, Asia in Maps, from Ancient Times to the mid-19th Century, Acta Humaniora, Edition Leipzig, Weinheim, 1989, p.61.

## Annex Two Three thousand or thirty thousand ?

It is generally accepted that 30,000 Trinh soldiers were captured by the army of the south in 1648, which suggests that Trinh-Nguyen warfare consumed large numbers of soldiers. Tien Bien described the incident vividly,<sup>1</sup> as too has Phan Khoang in Lich Su Xu Dang Trong. Yet the Cuong Muc says only 3,000 soldiers were captured,<sup>2</sup> while the Toan Thu does not mention such losses at all (In the latter case, northern historians might have conveniently omitted the inglorious event). But if we consider the sizes of the armies involved, the Cuong Muc's claim seems closest to the truth.

Judging from the Tien Bien's descriptions of on the wars, the armed forces of the Trinh could not have exceeded 100,000.<sup>3</sup> In support, Choisy tells us that the king of Tonking had 90,000 troops, 8,000 horses, and 700 elephants.<sup>4</sup> As for the armed forces of the south, Vachet says in 1671 that the Nguyen had 40,000 soldiers (possibly including the navy), 15,000 of them guarding the northern border. Borri says that the forces of Tongking were four times larger than those of Cochinchina between 1618 and 1622,<sup>5</sup> something which could hardly have changed dramatically in several decades, given the lack of manpower in the south. Sources on both sides also agree that the Nguyen never put more than 15,000 soldiers into the field against the north. As for the Trinh, although they controlled much larger numbers, we should not forget that their war with the Mac in the far north did not end until 1667, only five years before their truce with the Nguyen. In these circumstances, the Trinh dared not send their entire army south. It is therefore hard to believe that the Trinh would have hazarded more than half their entire force in a campaign against the south, or that the Nguyen would manage to capture an enemy army at least twice its own size. No 17th century Southeast Asian country could have accomplished such a feat easily, nor been able adequately to control the massive number of prisoners afterwards.

According to the Tien Bien, these "30,000 war prisoners" played a crucial role in

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<sup>1</sup> Tien Bien, vol.3, pp.51-52.

<sup>2</sup> Cuong Muc, vol.32, pp.2930-2931.

<sup>3</sup> Tien Bien, Vol.5, p.11.

<sup>4</sup> Choisy, Journal du voyage de Siam fait en 1685 et 1686, ed.Maurice Garcon, Paris, Duchartre et Van Buggenhout, 1930, p.253.

<sup>5</sup> Borri, Cochinchina, London, 1633, reprinted by Theatrum Orbis Terraum Ltd., Amsterdam, 1970, p.H3.

the opening of Phu Yen. The story went as follows:

[In the war of 1648] having defeated the Trinh and captured 30,000 of their soldiers, the **chua** [Nguyen Phuc Lan, 1635-1648 ] discussed with his subjects how to deal with the prisoners of war. Some said that these people were unreliable, and should be sent either into the high mountains or to the islands, in case they made trouble; others said that the high officials should be put to death, and the others allowed to go back to the north.

The **chua** said: 'South of Thang Binh and Dien Ban lies the old territory of Champa where very few people live. If we put the captured soldiers on this land, give them oxen and farm implements, provide them with food to eat, and let them clear the land, then in several years they could produce enough for their own needs. After they marry and have children, in 20 years the children can be soldiers of the country. I foresee no trouble at all from them.'

... The soldiers were divided into villages, 50 soldiers to each village, and given half a year's food supply. Further, the **Chua** ordered the better-off people to lend them food. The resettled people were free to seek a livelihood from the mountains and lakes. And so villages flourished from Thang Hoa and Dien Ban to Phu Yen and the families eventually became registered households.<sup>6</sup>

The Tien Bien may have portrayed accurately the manner of settling the captured soldiers, except for the numbers involved. But though the numbers of prisoners of war was smaller than claimed, prisoners from another source - the common people living in enemy territory - may have been even higher. Official Nguyen histories would never have discussed the capture of common people, had there had no such story as the Tay Son brothers. As the Hoang Le Nhat Thong Chi (Journal of the Unified Royal Le), a book written by Ngo Thi Chi, a northerner, recounts:

The ancestor [of the Tay Son brothers] was originally from Hung Nguyen county of Nghe An. During the years of **Thinh Duc** (1653 - 1657), when the army of the Nguyen occupied seven counties of Nghe An, captured people were taken back and put in Tay Son [county]. Their ancestor was among them.<sup>7</sup>

The Dai Nam Chinh Bien Liet Truyen So Tap (First Collection of the Primary Compilation of Biographies of Imperial Vietnam), abbreviated a similar story, saying: "Their ancestor of 4 generations was captured by our army during the years of Thinh Duc",<sup>8</sup> although without indicating whether he had been a

<sup>6</sup> Tien Bien, Vol. 3, pp.51-52.

<sup>7</sup> Ngo Thi Chi, Hoang Le Nhat Thong Chi, Collection Romans & Contes du Vietnam en Han, Ecole Francaise d'Extreme-Orient & Student Book Co.Ltd, Paris-Taipei, 1986, p.61.

<sup>8</sup> Dai Nam Chinh Bien Liet Truyen So Tap, Keio Institute of Linguistic Studies, Mita, Siba, Minato-ku, Tokyo, 1962, Vol.30, p.1.

commoner or a soldier, or whether the Nguyen army had also captured other common people. The Tay Son Thuat Luoc, however, states clearly that: "During the years of Duong Duc, our army occupied seven counties of the north and moved the people [from there into the south]. The ancestor of the Nguyen brothers was one of them."<sup>9</sup> Only when talking about the death of Nguyen Hue does the Thuc Luc Chinh Bien (Chronicle of Nguyen Dynasty, Gia Long Reign, Part I) admit:

His ancestor was from Hung Nguyen county, Nghe An. Having attacked and occupied seven counties of Nghe An, our emperor Thai Tong (Chua Hien, 1648-1687) moved people there to Quy Nhon.<sup>10</sup>

It is logical to assume that the Nguyen would have encouraged, if not forced, the emigration of people whom they controlled only temporarily.

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<sup>9</sup> The year of Duong Duc should be Thinh Duc. Tay Son Thuat Luoc, Phu Quoc-vu-khanh Dac trach Van Hoa, Saigon, 1971, p.1.

<sup>10</sup> Thuc Luc Chinh Bien, The Oriental Institute Keio University, Mita, Siba, Minato-ku, Tokyo, 1963, Vol.6, p.384.

### Annex 3      Conflicts between the Dutch and the Nguyen

Although the Netherlands was the only Western country to fight the Vietnamese before the 19th century, actual military encounters between the Trinh, the Nguyen, and the Dutch East India Company (the **Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie**, here afterwards the VOC) in the 1630s and 1640s remain vague. Different stories crop up about almost every aspect. The following is an attempt, with the generous help of Professor Anthony Reid, to survey the situation.

We begin with a letter sent in 1637 by the Trinh to the Governor General of the VOC (the letter, translated by the Japanese, called him **Sessche Quan Kichio**) in Batavia which seems not to have been given enough attention by scholars. This is the main part of the letter:

[...] Some beasts in human shape (meaning the Nguyen) have set up a separatist regime on our southern border and are relying on their tenable defensive position to resist the court (of the Le in Thang Long). We have not yet done anything about them because we are afraid that something unforeseen may happen at sea. Since you intend to be friendly with us, could you give us either 2 or 3 ships, or 200 soldiers who are good at shooting, as proof of your kindness. These soldiers can help us with the cannons. In addition, please send 50 galleys with picked soldiers and powerful guns to us, and we will send some of our trusted soldiers to lead your galleys to Quang Nam, as our reinforcements. At the same time our army will attack Thuan Hoa.[...] After the victory we will give your soldiers 20,000 to 30,000 taels of silver as a gift. As for Your Excellency, we will give you Quang Nam to govern. You can select some soldiers to build and guard the city, and we will order the people there to do corvee for you. You collect the products of the area and give a part of it to our court, so both sides will benefit from it. God will punish us if the foregoing is not honest.<sup>1</sup>

This letter is quite striking. The Trinh would not have made such an offer had they had not recognized that it would be hard to defeat the Nguyen on their own in the late 1630s, 10 years after war had broken out between the two.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Being written in Chinese, which no Dutch understood at the time, this letter was sent to Japan for Meison, a Japanese interpreter in Nagasaki to translate into Dutch. Giving the translated letter to the VOC, Meison kept the original letter for himself. See Iwao Seiichi 'About the letter asking help from the Dutch navy, sent by Annam to Wulan (Netherland)', To-ho-gaku, No.23, 1962, pp.109-118.

<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, it also suggests the way Vietnamese rulers in the north, up to the Tay Son period, were willing to sacrifice the south - a land formerly belonging to others, which was not under their own power at the time - to meet their own more urgent needs. Interestingly enough, about 150 years later, Nguyen Anh did almost exactly the same thing when he asked the Portuguese to help him against the Tay Son in 1786. See Pierre-Yves Manguin, Les Nguyen, Macau et le Portugal, Ecole Francaise d'Extreme-Orient, Paris, 1984, Pl.1. The only difference was that he said he would give the Portuguese the small town and anchorage of Vung Tau to govern.



The letter seems to have convinced the Dutch, who were angry about plundering by the Nguyen of two Dutch ships wrecked near the coast of Cochinchina. One of the ships, the **Grootenbroeck** was said to carry a cargo worth 23,580 reals, all of which had been seized by the Nguyen.<sup>3</sup> After repeated negotiations between 1637 and 1638 about a military alliance, in 1639 the Dutch decided to send four ships the next year to help attack Cochinchina, in return for trade concessions from Tongking. The Trinh in 1639 sent another letter in response to the Dutch Governor-General, insisting that the Dutch send 5 ships and 600 well-armed men.

Having gone through another round of negotiation for two years, during which the Trinh hesitated, an agreement finally seems to have been struck. On 14 May 1641, the Dutch Governor-General in Batavia wrote to Trinh Trang to say they were ready to send ships to mount a combined action against Quinam (Cochinchina).

In November 1641, another event hardened Dutch attitudes towards Quinam, confirming the desire to have Quinam punished and Dutch honour restored. Two additional Dutch ships, the "Eulden Buis" and the "Maria de Medicis", were wrecked on the Cochinchinese coast near Champelo island on 26 November 1641. All survivors - 82 Dutchmen - were taken prisoner to Hoi An, and the ships were confiscated by Cochinchina.

Fortunately for the Dutch, Jacob van Liesvelt had 120 Cochinchinese in his hands, who had been captured in early 1642 at Tourane at the request of an ambassador of the Trinh who was travelling with the Dutch to Batavia.<sup>4</sup> Later, when he learned of the imprisonment of Dutchmen at Hoi An, these prisoners were offered in exchange for the Dutch held by the Nguyen. But after the Dutch released the Cochinchinese, the chua Thuong (Nguyen Phuc Lan, r.1635-1648) refused to release the Dutch unless van Liesvelt also surrendered the ambassador of the Trinh to him.

Negotiations broke down, despite threats from both sides. Van Liesvelt not only refused to abandon the Tongking envoy, but also kept the Quinam mandarin and the Japanese translator, Francisco, who had been sent to negotiate. He then

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<sup>3</sup> J.M.Dixon, trans., "Voyage of the Dutch ship 'Grol' from Hirado to Tongking, Transactions of the Asiatic Society of Japan, Vol.XI, reprinted by Yushodo Booksellers Ltd. Tokyo, 1964, pp.192, 212.

<sup>4</sup> Buch, De Oost-Indische Compagne en Quinam, Amsterdam, H.J.Paris, 1929, p.80.

sailed off to Batavia.<sup>5</sup>

In May 1642 the Dutch sent a fleet of five ships with 125 sailors and 70 soldiers aboard. Its commander, Jan van Linga, was instructed by Batavia to seize many "Quinammers" along the coast, then send an ultimatum to the king threatening to kill half of them if Dutch demands were not met within 48 hours, with the other half to be taken to Tongking. Then they were ordered to sail north to the Tongking border to await the arrival of the Trinh forces (though few believed they would actually come).

On 31 May 1642, the Dutch entered the Bay of Cambir (Qui Nhon), burned 400 or 500 houses together with rice stores, and took 38 people prisoner. Probably at this point they decided to attempt to release the Dutch captives in Hoi An by force, without waiting for the Governor-General's permission. They continued to take captives along the coast, but the number did not seem to increase rapidly, as only another 11 were added within 10 days. To take more captives, Jacob van Liesvelt suggested they go to Champelo island, in apparent friendship, and lure Cochinchinese whom he had met before onto one of the ships in order to seize them.

Either because people in Quy Nhon had reported the Dutch actions or because the scouts of Cochinchina got the news before hand, when the Dutch arrived they found that "the Quinam government had already put the coastal regions in a defensive position".<sup>6</sup> When van Liesvelt went ashore with 150 men, he was attacked and killed, together with 10 of his men.

Curiously, the Tien Bien does not mention this story at all. The Nguyen, who definitely were seeking to prevent the Dutch from joining Tongking against them, showed van Linga their disappointment about the Dutch attack on them, but were slow to respond to the demand for release of Dutch captives. On 16 June

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<sup>5</sup> The chua Thuong must have taken the threat from the Dutch seriously. As a gesture of good-will, he released 50 Dutchmen in March 1642, possibly soon after van Liesvelt left. But the Dutch did not know this until 1643. These ill-fated men met another misfortune on the way back. On 15 April, they were attacked by a junk manned by Portuguese and some Chinese (Vietnamese sources say it was a Spanish ship which did this), their ship burned and many killed. Eighteen managed to swim away and regain the hulk of their boat after the Portuguese had gone. When they took it to the Champa coast and four more had died, the king of Champa seized the remainder and divided them as slaves among his men. One of them, Juriaan de Rode, was sent to the king of Cambodia, who let him get back to Batavia, where he arrived on 5 January 1643, and told his remarkable story. See Buch, pp.82-83.

<sup>6</sup> Buch, p.86.

the Dutch killed 20 Cochinchinese hostages in Tourane, then left for Tongking. When the Dutch commander asked the Trinh for forces to attack Cochinchina, Trinh Trang said that he had already sent them, only to have them return because the Dutch had not appeared. But this seems like a diplomatic lie to cover Trinh unwillingness to join forces: the Toan Thu does not mention the Trinh taking any military action in 1642, nor does the Tien Bien report anything in the south.

In January 1643, the Dutch sent a new fleet of five ships to Tongking, led by Johannes Lamotius, for a joint attack on Cochinchina, only to find that the army of Tongking was not ready. In June 1643 the patient Dutch sent yet another fleet of three ships, led by Pieter Baeck. Once more he was instructed to capture as many Cochinchinese as possible when sailing along the coast. Five miles south of the Gianh River<sup>7</sup>, however, they were surprised to see 50 galleys of the Nguyen coming towards them. According to Le Thanh Khoi: "The battle was a total disaster. The **de Wijdenes** [the flag ship] was destroyed, Baeck was killed, another two ships took great pains to escape."<sup>8</sup> Buch gives a more detailed report, saying that the **de Wijdenes** caught fire and was blown up by its own stock of gunpowder, killing all on board including Baeck. A Vietnamese version has it that the Dutch were so dispirited that they destroyed **de Wijdenes** themselves.<sup>9</sup> During this battle seven Quinam galleys were destroyed and 700-800 Quinam men killed, according to Dutch claims, but the Tien Bien makes no mention of Quinam losses at all.

The Dutch post-mortem heavily criticised their commanders for being unprepared for enemy attack. In both battles Nguyen surprise attacks had put the Dutch into a defensive posture from the first minute. According to the Tien Bien, the Nguyen were well prepared because they received reports from a special team called the

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<sup>7</sup> The Tien Bien said that it happened in Eo seaport. According to the Dai Nam Nhat Thong Chi, Eo seaport also called Noan seaport, both refer to Thuan An in the Hue area. See Dai Nam Nhat Thong Chi, Society of Indo-China Studies, Tokyo, 1941, Vol.1, p.256.

<sup>8</sup> Le Thanh Khoi, op.cit., p.248. This disaster even influenced the attitude of Japanese towards the VOC: "Having been told by the Chinese and local people who trade to Japan that the **de Wijdenes** was destroyed and other ships damaged by the Quinamers, the Japanese started to think that we have nothing to be afraid of and so looking down on us, and our company's credit has been lost a great deal [among Japanese]". See Dagbregister, Chinese trans. by Guo Hui, Taiwan sheng Wen xian wei yuan hui, Taipei, 1989, Vol. Vol.2, p.398.

<sup>9</sup> Quang Nam qua cac Thoi Dai ( Quang Nam through the centuries), Co hoc Tung Thu, Da Nang, 1974, Vol.1, p.144.

**tuan hai** (sea patrol), according to the Tien Bien.<sup>10</sup> In addition, they had lookout towers along the coast.<sup>11</sup>

The contacts between the Trinh and the Dutch suggest that the Trinh already recognized in 1637 that it would be too hard to fight against the Nguyen on their own. The Dutch believed in 1643 that the Trinh had only a very slight advantage over the southern enemy, and concluded at the end of 1644 that "the king of Tongking had had enough of war [against Cochinchina]". The period of the 1640s, therefore, may have represented a turning point in Nguyen military power, and perhaps in economic power as well.

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<sup>10</sup> Tien Bien, Vol.3, p.48.

<sup>11</sup> For details see Chapter Two.

## Annex Four On tutenague and silver used in Dang Trong

### Tutenague

In 1746, Nguyen Phuc Khoat was persuaded by a Chinese named Huang to begin casting coins. Vietnamese sources say that the coins were made from "white lead", brought from Macao by the Portuguese.<sup>1</sup> Western sources, however, all maintain that the material used was tutenague.<sup>2</sup>

We know that lead was brought by Western merchants in large amounts, and that it was "as good as money" in the 17th and 18th centuries. Yet it is also true that tutenague was produced in large quantities in China from the 17th century.<sup>3</sup> What is more, many scholars confused tutenague with white copper,<sup>4</sup> another metal produced in China which became well-known in Europe in the 18th century.<sup>5</sup> How do we know which of the three metals mentioned above was the so-called "white lead" used by the Nguyen used for casting coins in the 18th century? Although tutenague was confused by 18th century Europeans with two other metals, Asian designations were more precise. In Chinese sources **bai tong** (**paktong**, white copper) meant nickel-brass, while "**ya qian** (inferior lead)" meant zinc. The Phu Bien employed the latter when discussing the material used for casting coins in the 1740s.<sup>6</sup>

Was this **ya qian** the same thing referred to by Westerners as tutenague? According to the Japanese book Wakan Sanzai Zue, published in the 18th century, **ya qian** was "also called **totamu**".<sup>7</sup> This **totamu** is obviously a corrupt word for tutenague. Thus the word **ya qian** used in 18th century China, Japan

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<sup>1</sup> Phu Bien, Vol.4, pp.21b,22b; Tien Bien, Vol.10, p.140.

<sup>2</sup> Poivre, Journal de voyage du vaisseau de la compagnie le Machault a la Cochinchine, reprod. by H. Cordier in Revue de l'Extreme Orient, vol.3, 1885, p.430; Kirsop, "Some Accounts of Cochinchina", in A. Dalrymple, Oriental Repertory, London, 1808, Vol.1, p.245.

<sup>3</sup> Schroeder, Annam etudes numismatiques, p.493. Needham: "Under the name of tutenag (derived from **tutiya**, but spelt in a hundred curious ways) zinc metal had been an important article of export commerce from China to Europe since about 1605." See Joseph Needham, Science and Civilisation in China, Vol.5, Part II, Cambridge University Press, p.212.

<sup>4</sup> Needham: "There was great confusion for three centuries in Europe in the naming of the two great metal exports from China, tutenag (hence 'tooth-and-egg metal') being properly zinc, and **paktong** (white copper) properly cupro-nikel". *Ibid*, p.212.

<sup>5</sup> Needham says that the maximum intensity of the importation of "white copper" was between 1750 and 1800, Needham, p.228.

<sup>6</sup> Phu Bien, Vol.4, p.22b.

<sup>7</sup> Wakan Sanzai Zue, Vol.2, p.645. Boxer says that the word **totunaga** is from the Tamil **tattanagam**, meaning "zinc". See Seventeenth Century Macau, p.198.

and Cochinchina, and tutenague by the Westerners, referred to zinc, the metal most probably carried in both by the Chinese and the Portuguese from China, either directly or indirectly. In the numismatic catalogue of Albert Schroeder, eight out of nine coins stamped with the characters **Thai Binh**<sup>8</sup> are made of brass, while the other **Thai Binh** coin, and one other coin imprinted with the characters **Thien Minh**, are made of zinc.<sup>9</sup>

Zinc production in Yunnan was well developed, and it became a staple export item to European countries from the late 17th century. Although Poivre claims that zinc ("tutenague") was first brought to Cochinchina by the Chinese in 1745, it might well have come earlier.<sup>10</sup> Certainly it rapidly became the most important import item. Again according to Poivre, zinc "today [the 1740s] makes up the bulk of their [Chinese] trade. The huge profit they make on this material has led them to suspend all other goods."<sup>11</sup>

### Silver

Due to the strong trade connection between Japan and Cochinchina, through Japanese merchants in the early period and via Chinese merchants later, Japanese coins and silver played perhaps the most important role in the exchange system of Cochinchina. Although **Dang Trong** did not produce silver, its taxes paid to the Nguyen were 3,000 **lang** in silver yearly, at least in the 1770s, according to Le Quy Don.<sup>12</sup> Bowyear said in 1695 that silver was one of the main cargoes from Batavia and Manila to Cochinchina, which indicates a source from another direction. But as we will see, Japanese silver was still the most important one in Cochinchina.

Being preoccupied with Chinese culture, Le Quy Don might have sometimes

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<sup>8</sup> **Thai Binh** coins were first cast by the Mac in the late 16th century. The Nguyen also cast **Thai Binh** coins, as discussed in Chapter Five.

<sup>9</sup> Schroeder, Annam etudes numismatiques, Imprimerie Nationale, Paris, 1905, reprinted by Trismegiste, Paris, 1983, p.493.

<sup>10</sup> In 1739 the **Harrington**, an English ship alone took 1697 piculs from Canton to Bombay. See Morse, The Chronicles of the East India Company Trading to China, 1635-1834, Oxford at the Clarendon Press, 1926, p.271.

<sup>11</sup> "Description of Cochinchina, 1749-50", trans.by Kristine Alilunas-Rodgers, in Li Tana & Anthony Reid, Southern Vietnam under the Nguyen, Documents on the Economic History of Central (Nguyen) Vietnam, 1558-1777, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore/ECHOSEA, The Australian National University, forthcoming.

<sup>12</sup> Phu Bien, Vol.4, p.37a.

mistaken Japanese coins for Chinese. For instance, he said that in 1774 the Trinh army found more than 300,000 **quan** of best copper coins in the Nguyen treasury in Hue. According to him, most of them were Chinese coins of the Song dynasty (960 - 1279 A.D), and when the Nguyen cast their zinc coins in the 1740s, they copied the design of Chinese **Xiang Fu** coins (1008 -1016 A.D.). Yet, if we compare the zinc coin which has the characters "**Xiang Fu yuan bao**" imprinted,<sup>13</sup> the one most likely cast by the Nguyen during the 1740s, we will find that it was different from the Chinese **Xiang Fu** coin of the Song dynasty. Rather, it copied the Japanese **Shofu gempo** coin, one of the most common Japanese imitations of Chinese Song and Ming coins. It was cast in Nagasaki between 1659 and 1684 and has the same Chinese characters but a different design.<sup>14</sup> Most likely, therefore, there was a big percentage of Japanese coins among the 300,000 **quan** of fine copper coins found in the Nguyen treasury in 1774.

This discussion sheds light on some other questions in regard to silver. The Phu Bien gives three kinds of silver: first class silver (**giap ngan**), **dung ngan** and **ke ngan**.<sup>15</sup> When translating the Phu Bien into modern Vietnamese, both the scholars in Saigon and those in Hanoi give vague explanations about these terms. **Dung ngan** is explained as "silver in the shape of a banyan leaf", while **ke ngan** is "silver in the shape of a chicken".<sup>16</sup> All this sounds strange. I tend to think that there is a connection between Japanese silver **cho-jin** and the name **dung ngan**, which in Chinese reads as **rung yin**. **Cho-jin** was an alloy containing 80 percent silver, placed in circulation as legal tender in 1699 by the Tokugawa government. Furthermore, I suspect that the first class silver (**giap ngan** in Vietnamese, **jia yin** in Chinese) was a corrupt pronunciation for the Japanese **jo-jin**, a refined crude ore of silver used before 1699.<sup>17</sup> The third kind of silver **ke ngan** might refer to all kinds of European coins.

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<sup>13</sup> Albert Schroeder, Annam Etudes numistiques, Imprimerie Nationale, reprinted by Trismegiste, Paris, 1983, p.495, coin no.509.

<sup>14</sup> This study was done by Francois Thierry. See his Catalogue des monnaies vietnamiennes, Bibliotheque Nationale, Paris, 1987, p.75.

<sup>15</sup> Phu Bien, Vol.4, p.37a.

<sup>16</sup> See Saigon edition, Vol.4, p.76; Hanoi edition, Vol.4, p.236.

<sup>17</sup> See Kobata Atsushi, "Coinage from the Kamakura period through the Edo period", Acta Asiatica, no.21, pp.98-108.

## CHRONOLOGICAL LIST OF NGUYEN RULERS

Ruler's Name	Popular Title	Reign
1. Nguyễn Hoàng	Chúa Tiên (Đoan Quận Công)	1558-1613
2. Nguyễn Phúc Nguyên	Chúa Sãi	1613-1635
3. Nguyễn Phúc Lan	Chúa Thượng	1635-1648
4. Nguyễn Phúc Tần	Chúa Hiền	1648-1687
5. Nguyễn Phúc Trăn	Chúa Nghĩa	1687-1691
6. Nguyễn Phúc Chu	Minh Vương	1691-1725
7. Nguyễn Phúc Trú	Ninh Vương	1725-1738
8. Nguyễn Phúc Khoát	Võ Vương	1738-1765
9. Nguyễn Phúc Thuần	Định Vương	1765-1777



## Glossary

## Vietnamese Currency Units

Lạng	A unit of currency by weight used for precious stones and metals, with one lạng weigh 37.8 grams
Quan	10 mạch (600 cash)
Mạch	60 đồng

## Vietnamese Measures of Capacity

Cáp	0.23 litres
Thăng	10 cáp (2.3 litres)
Đấu	10 thăng (23 litres)
Thùng	10 đấu (230 litres)
Hốc	26 thăng (59.8 litres)
phương	30 đấu (30 litres)

## Vietnamese Measures on area used in the Texts

Thước	24 square metres
Sào	15 thước (360 square metres)
Mẫu	10 sào (3,600 square metres)

## Vietnamese Terms in the text

ác Man	wild barbarian
ăn gỏi	eating raw food
Bắc cự, Nam tiến	resist to the North, expand to the South → <i>Cai bạ</i> revenue collector
cầu hoa	ritual which prays for good harvests
cai phủ tàu	officer in charge of overseas trade
cai tổng	chief of region
cai đội	army officer commanding a unit of 220-500 men
chánh binh (chính binh)	regular troops
chương khí	miasma or unhealthy air
chúa ngụ	Prince of Devils
cơ	a unit of the army consisting of three to five thuyền, i.e. usually 220-500 soldiers
công thuế	official tax
cúng	making offering
dân	common people
duyên lại	lower official in county office
Đàng Ngoài	Vietnamese term for Tongking in the 17th and 18th centuries
Đàng Trong	Vietnamese term for Cochinchina in the 17th and 18th centuries
điều	corvee
đội khăn	wrap head with a piece of cloth, a common practice in Cochinchina but not in Tongkong
gốc	root
hương hỏa nô	slaves whose duty is keeping joss sticks in family temple
hải phòng	line of defence against the sea
ký lục	personnel officer

kỳ phong	rite of praying for good wind
ký huyện	secretary of county
ký phủ	secretary of prefecture
li	both as term for length (500 m) and for the administrative division. In 15th century Vietnam it contains 110 households
lễ cúng chủ đất cũ	making offering to the former master of the territory, practice made by the Vietnamese to the Cham deities
Mọi	Vietnamese term for uplanders in the central highland
Mọi buôn	uplanders who had commercial relations with the Vietnamese
Mọi hoang	wild uplanders who had nothing to do with the Vietnamese
Mọi thuộc	uplanders who paid tributes to the Nguyen
mở núi (khai sơn)	rite of opening the mountain
Nôm	Vietnamese demotic form of Chinese characters
nguyên	under the Nguyễn, regions where uplanders lived
Nhang Dang	(Cham) devil
nhiều phu	people who were given to the officials as their income. These people did not pay their taxes to the government but rather directly to the officials they belonged to
ông ghé cai bạ	chief customer
phiên vương	chief of vassal state
potao	lord, master, king
quân	armed forces
shén jì	(Chinese) magic power
shuin-sen	(Japanese) Red Seal ship
sơn phòng	line of defence against mountain
Thiên-Y-A-Na (Bà Ngọc)	the Cham goddess Po Ino Nagar in Vietnamese language
Thiên Vương	King of Heaven
thổ binh (Thuộc binh)	local troops or subordinate troops
thuyền	the smallest unit of the Nguyễn armed forces, with 30 to 100 soldiers
thuế Man	uplanders who paid taxes to the Nguyễn
tỉnh	province
trấn thủ	protector
tráng	main taxpayers (usually men aged between 20 and 60)
tàu vụ	overseas trade
Tạ thổ	rite of buying land
tư thuế	personal tax
trưởng thôn	head of village, similar to xã trưởng
tứ trụ đại thần	four major officers like four pillars in a palace
xã	village
xã trưởng	head of village
xã tắc	god of land crops, an important Confucian deity
xe	cart, carriage

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