Chapter One

The Setting

This chapter provides an overview of the 217 years of Nguyen rule over southern Vietnam. The area that came under Nguyen control stretched from the Nhat Le River in the province of Quang Binh to the southern-most Vietnamese territory of Ha Tien at the Mekong Delta. Nguyen rule began in 1558 when Nguyen Hoang (r. 1558-1613) was appointed governor of the province of Thuan Hoa. In 1627, the Nguyen family broke with the central government of the Le Dynasty (r. 1428-1788) which was based in the north. This thrust the Nguyen into an armed conflict with the Trinh family that was controlling the Le Court in Tay Do and later at Thanh Long. The Nguyen went on to establish a separate state of their own by expanding the Vietnamese sphere of influence and power in the south. This they did at the expense of the two ancient kingdoms of Champa and Cambodia. By the time of their fall to the Le-Trinh armies in 1775, Nguyen territories extended from central Vietnam at Quang-Binh to Ha Tien in the south. This roughly corresponds with the territories of what was once political South Vietnam.

This first chapter also provide a brief geographical sketch and a description of the ethnic composition of the territories before the arrival of the Nguyen. This is followed by a description of various aspects of governance that shaped the Nguyen family's 217 years rule over southern Vietnam.

Vietnam Prior to 1558

For more than two thousand years, Vietnamese civilization was confined to the Red River Delta. Until 1471, the heartland of the Viet people stretched from Lang Son, at the Chinese border, to the Thanh Hoa, and Nghe An provinces in present day central Vietnam. On the west, the western mountain range separated them from other minority ethnic groups. This geopolitical and cultural sphere derived its unity from the tradition of north Vietnam and this identity subsumed all other newly acquired territories in the south.

Like many people in Southeast Asia, the Vietnamese trace their history back to a myth. According to most Vietnamese traditions and annals, the first Vietnamese rulers were the Hung Kings of the Hong Bang or Hung Dynasty. Based on *Linh Nam Chich quai*, a 15th century folktale, the Vietnamese people are associated with the Hung Kings (Hung Vuong) who were believed to be descended from Lac Long Quan (Lac Dragon Lord). The latter was a hero from the sea who settled in the Red River area. He taught the people how to till the land and how to build settlements. He then returned to the sea. When a ruler from China came and took control of the land, the people called to Lac Long Quan for help. He came again to rescue them. He then took Au Co, the wife of the Chinese ruler and married her. The union between Lac Long Quan and Au Co became the progenitors of the Viet race – Hung Kings.[1]

New Vietnamese studies show that Hung is an Austroasiatic title of chieftainship in the languages of Mon-Khmer speaking people in Southeast Asia.

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[1] *Linh Nam Chich Quai*, as cited in Keith Taylor, *The Birth of Vietnam*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983, pp. 1, 6-7.

It is also used among the minority Muong people in northern Vietnam. Van Lang or the Vietnamese kingdom, actually refers to people or nation. The kingdom was based in the region of Me-Linh in the heart of the Red River Delta.

Earliest records of Vietnamese history came from *Viet Su Luoc* which recorded the reign of a Chinese ruler, Chuang (698-682BC) of Zhou Dynasty in China.[2] The Vietnamese considered Chuang of Zhou as their first Hung king. The main reason is that the records on the Chou kings showed 18 generations before it ended, and this is similar to the Vietnamese belief that the Hung Kingdom spanned 18 generations. More importantly, this period also coincided with the archaeological findings dating back to the 7th century BCE. These findings show that the various tribes and cultures in northern Vietnam shared one of the oldest bronze-using culture known as the Dongson culture.[3]

A total of 18 Hung rulers ruled this kingdom from the 7th century BCE to 258BCE. The dynasty came to an end when a ruler of Chinese descent, Thuc Vuong Phan took over. He changed the country's name to Au Lac and he set up his rule at Co Loa, in present day Bac Ninh. A citadel was constructed at the site, and Thuc Vuong Phan ruled with the title of An Duong Vuong (or King An Duong).

In 208 BCE, An Duong Vuong was defeated by Trieu Da, a Chinese general who then set up the Trieu Dynasty. The country was then called Nam Viet (southern Viet). The dynasty lasted until 111 BCE before it was overthrown by an

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[2] *Viet Su Luoc*, Vol. 1: 1a as cited in Keith Taylor, *Ibid.*, pp. 3 and 309-310.
[3] Keith Taylor, *Ibid.* p. 7. For more detailed studies on the Dong Son culture, see Charles Higham, *Archaeology in Mainland Southeast Asia*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989.

invading army from China, now under Han Wu Ti of the Han Dynasty.[4] The event marked the beginning of a thousand years of Chinese domination over Vietnam which only ended in 938 CE.

Under the Chinese, Vietnam was administered as a military colony with the presence of a Chinese garrison.[5] During the Chinese rule, internal political problems in China did allow occasional brief period of independence for the Vietnamese. In 40 to 43 CE for instance, the Trung sisters (Hai Ba Trung), Trung Trac and Trung Nhi, led a rebellion against the Chinese, and held court at Me-Linh, Son-Tay.[6] In 248 CE, Trieu Au, another woman leader started an insurrection against the Chinese. In 544, Ly-Bon, who was of Chinese descent, revolted against the Chinese in the Red River Delta but was defeated. In 687, Ly Tu Tien led another Vietnamese rebellion against the Chinese. After Ly Tu Tien was killed, he was succeeded by Dinh Kien, and the rebellion threatened the Chinese garrison. It was not until reinforcements from Guangxi (China) came to the garrison's rescue that the rebellion was defeated. In 720s, Mai Thuc Loan led a rebellion against the Chinese. Other than that, the Chinese were able to maintain a firm grip on the region which they called Giao Chi, and later Annan (Annam or An Nan which in Chinese means Pacified South). However, this feature of

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[4] It is interesting to note that, due to this historical connection as well as the overwhelming borrowing of Chinese culture, Vietnam was considered part of East Asia by scholars such as Fairbank and Reischauer. See John Fairbank, E. O. Reischauer & Albert M. Craig, *East Asia, Tradition and Transformation*, London: George Allen & Unwin, 1975, pp. 258-276.

[5] For a study on the early history on Vietnam, see Keith Taylor, *The Birth of Vietnam*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983. On the Chinese occupation of Vietnam see Jennifer Holmgren, *Chinese Colonisation of northern Vietnam: Administrative Geography and Political Development in Tongking Delta, first to sixth centuries AD*, Canberra: Australian National University, Oriental Monograph Series, No. 27, 1980.

[6] The two sisters, Trung Trac and Trung Nhi, commonly known as Hai Ba Trung (Two Trung Sisters) committed suicide when they were defeated and pursued by the Chinese army. A shrine named Hat-Mon Pagoda was erected in Son Tay in their memory, another, named Hai Ba was situated at Hanoi.

resisting the Chinese and later things foreign, was one of the most enduring traditions of the Vietnamese people.

One thousand years of Chinese rule saw the Vietnamese adopt many aspects of the Chinese way of life. Chinese influence range from economic, cultural to intellectual development. Despite encountering many aspects of Chinese culture, the Vietnamese were still able to maintain some elements of their own indigenous identity and way of life.[7] This helped the Vietnamese in maintaining an independent identity and a constant consciousness of their distinctive features as contrasted to the Chinese.

Perhaps the greatest Chinese influence on the Vietnamese was in the aspect of intellectual and literary development. The Vietnamese had adopted the Chinese characters in their system of writing, and Confucianism dominated the social code and general outlook of the Vietnamese. Such adoption of Chinese elements continued even after Ngo Quyen had freed Vietnam from the Chinese control in 938 A.D. Ngo Quyen and subsequent Vietnamese rulers of various dynasties looked to Chinese models for their system of government and social order.

The Vietnamese retained the Chinese characters in their system of writing even though the indigenous Vietnamese spoken language was maintained, particularly in the rural areas where the degree of Sinicization was lower. In the eleventh century, the Ly Dynasty (1009-1225) introduced public examinations as a means to recruit officials into its government service. The examinations were

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[7] For a study on Vietnamese civilisation, see Nguyen Van Huyen, *The Ancient Civilization of Vietnam*, Hanoi: The Gioi, 1995.

modelled after those conducted in China. The examination were based largely on the Confucianist classics. Since then, it became part of the Vietnamese national culture and was vital in shaping the traditional outlook and world view of the Vietnamese, especially among the officialdom. Like their counterparts in China, the Sinicised Vietnamese adopted Confucianism as their ways of life. In dealing with non-Viet people, the Viet people adopted a superior posture the same way the Chinese had regarded all non-Chinese as barbarians and uncivilised.

The independent nation of Vietnam essentially covered the region around the Red River Delta, with Thang Long (present day Hanoi) as its centre of authority. The city remained the heart of Vietnamese culture and political power for six hundred years before being challenged by the emergence of an alternate political entity in the south led by the Nguyen from the end of the sixteenth century to the eighteenth century.

After regaining its independence from China in 938A.D., the Vietnamese were ruled by six indigenous dynasties, namely, the Ngo (938-944); Dinh (968-980); Early Le (Tien Le, 980-1009); Ly (1009-1225); Tran (1225-1400); and Ho (1400-1406). Internal crises during the Ho dynasty allowed the Chinese an opportunity to re-assert its rule in Vietnam. A Chinese army during the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) invaded Vietnam and re-established Chinese rule over Vietnam. This time, the Chinese could only stay for 23 years (1406-1428). In 1428, Le Loi, a Vietnamese leader from Lam Son, Thanh Hoa province defeated and expelled the Chinese army and established indigenous rule over Vietnam. The new dynasty was called the Le Dynasty (also known as Hau Le, later Le 1428-

1778 to distinguish it from the former Le), whereas the country was called Dai Viet.

It was during the Le dynasty that many of the Vietnamese traditions emerged, including the adoption of a legal system of its own, the Hong Duc Legal Code.[8] There were also significant breakthrough in the development of literature. There was also the expansion of Vietnamese territory to the southernmost areas of Thuan Hoa and Quang Nam before the Nguyen's subsequent southward movement to complete the incorporation of the southern land under Vietnamese rule.

Geographical Features of Southern Vietnam

Vietnam is a long narrow country. Its long stretch of territory which measures roughly six hundred miles from north to the south, provides for a diverse

[8] The Hong Duc Legal Code was an extensive set of laws promulgated in circa 1475 by Emperor Le Thanh Tong (1460-1497). It encompassed almost every aspect of Vietnamese lives, and would serve as the basis for the Gia Long Legal Code, introduced in 1812. See Danny Whitfield, *Historical and Cultural Dictionary of Vietnam*, New Jersey: The Scarecrow Press, 1976, pp.114-115. For a legal history of this period, see Yu Insun, *Law and Society in Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century Vietnam*, Seoul: The Asiatic Research Centre, Korea University, 1990.

geographical setting.[9] According to Jean Chesneaux, this diversity had advantages and some disadvantages.[10] Generally, there are four main features.

First, in central Vietnam where the Nguyen territory begins, is the Truong Son mountain range, formerly known as the Annamite Cordillera or chain of mountains. This extends through the entire southern part of the country and is not far from the sea. In this narrow space are the plains of Dong Hoi, Quang Tri, Hue and Phu Gia. Some of the places, like the area around Hue in Thua Thien has only around 25 miles of land, sandwiched between the South China Sea and the borders of Laos. However, the plains begin to widen along the southern part of the Truong Son mountain range. The Truong Son is also progressively of lower heights as it extends to the south. These mountains are accessible from the plains through passes such as the Ai Lao and Mu Gia. The mountains give way to the plains as it reaches the Mekong Delta. The alluvial deposits of the Mekong river and other smaller rivers such as the Bassac and Saigon make the delta plains fertile and suitable for farming. Hence, the topography of the land changed from a narrow and rugged strip of highlands in the north to a vast and flat lowland delta in the south.

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[9] For discussions on the historical geography of Nguyen Southern Vietnam, see *Dai Nam Nhat Thong Chi* (The Geographical Gazetteer of Dai Nam), hereafter *DNNTC*. Listed as Manuscript A69/7 in Institute of Han-Nom Research and Ecole Francaise d'Extreme-Orient collections: various volumes on the southern region south of Nghe An, including, Vol. 4: Quang Binh, Vol. 8: Thua Thien, Vol. 9: Phu Xuan, Quang Nam, Quang Ngai, Vol. 10: Binh Dinh, Phu Yen, Khanh Hoa, Binh Thuan, Vol. 11: Gia Dinh, Dinh Thuong, Ha Tien, and Vol. 12: An Giang, Vinh Long, Bien Hoa. For a discussion on Quang Binh, see L. Cadiere, "Geographie Histoire Du Quang Binh d'apres les annales Imperiales", *BEFEO*, Vol.2, 1902. For geographical studies on the south, see Trinh Hoai Duc, *Gia Dinh Thanh Thong Chi*. For the French version, see *Histoire et Description de La Basse Cochichine*, G. Aubart (trans.), Paris: Impemerie Imperiale, 1893. For an old geography of southern Vietnam, see *Nam Ky Dia Du Chi* [Institute of Ham-Nom collection, MS VHv 1547].

[10] Jean Chesneaux, *The Vietnamese Nation: Contribution to a History*, Sydney: Current Book Distributors, 1966, p. 9.

Secondly, cutting through the mountains and the plains are numerous rivers that flow from the highlands to the plains before emptying into the South China Sea. Apart from being a source of water supply for agriculture, these short and fast flowing rivers also serve as natural demarcation points between the Viet people and their southern neighbours. As the Truong Son descend to the Mekong plains, the rivers flowing from its hills also become larger and slower. Nonetheless, they continue to serve as natural demarcation lines for the Viet people and the Khmers. This was especially so during the later stage of the Nguyen rule.

Thirdly, on the east is the long Vietnamese coast that extends through the entire length of the country. The coastal line spans over six hundred miles from present day Quang Binh province in the central Vietnam to Ha Tien in the southwest bordering present day Cambodia. Even though the southern Vietnamese are not known to be great seafaring people,[11] the long coastal region enable them to share in the rich maritime culture of Southeast Asia. This is evident from the way the population is concentrated near the coast. It has also made the country accessible from abroad. Hence, one would find a series of ports along the coast as the Viet people progressively migrated further south. These ports include Hue, Tourane (Danang), Hoi An, Qui Nhon, Saigon and Ha Tien. Even before the Nguyen extended their rule to the south, some southern ports

[11] Such view was expressed by John Crawfurd who visited Saigon and Hue in 1820. According to Crawfurd, "This branch (British Ports in the Straits of Malacca), and any other of the foreign trade of Cochin China, is carried out by Chinese, who are both the merchants, mariners and navigators. The native Cochin Chinese scarcely venture beyond their own coasts.", see John Crawfurd, *Journal of an Embassy to the Court of Siam and Cochin China*, Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press Reprint, 1987, p. 514. In fact, this situation persisted until the early 19th century, see George Windsor Earl, *The Eastern Seas or Voyages and Adventures in the Indian Archipelago in 1832-33-34*, London: William H. Allen, 1837, reprinted, Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1971, p. 198.

have been recognised as important entry points of the country. The Chinese scholar Zhang Xie who mentioned the two ports of Tan Chau and De-di as the main entrances to southern Vietnam. *O Chau Can Luc*, the geographical gazetteer compiled in 1365 provides a list of natural products from the region of Thuan Hoa and Quang Nam. Among them were elephant tusks, bee wax, olive, rattan, iron ore, pepper, calambac, rhino horns, silk, buffalo horns, and deer skins.[12] The richness of southern Vietnam was also described by Zhang Xie in his *Dong Xi Yang Kao*, compiled in 1618. A total of 62 items were listed, among them gold, elephant tusks, rhinoceros horns, pearl, mother of pearl, Khe Nam, silk linen and bee wax.[13]

Fourthly, there was the natural richness of the mountains and the sea. The richness of the mountain land is evident from the goods that were brought down by the uplanders[14] and the Viet people who ventured into the highlands. Chief among the products were Khe Nam and calambac, bee wax, swift nests, pepper, elephant tusks, rhinoceros horns, and even elephants.[15] From the sea came sharkskin and fish. This natural wealth was recognised at the very early stage of the Nguyen rule by its founder, Nguyen Hoang, who reminded his successors to be grateful for the abundant wealth of the land and sea that could sustain them for generations.[16]

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[12] *O Chau Can Luc* (MS A 263), Vol. 2: 18-19.
[13] Zhang Xie, *Dong Xi Yang Kao*, 1618, Vol. 1: 13-16. This edition, Taipei: Zheng Zhong Zhu Ju, 1962.
[14] The term uplanders is used in this study to denote the hill tribes living within southern Vietnam as well as those living beyond the western boundaries of southern Vietnam. The term is also used by Li Tana in her *Nguyen Cochinchina*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998.
[15] Ibid., Vol. 1: 15-18.
[16] *Dai Nam Thuc Luc Tien Bien* (hereafter *Tien Bien*), Vol. 1: 35.

The Population of Southern Vietnam

It is difficult to provide accurate statistics on the size of the population of southern Vietnam at the time of Nguyen Hoang's arrival in Thuan Hoa, generally it is agreed that Nguyen Southern Vietnam had always had smaller population compared to the north. La Bissachere estimated that in 1800s, the population in the north was 18,000,000 and Cochinchina had about 1,500,000.[17] Li Tana gives a figure of around 5.5 million in the north in 1539 and around 400,000 in southern Vietnam in 1555.[18] Generally, the population of Nguyen Southern Vietnam can be divided into two broad groups, namely, the indigenous people, which included the Viet, the various groups that were living in what is considered Nguyen Southern Vietnam and the Cham population, and the uplanders, which denote the hill tribes living mainly on the western highland areas. The second group in the population consisted of immigrants like the Chinese and Japanese.

The southern province of Thuan Hoa came under Vietnamese control in 1306 after the Champa ruler, Jaya Simhavarman III gave it up in exchange for marriage with the Vietnamese princess, Tran Huyen.[19] In 1402, a greater part of Quang Nam, another southern province was taken over when the Vietnamese defeated Jaya Simhavarman V of Champa. In 1471, the Vietnamese under Le

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[17] La Bissachere, *Relations sur le Tonkin et la Cochinchine* (1807), published by Charles B. Maybon, Paris: 1920,as cited in Dang Phuong Nghi, *Les Institutions Public du Viet Nam*, Paris: Ecole Francaise d'Extreme-Orient, 1967, p. 34.

[18] Li Tana, *Nguyen Cochinchina*, p. 160-161. Li Tana's figures were compiled from various sources including *Ngan Nam Tche Yuan* (Record on Annam).

[19] Much of the early history of Thuan Hoa and some parts of Quang Nam can be found in *O Chau Can Luc* that was compiled before Nguyen Hoang came down to Thuan Hoa.

Thanh Ton again defeated Champa,[20] and extended the Vietnamese sphere of influence up to the region of Phu Yen. Since then, the Vietnamese had established military colonies in Quang Nam through which to re-settle their people. These military colonies will in turn serve to protect them against the Cham or uplander intrusions. These people were also a barrier between the Vietnamese heartland and their enemies. Between 1504-1509, the Chams launched attacks against the Vietnamese, it resulted in the latter driving the Chams and uplanders into the western highlands.[21]

Generally, the Vietnamese settlers who were brought into Thuan Hoa and Quang Nam after 1306 and 1471 had little contact with the uplanders as well as groups such as the Chams. There were several barriers against such contacts. Firstly, there was a royal edict of 1449 which forbade inter-marriage between Vietnamese and the Champa people. This implied that uplanders were also excluded as they were regarded to be inferior to the Chams. Judiciary measures that prevented inter-marriages were enshrined in the Le Code (Code of Hong Duc).[22] This law, considered the most important ever formulated in the history of Vietnam, was subsequently adopted in post-Hong Duc period as in Article 333 of

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[20] Early scholars including Georges Maspero contended that the Vietnamese conquest of 1471 marked the end of Champa, see Georges Maspero, *Le Royaume de Champa*, Paris: Histoire Nationale d'Art et d'Histoire, 1928. However, Vietnamese chronicles maintained that Champa remained in existence as the independent nation of Panduranga in the southern region of Phan Rang until at least 1693 when the Nguyen conquered it and set up a Nguyen-sponsored government. See for instance, *Tien Bien, Vol. 6:*. Some later works including that by Po Dharma suggest that Champa remained independent until 1834 when it was finally absorbed by Emperor Minh Manh, see Po Dharma, *Le Panduranga (Campa) 1802-1835, ses rapports avec le Vietnam*, Paris: EFEO, 1987.

[21] Gerald Hickey, *Sons of the Mountains: Ethnohistory of the Vietnamese Central Highlands to 1954*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982, p. 155. See also Le Thanh Khoi, *Histoire du Viet Nam*, p. 230.

[22] Hong Duc, after the reign title of Emperor Le Thanh Ton (1460-1497).

the Le Code that forbade the marriage of Vietnamese officials and Chams.[23] In 1499, a further decree was issued to prohibit Vietnamese from marrying Cham women. The rationale was a need to maintain the purity of Vietnamese customs.[24]

Secondly, there existed a cultural as well as linguistic barriers between the Vietnamese and the colonised. The Vietnamese adopted a superior attitude vis-à-vis the uplanders and the Chams. Thus, contact between these two peoples was minimal. Furthermore, in the early stages the Vietnamese did not trade with the uplanders and this meant minimal contact. The only occasion when the uplanders did come into contact with the Vietnamese, was in the markets (fairs) where they sold their jungle products. Very few Vietnamese ventured into the mountains to conduct trade with the uplanders.

A sound administration over the uplanders and careful dealing with the Chams was a hallmark of Vietnamese rule even before the arrival of Nguyen Hoang. The frequent armed attacks by the uplanders and the Chams on the Vietnamese settlers disrupted the development of the Vietnamese settlements. Between 1471 and 1509, the uplanders and the Chams attacked Vietnamese settlements on no less than five occasions.[25] The Chams in particular, continued to maintain a sizeable army and in their first military encounter with the Nguyen in 1611 they managed to muster a full scale attack. The Chams continued to be a torn in the flesh of the Vietnamese until the Nguyen conquest in 1693

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[23] See Gerald Hickey, *Sons of the Mountains*, and Insun Yu, *Law and Society in Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century Vietnam*, Seoul: Asiatic Research Center, Korea University, 1990, p. 154.
[24] *Kham Dinh Viet Su Thong Giam Cuong Muc*,(MS A. 1 hereafter *Cuong Muc*), Vol. 24: 39-40.
[25] See Hickey, *Sons of the Mountain*, pp. 154-155.

The region that came under the Nguyen rule was ethnically diverse. The region from Quang Binh down to Phu Yen were formerly occupied by the Cham people. Encounters between the Viet people and the Cham during the Tran (1225-1400) and the Le (1428-1788) dynasties gravely weakened the Champa Kingdom. As a result of these two encounters, the Champa Kingdom shifted its capital to the region south of Phu Yen thus leaving large tracks of land in the hands of the Viet people.

The Cham belong to the Austronesian stock.[26] They came under Indian cultural and religious influence around the middle of the fourth century CE. The fusion between the local dynamics and this foreign influence is evident even today in Cham architecture and relics found in the region between present day Hue and Quang Nam. The cities of Tra-kieu, Dong Duong and My-son are fine examples of this influence. At the time of the establishment of Nguyen rule in Thuan Hoa in 1558, the Cham Kingdom (or Nagara Champa) was centred at Phan Rang, and called itself, Panduranga.

Contrary to findings of earlier scholars, the people of Champa were not homogenous.[27] In fact, over the centuries, interaction took place between the Cham and the uplanders from the Truong Son (Annamite Mountain Chains) range. Former Cham centres in the highlands such as My-son lend support to such an argument. There are new findings that suggest that there exists an incorporation of other Austronesian tribes such as the Jarai, the Chru, the

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[26] Eric Christal, "Champa and the Study of Southeast Asia", *Le Campa et Le Monde Malais: Acts de la Conference Internationale sur le Campa et le Monde Malais*, Paris: Centre d'Histoire et Civilisations de la Peninsule Indochinoise, 1991, pp. 66.

[27] For many years, scholars were influenced by Maspero's view that the Chams were homogenous. See Georges Maspero, *Le Royaume de Campa*, Paris: editions G. Vanoest, 1928.

Ronglais and the Rhade in Champa. In fact, Po Rome (1627-1651), who was one of the most popular kings in the history of Champa, was actually of Chru descent. Po Rome's son, Po Saut, was in turn, of Chru and Rhade parentage.[28] There were also evidence which suggests the incorporation of other non-Austronesian groups into the kingdom of Champa, namely, the Stieng and the Hmong.[29]

Apart from the Cham, who were mainly dwellers of the plains, the Viet settlers from the north also encountered uplanders who lived in the highlands on the western side of the central Vietnamese plains. Those uplanders who were associated with the Chams were concentrated in the region between Qiang Binh and Phan Rang. Further to the south were the Bahnar, the Sedang, Hre and Kato. They were Mon-Khmer speakers. Towards the southern end of the Truong Son in the Mekong region were the Maa, Stieng, Mnong and Sre, who were Mon-Khmer speakers.[30]

And even as the Vietnamese under the Nguyen began to advance into the south, they encountered other uplanders who spoke different tongues.

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[28] Gerald Hickey, *Sons of the Mountains*, p. 56.

[29] For some recent studies that took up this line of argument, see Benard Gay, "Une Nouvelle sur le Composition Ethnique du Campa" in *Actes du Seminaire sur le Campa organise a l'Universitaire de Copenhangen*, Paris: Centre d'Histoire et Civilisations de la Peninsule Indochinoise, 1988, pp. 49-56; Po Dharma, *Le Panduranga (Campa) 1802-1835, Ses Rapports avec Vietnam, Vol. I*, Paris: Ecole Francaise d'Extreme-Orient, 1987; and Pierre-Bernard Lafont, "Les Grandes Dates de l'Histoire du Campa", in *Le Campa et la Monde Malais*, Paris: Centre d'Histoire et Civilisations de la Peninsule Indochinoise, 1991, pp. 6-25.

[30] For more on uplander tribes in the Central Vietnamese highlands, see Bernard Bourotte, "Essai d'Histoire des Populations Montagnardes du Sud-Indochinois jusqu'a 1945", *Bulletin de la Societe des Etudes Indochinoises*, (hereafter, *BSEI*), Vol. XXX, 1955, p. 17; see also Gerald Hickey, *Sons of the Mountains*, pp. 1-19.

Vietnamese sources have tried but failed to identify the differences between these uplanders.[31]

Despite official efforts at prohibiting lowland and highland contacts, such relations did take place. This was especially so in the case of traders and individual settlers. To the Viet people, the highlands were commercially attractive. Various uplanders had supplied different Vietnamese courts with highlands products. Commodities such as elephant tusks, rhinoceros horns, wax, honeycombs, sandalwood, calambac, resin, and even lacquer were items that were very much sought after by the Viet people. But in view of the prohibitions, the Chams very often became the middlemen in helping the Vietnamese acquire these jungle goods. There were also Viet people who had made inroads into the highlands and who traded directly with the uplanders.

During the early stages of Nguyen rule, contact between the Viet people and the uplanders was limited. It was only with International trade and demand for jungle products from the highlands however, that saw the Nguyen making efforts to engage in trade with the uplanders. This included the imposition of certain forms of monopoly over some prized commodities like sandalwood, calambac, gold and other precious metals. By including these goods as part of the annual gifts and tribute sent by these tribes to the Nguyen a form of monopoly was imposed.

Before 1558, there were already some foreigners in southern Vietnam. These included the Chinese and the Japanese. The Chinese were mainly traders. Most of

[31] For several examples of Vietnamese attempts to identify the various uplanders in the Nguyen domains, see *Phu Bien Tap Luc*, Vol. 2: 22-23, 30-31; Vol. 4: 3-20. (Institute of Han-Nom and EFEO version)

the Chinese who came to trade in southern Vietnam arrived during the early stage of Nguyen rule. In 1570 for instance, it was reported that a total of 13 to 14 trading junks from Fujian arrived at Thuan Hoa.[32] During the 17th centuries, the Chinese were allowed to set up their own quarters at the port of Hoi An, as well as the region of Thuan Hoa.[33]

The Japanese arrived in Tonking in north Vietnam long before the 16th century. They were already trading at the port of Van Don.[34] They came to southern Vietnam at about the same time as the Chinese traders in the 15th century. The Japanese began to arrive in southern Vietnam in large numbers following the anti-Catholicism edict that was issued by Shogun Toyotomi Hideyoshi in 1587. Most of the Japanese settled at Hoi An. However, it is believed that there were already some Japanese traders living in Hoi An before 1587 though their numbers are uncertain.[35] Most of the Japanese were involved in the silk trade.

Southern Vietnam Before Nguyen Hoang

After living under Chinese domination for more than one thousand years, the Vietnamese people under the leadership of Ngo Quyen, finally broke away from Chinese rule in 939 CE. The new Vietnam, officially known as Dai Co Viet,

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[32] Chen Chingho, "Ming Huong Xa and Thanh Ha Xa in Thua Tien", *The New Asia Journal*, Thuan Hoa here during 1570 does not refer to Hue or even Hoi An, but rather, refers to the former headquarters of Nguyen Hoang at Dinh Cat in present day Quang Tri.

[33] See for instance, Chen Chingho, *Historical Notes on Hoi-An (Faifo)*, Carbondale: Center for Vietnamese Studies, Southern Illinois University, 1973; see also Chen Chingho, "The Chinese Quarter of Faifo (Hoi-An) and Its Foreign Trade during the 17th & 18th Centuries", *The New Asia Journal*, Vol. 3, No. 1, August 1957, pp. 273-333.(In Chinese)

[34] J. H. Peysonnaux, "Ancienne Colonies Japonaises en Indochine", *Bulletin des Amis du Vieux Hue* (hereafter *BAVH*), No. 4, 1933, p. 262.

[35] A. Sallet, "Le Vieux Hue-Souvenir Japonais", *BAVH*, No. 4, 1919, pp. 506-507.

was confined to the region around the Red River Delta. In 982 CE., less than fifty years after regaining independence, the Vietnamese under Le Hoan (980-1005) of the early Le Dynasty (1010-1225), launched the first attack on its southern neighbour, the Kingdom of Champa. The attack was a success and the Vietnamese carried off 100 Cham ladies and an Indian holy man from the royal court of Champa.[36] The event marked the beginning of the process of *Nam Tien* or southward movement of the Viet people. In 992, it was reported that Le Hoan sent an army of 30,000 men to build a road from Cua Sot in present day Ha Tinh province into the Champa prefecture of Dia Ly.[37] By then, the Vietnamese sphere of influence had reached the region of present day Quang Binh.

In 1001, due to military pressures from the Vietnamese, the Chams under King Harivarman, abandoned Indrapura, the capital at present day Tra Kieu of Quang Nam province and moved the Cham royal court to Vijaya in present day Binh Dinh. Further Vietnamese territorial expansion to the south began in 1069 when Emperor Ly Thanh Tong (r. 1054-1072) of the Ly Dynasty (1009-1225) defeated an invading Cham army[38] and annexed the area in Bo-Chinh (in Dia-Ly) and Ma-Linh (Present Day Quang Binh and part of Quang Tri). They further expanded the Vietnamese territories to the region just north of Thua Thien in present day Hue. In 1075, Emperor Ly Nhan Ton (r. 1072-1127), the 4th Emperor

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[36] *Dai Viet Su Ky Toan Thu*, (hereafter *Toan Thu*, this edition, edited by Chen Chingho, Tokyo: Tokyo University, Centre for East Asian Research, 1985) Vol. 1: 189. See also Georges Maspero, *Le Royaume De Champa*, Paris: edition G. Vanoest, 1928, pp. 122-123.

[37] *Toan Thu*, Vol. 1: 193.

[38] The Kingdom of Champa was founded between 190-193 CE. by the Cham people. It was an Indianized state, extending from present day Quang Nam area to the Mekong Delta in the south. Known as Lin Yi by the Chinese, the kingdom was constantly threatening the Vietnamese people, as well as being at war with the Cambodians. By the early fifteenth century, the Chams however, were in decline. For a detailed study of the kingdom of Champa, see Georges Maspero, *Le Royaume De Champa*, Paris: edition G. Vanoest, 1928.

of the Ly Dynasty, issued a decree for the emigration of Vietnamese to the newly acquired Champa lands. This started the *Don Tien* system of resettlement of Vietnamese pioneers in the south.[39] There were however temporary setbacks of this system when the Chams, with the assistance of the Khmers and some Chinese, attacked the Vietnamese in 1076.

During the Tran Dynasty (1226-1400), Vietnamese territories expanded further to the south. In 1306, Emperor Tran Nhan Ton (r. 1279-1293) sent his daughter Nuyen-Chan *Cong Chua* to marry Che Man, the King of Champa. In return, the two prefectures of O-Chau (Thuan Chau) and Li-Chau (Hoa Chau) were given "as bride price" by the Cham King.[40] A year later in 1307, the Vietnamese army defeated the Champa army when the latter tried to regain these lost territories. This time, the Vietnamese annexed the entire Thuan Hoa (Thua Thien Province) and pushed down into the area just north of Dao Hai Van in Quang Nam (present day Danang). It was only in 1371 and 1378 that the Vietnamese advance was temporarily checked when a Cham King named Che Bong Nga led an army and invaded Thang Long and sacked the city.

Under the Le Dynasty, the Vietnamese army fought a battle in 1471 against the Chams and expanded the Vietnamese territories to incorporate the area just beyond Vijaya (Nha Trang), the governing seat of the Kauthara phase of the

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[39] *Toan Thu*, Vol. 3: 248. This was when Minh Linh Chau and Dia Ly came under Vietnamese rule. The name of Dia Ly was changed to Linh Binh.

[40] *Toan Thu*, Vol. 6: 388. Earliest Vietnamese description of the newly acquired regions are found in the *O-Chau Can Luc* (Institute of Han-Nom Research, listed as A263), compiled by Duong Van An during 1548 and 1553, that is shortly before Nguyen Hoang arrived in Thuan Hoa.

Cham kingdom. The battle effectively reduced greatly the power of the Cham Court, leaving it a minor player in the history of mainland Southeast Asia.[41]

Details of the Vietnamese' southward movement have been explained elsewhere. However, it is necessary to highlight several factors that spurred this expansion. Firstly, there was a need to overcome population congestion in the Red River Delta. It is estimated that by the 12th century, the population in that area had grown to a level where the land was insufficient to support the production of food crops. Moving south made sense as the existing area was constrained to the west by highlands.

Besides the congestion in the Red River Delta, the second factor lies with developments in China. Chinese dominance in the north compelled the Vietnamese to look to the south for new settlements. Since 938 CE, China remained a potential threat to Vietnam's security. The military might of the Chinese was not something that the Viet people were keen to challenge. On top of that, Vietnamese emperors submitted to Chinese rulers. Thus a northward expansion was not an option.

The incorporation of vast areas of new land over a period of 400 years from 938 CE to 1400 resulted in the doubling of the geographical size of Vietnam. Over this period however, the various Vietnamese Courts could only exert effective control over the two important provinces of Nghe An and Thanh Hoa, leaving other newly acquired southern areas under nominal control. This

[41] The circumstances which brought about the Vietnamese attack on Champa is discussed in John K. Whitmore, "The Development of the Le Government in Fifteenth Century Vietnam", PhD Thesis, Cornell University, 1968, pp. 198-199 & 207-213. Interestingly, one of the major issues was the excessive demand by the Le emperor for Champa tribute which the latter failed to provide.

lack of central control was due mainly to the alien terrain of the region as well as due to the resistance of the Cham people.

Indeed, the same Champa that was defeated by Le Thanh Tong in 1471 actually managed to gain recognition from the Ming Court. In 1481, the Ming Court sent a 2,000 strong armed delegation to escort 'Gu Lai' the descendant of the old king back to Champa and crown him as king. The Ming Court also despatched an envoy to the Le Court to demand an explanation for the 1471 attack on Champa.[42]

Ming support for Champa was part of the Chinese world order that existed in the form of tributary relations. Even though the Chams were at war with the Vietnamese, both these regions were part of the Chinese world order and submitted regular tribute to the Chinese court. In return, the Chinese emperors extended recognition to the Vietnamese and Cham rulers and promised protection to the two states should they come under attack. In this case Chinese support for the Chams was made in order to preserve a harmonious Chinese world order.

In 1509, the Le Court sent Do Doc, Le Tu Van and Vu Di to administer Quang Nam. In line with the 1487 Cham restoration, Tra Phuc, the son of the fallen Cham king, Tra Doi (Che Man), who died in captivity in Thang Long, seized the remains of his father and escaped to Champa. The act was a symbolic rallying point for Cham restoration. By bringing back the remains of the former king, it denoted the return of the King to his subjects. The Cham also sent an envoy to Ming China to obtain the latter's support. Ming officials were sent

[42] *Cuong Muc*, Vol. 24: 6-8.

supposedly to investigate the matter and to kill all Cham conspirators.[43] The event also suggest that despite their 1471 defeat, the Chams were still aiming to free their occupied land from the Vietnamese.

The expansion to the south was slow despite the two factors mentioned above. In addition to resistance from the Chams, the largely unexplored highlands and the unaccustomed warmer climate in the south also discouraged Vietnamese settlement. The prospect of leaving one's ancestral land for an unknown world did not appeal to the majority of the Vietnamese of the Red River Delta. Similarly the Le Court was more preoccupied with court politics and had little time to encourage a southward settlement. This is especially true in the two decades leading to the Mac usurpation of 1529.

This however, does not mean that no one was interested in settling in the south. On the contrary, there was a steady voluntary movement of Vietnamese to the south. One of the first acts by Vietnamese emperors after conquering the new lands was to parcel them out among the princes and mandarins who in turn, undertook the pioneering process by employing peasants and workers to clear the land for cultivation. The process was in many ways an effort in imposing the same "feudal" social structures that existed in the Red River Delta.[44]

Under the Le Dynasty, the Vietnamese government in Thang Long also introduced laws to banish criminals to the south. By so doing, the government hoped to rid the north of undesirable elements as well as to utilize their energies in opening up the land and establish settlements in the south. In 1474, three years

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[43] *Ibid.*, Vol. 25: 30.
[44] Li Tana, *Nguyen Cochinchina*, pp. 25-26.

after the annexation of Cape Varella from Champa, the Le government acted to banish criminals there. The criminals were divided into three categories according to the severity of their crimes. Those with the gravest offences were sent to the southern-most region.[45]

Apart from the criminals, there were those who Camile Briffaut called '*les errants*'. Briffaut suggested that throughout the southward movement of the Vietnamese people, the majority of the pioneers were 'marginal members' of society. He mentioned two types of Vietnamese in the villages: the sedentary and established *cite* (urban) people, and those who were not part of the main stream society, or '*les errants*'. It was the *errants* who were called to clear new fields and organise new villages.[46] They were people without homes, land or ancestral altars or family tombs. In other cases they were also those uprooted either by conflicts or natural disasters. These '*errants*' included people from weakened clans without resources, the rebels and criminals, as well as, craftsmen and shamans who were seeking new opportunities.[47] Nonetheless, the number of people who ventured south was small prior to the 17th Century.

However, by the early 16th Century, the southern region began to receive more attention from the Vietnamese. This was due to the growing economic difficulties that had arisen in the Red River Delta, compelling many to leave for new opportunities. Natural calamities such as flood and famine ravaged the north. The Le Court at the time were drawn into court intrigues and efforts to control

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[45] See *Lich Trieu Hien Chuong Loai Chi: Hinh Luat Chi*, p. 331.
[46] Camille Briffaut, *Le Cite Annamite*, Vol. 3, Paris: Librairie Coloniale & Orientaliste, Emile Larose, 1912, pp. 10-30, as cited in Gerald Hickey, *Sons of the Mountain*, pp. 150-151. See also *Lich Trieu Hien Chuong Loai Chi: Hinh Luat Chi*, p. 331.
[47] Briffaut, *Le Cite Annamite*, pp. 10-33.

floods and in overcoming drought were neglected. Among the provinces most affected were Thanh Hoa and Nghe An which were situated at the tail of typhoon. A series of migration to the south then took place each time a natural disaster struck. Thuan Hoa and Quang Nam were the normal destinations. The flow of people from the two provinces to Thuan Hoa and Quang Nam continued even after the arrival of Nguyen Hoang. In the autumn of 1559 for instance, a severe flood in Nghe An and Thanh Hoa caused many to move south and settled in Thuan Hoa.[48] Even during the Nguyen-Trinh conflict this exodus from the two province of Nghe An and Thanh Hoa continued. This provided new settlers populate Nguyen's southern Vietnam. According to Li Tana, the floods that took place in Thanh Hoa and Nghe An in the years 1561, 1570, 1571, 1572, 1586, 1589, 1592, 1594, 1595, 1596 and 1597, resulted in continued immigration from these regions into Nguyen Southern Vietnam.[49]

The Red River Delta was also increasingly unable to support a fast growing population. The relative peace experienced during the nearly two hundred years of the Tran Dynasty (1225-1400) and the first hundred years of the Le Dynasty (1427-1529) saw a rapid increase in population of Vietnam. The traditional Vietnamese heartland of the Red River Delta became overcrowded.[50] The population in the north had increased from an estimated barely two million in

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[48] *Tien Bien*, Vol. 1: p. 7a.
[49] Li Tana, *Nguyen Cochinchina*, p. 26, fn. 38.
[50] For discussions on the population of Vietnam during this time, see Ng Shui Ming, *The Population of Indochina*, Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1974, pp. 11-13; see also Li Tana, *Nguyen Cochinchina*, pp. 161-172.

1417 to more than five million in 1539.[51] Thus, the vast area in the south offered an alternative to those who seek new opportunities.

There was also the growing tension of war particularly after the Mac Usurpation of 1527 that caused a southward migration. In this period, the country was temporarily divided between the Le Restoration forces and the Mac army, which lasted until 1596. Political sentiments was divided among the elites with some championing for the restoration of the disposed Le Dynasty, while others gave their support to the Mac. The war that spread throughout the country resulted in the uprooting of many who wished to avoid the conflict, particularly men who wanted to avoid being drafted into the combating armies. The south, with its looser central control, became an attractive avenue to escape the conflict.

Finally, the southward movement was more than a process of the emigration of peasants and *errants*. It was a process of migration of people which encompassed many levels, bringing people of different backgrounds and even political affiliations to settle in the new land. However, it was Nguyen Hoang, the founder of the Nguyen rule in southern Vietnam, who acted as a catalyst of the Nam Tien process, in the new lands he took control of.

Foreign Relations in the Vietnam World

The history of Vietnam's foreign relations since 1428 has been shaped and coloured by the Vietnamese rulers' acceptance of the Chinese world order. In that year, Le Loi (reigned as Le Thai To, 1428 to 1433), the founder of the Le Dynasty (1428-1788), drove out the army of Ming China that had occupied Vietnam from

[51] Li Tana, *Nguyen Cochinchina*, p. 160.

1408 to 1428. One of the first things that Le Loi did was to send a tribute to the Chinese court at Nanjing.[52] The act demonstrated Vietnam or Dai Viet's (as Vietnam was known under the Le) willingness to be subordinate to the Chinese court despite having expelled the Chinese army from Vietnam. The move also signified Dai Viet's status as a vassal state with China as its suzerain. This act of submission effectively placed the Vietnamese within the Chinese world order and tributary system.

The rituals of tributary diplomacy involved a whole range of activities including the exchange of gifts (known as tribute goods), letters and ambassadors. The ultimate goal was the maintenance of the status-quo, which could be translated into the sustainment of the suzerain and subordinate relations between the patron state and the vassal states.

Historians tend to divide Southeast Asia into two cultural spheres, namely, the Indianised states, that is to say, those which had accepted some form of cultural influence from India, and Sinicised, referring to those which received Chinese influence. Between the two, Indian influence extended over a wider area with Vietnam being the exception.[53] However, despite their influence on the socio-cultural life of the major part of Southeast Asia, the Indians never had any

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[52] Such a practice is not confined to Le Loi alone. In 1788, when the Tay Son rebellion overthrew the Le dynasty and defeated an intervening Chinese army, the first thing that Nguyen Hue (Emperor Quang Trung), the Tay Son Emperor did was to send a tribute mission to China and presented himself at the Chinese Court. When Nguyen Phuc Anh established the Nguyen Dynasty in 1802, the first thing he did was to send a tribute to China. See Truong Buu Lam, "Intervention Versus Tribute in Sino-Vietnamese Relations, 1788-1790", in John K. Fairbank (ed.), *The Chinese World Order: Traditional China's Foreign Relations*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1968, pp.165-179; and Phan Thuc Truc, *Quoc Su Di Bien*, (National History, Supplementary Version), Chen Chingho (ed.), Hong Kong: New Asia Research Institute, Chinese University of Hong Kong, Vol. I: pp. 30-31.

[53] Some scholars like John Fairbank and Edwin Reischauer and Albert Craig were more inclined to include Vietnam as part of East Asia than Southeast Asia. See Fairbank, Reischauer and Craig, *East Asia: Tradition and Transformation*, London: George Allen & Unwin, 1973, pp. 258-259.

direct political relations with the states in the region. On the other hand, most Southeast Asian states have sent diplomatic missions to the Chinese Court.

The sending of diplomatic missions to China, often in the form of tributary missions, demonstrated that these states understood the significance of such relations. In fact, tributary relations between Southeast Asian states and China only ceased after most of these countries came under western colonisation in the 19th century. In the case of Vietnam, such a relationship did not end until 1885 when the French managed to wrest Vietnam from China.

However, China's military or imperial contact with Southeast Asia was limited to the Mongol invasion in the 13th century and Admiral Cheng Ho (Zheng He)'s seven voyages between 1403 and 1427. The Chinese had never sought control over other Southeast Asian states. Apart from granting recognition and in some cases, protection, Chinese control over Southeast Asia was nominal. Thus, for most Southeast Asian states, China's distance and its unwillingness to project its power meant that there was no real security threat from China should any of the Southeast Asian states refused to submit. This view was not shared by Vietnam, one of the two countries in Southeast Asia which continued to send tributary missions to China throughout the greater part of its independent history. The other was Siam.[54]

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[54] For a study on the Siamese tributary relations with China, see Sarasin Viraphol, *Tribute and Profit: Sino-Siamese Trade, 1652-1853*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1977, see also Takeshi Hamashita, "The Tribute Trade System and Modern Asia", *Memoirs of the Research Department of the Toyo Bunko* (The Oriental Library), No. 46, 1988.

Truong Buu Lam is of the opinion that for the Vietnamese rulers, tributary relations provided a way to remain relatively independent of their giant neighbour, and to prevent Chinese interference in their internal affairs.[55] Strongly conscious of their country's geographical proximity to China, Vietnamese rulers were eager to keep the Chinese at bay by assuming the position of a subordinate vassal in their relationship with China. This strategic consideration was also reinforced by the belief of the Vietnamese in a Chinese world order.

For Vietnam, being the immediate southern neighbour of China, the Chinese threat was real. When Le Loi accepted the position of vassal to the emperor of China, it was out of several considerations, including security. From the days of Le Loi's reign until the Mac family usurped the throne in 1527, the Le Court at Thang Long (Hanoi) sent regular tribute to the Ming Court. The Vietnamese court also sent missions to China each time a new Vietnamese emperor came to the throne.[56]

In return, the Chinese emperors would reward the Vietnamese emperor with the regalia of investiture as well as the seal of authority, which corresponds to the rank of a provincial governor in China. Apart from that, the Chinese emperors would also reward the Vietnamese emperors with gifts, many times more valuable than what was contained in the Vietnamese tributes. The measure was a reflection of both the superior position of the Chinese emperor as well as his benevolent character.

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[55] Truong Buu Lam, "Intervention Versus Tribute in Sino-Vietnamese Relations, 1788-1790", p. 165.

[56] For a study on Chinese sources relating to Sino-Vietnamese tributary relations, see G. Deveria, *Histoire des Relations de la Chine avec l'Annam-Vietnam du XVIe au XIX Siecle*, Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1880.

Tributary delegations from Vietnam to China were given very strict specification including the route to be taken, the size of the delegation as well as the content of the tribute specifically stipulated to the item. Any change to the specification of the tribute would require the approval of the Chinese. Unlike most other Southeast Asian states which used the maritime route for sending tribute, the Vietnamese delegations travelled on land. The route would take the delegation from Thang Long through Lang Son on the Sino-Vietnamese border before entering China via the Zheng Nanguan in the province of Guangxi. From there, the delegation would travel to the Chinese capital where it would be received.

Vietnam's normal tribute to China during the Le Dynasty consisted of four gold incense pots and vases, weighing 209 taels; 12 silver pots weighing 691 taels, 20 Rhinoceros horns, and 20 elephant tusks.[57] There were instances when these were substituted with gold and silver, the reason being the difficulty faced in transporting these items over land, as in the year 1716.[58]

In discussing the case of tribute and trade relation between Siam and China, Sarasin Viraphol suggests that there was an economic dimension to the notion of tributary relations, namely, the accompanying trade mission. Tributary relations with China went beyond the basic characteristic of state-to-state diplomacy. Viraphol argues that despite the general Confucianist disdain for commercial activities, and the Neo-Confucianist philosophy that was championing a self-imposed isolationist policy in China during the 17th and 18th

[57] *Cuong Muc*, Vol. 35: 17.
[58] *Ibid*, Vol. 35: 17.

centuries, the Chinese could not shun trade. Despite the image of Chinese self-sufficiency, there was a certain degree of economic interdependence, and in the case of Siam, it was the demand for rice.[59] For the Siamese, profit generated from the conduct of tribute trade was so great that it was worthwhile to engage in it.

The concept of tribute trade involved the admission to the tributary diplomacy arrangement which was followed by permission to trade. In this case, goods from the official trade mission were exempted from taxes, making it a profitable venture. While this element of tribute trade became so much an integral part of Siam's relations with China, the same could not be said of Vietnam's case. At least historical sources relating to Vietnam's dealings with China (reports of tributary missions to China) do not reflect the existence of tributary trade.

In the case of Vietnam, the tribute trade with China is unclear. The lack of evidence from the Vietnamese side seem to suggest that its tributary relations with China was limited to state-to-state relations. Vietnamese historical materials have not provided us with a clear idea of additional activities beyond the framework of the state-to-state diplomacy.

However, the existence of tribute trade is evident in Vietnam's dealings with delegations from Insular Southeast Asia. The *Dai Viet Su Ky Toan Thu* describes many instances where traders from Do Ba (Cha Va) arrived in Thang Long with their tribute of local produce while seeking permission to trade.[60] There were also occasions where traders from Insular Southeast Asia, most likely to be Malays, offered precious items such as pearls to the Vietnamese emperors,

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[59] Sarasin Viraphol, *Tribute and Profit: Sino-Siamese Trade, 1652-1853*, p. 1.
[60] *Dai Viet Su Ky Toan Thu* (MS A. 3 hereafter *Toan Thu*), Vol. 3: 4; Vol. 7: 14; Vol. 11: 17 & 57.

presumably in the hope of gaining permission to trade in Vietnam. Despite the usage of the term *Cong* or tribute when referring to such instances, at no time in its history has any state from Insular Southeast Asia considered itself a vassal of Vietnam.

Given this situation, it is perhaps important to bear in mind that despite Vietnamese rulers' acceptance of the Chinese model of tributary relations as the modus operandi of their foreign relations, the reality of the functioning of this system in Vietnam's case reflects some variants that warrant attention. This is especially so in Vietnam's dealings with its neighbours and foreigners.

Like most countries in Southeast Asia at that time, the first maxim which governed the relations of Vietnam's relations with foreign countries was based on the understanding that actual diplomatic exchanges or embassies were seen as ritual confirmation of existing ties. The second maxim is that Vietnam will not acknowledge itself to be inferior to any other country.[61] The exception being its relations with China in which the latter was considered to be the source of legitimising its rule. These maxims were evident in the case of Japan in the 17th and 18th centuries as W. J. Boot argues. Also, according to Boot, "in a hierarchically conceived world, equals do not exist".[62] Given these maxims, it would appear that successive Vietnamese regimes have subscribed to them.

Gideon Rose argues that "Theories of foreign policy seek to explain what states try to achieve in the external realm".[63] In looking at the Nguyen foreign

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[61] W. J. Boot, "Maxims of Foreign Policies", *Itinerario*, Vol. XXIV, No. 2, 2000, p. 66.
[62] Ibid., p. 69.
[63] Gideon Rose, "Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policies", *World Politics*, Vol. 51, 1: pp. 144-172.

relations, it would appear that the question to ask is, "what causes states to adopt certain kinds of foreign policies?" And in this case, the Nguyen. Nguyen went with the neoclassical realism where the most common approach has been to assume that foreign policies have their sources in domestic politics.[64]

In accepting the Chinese tributary system in its relationship *vis-a-vis* its larger northern neighbour, the Vietnamese also adopted a similar system in conducting its relationship with its other neighbours. Thus when Ngo Si Lien wrote in the *Dai Viet Su Ky Toan Thu* on the Le Court's relationship with the kingdom of Champa and Ai Lao, he used the word 'Cong', or tribute to describe the relationship. In other words, Vietnam imitated the Chinese, taking on the role of a superior state. The marked difference however, lies with the fact that the Vietnamese' sphere of influence was limited. Alexander Woodside made clear that the Vietnamese never achieved the position of universal empire as in the case of Imperial China. It was "one of a number competing domains in the genuine if vaguely defined multi-kingdom political environment of mainland Southeast Asia".[65] Thus, at best, the Vietnamese tributary system was a pale shadow of the system practiced by the Chinese universal empire. Such an argument is valid considering the fact that the Vietnamese had not the capability to project its power against Siam or Burma. It also did not have the cultural influence of China.

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[64] Ibid., p. 147. For a discussion on Realism in foreign policies, see K. J. Holsti, *International Politics: A Framework for Analysis*, 6th edition, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall International Editions, 1992, pp. 67-68.

[65] Alexander Barton Woodside, *Vietnam and the Chinese Model: A Comparative Study of Nguyen and Ch'ing Civil Government in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1971, p. 235. Chapter Five, "The Emperor, the Bureaucracy and the World Outside Vietnam", deals with this question of Vietnam's foreign relations under the Nguyen dynasty during the first part of the 19th century.

Suffice to say the various Vietnamese rulers, including Le Loi and his descendants, conducted their foreign affairs by imitating the tributary system of China. Even though the adoption of the Chinese system was most apparent during the later Nguyen Dynasty (1802-1945) as explained by Alexander Woodside this system began in the days of the Le Dynasty.

Despite the reality that it was merely a middle-level power, the Vietnamese emperor assumed the position of *Tien Tu* (Son of Heaven). This was also the title of the Chinese emperors, and can be seen as an attempt to elevate Vietnam onto a platform as the centre of universe in relation to its immediate neighbours and the non-Viet peoples living within or without its political boundaries, and thus, demanded the respect due to such position from them. In resuming its relationship with its neighbour such as Champa and the various principalities in Laos, the Vietnamese rulers demanded tribute from them.

The entire process was an expression of the relative status of the rulers of Vietnam and their neighbours. While the Vietnamese had copied the tributary diplomacy framework of the Chinese in dealing with their neighbours, the very states that they had demanded tribute from were used to operating in a non-Sinicised tributary diplomacy framework. While the Siamese could recognise the Chinese diplomatic techniques, other states that the Vietnamese came into contact with, including Champa and Cambodia, were less well-informed of it. Nonetheless, this does not mean that states like Champa and Cambodia did not understand their positions with regard to their larger neighnours. In fact, David Chandler suggests that, "Cambodian kings, pulled into tributary relations with

their stronger neighbours, knew the rules of the game and what position they had to take".[66]

Tributary relations could also take the form of punitive actions on the part of the patron states whenever a vassal ruler seemed to contravene the tributary relationship. Thus, when Champa failed to pay a heavy tribute as demanded by the Le emperor in 1471, the Vietnamese attacked and annexed a large part of Champa. The justification for such action against Champa was that the people of Champa who "do not fear heaven and are negligible in protecting (its proper patterns)", were enemies of the Vietnamese.[67] The attack on Champa confirmed the Vietnamese' power vis-à-vis Champa. After the sacking of the Champa capital, Vijaya, the Vietnamese emperor received tributes from other more distant hill peoples, including Ai-Lao (which was defeated by the Vietnamese in 1467), Tran-ninh (a plateau in eastern Laos), and the newly annexed Thuan-hoa and Quang-nam.[68]

Such tribute relationships continued into the days of the later Le period and even during the Mac period. During the Mac usurpation period (1527-1600), the Vietnamese court at Thanh Hoa, under the Le Restoration campaign continued to receive tribute and gifts from its neighbours, particularly Ai Lao and Tran Ninh. Such relationships continued after the Le was successfully returned to Thang Long (Hanoi) in 1590.

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[66] David Porter Chandler, "Cambodia before the French: Politics in a Tributary Kingdom, 1794-1848", Ph. D. Dissertation, University of Michigan, 1973, p. 61.
[67] John K. Whitmore, "The Development of Le Government in Fifteenth Century Vietnam", Cornell University, Ph. D., 1968, p. 209.
[68] Ibid., pp. 213-214.

Conclusion

This chapter outlines the settings that prepare us for the further understanding of the subsequent chapters by focusing on two main areas. Firstly, the settings of Nguyen Southern Vietnam prior to the establishment of the Nguyen rule. In this regard, emphasis is given to the geographical feature and characteristics of the population of Nguyen Southern Vietnam. Secondly, this chapter also highlighted the manner foreign relations were being practiced by states in mainland Southeast Asia and Vietnam prior to the establishment of Nguyen rule.