

## **Chapter Two**

### **Initial Contacts with Foreigners, 1558-1613**

Nguyen rule over southern Vietnam began in 1558 with the appointment of the patriarch of the Nguyen family, Nguyen Hoang to the position of governor of Thuan Hoa. It can be argued that during the first 42 years of Nguyen Hoang's rule, from 1558 to 1600, southern Vietnam's external linkages were actually an extension of the foreign relations of the Le Court. It was only after 1600 when Nguyen Hoang resolved to carve out a separate power base of his own in the south that the nature of the foreign relations became the direct concern of the Nguyen. This chapter will look at how foreign relations and foreign trade became important in the last few years of Nguyen Hoang's reign as part of Nguyen Hoang's goal in strengthening his hold on the two provinces of Thuan Hoa and Quang Nam.

#### **The Beginning of Nguyen Rule**

The departure of the Nguyen family to southern Vietnam during the mid-16th Century was the result of an inter-family feud which saw Nguyen Hoang, the patriarch of the Nguyen Lords, taking up appointment as the governor and garrison commander of Thuan Hoa, then one of the southern-most Vietnamese province.<sup>1</sup> Dai Viet, as Vietnam under the Le Dynasty was called, entered into a state of civil war between the Mac and the pro-Le forces creating two centres of

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<sup>1</sup> After Thuan Hoa, there were Quang Nam, Binh Dinh and Phu Yen which were further to the south.

power from 1529 to 1592. The Mac entrenched themselves in the northern capital of Thang Long, while the Le Restoration forces had first regrouped at Ai Lao, in present day Laos, before launching attacks on Thanh Hoa province. They captured the city of Tay Do in 1543 and made it the capital of the Le Restoration Movement. Established in 1533, the movement was led by Nguyen Hoang's father, Nguyen Kim. When he first arrived in Sam Chau, Ai Lao, Nguyen Kim's Le forces only numbered a few thousand men and 30 war elephants. He received help from the ruler of Ai Lao, Sau Dau to strengthen his forces. That year, Nguyen Kim discovered the existence of Ninh, the youngest son of Le Chieu Ton, the deposed emperor, hiding in disguise in Ai Lao with some court officials. Upon putting Ninh on the throne with the reign title of Le Trang Ton, Nguyen Kim proclaimed the Le-Restoration movement.<sup>2</sup> Kim's appeal to Le loyalists resulted in the rallying of many able-men who remained faithful to the Le, and by 1543, the Le army managed to wrest Thanh Hoa and Nghe An from the Mac, and temporarily restored the Le Court in Tay Do, in Thanh Hoa.

Upon usurping the throne in 1529, the Mac family tried to establish a dynastic rule in Thang Long. Apart from restoring law and order in the country, it also tried to obtain recognition from China to legitimise its rule. This was achieved in 1543 when the Ming Dynasty in China recognised the Mac as the legitimate rulers over Vietnam. The recognition helped to rally some support among the Vietnamese to the Mac, thus allowing it to exercise some form of normalcy and order in administrating the country. However, Mac rule was challenged by a section of the elites who remained loyal to the deposed Le family.

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<sup>2</sup> *Tien Bien*, Vol. 1: 2, see also *Toan Thu*, Vol. 16: 845 and *Cuong Muc*, Vol. 27: 25.

Just as the Le forces was gaining strength, Nguyen Kim was assassinated in 1545. He was poisoned by Duong Chap Nhat, the Mac Tong Tran (Garrison Commander) of Thanh Hoa who pretended to have shifted allegiance to the Le.<sup>3</sup> The control of military power fell into the hands of Kim's son-in-law, Trinh Kiem, a commander in the Le forces. Trinh Kiem was a native of Soc Son village, Vinh Phuc district in Thanh Hoa. He first joined Nguyen Kim during the campaign against the Mac from Ai Lao. Due to his bravery and ability, especially in the battle of Luu Duong in 1537, he was made a general. Kim also gave his eldest daughter, Ngoc Buu, in marriage to Kiem.<sup>4</sup> Nguyen Kim had two sons, both of whom were still young when their father died. Nguyen Uong, the elder was in his early twenties, while the second son Hoang was only twenty. As the war against the Mac was conducted under the leadership of Trinh Kiem, both of Nguyen Kim's sons also contributed to the Le cause. According to the *Dai Nam Thuc Luc Tien Bien*, the history commissioned by the Nguyen's descendants in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Le Emperor recognised their ability and rewarded them through promotions in the Court. Uong was made a Quan Cong,<sup>5</sup> and held the administrative position of Ta Tuong, whereas Hoang's ability in battle won him the title of Hau.<sup>6</sup> These promotions drew the jealousy of Kiem who saw the two

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<sup>3</sup> See *Tien Bien*, Vol. I: 3a; see also *Cuong Muc*, Vol. XXVII: 40b-41a.

<sup>4</sup> See *Tien Bien*, Vol. I: 3a; see also *Cuong Muc*, Vol. XXVII: 30.

<sup>5</sup> Though there is no direct equivalent between the Vietnamese Court titles to those of European origins, a Quan Cong will be roughly equivalent to a Count.

<sup>6</sup> Roughly equivalent to a Viscount or a Baron. According to M. L. Cadiere, the title of Quoc Cong entitled a person to be appointed a prefect or governor, a Quan Cong to be a sub-prefect, and a Hau as the head of a village. The administrative position of Ta Tuong, literally meaning Left-Minister and member of the Grand Councilors (tsai-hsiang) allowed a person to participate in government affairs, see Charles O. Hucker, *A Dictionary of Official Titles in Imperial China*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1985, p. 522. See also M. L. Cadiere, "Le Mur de Dong-Hoi: Etude sur l'établissement des Nguyen en Cochinchine", *BEFEO*, Vol. VI, 1906, p.89.

brothers as threats to his position. This led to the killing of Uong, allegedly on Kiem's orders. Hoang was afraid that he might suffer the same fate as his brother. He was advised by Nguyen U Ky, his maternal uncle<sup>7</sup> to pretend insanity in order to avoid Kiem's suspicions. At the same time he consulted Nguyen Binh Khiem,<sup>8</sup> a very famous scholar who had retired from the service of the Mac, and no longer party to the civil war. Khiem advised Hoang to go south.

Trinh Kiem's jealousy which had brought about Uong's death, causing Hoang to feel threatened is a matter requiring deliberation in order to trace the genesis of the southward movement of the Nguyen. This is especially so because there exists two conflicting versions of the episode offered by the historical records of different Courts. Historical records from the Su Quan or Historical Institute of the later Nguyen Dynasty, the successors of the Nguyen in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, described how Trinh Kiem was jealous of the achievements of the two Nguyen brothers so that he had the elder one killed. There was, however, no mention of his intention of killing Hoang, apart from that allegedly perceived by Hoang himself, or deliberately by the subsequent court historians to justify Hoang's move to the south.<sup>9</sup> The records of the Le Dynasty, *Dai Viet Su Ky Toan*

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<sup>7</sup> Nguyen Hoang was under the care of Ky when his father first arrived in Ai Lao. Ky continued to serve as the teacher and advisor of Hoang even as Hoang moved to the south in 1558. See *Tien Bien*, Vol.I: 5b & 6b.

<sup>8</sup> For a biography of Nguyen Binh Khiem (1491-1585), see *Tu Dien Nhan Vat Lich Su Viet Nam* (A Biography of Historical Figures of Vietnam), Hanoi: Nha Xuat Ban Van Hoa, 1993, pp. 491-493. Khiem was known to be the writer of *Bach Van Nguyen Trinh Quoc Cong Luc Ki* (The Poems of Nguyen Trinh Quoc Cong), Vien Han Nom MS VHv 1453.

<sup>9</sup> All the records produced by the southern historians including the *Tien Bien*, *Cuong Muc*, and *Nam Ha Tiep Luc (NHTL)* mentioned Trinh Kiem's jealousy as the cause of Uong's death, without providing any explicit motive on Trinh Kiem's part to kill Hoang, apart from Hoang's personal perception of the threat.

*Thu*, written largely under the *de facto* rule of the Trinh Lords, was silent on the event.<sup>10</sup>

Nevertheless, the real reason for Nguyen Hoang's appointment to the governorship of Thuan Hoa region could have been due to Trinh Kiem's appeal to the Emperor Le Anh Ton for Nguyen Hoang's appointment. In his presentation to the emperor, Trinh Kiem mentioned the strategic value of Thuan Hoa both in term of military and economic value. He also cautioned about the disunity of the people in the Thuan Hoa region, many of whom were suspected to be inclined to assist the Mac forces. Trinh Kiem reiterated that the situation posed a serious threat to the Le restoration movement. Thus, he recommended Nguyen Hoang for the position of governorship, as his family is "militarily-inclined, with many talents".<sup>11</sup> Trinh Khiem assured the emperor that with Nguyen Hoang working hand-in-hand with the garrison commander of Quang Nam, the Le court would have no more worries in the south.<sup>12</sup>

Whereas this recommendation to the emperor was 'recorded in verbatim' by the later Nguyen historians in the *Tien Bien*, the northern records are again silent. In his discussion of Nguyen Hoang's decision to go south, Keith Taylor accepted the *Tien Bien*'s account as politically motivated, as it was more likely to have been recorded in such a manner by later historians in trying to justify

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<sup>10</sup> Even Le Quy Don, the author of *Phu Bien Tap Luc* (PBTL) was silent on this matter. Writing on the history of the southern border two hundred years after Nguyen Hoang left for Thuan Hoa, Don too was perhaps bound by loyalty to his master, the Trinh, not to mention of the rivalry.

<sup>11</sup> *Tien Bien*, Vol. 1: 6.

<sup>12</sup> See *Tien Bien*, Vol. I, p. 6a. A notable surprise on this point is the silence of the northern records on the matter. While Keith Taylor was satisfied that Trinh Kiem's recommendation to the Le emperor which was recorded in verbatim in the *Tien Bien*, but not mentioned at all in the northern records seems to suggest that it was done to justify the Nguyen's break from the traditional Le Court.

Nguyen Hoang's break with the traditional north and the Le court.<sup>13</sup> Nonetheless, when looking from another perspective, Trinh Kiem's intention could be exactly as in his recommendation to the emperor, albeit with some hidden motives, including an attempt to keep Nguyen Hoang from remaining as a potent force in the central political life at Tay Do. From a strategic point of view, the region of Thuan Hoa, in the central position between the northern Nghe An and Thanh Hoa, and Quang Nam in the south, was important in maintaining the geopolitical unity of the Le restoration movement which was under the constant threat of the Mac forces in the north. Any strategic gain by the Mac forces in Thuan Hoa would break the Le Restoration movement's territories into two parts. Thus, it was sensible to send a strong leader like Nguyen Hoang to maintain the region under Le rule. Taylor who has examined both the Northern (*Toan Thu*) and Southern (*Tien Bien*) sources argued that Nguyen Hoang's departure for Thuan Hoa was more a part of the inter-family rivalries in the capital city that did not involve life-threatening danger as suggested by the *Tien Bien*. He suggests that Nguyen Hoang had to leave Tay Do as he was clearly unable to challenge the political leadership in the capital. The command of Thuan Hoa would at least give him "an alternate power-base".<sup>14</sup> However, despite his removal from the centre of power, it is important to note that Nguyen Hoang remained a loyal servant of the Le Court.

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<sup>13</sup> Keith Taylor, "Nguyen Hoang and Vietnam's Southward Expansion" in Anthony Reid (ed.), *Southeast Asia in the Early Modern Era: Trade, Power and Belief*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993, pp. 46-47.

<sup>14</sup> Keith Taylor, *Ibid.*, p. 55-58.

The issue of Nguyen Hoang's departure to Thuan Hoa has also been dealt with by Nola Cooke<sup>15</sup> who concurs with Taylor that Nguyen Hoang's departure from Thanh Hoa was the result of a family feud between the Nguyen and the Trinh for power and authority in the Le Court; and, that at the time of his departure from Thanh Hoa to Thuan Hoa, Nguyen Hoang had lost out in the power struggle against the more established and entrenched Trinh. This view differs significantly from those offered by earlier researcher L. Cadiere,<sup>16</sup> and lately, Yang Baoyun,<sup>17</sup> who, in accepting the *Tien Bien* version, maintained that Nguyen Hoang went south in 1558 on his own, and that he did so with the vision of a creating a new polity for himself and his descendants.<sup>18</sup>

This study takes the view that Nguyen Hoang had no choice but to go south in 1558 as he was not making any gains in the Le Court. However, Nguyen Hoang did not lose sight of the Le Court where he was still hoping to challenge for power. The south was for a time, a base where he could build on his strength. However, it was only after 1600 when Nguyen Hoang, again, lost out to the Trinh for position in the Le Court that he decided to build an alternative power base for himself in the south.

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<sup>15</sup> Nola Cooke, "Regionalism and the Nature of Nguyen Rule in Seventeenth Century Dang Trong (Cochinchina)", *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, Vol. 29, No. 1, March 1998, pp. 122-161.

<sup>16</sup> See for instance, L. Cadiere, "Le Mur de Dong-Hoi: Etudes sur l'établissement des Nguyen en Cochinchine", *Bulletin d'Ecole Francaise d'Extrême-Orient* (hereafter *BEFEO*), Vol. VI, 1906, pp. 87-254.

<sup>17</sup> Yang Baoyun, *Contributions a l'histoire de la Principauté des Nguyen au Vietnam meridional (1600-1775)*, Geneva: Loisan/Etudes Orientales, 1992.

<sup>18</sup> See the description of Nguyen Hoang's death bed message to his successor, Nguyen Phuc Nguyen in *Tien Bien*, Vol. 1: 23-24.

In his article describing the various sites of the Nguyen's headquarters, Cadiere used the term 'Rois' or Kings when referring to the Nguyen.<sup>19</sup> Likewise, Yang terms the Nguyen rule as a 'Principality', which accorded the status of royalty to the Nguyen.

When Nguyen Hoang went to Thuan Hoa, he was accompanied by members of his clan from Tong Son in Thanh Hoa province, which included mandarin-administrators, soldiers and their families. Thus, the 1558 appointment actually brought a group of highly-placed and able people to Thuan Hoa. It was with the help of this group of people and the subsequent arrivals that Nguyen Hoang laid the foundation for a separate Vietnamese nation that offered a variant to the traditional northern Vietnamese political, economic, socio-cultural entity, as well as foreign relations.

### **Southern Vietnam Under Nguyen Hoang**

Nguyen Hoang arrived in Thuan Hoa with his entourage that consisted of his former troops in 1558 as the Tran Thu (military governor) of the province. Prior to his arrival, Thuan Hoa was administered by a administrative system known as Tam Ty.<sup>20</sup> The system was introduced in Thuan Hoa in 1461 by Emperor Le Thanh Tong (r. 1460-1497 under the title of Hong Duc) shortly after the Le

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<sup>19</sup> L. Cadiere, "Les Residences des rois de Cochinchine avant Gia-Long", *Bulletin de la Commission Archeologique de l'Indochine*, 1913, pp. 103-185.

<sup>20</sup> For a brief statement on Tam Ty system and the various local and central government system of 18th century Vietnam, see Dang Phuong-Nghi, *Les Institutions Publiques Du Viet-Nam Au XVIIIe Siecle*, Paris: Ecole Française D'Extreme-Orient, 1969, p. 59.

Dynasty had acquired the area from the Kingdom of Champa.<sup>21</sup> The system placed the administration of a province under three magistrates, with each holding a different portfolio. The actual nature of the Tam Ty at Thuan Hoa during the arrival of Nguyen Hoang was not clear. The *Tien Bien* only mentions how the officials of the Tam Ty agreed to obey Hoang's command.<sup>22</sup>

The Tam Ty system originated in China. It was known as San Si and had been employed in the Chinese administration system since the Han Dynasty. But the Tam Ty system that was practised in the Le Dynasty was actually modelled after the provincial administration of the Ming Dynasty. The Qing government also used the system for provincial administration.<sup>23</sup> Its proper function however, is believed to have been modified by Nguyen Hoang. Under his son Nguyen Phuc Nguyen, the Tam Ty was fully restored and enlarged. It consisted of Xa Sai Ty which dealt with Chancellery affairs and the administration of justice. It was led by a Do Tri (magistrate) and assisted by a Ky Luc (Provincial Magistrate). The second portfolio was that of Tuong Than Lai Ty with jurisdiction over import taxes and customs and the control of the army in the provincial areas. It was led by a Cai-Ba (Treasurer). Lenh Su Ty was the third portfolio which was responsible for celebration of rites and the control of the army in the capital. It was under the charge of a Nha-Uy (commander),<sup>24</sup> whose duties included foreign relations.

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<sup>21</sup> See *PBTL*, Vol. 1: 13.

<sup>22</sup> *Tien Bien*, Vol. 1: 6b.

<sup>23</sup> See Charles O. Hucker, *A Dictionary of Official Titles in Imperial China*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1985, pp. 401-402.

<sup>24</sup> *Tien Bien*, Vol. 2: 2b, see also *PBTL*, Vol. 3: 24b-26a.

Heading the Tam Ty was a Tran Phu (a judge in a military guard).<sup>25</sup> The presence of the Tam Ty system suggests, on the one hand, the existence of a mandarin civil-service-led administration. On the other hand, the frontier character of the region did not warrant the employment of a full civil administration. This is mainly due to the fact that the Tam Ty administration, although led by a civil mandarin, was also militarily inclined, with a strong military section. The system was usually used by the Vietnamese court as a form of local administration in frontier areas. At the time of Nguyen Hoang's arrival at Thuan Hoa in 1558, the province, together with Quang Nam were then the southern most region of Vietnamese influence.

In 1558, Quang Nam was under the command of Bui Ta Han, who was also known as Tran Quan Cong. Bui Ta Han was a native of Quang Ngai. He was appointed the governor of Quang Nam under the Le Government and remained loyal to the Le after the Mac usurpation. During Nguyen Hoang's early days in Thuan Hoa, Han was instrumental in assisting Nguyen Hoang to resist the Mac army. Han however, had a special place in Vietnamese history as he was known as the official who had set up the Son Phong (Mountain Defence) system as part of the Vietnamese means of controlling the uplanders along the western highlands. Interestingly, though Han was an equal of Nguyen Hoang, later court historians categorised him as one of the Nguyen's trusted subordinates.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> See *Tien Bien*, Vol. 1, p.5b.

<sup>26</sup> See *Dai Nam Liet Truyen Tien Bien*. For this study, the version from the Institute of Han-Nom is used, MS VHv 172), Vol. 3: 16-17. For Bui Ta Han's role in the setting up of the Son Phong system, see preface of *Phu Man Tap Luc*, (Miscellaneous Records of the Pacification of the Barbarians, Vien Han-Nom, MS A. 68), Vol. 1: 10 & Vol. 3: 1.

Upon Nguyen Hoang's arrival, Tong Phuc Tri,<sup>27</sup> the chief of the Tam Ty, presented to Hoang the various registry books of Thuan Hoa, and offered to serve under Hoang. Tong Phuc Tri, also known as Lun Quan Cong, was a native of Thanh Hoa. He was sent to serve as the judge of the Tam Ty at Thuan Hoa. After Nguyen Hoang took over Thuan Hoa, Tri became one of Hoang's most trusted subordinates. Since then, the Tong family remained an integral part of the elite circle in the Nguyen Court in southern Vietnam. Apart from Tri, Nguyen Hoang was assisted by his uncle, Nguyen U Ky, and Mac Canh Truc. Nguyen U Ky was the elder brother of Nguyen Hoang's mother. His family was originally from Hai Duong province but had settled in Thanh Hoa. Members of his family had been serving the Le Court. It was Nguyen U Ky who was mainly responsible in bringing up Nguyen Hoang.<sup>28</sup> Mac Canh Truc (not related to the Mac family) was a native of Hai Duong. He came to Thuan Hoa as part of Nguyen Hoang's entourage, and held many important positions. After his demise, the family changed the family name to Nguyen Phuc, and later, Nguyen Huu.<sup>29</sup>

Nguyen Hoang set up his headquarters at Ai Tu, near to the present day city of Quang Binh as his centre of administration. The choice of Ai Tu is an indication that Nguyen Hoang was more concerned to defend the region from the attack of Mac forces still based in Thang Long than to actually pay close attention to civil rule. This is especially so as Ai Tu was strategically placed near to the approaches of the Linh Giang and hence, would enable Nguyen Hoang to control the flow of movement between Nghe An and Thuan Hoa-Quang Nam region. One

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<sup>27</sup> For a brief biography, see *Liet Truyen Tien Bien*, Vol. 3: 5.

<sup>28</sup> *Tien Bien*, Vol. 1: 7a. See also *Liet Truyen Tien Bien*, Vol. 3: 1-2.

<sup>29</sup> See *Liet Truyen Tien Bien*, Vol. 3: 9.

example which demonstrated Nguyen Hoang's concern for military-security problem was the setting up of a coastal defence (Hai Phong) to guard against attempts by the Mac forces from attacking the Le controlled territories in the south.<sup>30</sup>

The *Tien Bien* is silent on the Tam Ty system at Thuan Hoa after Nguyen Hoang's arrival. It was not mentioned again during his administration. It is most likely that the system was maintained but under the direct jurisdiction of Nguyen Hoang, leaving little room for the Tam Ty to act independently as it used to. It is likely that the Tam Ty was allowed to administer civil affairs while military decisions were executed by Nguyen Hoang and his original followers. This had probably led to a situation where the Tam Ty system was unable to develop fully, neglecting certain aspects of the administration. The inability of the Tam Ty to function effectively is demonstrated in a case that took place in the Spring of 1586 when the Le Emperor dispatched Nguyen Tao, a Hien Sat Su (censor) at the Le Court to Thuan Hoa for the purpose of extracting taxes from the two provinces of Thuan Hoa and Quang Nam. However no taxes were collected as there were no proper and accurate land registry and population census available for the two regions. This problem was later rectified by Nguyen Hoang who called for the preparation of the necessary registries by the various officials of Phu (prefecture) and huyen (county). The case suggests the subordination of the Tam Ty and civil affairs administration to military considerations. Such developments was probably unavoidable as Vietnam was still in the midst of a civil war between the Mac and the Le forces.

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<sup>30</sup> *Tien Bien*, Vol. 1, 7a.

Even without an effective Tam Ty administrative system, Nguyen Hoang was reported to have been a successful governor for Thuan Hoa and Quang Nam.<sup>31</sup> Quang Nam was placed under his jurisdiction in 1570 after the former governor, Nguyen Ba Quynh was recalled by the Le Court. Nguyen Ba Quynh had succeeded Bui Ta Han following the latter's demise in 1569. It is interesting to note that the appointment was made while Nguyen Hoang was in the temporary capital of Tay Do (Thanh Hoa), indicating the possibility that Nguyen Hoang coveted the appointment to the seat of the more prosperous Quang Nam in addition to his Thuan Hoa.<sup>32</sup> That same year also saw Nguyen Hoang going to Tay Do to seek Trinh Kiem's favour in granting him the governorship of Quang Nam. During his governorship of Thuan Hoa and later, Quang Nam, Nguyen Hoang was able to lead his forces against Mac attacks on the two provinces. One of Hoang's more famous victories was against the Mac general, Lap Bao, in 1574,<sup>33</sup> but more important than such victories was that Nguyen Hoang was able to rule quite effectively:

“Hoang soothed and governed for more than ten years with geniality; seaborne merchants favoured him; he applied law with impartiality, kept the local strongmen in check, and put an end to the cruel and crafty; the inhabitants of the two provinces were influenced toward compassion and virtue and public morality was improved; people did not become bandits, doors were not locked, seaborne merchants from foreign kingdoms all came to buy and to sell, a trading centre was established; military discipline was strict, everyone worked hard. From that time,

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<sup>31</sup> See *Tien Bien*, Vol. 1: 12b.

<sup>32</sup> See *Toan Thu*, Vol. 16: 862; see also *Tien Bien*, Vol. 1: 7b - 8a.

<sup>33</sup> *Tien Bien*, Vol. 1: 10-12.

men of Mac did not dare come for plunder and the border lands were at peace”.<sup>34</sup>

Nguyen chronicles observed that Nguyen Hoang was successful in his administration. This presented him with a new opportunity to try his fortunes up north in the Le Court. *Phu Bien Tap Luc*, an earlier text from which the *Tien Bien* had drawn much of its information, also acknowledged Nguyen Hoang’s success in resisting the threats of the Mac forces and the moves to wrest the two provinces from the Le. It also mentioned that Nguyen Hoang being well liked by the population of the two provinces.<sup>35</sup>

Throughout his tenure as the governor of Thuan Hoa and after 1570 as well Quang Nam that extended to the region of Phu Yen and Qui Nhon, Nguyen Hoang was very much a loyal servant of Le. Both the *Tien Bien* and *Dai Viet Su Ky Toan Thu* provide a detailed record of Nguyen Hoang’s exploits in resisting the Mac in the south and joining the Le Restoration forces in fighting the Mac in the north from 1593 to 1600. In this respect though, the northern chronicles of *Dai Viet Su Ky Toan Thu* devoted less importance to Hoang when compared to *Tien Bien* a southern chronicle. The northern annals’ treatment of Nguyen Hoang is by no mean biased against him since Nguyen Hoang was but only one of the many officials in the service of the Le. The southern Chronicle however saw Hoang as the founder of a dynasty in the South.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> *Toan Thu*, Vol. 16: 868, cited in Keith Taylor, “Nguyen Hoang and the Beginning of Viet Nam’s Southward Expansion”, p. 49. This is the best available translation. Both the *Cuong Muc* and the *Tien Bien* have a shorter abridged version, see *Tien Bien*, Vol. 1: 12 and *Cuong Muc*, Vol. 28: 32.

<sup>35</sup> *PBTL*, Vol. 1: 20.

<sup>36</sup> In many ways, the *Tien Bien* could be seen as a political statement written to justify the move of the Nguyen in resisting the authority of the Le Court.

The period between 1558 and 1600 saw Nguyen Hoang remaining a loyal servant of the Le as a strategy. During this period, he did his best to contribute to the Le Restoration Movement's campaign against the Mac. In 1590, Nguyen Hoang sent more money and supplies to the Le Court in aid of the military campaign,<sup>37</sup> when the salary of his garrison force was delayed in 1592. He did this without complaining. In 1593, the Le forces recaptured Thang Long (also known as Dong Kinh or Eastern Capital). In the following year, Nguyen Hoang went to Thang Long to pay his respect to the Le Emperor, and was made a Tai Ve with the rank of Quoc Cong (Grand Duke). Nguyen Hoang then returned to his home province of Thanh Hoa to pay respect at the tomb of his father, Nguyen Kim.

During the entire period from 1558 to 1600, there was little evidence of Nguyen Hoang dealing in foreign relations. Apart from receiving foreign merchants at the major port at Hoi An and Ai Tu, Hoang's external contacts were limited. The only instance where Nguyen Hoang was involved directly in foreign relations was under the direct aegis of the Le Court. In 1597, Hoang was appointed one of the main officials accompanying the Le Emperor to the Vietnam-Chinese borders in the north to seek recognition from China.<sup>38</sup> Hence suffice to say that prior to 1600, Nguyen Hoang was still acting entirely in the capacity of a Le official. It was only after that year that Hoang's attitude changed. This marked a new phase in his dealings with foreigners and there was evidence of a sense of independence. Nguyen Hoang's dealing with foreigners was aimed at advancing his own political gain rather than that of the Le Court.

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<sup>37</sup> *Tien Bien*, Vol. 1: 14.

<sup>38</sup> *Toan Thu*, Vol. 17: 909.

Hence, from 1600, there was a marked increase in the external contacts of the Nguyen and this is reflected certainly in the records.

### **Nguyen Hoang, 1600-1613**

Nguyen Hoang stayed in the Le Court from 1593 to 1600. Having met objective of securing the south, he can now turn his attention to assist in the fight the remnants of the Mac forces. During this period, he was involved in the military campaign to rout the remnants of the Mac forces at Son Nam in 1594. Han, his second son was killed in this military campaign.<sup>39</sup> However, from his marriage with at least four women, Nguyen Hoang had ten sons and two daughters. Hoang also took part in the campaign of 1595 against the Mac at Hai Duong, Tai Nguyen and Son Tay. By then, the forces of the Mac Dynasty could no longer hold out against the Le Restoration Forces, and the Mac family retreated to territories in China but continued to maintain some hold on the province of Cao Bang at the Sino-Vietnamese borders until 1663. With its restoration completed in Vietnam, the Le Emperor had to seek official recognition from China. It requested to be readmitted as a tribute sending state. The matter however was complicated by China's recognition of the Mac in 1540. For this, the Le Emperor had to travel to the borders of China with the Imperial Seal in 1597 and to present his credentials to the representative of the Chinese Emperor. Nguyen Hoang was part of the entourage. The *Tien Bien* again played up the importance of Nguyen Hoang in this diplomatic mission by not making reference

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<sup>39</sup> For brief biography of Nguyen Hoang's children, see *Liet Truyen Tien Bien*, Vol. 2: 3-8 & Vol. 2: 37. See also Vinh Cao et al. (comp.), *Nguyen Phuc Toc The Pha: Thuy To Pha-Vuong Pha-De Pha*, [Genealogy of Nguyen Phuc To] Hue: Nha Xuat Ban Thuan Hoa, 1995, pp. 101-119.

to the roles of other officials. The *Toan Thu* however, only included Hoang's name among a list of other names, without highlighting anyone in particular.<sup>40</sup> Nguyen Hoang took part in both the Le's missions to the China-Vietnam borders in 1597 and 1598 to seek Chinese recognition for the Le.

Hoang realized that he was still losing out in the Le Court. Despite serving the Le faithfully for a decade in the north, it was obvious that Nguyen Hoang was unhappy with the lack of recognition accorded to him compared to the emphatic rise of his nephew, Trinh Tong (1570 to 1623)<sup>41</sup> Nguyen Hoang's contribution to the Le Restoration movement between 1593 and 1600 was significant having actively participated in the campaign against the Mac in north. Nonetheless, Hoang's contributions were considered by the Le Court, dominated by the Trinh family, as of lesser worth compared to the leadership of the Trinh family. While Nguyen Hoang was the provincial governor of Thuan Hoa and Quang Nam, the Trinh family remained the principal figures in the Le Court. Several other events probably contributed to Nguyen Hoang's decision to once again focus his efforts in the south, particularly since those efforts in the north were unproductive. While he was in (having come north to aid in military campaign against the Mac) the Le Court in 1594, he was asked by the Le emperor to officiate in the conferment of posthumous title of Vuong (king) to Trinh Kiem, his brother-in-law, who had died in 1571. In the same ceremony, Nguyen Hoang's late father, Nguyen Kim, was

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<sup>40</sup> See *Tien Bien*, Vol. 1: 17-18, see also *Toan Thu*, Vol. 17: 907 & 909.

<sup>41</sup> Trinh Tong was the son of Trinh Kiem, the leader of the Le Restoration from 1539 to 1569, who succeeded Nguyen Kim, Nguyen Hoang's father. Kiem had married Ngoc Bao, Hoang's only sister.

only honoured with a lower posthumous position of Quoc Cong (Grand Duke).<sup>42</sup> In 1599, when the Le emperor accorded the title of Binh An Vuong (King of Pacification) to Trinh Tong, Nguyen Hoang remained as a Quoc Cong (Grand Duke), a rank lower than Trinh Tong.

There was also no further honour coming Hoang's way in the form of appointments. Neither was he appointed to any of the positions in the central Le Court. Even though Hoang also held the title of Thai Ve (Defender in Chief), his administrative position remained that of governor of Thuan Hoa and Quang Nam. This view was shared by Le Quy Don in his *Phu Bien Tap Luc* written in 1776.

According to Don:

“During the fifth month of the fifth year of Emperor Khanh Tong (1600), Thuan Quoc Cong (Nguyen Hoang) whose reputation and merits were gaining ground was unhappy that he was not rewarded. He was also disturbed by overtures from the usurper Mac to rebel. This anxiety caused him to conspire with the naval commanders, Phan Nhan (Soc Quan Cong), Ngo Dinh Ngo (Trang Quan Cong) and Bui Van Khue (My Quan Cong) to rebel. He in turn, volunteered to quash the rebellion and used that as a ruse to return to Thuan Hoa with his forces”.<sup>43</sup>

By then, Nguyen Hoang realised that his family had lost out in the power struggle at the centre. Thus, from then he began to seriously look to the creation of a separate power-base in the south.<sup>44</sup>

During the period between 1593 and 1600, Nguyen Hoang and his personal army had to serve under the leadership of Trinh Tong. Nguyen Hoang

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<sup>42</sup> *Toan Thu*, Vol. 16: 899.

<sup>43</sup> *PBTL*, Vol. 1: 20.

<sup>44</sup> This view is subscribed to by Keith Taylor, “Nguyen Hoang and the Beginning of Viet Nam's Southward Expansion”, pp. 55-56.

was reported to have about 20,000 men under his command while serving in the north during the period between 1594 and 1601. However, it is not clear as to whether they were from his original force in Thuan Hoa and Quang Nam.<sup>45</sup> Recognizing that he had little chance in advancing his family fortunes by remaining in the Le Court, with the power of the central government firmly in the hands of his nephew Trinh Tong, Nguyen Hoang in 1600 quietly withdrew his forces from north of the Linh Giang River and returned to Thuan Hoa.

Keith Taylor argues that Nguyen Hoang's withdrawal from the north in 1600 was of significance in the early modern era of Vietnamese history, Nguyen Hoang had reached a point where his decision to leave the north made him a rebel in the eyes of his contemporaries. He came to be judged harshly from a traditional Vietnamese outlook for going away without permission. Taylor however is of the view that all these mattered little to Hoang because he had his eyes firmly fixed on a new region in the South.<sup>46</sup> He continued to profess his undivided loyalty to the Le, with his desire for a larger share of power in the capital vis-à-vis the Trinh undiminished. Nola Cooke suggests that despite having expanded to the south and having built up a separate political entity that was probably equal to that of the Le-Trinh in the north, throughout the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the Nguyen family did not give up their desire to compete for influence against the Trinh in the Le Court.<sup>47</sup>

Between 1600 until his death in 1613, Nguyen Hoang's policies in southern Vietnam focused on the strategy to carve out a separate power-base in

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<sup>45</sup> See *Tien Dai Ven Tan*, p. 46. However, I am unable to verify the authenticity of this figure of 20,000 men.

<sup>46</sup> Taylor, "Nguyen Hoang ...", pp. 55-56.

<sup>47</sup> Nola Cooke, "Regionalism and the Nature of Nguyen Rule in Seventeenth Century Dang Trong (Cochinchina)", pp. 156-157.

the south. In the same year of his return from Thang Long, Hoang moved his headquarters from Ai Tu to the eastern part Thuan Hoa and named it Dinh Cat.<sup>48</sup> This move was a strategic decision to relocate his headquarters further south. In continuing to pledge loyalty to the Le Court, Hoang also tried to demonstrate strong ties with the Trinh by marrying his daughter, Ngoc Tu, to Trinh Trac, the son and eventual successor of Trinh Tong. At the same time, his scheme in the south also began to take shape. That same year, he established new granary at Thuan Hoa as part of the measure to be self-sufficient.<sup>49</sup>

In 1602, Nguyen Hoang went down to Quang Nam, and after inspecting a geographically-strategic location, he established a second residence and a second new granary “to store money and grains”.<sup>50</sup> From that year, Nguyen Hoang began to place more importance on the southern province of Quang Nam. He appointed his sixth son and successor, Nguyen Phuc Nguyen to be the garrison commander (Tran Thu) of Quang Nam. For Hoang, Quang Nam had great strategic advantages considering the geographical barrier posed by the Hai Van Pass that would help ensure the security of the province. As Nguyen Hoang passed through Hai Van Pass, he took note of the strategic bottle-neck position of the pass between Thuan Hoa and Quang Nam, and decided to set up a garrison at the pass. Quang Nam was also richer in resources than Thuan Hoa.<sup>51</sup> For Nguyen Hoang, Quang Nam was the main revenue earner, having received more tax revenue than

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<sup>48</sup> For a study on the various sites of the Nguyen headquarters prior to the move to Phu Xuan near present day Hue, see L. Cadiere, “Les Residences des rois de Cochinchine avant Gia-Long”, *Bulletin de la Commission Archeologique de l’Indochine*, 1913, pp. 103-185.

<sup>49</sup> *Tien Bien*, 1: 21 & *PBTL*, Vol. 1: 21.

<sup>50</sup> *PBTL*, Vol. 1: 21-22.

<sup>51</sup> *Tien Bien*, Vol. 1: 21b.

Thuan Hoa. The province also boasted the port of Hoi An, which became one of the most important ports in the Nguyen domain. This shift had actually prompted Nguyen Hoang to move a larger part of his army to Quang Nam.

Another prong in Nguyen Hoang's strategy to strengthen himself in the south was the construction of the Thien Mu Temple in 1601. Nguyen The Anh argues that the setting up of the Thien Mu temple was an attempt to promote a separate national cult in the south "by placing himself [Hoang] under the aegis of a spirit not enfeoffed to the Thang Long Court [The Le]".<sup>52</sup> The creation of a separate national cult was important in his claim to authority. Later historians at the Court of the Nguyen Dynasty (1802-1945), went to great length to justify this position. According to the *Tien Bien*, local legend had it that at the hilly locality of the village of Ha Khe, by the Huong Gianh (Perfume River), an old female spirit dressed in red had predicted the coming of a true lord who would build a temple at the locality. The identification of Hoang as this 'true lord' endowed his rule with divine legitimacy.<sup>53</sup> Since its construction, the temple became the main spiritual centre for the later Nguyen rulers. Even though named after a local woman deity, the temple was a Buddhist temple.

Nguyen Hoang's decision to concentrate on state formation in the south in his final years can be seen in what he supposedly uttered to his son, Nguyen Phuc Nguyen at his death bed. Hoang reminded his successor that, "at the northern part

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<sup>52</sup> Nguyen The Anh, "The Vietnamization of Po Nagar", in *Essays into Vietnamese Past*, Keith W. Taylor & John K. Whitmore (eds.), Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995, p. 49.

<sup>53</sup> See *Tien Bien*, Vol. 1: 20-21. This episode is discussed by Nguyen The Anh, "The Vietnamization of Po Nagar", p. 49; see also A. Bonhomme, "La Pagode Thein-mau: Historique", *Bulletin des Amis du Vieux Hue (BAVH)*, No. 2, April-June 1915, p. 177. Bonhomme was an official in the French administration of Vietnam.

of Thuan Hoa are the barriers of Hoanh Son Mountain and the River Linh Giang, and in the south are the Hai Van Pass and the Thach Bi Mountain which will serve as walls. The mountain produces gold and iron, while the sea produces fish and salt. This is a place where meritorious heroes would excel. If you could gather the people and train an army to resist the Trinh, our cause would endure for thousands of years".<sup>54</sup> He passed away in 1613 at the age of 89.

Nguyen Hoang's death bed advice was exploited by the later Nguyen Dynasty Court historians as the basis for the Nguyen family's establishment of a separate nation. While it is without question that Nguyen Hoang saw the strategic position of the region south of Hoanh Son as the basis for building up the Nguyen family's power base (Strategy 1), the Nguyen continued to challenge the Trinh for power in the north. This objective (Strategy 2) was to remain a feature in the Nguyen policy well until the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> Century.<sup>55</sup>

Even though subsequent Nguyen rule in South resembled a separate kingdom in opposition to the Le-Trinh domain in the traditional Vietnamese heartland, the link with the north was not severed. From the time of Nguyen Hoang's departure from Thang Long in 1601 until the first few years of the rule of Nguyen Phuc Khoat (r. 1738-1765), the Nguyen were still acknowledging their subordinate position to the Le Court, as evident from the titles they assumed upon succeeding to power. Successive Nguyen rulers held the Le title of either Quan Cong or Quoc Cong. However, from 1653 onward, Nguyen Phuc Tan had

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<sup>54</sup> *Tien Bien*, Vol. 1: 23-24. It is not known whether Nguyen Hoang had actually uttered these words, but later Nguyen rulers clearly continued their rule with Hoang's advice in mind.

<sup>55</sup> Nola Cooke is of this view. See Nola Cooke, "Regionalism and the Nature of Nguyen Rule in 17<sup>th</sup> Century Dang Trong", p. 123.

unilaterally declared himself as Quoc Cong,<sup>56</sup> such a declaration was not accepted by the Le Court. Even after Nguyen Phuc Khoat had unilaterally declared himself as Vuong, or King in 1744, this elevation was merely an attempt to be equal to the Trinh's position. This was because even though Nguyen Southern Vietnam was in many ways a de facto state, the Nguyen continued to maintain their links with the north.

### **Initial Contact with the Uplanders**

Nguyen Hoang's decision to return to Thuan Hoa in 1600 to build a separate power-base in the south saw him consolidating his strategic position. Thus, Nguyen Hoang had to make sure that his control on Thuan Hoa and Quang Nam would not be challenged from within as well as from his southern neighbours.

However, his southward movement inevitably brought them into contact with numerous tribes that the Vietnamese considered as barbarians or "uplanders". Nguyen Hoang had to deal with the uplanders living under his jurisdiction as well as those from beyond the boundaries of Thuan Hoa and Quang Nam.

When Nguyen Hoang first took over Thuan Hoa, and later in 1570, Quang Nam, the two provinces were not only inhabited by the Viet people who lived mainly in the plains and coastal areas, but also by non-Vietnamese people who were made up of dwellers of hills and highlands on the western side of the two provinces. These were the 'Moi' (savages) or 'Man' as recorded in Sino-

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<sup>56</sup> *Tien Bien*, Vol. 4: 5b; *PBTL*, Vol. 1: 25.

Vietnamese texts.<sup>57</sup> These uplanders were generally regarded by the Viet people as inferior in culture and primitive in lifestyle, and did not follow the more superior ‘Han Phong’ (referring to Han culture), or in this case, Vietnamese culture.

Shortly before Nguyen Hoang came to Thuan Hoa, a scheme was introduced in 1540 by Bui Ta Han (Nguyen Quan Cong), the governor of Quang Nam, to deal with the uplanders. The scheme, known as the Son Phong system, literally ‘Defense Against the Mountains’ or ‘Pacify the Mountains’ was introduced to,

“...cope with the various problems that had arisen in settlement areas adjacent to the uplands, such as protection for the newly established Vietnamese settlements from the hostility of the uplanders, the control of contacts between uplanders and Vietnamese , and relating to this, problem of regulating of trade between highlands and lowlands”.<sup>58</sup>

The scheme involved the creation of new sub-districts (nguồn) in the areas occupied by the uplanders. Each nguồn would be governed by an indigenous chief with the title of Giao Dich, who had to work in collaboration with minor Vietnamese officials in the Vietnamese administrative district (Huyen/Phu or prefecture and sub-prefecture). The scheme was first introduced in the Quang Ngai area in 1540. In carrying out this scheme, Bui Ta Han created four nguồn

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<sup>57</sup> One of the earliest western usage of the term ‘moi’ as savage was by Father Jean Koffler, a Jesuit who was in Nguyen Southern Vietnam from 1748 to 1756.

<sup>58</sup> *Phu Man Tap Luc* (Miscellaneous Records of the Pacification of the Barbarians, this study uses the Institute of Han-Nom edition, shelf No. VHv 1239), Vol. 1: 10a. *Phu Man Tap Luc* was compiled by Nguyen On Khe, a mandarin who was serving as the head of Son Phong in 1871. See also Gerald Hickey, *Sons of the Mountains*, p. 155.

(sub-districts) in the highlands that fell within the Vietnamese boundaries. The sub-districts of Da Bong and Cu Ba were placed under the district of Binh Son, while Phu Ba nguon came under the jurisdiction of (Trung) Nghia district, and Ba To nguon under Mo Duc district.<sup>59</sup> It is difficult to know which uplander group was covered in these four nguons, but they were most likely to be either Kayong, Hre or Monom, three Mon-Khmer speaking groups.

As the uplanders lived in small groups and could be found both within and beyond the Nguyen's territorial boundaries, this made the task of controlling them difficult and troublesome. Generally, the uplanders who lived within the boundaries of the Nguyen domains were peripheral tribes who had for generations, lived in the highlands bordering the plains of central Vietnam. They could be found in the hills surrounding Phu Xuan as well as on the western side of the Quang Nam province. They were nomadic, moving from one place to another within the hills, and practicing a slash and burn cultivation system.<sup>60</sup>

When Nguyen Hoang first entered Thuan Hoa, it was reported that on the eastern side of the Ai Tu River near his main encampment, there were two xa (villages) of Dao Chinh and Hoa La. Le Quy Don's *Phu Bien Tap Luc* provided the locations of the uplanders there. According to Don, along the River Khue Quan near Cam Lo, leading upstream to Ai Lao, Tay Nguyen, there were many sach (tribes)<sup>61</sup> of 'savages' and there were also many routes from there which led

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<sup>59</sup> *Phu Man Tap Luc*, Vol. 1: 10a.

<sup>60</sup> For a detailed study on the uplanders and their relations with the Vietnamese, see Gerard Hickey, *Sons of the Mountains*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982.

<sup>61</sup> When referring to the various groups of uplanders, Vietnamese documents normally use either the term nguon or sach followed by the name of their locations to differentiate one group from another.

to Lac Huan Quoc (the kingdom of Lac Hoan in present day Savanaket in Laos). Don also explained how the various Bo (tribe) of Lao people in Qui Hop Chau in Tran Ninh Phu used routes leading to Van Tuong and Lo Huan, the homeland of two minority ethnic groups in Laos. The Nguyen would later accord the status of Quoc or kingdom on these settlements.<sup>62</sup>

Those who lived beyond the western boundary of Thuan Hoa and Quang Nam could be further divided into two, namely, the better organised bigger tribes and the minor hill tribes. The first was made up of larger tribes of uplanders organised under the rule of a chieftain. They included the Jarais, the Rhades, and the Bahnars. These tribes were, at some point of time, regarded as states (Quoc) by the Vietnamese. The second group was made up of smaller tribes which had very little contact with the Vietnamese, and who lived in places considered inaccessible by the Vietnamese. Only Vietnamese traders who visited these highlands in search of jungle products, came into contact with them.

While it is known that the Son Phong system continued to be implemented during the Nguyen Dynasty,<sup>63</sup> it is not clear if Nguyen Hoang and his successors practiced it in the way Bui Ta Han had introduced it in around 1540. *Phu Man Tap Luc* (Pacification of the Savages), published in 1871, recorded that “for seven or eight generations of the Nguyen rule, the Vietnamese and the Man (savages)

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<sup>62</sup> *Phu Bien Tap Luc*, Vol. 2: In the case of Nam Ban, which was situated outside the Nguyen domains, it was accorded the status of a kingdom by the Le Emperor, Le Thanh Tong (r. 1460-1497), see *PBTL*, Vol. 2: 30.

<sup>63</sup> Nguyen On Khe, the author of *Phu Man Tap Luc*, (Pacification of the Savages/Barbarians) first published in 1871, was the head of Son Phong programme in Quang Ngai. See preface of *Phu Man Tap Luc*.

co-existed in a very amicable manner, and that there was no disturbance taking place”.<sup>64</sup>

This is not surprising given that it drew on the *Tien Bien* of 1844 which had only one entry regarding the uplanders for the entire administration of Nguyen Hoang. In the entry for August 1571, it was reported that a few uplander tribes in Quang Nam were conducting raids against one another.<sup>65</sup> The matter was resolved by Nguyen Hoang who sent one of his commanders, Mai Dinh Dung to put down the attackers. Dung was later asked to set up garrison in the area. Even then, it is not clear as to which *nguyen* (sub-district) the natives actually belonged to.<sup>66</sup>

*Tien Bien*'s coverage on the early period regarding trade relations between the Nguyen and uplanders was brief even though after 1570, Nguyen Hoang was in charge of both Thuan Hoa and Quang Nam provinces, a relatively large area.

From the day the Son Phong System was implemented, it was apparent that trade was a major concern for the Vietnamese. This is reflected in a taxation system that relied on trade agents who dealt with certain uplanders. These agents were issued licenses by the Vietnamese authority to trade. The uplanders would pay taxes to the trade agents who would then pay a certain sum to the mandarin in

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<sup>64</sup> *Phu Man Tap Luc*, Vol. 3: 1.

<sup>65</sup> *Tien Bien*, Vol. 1: 10.

<sup>66</sup> The method in identification of the respective uplander tribes was not properly practiced by the Vietnamese, who at best, could only identify several major groups such as the Jarai and the Cham. Even then, it was through a given Vietnamese name. For all other uplanders, the usual method in identification was to call the people a uplander tribe followed by the name of the locality, eg., the uplanders from Cam Lo. For a better understanding of the various uplanders dealt with by the Nguyen, I decided to follow the geographical division of the various ethno-linguistic groups as proposed by Gerald C. Hickey, *The Highland People of South Vietnam: Social and Economic Development*, Santa Monica: The Rand Corporation, September 1967, pp.13-23, and the map on p. 1. This is taking the assumption that such distribution had undergone only minimal changes over the years.

charge of the district. Even though all the taxes were quoted in Vietnamese currency, ie. quan, the uplanders normally paid their taxes in kind, i.e., jungle products. These jungle products would then be brought down to the plains by the trade agents to be sold in the various markets or fairs. Eventually, these goods would reach the ports along the coast like Hoi An, Viet Hai, and Pulo Chiam. The volume of this highland-lowland trade, though small in comparison with the external trade conducted by the Nguyen with the Japanese and Chinese was important enough to ensure that items from inland areas such as elephant tusks, rhinoceros horns, wax, bee wax, sandal wood, clove, rattan, and raisins, were available for the Vietnamese to trade with the foreigners.

Trade with the uplanders and its taxation contributed to the economic development of Nguyen Hoang's southern Vietnam. There was also a barter trade where jungle produce was exchanged for salt, farming tools, cooking utensils, as well as domesticated animals.<sup>67</sup> The supplies of jungle products from the uplanders varied according to locality. The *Phu Bien Tap Luc* provided a glimpse of this such as that in Table 1:

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<sup>67</sup> According to Le Quy Don (the *Phu Bien Tap Luc*), due to their frequent ceremonial feasts, the uplanders from nguon (sub-district) Ta-trach at Dai Khai in Phu Xuan, also wanted some domesticated animals in exchange for their jungle produce. See *PBTL*, Vol. 2: 23.

**Table 1: Uplander Tribes and Products**

Name of Tribes	Locality	Produce
sach Lang-nuoc sach Ha-van	Binh-luong, Huong-tra in Phu Xuan	Rattan, wax, honey and Kien-kien wood
Sach A-man-cach	Phuong An- Binh in Phu- vang	Kien-kien wood

Source: *Phu Bien Tap Luc*, Vol. 2: 22-23.

In terms of tribute from Hoa Xa and Thuy Xa and Nam Ban, the *Phu Bien Tap Luc* also recorded them as well as the taxes.

**Table 2: Tariff Rate for Licence to Trade with Uplanders**

Name of Route Entry Point	Destination	Tariff for Trading Licence
Tuan Ba-giang (Phuong An Khang)	Ai Lao Borders	110 quan <sup>68</sup>
Tuan Nguu-cuoc (Hieu-giang River)	Muong-vanh and Van-tuong	120 quan

Source: *Phu Bien Tap Luc*, Vol. 2: 15-16.

It can thus be seen that Nguyen-Uplander relations were commercially beneficial. Firstly, Nguyen Hoang's administration benefited from the revenue generated by tariffs imposed on Vietnamese and Chinese traders who wanted to access the highlands. The amount of 120 quan (120 strings of cash) per licence was a considerable sum of money then for a picul (100 catties/60 kilograms) of

<sup>68</sup> The translation of *Phu Bien Tap Luc* by the Nha Xuat Ban Khoa Hoc Xa Hoi (Social Sciences Publisher) of 1977 gives the figure as 120 quan. See *Phu Bien Tap Luc in Le Quy Don Toan Tap*, Vol. 1, Hanoi: Nha Xuat Ban Khoa Hoc Xa Hoi, 1977, p. 108.

nutmeg was worth only five quan at the port of Hoi An.<sup>69</sup> Secondly, the uplanders remained the most important suppliers of local commodities exported through the ports in southern Vietnam. Out of a list of 23 commodities sold at the entrepot of Hoi An, in Quang Nam, at least 11 items were supplied by the uplanders.

**Table 3: Commodities Supplied by Uplanders Sold at Quang Nam and Their Value**

Commodity	Cost per Picul (Ta)
Betel Nut	3 quan
Nutmeg	5 quan
Sappan wood	6 quan
Cardomon <sup>70</sup>	12 quan
Ebony wood	600 tien/cash (6 mach)
Lacquer Wood	1 quan
Cyprus Wood	1.2 quan
Rhinoceros Horn	500 quan
Deers' tendon <sup>71</sup>	15 quan
Elephants' tusks	40 quan
Calambac (one Can/catti)	120 quan

Source: *Phu Bien Tap Luc*, Vol. 4: 38.

As these commodities were much sought after by foreign traders, they were the most important if not, most expensive items sold at Hoi An. This uneasy relationship, where the uplanders were important for trade but were also a security threat, persisted beyond the rule of Nguyen Hoang.

<sup>69</sup> *PBTL*, Vol. 4: 38. Examples of the cost of a few items include a picul betel-nut costing 3 quan, elephant tusks 40 quan a picul, and pepper cost only 20 quan, just to name a few.

<sup>70</sup> Li Tana gives the term *Amonnum xanthioides* nuts and noted that it is related to the Cardomon plant, Li Tana and Anthony Reid, *Southern Vietnam under the Nguyen*, p. 117, fn. 44.

<sup>71</sup> Li Tana gives the item as deers' antlers. The Vien Han-Nom version reads as tendon. See Li Tana and Anthony Reid, *Ibid.*, p. 117 & *PBTL*, Vol. 4: 38.

## Initial Relations with Champa

After he took over the administration of Quang Nam in 1570, Nguyen Hoang and his people occupied a country ranging from the region south of Nhat Le River (in present day Quang Tri) to the area north of Cape Verella (Vung Tau). This brought them into direct contact with the Kingdom of Champa.

Nguyen Hoang was fully aware of the existence of Champa as a neighbour in the south that could threaten his position in southern Vietnam. He saw not only a military threat but also viewed Cham culture with suspicion. The many Cham ruins and relics found in the south today is a measure of the persistence of Cham culture.<sup>72</sup>

Until the middle of the 17th century, the Vietnamese sphere of influence in the south was checked by the Champa Kingdom<sup>73</sup> Even though the Vietnamese had defeated the Chams in the 1471 and annexed the northern part of the country, the kingdom reassembled itself in its new capital in the region around Phan Thiet.

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<sup>72</sup> In fact, some scholars are of the opinion that much of the new Nguyen Vietnamese culture that emerged can be attributed to Cham influence. This includes music and costume. See for instance, Gerald C. Hickey, *Sons of the Mountains: Ethnohistory of the Vietnamese Central Highland to 1954*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982; L. Cadiere, "Geographie Historique du Quang-Binh D'apres Les Annales Imperiales", *BEFEO*, Vol. II, 1902; Li Tana, *Nguyen Cochinchina: Southern Vietnam in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998, pp. 113-114. See also Alexander B. Woodside, *Vietnam and the Chinese Model: A Comparative Study of Vietnamese and Chinese Government in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century*, New Haven: 1971, pp. 23-24 & 26.

<sup>73</sup> Champa is traditionally known as Chiem Thanh in Vietnamese sources, a term borrowed from Zhan Chen in Chinese writings. The name seemed to denote homogeneity to this nation. Even early western scholars tend to accept Champa as a single centralised nation that had gradually shifted its capital southwardly in the face of the Vietnamese threat. See Georges Maspero, *Le Royaume de Champa*, Paris: editions, 1928. Recent scholarship however, confirmed that the Chams were a federation of five principality regions, stretching from present day Nghe An/Thua Thien to the region just beyond Mekong Delta. Champa was also multiethnic, and not homogenous as suggested earlier. See Bernard Guy, "Une Nouvelle sur le Composition Ethnique du Champa", *Actes du Seminaire sur le Campa*, Paris: Centre D'Histoire et Civilisations de la Peninsule Indochinoise, 1988, pp. 49-58.

From there, the Chams continued to send periodic tribute to the Vietnamese court at Thang Long. As late as the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the King of Champa was still able to honour its alliance with the Malay World when he sent a military force to assist the Sultan of Melaka-Johor in the 1594 battle against the Portuguese then based in Melaka.<sup>74</sup> Thus, the Kingdom of Champa that Nguyen Hoang encountered in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, was still a force to be reckoned with.

Two incidents relating to the Chams during Nguyen Hoang's time are recorded in the *Tien Bien*. In 1602, the Chams were reported to have sent a delegation to Nguyen Hoang's court. The *Tien Bien* used the term 'thong hao', which means that the Chams had come to establish friendly relations with the Nguyen. Little is known of the actual nature of the transaction between Nguyen Hoang and the Cham envoy. Nothing further is mentioned of the outcome of this mission by the Chams.

It was not until 1611 that Champa was next mentioned in Vietnamese chronicles. In that year, Nguyen Hoang established a prefecture in Phu Yen.<sup>75</sup> Even though no reasons were given with regard to Nguyen Hoang's decision in the setting up of the Phu Yen prefecture, it may be possible that he was looking to the region further south as a suitable base to strengthen his family's position. In

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<sup>74</sup> Pierre-Yves Manguin, "The Introduction of Islam into Champa", *JMBRAS*, Vol. 58, part 1, 1985, p. 12 and P. B. Lafont, "Hubungan antara Champa dengan Asia Tenggara", In *Dunia Melayu dan Dunia Indocina*, Ismail Hussein, P. B. Lafont & Po Dharma (eds.), Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa & Pustaka, 1995, p. 214.

<sup>75</sup> The Thach Bi or sometimes known as Hong Duc Thach Bi (The steele of Hong Duc) was set on a mountain at Phu Yen to mark the official demarcation line between Champa and Dai Viet after Le Thanh Tong's victory against Champa in 1471. See Maspero, *Le Royaume de Champa*, p. 240; Po Dharma, "Le Frontieres du Campa (Denier etat des recherches)", in P. B. Lafont (ed.), *Les Frontieres du Vietnam*, Paris: L'Hamattan, 1989, p. 123.

reaction, a Cham force crossed the demarcation line at the Thach-Bi Mountain to attack the Vietnamese settlements in Phu Yen.

At the time of the attack, the Chams had their capital at Panduranga, near present day Phan Thiet, and was led by a king known as Po Nit. It is evident that Po Nit felt threatened by the influx of Vietnamese into the region of Phu Yen, till then considered a no-man's land. Po Nit felt that with the setting up of the Phu Yen prefecture, the balance of power in the area had tilted in favour of the Nguyen.

To counter the attack by Champa, Nguyen Hoang sent a force to defend Phu Yen against the Cham incursion, and later, to garrison the area.<sup>76</sup> However, no efforts were made to enter Cham territories beyond the boundary set in 1471 when Champa was defeated by Emperor Le Thanh Tong. What Nguyen Hoang did was to establish two new districts of Dong Xuan and Tuy Hoa, placing them under the jurisdiction of the prefecture of Phu Yen. The two districts fell within the boundary set in 1471.<sup>77</sup> Nguyen Hoang's decision not to invade Champa probably stemmed from his weak position due to the Trinh threat coming from the north. But more possibly, Hoang was not in good health to lead a military expedition and he died two years later at the age of 89.

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<sup>76</sup> *Tien Bien*, Vol. 1, pp. 22b-23a.

<sup>77</sup> *DNNTC*, Vol. 10: Binh Dinh, p. 2-3.

## Early Nguyen Trade

In an entry for 1573, shortly after Nguyen Hoang had added Quang Nam to his rule, the *Tien Bien* recounted how the two provinces of Thuan Hoa and Quang Nam were prosperous and peaceful. "Prices of goods were well controlled, and the ports in the two provinces became the focus of many foreign trading ships".<sup>78</sup> This development was the result of Nguyen Hoang's decision to engage in trade, a move that would later influence the survival and direction of his successors' rule. In many ways, Nguyen Hoang's decision to promote trading activities in the regions under his jurisdiction could be regarded as the indication of the pragmatism on his part, a first sign of being different from the traditional centre of power in the north which was not outward looking.<sup>79</sup> The *Dai Viet Su Ky Toan Thu*, which was the official record of the Le Dynasty, regularly recorded visits made by foreign traders to the Vietnamese courts, seeking permission to trade from the emperors. This included many traders from the Malay world.<sup>80</sup> However, little is mentioned of initiatives taken by the Vietnamese court to engage in trade abroad. Even though trade was not totally shunned, the Le Court did not encourage it. Until the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Van Don remained the only major port open for trade in the north under the Le. However, the port was already in decline by

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<sup>78</sup> *Tien Bien*, Vol. 1: 12, see also *PBTL*, Vol. 1: 20.

<sup>79</sup> Throughout its history, Vietnam was more inclined to concentrate on agricultural activities. As far as trading activities were concerned, Vietnamese response were sporadic and, it depended largely on the initiatives of several rulers who were exception to the norm.

<sup>80</sup> See Nguyen The Anh, "Indochina and the Malay World: A Glimpse on Malay-Vietnamese Relations to the Mid-Nineteenth Century", *Asia Journal*, Vol. 3, No. 1, June 1996, pp. 105-131; see also Danny Wong Tze Ken, "Nuoc Do Ba: Malay World as Seen from Vietnamese Sources", paper presented to the International Conference on the Malay World and the Indochina World, Kuala Lumpur, 21-23 November 2000.

the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>81</sup> The Le adopted Chinese philosophy that shunned trading activities. This has a lot to do with Confucianism teaching whereby in terms of the occupational hierarchy, the merchants were ranked the lowest after scholars, farmers, soldiers, and craftsmen. Apart from that, as A. C. Milner has suggested in *Kerajaan*, the rulers in Southeast Asia distrusted their own local traders.<sup>82</sup> This step was common especially in the island states where local rulers were apprehensive of any of his subjects who had become rich through trade. As wealth means power, a subject of wealthy means could become a rival or threat. Thus when Nguyen Hoang decided to encourage trade, his decision was a departure from traditional policy on the matter. In many ways, Nguyen Hoang was also not bound by tradition, having made the decision to look towards the south as his base.

One reason why Nguyen Hoang started encouraging trade was the increasing revenue on the coast of central Vietnam were generating. Hoi An, for example, was beginning to emerge as one of the more important ports on mainland Southeast Asia during the 16<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. Even though it had not gained prominence as an entrepot in Southeast Asia when Nguyen Hoang first arrived in Thuan Hoa, it was definitely an important port during the last years of his rule.<sup>83</sup> Chen Chingho, who pioneered the study of Hoi An, suggests that a

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<sup>81</sup> See T. Yamamoto, "Van-Don: A Trade Port in Vietnam", *Memoirs of the Research Department of the Toyo Bunko*, No. 39, 1981.

<sup>82</sup> A. C. Milner, *Kerajaan: Malay Political Culture on the Eve of Colonial Rule*, Tuscon: Arizona University Press, 1982, p. 65. In his discussion on trade, Anthony Reid also stressed this point. See Anthony Reid, *Southeast Asia in the Age of Commerce, 1450-1680, Vol. II: Expansion and Crisis*, New haven: Yale University Press, 1993, pp. 120-124.

<sup>83</sup> For a study regarding local traders in Hoi An, see *Ancient Town of Hoi An*, International Symposium Held in Danang on 22-23 March 1990, Hanoi: The Gioi Publisher, 1991. See also

trading fair was established at Hoi An shortly after Nguyen Hoang had established the Quang Nam provincial administration in 1602 and after he appointed Nguyen Phuc Nguyen, his son, to govern the province.<sup>84</sup> It was to this trading fair that foreign traders began to congregate. Apart from Hoi An, at least two other ports in Thuan Hoa and Quang Nam were frequented by foreign traders during Nguyen Hoang's reign. They were Hoi Linh (in Thieu Phuong Phu) in Thanh Ha, and Kim Phuong at Qui Nhon (Binh Dinh).<sup>85</sup>

Chinese and Japanese traders were the largest group of traders who had frequented Nguyen Hoang's ports. According to Zhang Xie's *Dongxi Yangkao*, published in 1617, Chinese traders were already trading in the port of Thuan Hoa and Quang Nam.<sup>86</sup> Chinese traders' visits to Nguyen Hoang's southern Vietnam was made possible with the lifting of the restriction to travel abroad by the Chinese emperor, Ming Mu Zung (r.1567-1572) in 1567. With the lifting of the ban that was imposed since the reign of Emperor Yong Le (r.1403-1424), Chinese traders began to arrive in Nguyen Southern Vietnam in large numbers. The Chinese came to Nguyen Southern Vietnam because despite the lifting of the ban, direct trade with Japan, particularly in the trading of strategic materials such as copper, iron, saltpetre and sulphur, was still restricted by the Tokugawa government.<sup>87</sup> Thus, traders from China and Japan met at Quang Nam, particularly at the port of Hoi An to exchange their wares. According to

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Chen Chingho, *Historical Notes on Hoi-An (Faifo)*, Carbondale: Center for Vietnamese Studies, Southern Illinois University, 1974.

<sup>84</sup> Chen Chingho, *Historical Notes on Hoi-An (Faifo)*, pp. 14-15.

<sup>85</sup> See Phan Dai Doan, "Hoi An and Dang Trong", in *Ancient Town of Hoi An*, p. 169. I would like to thank Prof. Doan for bringing my attention to other ports in southern Vietnam during Nguyen rule.

<sup>86</sup> Zhang Xie, *Dongxi Yangkao*, (Study on the East-West Seas), Vol. 1: 16.

<sup>87</sup> Chen Chingho, *Historical Notes on Hoi-An (Faifo)*, p. 12.

Cristoforo Borri, the Jesuit priest who lived in Hoi An from 1618 to 1621, “The Chinese and the Japanese are they that make the chief negotiation of Cochin-China, in a fair which is verily held in one of their ports [Hoi An]...”.<sup>88</sup>

As the number of Chinese and Japanese traders in Hoi An increased, special quarters were being set up for them by Nguyen Phuc Nguyen, who was appointed governor of Quang Nam since 1602. As Cristoforo Borri explained further:

“Here the King of Cochinchina assigned the Chinese and Japanese a convenient spot ground to build a city for the benefit of the fair. This city is called “Faifo”, which is so great, that one may well say, that there are two towns; One for the Chinese and the other of Japanese: Each of them having his quarter apart, and their several governors, and living after their own manner: That is the Chinese according to their own particular laws, and customs of China, as the Japanese according to theirs.”<sup>89</sup>

From Borri’s account, it is clear that the Chinese and Japanese quarters at Hoi An were built during Nguyen Hoang’s rule, though it was Nguyen Phuc Nguyen who was responsible in developing the place. The Chinese quarters would remain an important factor in the prosperity of Hoi An as their sizeable presence ensured the continual arrival of Chinese traders to the port.<sup>90</sup> The Japanese community in Hoi An declined to very negligible numbers after the Tokugawa edict of 1639

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<sup>88</sup> Cristoforo Borri, Borri, Cristoforo, *Cochin China: Containing Many Admirable Ranties and Singularities of that Countrey*, London: Robert Ashley for Richard Clutterbuck, 1633. This edition, Da Capo Press, Amsterdam, 1970, p. 1.

<sup>89</sup> Cristoforo Borri, *Ibid.*, p. 13

<sup>90</sup> For a discussion on the Chinese quarters in Hoi An, see Cheng Chingho, *Historical Notes on Hoi An*, pp. 14-15 & 35-77 and also his “The Chinese Quarter of Faifo (Hoi-An) and Its Foreign Trade during the 17<sup>th</sup> & 18<sup>th</sup> Centuries”, *The New Asia Journal*, Vol. 3, No. 1, August 1957, pp. 273-303.[In Chinese]

forbidding the Japanese from trading abroad. Thus by the 19th century, only the Chinese are mentioned in the geographical gazetteers.

Through international trade, the Nguyen had opened a window to the world. Even though the real benefits of such activity would not become fully apparent during Nguyen Hoang's reign, its importance was felt both in terms of trade and in military terms. Commenting on early Nguyen trade, Cristoforo Borri remarked that, "The King received a great revenue out of this Faire [sic], by his duties and imports, and the country an unspeakable gain".<sup>91</sup> Borri also added that the fair at Hoi An had brought to the population of Nguyen Southern Vietnam, goods that were not found locally, especially those manufactured abroad, which included items such as combs, needles, bracelets, beads of glass.

Japan was one of the earliest foreign countries to have contacts with southern Vietnam during Nguyen Hoang's time. Some of Nguyen Hoang's correspondence with the Tokugawa Shogunate survived and this provides us with some insights to this relationship.<sup>92</sup> One of the earliest communication that took place between the Nguyen and the Tokugawa Shogunate was regarding Hien Quy (or Shirahama Kenki), a Japanese pirate who was wrongly thought to be a European by later Nguyen Court historians. In 1585, Shirahama Kenki was in command of five ships which plundered the coastal area of Quang Nam. His fleet

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<sup>91</sup> Cristoforo Borri, *Cochin-China*, pp. 1-12.

<sup>92</sup> See Kondo Juzhu (comp.), *Gaiban Tsuusho (Ngoai Phien Thong Thu)*, Tokyo: Tokyo University, 1911. The correspondence were compiled during the time of Shogun Tokugawa Ienari (1787-1837). For a discussion on Nguyen Hoang's correspondence with Japan, see Kawamoto Kuniye, "The International Outlook of the Quang Nam (Nguyen) Regime as Revealed in *Gaiban Tsuusho*", in *Ancient Town of Hoi An*, pp. 109-116.

was later defeated by Nguyen Phuc Nguyen who had ten ships under his command, and Shirahama had to flee.<sup>93</sup>

It was the Shirahama Kenki affair that sparked Nguyen Hoang's initial correspondence with Japan. It started in 1599 when Shirahama, now captain of a Japanese trading ship, was shipwrecked off the coast of Vietnam. He got into trouble with the local officials and killed one of the Do Thang Quan (custom officer) at Thuan Hoa. Shirahama was arrested and kept in prison until Nguyen Hoang came back from the north. After meeting him in 1601, Nguyen Hoang decided to repatriate Shirahama to Japan as a gesture of good will to the Shogun.<sup>94</sup> This was actually two years before Shogun Ieyasu established the Tokugawa Shogunate at Edo. In his letter, Hoang appealed to Japan whom he considered as a 'God Brother', for guns and ammunition. He also sent to the Shogunate some prized local products as gesture of friendship.<sup>95</sup> In reply, the Shogun asked Nguyen Hoang not to admit any Japanese ships that did not carry any red seals, as a precaution against any unsanctioned ships.<sup>96</sup> He also sent Nguyen Hoang some presents.

In the 1590s, Japanese traders were regulated and were only allowed to use authorised ships. These merchants were issued a certificate by the Shogunate

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<sup>93</sup> *Tien Bien*, Vol. 1: 13-14. When writing about Hien Quy, Yang Baoyun did not attempt to identify Hien Quy as a Japanese but merely accepted the Tien Bien's information that Hien Quy was a European. See Yang Baoyun, *Contribution a l'histoire de la principaute des Nguyen au Vietnam Meridional (1600-1775)*, p. 119.

<sup>94</sup> "Nguyen Hoang to Shogun Ieyasu", in *Gaiban Tsuusho (Ngoai Phien Thong Thu)*, Vol. 11, p. 96.

<sup>95</sup> The gifts including 30 katies of Khe Nam Huong, three pieces of white linen, 10 jars of white honey, 100 bottles of water and five pheasants, see "Nguyen Hoang to Shogun Ieyasu", *Gaiban Shushi (Ngoai Phien Thong Thu)*, p. 96.

<sup>96</sup> "Shogun Ieyasu to Nguyen Hoang", in *Gaiban Tsuusho (Ngoai Phien Thong Thu)*, Vol. 11, p. 98.

in the form of a red seal. Hence the name of red seal ships or *shuin-sen* meaning ships that had official sanction to trade outside of Japan. The move was to allow legitimate traders, to circumvent the Ming prohibition of trade, via entrepôts like Hoi An, where they bought Chinese goods.<sup>97</sup>

In a series of correspondence that took place between Nguyen Hoang and the Shogun from 1601 to 1613, many expensive presents were exchanged. The Shogun continued to press Nguyen Hoang to accept only Japanese ships that were issued with the red seal and records show that Nguyen Hoang complied with this request. But for Nguyen Hoang, it was clear that the greatest prize lie not with the expensive gifts but with the continued arrival of Japanese trading vessels bringing with them valuable goods and revenue from tariffs imposed. It was this cordial relationship with the Shogunate and the hope of encouraging trade that saw Nguyen Hoang welcome Japanese traders to Quang Nam.

One important feature in Nguyen Hoang's letters to the Shogun was his persistent request for arms from Japan. The Shogun however, never fully obliged him. From time to time, Nguyen Hoang would receive some swords and armour, but nothing significant. Nguyen Hoang was not alone in such request. The Trinh were also making similar requests to the Japanese and seemed to be receiving the same response as indicated by the gifts sent in 1624. In that year, the Japanese had sent the Trinh 10,000 katis of saltpetre for the making of gun powder.<sup>98</sup> The continued request for arms from the Japanese ruler indicated Nguyen Hoang's attempt to strengthen his armed forces in the face of possible attack by the Trinh.

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<sup>97</sup> Li Tana, *Nguyen Cochinchina*, p. 60.

<sup>98</sup> "A Shogunate Garrison Commander to the commander of Bo Chinh Chau, Hoa Quan Cong", June 1624, in *Gaiban Tsuusho (Ngoai Phien Thong Thu)*, Vol. 13, p. 114..

The move also confirmed Nguyen Hoang's determination to defend his power base.

Another feature that can be seen from Nguyen Hoang's correspondence with the Shogunate was the manner in which he referred to himself and the continued usage of the reign title and year of the Le Emperor. Nguyen Hoang's two strategies, maintaining links with the north while establishing an alternate power base becomes clear. Nguyen Hoang maintained his image as a loyal servant of the Le Court by continuing to use the reign title and year of the Le emperor in all his correspondence. Nguyen Hoang also used his official title as accorded by the Le Court. Nonetheless, in describing the relationship between his domain and Japan, he used the term two Quoc (states), giving the impression that he had assumed power as the ruler of a separate state. On the part of the Japanese, the term Annam was used, when referring to Nguyen Southern Vietnam. This was consistent with the Chinese name for Vietnam at that time.

The Japanese settlement in Hoi An was acceptable to Nguyen Hoang, but he complained to the Shogun about the constant harassment on the villages along the coast by Japanese pirates who robbed Fujian traders and raped some womenfolk.<sup>99</sup> Nguyen Hoang managed to resolve the problem only after he sent in troops to suppress them.<sup>100</sup> To avoid a recurrence of such events, he asked the Shogun to advise his subjects to abide by the laws of southern Vietnam. As a means to guarantee and supervise Nguyen Southern Vietnam and his relations

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<sup>99</sup> "Nguyen Hoang to Shogun Hidetada", 15 April 1606, in *Gaiban Tsuusho (Ngoai Phien Thong Thu)*, Vol. 12, p. 106.

<sup>100</sup> The event is not recorded in any of the Nguyen sources.

with Japan, a four points code of conduct was agreed upon by both sides.<sup>101</sup> The five articles stipulated that traders had to be honest; the two kingdoms should have mutual respect for visitors; equal treatment of shipwrecks, to provide medicine and food for shipwreck victims and that the visitors should be of the highest moral quality.<sup>102</sup>

In his dealings with Japan, Nguyen Hoang did more than cultivate relations with the Tokugawa Shogunate. In 1604, he adopted a Japanese merchant, Hunamoto Yabeiiji as his son.<sup>103</sup> Incidentally, Hunamoto was also the first envoy of the Shogun to Nguyen Hoang. In the same letter that he informed Shogun Ieyasu regarding his adoption of Hunamoto, he also asked the Shogun to allow Hunamoto to return to southern Vietnam the following year. Even though the correspondence did not provide details on the adoption, it is most likely that Nguyen Hoang did so with the intention of improving his relations with the Japanese.

Nguyen's direct trade with Japan under the arrangement of the Red Seal ships came to an end in 1633 when Shogun Ieyasu decided to reverse the earlier policy of engaging in foreign trade to a policy of isolation. The decision resulted in Japanese withdrawal from active participation in international trade. Since then, all contact with foreigners and trade was conducted only through the special port

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<sup>101</sup> "Shogun Ieyasu to Nguyen Hoang", *Gaiban Tsuusho (Ngoai Phien Thong Thu)*, Vol. 12, p. 105. Unfortunately, the date for the agreement is not available.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>103</sup> "Nguyen Hoang to Shogun Ieyasu", 6 May 1605, in *Gaiban Tsuusho (Ngoai Phien Thong Thu)*, Vol. 12, pp. 103-104.

enclave at Hirado (Nagasaki). Subsequently, trading activities between Nguyen Southern Vietnam and Japan were mainly in the hands of Chinese traders.<sup>104</sup>

At the height of Nguyen-Japan trade, the principal trade items from the Vietnamese side were silk, sugar, pepper and sappanwood. In return, the Vietnamese wanted copper and saltpetre, the main ingredients for the casting of cannons and the making of gunpowder respectively. Trade with Japan had ensured good returns in terms of the trade of commodities and this strengthened Nguyen's economic position. However, Nguyen Hoang and his successor, Nguyen Phuc Nguyen received very little of what they really wanted – ready-made guns for their army. Even though the Shogun was most obliging in replying to Nguyen Hoang's letters, there were very few tangible results. This had inevitably pushed the Nguyen to seek for arms and ammunition from other sources. One important contribution of the trade and official transactions with Japan was the recognition extended by the Tokugawa Shogunate to Nguyen Hoang and his successors as the rulers of southern Vietnam. This contributed to further independence that Nguyen Hoang and his successors enjoyed.

It is unclear if there were many trading vessels from island Southeast Asia in the Nguyen ports during Nguyen Hoang's reign. However, in the ports of Phan Rang, Phan Ri and Cam Ranh Bay in Champa, there were visitors from the Malay Archipelago as well as from Portuguese sailors.<sup>105</sup> The earliest western trader to

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<sup>104</sup> The Japan-Southeast Asian trade after 1633 were conducted by Chinese traders using junks. See *Kai-Hentai* (Description of the Chinese), 3 Vols., Tokyo: Toyo Bunko, 1958-1960. Part of the reports by the Chinese shippers were translated and compiled by Yoneo Ishii in his *Chinese Junk Trade*, Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1998.

<sup>105</sup> On Champa's dealings with the Malay Archipelago, see Pierre-Yves Manguin, "The Introduction of Islam into Champa", *JMBRAS*, Vol. 58, part 1, 1985, p. 12 & P. B. Lafont, "Hubungan antara Champa dengan Asia Tenggara", In *Dunia Melayu dan Dunia Indocina*, Ismail

have arrived in Nguyen Southern Vietnam was probably Antonio de Faria, a Portuguese trader who visited a 'town' in the Bay of Tourane (Hoi An, Quang Nam) in 1535. De Faria's visit predates Nguyen Hoang's rule over Thuan Hoa and Quang Nam by some 23 years. But he did not trade there.

Nguyen Hoang employed very interesting people when conducting business with foreigners. It was reported that there were at least two female Loncay (Lonckey in European languages) or interpreters in his service. Both women had spent many years in Macao, having married Portuguese men. Both spoke excellent Portuguese and Malay. One of them was Nguyen Hoang's interpreter for 30 years.<sup>106</sup> They probably influenced Nguyen Hoang to favour the Portuguese when dealing with Europeans. The need for modern military hardware also saw the Nguyen relying heavily on the Portuguese.

Nguyen's relationship with the Portuguese went beyond trade. This first European power in Southeast Asia came at the time Nguyen Hoang was establishing his regime in Thuan Hoa and Quang Nam. Even though the Dutch would overtake the Portuguese as the foremost seaborne power in Southeast Asia by the mid 17th century, the Portuguese still enjoyed special treatment from successive Nguyen Lords. This has a lot to do with the fact that it was the Portuguese who were first received by the Nguyen Court as interpreters. Portuguese Catholic priests were also physicians or teachers of mathematics in the

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Hussein, P. B. Lafont and Po Dharma (eds.), Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1995, p. 214.

<sup>106</sup> Li Tana and Anthony Reid, *Southern Vietnam under the Nguyen*, Singapore: ASEAN Economic Research, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1993, p. 7.

Nguyen Court. Furthermore, the first gun founder in the employment of the Nguyen was also a Portuguese.

## **Conclusion**

Throughout Nguyen Hoang's administration of southern Vietnam, there was no explicit policy being implemented with regard to 'foreign' elements like the uplanders or to foreign traders visiting Hoi An. This was mainly due to Nguyen Hoang's preoccupation with the affairs in the north. Despite later Nguyen historians' attempts to portray Nguyen Hoang as the founder and originator of a separate new Vietnam in the South, Nguyen Hoang did not cut his links with the Le Dynasty.

However, the year 1600 marks the beginning of change in Nguyen Hoang's position when he began to focus on the effort to develop an alternate power base. Even though Nguyen Hoang was still hoping to challenge for power in the North, his dealings with his non-Vietnamese neighbours as well as with foreigners, gave him a certain measure of independence.

This sense of independence was also reinforced by Thuan Hoa and Quang Nam's distance from Thang Long, which inevitably left Nguyen Hoang to act unilaterally over many issues, including foreign relations. While Hoang did not try to secede from the Le, the last 13 years of his reign saw this new sense of independence take root especially in sixth son, Nguyen Phuc Nguyen. The latter would lead an open confrontation against the Trinh-controlled Le Court in 1627.