

Chapter Four

Role of Foreigners in the Shaping of a Nguyen State, 1672-1725

This chapter will look into the Nguyen's foreign relations during a period that covers the immediate post-1672 years up to 1725 which correspond with the last years of the fourth Nguyen, Phuc Tan's rule (1672-1687), the brief four years administration of Nguyen Phuc Tran (1687-1691) and thirty four years under Nguyen Phuc Chu (1691-1725). If foreign relations was a vital tool in ensuring the survival of Nguyen rule in southern Vietnam during the 1627-1672 conflict with the Trinh as discussed in the previous chapter, a shift of role is seen during the post-1672 period. Subsequent to 1672, foreign relations was a means for the Nguyen to project itself as an independent entity. This chapter will focus on the Nguyen's relations with China and other countries.

Nguyen Rule 1672 to 1691

The military stalemate that lasted from 1672 and 1691 is an important period in the history of Nguyen rule in southern Vietnam. Freed for the first time from the demands of military conflict, the Nguyen were able to establish and develop its administration, pay attention to cultural and religious activities as well as promote trade.

Nguyen Phuc Tan was in the 24th year of his rule when the war with the Trinh was fought to a standstill. Due to the war, his entire attention till then had been devoted to military affairs. After 1672, the need to maintain an effective

fighting force become a preoccupation of the battle-worn ruler. However, the lull now allowed him to give his attention to other aspects of administration his rule. Among these was the development of public examinations. A total of three public examinations were organised during the last 15 years of his rule, namely in 1675, 1679 and 1683 respectively. Under Nguyen Phuc Tan, a new official post was inaugurated and offered for competition through examinations. The post was that of Tham Phong (Inspector). In order to qualify, a candidate was examined on current affairs, relating to both civil and military matters. The chosen inspectors were assigned to assist in the provincial administration.

Upon the death of his father, Nguyen Phuc Tan in 1687, Nguyen Phuc Tran (r. 1687-1691) became the ruler of Thuan Hoa and Quang Nam. Even though his rule was the shortest of the nine Nguyen, it was eventful. While Li Tana describes the year 1672 till 1744 as a period in which the Nguyen were moving towards a “civil government”,¹ this shift begins with the rule of Nguyen Phuc Tran. It was Nguyen Phuc Tran who initiated a change towards the cultural and religious matters.

Nguyen Phuc Tran’s first decision as ruler was to move his capital from Kim Long to nearby Phu Xuan in 1687. He also built a majestic capital city. With the help of Jesuits missionaries, great ponds were dug and a fountain was installed.² The buildings at the old capital were turned into the main temple. Upon the new capital’s completion at the end of 1687, a delegation from the king of

¹ Li Tana, *Nguyen Cochinchina: Southern Vietnam in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, Southeast Asian Programme, 1998, pp. 46-48

² *Dai Nam Thuc Luc Tien Bien* (hereafter *Tien Bien*), Vol. 6:4-5.

Cambodia came to pay their respect at the temple.³ The move established the capital's dual functions as an administrative as well as a religious centre.

In June 1687, after a fire had destroyed the resident quarters of the Gian Thanh Lai Quan Xa (the administrative staff of the capital) destroying more than 800 houses, Nguyen Phuc Tran ordered a three year mourning period and led his officials in the rites.⁴ A Nguyen ruler leading his people in a spiritual affair was unprecedented.⁵ In 1688, Nguyen Phuc Tran renovated the Thuan An Temple in the vicinity of Phu Xuan. A year later, he took the necessary steps to honour and promote the various deities and spirits within his realm. He repeated this in 1689. The move was a demonstration of his authority which amplified his influence in the realm of both men and spirits.⁶ The act of honouring and promoting deities within their realm began with Nguyen Hoang in 1576. He started with honouring the spirit of an old lady, whom he believed helped him to defeat the Mac army.⁷ Nguyen Phuc Tran also conducted some ceremonies calling for rain during the dry seasons of 1689. Many of these ceremonies were elaborate. On the same occasion, boat racing was also performed. The plentiful harvest the following year was attributed to these rituals.⁸

In 1689, Nguyen Phuc Tran reversed his father's decision to hold public examinations only once in nine years. He ordered the cycle for the examinations

³ *Tien Bien*, Vol. 6: 5.

⁴ *Tien Bien*, Vol. 6: 4.

⁵ Earlier in 1670, when a fire destroyed 700 houses, Nguyen Phuc Tan meditated and carried out charity works in order to gain absolution. see *Tien Bien*, Vol. 5: 7.

⁶ *Tien Bien*, Vol. 6: 11.

⁷ *Tien Bien*, Vol. 1: 12.

⁸ *Tien Bien*, Vol. 6: 13. This description is only found in the *Tien Bien*, more likely an effort by the Court historians to cultivate an image of a benevolent ruler whose wishes were granted even by the Heaven.

to revert to three years. He also re-instituted the examination for the position of Chinh Do and for those who were competent in the Chinese language. The examinations for the two positions had been abolished by Nguyen Phuc Tan in 1679. According to the *Tien Bien*, Nguyen Phuc Tran hoped to nurture talent and decided to encourage the old examination system. The decision was apparently well received by the people.⁹ The revival of the examinations for Chinh Do and Chinese language was an important decision as the successful candidates later filled positions of secretary and district administrators.¹⁰

Nguyen Phuc Tran was a devout Buddhist. It was he who made the effort to invite learned Buddhist monks from China to serve in southern Vietnam. Though none of them actually arrived during his life time, the decision benefited his successor, Nguyen Phuc Chu. Among those invited by Phuc Tran was Thich Da Shan, who received his invitation in 1690 and who came to Nguyen Southern Vietnam in 1695.¹¹

Nguyen Phuc Tran died in 1691, after ruling for barely four years. He was succeeded by his eldest son, Nguyen Phuc Chu, who reigned from 1691 to 1725. Nguyen Phuc Chu, the sixth Nguyen ruler, was probably one of the most colourful and important of all of Nguyen Hoang's successors. His rule over southern Vietnam can be described as a period of major transformation characterized by the massive expansion southwards, increased trading activities,

⁹ *Tien Bien*, Vol. 6: 7.

¹⁰ *Phu Bien Tap Luc* (hereafter *PBTL*), Vol. 5: 1-2.

innovative administrative reforms, Buddhist revivalism and most importantly the realization of independence. For all of these achievements, Nguyen Phuc Chu fully utilized his contacts with foreigners.

Nguyen Attempt to Gain Chinese Recognition

Even though by 1691 the Nguyen had ruled southern Vietnam for more than 150 years, the desire to regain the family's premier position in the Le Court was still a preoccupation as this was one of the two-prong strategy thus far implemented by them. For Nguyen Phuc Chu, the important task was to gain recognition for his regime in southern Vietnam. If the Trinh Lords had perceived the Nguyen Lords as rulers of a renegade province trying to break away from central control, in return, the Nguyen saw the Trinh as usurper against the Le Throne.¹² With the Trinh firmly in control over the Le emperor, it was virtually impossible for the Nguyen to gain recognition and promotion in the Court hierarchy, thus the need to turn to China for such recognition.

In his memoir, the Chinese monk, Da Shan states that his advice to Nguyen Phuc Chu was to send tribute to China in order to obtain the rightful title of “*vuong*” (king). Da Shan, who visited Nguyen Southern Vietnam in 1695 to 1696, wrote:

¹¹ Da Shan left behind an account of his two years stay in Nguyen Southern Vietnam, see *Hai Wai Ji Shi* (hereafter *HWJS*, *Overseas Journal*) in Chen Chingho (ed.), *Shi Qi Shi Ji Guangnan Zhi Xin Shi Liao* (New Sources on Seventeenth Century Guangnan), Taipei: Zhonghua Chong Shu, 1960.

¹² This view is also expressed by later Vietnamese scholars who were serving the later Nguyen Dynasty. In *Su Luoc* for instance, the Trinh Lords were compared to the Mac (1527-1691) as usurpers to the throne, See *Su Luoc*, Vol. 2: Chapter 18, pp. 8-9. As explained in Chapter Two, the Trinh and the Nguyen were the highest ranking aristocrats in the Le Court with the Nguyen in-charge before the Trinh ousted them from this position and Nguyen Hoang was sent south.

The Emperor Kang Xi ruled over nine zhou and 15 provinces, and had an army of tens of thousands strong. The borders of you, the king, is close to Guangdong. It would be good to send an envoy to establish good relations with the governor (General) and then request for admission to the tributary system and to obtain recognition to be King. With the great reputation and might of Guangdong as anchor stone, small bandits would definitely submit to your kingdom and would not dare to attack. This would allow the kingdom to have everlasting peace and prosperity. This is like to win a war without going into battle.¹³

The suggestion was accepted by Nguyen Phuc Chu who was probably impressed by the prospects of “winning a war without battle”. The idea of seeking China’s recognition as a defence against one’s enemies was also a popular strategy employed by states in Mainland Southeast Asia at that time.

Among the Southeast Asian states that were part of the Chinese tributary arrangements were Siam, Burma, Champa and Vietnam. Recognition from China and admission into the tributary system would raise the status of Nguyen Southern Vietnam in the eyes of its neighbours. Following Da Shan’s suggestion, a delegation was sent to China in June 1702, seeking permission to be accepted as a tribute sending-state. This indirectly implies that the Nguyen were seeking the Chinese Court’s recognition for its independence.

In 1702, Nguyen Phuc Chu tried to send a delegation to the Qing Court, seeking recognition and admission to be part of the Chinese tributary arrangements. This was based on Da Shan’s¹⁴ earlier advice for the Nguyen to

¹³ *Hai Wai Ji Shi* (*Memoir on an Overseas Trip* hereafter *HWJS*), Vol. 1: 34.

¹⁴ For a biography of Tich Da Shan, see *Dai Nam Liet Truyen Tien Bien* (hereafter *Liet Truyen Tien Bien*), Vol. 5: 24-25. See also Jiang Boqin, *Qing Chu Lingnan Chanxue Shi Yanjiu Chubian*:

seek recognition from China.¹⁵ The mission was led by two of Da Shan's followers, Hoang Chen, a former student at the Chinese National Academy (Guo Zijian) and Xing Che, a Buddhist monk. Both were natives of Guangdong. They went to Guangdong on board a Siamese 'secondary' tribute vessel that had earlier drifted into the Nguyen port of Hoi An.¹⁶ The mission brought along an impressive list of goods to be presented as tribute to the Manchu Court (Qing Dynasty, 1644-1912). Included in the list were two elephant tusks with a combined weight of 350 catties; one catty and 13 taels of gold; flowery rattan (50 pieces); and precious stones (5 catties four taels).¹⁷ On top of that, Nguyen Phuc Chu also made a presentation of 50,000 *lang* of silver to the governor of Guangdong and Guangxi (commonly known as the two Guang), possibly as an inducement to facilitate the tribute mission's admission.¹⁸

Both the *Tien Bien* and the *Phu Bien Tap Luc* (Miscellaneous Records of the Frontiers) reported that the mission was rejected. The reason given was that the Chinese acknowledged the Nguyen as subjects of the Le Dynasty. Any attempt to admit the Nguyen into the Chinese tributary system would have

Shi Lian Da Xian Yu Aomen Chan Shi, (*Thach Liem Da Shan and the Development of Zen in Macau*), Shanghai: Xue Lin Chu Ban She, 1999.

¹⁵ This was also acknowledged by Da Shan in his *Hai Wai Ji Shi*, Vol. 3: 2-3.

¹⁶ *Tien Bien*, Vol. 7: 20. As for the Siamese secondary tribute ship, it was most likely to have been manned by Chinese seamen as it was common for the Siamese and other Southeast Asian nations to commission a sea-going Chinese vessel to travel to China. This is highlighted by Yoneo Ishii in his *The Junk Trade from Southeast Asia, Translation from the Tosen Fusetsu-gaki, 1674-1723*, Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies & Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, Australian National University, 1998, pp. 2-3 & 18-21; see also Jennifer Wayne Cushman, *Fields from the Sea, Chinese Junk Trade with Siam during the Late Eighteenth Century and Early Nineteenth Century*, Ithaca: Cornell University Southeast Asia Program, 1993, pp. 2-3.

¹⁷ *Tien Bien*, Vol. 7: 20. The *Phu Bien Tap Luc* (*Miscellaneous Records of the Pacification of the Frontiers* hereafter *PBTL*) differs slightly with the *Tien Bien* regarding the contents of the tribute. In addition to the items listed in the *Tien Bien*, the *PBTL* list includes two pieces of sappan wood, three pairs of singing birds, and one pair of "Lightning" Bronze bracelets, see *PBTL*, Vol. 5: 27.

¹⁸ *PBTL*, Vol. 5:27.

contravened China-Le relations. However, later Nguyen historians who compiled the *Tien Bien*, tried to explain China's decision in terms of their apprehension that if granted recognition, the Guangnan Guo (Nguyen Southern Vietnam or the Kingdom of Quang Nam as known in Chinese) would supersede the authority of the Le Government.¹⁹

While compiling the *Phu Bien Tap Luc*, Le Quy Don had collected materials from the family of Nguyen Quang Tien,²⁰ the man who was responsible for drafting the tributary letter sent to the Qing Court in 1702. In the letter to the governor of the Two Guangs in 1702, Nguyen Phuc Chu stated his reasons for seeking acceptance of tributary relations. Among his reasons was that he was fulfilling the intentions of his forbearers to expand the territories of the Nguyen Lords. He also explained that it was only with his growing strength that he was ready to pay homage to the Chinese Court.

Nguyen Phuc Chu's hope of gaining Chinese recognition was stopped at the first step by the governor of Guangdong and Guangxi who refused to allow the Nguyen delegate to proceed to Beijing in 1702. The decision was based on the Chinese' understanding that the Nguyen was subordinate to the Le. However, the decision did not mean the end of official contact between Nguyen and the governor of the two southern Chinese provinces. Most of the subsequent meetings took place through the initiatives of the Vietnamese. In 1724, when Yang Ling,

¹⁹ *Tien Bien*, Vol. 7: 20.

²⁰ Nguyen Quang Tien was a native of Thua Thien, in Quang Dien (Thuan Hoa). Known as a talented man, Quang Tien entered the Nguyen service during Nguyen Phuc Chu's reign. He was responsible for drafting the letter to seek admission to the Chinese tribute system in 1702. He was also one of the few talented people identified by Le Quy Don. See *Liet Truyen Tien Bien*, Vol. 5: 31-32 & *PBTL*, Vol. 5: 11.

the governor of the two Guangs passed away, Nguyen Phuc Chu sent his condolences to the family. He also sent 100 taels of gold to the family of the Governor.²¹ Though the *Tien Bien* is silent on this event, it is likely that despite the rejection in 1702, Nguyen Phuc Chu remained in contact with the governor of the two Guangs, the gate keeper to the Chinese capital. This was possibly with the hope of cultivating closer relations in order to facilitate future attempts for admission into the tributary arrangements and trade relations. Judging from the personal contact maintained by Nguyen Phuc Chu with the governor of the two Guangs, it is conceivable that similar relations were also maintained by his successors. Indeed, Le Quy Don, the compiler of the *Phu Bien Tap Luc*, commented that Thuan Hoa maintained regular correspondence with the governor of Guangdong.²² However, no further attempts were made to seek recognition of China by subsequent Nguyen.

One aspect that requires further investigation is the hidden agenda of Nguyen Phuc Chu's tribute mission of 1702. Official recognition aside, a more tangible or even pressing aspect of the Nguyen's needs would be permission to trade officially with China. Until 1702, the Chinese who came to trade in Nguyen Southern Vietnam were private traders, many of them operating out of China.²³ However, there was no instances of China having granted the Nguyen permission to trade in Chinese ports. Thus, unlike the Siamese who also conducted tribute trade with China, the Nguyen were not granted such privilege.

²¹ *PBTL*, Vol. 5: 29-30.

²² *PBTL*, Vol. 5: 27.

As Nguyen Phuc Chu's mission is not mentioned in any Chinese source, it is difficult to know what had actually transpired when the mission arrived at Guangzhou. It is likely that by the time of the arrival of Nguyen Phuc Chu's delegation to Guangdong, the Chinese official who was expected by Da Shan to facilitate the Nguyen delegation's admission had been transferred from his post.²⁴ That same year also saw Da Shan falling from grace in China. He was arrested by the Chinese authority on charges of corruption and accused of enriching himself through overseas trade. It is possible that Da Shan was in the process of being returned to his hometown in chains when the Nguyen delegation arrived.²⁵

It is worthwhile to find out how the Chinese viewed the Nguyen. In *Huang Zhao Wen Xian Tong Kao* (The Literature and Documentations of the Dynasty), one of the earliest Chinese official record on a transaction between the Nguyen and the Chinese authorities in 1669, the Chinese referred to the Nguyen Southern Vietnam as Guangnan Guo (Kingdom of Guangnan or Quang Nam). On that occasion, a trading ship from Guangnan Guo arrived at Guangzhou carrying Liu Sifu, a military officer with the rank of Du Shi (Brigade Vice-Commander), and ranked fourth in the Chinese official hierarchy, had drifted into Quang Nam. The Nguyen repatriated him and took the opportunity to trade in Guangdong.²⁶ The Nguyen delegation was led by Zhao Wenbin, a Chinese who had lived abroad for many years. The Nguyen's efforts was commented upon by Chinese officials.

²³ See for instance, Yoneo Ishii, *The Junk Trade from Southeast Asia*, p. 3; see also Chen Chingho, "The Chinese Quarter of Faifo (Hoi-An) and Its Foreign Trade during the 17th & 18th Centuries", *The New Asia Journal*, 3: 1, (August 1957), pp. 273-303.

²⁴ In *HWJS*, Nguyen Phuc Chu had asked Da Shan to pave the way at Guangzhou to facilitate the sending of the tribute delegation, see *HWJS*, Vol. 3: 2-3.

²⁵ This idea was expressed by Jiang Boqin in *Qing Chu Lingnan Chanxue Shi Yanjiu Chubian: Shi Lian Da Xian Yu Aomen Chan Shi*, p. 415.

However, the trade goods were confiscated as China was still enforcing the ban for overseas trade and travelling, so that any attempt to send goods to China outside the stipulated year when tribute should be sent would not be accepted.²⁷

A second Chinese record, the *Qing Shi* (History of the Qing Dynasty), in commenting about the origin of the Nguyen rule in southern Vietnam, showed that it was unaware of the rivalry between the Trinh and the Nguyen families. According to *Qing Shi*, “the Le Emperor sent the Nguyen Lord to govern Xun Hoa (Thuan Hoa). He was given the title of the King of Guangnan”.²⁸ When outlining the various territories found in Vietnam, the *Qing Shi* mentioned how the two provinces of Guangnan (Quang Nam) and Xun Hua (Thuan Hoa) were originally the Nguyen’s holdings.²⁹ Such little information, albeit distorted on Nguyen Southern Vietnam demonstrated that the Qing Court had always regarded the Nguyen as under the sovereignty of the Le, as indicated in the reply given to the 1702 Nguyen mission and as cited in the Nguyen accounts. Nonetheless, in most cases, even though the Chinese did not officially recognise the Nguyen as a separate entity, they nevertheless still called it Guangnan Guo (Kingdom of Quang Nam).

The Chinese Court’s confusion over the actual status of the Nguyen rule in southern Vietnam is also reflected in another incident that was reported in the Vietnamese source of *Bang Giao Luc* (Records of Foreign Relations). In 1718, the governor of the two Guangs confiscated two boats from Thuan Hoa, significantly,

²⁶ *Huang Zhao Wen Xian Tong Kao*, Vol. 33.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Qing Shi Gao Jiao Zhu*, Vol. 534: *Lie Zhuan*, Vol. 314, p. 12097.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 12098.

the Governor repatriated the boat and crews to the Le Court. The letter was also addressed to the Le Emperor.³⁰ This transaction suggests that the Chinese probably did not know that the Nguyen were no longer represented at the Le Court, and that Thuan Hoa was by then, a separate entity.

Despite gaining few substantial results from their transactions with the Chinese, particularly with the governor of Guangdong and Guangxi, the Nguyen family did not let up in their attempts to win acceptance of the Chinese government. The Nguyen continued to look to the Chinese court as the ultimate source of authority for the legitimisation of the Nguyen rule in southern Vietnam.

The Chinese Link in Religious Development

Apart from being a source of political legitimisation, Chinese tradition served as a source of spiritual and cultural inspiration for Nguyen rule.³¹ This was especially so in the case of the Nguyen's shift towards Buddhism. In the early stages of their rule, the Nguyen venerated local deities and spirits. Many temples of this nature were set up under the patronage of the Nguyen, chief among them was the Thien Mu temple near Phu Xuan, built in 1601.³² Buddhism only became important during the late 17th Century when Nguyen Phuc Tran, who was a pious

³⁰ *Bang Giao Luc* (Notes on Foreign Affairs), Vol. 1, as cited in Yang Baoyun, *Contribution a l'Histoire de la Principaute des Nguyen* p. 161.

³¹ This section will focus on the religious aspect. For the cultural aspect, see my forthcoming article, "The Chinese Factor in the Shaping of the Nguyen Rule over Southern Vietnam during the 17th & 18th Centuries", in *China and Southeast Asia: Historical Interaction*, Hong Kong: Centre of Asian Studies, The University of Hong Kong. (forthcoming)

³² For the background to Nguyen Hoang's decision to construct the Thien Mu pagoda, see *Tien Bien*, Vol. 1: 20. See also Ha Xuan Liem, *Chua Thien Mu* (Thien Mu Pagoda), Hue: Nha Xuat Ban Thuan Hoa, 1999, pp. 51-76.

Buddhist, took the initiative to promote the religion by inviting Buddhist monks from China.

First introduced to Vietnam between the sixth and the ninth centuries during Chinese rule, Buddhism in Vietnam was largely neglected under the Le Dynasty. The Hong Duc Code of Law (c. 1475), promulgated by Le Thanh Tong (r. 1460-1497), left out Buddhism as part of the social institution of the Vietnamese people, considering it to be a harmful influence and best erased from Vietnamese society. But the situation began to change during the late 17th century. Wearing by civil wars, the population began to yearn for spiritual solace of which Buddhism provided.³³ In the south, the Nguyen allowed the Buddhist religion to develop and flourish under their patronage.³⁴ This helped to attract many learned Buddhist clergy and scholars to the Nguyen domain, including those from China.

Over the years, Chinese Buddhist monks had been coming to Vietnam to spread Buddhism to the Vietnamese. One of the earliest Buddhist monks to arrive in the South was Chuyet Chuyet left China with some of his disciples in 1630. He first arrived in Dong Nai at the Mekong Delta, before moving to the land of Champa.³⁵ Shortly after that, he left for the north, presumably after the outbreak of hostility between the Nguyen and the Trinh.

During the second half of the 17th century, following the fall of the Ming Dynasty in China, many Chinese monks, refusing to live under the new regime, left for Vietnam. Among the first of Chinese monks who served the Nguyen was

³³ Minh Chi, Ha Van Tan & Nguyen Tai Thu, *Buddhism in Vietnam*, Hanoi: The Gioi Publishers, 1993, p. 148.

³⁴ Nguyen Long, *Viet Nam Phat Giao Su Luon*, Tap 2, Hanoi: Nha Xuat Ban Van Hoc, 1992, p. 184.

the abbot Ta Nguyen Thieu (Xie Yuan Shao). A native of Chaozhou in Guangdong, he first came to Qui Ninh in 1665.³⁶ During his stay in southern Vietnam, he built the Thap Thap Di Da Pagoda in Qui Nhon and three temples including the pagoda of Thap My To, the Quoc An pagoda and the Phu Dong pagoda in Phu Xuan. Before he passed away, he was asked by Nguyen Phuc Tran to invite a learned monk from southern China and to purchase religious texts.³⁷

By the time of Da Shan's arrival in 1695,³⁸ Nguyen Phuc Tran had long passed away. It was his son, Nguyen Phuc Chu who took on the efforts to promote Buddhism. Among the many Chinese who came and stayed in Nguyen Southern Vietnam, none had more profound influence upon the development of religion and culture of the Nguyen rule than the monk Da Shan. For a man who spent only one and a half years in the Nguyen domain, Da Shan's influence on various aspects of the Nguyen rule was substantial, especially in taking the first step towards the legitimising (in the eyes of China) of their de facto rule in southern Vietnam.

Da Shan was a native of Zhejiang in central China. He was known to be a learned man, knowledgeable in politics, astronomy, painting and verse.³⁹ Before

³⁵ Minh Chi, Ha Van Tan & Nguyen Tai Thu, *Buddhism in Vietnam*, p. 150.

³⁶ For a biography of Ta Nguyen Thieu, see *Liet Truyen Tien Bien*, Vol. 6: See also *Dai Nam Nhat Thong Chi* (Geographical Gazetteer of Dai Nam): *Thua Thien*, p. 79.

³⁷ *Liet Truyen Tien Bien*, Vol. 6: 23. Other Chinese monks who lived in Nguyen Southern Vietnam at that time included Jie Ling, who was a native of Guangdong and who was the 35th Master of a Buddhist sect called Linh Thu. Jie Ling had first arrived at Dong Pho, in Dong Nai. He later went to Phu Xuan and served in the Pha Van Pagoda, *Liet Truyen Tien Bien*, Vol. 6: 26.

³⁸ For Da Shan's biography, see *Liet Truyen Tien Bien*, Vol. 6: 24-25. The *Liet Truyen Tien Bien*'s portrayal of Da Shan was full of praise for his contribution to the Nguyen rule when compared to the portrayals in the Chinese sources, see Chen Chingho (ed.), *Shi Qi Shi Ji Guangnan Zhi Xin Shi Liao* (New Sources on Seventeenth Century Guangnan), Taipei: Zhonghua Chong Shu, 1960, pp.5-15.

³⁹ For some examples of Da Shan's painting, see Jiang Boqin, *Qing Chu Ling Nan Chan Xue Shi Yan Jiu Chu Bian*, *Shi Lian Da Xian Yu Aomen Chan Shi*.

travelling to southern Vietnam, Da Shan was the abbot of the Zhang Shou temple in Guangzhou. Apparently, it took three invitations to get Da Shan to come to Nguyen Southern Vietnam. The third invitation in late 1694, convinced Da Shan of the sincerity of Nguyen Phuc Chu who had succeeded Nguyen Phuc Tran.⁴⁰

Da Shan departed from Guangzhou in 1695 and was installed at a temple near to Phu Xuan. Judging from the accounts in Da Shan's memoir, *Hai Wai Ji Shi* (HWJS) and the *Dai Nam Liet Truyen Tien Bien* (Biographies of the Former Dai Nam), Nguyen Phuc Chu was very fond of the abbot, and was frequently in his company.⁴¹ Apart from that, Nguyen Phuc Chu's immediate family and many other nobles were also known to be disciples and very devoted to Da Shan. It could be argued that the revival of Buddhism and its emergence as the dominant religion in southern Vietnam was the result of the work of Da Shan,⁴² the patronage of Nguyen Phuc Chu. Many monks, including those from China had thus far, failed to exert the kind of influence that Da Shan had on Nguyen Phuc Chu and his family.

The Nguyen rule also benefited from Da Shan's counsel on politics and government. Barely 20 days after his arrival, Da Shan began to provide counsel to Nguyen Phuc Chu on four matters relating to government.

First, Da Shan counselled Nguyen Phuc Chu to seek official recognition from China. This, according to Da Shan, was paramount to the security and

⁴⁰ HWJS, Vol. 1: 1. See also "Report of Ship No. 36 from Guangnan, Vol. 22, 1695" in Hayashi Harakatsu & Hayashi Nobotoku (comp.) *Kai-Hentai*, Vol. 2, Tokyo: Toyo Buno, 1958-1960, p. 1744. According to the report, the two Nguyen delegates sent to invite him, Chen Tianguan and Wu Ziguan were both Chinese.

⁴¹ HWJS, Vol. 1: 32.

⁴² Minh Chi, Ha Van Tan & Nguyen Tai Thu, *Buddhism in Vietnam*, p. 165.

prestige of the Nguyen Southern Vietnam.⁴³ This advice was to have a profound effect on the thinking of Nguyen Phuc Chu and subsequent Nguyen Lords, especially on the way they perceived their position in relation to the Trinh.

Secondly, during the very short time that he had spent in Thuan Hoa and Quang Nam, Da Shan noticed how the Nguyen Lord had placed military concerns over civilian affairs. He had also taken note of the concentration of armed forces in the province of Quang Binh. He also noticed how the corvee and military service that the Nguyen Lords exerted on its population had become a burden. Under the Nguyen rule, all male, aged between 18 and 60 were liable to be called for service to the state. Many were required to serve through many months in a year to fulfil their obligations.⁴⁴ For Da Shan, such relics of the 1627-1672 wars should have been dismantled and restructured to allow the soldiers to return home periodically to be with their families.⁴⁵ This advice was heeded by Nguyen Phuc Chu who later introduced a series of reforms on the Nguyen armed forces and relaxed the harsh rules of corvee and military services.⁴⁶ A new corvee and taxation regulation was also introduced for the census of 1707. The new regulation provide for a number of the people to be exempted from corvee.⁴⁷

Thirdly, Da Shan also pointed out to Nguyen Phuc Chu the need for the Nguyen domain to be governed by well-qualified persons who should not be concentrating on military affairs.⁴⁸ He urged the setting up of places of learning to

⁴³ *HWJS*, Vol. 1: 34.

⁴⁴ *HWJS*, Vol. 1: 35 and *Tien Bien*, Vol. 8: 1-3..

⁴⁵ *HWJS*, Vol. 1: 35b-36.

⁴⁶ For instance, Nguyen Phuc Chu ordered the establishment of military flags for his navy, and was constantly conducting maneuvers to keep his army in good shape. *Tien Bien*, Vol. 7:17.

⁴⁷ *Tien Bien*, Vol. 8: 1-3.

⁴⁸ *HWJS*, Vol. 1: 36.

cultivate a Confucianist bureaucracy. According to him, it is only through such measures that Nguyen Southern Vietnam would be known as a civilised kingdom.⁴⁹ This was a very important observation by Da Shan. When Nguyen Phuc Chu came to power in 1691, the Nguyen had effectively broken with the north for more than 64 years. During that period, the Nguyen officialdom experienced a significant change in composition. For by then, there were none who had actually sat for public examinations under the Le administration. The war had prevented the Nguyen from having sufficient recruitment of qualified personnel in its service, with perhaps the occasional man of talent from the north who came to enter the Nguyen's service. In 1695, Nguyen Phuc Chu instituted a public examination to fill the positions of secretary/district magistrates, advisors/teacher, rites officials, and provincial administrative officials.⁵⁰ While the examinations of the Nguyen were not as elaborate as those held under the Le dynasty, nonetheless, they helped to identify more educated people to serve the state. This enabled the Nguyen to maintain their rule in southern Vietnam.

Da Shan also advised on the need for the ruler to delegate responsibility and to establish a proper chain of command in the state.⁵¹ He suggested a system of chain of command based on the system practiced by the Chinese court and garrison.⁵² The system would serve as a mechanism that would limit the personal involvement of the Nguyen in trivial matters and prevent them from taking unnecessary personal risk. Before Da Shan's departure from southern Vietnam, he

⁴⁹ *HWJS*, Vol. 1: 35-36.

⁵⁰ *Tien Bien*, Vol. 7:10.

⁵¹ *HWJS*, Vol. 2: 31. The incident however, was recorded slightly different in the *Liet Truyen Tien Bien*, Vol. 6: 25.

recommended 18 articles of public service code of conduct that was based on the social ethic of the Chinese, and had them put up in both the court and public places in order to educate the people.⁵³ In addition to that, a system of public complaints, modelled after that practiced in China was instituted.⁵⁴

Da Shan's host, Nguyen Phuc Chu was obviously impressed and appreciated what Da Shan had done for the Nguyen state. His devotion towards Da Shan was quite genuine, to the extent of believing the presence of Da Shan as the main reason for the prosperity and well-being of the Nguyen domain. When the monk was leaving for China,⁵⁵ Nguyen Phuc Chu commented on the increase in the number of ships coming to Hoi An from 6-7 in the preceding years, to 16-17 ships in 1695. As if Da Shan was invested with some special power, Nguyen Phuc Chu also expressed his willingness to obey whatever instructions that Da Shan cared to give.⁵⁶

The influence of Da Shan over the Nguyen can be seen from the new found confidence demonstrated by Nguyen Phuc Chu and his successors. More importantly, it is obvious that Da Shan had addressed Nguyen Phuc Chu as king (Vuong) throughout his stay in southern Vietnam. He had also used the corresponding terms when referring to Nguyen Phuc Chu's immediate family members, calling them queen, queen mother, brother of the king and son-in-law

⁵² *HWJS*, Vol. 2: 32.

⁵³ *HWJS*, 2: 32-33.

⁵⁴ *HWJS*, Vol. 2: 33.

⁵⁵ Da Shan's first departure was on the 1st day of the seventh month 1695, but he only went as far as Hoi An where he was taken ill. He then decided to stay on until 1696.

⁵⁶ "Nguyen Phuc Chu's letter to Da Shan", as cited in Chen Chingho, *Shi Qi Shi Ji Guangnan Zi Xin Shi Liao* (New Sources on Seventeenth Century Guangnan), pp. 24-25.

of king.⁵⁷ It is not clear if Da Shan had any other agenda in doing so, that he did this reflected the de facto situation of the Nguyen as the rulers of a separate and independent kingdom.

In his letter to the Governor of the Two Guangs in 1702, Nguyen Phuc Chu declared that he and his ancestors were Buddhists.⁵⁸ This acknowledgement was the first manifestation by a Nguyen Lord in identifying with an established religion. Thus far, the Nguyen Lords before Nguyen Phuc Chu had concentrated on building and developing local deities and spirits. The growing importance of Buddhism among the southern Vietnamese under the Nguyen Lords definitely had their roots in the role played by the respective Chinese Buddhist monks.

To the Vietnamese living under the Nguyen Lords, China was also seen as the source of knowledge. In this regard, the Vietnamese in Quang Nam for instance, were reported to be willing to pay high prices for books imported from China via the port of Hoi An. The seventeenth century account, *Dong Xi Yang Kao* remarked, “the local people are fond of (Chinese) books. Each time [the Chinese junks arrived], they competed to purchase the books at high price”.⁵⁹ This indicated that the closing of the northern borders with Le-Trinh had deprived the population of their traditional cultural ties, which prompted the Nguyen Vietnam to look to China as the alternative source for knowledge.

Nguyen Southern Vietnam’s yearning for things Chinese was also noticed by Da Shan who related this in his memoirs the enthusiasm of the Vietnamese in

⁵⁷ *HWJS*, Vol. 3: 26 and Vol. 5: 6.

⁵⁸ *PBTL*, Vol. 5: 27.

⁵⁹ *Dong Xi Yang Kao*, Vol. 1: 19, see also Chen Chingho, *Historical Notes on Hoi-An (Faifo)*, Carbondale: Center for Vietnamese Studies, Southern Illinois University, 1974, p. 20.

emulating the “Han Feng” (Chinese Wind, meaning Chinese trends). Da Shan was continually asked about current practices in China.⁶⁰

The Ming Refugees Policy

One of the more striking decisions of the Nguyen rule to the population development of Vietnam is its policy of allowing large numbers of Chinese refugees to settle in their domain. The Chinese in the south included soldiers, merchants, literary men, artisans, physicians and Buddhist monks.

Barring the cultural effect of the Chinese presence, the Nguyen had their own reasons to welcome these political refugees. First, as most of the arrivals had a military background, they proved to be invaluable to the Nguyen under constant military threat from the north. Secondly, the Nguyen were hoping to utilise, some of the literati into their administrative service. Thirdly, the Nguyen were hoping that the presence of large numbers of Chinese may attract more Chinese to trade in the various Nguyen ports. While the presence of the Chinese in the various ports did actually contribute to the prosperity of the Nguyen’s international trading activities, the former two expectations were not fully realised.

Apart from the Ming Chinese military personnel, scholars were also employed by the Nguyen. These were scholars who left China after 1644 as they refused to serve the Manchu rulers. Many travelled to Southeast Asia, including Nguyen Southern Vietnam, with the hope of establishing a resistance network against the Manchu and to restore the Ming Dynasty.

⁶⁰ *HWJS*, Vol. I: 19.

When recruited to serve the Nguyen, this group of scholars had a profound influence in the shaping of Nguyen rule, especially from the administration angle. Indirectly, their presence also helped to perpetuate the spreading of Chinese culture in southern Vietnam.⁶¹ Claudine Salmon, in her excellent study on some of these Ming refugees, is of the view that "...In fact, during their rule over Quang Nam (central part of Annam) the Nguyen played an active part in the expansion of Chinese culture which was in fact one certain form of "Vietnamisation".⁶²

The more renown of these Chinese scholar-refugee was Zhu Shunshui (1600-1682), a Ming scholar from Zhejiang in Jiangnan. He was among the first who arrived in the Nguyen domain, and has left us with an account of his stay. Between 1646 and 1656, Zhu came to Hoi An six times for the purpose of garnering support for the Ming cause in China. His presence however became known to Nguyen Phuc Tan then sought his service. Nguyen Phuc Tan's offer of positions was rejected by Zhu, though he did not object to the request of carrying out some secret businesses in Japan.⁶³ In 1657, Zhu was seized by Nguyen soldiers at Hoi An, and was asked to submit to the authority of the Nguyen, but he refused. He was interned at Dinh Cat, the former administrative centre of the Nguyen, and was forced to help the Nguyen write official letters to the Trinh and China. He was also asked to serve in other capacities, for example, explaining

⁶¹ Claudine Salmon, "Regards de Quelques voyageurs Chinois sur le Vietnam du XVIIe Siecle", in Roderich Ptak & Denys Lombard (eds.), *South China & Maritime Asia, Vol. I*, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 1994, p. 117.

⁶² Ibid..

⁶³ Ibid., p. 126. It is unclear what the business were, but it is probable that Zhu was sent to purchase arms.

certain Chinese terms used in letters received. Zhu however, remained adamant in his position regarding service to the Nguyen. When confronted, he cited loyalty to the Ming as his reason for refusing to pledge loyalty to Nguyen Phuc Tan.⁶⁴

The undying loyalty of Zhu to Ming China was not peculiar to him. In fact, there were some who regarded their stay in Nguyen Southern Vietnam as a temporary measure. Many were probably unable to accept Nguyen's assumption of the role of an independent ruler. Despite its *de facto* status, Nguyen Southern Vietnam was basically a breakaway entity. In response to the treatment received at the hands of the Nguyen Lords, Zhu Shunsui held a very negative impression of Nguyen Southern Vietnam. According to him, "It is a small country but it is arrogant. Its studies are superficial and mediocre. It has little talent, rivalling Yelang...."⁶⁵

Such perceptions however, changed with the passage of time, and these varied with different sojourners. There were others who were more receptive and willing to serve the so-called 'renegade' Nguyen regime. One such person was Wei Jiuguan, a native of Fuzhou in Fujian, came to Nguyen Southern Vietnam during the time of Nguyen Phuc Tan. Apparently, he still harboured hopes of reviving the Ming Dynasty. While Wei did not officially served the Nguyen, he had taken up several commercial missions on behalf of the Nguyen to Japan. From his correspondence with Nguyen Phuc Tran, who had yet to succeed his father, it was clear that Wei was involved in helping the Nguyen obtain Japanese

⁶⁴ Zhu Shunsui, *Annan Gongyi Jishi*, in *Zhu Shun Shui Quan Ji*, Taipei: Shi Jie Shu Ju, 1956, p. 303 & 305-306.

⁶⁵ Ye Lang, a small state which existed in the region of Guizhou during the Han Dynasty where the king liked to boast. See Zhu Shunshui, *Annan Gongyi Jishi*, p. 315.

goods as well arms and ammunition from that country. Wei was also entrusted with large sum of money on the mission⁶⁶ Wei however, did not stay in Nguyen Southern Vietnam. Sensing the futility of reviving the Ming Dynasty, Wei and his sons settled in Japan.

Another case of a refugee willing to work with the Nguyen was Tran Hung (Chen Hong), a second generation Chinese of the Chinese settlement of Minh Huong Xa in Thua Thien, Thuan Hoa. Hung was the second son of Tran Duong Thuan, a merchant from Zhangzhou Phu in Fujian, who had arrived in southern Vietnam in the 1670s. Hung's mother was a Vietnamese. According to the Tran family register, Hung, a physician of Chinese medicine had befriended and served Nguyen Phuc Chu, for more than ten years.⁶⁷ It is not known if Hung had continued to serve the Nguyen Court after the death of Nguyen Phuc Chu in 1725. But after Hung had passed away in 1730, his son, who was also a physician, moved his practice to Vuon Rau (in present day Ba Die in Saigon).

The family register of Tran Hung provides interesting information on the spouses of several women born in the family who had married Chinese or Chinese descendants, some of whom were in the service of the Nguyen.⁶⁸ The family of Trinh Hoai Duc (1765-1825), the author of the early 19th century gazetteer of *Gia Dinh Thong Chi* also originated from China. Duc's grandfather was a native of

⁶⁶ "Nguyen Phuc Tran to Wei Jiuguan", 11 August 1673 as cited in *Ming Do Su*, Vol. 7: 95. *Ming Do Su* is a private manuscript kept by the Le family, now part of the manuscript collection of the Institute of History at Hanoi, MSS No. 285. On one occasion, he was entrusted with 5,000 taels of silver.

⁶⁷ See the family register of the Tran family in Chen Chingho (ed.), *A Brief Study of the Family Register of the Trans. A Ming Refugee Family in Minh-Huong-Xa Thua-Thien (Central Vietnam)*, Hong Kong: Southeast Asian Studies Section, New Asia Research Institute, Chinese University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong, 1964, p. 46.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

Fuzhou and the family was part of the elite in their community. After the fall of the Ming Dynasty, the family moved to southern Vietnam.⁶⁹ It is evident that successive Nguyen rulers since Nguyen Phuc Tan had placed many Chinese in the inner court circle, mainly to serve in the civil administration, as well as being appointed court physicians. This reflected the inadequate number of learned Vietnamese in southern Vietnam to serve in the various administrative positions. The utilisation of Chinese even in the inner court demonstrated the Nguyen's sense of pragmatism. For, from among the ranks of the Chinese refugees, the Nguyen could recruit well-trained scholars without having to source through the rudimentary public examinations organised by them since mid-17th Century.

Fully conscious of the potential of the Chinese in contributing to the economic development of southern Vietnam, Nguyen Phuc Chu took certain measures to fully exploit their presence to the benefit of the Nguyen. However, as more Chinese continue to arrive, Nguyen Phuc Chu began to regulate their activities. In 1698, he allowed the Chinese to settle and trade at Tran Bien and consented to the setting up of the Thanh Ha Xa (Village of Qing River) exclusively for the Chinese who came during the Manchu rule in China. The Chinese settlement at Phien Tran was called Minh Huong Xa, to designate their Ming connections.⁷⁰ Similar settlements were also established at Thuan Hoa. The Nguyen also decided to register all the Chinese living in southern Vietnam.

⁶⁹ See *Dai Nam Liet Truyen Chinh Bien*, Vol. 1: 3, see also Chen Chingho, "Trinh Hoai Duc and his Gia Dinh Thong Chi", *Journal of South Seas Society*, Vol. 12, No. 2, 1956, p. 1. It was Duc's father who had purchased an official position in the Nguyen Court.

⁷⁰ *Tien Bien*, Vol. 7: 14a. See Chen Chingho, *Historical Notes on Hoi-An (Faifo)*, Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Center for Vietnamese Studies, 1974, p. see also Chen Chingho, "Shi Qi Ba Shi Ji Hui An Zhi tang Ren Jie Ji Qi Shang Ye [The Chinese Town of Hoi An and its Trade During the 17th & 18th Centuries]" *Xin Ya Xue Bao (New Asia Journal)*, Vol.3, No.1, Hong

In looking at the Nguyen's relations with the Chinese, the Taiwan factor was important especially during the mid-seventeenth century when the Manchu Court was trying to capture the island from the Zheng family. In this regard, Nguyen Southern Vietnam became both a source of arms through trade, as well as a potential destination for members of the renegade Zheng family in Taiwan should the Manchu capture the island, as demonstrated by the arrivals of Yang Yandi and Chen in 1679. Apart from that, Quang Nam (Hoi An) was one of the destinations of Chinese trading vessels sent by Zheng Chengong to Southeast Asia in 1665.⁷¹ Nguyen Southern Vietnam was also known to have exported rice to Taiwan through Chinese vessels in 1683.⁷² All these activities took place during the Manchu Court's long drawn campaign to bring Taiwan under its rule. Judging from the Nguyen's position vis-à-vis the Ming refugees, it is no wonder that the Manchu Court would view the Nguyen negatively.

At the end of the Nguyen's reign in southern Vietnam, the Chinese presence was significant. First, there were relics of Chinese presence in places such as in the trading town of Hoi An. Secondly, when the Tayson took Saigon in 1776,⁷³ they were reported to have massacred more than 10,000 Chinese in that town. This shows a significant Chinese presence in the south as well as further substantiating the view of the Nguyen's policy in allowing a sizeable Chinese community in their domain.

Kong, 1960, pp.273-332. Chen Chingho, "Qing Chu Zheng Chen Gong zhan pu zhi yi ze Nan Ze (The Migration of Cheng Partisans to South Vietnam)", *Xin Ya Xue Pao (The New Asia Journal)*, Vol. 5, No. 1, August 1960, pp. 433-459.

⁷¹ Cao Yong He, *Taiwan Zao Qi Shi*, as cited in Li Tana, *Nguyen Cochinchina*, p. 69.

⁷² Li Tana, *Nguyen Cochinchina*, p. 69.

⁷³ The Tayson was a revolt started in 1771 that was led by three brothers from the hill region of Tayson in Binh Dinh. This will be discussed in Chapter Seven.

While valuing their presence, Nguyen Phuc Chu, like his grandfather, was conscious of the Chinese' disdain of being identified with the Vietnamese, and preferred to live apart from the Vietnamese. He was also aware of the need for easier control to segregate the foreigners from getting too close to the Vietnamese. Hence, throughout their presence in the Nguyen's domain, the Chinese lived apart from the Vietnamese resulting in the existence of distinctive Chinese settlements such as Ming Huong Xa, or communities of Chinese of who came during the Ming Dynasty in the town of Hoi An, Gia Dinh, and Thua Thien. The community at Hoi An which Chen Chingho had studied in detail, functioned more or less in an autonomous manner. In Hoi An and Pho Xuan (Hue), the Chinese were also allowed to set up their own community halls or dialect associations.

But more importantly, Nguyen Phuc Chu also understood the need to be more tolerant towards the Chinese so as to encourage them to continue to trade in his domain. This stand was very crucial especially after the Japanese Government decided in 1689 to limit the number of Chinese vessels coming to trade in Japan to seventy per year. These ships could only enter Japan through the port of Hirado and Nagasaki. This was further reduced to thirty per year in 1715.⁷⁴ The reduction of foreign vessels allowed to trade in Japan saw the Chinese shifting to other destinations in Southeast Asia, especially Hoi An in Nguyen Southern Vietnam. This new Chinese presence compensated the shrinking Vietnam-Japan trade as evident from the increasing number of ships calling at the Nguyen's ports.

⁷⁴ Li Tana, *Nguyen Cochinchina*, p. 70. See also Yoneo Ishii, *The Junk Trade from Southeast Asia*, pp. 10-11.

During his mission at Hoi An, Thomas Bowyear reported that the port received about twelve Chinese vessels annually.⁷⁵ The number increased quite dramatically after 1715 when the port was reported to have received about thirty ships per year, culminating in eighty ships annually in the 1740s and 1750s.⁷⁶

In contrast to the general perception that most of the Chinese ships that came to trade in Southeast Asia were from the two southern provinces of Guangdong and Fujian, many had actually originated from the port of Ningpo, near present day Nanjing.⁷⁷ This is confirmed by Yoneo Ishii whose compilation of the reports from Chinese junk captains in Nagasaki also indicated Ningpo, Jiangsu, Shandong, Zhoushan, Putuoshan, Taizhou and Wen Zhou as the extra Chinese ports of origins.⁷⁸ One interesting point to note is that the import duty charged on ships from Zhejiang (Shanghai) that were on official businesses was 2,000 quan, considerably less than the rate charged on ships from Guangdong.⁷⁹ This probably had to do with the Nguyen's desire to encourage Chinese traders from other Chinese regions to come to Nguyen Southern Vietnam.

Nguyen Phuc Chu's clear understanding of the Chinese merchants and Ming refugees and his ability to position them under his rule, both in terms of making use of them as in the case of the Ming refugees, as well as accommodating them, as in the case of the merchants, saw Nguyen Southern Vietnam benefiting from their presence. In contrast however, Nguyen Phuc Chu

⁷⁵ Alastair Lamb, *The Mandarin Road to Old Hue*, London: Chatto & Windus, 1970, p. 52.

⁷⁶ Jean Koffler, "Description historique de la Cochinchine", *Revue Indochinoise*, Vol. 16, 1911, p. 585.

⁷⁷ This was pointed out by Li Tana, see her *Nguyen Cochinchina*, p. 69, fn. 42.

⁷⁸ Yoneo Ishii (ed.), *The Junk Trade from Southeast Asia, Translations from the Tosen Fusetsugaki, 1674-1723*, p. 2; see also the places of origins of the Chinese ships in their report to the port at Nagasaki in *Kai Hantai*, Volume 1 to 3.

and his father were less favourably disposed towards the Westerners, especially with regard to the Christian missionaries.

Policy Towards the Missionaries

The Christian missionaries were the main group of Europeans present in Nguyen Southern Vietnam. As the war with the Trinh came to a stalemate in 1672, the position of the Christian missionaries seen as possible intermediaries for the Nguyen in procuring arms also declined in importance. This was followed by a gradual shift in the Nguyen's treatment of the Christian missionaries. The tolerance shown toward the priests and their religion also began to lessen. Nevertheless, the priests continued their work, especially among the elites of the Nguyen society. Bishop Mahot, one of the French priests who was working in Quang Nam, related how he continued to visit the family of the governor of Quang Nam in 1683 to 1684 in the hope of converting them.⁸⁰

It is interesting to note that the Nguyen archives' is silent on this matter. But there is no doubt that relations between the Nguyen and Christian missionaries were centred on the Nguyen's pragmatic approach in safeguarding their own interests.

In 1683 when he arrived in Cochinchina, the French missionary, Father Labbe learned of Nguyen Phuc Tan's order to expel Christians. Incidentally, Labbe was recommended to be the mathematics teacher to the young prince who

⁷⁹ *PBTL*, Vol. 4: 36.

⁸⁰ "Report of Bishop Mahot for 1683 to 1684", AMEP, Vol. 735: Cochinchine, f. 670.

was destined for the throne (possibly Nguyen Phuc Chu).⁸¹ Maybon however, mentioned how the same Nguyen had in 1676, welcomed the missionaries, and accorded priests from the French Foreign Mission, the freedom to carry out their religious activities.⁸² Ironically, while the Nguyen were tolerant of Christian missionaries in the court, they banned the preaching of Christianity in their country. Just a few years later in 1689, the king was reported to be less hostile to Christians, and that he had “developed an affection” towards Bishop Laneau.⁸³

The same period also saw the beginning of infighting among the European missionaries working in Nguyen Southern Vietnam. The most bitter rivalry was between the Jesuits and missionaries from the French Foreign Missionary Society of Paris (Missions Etrangeres de Paris). Apart from the question of “schism” which involved religious practices, the two orders were also representing the national interests of two different European countries. The Jesuits were generally regarded as representing Portuguese interests whereas the Missions Etrangeres represented French interests. Other orders such as the Franciscans and the Dominicans were deemed to be closer to the Portuguese than the French.

When Father Louis Chevreuil, the first missionary from the French Foreign Mission arrived in Hoi An in 1664, his presence was tolerated by Nguyen Phuc Tan. But Chevreuil faced hostile challenges from the Portuguese clergy who had demanded his expulsion. Due to this, Chevreuil had to leave for Ayudhya. He returned once more to Hoi An in 1665 but was arrested several times by the

⁸¹ “Labbe to his Mother”, 16 February 1683, AMEP: Cochinchine, Vol. 735, f. 160.

⁸² Maybon, *Histoire Moderne du Pays d'Annam*, pp. 47-49.

⁸³ “Relations des Affaires de Cochinchine”, 1689, AMEP:Cochinchine, Vol. 736, f. 309.

Nguyen authority.⁸⁴ The last arrest in that year again came at the instigation of the Portuguese Jesuits who accused Chevreuil of being a heretic. Chevreuil was sent to Macao to be tried by the Catholic Church Holy Office.⁸⁵ The animosity between the French missionaries and the Portuguese clergies took on an unpleasant dimension in 1685 when Jean de la Croix (or Joao Da Cruz), the Portuguese gun-maker who was in the employment of the Nguyen, accused Father Jean de Maquellonne de Courtaulin from the French Foreign Missionary Society, of espionage. Disillusioned, de Courtaulin left the mission that year.⁸⁶

In another case, a Japanese woman who was a friend of the Jesuits, made some accusations against the French Foreign missionaries to the king (Nguyen).⁸⁷ The in-fighting among the missionaries continued even during the reign of Nguyen Phuc Tran. In 1689, Father Barthelemy of the Jesuits Order, denounced the French priest Father Labbe as a heretic in front of Nguyen Phuc Tran over the issues of Christian rites.⁸⁸

The Nguyen Lords adopted a very pragmatic approach in dealing with this in-fighting. Even when the Portuguese priests were engaged in heated arguments against the French missionaries in the court, the Nguyen were tolerant so long as the situation was in their favour. Just as the Portuguese and the French priests were throwing accusations against one another, Nguyen Phuc Tran received the Portuguese ambassador's delegation from Macao bearing a gift from the King of

⁸⁴ A. Launay, *Memoriales des Mission Etrangères de Paris*, Paris: 1916, p. 133.

⁸⁵ Georges Taboulet, *La Geste Française en Indochine, Histoire par les textes de la France en Indochine d'origines à 1914*, Vol. I, Paris: Maisonneuve, 1955, p. 29. Chevreuil was tried and judged by a tribunal that was greatly influenced by the King of Portugal. He was only freed in 1671. After that, he worked in India and Siam, and died in Ayudhya in 1693.

⁸⁶ "Relations des Affaires de Cochinchie, 1689-", AMEP: Cochinchine, Vol. 736, f. 216.

⁸⁷ "Father Ausier to Bishop Laneau", 15 March 1686, AMEP: Cochinchina, Vol. 736, f. 107.

Portugal in 1689. The delegation also consisted of Portuguese Jesuits who were serving in Vietnam.⁸⁹

One of the earliest Missions Etrangères reports from Nguyen Southern Vietnam described how at their arrival at Thuan Hoa and Quang Nam in the 1660s, there were already many Christians, mainly the result of the work of the Portuguese Jesuits. According to the same report, most of the Portuguese missionaries were accorded protection by the King of Cochinchina that is Nguyen Southern Vietnam.⁹⁰ Naturally the Nguyen's preference of the Portuguese priests in the 1660s was understandable. First, the Portuguese were the earliest to arrive, having begun their mission at the Nguyen's domains since 1590s. But more importantly at this juncture was the presence of the Portuguese gun founder, Joao da Cruz (Jean De la Croix)⁹¹ who, because of his crucially needed skill in casting cannons and ammunition, was very influential in the Nguyen's Court.⁹²

The Nguyen's favourable treatment of the Portuguese missionaries continued even after the death of Joao Da Cruz in 1682. Even though the cessation of hostilities between the Nguyen and the Trinh in 1672⁹³ brought about the end of the Nguyen's urgent need for a gun founder, their reliance on Portuguese missionaries as intermediaries for procuring strategic materials and

⁸⁸ "Father Labbe to Superior", 27 January 1689, AMEP: Cochinchina, Vol. 735, ff. 161-164.

⁸⁹ "Father Labbe to Saint Congregation de la Propaganda", February 1689, AMEP: Cochinchine, Vol. 736, f.215 and "Mgr Perez to the Saint Congregation", 21 February 1692, AMEP: Cochinchine, Vol. 737, f. 363.

⁹⁰ "Relation de la Persecution et du martyre de quarte Chretiens de la Cochinchine", 7 Mai 1663, AMEP: Cochinchine, Vol. 733, f.1.

⁹¹ For Da Cruz's year of arrival, see the discussion in the previous chapter.

⁹² Such was the perception of the French missionary, Antoine Haingues who served in Cochinchina from 1665 and stationed at Pho Moi in Quang Ngai. See "Hainques to the Sacred Congregation" 19 February 1670, AMEP: Cochinchine, Vol. 733, f. 245.

other forms of assistance did not diminish. In 1686, Nguyen Phuc Tan wrote to the Catholic Senate at Macao to request for the return of his former physician, Father Bartholomeu da Costa, a Portuguese.⁹⁴ In 1682, Nguyen Phuc Tan ordered the expulsion of Christians from his domain,⁹⁵ with only the Portuguese priests spared.

Nguyen Phuc Tran's brief four years reign did not leave much information with to regard his attitude towards Europeans. Despite his inclination toward Buddhism, Nguyen Phuc Tran was known to be one of the most generous and tolerant of all the Nguyen towards the missionaries' presence in southern Vietnam. Father Ferret, of the Missions Etrangeres, reported to his superior of the generous treatment he received from Nguyen Phuc Tran.⁹⁶ Nguyen Phuc Tran's tolerant attitude toward the presence of Europeans and Christian missionaries was not shared by his successor.

In contrast, the 34 years of Nguyen Phuc Chu's rule saw a series of harsh actions toward western missionaries. Nguyen Phuc Chu was probably the most well known Buddhist among the Nguyen. Using the religious title of Thien Tung Dao Nhan (The Heavenly Favoured Sage), he was also known as the 30th Patriarch of the Tao Dong Buddhist Sect, a title bestowed on him by the Chinese

⁹³ While the security at the north seems to have subsided with the truce of 1672, the Nguyen Army was maintained at high alert for many years after that. This is evident from the Nguyen insistence on constantly conducting military exercises. Such trends continued until Nguyen Phuc Chu's time.

⁹⁴ De San-Januario, "Documents sur les Missions Portugaises", *Bulletin de Societe Academie du Indochine*, Vol. II, p. 184, as cited in Nguyen Thanh Nha, *Les Tableaux Economique du Vietnam*, p. 203.

⁹⁵ "Labbe to his Mother", 16 February 1683, AMEP: Cochinchine, Vol. 735, f. 160.

⁹⁶ "Father Feret to the Surperior of the Holy Family", 29 February 1692, AMEP: Cochinchine, Vol. 737, p. 149.

monk Da Shan in 1696.⁹⁷ It was he who was known to the missionaries as the “enemy” of the Christian religion. Almost immediately after he succeeded his father, Nguyen Phuc Chu began a series of anti-Christian campaigns, beginning with 1691, and subsequent years of 1693, 1694, and 1699-1701.⁹⁸

No Vietnamese sources have offered any idea as to why Nguyen Phuc Chu had adopted an anti-Christian stance, nor the reasons behind his decision to launch anti-Christian campaigns. Possible explanations are his devotion to the Buddhist religion and potential threat from their links with the Trinh. [See below for a lengthier discussion]

In 1691, Nguyen Phuc Chu issued a series of edicts aimed at banning the Christian religion.⁹⁹ Even though the first official ban against Christianity was proclaimed by Nguyen Phuc Tan back in 1664, it was not strictly enforced. The Nguyen’s dependency on Christian missionaries as intermediaries for procuring arms and strategic materials helped to ensure that the ban was not carried out.

The 1691 edict against Christianity saw several missionaries being arrested. The French priest, Father Pierre Langlois for instance, was arrested in 1691. The campaign also disrupted a series of missionary work in the Cham Province (Quang Nam), Quang Binh, Nuoc Man and Dinh Cat. The missionaries

⁹⁷ Minh Chi, Ha Van Tan & Nguyen Tai Thu, *Buddhism in Vietnam*, Hanoi: The Gioi Publishers, 1993, p. 165.

⁹⁸ “Father Feret to the Superior of the Holy Family”, 29 February 1692, AMEP: Cochinchine, Vol. 737, f. 149.

⁹⁹ “Father Nougette to his Superior”, 13 January 1691, AMEP: Cochinchine, Vol. 736, f. 571.

were forced to go into hiding in the southern-most region of Phu Yen and Nha Trang where the anti-Christian campaign had not started.¹⁰⁰

Some were expelled from southern Vietnam. However, it was not harsh when compared to later anti-Christian campaigns. Bishop Perez, the half-caste Portuguese priest who was arrested in 1691, was released in February 1692 when a general amnesty was proclaimed in conjunction with the first year of Nguyen Phuc Chu's rule. After his release, Perez visited various mission stations in Nguyen Southern Vietnam.¹⁰¹ Perez's release and the ease which he was able to move around the country shows that the enforcement of the edict was not strictly enforced.

Despite the anti-Christian stance, European presence in the Nguyen Court continued even during Nguyen Phuc Chu's reign. It is known that the Nguyen Court had maintained several missionaries to serve as Court physician and Court mathematician. Their presence were considered important to the Nguyen Lords to fulfil their quest for practical knowledge as well as for medical reasons. During the early days of his reign, Nguyen Phuc Chu employed the French priest, Pierre Langlois as court physician and mathematician and the Portuguese priest, Father Antoine de Arnedo as mathematician and astronomer. At the end of his reign in 1724, he still had in his court, Father de Lima holding similar positions.¹⁰² When Father Antoine died in 1698, Nguyen Phuc Chu actually wrote to the Portuguese

¹⁰⁰ "Father Labbe to Mgr. Laneau", 5 February 1691, AMEP: Cochinchine, Vol. 736, ff. 618-619; see also "Father Langlois to Mgr. Laneau", 16 January 1691, AMEP: Cochinchine, Vol. 791, f. 663.

¹⁰¹ "Bishop Perez to Sainte Congregation de la Propaganda", 21 February 1692, AMEP: Cochinchine, Vol. 737, f.105.

¹⁰² Nguyen Thanh Nha, *Tableau Economique du Viet-Nam au XVIIe et XVIIIe Siecles*, Paris: Editions Cujas, 1970, pp. 203-204.

in Macao requesting for a new mathematician who also understood medicine to serve in the Court. At the same time, there was another French priest, Father de Capponi who was working as a medical physician in the Nguyen Court.¹⁰³

Under normal circumstances, these appointments placed the priests as members of the bureaucracy, with ranks falling between the Sixth and Seventh grades in the Le or later Nguyen Dynasties.¹⁰⁴ However, it is unclear what the official designations of these priests were while serving in Nguyen Phuc Chu's Court as his was still essentially a provincial administration. It is likely that they were treated as advisors.

Father Pierre Langlois, the French priest who served as physician and mathematician at Nguyen Phuc Chu's court,¹⁰⁵ wrote extensively to both his family members and superiors regarding the situation in Nguyen Phuc Chu's Court. As a person with access to the inner circle of the court, Langlois was able to provide information regarding conversions to Christianity in the court. The person with a very high standing in the Court mentioned in Langlois' letters was the sister of the king (Nguyen Phuc Chu).¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³ "Mgr. Perez to his Superior", 31 October 1698, AMEP: Cochinchine, Vol. 725, f. 6. In the initial stage, the Portuguese were important to the Nguyen. See Pierre Yves Manguin, Manguin, Pierre-Yves, *Les Portugais sur les Cotes de Viet Nam et Du Campa: Etude sur les Sources Portugaises (XVIe, XVIIe, XVIIIe siecles)*, Paris: Ecole Francaise D'etreme-Orient, 1972.

¹⁰⁴ *Lich Trieu Hien Cuong Luai Chi, Lich Trieu Hien Cuong Luai Chi* (Institutions of the Various Dynasties), MS. SA HM2126 (Societe Asiatique), Vol. 13: pp. 18-19.

¹⁰⁵ The Nguyen were not the only ones who had great demand for mathematician and physician. The Trinh also had similar demand. See Mahot, "Relations des Principes Choses qui se Sont Passes en Cochinchine", 1674 to 27 March 1675, AMEP: Cochinchine, Vol. 734, ff. 109 & 111.

¹⁰⁶ "Langlois to Bishop de Lionne", 1 February 1689, AMEP: Cochinchine, Vol. 736, ff. 165-169.

Langlois permission to set up a small chapel in the court. Nguyen Phuc Chu's sister was baptised as a Christian in 1689.¹⁰⁷ Bishop Francois Perez, the Vicar-apostle for Macao also related in 1692 how two Nguyen princes had become Christians that year along with five mandarins.¹⁰⁸

Throughout Nguyen Phuc Chu's 34 years rule, there were at least 21 Jesuits priests who were sent to serve in the Nguyen domain.¹⁰⁹ Another 12 priests from the Mission Etrangeres de Paris and some from the Franciscans Order also served in different parts of the country. Yet in 1699, Father Pierre Langlois, the Court Physician and Father Ferret of the French Foreign mission were arrested and thrown into prison. Together with them were two Jesuits, namely Joseph Candone and Pierre Belmonte who were also arrested. All four died during imprisonment. Nguyen Phuc Chu's decision to imprison the European priests came at the same time a decree to ban Christianity was imposed throughout the country. The *Tien Bien* tells of a campaign being launched by Nguyen Phuc Chu in 1699, aimed at arresting Catholic believers and to banish the European priests who were 'illegally' staying in Gia Dinh.¹¹⁰

The timing of many of the Nguyen's anti-Christian campaigns coincided with some major military campaigns. The anti-Christian campaigns of 1699 to

¹⁰⁷ See "Langlois to His Superior", AMEP: Cochinchine, Vol. 713, f. see also "Langlois to Bishop de Lionne", 1 February 1689, AMEP: Cochinchine, Vol. 736, ff. 165-169.

¹⁰⁸ "Mgr. Perez to Saint Congregation", 21 February 1692, AMEP: Cochinchine, Vol. 737. It is not known who the princes were as the Nguyen sources are silent on this, while the missionaries' letters did not provide these names. The Vietnamese in southern Vietnam who became Christians came from very diverse backgrounds. Apart from the common peasants, there were also soldiers, mandarins and some palace officials as well as members of the nobility and even the family members of the Nguyen Lords.

¹⁰⁹ "List of Jesuits Missionaries who served in Cochinchina", in *Voyages et Travaux des Missionnaires de la Compagnie de Jesus: Mission de la Cochinchine et du Tonkin*, Paris: Charles Douniol edition, 1888, pp. 387-388.

1701 for instance, coincided with first, an internal power struggle in Cambodia that was threatening Nguyen's influence in that country in August 1699. In 1700, Nguyen Phuc Chu's Army marched into Cambodia to force the Khmer ruler to continue sending tribute to the Nguyen Court.¹¹¹ Father d'Estrechy, another French priest living in southern Vietnam at that time felt that though he was unsure of the reason behind Nguyen Phuc Chu's decision to persecute the Christians, he believed it was possibly provoked by the preparation for war against Tonkin (the Trinh).¹¹² And indeed, that was the time when Nguyen Phuc Chu was reported to have spent a great deal of effort in briefing up the defence at the northern borders at Quang Binh. At the same time, he had also expressed his intention to launch an attack against the Trinh.¹¹³

Earlier, shortly after he first came to power in 1693, Nguyen Phuc Chu had also proclaimed a decree against Christianity. This time, the French missionaries also attributed it to the war between the Nguyen Army against Champa which resulted in the military victory over Champa.¹¹⁴ In 1715 when another anti-Christian campaign was unleashed by Nguyen Phuc Chu, it coincided with the military campaign in Cambodia and Ha Tien where the Nguyen Army had to face an advancing Siamese Army. That same persecution

¹¹⁰ *Tien Bien*, Vol. 7: 15b.

¹¹¹ See *Tien Bien*, Vol. 7: 15a; see also "de Caponi to His Superior", 14 January 1701, AMEP: Cochinchine, Vol. 725, f. 51.

¹¹² "Father d'Estrechy to Mgr. Degure", 24 February 1701, AMEP: Cochinchine, Vol. 725, f. 56.

¹¹³ *Tien Bien*, Vol. 7: 18-19.

¹¹⁴ Father Ferret to Mr. De Chaucierge, Superieur", 4 January 1694, AMEP, Cochinchine, Vol. 726, f. 182.

against Christian religion also coincided with the hatching of Nguyen Phuc Chu's aborted plan to invade the north.¹¹⁵

The coincidental timing of anti-Christian activities with military campaigns provide the following possible reasons: Firstly, Nguyen Phuc Chu was aware of the potential threat posed by Christianity in eroding the believers' political and to certain extent, spiritual allegiance to the Nguyen rule. While the Nguyen sources are silent on this matter, the Christian missionaries left some accounts of instances where the Christian Vietnamese openly pledged allegiance to their religion before their rulers. In December 1664, during the course of an anti-Christian campaign, the Nguyen authority at Dinh Cat arrested four soldiers from the Nguyen cavalry troops and three from Nguyen Phuc Tan's personal guard. Apparently, during the trials, one of them, Pierre Dang refused to renounce his Christian religion, openly confessed his allegiance to the Christian God first *before* [Italics supplied] his ruler.¹¹⁶

Secondly, the missionary orders in the Nguyen domain also had their compatriots working for the Trinh Court. It became a major security concern, especially when members of an order serving both Trinh Vietnam and Nguyen Southern Vietnam exchanged letters and information which could compromise the Nguyen's security. In a letter to his superiors in Paris in 1712, Father Lennemand asked the directors to be cautious in sending letters to Nguyen

¹¹⁵ See *Tien Bien*, Vol. 8: 27.

¹¹⁶ *Voyages et Travaux des Missionnaires de la Compagnie de Jesus: Mission de la Cochinchine et du Tonkin*, p. 218.

Southern Vietnam lest they were intercepted by the opposite order, the Jesuits who would read the letters in front of Nguyen Phuc Chu.¹¹⁷

Missionary links with non-Vietnamese population were also cause for concern for the Nguyen. Since 1662, Christian missionaries were found working in the land of Champa and the Khmer Mekong. They also carried out work among the uplanders. In the central highlands for instance, French missionaries were able to start a new church among the uplanders at Badaj on Ba Hun Mountains. In order to visit the uplanders, the missionaries had to travel through Hoi An. In fact, places such as Badaj became the refuge for the missionaries during persecution launched by the Nguyen.¹¹⁸

Throughout his reign, Nguyen Phuc Chu remained suspicious of the missionaries' presence in his realm. There were many instances of missionaries' letters being intercepted by mandarins and were brought to the Court to be translated and read out in front of Nguyen Phuc Chu.¹¹⁹ This was especially so during Nguyen Phuc Chu's tussles against Siam in their competition to exert control over Cambodia. The fact that the College General of the Catholic Church, where priests were trained, was situated at Ayudhya at that time only further compounded the matter. After their letters were intercepted several times by the Nguyen administration, the French missionaries decided to send their letters

¹¹⁷ "Father Lennemand to the Directors of Seminary", 23 January 1712, AMEP: Cochinchine, Vol. 726, f. 383.

¹¹⁸ "Journal of Father Aussies to the Directors of Seminary", 1689 and 1690, AMEP: Cochinchine, Vol. 725, f. 135.

¹¹⁹ "Mgr. Mazin Labbe to ?", 24 July 1710, AMEP: Cochinchine, Vol. 725, f. 258.

through Siam.¹²⁰ But when they started doing so, any interception would implicate them in relations to Siam as happened in 1710.¹²¹

The question of the Christian religion had also evidently divided some of Nguyen Phuc Chu's subordinates.¹²² French missionaries of the Missions Etrangeres reported instances of mandarins and members of the royal family converting to Christianity (Catholicism). In a letter to his superior in 1689, Pierre Langlois mentioned the baptism (conversion) of a daughter of the king.¹²³ In a letter addressed to the Pope dated 1693, a group of ten Christians at Chinh Dinh (the main encampment at Phu Xuan) signed their names. Out of the ten, there were four civil mandarins, a eunuch,¹²⁴ and a military commander with the rank of a Cai Doi (Company Commander) named Paul.¹²⁵ There was also a report of the conversion of the governor of Champa (Quang Nam) to Christianity in 1685.¹²⁶

While there were those who were sympathetic to the religion, some of Nguyen Phuc Chu's subordinates who saw the Christian missionaries providers of western technical knowhow. This mirrored a similar development in China

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ "Courtaulin to Mgr. ?", 15 February 1675, AMEP: Cochinchine, Vol. 734, f. 25. For a study on the College General at Ayudhya, see P. Destombes, *Le College General de la Societe des Missions-Etrangeres*, Paris: Missions Etrangeres des Paris, 1939, pp. 12-62. In 1675, Nguyen Phuc Tan also ordered the execution of his subjects who were caught travelling to Ayudhya in Siam, to study at the College General (Major Catholic Seminary).

¹²² "Father Langlois to Labbe and Noguette", 12 July 1693, AMEP: Cochinchine, Vol. 726, f. 122.

¹²³ "Langlois to Mgr. de Lionne", 1 February 1689, AMEP: Cochinchine, Vol. 736, ff. 165-169.

¹²⁴ The existence of the position of Eunuch in the early stages of Nguyen rule is debatable. However, the person who signed the letter used the title of 'Thai Giam' (Eunuch).

¹²⁵ "Letter from Ten Christians at Chinh Dinh to the Pope", 1693, AMEP: Cochinchine, Vol. 737, f. 653.

¹²⁶ Mahot, "Quelques Remarques sur la vie de Mgr. Mahot", 1685, AMEP: Cochinchine, Vol. 735, f. 331. The French Missionaries used land of Champa to refer to Quang Nam whereas Champa proper refers to just Champa.

around the same time.¹²⁷ The others, especially the Buddhists, were seriously opposed to the proselytizing of the Vietnamese by the Christian missionaries. While there is no way of telling who were involved in the issue, the fact that a division existed at all threatened the unity of Nguyen Phuc Chu's court. At any rate, the security dimension appears to be quite prominent

Nguyen Treatment of Merchants

As explained earlier, the Nguyen realized that trade was a source of wealth. This understanding explains why during this period the merchants were well treated. Both Nguyen Phuc Tran and Nguyen Phuc Chu were always receptive of the merchants as they understood the need to continue promoting trade in southern Vietnam as a means to generate wealth and maintain international contacts. Relations with the West during Nguyen Phuc Tran and Nguyen Phuc Chu's reign can be broadly divided into two aspects, namely, maintaining trading activities and strategic considerations.

It was during this time that the English East India Company was re-entering Vietnam. After a series of setbacks, including the closing of their factories at Lovec, Cambodia in 1656,¹²⁸ Ayudhya, first in 1623, and then in 1664,¹²⁹ the English were again back on the mainland Southeast Asia by the closing decades of the seventeenth century. The next British enterprise in Vietnam

¹²⁷ Joanna Waley-Chen, *The Sextants of Beijing, Global Currents in Chinese History*, New York: W. W. Norton, 1999, pp. 80-89.

¹²⁸ For a study on the English factory in Cambodia, see D. K. Bassett, "The Trade of the English East India Company in Cambodia, 1651-1656", *Journal of Royal Asiatic Society* (hereafter *JRAS*), 1962.

¹²⁹ For a study on the English factory in Siam (Ayudhya), see D. K. Bassett, "The Trade of the East India Company in Siam", *JRAS*, 1961.

was started in 1672, when the East India Company obtained permission to set up a factory at Pho Hien, outside of Thang Long. Permission was granted mainly because the Trinh were interested to expand their trading activities to increase revenue and to acquire military technology in the face of an increasing threatening Nguyen in the southern domains. But by 1690s, the East India Company was beginning to look elsewhere as silk, the main trading commodity of the Company in northern Vietnam was becoming more expensive than those in the China market. It was found that silk was cheaper in China and were of better quality. Thus on 29 November 1697, Richard Watts, the last chief of the Pho Hien establishment, left with his staff. In 1700, the East India Company then set up operation at Chusan, an island outside of Ningpo (near present day Nanjing) in China.¹³⁰

The Nguyen's brief contact with the East India Company was resumed in 1696 when Nathaniel Higginson, the president at Fort St. George in India, sent Thomas Bowyear to explore the possibility of opening of a English factory at the vicinity of Hoi An or Phu Xuan. After much trouble including the recurrent problem of the repayment of cargoes and the numerous efforts to lobby for favour from the mandarins of the Nguyen Court, Bowyear finally obtained permission from Nguyen Phuc Chu to set up a factory in the Nguyen domain. However, Phuc Chu did not stipulate the actual place and did not agree to Hoi An as requested by

¹³⁰ A. Lamb, *The Mandarin Road to Old Hue*, pp. 26-37; for a study on the English factory in Tongkin, see also Charles B. Maybon, "Une Factorie Anglaise au Tonkin au XVII^e siecle (1672-1697)", *BEFEO*, 1910.

the English.¹³¹ Nguyen Phuc Chu's decision was most likely influenced by the desire to keep Hoi An free from permanent western factories. In fact, ever since their unpleasant experience with the Dutch in 1643, the Nguyen no longer trusted any Westerner with a factory or settlement so close to their main trading port of Hoi An especially as the port was situated not very far from Phu Xuan, the seat of government.

When Bowyear was ready to leave after selling off his cargoes, he was faced with difficulties in collecting money due to him. According to Bowyear, the King (Nguyen Phuc Chu) had settled his payment with Bowyear, and had ordered all in the government service to pay Bowyear, by threat of demotion or being sacked from the service should they default in payment.¹³² But it was mainly the Japanese traders who owed Bowyear money. The Japanese were induced by Nguyen Phuc Chu to buy from Bowyear, but they were unable to settle the amount.¹³³ Before leaving Hoi An, Bowyear appointed one Clement de la Croix, possibly the son of Jean de la Croix (Joao Da Cruz) the gun-founder to be his debt collector, and left instructions to leave the money with the French priests to be forwarded to Madras. But according to Father Pierre Langlois, no money had changed hands.¹³⁴

Failing to obtain permission to set up a factory at Hoi An, Bowyear proposed Cambodia as an alternative. He returned to Madras where he put up a

¹³¹ "Father Pierre Langlois to his superior (possibly Perez?)", 15 March 1699, AMEP: Cochinchine, Vol. 726, f. 269.

¹³² "Bowyear's Narrative to Nathaniel Higginson", 30 April 1696, in A. Lamb, *The Mandarin Road to Old Hue*, p. 45.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ "Langlois to his Superior", 15 March 1699, AMEP: Cochinchine, Vol. 726, f. 269.

favourable report on the possibility of reviving the English factory in Cambodia. The East India Company had a factory there from 1651 to 1656, but closed it down because of the frequent internal struggle among members of the royal family.¹³⁵ While he was in Phu Xuan, Bowyear was approached by someone whom he identified as the Cambodian ambassador to Phu Xuan, who had “endeavoured to persuade him (Bowyear) to open up a trade with their country, assuring him he would be free from the imposts and difficulties met with in Cochin China (Nguyen Southern Vietnam)”.¹³⁶ He asked permission from Nguyen Phuc Chu to send two ships annually to Champa and Cambodia. Nguyen Phuc Chu however, did not respond positively to the requests.

Many, including Lamb, held the impression that Thomas Bowyear’s efforts and recommendations had come to naught,¹³⁷ but they failed to see the link between Bowyear and the attempt to set up an English factory on Pulo Condore, which took place six years after Bowyear’s return to India in 1702. This is a group of twelve islands about 150 miles off Vung Tau (Cape de Saint Jacques) on the coast of southern Vietnam. The English factory on this island was the last British settlement in Vietnam. It lasted until 1705 when Catchpoole and his council were massacred by their hired Macassarese. This will be discussed in a later chapter.

The Nguyen’s attitude towards western traders was not only pragmatic but reveals their understanding of international trade. For by then, Hoi An, was a node in the East-West trading network. Thus, being fully conscious of the need to

¹³⁵ See D. K. Bassett, “The Trade of the English East India Company in Cambodia, 1651-1656”.

¹³⁶ See Lamb, *The Mandarin Road to Old Hue*, p. 55.

attract western traders who not only brought with them valuable goods, the Nguyen encouraged trade as it was an important source of harbour duties. Under Nguyen Phuc Chu, tariff rates for European ships entering southern Vietnam were the highest compared to ships from other places. European ships were charged 8,000 quan compared to a mere 2,000 quan for ships from Cambodia.¹³⁷ But at the same time, the Nguyen were also apprehensive of having too many westerners congregating in a single port and encouraged the traders to go to other ports in their domain.

The Nguyen's dependence on western technology, particularly for military purposes, also did not decline with the ending of active hostilities with the Trinh in 1672. In fact, the Nguyen were aware of their vulnerability to the military threat from the Trinh and were thus constantly vigilant. Apart from the Trinh, the Nguyen also needed better firearms for their expansion policy south advance into Champa territories and later, Cambodia. Thomas Bowyear related in his narrative how after the settlement of agreement with Nguyen Phuc Chu, the following took place:

“The answer was that in case of a settlement the proposal should be granted, and if I would right make them choice of grand for a factory; and Ung Coy Backe Lorke was ordered to show me the guns about the palace, to know if his honour (Nathaniel Higginson) could send the king such guns”¹³⁹

¹³⁷ Howard T. Fry, *Alexander Dalrymple (1737-1808) and the Expansion of British Trade*, London: The Royal Commonwealth Society & Frank Cass & Co., 1970, p. 166; see also A. Lamb, *The Mandarin Road to Old Hue*, p. 36.

¹³⁸ *Tien Bien*, Vol. 8: 13.

¹³⁹ “Thomas Bowyear's Narrative” in A. Lamb, *The Mandarin Road to Old Hue*, p. 51.

Thus, European traders were still being well-received. And the profits from trade with Europeans were higher in comparison with the Asian traders. Nevertheless, at the same time, the Nguyen were also wary of the activities of the missionaries in spreading the Christian faith to the Vietnamese.

French presence in Nguyen Southern Vietnam at this time was confined to the Christian missionaries. The setting up of the Royal French East India Company in 1644 and their venture into the China trade brought the French into contact with the Nguyen Southern Vietnam. However, nothing concrete came out of it. Apart from the need to source for a suitable place to trade, the French, like their Portuguese and Spanish Catholics, were also extremely fervent in championing the cause of the Catholic faith. At that time, the French maintained a few bases in Asia, including Pondicherry, which was their main headquarters. In 1699, the first French vessel arrived at Hoi An but did not conduct any trade there.

The attempt to establish trade relations by the French came only in 1672 when Bishop La Motte Lambert, the first French Apostolic Vicar, obtained from Nguyen Phuc Tan, permission for the French to set up a trading house along with permission to carry out missionary work. It is not clear how the Royal French East India Company which was operating from Bantam carried out its trading activities with the Nguyen at this time. But in 1680, a trade delegate was sent to Tonkin to look into trading opportunities with the Trinh. The French were granted permission to trade in the Trinh's trading town of Pho Hien. Two years later, just as the French were planning a second load of cargo to Pho Hien, Bantam fell into

the hands of the Dutch who expelled all Europeans from the settlement. This resulted in the French trading house in Pho Hien being cut off from their main settlement in Pondicherry. The French factory at Pho Hien was soon closed down in 1682.¹⁴⁰ It is not clear if the French's efforts to trade in the Trinh domain had jeopardised their trading position in Nguyen Phuc Tan's domain, but the French presence in southern Vietnam also suffered the effect of the loss of their base at Bantam in 1681.

Conclusion

Nguyen Phuc Tan's long reign in southern Vietnam saw a spate of activities aimed at resisting the Trinh, and when that military threat had subsided, the focus shifted to the building of a separate state which inevitably led to civil development.

Nguyen rule, especially during the transitional period of 1672 to 1720, owed much of its cultural, religious and administrative development to a number of Chinese refugees played important role in southern Vietnam during this period. This is evident in the manner in which religious personnel were venerated and their teachings followed. Apart from that, the Nguyen administration also made use of Chinese scholars as scribes and administrators, filling a gap due to the loss of Vietnamese scholars because of the barrier between south and the north created by the Nguyen-Trinh hostilities.

¹⁴⁰ Nguyen Thua Hy, "Pho Hien as Seen From Foreign Sources", *Pho Hien: The Centre of International Commerce in the XVIIth-XVIIIth Centuries*, p. 86.

The Nguyen gained more tangible results from the Chinese in the development of the Buddhist religion and culture. With the exodus of Chinese Buddhist monks and scholars after the fall of the Ming Dynasty, Nguyen Southern Vietnam benefited from the knowledge and skill of these men. The role of the Chinese monk, Da Shan, was especially important in bringing about the emergence of Buddhism as the dominant religion in southern Vietnam. More importantly, it was through his suggestion that the Nguyen made the attempt to obtain recognition from China for their rule in southern Vietnam. Though the attempt failed, it nevertheless, helped the Nguyen gain confidence of their actual position as the de facto ruler of southern Vietnam.

It is thus clear that Chinese links were important factors that shaped the nature of the Nguyen rule in southern Vietnam during the 17th and 18th centuries. It can be argued that, links with China, especially through Nguyen Phuc Chu's tributary mission had contributed in reinforcing the Nguyen's sense of independence vis-à-vis the Le Court. For the Nguyen, China remained the ultimate source of legitimisation of their position.¹⁴¹ Though Nguyen initiatives, including the attempt to gain official recognition from the Chinese were unsuccessful, the Nguyen did not let up in their attempts to win favour with the Chinese government.

¹⁴¹ China is recognized as a dominant power and market in Asia in early modern era. The Nguyen orientation to China is not the only one. The tributary relations that went on between Siam and China, and Japan with China are other instances of such orientation. For the case of Siam, see Sarasin Viraphol, *Tribute and Profit: Sino-Siamese Trade, 1652-1853*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1977. And in the case of Japan, see W. J. Boot, "Maxims of Foreign Policies", *Itinerario*, Vol. XXIV, No. 2, 2000, pp. 62-79.

The Nguyen's ties with the West during this period also underwent some changes. If the Nguyen were tolerant to Christian missionaries during the Nguyen-Trinh War, they became less so during the post-1672 years, particularly under Nguyen Phuc Chu. The easing of the military threat from the north had lessened the importance of missionaries as arms procurers. This had resulted in the various anti-Christian campaigns. The Nguyen however, continued to welcome western traders.

As the threat of war from the north subsided, the Nguyen were able to turn to internal developments (strengthening their governmental apparatus and reinforcing their position via the growth of a "civil government")¹⁴² as well as look into further advance into the south. This will be discussed in the next chapter.

¹⁴² Li Tana, *Nguyen Cochinchina*, pp. 46-48.