

JOHN K. WHITMORE

Ngo (Chinese) Communities and Montane– Littoral Conflict in Dai Viet, ca. 1400–1600

In his well-known edict titled “Binh Ngo dai cao” 平吳大誥 (“Great Proclamation on Defeating the Ngo”) of 1428, why did the minister Nguyen Trai 阮薦 (1380–1442), writing for his lord Le Loi 黎利 (Thai-to; r. 1428–1433), have the victorious Vietnamese overcome the Ngo (Ch.: Wu 吳) and not the Ming? As Stephen O’Harrow has noted, “...it is the use of the term ‘Ngo’ that is the problem,” and he quite properly pointed to the classical allusion of Wu 吳/Yue 越 (V.: Ngo/Viet). This entailed the strong rivalry 2,000 years earlier between belligerent Wu and properly vengeful Yue during the Warring States period of Chinese history. The defeat and bitter humiliation of Yue by Wu, when Wu did not completely absorb Yue, spurred the ultimate victory of Yue and the failure of expansionist Wu due to its arrogance.¹ But might there be more behind this image?

I suggest a different understanding of the situation. The northerners whom the Vietnamese knew most intimately were those from the southeast coast of China. The maritime connection brought Fujianese and others down the coast to Dai Viet 大越 for both trade and settlement. Thus, for the Vietnamese, the term Ngo may have primarily

I WISH to thank Li Tana for her work that set me on this path, James A. Anderson for his aid, and the editors for their fine labors. This paper was originally presented at the conference Maritime Frontiers in Asia: Indigenous Communities and State Control in South China and Southeast Asia, 2000 BCE–1800 CE, Pennsylvania State University, April 2013.

¹ Stephen O’Harrow, “Nguyen Trai’s *Binh Ngo Dai Cao* of 1428: The Development of a Vietnamese National Identity,” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 10.1 (1979), pp. 165–67 (quotation, p. 165). For the literary heritage of Wu and Yue, see Olivia Milburn, *Cherishing Antiquity, The Cultural Construction of an Ancient Chinese Kingdom* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2013), especially chap. 3. The proclamation made an explicit reference to this ancient epic because Le Loi (via Nguyen Trai) spoke of “tasting gall,” a direct allusion to King Goujian of Yue and his suffering under Wu hegemony. An earlier work, “Binh Ngo sach” 平吳冊 (“Strategy for Defeating the Ngo”) apparently existed about 1420; Esta S. Ungar, “Vietnamese Leadership and Order: Dai Viet under the Le Dynasty (1428–59),” Ph.D. diss. (Cornell University, 1983), p. 67.

referred to these Chinese inhabiting the littoral regions of the delta, and only secondarily to the Ming state in general. If this were the case, it was not only political power that the victors resisted, but also the power and prestige of a specific Chinese community that was currently inhabiting the coastal zone of Dai Viet, that is, the Lower Delta of the Red River.²

More than defeating the invading armies of the Ming regime, Le Loi and his mountain army opposed the thriving shared Sino-Vietnamese coastal culture of the previous three centuries. This coastal culture had led first to the Tran (Ch.: Chen 陳) dynasty (1225–1400) centered at their base of Thien Truong 天長 in the southern Lower Delta, and then to the two-decade Ming occupation (1407–1427). For me, the term Ngo/Wu encompassed not just the Ming empire that had risen in the lower Yangzi valley (the former Wu area), but also the culture that had flowed down the dynamic coast of southeast China into the underpopulated Lower Delta region of what is now northern Viet Nam. The montane–littoral, highland–coastal conflict arose out of competition for control over the lowland Vietnamese and their capital of Thang Long 昇龍 (now Ha Noi) in the mid-river sector of the Red River delta. It would have a great impact on fifteenth-century Dai Viet and would lead to much continued conflict throughout the following century. Indeed, as Hugh Clark has noted, the opposition that these fringe southerners mounted against incoming northerners was not mild; rather, it might be described as violently hostile and aggressive resistance.³

THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF MONTANE–LITTORAL CONFLICTS IN NORTHERN VIETNAM

In order to establish a case for a strong, Chinese immigrant community associated with the Ngo, we must first reexamine present thought on the preceding Ly-Tran epoch (1009–1400) of Dai Viet. In particular, we need to remove the hyphen between these two dynasties presently applied in Vietnamese historiography – which implies seamless continuity. Where continuity did exist from the Ly 李 (1009–1225) into the Tran/Chen, particularly in the royal capital of Thang Long and its rituals, the changes between the two eras were important. The Ly origin and their region lay in the mid-river segment of the Red River

² For a map of the coastal region, see the Introduction to this volume.

³ Hugh Clark, “Indigenous Responses to Northern Migration Through the First Millennium”; paper presented for the conference, *Maritime Frontiers in Asia* (see acknowledgment note).

delta around what became the capital Thang Long; the Tran/Chen,⁴ originating from Fujian province on the southeast coast of China, had their base in the Lower Delta. The Ly built the kingdom of Dai Viet and had to worry about competitors to the south (Champa), the west (Dali), and the north (the Nong/Nung and the Song); the Tran/Chen, building on this foundation, were more cosmopolitan and acted as an independent southern Chinese regime, using as an exemplar the Han-period founder of the Kingdom of Southern Yue (Nan Yue; V.: Nam Viet) – Zhao Tuo 趙佗 (V.: Trieu Da).

Other differences between the two regimes and periods are noteworthy as well. Whereas the Ly became strongly Buddhist, stressing links to India, the Tran/Chen, with their coastal ties, brought in classical Chinese thought (Confucianism) as well as recent developments in Chan 禪 (V.: Thien) Buddhism. Economically, the Ly, as in contemporary Angkor and Pagan (in present-day Cambodia and Myanmar, respectively), emphasized agriculturally productive temples in the mid-river region, with increasing trade; the Tran/Chen, following activities on the southeast coast of China, developed the Lower Delta and established a series of royal estates, along with manufacturing and foreign commerce linked to the Ngo community. Certainly the Tran/Chen patrilineal clan system was much stronger than the Ly pattern of intermarrying with local powers. The Tran/Chen also initially brought in a stronger administrative system, although the growing power of its princes eventually undercut it.⁵

This interpretation of the history of early Dai Viet from the eleventh through the fourteenth centuries fits well with the present interpretation of the contemporaneous history of mainland Southeast Asia. As outlined by Victor Lieberman, Kenneth R. Hall, and Michael Aung-Thwin,⁶ the classical civilizations of Angkor and Pagan each grew and flourished from the tenth to eleventh centuries in the mid-river sections of the Irrawaddy (Pagan) and the Mekong/Chao Phraya (Angkor) river valleys. Growing in the midst of wet rice agriculture, especially by tem-

⁴ Where the Vietnamese dynasty was of Chinese descent, I use both Vietnamese and Chinese versions of its name; where the dynasty was not of Chinese descent, I do not.

⁵ John K. Whitmore, "The Rise of the Coast: Trade, State, and Culture in Early Dai Viet," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 37.1 (2006), pp. 103–22.

⁶ Victor B. Lieberman, *Strange Parallels, Southeast Asia in Global Context, c. 800–1830*, vol. 1, *Integration on the Mainland* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 2003), pp. 23–44; Kenneth R. Hall, *A History of Early Southeast Asia, Maritime Trade and Societal Development, 100–1500* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2011), chaps. 6–8; Michael Aung-Thwin and Maitrii Aung-Thwin, *A History of Myanmar since Ancient Times, Traditions and Transformations* (London: Reaktion Books, 2012), pp. 77–111.

ple establishments, these two capitals strongly advanced their political domains over surrounding regions with military power, sacred centers, and intermarriage. The resulting rise in economic activity and ensuing social stratification led to increased trade with the mountains and the coasts. The simultaneous growth in maritime commerce during the Song dynasty (960–1279), especially the Southern Song (1127–1279), led to a surge in trade along the coasts of Southeast Asia. With this trade, prosperity and power grew in these coastal regions. Yet internal strains in the inland capitals, along with the coastal competition, helped bring about the decline of the inland central powers, replaced by polities centered on coastal entrepôts: Pegu in the Irrawaddy domain, Ayudhya in the Chao Phraya, and the Phnom Penh region in the Mekong. In Dai Viet, likewise, the Tran/Chen base of Tuc Mac 即墨/Thien Truong displaced (if not actually replaced) the capital of Thang Long.

Behind these historical developments across the mainland lay the impact of a change in climate, as discussed by Victor Lieberman and Brendan Buckley.⁷ Based on a variety of indicators, they correlate rainfall with the rise and fall of these great classical polities of mainland Southeast Asia. The emergence of the great empires of Angkor, Pagan, and Thang Long (the Ly) took place as high levels of monsoon rain hit the mainland. Then with the falloff in the amounts of rain and the appearance of drought, which exacerbated existing internal problems, a series of crises struck across the lowlands during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Eventually, Pagan and Angkor would be abandoned. Thang Long, while still remaining the official capital, would, like the others, be displaced as the central power base by a coastal location (Tuc Mac/Thien Truong). These coastal capitals would flourish under the positive maritime trade policies of the Chinese Song and Yuan dynasties. Where polities like Majapahit in east Java and Vijaya in central Champa thrived during the fourteenth century, as agrarian-commercial economies protected them from the full force of climatic changes, the inland realms of the mainland fell victim to increasing problems.⁸

For Dai Viet, the combination of increasing drought, the environmental impact of Thang Long's developing mid-river society, and the growth outward of the Red River delta all led to greater attention be-

⁷ Victor B. Lieberman and Brendan Buckley, "The Impact of Climate on Southeast Asia, c.950–1820: New Findings," *Modern Asian Studies* 46.5 (2012), pp. 1–48.

⁸ Victor B. Lieberman, "Charter State Collapse in Southeast Asia, ca. 1250–1400, as a Problem in Regional and World History," *American Historical Review* 116.4 (2011), pp. 937–62; John K. Whitmore, "The Last Great King of Classical Southeast Asia: 'Che Bong Nga' and Champa in the Fourteenth Century," in B. M. Lockhart and Tran Ky Phuong, eds., *The Cham in Vietnam, History, Society and Art* (Singapore: National U. of Singapore P., 2011), pp. 168–203.

ing focused on the Lower Delta. Together with the growth of maritime commerce and the consequent movement of trade through this region upriver to Thang Long, the demands of economic development drew Chinese labor down the coast into this underpopulated territory. Out of this growing coastal community came the power of the new Tran/Chen dynasty and the Ngo community in which it was based.⁹

Thien Truong (originally Tuc Mac) in the southern Lower Delta of the Red River became the political base of the coastal, Fujian-descended royal Tran/Chen family in the late-twelfth century.¹⁰ It also formed the center of the thriving Sino-Vietnamese coastal culture linking southeast China and lower Dai Viet through the maritime connections between the two. This Sino-Vietnamese society and culture had begun to form at least by the twelfth century, when the Song dynasty lost the north and then moved its capital into the lower Yangzi region (the Wu area) in 1127. Southern Chinese society and culture developed strongly, and international commerce followed significantly. Elements moved out to sea, down the coast, and into the underpopulated Lower Delta of the Red River region.

The royal Tran/Chen family had originally been one of these migrating families and were described later on as fishermen. They built their wealth and power in the Lower Delta and its amorphous water culture, becoming first a local, then the central power within Dai Viet. Consequently, a Chinese-style society and culture grew along Dai Viet's coastal zone, bringing in contemporary Song elements such as its literati culture (Nho; Ch.: Ru 儒) and Chan Buddhist thought. This led to significant cultural changes in Dai Viet during the fourteenth century.

⁹ Li Tana's recent work, especially concerning the Jiaozhi Ocean system, forms the basis for our analysis of this earlier period and allows us to understand the major changes that occurred from the Ly (1010-1225) to the Tran/Chen and another coastal dynasty, the brief Ho/Hu (1400-07), and on into the succeeding Le dynasty (1428-1527) in the fifteenth century. Moving away from the modern standard histories with their focus on the Kinh (Vietnamese), we can understand better the multiethnic relationships and cross-cultural activities that led to the growth first of Dai Viet, then of the modern Viet Nam. See the following works of Li Tana: "The Rise of the Jiaozhi Ocean Region," in Angela Schottenhammer and Roderich Ptak, eds., *The Perception of Maritime Space in Traditional Chinese Sources* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2006), pp. 125-39; "A View From the Sea: Perspectives on the Northern and Central Vietnamese Coast," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 37.1 (2006), pp. 83-102; "Introduction: The Tongking Gulf through History, A Geopolitical Overview," in Nola Cooke, Tana Li, and James A. Anderson, eds., *The Tongking Gulf through History* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011; Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2013), pp. 1-21; "Towards an Environmental History of the Eastern Red River Delta, Vietnam, c. 900-1400 C.E.," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* (forthcoming).

¹⁰ John K. Whitmore, "The Secondary Capitals of Dai Viet: Shifting Elite Power Bases," in Kenneth R. Hall, ed., *Secondary Cities and Urban Networking in the Indian Ocean Realm, c.1400-1800* (Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, 2008), pp. 158-61.

The general era of Sino-Vietnamese culture, with its split loyalties (up-river to the Dai Viet capital of Thang Long as well as up the coast to the Chinese empire), would culminate in the two-decade-long Ming occupation of 1407–27.¹¹

Two elements then proceeded to block any continuation of this coastal development through the fifteenth century – the victorious anti-Ming resistance of Le Loi from the highlands, and the existing Ming policy banning maritime movement down its own coast. Coming out of the distant southwest mountains where Mount Lam (Lam Son 藍山) was located, just beyond crushing Ming control, Le Loi and his highland followers were, it seems, anti-Ming, anti-Chinese, anti-Tran/Chen, and anti-coastal (Ngo/Wu). In their victory, the new Le dynasty (1428–1527) acted strongly against “collaborators” (*nguy quan* 僞官) within the Ming colonial regime, especially in the coastal regions (where Thien Truong had been the center). Eventually, four decades later, the reforming Vietnamese emperor Le Thanh-tong 黎聖宗 (r. 1460–1497) brought Thien Truong and the coast into a new bureaucratic structure as mere units of his new, centralized, provincial administration.

Although the population of the Lower Delta of the Red River had suffered greatly through six decades of war (1367–1427) and environmental problems, the 1371 Ming ban on its own coastal movements kept even more Chinese from continuing their migration into, and filling out, geographically and socially, the Lower Delta. The fact that it was a province of China during the Ming occupation would have allowed such migration in, but the subsequent Le policy against the *nguy quan* would most likely have driven many of the Ngo community out, and the Ming ban kept any more Chinese from coming in. The result was that through the middle third of the fifteenth century there was a relatively low population in the coastal zone (as discussed further, below). Undoubtedly, some elements of the earlier Sino-Vietnamese population remained (purportedly including the future royal Mac/Mo 莫, also fishermen), but a larger population was necessary to fulfill the new government’s administrative efforts. Following Le Tu Thanh’s (discussed, below) two great campaigns of the 1470s – southward to destroy Champa and westward to inhibit the Lao/Tai principalities – the king moved his western fighters into the Lower Delta area, where increasing Chinese immigration added to the population.¹²

¹¹ Whitmore, “Rise of the Coast,” pp. 108–21.

¹² Li Tana, “The Ming Factor and the Emergence of the Vietnamese in the 15th Century,” in Geoff Wade and Laichen Sun, eds., *Southeast Asia in the Fifteenth Century: The China Factor* (Singapore: National University of Singapore Press, 2010), pp. 83–103.

Despite strong bureaucratic control and the government resettlement program, older mountain and coastal forces resurfaced strongly through the sixteenth century to contest with each other over control of the Vietnamese lowlands. The Uy Muc emperor 黎威穆 (r. 1505–1509) of the Le favored his coastal maternal side over his montane paternal line (see below), leading to a strong montane aristocratic reaction. Next came the major coastal rebellion of Tran Cao 陳暉 seeking to overthrow the entire Le establishment, returning to the prior Tran/Chen style. Though at first defeated, it was a coastal element led by Mac Dang Dung (1483–1541; r. 1528–1541), this time focusing on restoration of the Le model, that reestablished central power in Dai Viet (1528–1592).

Nevertheless, like the Ming whom it had allegedly served a century earlier, the Mac/Mo dynasty could not reach into the distant mountain valleys where the Le forces had returned for refuge. The result was initially, through the mid-sixteenth century, a stalemate between the montane forces of Mount Lam (now called the Western Capital Tay Kinh 西京) and the littoral forces of Thang Long (the Eastern Capital, or Dong Kinh 東京), with the Mac/Mo base at Co Trai on the coast. The final third of the century saw the montane Restoration effort gradually and increasingly succeed. In the 1590s, the aristocratic Le Restoration (1592–1788) forces drove the Mac/Mo out of the Red River delta, both north into Sino-Vietnamese frontier territory and south into the former territory of Champa. There, in the south, a new Sino-Vietnamese coastal zone emerged, centered at Hoi An 會安, that would have great consequences for the later history of Viet Nam.

THE NGO COMMUNITY AND ITS CONNECTIONS WITH SOUTHEAST CHINA

What, then, was this Ngo community that I am proposing? Of whom did it consist? By the fifteenth century, it would have predominantly been descendants of males from the southeast coast of China who, over the previous three centuries, had moved south into the Red River Lower Delta. Their settlement would have ebbed and flowed through the years with the rise and fall of trade and the occasional outbursts of warfare along these adjacent coasts. Presumably kinship and other relations drew individuals down the coast and maintained relations between the settlers in the Lower Delta and their home regions up the coast. Merchant contacts, manufacturing opportunities, the search of the landless for agricultural fields, and anyone seeking a new land would have made up this community. By marrying locally

and establishing families, ever new immigrants accumulated and continually blended into the local society over generations, while retaining links with their ancestral homes. If not coherent in and of itself as a community, the indigenous Vietnamese population came to conceive of these people and their strong connections with their homeland as a separate group, the Ngo.

Let us briefly examine the history of the formation of this community. In the first centuries of the second millennium CE, the Red River was filling in its Lower Delta with sediment brought downstream from the mid-river development of Dai Viet and its civilization. Li Tana has used geologic reports to indicate that, as this coastal region filled out, the process opened up agricultural development and settlement,¹³ making the need for local labor acute. This occurred while the Song dynasty was reacting to the loss of northern overland routes by switching to southern maritime links.¹⁴ The resulting surge in international sea trade also saw a population movement out of southeast China, along the coastal flow, and into the Lower Delta. In the 1170s, Fan Chengda 范成大 (1126–1193), a Song official in Guangxi province just to the north, described what came to be the Ngo community. Though Fan meant his description to be of the entire land of Dai Viet (for him, Annan 安南), I believe that he was looking at the country through the coastal prism of the Lower Delta, and so his words make sense mainly for this area, the one with which the Chinese would have had the most contact and familiarity. For Fan, Vietnamese were “extremely few,” and “half the people” had come by ship from China, especially from Min (Fujian). The apparent labor shortage led to the flow of large numbers of Chinese there, with literacy a prized commodity. Such migrants from China’s shores took advantage of local land opportunities to settle, and to work and intermarry with the inhabitants. The knowledge these settlers brought with them enhanced Dai Viet’s intellectual and physical situation and strengthened Dai Viet’s position against China.¹⁵ It is these people, I believe, who helped in the creation of this Ngo community in the Lower Delta.

¹³ Li, “Towards an Environmental History.”

¹⁴ James A. Anderson in this volume.

¹⁵ Fan Chengda, *Treatises of the Supervisor and Guardian of the Cinnamon Sea: The Natural World and Material Culture of 12th Century South China*, James M. Hargett, trans. (Seattle: U. Washington P., 2010), pp. 203–4, 259; John K. Whitmore, “Brush and Ship: The Southern Chinese Diaspora and Literati in Dai Viet during the 12th and 13th Centuries,” *Chinese Southern Diaspora Studies* 4 (2010), pp. 38–39; also Sean Marsh in this volume.

The Lower Delta saw further development during the thirteenth century as the Tran/Chen royal family utilized the new sources of labor to dike off wetlands and transform their lands into paddy fields, creating princely estates. Nguyen Thi Phuong Chi describes well the growth of these estates, with their thriving communities, self-sufficient economies, and religious institutions, across the Lower Delta, both in its northern sector around Chi Linh 咖靈 and its southern one around Tuc Mac/Thien Truong.¹⁶ Local population, production, and power thus developed across the whole region. One young Tran/Chen prince entertained Song envoys during their stays in the Vietnamese capital, quite enjoying their company. Later, after Song refugees from the Mongol onslaught followed the maritime route into Dai Viet (not unlike later Ming refugees from the Manchu conquest), this same prince led them in battle against the Mongol invaders of his own land.¹⁷ The princely estates were serving generally as local bases for the Vietnamese resistance to Mongol intrusions into Dai Viet during the 1280s. Still, among the Ngo community, there was the shared allegiance to both Thang Long and the southeast coast of China, which caused some of the Tran/Chen royal family to side with the Mongols. The hero of the Mongol Wars, the Hung-dao 興道 prince, Tran Quoc Tuan 陳國峻 (1228–1300), had to make an explicit plea to the personal loyalty of his troops, based on the material support he had provided followers on his estate (“I gave you...”).¹⁸

The area around the Vietnamese port of Van Don, in the islands northeast of the Lower Delta and in its manufacturing hinterlands, became quite “Northern” culturally, specifically in economic patterns and habits of dress. The *Vietnamese Chronicle* (or, *Dai Viet su ky toan thu* 大越史記全書) describes the people there as involved in trade with Chinese merchants for their food, drink, and clothing. When about to resist the Mongols, the Tran prince in charge of the region had the locals change

¹⁶ Nguyen Thi Phuong Chi, *Thai Ap-Dien Trang Thoi Tran, The Ky XIII-XIV (Estates in The Tran Era, 13th–14th Centuries)* (Hanoi: NXB Khoa Hoc Xa Hoi, 2002); idem, “Tam Nhin cua cac Trieu Ly, Tran ve Van Don va Vung Dong Bac” (“Examining the Ly and Tran Courts in Van Don and the Northeast”), in Ban Quan Ly Cac Di Tich Trong Diem Quang Ninh, ed., *Di Tich Lich Su-Van Hoa Thuong Cang Van Don (Historical and Cultural Vestiges of the Port of Van Don)* (Hanoi: NXB Khoa Hoc Xa Hoi, 2010), pp. 201–8. See also Nguyen Van Hoan and Le Quang Chan, “Dien Trang cua An Sinh Vuong Tran Lieu o Duyen Yen” (“The Estate of the An Sinh Prince Tran Lieu at Duyen Yen”), in their *Theo Dong Chay Lich Su Viet Nam (Following the Flow of Vietnamese History)* (Hanoi: NXB Lao Dong, 2010), pp. 201–8.

¹⁷ *Dai Viet su ky toan thu* 大越史記全書 (1697; 19th-c. printed edn.; hereafter cited as *TT*) 5, pp. 48a–b; 7, pp. 2a–3a. In this article the work is sometimes referred to as the *Vietnamese Chronicle*.

¹⁸ Truong Buu Lam, *Patterns of Vietnamese Response to Foreign Intervention, 1858–1900* (New Haven: Southeast Asian Studies, Yale University, 1967), pp. 49–53.

their Northern-style hats for more indigenous ones in order to avoid confusion in the heat of battle.¹⁹

In addition to this socio-economic integration of the Lower Delta and the southeast coast of China, there was also a shared community at the literati level. James A. Anderson has shown how the writings of Vietnamese scholars Le Van Huu 黎文休 and Le Tac 黎崱 fit into what he terms “the common ground” encompassing these two regions and their literati culture in “a common textual community.”²⁰ Part of this shared culture would also have been the tale of Zhao Tuo/Trieu Da, the northern founder of the Nan Yue/Nam Viet 南越 (Southern Yue) realm in early Han-dynasty times, almost a millennium and a half earlier.²¹ In their ideological reformulation of such history during the second half of the fourteenth century, students of the Chinese-descended scholar Chu Van An 朱文安 developed their own local antiquity, with its eighteen Hung kings equivalent to China’s and a genealogy going back millennia, which also ultimately linked it to Chinese origins.²²

In the political dimension, there may have been an additional shared discourse. Such an aspect of the shared culture arose among rival rebels in central and southern China against the Mongol Yuan

¹⁹ *TT*5, pp. 53a–b; Ngo Si Lien, “Northern Commerce,” in George E. Dutton, Jayne S. Werner, and John K. Whitmore, *Sources of Vietnamese Tradition* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), p. 43; John K. Whitmore, “Van Don, the ‘Mac Gap,’ and the End of the Jiaozhi Ocean System: Trade and State in Dai Viet, 1450–1550,” in *The Tongking Gulf through History*, p. 104. On the port of Van Don, see *Di Tich Lich Su-Van Hoa Thuong Cang Van Don* (cited n. 16, above), which contains these articles on the Chinese that were there: Nguyen Tien Dung, “Nhan Hue Vuong Tran Khanh Du va Nhung Hoat Dong o Van Don Nua Cuoi The Ky XIII” (“The Nhan Hue Prince Tran Khanh Du and Activities in Van Don in the Late Thirteenth Century”), pp. 259–96, esp. 286–92, and including one on the connections with Chinese ports: Duong Van Huy, “Quan He Giao Thuong giua Vung Dong Bac Viet Nam voi cac Cang Mien Nam Trung Hoa The Ky X-XIV” (“Commercial Connections between Northeast Vietnam and Ports of South China in the Tenth to Fourteenth Centuries”), pp. 356–94.

²⁰ James A. Anderson, “The *An Nam Chi Luoc* as Common Ground: Le Tac’s Private History and Its Sino-Vietnamese Audience,” presented at the annual meeting of the American Historical Association, Boston, 2001.

²¹ John K. Whitmore, “Keeping the Emperor Out!: Trieu Da and the Hongwu Emperor,” in Sarah Schneewind, ed., *Long Live the Emperor! Uses of the Ming Founder across Six Centuries of East Asian History* (Minneapolis: Society for Ming Studies, 2008), pp. 345–53; presentations of Allard, Brindley, Clark, and Henry at the conference *Maritime Frontiers of Asia* all discussed Nan Yue and Zhao Tuo.

²² John K. Whitmore, “Chu Van An and the Rise of Antiquity in Fourteenth Century Dai Viet,” pp. 50–61, and O. W. Wolters, “Chu Van An: An Exemplary Retirement,” pp. 62–96, both in *Vietnam Review* 1 (1996); Liam C. Kelley, “The Biography of the Hong Bang Clan as a Medieval Viet Invented Tradition,” *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 7.2 (2012), pp. 87–130. I believe that the text, *Linh Nam chich quai* 嶺南撫怪, originated in the 1380s and was re-edited a century later. It requires further study. (The eighteen kings mentioned here were a mythic construction of the late 14th c., used to link Dai Viet’s longevity and antiquity to those of China.)

dynasty in the middle of the fourteenth century. One of these rebels, Chen Youliang 陳友諒 (V.: Tran Huu Luong), operated from the middle-Yangzi valley and in his campaigns sought aid from the Tran/Chen royal court in Thang Long. We might assume that this was merely an opportunistic appeal to a political power with the same surname. Yet, if we place it within the context of the Ngo community, it might be seen as the appeal of one chief to another inside the community. Though Chen Youliang was not from the coast, he might have seen the Tran and himself as brothers operating equivalent actions and hence being potential allies versus the Mongols. Indeed, another such chief, Chen Youding 陳友定 in Fujian, might have been another who appealed to the Tran/Chen. In any case, there is no record of the latter, and the Tran/Chen rejected the former.²³ Indeed, by the end of the century, with the new Ming dynasty emerging out of the Wu region and established on the northern throne, the Tran/Chen royal family member and minister Tran Nguyen Dan 陳元旦 on his deathbed advised his king, "Respect the Ming country as a father."²⁴ This, we may assume, reflected the sentiments of the Ngo community at large.

In the increasingly populous zone of the Lower Delta, particularly the northern sector, manufacture was developing, especially ceramics, and it tied into the coastal zone of southeast China and the international trade. As Li Tana so well describes, during the half century of peace after the victories over the Mongols, significant deforestation from the fuel production demanded by manufacturing, as well as by population growth, salt production, and Buddhist temple building placed strains on the socio-economic system of the Red River delta.²⁵ At the same time there occurred a major geomorphic change in the Lower Delta: the shift of major water flow from the northern (Bach Dang) branch of the Red River to the southern (Thai Binh) branch. As Li Tana sees it, manmade hydraulic controls, the resulting silting, lower riverine flow, encroaching seawater, and coastal exposure to storms all weakened the northern Lower Delta. Drought throughout the fourteenth century added to the problem, as the flow consequently lessened.

²³ *TT*7, pp. 23b-24a; F. W. Mote, *Imperial China, 900-1800* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999), pp. 530-31, 539, 558; Cho-yun Hsu, *China, A New Cultural History* (New York: Columbia U.P., 2012), pp. 274-75.

²⁴ *TT*8, pp. 19b-20a; Dutton, Werner, and Whitmore, *Sources of Vietnamese Tradition*, p. 88.

²⁵ Li, "Towards an Environmental History"; Lieberman and Buckley, "Impact of Climate."

Such environmental problems were compounded through the final third of the fourteenth century and into the fifteenth when a series of martial and political events hit Dai Viet and its Lower Delta. First came the Champa invasions from 1371 to 1390 that chased the Tran/Chen rulers, senior and junior, out of both Thien Truong and Thang Long at various times. During this chaos, a court minister, Le Quy Ly, his family, and provincial compatriots from Thanh Hoa to the south gradually gained power and took the throne in 1400 as the Ho/Hu regime 胡朝, also of Ngo provenance. In the process, the Ho/Hu shifted the royal base from Thien Truong south to Tay Do 西都 (the Western Capital) in Thanh Hoa province and cracked down on the Tran/Chen clan and its supporters.²⁶ Then, following the consequent Ming invasion and destruction of the Ho/Hu regime, various Tran/Chen claimants rose against the Ming and were defeated. This fighting involved the Thien Truong area as well as territory farther south. The Ming consequently established their fortification of Co Long in the southern Lower Delta, the old Tran/Chen royal territory southeast of the capital. They controlled the northern Lower Delta from their base at Chi Linh.²⁷

By the time of full Ming control over what was now their new province of Jiaozhi 交趾 in 1414,²⁸ the southern Lower Delta had been subjected to almost five decades of destruction, on top of environmental damage, while the northern Lower Delta would have been relatively undamaged, despite the environmental problems, and its manufacturing and commercial zone continued. This difference between the northern and southern sectors of the Lower Delta appears in the Ming records, for example, in *An Nan zhi yuan* 安南志原, written around 1418.²⁹ Li Tana shows this difference in her tables: much higher numbers of peasant villages, rice and salt production, and trade in the northern sector.³⁰ This sector had at least twice as much as the southern in each of these categories, particularly in trade. Thus, the area around Chi Linh, the

²⁶ John K. Whitmore, *Vietnam, Ho Quy Ly, and the Ming, 1371-1421* (New Haven: Council of Southeast Asian Studies, Yale University, 1985), chaps. 1-4; idem, "Secondary Capitals," pp. 161-63.

²⁷ Phan Huy Le and Phan Dai Doan, *Khoi Nghia Lam Son, 1418-1427 (Righteous Revolt of Mt. Lam)*, 4th edn. (Hanoi: NXB Quan Doi Nhan Dan, 2005), pp. 42-87 (map, p. 79).

²⁸ Alexander Ong Eng Ann, "Contextualising the Book-Burning Episode during the Ming Invasion and Occupation of Vietnam," in Wade and Sun, eds., *Southeast Asia in the 15th Century*, pp. 154-65.

²⁹ *Ngan-Nan Tche Yuan*, Léonard Aourousseau, ed. (Hanoi: École Française d'Extrême Orient, 1932), pp. 26-38, 1-257 (Ch.); Li, "Ming Factor," p. 98, n. 19; Whitmore, *Ho Quy Ly*, pp. 180 n. 28, 182 n. 37.

³⁰ Li, "Ming Factor," p. 93; idem, "Towards an Environmental History."

core Ngo economic area, formed a solid foundation for Ming control in Jiaozhi.

Given this situation, the Lower Delta of the Red River and its Ngo community, having lost its Tran/Chen royal family and their political base of Thien Truong to the Ho/Hu, would have swung easily to support participation in the new Ming administration. The Ngo joint allegiance (upriver to Thang Long, up the coast to China) allowed many of them to shift to the new regime. Given the ruins of the southern Lower Delta, the former Tran/Chen base, it is no surprise that strong participation occurred in the northern sector. Four of the six ideal “native officials” mentioned in *An Nan zhi yuan* came from Tan An (Ch.: Xin’an 新安, “New Peace”), the main jurisdiction of this northern sector, and particularly Chi Linh within it. Such local officials filled the prefectural and lower posts of the new Ming province’s civil administration as well as secondary military positions. Searching locally for “men of talent,” the Ming administration employed a large number of locals, presumably many from the Ngo community. The Ming sought literacy and numeracy, good communication skills, and proper (Sinic) character. They also looked for artisanal skills in manufacturing and commerce as well as maritime shipping abilities.³¹

Certainly, the Ngo community contributed many, if not most, of these skills. Even those who had joined in the Tran/Chen resistance movements were welcome. Overall, as the Ming stated, “many of their own free will” chose to be part of their new provincial system, and, as even the *Vietnamese Chronicle* would later acknowledge, “a few with reputation accepted” such positions.³² For the Ming, these local officials provided contact with and information and resources, human and material, from the Vietnamese population, including specifically the Ngo community itself (that is, the local Chinese). Mac Thuy and his family of Chi Linh stood out in this service. Honored and promoted, such Ngo figures formed the necessary foundation for the Ming provincial structure.

³¹ *Ngan-Nan Tche Yuan*, pp. 205–7; Whitmore, *Ho Quy Ly*, pp. 114–16, 166–68 nn. 55–70.

³² *Ming shilu* 明實錄 (Yongle reign) (Taipei: Academia Sinica, 1962) 115, p. 3b; *TT* 8, pp. 53a–b; 9, pp. 4a, 6a; Duong Van An 揚文安, *O Chau can luc* 烏州幟錄 (Hanoi: NXB Khoa Hoc Xa Hoi, 1997), pp. 91–92; Whitmore, *Ho Quy Ly*, p. 115.

FIGHTING THE NGO

The successful resistance forces that defeated and drove the Ming occupation out of Dai Viet after two decades came from the fringe of their land opposite that of the Ngo community. Le Loi and his mountain troops began their campaign just beyond the oppressive Ming reach at Mount Lam, the western highlands of Thanh Hoa province southwest of the capital. Their parochialism would have predisposed them to look askance at the Ngo community and its culture, with a deep feeling and suspicion of “otherness.”³³ Thus, this campaign opposed not just the Ming state, but, I believe, the Ngo community that spanned both Chinese and Vietnamese coasts and its political focus, the Tran/Chen royal family. They also despised the coastal Ho/Hu regime. The effort by Le Loi and his mountain followers was not just to drive the northerners out, as had been done before in Vietnamese history, but to resist this entire Ngo culture that tied together the coasts of Dai Viet and southeast China. Their campaign, I argue, was to be anti-Ming, anti-Ngo, anti-Tran/Chen, and anti-coastal. In short, it aimed to contest Ngo control of the lowlands lying between them and opposed the shared community and loyalties of this coastal zone. For Le Loi, in Esta Ungar’s words, the Tran/Chen were “cowardly and dissipated.”³⁴

Originating deep in the backwoods, the forces of Mount Lam were able to maneuver among the mountains and just barely avoid the Ming counterstrikes. In the first years after 1418, they faced rough times (similar to the American experience at Valley Forge) and were almost caught in a pincer movement between allied Chinese and Lao forces. Only in 1424 were they able to break out of the highlands into the southern lowlands, and only after eight years could they begin to attack the Ming in the Red River delta.³⁵ At this point, in 1426, Le Loi sent his troops around the Lower Delta, bypassing the Ngo community first to surround the capital (under the Ming named Dong Quan 東關), engaging them in battle, and second to block northern military relief columns that came overland from Guangxi and Yunnan provinces.³⁶

As Le Loi planned his campaign against the Ming provincial capital and set out to contest them in major battles, he acted to contain the Lower Delta, its forts, and the Ngo community. Not directly confronting

³³ Ungar, “Vietnamese Leadership,” pp. 51–58, 82–90; Whitmore, “Secondary Capitals,” pp. 164–65.

³⁴ Ungar, “Vietnamese Leadership,” p. 51.

³⁵ Phan and Phan, *Khoi Nghia Lam Son*, pp. 144–282.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 289–92.

the latter, he cut them off from the main Ming forces and resources. The resistance troops besieged and immobilized the Ming garrisons of Tay Do, Co Long, and Chi Linh. Tay Do, the Ho/Hu Western Capital, sat in Thanh Hoa, just south of the Red River delta. Just to its north, Co Long was the Ming base in the southern Lower Delta, the territory of Thien Truong, just as Chi Linh was for the Ming in the northern Lower Delta. Le Loi particularly made sure that his forces controlled the old Tran/Chen base around what had become Co Long.³⁷

Moving his troops north into the Red River delta, Le Loi organized its territory into four directional circuits (*dao* 道), the eastern one covering the northern Lower Delta and the southern the southern Lower Delta. At the same time, he established at each seaport a surveillance office and directed the officials of all these jurisdictions “to inspect all persons coming and going and to seize the traitorous officials (*nguy quan*) and treacherous elements who have yet to come over (to us), those of the people and the army of two minds, and those who smuggle documents and go back north.” Le Loi ordered the seizure of the property of the *nguy quan*, their wives, their children, and their dependents/servants for the army.³⁸ He also asked any “countryman” (*quoc nhan*; Ch.: *guo ren* 國人) who had parents, wives and children, older and younger brothers, dependents/servants, or any other kin who had followed the Ming into the occupied cities to go in and bring them back to their families. If he or she were not willing to do so, they might be punished.³⁹ If, however, those wives, children, and brothers had been coerced to serve the Ming and now answered the call to resist, they would be rewarded. “Still,” as Le Loi stated, “to my left and to my right, (we) have yet to gain these people.”⁴⁰

Distinguishing between Ming officials and the *nguy quan*, Le Loi proceeded to sort out those who were opposing him and his forces. In the middle of 1427, he ordered that official documents and seals from “Ngo times” be gathered and examined. His officials were “to seize and send in all traitorous local officials (*nguy tho quan* 僞土官), soldiers, and people of the (Ming occupied) cities and their wives, children, dependents/servants, property, and buffaloes, searching out those of different allegiance; get hold of *nguy quan* documents and seals and send (them)

³⁷ Ibid., pp. 359, 377, 390–94, 402 (maps, 291, 401); Ungar, “Vietnamese Leadership,” pp. 74–79.

³⁸ *TT* 10, pp. 24a–b.

³⁹ *TT* 10, p. 28a.

⁴⁰ *TT* 10, pp. 31a, 34a (quotation).

up (to us) in the accorded time.” When bringing men into the army, the officials “were not to seek to change (their allegiance).”⁴¹

In this light, Le Loi looked specifically at the old Tran/Chen (and Ngo) base of Thien Truong. Across the southern Lower Delta territory encompassing Thien Truong, Kien Xuong, Ly Nhan, and Tan Hung,⁴² his officers had to take in and sustain the more than 6,000 men and women who had surrendered from the besieged territory, providing food and shelter. According to the prior orders, this being the old Tran/Chen-Ngo center, the resistance troops would have carefully scrutinized all those from this region who came in front of them.⁴³ The following month (July 1427), the rebel army set the amounts of money needed to release the *nguy quan*, their wives, and their dependents/servants: 70 strings of cash for wives of top officials and progressively down to 10 strings for those of students, indigenous officials (*tho quan* 土官), their clerks, and their associates. For children (male and female) and servants aged ten and under, the cost was half that. That September, Le Loi addressed the Ming empire (Thien Ha), “(You) bandits in the Central Kingdom – the people are still unsettled. Do they exist in *your* peace? The Ho/Hu family were without the Dao, and so (you) bandits did this, grabbing our land and placing it within the tiger’s injurious grip. You all have seen it! Now for one year there has been the distress of applied power, and so this is the heritage of (your) ‘10,000 years of Great Peace’ – think well on it. Do not pass it on and later come to regret it (emphasis, above indicates use of a familiar, informal tone).”⁴⁴

Strongly concerned with loyalty (V.: *trung*; Ch.: *zhong* 忠) and the divided allegiance of his people (whether with Champa or with the Ming),⁴⁵ Le Loi pressed on with the final stages of his campaign. As his forces maneuvered to cut off Dong Quan and block the Ming relief columns moving overland, they also took Chi Linh and the northern Lower Delta. Chi Linh supported the Xuong River post guarding the route from Guangxi. The other forts, Co Long and Tay Do, remained besieged and cut off. The Ming commander gave *nguy quan* and indigenous militia households who had taken refuge in the Chinese-controlled cities the option of either going North or remaining in the South. Most

⁴¹ *TT* 10, pp. 35a–b.

⁴² See Buu Cam et al., *Hong-Duc ban do (Maps of the Hong-Duc Era)* (Saigon: Bo Quoc-Gia Giao-Duc, 1962), pp. 19–21.

⁴³ *TT* 10, pp. 35b, 36b.

⁴⁴ *TT* 10, p. 36b.

⁴⁵ *TT* 10, pp. 38a–b.

chose to stay South. Shortly after, all *nguy quan* sheltering in Dong Quan were ordered out to return home.⁴⁶

As the end came for the Ming, Le Loi differentiated between them and the *nguy quan*. The Ming troops and officials left by land and sea. The last strongholds of Co Long and Tay Do surrendered, and their forces left. As the *Ming shilu* stated in late 1427, “The number of civilian and military officials, commanders, troops, clerks, and assignees of the three Jiaozhi offices and their family members who returned was 86,640 persons.”⁴⁷ At this point, Le Loi issued the text of “Binh Ngo dai cao” (mentioned at the beginning of this article).⁴⁸ He had defeated the Ngo, and both the Ming and the *nguy quan*; and his veterans would return in following decades to Mount Lam to maintain their shared memory and to celebrate this victory with great emotion and tears in the performance of the dance “Defeating the Ngo (Binh Ngo)” set to the music known as “Shattering the Ranks” (“Pha Tran”).⁴⁹ As Ngo Si Lien wrote in his edition of the *Vietnamese Chronicle* half a century later, one result of Le Loi’s victory had been to prevent the Ming from “changing (our) customs into (those of) long hair and white teeth, transforming (us) into northerners – alas, it would be the ultimate in disorder!”⁵⁰

THE NGUY QUAN POLICY

What of the *nguy quan* and the Ngo community at large? First of all, for Le Loi there was the matter of Tran Cao. The resistance had made him ruler of Dai Viet, heir to the preceding Tran/Chen dynasty, and the Ming had confirmed him as king of the state of An Nan (An Nan *guowang*).⁵¹ This act enabled the Ming to withdraw, having ostensibly achieved their original goal – to defeat the usurping Ho/Hu and restore the Tran/Chen, leaving the region in Ngo hands. That it was done and Cao had served his purpose, what would Le Loi do next? The new Le

⁴⁶ *TT* 10, pp. 45b, 49b.

⁴⁷ *Ming shilu* (Xuanzong reign) 34, p. 6a, as translated in Geoff P. Wade, “The *Ming Shi-lu* (Veritable Records of the Ming Dynasty) as a Source for Southeast Asian History, 14th to 17th Centuries,” Ph.D. diss. (University of Hong Kong, 1994), p. 977 (quotation); <http://epress.nus.edu.sg/msl/>; *TT* 10, pp. 46b–47a.

⁴⁸ *TT* 10, p. 47b; O’Harrow, “Nguyen Trai’s *Binh Ngo Dai Cao*.”

⁴⁹ The *Vietnamese Chronicle* recorded this event in the years 1449 and 1456; see *TT* 11, pp. 76a, 91a–b. In 1449, the dance dismayed civil officials, including the Ngo liaison Dao Cong Soan (see below), who saw the performance as most unseemly. After the 1460s, with the next generation, the Ngo did not appear to be a significant threat, and this performance seems to have been discontinued.

⁵⁰ *TT* 10, p. 53a.

⁵¹ *TT* 10, pp. 24b, 45a.

regime promptly removed Cao, and the record indicates that part of the reason may have been Tran Cao's place in the Ngo community. In the *Vietnamese Chronicle*, there are four versions of how Tran Cao came to his end. Where the official one had him fleeing by ship out to sea and then south down the coast to Nghe An, the other three had him going to Co Long in the heart of the Thien Truong territory of the southern Lower Delta. Thus the memory of Tran Cao strongly associated him with the coast and the Tran/Chen-Ngo region; he was sometimes depicted as having been killed, and sometimes as going out to sea – an antithesis of Le Loi's mountain-based force.⁵² Tran Cao's disappearance was another step in the defeat of the Ngo and their community.

Now, in 1428, with the title of king (to become posthumously known as Thai-to), Le Loi had to deal with the *nguy quan* and their families, dependents/servants, and associates. He ordered his provincial officials to watch for any *nguy quan*, indigenous militia (*tho quan*), or people who had fled the now conquered Ming-occupied cities, that is, people of "strange appearance" who had not reported to the new officials. They, and all who allowed them to escape, were to be put to death. On the other hand, since the Ming had commanded the Vietnamese to return all civil and military prisoners with their weapons, Le Loi put out a public placard announcing that no Ming official or soldier could be hidden – an act subject to death without reprieve.⁵³ The new ruler was making sure that his officials controlled both local collaborators and Ming appointees, preventing any from melting into the local Ngo community. Two months later, having officially established the name of his reign (Thuan Thien; Ch.: Shuntian 順天) and re-established those of his country (Dai Viet) and his capital (Dong Kinh), Le Loi decreed that any who refused to accept this reality were subject to caning and loss of social status. The new Le regime would have aimed this at both Ming and Tran/Chen supporters, at anyone with an ambivalent or split allegiance and loyalty. And indeed the Le banned the written Chinese character Tran/Chen, since it was the personal name of a Le queen.⁵⁴

As the Ming troops and administration pulled out of Dai Viet, suspicions about their supporters remained, as would occur similarly in the situations of the British in 1770s America, the French in 1950s Tonkin, and the Americans in Saigon two decades later. For the next

⁵² *TT* 10, pp. 55a–b; Ungar, 'Vietnamese Leadership,' pp. 154–56.

⁵³ *TT* 10, pp. 56a–b.

⁵⁴ *TT* 10, pp. 57b–58b; 11, pp. 23b–24a.

several years, there were questions as to whether all Chinese Ming appointees and their weaponry had actually left Dai Viet (not unlike the POW/MIA issue of 1980s America), and there probably was a stream of such elements in the Ngo community who left Dai Viet, as the disentanglement of the two states took place. In the face of Ming accusations, the Vietnamese continued to insist, “(We) have completely returned the captured soldiers and arms.”⁵⁵ Eventually, Le Loi flatly stated, “As for any Ming subjects, officials, or soldiers and their weapons, (we) have already returned all (of them) – there are no remaining transgressors imprisoned (or) hidden (here).”⁵⁶ By late 1429, the Ming court was still insisting on the return, this time more generally, of “the population of the Ming state 明國人口 and military weapons.”⁵⁷ Now the Ming wanted their “population” back, not just their officials and soldiers. Indeed, they had already issued an imperial edict “releasing the clerks and others of Jiaozhi who had been issued land to come back to (their) native country.” The Ming would keep raising this issue until at least 1434, after Le Loi’s death.⁵⁸

Did this broadening of the Ming demands open a path for (and indeed encourage) the Le to move parts of the Ngo community out? What did “population of the Ming state” mean vis-a-vis Dai Viet? The phrase undoubtedly encompassed those from the southeast coast of China and thus included its subjects now within the independent Vietnamese state, particularly the Lower Delta. The result was a ‘pull-push’ situation, with the Ming wanting their subjects back and the Le wanting them to go.

The Le state’s desires may be clearly seen in the development of its *nguy quan* policy. First, the people who had been subject to the Ming and their local officials would have their taxes remitted, and those, both military and civilian, who had been held in the main occupied cities (Dong Kinh, Tay Do, Co Long, Chi Linh) and eventually joined the resistance (resulting in the Ming seizing their lands) got their fields back. Mainly, the Le “set right all the crimes of the *nguy quan*” and began their search for those who had supported the Ming occupation. This first stage of the policy lasted through the middle of 1428. Establishing a watch on the seaports as well as on other strategic points across the realm, Le Loi and his lords took control.⁵⁹ As they

⁵⁵ *TT* 10, p. 59a.

⁵⁶ *TT* 10, p. 62a.

⁵⁷ *TT* 10, pp. 70b–71a.

⁵⁸ *TT* 10, pp. 61a (quotation), 73a–b; 11, p. 1b.

⁵⁹ *TT* 10, pp. 58b–59b (quotation 59a). My thanks to the reader who suggested this approach.

began to establish their new regime, the Le acted with a sharp eye on the Ngo community.

In the second stage, through the last four months of 1428, the new regime punished and dispossessed the *nguy quan* and their supporters. The Le state moved against “the powerful families of prior [Tran/Chen, Ho/Hu] dynasties,” both of Ngo descent, and the *nguy quan*, working to seize their lands and property, once their holdings had been verified. With this in progress, the Le moved against the major *nguy quan*, those who had served in the highest positions under the Ming, eight in all, and executed them. Their kin were implicated as well, some having been caught in the act of supporting Ming troops.⁶⁰ As the Le assessed the resources of their new realm, the king instructed his local officials to redo the land and population registers and to be on the lookout for the holdings of the powerful families. Their fields and other properties became state (V.: *quan* 官) property. The officials had to make clear the details of *nguy quan* households and lands. No one who had been associated with the Ming was eligible for exemption from corvée, even if he was a member of a resistance family. Among the resources being assessed for taxation were fishing in the streams and offshore from sea ports, and the salt fields.⁶¹ Such taxes no doubt impacted the Lower Delta.

With the new year of 1429, Le Loi declared to his people, all the way down into the villages, that those wandering by boat or by foot, playing go and gambling, not to mention partying and drinking, would be punished. Indeed, if such wanderers and idlers had an abundance of land or were thieves, being without “complete allegiance to the country,” they were to be reported.⁶² All this undoubtedly affected the Ngo community. In mid-year, the king began the third stage of his *nguy quan* policy. It was an amelioration of the harshness of the first two stages. He ordered that those pardoned would have their lands returned. Yet, at a time when he was rewarding his followers and giving them positions, the king explicitly warned his officers and officials not to select any former *nguy quan* for service, whether scholars or commoners, however talented, even as he called for literati learned in the histories and the classics to take state positions. At this point, the state marked out those parcels of land belonging to *nguy quan*, presumably sorting out the property to be returned and that for confiscation.⁶³

⁶⁰ *TT* 10, pp. 60b–61a, 62a–b; John K. Whitmore, “Property and State in 15th Century Dai Viet: Public and Private Land,” presented at the conference titled Property and Property Rights in Vietnam, Harvard University, May 2009.

⁶¹ *TT* 10, pp. 62b, 63a–b; Whitmore, “Property.”

⁶² *TT* 10, pp. 65a; Ungar, ‘Vietnamese Leadership,’ pp. 106, 111.

⁶³ *TT* 10, pp. 63b–64a, 66b, 67a–68a.

Four months later, the king returned to his forbearance. He announced to all soldiers and subjects “under heaven” that he would hear cases on redeeming the lives of wives and children living in the villages (and others unregistered) of the following types of husbands/fathers:

- *nguy quan*, deceased, civil, of the rank of district officers (*tri chau* 知州) and below;
- deceased, military, of the rank of 1,000 households and below;
- local militia (*tho quan*);
- those who had entered the Ming-occupied cities, now fallen, then surrendered;
- former officials of the Ho/Hu family captured by the bandits (Ming) and taken north.

This consideration did not apply either to people who had already been taken into state servitude and assigned to officials or to those with bad reputations.⁶⁴ The next month, the king wished “to know whether his officials had a true or a false (*nguy* 偽) spirit”; and he sought to determine that they would “exhaust their sincerity in serving the king.”⁶⁵ Thus, the question of allegiance and loyalty continued to plague Le Loi’s mind. Historians might wonder if the latter’s crackdown on lowland members of the anti-Ming resistance at this time (for example, Nguyen Trai and Tran Nguyen Han) was linked to deep antipathy toward the Ngo community, with its Tran/Chen and Ho/Hu remnants and their possible activities.⁶⁶

By the end of 1429, the *nguy quan* policy had taken shape: some *nguy quan* had been executed, some spared and their lands, women, and servants confiscated or returned. A deep antipathy toward them sown in Vietnamese society. The *nguy quan* question appears to have been settled, for we hear no more of it (though suspicions of scheming and inconstancy among potential lowland scholar-officials would remain for some years).⁶⁷ What of the remaining Ngo community as a whole? We can only imagine the impact of the new Le regime on these people in the period 1428–1429. The elite *nguy quan* and their kin networks would have been devastated. Those serving in militia or otherwise linked to the Ming apparatus must have felt distinctly unwanted and possibly discriminated against. As the Ming left, many in the Lower Delta of the Red River probably followed, moving back to the south-east coast of China (as the Ming court had required of them). Were

⁶⁴ *TT* 10, pp. 68b–69a.

⁶⁵ *TT* 10, pp. 69a–b.

⁶⁶ Ungar, “Vietnamese Leadership,” pp. 157–61.

⁶⁷ *TT* 11, pp. 5a, 6a, 11a; Ungar, “Vietnamese Leadership,” p. 165.

these returnees boat people, as would happen in 1979–80? Were they leaving in droves? We do not know, but the result, I postulate, was a reduction in the size of the Ngo community and a decrease in overall population across the Lower Delta.

From 1430, the Lower Delta existed with little note in the *Vietnamese Chronicle*; administratively, the region comprised more or less the East and South circuits (*dao*), from among what had been established at the time as five circuits, each under the command of a lord (*hanh khien* 行遣). Li Tana has pointed out the greater importance of the northern Lower Delta by this time, versus the southern portion.⁶⁸ An indication of this was the appointment of the scholar-official Dao Cong Soan as chief civil administrator (Tham Tri) of the East circuit. Soan was a scholar of the older generation known for being “versed in the old texts and in Ngo customs.”⁶⁹ He had been sent on embassies to the Ming court and could be expected to deal with the Ngo community. Then, possibly for the first time in Vietnamese history, as a culmination of sixty years of literati advocacy, in 1437 the Le state ordered “Ming subjects to dress in Kinh [Vietnamese] style and to wear their hair short.”⁷⁰ This indicates to us that Chinese had remained in Dai Viet and that the regime was quite aware of their presence. The new Le court preferred to describe these local people in foreign terms (at the same time that it was adopting both Ming court ritual and the mythic Sinic past linked to the so-called eighteen Hung kings from the previous century). The restriction on Chinese appearance was tied to the increasing insistence among Vietnamese scholars that Vietnamese not dress or wear their hair in the Chinese manner, nor speak Lao or Cham. In 1435, the minister Nguyen Trai 阮薦 (see the beginning of this article) had used the lessons about geography he gave to the new young king Le Nguyen Long 元龍 (Thai-tong; r. 1434–1442) to form the first Dai Viet geography (*Du dia chi* 輿地志). In it he flatly stated, “The people of our land should not adopt the languages or the clothing of the countries of the Ngo, Champa, the Lao, Siam, or Zhen La (Cambodia), since doing so will bring chaos to the customs of our country.” He referred to the Ngo way of speaking and provided a description of non-conforming Ngo dress and hair. To do otherwise would be “to disregard our customs.”⁷¹

⁶⁸ Li, “Environmental History.”

⁶⁹ *TT* 10, pp. 71a–b; 11, pp. 24a, 33a (quotation), 34b.

⁷⁰ *TT* 11, p. 50a.

⁷¹ *TT* 7, p. 41b; Nguyen Trai, “Du Dia Chi,” in *Nguyen Trai toan tap* (Hanoi: NXB Khoa

Through the 1430s, the Lower Delta, like the rest of Dai Viet, began to pull out of the years of combat and chaos. A sustained peace had come to the Vietnamese for the first time in over six decades. The less damaged northern sector of the East circuit expanded its manufacturing, particularly of ceramics, and developed the thriving port of Van Don, in the face of the Ming ban on Chinese private foreign trade.⁷² The more damaged southern portion seems to have remained stifled – still the old home of the Tran/Chen dynasty and its Ngo traditions. It is surely no coincidence that Phan Phu Tien, assigned to write the history of the Tran/Chen for the *Chronicle* in 1455, had been a civil administrator in Thien Truong.⁷³

THE MING MARITIME BAN AND VIETNAMESE DEMOGRAPHICS

As the new Le regime in Dai Viet worked to control the Ngo population of the Lower Delta of the Red River and its *nguy quan*, Dai Viet's territory once again came under the maritime ban. No longer the province of Jiaozhi inside China, Dai Viet once again fell outside the zone where Chinese migrants could legally move.⁷⁴

From the initial moment of the Ming travel ban in 1371 to the end of the fourteenth century, we must assume that the ability of coastal Chinese to move down into the Lower Delta was negatively impacted. Added to the ban, the invasions into Dai Viet by its southern neighbor Champa (1371–1390), followed by the Ho/Hu activities, also restricted population growth per se. The ban, established by the Ming Hongwu emperor (r. 1368–1398), had created a very difficult situation for any coastal Chinese wishing to move in groups into the Lower Delta. For the Vietnamese, the ban would have ended with the Ming conquest, since Jiaozhi once again came within China's domain and consequently allowed internal movement, but not external. The Ming Yongle emperor (r. 1402–1424) announced to the locals in 1407: "Also, it is not permitted for military personnel or civilians to go beyond the boundaries in private dealings or to privately cross the oceans to deal in foreign products."⁷⁵ The Vietnamese had come to lie within, not

Hoc Xa Hoi, 1969), pp. 232–33; Dutton, Werner, and Whitmore, *Sources of Vietnamese Tradition*, pp. 87, 106–8, 138–39.

⁷² Whitmore, "Van Don," pp. 105–7.

⁷³ *T'11*, pp. 75a, 90a.

⁷⁴ Diana Lary, *Chinese Migrations: The Movement of People, Goods, and Ideas over Four Millennia* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2012), pp. 64, 66–68, 71.

⁷⁵ *Ming shilu* (*Yongle reign*) 68, pp. 1a–3b, as translated in Wade, "Ming Shi-lu," p. 368.

without, the empire, and coastal Chinese could again come down into the Lower Delta. This situation lasted until the Le victory two decades later, though the increasing lowland warfare during the mid-1420s must have discouraged such movement.

Thus, by 1428, Dai Viet stood again beyond the empire. Coastal Chinese could no longer enter the Lower Delta, as though they were moving from province to province. The social and economic impact of these decades (1370s-1420s) on the southeast coastal Chinese had been strong. In a major break from the prior three centuries, from the pro-mercantile policies of the Southern Song and the Yuan, the policy banning coastal activity greatly inhibited local economic and social growth. As the Ming withdrew from the south, both by land (Jiaozhi, 1427) and sea (the Zheng He voyages, 1433), the emperors strongly reinforced the ban. To quote Mark Elvin,⁷⁶ “New maritime edicts, with increasingly savage penalties for disobedience, were issued in 1433, 1449, and 1452. At some point – when is not clear – the ban was extended to coastal shipping, so that, in the famous phrase, ‘there was not an inch of plank on the seas.’” So different from Fan Chengda’s twelfth century comment! The overall result was, to continue with Elvin, “... that government policy caused Chinese overseas and coastal trade to go through a prolonged depression, beginning in the fourteenth century and ending in the sixteenth.”⁷⁷ Thus, in Elvin’s eyes, through most of the fifteenth century there would have been little flow of Chinese coastal migration into the Lower Delta of the Red River.

Yet these edicts were just words, although imperial words, and their repetition implies a certain ineffectiveness of the maritime ban. What were the exact means applied by the Ming state to restrict coastal movement? How effective were these means? First was the limitation on the size of ships being built; second were the guard stations set up along the coast and manned by troops. But what was happening in the 1430s?

Let us follow Li Kangying’s recent discussion of the maritime prohibition (Ch.: *haijin*). The ban was set in motion by the Hongwu emperor’s forbidding coastal people from leaving the Ming realm. This included stipulations such as, “Coastal people are prohibited from going to sea, ...” and “No ships with two masts are allowed to be built... .” (This even included fishermen.) Coastal fortifications, staffed by local draftees, guarded the shores and inlets of southeast China, seventy-

⁷⁶ Mark Elvin, *The Pattern of the Chinese Past* (Stanford: Stanford U.P., 1973), p. 218.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 224.

four of them from Shandong to Guangdong. Armed fleets of coast guard vessels maintained shore patrols. Later years undoubtedly saw more garrisons constructed as much money went into the project. The Ming state enforced the prohibition with executions. As one Chinese author commented looking back from about 1600, constructing sea-worthy ships, recruiting crews, bringing merchants (and passengers) on board, and sailing out of the harbors under the coast guards' noses had been "impossible" (except where local officials had been part of the scheme).⁷⁸

Aside from curtailing commerce and mercantilism, the Hongwu emperor especially desired to keep the population in its place, physically and socially: in Li Kangying's words, "...to maintain the stability-orientated social and economic ideals."⁷⁹ Yet, tied in, as the maritime ban was, to socio-economic realities, how long was it effective? The system as a whole lasted for about two centuries, to 1567. Still it was probably never totally effective and would have had times of stronger and weaker enforcement as well as variations among coastal localities. Nevertheless, these rules would have restricted movement into Dai Viet and hampered efforts to maintain connections between coastal localities in China and the Lower Delta, not totally perhaps, but significantly. This seems to have been the case through the middle third of the fifteenth century, after the Ming forces abandoned Jiaozhi. The three maritime edicts of 1433, 1449, and 1452 indicate both this effort and its problems. Li Kangying states that the system remained effective for "about a century" and "a century-long period" through the middle third of the fifteenth century.⁸⁰ Thereafter socio-economic changes began to lead to strong pressures against the maritime ban.

In this way, from the 1430s on, the combination of environmental factors, warfare, reduced maritime flow of coastal Chinese, mainly Fujianese, and the *nguy quan* policy of the Le in Dai Viet meant a lesser population across the Lower Delta of the Red River. On the one hand, the Ming state did not want its people moving overseas; on the other, the new Dai Viet state and its policies would have led to the move north of many in the Ngo community and would not have welcomed new

⁷⁸ Li Kangying, *The Ming Maritime Trade Policy in Transition, 1368-1567* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2010), pp. 3-4 (quotations), 10-11, 50, 93; also Roderich Ptak, "Ming Maritime Trade in Southeast Asia, 1368-1567: Visions of a 'System'", in Claude Guillot, Denys Lombard, and Roderich Ptak, eds., *From the Mediterranean to the China Sea* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1998), pp. 159-60..

⁷⁹ Li, *Ming Maritime Trade Policy*, pp. 33, 36, 45 (quotation).

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 53, 57, 62; see also Ptak, "Ming Maritime Trade," pp. 168-69, 172-74; Hsu, *China*, pp. 349-52.

ones. There would have been little demographic replenishment from outside the already lowered population in this region. Undoubtedly, the population and numbers of villages there had dropped from even the low totals of the Ming 1417 tabulation, even with the peace and increasing prosperity of the Le state from the 1430s through the 1450s. After Le Loi's death in 1433, the government of Dai Viet was handled by the newly appointed lords from the mountain zones (and perhaps of a different cultural background), as young kings reigned. Scholar-officials became increasingly involved in central administration in these years; the lords ran the court, and there was little active governmental activity in the provinces. Some highland veterans would have settled in the population-depleted Lower Delta, but it was undoubtedly a foreign environment for them and labor must have been scarce in any case. The seized *nguy quan* and lands became the property of the state as the Le regime created a stronger fiscal base for itself with these state lands in the villages (*cong dien*). The surviving Ngo community would have picked up the pieces and continued their lives, especially with the growth in the manufacturing and commercial sectors of the northern part of the Lower Delta due to the Ming economic ban, unreinforced by much inflow from their homeland on the southeast coast.

This all changed over the last third of the fifteenth century. Because Le Loi's fourth (and last) grandson Tu Thanh 思誠 (r. Thanh-tong, 1460–1497) took the throne after a coup and countercoup, there was a fear of Ngo taking advantage of the resulting instability. In 1462, the court warned that Ngo servants in the capital region were not to have any contact with visiting Ming envoys; five years later the king pulled Ming subjects (*Ming guoren* 明國人) off a merchant ship from Sumatra and sent them home.⁸¹ But after the young king redid the state along the Ming bureaucratic model in the 1460s, strongly aided by his scholar-official allies, this concern receded and generally the community and the term for it ceased to have much political significance. Now the government became strongly involved in the localities and worked to strengthen the wellbeing of the state and its population. The new administrative structure displaced the mountain aristocrats and reached directly from the throne through the six functional ministries and the provincial, prefectural, and district offices into the villages. What did this mean for Thien Truong and Chi Linh, for the southern and northern sectors of the Lower Delta? No longer segments of the broader aristocratic circuits (South and East), these localities became part of

⁸¹ *TT* 12, pp. 9a, 33b.

the twelve (soon to be thirteen) more narrowly focused bureaucratic provinces, with their prefectures and districts leading down and out to the villages. This administrative re-organization meant that, for the first time, government policy went directly into the villages, both to deliver its Confucian moral message and to extract resources.⁸² The remaining Ngo community of the Lower Delta would have been absorbed into both the growing prosperity, enhanced by the new governmental activism, and the effective administrative structure.

Nevertheless, Le Tu Thanh had not forgotten what had occurred four decades earlier, in his grandfather's time. During his major royal progress in 1467, having finished the reorganization, the king stopped at the provincial office in Thien Truong. There he spoke with local officials, inquiring after the wellbeing of the populace and rewarding them. Four and a half years later, soon after his victorious 1470-71 campaign south against Champa and as he was in the process of officially establishing his new bureaucratic structure (Hoang Trieu Quan Che), Tu Thanh also acted to integrate those in state servitude and their descendants into his state and society. Again we hear of those who had been *nguy quan* (and also *nguy lai*, their clerks), indigenous officials, and those who had opposed the resistance and entered the Ming-held cities before surrendering. In addition, the king now mentioned those produced by the "vile" union of Ngo fathers and Kinh (Vietnamese) mothers, as well as rebel factions and foreigners from Champa, Ai Lao, and other such places. All these already had their places in the state service structure. Due to their crimes, they were to be treated as children and given family and personal names in accordance with those of his Kinh subjects. They were to marry in different districts and villages than their own, and their children and grandchildren (and their brothers' children) were to have names particular to themselves. These children were to be registered at the Pearl and Forest Agency (Chau Lam Vien) and assigned their own service categories.⁸³

An example of such Ngo servitude was recorded four years earlier. Dao Bao was a Ngo captured in the conquest of one of the occupied cities in 1427 and placed in service to Le Sat, a Mount Lam general and the lord who held power in the court from 1433 to 1437. After Sat's fall and the confiscation of his property, Bao eventually became a member of the retinue of the young Le prince Tu Thanh. In 1467,

⁸² John K. Whitmore, "Paperwork: The Rise of the New Literati and Ministerial Power and the Effort toward Legibility in Dai Viet," in Wade and Sun, eds., *Southeast Asia in the 15th Century*, pp. 104-16.

⁸³ *TT* 12, pp. 29a, 66a.

as a naval commander, Bao was charged with going against orders and sentenced to death. On the basis of Bao's past personal service to the young prince, however, Tu Thanh commuted the sentence to demotion as a common soldier in the paddy fields.⁸⁴

With the state of Dai Viet strengthening via its greater efficiency of resource control and military capability, including firearms, during the 1470s Tu Thanh took on foreign threats; as noted, he crushed Champa and opened the south to Vietnamese expansion, then he attacked the Tai realms to the west in 1479 and thereafter.⁸⁵ The 1480s saw greater state concerns over the villages and rural areas. At this time, the king established a *don dien* (Ch.: *tuntian* 屯田, or "military farm") policy. It appears that he actively moved to make up for the depleted population of the Lower Delta in order to insure greater productivity in the region. Li Tana shows the great gain in population for the Lower Delta by 1490. The number of villages across the region doubled or tripled in different localities from the Ming count of 1417 and probably increased more than that when measured against the period right after the war and in the 1430s, perhaps the low point in the fifteenth century. While the core of the northern sector around Chi Linh tripled its number of villages, that in the southern area went up four-fold, all this despite the general decrease in rainfall over the previous two centuries. Li Tana then describes how the *don dien*, established mainly in the Lower Delta, in 1481 were meant to bring into cultivation what were then vacant lands.⁸⁶ Linking these *don dien* to the aftermath of the Champa and Tai wars, she sees this program as a way both of productively employing his veterans and of making sure the delta lands contributed to his state and society, in the king's words, "... to gain full use of (our) agricultural potential and to broaden the resources of the realm."⁸⁷ Overall, what flow there had been over the previous half century from the end of the Ngo war of Thanh Hoa and Nghe An resistance veterans and their families into the Lower Delta was topped off by the *don dien* for the latest war veterans. Tu Thanh's governmental activism organized and guided it.

Here then was a prosperous and growing population, which, together with a state program to set veterans to work, helped fill in

⁸⁴ *TT* 12, pp. 53b-54a; Whitmore, "Van Don," p. 108.

⁸⁵ John K. Whitmore, "The Two Great Campaigns of the Hong-Duc Era (1470-97) in Dai Viet," *South East Asia Research* 12.1 (2004), pp. 119-36.

⁸⁶ Li, "Ming Factor," pp. 93-95.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*; *TT* 13, p. 31a (quotation); *Kham dinh Viet su Thong giam cuong muc* 欽定越史通鑑綱目 (1884) 23, pp. 36b-37a, as taken from *Thien Nam du ha tap* 天南餘暇集 (15th c.; E.F.E.O. microfilm A.334).

the agriculture of the Lower Delta. A third element in the population growth of this region may have been a loosening (though not an actual removal) by the Ming of their maritime ban. The strongly developed state of fifteenth century Dai Viet, together with the flourishing sea trade of the Southeast Asian islands at the time,⁸⁸ provided opportunities both for profit in trade and for labor and land again in the Lower Delta. The manufacturing cluster and commerce of the northern sector as well as the agricultural increase in the southern part could well have been magnets once again for southeast coast Chinese, especially with episodes wherein local control of that coast weakened and corruption and smuggling set in. At this time a variety of social elements was living on the sea and along the coasts who, if they wished land and to settle down, were available to take advantage of opportunities presented in the Lower Delta. This included Dan 蟹 fisherfolk, among them perhaps the future royal Mac/Mo clan.⁸⁹ Despite the bias as expressed by Tu Thanh against Ngo fathers and Kinh mothers (see above), I can see the Ngo community beginning to pick up once more in the Lower Delta east of the capital of Thang Long through the final decades of the fifteenth century.

EMERGENCE OF A NEW NGO COMMUNITY IN THE SOUTH

By the end of the fifteenth century, Dai Viet had overcome the devastation of the first third of the century. The mountain forces had initially crushed their littoral opposition, particularly in the Ngo community, and Tu Thanh during his Quang Thuan reign (1460–1469) and Hong Duc reign (1470–1497) remodeled both state and society, in the process of which having his lands mapped for the very first time. The depopulation at the beginning of the century in the Lower Delta, northern and southern, had been reversed, and this region was thriving. Nevertheless, the montane and the littoral of Dai Viet with their highland and Ngo communities never quite fused. The tale of the sixteenth century consisted of this fact.

The increasing chaos of the first quarter of the sixteenth century was fueled by this conflict between the two regions, and the rest of the

⁸⁸ Anthony Reid, *Southeast Asia in the Age of Commerce*, vol. 2, *Expansion and Crisis* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), pp. 4–6, 13–14; Whitmore, “Van Don,” pp. 111–13.

⁸⁹ Li, *Ming Maritime Trade Policy*, pp. 57, 62–66; Gang Zhao, “Restructuring the Authority of the Ancestor: Zhu Yuanzhang’s Role in the Evolution of Ming Maritime Policy (1400–1600),” in Schneewind, *Long Live the Emperor!*, pp. 92–97, 100, 102; also Robert J. Antony in this volume.

century saw decades of war between them.⁹⁰ Initially, Le Uy Muc De (r. 1505–1509), who was originally blocked from ascending the throne, turned to his own distaff families, in the Lower Delta, to go against his mountain paternal kin. The corruption of these women’s relatives and the resulting warfare strongly disrupted the environment and the economy of the Lower Delta.⁹¹ Then, within a decade, a strong uprising emerged from the northern Lower Delta around Chi Linh to restore the Tran/Chen dynasty and its aristocratic system, including Buddhism, with another figure named Tran Cao as claimant, said to be a reincarnation of the first. Various elements were involved in this action, including Chams. Though there is no direct indication of Ngo participation, those who held the second Tran Cao to be a reincarnation were possibly Ngo.⁹² Where the latter did appear was in the efforts of the Mac/Mo clan of Co Trai on the coast. Their leader, Mac Dang Dung, was born in 1483 in the northern Lower Delta to a fishing family (as had the Tran/Chen three centuries before); it was said that he was originally a Dan (according to a Chinese source). Whether his immediate family was or was not directly from China is difficult to say, but Dang Dung grafted his line onto a treasured Ngo lineage going back seven generations (covering two centuries) to the scholar official Mac Dinh Chi (ca. 1280–1350), including the major *nguy quan* family of Mac Thuy. I believe that it was Mac/Mo historians in the first decade or so of Mac/Mo rule who compiled the original Le section (1428–1527) of the *Chronicle*, for example adding to the official version the three Tran Cao tales mentioned above that linked him to Co Long and the Ngo community.⁹³

Gaining both power and support from literati as he urged the restoration of Le Tu Thanh’s bureaucratic Hong Duc model, Mac Dang Dung (r. 1528–1541) disposed of the Le royal family, chased the montane aristocracy back into the highlands of Mount Lam, and took the throne. Like the Tran/Chen and Thien Truong in the thirteenth century, Dang Dung established his family base, this time in the northern sector

⁹⁰ Nola Cooke, “Regionalism and the Nature of Nguyen Rule in Seventeenth Century Dang Trong (Cochinchina),” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 29 (1998), pp. 125–44.

⁹¹ Whitmore, “Van Don,” pp. 113–14.

⁹² *TT* 10, pp. 55b; 15. . 27a–b, 30b, 33a.

⁹³ John K. Whitmore, “Chung-hsing and Cheng-t’ung in Texts of and on 16th Century Viet Nam,” in Keith W. Taylor and John K. Whitmore, eds., *Essays into Vietnamese Pasts* (Ithaca: Southeast Asia Program, Cornell University, 1995), pp. 124–29; Kathlene Baldanza, “The Ambiguous Border: Sino-Vietnamese Diplomacy in the Early Modern World,” Ph.D. diss. (University of Pennsylvania, 2010), pp. 58–59, and in this volume. On the Dan, see Antony in this volume.

at Co Trai, while also keeping Thang Long as the capital.⁹⁴ As in Fan Chengda's description almost 400 years earlier, we see the coastal Ngo elements at this time (the 1550s) in the description of the Portuguese missionary Gaspar da Cruz – a very Sinicized society and realm.⁹⁵ Was this view too seen through the coastal prism and thus overemphasizing the Sinic nature of Vietnamese society? It is probably so. In the meantime, the shattered montane aristocracy, led by the Nguyen and Trinh clans, regrouped at Mount Lam and in the Lao highlands and placed a Le prince on their throne. Gradually, from the 1530s, this group gained strength. The Mac/Mo court, despite its Ngo connections, found itself caught between the Ming court (now supporting as legitimate its old enemy the Le against the Ngo) and the Le restoration forces.⁹⁶ With the former on their north and the latter to their south, the Mac/Mo regime faced potential adversaries in both directions.

Like the Ming at the beginning of the previous century, the coastal Mac/Mo were unable to reach deeply into the mountains to wipe out the Le resistance. Negotiating and settling with the Ming on their north,⁹⁷ the Mac/Mo continued their long and eventually losing battle with the montane Le forces, lasting six decades into the 1590s. With their loss of Thang Long and the Red River delta, the Le troops destroying Co Trai, the Ngo forces of the Mac/Mo and the Ming reconnected, and the Chinese court provided protection for the defeated Mac/Mo in their own mountain redoubt north along the Sino-Vietnamese frontier in Cao Bang.

At the same time, the Mac/Mo had maintained a base in the newest section of Dai Viet, down the coast where the Champa kingdom had been defeated by Le Tu Thanh. There a new Ngo community was forming. A sixteenth-century Mac/Mo text titled *O chau can luc* 烏州近錄 (*Recent Record of O chau* [central Vietnam]) shows that the Mac/Mo regime was solidly established in the coastal region of modern central Vietnam.⁹⁸ It describes the clothes of the locals as “no different from those of the Central Kingdom” (similar to Van Don 300 years before) and notes the existence of Ngo villages there (as well as Phan [Ch.: Fan] villages, those of other foreigners?). Evidence presented by Brian

⁹⁴ Whitmore, “Secondary Capitals,” pp. 168–70.

⁹⁵ C. R. Boxer, *South China in the Sixteenth Century* (London: Hakluyt Society, 1953), p. 73.

⁹⁶ Baldanza, “Ambiguous Border,” chap. 2.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, chap. 3, and in this volume.

⁹⁸ Duong Van An, *O Chau Can Luc*, pp. 44, 225 [34a] (quotation); Li, *Nguyen Cochinchina*, p. 23.

Zottoli suggests that there was a gradual merger of the Mac/Mo and Nguyen clans in this southern territory (information later removed by the Nguyen dynasty) through the second half of the century.⁹⁹ Eventually, the Nguyen clan, originally a mountain ally of Le Loi and strongly favored by Le Tu Thanh's mother, gained power in the south and erased the prior memory.¹⁰⁰

In this Cham territory, under first the Mac/Mo, then the Nguyen, the new Sino-Vietnamese littoral society appeared and welcomed Chinese from the southeast coast. This occurred as the Portuguese (joined by the Spanish from Manila) shifted their focus from the South and Southeast Asian pepper and spice trade to prosperous Ming China and East Asia in general, founding Macao. With the new trade system emerging in the Asian seas and a greater level of smuggling occurring (involving so-called *wokou* pirates), the Ming maritime ban crumbled under the Jiajing emperor (r. 1522–1566) and disappeared upon his death.¹⁰¹ The coastal Chinese movement revived and headed this time toward Hoi An 會安 (Ch.: Jiuzhou – the “old” Champa port of the Thu Bon River system) to take advantage of the rising trade with Japanese merchants that was unwelcome in Ming ports. A new Ngo community thus came into being (eventually to be called Minh Huong 明香, Ming Loyalists), now on the central coast of Vietnam.¹⁰² A new Thien Truong rose at Phu Xuan 富春 (later to be the capital Hue), keeping the Vietnamese in touch with contemporary China, irrespective of indigenous tradition. The Vietnamese southern coast thus maintained contact with and paid attention to the contemporary dynamism of China via the latter's southeast coast (as the northern Vietnamese had done from its Lower

⁹⁹ Brian Zottoli, “Reconceptualizing Southern Vietnamese History from the 15th to 18th Centuries: Competition along the Coasts from Guangdong to Cambodia,” Ph.D. diss. (University of Michigan, 2011), chaps. 3–6; idem, “From Champa to Cochinchina: Regional Dimensions of Champa's Transformation from the 15th to 18th Centuries,” paper presented at the Conference on New Research in Historical Campa Studies, Paris, June 2012.

¹⁰⁰ J.K. Whitmore, “Queen Mother: The Origin of Family Politics in Early Modern Viet Nam,” in G. Bousquet and N. Taylor, eds., *Le Viet Nam au féminin* (Paris: Les Indes Savantes, 2005), pp. 43–50.

¹⁰¹ Li, *Ming Maritime Trade Policy*, chaps. 4–5; Timothy Brook, *Confusions of Pleasure: Commerce and Culture in Ming China* (Berkeley: U. California P., 1998), pp. 117–24, 204–7; Antony in this volume; John K. Whitmore, “Vietnam and the Monetary Flow of Eastern Asia, 13th to 18th Centuries,” in J. F. Richards, ed., *Precious Metals in the Later Medieval and Early Modern Worlds* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1983), pp. 377–81; John W. Dardess, *A Political Life in Ming China: A Grand Secretary and His Times* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2013), chap. 3, “The Coast.” For a recent broad view of the Eurasian context, see chap. 8, “Convergence in the Far East,” in Howard J. Erlichman, *Conquest, Tribute, and Trade: The Quest for Precious Metals and the Birth of Globalization* (Amherst, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 2010), pp. 313–60.

¹⁰² Li, *Nguyen Cochinchina*.

Delta under the Tran/Chen). The state of Dai Viet in Dong Kinh under Trinh control would, on the other hand, now become engrossed in the Chinese past and traditions as well as in its own, with less contact with contemporary China.

For half a millennium, then, from the twelfth century into the seventeenth, Chinese (Ngo) communities, first in the Lower Delta of the Red River, then on the central coast of Viet Nam, formed with important economic, social, political, and cultural consequences for Dai Viet and eventually for Viet Nam. These “fusion” zones, as I have suggested elsewhere,¹⁰³ kept in contact via the Chinese connections and their southeast coast with contemporary China. In this way, the littoral segments of Vietnamese society maintained a certain significance vis-a-vis the Vietnamese state’s power structure. Eventually, mountain forces, the Le followed by the Trinh, came to control the capital of Thang Long in the north. Through all these centuries, the lowland Vietnamese in the capital region and the mid-river section of the Red River delta found themselves caught between montane and littoral, having been conquered by the Tran/Chen, the Ho/Hu, the Ming, and eventually the Mac/Mo from the coast, with the Le, the Nguyen, and the Trinh contesting the core of the Vietnamese state from their highland territory.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

TT *Dai Viet su ky toan thu* 大越史記全書

¹⁰³ Whitmore, “Rise of the Coast,” pp. 111–12.