Nguyen Lords' Policies on Ethnic Minorities in Cochinchin

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Abstract: The civil war of Trinh – Nguyễn lasted nearly half a century (1627-1672). Trịnh and Nguyễn Lords agreed "to take Gianh river as the border line. The South of the river is Nam Hà and the North is Bắc Hà. Both sides got ceasefire since then" (MVNH, 2004: 88). In old history documents, Bắc Hà was called Đàng Ngoài (Tonkin), Nam Hà was Đàng Trong (Cochinchin) which formed Đại Việt. Once settled, Nguyễn Lords paid much attention to policies for ethnic minorities. The author focuses on Nguyễn Lords' policies in this period, namely suppressing minorities' rebels to accelerate Southwards movement and strengthening South permanence of Cochin, protecting and using surrenders and ethnic minority talents, expelling discrimination and allowing ethnic minorities live in their cultural traditions and customs.

Key words: Cochinchin, Nguyễn Lords, Đại Việt, ethnic minorities.

1. Introduction

Nguyễn Hoàng was assigned to administrate Thuận Hóa town in 1558, then in 1570, Lê -Trịnh appointed him to take care Quảng Nam province. The Southern land of Quảng Nam then was Tuy Viễn district, Hoài Nhân metropolis (now Quy Nhon city, Bình Định province). Across the Cù Mông Pass, the boundary between Bình Định and Phú Yên province was the Champa country. It could be said that, since being assigned proconsul of Thuận Hóa, Chúa Tiên (Nguyễn Hoàng) had a big ambition to divide the country into 2 parts and developed his power to the South to confront the Trịnh family in Tonkin.

In 1611, Nguyễn Hoàng sent Văn Phong attacked Champa, took the land from opposite Cù Mông Pass to Thạch Bi mountain (named Đá Bia mountain by Lê Thánh Tông King in 1471) to form Phú Yên province consisting of two districts: Đồng Xuân và Tuy Hòa, and assigned Văn Phong ruled the land (MVNH, 2004: 36).

When dying in 1613, Nguyễn Hoàng

told Prince Nguyễn Phúc Nguyên that: "In Thuận Quảng land, there rugged Hoành Sơn mountains (Đèo Ngang) and Linh Giang (Gianh) river in the North, the South is surrounded by sustainable Hải Vân and Thạch Bi mountain. Gold and iron are available in the mountain, salt and fish in the sea, this is the hunting ground of any hero. If you know how to teach people, train soldiers to fight against the Trịnh dynasty, it is enough to build the eternal hereditary. If your forces cannot fight the enemy, then try to keep the land and wait for the chance, but do not ignore my advice"(MVNH, 2004: 37).

In 1629, long lasting Phú Yên leader Văn Phong changed mind to follow Champa throne and used Champa army of to counter. Nguyễn Phúc Nguyên Lord commanded Deputy Captain Nguyễn Phúc Vinh to

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restore the territory and changed Phú Yên metropolis to Trấn Biên palace. In any new expansion of Cochinchin territory, Nguyễn Lords called it "Trấn Biên" (Frontier Facade) (MHVH, 2004: 44).

In 1648, Trịnh Tráng's military invaded Nam Hà land. Nguyễn Phúc Lan Lord was unwell then, so he commanded his son Nguyễn Phúc Tần replace him to fight the enemy back. In the battle at Quảng Bình county, Nguyễn's military defeated and captured many generals and 30,000 Trịnh's troops. Nguyễn Phúc Lan Lord had to take a meeting to find a solution with so many surrenders. Some suggested that the best strategy to deal with cheeky enemy is to isolate them in deep mountains or islands for not to be worry later. Other proposed to kill generals and sent troops home in the North.

But Nguyễn Phúc Lan Lord had a wise, humane choice to state: "Currently, from Thăng Hoa, Điện Bàn areas to the South are old land of Chăm people with little population density. If we bring them there and provide them buffalos and plows, set administrative units and grant them food to make new water rice fields, then within a few years tax revenues may be enough for country use, and after twenty years the spawning will be enough to add troops, then there are nothing to worry about "(MVNH, 2004: 59). After that, he released some 60 Trinh generals back to the North, then assigned 30,000 soldiers to stay from Thăng Hoa, Điện Bàn to Phú Yên, every 50 people form a village and provide them food for half a year. He demanded the rich lend them rice and let them search the

benefits to live. Since then, from Thăng Hoa, Điện Bàn to Phú Yên, villages interconnected and household were significantly increased (MVNH, 2004: 59).

In 1653, when realizing Bà Tấm - the King of Champa - often invaded Phú Yên, Nguyễn Phúc Tần Lord sent captain Hùng Lộc and deputy cum consultant Minh Vũ attacked them. Nguyễn's soldiers overtook Hổ Dương Pass, Thạch Bi mountain and went straight to the capital of Champa, launched the fire in the night, defeated the Champa that led Bà Tấm dropped and fled. Nguyễn's soldiers went on to reach Phan Rang river, forced Bà Tấm sent her son Xác Bà Ân to ask for surrendering.

Nguyễn Phúc Tần Lord again occupied a large portion of Champa land, from Phú Yên to Phan Rang river and established two metropolises: Thái Khang (consisting of two districts, Quảng Phúc and Tân An), and Diên Ninh (later renamed Diên Khánh, consisting of three districts: Phúc Điền, Vĩnh Xương, Hoa Châu). Two newly formed metropolises formed Thai Khang palace (now Khánh Hòa), administrated by do Hùng Lộc (MVNH, 2004: 62). Since then, most land of two small nations Champa and Hoa Anh assigned by Lê Thánh Tông King (MVNH, 2004: 106, 107) had been incorporated into Đại Việt territory, which led Bà Tấm -King of Champa only kept the South land of Phan Rang river and had to annually serve to Nguyễn Lords.

After the end of Trinh - Nguyễn war (1627 - 1672), Nguyễn Lords accelerated southwards aggressively. In 1693, Nguyễn Phúc Chu Lord assigned General Nguyễn Hữu Kính attacked Champa that made Bà Tranh, King of Champa fled. In April 1693, Nguyễn Hữu Kính captured Bà Tranh, her assistants Tả Trà Viên Kế Bà Tử and Năng Mi Bà Ân and brought them to Phú Xuân. Nguyễn Phúc Chu Lord instantly changed remaining Champa land in the South of Phan Rang river to Thuận Thành town and incorporated into territory of Đại Việt. Since then, Champa diminished (MVNH, 2004: 106, 107).

The southward progress of Nguyễn Lords in Cochinchin happened relatively fast and steady due to many reasons. It is possible that one of the main causes was the Nguyễn Lords' appropriate policies for ethnic minorities in the new land. The next parts briefly describe those polices.

2. The Southward progress acceleration and Cochinchin sustainability strengthening

After defeating Champa, Captain Nguyễn Hữu Kính took Bà Tranh, King of Champa to Phú Xuân, where Nguyễn Phúc Chu Lord charged her crimes and imprisoned in Ngọc Trản (Hòn Chén) mountain. She was monthly provided cash, rice, silk sufficiently (MVNH, 2004: 107). She died in the following year, and Nguyễn Phúc Chu Lord granted 200 silver coins and brocade fabric for her funeral (MVNH, 2004: 108).

To prevent the reaction of Chăm people, Nguyễn Phúc Chu Lord assigned captain Nguyễn Trí Thắng brought troops kept Phố Hài, captain Nguyễn Tân Lễ kept Phan Rí, captain Chu Kiêm Thắng kept Phan Rang (Phố Hài, Phan Rí, Phan Rang and Bình Thuận was then under Bình Thuận province). In September 1693, Thuận Thành town was changed into Bình Thuận metropolis. Nguyễn Phúc Chu Lord wanted to cajole Chăm people, so he appointed former governor of Champa Kế Bà Tử Chief of Binh Thuan metropolis, three children of Bà Ân as administrators and dressed in the Kinh (Vietnamese) style to rule Chăm people (MVNH, 2004: 107).

But Chăm people still rebelled to fight vehemently. In December 1693, a Champa official - Hữu Trà Viên Ốc Nha Thát cooperated with a Chinese leader in Thuận Thành named A Ban, who earlier tried to rebel in Đại Đồng when Bà Tranh was arrested. A Ban renamed Ngô Lãng and claimed to be able to call wind, change rain, and sword cannot hurt him. A Chăm person in Thuận Thành named Chế Vinh called people to follow A Ban. Then, A Ban robbed Phố Hài, captain Nguyễn Trí Thắng chased and was killed by ambush team. Dực, captain of Bà Rịa and assistant Mai brought troops to relieve but they both were killed.

A Ban continued to invade Phan Rí, knowing that Nguyễn Tân Lễ was strong and hard to defeat, he sent a Chăm girl poisoned him through a banana, which made him dumb. A Ban again used much money to lure Nguyễn Tân Lễ army rebelled. In the battle, Nguyễn Tân Lễ was stabbed to death by betrayed soldiers, the camps and assets were burned and looted. A Ban again sent troops to Phan Rang, where captain Chu Kiêm Thắng closed the citadel because of his less force. Chu Kiêm Thắng arrested Chief Kế Bà Tử and threatened to kill him had the troop not withdraw. Feared that Kế Bà Tử may be killed, Óc Nha Thát told A Ban to drop troops, then Chu Kiêm Thắng released Kế Bà Tử.

In February 1694, A Ban again led troops surrounded Phan Rang, Chu Kiêm Thắng urgently informed Bình Khang palace. Governor Nguyễn Hữu Oai và assistant Nhuận carried soldiers along the upstream direction to relieve Phan Rang. Assistant Nhuận and Captains Tống Tuân, Nguyễn Thành attacked Ô Liêm village where A Ban took control. A Ban was defeated and ran to Phố Châm, then Thượng Dã near the border of Chân Lap (Chenla). Assistant Nhuận reported situation to Nguyễn Phúc Chu, then Chu ordered captain Nguyễn Hữu Kính and assistant Trinh Tường independently solve the issue. Captain Nguyễn Hữu Kính took soldiers to defeat A Ban (MVNH, 2004: 108).

Champa forces still occasionally rebelled to Nguyễn Lords. In 1746, two Champa leaders named Dương Bao Lai và Diệp Mã Lăng rebelled in Thuận Thành. Trấn Biên administrator Nguyễn Cương built Cổ Tỉnh facade and deployed troops to fight, managed to catch and kill Dương Bao Lai và Diệp Mã Lăng (MVNH, 2004: 154).

Suppressing the Chăm leaders' revolt associated with a number of Chinese political adventurers by Nguyễn Lord is necessary and matches with the laws of historical development. Southwards movement of Vietnam, including Kinh people (Vietnamese) and the Chăm people..., still lasted more than a half century to complete. Without beating rebellion occurred continuously in Cochinchin, Vietnam could not have got unity power to carry out the great mission of expanding the border to the South.

3. Praise, use surrenders and ethnic minority talents

In the events mentioned above, some Champa people ran to Chân Lạp in the South, or West Highlands region- now the Central Highlands of Vietnam. In September 1694, Kế Bà Tử reported Nguyễn Phúc Chu Lord:"Since renaming my territory, famines often occur and Champa people died of disease so much", which implicitly wanted to restore the name of his country. Nguyễn Phúc Chu then allowed to restore Thuận Thành name and and assigned Kế Bà Tử ruled the territory (MVNH, 2004: 109).

Considering Champa people's rebellion led by A Ban and the analysis of Kế Bà Tử, Nguyễn Phúc Chu saw that it was not wise to remove Champa immediately and ruled Chăm people by Kinh people (Vietnam), so in December 1694 he enthroned Kế Bà Tử the King of Thuận Thành territory. Since then, Kế Bà Tử King directly ruled Champa people and annually served Nguyễn Lords with items. Nguyễn Phúc Chu Lord returned seals, swords, saddle horses and the Champa people previously arrested to Kế Bà Tử (MVNH, 2004: 109). The annual tribute included two male elephants, 20 yellow oxen, 6 ivories, 10 horns, 500 white cloths, 50 kg of bee wax, 200 plates of fish skin for cooking, 400 baskets of sparkling sand for washing hair, 500 white bamboo mats, 200 logs of ebony, 1 long boat (MVNH, 2004: 109).

In 1679, former generals of the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) including General of Long Môn - Dương Ngạn Địch, Deputy General Hoàng Tiến, General Trần Thượng Xuyên, Deputy General Trần An Bình brought soldiers and families of more than 3,000 people in more than 50 boats parked along the coast from Eo estuary (Tu Dung) to Đà Nẵng estuary. Official Trí Thắng Hầu of Tư Dung asked for explanation, Dương Ngạn Địch raised white flags and submitted that: "We are the exile of Great Ming, because of our country we had sworn to devote allegiance, now our strength are over and the Ming Dynasty ended, we cannot suffer to be servant of the Qing, so we run to your country and voluntarily to be your servant"(Phan Khoang, 2001: 315).

Then, Dương Ngạn Địch sent Hoàng Tiến, Quách Tam followed Trí Thắng Hầu coming to the Lord to present their wishes. Nguyễn Phúc Tần Lord (1648 - 1687) with his consultants discussed how to deal with the issue. Some people argued that: "due to their different customs, it is hard to accommodate them, but they were so desperate to come here and they could not bear to be rebutted. Now there is Đông Phố (Gia Định) in Chân Lạp country with thousand miles of fertile fields, and the court has not visited frequently, so we would allow strong workers to exploit fields to stay, one arrow kills three birds" (MVNH, 2004: 91). Nguyễn Phúc Tần Lord agreed to set banquet, comfort and praise former general officials, added them new titles and made them live in Đông Phố to expand his land.

Nguyễn Phúc Tần ordered Văn Trình, Văn Chiêu to propose a letter requesting king of Chân Lạp give him some land. They both accompanied Dương Ngạn Địch and Trần Thượng Xuyên for guidance. The fleet of Dương Ngạn Địch and Hoàng Tiến entered Lôi Lạp estuary (in Gia Định), and settled in Mỹ Tho; another fleet led by Trần Thượng Xuyên, Trần An Bình went along Cần Giờ estuary to settle in Bàn Lân, Biên Hòa province (MVNH, 1962: 125). "They expanded new agricultural land, built towns that made Chinese, Japanese, Malaysian merchant ships rushed in and out, which made indigenous people gradually absorbed Chinese culture and custom gradually" (MVNH, 1962: 91).

In Biên Hòa, Trần Thượng Xuyên gathered Chinese entrepreneurs in Cù Lao Phố near Đồng Nai river, southwards Biên Hòa province (now Đồng Nai province). In Cù Lao Phố, European, Japanese, Malaysian, Chinese people traded better and better, it became an important commercial center of the South.

In Mỹ Tho, Dương Ngạn Địch also established Great Mỹ Tho city which attracted foreign vessels crowdedly traded goods, and Chinese, Khmer, Kinh people broken wasteland to farming, establishing farms and villages. Since Dương Ngạn Địch settled in Mỹ Tho (1679), Nguyễn Hữu Kính established Gia Định (1698), it is assumed that the territory of Gia Định, Biên Hòa provinces belong to Cochinchin. In Mỹ Tho, Nguyễn Lords also established quasiadministration agencies.

In September 1708, Lord Nguyễn Phúc Chu (1691 - 1725) assigned Mạc Cửu (1658 - 1735), an entrepreneur born in Leizhou, Guangdong province, to be General of Hà Tiên. He was famous for promoting Taiwan trade oversea. Knowing Ming Dynasty could not be revived, he refused to behave in Qing Dynasty style and ran to reside in Chenla in about1680, became an official in this country.

Seeing the political chaos of this country, he opened casinos in Sài Mat metropolis to collect fees and became rich. Then, he built a facade on the beach and opened towns to gather people to Phú Quốc, Cần Bột (Kampot), Giá Khê (Rach Giá), Luống Cày, Hương Úc (Vũng Thơm, Kompong Som), Cà Mau and established 7 communes and villages. Fairy was believed to have seen on the river, so he named the land Hà Tiên (Fairy of the river). In about 1687 - 1688, Siam military (Thailand) robbed Hà Tiên, caught Mac Cửu to the harbor of Muang Gialapuri in Thailand. Later, he managed to return to Long Kỳ, and in around 1700, he came back to Hà Tiên (Phan Khoang, 2001: 326-327).

Since Nguyễn Lord established Gia Định metropolis in1698, Kinh people status on Chenla land was sustainable, while rebellion happened continuously to their neighbor with constant Siamese intervention. Considering the situation to maintain his position, Mạc Cửu followed the advice of his counselor Tô to assign Trương Cầu, Lý Xã bring pearls and silk to Phú Xuân capital to serve and wished to be chief of Hà Tiên. Nguyễn Lord received and entitled him General of Hà Tiên (Phan Khoang, 2001: 122) in August 1708 which made more people followed him (Trịnh Hoài Đức, 2005: 159).

The appropriate policies of Nguyễn

Lords on Ming Dynasty immigrant officials made them and their offspring quickly integrated into their new homeland society. They gradually became a crucial part of Vietnam people community. Nguyễn Lords never discriminated the descendants of these Chinese people, they were promoted if they got talents.

In 1735, Hà Tiên General Mạc Cửu died, Nguyễn Phúc Trú Lord rewarded him title of Vũ Nghị Earl, Great Military and assigned Mạc Cửu's son Mạc Thiên Tứ General of Hà Tiên one year later (Trịnh Hoài Đức, 2005: 145). After Trần Thượng Xuyên died, Nguyễn Lord got Trần Đại Định, his son took his father privilege and became army chief, and in turn, Trần Đại Định's son Trần Đại Lực became army captain (MVNH, 1993: 186-187).

Trinh Hoài Đức (1765 - 1825), author of the book "Gia Định thành thông chí", was an official at the early stage of Nguyễn Dynasty, under Gia Long period (1802 -1819) and early of the Minh Mênh reign (1820-1841). At early period of Minh Mệnh reign, Trinh Hoài Đức was army chief of of Gia Định town, then he was called to Phú Xuân capital to become Minister of Administration. His ancestors were in Fujian Province, China. At early Qing Dynasty (1644 - 1911), his grandfather Trịnh Hội (Sư Khổng) immigrated to Vietnam and lived in Trấn Biên (Biên Hòa). His father wasTrinh Khánh, in the reign of Nguyễn Phúc Khoát Lord (1738 - 1765), he was appointed as leader, then promoted captain. Trịnh Hoài Đức was only 10 year old when his father died, he followed his

mother to move to Phiên Trấn (Gia Định). From there, he followed teacher Võ Trường Toản to study. It could be seen that he has totally become a Vietnamese person in his second hometown (Trịnh Hoài Đức, 2005: 6).

In official Nguyễn Dynasty history books, such as Đại Nam thực lục tiền biên, Đại Nam liệt truyện tiền biên, Đại Nam chính biên liệt truyện, Đại Nam nhất thống chí, etc. or geographic-history book like Gia Định thành thông chí of Trịnh Hoài Đức, Nam triều công nghiệp diễn chí of Nguyễn Khoa Chiêm (1659 - 1736)...), authors wrote much about Ming officials failed in their coups against Qing Dynasty and fled to Vietnam where they were accepted and granted favorable conditions to live. Gradually, they have become Hoa people, one of 54 ethnic groups in Vietnam to build a peaceful and prosperous Southern land today.

4. The ethnic minorities lived up to their cultural traditions, customs and practices

History of Vietnam Southward progress showed the fact that in 1693, Champa country disappeared but Chăm people still existed, and in 1757 Thủy Chân Lạp country collapsed but Khmer people continued to reside in the South land of Cochinchin. Vietnam history proved that Nguyễn Dynasty did not implement the policies of discrimination, cultural assimilation with Champa and Khmer people in particular and other ethnic minorities of Nam Hà in general.

The book "Đại Nam thực lục tiền biên" recorded Lord Nguyễn Phúc Chu's proper policies on Chăm people as follows: "In September 1712, Kế Bà Tử - Lord of Thuận Thành territory asked for some own rules for his town. Nguyễn Phúc Chu Lord promulgated some issues: any litigation between Champa and Vietnamese people must be judged by a court of three members, within Champa people is ruled by the Lord; Two facades Kiền Kiền và Ô Cam have to guard seriously and corruption is strictly forbidden; Those who trade Champa books must get written permission from authorities; Any Thuận Thành people migrated to Phiên Trấn county are given favorable condition to do business to avoid turbulence (MVNH, 1993, Vol.2: 128).

There were no data of Kế Bà Tử and his descendants in 80 years. In March 1794, Nguyễn Dynasty history document (Đại Nam thực lục) referred Tá – possibly Kế Bà Tử's 4th or 5th generation grandnephew: "In February 1794, the King assigned Chief and Deputy Chief of Thuân Thành, which has been hereditary by Kế Bà Tử's generation to generation; Tá was the last Kế Bà Tử's heir. In 1782, Tây Sơn attacked the town and Tá brought all the national treasure to surrender them. In 1788, King Nguyễn Ánh recaptured Gia Đinh and required Tá followed but he was too afraid to obey. Tá's military forces many times ambushed and killed Nguyễn Ánh army personnel in Bình Thuân. In summer 1793, Nguyễn Ánh had army attack Phan Rí, Tá followed Tây Sơn Commander Hồ Văn Tư to the upper region. Captain Nguyễn Văn Hào chased, arrested and killed him. Since then, the title of Thuận Thành king has been removed and Nguyễn Văn Hào is appointed army commander cum chairman, captain Nguyễn Văn Chấn is appointed deputy chairman responsible for local personnel and any registry in Bình Thuận (MVNH, 1993, Vol.2: 306).

Nguyễn Lords also let ethnic minorities in Thủy Chân Lạp (as Khmer, Chinese...) live in their tradition, custom and practice. Gia Định is in the South of Vietnam, initially there were Kinh, Chinese, Khmer, Java and European people living there, the population has become bigger but they still followed their traditional clothing and furniture"(Trịnh Hoài Đức, 2005: 181).

In China, when Manchu people crossing the Great Wall of China to the Central Highland to overthrow the Ming Dynasty (1368 - 1644) and established the Qing Dynasty (1644 - 1911), they strongly implemented the assimilation policy against Chinese people, but finally they were assimilated by Han culture. The defeated nation assimilated the conqueror because the Chinese culture was older and more diversified. In Cochinchin of Vietnam, Nguyễn Lords also conquered Champa and Chenla in 17th, 18th centuries but they did not enforce assimilation policy against Champa and Khmer ethnic minorities on new land. Followings are some possible reasons.

First, Vietnam imperial dynasties since being independent from the Northern feudatory in the early 10th century onwards always implemented flexible, humanitarian practice on all ethnic minorities residing in the territory of Vietnam. The ways Nguyễn Lords implemented such policies towards ethnic minorities (Chăm, Khmer, Gia rai, Ede...) was essentially learning and inheriting Dai Việt monarchy's traditional policy.

Second, Vietnam people mainly cultivated wet rice and used to live peacefully in

villages, they loved peace and hated war. Kinh, Chăm, Khmer people... living in Nam Hà land during Nguyễn Dynasty were sympathetic, hard working and exposed to the exploitation of the feudal authorities. Furthermore, Chăm and Khmer ethnic minorities is relatively easy-going that can live harmonically with Kinh and other ethnic minorities in the Central Highlands.

Third, from Nguyễn Lords initial practices, they naturally targeted to expand and protect territory; that theory gained consensus of Kinh, Chăm, Khmer people to live together in peace and development. It is possible to conclude that Nguyễn Lords' policies towards ethnic minorities in the 17th, 18th centuries in Cochinchin were essential to build mutual respect and benefits.

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