

Nguyen Hoang's Role in Land Reclamation and Expansion in Phu Yen

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Abstract: Nguyen Hoang (1525-1613) is a historic figure who deserved particular credit for the restoration of the Later Le dynasty and set the foundation for the southward territorial expansion and the establishment of “*Đàng Trong*” (Southern land, the region in Central Vietnam, which was later enlarged to become Cochinchina) during the period of the Nguyen lords. He was highly appreciated in the historical documents of not only the Nguyen but also the Later Le, who were in the mutually antagonistic relationship. Ruling the region as a lord, he created a new region named Phu Yen, extending the national territory one latitude southwards. On the occasion of the 400-year anniversary of Nguyen Hoang's death, we would like to present some explanations so as to honour him as a predecessor of great credit for the national defence and territorial expansion.

Keywords: Nguyen Hoang, Phu Yen, *Đàng Trong*, Luong Van Chanh.

Subject classification: History

1. Introduction

As a breakthrough in recognising systematically and scientifically the roles of the Nguyen lords and the Nguyen dynasty (lasting from the 16th to the 19th century), which is one of the major topics on the history of Vietnam, a large-scale scientific conference was held in mid-October 2008 in Thanh Hoa, the original homeland of the relatively well-known Nguyen lineage. Later on, another relevant

conference which was entitled “Quang Tri, Where Lord Nguyen Hoang Developed his Great Career from 1558 to 1613” (Vietnamese: *Quảng Trị - Đất dựng nghiệp của chúa Nguyễn Hoàng 1558-1613*) was held in late September 2013, on the occasion of the 400-year anniversary of the death of Nguyen Hoang.

With the two significant conferences, therefore, actions and achievements of Nguyen Hoang were described and assessed quite comprehensively, outlining

clearly the image of a national pre-eminent leader in the late medieval period in Vietnam. In regard to the initial stages of the southward expansion, Phu Yen was evidently seen as a place showing the hallmark of his achievements in the national territorial expansion under his reign.

Of the eight papers presented at the conference held in Thanh Hoa, which mentioned directly the roles of the historical figure establishing the reign of the Nguyen in history with respect to Phu Yen, the most remarkable one is the paper of Nguyen Thi Hau with the title "Nguyen Hoang and First Steps towards South Central Vietnam" (Vietnamese: *Nguyễn Hoàng và bước đầu tiến vào vùng Nam Trung Bộ*). Acknowledging that Phu Yen prefecture was the territory of the vassal state of Hoa Anh prior to the punitive attack carried out by Nguyen Hoang, the author of the paper emphasised: "After being inaugurated as the governor of Quang Nam (1570), in 1578 Duke Nguyen Hoang appointed Luong Van Chanh as the prefect of Tuy Vien district, one of the two districts of Binh Dinh province that were contiguous to the land of the vassal state of Hoa Anh, and commissioned him to mobilise and recruit exiles and local people for the settlement and land reclamation in Cu Mong, Ba Dai, and Da Dien (...) The establishment of Phu Yen prefecture in 1611 by Nguyen Hoang marked the beginning of the southward expansion carried out by the government of the Nguyen lords in *Đàng Trong* (Southern land, the region in Central Vietnam, which was later

enlarged to become Cochinchina). It was also seen as the end of the vassal state of Hoa Anh, which had existed for over 140 years since 1471" [16, pp.70, 74]. It is possible to say that such a long period of the existence of the vassal state of Hoa Anh mentioned in the paper does not match the historical documents² and, moreover, the role of Nguyen Hoang as a pioneer in the southward expansion was not described and assessed systematically.

Of about ten papers relating to Phu Yen province, which were presented at another conference held in Quang Tri province with the title "From Land of Quang Tri - Nguyen Hoang Started Sovereignty over Cochinchina" (Vietnamese: *Từ đất Quảng Trị - Nguyễn Hoàng khởi nghiệp Đàng Trong*), the paper of Do Quynh Nga mentioned again such a period of the existence of the vassal state of Hoa Anh; i.e. it lasted from 1471 to 1611, as stated previously by Nguyen Thi Hau. In addition, the paper seems to have relied on folk legends to determine that the land reclamation for village settlement took place right after the attack on Thanh Ho Citadel (1578) and before the official order given by Governor Nguyen Hoang (1597): "Nominally, the attack was aimed at keeping the previous order and the existing border between the two countries. In essence, however, the Nguyen lord made an advance by sending people to the region for land reclamation and, consequently, scattered villages were gradually set up" [5, p.104]. Obviously, the above-mentioned approach is a cliché stemming from the subjective feeling about the documents.

In addition, of a series of monographs written by foreign scholars under the title “Historical Issues of Vietnam” (Vietnamese: *Những vấn đề lịch sử Việt Nam*) in a volume of the review “Past and Present” (Vietnamese: *Xưa & Nay*) published prior to the above-mentioned conferences, Keith W. Taylor’s paper “Nguyen Hoang and the Beginning of Vietnam’s Southward Expansion” (Vietnamese: *Nguyễn Hoàng và bước mở đầu cuộc Nam tiến của người Việt*) and Li Tana’s paper “Cochinchina in the 17th and 18th Centuries: An Alternative Vietnam” (Vietnamese: *Xứ Đàng Trong thế kỷ XVII và XVIII - Một mô hình khác của Việt Nam*) mention quite comprehensively many issues during the reign of Nguyen Hoang. Unfortunately, they do not provide interpretations on the events relating to Phu Yen. The following is the only paragraph written by Keith Taylor about the region: “In 1611, hostilities with the Chams resulted in the formation of Phu Yen, a new jurisdiction in the region of modern Tuy Hoa. Before this time, Binh Dinh had been the southernmost command of Hoang’s domain with the border at Cu Mong. With the acquisition of Phu Yen, the border was shifted to the cape called Varella. The southern border was easily expanded, in contrast to the fixed line that marked the northern border both of the Le realm with China and of the Nguyen lands with the Trinh domain. The experience of an expanding frontier is reminiscent of the broadening horizons experienced by the early Ly kings during the eleventh century, before the Sino-Vietnamese border was clearly defined. But it also

drew the Vietnamese away from the source of their own traditions and exposed them to a non-Vietnamese world with possibilities of being Vietnamese in nontraditional ways” [8, p.179].

Discussing the achievements of the late lord Nguyen Hoang, it would be a severe shortcoming, if we did not mention the roles of the subordinates who were responsible for the border remote areas. A book entitled “Luong Van Chanh - Life and Career” (Vietnamese: *Luong Văn Chánh - Thân thế và sự nghiệp*) edited by Nguyen Van Thuong, which consists of monographs on a local figure, is such a work. The significance of the figure and events has become, however, pragmatic due to the explanations full of the authors’ main ideas. Making assessment of the event in the Year of Metal Pig (Tan Hoi) (1611), it is written as the follows: “... Phu Yen prefecture was initially established. At that time, the troops of the Kingdom of Champa were invading the border area. The lord commanded a bureau secretary (Vietnamese: *Chủ sự*) named Van Phong (surname unknown) to take the army to seize it (the land) back. As a result, a prefecture was established, consisting of Dong Xuan and Tuy Hoa districts. On the occasion, Van Phong was assigned to administer the land” [10, pp.43-44]. As written in the historical record entitled “Remote Frontier” (Vietnamese: *Tiền biên*) released under the Nguyen dynasty, the author claimed: “Luong Van Chanh... got success in the land, where he directed the land reclamation for the village establishment.

Thus, there were not any disturbances in the area over the period, when he was still alive. Until 1611, after he passed away..., some disturbances took place, but they were not severe at all. Nguyen Hoang sent Van Phong to the area to pacify the disturbances very quickly. Mentioning the event, historical documents have only one brief sentence. Neither fierce battles nor large-scale suppression were recorded at all. It demonstrates that Van Phong got success very quickly without any difficulties. And by extension, Luong Van Chanh had a lot of prestige in his life and the national harmony was highly appreciated. The disturbances taking place afterwards, consequently, could not mobilise powerful forces to cause serious impact to the stabilisation of the situation by the apparatus of administration of the Viet” [13, pp.98-99]. In addition to the arbitrary fabrication of the details of Nguyen Van Chanh’s biography, the historical context of the border area in the early time of the country was described exaggeratedly due to the impromptu moods of the officials, who wrote the historical documents. While they tried to raise a high opinion of local meritorious figures, it was an appropriate way that they lowered the mission of the conquerors.

Realising the geographical significances of the new land, Phu Yen, which was extremely important to the general situation of the southward expansion carried out by the Nguyen lords, this paper is focused on the key points seen as the hallmarks in the early stage.

2. Major content

2.1. Nguyen Hoang’s credit in the national history

2.1.1. Records in the chronicles under the Later Le dynasty

Being descended from the lineage of Nguyen Kim, who was a meritorious mandarin under the Revival Le dynasty (Vietnamese: *Lê trung hưng*), Nguyen Hoang was mentioned in the historical documents written over the rise and fall of the Later Le dynasty as a figure with admirable achievements. No matter what far-reaching motive it was³, the report made by Great Preceptor Trinh Kiem to King Le Anh Tong in the Year of Earth Horse (Mau Ngo) (1558) at Tay Kinh general headquarter in Thanh Hoa province, when discussing the way to fight against the army of the Mac dynasty and when Nguyen Hoang was titled “Duke of Doan”, was emphasised by the pen of Le Quy Don, a historical writer of the previous dynasty, as follows: “I, Your Majesty’s humble subject, have realised that Nguyen Hoang, second son of Chiem Huan Tinh, is a serene and determined man, who is well versed in planning and strategy, while he has a plain and tolerant attitude towards soldiers. Thus, I would like to beg you to appoint him to be a commander in the frontier so as to keep the public order and fight against the enemy from the North. In addition, he can cooperate with the duke governing Quang Nam to provide mutual assistance for

each other. Let him at his will take control over everything, both important and unimportant things, in the local area. Let mandate him to collect taxes and deliver them to the royal court on the deadline for domestic expenditure. Thus, we will no longer worry about the whole region of O Chau and I will pay the entire mind on the eastern pacification without being distracted... The restoration will be successful soon at that time” [2, p.306]. It was Thuan Hoa region, where the Duke of Doan [Nguyen Hoang], who was also the military governor, came immediately to exercise the mission. The result was not different from what was expected at the beginning with the trust: “King Le Anh Tong accepted the proposal. Since then, Mac Phuc Nguyen no longer had the intention of invading Thuan and Quang regions” [2, p.306].

Many years later, after being appointed to govern Quang Nam county, Duke Nguyen Hoang was still highly appreciated for his achievements, as recorded by the mandarins responsible for writing history under the Later Le dynasty: “Hoang soothed and governed for more than ten years. He ruled with geniality, applied law with impartiality, often granted favour, and implemented justice. He usually made corrections and gave advice to the army under his command. Cruel forces were strictly banned and eliminated. The inhabitants of the two districts [Thuan Hoa and Quang Nam] admired his kindness. Public morality and customs were improved; people were not overcharged at the market. People did not become bandits;

doors were not locked; seaborne merchants from foreign kingdoms all came to buy and sell things at reasonable prices; a trading centre was established; military discipline was strict; everyone worked hard. From that time, men of Mac did not dare come for plunder and the borderlands were at peace” [17, Vol.3, p.147]. More remarkably, Nguyen Hoang was successful in not only maintaining security and peace in the two districts under his command but also collecting taxes to provide support for the people and the army of the government in Tay Kinh (lit. Western Capital), making it better for them to carry out resistance against the army of the Mac dynasty in all battlefields. As a result, in the autumn of the Year of Water Dragon (Nham Thin) (1592), the army of the Le - Trinh dynasty drove off the army of the Mac dynasty to the northern border, taking control over Dong Do (lit. Eastern Capital). Next year, the Year of Water Snake (Quy Ti), Nguyen Hoang took all treasures and troops to join the Le – Trinh dynasty and he was titled “Duke of Doan”. He undertook the task of pursuing the remnants of the Mac army in the northeast sea for eight years. By the Year of Metal Rat (Canh Ty) (1600), he returned Thuan Quang, after having realised the Trinh’s unruly abuse of power over the Le king and their U-turn behaviour towards the credit and appropriate rewards he deserved.

Commenting on the event, Le Quy Don wrote: “Duke of Doan saw that he made more and more credit, but rewards were no longer bestowed upon him...” [3,

p.62]; when the military generals, who had turned traitor to the Mac dynasty earlier, started to lead their naval forces to betray the Le-Trinh dynasty, “Nguyen Hoang pretended to take the army to suppress the traitors, but in reality he set fire to all the barracks and left to Quang Nam on boats. The country was then separated and people fell in a disordered state” [2, p.375]. Meanwhile, Lord Trinh Tung, who was manipulating the government in Dong Do, bitterly regretted missing out the most dangerous opponent by rashness: “Duke of Doan had taken control over Thuan Quang for over 30 years. He had been loved and admired by local people. When he returned the region, he was really in his element like fish in water or birds in jungles; it was impossible [for the Le-Trinh dynasty] to take control over him at that time” [2, p.376]. Obviously, Nguyen Hoang’s decision about freeing himself stemmed from the conspiracy of the descendant of the Trinh, who tried to dominate and usurp the power of the Le dynasty.

2.1.2. Records in the national historical documents under the Nguyen dynasty

Together with the fact that Grand Preceptor Trinh Kiem submitted his report to King Le Anh Tong, asking for appointing Nguyen Hoang to be in charge of governing and defending Thuan Hoa in the Year of Earth Horse (Mau Ngo) (1558), it was written by the National History Bureau of the Nguyen Dynasty (Vietnamese: *Quốc Sử quán triều Nguyễn*) during the time under the reign of Emperor Thieu Tri as follows:

“Thuan Hoa is an important land, which provides troops and wealth. It contributed crucial part towards the success achieved in the early period of the dynasty. At present, however, people still remain devious; many of them crossed the sea to defect to the Mac and some may take the enemy back to do pillaging. It cannot be peaceful, if there is not a talented military officer governing and keeping peace. The Duke of Doan [Nguyen Hoang] is a son of the military lineage and versed in planning and strategy. Thus, he can be sent to stand guard in this place; he and the commander of Quang Nam will provide mutual assistance for each other, looking after all our worries in the south. The Le king accepted the proposal and granted the commanding flag. Hoang was mandated to undertake all the tasks involved; what he had to do is to deliver the amount of taxes he collected to the government every year” [10, p.31]. According to the report of the Grand Preceptor, Nguyen Hoang did not have particular virtues, except for being versed in military planning and strategy. His ruling way was, however, considered extraordinarily effective: “The lord knew how to console civilians and soldiers, while employing talented people and imposing reasonable taxes. This made him loved and admired by the people. At that time, they often called him *Chúa Tiên* (lit. Lord Immortal). The kingship really started with such foundation” [10, p.32].

In another situation, Nguyen Hoang could compare to the commander of Nghe An in terms of the tactics for launching counter-attacks against the Mac army. It

was a sound choice that he was appointed to replace Nguyen Ba Quynh to govern Quang Nam county in the Year of Metal Horse (Canh Ngo) (1570): “At that time, Mac Hau Hop ordered Kinh Dien, two of his military generals, to take the army to invade Thanh Nghe. Nguyen Ba Quynh, Commander of Nghe An, heard the news and fled away. The enemy’s forces were very fierce and local people felt alarmed. Meanwhile, the lord was famous for his powerful authority, strategy and disciplines; the defence was built stringently. Thus, the enemy did not dare trespass on his land. As a result, the two regions, Thuan and Quang, were kept in peace” [10, p.33].

Talking about Nguyen Hoang, the high tide of the ruling achievements in Thuan Quang was summarised in a famous collection of national historical records of the Nguyen dynasty compiled under the direct guidance of Emperor Tu Duc as follows: “At that time, Emperor Gia Du, founder of the dynasty, ruled the county over more than a decade with harmonious policies and strict disciplines. People in Thuan Hoa and Quang Nam were well brought up and imbued with gratitude. Traders earned a living in peace; the market did not have two prices [i.e. there was one fixed price]; there were neither thieves nor robbers all over the region. People from other kingdoms gathered and did business happily. The county got increasingly busier and more prosperous” [12, Vol.2, p.158].

As described in detail by the National Historical Bureau of the Nguyen dynasty, a wide range of victories in the

extermination of the Mac troops in the North demonstrated clearly an outstanding role played by Nguyen Hoang, contrary to the helplessness of the troops of the Le-Trinh. Typically, “Bui Van Khue and Tran Bach Nien led the army to Son Nam to suppress the enemy. More than a month passed, but they could not defeat the enemy... Then, Emperor Gia Du, founder of the dynasty, took the army to the area, ordering his troops to use incendiary weapons and fuses to attack and destroy the earthen ramparts. The enemy was terror-stricken and defeated” [12, Vol.2, pp.201-202].

The dramatic situation leading to the division of the power of the Revival Le dynasty was explained unanimously, according to the opinion in the National Historical Records of the Nguyen dynasty, as follows: “By that time, the lord had been in Dong Do for eight years. He defeated the enemy in all areas, deserved great credit. Thus, the Trinh hated him” [10, p.41]. Taking advantage of the disorder in the army of the Le - Trinh, Nguyen Hoang took his naval forces to the south by the sea.

Since then, Nguyen Hoang decided to break away from the central government in the North. He proactively carried out the territorial expansion in Thuan Quang, forming his own kingdom of *Đàng Trong*, which later became Cochinchina as set in history.

Based on the above-mentioned comments, consequently, Nguyen Hoang was still highly appreciated by the historical writing officials under the Later Le dynasty for his virtues and capacities as a

great ruler in the feudal period of Dai Viet, although he was the man who made the decision about seceding from the restraint of the central government ruled by the Le and the Trinh. The opinion of the National Historical Bureau of the Nguyen dynasty is certainly similar to most of the opinions which gave prominence to the founder of the Nguyen dynasty. The mandarins under the Le - Trinh dynasty many times proposed sending the army to Thuan Quang to attack and chastise the Nguyen, aiming at unifying the regime. After Nguyen Hoang died in the Year of Water Buffalo (Quy Suu) (1613), however, his prestige and authority became greater, as judged in the National History of the Le dynasty (Vietnamese: *Quốc sử nhà Lê*): “Nguyen Hoang, who took control over Thuan and Quang counties with the title of Grand-commandant, Prefect, and Duke of Doan, passed away. Hoang was a man of great wisdom; he had high prestige, ruling the region generously and strictly and gaining in popularity... His son, *Duke of Thuy* Nguyen Phuc Nguyen, succeeded him as the prefect and was titled “Grand Protector” (Vietnamese: *Thái bảo*)...” [17, Vol.3, p.316]. Before the North - South conflict actually took place during the reign of the successor lord Nguyen Phuc Nguyen resulting from the doctrine of “might is right” of the Le - Trinh royal court, Nguyen Hoang did not have to cope with any punitive attacks from the Le -Trinh army. In other words, *Duke of Doan* Nguyen Hoang was spectacularly successful in creating the isolation so that he later could seize one

pole of the royal power in the late medieval period in Vietnam.

2.2. *Nguyen Hoang's turning-point decisions about land of Phu Yen*

2.2.1. Attacking Thanh Ho fortified citadel (1578)

Immediately after becoming the military governor of Thuan Hoa and Quang Nam in the Year of Metal Horse (Canh Ngo) (1570), Nguyen Hoang tried his best to magnify his influence further over Tuy Vien remote frontier in Hoai Nhan prefecture, while luring local wealthy and powerful figures, of whom many were native Cham people. He realised that Thanh Ho citadel located in the Aryuaru sub-region of the kingdom of Champa in the other side of the border was an advantageous fortified outpost and, at the same time, a busy seaport⁴ crowded with not only Cham people from the coastal and mountainous areas but also Vietnamese people as well as foreign merchants coming from China, Malaysia, Japan and some Western countries via the international trade routes established across the South China Sea (Vietnamese: *Biển Đông*, lit. East Sea) in the early 16th century. Consequently, he made a strategic decision about carrying out a raid to overrun it and retreat quickly afterwards, in the condition that he had neither sufficient forces to occupy and keep it nor appropriate human resources to exploit it.

Pleading that the Champa troops coming from Thanh Ho citadel often

attacked and invaded land of Hoai Nhan prefecture, which belonged to Quang Nam county, trespassing on the territorial border set up by the heroic emperor Le Thanh Tong of the Later Le dynasty after mounting punitive expeditions during the second half of the previous century, Nguyen Hoang asked the royal court in Tay Kinh (Thanh Hoa) to provide him with reinforcements with the aim of gaining definitely a victory in the attacks. Facing such an urgent situation relating to the prestige of the existing royal court and aiming to show off the power to the Mac army, without the slightest hesitation Grand Commandant Trinh Tung, the successor to Great Preceptor Trinh Kiem, discussed providing reinforcements for Thuan Quang region with King Le The Tong. Perhaps, Aide-de-camp Luong Van Chanh was assigned by the royal court to take naval forces to the remote frontier with the kingdom of Champa at that time; i.e. in the Year of Earth Tiger (Mau Dan) (1578)⁵. As a military governor, Nguyen Hoang kept the supreme power over the whole operation and assigned Aide-de-camp Luong Van Chanh to lead the vanguard in carrying out a large-scale raid on the base of the enemy. “Chanh took the army to Da Dien and successfully occupied Thanh Ho” [11, p.89]. Thanh Ho fortified citadel was rebuilt on a large scale as much as possible during the reign of the Champa royal dynasty, as mentioned quite precisely in the following sentence: “Since 1471, the building of temples and towers was almost completely stopped, in order to concentrate resources

on building an unprecedented fortified citadel” [9, p.211]. All its strong fortifications were, however, destroyed by the troops of the winner. Being defeated, King Po At (1553-1579) had no choice but to order the remnants of the Champa army to withdraw from Ba Dien/Da Dien valley to the south of Thach Bi mountain. This marked the renunciation of Aryaru sub-region for ever in the long history of the kingdom⁶. Although later they sometimes carried out attacks with the aim of getting it back, they always failed and had to accept the newly-established border.

However, it was a land full of danger, while Governor Nguyen Hoang did not have enough human resources to take control over it. He, therefore, ordered Luong Van Chanh to withdraw the forces to the fortification in Cu Mong. Nguyen Hoang put his complete trust in this diligent subordinate for the outstanding victory and decided to submit a proposal to the royal court, asking the Le king to appoint him as the governor of An Bien county in Tuy Vien district. It was an extremely important location, which Nguyen Hoang then used as a springboard to go further towards the south with his burning ambition.

With the overrunning of Thanh Ho citadel, Nguyen Hoang wiped out not only a fortification, which could make dangerous attacks to the north, in the military terms, but also an internationally important trade centre of the kingdom of Champa. Since then, the region of Thuan Quang started to get more advantages in trade with the rehabilitation of Vijaya (also called *Nước Mặn*; lit. Salt Water),

Faifo, and Tourane, while the kingdom of Champa moved southwards with the establishment of new trade centres, including Kauthara and Panduranga.

2.2.2. Policy on migration for village settlement in the new land (1597)

Two decades later, when the human resources in the region of Thuan Quang were significantly improved and the government of the Le - Trinh was stuck for years in the north, Nguyen Hoang was aware of the necessity of implementing promptly his plan of separating from the royal power. He therefore ordered Luong Van Chanh, commander of An Bien county, to expand the governance and exploit the southern land, which was occupied in name but not yet governed with sovereignty in fact. The mission order sent to Chanh read: "It is an instruction to my loyal marquis Luong Van Chanh... Take those who have been Ba The village people and those of other groups to serve the mission. Send the later to Cu Mong, Ba Dai, Ba Dien, and Da Nieu to settle and reclaim land all over from the mountains to the seaports. When the farming is fine, taxes will be imposed as usual. If the people are harassed due to the mission, investigations and punishments will be made" [7].

The mission order conveyed a top-secret scheme to a reliable military subordinate in the southern remote frontier. In order to avoid being suspected by the Le-Trinh royal court, Nguyen Hoang had earlier sent a report to King Le The Tong, asking for conferring an

exceptional title on his subordinate, Luong Van Chanh, due to the achievements in suppressing the Mac army and especially the punitive attacks on Thanh Ho Citadel of the kingdom of Champa. Nguyen Hoang then commanded his emissary to bring the royal proclamation conferring the title issued by the Le king on the fifth of the 12th month in the 19th year of Quang Hung era, or the Year of Fire Monkey (Binh Than) (1596) (i.e. 22 January 1597 BC) and the secret order sealed the stamp "Prefecture Governor" and dated sixth of the second month of the 20th year of Quang Hung era, or the year of Fire Rooster (Dinh Dau) (1597); i.e. nearly two months later, which were enough to prepare gifts, personnel, and means of transport for the emissary's trip from Dong Do to Thuan Quang.

It was a timely and appropriate decision to expand the narrow territory located by the coast in the newly changing context. Since it was an urgent guideline, the implementing measures should be watertight with a strong sense of motivation and encouragement. Obviously, Nguyen Hoang was thoroughly informed of the situation in the frontier, although it was far from the area under his direct governance. His order, therefore, seemed to be tolerant towards the people and appropriate with specific locations. Although Luong Van Chanh was a diligent and reliable subordinate, who was assigned to take control over the frontier land for decades, Nguyen Hoang told him carefully about the discipline, which demonstrated the importance of the task of sending people to settle and reclaim in the geographically

complicated area. This further proved that the true ruling way of the southern future lord was “to be always generous and kind for the sake of the people” [3, p.63], as commented two centuries later by Le Quy Don in his outstanding geographical work entitled “Miscellaneous Chronicles of the Pacified Frontier - 1776” (Vietnamese: *Phủ biên tạp lục - 1776*), which was compiled in Phu Xuan imperial city of the Nguyen.

In the Year of Metal Rat (Canh Ty (1600), Nguyen Hoang came back by the sea and accelerated the exploitation of resources available in the remote frontier, where more and more people came to reside.

The guideline on sending people to live and set up villages in the land, over which the sovereignty still remained unidentified⁷, was a step towards the formation of administrative units and territorial sovereignty.

2.2.3. Establishment of Phu Yen prefecture (1611)

Indeed, the migration for village settlement was a process, in which Vietnamese people gradually came and lived together with indigenous people, including mainly Cham people, who were so closely associated with their economic assets that they did not have the heart to leave or who kept staying to take care of the ancestor’s property. It was unavoidable that contradictions with respect to interests would occur between different groups of people. With the intention of reoccupying the populous and fertile basin of Da Dien

River, especially Thanh Ho Citadel, which was a favourable location for defence, religion and trade, King Po Nit (1603-1613), after succeeding King Po Klong Halau (1579-1603), spent many years strengthening the military power and making the social conflict between the two sides more and more acute. Eventually, he sent the army to cross over Dai Linh border (Thach Bi mountain) to raid the villages and farming, which had been just set up by Vietnamese troops and people. At the same time, he tried to stimulate the noncooperation of Cham people and other local ethnic groups, who were in the traditional alliance of Nagara Campa⁸. This caused considerable damage in the politico-military and civil terms. Even, those who directly organised and managed the migration according to the order from Nguyen Hoang were assassinated or killed in public during the raid⁹.

It was surely necessary to mount a military counter-attack against Champa, aiming at protecting life of the migrants and achievements of the land reclamation. Long-term and feasible measures were, however, needed so as to reconcile the internal contradictions among local groups of people in the frontier, which should be taken into account as a big sensitive problem. Being flexible and skilful at using connections, Nguyen Hoang managed to meet a Cham official, who was thoroughly aware of the aspirations and desires of local people, comforting and persuading him.

Van Phong, whose surname was deliberately omitted as “unknown”¹⁰ in the historical records of the Nguyen, satisfied

the requirements for Nguyen Hoang's choice. He seemed undaunted in fighting, good at harmonising interests of different groups of people, and prepared to uphold indigenous people, who were oppressed by others. As a result of the new cooperative relationship between officials and local people, a form of transitional semi-autonomous government was created. Such a model of administration was completely appropriate with the context of the peripheral society containing latent complicated conflicts. This is quite similar to what recorded in the chronicles of the Nguyen with polished and smooth words, as follows: "At that time, the army of Champa invaded the border area. The lord ordered the chief official named Van Phong (surname unknown) to take the troops to attack and get the land, on which a new prefecture, consisting of also Dong Xuan and Tuy Hoa districts, was then established. By the way, Van Phong was appointed to be the governor of the land" [10, pp.43-44]. The event took place in the Year of Metal Pig (Tan Hoi) (1611), which was 14 years after the first Vietnamese migrants came to the new land to settle together with the indigenous people, who had lived there for thousands of years. It was impossible to find out any other intermediary models of administration that were more flexible and effective than the semi-autonomous governance in the frontier area, where people often had to cope with multidimensional challenges.

In fact, the tactic on using Champa officials to administer local Cham people and those of the Champa alliance was

ever implemented by the Ho dynasty in the Year of Water Horse (Nham Ngo) (1402) after occupying Chiem Dong and Co Luy. At that time, Co Luy was divided into two counties, including Tu and Nghia, which Che Ma No Da Nan, a surrender military general of the kingdom of Champa, was assigned to administer for the purpose of "...gathering and persuading those who were people of the kingdom of Champa. It served a scheme for occupying land of the kingdom of Champa" [12, Vol.1, p.713]. Different from the Ho, however, Phu Yen had been under the rule of Nguyen Hoang for more than 30 years with a wide range of socio-economic establishments set up there for more than a decade, though the prefecture name was just made. Obviously, the Nguyen made use of the historical experience carefully and wisely so as to ensure success in the territorial expansion in a particular context, in spite of encountering hindrances in various aspects.

2.2.4. Final words of advice for the successor (1613)

Nguyen Hoang was not alive long enough to witness the achievements resulting from the ruling policies he implemented during the conquering period under his reign, which caused long-term influence, especially on the new land, Phu Yen. Two years after the event related to the hectic preparation for the kingship, Nguyen Hoang was sick and passed away on the 3rd of the sixth month in the Year of Water Buffalo (Quy Suu) (1613). Over

whole life, he was well-known for the ability to deal aptly and boldly with emergencies and difficulties. Before passing away, the advice he gave to the successor, Nguyen Phuc Nguyen, who was his sixth son, was also extremely important for the protection and territorial expansion of the country; i.e. Cochinchina, of which he spent life building the foundation: “In Thuan Quang land, there is Ngang mountain (Hoanh Son) and Gianh River (Linh Giang), forming difficult terrain in the North, and everlasting Hai Van and Da Bia (Thach Bi) mountains in the south. The mountains contain gold and iron; the sea has fish and salt. It is an advantageous land for heroes. If you know how to teach people and drill soldiers for the sake of coping with the Trinh, a great fortune can be built for generations. If our force is not powerful enough to cope with the enemy, try to keep land, while waiting for opportunities. Do not ignore my advice” [10, p.44].

During his lifetime, Nguyen Hoang once showed the intention of separating peacefully from the Le - Trinh power so as to lord over an independent region. As reported by his son, Nguyen Phuc Hai, to the Le - Trinh court in Tay Kinh, when the naval forces of Dong Do were pursuing Nguyen Hoang due to his maritime escape to the south in the year of Metal Rat (Canh Ty) (1600), that he was “coming back to Thuan Hoa with the only aim of protecting land and without any other intentions” [10, p.41]. It means that the Nguyen, who ruled over *Đàng Trong* (later known as Cochinchina), intended to avoid armed

conflicts with *Đàng Ngoài* (later known as Tonkin). If they were indisposed to mount a war, it was just for the sake of self-defence, as interpreted by Le Quy Don: “By that time, the Duke of Doan had governed and defended two regions [i.e. Thuan Hoa and Quang Nam] for 40 years. It was when the Nguyen started to take control over the land” [3, p.63]. The advice given by Nguyen Hoang on his deathbed was consistent with the proclamation issued 13 years earlier: The only side, with which the state of equilibrium must be kept unconditionally, was the northern border with the Le - Trinh. The final target set up by him for both the two opposite situations was to keep control over the land. Meanwhile, he did not give specific advice with respect to others. This can be understood as a suggestion that it was necessary to strive actively for development. Was it seen as an overview instruction shaping the territory of *Đàng Trong* during nearly two decades afterwards?

Like other later successors of the Nguyen, Nguyen Phuc Nguyen tried to follow closely what his father confided. In 1627, Linh Giang River became the front line of a war taking place for half of the 17th century and, consequently, people and troops in *Đàng Trong* had to make every effort to fight against the attacks of the northern rival, which was initially ten times more powerful [10, p.56]. Utilising flexible measures in economic development in addition to the advantage in agriculture, however, *Đàng Trong* put emphasis on exploiting forestry and fishery with highly tradable

specialities. Owing to the conveniences relating to the sea routes and inland waterways, it attracted both local and international merchants, who came to do business regularly and unceasingly. It can be said that Nguyen Hoang was the first leader in the South, who could control the traditional sense, according to which agriculture was considered as the ground for development (Vietnamese: *Dĩ nông vi bản*). He realised the advantage of the forest and sea in Phu Yen particularly and Thuan Quang generally and, therefore, highlighted the key points for development. In the order issued in the Year of Fire Rooster (Dinh Dau) (1597) on organising migration flows to the new land, which then became Phu Yen prefecture, he especially noticed the two advantages “from the mountains to the seaports” [7]. At the time of death, the founder of the dynasty in the South still kept the burning expectation: “The mountains contain gold and iron; the sea has fish and salt. It is an advantageous land for heroes” [10, p.44]. Phu Yen actually was really a place, where the heroic predecessors smouldered with the enthusiasm and performed it in practice.

The economic accumulation enabled the Nguyen to better its military forces. Western weapons and military tactics were used, changing quickly the balance of power in the battlefields. The defence power against the attacks from the North and the capacity to mount punitive expeditions towards the South were drastically improved. As a result, after the Trinh - Nguyen war was settled in the year of Water Rat (Nham Ty) (1672), *Đàng*

Trong not only remained independent from the North, but also moved its southern border southwards to Phan Rang River; meanwhile, it was also successful in penetrating deep into the land of Lower Chenla.

The advice given by Nguyen Hoang to his successor, Nguyen Phuc Nguyen, was seen as a guideline for territorial protection and expansion during the reigns of the subsequent Nguyen lords. Thus, the territory of *Đàng Trong* eventually became as great as Cochinchina in 1758 under the reign of the eighth lord, Nguyen Phuc Khoat, before all fragments of Vietnam was joined into a complete map of Vietnam in 1802 by King Gia Long, who was a descendant of the ninth generation of the Nguyen lords. It can be said that the particular historical conditions in the 16th and the 17th centuries resulted in Nguyen Hoang acquiring an excellent vision to catch up with the trends of his era.

3. Conclusion

In addition to the contributions to the central government of the Le-Trinh towards ending the conflict with the Mac army as well as other forces in the name of the Mac, who had the backing of the Ming dynasty, aiming at achieving the national unity and re-establishing the diplomatic ties with the Ming dynasty, Nguyen Hoang's role in ruling, expanding the territory in the south, and bringing stable and happy life to the people in the

region of Thuan Quang, which was equivalent to half the country, made him deserve to be a national hero, whose ruling way was beyond the then ruling patterns and created a new era of integration with countries other than China during the late medieval period in Vietnam.

Until now, the active and prerequisite contributions made by Nguyen Hoang have been recognised unanimously, although final agreements about the issues with respect to the Nguyen lords and the Nguyen dynasty have not been settled at the national scientific conferences. The public awareness of his historical role, however, has not changed significantly, which is shown most clearly by the attitude of the authorities and the historical advisors of the administration.

At the time of Nguyen Hoang, another co-commander in Quang Nam named Bui Ta Han was highly respected and admired by both Vietnamese and the ethnic mountainous people. Regarding his subordinates, Tran Duc Hoa was famous for the benevolent attitude; Luong Van Chanh was well-known for the merits in the attacks on the kingdom of Champa and the organisation of the migration for village settlement. In Phu Yen province, the temple and the tomb of Luong Van Chanh have been rehabilitated and the ceremonies for worshipping him or reporting achievements are held solemnly by the local institutions and organisations every year. A number of major scientific conferences on him have been also held. There are streets and schools, including

secondary and high schools for the gifted, bearing his name... They are what we have to do to show the gratitude for his contributions. Meanwhile, the administration as well as the local historical compilers have paid inconsiderable attention to Nguyen Hoang, who was the governor of Thuan Quang region and made significant decisions relating directly to Phu Yen, including: the guideline on attacking Thanh Ho Citadel; the order to enforce the migration for land reclamation and village settlement; the decision about the establishment of a new prefecture called Phu Yen; the organisation of the semi-autonomous model of government that was appropriate to the then social context and the territorial defence; and, the theoretical and practical grounds for the southward expansion, etc.

Certainly, Nguyen Hoang was a pioneering leader in many fields. What he did for Quang Tri and Quang Nam during his life was highly appreciated and recognised by those local governments and people, which are shown by Ai Tu, Tra Bat towns and Hoi An national seaport. In regard to the remote frontier Phu Yen, Nguyen Hoang set up an initial stage for the new historical trend on the southward expansion reaching the remote south, which is contiguous to the Gulf of Thailand along the west margin of the East Sea. Based on the extraordinarily strategic vision of Nguyen Hoang, not only Phu Yen but also all the demarcations of Cochinchina and the entire kingdom of *Đàng Trong* bore his image as a great hero in the

period of the territorial expansion and conquest. Thus, Nguyen Hoang is surely an indispensable figure in the national history of Vietnam.

Notes

¹ The paper was published in Vietnamese in: *Nghiên cứu Lịch sử*, số 5, 2018. Translated by Nguyen Tuan Sinh, edited by Etienne Mahler.

² According to Complete Annals of Dai Viet (Vietnamese: *Đại Việt sử ký toàn thư*), the vassal state of Hoa Anh was established at the same time with Nam Ban in 1471 under the approval from King Le Thanh Tong [17, Vol.2, p.450]. The information on the vassal state of Hoa Anh was not mentioned in the official historical records under the Later Le dynasty. According to our explanation in a recently published paper, Maha Saya (Vietnamese: *Bàn La Trà Duyệt*) was appointed to be the king of the vassal state of Hoa Anh. The king of Dai Viet, however, ordered the second punitive attack, due to the opposition led by the vassal king in the very year of 1471. As a result, Maha Saya was arrested and extradited to Dong Do. Trai A Ma Phat Am, who was then appointed to replace the previous king, joined his land into Panduranga to form the Panduranga - Champa principality or the Later Champa [4].

Thus, the vassal state of Hoa Anh just existed within 1471, followed by the reign of Trai A Ma Phat Am, of which the end still remains unknown. However, it could not last for till 1611 (140 years later), when Phu Yen prefecture was established.

³ According to the supposition supported by all the historical records of the Nguyen dynasty,

Nguyen Hoang was oppressed by Trinh Kiem, his older brother-in-law, so he asked Ngoc Bao, who was his older sister and Trinh Kiem's wife, to plead with Trinh Kiem to tell the Le king to appoint him to be a military governor of Thuan Hoa, as a way to avoid danger, accumulating and strengthening the power so as to lord over the region against the Trinh.

⁴ Antonio de Faria, a Portuguese explorer, left the following weird notes: "After passing Pulo Campello island [Cu Lao Cham] located at latitude 14⁰ 20' north, they reached Pulo Capas island, where they saw a group consisting of 40 large sampans, of which each had two or three storeys, in Boralho River (i.e. Varella in the nautical chart); Faria sent his men to explore the island. And then, they saw another group, which perhaps consisted of 2,000 big and small boats, and a city surrounded by walls with about a dozen thousand houses" [1, pp.123-124].

Based on a descriptive passage, John Barrow alleged that it was the location of Faifo [1, pp.123-124]. Sallet MD, however, came to another conclusion, based on the Jackson's memoirs: Tra Kieu was a city surrounded by walls, which Faria saw in 1537 [6, p.517], [14, p.368]. In fact, neither Faifo nor Tourane was a city surrounded by walls, while the erstwhile Tra Kieu had been already in ruin. At the same time, Thanh Ho Citadel in Phu Yen was known as a citadel of the kingdom of Champa; it was built from the bricks used to build the ancient trapezium-shaped towers, of which the lower base was about 30m long; the upper base ranged from 10 to 15m; and the height was 6 or 7m [15, p.102]. On the other hand, it was called Boralho according to the local pronunciation, which was similar to the name of Ba River in Phu Yen. Thus, Boralho = Baran = Ba Ran/Da Ran; i.e.

the present-day Da Rang River. At that time, the river mouth was next to Thanh Ho citadel in the east.

Thus, perhaps Thanh Ho citadel was the very sea port mentioned by Antonio de Faria.

⁵ As written in the publications titled “Arranged Biographies of Great [Country in the] South” (Vietnamese: *Đại Nam liệt truyện*), at first Luong Van Chanh was a mandarin of the Le dynasty; then, he moved to the south, when Nguyen Hoang took up the position of the military governor of Thuan Hoa in the year of Earth Horse (Mau Ngo) (1558). Meanwhile, the proclamation on the military medal bestowed upon Luong Van Chanh in the Year of Fire Monkey (Binh Than) (1596) says: “Luong Van Chanh... was many times sent by Grand Commandant Trinh Tung to fight the enemy and he gained a lot of achievements. Thus, the Royal Court members discussed and recommended him for promotion...” (The version is kept at the Temple of Luong Van Chanh in Long Phung village, Hoa Tri commune, Phu Hoa district, Phu Yen province). Prior to the year of Metal Horse (Canh Ngo) (1570), the army of the Le dynasty was administered by Trinh Kiem. Then, Trinh Tung started to act as regent and was conferred by the Le king as Grand Commandant in the year of Water Rooster (Quy Dau) (1573). Thus, the time, when Luong Van Chanh, under the command of Trinh Tung, received the military medal ranged from that year to the Year of Earth Tiger (Mau Dan) (1578), when he won a victory in the punitive attack on Thanh Ho citadel. It is, therefore, quite reasonable to assume that Luong Van Chanh was sent by Grand Commandant Trinh Tung to Thuan Quang region to provide support for Nguyen Hoang at the very time, when

the well-known battlefield against Thanh Ho citadel was taking place.

⁶ The archaeological excavations at the site of Thanh Ho citadel in 2008 and 2009 demonstrated a new date, which was 230 AD, near the date of the establishment of Lam Ap principality in the late second century (192 AD). Thus, it is supposed that Thanh Ho citadel was the capital city of the early state of Ho Ton in the chronicles before being the capital city of the principality of Lam Ap in history. It was then expanded northwards in the next centuries.

⁷ It was the land over which the sovereignty remained unclear.

⁸ Nagara Campa is a term used by Cham people to indicate their own kingdom, showing a unique particularity in Southeast Asian continent that “... it was a multi-ethnic country, where all ethnic groups were equal” (Bernard Gay).

⁹ In folk tales, Luong Van Chanh is mentioned to be a wise and flexible mandarin and good at witchcraft. His colloquial name was Luong Phu Gia, meaning that he used witchcraft for the purpose of curing people and expelling devil spirits or winning over opponents by tricks; for example, he secretly set fire to his fake tower in a tower building and burning competition with the locals. Perhaps, local people felt resentment against him. Taking advantage of the disordered situation, they therefore assassinated him. Legend has it that he was wounded to death on a horse; his head fell down somewhere on the way and the rest body was taken to Cam mountain to be buried. Due north of Chop Chai mountain, there was a head-worshipping shrine named “*Thần Đầu miếu*” (*thần* = deity, *đầu* = head). It might be an evidence of the event.

¹⁰ Van Phong might be a full name of the Cham aristocratic lineage who lived in Thuan Quang for a long time, because before being acculturated to Vietnamese society, Cham people did not use surnames; at that time, they just used “Ja” or “Mu/Mung” together with names to differentiate between men and women, similar to “Van” or “Thi” used among Vietnamese people. Ja Phong is surely the original name of Van Phong. Later on, “Van” was even used as an official surname of Cham people.

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