

## Chapter 8: Đại Việt Civilization (939-1407)

### *Đại Việt Society (939-1407)*

The society that emerged from more than 1000 years of Chinese colonization was a society with highly feudal characteristics. It was profoundly shaped by the long war against Nanzhao so that central power, whether imperial Chinese or indigenous, was usually limited and concentrated within a small region around the capital while powers at other regions were held by local prominent families, many of them continued to control their fiefs and play important roles in the political life of the country, no matter who was in control of the central government. These prominent families also constituted the elite class controlling the central government from the emperor downward.

It was also a disparate group of different societies divided by both geography and ethnic. The most sophisticated one was Giao, the heartland of Chinese domination consisting of the central plain between the Red River and the Bạch Đằng River including the old Chinese capital Đại La. It was home for the most sinicised society with many Chinese settlers and traders as well as a flourishing Buddhist community. Then there were Trường (Hà Nam, Ninh Bình in the present time) in the lower end of the Red River plains, the new area developed during the Sui and the Tang under the equal field system and Phong (Son Tây, Vĩnh Phúc Yên in the present time) in the northwest end of the central plain and adjacent hills which was the center of old Lạc society. Further south there were Ái (Thanh Hóa) in the Mã River delta and Hoan (Nghệ an, Hà Tĩnh) with the Cả River, reaching to the border with Champa. Finally there was the mountainous marches inhabited by both the Vietic speaking old Lạc people and Tai-Kadar minority hill tribes, who were allied with the Nanzhao during the war of the 800 and 900 and continued to resist the central authority in the plains.

Culturally while most of the upper class and their retainers spoke a kind of Chinese dialect, the common people spoke a language belonging to the Vietic language group that we may call Viet Muong. In the four hundred years of the Đại Việt kingdom, these disparate societies eventually welded together to form a unique society, we might call it Đại Việt society. That society had vanished or rather changed beyond recognition, however the legacy of this time continues until the present day.

The character of this Viet society can be seen clearly in the so called “War of the Twelve Warlords” even though the numbers of warlords involved were considerably more than twelve. A careful consideration of the people involved showed clearly where they came from. There were ones that had their roots deep in colonial times like the Kiều brothers, the Ngô, Ngô Nhật Khánh, probably the son of Ngô Xương Vãn in the traditional seat of the Ngô as well as Ngô Xương Xí, son of Xương Ngập in the place of his maternal family, Do Cảnh Thạc probably a descendent of the Đỗ Anh Hàn, Đỗ Anh Sách of the Tang times and possibly reaching up to the famous Đỗ family of the 4<sup>th</sup> century and whose prominence continued unto the Lý with Đỗ Anh Vũ and Trần with Đỗ Khắc Chung (later given Trần surname and

became Trần Khắc Chung). There were the Phạm, both the ones giving refuge to Ngô Xương Ngập in Nam Sách and the war lord Phạm Bạch Hổ and whose descendants, Phạm Cự Lượng later helped Lê Hoàn taking the throne of the Đinh. There were those who rose up more recently through trade or other means like the Nguyễn brothers or Trần Lãm. And then there were those not mentioned in the list of warlords like the Dương family in Thanh Hóa, Lê Lương whose hold on part of the Ái province was confirmed by the Đinh First Emperor “in perpetuity” Or the Lê family who took Lê Hoàn in as foster son.

These families did not all prosper under the various dynasties, especially for those who supports the losing side, thus there were constant change in the composition of these elites.

Đại Việt society during the first period of independence was clearly divided into classes. In the beginning, during the Ngô, Đinh and Lê dynasties, the class’s distinction was not rigid and some people could still moved upward through the class barrier. Đinh Công Trứ, father of Đinh Bộ Lĩnh, the founder of the Đinh dynasty for example, rose from a “retainer” in the household of Dương Đình Nghệ, to be governor of Hoan province. But later, by the time of Lý dynasty, the class distinction became rigid with law made to prevent people from the lower classes to rise.

At the bottom of the ladder was the slaves and serfs. They were divided into private slaves or state slaves. Private slaves were private possessions of the rich landowners or aristocrat. State slaves were prisoners of war, convicted people who were condemned to slavery. As the lowest level of society, they were only allowed to marry within themselves as well as were forbidden certain body tattoos.

During the Lý and especially Trần dynasty, private slaves in aristocratic houses might reached to thousands of persons. The private armies of the aristocrats in the Lý and Trần dynasties probably were composed of slaves and serfs from their estates. Vietnamese annals recounted the story of Trần Quốc Toản who, while still very young, raised an army among the slaves and serfs of his estates to fight the Mongols. However those slaves, even if they contributed to a military victory were not to be rewarded even though their owner might choose to free them from slavery. Thus the two personal attendants of Trần Quốc Tuấn, Yết Kiêu and Dã Tượng were not rewarded for their contributions in the Trần war against the Mongols.

Almost all those who became slaves came from poor families who from one reason or the other had to sell themselves to the rich. In addition people convicted of crimes of certain character also were made into state slaves. These state slaves had to cultivate state owned rice fields or lent out to serve at the royal palace or at the estates of the high members of the aristocracy. *A Nam Chí lược* wrote:

“Those who cannot pay their debt may be jailed by their creditors until their debt, both principal and interest are paid. Those who are too poor to repay their debt are allowed to sell themselves into slavery to repay their debt. ..The crime of robbery is punished by beating, 80 strokes from a cane, tattooed the word “robber” in the face. The robber has to repay the

owner nine times the value of the objects robbed. If he could not repay that amount, his wife and children will be sold as slaves. ... Woman who commits adultery will be made into a slave to her husband. The husband can sell or lend her out like any other slave.”<sup>1</sup>

Sometimes high officials were also made to be a slave and sent to forced labor. The most famous example was Đỗ Anh Vũ, regent to Lý Thiên Tông (Anh Tông) who was overthrown in a *coup de palace* and made a slave to work in a state owned agricultural estate. He was later rescued by the queen regent (who also was his lover) and killed off his opponents in court<sup>2</sup>.

Slaves were also bought from China. A *Nam Chí lược* wrote “In the year Diên Hựu (1230) bandits in Hainan pillaged and captured many young girls from the common people and sold them to Annam”

Above the class of slaves and serfs was the common people, consisting of the free peasants who lived in their communities in the countryside as well as the artisans and merchants who lived in towns and cities. They were the main sources of manpower for the reigning dynasty, providing soldiers as well as forced labor services. They were also one of the main financial resources for the government, the other were the state owned rice fields tilled by state slaves. Thus to protect that source of man and financial power, the Lý and afterward the Trần forbade the sale of young boys (under 18 years old) into slavery. To distinguish between the common people and the gentry and aristocratic class, Lý's laws forbade the common people to build houses with brick and tiles. The artisans were not allowed to sell objects used by the aristocracy to the common people while the women of the common people were not allowed to wear the dress and jewelry used by the gentry.

To control and exploit these human resources, the Trần set up a system of census for everyone in the country. According to *Đại Việt Sử Ký Toàn Thư*, every year, at the beginning of spring, every village had to declare the number of people living in it with detailed information concerning their class: royal relatives, civil and military officials, clerks, adult men (from 18 to 60), old men (above 60), and disabled men. In the beginning, the class distinction was rigid, common people could not be officials no matter how rich they were. But later this class barrier was much relaxed. With the establishment of state examination, bright common people could join the mandarin class and become landed gentry. Wealth also opened up the ladder. The later kings of the Lý started the practice of selling offices.

At the top of the social ladder was the landed gentry and aristocracy. Until late in the Lý dynasty, they occupied all the important posts in the government. Even after the Lý set up a system of examination to choose government officials, it was reserved to the children of the members of this class. Only much later, under the Trần, were these examinations opened to the common people.

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<sup>1</sup>*An Nam Chí Lược* p.113

<sup>2</sup>*Đại Việt Sử Ký Toàn thư*.140

In the beginning this class consisted of the great landowning families left over from the time of Chinese colonization who gained power during period of the Nanzhao war and the end of the Tang dynasty or merchants' family who gained wealth from the Nanhai trade. They were quite different from the common people around them. Probably many of them still consider themselves Chinese and earned to be back within the Chinese empire. However in the first 100 years of independence, they gradually integrate with the rest of the people and by the time of the Lý dynasty, they could proudly proclaimed with Lý Thường Kiệt "the mountains and river of the southern realm is the abode of the southern emperor. It has been written thus in the Book of Heaven"

Outside these three classes were the monks, Buddhists and Daoists, who held a special position in the country. The monks enjoyed many privileges, political and economic. Whoever was accepted to be a monk, would have his name withdrawn from the population registry, thus was not liable to pay taxes or to provide forced labor. Many of the monks came from the aristocracy. Many of the temples were also built by the aristocrats or by the kings and endowed with fields and slaves. Thus each of the temples could be considered an estate equivalent with the estate of an aristocrat. In addition many monks were granted by the king the right to enjoy the tax taken from a number of common people family just like an aristocrat's fief. According to *Thiền Uyển Tập Anh*, the monk Mãn Giác of the Giác Nguyên pagoda was granted the right to enjoy the tax of 50 households.<sup>3</sup>

Under the first three dynasties, Ngô, Đinh, Lê, the aristocracy was pretty much independent. Rebellions occurred frequently. Lê Hoàn attempted to control them by assigning each of his sons to oversee a region, but was not really successful. The Lý and especially the Trần was much more successful in taming the aristocracy and concentrating power into their hands. The Lý both followed the Lê dynasty in sending their princes to govern distant and potentially unsubordinated regions and at the same time practiced marriage alliance to bind those in power in these regions to themselves. The Trần followed the Lý practice in sending not only Trần princes but also other close relatives to govern the regions considered important. The title of governors of these regions was made hereditary to reinforce the hold of the court on these regions. Thus the descendants of Trần Quốc Khang, a son of Trần Cảnh (Thái tông) was hereditary governor of Diên châu; Trần Nhật Duật's descendants, governor of Thanh Hóa; Trần Khánh Dư's descendants were hereditary governor of Vân Đồn, they were the most typical examples.

The Trần also codified the ranking within the royalty. In 1267, Trần Cảnh (Thái tông) formed the Office of Royal Genealogy (Tông Chính phủ) to register and follow all the royal relatives.

## ***Society and Politics***

The first three dynasties basically were a kind of alliance where the one with the most powerful army held power in central government but at regional and local level, power were still held by powerful local families. And even the kings or emperors behaved more like a

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<sup>3</sup>*Thiền Uyển Tập Anh* – Mãn Giác đại sư p.72

landowner than a monarch. Đinh Bộ Lĩnh, after defeating the twelve warlords and got the submission of others, at first wanted to choose the Đầm hamlet, the birth place of his mother as his capital and was only dissuaded from choosing that place because it was too “small and not suitable for defense” as was written in the annals. Lê Hoàn in the next dynasty wanted to impress the Song envoy with his wealth by showing him “thousand of the king’s cattle”

These events showed the struggle between the new and the old. The newness of independence was so sudden that they did not know how to react and behaved like old fashioned landowners. Part of this type of behavior lasted well until the Lý with the annals constantly recorded the trips the emperors made to see the harvest at the land they owned personally just like a common landowner surveyed his peasant gathered the harvest for him.

In spite of a millennium of Chinese rule, many features of old Lạc society still existed. Like the time of the Trưng sisters society was very loosely unified and regional differences persisted. Woman and maternal relatives played an important role both in giving legitimacy for the regime as well as holding real power. The Đinh, Lê and the first Lý kings all used marriage to consolidate their rule as well as asserted their legitimacy.

Between them, Đinh Bộ Lĩnh and Lê Hoàn appointed ten queens all of equal rank. Lý Công Uẩn, the founder of Lý dynasty had six queens. In the 10<sup>th</sup> century all the three dynasties, Ngô, Đinh and Lê married into the Dương family. Đinh Bộ Lĩnh also married into the Ngô clan, taking Ngô Nhật Khánh’s mother as his queen, Nhật Khánh’s sister as Đinh Liễn’s wife and gave his daughter to Nhật Khánh as wife in a triple alliance. It was also possible that the wish to assert that his dynasty was a legitimate continuation of the Ngô that led Đinh Bộ Lĩnh to appoint his youngest son Hang Lạng instead of his eldest son Đinh Liễn as crown prince. s

The Lý continued the practice of alliance by marriage. The first Lý kings continued the Đinh and Lê practice and appointed many queens at the same time thus showed that they still felt the need to have alliances with many powerful clans at the same time. However, while under the Đinh and Lê all the queens had the same position and prestige, the Lý started to differentiate with one queen preeminent over the other (even though the person holding the position may change) Lý Công Uẩn for example appointed six queens when he ascended to the throne, but only one queen Lập Giáo was given preferential treatment “with special carriages and clothing different from others”<sup>4</sup>. But then she was replaced by another and reverted to the position of subordinate queen. By the time of Lý Dương Hoán (Thần tông) the policy of appointing many queen had been dropped, probably under the influences of the Confucians, but may also be because the Lý was confident enough of their hold on the country not to require many alliances.

The Lý also allowed women to involve in the political life of the country. Outside their roles as objects of political alliances, the Lý’s king daughters played an important role in the administering of the country. It started with Lý Công Uẩn (Thái tổ) who gave them a role in

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<sup>4</sup>*Đại Việt Sử Ký Toàn thư*.79

collecting taxes from the people<sup>5</sup>. The princesses were also allowed to join in the court meeting. *Đại Việt Sử Ký Toàn Thư* recounted that:

(The year 1064) the king (Lý Nhật Tôn) sat at Thiên Khánh palace listening to a trial. The princess Động Thiên stood at his side. The king pointed to the princess and told the judge ‘I love my daughter just like I love my people. The people because they were ignorant thus infringed on the law. Treat them leniently’<sup>6</sup>

The wives and concubines of the king also accompanied him even when he went to war. *Đại Việt Sử Ký Toàn Thư* mentioned a feast organized by Lý Phật Mã (Thái tông) in 1035 at the military camp when he was in an expedition against the rebels in Ái province. In attendance were many of his wives and concubines.<sup>7</sup>

The role of women in politics diminished greatly under the Trần.

## Political Culture and Political Structure

The royal court of the first three dynasties was fairly simple. Not much was known about the organization of Ngô Quyền’s court. We know that he tried to revive the ancient Lạc rituals, basing his capital in Cổ Loa, the pre Hán walled city of An Dương Vương, “strengthened old rituals, and also provided feathered accessories, yellow banners, brass gongs and deerskin drums for all the ancient dances with swords and battle axe”<sup>8</sup>, but in spite of what the annals wrote that “he assigned a hundred mandarins, decided on the designs and colors of royal robes and hats for everyone”<sup>9</sup> no details existed and the sentences was just a standard cliché taken from a Chinese history when relating about a new dynasty. About the only detail that the annals told us about Ngô Quyền’s court was his queen, lady Dương, who was Dương Đình Nghệ’s daughter and that after his death, power fell into the hand of his brother in law Dương Tam Kha (probably meaning Dương the Third brother) who commanded his army - he was also called Dương the commander in chief (*Dương chủ tướng*). The crisis after Ngô Quyền’s death reflected the conflict between the old Lạc tradition of matrilineal succession and the new Chinese patrilineal succession already taken roots in Sinicised Giao. Thus we have Ngô Xương Ngập, Ngô Quyền’s eldest son, running away to take refuge with the Phạm family in Nam Sách, while his younger brother Ngô Xương Văn was adopted by their maternal uncle. It is significant that the problem of Ngô Quyền’s succession was similar to that of Phùng Hưng two centuries before which saw a struggle for power between Phùng Hải, Phùng Hưng’s brother and Phùng An his son, In short Ngô Quyền’s court looked like a mix between a military camp and an old Lạc tribal court.

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<sup>5</sup>*Đại Việt Sử Ký Toàn thư*.83

<sup>6</sup>*Đại Việt Sử Ký Toàn thư*.113

<sup>7</sup>*Đại Việt Sử Ký Toàn thư*.94

<sup>8</sup>Lý Tế Xuyên *Việt Điện U Linh Tập* (translated version of Lê Hữu Mục) p.27

<sup>9</sup>Anonymous *Đại Việt Sử Lược* (translated by Trần Quốc Vượng)

We knew a bit more about Đinh Bộ Lĩnh court. It was simple: an emperor (Đinh Bộ Lĩnh), a king (Đinh Liễn), a duke (Nguyễn Bặc), a general (Lê Hoàn) and a judge (Đô Hộ phủ sỹ sư Lưu Cơ). It is presumed that the local prominent families continued to govern their fief and the surrounding countryside even though we only have a single case of Lê Lương, a powerful family in Thanh Hóa whose family was granted the title of governor in perpetuity of Cửu Chân district because their possession was confiscated later and only was partly returned by the Lý dynasty.

The Đinh First Emperor paid special attention to the religious clergy, Buddhist and Daoist probably because they were the only organizations that transcend local differences. Buddhism especially was patronized by the court. The Buddhist clergy, probably the best educated elements of Viet society outside the literati class in Jiao who was still mostly oriented toward China provided whatever administrative tasks the court needs, hence the *tăng lục* (head clerk of the Buddhist church) held by Trương Ma ni, (probably a nun, with the surname Trương) also doubled as a secretariat for the court.

The next dynasty, the Lê took a step forward in centralizing power in the hand of the court. Lê Hoàn came from Trường even though he became the adopted son of a prominent family from Ái. Trường was the place where the “equal field” system of the Sui and early Tang was applied most actively so that there was no great landowner dominating the area, however in the chaos of Nanzhao war, many villages became self governing under their village elites the absence of central authority. Lê Hoàn probably came from one of these elites. His birth father had no surname a further proof of his birth among the common people. The “adopted son” custom of the time was possibly a form of alliance – the adoption of Đinh bộ Lĩnh by Trần Lãm was an example. Lê Hoàn’s adoption into the Lê family of Thanh Hóa was probably more similar to Đinh Công Trứ, Đinh Bộ Lĩnh’s father, who became one of the “adopted sons” of Dương Đình Nghệ. It gave him the first chance to rise in society. In the case of Lê Hoàn, he got his chance when he became a protégé of Đinh Liễn and was given command of a division of 2,000 men in the war against the warlords

In the fighting between Lê Hoàn and a group of rivals, among them Đinh Điền, a Đinh relative and Nguyễn Bặc, a close associate of Đinh Bộ Lĩnh who was appointed Duke of National Consolidation (Định Quốc Công), Lê Hoàn got the help of the men from Giao through the person of Phạm Cự Lượng, a scion from the Phạm family in Nam Sách against the others who got their support from the southern province of Hoan And Ái. The invasion of Đại Việt by the Song only served to bind Giao more firmly to Lê Hoàn. However, not all of Giao followed him. One notable exception was Phạm Hạp, elder brother of Phạm Cự Lượng who chose to cast his lot with Đinh Điền and Nguyễn Bặc. But it is significant that when Lê Hoàn defeated his rivals, it was recorded that both Đinh Điền and Nguyễn Bặc was killed, but no mention was said of Phạm Hạp’s fate. The annals only recorded that he was captured.

By crushing his rivals Lê Hoàn lost the allegiance of the southern provinces and had to rely on the support from those in the Red River Delta. Thus throughout his reign as well as his son’s, the Lê had to content with repeated rebellions from the South. This situation continued

into the Lý, who changed the status of the two southern provinces from provinces to garrisons (*trại*) thus emphasized the difference between the two regions

Thus during the Lê dynasty, Hoa Lu became the base for Giao to control and repressed the southern provinces, instead of the place where the southern provinces watched and control Giao under Đinh Bộ Lĩnh. It was Lý Công Uẩn who finally completed the domination of Giao over the rest of the country by moving the capital to Đại La, the old Tang capital, that he renamed Thăng Long

Lê Hoàn's court was still rustic – the Song envoy to the Lê court described Hoa Lu as no better than a military fortress with almost no civilians inside the city and the palace of the king as small and poor, in the words of Song Gao, the envoy “The capital was just a camp, nobody except the soldiers lived there. The abode of Lê Hoàn was small and miserable, but in front of the house were carved two words ‘Minh Đức’ (Virtue clarified)”. In entertaining the Song embassy, Lê Hoàn followed the Viet tradition, offering them betel nuts to chew<sup>10</sup>.

However, Lê Hoàn's court was probably more sophisticated than that of Đinh Bộ Lĩnh. Much of it was attributed to an erudite Chinese, Hồng Hiến whom he appointed chancellor. Hồng Hiến apparently hold some administrative control in Giao for Lê Hoàn, so that after his death, probably because he could not find someone with the same ability and trust, Lê Hoàn began to assign fiefs to his sons in Giao. This is understandable since Giao was the basis of his power, the source of his manpower with important economic and intellectual resources.

It was under the Lê that the process of integrating the southern provinces with the Red River Delta started. Lê Hoàn and later his son Long Đĩnh spent most of their time repressing revolts in the southern provinces. In order to achieve that task they had to recruit soldiers in Giao as well as built roads, canals and other infrastructure in the south. He probably also recruit settlers from the north to settle in the places where those who resisted was killed off or pushed up to the mountains. It was at this time that Lê Lương's family whom Đinh Bộ Lĩnh granted “power in perpetuity” over Cửu Chân district probably lost their fief along with their power.

Lê Hoàn died in 1005 at the age of 64. His eldest son and crown prince. Long Thâu died earlier in 1002. His choice of the next crown prince led to much speculation. He did not choose his second eldest son (now the eldest and probably the son of the same queen who gave birth to the previous crown prince) but his third son, Long Việt who was born not from a woman of prominent family like the custom of the time, but from the class of palace servants – some Vietnamese historians even advance the these that Long Việt and Long Đĩnh was born from a Cham captive<sup>11</sup>. *Đại Việt Sử Lược*, an early Vietnamese history written in the 14<sup>th</sup> century wrote that Long Việt's mother was “a barbarian servant”<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>Lê Tắc *An Nam Chí lược* (translated into Vietnamese) p.35

<sup>11</sup>Tạ Chí Đại Trường *Bài Sử Khác cho Việt Nam* p.79 Tạp Chí Da Màu (Damau.org) 2009

<sup>12</sup>*Đại Việt sử lược*.32 The Vietnamese translation was “son of a servant girl!” but the original Chinese version wrote that “son of a barbarian servant” (Sino Vietnamese *hầu di nữ*) which later was interpreted by *Đại Việt Sử*



All the eleven sons and one adopted son of Lê Hosannas given fiefs to govern. Eight of them were in Giao and one in Ái. The three left was in the most strategic locations defending Đại Việt heartland against the invasion from the north. One was in Phong near Việt Trì guarding the route from the northwest following the flow of the Red River, Another guarding the traditional land route of invasion near Phả Lại and the last was in Hưng Yên, guarding the sea route of invasion. It is significant that one of the three princes given these fiefs was Long Đĩnh who proved himself to be ambitious at a young age since he asked his father to appoint him crown prince when he was only 15.

The war of succession after Lê Hoàn's death resulted in an eight month war between his sons Long Tích, Long Việt, Long Đĩnh and Long Kính. Finally after eight month of fighting, Long Việt defeated all the others and ascended to the throne only to be assassinated by Long Đĩnh after being king a mere three days. Long Đĩnh's reign was also short lived. He died only after four years. Not much was known about his reign except that he spent most of his time fighting uprisings especially in the southern provinces. Buddhism was still the most powerful influence. There is recorded of a mission to China to request Buddhist sutras.

The influence of the Sinicised elite of Giao became dominant under the Lý even though it started under Lê Hoàn. Lý Công Uẩn was a man from Giao. The palace coup that brought him the crown only need two days after the death of Long Đĩnh and did not need neither the cooperation of a queen regent or the pressure from the army. He was not even the commander in chief of the army but only one of the two commanders of the palace guards, but he had a commanding advantage. Lý Công Uẩn was a favorite of the Buddhist clergy who was the dominant faction in Hoa Lư's court.

History recorded Công Uẩn was the adopted son of the monk Lý Khánh Vân. In the context of the time, adopted son meant a strong alliance. Here it means a candidate of the Buddhist church. History also recorded that he had not only elevated his father and mother to the title of king and queen but also his many brothers and relatives, showing that he came from a big family in Giao<sup>13</sup>. It was probably the Buddhist connection that kept him alive when he cried in front of the body of Long Việt after the latter was killed by Long Đĩnh.

With Lý Công Uẩn, the rise of the Sinicised elements from Giao to dominate the politics of Đại Việt became complete. Hoa Lư lost its raison d'être of watching and guarding again Giao and thus was discarded. One of the first thing Lý Công Uẩn did was to move the capital to Đại La, the old capital of Chinese colonialists and rename it Thăng Long. The southern provinces were downgraded and lost their status as provinces proper to become "trại" (garrison), an administrative status denoting a semi barbarian province to be governed differently and controlled by military force. However the Lý continued and extended the practice of binding the other prominent families to them by marriage. Lý king took their

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*ký toàn thư* and *Khâm Định Việt Sử thông giám cương mục* as the son of the daughter of the official holding the post chi hậu named Diêu", either a mis reading or an intentionally misinterpretation.

<sup>13</sup>*Đại Việt sử lược* p.36

daughters as queens and consorts while Lý princesses were given in marriage not only to regional prominent families but also to ethnic chieftains in strategic locations.

Under the Lý, political situation stabilized greatly compared with previous dynasty. Aside a brief rebellion of his three brothers against the crown prince Lý Phật Mã after the death of their father, Lý Công Uẩn, in the early beginning of the dynasty, all succession was orderly even at the end of the dynasty.

The Lý emperors followed Lê Hoàn in assigning their sons their fiefs in strategic locations in the country. Even though the annals did not mention the specific locations of their fiefs, but from their brief mentions we can guess that they were sent to place where the local population might not accept Lý rule. One of the son of Lý Công Uẩn, for example, was given a fief in Trường Yên (Ninh Bình), the old place of the Lê including the old capital Hoa Lư. Lý Công Uẩn successor, Lý Phật Mã followed his father practice and appoint one of his son fief in Nghệ An province.

Because of more than one thousand years under Chinese domination with the ruling class profoundly influenced by Chinese culture and political practice, all the independent Viet dynasties could not find something better than recreate a small Chinese court in the country, although they also retain much of the traditional Lạc customs, which were gradually discarded with the rise of the Confucian literati (Vietnamese *nho*), starting from the third Lý king, Lý Nhật Tôn (Thánh tông).

The first three Lý kings were all mature when they ascended the throne. However the later Lý kings was all very young when they became kings and usually relied on their mothers as regents, whose relatives controlled the court at the expense of the royal clan. Conscious of this weakness, the Trần made a rule that all the queens had to come from the Trần clan. This however could not prevent one of the last Trần kings, Trần Phủ (Nghệ tông) whose mother, only a consort not the queen, who came from the Lê clan in Thanh Hóa, from relying on his maternal relatives leading to the rise of Lê (Hò) Quý Ly and the fall of the Trần.

## **Government Structure**

Not much was known about the administrative structure of the country during the first three dynasty. It is almost certain that the local family still governed their fiefs and the surrounding region, while in the place where there were not prominent family, the village people would govern themselves according to their traditional customs. The power of the court only covered the capital and its surroundings. However even in the court, there was not much of a bureaucracy. The Song envoy to Lê Hoàn court in his reports, observed that there was almost no formal administration, “the officials, those who proved capable were chosen to be close associates. Anyone who made a mistake was beaten and expelled, but when the king’s anger faded, he was recalled and continued his old job”<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>*An Nam Chí Lược* p.35

It was the Lý who succeeded in welding the country into a unified one with a character of its own. The first three Lý kings, Lý Công Uẩn (1009-1028), his son Lý Phật Mã (1028-1054) and his grandson Lý Nhật Tôn (1054-1072) was instrumental in building up the country and its civilization. In their time the country grew up in power and prosperity.

From Đinh Bộ Lĩnh who divided the country into ten circuits (*đạo*) to Lý Công Uẩn changed the 10 circuits into 24 routes (*lộ*). This division of the country sounds like an echo of the Tang Empire which divided the whole vast empire into 10 circuits, or the Song which divided their China into 24 routes. We did not know whether those “circuits” or “routes” were administrative units or just names nor do we know their location. However, we do know that the two provinces of Thanh Hóa (Ái) and Nghệ An (Hoan) were now considered semi-barbarian and needed to be repressed, thus their designation as “garrison” (*trại*), showing the Lý, with their base in the Red River Delta did not yet have the support of the southern provinces.

It was only until the Trần that the central government power really reached the regions outside the capital and its surroundings. In 1242, Trần Cảnh (Thái tông) reduced the 24 *lộ* of the Lý to 12, and appointed a government to govern each *lộ* composed of a governor (*an phủ sứ*), deputy governor (*phó sứ*), military garrison commander (*trấn thủ*), civilian administrator (*thông phán*). In addition two mandarins were appointed to take charge of building and maintaining the dikes and two appointed to look after agriculture. All with their sub-officials (clerks). Each *lộ* was further subdivided into *phủ*, *châu* (*prefecture*) with a prefect (*tri phủ* or *tri châu*). Under *phủ* or *châu* was *huyện* (*district*). Under *huyện* was *xã* (*village*). Under the Trần the two southern provinces Hoan and Ái were incorporated back into the main body and treated the same as the Red River Delta.

The second Lý king, Lý Phật Mã (Thái tông) was the one who set up a central civil service along the line of the Song dynasty with a Privy Council (*Khu mật*) to handle military matters. The administrative structure only became complete in the reign of Lý Càn Đức (Nhân tông). According to the *Lịch Triều Kiến Chương Loại Chí* of Phan Huy Chú, the administrative structure set up by the Lý was a simplified version of the Song one. However, there was a major difference. Most of these positions modeled after the Song court were ceremonial or advisory. The real administrative work was filled by a shadowy “inner court” consisting of eunuchs and other officials, while most of the official court positions were held by the aristocratic families allied to the Lý. Over time, with the dynasty prospering and stabilizing, many of the official “outer court” positions also became positions of real power, and we can see some of the officials moved from “outer” positions to “inner” positions and vice versa during their careers. This division was known by the Song who observed that, in the Lý court “the outer officials were in charge of military matters while the ‘inner’ officials governed the country”<sup>15</sup>

The most important position in the “inner court” was the *hành khiển*, a term that can be roughly translated into “administrator” of the court. During Lý times, the post of *hành khiển* was always held by a eunuch. The Trần, replacing the Lý, while keeping the same position of *hành khiển*, but filled it with a Trần prince, closely related to the king. During the reign of

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<sup>15</sup>Zhou Qu Fei *Lingwa Daida* Book.2

Trần Thánh tông for example, Trần Quang Khải, the king brother held both the position of chancellor (*thái sư*) and *hành khiển*. Only much later, with the rise of the Confucian literati, that the post of *hành khiển* was filled by a non royal official.

Another set of position was the *viên ngoại lang*, a kind of jack of all trade position at first set outside the official hierarchy. The position was first mentioned in the annals when it was stated that Lý Công Uẩn sent two of them, Lý Nhân Nghĩa and Đào Khánh Vân in mission to the Song court<sup>16</sup>. These two apparently either were Chinese or had close connection with China since one of them tried to stay in China, but was arrested and handed back to Đại Việt by the Song authority. Throughout the reign of Lý Công Uẩn (Thái tổ) and Lý Phật Mã (Thái tông) this class of officials constantly appeared serving as diplomatic envoy as well as in other functions such as judges. These *viên ngoại lang*, in contrast to other serving at the Lý court also got a salary<sup>17</sup>. They probably did not come from the landed gentry class and thus could not afford to be without salary. The class of *viên ngoại lang* was finally assimilated into the hierarchy of the court under Lý Dương Hóan (Thần tông) (1128-38)

As the number of officials was limited, the role of the clerks became very important. The Lý was the only dynasty in Đại Việt which organized examination to recruit clerks. The subject tested in the examination included mathematics. According to Lê Quý Đôn, these clerks, which the annals called *thư gia* played a much more important role than that assigned to them in China or in later Vietnamese dynasty<sup>18</sup>. The difference between the clerks and the court official in Lý times was also not great. A high official might be demoted to become a clerk like the case of Lê Bá Ngọc who was demoted from the post of *thị lang*, a very high position in the court equivalent to head of a ministry to a position of *Nội nhân thư gia* a kind of personal servant to the king in 1118 before being restored to the old position in 1124. But his misfortune was also his good luck. Probably during this time serving the king as the personal attendant, he attracted the king's attention so that he later was charged with ensuring that the the young crown prince Dương Hoán could succeed to the throne smoothly.

Even though the Lý had started using examinations to choose officials for the civil services, but the examinations were not held regularly. The candidates were also limited to those belonging to the children of the aristocrats. The main way of choosing people for government positions was still choosing from the sons of actual member of government. Since most of the officials came from the landowning class they usually served without a salary. According Phan Huy Chú's *Lịch Triều Hiến Chương Loại Chí*, under the Lý "all the court officials as well as the official serving in the regions were not paid a salary. Those serving at court might from time to time was given a compensation while those serving in the regions were granted a temporary fief where he could levy taxes on the population to cover his expenses"<sup>19</sup>.

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<sup>16</sup>Đại Việt Sử Ký Toàn thư p.82

<sup>17</sup>Đại Việt Sử Ký Toàn thư p.107

<sup>18</sup>Lê Quý Đôn *Kiến Văn Tiểu lục* (trans. into Vietnamese) p.129-130 Nhà Xuất Bản Sử Học, Hà Nội 1962

<sup>19</sup>Phan Huy Chú *Lịch Triều Hiến Chương Loại chí*(translated into Vietnamese) p.642 Hà Nội, Nhà Xuất Bản Giáo Dục, 1960

However there was also exception, probably for special cases, people with special skills not coming from the landowning class. The annals recorded that in 1067, Nguyễn Trọng Hòa and Đặng Thế Tư were appointed judges in the capital along with 10 clerks (*thư gia*) to serve as prosecutors. Trọng Hòa and Thế Tư were paid annually 50 *quan* in money, 100 bushel of rice, enough fish and salt to use for the year while each of the clerk was paid 20 *quan* in money, and 100 bushel of rice.<sup>20</sup>

Under the Trần, the introduction of regular civil service examinations to select mandarins gradually changed the character of the administration. The role of the eunuch as well as the inner royal household diminished greatly. While in the beginning almost all of the important functions of state were held by Trần clan or other noble houses allied with the Trần, by the time the dynasty reached its middle age (about 100 years after the founding of the dynasty) a corps of Confucian literati dominated the civil services. The first non Trần hành khiển was appointed under Trần Mạnh (1315-1358). The change to a permanent, professional civil services under the Trần also led to the civil servants being paid a salary, greatly increased the financial charge of the royal treasury.

Under the first three dynasties most of the laws used in Đại Việt was laws left over from Tang times. The Lý was the first promulgate a new code of law. In 1042, Lý Phật Mã order the chancellor to “codify old laws and regulations, taking into consideration customs and traditions, classified the laws according types and subject with clear heading. The result to be a Book of Law of the dynasty so that everybody could consult to know about the law.”<sup>21</sup>

While the Lý’s Book of Law had been lost, but many of the edicts that formed the basis for the Code were still extant. They showed the the laws were trying to protect the common people, the sources of its revenues, against the exploitation both of corrupt officials and the rising class of aristocrats as well as their morals. According to Phan Huy Chú’s *Lịch Triều Hiến Chương Loại Chí*, the Lý laws tend to be too lenient. Its leniency was seen in the fact that one can buy one’s way out of physical punishment. The laws allowed those above 70 or under 15, those disabled, royal relatives or mahad made great contribution to the state to use money to ransom punishment except for the ten “Great Crimes” (Tội thập ác)<sup>22</sup>

## **Military Organization**

All the Đại Việt dynasties paid close attention to their military forces. Đinh Bộ Lĩnh stated his intention to have an army of one million men organized into 10 armies. However considering the size of the population at the time as well as the existence of private armies

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<sup>20</sup>Đại Việt Sử Ký Toàn thư p.107

<sup>21</sup>Đại Việt Sử Ký Toàn thư p.99

<sup>22</sup>The ten Great Crimes: the ten crimes considered most serious in old Vietnamese criminal law. These crimes are: 1. Sedition, trying to overthrow the regime. 2. Damaging or destructing the king’s palaces or his tombs or his monuments. 3. Treason 4. Trying to kill or to beat one’s parents or grand parents 5. Steal the offerings in the king’s tombs; fake the king’s seal 6. Unfilial: disrespectful towards one’s parents, does not care for one’s old parents. 7. Mass murder 8. Discord: trying to kill or enslave one’s relatives (up to 5 generations) 9. Unrighteousness: killing state officials or those who had given favour to oneself. 10. Incest

belonging to the nobility, this goal was impossible to achieve. According to *Việt Sử Tiêu Án* of Ngô Thì Sĩ the army planned by Đinh Bộ Lĩnh was mainly reserve troops liable to be called up when needed and released to their peaceful activities when not needed. Lê Hoàn was the first to form a regular army called *Thân quân* whose member all have their front tattooed with the words “*Thiên tử quân*” (soldier of the Son of Heaven). This practice of tattooing continued until the Trần. We do not know how large was the regular army under Lê Hoàn, but according to the Song envoy to Lê Hoàn court, their number should come to several thousand, since their barrack occupied almost all of the city of Hoa Lu.

According to Ngô Thì Sĩ, the Lý perfected the military organization started by the Đinh and the Lê. The army was divided into the guards (*quân túc vệ* or *cấm quân*) who was charged with protecting the king and defending the capital and the regular army. Under Lý Công Uẩn, the guards consisted of two units, each comprised 200 men. Under Lý Phật Mã (Thái tông), possibly because of the revolt of the three princes showed the necessity of having a strong protecting army, the number of guard units was increased to 10 (or 2,000 men). The number of guard units were increased to 16 under Lý Nhật Tôn (Thánh tông) and 18 under Lý Cảnh Đức (Nhân tông), later reduced to 16 under Lý Dương Hóan (Thần tông).

Outside the guards units in the capital, the Lý also stationed troops in important places in the country. They constituted the regular army. According to *An Nam Chí Lược*, the troops were levied locally, and while serving, the soldiers were also allowed to return home every month to work on their fields. According to *Lingwai Daida* (Lĩnh Ngoại Đại Đáp) of Zhou Qufei (Chu Khứ Phi) (1135-1189) a Chinese official who was very familiar with Đại Việt situation of the time, “soldiers were organized into groups alternatively went back home to cultivate their fields to provide for themselves. Every year, at the 7<sup>th</sup> day of the first month, each soldier was given 300 pieces of money and a roll of silk. Every month, each soldier was given 10 bunches of rice. In the first day of the month the soldiers were also given pickled fish.”<sup>23</sup>

The Trần modified the Lý system, setting up a three level system of regular troops. Under Trần Cảnh, the guards consisted of 3 units of 200 men each. Outside the guard were regular troops. Those levied from the regions of Thiên Trường, Long Hưng (present day Thái Bình) the Trần original fiefs, were formed into four divisions (*quân*) of 2400 men each. Each division divided into 30 companies (*đội*) of 30 men. The troops levied from the region Hồng, Khoái (present day Hải Dương, Hưng Yên) as well as the region Trường Yên, Kiến Xương (present day Ninh Bình, Hà Nam) were formed into four other division with the same number of troops.<sup>24</sup> Outside the regular army, there were also private army maintained by the aristocracy both under the Lý and the Trần. The regular troops' numbers were quite small. The main military resources was the free peasants in the villages. Every man from 18 year old had to register for conscription. Any one above 20 year old was liable to be mobilized. Thus in case of war both the Lý and Trần were able to mobilized huge armies to resist the

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<sup>23</sup>Zhou Qufei *Lingwa Daida* Book 2 Part 3b PDF version of the book published in 1736 (Wikimedia.org)

<sup>24</sup>Phan Huy Chú *Lịch Triều Hiến Chương loại chí* (translated into Vietnamese) Vol.2 p.9 Hà Nội Nhà Xuất Bản Khoa Học Xã Hội 1989

invaders. They played an important role in the war against the Song in the Lý dynasty and against the Mongols under the Trần dynasty.

In the Đinh and Lê dynasty, the weapons and fighting capability of Đại Việt armed forces were possibly relatively inferior to the Chinese regular army. The Song envoy to Lê Hoàn, Song Gao, described the guards of Lê Hoàn as followed “there are about 3,000 men all tattooed with the words ‘Soldiers of the King of Heaven’ on their front. Weapons consisted of bow, crossbow, lances, swords, even wooden staff, and all looked flimsy not much use”<sup>25</sup>. However, by the Lý dynasty, Đại Việt armed forces had become such as the Song had to respect and even considered to copy. *Song shi– Tai Wanqing biography* wrote “Tai Wanqing obtained the book ‘Rule of military operation of Annam’ teaching how to coordinate the operations of the various fighting corps ...He wrote about it and submitted to Shenzong..”<sup>26</sup>. As for weapons, Lý Thường Kiệt campaign in Song’s territories and especially the siege of Yongzhou (Ung châu) showed that Đại Việt army possessed most of Song advanced siege equipments except for the catapult shooting stone bloc that the Song used with great effect later in the fight at the Như Nguyệt River<sup>27</sup>.

By the time of the Trần, Đại Việt also acquired firearms. While the use of firearms was not mentioned in the fight against the Mongols, by 1293 the Yuan envoy Chen Fu (Trần Phu) noted in his report poem *Annan Jishi*(An Nam Tức sự) that Đại Việt soldiers were armed with a type of gun along with crossbow shooting poisoned arrows and other arms like swords or lances. <sup>28</sup>. The use of firearms became more widespread later in the 14<sup>th</sup> century as showed in the campaign of Trần Khát Chân against the Champa king Chế Bồng Nga<sup>29</sup>.

## ***Economic Situation***

### **Agriculture**

The main economic activity was agriculture, especially wet rice cultivation. However other crops were also grown, especially mulberry to feed silkworm for silk production. At the same time, commerce and handicraft also flourished especially foreign trade at the time was still not a state monopoly.

Not much was known about the actual division of the land and the ownership of it, but from the few information recorded in the annals, we can recognize the structure of land ownership during the period as followed:

**The state owned fields:** The fields and land under the private ownership of the king. These fields might be the lands confiscated from the Chinese colonial officials or from the royal

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<sup>25</sup>*An Nam Chí Lược* p. 35

<sup>26</sup>*Songshi* Book 286

<sup>27</sup>*Songshi* Book 446; Hoàng Xuân Hãn *Lý Thường Kiệt* p. 139; p. 207-218

<sup>28</sup>Chen Fu *Annan Ji shi*元诗选: 安南即事- 中国哲学书电子化计划 (ctext.org)

<sup>29</sup>*Đại Việt Sử Ký Toàn thư* p.282

house of the previous dynasties, or from those aristocrats who opposed the present dynasties or even the lands owned by the royal house before ascending to the throne. These fields were worked by state slaves, and the products of these fields all gone directly to the king's treasury to cover for the expenses of the royal household. The early kings were very proud of these possessions and paid careful to their management. According to the annals, they frequently spent time watching the harvest just like any big farmer<sup>30</sup>.

The slaves who cultivated these fields however were treated decently. They had to give to the crown a portion of the harvest larger than the field tax paid by the free peasant but they were allowed to keep the rest of the harvest for themselves. According to Cao Hùng Trung, a Ming historian in his book *An Nam Chí Nguyên* each *mẫu* (roughly 3,600 square meters) of first grade fields had to pay annually 6 *thạch* 80 *thăng* of paddy while the second grade field had to pay 4 *thạch* and third grade field 1 *thạch*. One *thạch* is equivalent to 150kg in present day weight.<sup>31</sup>

**Estates of the aristocracy and temples.** Outside their own private landholdings, the aristocrats and the temples could be granted lands taken from common people. The grant did not provide the ownership of the land involved, it only allowed the one who was granted land the right to levy rent or taxes on those who tilled the land. There were two kind of grant. “*thực ấp*”, in which the grantees was allowed both the rent of the land and the personal services of those who lived on the land and “*thực ấp*” where the grantee was only allowed to levy rent on the land, the people who lived on the land still have to do labor services for the crown. The annals only mentioned a few of those who was granted land that way though it is possible that most of them enjoyed some of that grant. Lý Thường Kiệt, the hero of the Lý-Song war in 1082 was granted a land with ten thousand household as a fief.<sup>32</sup>

Those land granted as fiefs however could be also withdrawn at the pleasure of the king, especially if there was a change of dynasty. A typical example was the case of Lê Lương who was granted “in perpetuity” a huge plot of land in Thanh Hóa “east to Phân Dịch, south to Vũ Long, west to the Ma La Mountain, north to the Kim Cốc Mountain. His descendants will be allowed to rule that land forever”. But sometimes between the Đinh and the Lý dynasty, that land had been confiscated since in 1081, there was an edict returning a small part of the land to the descendants of Lê Lương<sup>33</sup>

The Buddhist temples as well as some of the monks also benefitted from this land grant. A monk at the time had many privileges. His name was withdrew from the population register. That meant he did not have to pay tax or do personal labor services. Neither was he conscripted to serve in the army. However, the Buddhist clergy was also under the supervision of the court with a head monk – *tăng thống* – and secretary – *tăng lục* –

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<sup>30</sup>*Đại Việt Sử Ký toàn thư* p.91

<sup>31</sup>Quoted in Trần Quốc Vượng and Hà Văn Tấn *Lịch Sử Chế Độ Phong Kiến tại Việt Nam* Vol.1 p.213

<sup>32</sup>*Đại Việt Sử Ký toàn thư* p.115

<sup>33</sup>Hoàng Xuân Hãn *Lý Thường Kiệt, Lịch Sử Ngoại Giao và Tôn Giáo triều Lý* Hà Nội, Nhà Xuất Bản Khoa Học Xã Hội p.437



appointed by the king. It was the task of the church to recognize who was qualified to be a monk since being a monk had many privileges that the state wanted to limit their number.

Under the Lý and the Trần almost all the pagodas were founded by either the king or the royal relatives. Each pagoda thus was granted a large estate and even slaves to till the land for the use of the monk in the pagoda. As some of the pagodas had hundred of monks, the temple's estate could be very large. Outside the rent that the temples raised from their estates, they also received gifts from devotees. Some of the gifts might be very generous. *Thiền Uyển Tập Anh* recorded that the monk Hiện Quang received so much gifts from the princess Hoa Dương that "people started to criticize"<sup>34</sup>. Since to be a monks had so much privileges that by the end of the Lý dynasty, there were so many monks that the historian Lê Văn Hưu had to criticize "half of the country became monks"

**Public land belonging to village community;** Most of the agricultural land in the country was public land owned in common by village community. In principle, these lands belonged to the king and the peasants who tilled had to pay rent to the king as taxes. Land taxes was the most important financial resources for the dynasty. However the king could exempt partially or wholly the taxes in case of natural catastrophe or even in case the royal treasury was flush with resources. The annals recorded that in 1016, Lý Công Uẩn exempted land tax for three years for the whole country. Again in 1044, Lý Phật Mã exempted half the land tax for the population.

These public lands were registered in the village land registry and were distributed solely to the people in the village. Sometimes two villages fought to possess a plot of land leading to the intervention of the authority.

**Privately owned land:** There also existed privately owned land. Even though the majority of these private land belonged to the aristocracy, there were also plot owned by non aristocrat. The rights of the owners of the land were respected by the law. While the land granted by the king or public land distributed to the common people to till were forbidden to sell or mortgage, these private plots of land could be freely sold or mortgaged by the owner. However, in case the owner let these plots of land vacant and someone else came to till them, he was allowed one year to reclaim it. After one year if he did not claim, he would lost the rights to the land.

Before the Lý dynasty, the amount of land under private possession was quite small and mostly owned by the aristocracy. But from the time of Lý dynasty, and especially under the Trần, the amount of land under private possession increased greatly. One of the reason was that they were taxed very lightly by the authority. According to *An Nam Chí Nguyên* of Cao Hùng Trưng, under the Lý and the Trần each *mẫu* (about 3,600 m<sup>2</sup>) of private rice field was taxed 3 *thăng* (approximately 3 liter) of rice while the same *mẫu* was taxed 100 *thăng* if public.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup>*Thiền Uyển Tập Anh* – Hiện quang thiền sư p.124

<sup>35</sup>Quoted in Trần Quốc Vương and Hà Văn Tấn *Lịch sử chế độ phong kiến* Vol.1 p. 284

While property rights were recognized by the Lý, it was the Trần who reinforced it, granting compensation if the state need to requisition private land for public use. In 1248, when building the Đĩnh Nhĩ dyke, the king ordered compensation in money to those whose land was encroached upon by the dyke.<sup>36</sup> The Trần also actively promoted private possession. In 1254 Trần Cảnh issued an edict allowing the sale of public land to private people. Each *mẫu* was priced at 5 *quan* (old monetary unit worth 600 coins, equivalent to one tael (37.5 g) of pure silver) of money. Later in the Trần dynasty, the Trần aristocracy greatly increased their holding by enclosing with dyke the land newly formed by the silts of the Red River. Private landholding became such prevalent that there were not enough common land to distribute to the free peasant to till. Thus in 1397, with Lê Quý Ly holding effective power, the court issued an edict limiting private land holding to 10 *mẫu* for everyone except close relative of the king.<sup>37</sup>

The Trần dynasty, drawing lesson from the chaos at the end of the Lý dynasty, paid particular attention to increasing the amount of land for agriculture and ensuring that the people did not suffered too much from natural catastrophes. In every province (*lộ*), two officials – *doanh điền sứ* - were appointed with the responsibility to reclaim waste or empty lands gave them to villages to distribute to peasants. In 1266, the court allowed the aristocracy to gather landless peasants, people who was displaced by wars or catastrophes to work to reclaim waste lands, land contaminated by salt, land newly formed by silt of the rivers etc.. The land reclaimed became private property of the nobles but the people involved were allowed to settle and till the land for themselves, paying rent to the owners<sup>38</sup>.

Flood control was particularly important in the Red River delta. The building of dykes to contain the flood started from colonial times. By the time of independence, there already existed a network of dykes covering most of the delta. While the Lý built some of the new dykes and refurbished many of the old ones, most of the work of maintaining the dykes system were under the Trần. In 1248, Trần Cảnh issued an edict ordering the provinces to build dykes around the major rivers “from the sources to the sea” to prevent the rivers from flooding the surrounding fields. He also appointed two officials, one principal and one deputy – *hà đê chánh phó sứ* - responsible for maintaining the dykes system as well as building new ones as necessary.<sup>39</sup>

*An Nam Chí Nguyên* recounted the effort of maintaining the dykes system in the Trần era as followed:

“Every year, in the first month, the official in charge of the dykes mobilized all the people in the surrounding area, old, young, rich poor equally, to go maintaining the dykes. Any place that was too low have to be built higher; where there was a landslide was to be filled back.

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<sup>36</sup>*Đại Việt Sử ký toàn thư* Vol.1 p.169

<sup>37</sup>*Đại Việt Sử ký toàn thư* Vol.1 p.292

<sup>38</sup>*Đại Việt Sử ký toàn thư* Vol.1 p.179

<sup>39</sup>*Đại Việt Sử ký toàn thư* Vol.1 p.169

The work continued until the beginning of summer. When the river water level started to rise in the sixth and seventh month, the official in charge of the dykes had to patrol the dykes continuously to see if there was any damages to the dykes and repaired them immediately. If he allowed the flood to reach the people, damaging the harvest he was punished according to the damages caused by the flood. Thus from that time flood did not occur. The people prospered...<sup>40</sup>

## **Industry and Handicraft**

In contrast to later dynasties, profoundly influenced by neo Confucianism from the Song era, commerce and handicraft flourished under the Đại Việt period.

In spite of, or possibly because of separation from China, handicraft and industry in Đại Việt made great progress during the four hundred years after independence. This is the time when Buddhism was in ascendance with many temples built throughout the country, especially during the Lý dynasty, thus the building and other crafts associated with it, developed uncommonly fast. Their progress also benefitted from the influx of Champa artists and builders who were taken prisoners during the wars with Đại Việt and brought back to the country to work in many of the state enterprises. Their influence on the architecture and arts of Đại Việt during the Lý dynasty and later can still be seen in many of the Buddhist temples built during Lý times, notably in the Kiến Sơ pagoda where the spirit Ông Gióng (Phù đổng Thiên vương) was worshipped along with the Buddha<sup>41</sup>

The state enterprises comprised of those which minted money, making weapons for the armed forces, including war ships, making court ceremonial dress and other ceremonial objects required by the court for the king and the high officials. Those working in these enterprises were either prisoners or free people with necessary skill requisitioned to work in these enterprises. In the beginning these enterprises could also produced other good to sell to the population in the markets but from 1145, they were forbidden to do so.

Outside the state enterprises there were many private ones. These were well developed and prosperous. Even in building and construction, sometimes the court had to use them when state enterprises were stretched. In 1010 for example Lý Công Uẩn (Thái tổ) had to use private contractors to build a pagoda in Thiên Đức and in 1031 Lý Phật Mã (Thái tông) had to hire them to build 150 pagodas across the country.

After many years of war and disorder the need for reconstruction was acute. Thus along with the construction industry, the production of building materials, brick, tiles, ceramics was also well developed. In 1084, the court allowed common people to use roof tiles for their houses, (but rescinded the edict in 1097). The artifacts found from the archeological exploration of the Lý Trần period such as large terra cotta statues show a high degree of skill and artistry. Lý Trần ceramics were equal in quality to Song ones, with beautiful glaze. Many small dishes

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<sup>40</sup>Quoted in Trần Quốc Vương and Hà Văn Tấn “*Lịch Sử chế độ phong kiến*” Vol.1 p.286

<sup>41</sup>Trần Quốc Vương “The Legend of Ông Dóng” in Taylor K. and Whitmore J, *Essays into Vietnamese Past*

and plates were fashioned like a lotus flower; some were decorated with chrysanthemum motifs.<sup>42</sup>

One of the well developed industry under the Lý dynasty was metal working and metal casting. The Lý casted many big bronze bell as well as many statues in bronze and precious metals like gold or silver. In 1035 Lý Phật Mã (Thái tông) gave 7,500 pounds of copper to cast the big bell of Trùng Quang pagoda. In 1041, he again gave 7,500 pounds of copper to cast the statue of the Maitreya Buddha to be placed at the pagoda Thiên Phúc in Tiên Du. In 1066, Lý Nhật Tôn (Thánh tông) gave 12,000 pounds of copper to be casted in to a bell for the Báo Thiên tower. The bell was so heavy that it could not be lifted to the tower and was left lying in the field. It was thus called the Bell of the Tortoise Field (Chuông Quy Điền) because the field where the bell was placed had many tortoises.

There were also statues casted in precious metals. In 1135, Lý Dương Hóan (Thần tông) ordered the casting of 3 gold statues of the Amitabha Buddha accompanied on the left by Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara (Quán thế Âm) and on the right by the Bodhisattva Mahasthamaprapta (Đại Thế Chí) to be placed in the Five Holy Mountains temple (Quán Ngũ Nhạc)<sup>43</sup>. In 1160 Lý Thiên Tông (Anh tông) ordered the casting of a statue of Indra (Đế Thích) and a statue of Suddhodana (Phạn vương) in gold to be placed the pagodas Thiên Phù and Thiên Hựu. The art of working precious metal was also well developed. *Đại Việt Sử Lược* recorded that in 1162, Lý Thiên Tông (Anh Tông) built the palace of Chủng Tiên with roof covered in gold and the floor covered in silver.<sup>44</sup>

Mining was well developed to provide materials for industry especially the mining for precious metals. The annals recorded that in 1062 the court sent men to work on the gold mine at the Vũ Kiến valley and silver mine at Hạ Liên district. In 1198 men were sent to mine for tin and copper in Lạng province. The annals did not record how the court organised the mining ventures, but they probably succeeded in extracting a significant quantity of metals to provide for their extravagant use.

The textile industry was also well developed. Local weavers succeeded in producing many of the luxury fabric that used to be imported from China. Thus when in 1040, according to *Đại Việt Sử Ký toàn thư* “the ladies of the palace had succeeded in weaving brocades and fine silks equivalent to those imported from China, the king ordered the warehouses opened and distributed all the Song fabrics to the officials. This is to show that we now don’t have to use Song fabrics anymore”<sup>45</sup>. The Lý even sent their textile to China. According to *Lingwa Daida*, in 1156, among the tribute that Lý sent to Song were “850 rolls of deep yellow silk embroidered with coiling dragons”<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>42</sup>Tatsuro Yamamoto *Annam no boeki ko Undon* (Annam’s trade in Vân Đồn) Toho gakuko V.9 Tokyo, 1939 quoted in Trần and Hà “*Lịch sử*” Vol.1 p.223

<sup>43</sup>*Đại Việt Sử ký toàn thư* Vol.1 p.131

<sup>44</sup>*Việt sử lược* Book 3 Pa.6b

<sup>45</sup>*Đại Việt Sử ký toàn thư* Vol.1 p.97

<sup>46</sup>Zhou Qufei *Lingwa Daida* Book.2 p.4b

The court established an organization called “*quyển khổ ty*” to buy silk from private weavers. At the same time, there were also state enterprises to grow mulberry, raise silkworm and weave their own silk. Those working in these establishment usually were women prisoners.

While the art of paper making had been introduced to Đại Việt from Chinese time, the art of printing was first started under the Lý dynasty, at first in the pagodas to print and distribute Buddhist sutras. It expanded greatly during the Trần, with so many of the sutras being printed and disseminated that from then on there was no need to sent envoys to China to ask for them. Under the Trần, other books outside Buddhist sutras were also printed and distributed

Building industry as well as the production of building materials, well developed under the Lý, progressed further under the Trần. Stone work especially was impressive as can be seen in the remnant of the wall surrounding the capital that Hồ Quý Ly built in An Tôn, Thanh Hóa. Even though the Lý had succeeded in producing ceramic tiles – the roof of the Diên Hựu pagoda (Chùa Một Cột) was supposed to be covered with it – the Trần developed them further. The Trần allowed even the common people to used tiles for their houses so the use of bricks and tiles for houses was well spread as the Yuan envoy Chen Fu noted in his report *Annan Ji Shi* “The tile looks like a wood board, the top part is square while the lower part was angular. They use nails made from bamboo to hold the tiles. The covering started from rooftop downward with tiles overlapping each other like fish scale...”<sup>47</sup>

Ceramic industry continued to develop and became so well known that the Yuan court required the Trần to include plates, bowl and cups in white porcelain among the tribute sent to China<sup>48</sup>. Glassmaking also developed, especially decorative glass. Lê Quý Đôn mentioned a penholder made from glass among the tribute sent to the Yuan from the Trần<sup>49</sup>

Textile industry also continued to expand. Many households produced their own silk for personal use. Chen Fu recounted that “many households had their own mulberry field, about 3 to 5 *mẫu*”. However the common people were not allowed to use colors for their clothing, so according to Chen Fu “the only color they were allowed to use was black”. But there were enough demand from the nobility that colored textile were available. Among the tributes sent to the Yuan in 1289 there were a roll of thick brocades, two rolls of thin brocades and twenty rolls of silk dyed in five colors.<sup>50</sup>

Outside silk, there was also cotton. While previously under the Lý, cotton cloth had to be imported from Champa, by the time of the Trần, the cotton industry in Đại Việt had progressed well enough that the tributes sent to the Yuan court in 1289 includes “ten rolls of white cotton cloths”

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<sup>47</sup>Chen Fu *Annam Ji Shi*

<sup>48</sup>*Yuan shi* Book 209

<sup>49</sup>Lê Quý Đôn *Văn Đai Loại Ngữ* (translated into Vietnamese by Trần văn Giáp, Trần văn Khang and Cao Xuân Huy) (Book IX par.39) p.383 Hà Nội, Nhà Xuất Bản Văn Hóa Thông tin 2006

<sup>50</sup>Trần and Hà *Lịch sử chế độ phong kiến* Vol.1 p.288

Metal working continued the Lý tradition. In 1256, Trần Cảnh (Thái tông) commissioned the casting of 350 bronze bells to be placed in the pagodas.

Handicraft and commerce development led to the development of science and technology. Lý times saw some developments in mechanical arts. There were mentions about automata, mainly in the development of toys but still a notable development. Inscription on the stone stele at the stupa Sùng Thiện Diên Linh recounted:

“On the Mid Autumn Festival day and the New Year day, the king (Lý Càn Đức) went to stay at Linh Quang Palace on the bank of the Lô River. On the river, thousand of boats, beating drums, engaged in racing competition. Then from the middle of the river, a golden turtle surfaced, on its backs was three mountains...it swam around, turning its head toward the land while spitting water from its mouth. When it reached the place the king sat its bowed its head..”<sup>51</sup>

The stone inscription also mentioned a rotating lamp as well as a mechanism to ring the bells automatically.

Science was also given importance. The examination to recruit clerks for the government in the Lý dynasty had mathematics among the subjects to be tested. Under the Trần, astronomy advanced enough that the Trần could produce its own calendar based on the local time instead of relying on Chinese calendar. The annals mentioned Đặng Lộ in Trần Mạnh (Minh tông) time who invented the *linh lung nghi*, an instrument to observe the motion of the planets across the heaven accurately. It was he who produced the first calendar based on the motion of the sun and the planet as observed from Thăng Long<sup>52</sup>

The art of weapon making was particularly well developed. While firearms had been in use in Đại Việt since the late 13<sup>th</sup> century, it was improved greatly by Hồ Nguyên Trùng<sup>53</sup> the eldest son of Hồ Quý Ly with the new “*thần cơ*” gun. We do not know what improvement Trùng made to the design of the gun, but according to Chinese sources, Trùng helped the Ming improved their guns by introducing a mechanism making the gun much faster to fire. Thus according Lê Quý Đôn, the Ming worshipped Trùng as the father of firearms<sup>54</sup>. Hồ Nguyên Trùng also designed and built a new type of war boat with two decks, the lower one sat the rower while the upper part was covered with planks to make it easier for soldiers to fight.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>51</sup>Thi Văn Lý Trần

<sup>52</sup>*Đại Việt Sử ký toàn thư* Vol.1 p.246

<sup>53</sup>Hồ Nguyên Trùng was the eldest son of Hồ Quý Ly, but was not allowed to succeed his father to the throne because he was the son of a concubine, not of a Trần princess like his brother Hồ Hán Thương. After the Ming conquered Đại Việt, he was brought back to China as a prisoner. But because his talent as an engineer he was pardoned by the Ming emperor and pressed into service with the Ming. He created new weapons for the Ming and end up becoming minister of construction (Công bộ thượng thư) in the Ming court. He left a memoirs about his life and time, “*Nam Ông Mộng Lục*” (*The Dream of a Southern Old Man*) that provide much materials about the Đại Việt of 14 and 15 century.

<sup>54</sup>Lê Quý Đôn *Văn Đài Loại Ngữ* (Book IV par. 109) p.220

<sup>55</sup>*Đại Việt Sử ký toàn thư* Vol.1 p.302

In general, most of the production during the period was small scale and meant to satisfy local demand. However by the time of the Trần the market economy had developed enough that there appears the so called handicraft villages (*làng nghề*), a whole village devoted to produce specific items to be sold widely. The first such village mentioned in the annals was the village of Ma Lô in the Hồng province (present day Hải Dương) producing a kind of special hat from bamboo called Ma lô hat. These *làng nghề* survived until present time. Many still produce their traditional products while some diversify to adapt to new situation

## Commerce

Trade, both internal and international trade was an important economic activity of Đại Việt. Commercial transactions need a medium of exchange to complete, thus the more commercial activities the more money it needs. The need to provide money for trade led to the almost continuous minting of money by the Lý and Trần kings.<sup>56</sup> Outside the coins minted by the Lý and Trần court, people also used Chinese coins minted by the Tang and Song, especially in the highlands near Chinese borders.

Internal trade was carried out mostly through the system of markets which was established everywhere. The capital Thăng Long had three main markets called the East, West and South while almost every village had its own market. Chen Fu in his *Annan Ji shi* wrote:

“Markets were established in villages and hamlets, to be held every two days. All kind of goods were presented to be sold, looking really exciting. Every five *lí* (about 2.5 km), a house with three partitions was built with stalls around all four sides to be the place where markets was to be held.”<sup>57</sup>

Internal regional trade was also encouraged by the development of roads and canals. Beginning with Lê Hoàn, many roads were built or consolidated to connect the regions together, some even reached into Champa or Chenla (Angkorian Cambodia). Many of these roads also had stopping posts, inns where people could rest and stay. Those inns were painted white to show their purposes. The government also dug many canals to facilitate river transport. New type of boat also facilitated the trade by water, especially the coastal trade between the Red River delta and the Thanh Hóa, Nghệ An regions. Chen Fu noted that

“The boat is light and long, makes of thin wooden planks. The stern look like the wing of water bird. Usually the boat has thirty rowers but may has as many as one hundred. It goes very fast”

He also recorded that “The Thanh Hóa prefecture is about 200 *li* from the capital, ships from many countries came there to trade. They traded with each other right on the ship, headed

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<sup>56</sup>Trần and Hà *Lịch sử* Vol.1 p. 222

<sup>57</sup>Chen Fu *Annan Ji shi*

together like the spokes of a wheel. I saw many products for sales, almost uncountable. It was the fief of the uncle of the king, Chiêu Văn (Trần Nhật Duật)”<sup>58</sup>

The development of regional trade led to the need for the unification of weights and measures. In 1280, the Trần court issued an edict setting up a common measure of length for distance and also set up a unified width for cloth. For the rest of the weight and measures, the use of Chinese weight and measures continued.<sup>59</sup>

Many of the commercial activities, were carried out by women. Zhou Qufei’s *Lingwai Daida* recorded:

“From city to the country side, many Jiao women engaged in small scale commerce to try to make some profit. Men who went away to trade or to work also bring their wives with them. I admired Annamese women. Even though men may have many wives but the wives were all independent, they engaged in buying and selling along the roads or in the markets to make their living. The extra money they gave to their husbands.”<sup>60</sup>

Not all internal trade was limited in extent. The building of roads and canals started under Lê Hoàn and his sons and continued under the Lý and Trần, even though mainly for purpose of military communications played an important part in developing trade between the different regions of the country. The trade between the lowlands and the mountain regions was especially active. Many cache of money found in the northern highlands dating from this time proved great scale of trade between the plain and the mountain. The large amount of Song coins found, also proved the importance of border trade with Song. The lowlands Viet usually brought salt and iron objects to exchange for gold, silver, forest products and animal from the ethnic minority in the mountain. Salt and iron were basic necessities for the tribal area, thus when, in 1179 the court forbid the sale of salt, iron and pickled fishes to the mountainous area, it caused enormous unrest and became the direct cause of several rebellions. There were trade across the border between the ethnic tribes in Đại Việt with the brethren in China. The annals recorded that in 1012 “the barbarians (the Thai from Yunnan, at that time was an independent kingdom named Dali) crossed the border to Vỹ Long (now Tuyên Quang) to trade. The kings sent men to arrest them and confiscated more than ten thousand horses”<sup>61</sup> It was possible that the arrest of Dali traders and the confiscation of their horses caused a war between Lý and Dali in 1013.

During Chinese time, Annam was an important stages in the east-west trade route called the Nanhai Trade. Long Biên and later La Thành was an important post rivaling Guangzhou in attracting foreign ships bringing luxury and tropical goods to China. With independence, number of ships from abroad docking at Đại Việt ports decreased greatly even still in sufficiently number to get the attention of the court. Đại Việt dynasties, both the Lý and the

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<sup>58</sup>Chen Fu *Annam Ji shi*

<sup>59</sup>Lê Tắc *An Nam chí lược*

<sup>60</sup>Zhou Qufei *Lingwai Daida* Book.10

<sup>61</sup>*Đại Việt Sử ký toàn thư* Vol.1 p.83



Trần, limited international trade by ship to a few sites where foreign merchants could be supervised closely by authority. During the Lý and the Trần, the most well known port was Vân Đồn. To compensate for the decrease in seaborne trade, the trade between Đại Việt and Song China increased greatly.

Unlike later time where the Viet hardly moved anywhere out of their own country, during Lý Trần time, Viet merchants also ventured abroad, mainly to China for business. Trade between Song and Đại Việt took place mainly in three places at the border between the two countries. The two smaller ones were in Yongzhou (Ung châu) where the goods bought and sold were of small values and in small quantities. The biggest one was in Qinzhou (Khâm châu) where goods bought and sold were of great quantities and high values. According Zhou Qufei, of the two places in Yongzhou, one at Hengshan zhai was the place where the ethnic minority came to sell horses, forest products in exchange for silks, other textiles and manufacturing products; the other one was at Yongping zhai where “Jiao (Đại Việt) people brought incense woods, rhinoceros horn, ivory, gold, silver, salt to exchange for silks and and other textile. The good they brought was all small and light except for salt which was compacted in bloc of 25 *jin* (app. 15kg) each. The Jiao people in Yongping all came by road. They were simplistic and honest unlike those who went to Qinzhou”

The biggest place for Song- Đại Việt trade was at Qinzhou. According to Zhou Qufei “Trading took place in the outskirts of the city. Their fishermen (Đại Việt) brought fishes to exchange for rice and textile. Their merchants, when they wanted to come had to ask for permission first. The goods brought to trade included silver, copper, various types of incense woods, pearls, ivory, and rhinoceros horns. Our small traders (Song) sold pens and paper, rice, textile to Jiao men in everyday exchange. But these trades were insignificant. The big trades came with the big merchants from Shu (Sichuan), bringing their Shu brocades to exchange for incense woods. They only came once a year, each time the value of goods exchanged rose to several thousands *quan*. They showed each other their goods and began to bargain. In the beginning, the price asked and the price bid was far apart. Our merchants (Shu merchants) ordered their servant to do small trades and even bought fields to till to provide for themselves, in order to show their determination. Their merchants were equally stubborn, they did not lower their prices to make us miserable. When the two sides finally tired and met again, they would act like old friends, drinking together without talking about business. Only after a time, their attendants started to negotiate until their prices were equal or nearly equal. Only then that government officials took charge, weighing the brocades and the incense woods and charging custom duty. Custom duty was only charged on Chinese goods. Each *quan* of goods had to pay duty of 30 coins.”<sup>62</sup>

Outside China, Đại Việt also traded with Champa and Chenla (Angkorian Cambodia). Most of the incense wood sold in China came from Champa or Chenla. A Khmer inscription dated from the year 987 recorded the arrival of Đại Việt traders from across the Trường Sơn

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<sup>62</sup>Zhou Qufei *Lingwai Dada* Book. 5

(Annamese Cordillera)<sup>63</sup> Angkorian Empire at the time covered most of present day Laos as well as part of Thailand and bordered Đại Việt in Nghệ An. In 1072, the annals wrote that the Lý king abolished custom duty on the Champa white cotton cloth<sup>64</sup>

The trade with China and Champa as well as Chenla was carried out mostly by land. There was also trade with other countries by sea similar to that under Chinese time. The main port used for the trade was the island of Vân Đồn which was established in 1149 for the exclusive use of foreign seaborne trade. *Đại Việt Sử Ký toàn thư* wrote, in 1149, “merchants ship from Qua Oa, Lô Lạc, Xiêm La entered the Hải đông region (now Quảng Yên) to ask for trade, The king ordered to make a port at the island of Vân Đồn for trade with the foreigners”<sup>65</sup> Qua Oa was the Vietnamese name for present day Java, Lô Lạc was Lopburi an ancient kingdom in central Thailand about 100 miles northeast of Bangkok while Xiêm La was the name of the Thai kingdom at the upper reach of the Menam River. Before the establishment of Vân Đồn, merchant ships from abroad used to come directly to the capital to ask for trade and sent present to the king. The annals recorded that in 1066, merchants from Java went to the capital and presented to the king a piece of luminous jade (ngọc dạ quang) worth 10,000 *quan*<sup>66</sup>. During Trần time, other places were also opened for foreign trade outside Vân Đồn. Chen Fu mentioned Thanh Hóa as another place where foreign merchant ships came to trade.

The most common foreign ships coming to trade were Chinese, then ship from other country in Southeast Asia. However there were also ship coming from further west. *Yuan shi* mentioned that one of the demands that the Mongols emperor required of the Trần king was to send back into Mongols hands Uigur merchants living in Đại Việt.

Under the Lý and the Trần, the merchants and the artisans had a respectable position in society unlike later time when the rise of the Confucian literati led to a neglect of commerce and industry. In fact, many Trần nobles like Trần Khánh Dư engaged in trade. And successful merchants could even joined in the rank of nobility. *Đại Việt Sử Ký toàn thư* mentioned a merchant who was so successful in his foreign venture and became so rich that his son was allowed to marry a Trần princess<sup>67</sup>

## State Finance and Taxation

The Đinh, Lê and to a certain extent the Lý depended mainly on their own holdings and those confiscated from their rivals to finance the operations of state. We can see the importance of the royal domain by the attention the Lý kings paid to their operation. Annals constantly mentioned about them coming to see how their fields were harvested, just like a landowner coming to inspect the harvest of his field.

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<sup>63</sup>Hall K.R. *Maritime Trade and State Development in Early Southeast Asia* Honolulu, University of Hawaii Press (1985)

<sup>64</sup>*Đại Việt sử lược* Book 2 Par 15a

<sup>65</sup>*Đại Việt Sử Ký toàn thư* Vol.1 p.138

<sup>66</sup>*Đại Việt Sử Ký toàn thư* Vol.1 p.107

<sup>67</sup>*Đại Việt Sử Ký toàn thư* Vol.1 p.257

However, with the increased scale of government, taxation played an increasing role in their financing. In 1013, Lý Công Uẩn signed an edict setting up 6 categories of taxes:

1. Ricefields, ponds and swamps
2. Mulberry orchard (to be paid in money or paddy)
3. Forest products
4. Salts and pickled fishes when transited through the control posts on the way abroad or to the highlands
5. Rhinoceros horn, ivory, incense woods
6. Timber, fruits from the highlands

There is no information about how these taxes were collected, except that they were collected through a system of tax farmers who were allowed to collect an extra 10% of the tax due for themselves.<sup>68</sup> These tax farmers were mostly local landowners but royal relatives and other nobility, including the princesses were allowed to collect taxes<sup>69</sup>

Outside of these six categories of taxes, there might be a tax on person like the head tax (*thuế thân*) of later times since *Thiền Uyển Tập Anh* recounted that the monk Tĩnh Giới became a monk without the authorization of the state, thus his sister, lady Chu had to pay his taxes for him. Only, later after he was famous for his prowess in calling for rain, and was officially ordered a monk that he was relieved from paying tax (as well as his family)<sup>70</sup>. Buddhist monks and Daoist priests as well as the aristocrats, and later the Confucian literati were all exempt from this head tax.

In addition to the taxes, peasant had to pay rent (*tô*) for using the common land of the village. The peasant who lived in the fief of the aristocrat. According to *An Nam Chí Nguyên* the rent levied on the fields varied with the fertility of the field. First grade field pay one *thạch* of paddy (about 71 kgs) *amẫu* (3600 m<sup>2</sup>), second grade field one *thạch* for every 3 *mẫu* and the lowest grade field, one *thạch* for every 4 *mẫu*.<sup>71</sup> Rent was levied on the village public land distributed to the peasants as well as on private owned land in addition to taxes, but seemingly only from time to time. *Đại Việt Sử Ký toàn thư* wrote “the year Nhâm Thân (1092) great harvest, fixing the land register, each *mẫu* to paid rent (*tô*) 3 *thăng*(about 3 liter) to provide for the soldiers”<sup>72</sup> and then in 1155, the annals wrote “the ninth month, levied rent on the spring harvest (*lúa chiêm*)”<sup>73</sup>It seemed from these few indications that rent was levied only in case of need and may be confined to only one harvest instead of the full year.

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<sup>68</sup>Phan Huy Chú *Lịch triều Hiến chương loại chí* Vol.2 p.227

<sup>69</sup>*Đại Việt Sử ký toàn thư* Vol.1 p.83

<sup>70</sup>*Thiền Uyển Tập Anh* – Tĩnh Giới thiền sư p.104

<sup>71</sup>Quoted in Trần and Hà “*Lịch sử*” Vol.1 p.112

<sup>72</sup>*Đại Việt Sử Ký toàn thư* Vol.1 p.113

<sup>73</sup>*Đại Việt Sử Ký toàn thư* Vol.1 p.143

We know more about the taxation of the Trần. In Trần time, the money economy was sufficiently developed so that many of the taxes now were paid in money. In 1242, Trần Cảnh (Thái tông) reformed the Lý system of taxation.

Taxes on rice field was abolished, replaced by rent fixed at 100 thăng per *mẫu*. A new tax was introduced, the head tax (*thuế đinh*) which in some measure was a wealth tax. This head tax was to be paid in money and was structured as followed: those who have from one to two *mẫu* have to pay one *quan* per year; from three to four *mẫu*, two *quan* and above five *mẫu*, three *quan*<sup>74</sup>. Mulberry orchard and salt fields was also taxed, to be paid in money, each mulberry *mẫu* have to pay from 7 to 9 *quan*. The Trần also taxed many other products and activities, almost all to be paid in money.

In addition to the taxes, the people also had to pay other fees in money for services. Lê Tắc wrote in *An Nam Chí Lược*“(Outside the taxes) Every year, the people also has to pay fee for services in money as well as gift for Tết in the first month; paddy and fish in the seventh month”<sup>75</sup>

How heavy was the tax burden under the Lý and the Trần? According to the report of Zhao Xie, the Song deputy commander of the invasion army in 1075, to the Song court:

“Jiaozhi taxed its people very heavily. Even those households in the middle or lower rank had to pay every year up to one hundred *quan*. Only four tenth of those taxes were submitted to the king, the rest were kept by their tribal chiefs. The taxes were so heavy that many people had to sell their assets, even their wives and children and still do not have enough to pay taxes”<sup>76</sup>

Similarly, Chen Fu, the Yuan envoy to the Trần court in 1290 observed that:

“..Taxes are heavy, fish, shrimp, fruits and vegetables, all are taxed. They are collected by the district chief. The betel nuts has its own tax collector...”<sup>77</sup>

Zhao Xie were probably incorrect. His army never reached the plains where most of the Viet lived, so what he described was probably hearsay. Chen Fu who was in Đại Việt almost two months during his mission and had time to go out and observe was probably correct. However he also observed that the Viet common people were quite prosperous; so even though taxation was heavy, it would not be too great a burden on the common people.

Taxes while heavy was frequently exempted when there was natural catastrophe or even when harvests were plentiful and the court warehouses were full. An example was in 1016, Lý Công Uẩn exempted the whole country of all taxes for three years. Then in 1044, his son,

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<sup>74</sup>*Đại Việt Sử Ký toàn thư* Vol.1 p.167

<sup>75</sup>Lê Tắc *An Nam chí lược* p.113

<sup>76</sup>Hoàng Xuân Hãn *Lý thương Kiệt* p.313

<sup>77</sup>Chen Fu *Annan Ji Shi*

Lý Phật Mã exempted half of all the taxes.<sup>78</sup> The tax burden only became intolerable later in the life of the dynasty, when wasteful and extravagant spending of king and court caused tax to increase so much that the burden became unbearable and rebellion broke out leading to the end of the dynasty.

## Life in the Đại Việt period

The period from about 900 to about 1340 was a period of climate change known as Medieval Warm Period. In Southeast Asia it produced stronger monsoons.<sup>79</sup> The warmer, wetter climate led to bigger and more plentiful harvests in Southeast Asia. Thus this period saw the rise, not only of Đại Việt, but the Angkorian Khmer Empire that reached its zenith in the 12<sup>th</sup> century and the Burmese kingdom of Pagan. Even the Champa kingdom which was weakened by internal wars also regained its vitality and fought with both Đại Việt and Angkor for a time.

We did not know much about the Việt in the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> century. But they probably did not differ very much from those of later centuries. Zhou Qufei, writing in about 1170 left a detailed description of the Viets at the time, that can be roughly summarized as followed:

“They (the Viet) were of small stature, wearing black clothes, dyed their teeth black, kept their long hair in bun at the top of the head, walking barefoot. The rich and the poor were all like that. Both male and female wear a kind of shirt made of four piece of clothes call “tứ dinh” (probably similar to the “tứ thân” that Vietnamese women still wear in North Vietnam until the twentieth century) for the upper body. For the lower body the woman wear a skirt while the men wear a roll of fabric wrapped around the the lower body like a skirt (probably like a sarong still worn by the Burmese and Thai). Their king himself would wear a yellow shirt in the upper body and a roll of purple cloth wrapped around the lower body. He used a gold pin to keep his hair in place. His subjects would use an iron pin. Going about they carried a fan made from feather and wear a conical hat shaped like a snail. Everybody tattooed like the figures on a bronze drum. The soldiers all tattooed on their forehead with the words ‘Soldiers of the Son of Heaven’. The women were fair of skin, different from the men. They took fragrant oil or wax to wash their hair making them shiny like painted. Their hair was tucked under a headscarf made from thin black silk, which was round up to the forehead, but pleated into seam up to the top (probably a description of the headscarf called *khăn mỏ quạ*- raven beak headscarf – popular among north Vietnamese women until 20<sup>th</sup> century) The rich women wore a black shirt with a rolled collar outside an inner shirt. They wore shoes with sock, and when walking in the streets and alleys they looked just like our women (Chinese) except for the headscarf. The mandarins who came to exchange communication wore purple robe, carrying the ivory badge of their office. They carried themselves with

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<sup>78</sup>Đại Việt Sử Ký toàn thư Vol.1 p.87 and p.102

<sup>79</sup>Brendan m. Buckley et al. “Climate as a Contributing Factor in the Demise of Angkor” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 107 (2010). Available online at [www.pnas.org/content/107/15/6748.short](http://www.pnas.org/content/107/15/6748.short)

grace. Meeting Chinese envoys, the mandarins, military and civil, all wear purple robe, their belt embroidered with rhinoceros but not fish.”<sup>80</sup>

Not much changed during the more than one century between the time of Zhou Qufei and Chen Fu who wrote in 1290 that:

“The people mostly wear black, made from four pieces of cloths, the flap curved, the collar made from thin silk. The women wear the same except that they use white cloth to make inner clothes, which is longer than the outer one at the collar, thus jutting out about 4 *thốn* (13cm). I never see anyone wearing blue, red or yellow.”<sup>81</sup>

Except for the slaves, most of the Đại Việt population was fairly prosperous. Chen Fu in 1290 wrote that:

“Rice fields give four harvests a year, even in mid winter the rice plants are still green...Each household has several *mẫu* of mulberry orchards to make into silk for clothing. The cloths made are beautiful. The houses do not have fences. To replace fences, they grow bamboo all around, as green as jade. On the side of the village roads, they grow a kind of spiny bamboo, very big, the diameter may be as large as 7 to 8 *thốn* (22 to 25 cm). The bamboo spine is as hard as steel. The bamboo grows very easily, plants a piece of it in the ground and it lives and grow...They have a type of banana called buffalo banana, the fruit of which has a length of many *thốn* hanging like a sword, the outside is bright yellow but the inside is green with a tint of pink, tasting really sweet and delicious. And there is a type of lychee called dragon lychee, smaller than the normal one, but tasting as sweet as longan; its leaves a deep green like jade...As for other fruits, there are coconuts, sugarcanes, oranges, jackfruits, guavas...fruits for every seasons. They taste better than those of other countries that I have been”<sup>82</sup>

Even though under Chinese colonization for so long, Viet society still kept many of its own traditions. Writing in 960, Shi Yue in his encyclopedia *Taiping Huanyu Ji*, complained that the Lo Yue (Lạc Việt) did not celebrate the New Year like the Chinese but choose the mid Autumn as the date for celebration, and that in that occasion “young men and young women went out to meet each other, and if please with each other, they can marry without the agreement of their parents” Shi Yue considered that a sign of lack of civilization.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>80</sup>Zhou Qu Fei *Lingwa Daida* Book 2. Zhou Qu Fei at the time was a mandarin posted in Qinzhou so he was quite familiar with the Viet who came to China to trade or passed through on official mission. Here he made a distinction between Song Chinese custom which differentiate between the military and civilian mandarin who wore different colors in their official robes with different motif embroidered on their robes. Fishes and rhinoceros were the picture commonly embroidered on the robes of Chinese mandarins

<sup>81</sup>Chen Fu *Annam Ji shi*

<sup>82</sup>Chen Fu *Annam Ji shi*

<sup>83</sup>Shi Yue *Taiping Huanyu Ji* Book.171 This is similar to the letter that Zhao Guangyi, the Song emperor sent to Lê Hoàn that said because he wanted to bring civilisation to the Viet, he had to send troops to liberate them from their barbarism.

By the time of Zhou Qufei (1169), the Chinese New Year had been adopted by the Đại Việt Lý dynasty, but the population still celebrate the traditional festival that they called Great Tet (Tết cả). *Lingwa dai da* wrote “(Every year) on the fourth day of the first month, the king invited all the mandarins to a great feast. But only on the fifteenth of the seventh month which they called the Great Tet that the people celebrate. Then, on the birthday of the kings, the mandarins all brought gifts to the king. The next day, the king ordered a great feast to entertain the mandarins”<sup>84</sup>

And “The custom of the Jiao people (on the Tet day), young men and women gathered to gether in group, using five colors threads made into a ball, singing and throw the balls at each other. If a girl accept the ball from a boy, they are considered to be engaged to be married”<sup>85</sup>

By the time of the Trần, the Chinese custom of celebrating the New Year had become prevalent. According to Lê Tắc, the rituals of celebrating the New Year followed closely Chinese practice except for some changes due to Buddhist influence. Thus “Two days before Tết (New Year day), the king rode on his carriage, followed by all the mandarins in court dress, to the pagoda to make sacrifice to Indra (Đế Thích) the king of the second heaven” And on the afternoon of the last day before Tet “a group of the monks came in the palace to perform the rite called “Khu Na” meaning to clean the palace of evil spirits.”

As for the common people, they celebrated the event by opening their houses, burning firecrackers and preparing the meal to present to their ancestors.

Outside the New Year, almost every month had a feast day where the people can rest after toiling hard the rest of the time. These included the Cold Food Festival (*Tết Hàn thực*) on the third day of the third month when steamed rolled pancakes (*bánh cuốn*) was served. The Buddha’s Birthday festival on the eighth day of the fourth month when people went to the pagoda to perform the ritual of “bathing the Buddha” – using fragrant water to wash Buddha’s statues and make glutinous rice cake (*bánh dầy*) to present to the Buddha as act of worship. The Mid Year Festival (*Tết Đoan Ngọ*) on the fifth day of the fifth month when the king went to the river to watch the Dragon boat race.

The most important festival after the New Year was the festival of Vu Lan on the 15<sup>th</sup> of the seventh month. It was also the time when the people were supposed to bring “gifts” to their mandarins and visit each other. Afterward there were the Mid Autumn festival (*Trung Thu*) on the fifteenth of the eighth month and the Double Nine (*Trùng Cửu*) on the ninth day of the ninth month. On the first day of the tenth month was the feast of New Rice when people make a big feast to present to their ancestor.

When the Viet met, they usually offered each other betel nut and areca leaves (trầu cau). Even the king greeted his guest with that. According to Song Gao, the Song envoy to the court of Lê Hoàn, who reported that, after he met Lê Hoàn, the two rode together and “from

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<sup>84</sup>Zhou Qu Fei *Lingwa Daida* Book. 2

<sup>85</sup>Zhou Qu Fei *Lingwa Daida* Book.10

time to time (Hoàn) offered me betel nut and areca leaves. It is their custom to show their appreciation of the guest”<sup>86</sup>

The custom of chewing betel nut with areca leaves lasted until present day in Vietnam. It was first mentioned *Lĩnh Nam Chích quái*, a collection of folk tales written at the end of the Trần dynasty, showing the ancient root of the custom. However the custom of chewing areca nut was not limited to Đại Việt. According to Zhou Qufei, this custom was common throughout southern China, From Fujian down to the border with Vietnam.

For their entertainment, the Viets had various games. Both the people and the nobility enjoyed “kicking the ball”. A ball made from bamboo and covered with brocades about the size of a child’s fist with as much as twenty tassels dangling was kicked around, whoever let the ball fell to the ground was the loser. The nobility also played a kind of polo, riding horses and hit a ball with a stick. There was also wrestling competition, a kind of chess as well as games of chance.<sup>87</sup>

Other form of entertainment included Vietnamese opera (chèo) which appeared at about the 10<sup>th</sup> century at the time of Đinh Bộ Lĩnh<sup>88</sup>. Puppet show with the puppets hoisted on top of a stick as well as other “street show” such as wire walking, climbing a straight pole etc<sup>89</sup> Chinese prisoners from the Mongols wars brought Chinese opera to Đại Việt, which later became the “tuồng” form in Vietnamese theatre. *Đại Việt Sử ký toàn thư* wrote:

“Previously, while fighting against Toa Đô (Sugetu), we captured a northerner called Lý Phương Cát who was well versed in the art of singing. He taught the young serving girls from the noble houses to sing the northern songs. He then wrote plays based on old (Chinese) legends such as The Queen Mother of the West presents her magic peaches... We have *tuồng* from that time on”<sup>90</sup>

The royal and nobility way of entertainment was not much different from that of the common people. Lý Nhật Tôn (Thánh tông) loved Cham music. According to the annals, he translated Cham music and drumbeat for the musicians to learn to sing and play<sup>91</sup>. Vietnamese music was deeply influenced by Cham music from then on. The Lý also brought Cham royal dancing girls back to Đại Việt and let them train court dancers. Thus court music and dance during the Lý and Trần dynasty basically was Cham music and dances. Chen Fu recorded a banquet at the Trần court as followed:

“I have the honor of attending a banquet at the Tập Hiền hall. To entertain the guests there are music and dancing. The musicians includes both male and female singers, divided in two

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<sup>86</sup>Lê Tắc An *Nam chí lược* p.35

<sup>87</sup>Lê Tắc An *Nam Chí Lược* p.15

<sup>88</sup>Nguyễn thúc Khiêm “Khảo về hát tuồng và hát chèo” *Nam Phong Tạp Chí* No. 141 Jan 1930

<sup>89</sup>Chen Fu *Annam Jishi*

<sup>90</sup>*Đại Việt Sử ký toàn thư* Vol.1 p.256

<sup>91</sup>*Đại Việt Sử ký toàn thư* Vol.1 p.106



group according to sex, each ten persons. They sit on straw mats laid on the ground. Musical instruments included *pipa*, *qin zheng* (VN: đàn tranh), and a one strings instrument. Before singing, they would try their voice first... The dancers are barefoot, wearing a ring around their ankle, they dance with their fingers spread in a kind of obscene gesture. In front of the hall there is puppet show, with the puppets laid on sticks and there are group of men wearing trousers made from brocades but upper body left bare blowing horns.”<sup>92</sup>

Buddhism was the official religion under both the Lý and the Trần. However, to both the common people as well as the king and the aristocracy, Buddhism was mixed with the cult of many other supernatural beings of earth spirits, mountain spirits, water spirits and spirits of departed heroes over which a “heavenly emperor” was supposed to rule. It was probably at the time of the Lý dynasty that the traditional Lạc cult of the mother goddesses acquired a fourth mothers in addition to the original three. The new one, Mother Goddess of the Sky Yana (Mẫu Thiên Yana) was obviously of Cham origin and almost certainly related to the goddess Yan Po Nagar worshipped by the Cham in the temple complex Po Nagar near present day Nha Trang.

Chen Fu noticed that “in front of almost every house in Thăng Long is a small shrine dedicated to a spirit called ‘the great Ma’ whose wooden statue looked really cruel and ugly. It was taken out on the first day of every month and placed in the courtyard where every one, old and young, paid homage to it.”<sup>93</sup>

The “great Ma” whose cult Chen Fu noticed in Thăng Long at the time, was probably Ma Yuan, still widely worshipped in present day southern China, especially in the provinces bordering Vietnam. Thus it might be a relic of the time when Đại Việt was still a province of China.

## ***Cultural Development***

### **The Formation and Development of the Vietnamese language**

The country that Ngô Quyền delivered from Chinese domination when he defeated the Nan Han kingdom’s invasion army was a collection of six colonies in various stage of Sinicisation. The richest, most populous and most Sinicised was Giao which covered most of the Red River Delta; then there was Phong located at the northwest corner of the Red River Delta; Trường at the southern end of the delta; Lục the northeast seacoast and the two southern colonies, Ái (present day Thanh Hóa) and Hoan (Nghệ An) with the last three the least Sinicised.

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<sup>92</sup>Chen Fu *Annam Jishi*. The gestures that Chen Fu described as obscene are common in Cham and Cambodian dance, where they are used to tell a story about the dance. We can still see them in the statues in Angkor and Cham relic. This type of dance is still preserved in the present Royal Cambodian Dance troops.

<sup>93</sup>Chen Fu *Annam Jishi*

In all of these colonies, the local elite – landowners, rich merchants etc.. – consisting mostly of Chinese settlers or Sinicised Lạc aristocrats, spoke a Chinese dialect, formed by generations of Chinese settlers coming from all provinces of China during the millennium of Chinese colonization, called Annamese Middle Chinese<sup>94</sup>. This dialect belonged to the group of Chinese dialects commonly spoken in southwestern China that eventually "diversified into" the various Xiang Chinese dialects in Guangxi and Hunan provinces at the present time.

However, those Chinese speakers lived amid a majority who spoke various Vietic dialects and thus became bilingual. Meanwhile, over the millennia of Chinese rule, the Vietic speaking people of the Red River Valley as well as of the Ma and Chu Valley adopted elements of Chinese vocabulary as well as tones. Thus from this two way interaction that a proto Vietnamese language emerged in Annam at the end of the first millennium, the Việt Mường. According to John D. Phan the first borrowing from Chinese language happened in the Han and Jin dynasties (from 1<sup>st</sup> century CE to 4<sup>th</sup> century CE) when Vietnamese acquired its first three tones and the second borrowing was in the Tang dynasty when the rest of the tones in Vietnamese was acquired<sup>95</sup>

By the time of independence, while Chinese was still spoken among the elites, Việt Mường, the language of the majority became the main language and even the language of the court, Annamese Middle Chinese, cut off from contact with China was eventually absorbed into Viet-Muong. Its legacy probably still existed in the way the Vietnamese pronounced the Chinese words as well as the Chinese vocabulary it gave to Vietnamese.

Chinese was probably still in wide use in the 10<sup>th</sup> century. The Khúc family, Đương Đình Nghệ, Ngô Quyền still used it in their court because they all came from the upper class. But with Đinh Bộ Lĩnh, there are reasons to believe that the language used in court was Việt Mường. Đinh Bộ Lĩnh came from Hoa Lư, one of the less Sinicised region of Trường. His father, Đinh Công Trứ was probably poor peasant, otherwise he would not have to be Đương Đình Nghệ retainer. Even though later he became governor of Hoan under Đương Đình Nghệ, Hoan was the least Sinicised of all the regions of Đại Việt. Furthermore, Đinh Bộ Lĩnh certainly did not inherit his father's position. The annals told us that he spent his childhood with his mother in Hoa Lư and that he had to fight his uncle for his inheritance. The succession from brother to brother is a feature in many tribal societies in Southeast Asia and possibly also a tradition in old Lạc society that we can still see in the story of Phùng Hưng whose brother and son fought each other for his inheritance after his death.

Đình Liễn, his son, however spoke Chinese fluently. He spent time in Ngô court as a hostage and only came back to his father after the death of Ngô Xương Vãn. And that explains why Đình Liễn was the one directly in contact with the Song court and the one who received the Song envoy.

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<sup>94</sup>Phan, John *Lacquered Words: The Evolution of Vietnamese under Sinitic Influence from the 1<sup>st</sup> Century BCE to 17<sup>th</sup> Century CE* Ph. D Thesis Cornell University 2013

<sup>95</sup>Phan, John "Re-Imagining Annam: A New Analysis of Sino-Viet-Muong Linguistic Contact" in *Chinese Southern Diaspora Studies* Vol.4 (2010)

Lê Hoàn spoke Chinese fluently. The Song envoy, Song Gao reported he talked to Lê Hoàn directly without any translator. Lê Hoàn and the monks he used to receive and entertain the Song envoy all spoke fluent Chinese and left anecdotes about their meetings which did not happen later when relations were more formal and separated by languages.

With the Lý dynasty, almost one hundred years passed since the time of Chinese rule. By that time Annamese Middle Chinese probably had been absorbed into Việt Mường. Meanwhile another process of separation also occurred. As Việt Mường became the language of the court, it continued to evolve, borrowing political and other concepts from Chinese as well as elements of Chinese phonology. Gradually, it diverged from the language of its closest relatives, the Mường and Nguồn people. As its speakers gradually dropped the first syllable from the disyllable words of the original Vietic words, the language became a monosyllabic tonal language. A new language was born, we can call it old Vietnamese.

By the time of the Trần dynasty, the transformation was complete. Even though written Chinese was taught and used as official language of the court, not many people know the spoken language. Thus Trần Nhật Duật was praised in the annals for “speaking many languages, including Chinese”.

Chen Fu, the Yuan envoy to the Trần court in 1290 left an account about the Viet’s language of the time as followed:

“Their speech is like bird’s song or rather like a singer singing a song. Following are a few of their words transcribed (into Chinese) thus: heaven called 勃未 (pinyin *bowe*; Sino Vietnamese *bột mạt*) [possibly *b’lòi* in old Vietnamese; present day Vietnamese *trời* or *giời*]; earth pronounced 得 (pinyin *de*; Sino Vietnamese *đắc*) [present day Vietnamese *đất*]; sun called 扶勃未 (*fubowe*; *phù bột mạt*) [*mặt trời*]; moon called 勃叉 (*bocha*; *bột lãg*) [*b’lãg* (?), *trăng*]; wind called 教 (*jiao*; *giáo*) [*gió*]; cloud called 梅 (*mei*, *mai*) [*mây*]; mountain called 幹隈 (*wo wei*, *can ôi*) [*cái núi* (?)]; water called 掠 (*lue*; *lược*) [*nước*]; eye called 末 (*mo*; *mạt*) [*mắt*]; mouth called 皿 (*min*; *mãnh*) [*miệng*]; father called 吒 (*zha*; *tra*) [*cha*]; mother called 娜 (*na*; *na*) [*má*]; son called 乾多 (*qian duo*; *can đa*) [*con trai*]; daughter called 于多 (*yudo*; *vu đa*) [(?)] or 乾蓋 (*qian gai*; *can cái*) [*con gái*]; husband called 重 (*zhong*; *trọng*) [*chồng*]; wife called 陀被 (*tuo bei*; *đà ba*) [*đàn bà* (?)]; good called 領 (*ling*; *lãnh*) [*lãnh*] or 頗 (*po*; *phả*) [*phải*]; bad called 張領 (*zhang ling*; *trang lãnh*) [*chẳng lãnh*].

From the sample that Chen Fu gave, we can see that old Vietnamese differed little from present day Vietnamese except that old Vietnamese still retained quite a few disyllabic words as well as some archaic terms.

## Champa and Đại Việt

The Đại Việt that gained independence in the 10<sup>th</sup> century was quite backward in terms of cultural development compared with both its neighbors north and south. As it progressed, it was influenced by both north and south.

### Champa: From Origins to 15<sup>th</sup> century

According to Cham legends as well as archeological evidence, the Cham migrated from Borneo to the coast of present day central Vietnam at about the first millennium BCE. They settled in the place that was present day Quảng Ngãi province and founded what is called the Sa Huỳnh culture by about the time of the Đông Sơn culture in the north.<sup>96</sup> By the time of the first century CE, late Sa Huỳnh settlements had developed into semi urban riverine and coastal port cities with Trà Kiệu and Gò Gấm important trading hubs.<sup>97</sup> It was at this time that they also started their raid into the Chinese colony of Rinan (Nhật Nam). *Hou Han shu* recorded several raid as well as rebellions with the help of “barbarians from beyond the frontier” in 100, 124, 135-7, and 140-46. Finally, in 192 a revolt broke out in the district of Xianglin (present day Thừa Thiên) and drove the Chinese administration of the whole prefecture of Rinan (from Đào Ngang pass to the Hải Vân pass). The leader of the revolt then founded the kingdom of Linyi (Lâm Ấp).<sup>98</sup>

Traditionally, Linyi was associated with the later kingdom of Champa. But lately, a few historians raise question whether the Cham state was a direct descendant of Linyi. Linyi left no information except those written in Chinese records while south of Linyi, Chinese histories also records many kingdoms in the place that would be part of Champa later. One of these kingdom was Quduqian (Khuất Đô Can) situated in the present day Bình Định province that sent an embassy to the Jin court in 286; north of it was Bolliao in the region of present day Tam Kỳ and Xitu (Tây Đồ Quốc), south of the Hải Vân pass and covered the Thu Bồn River valley which can be considered the birth place of Cham civilization.

There is reasons to believe Linyi is not a Chamic kingdom. Chinese annals almost uniformly gave the same name title Phạm (Middle Chinese *buam*) to the ruler of Linyi, which is closely related to the Khmer title *poñ* found in seventh-century Khmer inscriptions or the old Vietic *bu*. Thus it was proposed that the Linyi of Chinese history was not Cham at all but its people was either Vietic or Mon-Khmer.<sup>99</sup> The Vietnamese scholar Lê Quý Đôn in the 18<sup>th</sup> century thought that Xitu was merged into Linyi in about the fifth or sixth century. However, modern

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<sup>96</sup>Higham C. *Early Mainland Southeast Asia: From First Humans to Angkor* Cambridge University Press (2014)

<sup>97</sup>Southworth, W., "River Settlement and Coastal Trade: Towards a Specific Model of Early State Development in Champa", in Lockhart, Bruce; Trần, Kỳ Phương (eds.), *The Cham of Vietnam: History, Society and Art*, Hawaii: University of Hawaii Press (2011)

<sup>98</sup>*Hou Han shu* Book 65

<sup>99</sup> Vickery M. T. *Champa revised*. Asia Research Institute, Singapore (2005)

historians now believe that Xitu, instead of Linyi, was the actual Champa and that Xitu absorbed Linyi in the late fifth or sixth century.<sup>100</sup>

Thus the emergence of Champa in the 6<sup>th</sup> century was the result of a process of gradual northward and southward expansion from its original home in the Thu Bồn river region. It also involved a process of amalgamation of many proto-Cham independent kingdoms into a single one. It was during this time that the Cham came under the influence of Indian civilization through its neighbor in the southwest, Funan. By the 4<sup>th</sup> century, Indianisation was well underway. It was during this period that the Cham people created a unique script for their language from Sanskrit, and made stone inscriptions in both Sanskrit and their own language. They thus became the first people in Southeast Asia to create a script for their own language, preceding the Khmer and the Mon by several centuries.

The first king acknowledged in the inscriptions is Bhadravarman, who reigned from 380 to 413. At Mỹ Sơn, King Bhadravarman established a *linga* called Bhadresvara, whose name was a combination of the king's own name and that of the Hindu god Shiva. The worship of the original god-king under the name Bhadresvara and other names continued through the centuries that followed. The authorities of King Bhadravarman might have spanned from nowadays Quảng Nam to Chợ Dinh, Phú Yên, near the Đà Rằng River. He made his capital, Simhapura (City of the Lion) in present-day Trà Kiệu. It was the city that was sacked by Liu Fang in 605.

Xitu's conquest of Linyi occurred at about the time in Jiao, Lý Bí drove the Liang Chinese authority out of the country and founded the Vạn Xuân state. It was thus the two countries met when Xitu's forces tried to advance further north and attacked Cửu Đức. It was surmised that the old remnants of Linyi, mostly Mon-Khmer or Vietic chiefs might have moved north and helped Lý Bí defeat the invaders.<sup>101</sup>

It was at that time that the Mỹ Sơn religious complex was restored and expanded. Many royal temples were erected, most of them devoted to Shiva though some were also devoted to Vishnu. The king Vikrantavarman I who claimed through his mother to be a descendant of the legendary Brahman Kaundinya and the princess Soma, legendary ancestor of the Khmer (Funan), launched a series of campaigns to unify all the other Chamic states in the south. The consolidation and unification of the country was probably completed by the mid-seventh century when he claimed to be Lord of the Cham nation (*campādeśa*) in 658. The state he controlled stretched from the Đèo Ngang pass (Quảng Bình) in the north to around Ninh Hòa (Khánh Hòa) in the south.<sup>102</sup> The southern Cham kingdom of Panduranga became a dependent principality.

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<sup>100</sup>Griffiths, A.; Hardy, A.; Wade, G., eds.. *Champa: Territories and Networks of a Southeast Asian Kingdom*. Danang: École française d'Extrême-Orient (2019)

<sup>101</sup> Vickery M. T. *Champa revised*. Asia Research Institute, Singapore (2005)

<sup>102</sup>Zakharov, A.O. "Was the Early History of Campā Really Revised? A Reassessment of the Classical Narratives of Linyi and the 6th–8th-Century Campā Kingdom", in Griffiths, Arlo; Hardy, Andrew; Wade, Geoff (eds.), *Champa: Territories and Networks of a Southeast Asian Kingdom*, Danang, École française d'Extrême-Orient, (2019)

However the Chinese continued to use the name Linyi until 756 when it record the death of its last king. Afterward for a time they use the name Huanwang (Hòan Vương) until finally Cheng Cheng (Chiêm Thành) – city of the Cham – in 877.

From the 7<sup>th</sup> to the 10<sup>th</sup> century, Cham's power was at its peak. The Cham controlled the trade in spices and silk between China, India, the Indonesian islands, and the Abbasid Empire in Baghdad. They supplemented their income from the trade routes not only by exporting ivory and aloe, but also by engaging in piracy and raiding<sup>103</sup>

However internal conflicts soon led to their decline. In the 9<sup>th</sup> century, political power shifted south to the region of Panduranga (Phan Rang) and Kauthara (Khánh Hòa) centered around the temple complex of Po Nagar near modern Nha Trang that was dedicated to the indigenous Earth goddess Yan Po Nagar. It was at this time that Champa suffered terribly from Javanese sea raiders which terrorized the sea coast of Indochina from the Khmer Empire in the south to Annam in the north. In 774, a raid on Kauthara destroyed the temple of Po Nagar. Champa source mentioned their invaders as *foreigners, sea-farers, eaters of inferior food, of frightful appearance, extraordinarily black and thin*.<sup>104</sup> It was at this time that Chinese record changed the name from Linyi to Huanwang.

Power shifted to the north when in 875 king Indravarman II founded a new dynasty in Indrapura (Đông Dương, Quảng Nam). It was at this time that the Chinese records began to show the name Cheng Cheng (Chiêm Thành). Indravarman was the first Cham king who followed Mahayana Buddhism. At the center of Indrapura he build a temple dedicated to the bodhisattva Avalokesvara. The Buddhist period as official religion probably lasted until 925, when the Cham reverted to Hinduism even though Buddhism still existed in the country until much later.

In 979 the Cham king Parameshvaravarman I (Bồ mi Thuê) sent a fleet to attack Hoa Lu in support of dissatisfied prince Ngô Nhật Khánh following the Đại Việt civil war of twelve warlords. However, the ill-fated expedition was scuttled by a typhoon. In 982, after seeing his ambassadors to Indrapura detained by the Cham, Lê Hoàn decided to attack Champa. He defeated the Cham king Parameshvararman I, killed him in battle and sacked Indrapura, the Cham capital. They carried off women from the king's entourage, gold, silver, and other precious objects before burning the city to the ground.

With northern Champa ruled by a Viet named Lư Kế Tông from 986 to 989, political center of Champa shifted south to Vijaya (Qui Nhơn) which became the capital in 1000. However additional fights with Đại Việt led to successive defeat in 1021, 1026 and 1044. The defeat of 1044 was most catastrophic. It led to the death of the king Sạ Đầu and the sack of Vijaya. The Viet captured elephants, musicians, dancers as well as the harem of the Cham king including the queen My Ê who committed suicide on the way back to Đại Việt. The next war occurred in 1068, when Rudravarman III (Chế Củ) allegedly attacked Đại Việt to revenge the defeat of

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<sup>103</sup>Lê Thành Khôi *Histoire du Vietnam des origines à 1858* Paris, Sudestasie (1990)

<sup>104</sup>Coedes, G. *The Indianized States of Southeast Asia*, University of Hawaii Press, 1968

1044. The Đại Việt counter attack led to the captured of the king and another sack of Vijaya. This defeat had profound implications to both Đại Việt and Champa. It started the “march to the South” of Đại Việt when Rudravarman III, in order to be freed from captivity offered to cede the three Northern provinces to Đại Việt, starting a process where Champa gradually lost territories to Đại Việt until the whole country was lost. On the other hand, the Cham prisoners taken back to Đại Việt and settled among the Viet eventually play an important role in “civilizing” the Viet.

Taking advantage of the capture of the king, the southern provinces rebelled and established an independent kingdom in Panduranga which lasted until 1084. In 1074, King Harivarman IV took the throne, restoring the temples at Mỹ Sơn and ushering in a period of relative prosperity. But while making peace with Đại Việt, he soon ran into war with the Khmer Angkorian Empire. In 1080 a Khmer army attacked Vijaya and other northern Cham centers, destroyed the temples at My Sơn until finally the Cham managed to defeat them and restored the temples. However in 1145, a Khmer army under king Suryavarman, the builder of Angkor Wat, succeeded in occupying Vijaya and proceeded to conquer the rest of Champa until in 1149, the king of the southern principality of Panduranga. Jaya Hrivarman I defeated the Khmer and took the throne of Vijaya.

The Chams took revenge on Angkor in 1177 when a Cham fleet sailed up the Mekong River and defeated the Ankorian Navy in the battle of Tonle Sap, killing the Khmer king. After that they captured Angkor and looted the city. But the Khmers were rallied by a new king Jayavarman VI who drove the Chams out. Later, they attacked Champa and occupied the country for thirty years from 1190 to 1220. The Chams constant raiding of Đại Việt coast led to a punitive expedition by the Trần dynasty in 1226, but in general Champa and Đại Việt relations during that period was were peaceful.

The two countries cooperated closely against the Mongols in the Mongol war of 1282-1287, an alliance that led to the marriage of Princess Huyền Trân of Đại Việt to Jaya Simhavarman III (Chế Mân) in 1307. The Cham king ceded the two Northern provinces, Ô and Lý as a wedding gifts to Đại Việt. However when Simhavarman died shortly after the marriage, the Trần king sent his manadarin, Trần Khắc Chung to fetch the princess home causing a break of relation between the two countries.

The fourteenth century saw a gradual breakdown of the Cham kingdom with no inscription erected after 1307, religious construction and arts began to degrade, some cities such as Trà Kiệu (Simhapura) were abandoned. There were many reasons for this decline and breakdown. The devastating wars with Dại Việt and Angkor certainly played a role. Another factors was the gbradual change of religion from Hindu-Buddhist to Islam undermined the king claim of spiritual divinity resulting in growing strife among the Cham aristocracy. Finally, climate change that turn against Southeast Asia staring at about 1350 also played a role.

The last great king Champa had was Chế Bồng Nga (Po Binasuor) who ruled from 1360 to 1390. He apparently succeeded in unifying the country and by 1361 felt strong enough to attack Đại Việt from the sea. In 1372, he sent a letter to the Ming emperor Hongwu, warning

that Đại Việt was planning to attack his country and asking the Ming for war materials. His troops sacked Đại Việt capital Thăng Long twice in 1371, twice in 1377 and once in 1383 until he was finally killed in 1390 during another invasion of Đại Việt when his royal flagship was hit by a volley of musketry. With the death of Chế Bồng Nga ended the last attempt of the Chăm to resist the southward expansion of the Việt.

### **Cham influence on Đại Việt**

By the 11<sup>th</sup> century, Champa was a state with a high level of cultural development. It had developed its own style of music, dance and architecture that was far above the level reached by Đại Việt at the time. Thus in it is not surprising that when the two country came into contact Đại Việt would be profoundly influenced by Champa.

The first field that felt the influence of Champa was music and dance. The Lý expeditions against Champa under Lý Phật Mã (Thái tông) and Nhật Tôn (Thánh tông) led to the capture of many Cham musicians, dancers as well as many artists and builders. It was written that Lý Nhật Tôn (Thánh tông) loved Cham music. He personally translated Cham music and drumbeat into Viet languages for musicians to sing<sup>105</sup>. It was at this time that the small drum that the Vietnamese called *trống cơm* of Champa became one of the popular musical instrument of Đại Việt.<sup>106</sup> The influence of Cham music extended beyond court music. Some Vietnamese historians consider the traditional Vietnamese *quan họ* style of song and the traditional *lục bát* (six eight) form of poetry came from Cham poetry and folk music<sup>107</sup>

The dance that Chen Fu saw when he attended a banquet at the palace was also of Cham origin. The gestures the dancers made as well as the fact that the dancer danced barefoot with ring around their ankles reminded one of the carvings of the apsara in the Cham temple in My Son,

Outside music and dance, the Cham also deeply influenced Đại Việt architecture and construction. Cham architects and craftsmen played important role in the building of many pagodas during the Lý dynasty. Thousand of bricks inscribed with Cham script indicate that a multitude of Vietnamese temples and holy sites were built by Cham engineers.<sup>108</sup>

Perhaps the most concrete example of Cham engineers and architects contribution to Đại Việt was the construction of the Báo Thiên tower. According to Lê Tắc:

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<sup>105</sup> *Đại Việt Sử ký toàn thư* Vol.1 p.106

<sup>106</sup> *An Nam chí lược* p.16

<sup>107</sup> Trần Quốc Vượng “Viet Cham cultural contacts” in Trần Kỳ Phương and Lockhardt B. (eds) *The Cham of Vietnam: History, Society and Art*, Hawaii, University of Hawaii Press (2011)

<sup>108</sup> Miksic J.N. and Yian G.G. *Ancient Southeast Asia* Routledge (2016)



“In the old time, Lý Thánh king while attacking Champa, captured a very good builder (among the prisoner). Coming back, he ordered the man to build a great tower, thirteen stories, the top was made from bronze”<sup>109</sup>

The tower later was demolished, but its ruins still existed until late into the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Phạm Đình Hổ and Nguyễn Án left the following account of the excavations of the ruins of the tower in 1791:

“The tower “Thinking of Heaven in Great Victory” (Báo Thiên tower) at the Báo Thiên pagoda was erected in the reign of Lý Thánh tông (Lý Nhật Tôn). It has twelve stories with a height reached several dozen *trượng*. During the Ming Tuyên Đức period, our Thái tổ emperor (Lê Lợi) laid siege to Đông đô (Thăng Long). The Ming commander of the city, Vương Thông (Wang Tong) demolished the tower to (get the bronze in the tower) to cast guns to defend the place. Our previous dynasty covered the ruins with earth...The year Giáp Dần (1791) the authority ordered the excavations of the ruins to get the brick and stone to repair the walls of Thăng Long. When the workers broke in, they found eight statues of Dharma Protectors (Kim Cương Hộ Pháp) guarding the four doors as well as other statues of gods and spirits, birds and animals as well as beds, chairs, tables too numerous to count all in stone”<sup>110</sup>

The Cham also influenced Đại Việt religion. Outside the mother goddess cult which acquired a fourth mother goddess from Champa, a third Dhyana sect, the Thảo Đường, was imported in Đại Việt from Champa via a Chinese monk captured in Champa in Lý Nhật Tôn (Thánh tông) expedition against Champa in 1069. Most of the Lý kings later became followers of the Thảo Đường sect. It is possible that the widespread cult of Avalokitesvara (Quán thế Âm) in Đại Việt was also influenced by Champa, which worship Avalokitesvara as an avatar of Shiva.

## **The rise and decline of Buddhism**

Buddhism reached the land of Jiao from the time of the Eastern Han dynasty. By the period of the Three Kingdoms (220-280), it had spread widely among the common people even though it failed to penetrate deeply into the elite. The arrival of the *dhyana* (thiền in VN, Chan in Chinese, known as Zen in the West) sects of Buddhism first in the 7<sup>th</sup> century with Vinitaruci and then with Vô Ngôn Thông in the 9<sup>th</sup> century made Buddhism acceptable within the elite. Under the Sui and the Tang, with the encouragement from the colonial government, Buddhism expanded throughout the country and became one of very institutions connecting both the disparate regions and the various classes of the population together.

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<sup>109</sup>*An Nam chí lược* p.14

<sup>110</sup>Phạm Đình Hổ and Nguyễn Án Tang *Thương Ngẫu Lục* (translated into Vietnamese) p.204 Sài Gòn, Tủ Sách Dịch thuật, Sở Nghiên Cứu Giáo Dục (1961). The pagoda Báo Thiên as well as the ruins of the Báo Thiên Tower was given by the governor of Hà Nội- Bắc Ninh, Nguyễn Hữu Độ to the Catholic church as the site of Hanoi cathedral.

Thus after independence was achieved in the 10<sup>th</sup> century, Buddhism played a key role in unifying the country and sustaining the first dynasties. It became a *de facto* state religion until the first period of independence and enjoyed the support but also accepted the control of the state. Đinh Bộ Lĩnh was the first ruler to associate the Buddhism church with his rule. He was the first one who set up or rather confirmed a hierarchy within the church appointing a head of the church (tăng thống) and an administrator (tăng lục).

However the Buddhist church was an eclectic one. The *dhyana* sects were quite intellectual with an emphasis on self knowledge and seeking enlightenment through meditation. It appealed mostly to the elites. Popular Buddhism was a mixture of Buddhism of the Pure Land (Tịnh Độ) sect which worship the Amitabha Buddha with local worship of natural spirits plus some Tantric magic. In the 11<sup>th</sup> century, the cult of Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva (Quán thế Âm Bồ Tát) imported from Champa along with the royal cult of Indra (Đế Thích) became widespread.

Under the Đinh, Lê and the first three kings of the Lý dynasty, the two most important dhyana sect was the Southern Chan sect whose founder was the Indian monk Vinitaruci who went to Jiao in the 7<sup>th</sup> century and the Quan Bích whose founder was the Chinese monk Vô Ngôn Thông who went to Jiao in the 9<sup>th</sup> century. All the most famous monks in the first two hundred years of independence belong to either one of these two sects. The monks, Pháp Thuận who helped Lê Hoàn; Vạn Hạnh who helped Lý Công Uẩn; Từ Đạo Hạnh and Nguyễn Minh Không during Lý Dương Hoán (Thần tông) all belonged to the Southern Chan sect while Ngô Chân Lưu who was head of the Buddhist church and was appointed Khuông Việt đại sư (Great Teacher who Protect the Việt) during the Đinh and Lê time; as well as the monks Thông Biện, Không Lộ, Giác Hải belonged to the Quan Bích sect. In the middle of the 11<sup>th</sup> century a third dhyana sect entered Đại Việt, the Thảo Đường whose founder was a Chinese monks captured in Champa during an expedition against Champa by Lý Nhật Tôn (Thánh tông) who became his first convert. He also was the first Thảo Đường patriarch after the founder.

The mixture of Buddhism with magic and other cults such as the cults of natural spirits was not confined to the common people but pervasive among the elites. The stories of Giác Hải and Không Lộ or Từ Đạo Hạnh and Nguyễn Minh Không reflected a Buddhism almost have no relation with the pure dhyana Buddhism that these monks supposed to represent. The *Thiền Uyển Tập Anh*, a collection of biography of the most prominent monks in Jiao and Đại Việt up to the thirteenth century (it was written in 1337) are full of these marvelous tales.

It was the mixture of transcendental and high intellectual of dhyana Buddhism and the magical mix of populist and naturalistic of popular Buddhism that was both the strongest and weakest point of Buddhism in Đại Việt. In a world where people was almost helpless in face of natural forces, the monks was the mediators between the people and the forces of nature that caused floods, drought or plagues. Thus it was said that the monk Nguyễn Học used the Darani incantations to cure illness as well as call for rain. He wrought so many miracles that “Lý Anh tông gave him freedom of the palace so that he can use this incantations whenever it

is needed”<sup>111</sup>. The religion was respected and followed as long as these incantations and prayers were effective, but when these lost their effects, people began to turn away from it.

During the first stage of independence, Buddhism played an important role in helping the first dynasty consolidate their power with their people, bringing a legitimacy to the separation of Đại Việt from the world of Chinese Empire. Đinh the First Emperor appointed the monk Ngô Chân Lưu *tăng thống* and made him Great Teacher Protecting the Việt (Khuông Việt đại sư). He continued to bear that title under Lê Hoàn and “was even more appreciated by the king; at the discussion of all the important affairs of state, he was invited”. The monk Vạn Hạnh was instrumental in the crowning of Lý Công Uẩn. After Vạn Hạnh, the monk Đa Bảo replaced him as advisor to the Lý king, “after taking the crown, the king (Lý Công Uẩn) often invited him (Đa Bảo) to the palace to ask about the Way (Buddhism) very respectfully. He was even allowed to help to decide affairs of the court”<sup>112</sup> However, after Lý Công Uẩn, Buddhist monks never reached the political influence they exercised in the Đinh and Lê. Even though the court still appointed the head of the church (*tăng thống*), the annals never mention intervention from any of them in the political affairs of the day. On the contrary, the court began to intervene in the affairs of the church by formalizing the process of choosing who was to be ordained monk. It started with Lý Công Uẩn who in 1016 chose 1,000 person to be ordained Buddhist and Daoist priests<sup>113</sup> This practice continued throughout the Lý. However, like the examination to choose mandarin, it was held irregularly. It was only under the Trần that a system of examination to choose Buddhist and Daoist priests was set up with examinations held every three years. The topics to be examined were Buddhist sutras for monks and Daoist Classic for Daoist priest.

Buddhism reached its highest point in the Lý dynasty. Almost all the pagodas founded during that period was by either the kings or the aristocracy. Almost all the most famous pagodas in present day North Vietnam were built during that period, like the pagoda Diên Hựu (chùa Một Cột) built in 1049. Lý Công Uẩn right after ascending the throne, ordered the building of 8 pagoda in the prefecture of Thiên Đức (present day Bắc Ninh), the original fief of the Lý. His son, Lý Phật Mã built 150 pagodas throughout the country<sup>114</sup>

The reasons for the buildings of so many pagodas was not only to spread Buddhism more widely within the country but was part of a policy to weld an unified country out of disparate regional fiefdoms, different cultural constituencies and segmented economy. Marriage alliance was one part of the attempt. Another part was to bring all the local “guardian spirits”, from the Trung sisters in the west, to the earth genie of Phù Đổng north of Thăng Long to the spirit of the Bronze Drum Mountain (núi Đồng Cổ) in Thanh Hóa were brought to the capital and located in special temple dedicated to them.<sup>115</sup> The building of pagodas was

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<sup>111</sup>*Thiền Uyển Tập Anh* - Thiền sư Nguyên Học p.108

<sup>112</sup>*Thiền Uyển Tập Anh* Đại Sư Khuông Việt p.31 Thiền sư Đa Bảo p.35 Thiền sư Vạn Hạnh p.152

<sup>113</sup>*Đại Việt Sử ký toàn thư* Vol.1 p.84

<sup>114</sup>*Đại Việt Sử ký toàn thư* Vol.1 p.92

<sup>115</sup>Trần Quốc Vương “The Legend of Ông Đổng” in Taylor K. and Whitmore J, *Essays into Vietnamese Past*

another part of this attempt. According to J. K. Whitmore, these pagodas served both as symbols of royal power and centers for economic development, “temples networks was a key element in agricultural, hence economic expansion growing dramatically in organizational complexity and number. In the process these networks served three prime functions. First they concentrated and distributed resources, land, livelihood and seeds. They also brought together talented individuals and their skills as scholars, artisans and technicians. Third they developed the infrastructure for opening new lands to production”<sup>116</sup>

Many of the monks came from royalty or aristocracy. The monk Viên Chiếu was the son of the elder brother of Queen Ý Lan, Trí Bảo was uncle of the famous mandarin Tô Hiến Thành, regent to king Lý Long Trát (Cao tông), the nun Diệu Nhân was adopted daughter of king Lý Phật Mã (Thái tông). The king himself was the seventh patriarch of the *dhyana* sect Quan Bích. His son king Lý Nhật Tôn (Thánh tông) was the first patriarch of the *dhyana* sect Thảo Đường. Trần Cảnh the first king of the Trần dynasty was also a *dhyana* monk, although he did not join any sect. who was author of several books about Buddhism. His grandson was he founder of the *dhyana* sect Trúc Lâm (Bamboo Groves), Trần Khâm (Nhân tông) whose teacher was Trần Quốc Tung, called the Great Venerable Tuệ Trung (Tuệ Trung thượng sỹ), elder brother of prince Hưng Đạo, Trần Quốc Tuấn.

Buddhism began to decline at the end of the Lý dynasty. The veneration and donations received from the rich and powerful made many pagodas and monks immensely rich and influential. Each pagodas had its own rice fields, sometimes including serfs attached to them who thus became temple slaves. Large pagodas thus could have thousands of *mẫu* along with thousand of temple slaves. Outside land, the monks also received other donations including precious metals like gold and silver. The monk Tĩnh Không of the Khai Quốc pagoda in the prefecture of Thiên Đức (present day Bắc Ninh) received “so much cash, gold, silver and other donations that the pagoda was full”<sup>117</sup> while the monk Hiệu Quang received so much donations from the princess Hoa Dương that “he was criticized”<sup>118</sup>

Wealth and power gradually undermine the ideals of Buddhism. Many who came to the Buddha were motivated not by a wish to be delivered from the afflictions of this world and be liberated from the cycle of rebirth, but just to enjoy the pleasures of the world. This situation became so prevalent that the monk Tĩnh Giới complained in a poem:

“At the present time, only a few people understand about the True Way. Because the Way had lost its “heart””

And he commented ironically about those monks who frequented the rich aristocratic houses to preach about Buddhist enlightenment:

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<sup>116</sup>Whitmore J. K. “The Rise of the Coast: Trade, State and Culture in Early Đại Việt” in *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* Vol.37 No.1 February 2006

<sup>117</sup>Thiền Uyển Tập Anh p.88

<sup>118</sup>Thiền Uyển Tập Anh p.128

“How laughable are those ignorant and stupid *chan* monks; how can you find language to transmit something of the heart”<sup>119</sup>

At the end of the Lý dynasty, the number of Buddhist monks increased so much that the head of the army (thái úy) Đàm Dĩ Mông had to report to the king Lý Long Trát (Cao tông) that:

“At the present time, the number of monks and the number of men able to serve are equal. They (the monks) gathered into bands and do many dirty and corrupt things. Either they openly drink alcohol and eat meat at the places where these are forbidden or commit sexual intercourses in their own monk’s room. Hiding during the day, only go out at night like a swarm of rats. Their offenses against tradition and religion gradually became a habit. If we do not eradicate them, in the long time they will become a danger”<sup>120</sup>

Buddhism recovered during the early period of the Trần dynasty. The Trần kings appeared to have absorbed a more contemporary form of dhyana Buddhism with a stress on seeking Buddhahood within oneself. In the thirteenth there was strong integration of this Buddhism with classical Chinese thoughts. Trần Khâm (Nhân tông) connected with the Chàm and their Buddhist sites and he succeeded in fusing the varied segments of the Đại Việt Buddhism into a single strand, the Thiền Trúc lâm (Bamboo Grove sect). His new dhyana sect came to a time when all of the three previous dhyana sects became extinct. The royal sect of Thảo Đường came to an end with the death of Lý Long Trát (Cao tông) in 1210 while the last patriarch of the Southern school of Vinitaruci, the Venerable Y Sơn died in 1213 and the last patriarch of the Quan Bích School, the Venerable Hiên Quang died in 1221.<sup>121</sup>

However, by then Buddhism had become the target of criticism from the newly influential Confucian literati. One of the fiercest critics of Buddhism was Lê Văn Hưu. Commenting on Lý Công Uẩn (Thái tổ), Lê Văn Hưu wrote:

“Thái tổ ascended to the throne not yet two years, the altar to the ancestors not yet built, the temple to Heaven and Earth not yet established, but he already built eight pagodas in the prefecture of Thiên Đức, renovates other pagodas in the regions, ordained more than one thousand person in the capital to be monks. The waste in money, people labors and building materials must be uncountable. Wealth does not just fall from the sky. The labors of the people cannot be just materialized by a touch of a god. These things come from the exploitation of the blood and sweat of the people. How can exploiting the blood and sweat of the people be called by praying for the happiness of the land? ... Now the house of the Buddha is more munificent than the king’s palace. More than half the common people are monks. Everywhere there are pagodas. Thus is the origin of decline and fall”<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> *Thiền Uyển Tập Anh* p.105

<sup>120</sup> *Đại Việt Sử lược* p.85

<sup>121</sup> Trần văn Giáp “Le Bouddhisme en Annam, des origines au XIIIe siècle” *Bulletin de l’ecole française d’Extrême Orient* Vol. 32 No. 1 (1932)

<sup>122</sup> *Đại Việt Sử ký toàn thư* Vol.1 p.81

Another fierce critics of Buddhism was Trương Hán Siêu. In the inscription on the stone stele of Khai Nghiêm pagoda, commemorating the pagoda's renovation, Trương Hán Siêu declared frankly his point of view:

“To renovate the ruined pagoda is not my wish. To erect a stele to commemorate the event should not involve me. Presently our sacred dynasty wishes to draw a great wind to blow away all the bad habits. Superstition should be discarded, the right way should be restored. A scholar should not talk about anything else except about the way of the Emperors Yao (Nghieu) or Shun (Thuần); should not write about anything except the way of Kung (Khổng) or Meng (Mạnh). So why am I here writing about the way of the Buddha. Who am I trying to fool?”<sup>123</sup>

Under the constant attacks of the Confucian literati, Buddhism began to lose the support of the aristocracy. However, Buddhism in its highest, transcendental form provides answers to many metaphysical questions about life and death that are not to be found in Confucianism while in its popular form it provides the common people crutch against helplessness before natural catastrophes. Even Trương Hán Siêu who was so strident against it, turned to Buddhism in his old age.

What finally pushed Buddhism to its final decline in Đại Việt was climate change. By the middle of the fourteenth century, the Medieval Warm Period ended and the earth entered what is called “Little Ice Age”. The warm weather with abundant rainfall of the previous centuries ended in the late 1330. A transition period of about ten years with extreme climate fluctuations during the 1330 and 1340 opened the way for new conditions which characterizes by little rainfall. It created some of the most sustained droughts in the history of Đại Việt. The effects of natural catastrophes were compounded by an increasing gulf between rich and poor as the Trần aristocracy accumulated land and wealth at the expense of the poor. The situation became so dire that Lê Quý Ly in 1397 had to issue an edict limiting private ownership of land to 10 *mẫu* except for the sons and daughters of the king.<sup>124</sup>

By the 1350s, Đại Việt fell into a grave social crisis. In addition to natural catastrophes and rebellion, there were invasions from a resurging Champa under its greatest king Po Binasuor (Chế Bồng Nga) who in the twenty years from 1371 to 1390 sacked Thăng Long six times “setting fire to the palaces and seizing women, jewels and silk”. All books held in the royal palace was lost<sup>125</sup>

The demographic impact of these multiple crises was devastating. The population of Đại Việt fell thirty percent from 2.4 million in 1340 to 1.6 million 1400<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>123</sup>Inscription of the stone stele of Khai Nghiêm pagoda.

<sup>124</sup>*Đại Việt Sử ký toàn thư* Vol.1 p.291

<sup>125</sup>Maspero G. *Le Royaume de Champa* Paris, G. Van Oest (1928)

<sup>126</sup>Lieberman V. *Strange Parallels: Southeast Asia in Global Context c.800-1830* New York, Cambridge University Press (2003)

The powerlessness of both the secular and religious authority against such a catastrophic breakdown in society had many consequences, one of which was a lost confidence in the power of Buddhism.

The period would see two major efforts to try this social crises.. The first using a renovated Buddhist basis and the second the new Confucian culture. Both of them failed. But by the end the first was fading while the second was on the rise, incorporating elements of the first but reject its Buddhist premises.

The first effort started with the foundation of the dhyana sect Bamboo Groves (Trúc Lâm) by Trần Khâm (Nhân tông) to unify various strands of Buddhism in Đại Việt and continued under his son and grandson, Trần Thuyên (Anh tông) and Trần Mạnh (Minh tông). The hope was that it would support the throne and stabilize the realm

One important text representing the first effort was the *Việt Điện U Linh tập* in 1329 which related tales of supernatural spirits that was honored specifically for their aid in helping the kingdom to repelled invaders. Triệu Đà was not included in the list.

The second was represented by Chu văn An, his colleagues and his students who looked to classical Antiquity in China for their answers to the present problems. They believed that only by perfecting one virtues, following the Right Way prescribed in the words of the Ancient Sage that one could regain the favor of Heaven and save the people from natural catastrophe. Thus on the one hand they criticized the Buddhist influence at the court that made Đại Việt court deviated from the “proper rites” as prescribed in the Confucian classic, while on the other hand advocated the opening of school and temples for Confucius everywhere to spread Confucian morality to the common people. Lê Quát, a prominent student of Chu Văn An complained:

“I have always travelled through the country, leaving my footprints over half the empire but I have never once seen the so called *nhà học* or *văn miếu*”<sup>127</sup>

The court at first favored the first approach. But by 1340, Emperor Trần Mạnh (Minh tông) recalled Chu văn An from his self imposed exile south of Thăng Long. This marked the final decline of Buddhism. From then on, while Buddhism resurrected and became popular again but it remain the religion of the common people and never retgained its previous economic and political power.

## **The Rise of Confucianism**

Confucianism or more accurately the doctrine of the literati (Nho học) was a system of thoughts and behavior taught to the children of the aristocracy in ancient China during the time of the Zhou dynasty (1046-276 BCE). It was in the period named Spring and Autumn, when the power of Zhou waned and with other states contending for hegemony that Kong

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<sup>127</sup>*Thi Văn Lý Trần*Vol.3

Kiu (Khổng Khâu) - later venerated as Kong Fuzi (Khổng Phu tử - Master Kong) hence Western name Confucius – tried to restore what he claimed the teaching of the duke of Zhou and the wisdom of the houses of Xia, Shang and Zhou that had been abandoned by his time. Later his disciples, famously Meng Ke (Mạnh Kha) or Mengzi (Mạnh tử, Mencius), competed against many other school of thoughts during the period called Warring States in what was called Hundred Flowers competing to Bloom. From their writings, as well as from a compendium of what was called the “saying of the Master”, the basis of what was Confucianism was formed.

Confucianism was adopted with some modifications as state ideology by the Western Han dynasty. The modifications made it not only a system of philosophy and a set of moral values but also a kind of religion (Nho giáo) in which the king or emperor was the head of not only society but the unique mediator between Heaven and men. The act of worship Heaven and Earth was reserved exclusively to the Emperor who is called “the Son of Heaven”. All the later dynasties followed the Han and adopted it as state ideology even though individual emperors might follow other religion such as Daoism or Buddhism. Confucianism was appreciated as an effective instrument to stabilize society.

Confucianism had been present in Jiao almost from the beginning of Chinese colonization. At the end of the Western Han dynasty (around the beginning of the ~Common Era) many Chinese lettré taking refuge from the chaos in the north settled in Jiao province. They opened schools and propangadized Confucian thoughts among the Chinese settlers as well as the indigenous Lac. In that endeavor they were actively assisted by Chinese officials ruling the country in their attempt to Sinicise the country.

The rebellion of the Trung sisters with the support of most of the population showed the failure of that attempt. But the expedition of Ma Yuan and his destruction of the old Lac elite led to the rise of a new elite consisting of Chinese settlers and those native people who adopted Chinese way. Cufucianism was a way for them to prove their loyalty to the Empire as well as mean to advance themselves. Thus by the middle of the Eastern Han period, there were several people from Jiao who succeeded in being appointed mandarins in the Han court. One of them Lý Tiến even became governmor of Jiao province while another Lý Cầm reached the position *tu lệ hiệu úy*, a post of inspector general in charge of following the activities of the court officials in area around the capital. By this time, Confucianism in Jiao had been popular enough that the Han court allowed the province to choose among those who knew Confucian Classics one to be granted the title *mậu tài* and one granted the title *hiếu liêm* to be appointed mandarins outside the province.

Confucianism progressed one step further at the end of the Eastern Han when Shi Xie was governor of Jiao province. Just like at the end of Western Han dynasty, Jiao was the place of refuge for many Chinese scholars. They were encouraged by Shi Xie to spread Confucianism further creating a sort of golden age for Confucianism in Jiao that was still remembered by the Viet litterati later who worshipped Shi Xie and made him a king, Shi Wang in their writings.



Confucianism continued to expand in Jiao during the next few centuries, but quite slowly because of the “Great Family system” which favored influential family in central China at the expense of those in the periphery. The situation changed with the Sui and the Tang when the system of examination to choose mandarins was established and the “Great Family system” declined. With this boost, Confucianism quickly spread among the elites in Jiao. Some of them achieved high position in Tang court such as the father and sons Khương Tuấn Thần, Khương Công Phụ, Khương Công Phục who all passed the *jin xi* (tiên sỹ) examination. Khương Công Phụ even reached the position of chancellor under the emperor Tang Dezong. Others like Liêu Hữu Phương became famous for their poetry and had his poems listed in the *Compendium of Tang Poetry* (Toàn Đường thi)

However, the spread of Confucianism as well as Chinese culture was confined within the elites even in Jiao where Chinese influence was strongest. At the other colonies, Confucianism and Chinese culture penetration were even more limited. But this fact has an important implications. The Tang more equal treatment of the colonies created a sense of loyalty to the Empire that other dynasties lacked. Thus if previously, rebellion against the Empire were usually led by the elites of Jiao society and from the Red River delta, the richest and most populous colony, during Tang time most of the rebellions was led from the periphery, Phong or Hoan, Ái where Chinese penetration was shallowest. The people of Jiao, especially their elites, had become loyal subjects of the Empire.

The pro Chinese attitude of most of the Confucian literati at the beginning of the independence period was the reason that made the Đinh and Lê cautious about using them. Instead they relied on the Buddhist monks, who were another set of intellectuals but without strong ties to China, or even foreigner like Hồng Hiến whom they could be assured of loyalty.

But Confucianism is one of the best instruments a government can use. Its ideology justify the legitimacy of imperial power. Its teachings demand loyalty to the king or emperor, some times even at the expense of national interest. Thus by the time of the Lý dynasty, when the fear of northern invasion diminished, the government began to consider the use and training of the Confucian literati.

The first mention about Confucian literati (nho thần) in Lý dynasty was under Lý Phật Mã (Thái tông) when the annals recorded that, “the king visited the pagoda Tùng Sơn and saw a column that leaned to one side. While he was considering ordering the restoration, the column suddenly righted itself. The king ordered the Confucian mandarins to write a poem to commemorate the event”<sup>128</sup>

That event happened in 1043, but only in 1070 that Lý Nhật Tôn (Thánh tông) formally introduced the cult of Confucius and adopted Confucianism as state ideology. He ordered the building of a temple outside the city of Thăng Long with the statues of Confucius, the duke of Zhou, the four great disciples of Confucius to be worshipped inside the temple. He also

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<sup>128</sup>*Đại Việt sử lược* p.43

ordered the painting of the 72 sages (the 72 disciples of Confucius) to be hung in the temple. A school was built outside the temple to teach pupils about the doctrine of Confucianism.

The first examination, the Minh Kinh (Explaining the Classics) was held in 1075. Even though it was only symbolic, only one is chosen Lê Văn Thịnh, out of how many we don't know, to be the preceptor to the crown prince, but it was a significant step toward changing the way the court choose its officials which still mostly based on family connection. The next examination was not held until 1088. Again only one candidate was chosen, Mạc Hiến Tích who was appointed Scholar of the Academy (*Hàn Lâm học sỹ*). It is to be noted that all those allowed to take the examination was from the aristocracy unlike later dynasties. Perhaps because the Lý chose their officials exclusively from the aristocracy, there was not much need for this kind of examination except for special cases where proficiency in the Classic was required. Thus throughout the Lý period, only seven examinations were held in more than 200 years

For the common people, there was the clerk examinations which did not required the knowledge of Confucian classic but mathematics and law. The first clerk's examination was held in 1077.

The more important aspect of Confucian adoption was the adoption of the rites and ceremonies associated with Confucianism or rather Chinese culture. Lý Phật Mã (Thái tông) was the first king to build a platform to perform the rite worshipping Heaven and Earth, the *đàn Nam Giao* and performed the rite of ploughing a symbolic furrow on the royal rice field. It is possible that it was under him or his son that the Viet began to celebrate the Chinese New Year instead of the old one in mid autumn.

The Trần expanded the use of the examination system to choose officials. In 1232 Trần Cảnh (Thái tông) held the first *Thái học sinh* examination to choose mandarin. Those chosen was ranked according to their scores and grouped into three groups: first, second and third. From then on, examinations was held every few years. Even though not regularly, but there was at least one examination every ten years. About 30 to 40 persons was chosen each time with their ranking in the examination determines the post they were appointed.

In 1247, the first three highest ranking was singled out for special treatment and given title of *Trạng nguyên, bảng nhãn, thám hoa*, a practice that was followed by other dynasties until the Nguyễn. Until 1374, all those who passed the examinations was only called *thái học sinh* (roughly graduate student) when Trần Kính (Duệ tông) established the title *tiến sỹ* to replace the older one. This title was used by all later dynasties.

Under the Lý and the first Trần king, there was no formal requirement for the examination. It was only in 1304 that Trần Thuyên (Anh tông) reformed the system of examination. Before being allowed to sit for the *Thái học sinh* examination, the student must pass a preliminary exam to eliminate those not reaching a certain standard. The examination itself now consisted of four stages testing the student understanding of the Confucian Classics, his ability to write poetry, to write court documents and finally an essay discussing a political problem taken

from history or current political events. Student must pass one stage to be allowed to proceed to the next. The four stage exam structure was followed by later dynasties and the system of examination was only abolished in 1918 by French colonial authority.

In 1396, Lê Quý Ly changed the preliminary examination into the district examination (*thi hương*) and decreed that the *thi hương* was to be taken one year before the main one. In 1404 Hồ Quý Ly (now changed the surname from Lê to Hồ) added a fifth stage to the exam, mathematics and art of writing, which was not retained by later dynasties.

The Trần also continued the Lý practice of holding examinations to choose clerks. The subject tested did not cover any of the above but mathematics and the writing of administrative documents.

Contrary to the Lý, the Trần allowed common people to sit for the examination. Thus even though under the Trần class distinction was still very rigid, a way was opened for mobility within society. The privileges that those passed the *tiến sĩ* received as well as the effort of the Trần court to expand education led to the wide spread expansion of Confucianism within the people.

In 1232, Trần Cảnh (Thái tông) founded the *Quốc tử viện* to teach the Confucian Classic to the sons of high mandarins and royal relatives. In 1253 he founded another one, the *Quốc Học Viện* for chosen students to prepare for the *thái học sinh*. These two schools were later merged into one and can be considered to be Viet Nam first university. Students in the school was taught by scholars appointed by the court.

The first school opened by the court outside Thăng Long was in Thiên Trường, the old fief of the Trần in 1281. In 1397, Lê Quý Ly as chancellor ordered the opening of school in every districts, appointing an education officer in every province, prefecture and district to oversee the teachings as well as granting each school enough public rice fields to pay the teachers. Outside of the state schools there were also private schools opened by famous Confucian scholars, the most famous among them were schools opened by Trần Ích Tắc at the beginning of the dynasty and that of Chu Văn An later near its end.

The opening to the common people of the examinations occurred in parallel with the economic policy of encouraging private property led to a great change in society. A new class of moderately wealthy but non aristocratic “lower landowner” was formed, who farmed their holdings with hired laborers. They concentrated mostly in the provinces south and east of Thăng Long – from Hải Dương to Ninh Bình in present day - the place where the Sui and Tang dynasties “equal field” policy was most effective in preventing the formation of great estates. Their offsprings came to dominate the examinations and formed a class of Confucian litterati that competed effectively against the Buddhist dominated aristocracies who held all the most important function of states.<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>129</sup>Whitmore J.K *Vietnam, Hồ Quý Ly and the Ming 1371-1421* New Haven, Yale Council on Southeast Asian Studies (1985)

They were helped in their endeavor by the rising need for personnel by the state bureaucracy. Under the Trần the power of the state reached down to village level. Compared to the Lý the number of officials were much more numerous. In Trần Thuyên (Anh tông) time, the number of mandarins increased so much that the senior king Nhân tông complained “Why do a country as small as a hand needs so much officials?”

The Trần tradition reserved the most important position in the court for royal relatives. Under Trần Hoảng (Thánh tông) for example, the post chancellor (*thương tướng thái sư*) as well as court administrator (*hành khiển*) both was held by the king’s brother Trần Quang Khải. However by 1303 during Trần Thuyên (Anh tông) time, the position of *hành khiển* was given to Trần Khắc Chung (originally Đỗ Khắc Chung, given the surname Trần after the Mongol wars), a non royal aristocrat. In the same year, Đoàn Nhữ Hài was appointed *tham tri chính sự*, a position considered as deputy to the chancellor, and the next year was appointed to the Privy Council. The fact that Nhữ Hài, a commoner, was appointed to such a high position was commented by the *Khâm Định Việt Sử Thông giám cương mục* as followed:

“From the year Kiến Trung (1226) until now, the great officials who held power in the court were all royal relatives. Presently, Nhữ Hài, a mere student, is elevated to such an important position; From now on the way of employment will not differentiate between social positions anymore”<sup>130</sup>

The new class of mandarins, the Confucian literati brought with them a critical view of the moral and behavior of the court and society. Their sense of moral righteousness can be seen in Lê văn Hưu *Đại Việt Sử Ký* (Historical Records of the Great Viet) in which he used the past to give critical comment of the present. He spoke against the legacy of the traditional Lạc culture, seeing it as lacking in court style and hierarchy, ignorant of proper behavior, thus setting a bad example for the people. He was particularly incensed of what he thought as licentiousness such as too many wives (he was not again a man taking concubines, just wives of equal rank), lack of piety for paternal line, too short a period of mourning in the death of a king, as well as other cultural practices. We see the clearly the pattern of Hưu’s thought by the fact the he began his history with Triệu Đà whom he placed in the place of a sage king by frequently quoting Mencius on the rules of succession.

Lê văn Hưu provided a strong sense of coastal thoughts. He used the past to give critical comment of another. He spoke against the inland culture, seeing it as lacking in court style and hierarchy, being ignorant of proper behavior and setting a bad example for the people. Too many wives, a lack of piety for the paternal line, and too short a period of mourning on the death of the king as well as other cultural practices was view as serious problems. Hưu began his history with Triệu Đà whom he placed in the context of a Chinese sage – king<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>130</sup>*Khâm định Việt Sử thông giám cương mục* (translated into Vietnamese) Hà Nội, Nhà Xuất Bản Giáo Dục (1998)

<sup>131</sup>Lê văn Hưu’s book had been lost, but his comments were preserved in Ngô Sĩ Liên’s *Đại Việt Sử Ký toàn thư*. About Triệu Đà, Hưu’s comment was “Emperor Thuấn was an Eastern barbarian, yet was famous as one of the Five Emperor. King Wen of the Zhou dynasty was a Western barbarian yet was one of the sage king of the Three Dynasty, thus a sage king cannot be judge on whether civilised or barbarian but on virtue alone. The

Lê văn Hưu lived in the 13<sup>th</sup> century where the Confucian literati still constituted a minority in the court. So his voice was somewhat a lonely voice. But by the fourteenth century they had become a majority within the mandarin state even though most of the important positions were still held by Trần royals.

The key thinker of this new group of intellectuals was Chu An or Chu văn An (1292-1370) who passed the *thái học sinh* exam but refused to take an official post but returned home to open a private school in his village south of Thăng Long. Chu văn An looked to Chinese antiquity to answer for the present problems and advocate a strict following of Confucian doctrine. In 1340, he was summoned by the senior king Trần Mạnh (Minh tông) to the court and appointed royal tutor to his sons and heirs. The next years (1340) he was appointed head of the Quốc Học Viện, the national academy where most of the new mandarins were trained, a post he occupied for almost two decades. Thus for almost a quarter century he was the foremost scholar and political thinker of Đại Việt. His student eventually came to dominate the Trần civil services, most importantly in the local and regional administration and started acting on their beliefs. He resigned his position in 1360 when the king Trần Hạo (Dụ tông) rejected his demand to execute seven of his favorites as “treacherous flatterer”

In the beginning their attempt to impose their concept of political and moral correctness met with opposition from both the people and the aristocracy. An early thirteenth century folk tale, *Trê Cóc* (The Catfish and the Toad) tell of a Confucian bureaucrat and his corrupt underling’s dogmatic judgment without knowing the real nature of things to judge the tadpoles belong to the catfish only to be confounded by reality when the tadpoles grow up, shed their tails and return to their true parents the toad. As the American historian Alexander Woodside points out the poem mocks “the Chinese style mandarin’s attempt to thwart the concrete realities of his environment”<sup>132</sup>

The resistance of the court was straightforward. When Lê Quát and Phạm Sư Mạnh pushed for change in the legal system, Trần Mạnh (Minh tông) dismissed them for advocating a Chinese model not appropriate to Đại Việt

“From the time when state has its system of laws, North and South have been different. If one were to listen to inexperienced scholars, seeking to achieve their objectives, disorder would break out”<sup>133</sup>

## **The Cult of antiquity and a new identity**

Contrary to the Buddhist hierarchy, Chu văn An had a different approach to healing “the ills of existing society”. This included the reduction of Buddhist influence and link the present time to the “sage rulers of antiquities” – Yao, Shun and the duke of Zhou. To do that, it was

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Martial Emperor of Chao governed our Viet land, making himself emperor equal to the Han. He began the path leading to Viet Empire. This achievement could be said to be really great.” *Đại Việt Sử ký toàn thư* Vol. 1 p.14

<sup>132</sup>Woodside A. B. *Vietnam and the Chinese Model* Cambridge, MA; Harvard University Press (1971)

<sup>133</sup>*Đại Việt Sử ký toàn thư* Vol. 1 p.254

necessary to “return to antiquity” (*phục cổ*) and recreate the “ideals of that past in the present”. However he and his disciples were also conscious that “North and South are different” as observed by Trần Minh tông, and set out to find an antiquity of their own so that they could learn of the way to transform their own people.

And they found it first in scattered Chinese writings. It was one of Chu văn An students, Phạm Sư Mạnh who first provided Đại Việt with the first indigenous dynasty before the arrival of the Chinese: the kingdom of Văn Lang. Phạm Sư Mạnh served the Trần court as a military official from 1342 to 1362 and spent most of this time in the north and northwest regions “to pacify” rebellions there. It was while in this region of old Tang province of Phong that he discovered Tang’s text about the prehistoric kingdom of Văn Lang, which the Chinese situated in Phong. In the 1350 wrote a poem titled “Patrolling” (Hành Quận) in which he described for the first time in connection of the course of the Red River (which was called the Thao at this part) the kingdom of Văn Lang as well as An Dương Vương:

“Here Văn Lang’s sun and moon once shone upon Thục’s mountains and rivers”<sup>134</sup>

Their effort were represented by the book *Lĩnh Nam Chích Quái* (Strange Wonders from South of the Passes), a collection of tales taken from popular memory about a pre Chinese past. It was at about the same time that the *Việt sử lược* was written with the first mention of the kingdom of Văn Lang into history. By 1400, a new mythic foundation had come into existence and became the foundation for a new Vietnamese identity. It was at that time that the Viet began to have a different views of their neighbors. An official edict in 1374 warned the Viet not to “dress in the fashion of northerners (Chinese) nor copy the speech of the Chams and Lao”. According to Nguyễn Thế An this was the first signs of Đại Việt unease at Cham cultural influence<sup>135</sup>

## ***Cultural Development***

With political independence, art and literature in the ex Chinese colony of Annam slowly separated from Chinese. If earlier authors like Liễu Hữu Phương or Khương Công Phụ or what the *Complete Collection of Tang Poems* called Jinan monk belonged strictly in the realm of Chinese literature, Việt authors from the 10<sup>th</sup> century onward, even if they wrote in Chinese were distinctly different. They are part of the new Đại Việt civilisation.

Many of the writings were lost during the war again Champa in the later half of the 14<sup>th</sup> century and Cham troops occupied and looted the capital Thăng Long. However, the worst destruction happened during the Ming occupation of the country from 1407 to 1428, where they burned or brought to China every piece of writings they could collect from the country in order to destroy every memory of the past in the effort to incorporate the country into a part of China. According to Phan Huy Chú, the lost books included the most basic documents

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<sup>134</sup>*Thi Văn Lý Trần* Vol.3

<sup>135</sup>Nguyễn Thế Anh “The Vietnamization of the Cham Deity Po Nagar” in *Essays into Vietnamese Past* Taylor K.W. and Whitmore J.K. eds Ithaca, NY, Cornell University Press (1995)

about the country legal and constitutional structure including *Genealogy of the Lý dynasty* (Lý triều ngọc diệp), *Lý's criminal law* (Hình thư), *Map of Showing the Division of the Border Area between North (China) and South (Đại Việt)* (Nam Bắc Phân giới địa đồ), *Dynastic Rites and Customs* (Quốc triều thường lễ) (written under Trần Cảnh), *Genealogy of Trần's Dynasty* (Hàng tông ngọc diệp) *Trần's Compendium of Laws and Rites* (Hoàng triều đại điển). *Trần's Criminal Law* (Hình luật thư)<sup>136</sup>. Thus what was left was only a very small part of a rich and flourishing literature.

## Art and Literature

Under the first three dynasties, the most urgent tasks were to stabilize the situation and defending the newly acquired independence thus art and literature were not considered important. The number of writings left from that time were few and consisted of dialogues and exchange of poems with Chinese envoys by Việt monks tasked with receiving and entertained them. Their writings, even though written in Chinese already had their own distinct characteristic different from the old Tang or new Song writings. If the writings left over from Đinh and Lê times all came from the Buddhist monks, it was because the Confucian literati were still looking to China and isolated themselves from the task of building a new country.

The situation changed with the Lý and the Trần. While many of the authors were Buddhist monks, especially during Lý times, the number of secular authors became more and more numerous until at the middle of the Trần dynasty the number of secular authors overwhelmed those religious ones.

The legacy of Chinese domination still influenced much of Đại Việt literature, not only during the Lý-Trần period, but until much much later. Not only Viet authors used Chinese language and characters in their writings but they also used Chinese metaphors, literary allusion taken from Chinese history, literature. Sometimes these allusions became overly unrealistic, for example talking about snow in winter, while the country was never cold enough to have snow even in the mountains. Thus it was not surprising when such a great piece of writing like the “To the Officers and Men” (Dụ chư tỳ tướng hịch văn) of prince Hưng Đạo Trần Quốc Tuấn made mention about Chinese heroes living under the Warring States or Han Jin periods like Kỷ Tín, Do Vu, Dữ Nhượng.

If both Lý and Trần authors used the same Tang's style form of poetry to express themselves, the ideas they expressed though their poems were quite different. Lý's poems were deeply reflected Buddhist thoughts, especially those of the Dhyana School. However, as the Buddhist monks during the Lý period actively participate in the political life of the country, their poems reflected a more engaged with secular life than usual. An example is “To the disciples” of the Venerable Vạn Hạnh:

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<sup>136</sup>Phan Huy Chú *Lịch Triều Hiến Chương loại chí* vol.3 p.44

示弟子

|   |   |   |   |   |   |    |                               |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|----|-------------------------------|
| 身 | 如 | 电 | 影 | 有 | 还 | 无。 | Thị dệ tử                     |
| 万 | 木 | 春 | 荣 | 秋 | 又 | 枯。 | Thân như điện ảnh hữu hoàn vô |
| 任 | 运 | 盛 | 衰 | 无 | 怖 | 畏。 | Vạn mộc xuân vinh thu hựu khô |
| 盛 | 衰 | 如 | 露 | 草 | 头 | 铺。 | Nhâm vận thịnh suy vô bổ úy   |
|   |   |   |   |   |   |    | Thịnh suy như lộ thảo đầu phô |

Life is like a stroke of lightning, existing a moment then no more  
 Like a tree, flourishing in spring then drying in the fall  
 Do not be afraid of whether the time is prosperous or in decline  
 Prosperity or decline is just like a drop of mist on top of a blade of grass<sup>137</sup>

Another one the Venerable nun Diệu Nhân Lý Ngọc Kiều advocated people to live a normal life, did not looking for salvation from either Buddha or dhyana:

|   |   |   |    |                        |
|---|---|---|----|------------------------|
| 生 | 老 | 病 | 死  | Sinh Lão bệnh tử       |
| 自 | 古 | 常 | 然。 | Tự cổ thường nhiên     |
| 欲 | 求 | 出 | 离。 | Dục cầu xuất ly        |
| 解 | 缚 | 添 | 缠。 | Giải phộc thêm triền   |
| 迷 | 之 | 求 | 佛。 | Mê chi cầu Phật        |
| 惑 | 之 | 求 | 禅。 | Hoặc chi cầu Thiên     |
| 禅 | 佛 | 不 | 求。 | Thiên Phật bất cầu     |
| 杜 | 口 | 无 | 言。 | Đỗ khẩu vô ngôn (ngôn) |

Birth, old age, illness, death  
 They are the normal conditions of life  
 To search for salvation  
 Is just like want to unbind but end by binding tighter  
 Only the confused look to the Buddha  
 The mistaken try to follow Zen  
 Don't look to the Buddha, to try Zen  
 Let's stiffen our lips, keep silent<sup>138</sup>

Compared with the Lý, Trần's poetry was much more diverse. The poet looked for inspiration not only from the inner spirit but also from outside scenery and scenes of life in society such as this poem of the Venerable Huyền Quang, third patriarch of the Bamboo Groves dhyana sect:

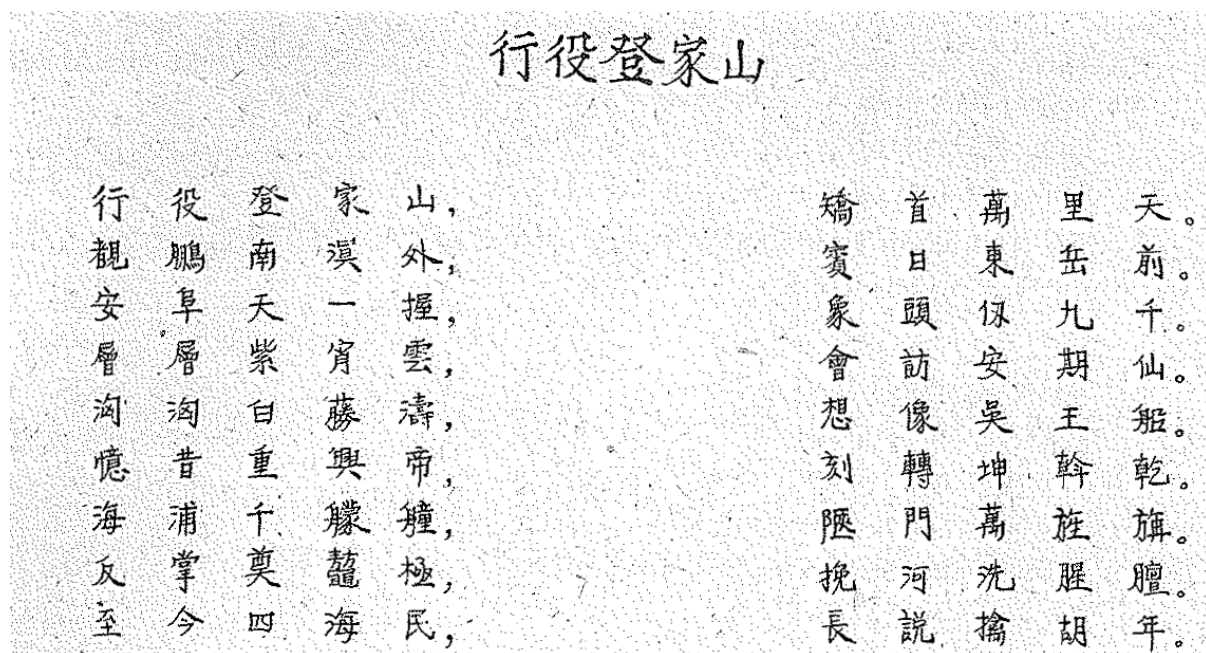
|   |   |   |   |                                     |
|---|---|---|---|-------------------------------------|
|   | 舟 | 中 |   | Nhất diệp biên chu hồ hải khách     |
| 一 | 葉 | 扁 | 舟 | Xanh xuất vi hàng phong thích thích |
| 撐 | 出 | 葦 | 行 | Vi mang tứ cố vãn triều sinh        |
| 微 | 茫 | 四 | 顧 | Giang thủy liên thiên nhất âu bạch  |
| 江 | 水 | 連 | 天 |                                     |
|   |   |   | 一 | 區                                   |
|   |   |   | 區 | 鳥                                   |
|   |   |   |   | 白                                   |

<sup>138</sup>Thơ Văn Lý Trần Vol.1 p.340



A small boat like a leaf, a river and lake traveller  
 Rowing past the field of reeds, a light wind blow  
 All around are misty, the evening tide is rising  
 In the blending of river and sky, one single white gull.<sup>139</sup>

War and its consequences also provided inspiration but while Phạm Sư Mạnh was proud of the Viet victory at the Bạch Đằng river



Hành dịch đăng gia sơn  
 Kiêu thủ vạn lý thiên  
 Đồ bằng nam minh ngoại  
 Tân nhật đông nhạc tiền  
 Yên Phụ thiên nhất ác  
 Tượng đầu nhân cử thiên  
 Tầng tầng Tử tiêu vân  
 Hội phỏng An kỳ tiên  
 Hung hung Bạch Đằng đào  
 Tưởng tương Ngô vương thuyền  
 Ưc tích Trùng hưng đế  
 Khắc chuyên khôn át kiên  
 Hải phổ thiên mông đồng  
 Hiệp môn vạn tinh chiên  
 Phán chương điện ngao cực  
 Văn hà tây tinh chiên

<sup>139</sup>Thơ Văn Lý Trần Vol.2 p.684



|   |   |   |   |   |   |    |                                      |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|----|--------------------------------------|
| 年 | 來 | 夏 | 旱 | 又 | 秋 | 霖， | Niên lai hạ hạn hựu thu lâm          |
| 禾 | 稿 | 苗 | 傷 | 害 | 轉 | 深。 | Hòa cáo, miêu thương hại chuyển thâm |
| 三 | 萬 | 卷 | 書 | 無 | 用 | 處， | Tam vạn quyển thư vô dụng xứ         |
| 白 | 頭 | 空 | 負 | 愛 | 民 | 心。 | Bạch đầu không phụ ái dân tâm        |

These years, there were drought in summer while autumn brought floods  
The crops had withered and the sprouts damaged  
Thirty thousand scrolls of book were of no use  
The white head felt useless to response to the loving the people heart<sup>142</sup>

And because he had lost all the self confidence of his ancestor, Trần Nguyên Đán resigned to the prospect of the fall of his dynasty

|   |   |   |   |   |   |    |                                |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|----|--------------------------------|
| 萬 | 國 | 民 | 生 | 沸 | 鼎 | 魚， | Vạn quốc dân sinh phí đỉnh ngư |
| 朔 | 燕 | 東 | 汴 | 已 | 邱 | 墟。 | Sóc Yên, đông Biện dĩ khâu khư |
| 歸 | 舟 | 未 | 穩 | 江 | 湖 | 夢， | Qui châu vị ổn giang hồ mộng   |
| 分 | 取 | 魚 | 燈 | 照 | 古 | 書。 | Phân thủ ngư đăng chiếu cổ thư |

People from thousand of countries were like fishes on the cutting board  
Beijing in the north, Kaifeng in theeast all became ruins<sup>143</sup>  
On the boat going home still cannot sleep because of the dream of river and lake  
Borrowing the light from the fishing boats to read antique books.<sup>144</sup>

Outside of the poems written in the format of Tang rule, there were also long prose poem (phú) the most famous of which was the *Bạch Đằng Giang phú* (In Praise of the River Bạch Đằng) of Trương Hán Siêu which was praised by the 18<sup>th</sup> critics Lê Quý Đôn as “comparable to the Red Cliff long prose poem” by the Song poet Su Dongpo. While only a few of these survived, they were considered by Lê Quý Đôn as equivalent to the best writings of the Song dynasty.

## The first histories and collection of myths and legends

Outside poetry, other forms of literature also developed, the most important of which was history. The first book of history written by a Việt was the *Sử Ký* (Historical Records) by Đỗ Thiện written in the Lý dynasty. This book is now lost. What were left, were scattered references to it in the *Việt Điện U Linh tập* and *Lĩnh Nam Chích Quái*. Other historical books from the Lý era, if existed were completely lost. The Trần dynasty paid more attention to history. Trần Cảnh (Thái tông) founded the Office of National Historical Records (Quốc Sử Quán) to record what were happening in the court and in the country. The first history written

<sup>142</sup>Thơ văn Lý Trần Vol.3 p.208

<sup>143</sup>Beijing or Yenjing was the capital of the Yuan; Kaifeng was the capital of the Northern Song, both were replaced by another dynasty.

<sup>144</sup>Thơ Văn Lý Trần Vol.3 p.210

in the Trần dynasty was the *Việt Chí* (Annals of the Việt) by Trần Tấn under the reign of Trần Cảnh (Thái tông) which was lost. Then in 1272, Lê Văn Hưu, using the *Việt Chí* as basis wrote the *Đại Việt Sử Ký* (Historical Records of the Great Viet) totaled 30 volumes from the time Triệu Đà (Zhao To) to Lý Chiêu Hoàng, the last queen of the Lý dynasty.

Lê Văn Hưu's book was also lost. But the form and shape of his book as well as his thoughts on history were preserved in his comments included in the *Đại Việt Sử Ký toàn thư* (Complete Historical Records of the Great Viet) by Ngô Sĩ Liên written in the late 15<sup>th</sup> century. In form, he followed the pattern set by the Song historian Si Ma Guang (Tư Mã Quang) chronicled what happened day by day along with comments, the role of which was to enshrine the Confucian ideals of a ruler and of right behavior. Thus Lê Văn Hưu idealized Triệu Đà as a sage ruler like the legendary Shun (Thuần) emperor who “followed the correct way in relation with neighboring countries and safeguarding the throne”<sup>145</sup> while the Trưng's sisters were dismissed as “mere women” whose actions pointed up the failings of the male leaders for over one thousand years of Chinese rule “Trưng Trắc and Trưng Nhị were women, but they had only make a single appeal then the whole province, all responded... But men were merely kowtowing and resigning to submit to the Chinese! They would not even know that they should be embarrassed by the two Trưng ladies! How shameful!”<sup>146</sup>

Another history book from the Trần period was the *Đại Việt sử lược* (Short History of Đại Việt) appeared. The book was lost in Vietnam until the 18<sup>th</sup> century when it was discovered in the Imperial library of the Qing court. Thus it was re-edited and printed under the Qing dynasty as a supplement for Chinese dynastic history of the Song and Yuan dynasties. The book composed of 4 volumes, of which the last volume was a supplement recording the reign name of the Trần king probably was not part of the original book. The book was the first historical book mentioning the kingdom of Văn Lang and the dynasty of the Hùng king. Its account of the formation of Văn Lang differed greatly from later accounts which was much more mythical:

“In the time of king Trang of Zhou dynasty (696-682 BCE) there appeared at the Gia Ninh tribe an extraordinary man who used magical means to subdue all the tribes. He called himself king Hùng, made his capital in Văn Lang and called the country Văn Lang. Văn Lang tradition and custom were simple and rustic. To remember things they tied knots in a string. The dynasty lasted 18 reigns, all called Hùng”<sup>147</sup>

The name of the book's author was lost, but the inclusion of the Văn Lang kingdom led many researchers to situate the date when the book was written in the 1370's when the search for antiquity was at its height. By the end of the Trần, Hồ Tôn Thốt wrote *Việt Sử Cương Mục* (Mirror of Viet History) and *Việt Nam thế chí* (Annal of the kings of the South Viet) which were all lost except for the preface of *Việt Nam thế chí*. There were also account of special

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<sup>145</sup> *Đại Việt Sử Ký toàn thư* Vol.1 p.14

<sup>146</sup> *Đại Việt Sử Ký toàn thư* Vol.1 p.21

<sup>147</sup> *Đại Việt Sử Lược* p.3

events in history like the *Trung Hưng thực lục* (Account of the event of the reign Trung Hưng) recounted the struggle against the Mongols, and an account of Nguyễn Trung Ngạn about the wars against the Lao. Around 1337, an unknown Buddhist monk wrote the *Thiền Uyển Tập Anh* (A Collection of Flowers in the Garden of Zen) which contained the biography of sixty five prominent dhyana monks in Đại Việt from the sixth to the thirteenth century.

The search for the past also produced two collection of folk tales and legend, the *Việt Điện U Minh tập* and the *Lĩnh Nam Chích Quái*. *Việt Điện U Minh tập* written in 1329 by Lý Tế Xuyên detailed the stories of thirty legendary guardian spirits who kept the realm of the Viet safe. They included 8 “sovereign” - kings and queens including the ladies Trung, Phùng Hưng, Shi Xie but also the eleventh century Cham queen My Ê, twelve military commanders like Lý Thường Kiệt. The ten non human spirits included the Lady Goddess of the Earth (Hậu Thổ) as well as the spirits of the sacred mountains like the Bronze Drum Mountain (núi Đồng Cổ), the Dragon Lord of Thăng Long and the Dragon Lord of South Sea. *Lĩnh Nam Chích Quái* by Trần Thế Pháp và written much later, in the 1380, was a mix of folk tales as well as legends about the origin of the country.

Đại Việt’s authors in exile in China included Lê Tắc who surrendered to the Mongols with Trần Ích Tắc and Hồ Nguyên Trừng (Lê Trừng) eldest son of Hồ Quý Ly who was captured by the Ming. Lê Tắc’s book *An Nam chí lược* (Brief History of Annam) published in 1339, was the earliest still extant book about the history of Vietnam. It contains valuable early materials whose original Chinese sources are now lost. Hồ Nguyên Trừng’s book *Nam Ông Mộng lục* (Dream of a Southern Old Man) is a memoirs of his life and time and contain valuable materials about the last decades of the Trần dynasty.

## **The invention and development of the Southern Script (Chữ Nôm)**

The Southern Script (Chữ Nôm) is a script using Chinese characters to represent the language of the Việt. When this script was invented is a matter of debate. Some researcher like Trần Văn Giáp speculated that it might be invented as early as the Han time (1<sup>st</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> century CE) when the Chinese first tried to teach Chinese to the native of Jiao. However the first use of a *nôm* word only appeared in the 8<sup>th</sup> century with the title *Bố Cái đại vương* (Great King Father and Mother) bestowed on Phùng Hưng<sup>148</sup>.

After independence, the use of the *chữ Nôm* began to spread. A few of the stone stele inscriptions in the Lý dynasty had *nôm* characters in between Chinese characters to represent Viet names that had no Chinese equivalent. The oldest surviving *nôm* inscription, was on a bell dating from 1076 of the pagoda of Vụ Bản (Hải Phòng). Even though there is no concrete evidence, but some Vietnamese researchers speculate that *nôm* was also used widely under the Đinh, Lê and Lý to communicate the laws and regulations of the court to the people, but the first evidence of the use of this script for that purpose was under Trần Khâm (Nhân tông)

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<sup>148</sup>Keith Taylor reckoned this should be read *Bua Cái Đại vương* (Great King Great King) in line with the later use by Đinh Bộ Lĩnh *Đại Cổ Việt* (Great Great Việt)

who ordered the *hành khiển* office when communicating the court laws and orders to the people “to explain both the words and the meaning”<sup>149</sup>

The Trần was the first dynasty where the *nôm* was used widely. The first work written in *nôm* according to the annal was by Nguyễn Thuyên who in 1282 composed a poem ordering the crocodiles which infested the Red River to go away. The annals also recorded that both Nguyễn Thuyên and Nguyễn Sĩ Cố used to write poems in *nôm*<sup>150</sup> The first long prose poem (*phú*) in *nôm* was the *Cư Trần Lạc Đạo phú* (Rhapsody on Living on Earth, Enjoying the Way) by Trần Khâm (Nhân tông) who wrote in the poem “Thus we know, Buddha is right in the house, we do not have to search far. I was looking for the Buddha. Now it is clear that the Buddha is me”<sup>151</sup>

At the marriage of the princess Huyền Trân to the king of Champ many opponents of the marriage expressed their opposition in poems through allusion to the story from the Han dynasty when the Hán emperor Nguyên đế was forced to give one of his concubines, Vương Chiêu Quân in marriage to the king of the Hsiungnu to buy peace. Their poems were written in *nôm*.

By the end of the Trần dynasty, the use of the *nôm* script became widespread. Hồ Quý Ly translated some of the Confucian Classics, notably the Book of Document (Kinh Thư) into *nôm* to teach the crown prince. He also translated the Book of Poetry (Kinh Thi) to teach the ladies of the Court. Becoming emperor he attempted to replace Chinese by *nôm* as the language of the court but was overthrown by the Ming before it had any impact.

*Nôm* was also used for the lyrics of music. The Yuan envoy Chen Fu mentioned that while attending a banquet at the court, while the music was familiar, he could not understand the words<sup>152</sup> An *Nam chí lược* also mentioned that lyrics of music were composed in *nôm*

## Other Arts – The Thăng Long Style

While Đại Việt’s literature was almost wholly influenced by China, the performing arts were equally influenced by China and Champa. Champa’s influence were especially notable in music. Lý Nhật Tôn (Thánh tông) himself transcribed Cham music and drumbeat to teach the Viet musicians while Lý Long Trát (Cao tông) loved to listen to the “sorrowful rhythm of Cham music” and often ordered the musician to sing them accompanied with the sound of the Bà Lỗi musical instrument. The Bà Lỗi and the small drum (*trống cơm*). Of other the musical instrument mentioned in *An Nam Chí lược* probably the only native instruments were the two stringed instrument (*nhị*) and the flute (*sáo*), the rest like the *pipa*, the *tranh*, the seven strings all came from China. Outside Cham music, the Viet also imported Chinese music - Chen Fu

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<sup>149</sup>*Đại Việt Sử Ký toàn thư* Vol.1 p.199

<sup>150</sup>*Đại Việt Sử Ký toàn thư* Vol.1 p.188

<sup>151</sup>*Cư Trần Lạc Đạo phú*<https://langmai.org/tang-kinh-cac/vien-sach/giang-kinh/trai-tim-cua-truc-lam-dai-si/cu-tran-lac-dao-phan-nguyen-van/>

<sup>152</sup>Chen Fu *Annam Ji shi*

mentioned some of the pieces like Dream of Butterfly (Mộng Hồ Điệp) or The Separation of Bạch Lạc Thiên and his mother (Bạch Lạc Thiên mẫu tử biệt), Walking Under the Moon (Đạp Nguyệt Lý Ca Huyền) – but with the Chinese lyrics replaced by native ones.

Dance was almost entirely influenced by Champa probably even to the type of clothing the dancers wear.

Theatre was the only one with a native form, the *chèo* supposedly appeared at the time of Đinh Bộ Lĩnh (10<sup>th</sup> century). By the 13<sup>th</sup> century it had a competitor in the form of Chinese opera, the *tuồng* which was introduced into Đại Việt by a Chinese prisoner of war captured during the war against the Mongols. While the *tuồng* used Chinese history as subjects of its play, the *chèo* mostly used popular Viet subjects.

The visual arts were equally influenced both by Champa and China. As Buddhism was the religion favored by both the Lý and the Trần kings, the religion played an important role in the development of both architecture and sculpture in Đại Việt. Pagodas and stupas as well as all that related to them are the only relics left from that time.

These relics show clearly the influence from China and Champa, however, they also demonstrated that these influences had been blended into an original Viet style that the archeologist called the Thăng Long style.

Structurally, most pagodas built in Lý and Trần era were wooden structures supported by short cylindrical wooden columns made from iron wood (*gỗ lim*) with tiled roofs. One of the most representative of this type of structure is the Diên Hựu pagoda (Chùa Một Cột) built in 1049 and still exists in Hà Nội even though it has been repaired many times in the more than 800 years of its existence. It is supported by a single column and situated in the middle of a pond, looking like a lotus flower rising from the water.

But these buildings can also be very large. The ruins of the Lý royal palace that was discovered only in 2002 proved to be a huge wooden structure with at least three stories. The columns supporting the structure had diameters ranging from 45cm to 80 cm. According to Bùi Minh Trí, the archeologist in charge of the exploration of the ruins, the Lý royal palace can be considered the second largest wooden structure built in ancient times after the Todai pagoda in Nara, Japan built in 743.

Another characteristic of Lý-Trần architecture was the stupa or tower that combined Cham and Chinese characters. Even though the biggest, the Báo Thiên tower had been destroyed, there still exist many smaller towers that gave us some ideas about the art of building in Đại Việt times. One of the towers is the Bình Sơn tower in Phú Thọ. Originally the tower had 13 stories, but now only 11 stories were left. The tower was built in the shape of a pyramid with a height of 16.5 metres. The base is a square with each side 4.45 metres while the square at the top story only measures 1.55 metres. The whole tower was built from bricks. There are two types of bricks: the inside one was the load supporting bricks, which was covered outside by a

set of decorative bricks decorative with flowers motifs and scenes taken from Buddhist myths and legends<sup>153</sup>.

The biggest stone structure of the period was the unfinished capital that Hồ Quý Ly built in 1397. The still standing part of the wall shows that it was a huge undertaking with some blocks of stone measures 7 metre by 1.5 metre and weighed up to 15 tons.

The art of stone working probably came from Champa since after the Lý Trần period, there were few work in stone especially stone sculptures. These sculpture even though limited by conventions inherited from Buddhist art in Tang China, still achieved a lifelike reality as shown in the statue of a Varajpani (Kim Cương) and the statue of a Lokapala (Hộ Pháp) in Phật Tích pagoda. These statues obviously was inspired by Cham traditions. The folds of the robes of the Kim Cương as well as Hộ Pháp was decorated with simple flowers commonly seen on Cham statues and never seen on statues made after the Lý Trần period. There were also decorative motif specifically taken from Champa like the winged man with drum, the sacred bird Garuda etc. Even the Lý dragon with its long and sinuos body looked more like the Naga of Buddhism mythology than the Chinese dragon.

But in spite of Cham and Chinese influence, there were recurrent motif that show a specifially Viet style. The recurrent motifs both concretely and symbolically was the lotus flower, the mountain and water and the chrysanthemum which was present any where even in the brick used in construction the tower or the roof tiles of the palace. They represent the Thăng Long style that the archeologists gave to the art of the period.

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<sup>153</sup>*Tháp Bình Sơn* tored 03/26/2009 at Wayback Machine