

Conclusion

This study started out with an investigation of the Nguyen rulers of southern Vietnam with Champa during the period from 1558 when the Nguyen rule was established to 1776 when it ended.

In looking at the development of Nguyen rule, it began with the banishment of Nguyen Hoang from the Le Court to Thuan Hoa province in 1558 where he served as governor. However, in the course of 17th century, as the Nguyen were able to build their sphere of influence in the south vis-à-vis their neighbours, developed the internal governmental structure, the Nguyen began to act as independent state. By early 18th century, the Nguyen had clearly transformed their position from being loyal servants of Le to become rulers of a de facto state in the South.

The beginning of this transformation can be traced to the time of Nguyen Hoang. In his efforts to re-establish the family's formerly eminent position in the central government, Nguyen Hoang was unsuccessful. This study takes the position that with the central government firmly in the hands of the Trinh family, Nguyen Hoang had since 1600, turned his attention to building a power base in the south. At the same time, he did not sever his ties with the Le Court but remained hopeful in reinstating the family in the highest hierarchy of power in the Le Court. This was a two-prong strategy that Nguyen Hoang and his successors sought to implement.

Strategy one is based on the consideration of building a separate power-base in the south, with the view of realising the objective of the building of a separate state. In strategy two, the Nguyen were to maintain their links with the view of waiting for the opportunity to return to their rightful position as the premier aristocrat family in the Le Court, now under the control of the rival family, the Trinh Lords. The pursuit of this second strategy would go as far to the point where it was no longer feasible for the

Nguyen to realise their goal in re-establishing themselves as the premier family in the Le Court. Only when there was no chance of that would the Nguyen abandon strategy two and go all out to pursue strategy one.

The pursuit of this two-prong strategy as described in this study is present in the various policies of all Nguyen rulers, beginning with Nguyen Phuc Nguyen who broke with the central government resulting in a civil war that lasted from 1627 to 1672. As discussed in Chapter Two, this situation shaped the early phase of the Nguyen's foreign relations. Trading activities, dealings with foreigners, including Champa and the occupation of Southern Vietnam proper, gave the Nguyen a new sense of being rooted to their contemporary situation. It must be acknowledged that in this early period, this sense of being a new state was tempered by nostalgia for the Le Court. It was not until 1600 that the Nguyen were confident enough to make a break with the north.

One important consequence of this break with the north is the increase by the Nguyen in exercising de facto rule including the conduct of foreign relations with their neighbours including Champa. In relation to this, Nguyen foreign relations have to be understood in the context of the state formation process. The underlying factor being the employment of foreign relations to realise their ambition of defeating the Trinh and to firmly entrench themselves in southern Vietnam. This important phase also solidified for the Nguyen their first impressions of foreign traders, missionaries and its neighbours characterised by the decaying Champa and Cambodian powers. It is not surprising that the Nguyen thought of itself in highly ornamental terms. Throughout its reign, the Nguyen saw itself as the rightful heirs of the Le Court and in its rebirth in southern Vietnam, felt itself the central military and civilising force. In other words, the Nguyen learned the dynamics of war and power.

This self-image is important when we consider what constituted Nguyen foreign relations. In this study, foreign relations refers to state-to-state relations as well as all forms of contacts with external entities – foreign

nationals (traders, missionaries) and non-state groups (non-Vietnamese elements within or beyond its boundaries). Secondly, due to the war and the exigencies of having to immediately deal with 'situations', Nguyen foreign policy in the early phase was definitely propelled by emerging circumstances. If a foreign policy theory has to be applied to elucidate this situation then this study has shown that Nguyen approach to foreign policy is a realist one and is similar to the neo-classical European situation.

This study shows that by the 18th century, the Nguyen had shifted their position from being traditionally bound to their northern rulers to being an independent nation with its identity forged in south Vietnam. In relation to the central thesis, four aspects are covered in this study. Firstly, the Nguyen became a de facto kingdom through the exercise of foreign relations. Secondly, the evolution in the growing strength of the Nguyen made possibility of a separate statehood real. Thirdly, a tributary system was being built up through the Nguyen's relations with smaller nations. And finally, apart from exercising foreign relations, the Nguyen also devoted their efforts in developing internal government apparatus in order to consolidate its position as a polity. This is especially evident after 1672.

In the first instance, the Nguyen had used foreign relations to bolster their image where they were placed in a position to act as a de facto independent state. Geographically and politically separated from the Le Court in the north by the 1627-1672 Nguyen-Trinh War, the Nguyen were thrust into the position of acting as a de facto kingdom, especially in their dealings with foreigners and neighbours. The Nguyen had to react to these foreign elements just as a sovereign state would do so. This amounts to the exercise of authority as de facto rulers of a state.

Contemporaries who were in Nguyen Southern Vietnam also saw the Nguyen as rulers of southern Vietnam. Among the foreign travellers who were in Nguyen Southern Vietnam were Christoforo Borri (1617-1621), Alexander de Rhodes (1624-1645), Da Shan (1695-

96), Thomas Bowyear (1695), who repeatedly referred to the Nguyen rulers as Kings and their territories as a kingdom. The Nguyen's de facto status of independent ruler was also acknowledged by their rivals, the Trinh. In fact, it was based on this perception that the Trinh had regarded the Nguyen as a renegade regime.

When the Nguyen felt that they were strong enough after the civil war with the Trinh came to a stand still in 1672, they began to build on their growing strength in order to look into the possibility of becoming an independent state. Efforts in the promotion of trade, the improvement of the administrative system and the development of religious and cultural activities were keenly pursued. As a culmination to these efforts, the Nguyen in 1702 again drew on foreign relations as a means of attaining their goal by obtaining political recognition from China. Even though the attempt failed, the possibility of attaining independent statehood remained a goal that was unilaterally 'announced' when Nguyen Phuc Khoat declared himself as *vuong* (king) in 1744.

In spite of the importance of foreign relations as a tool to achieve its purpose of state formation, the Nguyen did not have the luxury to formulate a foreign policy, but to react to circumstances and actual situations as they emerged or happened. This is particularly apparent in the discussion in Chapters Two and Three where the Nguyen, being in a weaker position (*vis-à-vis* the Trinh and even occasionally *vis-à-vis* their southern neighbours, Champa and Cambodia), had to adopt a 'Realist' approach when they did not strictly enforce tribute collection.

The Nguyen's realist approach in conducting foreign relations is most apparent during the course of the Nguyen-Trinh war of 1627-1672. During this period when Nguyen survival was threatened by a militarily more powerful Trinh force, they fully utilised foreign relations as a means to bolster the Nguyen's position. This included the opening up of Nguyen Southern Vietnam to international trade through which strategic materials could be obtained, and the coffers of the state enriched. The Nguyen also used marriage diplomacy with Champa when

a daughter of Nguyen rulers was married off to the King of Champa in 1631. The marriage helped to secure peace for the Nguyen in the south when it was facing severe threat from the Trinh in the north. However, when the Nguyen had become stronger in the post-1672 period, it began to intervene in the South including conquering Champa.

In imposing tributary relations, this realist approach only came about when the Nguyen felt strong enough to impose the system on its neighbours, notably, on Champa when tribute was first exacted in 1653 and later on Cambodia in 1658. Since then, tributary relations became a common practice of the Nguyen in conducting its foreign policy, particularly towards weaker states. The Nguyen's understanding of tributary relations came from the Chinese model of a tributary system. Their adoption of such practices has to be seen in the context of China as the dominant power in Southeast Asia during the early modern era, if not earlier. There were others who also practised tributary relations in Southeast Asia including Burma, Siam and even Vietnam (Le Government) on the mainland and Malacca, Brunei and Sulu in the insular states.

This study has set out to investigate the nature of Nguyen- Champa relations within the framework of the Nguyen's broader foreign relations. In so doing, the distinctive features of the Nguyen's dealings with Champa helped to support the notion that the Nguyen had utilised foreign relations as a means to achieve its overall goal of becoming independent in the south.

It is the hope of this study to fill this gap regarding the Nguyen rule during the 17th and 18th century by addressing specifically on its foreign relations with Champa, in order to contribute another piece of the picture of southern Vietnam under the Nguyen from the mid-16th century to 18th century.