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THE ROLE OF CHINESE IMMIGRANTS IN ESTABLISHING SOVEREIGNTY OVER THE LOWER MEKONG RIVER (17TH–18TH CENTURIES): CASE STUDY OF THE MAC FAMILY IN HA TIEN

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The article explains the role of the Mac family in establishing and enforcing the sovereignty of the Nguyen lords over the mainland, as well as the Southwestern sea region and islands (Vietnam) in the 17th and 18th centuries. In the context that the kingdom of Siam has just stepped out of the war with Burma and strongly implemented the “Advance East” policy, the kingdom of Cambodia has not given up its ambition to retake the lower Mekong River region, which sovereignty it has always considered its rights. Around the end of the 17th century, Mac Cuu, a Chinese person in the group “anti-Qing, restored to Ming”, after being suppressed by the Qing Dynasty, fled to Cambodia, and was appointed by the Cambodian king to govern the downstream area of the Mekong River. The context when the Mac family arrived was also at the same time that the lord Nguyen government (Vietnam) was accelerating the “advancing South” process. After annexing the lands of Tran Bien and Phien Tran (Southeast), the Nguyen lords began to pay attention to the fertile and prosperous lower Mekong Delta region. Although initially having their ambitions, with the skillful policies of the Cochinchina government (Vietnam), the Mac family gradually integrated and made important marks in the process of establishing and exercising sovereignty in the Southwestern region of Vietnam.

Keywords: Cochinchina; Ha Tien; Lord Nguyen; Mac family; sovereignty; Southwestern region of Vietnam

Introduction

Since the mid-17th century, due to the instability of the Chinese situation, especially after the Manchus completely defeated the Ming Dynasty and established the Qing Dynasty (in 1644), the wave of Chinese immigrants to Dang Trong territory became increasingly large. In the context that Lord Nguyen’s government was promoting land opening in the South, Chinese migrants made important contributions to the process of establishing and enforcing Cochinchina’s¹ sovereignty over this land.

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Before integrating Ha Tien land into Cochinchina, the Mac family also had the ambition to build their territory. However, in the context of not being able to rely on Siam or Cambodia, Mac Cuu and then Mac Thien Tu decided to seek refuge with the Cochinchina government. The Nguyen lords introduced a flexible, skillful but no less drastic policy to gradually conquer the Mac family. First, create conditions, be ready to absorb, then support, and finally declare sovereignty and take action to protect the territory. That path took Ha Tien from an independent territory, a “subject country” to a “dependent” land, and it finally became an inseparable part of the territory of Cochinchina (Vietnam).

During the process of searching and collecting documents and information sources to serve the article, we found that the topic of the role of the Chinese people in establishing sovereignty in the lower Mekong region under the Nguyen lords was Vietnam (17th–18th centuries), especially about the Mac family in Ha Tien, is an interesting topic that attracts the attention of many scholars in Southeast Asia and the world. This topic is researched, discussed directly, or indirectly in works such as: *The Last Stand of Asian Autonomies Responses to Modernity in the Diverse States of Southeast Asia and Korea, 1750–1900* by Anthony Reid (1997); *A History of Cambodia* by David Chandler (2000); *Un Chinois des Mers du Sud le Fondateur de Ha-Tien [The Chinese of the South Sea, founder of Ha Tien]* by Emile Gaspardone (1952), “Mac Thien Tu and Phrayatakin, a Survey on Their Politics Stand, Conflicts and Background” by Chen Ching Ho (1979), *Nguyen Cochinchina: Southern Vietnam in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* and “An Alternative Vietnam? The Nguyen Kingdom in the 17th and 18th Century” by Li Tana (1998), *Water frontier: commerce and the Chinese in the Lower Mekong Region, 1750–1880* edited by Nola Cooke and Li Tana (2004), *History of South East Asia* by D. G. Hall (1981), *Công cuộc mở đất Tây Nam Bộ thời chúa Nguyễn [The opening up of the Southwest land during the reign of Lord Nguyen]* by Do Quynh Nga (2022), *Nghiên cứu Hà Tiên [Ha Tien Research]* by Trong Minh Dat (2008), *Mạc Thị gia phả [Mac Thi Genealogy]* by Vu The Dinh (2002), *Vùng đất Nam Bộ [Southern region of Vietnam]*, Volume IV edited by Nguyen Quang Ngoc (2017). In addition, it is impossible not to mention the notes of very important works by Le Quy Don (*Phủ biên tạp lục [Records of the Frontier region]*) (2007), Trinh Hoai Duc (*Gia Định thành thông chí [Records about Gia Dinh citadel]*) (2006), and records of the Nguyen Dynasty’s histories (*Đại Nam thực lục [Dai Nam Chronicle]*) (2002), *Đại Nam nhất thống chí [The geography of the unified Dai Nam country]* (2006), *Đại Nam liệt truyện [List the stories of Dai Nam country]* (2005)).

However, in general, the main works are only partly mentioned, there is no work that comprehensively and systematically studies the role of the Chinese people in establishing sovereignty in the lower Mekong River basin under the reign of the Chinese, Lord Nguyen of Vietnam (17th–18th centuries), especially about the Mac family in Ha Tien. Therefore, it can be said that this is still a very new topic that needs to be studied more deeply and systematically to contribute to a broader and more accurate understanding of the role of the Chinese in the process of establishing and protecting the sovereignty of the Nguyen Lords in the Southwest region in the 17th and 18th centuries. Historical and logical methods are considered two main and indispensable means of historical research. In particular, the historical method helps scholars “restore” the full picture of historical events and phenomena through the lens of relevant historical sources as accurately as possible. On that basis, historians will review, evaluate, and draw out the nature, laws, or trends in the movement and development of historical events and phenomena. That is the manifestation of applying logical methods in studying history.

***The Mac Family with the Exploration and Establishment of Sovereignty
of the Nguyen Lords in the Lower Mekong River Against
the Ambitions of Siam and Cambodia***

Regarding the migration of Mac Cuu and the process of enlightenment of Ha Tien, there are many works mentioned in different aspects. According to historians of the

Nguyen Dynasty, Mac Cuu was from Loi Chau, Guangdong. The Ming dynasty passed away and fled to the South, arriving in Cambodia to work as Okna². Seeing that the Sai Mat province of that country had many traders from all over the country gathered, he opened a casino to collect taxes, called the “hoa chi” tax, and got a profit. He became richer when he found a silver pot [National History of the Nguyen Dynasty 2002, 122]. In *The geography of the unified Dai Nam country* [*Đại Nam nhất thống chí*], *Dai Nam Chronicle* [*Đại Nam thực lục*] also similarly recorded Mac Cuu’s behavior when he came to the land of Mang Kham (Ha Tien). Vu The Dinh (adopted son of Mac Thien Tu) in the *Mac Thi genealogy* [*Mac thị gia phả*] wrote: At the end of the Ming Dynasty, China was in great chaos, Mac Thai Cong, surnamed Cuu, from Loi Chau, was born on May 8, the year At Mui, in the 9th year of Vinh Lich of the Ming Dynasty (1655), unable to withstand the disturbances of the Ho invaders, he crossed the sea to the South, residing in Cambodia. This event happened in the year of the Pig (1671). That year Mac Cuu was 17 years old. Thai Cong was favored and trusted by King Chan Lap, all business affairs were entrusted to Mac Thai Cong to take care of everything [Dinh 2006, 16]. Dong Ho Lam Tan Phac in Ha Tien Mac Thi Su did not agree with the milestones given by Vu The Dinh, saying that the time was 3 years from 1671 to 1674, but Mac Cuu did too many things: he had just been in China, helping the King of Cambodia, exploiting Mang Kham land to become a rich land was difficult to happen [Dat 2008, 72]. We also think that the timeline of Mac Cuu arriving in Ha Tien in 1671 (when he was only 17 years old) also needs to be reviewed. At 17 years old, was he already a rich merchant, having traded in many countries, helping Trinh Thanh Cong (Zhèng Chénggōng) in purchasing food throughout the southern coast of China... before arriving at Chenla? Researcher Chen Ching Ho (Tran Kinh Hoa / 陳荆和), based on Cambodian history, believes that in 1671, Mac Cuu traveled from Guangdong to the Philippines and Java. He eventually arrived at the Chenla court in Udong and won the trust of King Chey Chettha IV (Ang Sor). The jealousy of high-ranking Khmer officials eventually forced him to ask the king to let him govern the land of Banday Mas. The Khmer king then approved and gave him the title Okya [Chen 1979, 1537]. Based on the documents, we can roughly estimate that in 1671, he traveled from Guangdong through countries in Southeast Asia, and then chose Chenla as a place to stop in 1680 (as recorded by Trinh Hoai Duc).

In short, all documents record that Mac Cuu was originally from Chau Loi, Guangdong province, China, and was once a large merchant ship owner who often brought goods to exchange in Cambodia, Cha Va (Java), Siam..., and closely related to Trinh Thanh Cong’s resistance war against Qing in Taiwan (as a food supplier and weapons buyer). Regarding the time when Mac Cuu arrived at Chan Lap and Ha Tien, researchers have proposed many different milestones³. According to the author, Mac Cuu came from China to Cambodia in the 19th year of Kangxi (1680) [Duc 2006, 159], realizing the failure of the uprisings against the Qing Dynasty (this year the Tam Phien forces were almost defeated, Trinh Kinh retreated to Taiwan), Mac Cuu along with his servants went to Chan Lap. Initially, Mac Cuu was in the capital Chan Lap (Udon), but realizing the instability of this court, he used gold and silver as bribes (for the king’s beloved concubines and mandarins) to ask to guard the Lung Ky region⁴, and was ordained Okna by king of Cambodia.

Around 1700, realizing the narrowness of Lung Ky and the convenient location of the Mang Kham area (Ha Tien), Mac Cuu came here to gather people to explore and build. He recruited Vietnamese and Chinese people... to explore and establish 7 communes and villages (including the entire land of Ha Tien – Long Xuyen – Bac Lieu – Ca Mau, part of present-day Cambodia), collectively known as Ha Tien and built this area into a stronghold for his family, no longer dependent on the Cambodia government.

Before Mac Cuu came to Ha Tien, Vietnamese people were living in Chan Lap territory. In a report in 1665, missionary Chevreuil said: He arrived in Colompé (i.e. Nam

Vang, Phnom Penh) at the end of the year. There were two Vietnamese villages on the other side of the river, with more than 500 people. The number of Vietnamese in other places was even greater because, in 1666, the Chinese and Vietnamese had a dispute at the king's court, the king fell to the Chinese side, and the Vietnamese were persecuted and dragged back to the country by 7 or 8 hundred people [Dau 2016, 51]. It also needs to be affirmed that, initially, Mac Cuu's move from Phnom Penh to Sai Mat, Lung Ky, and then Mang Kham district was entirely motivated by building a personal fortune. The Mac family carried out their good intentions based on favorable developments in the land of Ha Tien. At this time, nominally it was under the control of Chenla, but in reality, Cambodia had never managed and could not directly manage the land of Ha Tien – the main place where Vietnamese, Chinese, and Khmer immigrants lived together... With fertile land conditions favorable for agricultural development and located in a key position on the international maritime route from the Indian Ocean to the Pacific Ocean, Ha Tien quickly became a prosperous port city. Because of its location, Ha Tien was the place where Siam, Lord Nguyen, and Chan Lap fought for influence. Especially with its Eastward policy, Siam repeatedly sent troops to invade Ha Tien. The King of Siam next to him, seeing that this land was becoming more and more prosperous, was determined to take it over and ordered his land army to invade [Cai 1972, 132]. In 1687, Siamese troops attacked Ha Tien, plundered and captured Mac Cuu, and brought him to Siam. It took more than 10 years for Mac Cuu to plot, escape, and return to the land of Ha Tien [Chuong 2010, 12]. From here, he contemplated his future as well as that of the land of Ha Tien. Through that great incident, Mac Cuu realized that the power of the Chenla dynasty was too weak to protect him. The Siamese dynasty was too ambitious. If he stood for Siam, his rights and that of his family would be ruined, he couldn't keep it. With the advice of his neighbors and the actual policy of Lord Nguyen's government towards his countrymen before⁵, in 1708, Mac Cuu sent people to Phu Xuan to bring jade and silk to show off as his subjects, asking to be annexed into Lord Nguyen's territory.

The development of Ha Tien took place in an important context in the history of the lower Mekong River in the early modern period when Western countries were increasingly penetrating the region. In context of the expansion of the centralized state models of the Vietnamese, Khmer, and Thais to the southeastern region of the Indochina peninsula. Researchers of pre-modern Southeast Asia call these the last autonomous lands in Asia before they were merged into the territories of centralized states [Reid 1997, 458].

Mac Cuu is the person who is credited with founding and shaping the land of Ha Tien (including Ha Tien, Rach Gia, Ca Mau, Phu Quoc (Vietnam), and even part of Cambodia). According to Truong Minh Dat, Mac Cuu's time in Cambodia can be divided into 4 periods:

King Chan Lap trusted the first, who appointed Oc Nha and allowed him to collect flower tax at Sai Mat palace.

Second, when Siam attacked Ha Tien, Mac Cuu was clearing land in Lung Ky and took refuge in Siam for a while (many documents say he was captured by Siam).

Third, returning to Lung Ky, this time Mac Cuu had the merit of gathering people to reclaim the land and establish 7 communes and villages.

Fourth, he moved to Phuong Thanh and in 1708 offered the land he reclaimed and managed to Lord Nguyen [Dat 2008, 71].

Vu Duc Liem explains the 1708 event in fact that the Mac family needed Lord Nguyen to resist the frequent invasions of the Thai and Khmer because of Ha Tien's extremely vulnerable position. Cochinchina also needed to control this land as a gateway to protect its territorial project in the lower Mekong. Ha Tien's entry into Vietnam was therefore a natural process [Liem 2017]. Located in a critical position, the intersection of the power of the kingdoms in Southeast Asia at this time (Siam, Chenla, Dang Trong, Java), right from the beginning of its formation, Ha Tien became a place of struggle for

influence fiercely between countries. To maintain their achievements and protect their inherent power in the land of Ha Tien against Siam's annexation ambitions, the Mac family was forced to rely on another force as a counterweight. Mac Cuu came to Lord Nguyen in 1708 for this very purpose. The autonomy of Ha Tien was accepted by Dang Trong, expressed in giving Mac Cuu the right to self-governance, enjoy inheritance, and use its seal. From the organization of the local bureaucracy, and the military organization to the tax regime, Lord Nguyen entrusted the Mac family with self-determination and considered Ha Tien as a "dependent land". Gradually, with clever measures, Lord Nguyen turned Ha Tien into an inseparable part of Cochinchina: helping to strengthen the defense, supporting when attacked, rewarding when defeating invading enemies, conferring a title on his successor...

The event of Mac Cuu offering the land he had explored and asking to become a subordinate of Cochinchina was an important event not only for the land of Ha Tien in particular but for the South in general. Along with Gia Dinh and Dong Nai, Ha Tien became one of the three vertices of the Vietnam triangle in the South, and at the same time a strategic forward station west of the Hau River, creating an unstoppable position in the advance of the southernmost land of the Southwest. Li Tana also said that: Ha Tien, a strategically important port on the Khmer-Vietnamese border, fell into the hands of the Nguyen Dynasty thanks to the activities of Mac Cuu, a Ming refugee from Guangdong [Tana 1998a, 111–121].

Gradually, with the wise policies of Lord Nguyen, Ha Tien land increasingly fully integrated into Cochinchina land. The Mac family also gradually became subjects of Lord Nguyen, integrating into Vietnamese life. The Mac family has sought to connect with the Vietnamese people in many different ways. Mac Cuu married a Vietnamese wife in Dong Mon (Bien Hoa), Bui Thi Lam, while his daughter married Tran Dai Dinh (son of Tran Thuong Xuyen in Dong Nai).

Following Mac Cuu, his successor Mac Thien Tu (whose book is called Tich) gathered migrants to explore, expand, and develop the southernmost region of Dang Trong to become an ideal destination for exiled people. The National History Institute of the Nguyen Dynasty commented: "In 1735, Mac Cuu died, Tuc Tong appointed his son Cuu as Admiral of Ha Tien town, ordered a palace to build a rampart, opened a street market, and merchants gathered" [National history of the Nguyen Dynasty 2006, 6]. During his time in power, with many policies, including clever diplomatic policies with Siam and Cambodia, Mac Thien Tu helped Lord Nguyen expand his lands in the southernmost part of Cochinchina Vietnam. Especial event took place in the year of Dinh Suu (1757), Cambodia had chaos in the royal court, and Nac Ton ran to Ha Tien to ask for help. Mac Thien Tu asked Lord Nguyen for someone to escort him back to the country. Nac Ton took it as a favor to cut land from 5 districts: Chau Um (Sum), Sai Mat, Linh Quynh, Can Vot, and Vung Thom to repay the favor. Thien Tu offered those 5 districts to the court (later these districts were redistributed to Cambodia by the French). Lord Nguyen placed it under Ha Tien's management and then established the Kien Giang religion in Rach Gia and the Long Xuyen religion in Ca Mau, both of which had control officials [National history of the Nguyen Dynasty 2006, 6]. Through the above event, it can be seen that Mac Thien Tu always wholeheartedly served the government of Lord Nguyen. He was the one who played the role of intermediary between Cambodia and Cochinchina, helping Lord Vo Vuong (Nguyen Phuc Khoat). Basically, the Southern career advanced in the year of Dinh Suu (1757). Regarding the event of Vo Vuong Nguyen Phuc Khoat annexing the southernmost land into Dang Trong, Dai Nam Thuc Luc said: "...At that time, Mac Thien Tu also helped Nac Ton. God then ordained Nac Ton as king of Cambodia country and sent Thien Tu and soldiers from five palaces to escort him back to the country. Nac Ton then offered Tam Phong Long land. Phuc Du and Cu Trinh asked to move Long Ho palace to Tam Bao land" [National history of the Nguyen Dynasty 2002, 166]. Thus, in addition to his

role as a bridge between Dang Trong and Chan Lap, Mac Thien Tu also carried out the “diplomatic” mission assigned by Vo Vuong, contributing to stabilizing the situation in Cambodia and South Vietnam.

The Mac Family Participates in Protecting New Lands and Exercising Sovereignty in the Southwest (Vietnam)

Since escaping Siam and returning to Ha Tien (around 1700), Mac Cuu has focused on building Ha Tien into a solid defensive base to protect himself. After merging the land of Ha Tien (now Ha Tien, Rach Gia, Ca Mau, Phu Quoc) into the territory of Dang Trong (1708), Lords Nguyen and Mac Cuu paid great attention to the defense of the important land. Mac Cuu only then took strict defense, built earthen ramparts, placed far rear chains as defensive plans, and many guard posts that were located at posts in Giang Thanh and islands [Duc 2006, 70]. The Cochinchina government is also increasingly aware of the geostrategic position of this land:

The east borders An Giang province, the southwest borders the sea, the north borders Cambodia, high mountains have Van Son, the river Big is Dong Ho, leaning against the mountain to make a citadel, close to the sea to make a moat, Bao Giang citadel supports the back side; The Phu Anh Thi Van security rampart covers the back side; Kim Dao fortress is the lock at the seaport, Phu Quoc island is the offshore screen... it is truly the vital gateway of Cochinchina [National history of the Nguyen Dynasty 2006, 9].

Especially after the event of the Siamese army attacking and pillaging Ha Tien in 1715, Lord Nguyen had even more special interest in the land of Ha Tien, caring to encourage and promptly assist the Mac family in arranging defenses against attacks from Cambodia and Siam. From then on, Mac Cuu and Mac Thien Tu organized forces to protect the peace of this land against attacks by foreign invaders, typically the resistance of Mac Thien Tu before the attack of the Cambodia-Siam coalition led by Nac Bon in 1739. After that event, Cambodia did not dare to look at Ha Tien anymore⁶. This event confirmed many things: first, Mac Thien Tu had great success in stopping Cambodia’s encroachment plot (with the help of Siam), second, Lord Nguyen’s government had the support, and promptly encouraged the Mac family to complete the mission of protecting Ha Tien against external threats.

Mac Thien Tu was also proactive in dealing with Siam’s annexation plot and Cambodia’s invasion. The Mac family organized a team of detectives specializing in providing information about Siam and Cambodia for timely preparation. According to Yuan Dynasty historians in 1766, “The detective reported that Siam had prepared warships to invade Ha Tien. In the winter of October, the army sent 3 boats to sea, 20 boats, and more than 1,000 soldiers stationed there. Ha Tien to prevent Siamese invaders” [National history of the Nguyen Dynasty 2002, 171]. The detective team’s information helps the Mac government always be ready in the fight to protect Ha Tien, the southernmost land of Dang Trong: “Ky Suu in the 4th year (1769), spring of February, The King of Siam, Qin, ordered his general Phi Nha So Si (name of the official), Bon Ma (name of the person) to bring troops to bring the Wei King of Cambodia, Nac Non, back to the country... Mac Thien Tu heard the news and became even more cautious” [National history of the Nguyen Dynasty 2002, 172].

During the battle with the Siamese army in 1771, thanks to intelligence information, Mac Thien Tu was carefully prepared, especially with the effective support of the Cochinchina army stationed in Gia Dinh, making complete failure of the Siamese army’s plot. According to Nguyen dynasty history, in the year of Tan Mao (1771), Mac Thien Tu received news that Siam was censoring military armor and set a date to bring troops to fight, so he sent a letter to ask for reinforcements from Lord Nguyen in Gia Dinh... In October of the year 1771, the King of Siam saw Chieu Thuy running to Ha Tien, fearing there would be future concerns, so he sent 20,000 land troops, using the Bach Ma mountain

invader, Tran Thai, as a guide to besiege, hoping to take over the town of Ha Tien once and for all again [National history of the Nguyen Dynasty 2002, 177]. The Siamese army occupied and destroyed Ha Tien, and the Cochinchina army (under the command of Nguyen Cuu Dam) attacked the Siamese-Cambodia coalition to the Cambodia capital. The King of Siam offered a letter of peace, but Mac Thien Tu refused. The following year, Lord Nguyen secretly sent Mac Thien Tu to Siam to pray for peace to spy on the situation. The King of Siam happily released the captured people and had his troops withdrawn from Ha Tien.

Ha Tien town developed prosperously thanks to the sea, but this also became a goal that many different forces wanted to occupy it. The Mac family took careful precautions to defeat the attacks, protect the land of Ha Tien, and fulfill the role assigned by Lord Nguyen. Typically, the National History Office of the Nguyen Dynasty said about the event of 1770:

In the fall of July, the soldier hiding in Ha Tien, Pham Lam, had a party meeting in Vung Uc and Can Vot with the Cha Va people, Vang Ly Ma Lu and the people. Chan Lap is Oc Nha Ke, assembled an army of more than 800 people and 15 warships, divided by land and water to raid Ha Tien. Just outside the ramparts, Mac Thien Tu led his army to resist, defeated him, stabbed Pham Lam to death in the middle of the river, captured Lu and Ke, and beheaded [National history of the Nguyen Dynasty 2002, 174].

Ha Tien in the 17th and 18th centuries was the center of regional disputes, in the context of the Nguyen Lord's power not being affirmed, and the Mac family's role in protecting sovereignty in the region. The southernmost land becomes even more important.

In particular, a huge threat to Ha Tien (and the Southwestern Sea region) comes from piracy. Many pirate groups have relied on the dangerous terrain of this area to hide, harass, and rob merchant ships passing through here, as well as public boats and even the boats of Mac envoys from Phu Xuan and beyond about Ha Tien [Nga 2022, 134]. Ha Tien is a rich land, rich in rare products, and located in a key position on the international maritime route, with a rugged terrain full of mountains, caves, as well as sunken and floating islands, so it became a place of refuge and activities for many pirate groups. In particular, in the Ha Tien sea area, Cha Va/Do Ba (Java) sea invaders often harass⁷. The Nguyen Dynasty's National History Institute also said: "The Cha Va sea pirates also suddenly hid on the islands to rob and capture people, so that country bought weapons to prepare, but patrol boats of provincial soldiers kept coming. In the south wind season, patrol carefully, if you are a little careless you will be robbed" [Duc 2006, 69].

The Mac family organized and defeated these dangerous pirate forces to protect the peace of the southernmost sea of Cochinchina. Mac's military forces defeated many dangerous bandits operating in the East Sea, returning peace and safety to merchant ships and fishermen passing through here: in 1747, Mac Thien Tu sent his son-in-law Ngu Nhung, the talented ruler Tu Huu Dung brought 10 warships to attack the "sea pirates named Wei Vu Vuong named Duc Bung (from Quy Nhon district)" and captured his entire rebel party including 4 people beheaded [Duc 2006, 160–161]. In 1767, destroying the notorious pirate Hoac Nhien, the Nguyen Dynasty's National History House recorded: that pirates Hoac Nhien "Besieged more and more, intending to keep an eye on Ha Tien. When the troops on patrol learned of the situation, Thien Tu secretly sent elite, underground troops to capture him" [National history of the Nguyen Dynasty 2002, 171]. In addition, another very dangerous force, factions of Chinese origin, are also preparing to gather forces to invade this metropolitan area. Typically, in the event of 1749, Tran Thai, a Chaozhou native, gathered forces at Bach Ma Mountain, secretly bribed, and combined with some members of the Mac family to act as internal agents. Mac Thien Tu sent troops to ambush and defeat the rebel forces, forcing Tran Thai to flee to Siam [National history of the Nguyen Dynasty 2002, 142].

Thanks to the activities of the Mac family (in the name of exercising the power assigned to them by the Cochinchina government), they contributed to affirming and exercising the sovereignty of the Nguyen lords in the mainland, as well as the Southwest Sea and islands of Vietnam. Of course, during that process, Lord Nguyen's government did not leave the Mac family to fend for themselves but always provided timely encouragement and material and spiritual support. Especially when the government and military apparatus in Gia Dinh prefecture were firmly consolidated, the connection between Dang Trong and Ha Tien became even stronger. Lord Nguyen's sovereignty over the lower Mekong River and off the coast of the East Sea to the Gulf of Thailand was fully affirmed and enforced.

***Mac Family with the Expansion of Trade
in the Southernmost Part of Cochinchina***

Maintaining the peace of this southernmost sea is important in attracting merchant ships to Cochinchina, as well as ensuring the circulation of goods between Ha Tien port town and outside. During the reign of Lord Nguyen (17th–18th centuries), the boundary of Ha Tien land under the management of the Mac family was much wider than that of Ha Tien province during the Nguyen Dynasty in the early 19th century. Mang Kham land was exploited by Mac Cuu and merged into Cochinchina, including Ha Tien, An Giang, Ca Mau, Phu Quoc Island, and part of Cambodia (the southernmost tip of Dang Trong, 2 sides bordering the sea) located in a strategic position on international maritime routes. Seeing the terrain of this land, “Thai Cong (Mac Cuu) worked day and night to gather people from all over the country to come and trade. Boats were bustling in and out, with Vietnamese, Duong, Lieu, and Man people racing. People flocked to stay, the household registration became more and more crowded, and Thai Cong's reputation became more and more famous” [Dinh 2002, 17].

Right from the moment he set foot on the land of Mang Kham (Ha Tien), Mac Cuu focused on developing trade, building this land to become the largest southernmost station of the Chinese living centers in south China. During the early period of annexation into Dang Trong territory, Ha Tien town was given relatively high autonomy by Lord Nguyen. The Mac family is free to make policies to build, develop, and protect this land. The Mac family even had the hereditary right to the position of Governor. The Qing Dynasty had a relatively accurate name for this land: “Khou Quoc Port” [Qing Dynasty Compilation Council 2010, 7463]. French missionary Pierre Poivre, when he came here, called it “the kingdom of Ponthiamas” [Kien Giang Department of Culture and Information 1987, 45].

To build their power, the Mac family had policies to expand the trade of Mang Kham land, calling on foreign traders to visit the port even though there were already Vietnamese and Khmer people exploring it to some extent, but in general it is still relatively wild and sparsely populated. With the sense of a merchant who spent many years floating around the South China Sea, the Gulf of Thailand, and the lower Mekong River, Mac Cuu realized Ha Tien's potential on the international trade route at present. Since then, he has built this place into a goods transshipment port on par with the region. Like many other areas of Cochinchina, Ha Tien has many seaports, convenient for foreign ships to anchor and exchange goods. That's why, when he moved from Lung Ky to Mang Kham, Mac Cuu promoted reclamation, established 7 communes and villages, and focused on developing trade, making Ha Tien increasingly crowded with traders coming to exchange goods. He also had a relatively gentle tax policy, aiming to attract more and more foreign merchant ships to the southernmost region of Cochinchina. Ha Tien became a promised land for migrants, as well as foreign traders: “His territory became the land of all diligent people who wanted to go there to settle down. His ports were open to all countries... he only established a trivial tax on the goods entering the port” [Gaspardone 1952, 26]. It can be said that Mac Cuu was the one who laid the first bricks to build Ha Tien into the

most prosperous port Cochinchina and had an important position in the region during this period. During Mac Thien Tu's reign, he continued to have many policies to promote the further development of Ha Tien Port town. Having just succeeded his father, Thien Tu was given many favorable privileges for commercial development by the Nguyen government: 3 ships with tax-free long cards to freely trade, and the freedom to open a coin mint... [National history of the Nguyen Dynasty 2002, 46]. Ha Tien during the reign of Mac Cuu and Mac Thien Tu was an important port in the Asian trade maritime route through the Gulf of Thailand to many countries and regions. In Gia Định thành thông chí, Trinh Hoai Duc described the bustling scene of Ha Tien as follows: Roads intersect, streets connect, Vietnamese, Chinese, Cambodian, Cha Va people all meet together live, boats on the rivers and seas travel back and forth here like a loom, it is truly a place of urbanization on the sea [Duc 2006, 238]. In trading with foreign countries, the Mac government in Ha Tien always had a relatively proactive policy. Unlike the ports of Dai Viet, during this period, trading activities mainly took place one-way: foreign traders came to buy goods and exchange some products to bring back to the homeland. During Mac Cuu's reign, he applied many policies to attract merchants to trade and promote trade in Mang Kham land. As soon as he replaced his father, Mac Thien Tu built market streets, roads, warehouses, especially built a shipbuilding workshop, built a wharf to make it easier for ships to enter and exit, etc. The face of Ha Tien port town is renewed, becoming more and more bustling, "a lot of merchant ships from all over the world come", truly "a place of the coastal metropolis" [Dinh 2002, 20].

With his growing potential, Mac Thien Tu has organized many merchant delegations to dock at ports of countries in the region to promote trade. Located between two major rice production centers: the Mekong Delta (Cochinchina) and the Chaophraya basin (Siam), Ha Tien has many advantages in controlling rice supply and trade with domestic ports area [Ngoc 2017, 146]. The Mac government also sent many fleets to China to establish trade relations. Not only did it trade with East Asian countries, but thanks to its key position in the region, Ha Tien became the most important trading port of the entire Southeast Asia region in the 17th and 18th centuries. Ha Tien's trading market is increasingly expanding, in addition to Dang Trong, there is also Cambodia, southern China, Siam, Manila, Batavia, India... [Nga 2022, 140].

In addition, based on trade reports stored in Guangzhou, Paul Van Dyke, when reviewing the trade of the South China region with Southeast Asian countries, affirmed Ha Tien's superiority in the system exchange in the Gulf of Thailand in the second half of the 18th century. With many favorable conditions, Ha Tien port has become an attractive destination for merchant ships in Guangzhou (China). According to statistics from 1761–1770, there were about 144 trading ships from Guangzhou to Southeast Asian ports, of which Ha Tien port had 17 ships docking to purchase and exchange goods [Ngoc 2017, 147]. It can be seen that Ha Tien in the 18th century became an important port, a link in the trade network from China to Southeast Asia. Puangthong Rungswasdisab drew on that trade network as follows: Traders often carried goods down the river by boat or bamboo raft until they reached the Khone Falls in southern Laos, where they would abandon the river and travel by cart to Cambodia. This old trade traffic continued at least until the late 19th century, with Laotian and Highlander (Vietnam) products joining other goods at Phnom Penh before traveling down the Mekong River to ships arrive Saigon-Cho Lon, or a branch near Chau Doc to go to Ha Tien [Cooke and Tana 2004, 102].

Not only is it a place that attracts foreign traders to trade here, Ha Tien is also a goods transit center in the Dang Trong region. From Ha Tien, many agricultural products of the Mekong Delta are transported to ports in the suburbs (especially the Thuan-Quang region), promoting connections between different regions of Dang Trong. At a time when the Thuan-Quang area often faced food shortages, the rich source of food from Ha Tien port was the factor that ensured the Nguyen government fight against famine. At the end

of the 18th century, Le Quy Don made a very relevant comment on the role of the Mekong Delta: "...Now Quy Nhon is in chaos, Gia Dinh is isolated, people are worried about food shortages, so from When the king's army finished suppressing the rebellion, the price of rice was expensive and the price of fields was also high" [Don 2007, 175].

In 1747, one of three merchant ships carrying Ha Tien's dragon cards crossed the sea, bringing many rare goods to Phu Xuan Capital to present to Lord Nguyen and conduct trade activities [National history of the Nguyen Dynasty 2002, 154]. This boat may have docked to exchange goods at the busiest trading port in the Thuan Quang region at that time, Hoi An. Mac Thien Tu created a connection to exchange goods between the two busiest centers at both ends of Dang Trong in the 17th and 18th centuries. This is also a very favorable condition for the flow of immigrants from the Ngu Quang region to the Southwest region, making the southernmost region of Dang Trong more and more prosperous.

The Mac Family with the Development of Culture in the Southern Region of Vietnam

After annexing Ha Tien into the land of Cochinchina (1708), Mac Cuu returned to the town, built a citadel, set up a military camp, appointed colonels, and built many guest houses to welcome talented people. Many sages everywhere came to the Mac government. Following his father's precepts, Mac Thien Tu built Tao Dan Chieu Anh Cac to worship Confucius and serve as a place to welcome talented people and exchange academic literature. The book Mac Thi genealogy [Mạc Thị gia phả] by Vu The Dinh records: "Thai Cong (Mac Thien Tu) founded the Chieu Anh Cac to worship the Saints and used the post-ceremony to gather talented people, handsome scholars in the Qing Dynasty and other nobles. Scholars overseas heard the Thai Cong's voice and gathered increasingly in large numbers" [Dinh 2002, 26]. Regarding Chieu Anh Cac's personnel, there are many different opinions. In Records of the Frontier region [Phủ biên tạp lục], Le Quy Don lists 25 Northern writers and 6 Southern writers (not including Mac Thien Tu) [Don, 2007, 345–346]. Another point of view, Claudine Ang said, "Within a year of assuming power, he undertook an ambitious literary project, in which he sought to compose a series of landscape poems about the domain he had recently acquired; he then invited more than thirty poets scattered along the Vietnamese and southern Chinese coastline to provide matching poems in celebration of its scenic sites" [Ang 2019, 121]. Also according to Claudine Ang, the head of the Mac government had relatively regular contact with the general who was good at poetry in Gia Dinh, Nguyen Cu Trinh. The two of them coordinated together to carry out the noble tasks assigned by Lord Nguyen, while exchanging poetry together, especially composing poems praising the beautiful scenery of Ha Tien land [Ang 2019, 111].

According to poet Dong Ho, who spent many years working with and researching Ha Tien, Tao Dan was established as a complete literary organization during Hong Duc's life. The way Chieu Anh Cac is organized is almost the same. During King Hong Duc's reign, there were 18 stars, and Chieu Anh Cac had more people. Some books record 32, but some books record 36. This number of 36 people is called thirty-six masterpieces, meaning 36 masters, among which 18 outstanding heroes [Ho 1996, 21–22]. Nguyen Ngoc Quynh also shared the above opinion and further clarified: "Chieu Anh Cac has 36 members, including 6 Vietnamese, 3 Minh Huong (Chinese origin), 1 monk, 1 Taoist, and 25 Chinese poets" [Quynh 2006, 45]. Chieu Anh Cac Taoist Temple "worshiping Confucius is a ritual... it is also a private center for teaching and training" [Quynh 2006, 45]. From its founding to 1778, Tao Dan Chieu Anh Cac contributed to Vietnamese literature many valuable works, such as "Hà Tiên thập cảnh", "Thụ Đức Hiên tứ cảnh", "Hà Tiên thập cảnh khúc vịnh", "Minh bột di ngư"... At the same time, the birth and activities of Chieu Anh Cac turned Ha Tien into a civilized land at the southern tip of Cochinchina.

Claudine Ang asserted that Chieu Anh must be understood not only as a work of art but also as a work of statecraft. It provides a window into the techniques through which the territory of Ha Tien was “civilized” and sheds light on the obscure political allegiances and machinations of its young ruler [Ang 2019, 111]. This shows Mac Thien Tu’s methodical “Use culture to educate” strategy to recruit people to found a nation.

Unfortunately, Ha Tien literature only flourished for 31 years; by 1771, Ha Tien was captured by the Siamese army, and Thien Tich had to flee to Gia Dinh. Chieu Anh pagoda disintegrated, and books were destroyed. In 1778, Thien Tich had to escape Tay Son and go to Siam, and two years later, in 1780, he committed suicide in the Siamese capital [National history of the Nguyen Dynasty 2002, 280]. Since then, the Mac family and the land of Ha Tien have declined and gradually lost their position in the region.

Conclusion

In short, the Mac family in Ha Tien played an important role in the process of establishing and enforcing Dang Trong’s sovereignty over the mainland, as well as the Southwest Sea and islands. From the beginning, the gathering of poor people to explore the land and build markets gradually shaped 7 communes and villages downstream of the Mekong River and merged into the territory of Dang Trong. With policies to encourage trade development, Mac Cuu and his successor, Mac Thien Tu, turned the pristine, sparsely populated Mang Kham land into a bustling port of Ha Tien with merchant ships from all over the world coming to trade. The formation of a busy trading port at the southern tip of Dang Trong had a significant impact on promoting land exploration and establishing and enforcing the sovereignty of the Nguyen Lords in the Southwest region.

Besides gathering people to explore the land and develop the economy, the Mac family took many drastic measures and actions to enforce Dang Trong’s sovereignty over both the mainland and the islands of the Southwest: attacking and responding to the invasions of Siam and Chenla, defeating the forces of bandits and pirates... Of course, this process had the side-by-side and effective support of the Dang Trong army.

It can be affirmed: Ha Tien became a part of Vietnam at the right time, not early, not late. If it is earlier, it means the Gia Dinh government has not yet been established; or later, the Tay Son – Nguyen Anh civil war broke out, and Ha Tien could not stand firm against the power of the Siamese. Therefore, after becoming part of Dang Trong, Ha Tien became a strong driving force, stimulating the region’s history to move forward, and contributing significantly to the expansion of the territory and the preservation of the national boundaries in the far southwestern border region of Vietnam and the region’s socio-economic development.

¹ Cochinchina is the name that refers to the territory of Dang Trong (from Quang Binh province to the southern tip of Vietnam today) under the management of Lord Nguyen in the 17th–18th centuries, not the French Cochinchina region at the late 19th – early 20th centuries.

² In the state apparatus organization of Chan Lap, Oc Nha – Okna refers to a governor position with the role of an independent local lord [Dinh 2006, 52]. David Chandler also said that Okya is a title for high-ranking Khmer officials [Chandler 2000, 108–111].

³ According to Dinh V. T, the time Mac Cuu arrived in Ha Tien was in 1671, when he was 17 years old [Dinh 2002, 16], Trinh Hoai Duc believes that the time when Mac Cuu arrived in Ha Tien was 1680 [Duc 2006, 159], Vuong Hong Sen gave the timeline as the year of Mau Ti (1708) [Sen 1999, 420–421].

⁴ Lung Ky, also known as Trung Ke, is located in the middle area between Ream and Sré Cham, northwest of Phu Quoc [Dat 2008, 68].

⁵ In 1679, a group of Chinese people of more than 3,000 people led by Duong Ngan Dich and Tran Thuong Xuyen, after failing to resist the Qing Dynasty, came to Dang Trong to ask for shelter

and become “subjects”. Lord Nguyen accepted and guided these two groups to settle in Ban Lan, Bien Hoa (Tran Thuong Xuyen group), and My Tho (Duong Ngan Dich group).

⁶ Historians of the Nguyen dynasty said: “Nac Bon of Cambodia encroached on Ha Tien. Cambodia resented Mac Cuu for losing his land. After Mac Cuu’s death, Thien Tu received the command. Bon then sent soldiers to encroach. Thien Tu brought all the basic troops out to fight and chased them to Sai Mat... The news of the victory was reported to the Lord, who praised him, especially giving Thien Tu the title of Admiral, giving him a red robe and belt, and conferring the title Nguyen Thi be a wife. Therefore, Cambodia no longer looks at Ha Tien” [National history of the Nguyen Dynasty 2002, 148].

⁷ Because the ancient Vietnamese people did not clearly distinguish the geography and humanity of the southern island region, they often called “Cha Va/Do Ba” to collectively refer to the inhabitants of Southeast Asia’s islands who practiced piracy origin of India, Malaysia, and Indonesia today [Tien 2013, 83–94].

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Нгуєн Дінх Ко, Чан Суан Х’єп

**Роль китайських іммігрантів у встановленні суверенітету
над нижньою течією річки Меконг (XVII–XVIII ст.)
на прикладі родини Мак у Хатъєні**

У статті розкривається роль сім’ї Мак у встановленні та зміцненні у XVII–XVIII ст. суверенітету імператорів Нгуєнів над материком, а також над Південно-Західним морським регіоном і островами (В’єтнам). У контексті того, що Королівство Сіам щойно вийшло з війни з Бірмою і рішуче втілювало в життя політику “Просування на Схід”, Королівство Камбоджа не відмовлялося від своїх амбіцій повернути регіон нижньої течії річки Меконг, оскільки завжди вважало, що його суверенні права розповсюджуються на цю територію. Приблизно наприкінці XVII ст. Мак Киу – китаєць, що належав до противників династії Цін, котрі бажали відновлення династії Мін – внаслідок переслідувань династією Цін утік до Камбоджі, де був призначений камбоджійським королем правити в нижній течії річки Меконг. Сім’я Мака прибула туди тоді, коли уряд імператора Нгуєна (В’єтнам) прискорював процес “Просування на Південь”. Після анексії земель Чанб’єну й Ф’єнчану (південний схід) династія Нгуєн почала звертати увагу на родючий і багатий регіон нижньої дельти Меконгу. Попри те, що спочатку Маки мали свої власні амбіції, завдяки вмілій політиці уряду Кохінхіна (В’єтнам) вони поступово інтегрувалися і зробили важливий внесок у процес встановлення та підтримання суверенітету в південно-західному регіоні В’єтнаму.

Ключові слова: імператор Нгуєн; Кохінхіна; Південно-західний регіон В’єтнаму; сім’я Мак; суверенітет; Хатъєн

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