

The Rise of the Coast: Trade, State and Culture in Early Đại Việt

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The surge in Song foreign trade affected Đại Việt greatly, helping to integrate the upper and lower valley of the Red River first economically in the twelfth century, then politically with the rise of the Trần dynasty in the thirteenth, and finally culturally in the fourteenth. Coastal wealth, power and classical Chinese scholarship entered the inland capital of Thăng Long (Hanoi) and strongly influenced it, leading to major changes across the land.

To consider the extent and impact of trade between Song China and other parts of Asia, we need to examine political and cultural aspects as well as the economic. Stretching from the Song epoch through the Yuan and into the Ming, increasing international trade linking the southeast coast of China to the Mediterranean had a major impact on the world of Southeast Asia. It strongly affected the classical states of Angkor and Pagan, and gave major impetus to Majapahit in eastern Java and Vijaya in central Champa. What, then, was the role of Đại Việt in this trade, and how did it affect the Vietnamese? I shall suggest that its impact was great, politically and culturally as well as economically.

The general historiography on Vietnam has tended both to downplay trade and international commerce among the Vietnamese and to treat 'Vietnam' as a whole. Traditionally considered as 'Confucian' and China-oriented following the millennium of control from the North, Đại Việt needs to be examined much more on its own terms and with reference to its various regions, and I am glad to join Momoki Shiro in studying this question.¹ From the tenth to the fourteenth century, Đại Việt and its capital of Thăng Long (now Hanoi) operated in ways similar to those of Angkor and Pagan. Yet, Đại Việt felt the impact of the Chinese trade earlier and in a much stronger way than did its neighbours to the West. The Song trade led to a major shift in the Vietnamese state and marked the beginning of significant cultural changes in Vietnamese society.

What I am proposing here, via the discussion of trade – both international and domestic – is a different view of Vietnamese history, one that is in keeping with ideas about other parts of mainland Southeast Asia. In 2004 the history of Champa was re-examined at an inspiring conference in Singapore; this paper carries that thought over

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1 Momoki Shiro, 'Đại Việt and the South China sea trade from the tenth to the fifteenth century', *Crossroads*, 12, 1 (1998): 1–34.

to the history of Đại Việt.² Good work on Vietnam is now being done on the early modern period, and we need to examine the years prior to that era, especially the tenth to fourteenth centuries. To the usual north/south emphasis, we need to add an east/west interpretation, more specifically, a riverine one that speaks of upriver/downriver interaction.³ Such interpretations have been made for the Chao Phraya and Irrawaddy valleys; it is now time to do so for the Red River valley as well. Such a view provides a different twist on Vietnamese history that will help us understand the dynamics of the Lý and the Trần dynasties as well as a more specific look at the nature of the Chinese role in the society and culture of their southern neighbours.

The focus on commerce, oft ignored heretofore, offers us the opportunity to approach the Vietnamese from the sea and the coast, to examine the culture of the eastern coastal region, and to gauge its impact on Vietnamese society at large. This approach also leads to a somewhat different view of the Vietnamese interaction with China in these centuries. This article will begin with a look at how Đại Việt was put together in the tenth and eleventh centuries, how its regions were linked. It will then consider economic change and the role of trade once Đại Việt had formed, during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. We will next move to the impact of the economic changes and of the trade in the thirteenth century on the politics and culture of Đại Việt, specifically the coastal control of the Trần dynasty based on commercial development. This development anticipated what would later happen at Pegu and Ayudhya to the West, except that here the capital did not shift to the coast; rather, the coast took control of the old capital itself.

With the rise of a coastal culture, wealth and power consequently led to a split with the inland, upriver core of Đại Việt. In the fourteenth century, attempts at integration of lower and upper, coastal and inland Đại Việt continued as the coastal culture drew in inland elements even as it superseded them – a process generally seen as a struggle between Buddhism and Confucianism. Yet the coastal zone and its literati culture continued to have a tendency to split along varied lines with allegiances spread among competing realms – pro-Vietnamese, pro-Champa or pro-Chinese – all the way from the Trần prince Ích Tắc in the Mongol wars of the late thirteenth century to the allies of Champa during the invasions a century later to the Mạc family support of the Ming occupation in the early 1400s. This different approach to Vietnamese regionalism and culture allows for a new understanding of the beginnings of an independent Vietnam.

Forming Đại Việt

Following the breakup of the Tang dynasty in China and the emergence of local powers through the tenth century and into the eleventh, there was the gradual formation of a growing political power that came to be called Đại Việt. My approach here is that of the mandala, how a variety of contesting local powers came to recognize one of those powers as dominant and became part of its developing political network. The study of the classical states of Southeast Asia always attempts to deal with the question of how a central power could form out of the varied regions it came to encompass. Thus any such

2 Symposium on New Scholarship on Champa, Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore, August 2004.

3 Michael Aung-Thwin's latest work, *The mists of Ramanna: The legend that was Lower Burma* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2005), provides an excellent example of this.

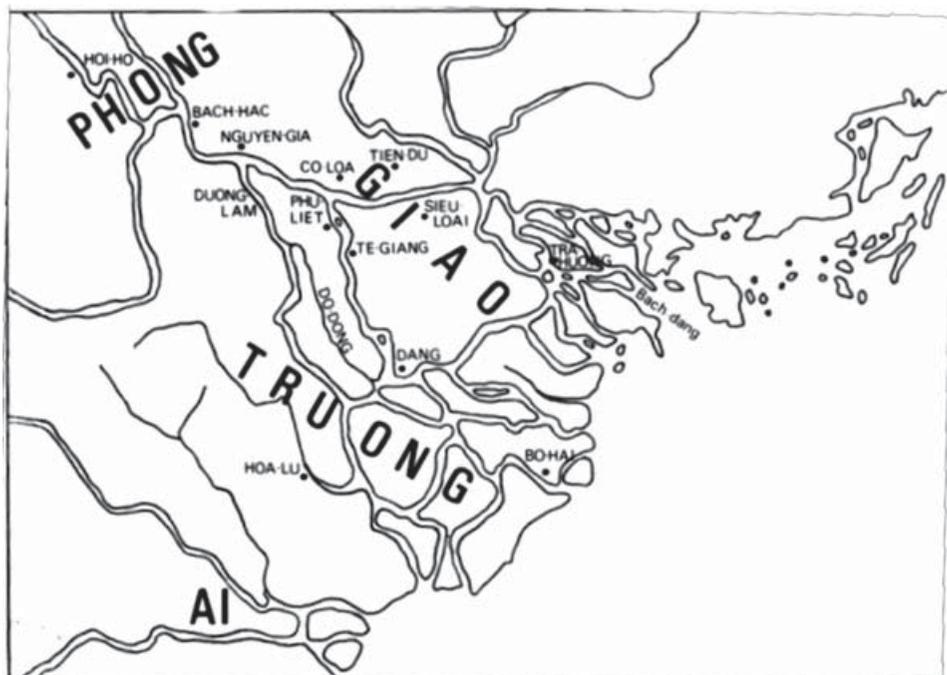
study needs to understand these regions first before dealing with the capital and its power. In Vietnam, the power of the Tang dynasty had limited local aspirations for almost three centuries, not allowing regional powers to rise and compete for control. Once this strong northern hold had dissipated by the tenth century, such regional powers began to emerge, and in them we can see the pattern of power at the beginning of Đại Việt.

Specifically, it is the mid-tenth century episode of the ‘Twelve Warlords’ that sets this pattern. Following the work of Sakurai Yumio, Trần Quốc Vượng and K. W. Taylor, we can see it as follows.⁴ In broad terms, the Tang organisation of what we now call northern Vietnam reflected the regionalism within which the local political powers operated. Upriver where the Red River comes out of the mountains from what is now Yunnan was Phong; this region, where agriculture and settlement had long been established on low terraces and natural levees along the river, had seen a strong intermixture of Tai and Vietnamese peoples that had split during the salt wars with Nanzhao in the 860s.⁵ Downriver, in the upper Red River Delta, was Giao, with emergent hills and the natural levees of the shifting rivers. Here lay the bulk of the Vietnamese population, a large Buddhist establishment and Đại La, the old capital of the province under Chinese rule. Further downriver, to the East and Southeast, existed the lower delta, on the fringes of Giao and undesignated under the Tang due to its swampy, tidal nature and resulting low population density. Trùng covered the southern edges of the delta and the hilly areas beyond it. Ái, Diễn and Hoan stretched south along the coast (now Thanh Hoá, Nghệ An and Hà Tĩnh provinces) with their own short river valleys.

What, then, was the pattern of local power within this broad regional situation? The site of each of the major local powers (‘Lords’) is shown on Taylor’s map. Upriver, Phong was controlled by the Kiều family on the terraces and adjacent lowlands who steadfastly held their own against the downriver powers. Two of the Lords were Kiều brothers in this upriver segment. Giao in the mid-river portion had seven of the Lords located among the emergent hills and natural levees as far as these extended to the east. This had been the earlier base of power for the Ngô family in their resistance to northern threats after the collapse of Tang control. By mid-century, five Lords led localities scattered throughout Giao; two more existed on its fringes. One of these two was upriver towards Phong, a brother of two of the five in central Giao; the three men came from an old-line Tang-Việt family. The other was at the head of the tidal creeks on the lower edge of the mid-river segment, facing the deeper, unruly portion of the delta; this Phạm family seems to have controlled and protected the interface of the mid- and lower delta zones. In the unnamed lower delta and coastal zone, there was only one Lord, Trần Lãm, a Chinese of Cantonese descent. His base was at Bồ Hải, a seaport. (His significance at this time may have been enhanced by later Trần-dynasty texts as a prophetic precursor of coastal and Trần

4 Sakurai Yumio, ‘Land, water, rice, and men in early Vietnam: Agrarian adaptation and socio-political organization’, ed. Keith W. Taylor and tr. T. A. Stanley (unpublished ms.), ch. 2; Keith W. Taylor, ‘The “Twelve Lords” in tenth century Vietnam’, *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* [henceforth *JSEAS*], 14, 1 (1983): 46–62; Taylor, *The birth of Vietnam* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), pp. 274–5; *Việt sử lược*, tr. and ed. Trần Quốc Vượng (henceforth *VSL*) (Hanoi: Văn Sử Địa, 1960), pp. 44–7.

5 John K. Whitmore, ‘Colliding peoples: Tai/Viet interactions in the 14th and 15th centuries’, paper presented at the Association of Asian Studies, San Diego, 2000.



Vietnam of the "Twelve Lords"

Source: Keith Taylor, 'The "Twelve Lords" in tenth century Vietnam'

developments yet to come.) On the southern edge of Giao lay Trù'ng, site of no identified Lord but home to Đinh Bộ Lĩnh, who would defeat the Lords and be seen in Trần dynastic texts as the 'First [Vietnamese] Emperor', assisted by Trần Lãm. On the west lay challenging forces further upriver in the mountains, ultimately backed by Nanzhao. Further south, Ái, Diển and Hoan formed the outer areas of the Viet realm, all coastal and all contested by the next realm to the South, Champa. To the North, in the mountains, lay another potential realm – this one Tai – which would contest the area with both Đại Việt and the Chinese Song dynasty.

Out of this regional *mélange* emerged the realm of Đại Việt in the century after 960. First the tenth-century rulers Đinh Bộ Lĩnh and Lê Hoàn, and finally the three strong kings of the Lý – the first successful Vietnamese 'dynasty' in the eleventh century – formed Đại Việt out of these regions, beat back Nanzhao to the west, established control of the southern fringe by defeating Champa, and crushed the Tai effort at autonomy on the north. The Đinh and Lê families had based themselves at Hoa Lu' in the southern hills of Trù'ng. Lý Công Uẩn (the future Emperor Lý Thái Tổ), operating in Giao, the mid-river core of the delta, shifted his base from Hoa Lu' to the old Tang capital (which he renamed Thăng Long) and worked to integrate the localities of the delta into his realm. The Đinh, through marriage, had already begun to bring the regions together, with the old royal Ngô family of Giao and, in addition, he brought in the Phạm and Trần families on the downriver and coastal fringes of Giao. Lê Hoàn defeated the Song effort to bring

the territory back into the Chinese empire and fought off Champa (the latter allied with the Ngô) to the South.⁶

James Anderson has shown us the initial developments of coastal trade in the post-Tang era. Stretching from southeast China down along the shores of the emerging Đại Việt towards Champa and centred on Qinzhou in Guangxi, this trade involved a variety of local peoples almost irrespective of the emerging political powers of the time. Different ethnic groups interacted and became involved as the new Song Empire, and began to show an interest in international trade. With the growth of this trade, the leadership in Hoa lư acted to tap into this increasing coastal activity (witness Đinh Bộ Lĩnh and Trần Lãm) and its wealth and to improve communications with the coast, specifically in Thanh Hoá and Nghệ An to the South. Lê Hoàn set up his sons in the different regions, including the lower delta.⁷

The three great rulers of the Lý (whose reigns spanned the period 1009–72) established Đại Việt in the upper delta, molding together Giao and Phong through force and marriage, and concentrated on the mid-river segment, leaving the coast behind. In James Anderson's terms, they appear to have pulled back from the earlier Hoa Lu/coastal links and to have focused on mountain and overland trade connections.⁸ At the centre of the Lý achievement was the Buddhist community, with numerous temples throughout Giao. These Lý kings actively supported and worked to build up this religious establishment, repairing old temples and having new ones constructed. Statues and bells were donated, and monks encouraged. These rulers also pursued the linking of local spirit cults with the Buddhist temples and with themselves as guardians.⁹ Gradually through the eleventh century, the Lý throne forged Đại Việt out of the varied regions on the basis of the traditions of the upper delta and steadily strengthened itself against the local powers. The blood oath and royal cults (to Indra [Viet. Đế Thích], for example) came to play major roles in the Lý monarchy.¹⁰ By the 1070s, Đại Việt was able both to have a child ascend the greatly strengthened throne and to repel a Song attack.

How then did the region to the East – downriver, the lower delta, the coast – fit into the Lý regime? It does not appear to have been of very great significance and possibly was of different ethnicity.¹¹ Yet the Lý rulers did eventually establish a number of royal outposts (*hành cung*, 'travel palaces') to the East and South of Thăng Long, penetrating

6 Keith W. Taylor, 'The Rise of Dai Viet and the establishment of Thang-long', in *Explorations in early Southeast Asian history*, ed. Kenneth R. Hall and John K. Whitmore (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Center for South and Southeast Asian Studies, 1976), pp. 157–70; Henri Maspéro, 'La géographie politique de l'empire d'Annam sous les Lý, les Trần, et les Hồ (X^e–XV^e s.)', *Bulletin de l'École Française d'Extrême-Orient* [henceforth *BEFEO*], 16, 1 (1916): 29–30; Li Tana, 'A view from the sea: Perspectives on the northern and central Vietnamese coast', in this issue.

7 James Anderson, 'Political alliances and trade networks along the Sino-Vietnamese frontier from the later tenth to the mid-eleventh century', paper presented at the Association of Asian Studies, Chicago, March 2005; see also Li, 'View from the sea'.

8 Anderson, 'Political alliances'; Li, 'View from the sea'.

9 Taylor, 'Rise of Dai Viet', pp. 172–6; Anderson, 'Political alliances'. On the links to spirits see Keith W. Taylor, 'Authority and legitimacy in eleventh century Vietnam', in *Southeast Asia in the ninth to fourteenth centuries*, ed. David G. Marr and Anthony C. Milner (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1986), pp. 139–76.

10 John K. Whitmore, "Elephants can actually swim", in Marr and Milner ed., *Southeast Asia*, pp. 126–7; Taylor, 'Rise of Dai Viet', pp. 175–81.

11 Maspéro, 'Géographie politique', pp. 30–40; Sakurai, 'Land, water'; Li, 'View from the sea'; Anderson, 'Political alliances'.

deeper into the delta. Momoki Shiro has described how these complexes were situated on waterways and built around Buddhist temples (generally on hillocks) with royal residences, storehouses and production centres (for roof tiles, for example). These sites formed both local bases of royal operations and centres for trade in the immediate area. Begun in the mid-eleventh century, they appear to have developed more strongly in the twelfth.¹² Royal processions to these locations would have brought the Lý presence into regions beyond the direct control of the throne. The second Lý ruler twice travelled to a river mouth and there performed an agricultural ritual; his successor also travelled to the coast several times. Interestingly, the acts of the second ruler involved ritual associated with Chinese-style literati, and the third ruler had both a greater coastal contact and a greater interest in just such Chinese scholarship.¹³ Such a coastal/literati configuration would blossom in later centuries. Overall, however, Lý Đại Việt – like Angkor and Pagan – was focused on the upper, mid-river portion of its territory and paid relatively little attention to the lower, deltaic, coastal segment downriver.

Trade and economic change

As the new political form of Đại Việt emerged through the middle of the eleventh century, economic changes occurred concomitantly with the developing power structure. The major changes took place first in and around the core region surrounding the capital of Thăng Long. This mid-river lowland region paralleled such areas in Angkor and Pagan and involved the structural development of the major temples of the area. The second region of economic change was downriver and along the coast, linked heavily to the surge of international trade coming out of Song China at the time. The first stage of this economic growth has yet to be closely examined – to my knowledge – and I can only postulate, by analogy, what it might have been like. By applying the scholarship on the economic change of the other major inland empires in what are now Cambodia and Burma, we may gain a sense of how Đại Việt developed at the same time. The key point is that temples lay at the centre of this growth.

There have yet to be studies of this phenomenon for the middle Red River area, the core of Đại Việt's original development. We know from the chronicles that the first half of the eleventh century, especially the early Lý decades, saw the construction of many new Buddhist temples. For example, around 1030, 'nearly 1000' were said to have been built in the early years of the second Lý reign. A recent publication has listed and illustrated the current incarnations of 38 such early temples, mainly in the internal, mid-river area.¹⁴ While some of the political, cultural and religious aspects of these temples have been discussed, apparently their economic dimension has not. Until such studies take place, we can only look at the other mainland centres for possible suggestions. Victor

12 Nishimura Masanori and Momoki Shiro, 'Nam Dinh and the lower Red River Delta in the Ly-Tran period, seen from archaeological and historical evidence', paper presented at the conference on Vietnamese Peasant Activities, an Interaction between Culture and Nature, International Institute for Asian Studies, Leiden, 2002; Momoki, 'Nam Định trong thời Lý-Trần', paper presented at the Hội Thảo Bách Cốc, Hanoi, July 2003; Momoki, personal communication; Sakurai, 'Land, rice', ch. 3.

13 VSL, pp. 84, 95–8; Ngô Sĩ Liên, *Đại Việt sử ký toàn thư* (henceforth *TT*) (1697 edn) (Hanoi: Khoa học Xã hội, 1998), 2: 25b, 30a, 37a; 3: 17b–25a; Taylor, 'Rise of Dai Viet', pp. 176–7; Keith W. Taylor, 'Looking behind the Vietnamese annals', *Vietnam Forum*, 7 (1986): 58–9.

14 Võ Văn Tường, *Những ngôi chùa nổi tiếng Việt Nam* [Vietnam's famous pagodas] (Hanoi: Văn hoá – Thông tin, 1994), pp. 74–211; the 1000 figure is from Taylor, 'Rise of Dai Viet', pp. 174–5.

Lieberman, in his recent discussion of the ‘charter states’, sees temple networks as a key element in agricultural and 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, livestock and seed. Second, 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.¹⁵ Out of the stability and prosperity rising from this system came an increasing density of population and economic velocity. Within the growth of wealth and patronage, demand and trade rose. Thus, through analogy, we would postulate that the growth of temple complexes in the mid-river zone of the Red River meant greater political stability for the Lý regime, more land under cultivation, greater production of rice, more people involved in the central economy and a rising demand for goods.

As this economic development was occurring in the central, mid-river zone through the mid-eleventh century, it would have had an impact on surrounding zones, especially those further upriver and downriver. The greater population, economic exchange and demand – that is, market forces – in the central lowlands would have extended up into the hills for the goods to be found there; coastal salt traded for highland horses was one specific exchange. It was undoubtedly no coincidence that at this time Đại Việt joined the Song to crush the attempt at highland autonomy by the Nùng.¹⁶ Simultaneously, as at Angkor and Pagan, the mid-river zone connected via the downriver zone with the major east–west international route to draw its goods up from the coast.¹⁷

Through the eleventh and twelfth centuries, especially with the shift of the Song capital south in 1126, there was a heavy involvement of Chinese merchants with this international trade. As the Song trade surge reached along the coastal zone of Đại Việt, it interacted strongly with the inland economic forces in the mid-river area as well as providing an even greater pull on the upriver zone for the greatly desired highland goods.¹⁸ This flow enhanced the growth, prosperity and wealth of the core of Đại Việt and the political control of the Lý dynasty. Yet at the same time, these economic forces, both

15 Victor B. Lieberman, *Strange parallels* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), vol. I, pp. 95–7, 227–8, 358, 362–5; Kenneth R. Hall, *Maritime trade and state development in early Southeast Asia* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1985), pp. 148–61; Hall, ‘Economic history of early Southeast Asia’, in *Cambridge history of Southeast Asia*, ed. Nicholas Tarling (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), vol. I, pp. 229–45; Michael Aung-Thwin, *Pagan: The origins of modern Burma* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1985), pp. 172–82.

16 Li, ‘View from the sea’; James Anderson, *The rebel den of Nung Tri Cao* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, forthcoming).

17 Lieberman, *Strange parallels*, pp. 93–5, 221–3; Hall, *Maritime trade*, pp. 173–7; Aung-Thwin, *Pagan*, pp. 104–5, 113–14. Aung-Thwin, *Mists*, gives the proper perspective for the relationship of mid-river and deltaic Burma at this time.

18 Huang Chunyan, *Songdai haiwai maoyi* [Overseas trade of the Song Dynasty] (Beijing: Shehui Kexue Wenxian Chubanshe, 2003). See also the papers presented at Symposium IV on Trading in the Southern Seas of the Song Dynasty, 50th International Conference of Asian Studies (Toho Gakkai), Tokyo, 20 May 2005: Shiba Yoshinobu, ‘A comparison of the Song junk trade with that of late imperial times: Managerial aspects in particular’; Huang Chunyan, ‘The prosperity of China’s maritime trade and the development of a market in Southeast Asia in the eleventh to thirteenth centuries’ (in Chinese); Fukami Sumio, ‘Tambralinga and the “Southeast Asian commercial boom”’; and Karashima Noboru, ‘Medieval commercial activities in the Indian Ocean as revealed from Chinese ceramic sherds and South Indian and Sri Lankan Inscriptions’. See also Momoki, ‘Dai Viet’; Kenneth R. Hall, ‘Local and international trade and traders in the Straits of Melaka region, 600–1500’, *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* [henceforth *JESHO*], 48, 2 (2005): 213–60; Sufumi So and Billy K. L. So, ‘Population growth and maritime prosperity: The case of Ch’uan-chou in comparative perspective, 946–1368’, *JESHO*, 45, 1 (2002): 96–127.

internal and international, led to major changes in the loosely controlled lower Đại Việt, the coastal zone. Increasingly, I would postulate, this lower, relatively open region of Đại Việt's mandala became an area of multicultural interaction and economic development. Inhabitants from the provinces of China's southeast coast flowed down into this area and helped to transform it economically, culturally and politically. Along with the commercial flow up and down the Red River valley through this zone, there was also what we might call industrial development, the production of goods for both local consumption and trade upriver and along the international routes.¹⁹

Lower Đại Việt sat on one edge of an amorphous '*Jiaozhi Yang*' (Jiaozhi Ocean) in an intermediate position along the international trade route, as Li Tana points out elsewhere in this issue. This 'ocean' stretched from the southeast coast of China south across the Gulf of Tonkin towards Champa. Initially, to all appearances, it was the southern sector of Đại Việt's coastal zone that was most involved in this trading sphere, Nghệ An in particular. Located at the centre of the *Jiaozhi Yang*, this trading sphere connected with Champa down the coast, with Angkor across the mountains and down the Mekong River, with Hainan to the East across the 'ocean' and with the core of Đại Việt to the North. By the twelfth century, this longstanding situation had begun to change with the growth of Đại Việt's core zone and the surge of Song trade. The intersection of these two forces seems to have drawn the commercial focal point northward up the coast at the same time as the growing competition occurred among the three mandalas of Đại Việt, Champa and Angkor over this stretch of coast. Such events led to the shift of the major port, without totally removing the commercial significance of the Nghệ An/Thanh Hoá area. What is now northern central Vietnam would remain an important part of the coastal zone.²⁰

Eventually, from the mid-twelfth century, the centre of these developments came to be the port of Vân Đồn, emerging out of the ethnically mixed Qinzhou trading field and linking a network of harbours on a variety of islands off the eastern coast of the delta.²¹ For this sphere, the *Đại Việt s'ư ký toàn thư* (*Complete Đại Việt chronicle*) records contact with traders from Java, the world of coastal Southeast Asia and the Gulf of Siam. There are also references to the local Chinese population, as we shall discuss below. Interestingly, Vân Đồn and the new Champa port of Thị Nai (Quy Nhơn) in Vijaya seem to have appeared on the north and central coasts respectively of present-day Vietnam simultaneously (from the mid-twelfth century); to have thrived on the rising international trade between eastern Java and southern China; and to have had political and cultural contacts with surrounding areas, namely Angkor for Vijaya and southern China for the coastal zone of Đại Việt. In addition, simultaneously, there came the rise of Tambralinga on the upper eastern side of the Malay Peninsula and its invasion of Sri Lanka.²²

19 Li, 'View from the sea'.

20 Ibid.; Momoki Shiro, personal communication.

21 *TT*, 4: 6b, 20a; John K. Whitmore, 'Vietnam and the monetary flow of eastern Asia, 13th–18th centuries', in *Precious metals in the later medieval and early modern worlds*, ed. J. F. Richards (Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press, 1983), p. 374; Li, 'View from the sea'; Yamamoto Tatsuro, 'Van-don, a trade port in Vietnam', *Memoirs of the Research Department of the Toyo Bunko*, 39 (1981): 1–28 (originally published in Japanese in 1939); Momoki Shiro, personal communication.

22 John K. Whitmore, 'The last great king of classical Southeast Asia: "Che Bong Nga" and 14th century Champa', paper presented at the Symposium on New Scholarship on Champa, Singapore, August 2004; Fukami Sumio, 'The long thirteenth century of Tambralinga, from Javaka to Siam', *Memoirs of the Research Department of the Toyo Bunko*, 62 (2004): 45–79.

A major part of this trade for Đại Việt involved large amounts of copper cash from the Song. The Vietnamese had produced coins through the first half of the eleventh century, but from this time onward, probably as a combination of greater economic demand and the availability of the Song coins, the latter became the main source for the local economy. The copper cash came from the southeast coast of China on board junks and supplied the developing economy of Đại Việt.²³ As the inland economy prospered, it drew this cash and other products through the coastal zone, in the process enriching the latter. In all probability, local production of wares such as ceramics grew in this zone as well.²⁴ The growth of the royal outposts in the lower delta through the mid-twelfth century would seem to indicate a deepening Lý interest there.²⁵

The full significance of the growth of the coastal zone – stretching from north of Vân Đồn southward to Thanh Hoá and Nghệ An – may be seen in reports during the 1170s made by Chinese officials in Guangxi province just to the North. These reports, by the provincial officials Fan Chengda and Zhou Qufei, seem overstated when applied to the entire realm of Đại Việt (An Nan to the Chinese). But, if we apply them specifically to the coastal zone of Đại Việt, the picture becomes clearer. Fan in particular emphasized the Chinese nature of the zone of contact between the two – a preponderance of Chinese goods and immigrants, dependent on China for items like paper and writing brushes. He argued to the Song court that the flow of manpower (in his terms slave trafficking), literati and coins down the coast into this zone had to be stopped. For him, it was coastal Chinese (explicitly from Min – Fujian) who supplied the brains; as we shall see, this turned out to be true for the coastal zone of Đại Việt as well.²⁶

As Fan indicated, this zone was the meeting point of the ‘infamous traffickers from the southern part of the [Song] empire’ with the ‘foreign merchants belonging to barbarian lands’. The local products were metals (gold, silver, copper) and animal products (elephant tusks, rhinoceros horn, kingfisher feathers) from the mountains and pearls from the sea.²⁷ In addition, more goods came from ‘all the southern barbarians to the west of the Chinese ports’, and these ports, particularly Qinzhou, were quite close by. Spread through this coastal zone there was also a variety of peoples. The late Trần Quốc Vương has spoken of the vestiges of Chams and other Austronesians scattered here, including a type of well, ceramics and artistic features.²⁸

What was taking place through the twelfth century was the formation of this coastal zone as an area of transition between the international and the internal, between lower and upper Đại Việt. The zone was much more commercial; it was open to the outside world and involved more directly with developments in China than was inland Đại Việt.

23 Whitmore, ‘Vietnam and the monetary flow’, pp. 365–6; Robert S. Wicks, *Money, markets, and trade in early Southeast Asia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Southeast Asia Program, 1992), pp. 54–61; Yamamoto, ‘Van-don’, pp. 19–23; Valerie Hansen, *The open empire* (New York: Norton, 2000), pp. 262–3, 266, 290–91.

24 John S. Guy, ‘Vietnamese ceramics and cultural identity: Evidence from the Ly and Tran dynasties’, in Marr and Milner ed., *Southeast Asia*, pp. 256–60; Li, ‘View from the sea’; Yamamoto, ‘Van-don’, pp. 19–20, 23–8; Momoki, ‘Dai Viet’, p. 20.

25 Nishimura and Momoki, ‘Nam Dinh’; Momoki, ‘Nam Định’.

26 Whitmore, “‘Elephants can actually swim’”, pp. 119–23, 129–31; Whitmore ‘Vietnam and the monetary flow’, pp. 374–5; Momoki, ‘Dai Viet’, pp. 11–16; Li, ‘View from the sea’.

27 Whitmore, “‘Elephants can actually swim’”, p. 121.

28 Trần Quốc Vương, ‘Champa’s cultural influences in northern Vietnam from the eleventh century to the sixteenth’, paper presented at the Symposium on New Scholarship on Champa, Singapore, August 2004.

It resembled the contemporary situation near the mouth of the Yangzi where Ningbo (Mingzhou) also formed just such a coastal zone of cultural interchange involving China, Korea and Japan. Ide Seinosuke, in discussing the questions of influence and ‘national’ identity for Buddhist paintings, notes how Ningbo was ‘a portal of cultural exchange’ and ‘a gateway’ for the flow of multicultural patterns across the East China Sea. In such an open zone, exposed to influences from a variety of peoples and directions, it is very difficult, he notes, to pin down the specific identity of a cultural work. Within such a zone, individuals could mesh together what appealed to them and create multicultural items – through fusion, if you will – that then flowed out in various directions. Such a fusion zone was a multifaceted interface drawing in elements from elsewhere, reworking them and sending them out again, not merely as hybrid products but as new creations.²⁹

The eastern region of Đại Việt (that is, lower Đại Việt) formed just such a fusion zone behind the port network of Vân Đồn. It was a zone heavily influenced by the flow from the southeast coastal ports of China, as Fan Chengda indicated, but it was not merely Chinese. As in later centuries, further South down the coast at Hội An, it was the product of a joint effort involving visiting Chinese, local Chinese, other visitors and varied indigenous inhabitants, all receptive to the international flow of goods and cultural influences.³⁰ It existed apart from the internal Buddhist world of the Lý dynasty around the capital of Thăng Long in the midriver zone, yet not completely separate from it. In this coastal zone, stretching south to Nghệ An, there arose a new culture, one more open to the Sinic world than the capital region.³¹ Increasingly, from the twelfth century through the thirteenth, within this open coastal zone we see the emergence of a literati culture different from the one that had come to exist upriver in the heavily Buddhist zone of the capital. Out of this new coastal culture would come a new government form and an upriver/downriver cultural split. Political allegiances in lower Đại Việt would be more problematic than those in its upper region.

Illustrative of this pattern is the problem which existed for the Trần prince Khánh Dư during the Mongol wars in the 1280s. He and his men had great difficulty distinguishing the coastal inhabitants from the northern troops in their dress, so he ordered the former to replace their northern style hats with ones in a different, indigenous (Ma Lôi, perhaps Cham) style. To quote the *Chronicle*, ‘the people [around Vân Đồn] customarily depended on trade for their livelihoods. They relied on “guests from the North” for whatever they ate, drank, and wore. And for this reason they customarily wore “Northern” clothing.’³² Also, within this zone, stretching south through Thanh Hoá and Nghệ An, there came to exist the literati culture that utilized the paper and writing brushes brought South; during this time, as noted above, there was inland contact with this region for ritual purposes, the sort specialised in by the literati.

29 Ide Seinosuke, ‘The question of identity in Chinese and Korean paintings imported to medieval Japan’, paper presented at the Center for Chinese Studies, University of Michigan, 4 November 2004; I wish to thank Professor Ide for his permission to use this paper.

30 Li, ‘View from the sea’; Li Tana, *Nguyễn Cochinchina* (Ithaca: Cornell University Southeast Asia Program, 1998); Hall, ‘Local and international’.

31 Whitmore, “Elephants can actually swim”, pp. 130–1; Emile Gaspardone, ‘Deux inscriptions du Musée de Hanoi’, *BEFEO*, 32, 2 (1932): 475–80; Hall, *Maritime trade*, pp. 173–5, 184; Yamamoto, ‘Van-don’, p. 3.

32 *TT*, 5: 53a–b, as translated by Yamamoto ‘Van-don’, pp. 2, 5. The suggestion that the term *Ma Lôi* might refer to Cham is in Trần Quốc Vượng, ‘Cultural influences’.

During the mid- and late twelfth century, inscriptions appeared in this zone that demonstrate the literati nature of the coastal world. First (in present-day Thái Bình province) there was the 1159 inscription for the powerful court minister Đỗ Anh Vũ with major scholarly allusions to the Chinese classical era – especially the Duke of Zhou, famed for his ministerial support of a young king. What we have, in Keith Taylor’s words, is the use of ‘the vocabulary of Confucian moral teaching’ and no reference to the Buddhism of the mid-river zone. This inscription mentions ‘merchants arriving from afar’; of Anh Vũ’s hold on Nghệ An and Thanh Hoá, major parts of the coastal zone; and of teachers and scholars – literati most likely from this same zone, of which both groups were involved with government. The ‘brush-and-ink men’ took part in a major ceremony. Yet this great man, Đỗ Anh Vũ, would be vilified in later literati texts. Though he had coastal links, he remained within the inland world of the capital of Thăng Long. In turn, scholars from without, as Taylor has termed them – undoubtedly from the coastal zone – maintained records in their libraries and archives that would be brought together in the thirteenth century, first by Trần Phủ in his *Việt chí* (*Record of Việt*) and then by Lê Văn Hưu in his official *Đại Việt sử ký* (*Chronicle of Đại Việt*) of 1272 (more below). Hence, the thriving literary scene of the prosperous coastal zone stood outside the court and the inland Buddhist cultural scene. A second inscription, from 1157 in present-day Hưng Yên, was from Anh Vũ’s mother’s family and confirms the basic pattern of the first inscription; it too had classical Chinese allusions. A third inscription, from later in the twelfth century and also in Hưng Yên province, was compiled by the top scholar in an examination of 1185.³³

While Đại Việt was forming in the central area of the Red River from the tenth century into the second half of the eleventh, the Song dynasty to the North had unified China and begun a massive involvement in international commerce. This effort would be enhanced in the twelfth century with the move of its capital into the Yangzi valley. What this meant for Đại Việt was the major growth of its more vacant coastal zone and an increasingly heavy Chinese presence through this area. This presence would eventually lead to a great shift in power in Đại Việt and the growing involvement there of a new group of intelligentsia, more classical Chinese than Buddhist in orientation.

Through the twelfth century and into the thirteenth, two major economic forces were at work; though separate, they intertwined and reinforced each other. The first was the agricultural development linked to the rise of the Lý state and the Buddhist temples and estates that provided the strong foundation for this state. This took place in the mid-river section that formed the core of Đại Việt. The second occurred on and near the coast and was linked to the surge of trade out of and into Song China; the latter naturally had a strong Chinese component. The first created a growing internal demand for foreign goods that moved up from the coast, while the second responded to the increasing external demand for goods, especially from the highlands. These came downriver to the coast or were created in the growing eastern coastal zone. Overall, the increasing

33 Keith W. Taylor, ‘Voices within and without: Tales from stone and paper about Đỗ Anh Vũ (1114–1159)’, in *Essays into Vietnamese pasts*, ed. Keith W. Taylor and John K. Whitmore (Ithaca: Cornell University Southeast Asia Program, 1995), pp. 59–80; Hà Văn Tấn, ‘Inscriptions from the tenth to the fourteenth centuries recently discovered in Viet Nam’, in the same volume, pp. 53–4. For the *Việt chí* and the *Đại Việt sử ký*, see Taylor, *Birth of Vietnam*, p. 351, and Taylor, ‘Looking behind’, pp. 49–50, 60–3.

economic integration of Đại Việt's territory would lead to major political and cultural change.

Thus, through the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the eastern zone along the coast of Đại Việt grew disproportionately in economic strength. The port of Vân Đồn emerged and became a strong regional base within East and Southeast Asia. Given the flow of goods up and down the Red River system, including the flood of Song copper cash, the infrastructure and population of this coastal zone would have grown greatly. A considerable portion of this growth involved a Chinese population that moved down the coast from the ports of Guangdong, Fujian and Zhejiang. As part of the growing South China Sea network of Chinese commerce, this sector began to wield increasing power within Đại Việt. By the thirteenth century, the power had begun to shift and, with it, a new cultural force began to appear in Vietnamese society.

Coastal control, administrative change and the literati

By 1200 lower Đại Việt, the coastal zone, had become a prosperous centre of international trade and a cultural region that drew in much outside influence, especially from down the southeast coast of China. Out of this economic and cultural complex there arose the political power of the Trần family, formerly from Fujian and originally fishermen in this coastal zone. The Trần established their base initially in the southern lower delta and then extended their power – primarily naval – into the northern part behind Vân Đồn.³⁴ Though not explicitly linked to the internal and international commercial forces of the twelfth century, this family of Chinese coastal descent emerged in the midst of these forces and appears to have taken advantage of them eventually to forge a political unity over both lower and upper Đại Việt. Where elsewhere to the West (in Ayudhya and Pegu) local power would rise and bring the capital to the coast, in Đại Việt the coastal power emerged and seized power in the capital of Thng Long itself, blending into the inland core's ritual life.

The coastal commercial forces in twelfth- and thirteenth-century Đại Việt were the beginnings of dynamics that were spreading along the shores of mainland Southeast Asia. At this time, it was the eastern coast of the mainland that felt the main impact of the Chinese trade surge. Both the eastern zone of Đại Việt and the central coast of Nagara Champa to the South saw major economic changes and power shifts. For the latter, it was the emergence of the port of Thị Nai at Quy Nhơn and its hinterland of Vijaya (in the central region of the country); this region joined forces with elements at Angkor to dominate Champa and to push aside the old port (now Hội An) and the political power of Amaravati (in its northern region).³⁵ In later centuries, riverine and coastal powers like Phnom Penh, Ayudhya and Pegu would also lead to capital displacements away from Angkor and Pagan.

For Đại Việt there would be no such displacement of the capital, no move of the central power down towards the coast. Instead, the coastal power reached upriver and gained control of the capital, leaving it in its old location and bringing new elements into it. Why did this happen? Partly perhaps because of the old capital's relative proximity to the coast in Đại Việt, but mainly, I suspect, due to the strong interest of the Trần in

34 Sakurai, 'Land, water, rice', ch. 3.

35 Whitmore, 'Last great king'.

agrarian development and in the ritual configuration of the core. In the process, the coastal patterns with their greater Chinese participation would begin what over two centuries later would be the major transformation of Đại Việt.

The transition of power from the Lý to the Trần, from inland control to coastal, has not been studied in detail. (Indeed, curiously, dynastic founders in Vietnam have yet to be examined as such to any degree.) O. W. Wolters looked at this Lý/Trần transition in an article discussing the differences between the chronicles of the thirteenth century (recompiled in the 1400s) and those of the fourteenth, each apparently the product of a coastal scholar.³⁶ Despite interesting differences, both texts were generally favourable to the new Trần family and agreed that the Lý were having problems, specifically that regionalism and local leaders were asserting themselves against the capital. The Lý had already linked themselves to the rising power of the Trần downriver in lower Đại Việt, and the first quarter of the thirteenth century was a tale of how the regional power conflicts across the Red River Delta were resolved. The Hồng region bordering the mid-river and downriver zones halfway between the capital and the coast was a major element in this question, as its leaders, especially Nguyễn Nộn, stood against both the upriver and the downriver powers. This was not only a political question; disruptions of communications along the waterways of the delta affected the merchants and their riverine trade. The Trần on the coast would have had a very strong interest in maintaining access to the main centre of population and wealth upriver from them. The result was that through very tense circumstances and dealings with the Lý, this coastal power eased its way into control of the capital and the inland core zone.

Having used intermarriages with the ruling Lý family to place a young male from their own family on the throne in Thăng Long in 1225, the Trần also had to resolve the problem of the regional powers that had allowed their rise; in particular, Hồng stood in their way. Through the 1210s and 1220s, the joint Lý/Trần forces overcame the local powers until finally Hồng fell and – to quote the fifteenth-century chronicle — ‘the state (*quốc*) became one’.³⁷ This is normally taken as indicating the standard unification of the new dynasty, but I would suggest that in this instance it means more than that. Rather, here it indicates the removal of any barrier between lower and upper Đại Việt and indeed for the first time these two zones were effectively brought together. This is confirmed in a note of the fourteenth-century *An Nam chí lược* (Ch. *An Nan zhilue*) that when the Trần took power, they integrated their homeland – the lower delta (Long Hưng, Thiên Trường as well as Trường An down the coast) – into the core region of upper Đại Việt (the Lý capital and homeland).³⁸ All the while, the Trần maintained their own political centre back in Thiên Trường deep in the delta and spent much time there as their secondary capital.³⁹

36 O. W. Wolters, ‘Narrating the fall of the Ly and the rise of the Tran dynasties’, *Asian Studies Association of Australia Review*, 10, 2 (1986): 24–32. The thirteenth-century chronicle was the *Đại Việt sử ký* of Lê Văn Hưu (see below), recompiled in the fifteenth century as the *Đại Việt sử ký toàn thư* by Phan Phu Tiên and Ngô Sĩ Liên; the fourteenth-century chronicle was the *Việt sử lược*. See also Sakurai, ‘Land, water, rice’, ch. 3.

37 *TT*, 5: 5b; O. W. Wolters, ‘On telling a story of Vietnam in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries’, *JSEAS*, 26, 1 (1995): 66; Sakurai, ‘Land, water, rice’, ch. 3.

38 Lê Tác, *An Nam chí lược* (henceforth *ANCL*) (Huế: Viện Đại học Huế, 1961), pp. 28–9, 19 (Chinese).

39 Li, ‘View from the sea’.

As the Trần and their coastal forces took control of the capital, they quickly blended into the existing ritual pattern of the inland core region. Staging the blood oath of allegiance in 1227, the Trần drew together the regions of Đại Việt as the Lý had done two centuries earlier, and they also continued the royal rites to Indra established by the Lý in the mid-eleventh century.⁴⁰ In addition, however, the Trần moved quickly to change the pattern that had allowed them to reach the throne, namely the regional power arrangement and intermarriage with those powers. In the process, it would appear that they drew on the Sinicized coastal culture whence they had just recently emerged. As O. W. Wolters described it, the Trần set up patrilineality and primogeniture as the key rules of succession, along with a strong sense of the clan and marriage strictly within it. To enforce this, they also established the institution of the senior, abdicated king who ruled while his young eldest son, the junior king, reigned. Other family members, male and female, supported the throne.⁴¹

The coastal culture included non-Chinese elements, as we might expect. Again taking the Trần clan as representative of at least a portion of that complex culture, we see elements that contemporary and later Chinese would view as odd and barbaric. Tattooing stood out here; it would appear to have been deeply engrained in the coastal zone, with dragons a primary motif. These creatures embodied the warrior tradition ‘from downriver’, as the Trần explicitly stated, and would help them avoid water serpents and storms at sea. For the Trần, the practice harkened back to their seagoing days deep in the delta. Another major element was the endogamy of the clan and its sexual practices, strongly condemned for centuries thereafter. The importance of the king providing a male heir was foremost and excused much in the effort to achieve it. Already in the 1230s, it led to the switch of a pregnant princess between brothers for this to occur. (Over a century later, a sexual prescription would take place for the same reason.) To resolve the tensions resulting from the switch, as well as to insure that no other local power would play a role (as the Lý had allowed the Trần to do), the royal branch intermarried with other branches of the clan (parallel cousins). While distinctly non-Chinese, was this strictly a pragmatic choice? Or did it too have its origin in the multicultural (perhaps Austronesian) life of the lower delta? Or both?⁴²

Having controlled the court, the Trần specifically chose Sinic elements to aid in ruling the state; these elements doubtless came out of their coastal culture as well. A more strictly classical Chinese examination gradually took the place of the Three Religions examination held sporadically during the Lý, whose contents included Confucian, Buddhist and Daoist teachings.⁴³ Through the middle of the thirteenth century, the Trần acted to push central control out into the regional areas, for the first time utilizing scholars from the examinations to fill some of these offices. Following, it would appear,

40 *TT*, 5: 4a–b; Whitmore, “Elephants can actually swim”, pp. 126–7, 132; *ANCL*, p. 46; Phan Huy Chú, *Lịch triều hiến chương loại chí* (henceforth *LTHCLC*) (Hanoi: Sử học, 1961), vol. II, p. 206.

41 Wolters, ‘On telling’, pp. 63–74; O. W. Wolters, *History, culture, and region in Southeast Asian perspectives*, rev. edn. (Ithaca: Cornell University Southeast Asia Program, 1999), pp. 143–51, 229–37.

42 Shawn McHale, “‘Texts and bodies’: Refashioning the disturbing past of Tran Vietnam (1225–1400)”, *JESHO*, 42, 4 (1999): 503–9; Trần Quốc Vương, ‘Traditions, acculturation, renovation: The evolutionary pattern of Vietnamese culture’, in Marr and Milner ed., *Southeast Asia*, p. 274; Momoki Shiro, personal communication.

43 *LTHCLC*, vol. II, pp. 69, 87; vol. III, pp. 6–8; *TT*, 5: 7b, 11b.

a general Sinic agrarian model, they developed population registers and worked to streamline the dike systems on both the Red and Mã Rivers (the latter in Thanh Hoá).⁴⁴

The basis for these mid-century administrative changes (as yet unstudied in any depth) was the literati who began to rise via the examinations. Through the thirteenth century and into the fourteenth, these scholars of classical Chinese came almost entirely out of the coastal zone, to the East and South of the capital. This literati surge emerged from lower Đại Việt, stretching southward down into Thanh Hoá, the transition zone of commerce and culture that had formed in the previous century. To all appearances, as Fan Chengda had declaimed, Chinese families of a literati bent had followed the coastal flow into the lower delta for its opportunities and had begun to bring their learning to other local inhabitants.⁴⁵ It would thus appear that the major impact of the Song trade on Đại Việt was to form this zone and to cause the resulting spread of its culture into the capital and government of Thăng Long.

The new examinations – beginning in 1232, 1239 and 1247 – produced graduates almost exclusively from the coastal zone, what would be the eastern and southern provinces of Hải Dương, Sơn Nam and Thanh Hoá. Gradually, these coastal scholars took administrative positions both in the capital and in the provinces, and increasingly through the rest of the century they gained greater significance, until for 1323 the chronicle listed 13 whose influence lasted from the late thirteenth century through the middle of the fourteenth.⁴⁶ These scholars came from the coastal zone, and a number of them directly challenged the Buddhist orientation of the old inland core. What resulted was a cultural divide between this core area around the capital with its strong Buddhist establishment and the coastal zone with its classical Chinese beliefs. In addition, there seems to have been a correlation between this coastal literati culture and the appearance of *Nôm* literature in these same years; this literature, utilizing Chinese characters to express the Vietnamese language, seems linked to Hải Dương in the East.⁴⁷

In 1253, the Trần established a National College (*Quốc Học Viện/Quốc Tử Viện*) with images of Confucius, the Duke of Zhou, Mencius and the 72 Sages; scholars were ordered to focus on the classical Chinese texts.⁴⁸ By 1272, they ordered a coastal scholar, Lê Văn Hưu of Thanh Hoá, to compile the official chronicle *Đại Việt sử ký*, covering almost 1500 years of their country's past. In this text Hưu – who also tutored a major Trần prince (Quang Khải) – provided a strong sense of coastal thought; geomancy was part of it, and the use of the past for critical comment another. As he examined this past, Hưu spoke against the inland culture, seeing it as lacking in court style and hierarchy, being ignorant of proper behaviour and setting a bad example for the people. Too many wives,

44 *LTHCLC*, vol. II, p. 7; vol. III, p. 48; *TT*, 5: 4b–5a, 8a, 11b, 17a, 20a.

45 Hansen, *Open empire*, pp. 293–6, speaks of the surplus of literati in Southern Song China, especially those of non-connected families, and other possibilities of employment for them; she notes (p. 297) that 'people traveled increasingly long distances. . . .' Though she does not connect the loose literati and the travel, it seems entirely possible that roving tutors would have moved down the coast into the region of Đại Việt.

46 *TT*, 6: 41b; Wolters, 'On telling', pp. 69, 71. On the examinations see *LTHCLC*, vol. III, pp. 7–8 and *Đại Việt lịch triều đăng khoa lục* (henceforth *ĐKL*) (Saigon: Bộ Quốc gia Giáo dục, 1962), pp. 12–17, 22–4.

47 *TT*, 5: 30a, 6: 41b; *ĐKL*, p. 16. On these scholars see *LTHCLC*, vol. I, p. 188 and *TT*, 7: 17b–18a, 36a–b.

48 *TT*, 5: 17a.

a lack of piety for the paternal line, and too short a mourning period on the death of the king – as well as other cultural practices – he viewed as distinct problems. Hu'u began his history in the third century BCE with Triệu Đà/Zhao Tuo, marking a major stage in the development of the Vietnamese monarchy. This was a figure who controlled the coastal zone, both north and south; who was the quintessential Sino-Vietnamese, protecting the South against the North; and whom Hu'u placed in the context of the Chinese sage-kings. The next key figure was Đinh Bộ Lĩnh (with his coastal contact Trần Lãm), who was more important for Hu'u than the Ngô and the Lý of the inland core.⁴⁹

In the meantime, the Trần royal family was expanding the agricultural base of the eastern delta in a major way as it established estates and created a coordinated dike system throughout the lower zone. Princes and princesses controlled and maintained the estates at riverine crossroads centred on Buddhist temples. Nguyễn Thị Phương Chi shows us the great extent to which these royal estates lay in the coastal zone; they were situated on important waterways and would have existed at the centre of the agricultural and commercial development of the region. With greater engineering (perhaps absorbed from southern China), the Trần accelerated the reclamation of the deltaic lands, both inland and coastal, and with it the population growth, drawing people in from the upper delta. These estates were initially placed at strategic points – especially between Thăng Long and Thiên Trường, the two capitals – and controlled by talented princes; a key example was Trần Quốc Tuấn, the Hưng Đạo prince, in the northeast section of the delta. The estates were economically self-sufficient, including agricultural, fishing, artisan and commercial villages. They were able to defend themselves and during the Mongol wars they acted as bases of the resistance. They served as the major residences of the royal clan, the places where its members spent much of their time. Their compounds would thus have been local social, economic, political and cultural centres. The clan also established the Buddhist temples on the estates.⁵⁰

The Trần clan appears to have absorbed a more contemporary Chinese form of Buddhism (the *Dhyana/Chan/Thiền/Son/Zen* school) brought by Chinese monks into the coastal region and to have introduced it into the inland core with a stress on seeking Buddhahood within oneself. In the thirteenth century, there was a strong integration of this Buddhism with classical Chinese thought. In the fourteenth, King Nhân Tông connected with the Chams and their Buddhist sites, and the Trần would seek to fuse the

49 O. W. Wolters, 'Le Van Huu's treatment of Ly Than Ton's reign (1127–1137)', in *Southeast Asian history and historiography*, ed. C. D. Cowan and O. W. Wolters (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1976), pp. 203–26; Wolters, 'Historians and emperors in Vietnam and China: Comments arising out of Le Van Huu's History, presented to the Tran court in 1272', in *Perceptions of the past in Southeast Asia*, ed. Anthony Reid and David Marr (Singapore: Heineman, 1979), pp. 69–85; John K. Whitmore, 'The Vietnamese Confucian scholar's view of his country's early history', in Hall and Whitmore ed., *Explorations in early Southeast Asia*, pp. 193–7; Esta S. Ungar, 'From myth to history: Imagined polities in fourteenth century Vietnam', in Marr and Milner ed., *Southeast Asia*, p. 179; James A. Anderson, 'The ANCL as common ground: Le Tac's private history and its Sino-Vietnamese audience', paper presented at the American Historical Association, Boston, 2001.

50 Nguyễn Thị Phương Chi, *Thái ấp - điền trang thời Trần* [Fiefs and estates of the Trần period] (Hanoi: Khoa học Xã hội, 2002), pp. 122–39, 210, 235–43 (locations), 199–212, 236–41 (characteristics); Lieberman, *Strange parallels*, pp. 362–5; Hansen, *Open empire*, p. 264. See also Nishimura and Momoki, 'Nam Dinh' and Momoki, 'Nam Định'.

varied elements of local Vietnamese Buddhist practice into the single strand of the Thiền Trúc Lâm sect and its strong base to the East (Mt. Yên Tử).⁵¹

The Trần princes of the thirteenth century thus played a vigorous role in the coastal culture, being linguistically proficient and writing a style of poetry different from that of the earlier centuries. Where the inland Lý poetry had strongly focused on Buddhist expression, this new form blended descriptions of nature with a strong sense of their country's past.⁵² One of the Trần princes, Ích Tắc, founded the first known school of classical Chinese studies on his estate, the source of a number of renowned Vietnamese scholars. These scholars, of course, came predominantly from the coastal zone.⁵³ Yet it was this very prince, Ích Tắc, who demonstrated the open allegiance of the coastal zone, an allegiance not tied directly to Đại Việt and its inland capital of Thăng Long. Existing in this transitional fusion zone, individuals could tie their loyalties and follow their interests in other directions besides upriver. Ích Tắc chose to go with the Mongol forces – not merely, I would think, due to his strong belief in classical Chinese thought, but also because of the coastal zone's ties to the North. Leading a group of families, Ích Tắc acted through a Vân Đồn merchant to contact the new Mongol rulers of China and to encourage their involvement in the south. When this involvement failed, blocked by the prince's kin, he followed his allegiance northward with the retreating forces. Another such example was the scholar Lê Tắc, later the author of the *An Nam chí lược*, who like Lê Văn Hưu came from Thanh Hoá.⁵⁴

These Mongol wars of the 1280s led to the greater involvement of the Trần princes, Ích Tắc's successful kin, in the central and regional government of Đại Việt. The administrative experiment of the mid-thirteenth century was thereby displaced by this princely rule. The literati, as we have noted, continued their rise, but now generally within the entourages of the powerful, especially those of the princes. By 1300, following the coastal-based Trần success and victory in the wars, the political integration of lower and upper Đại Việt had been achieved. What remained were the cultural differences between the two zones. The following century would resolve this question.

Cultural fusion

Given the regional imbalances within Đại Việt and the increasing socio-economic stresses and strains across the realm, there was a strong need for Thăng Long to bring the segments of the country more forcefully together. The fourteenth century would see two major efforts in this direction, the first using an inland Buddhist basis and the second that of the new Sinic-oriented coastal culture. By the end of the century, the first (Buddhist) would be fading as the second (classical Chinese) was on the rise, incorporating elements of the first but rejecting the Buddhist pattern.

51 Cuong Tu Nguyen, *Zen in medieval Vietnam* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1997), pp. 20–1, 49–50, 94, 342 (n. 47–51), 347 (n. 78–9), 359 (n. 148), 437–8 (n. 66); *History of Buddhism in Vietnam*, ed. Nguyễn Tài Thư (Hanoi: Social Sciences Publishing House, 1992), pp. 171–214; Wolters, 'Historians and emperors', p. 84; Li, 'View from the sea'.

52 Li, 'View from the sea'; John K. Whitmore, 'From classical scholarship to Confucian belief in Dai Viet', *Vietnam Forum*, 9 (1987): 50–2; Huynh Sanh Thong, *The heritage of Vietnamese poetry* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), pp. 3–5, 116–18.

53 *TT*, 5: 31a; *LTHCLC*, vol. IV, p. 64.

54 Anderson, 'ANCL as common ground'; on Trần Ích Tắc see *TT*, 5: 47b–48a; Yamamoto, 'Van-don', pp. 1, 5.

Through the first third of the fourteenth century, the Trần kings worked to fuse the many Buddhist elements across the land into a monolithic force that would support the throne and stabilize the realm. This was based on the Trúc Lâm (Bamboo Grove) sect of Thiền Buddhism. Established by the senior ruler Nhân Tông at the beginning of the century, this sect continued under the auspices of his son and grandson, Anh Tông and Minh Tông. Though linked to a site in lower Đại Việt to the East, this sect seems to have been more a part of the inland culture from the capital region. An important text of this effort was, I believe, the *Việt điện u linh tập* (*Secret powers of Việt*) from 1329, which related tales of supernatural spirits that were called upon to protect the throne and the Buddhist establishment and that represented the mid-river inland zone. Keith Taylor's article on this text shows that the cults of these spirits related much more strongly to the internal realm of the Lý and indeed had been honoured specifically for their aid in defeating the pro-Mongol coastal efforts; Triệu Đà was nowhere to be found herein.⁵⁵

Yet by the 1330s, the increasing stresses and strains through the realm signalled that this effort to integrate the land using the inland Buddhist ideology was not working. At this point, Trần Minh Tông turned to the literati coastal culture for new answers. By choosing the scholar Chu Văn An and bringing him from his famed local school south of the capital into the court, this king for the first time opted for an ideology based on classical Chinese thought. Chu Văn An (of coastal Chinese descent), his colleagues and his students looked to classical Antiquity (in China) for their answers to the present problems. Their poetry reflected a strong concern for these problems. They spoke strongly against the inland Buddhist establishment and sought to initiate the coastal ideology into the state of Đại Việt.⁵⁶ Through the middle and late fourteenth century, as Đại Việt sunk ever deeper into trouble, this brand of thought reached more deeply into the court and the emerging power of another coastal product. The powerful minister Lê (Hò) Quý Ly, also of Chinese coastal descent from Thanh Hoá, built his power during the 1370s and 1380s through the catastrophic years of the invasions by Champa (with its own support in the coastal zone), finally seizing the throne in 1400. His ideology in power would be the culmination of the classical Chinese thought developed by the coastal literati.⁵⁷

This second effort at cultural integration would succeed where its inland Buddhist predecessor had failed. By the end of the fourteenth century, scholars were beginning to emerge from the inland core, to the North and West of the capital (and the coming Ming occupation would advance this process).⁵⁸ Texts from the troubled decade of the 1380s show the reformulation taking place in the myth and culture of Đại Việt. This great crisis finally led to the fusion of the inland and coastal cultures, linked to classical Chinese thought and seen as descending from figures of ancient myth and legend to the north. The *Việt sử lược*, mentioned earlier, set the stage for this with its genealogy of mythic

55 Keith W. Taylor, 'Notes on the *Việt điện u linh tập*', *Vietnam Forum*, 8 (1986): 26–59; Taylor, *Birth of Vietnam*, pp. 352–4; Ungar, 'From myth', pp. 179–80; Wolters, 'Historians and emperors', p. 77.

56 Whitmore, 'From classical scholarship', pp. 53–6; Wolters, 'On telling', pp. 70–1; John K. Whitmore, 'Chu Van An and the rise of "antiquity" in fourteenth century Dai Viet', *Vietnam Review*, 1 (1996): 50–61 and O. W. Wolters, 'Chu Van An: An exemplary retirement' in the same issue, p. 88.

57 John K. Whitmore, *Vietnam, Ho Quy Ly, and the Ming, 1371–1421* (New Haven: Yale University Southeast Asian Studies, 1985), chs. 2–4.

58 *Ibid.*, pp. 66–7; *ĐKL*, pp. 17, 20–1, 24–5; *LTHCLC*, vol. I, pp. 192, 290, 293.

kings, but it was the *Lĩnh Nam chích quái* (*Wonders plucked from the dust south of the Passes*) that is most important for our discussion.⁵⁹ This collection of tales has a coastal dimension missing from the inland Buddhist *Việt đặng u linh tập* of about half a century earlier. Just as the coastal Trần male had married the inland Lý princess to begin the new dynasty and the integration of the land just over 150 years before, two well-known tales from this collection reflect the same themes. The most famous one involves Dragon King Lạc (Lạc Long Quân) from the sea and his marriage to Âu Cơ, princess from the mountains – seen as the origin myth of the Vietnamese people. This tale quite explicitly tells of the coastal male and the inland female, the power relations between the two and their connection to the mythic figures of China. The second tale, ‘One-Night Marsh’ (*Nhất Dạ Trạch*), also involves a coastal male and an inland princess; linked to overseas merchants, trade and Buddhism, it reflects the nature of the coastal fusion zone.⁶⁰ Cults still existing in this zone in the nineteenth century would seem to confirm this: Hưng Yên province, deep in the delta, contained cults to Dragon King Lạc and One-Night Marsh.⁶¹

The fourteenth century thus saw a dramatic cultural change, a ‘watershed’ in O. W. Wolters’ term, in the development of Vietnamese civilization.⁶² Gradually, the old core of Đại Việt in the mid-river zone became integrated with the downriver coastal zone, and the cultural forces of each merged. By 1400, a new mythic foundation had come into existence for Vietnamese civilization. All of this had begun with the trade surge of the Song and the resulting formation of the coastal fusion zone. The twelfth century had seen the increasing economic integration of coastal and inland, lower and upper Đại Việt. From this economic growth had come the political integration of the two zones under Trần rule in the thirteenth century and the resulting expansion of the literati coastal culture. Finally, the fourteenth century brought the cultural integration of coastal and inland Đại Việt, with the literati thought of the former eventually displacing the Buddhist establishment of the latter.

The Ming occupation of the early fifteenth century would both expose the fragility of coastal allegiance (with the Mạc family and other literati actively supporting the Chinese) and deepen the literati impact throughout lowland Đại Việt.⁶³ By the 1430s, Nguyễn Trãi and his colleagues in their *Địa dư chí* (*Geography*) presented what would be the culmination of the Trần integration and configuration. Now there were four ‘royal provinces’ (*kinh trấn*) to the East, West, South and North of Thăng Long, with the first of the four being Hải Dương on the coast, quite different from two hundred years earlier. Lightly populated deltaic terrain two centuries before had now come to be very productive agricultural land, as the ratings of the soil in this work show.⁶⁴ The administrative configuration included here would change in the coming decades; the mountain aristocracy of the new Lê dynasty, those victorious warriors from the highlands to the Southwest of

59 VSL, pp. 13–15; on the *Việt sử lược* see Wolters, ‘Narrating the fall’, p. 28; Taylor, *Birth of Vietnam*, pp. 309–11, 351–2; and Ungar, ‘From myth’, pp. 180–1.

60 Taylor, *Birth of Vietnam*, pp. 5–6, 82–3, 303–5, 354–7; Ungar, ‘From myth’, pp. 181–2; Eric Henry, ‘Chinese and indigenous influences in Vietnamese verse romances of the nineteenth century’, *Crossroads*, 15 Suppl. (2001): 13–14.

61 *Đại Nam nhất thống chí* (Huế: Thuận Hoá, 1996), vol. III, pp. 308–9.

62 Wolters, *History, culture and region*, p. 146.

63 Whitmore, *Vietnam, Hồ Quý Ly*, ch. 6.

64 Nguyễn Trãi, ‘Đư địa chí’, in *Nguyễn Trãi toàn tập* (Hanoi: Khoa học Xã hội, 1969), pp. 194–202.

the Red River Delta who had defeated the Ming, shifted the orientation and the second capital toward their home in western Thanh Hoá.

Though this study has brought to the fore the significance of trade and the coast in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries and the ramifications of the changes that arose from lower Đại Việt, there is still the need to emphasize that the inland core remained the centre and focal point of the polity's activities. For Đại Việt, an expanding interior agriculture formed its foundation, and this would continue, added to and supplemented by the commercial connections. Indeed, the commercial growth of these centuries would appear to have instigated the great agricultural expansion in the lower delta, causing this region to be very intensively farmed and populated today.

So, as Đại Việt developed in these early centuries, it gradually grew and changed – economically, politically and culturally. The interaction of its inland agricultural core, its coastal commercial zone and its mountain fringe with the rich products there led to a dynamic that first brought them together economically in the twelfth century, next integrated them politically in the thirteenth and finally fused them culturally in the fourteenth. The international trade of the Song surge figured greatly in this. Yet ultimately it was the action taken by the inland core that remained the crucial factor. During these centuries the mid-river zone would still have maintained a higher density of population and a firm agricultural base as well as the long-established religious centres, the Buddhist temples and the spirit shrines. In this I concur with Michael Aung-Thwin as he states for Burma that ‘a densely populated, well-irrigated, highly predictable, and productive agrarian interior’ remained dominant.⁶⁵ In Đại Việt the Trần, after all, did choose to keep the capital where it had been – in the mid-river core – and to develop further its agricultural potential. Now that we have a better sense of lower Đại Việt and the coast in these early centuries, we need to return to upper Đại Việt and the inland core and to re-examine the nature and essence of its civilization and institutions.

65 Aung-Thwin, *Mists*, p. 301.