

scholarship has shown, however, that they continued as a force in the region of Panduranga (Phan Rang) until the nineteenth century, though increasingly under the sway of the Vietnamese.⁵⁵ Western reports at the end of the sixteenth century still spoke of a thriving Champa kingdom,⁵⁶ but by the early seventeenth century, writings about the region turned to the Nguyen and the city of Hoi An at the mouth of the Thu Bon River in central Viet Nam.

At the end of the sixteenth century, the Trinh and Nguyen clans overthrew the Mac, who had been in power in the north since 1527, and restored the Le, who became the nominal rulers until 1788.⁵⁷ The Nguyen established themselves in the south (their kingdom was called Dang Trong) in Thua Thien Hue and Quang Nam provinces with their capital near Hue, while in the north, the Trinh retained power. The Trinh and Nguyen vied for power throughout the seventeenth century. In the north, the Trinh created a Confucian state that favored agriculture and disdained trade, though international trade did continue, centered at the port of Pho Hien.⁵⁸ Traditionally scholars have emphasized the Confucian, agricultural nature of the Dai Viet court, but more recent studies note the many connections north Viet Nam had to the outside world.⁵⁹

Before Pho Hien's ascendancy, Van Don had been a working port for a lengthy period; in 1149 the king Ly Anh Tong ordered improvements made at the port of Van Don, near Ha Long Bay. Van Don was located on the Bach Dang River, the main branch of the Hong River at that time, and its proximity to the kilns of Chu Dau made it ideal for ceramic exports. Further research may well indicate a much greater embrace of trade than previously believed and a less extreme contrast with Dang Trong in the south than past scholarship has suggested. In Dang Trong, the ruler Nguyen Hoang early recognized trade as a means of raising revenue for the state and promoted the port city of Hoi An, just south of modern-day Da Nang. The region was an ancient center of trade, first for the peoples of the Sa Huynh culture and then the Cham.

In speaking of Hoi An, known as Faifo to the Europeans of the time, the Jesuit missionary Christopher Borri (who lived in central and south Viet Nam during 1618–21) said: "One enters this port from two openings onto the sea: one is called Pullociampello (Cu Lao Cham, across from Dai Chiem): the other Touron (Tourane or Da Nang), which at the beginning is three or four leagues apart and then separates further as they go inland, becoming two rivers. They eventually become one river, on which one encounters vessels that have sailed on either one or the other of its parts."⁶⁰ One should not envision only international commerce, however, as a good deal of the commerce that occurred took place in smaller crafts that trafficked the thoroughfare of the rivers, lagoons, and streams of the littoral, and that carried the goods of the hinterland to the coast. As Wheeler has pointed out, "This littoral dynamic, where mountain and sea complement one another through a coastal artery, defines the basic structure within which economies, polities and societies developed in a South China Sea world, and it is within this littoral context that we must make sense of Thuan-Quang, Dang Trong and the classic Centre."⁶¹

To encourage trade, Nguyen Hoang levied few, if any, custom duties, and this was one important factor that helped make Hoi An such an attractive trading center. It was thus that Hoi An developed rapidly, becoming the port of choice first for the Japanese, then the Chinese, and eventually the Europeans. Various factors played a role in its importance as a port. The geography of the region, with the mouth of the Thu Bon River protected