

by the island of Cu Lao Cham, made the location ideal for ships seeking shelter from stormy seas. Its proximity to Hue, the capital of the Nguyen, clearly played a role, for trade provided upward of a third of royal revenue,⁶² which explains Nguyen involvement in commerce during this period. Because of the monsoon winds, Japanese and Chinese ships had to spend approximately half a year in port.

From the sixteenth century, Hoi An became a city dominated by foreigners, many of whom married local women who facilitated commerce with their knowledge of the local language and customs.⁶³ "This city is called Faifo; it is a fairly large one as one part belongs to the Chinese, another to the Japanese; they live separately, each having their own governor, the Chinese living according to the laws of China, the Japanese according to those of Japan,"⁶⁴ Borri wrote. "Trade with Dang Trong [Cochinchina, south Viet Nam] was chiefly done by the Chinese and the Japanese at a nearly four-month-long fair at a port in this region. The Japanese used to bring in 40,000 to 50,000 taels of sterling silver. The Chinese came on sailing boats together with numerous vessels which they called Sommes, bringing a great quantity of fine silk, silk-yarn and other goods. Thanks to this fair, the royal empire collected tremendous amounts of taxes and duties from which the whole country benefited."⁶⁵

Commercially licensed Japanese merchant vessels (*shuinsen*) dominated the boom period of 1600–1635. When the Tokugawa shogunate banned foreign trade in 1635 and required all Japanese to return home, the foreign population of Hoi An became predominantly Chinese, a trend that occurred at ports throughout Southeast Asia at this time.⁶⁶ Still, trade with the Japanese did not come to an end; the Dutch had established a factory in Hirada in 1609, and, through this factory, goods continued to flow into Japan. The Dutch were perfectly situated to replace the Japanese, both in Cochinchina and Tonkin (north Viet Nam), for though the Trinh of the Le dynasty eschewed trade in theory, its practice did not cease, and

FIG. 8
Men cleaning birds' nests in Hoi An.

