

abandoned all Japanese expatriates still abroad, and by 1695, only four or five families were said to be living in Hoi An.<sup>56</sup>

In their approach to trade, the Trinh were constrained by Confucianism, conservative and blunt; officially, commerce was considered peripheral, but they enjoyed the benefits it brought. In marked contrast to the cultivated approach of the Nguyen, the Trinh showed nonchalance toward the Red Seal traders, which was in keeping with their different philosophy toward trade. Not surprisingly, the two states had completely different experiences. The Trinh made official contact with the Japanese government only in 1624, and three years later, when the Trinh-Nguyen conflicts broke out, the Nguyen pressured Japan to desist from trading with its enemy. Japan complied, and in 1628 Japanese merchants were banned from making contact with Tongking.<sup>57</sup> As in Cochinchina, some Japanese remained in Tongking when Japan's closed-door policy was implemented. Some, well-versed in the language and customs, served as valued intermediaries in the foreign trading community.<sup>58</sup> While the Nguyen and the Trinh put pressure on foreign traders to shun trade with their adversary, textual records evidence considerable low-key clandestine trade between the two regions.<sup>59</sup>

China's trade into Hoi An flourished after the lifting of the Ming trade ban in 1567, and Hoi An's role as an entrepôt grew exponentially, as did the number of Chinese merchant ships that arrived each season on the monsoon winds. In the seventeenth century, the Minh Huong served this trading community in a role similar to the one they held in Thanh Ha (fig. 4). In the early seventeenth century, few, if any, custom duties were levied on foreign trade; wooden plates issued by the governor of Quang Nam signified authorization for foreign ships to trade.<sup>60</sup> Even precious woods were exempt from export duties, and this seems to have been the case throughout the century. Such a serendipitous arrangement could not but attract foreign traders, and the prosperity it brought enabled the local community to live almost entirely by commerce. Unlike Tongking, there were no monopolies, and even when they were later applied to calambac and gold, bulk commodities such as silk and sugar were traded freely in the marketplace by the common trader. By the end of the century, however, a reassessment of the state of trade placed controls on the

FIG. 4

Grave said to be that of Khong Thieu Nhu, a *Minh Huong* and mandarin of the Nguyen lords responsible for control of foreign merchant ships in Hoi An during the second half of the seventeenth century. Relocated in Hoi An town.

