

thousand houses.⁸¹ The growth in the local economy attracted skilled workers, and by the end of the century, handicrafts occupied eight of the twenty town quarters and included pottery, earthenware, tanning, and lacquer production.⁸² Surveys in 1989 showed evidence of four kiln sites, among them Xich Dang, active in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.⁸³

Yet Pho Hien had none of the easy physical advantages of Hoi An. It was not on main maritime routes. Negotiating the river mouth was hazardous, and larger ships, both Chinese and European, dared not enter. Europeans mostly entered via what they described as the "Domea" branch, which had deeper water, although it was more hazardous owing to shoals and a sandbar two miles wide. Neap tides were an additional hazard, and so local fishermen knowledgeable in the ways of the river became invaluable as pilots. From their village, they could see the ships at the river mouth and hear the gunfire that announced the arrival of the European traders. Because Europeans were not permitted to bring their ships all the way to Pho Hien, the Dutch went only as far as "the handsome village of Domea," which had about a hundred houses.⁸⁴ Trinh policy restricted the number of foreigners entering both the capital and delta towns with decrees issued in 1650, 1663, 1687, and 1696. While these were largely intended to control Chinese residents, it was mandatory for all foreigners—Chinese, Thai, and Europeans—to reside in Pho Hien.⁸⁵ These restrictions aimed at the Chinese contrast with the Nguyen approach, which even employed Minh Huong to assist in matters of trade.

The burgeoning Southeast Asian trade spearheaded the growth of both Hoi An and Pho Hien, yet their measure of response was dictated by different political and geographic environments and commercial cultures.⁸⁶ Englishman William Gyfford, authorized to inaugurate the British East India Company (EIC) factory in Tongking, was so depressed at the treatment he received at the hands of Trinh officials that, after one week, he felt it was a lost endeavor.⁸⁷ This was in marked contrast to the benevolent policies played out in Hoi An in the same period, although by mid-eighteenth century, some European visitors to Cochinchina were describing its officials in similarly disparaging terms.⁸⁸ Meanwhile, in seventeenth-century Tongking, court eunuchs commanded large presents, and rampant graft went forward under cover of the king's name. Accounts written by European merchants are peppered with colorful descriptions: "domineering eunuchs," "ravenous mandarins," "birds of prey," and "sponges for him [the king]."⁸⁹ When overall profits were no longer sufficient to recompense this ugly aspect of the trade, European merchants would go elsewhere, especially when Bengal silk and Chinese and Japanese ceramics gained ascendancy over Tongking products.

The pithy folk saying, "First is the capital; second is Pho Hien," neatly sums up Pho Hien's relationship with Thang Long as simply a transit point for foreign trade goods on their way to and from busy Ke Cho. Pho Hien was next in size to Ke Cho, and some of its inhabitants were very rich. As in Hoi An, Chinese merchants resided in one quarter but went to Ke Cho for trading transactions. Travelers considered Ke Cho comparable in size to most celebrated cities of Asia, and Baron reckoned its circumference was at least equal to that of Paris, but that no city equaled its population, especially on the first and fifteenth day of the lunar month, when large markets attracted all the inhabitants from villages for some considerable distance.

In Tongking, all international trade was conducted out of Ke Cho, with Pho Hien serving the role of handmaiden, but in Cochinchina, the