

## Improvising protocols: Two enterprising Chinese migrant families and the resourceful Nguyễn court

John D. Wong

*Chinese migrants fleeing from the incoming Qing regime assumed a range of political and economic positions as the Nguyễn court sought to extend its control to the south. A nuanced exploration of the historical experience of two powerful Chinese migrant families to Vietnam through their clan genealogies reveals two rather different paradigms — the Minh Hương paradigm and the Frontier paradigm. These paradigms reflect not only the Chinese migrants' varied, resourceful manoeuvres in their quest for a firm foothold in the evolving and expanding south, but equally, they demonstrate the Nguyễn court's flexibility in accommodating and capitalising on the strengths of different migrant groups it sought to incorporate into its realm.*

The devolution of Đại Việt into the control of the allied clans of Trịnh and Nguyễn, and the subsequent split of the two clans, divided the territory into two antagonistic spheres. This political split, along with the continued southern expansion of the Nguyễn regime, created in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries two increasingly distinct Vietnamese polities, each following a different trajectory of social, cultural and economic development driven by its own ecological conditions and demographic dynamics. The northern polity was known to the Vietnamese as ‘Đàng Ngoài’ and to foreigners as ‘Tonkin’ while the southern one, ‘Đàng Trong’, was called ‘Cochinchina’ by foreigners.<sup>1</sup>

In Đàng Trong, the southward expansion (*nam tiến*) of Nguyễn territories profited from the arrival of Chinese migrants to various parts of the coastline during different stages of the expansion. Recent studies have cautioned against a narrative of a

John D. Wong is Assistant Professor at The University of Hong Kong. Correspondence in connection with this article should be addressed to: [jd Wong@hku.hk](mailto:jd Wong@hku.hk). The author would like to thank Hue-Tam Ho Tai, Professor Emerita at Harvard University, and Bruce Lockhart, National University of Singapore, for their insightful comments. All translations from the Vietnamese and Chinese are the author's.

1 Keith Taylor, ‘Nguyen Hoang and the beginning of Vietnam's southward expansion’, in *Southeast Asia in the early modern era: Trade, power, and belief*, ed. Anthony Reid (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993), pp. 42–65; Charles Wheeler, ‘One region, two histories: Cham precedents in the history of the Hoi An region’, in *Vietnam: Borderless histories*, ed. Tran Tuyet Nhung and Anthony Reid (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006), pp. 163–93; and in particular, Li Tana, *Nguyễn Cochinchina: Southern Vietnam in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries* (Ithaca: Southeast Asia Program [SEAP], Cornell University, 1998).

steadily expanding Vietnam that tends to depict Nguyễn control of the south as pre-ordained, thereby oversimplifying a gradual and complex process that should not be reduced to family rivalries.<sup>2</sup> Chinese migrants played a role in shaping the course of this varied and uncertain process of territorial expansion. These enterprising Chinese migrants to Nguyễn territories exerted influences that stood in sharp contrast to the continuing Chinese influence in the northern territories of the Trịnh lords through the tribute system and Confucian education. There were Chinese migrants in Đàng Trong, but their influence as a community seems to have been less pronounced. However, a simple binary differentiation between the Chinese presence in the south from that in the north still does not sufficiently characterise the spectrum of experience of Chinese migrants to the south.

Scholarship has differentiated the groups of Chinese migrants to the ‘Water Frontier’, or the south.<sup>3</sup> However, as these studies were largely aimed at correcting previous state-centred historiography, few have examined the range of strategies the state employed in its interactions with these migrants. This article illustrates two paradigms of Chinese migrants to the various parts of this frontier exhibited as the Nguyễn court extended its political control to the south — a Minh Hương paradigm and a frontier paradigm. Both groups asserted their ethnic origin. Those exhibiting the Minh Hương paradigm furthered their interests by accentuating their cultural capital according to Sinitic standards while working closely with the Vietnamese court. Those demonstrating the frontier paradigm relied more on their military prowess and enterprising spirit in the dynamic borderland, pragmatically changing their political allegiance to the Nguyễn court.

Based on two extant genealogies of Chinese migrant families, the Trần (陳; Chinese: Chen), who settled near the Nguyễn political base around present-day Huế, and the celebrated Mạc (莫; Chinese: Mo), who founded their commercial enterprise in Hà Tiên (河仙; Chinese: Hexian) in the Mekong Delta, this article shows that not all Chinese migrants to the south manifested their entrepreneurial spirit in a similar manner. While their geographic proximity to the Nguyễn powerbase enabled the Trần family to transform their interests from commerce to political power by leveraging the court’s authority, the Mạc clan continued to operate as an economic concern and military power as it shifted its political allegiance opportunistically. Both families employed different strategies in their dealings with the court, their naming practices, the role of women, and the ways in which their respective genealogies recorded ancestral achievements. A more nuanced understanding of the Chinese

2 Brian Zottoli maintains that this narrative was promoted by the Nguyễn Dynasty Historical Office (‘Reconceptualizing Southern Vietnamese history from the 15th to 18th centuries: Competition along the coasts from Guangdong to Cambodia’ (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 2011). Taking regionalism as an interpretive framework, Claudine Ang examines the underlying coherence among scholarly representations of *Nam Tiên* in works published in the Republic of Vietnam between 1954 and 1975; see C. Ang, ‘Regionalism in Southern narratives of Vietnamese history: The case of the ‘Southern Advance’ [*Nam Tiên*]’, *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 8, 3 (2013): 1–26. For a critical view of the *Nam Tiên* paradigm, see Keith Taylor, ‘Surface orientations in Vietnam: Beyond histories of nation and region’, *Journal of Asian Studies* 57, 4 (1998): 951.

3 See, for example, Li Tana, ‘The Water Frontier’, in *Water Frontier: Commerce and the Chinese in the Lower Mekong Region, 1750–1880*, ed. Li Tana and Nola Cooke (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004), pp. 5–6.

migration to the south should enable us to appreciate not only their resourceful manoeuvres to gain a firm foothold in their new land, but also the flexibility of the Nguyễn court in its accommodation of different migrant groups it sought to incorporate into its realm.

### Background

When Mạc Đăng Dung usurped the Lê throne in 1527, the Trịnh and Nguyễn clans formed an alliance and resisted the Mạc. Trịnh Kiểm led the resistance movement and later the Trịnh family largely dominated the ruling Lê emperors. In order to forestall a political struggle, Nguyễn Hoàng heeded the advice of Nguyễn Bình Khiêm, the clairvoyant scholar whom he consulted: ‘*Hoành Sơn nhất đái, vạn đại dung thân*’ (橫山一帶, 萬代容身, The Hoành Sơn mountain area would provide refuge for thousands of generations). Through the intercession of his sister who was married to Trịnh Kiểm, Nguyễn Hoàng succeeded in securing from the Trịnh/Lê court an appointment in 1558 to the post of military commander in the distant southern frontier region of Thuận Hóa.<sup>4</sup> Nguyễn Hoàng proceeded to establish his political and economic base in the territories under his control. He would return to the north and stage an unsuccessful power struggle against Trịnh Kiểm’s son, his own nephew. Defeated, he returned to the south in 1600.<sup>5</sup> Thus began the split of the Nguyễn realm in the south from that of the Trịnh in the north.

This split became irreparable in 1624 when Nguyễn Hoàng’s son refused to continue the remittance of tax revenues to the Trịnh-controlled Lê court. Military conflicts between the Trịnh and the Nguyễn clans ensued, but neither side could sustain their offensives against the other. The two sides came to accept the military stalemate by 1672, after which they virtually ceased all direct contact with each other. Therefore, although the entire realm of Đại Việt was ostensibly under the rule of the Lê ruling house which had founded the dynasty in 1428, in reality, the country had split into two parts. In the north, the Trịnh lords (*chúa*) governed Đàng Ngoài (the Outer Region) in the name of the Lê house. Centred on Thăng Long, this northern polity stretched from the Chinese border in the north to Sông Gianh in the south, running through what is today the northern section of Quảng Bình province. In the south, the Nguyễn lords controlled Đàng Trong (the Inner Region), which comprised sections of present-day central and southern Vietnam.<sup>6</sup>

After the split, the Nguyễn clan expanded its territories in Đàng Trong toward the south. In addition, the Nguyễn state, which lacked an agricultural base to support its growing population, incorporated the existing trading port network of the Cham. The coastal region extended past the Mekong Delta as a portion of a ‘Water Frontier’ along which active trading took place. Trade played such an important role in the economy of the south that Li Tana questioned whether the Nguyễn state could

4 Li, *Nguyễn Cochinchina*, p. 11; Taylor, ‘Nguyen Hoang and Vietnam’s southward expansion’, p. 46.

5 Taylor, ‘Nguyen Hoang and the beginning of Vietnam’s southward expansion’, pp. 47–61.

6 On the terms Đàng Ngoài and Đàng Trong, see Taylor, ‘Surface orientations’, pp. 958–61. Also George Dutton, *The Tây Sơn uprising: Society and rebellion in eighteenth-century Vietnam* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2006), pp. 18–19. Zottoli suggests that the story of Nguyễn Hoàng wanting to escape from Trịnh Kiểm could have been fabricated to justify the split from the Lê-Trịnh regime (‘Reconceptualizing Southern Vietnamese history’).

have existed or *Đàng Trong* society survived in the absence of commerce.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, the area under the Nguyễn continued to attract Chinese migrants. Around 1680, Chinese refugees arrived in the area under the Nguyễn clan as the Qing court consolidated control over southern China. Some of these Chinese refugees who claimed to be loyalists of the previous dynasty, the Ming, had held out in southern China and Taiwan. As the Qing court managed to dislodge the son of the famed loyalist Zheng Chenggong (鄭成功; Koxinga), followers of the Zheng movement dispersed to Đại Việt and other parts of Southeast Asia.

In 1679, 3,000 people came in 50 warships and presented themselves at Huế demanding asylum.<sup>8</sup> These self-proclaimed ‘Ming loyalists’ were in reality ruffians and posed a challenge to the stability of Thuận Hóa and upper Quảng Nam under the rule of the Nguyễn rulers. The Nguyễn regime responded to this challenge by capitalising on these Chinese migrants and asylum seekers in the establishment of Gia Định as an administrative region in 1698.<sup>9</sup> These Chinese refugees came to be known as Minh Hương (Chinese: *Ming xiang*) in *Đàng Trong*.<sup>10</sup> Since the mid-seventeenth century, Ming refugees had begun to establish Minh Hương communities in the region with the permission of the Nguyễn lords. Originally written with the character that means sacrificial incense (香; Vietnamese: *huong*; Chinese: *xiang*), the designation signified the refugees’ intention of perpetuating their Ming pedigree. In the nineteenth century, however, Emperor Minh Mạng mandated that a different Chinese character meaning ‘village’ (鄉) be adopted for *huong*, diminishing its earlier connotations of political allegiance.<sup>11</sup> Although the Chinese migrants freely intermarried with local women, they maintained a distinct sense of community through the establishment of Minh Hương and dialect associations (幫 *bang*).<sup>12</sup>

One of the two genealogies that form the basis of this analysis comes from the Trần (陳; Chinese: Chen) family of Thừa Thiên (承天; Chinese: Chengtian), which refers to the administrative area along the banks of the River Hương (香江; Vietnamese: Hương Giang; Chinese: Xiangjiang) some 300 kilometres from the city

7 Li, *Nguyễn Cochinchina*, pp. 59, 77.

8 In his study of the pirate-refugee Yang Yandi (Dương Ngạn Địch), Robert Antony notes that Vietnamese sources date the arrival of the first Minh Hương to 1679 while the official records of the Qing dynasty provide a later date of 1682 (“‘Righteous Yang’: Pirate, rebel, and hero on the Sino-Vietnamese water frontier, 1644–1684”, *Cross-Currents: East Asian History and Culture Review* 11 [2014]: 6). Chen Ching-ho had dated Yang’s arrival between December 1682 and May 1683 (*Qingchu Zheng Chenggong canbu zhi yizhinanqi (shang)* 清初鄭成功殘部之移殖南圻(上)) [The migration of the Zheng partisans to southern Vietnam (Part 1)], *Xinya xue bao* 新亞學報 [New Asia Journal] 5, 1 (1960): 454.

9 Li, *Nguyễn Cochinchina*, p. 16.

10 Originally applied to migrants from the fall of the Ming dynasty in China, Minh Hương later came to stand for the offspring of intermarriages between these Chinese migrants and locals (Li, ‘The Water Frontier’, p. 6). In 1805, there were 20,241 Minh Hương in Quảng Nam province alone (Li, *Nguyễn Cochinchina*, p. 34).

11 Li Qingxin 李庆新, ‘Yuenan Mingxiang yu Mingxiangshe 越南明香与明乡社’, *Zhongguo shehui lishi pinglun* 中国社会历史评论 [Chinese Social History Review] 10 (2009): 205–23; Choi Byung Wook, *Southern Vietnam under the reign of Minh Mạng (1820–1841): Central policies and local response* (Ithaca: SEAP Cornell, 2004), pp. 19–44. On the evolution of Minh Hương identity, see Charles Wheeler, ‘Interests, institutions, and identity: Strategic adaptation and the ethno-evolution of Minh Hương (Central Vietnam), 16th–19th centuries’, *Itinerario* 39, 1 (2015): 141–66.

12 Li, *The Water Frontier*, pp. 85, 93.

of Thuận Hoá.<sup>13</sup> The Trần genealogy was edited for publication by Chen Ching-ho (Chen Jinghe) based on a version he had obtained from Trần Nguyên Thuốc (陳元爍; Chinese: Chen Yuanshuo), an eleventh-generation descendant of the founding ancestor of a Minh Hương family.<sup>14</sup> The three prefaces of the family registers indicate that this genealogical enterprise began with a fifth-generation descendant in the mid-eighteenth century. Trần Thế Xương (陳世昌; Chinese: Chen Shichang) was said to have compiled a simple record of names of the first four generations, and their dates of birth and death.<sup>15</sup> Then another fifth-generation descendant, Trần Sĩ Ích (陳士益; Chinese: Chen Shiyi), born in 1748, augmented Trần Thế Xương's compilation as he orchestrated an effort to collect information on the works and deeds of his ancestors. The preface Trần Sĩ Ích purportedly authored took pains to emphasise the lineage's roots in Ming China. However, the dating of this preface poses a problem of authorship. Trần Sĩ Ích's preface is dated 1739 (the fourth year of the Qing Emperor Qianlong's reign and the fifth year of the Vĩnh Hựu 永祐 reign of Lê Emperor Ý Tông), nine years before the birth of the author!<sup>16</sup> This internal contradiction in the dates in the family register brings to question its professed origins.

Then in 1875 the seventh-generation head, Trần Dưỡng Độn (陳養鈍; Chinese: Chen Yangdun), a celebrated official whose service in the Nguyễn court won the lineage tremendous fame, prepared a detailed version and appended it to the earlier genealogy. This was followed by the third edition of 1930, which formed the basis of Chen Ching-ho's publication.<sup>17</sup> The register traced the family's descent through a line of eldest sons as the head of the family through the third generation, but shifted to a branch of a younger son as the head of the fourth generation. This fourth-generation head was the earliest ancestor to have received a posthumous title for the seventh-generation Trần Dưỡng Độn's contributions to the Nguyễn court. As Chen Ching-ho indicated, this shift in the direction of the family register indicates that the genealogical enterprise evolved around Độn as the narrative centre, hence the record of the first seven generations in the last version of the register was to culminate with the achievements of Trần Dưỡng Độn.<sup>18</sup>

Further south from the region in which the Trần clan settled and operated in was a vast expanse of territories over which the Nguyễn lords had tenuous control, at best. Even some of the Vietnamese people who had moved to this area did not pledge allegiance to the Nguyễn lords. These migrants had been attracted to the area precisely because of the lack of state control. Politically unconstrained and distant from the rule of big states, this area attracted Chinese migrants among whom was Mạc Cửu (鄭玖; Chinese: Mo Jiu) who established around 1700 an autonomous polity in the town of Hà Tiên. In their adopted home, the Mạc clan had changed their surname to a homophonous Chinese character in order to distinguish themselves from the

13 Chen Jinghe (Chen Ching-ho) 陳荊和, *Chengtian mingxiangshe Chenshi zhengpu* 承天明鄉社陳氏正譜 [A brief study of the family register of the Trans, a Ming refugee family in Minh-Huong-Xa, Thua-Thien (Central Vietnam)] (Hong Kong: Chinese University of Hong Kong, 1964), p. 6.

14 *Ibid.*, p. 8.

15 *Ibid.*, p. 35.

16 *Ibid.*, pp. 41, 61.

17 *Ibid.*, pp. 35–41.

18 *Ibid.*, p. 13.

Mạc usurpers of 1527–1592.<sup>19</sup> Hà Tiên was in fact Khmer territory. Mạc Cửu had fled to Hà Tiên from his hometown of Leizhou (雷州) in Guangdong.<sup>20</sup> The genealogy of the Mạc family was compiled by Vũ Thế Doanh (武世營, Chinese: Wu Shiyong) (courtesy name Thận Vi 慎微; Chinese: Shenwei) in the year 1818.<sup>21</sup>

Given their dissimilar origins and family trajectories, both documents understandably present the respective families in a very different light. Bearing in mind each genealogy's biases, I will contrast the approaches each family employed in establishing itself in its new environment, and the Nguyễn court's ingenuity in its dealings with both these Chinese migrant clans.

### Moving to the south and dealings with the Nguyễn court

Both genealogies depicted their founding ancestors as having to flee from the incoming Qing regime in China. The founding ancestor of the Trần lineage named Trần Dưỡng Thuận (陳養純; Chinese: Chen Yangchun) was a native of 'Longxi county in the prefecture of Zhangzhou under the jurisdiction of the Fujian province of the state of the Great Ming' (大明國福建省漳州府龍溪縣). He was a resident in the upper hamlet of Yuzhou in the fourth ward of the 28th sector (二十八都四鄙玉州上社人). He had moved to the south to flee from the turmoil of the late Ming era, but had continued to follow the sartorial customs of the Ming.<sup>22</sup> As for Mạc Cửu, the genealogy of the Mạc clan maintained that he had fled from the 'barbaric' upheaval during the waning years of the Ming dynasty and escaped by boat to be a guest at Chân Lạp (真腊; Chinese: Zhenla; present-day Cambodia).<sup>23</sup> In contrast with the description of Trần Dưỡng Thuận's merely retaining the sartorial conventions, Mạc Cửu is depicted as actively demonstrating his resistance to the Qing by retaining his hairstyle from the Ming dynasty instead of adopting the half-tonsure and queue mandated by the new regime.<sup>24</sup> The genealogy simply stated that he had come from Leizhou, in the Chinese province of Guangdong. Thus, according to their genealogies, both the Trần and the Mạc families had relocated to another political jurisdiction during a period of turmoil to seek security and better economic prospects. Both families presented narratives that underscore the importance of the

19 Chen Jinghe, 'Hexianzhen Yezhen Moshi jiapu zhushi 河僊鎮叶鎮鄭氏家譜註釋' [The genealogy of the Mạc family in Hiệp village in Hà Tiên, with annotations], *Wenshi zhaxue bao* 文史哲學報 [Journal of history and philosophy], 7 (Apr. 1956): 83n2; Vũ Thế Doanh 武世營 [Wu Shiyong], *Hà Tiên trấn Hiệp trấn Mạc thị Gia phả* 河仙鎮叶鎮鄭氏家譜 [The genealogy of the Mạc family in Hiệp village in Hà Tiên], in *Lingnan zhiguai deng shiliao sanzong* 嶺南摭怪等史料三種, ed. Dai Kelai 戴可來 et. al. (Zhengzhou: Zhongzhou guji chubanshe, 1991), pp. 231n1, 250. Niu Junkai's (牛军凯) recent study of the Mạc dynasty highlights pragmatism as the underlying principle in Sino-Vietnamese relations in the late Ming and early Qing periods (*Wangshi houyi yu panluan zhe — Yuenan Moshi jiazou yu Zhongguo guanxi yanjiu* 王室后裔与叛乱者 — 越南莫氏家族与中国关系研究 [Royal descent and rebels: The relationship between the Vietnamese Mạc family and China] [Guangzhou: Shijie tushu chubanshe, 2012]). Zottoli suggests that the Mạc of Hà Tiên might be related to the usurping Mạc although he acknowledges that the relationship between the two Mạc families remains unresolved ('Reconceptualizing Southern Vietnamese history', pp. 348–9).

20 Vũ Thế Đình, *Hà Tiên trấn Hiệp trấn Mạc thị Gia phả*, p. 231.

21 Chen Jinghe, 'Hexianzhen Yezhen Moshi jiapu zhushi', p. 80.

22 Chen Jinghe, *Chentian mingxiangshe Chenshi zhengpu*, p. 41.

23 Vũ Thế Đình, *Hà Tiên trấn Hiệp trấn Mạc thị Gia phả*, p. 231.

24 Chen Jinghe, 'Hexianzhen Yezhen Moshi jiapu zhushi', p. 84n3.

opportunities and protection Chinese emigrants derived from sovereign boundaries, a common feature in the story of the Chinese diaspora that Philip Kuhn, historian of Chinese emigrants, highlighted.<sup>25</sup>

The Trần genealogy took pains to provide specific information on the founding ancestor's place of origin, but it did not provide many details on his life in his adopted home in Đàng Trong. Moreover, the genealogy stressed the Trần clan's continuous ties with their ancestral home in China. The third generation ancestor of the Trần clan was said to have returned to the clan's ancestral hometown in China after he had secured a progeny for the lineage with the birth of his eldest son. He united with his relatives and lived with them for two years before going back to Đàng Trong to care for his ageing parents.<sup>26</sup> As they demonstrated, according to their genealogy, such culturally prized values as filial piety across geographic boundaries, the Trần family's experiences echo Kuhn's claim that Chinese emigrants leveraged their marginal positions in their native lands as well as in their receiving communities.<sup>27</sup>

In contrast, the Mạc genealogy was short on details on Mạc Cửu's origins but rich on his experiences after he left China. The text portrays Mạc Cửu winning the king's favour in Cambodia at the age of 17 in 1671, and being entrusted with all matters of trade and commerce. Nonetheless, Mạc Cửu thought,

I travelled all alone for thousands of miles and the wild waves carried me to the land of the barbarians. I could rely on the generosity of others and hope for a lifetime of wealth and fortune, but if I ever fall from grace due to slanderous attacks, disasters would befall me and it would be too late for regrets. I should better plan to protect myself.

According to the genealogy, he then bribed the courtesans and ministers who enjoyed the favour of the Khmer king to intervene on his behalf. The king dispatched him to the Khmer territory of Peam where he built a prosperous port for trade and travel. This port enriched the royal treasury. People from Đàng Trong, China, and various faraway lands all came to this port where Mạc Cửu's enterprise flourished.<sup>28</sup> However, the fortunes of Mạc Cửu did not grow uninterrupted. After the Siamese incursion into Cambodia, Mạc Cửu 'had no choice but to go north to Siam' where upon meeting Mạc Cửu in person, the Siamese king took a liking to him and retained him. Thereafter, just when a crisis developed in Siam, Mạc Cửu escaped back to Peam in 1688.<sup>29</sup> As such, Mạc Cửu straddled the powers of Cambodia, the Nguyễn court, and Siam as he furthered his commercial interests. Chen Ching-ho believes that Mạc Cửu's commercial interests included gambling houses and silver mines even though these operations were not mentioned in the genealogy.<sup>30</sup>

Mạc Cửu ran Hà Tiên like his own fiefdom and competed with Ayutthaya for Southeast Asian trade. In 1708, according to the genealogy, one of Mạc Cửu's

25 Philip A. Kuhn, *Chinese among Others: Emigration in modern times* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008).

26 Chen Jinghe, *Chentian mingxiangshe Chenshi zhengpu*, p. 46.

27 Kuhn, *Chinese among Others*, p. 10.

28 Vũ Thế Dinh, *Hà Tiên trấn Hiệp trấn Mạc thị Gia phả*, pp. 231–2.

29 *Ibid.*, p. 231; Chen Jinghe, 'Hexianzhen Yezhen Moshi jiapu zhushi', p. 86n5.

30 Chen Jinghe, 'Hexianzhen Yezhen Moshi jiapu zhushi', p. 85n4.

followers advised him that the Khmer were deceitful and would not provide as good protection as the Nguyễn lord in the event of a military conflict. Therefore, Mạc Cửu proceeded north to pay homage to the Nguyễn court, which made him a tributary vassal and conferred upon his port the name of Hà Tiên. Enfeoffed as a general, Mạc Cửu returned to Hà Tiên, which he built up into a profitable entrepôt.<sup>31</sup> He controlled the port of Hà Tiên for over forty years and died in 1735 at the ripe old age of 81, at which time his son inherited his title of general.<sup>32</sup> Not until the death of the third-generation ruler Mạc Tử Thiêm did Emperor Gia Long find the opportunity to end the Mạc's rule over Hà Tiên.<sup>33</sup> For three generations, the Mạc clan had ruled over Hà Tiên and were essentially autonomous of the Nguyễn court.

The Nguyễn lords' fragile control over Mạc Cửu and his descendants reflected the borderless, fluid conditions of this expanding southern region, which was undergoing a gradual shift from Khmer to Vietnamese control. This region marched to a very different drumbeat compared with the more established rhythm of not just Đàng Ngoài in the north under the control of the Trịnh lords, but also the area of Đàng Trong near the powerbase of the Nguyễn court in which the Trần clan operated.

Despite their similar narratives of leaving China for their respective adopted homes in the south, the two clans as depicted by their genealogies also sharply contrasted in their records of their Chinese roots and their establishment in the new environment. The Trần celebrated their heritage by tracing their Chinese ancestry to a specific place of origin. Without providing details on the travails of the early generations of Trần migrants in Đàng Trong, the Trần genealogy gave the impression of their ready assimilation into the new environment and of establishing themselves near the Nguyễn powerbase. The Trần clan followed a strategy that underscores the Minh Hương paradigm. The Mạc genealogy, on the other hand, showcases the frontier paradigm. While constructing a narrative that culminated in the clan's submission to the Nguyễn court, the Mạc genealogy did not shy away from describing Mạc Cửu's shifting allegiances as he sought to develop a foothold around the volatile crossroads of Hà Tiên, which promised tremendous profits for those who played their political cards astutely.

Notably, the Nguyễn court bound both families to its expanding sphere of political influence in Đàng Trong with trappings of titles and symbols of royal patronage. However, the court modified these titles and insignias to suit the specific situation. Royal graces towards the Trần family took the form of formulaic bureaucratic honours.<sup>34</sup> The most illustrious member of the Trần clan was undoubtedly the seventh-generation Tiên Thành, who passed the *tiến sĩ* (進士; Chinese: *jìnshi*) examination in

31 Chen points out the consistency among various historical records of the year in which the Mạc clan pledged allegiance to the Nguyễn court and concludes that 1708 should be the most accurate (*Hexianzhen Yezhen Moshi jiapu zhushi*, p. 89n8).

32 Vũ, *Hà Tiên trấn Hiệp trấn Mạc thị Gia phả*, pp. 231–2.

33 Vũ Đức Liêm, 'Vietnamese politics at the Khmer frontier, 1802–1847', *Cross-Currents: East Asian History and Culture Review* 20 (Sept. 2016): 75–101.

34 The honours and names of offices the two families received paralleled official titles in China, especially those in the Ming dynasty. For instance, the attachment of Grand Secretary to a Hall in the palace (*Văn Minh Điện Đại Học Sĩ* 文明殿大學士) and the designation of military command (*Đại Đô Đốc* 大都督) followed similar naming patterns in the Ming court. See Charles O. Hucker, *A dictionary of official titles in imperial China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1985), pp. 467, 474.



1838 and received advanced placement by an imperial decree to be the Grand Master, Bulwark of Government and the Grand Secretary of the Văn Minh Palace (*Đặc Tiến Vinh Lộc Đại Phu* 特進榮祿大夫; *Phụ Chính Đại Thần* 輔政大臣; *Văn Minh Điện Đại Học Sĩ* 文明殿大學士). His contribution to the Nguyễn court brought not only his principal wife the title of Dame-consort of Rank 1A but also honour to the previous three generations as well, according to standard imperial procedures. His father, the sixth-generation ancestor, received the honourific title of President of the Board of Rites and his mother the title of the Kind, Gentle and Refined Dame-consort of Rank 2A (正二品慈淑端人). His grandfather, the fifth-generation ancestor, received the title of the honourable adviser and his grandmother the designation of the Chaste, Devoted and Gentle Dame-consort of Rank 3A (正三品貞一淑人). The honour *Tiền Thành* brought to the lineage extended to his great-grandfather, the fourth-generation ancestor, who was named posthumously a Hanlin (*Hàn Lâm*) Academician and his great-grandmother the Chaste, Agreeable and Respected Dame-consort of Rank 4A (正四品貞順恭人).<sup>35</sup> Subsequent generations would have some success in officialdom and earn posthumous titles for the Trần ancestors, but none would surpass the seventh-generation *Tiền Thành*'s achievements.

On the other hand, the Nguyễn bestowed honourific designations and tokens of investiture upon the Mạc family to emphasise their martial spirit as frontier dwellers and in order to ensure their political allegiance. In return for the Mạc clan's submission, the Nguyễn court made Mạc Cửu the Garrison Founder, Pillar of the State and General-in-chief (開鎮上柱國大將軍) and Mạc Thiên Tứ the Commander-in-chief (大都督營), and bestowed upon them embroidered red robes (紅蟒袍) as well as other insignias of power. In addition, the Mạc family's pledge to provide the court with military assistance earned the second-generation offspring feudatory titles equivalent in rank to the Three Dukes.<sup>36</sup> In essence, the court also made these appointments hereditary. The third-generation Mạc Tử Thiêm head was made the commander of the garrison of Hà Tiên, a title the fourth generation Mạc Công Du (鄭公榆; Chinese: Mo Congyu) inherited. The fifth-generation male descendants also received the royal favour of hereditary titles.<sup>37</sup> These hereditary titles celebrating the valour of the Mạc family suggest the enduring military power of the clan and its administrative control of the area, both of paramount importance to the court in its defence of the frontier region and its attempts to consolidate its influence there.

The value of the Mạc clan to the court extended beyond their military service. After Emperor Gia Long unified Vietnamese territory in 1802 (subsequently renamed 'Đại Nam', 'Great South'), he needed to substantiate his claims over the vast territories of the south that had come under Vietnamese control through the southward expansion of his family's polity. It should come as no surprise that the imperial court intervened in the compilation of the genealogy of the Mạc family as it sought to appropriate legitimacy over the newly incorporated territories by virtue of the Mạc

35 Chen, *Chentian mingxiangshe Chenshi zhengpu*, pp. 51, 53, 61, 63, 71, 75, 83, 97.

36 Vũ, *Hà Tiên trấn Hiệp trấn Mạc thị Gia phả*, pp. 232–3. *Tam Công* (三公; the Three Dukes) was a collective reference to the most esteemed members of officialdom who sat nominally at the top of the civil service hierarchy: the Grand Preceptor, the Grand Mentor and the Grand Guardian (Hucker, *A dictionary of official titles*, p. 399).

37 Vũ, *Hà Tiên trấn Hiệp trấn Mạc thị Gia phả*, p. 248.

family's allegiance to the Nguyễn court. Vũ Thế Doanh had written the genealogy at the request of Mạc Công Du, the fourth-generation head of the Mạc clan in Hà Tiên. Mạc Công Du himself was in turn commissioned to compile the genealogy by Gia Long after he had unified the empire. Presented as a record to exalt the martial achievements of the Mạc clan, the genealogy also served to bolster Emperor Gia Long's claim to long-standing jurisdictional rights over the territories despite their recent formal integration into the Nguyễn Empire which he had founded just 16 years ago. Instead of emphasising the Mạc fiefdom's long years of autonomy, official court documents explained the commissioning of this genealogy as an effort to recover lost records of Nguyễn imperial command over the area that the court had entrusted to the Mạc family:

[The court hereby] orders Mạc Công Du to gather information on Hà Tiên. The edict says, 'The area of Hà Tiên represents new territories our sagely ancestors had opened up. It was also the former region where your ancestors Mạc Cửu and Mạc Thiên Tứ had been enfeoffed. This fact had been documented in the previous reigns and has only been rendered untraceable by the dispersal of records during the turmoil of the illegitimate Tây Sơn rebels.' (命鄭公榆訪求河仙事蹟, 論曰河仙一境乃我列聖開拓之新疆, 爾先祖鄭玖、鄭天賜受封之故壤也, 先朝以來記事具有典籍, 自偽西之亂, 書籍散漫, 無從稽考。)<sup>38</sup>

Emperor Gia Long had just recovered the Nguyễn territories lost to the Tây Sơn forces, ending the 24-year 'illegitimate' rule under 'the Tây Sơn rebels'. The allegiance of the author to the Mạc family and the direct involvement of the family in the compilation of the genealogy ensured that the end product did not serve merely the needs of Gia Long's court but presented a record of the family since Mạc Cửu's arrival on the frontier and the founding of Hà Tiên. However, the compilation of this genealogy evidently served the interests of multiple parties.

In contrast, although the Trần family provided critical assistance to the bureaucracy which was indispensable to the machinery of the Nguyễn court, the family was but one of several contending powers among the literati in Đàng Trong.<sup>39</sup> Compared with the Trần clan's service to the Nguyễn court, the Mạc family's entrenched military power in the politically volatile Nam Bộ (southern region) left them in a stronger position vis-à-vis a court striving to extend its reach in the area. This difference between the two families reveals itself in their genealogies' divergent narrative styles in describing dealings with the court.

### Naming practices

Names convey the aspirations of the name-giver for those named. Name patterns across generations, like the ones in the genealogies of the Trần and Mạc clans, express

38 Chen, 'Hexianzhen Yezhen Moshi jiapu zhushi', p. 81, quoting *Đại Nam Thực Lục* (大南實錄) [The Veritable Record of the Great South], *ji* 1, *juan* 58. 'Tây Sơn' refers to the rebellions under the nominal rule of the Lê dynasty that concluded only with the establishment of the Nguyễn dynasty in 1802. For details, see Dutton, *The Tây Sơn Uprising*.

39 Trần Tiễn Thành, the leading figure in the seventh generation, perished in a power struggle at court when he served as one of three regents (alongside Nguyễn Văn Tường and Tôn Thất Thuyết) during the short reign of Dục Đức in 1883 (Chen, *Chentian mingxiangshe Chenshi zhengpu*, pp. 89–90).

not merely hopes for individual members of the families but also the desire of the collective enterprise of the lineage. The Trần clan's family register did not explicitly specify a naming requirement, but as Chen Ching-ho observed, the family followed a recurring generational naming pattern, including the use of names of lineal ancestors (taboo names). Taking a character each from the taboo name (諱 *huý*; Chinese *hui*) of the founding ancestor (for whom the genealogy did not register a courtesy name), the courtesy names (字 *tự*; Chinese *zi*) of the next three generations, and the taboo names of the fifth and sixth generations, the clan formulated a six-character sequence:

*duông* (養; Chinese: *yang*; meaning to foster or to cultivate)  
*hoài* (懷; Chinese: *huai*; meaning to bear in mind)  
*ngình* (迎; Chinese: *ying*; meaning to welcome or to receive)  
*nguyên* (元; Chinese: *yuan*; meaning original or fundamental)  
*sĩ* (士; Chinese: *shi*; meaning erudition), and  
*triều* (朝; Chinese: *chao*; meaning the court, or to face), respectively.

This series of six characters was repeated in the taboo name beginning with the seventh generation.<sup>40</sup> There is no indication that the use of these six characters was pre-determined by the founding ancestor. In general, the six characters suggest an aspiration for cultural preservation and conveyed neither an overt political stance toward the Ming dynasty to which they traced their roots nor the Nguyễn lords under whom their lineage began a new chapter.

While it was not surprising that the Trần clan adopted the common Chinese practice of naming descendants according to a series of the characters usually taken from a poem or a phrase from the classics, their repetition of the same series of characters every six generations conflicted with the Chinese proscription against naming descendants after lineal ancestors. The Trần clan appeared to have disregarded this Chinese restriction as they adopted a character from the courtesy names of certain ancestors and a character from the other generations' taboo names, whereas normally no such repetition would be allowed. Chen Ching-ho could not ascertain whether this practice represented a tradition among Minh Hương communities or a custom unique to the Trần lineage.<sup>41</sup>

In addition, after the imperial bestowal of the name Tiên Thành (踐誠; Chinese: Jiancheng; meaning to practice sincerity) to the celebrated lineage head of the seventh generation, not only did the male descendants repeat the naming sequence of their ancestors, but they also adopted the first character of the imperially granted name as the first character of their courtesy names. In addition, for the second character of their courtesy names, the Trần lineage initiated the practice of using Chinese characters with the Ngôn (言; *yan*) radical. Chen Ching-ho called this Vietnamese practice the custom of a branch name (chữ đệm; Chinese: *paiming* 派名).<sup>42</sup> Notably, the repetition of the naming sequence also coincided with the imperial bestowal of Tiên Thành's name in the seventh generation. The combination of incorporating the imperially granted name and following the sequence of characters according to

40 Chen, *Chentian mingxiangshe Chenshi zhengpu*, p. 29.

41 Ibid., p. 30.

42 Ibid.

Chinese custom demonstrated not only their observation of the beginning of their lineage as Ming refugees, but also their esteem of the seventh-generation ancestor. The success of this seventh-generation ancestor in establishing the family firmly in their adopted state of the Nguyễn lords culminated in the imperial conferral of the name *Tiền Thành*, which the lineage henceforth appropriated as their naming tradition. Thus, the naming practice of the Trần lineage evolved to fulfil the delicate task of balancing the elite family's aspiration to preserve the memory of its Chinese cultural roots, while incorporating and highlighting imperial prestige granted by the Nguyễn court to further the clan's interests in *Đàng Trong*.

Unlike the Trần lineage, the Mạc family did not evince any Confucian influence in its descendants' names. Mạc Thiên Tứ, the second-generation Mạc ruler of Hà Tiên, would initiate in the first year of his administration a literary project that focused on scenic sites in Hà Tiên. As Claudine Ang shows in her study of this literary project, Mạc Thiên Tứ leveraged this cultural undertaking to showcase the transformation of the area under his auspices and his father's.<sup>43</sup> However, the family's naming pattern, predating Mạc Thiên Tứ's literary project, articulated not Confucian virtues but feudatory titles. The specific naming pattern the descendants of Mạc Cửu followed came from a royal conferral. The Nguyễn court had granted the family the use in their names of seven characters alluding to noble ranks:

*thiên* (天; Chinese: *tian*; meaning Heaven)

*tử* (子; Chinese: *zi*; which together with the character used in the previous generation formed the compound *thiên tử* / *tianzi*, meaning Son of Heaven)

*công* (公; Chinese: *gong*; Duke)

*hậu* (侯; Chinese: *hou*; Marquess)

*bá* (伯; Chinese: *bo*; Earl)

*tử* (子; Chinese: *zi*; Viscount)

*nam* (男; Chinese: *nan*; Baron).

This series implies hereditary titles of decreasing royal ranks which were designed to continue for seven generations of Mạc Cửu's descendants.<sup>44</sup> The characters of the first two generations were extraordinary for they implied a rank equivalent to the lord of the realm. Taken literally, these characters would have put Mạc Cửu's sons and grandsons on an equal footing with the Nguyễn kings. Note that the character 'tử' appeared twice in the generational naming system. Its first appearance followed the 'thiên' generation, splitting the *thiên-tử* (Chinese *tianzi*) compound, a move probably designed to avoid any appearance of equality with the ruler. Also, instead of allowing outright the use of such royal titles, the Nguyễn court deftly turned these rank designations into characters embedded in the names of Mạc Cửu's descendants, thereby depriving

43 Claudine Ang, 'Writing landscapes into civilization: Ming loyalist ambitions on the Mekong Delta', unpublished MS. See also Li Qingxin 李庆新, *Binhai zhi di: Nanhai maoyi yu Zhongwai guanxi shi yanjiu* 濒海之地: 南海贸易与中外关系史研究 [The seaside world: Studies of the history of trade in the South China Seas and Sino-foreign relations] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2010), pp. 343–8.

44 Vũ, *Hà Tiên trấn Hiệp trấn Mạc thị Gia phả*, pp. 232–3, 251–2. There is no clear record on when exactly the Nguyễn court granted the Mạc clan this naming pattern. That Mạc Thiên Tứ changed his name to conform to this pattern indicates that the court granted the family this honour during his lifetime (1700–1780).

the Mạc family of the possibility of ever challenging the Nguyễn court on the basis of possessing such ‘ranks’ in their names.

These naming practices reveal another form of power negotiation between the Nguyễn court and each lineage. While the generation names of the Mạc reveal a more overt feudal relationship to the court, the Trần’s naming system also betrays a subtle calculation of respectful obeisance. Partly due to its own erudition, the Trần lineage was able to employ various naming strategies, including the use of courtesy names and ambiguous connotations of characters to preserve their Chinese cultural heritage outside the court’s purview. The family integrated into its naming practice the conferred name of its seventh-generation ancestor to mark its attainment of prestige in the adopted home. At the same time, the court granted the name Tiên Thành (‘practising sincerity’) to reinforce its expectations of the Trần family’s loyalty. Thus, the symbiotic relationship between the Trần clan and the court was complete: the Trần descendants could appropriate imperial prestige to demonstrate having established themselves in Đàng Trong and proceed to promote their social and economic interests while the court could continue to demand from the clan their enduring devotion and faithful service.

This symbiotic relationship is nowhere more evident than in the Trần genealogy, which is studded with imperial pronouncements extolling the clan’s loyalty and contribution to the Nguyễn court. As for the Mạc lineage, the court bestowed upon the family a gesture towards grander titles yet withheld from them the assertion of titular rights. The Mạc descendants were to be reminded in their names of the royal graces of enfeoffment and the responsibilities expected of them as hereditary vassals. Embedded in the naming practice of the Mạc clan was an understanding between their clan and the Nguyễn court, that theirs was a feudal relationship between suzerain and vassal.

### Role of women

While the genealogies focused primarily on recording information on the male ancestors, they also provide records of a few female members of the clans through which we can glean the different gender roles in the two families and their dissimilar cultural aspirations as expressed in marriages. In the Trần clan, there was the unwritten rule of generational elders marrying Chinese women. Along their descent line, generational elders through the ninth generation married Chinese immigrant women or locally-born women of Chinese descent. The principal wife of the founding ancestor was evidently Chinese. He had married her in China and as she remained in China after his migration to Đại Việt, she had never set foot in Đại Việt.<sup>45</sup> The second-generation ancestor married the daughter of someone who had fled to the south and lived in the same hamlet as the founding ancestor.<sup>46</sup> The third-generation ancestor took as his principal wife a woman, née Du (游; Chinese: You), whom Chen Ching-ho deduced to be of Chinese origin based on her maiden name.<sup>47</sup> The fourth-generation ancestor had married a Gia Định native, née Nguyễn (and thus most likely

45 Chen, *Chentian mingxiangshe Chenshi zhengpu*, p. 42.

46 *Ibid.*, p. 43.

47 *Ibid.*, pp. 27, 47.

an ethnic Vietnamese), while he pursued business opportunities in the area. However, he would take a Chinese woman to be his secondary wife.<sup>48</sup> His eldest brother, who was to yield to him the principal position in this genealogy, married Hoàng/Huang, the daughter of an official in the Academy of Imperial Medicine.<sup>49</sup> The fifth-generation ancestor married as his principal wife a Chinese woman from a Fuzhou family. Because she died early, he married another Fuzhou woman.<sup>50</sup> The principal wife of the sixth-generation ancestor was the daughter of a Confucian scholar.<sup>51</sup> Both the principal and the secondary wives of the seventh-generation ancestor were Chinese. His principal wife was the eldest daughter of the President of the Board of Rites, a man of Chinese descent, while his secondary wife came from a Minh Hương family in Hà Nội.<sup>52</sup> The eighth-generation ancestor married a woman whose family had come from Guangdong.<sup>53</sup> So did the ninth-generation ancestor.<sup>54</sup> Chen Ching-ho observed that it was almost an unwritten rule in the Trần clan that the head of each generation had to take his principal wife of Chinese descent.<sup>55</sup> In their capacity as principal wives, these Chinese women were the recipients of the aforementioned titles the court conferred which were chosen to exalt Confucian female virtues of kindness, gentleness, refinement, chastity and devotion.

This unwritten rule applied only to those descended through a line of eldest sons through the ninth generation. From the tenth generation onwards, the practice shifted. The head of the tenth generation married a Vietnamese; however, she was not only the daughter of a high-ranking official but also a relative of the reigning Nguyễn emperor.<sup>56</sup> Besides, branches of the family outside of the direct line of descent of generational elders did not follow the policy of marrying only women of Chinese descent and married instead local women. Some of these marriages or remarriages with local women could have been arranged partially to establish trade ties. Such practices represented a long-standing tradition of Chinese traders in Southeast Asian ports marrying local women for the sake of trade. Shi Dashan (釋大汕; Vietnamese: Thích Đại Sán), a Chinese monk who travelled through Đàng Trong in the seventeenth century, had observed that in Hội An, which was heavily populated by Fujianese, ‘the buyers and sellers are all female; there is no rigid distinction between the inner and outer quarters’ (市肆買賣皆婦女無內外之嫌), and that all visitors married local women to facilitate trade (凡客此者必娶一婦以便交易).<sup>57</sup> In particular, the

48 Ibid., pp. 53, 54.

49 Ibid., p. 58.

50 Ibid., pp. 63–4.

51 Ibid., p. 75.

52 Ibid., pp. 97, 99.

53 Ibid. p. 107.

54 Ibid., p. 120.

55 Ibid., p. 28.

56 Ibid., p. 131.

57 Shi Dashan 釋大汕, *Haiwai jishi* 海外紀事 [Chronicles of events overseas], in *Shiqi Shiji Guangnan zhi xin shiliao* 十七世紀廣南之新史料 [New historical materials on seventeenth-century Quảng Nam], ed. Chen Jinghe (Chen Ching-ho) 陳荆和 (Taipei: Zhonghua congshu weiyuanhui), *juan* 3, 3b, 16a; *juan* 4, 9b. Chen, *Chentian mingxiangshe Chenshi zhengpu*, p. 27. See also Charles Wheeler, ‘Cross-cultural trade and trans-regional networks in the Port of Hoi An: Maritime Vietnam in the early modern era’ (PhD diss., Yale University, 2001), pp. 142–9.

founding ancestor and the fourth-generation ancestor most likely married local women as they established themselves in their new trading environments.<sup>58</sup>

The Mạc family, on the other hand, observed no such rigid guidelines but adapted pragmatically to their very different conditions. The family register indicates that Mạc Cửu's mother was of Chinese descent. She moved from Mạc Cửu's hometown in Leizhou to join Mạc Cửu only after he had established himself in Hà Tiên.<sup>59</sup> Mạc Cửu's wife, née Bùi (裴; Chinese: Pei), was ethnically Vietnamese.<sup>60</sup> The genealogy provides no further clues on the ethnicity of the wives of the various descendants. We know of the wife of Mạc Thiên Tú, née Nguyễn, who received royal titles along with her husband for offering him assistance in his defeat of the Khmer.<sup>61</sup> We also know of a certain woman née Hứa (許; Chinese: Xu) married to a descendant in the generation with the name Tú.<sup>62</sup> That marital records did not feature prominently in the Mạc genealogy indicates that the Mạc family did not regard as important the Chinese practices of propriety in one's choice of marital partners. Unlike the Trần lineage which strove to preserve the purity of its Chinese bloodline through the line of direct descent, the Mạc clan was preoccupied with more immediate needs of the volatile environment in Nam Bộ, a region of 'openness, vulnerability, possibility'.<sup>63</sup> In not emphasising the choice of wives from scholarly families of Chinese descent with ties to the royal court like the Trần, the Mạc echoed Keith Taylor's observation that 'Functional relationship, personal loyalty, and expectations of the future counted for more than ancestry or appeals to the past' in Nam Bộ.<sup>64</sup> That the Mạc approach to the selection of marriage partners differed from the Trần reflects the concern of Mạc operations in Hà Tiên with money through trade and business, their role as militarists and conquerors which did not call for strict conformance to Chinese customs, and their more ready assimilation into the ethnically mixed and less Confucian culture of the south, where the gender roles for women were less formal. In any case, however, the Nguyễn court accommodated the different paragons of female virtues upheld by the two families and conferred honour on the women deemed praiseworthy based on the very different standards embraced by each family.

The two families had differing ideas of female virtues, as seen not just in their choice of principal wives but also in their selection of marriage partners for daughters. The Mạc clan had married a daughter in the second generation to a general in Đàng Trong to forge a military alliance.<sup>65</sup> This singular reference to the choice of marriage partner for a female offspring in the Mạc genealogy underscores the importance of natal relations in the battlefield. On the other hand, many of the female offspring of the Trần clan married men Chen Ching-ho inferred to be of Chinese descent.

58 Chen, *Chentian mingxiangshe Chenshi zhengpu*, pp. 42, 53–4.

59 Vũ, *Hà Tiên trấn Hiệp trấn Mạc thị Gia phả*, p. 232.

60 Chen, 'Hexianzhen Yezhen Moshi jiapu zhushi', p. 87n6.

61 Vũ, *Hà Tiên trấn Hiệp trấn Mạc thị Gia phả*, p. 232; Chen, 'Hexianzhen Yezhen Moshi jiapu zhushi', p. 96.

62 Vũ, *Hà Tiên trấn Hiệp trấn Mạc thị Gia phả*, pp. 232–3. Hứa's maiden name suggests that she was almost certainly Chinese.

63 Taylor, 'Surface orientations in Vietnam', p. 966.

64 Ibid., p. 966.

65 Vũ, *Hà Tiên trấn Hiệp trấn Mạc thị Gia phả*, p. 235; Chen, 'Hexianzhen Yezhen Moshi jiapu zhushi', p. 104n22.

The seventh daughter of the third-generation ancestor, the second daughter of the fourth-generation ancestor, and the eldest daughter of the fifth-generation ancestor all married men assumed to be of Chinese descent.<sup>66</sup> The second daughter of the fifth-generation ancestor married a man from Guangdong.<sup>67</sup>

Furthermore, while ethnic origin certainly figured prominently in the choice of spouse for the Trần family, they were also mindful of the political and economic importance of marital alliances. Three daughters of the fourth-generation ancestors married officials, as did two daughters of the seventh-generation ancestor and one daughter each of the fifth- and eighth-generation ancestors.<sup>68</sup> In addition, the second daughter of the fifth-generation ancestor was paired up with an official for her marriage.<sup>69</sup> Two of the female descendants of the Trần lineage were summoned to court at the age of fourteen but both were excused: the thirteenth daughter of the seventh-generation ancestor married the head of a Cantonese congregation (*bang*) while the seventh daughter of the eighth-generation ancestor married a Hainanese in the early twentieth century.<sup>70</sup> In sum, whereas the Mạc clan emphasised the utility of family relations in the forging of military alliances, the Trần clan chose their marriage partners based on ethnic considerations, political motivations and economic aspirations.

### Conclusion

Both the Trần and the Mạc clans had to contend with the challenges of their adopted homes. Ostensibly, both families lived under the jurisdiction of the Nguyễn court in Đàng Trong but in reality, the constraints imposed by the Nguyễn regime and the opportunities presented by the political powers differed drastically for the Trần living near the Nguyễn powerbase and the Mạc striving to hold onto the trading emporium they had created along the frontier in Hà Tiên. While the relative stability the Trần enjoyed within the bureaucracy called for a strategy to leverage the political authority of the Nguyễn court in order to enhance the family's status, the unrelenting military struggles around Hà Tiên resulted in the Mạc family opportunistically shifting political allegiance, and finally throwing in their lot with the Nguyễn court.

The Trần family sustained their leverage through marital alliances, continued ties with their ancestral home in China and their communion with fellow-Chinese migrants. Their symbiotic relationship with the Nguyễn state, therefore, depended on preserving their distinct ethnic background. On the other hand, the Mạc clan's initial claim to fame lay outside the sway of the Nguyễn state. The family's enterprise in Hà Tiên was but the landed equivalent of the entrepreneurial South China pirates Dian Murray depicted.<sup>71</sup> The Mạc genealogy employed standard Confucian tropes of loyalty, kindness, righteousness, and courage (賦性忠良, 仁慈義勇, 才德俱全)

66 Chen, *Chentian mingxiangshe Chenshi zhengpu*, pp. 28, 29, 60, 69, 81.

67 *Ibid.*, p. 81.

68 *Ibid.*, pp. 69–70, 82, 114–15, 125.

69 *Ibid.*, p. 81.

70 *Ibid.*, pp. 114, 126.

71 Dian H. Murray, *Pirates of the South China coast, 1790–1810* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987).



in its tribute to the Mạc ancestors. It claimed that Mạc Thiên Tứ's erudition encompassed not only Confucian scholarship but also an understanding of the various classics (博通經史、百家諸子之書, 無不洽蘊胸懷). However, the commercial environment of the region was also apparent in the genealogy's emphasis on Mạc Thiên Tứ's financial generosity in the attraction of virtuous talent (厚幣以招賢才). His success in the bellicose environment of the frontier stemmed not from his scholarly accomplishments but his martial skills and his 'mastery of the art of war' (武精韜略), so that not only did the learned flock to the region under his command, but 'rival powers also bowed to his military might' (威服外敵), resulting in a peaceful atmosphere in which culture and commerce could flourish.<sup>72</sup> The contribution of the Mạc clan to the Nguyễn state lay precisely in their military might and their control over the southern territories over which the newly founded Nguyễn dynasty desired to lay legitimate claim.

This examination of the genealogies of two Chinese migrant clans reveals not merely the different strategies employed by each family in response to their specific needs, but also the Nguyễn court's flexibility in adjusting its policies to accommodate the unique requirements of the two clans as the state sought to advance its territorial and economic control. Along the expanding frontier, the entrepreneurial Nguyễn court met the enterprising Trần and Mạc clans which had arrived from China in search of a more favourable political climate. This study of the Trần and Mạc clans parallels Charles Wheeler's effort to understand Đàng Trong by underscoring the contribution of the Chinese migrants in the midst of Cham and Đại Việt natives.<sup>73</sup> It also takes a step further Taylor's suggestion of appreciating the experience of the different groups by dispersing the coherencies of the national or regional histories of Vietnam.<sup>74</sup> We see in the experience of the Trần and Mạc clans how fellow-Chinese migrants to Đàng Trong conducted themselves in radically different fashions. We see in the Nguyễn court how the same court machinery devised different mechanisms to work with both groups of Chinese migrants. The capricious climate along the southern frontier called for agility and swift adjustments; the enterprising clans of the Trần and the Mạc, as well as the resourceful Nguyễn court, rose to the occasion.

72 Vũ, *Hà Tiên trấn Hiệp trấn Mạc thị Gia phả*, p. 233.

73 Wheeler, 'One region, two histories'.

74 Taylor, 'Surface orientations in Vietnam'.