



Universiteit
Leiden
The Netherlands

Silk for silver: Dutch-Vietnamese relations, 1637-1700

Hoang, A.T.

Citation

Hoang, A. T. (2006, December 7). *Silk for silver: Dutch-Vietnamese relations, 1637-1700*. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/5425>

Version: Not Applicable (or Unknown)

License: [Licence agreement concerning inclusion of doctoral thesis in the Institutional Repository of the University of Leiden](#)

Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/5425>

Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

CHAPTER THREE

INTIMATE PHASES

...where since wee [the English] arrived have heard of yours Majestie's great kindness to the Hollanders, as loving & receiving them as people of your own family [...]. We acknowledge that the Dutch at present may be in greater favour with your Majestie, having lived here many yeares, butt in all other places wee have the priority of them [...]. Wee likewise request of your Majestie to give order to your mandarines to settle and confirme us with the same accostomed previledges that the Dutch have already procured from your Majestie.¹

1. *The abortive Dutch trade with Quinam, 1601-1638*²

The first contact between the Dutch and the Vietnamese took place even before the foundation of the Dutch East India Company. In 1601, a Dutch fleet commanded by Admiral Jacob van Neck *en route* to South-East Asia from Macao called at a Chàm bay to take on fresh water. Fearful of the Dutch presence, the local inhabitants living around that bay fled. Shortly after this first Dutch visit to central Vietnam, the VOC ships the *Leiden* and the *Haarlem* on their way to the Middle Kingdom called at the Vietnamese coast where twenty-three Dutch sailors were killed by the local people. This bloody encounter did not discourage the Dutch from visiting Quinam. The merchants Jeronimus Wonderaer and Albert Cornelisz Ruyl were sent to Hội An to negotiate the opening of trade and were given a friendly welcome and granted a licence to trade freely at Hội An. Shortly afterwards, a rumour spread that the Nguyễn rulers were preparing a surprise attack on the Dutch. Upon hearing this unfounded rumour, the Dutch merchants hastily returned to their ships after having raided and burnt one village on their way to the sea. Because the southerly monsoon had ended, the *Leiden* and the *Haarlem* did not pursue their intended voyage to China and returned to Patani.³

The Dutch needed many years to overcome the aftermath of this unfortunate encounter. As the Malay Archipelago was the main theatre of the Dutch commercial

¹ BL OIOC G/12/17-1: 12, Petition of the English factory in Tonkin to *Chúa Trịnh Tạc*, 18 Jul. 1672.

² The writing of this sub-chapter is based largely on the pioneering work of Buch, *De Oost-Indische Compagnie*.

³ Buch, *De Oost-Indische Compagnie*, 9-10 ; Buch, "La Compagnie" (1936): 114-115; H.A. Foreest and A. de Booy (eds), *De vierde schipvaart der Nederlanders naar Oost-Indië onder Jacob Wilkens en Jacob van Neck (1599-1604)*, Vol. 2 (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1980-1981), 67-91; Li Tana and Reid (eds), *Southern Vietnam under the Nguyen*, 6-26. The following stories on the Dutch in central Vietnam have been largely based on Buch's pioneering research.

activities in the East, central Vietnam was of little importance. This state of affairs altered with the establishment of the Japan trade in 1609. Trading with Quinam became suddenly attractive to the Dutch Company. For a profitable trade with Japan, the Dutch, just as their Chinese and Portuguese competitors, needed Chinese silk, and since China's ports remained closed to the Dutch, they needed to procure Chinese silk at such regional rendezvous as Hội An.⁴ In 1613, the Dutch factory in Japan sent two merchants and a small cargo valued at 9,000 guilders to Hội An. This attempt again ended in a bitter loss of both people and property. One of the two Dutchmen was murdered together with an English merchant who had just arrived from Japan. The cause of this murder was never fully uncovered despite the investigations of two merchants sent to Hội An by the English factory in Japan.⁵ What the 1613 misfortune did reveal was that the Dutch aggression in Hội An in 1601 now came back to haunt them. After this second loss, Dutch eagerness to trade with central Vietnam was greatly dampened and simultaneously their hatred of the Nguyễn domain strengthened. Some Dutchmen even proposed raiding Chinese and Portuguese vessels trading to Hội An to exact vengeance and compensate themselves for their string of losses in this country.⁶

In 1617, the Dutch were offered an opportunity to break the deadlock. In this year, the Dutch factories in Siam and Patani received letters from high-ranking mandarins of Quinam, inviting the Company on behalf of the *Chúa* to trade with their country. The Patani Council accepted the invitation and decided to send two ships which were used to capture Portuguese vessels to Quinam, but both of them ended up in Hirado without visiting Hội An. In the following years, two other ships were destined for Quinam but, considering the high risk in trading with central Vietnam, the crews mutinied and refused to obey their masters' order. Hence, the opportunity to re-open the dialogue with the Nguyễn rulers was regrettably wasted. During the 1620s, the Dutch made no further attempt to make contact with the Indo-Chinese coast as they had their hands full with their Chinese campaign, which led to the establishment of a foothold on Formosa in 1624.⁷

⁴ Kato Eiichi, "From Pirates to Merchants: The VOC's Trading Policy towards Japan during the 1620s", in Reinhold Karl Haellquist (ed.), *Asian Trade Routes: Continental and Maritime* (London: Curzon Press, 1991), 181-192; Idem, "Shuinsen Licence Trade", 142-148.

⁵ The Italian priest Christopher Borri, who lived in Hội An between 1618 and 1622, recorded this incident:

"The King [*Chúa* Nguyễn Phúc Nguyên] ordered all the Dutch to go ashore [...] but as they were going upon the river in boats, they were on a sudden assaulted by the gallies, which destroyed most of them. The King remained master of their goods; and to justify this action, alleged, that he very well knew the Dutch, as notorious pirates, who infested all the seas, were worthy of severer punishment; and therefore, by proclamation, forbid any of them ever resorting to his country". Christopher Borri, "An Account of Cochinchina", 796-797; see also: Buch, "La Compagnie" (1936): 117; Lamb, *The Mandarin Road*, 12-15.

⁶ Buch, "La Compagnie" (1636): 117-118.

⁷ Buch, *De Oost-Indische Compagnie*, 17; Buch, "La Compagnie" (1936): 119-121. On the Dutch involvement in China: Leonard Blussé, "The Dutch Occupation of the Pescadores, 1622-1624", *Transactions of the International Conference of Orientalists in Japan* (The Toho Gakkai, XVIII, 1973): 28-44.

By the early 1630s, another opportunity presented itself to the Dutch to open trade with Quinam. In the autumn of 1632, a junk which the Dutch had captured from the Portuguese drifted to the Hội An shore, where, according to the local custom, it was held. The Dutch survivors were released and sent to Batavia on board a Chinese junk. The Nguyễn rulers accordingly sent a letter to the High Government in Batavia, reporting this accident and cordially inviting the Dutch Company to trade in their country. In view of the current stagnation of the VOC's Formosa-Japan trade,⁸ Batavia immediately embraced this new opportunity to establish trading relations with Hội An. In 1633, two Dutch ships carrying two skilled merchants, Paulus Traudenius and François Caron, left Batavia, carrying an adequate capital of 278,000 guilders. These merchants were warmly welcomed by the Nguyễn who granted them favourable trading privileges. Despite their facilitation by the court, the Dutch could not match the Portuguese and the Japanese in buying and selling goods. Two junks arrived from Japan with 300,000 taels and fiercely competed for the silk. Consequently, most of the Dutch capital remained unspent. Feeling disappointed, the Dutch merchants left for Formosa with most of the unspent money, leaving only two Dutchmen with a small amount of capital to maintain the Company presence at Hội An.⁹

This failure did not stop Batavia from making another attempt to trade with Quinam. But, in order to avoid the stiff Portuguese and Japanese competition during the trading season, the Dutch resolved to send ships to Hội An from Formosa during the wintertime. By so doing, they hoped to purchase winter silk which was normally harvested between October and December. This strategy miscarried as there was a large number of overseas Japanese residing permanently at Hội An. So powerful were these overseas Japanese that they had the wherewithal to influence the local authorities to hinder the Dutch trade. Thwarted by these tactics, the Dutch failed to purchase gold and silk, although there was an abundance of these two products on the local market. Hence, of the 186,485 guilders the Company had earmarked for the Quinam trade this year, 111,549 guilders remained unspent and had to be shipped back to Batavia in the spring of 1634.¹⁰

Misfortune continued to beset the Dutch trade with Hội An. In the winter of 1633, the *Kemphaan* and the *Quinam en route* from Formosa to Batavia were shipwrecked off Quinam. Salvaged goods, including merchandise, money, and cannon, which the Dutch survivors brought ashore were confiscated by the local mandarins. The current unprofitable trade with Quinam coupled with the Nguyễn's arcane confiscation laws disgusted Batavia and aroused even more aversion.¹¹ Those Dutch merchants who had

⁸ Blussé, "The Dutch Occupation of the Pescadores", 28-42; Ts'ao Yung-ho, "Taiwan as an Entrepôt in East Asia in the Seventeenth Century", *Itinerario* 21-3 (1997): 94-114.

⁹ Buch, "La Compagnie" (1936): 122-130.

¹⁰ Buch, *De Oost-Indische Compagnie*.

¹¹ All foreign merchants complained about this confiscation law which was also said to have been implemented in Pegu. See: Dampier, *Voyages and Discoveries*, 15; Frédéric Mantienné, "Indochinese

experienced the Quinam trade insisted that the Company would attain nothing from that country but losses and calamities. Their thoughts were no doubt influenced by the fact that silk and gold, the two key products which the Company had high hopes of procuring from Quinam, could since 1633 be provided by Formosa. In the meantime, the demand for gold on the Coromandel Coast had also eased as the Coast trade went into a state of temporary decline.¹² Considering the difficulty in re-opening the relationship once it had been officially abandoned, Batavia restrained itself from exacting any vengeance. Grinding up its loins yet again, the Company made another attempt to trade with central Vietnam in the following year.

Despite the patience shown by Batavia, the Company trade in Quinam could not make a break-through. So depressing was the Dutch trade at Hội An in 1634 that only 37,403 of 57,287 guilders could be spent on low-quality silk and gold. Worse still, the *Grootebroek en route* from Hội An to Formosa ran into a storm and wrecked on the Paracels, off the coast of Quinam. Thirteen survivors were humiliatingly treated by the local authorities while the salvaged goods, valued at 23,580 rixdollars, were again confiscated. The only saving grace was that the *Chúa* allowed the people to return to Batavia on a Japanese junk.¹³

This year's losses snapped the patience of Batavia with respect to its trade with Quinam. Upon the return of the Japanese junk to Hội An in the summer of 1635, the Governor-General sent a letter to the *Chúa*, demanding him to return the salvaged goods and monies which his mandarins had unjustifiably robbed from the Dutch survivors. To stress his demand, the Governor-General assigned Abraham Duycker, who had been directing the Company trade in central Vietnam up to that time, to negotiate compensation with the Nguyễn ruler. Duycker was expected to accomplish three tasks: negotiate with *Chúa* Nguyễn to retrieve all confiscated goods and monies; to extract more trading privileges for the Company; and imply that if the Nguyễn declined these requests, the Company would ally with the Trịnh rulers of Tonkin and simultaneously impose a protracted blockade on the coast of Quinam.¹⁴

The new *Chúa* who succeeded his father in 1635 refused the Company's demand for compensation, despite his partiality for the Dutch.¹⁵ Reviewing the sum of 23,580 rixdollars, the *Chúa* reasoned that it had been illegally confiscated and embezzled by a mandarin who had been beheaded the previous year. He was neither responsible for such an illegal action nor should he bear responsibility for what had happened during

Societies and European Traders: Different World of Trade? (17th-18th Centuries)", in Nguyen The Anh and Yoshiaki Ishizawa (eds), *Commerce et Navigation en Asie du Sud-Est (XIVe-XIXe siècle)* (Tokyo: Sophia University, 1999), 113-125.

¹² Buch, "La Compagnie" (1936): 132-133; Raychaudhuri, *Jan Company in Coromandel*, 187-188.

¹³ Buch, "La Compagnie" (1936): 135.

¹⁴ NA VOC 1120: 225-231, Hans Putmans to Duycker, 21 Feb. 1636; Buch, "La Compagnie" (1936): 136-137.

¹⁵ *Chúa* Thượng (Nguyễn Phúc Lan: 1635-1648) succeeded *Chúa Sãi* (Nguyễn Phúc Nguyên: 1613-1635).

his father's reign. Therefore, the *Chúa* wanted the Company to withdraw its demand for compensation. In return, he would grant the Dutch favourable trading privileges, exempting them from all taxes and the obligation to give presents. This concession pleased Duycker but did by no means satisfy the Governor-General and the Council of the Indies, who severely reprimanded him for his unsuccessful negotiations. Consequently, in the summer of 1636, Nicolaas Couckebacker, the chief factor of the Hirado factory, was assigned the position of the Company representative in re-negotiations with *Chúa* Nguyễn. In its letter to the Nguyễn ruler, Batavia insisted on compensation and uttered a stern warning it would attack Quinam if its requests were not fulfilled unconditionally.¹⁶

The haughty tone of the letter from Batavia extremely annoyed the Nguyễn ruler. Had his courtiers seen the letter, said the *Chúa* during his personal meeting with Duycker, they would have killed all Dutch merchants currently trading in his country. The *Chúa* adamantly refused the Company's demand for compensation and told Duycker that he was willing to return one cannon which his people had salvaged from the *Grootebroek*, although Duycker had counted eighteen pieces altogether on his previous visits. He also rejected Duycker's request for a meeting with Couckebacker, who was currently lying at anchor off the Hội An coast. The *Chúa* angrily expostulated that he was the king of a country, not a merchant whose only concern was to discuss trade. Should he feel like dealing with the Company, he would write directly to the Governor-General. Replying to the threat from Batavia to ally with the Trịnh and launch an attack on Quinam, the *Chúa* ironically provoked Duycker, saying that he was ready to welcome the Dutch fleets. They could exact all the revenge they pleased. Otherwise they should feel free to trade with his country.¹⁷

The final attempt to negotiate made by Batavia thus failed embarrassingly. Threats made no impression at all on the Nguyễn rulers and also from a simple commercial viewpoint, the Company would gain nothing from fighting the Nguyễn. As it so happened trade did not suffer as the Hirado factory sent a ship to Hội An in the spring of 1637. There, Duycker and the other Dutchmen were warmly received by the *Chúa*, who promised to facilitate the Company trade and offered them a well-built house in Hội An in which they could reside in comfort. Even more important was the partiality of the Japanese residing in Hội An towards the Company. Duycker therefore believed that the Company trade with central Vietnam would be profitable this year.¹⁸

The scene changed drastically, however, after Duycker left Hội An for Batavia in March 1637. Because the Japanese resolved to co-operate with the Chinese in the running of the Quinam-Japan trade, they reneged on the agreement they had made with

¹⁶ NA VOC 1120: 459-478, Duycker to Batavia, Oct. 1636; NA VOC 1120: 491-492, *Chúa* Thượng to Batavia, 12 Dec. 1636. See also: Buch, "La Compagnie" (1936): 139-140.

¹⁷ *Dagh-register Batavia* 1636, 91-93; Buch "La Compagnie" (1936): 136-145.

¹⁸ NA VOC 1123: 782-783, Summary of commercial affairs in Quinam, Tonkin, Cambodia, and Siam, from 8 Oct. 1636 to 3 Mar. 1637.

the Dutch. Therefore, most of the Dutch silk contracts with the Japanese were unfulfilled. As luck would have it, silk was scarce and expensive on the local market that season because heavy rains had largely destroyed the summer silk harvest. The shortage was compounded by the fact that the Trịnh rulers forbade their people to export Tonkinese silk to Quinam. Consequently, Dutch merchants in Hội An could spend only 54,123 of 130,004 guilders on silk and other miscellaneous items.¹⁹

However, as no decision from the High Government to abandon the trade with the Nguyễn domain was forthcoming, the Japan factory and the Zeelandia Castle were obliged to continue the Quinam trade. In the spring of 1638, Duycker again sailed to Hội An from Formosa with a cargo valued at 61,218 guilders. Silk and sugar, the two key items which the Dutch expected to purchase in Hội An, were scarce and dear. It was believed that as long as the Trịnh rulers persisted in their ban on the export of Tonkinese silk to Quinam, the silk shortage in central Vietnam would undoubtedly drag on. The Dutch now seriously wondered whether it was worthwhile to maintain a trade with Quinam which was both unprofitable and miserable while their trade with Tonkin and Formosa was much more profitable and pregnant with promise. In a disappointed tone Duycker wrote to Nachtegaal, the chief of the Dutch factory in Siam, for advice. He did not know that the Governor-General and the Council of the Indies had already decided to abandon the Company trade with Quinam. In the summer of 1638, Batavia sent a ship to Hội An to take its servants and property to Formosa; the Dutch trade with Quinam had finally come to an end. The decision of Batavia to abolish its trade with central Vietnam was made after having carefully considered the risks involved in continuing its relationship with the Nguyễn rulers, since it had officially established political and commercial relations the Lê/Trịnh one year earlier.²⁰

¹⁹ NA VOC 1123: 970-977, Duycker to Governor-General Antonio van Diemen, 21 Nov. 1637. See also: Buch, "La Compagnie" (1936): 157-158.

²⁰ NA VOC 1127: 369-380, Nachtegaal to Duycker, 3 May 1638; Buch, "La Compagnie" (1936): 159-162.

2. *The Dutch arrival in Tonkin, 1637*

The Dutch had already been looked for during the past year since the Portuguese had given notice of our intended expedition. They had repeated the usual calumnies, prejudicing the King of Tonkin against us. They had even suggested to him [*Chúa Trịnh Tráng*] that we probably intended to try to take his life; that we would no doubt enter his presence well armed with sabres and pistols, and that we would set out from Quinam to come here.

Carel Hartsinck (1637)²¹

In contrast to their repeated endeavours to build a relationship with Quinam, the Dutch did not bestow much attention on trade with Tonkin in the first three decades of the seventeenth century. In fact, in 1613, the Hirado factory half-heartedly sought to establish relationships with both Vietnamese kingdoms when it assigned two Dutch merchants to put this plan into operation. These Dutchmen, as mentioned in the previous sections, arrived first at Hội An, where one was assaulted and the other murdered. Although the Dutch made various efforts to trade with central Vietnam from this year on, there was no plan whatsoever to trade with the north until the early 1630s when Japanese politics and commerce underwent a critical transformation.²² In 1635, the Japanese Tokugawa Government promulgated a policy of seclusion, prohibiting Japanese people to sail abroad. Consequently, the Japanese *shuin-sen* trading system was disrupted. Such Western merchants as the Portuguese and the Dutch all hoped to seize the place of the Japanese traders at various trading-places including the Vietnamese kingdoms of Tonkin and Quinam. After trying vainly to improve their trade with Quinam, the Dutch finally decided to shift their commercial focus to Tonkin, whose silk had become increasingly profitable on the Japanese market. Besides, the Trịnh rulers of Tonkin had also dropped hints about granting them favourable trading privileges once they actually began to trade with northern Vietnam.²³

It is certainly curious that the Dutch were so tardy in opening up trade with Tonkin, in contrast to their repeated attempts to establish trade with Quinam. Tonkinese silk had been regularly exported to Japan and it was well-known that the bulk of the Vietnamese silk available in Quinam was not locally produced but imported from Tonkin. Yet it was the Dutch commercial weakness in Japan during the first three decades of the seventeenth century which restrained them from expanding their trade to other countries in the region. Until 1621, the Dutch factory at Hirado in Japan was virtually isolated

²¹ Dixon, "Voyage of the Dutch Ship 'Groll'": 180-215.

²² Buch, *De Oost-Indische Compagnie*, 12. On political and commercial transformations during the early 1630s, see Akira Nagazumi, Dhiravat Na Pombejra, and A.B. Lapien, *The Dutch East India Company in Japan, Siam and Indonesia: Three Essays* (Working Paper No. 16, Universiteit van Amsterdam, 1982); Van Dyke, "How and Why": 41-56.

²³ *Generale Missiven* I, 513-522; Buch, "La Compagnie" (1936): 142.

from the rest of the Company's intra-Asian trading network.²⁴ Besides, Tonkinese silk was obviously inferior to the Chinese product which was still easily purchasable in central Vietnam. Hence, Tonkin was commercially less attractive than Quinam. Not until the middle of the 1630s when Tonkinese silk became more marketable and profitable on the Japanese market, did the Dutch Company begin to consider trading with the Lê/Trịnh domain.²⁵

In 1636, Couckebacker gathered reliable information from merchants who had been trading with Tonkin in order to compile a report on the current trading situation in northern Vietnam. This impressive report contained information on such important topics as geographical features, the commercial and political situation, and trading prospects. Most remarkable was Couckebacker's optimistic estimation that Tonkin annually produced approximately 1,500 to 1,600 piculs of raw silk, 5,000 to 6,000 silk piece-goods, and a substantial quantity of cinnamon. The bright future of the Tonkin trade drawn in Couckebacker's report encouraged the Governor-General and the Council of the Indies to seek to establish relations with the Lê/Trịnh rulers the following year. In 1637, the *Grol* left Japan for northern Vietnam.²⁶

Handicapped by repeated Portuguese slanders on them, the Dutch were slightly suspect when they arrived in Tonkin. Because the Portuguese had begun to expand their trade with Tonkin after the Japanese seclusion policy in 1635, they were worried about the arrival of the *Grol*. Hence they tried to severely prejudice the Trịnh ruler by saying that the Dutch probably intended to assassinate him. To provoke the *Chúa*, the Portuguese had rumoured that the Dutch had offered the Nguyễn 150 pearls for the Chàm Islands off the coast of Hội An. Their minds full of forebodings, the local authorities were at first quite vigilant with the Dutch on their arrival. They ordered them to lay down their weapons and not to fire cannon. Thanks to Hartsinck's dexterous and courteous behaviour, the Dutch were able to overcome this early challenge. The Dutch chief sat upon the mats willingly during receptions, showed his reverence for the *Chúa*, chewed betel after the local custom, and elegantly took off his cap and bowed when visiting the royal tombs. Consequently, the Dutch not only established fairly good relations with the court, they were also granted more favourable trading privileges than other foreign merchants. The *Chúa* even symbolically adopted Carel Hartsinck as his own son, offering him court dress and flags so that the Dutch chief could enter Tonkin freely on his next arrival.²⁷

²⁴ Kato Eiichi, "Unification and Adaptation, the Early Shogunate and Dutch Trade Policies", in Blussé and Gastra (eds), *Companies and Trade*, 207-229; Idem, "Shuinsen Licence Trade", 142-148; Blussé, "From Inclusion to Exclusiveness", 13-32.

²⁵ Buch, "La Compagnie" (1936): 141-143 and passim; Van Dyke "How and Why"; Ts'ao Yung-ho, "Taiwan as an Entrepôt": 94-114.

²⁶ *Dagh-register Batavia* 1636, 72-73, 104; Valentyn, *Oud en Nieuw Oost Indiën*, Vol. 3, 7-18; Buch, "La Compagnie" (1936): 150-152.

²⁷ A detailed story of the inaugural Dutch voyage to Tonkin can be found in NA VOC 1124: 53-79, Log of the voyage of the ship *Grol* to Tonkin in 1637; NA VOC 1124: 80-81, *Chúa* Trịnh Tráng to Governor-

Incontrovertibly, the Trịnh warm's reception of and generosity towards the Dutch was a strategy to lure them into a military alliance or, at least, to obtain Western weapons to suppress their Nguyễn rivals. After their second defeat at the hands of the Nguyễn in 1633, the Trịnh rulers had been assiduously seeking military assistance from Western powers. The Portuguese had once been the Trịnh's target but their irregular arrivals, and especially their intimate relations with the Nguyễn, displeased the Trịnh.²⁸ As clearly reflected in the Dutch records, at times at which Batavia was vainly demanding compensation from the Nguyễn, the Trịnh hinted that they would willingly compensate the Company for the losses that it had suffered in the Nguyễn domain should Batavia agree to trade and be an ally of Tonkin.²⁹ These hints dropped by the Trịnh obviously influenced the Dutch negotiations with the Nguyễn ruler. During their first meeting with a Tonkinese mandarin, the Dutch were informed that *Chúa* Trịnh had been awaiting the Dutch arrival impatiently and would cordially welcome them in the capital. The *Chúa*'s decree sent to the Dutch said: "The arrival of the Dutch gives satisfaction to the *Chúa*. Commissioners have been sent to escort the Dutch and their goods to the royal court". At every meeting the *Chúa* without fail asked Hartsinck about Dutch power, their relations with other European countries, and whether they would be willing to ally with Tonkin to fight against Quinam. Carel Hartsinck adroitly responded satisfactorily to all the *Chúa*'s questions but invariably politely excused himself from discussing any alliance, saying that such an important decision could only be made by the Governor-General in Batavia.³⁰

Despite the trading privileges granted by the *Chúa*, the Dutch trade in Tonkin was severely obstructed by some high-ranking eunuchs. These mandarins tried in one way or the other to extort the money from Company in exchange for raw silk and piece-goods and openly expressed their desire to manipulate the silk supply. They also obstructed the Dutch sale of import goods and appropriated a large part of the Company goods on the *Chúa*'s account to resell them in the local market.

These impediments, however, could not dim the attraction of the Tonkinese silk trade. The Dutch noticed on their arrival that, the year before, the average purchase price of Tonkinese raw silk had been 45 taels per picul while that in Quinam had stood between 100 and 130 taels per picul. It was the low purchase price of Tonkinese raw

General Van Diemen, 1637; NA VOC 1124: 85, Declaration of the act of adopting Carel Hartsinck as the *Chúa*'s son, 1637. See also Dixon, "Voyage of the Dutch Ship 'Groll'"; Buch, "La Compagnie" (1936): 152-154.

²⁸ Because of the unprofitable trade with Tonkin as well as the high risk of piracy and shipwreck on the Macao-Tonkin trading route, Portuguese merchants in Macao did not sail to Tonkin in the years 1628 and 1629. Largely owing to the Portuguese non-appearance, the *Chúa*, in a fit of disappointment, deported all the Jesuits who had arrived in Tonkin on board the Portuguese ships in 1626 and 1627. Rhodes, *Histoire du royaume de Tunquin*, 121-130, 154-156, 221-225, 272-275.

²⁹ NA VOC 1120: 225-231, Hans Putmans to Duycker, 21 Feb. 1636; *Dagh-register Batavia* 1636, 67, 91, Buch, "La Compagnie" (1936): 137, 142.

³⁰ NA VOC 1124: 53-79, Log of the voyage of the ship *Grol* to Tonkin in 1637; Dixon, "Voyage of the Dutch Ship 'Groll'".

silk which had lured the Portuguese to visit Tonkin in the winter of 1636/1637 with three ships. Because many foreign ships arrived, the purchase price of Tonkinese raw silk rose to 60 taels per picul on average, but this still left it far lower than that in Quinam.³¹ Therefore, the Dutch could easily exchange their cargo valued at 188,166 guilders for 536.95 piculs of raw silk and 9,665 silk piece-goods, valued at 190,000 guilders in total. This silk cargo reportedly yielded an average profit of 80 per cent in Japan. The success of the inaugural voyage to Tonkin prompted the Dutch to cultivate intimate political relations with the Trịnh rulers in order to facilitate their silk trade between Tonkin and Japan. At long last they had found the raw silk and silk piece-goods they so hungrily desired to run their Japan trade. From now on, Tonkinese silk left on board Dutch ships in exchange for Japanese silver and Dutch ordnance pieces.

3. Ideological struggles and belligerent decisions, 1637-1643

Military or peaceful involvement, 1637-1641?

It was noted earlier that, by the middle of the 1630s, the Trịnh's strategy of luring the VOC into a military alliance fortuitously coincided with the latter's plan to carve itself a place on the Tonkin market so as to export silk to Japan. In order to reach their goal, the Trịnh rulers first inveigled the VOC out of the Nguyễn domain and having succeeded persuaded Batavia to ally with them to wage war against their Nguyễn rivals. They hinted that they would compensate the VOC for all the financial losses which the Company had suffered at the hands of the Nguyễn rulers, provided the Company traded with and supported Tonkin militarily. At this juncture, Duycker's negotiations with *Chúa* Nguyễn Phúc Lan to procure compensation and trading privileges for the Company failed. The time was ripe to encourage Batavia to shift its commercial focus from Quinam to Tonkin.

Nevertheless, the VOC found itself on the horns of a dilemma: how could it maintain the relationship with Tonkin without stirring up adverse reactions in Quinam and vice-versa. Despite the current unprofitable state of the Company trade with Quinam, mindful of the Company's long-term strategy for the Indo-Chinese Peninsula, the High Government still wanted to seek an amicable relationship with the Nguyễn kingdom.³² Military involvement with the Trịnh rulers was not a favourable option for the Company at this moment since it had already overburdened itself with wars and

³¹ NA VOC 1124: 80-81, *Chúa* Trịnh to Governor General Antonio Van Diemen, 1637; Buch, "La Compagnie" (1936): 140.

³² *Dagh-register Batavia* 1631-1633, 433.

conflicts elsewhere in Asia.³³ Batavia therefore needed to calculate carefully all possible gains and losses should it ally with Tonkin in a war against Quinam.³⁴

As reflected in the VOC documents, prior to the Company's inaugural voyage to Tonkin in 1637, Batavia still believed that it could maintain peaceful relationships with both Vietnamese kingdoms simultaneously. In his instruction to Carel Hartsinck in Tonkin in the spring of 1637, Duycker optimistically reasoned that, although the Trịnh-Nguyễn wars had already been in full swing for several years, the local inhabitants still had no difficulty in crossing the border to exchange their commodities.³⁵ Duycker's opinion was perhaps optimistically coloured by the fact that the Portuguese had been trading peacefully with both Vietnamese kingdoms up to that time. Notwithstanding his stated belief, Duycker still instructed Hartsinck to sound out *Chúa* Trịnh Tráng's attitude towards the Company given that the latter was waging war against Quinam to gain compensation.³⁶

To the north the Trịnh rulers were constantly pressing the Dutch to enter into a military alliance and to support them materially with soldiers, ships, weapons, and other martial paraphernalia to fight against Quinam. *Chúa* Trịnh Tráng not only openly expressed his desire to ally himself with the Dutch during his meetings with Hartsinck at his palace in 1637 but, in order to persuade the Governor-General in Batavia of the final victory over Quinam, he showed how powerful his armies were, at least on paper, in the following impressive list:³⁷

300,000	excellent soldiers
2,000	big elephants
10,000	warhorses well-trained for warring
1,000	war galleys
50,000	heavy guns which can be used both on land and on board the galleys
1,000	pieces of ordnance
30,000	guns with red lacquered stocks and long butts which can also shoot 30 bullets
20,000	guns with black lacquered stocks and short butts which can also shoot 30 bullets

And in order to explain the reason why he had waged wars against Nguyễn Quinam as well as his current need of the Company's military support, the *Chúa* gave the following justifications:³⁸

³³ Gaastra, *The Dutch East India Company*, 37-65; C.R. Boxer, *Jan Compagnie in War and Peace 1602-1799* (Hong Kong: Heinemann Asia, 1979), 1-28.

³⁴ Buch, "La Compagnie" (1936): 166.

³⁵ NA VOC 1124: 53-79, Log of the voyage of the ship *Grol* to Tonkin, 1637.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ NA VOC 1124: 80-81, *Chúa* Trịnh Tráng to Governor-General Antonio van Diemen, 1637.

³⁸ Ibid.

My country Tonkin lies at the centre [of the region]. Kings and Lords from the East, West, and North come to pay their respects to me with the exception of the South [Quinam]. The people there are country folk whose lives and contacts are weak and who carry out all good and laudable things in a wrong way. They rely on and comfort themselves in unusual ways and do not obey me. If I want to war against them at sea with galleys then the passage thence is too far for me, and the billows too high and the wind and the rain disadvantageous. Therefore I cannot achieve this by this means which leads these wicked people to persist even more in their wrongful ways and behaviour; which pleases them. These are the reasons why I have planned to seek the help from the Dutch. Should Your Majesty be willing to agree, then I shall ally my country forever with your country. Could you kindly supply me with three ships and 200 excellent men who can handle ordnance well and send them to Tonkin. In addition, I shall order my kinsmen and closest noble soldiers to war against these people at sea. Then at that precise time I shall also arrive there overland with all my troops so that Quinam can be attacked from both sides simultaneously and be destroyed.

In the same letter, *Chúa Trịnh* also promised to cover the costs and expenses incurred by the Company's sending ships and soldiers for up to two to three hundred thousand rixdollars. Above all, once the rebellious region had been completely pacified, he would grant the Company favourable privileges allowing it to reside, trade, build forts, and collect taxes and pluck all sorts of "incomes" and "fruits" from Quinam.³⁹ Besides this letter to the Governor-General, *Chúa Trịnh Tráng* and Crown Prince *Trịnh Căn*, who succeeded his father in 1657, also sent letters and presents to President Nicolaas Couckebacker in Hirado to strengthen the relationship. In the capital *Thăng Long*, *Chúa Trịnh Tráng* even symbolically adopted Carel Hartsinck as his own son.⁴⁰

In 1639, *Chúa Trịnh* sent his first ambassador to Batavia in order to attract more attention from the Company. The sole mission of the Tonkinese delegation was simply to visit the Company headquarters and observe its military prowess in order to seek out if there were any truth in the Portuguese calumnies about the Dutch. For the past few years, the Lusitanians had been busily spreading rumours that the Dutch in Asia were nothing better than pirates. As the Tonkinese ambassador was extremely impressed by the grandeur of the VOC headquarters in Batavia as well as the cordiality with which the High Government treated him, the Portuguese slanders on the Dutch transpired to be groundless. More importantly, the envoy's report of his voyage to Batavia impressed the *Chúa* and prompted him to consolidate political relations with the Company. Anxious to lure the Dutch into a military alliance to counter-attack Quinam, he generously granted

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ NA VOC 1124: 82, *Chúa Trịnh Tráng* to President Couckebacker, 1637; NA VOC 1124: 83, Prince *Trịnh Tạc* to President Couckebacker, 1637; NA VOC 1124: 85, Declaration of the act of adopting Carel Hartsinck as a son of the *Chúa*, 1637. See the proceeding section for the inaugural VOC voyage to Tonkin in 1637.

the Dutch factors even more trading privileges to buy and sell commodities in his territories.⁴¹

Upon the return of the Tonkinese delegation, Batavia assigned Couckebacker to be the Company representative to negotiate with the *Chúa* about conditions necessary to forge a military alliance. Couckebacker had been scrupulously instructed by the High Government that he should always parry the *Chúa*'s direct demands for Dutch assistance. He explained to the *Chúa* that the Company was a trading enterprise and, hence, should not involve itself in military actions. As matters stood, its ships in Asian waters were subject to the Portuguese threat, and the Company desperately needed to hold some squadrons in reserve to protect its servants and property from its mortal enemy. Should the *Chúa* need weapons to fight against Quinam, the Company would try to sell him some of its spare ordnance and ammunition. In exchange for the Company's assistance, the High Government expected the *Chúa* would generously grant the Dutch factors more trading privileges and simultaneously forbid the Portuguese to trade with Tonkin. *Chúa* Trịnh rejected these conditions and the negotiations stagnated. If the High Government did not reduce its unreasonable conditions, the *Chúa* threatened, he would terminate the relationship with the Company. His armies were powerful enough to pacify the Nguyễn kingdom without Dutch assistance. If the Company did not want to assist him but wanted only to trade with his country, they should feel free to come.

Such menaces did not embarrass Couckebacker in the least. He politely thanked the *Chúa* for no longer demanding military assistance from the Company. Shortly after this unsuccessful round of negotiations, Couckebacker left for Formosa and Batavia. As predicted, upon his departure, *Chúa* Trịnh Tráng sent a letter to Governor Van der Burch in Formosa, demanding the Company to provide him with five warships, 600 well-armed soldiers, 100 pieces of ordnance, and 200 gunners to attack Quinam in his next campaign.⁴²

Upon his arrival in Batavia in December 1639, Couckebacker submitted a detailed report of his mission to Tonkin to the High Government. According to what he had observed and perceived during his short visit to Thăng Long, the politics of Tonkin were rather unstable. Although the Trịnh family had completely amassed the power at court in its own hands, its position was highly vulnerable. The Mạc clan who had been driven out of Đông Kinh since 1592 remained a constant threat to the Lê/Trịnh government. Around the capital, the *Chúa*'s opponents also threatened to overthrow him. Given this situation, all the *Chúa*'s promises to the Company were by no means guaranteed. Ruminating on the perspective of a military alliance with Tonkin, Couckebacker pessimistically concluded that what the Trịnh rulers wanted was not to

⁴¹ N. MacLeod, *De Oost-indische Compagnie als Zeemogendheid in Azië*, Vol. 2 (Rijswijk: Blankwaadt & Schoonhoven 1927), 318-319.

⁴² Buch, "La Compagnie" (1936): 167.

create a genuine alliance but to effectuate a transfer of the burden of their war onto the Company.⁴³

Couckebacker's cautious advice about dealing with the Trịnh ruler did not alter the ultimate decision of Batavia to ally with Tonkin to wage war against Quinam. In his letter to *Chúa* Trịnh Tráng in 1640, Governor-General Van Diemen thanked the *Chúa* for entertaining his official so kindly during his visit to Tonkin, and he expressed his hope to establish a successful alliance between the two parties in the future. The Governor-General also expected the *Chúa* to inform him of the date as well as the garrisoning place for the first allied campaign, so that the High Government could send squadrons to Tonkin. Because he did not receive a reply from the Trịnh ruler, the Governor-General sent another letter to Thăng Long in 1641.⁴⁴ In November of the same year, Governor Paulus Traudenius in Formosa also dispatched a letter of his own and presents to *Chúa* Trịnh Tráng. Delighted with the Company's apparent readiness towards forming an alliance, the Trịnh ruler planned to send another ambassador to Batavia to strengthen the relationship and discuss the first allied campaign. Before Captain Jacob van Liesvelt, who had just arrived from Formosa, left for Batavia with the Tonkinese commissioner, the *Chúa* finally agreed to two important conditions: to compensate the Company willingly for its losses in Quinam in the past few years, and to send his armies to garrison Poutsin, the estuary of the Gianh River on the border between Tonkin and Quinam, to await the Dutch fleet. After achieving these concessions, Van Liesvelt departed for Batavia with a Tonkinese envoy on 18 January 1642.⁴⁵

Tension escalating in Quinam, 1642

The relationship between the VOC and Quinam worsened after Batavia withdrew its servants and property from Hội An completely in the summer of 1638. Tensions between the two parties escalated in the next few years as Batavia step by step cautiously committed itself to a military alliance with Thăng Long and these tensions erupted in the spring of 1642 when the Company suffered new misfortunes at the hands of the Nguyễn rulers. On 26 November 1641, the *Maria de Medicis* and the *Gulden Buijs* sailing to Batavia from Formosa encountered a storm and were wrecked on the coast of Quinam. Eighty-two survivors (thirty from the *Gulden Buijs* and the rest from the *Medicis*) managed to come ashore with a considerable amount of money and

⁴³ Idem: 167-168.

⁴⁴ A detailed discussion of Couckebacker's arguments on the *Chúa*'s ambivalent delays during these campaigns as well as the current hesitation of Batavia to continue its alliance with Tonkin can be found in Buch, *De Oost-Indische Compagnie*, 74-77; Buch, "La Compagnie" (1936): 168-169.

⁴⁵ MacLeod, *De Oost-Indische Compagnie*, Vol. 2, 319; Buch, "La Compagnie" (1936): 169. The Gianh River in modern Quảng Bình Province served as the borderline between Tonkin and Quinam throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, *Cương mục* II, 260.

merchandise. The rest, including Captain Jacob Jansen, the merchants Guilelmo de Wilt and Jan de Waert, and some Japanese, lost their lives. As soon as the survivors reached the shore, they were captured and held at Hội An. The salvaged goods, including money and eighteen cannon, were confiscated. The *Chúa* later summoned two constables to serve in his palace and released three Chinese merchants amongst the survivors, sending them to Batavia on board a Chinese junk sailing via Palembang to inform the High Government about the foundering of the Company ships.⁴⁶ As the news of the imprisonment of Company servants and the confiscation of salvaged goods reached Batavia, the High Government decided unanimously to attack Quinam to avenge its losses.⁴⁷

Tensions soon spilled over into an open conflict by Jacob van Liesvelt's hostile appearance off the Quinam coast. After his departure from Tonkin, on 6 February Van Liesvelt passed the Bay of Tourane where present-day Đà Nẵng city is situated. There, the Tonkinese ambassador asked Van Liesvelt to capture some Quinamese. Anxious to please the mandarin, the Dutch captain, ignorant of the recent wreck of the Company ships, sent thirty well-armed soldiers ashore to capture several hundreds of Quinamese and then quickly sailed away. At sea, the captives informed Van Liesvelt about the latest shipwrecks and the Dutch prisoners at Hội An. The captain therefore returned to negotiate with the Nguyễn rulers for an exchange of prisoners.⁴⁸

In Quinam, the news of the appearance of the hostile Dutch ship and its raid on the coastal people soon reached the court. A fleet of thirty-five ships commanded by the Crown Prince was ready to defend the coastal area against a Dutch attack.⁴⁹ In response to the Prince's demand for a meeting, Van Liesvelt appointed Isaacq Davids the Company representative to negotiate with the Prince. Both sides agreed to release all captives. Following the agreement, Van Liesvelt freed all Quinamese captives on board, keeping only the Quinamese mandarin and the Japanese interpreter, whom the Prince had sent to negotiate with Van Liesvelt, as security. With a great show of reluctance, the Prince refused to free any Dutch prisoners until Van Liesvelt had released his officials and had also handed over the Tonkinese ambassador to Quinam. High handedly the Prince threatened to execute all Dutch captives if his order was not obeyed within one day. Van Liesvelt strongly protested against the Prince's exorbitant ultimatum and threatened that any such assault would lead to fierce revenge by the Company. During these tense negotiations, the Dutch captives at Hội An secretly informed Van Liesvelt that the Prince was preparing a large fleet of some 300 well-armed vessels to launch a sudden attack on the Dutch ship. After a few days of fruitless negotiation, Van Liesvelt

⁴⁶ *Dagh-register Batavia* 1641-1642, 124-126, 641.

⁴⁷ NA VOC 665, Batavia Resolution, 12 Apr. 1642; MacLeod, *De Oost-Indische Compagnie*, Vol. 2, 319-320; Buch, "La Compagnie" (1936): 174-175.

⁴⁸ *Dagh-register Batavia* 1641-1642, 124-126.

⁴⁹ The Crown Prince was Nguyễn Phúc Tần, *Thực lục* I, 55-56.

decided to leave for Batavia, carrying with him the Quinamese official and the Japanese interpreter.⁵⁰

Both parties blamed each other for the incidents and not unnaturally interpreted them differently. The Nguyễn accused Van Liesvelt of capturing their subjects illegally in peacetime. Regarding the shipwreck of the *Maria de Medicis* and *Gulden Buijs*, directly after the accident, the *Chúa* had sent three Chinese survivors to Batavia to inform the Governor-General of the incident. The rest of these survivors were not imprisoned but guarded by the Japanese chief at Hội An. The *Chúa* wanted to see the official reply from Batavia on this matter before taking any decision. The *Chúa* took pains to stress that the court had the right to take all survivors prisoners and confiscate all salvaged goods from every shipwreck along the coast as was laid down in local law.⁵¹ Even leaving this tradition aside, since the VOC had officially allied itself with his enemy, the Trịnh, he had all the more reason to do so. Eager to please the Nguyễn rulers, the Japanese chief affirmed the genuineness of this statement.⁵²

What had the Nguyễn rulers actually done during these incidents? It is possible to piece together a general picture of these events with the help of sporadic, and sometimes contradictory, documents. The survivors of the *Maria de Medicis* and the *Gulden Buijs* were held captive at Hội An under the surveillance of the chief of the Japanese community. Three Dutchmen were ordered to serve in the *Chúa's* palace and the rest was provided with six bales of rice and 6,000 copper coins. The Dutch prisoners at Hội An lived in constant trepidation after hearing all sorts of rumours. Some said that *Chúa* Nguyễn would sooner or later send them to Batavia, while other rumoured that should the tension escalate and the Company remain steadfast in its alliance with Trịnh Tonkin, the Dutch captives would be executed. Pertinently, the actions of the Nguyễn rulers before Van Liesvelt's raid imply that they had indeed tried to avoid a military confrontation with the Company.⁵³

After Van Liesvelt had left Quinam for Batavia, *Chúa* Nguyễn summoned twelve Dutchmen to his palace. He strongly condemned Van Liesvelt's hostility towards his people at a time at which he and his people had been endeavouring to deal peacefully with the Company in order to eschew tension. After sending three Chinese survivors to Batavia to inform the Governor-General, he had even thought of releasing the rest of the Dutch captives. Now he had to wait for the Governor-General's reply on this matter. Perceiving the *Chúa's* hesitation, the Dutch prisoners asked him to let them carry his letter to the Governor-General in Batavia, where they would try their best to dispel the tension. Their request was granted; fifty Dutchmen were allowed to sail to Batavia

⁵⁰ *Dagh-register Batavia* 1641-1642, 124-126; Buch, "La Compagnie" (1936): 172.

⁵¹ According to the seventeenth-century English traveller William Dampier, the confiscation law was in force not only in Đàng Trong but also in Pegu: Dampier, *Voyages and Discoveries*, 13. See also: Mantiene, "Indochinese Societies", 113-125.

⁵² NA VOC 1141: 135-137, Letter of a Japanese in Quinam to his compatriots in Batavia.

⁵³ Buch, "La Compagnie" (1936): 170-171.

under the command of Joris Welten, the former captain of the *Gulden Buijs*, on 19 March 1643. The rest remained at Hội An until good news should arrive from Batavia.⁵⁴

The good news, for which the Dutch prisoners were longing, never came as the VOC-Quinam relationship was raised to a higher level of tension because of another misfortune. Only two days after she had left Quinam, the junk carrying the fifty Dutchmen was attacked by a Portuguese ship off the Chàm coast. The unarmed Dutch junk was quickly overwhelmed; and most of those on board were killed. Eighteen Dutchmen narrowly escaped by diving into the water.⁵⁵ After the Portuguese had sailed away, the survivors landed on the Chàm coast where four more died of exhaustion. Thirteen survivors were well received and later distributed to the care of several high-ranking mandarins by the Chàm King. The last man, Juriaen de Rooden, was presented to the King of Cambodia, who later freed him and let him go to Batavia.⁵⁶

The Dutch military defeats, 1642-1643

While the antipathy of Batavia towards Quinam was growing day after day, the Nguyễn concessions in these incidents were not perceived correctly. After the shipwreck of the *Maria de Medicis* and the *Gulden Buijs*, the High Government agreed unanimously to ally with Tonkin to take revenge against Nguyễn Quinam.⁵⁷ The goals of the military operations were to liberate the Dutch captives at Hội An, to seek compensation, and, equally important, to save the reputation of the Company which had been badly damaged after the accumulation of misfortunes in Quinam. Consequently, in the summer of 1642, a fleet of five ships carrying 222 men (the *Kievit* carried seventy men, *Meerman* sixty-five, *Wakende Boei* thirty-five, *Zeeuwsche Nachtegaal* thirty-five, and *Brack* seventeen) commanded by Jan van Linga was launched to attack Quinam. The fleet carried orders from Batavia to capture as many Quinamese prisoners as it could on the way to Tourane. There, Van Linga would send the Governor-General's letter to *Chúa* Nguyễn. Another letter would be sent to the Dutch captives at Hội An, ordering them to escape with the assistance of the fleet. Van Linga should try to convince the *Chúa* that, once the Dutch captives were released, the Company would stop its overtures to Tonkin. If the *Chúa* did not free all Dutch prisoners within forty-eight hours, Van Linga would execute half the Quinamese captives and the other half would be sent to Tonkin.⁵⁸

⁵⁴ NA VOC 1140: 295-298, Dutch prisoners in Quinam to Paulus Traudenius, 19 Jul. 1642.

⁵⁵ *Generale Missiven*, II, 190-191.

⁵⁶ NA VOC 1141: 138-140, Declaration of Juriaen de Rooden on the barbarities perpetrated by the Portuguese from Macao on fifty Company sailors.

⁵⁷ NA VOC 665, Batavia Resolution, 12 Apr. 1642.

⁵⁸ Buch, "La Compagnie" (1936): 174-175.

From 31 May 1642 the Dutch fleet began to raid coastal villages in Quinam. The Dutch troops landed at the Bay of Cambir (modern Quảng Ngãi Province), where they burned around 400-500 houses and captured thirty-eight people. In order to swell the number of captives, Van Liesvelt, who was sailing with the fleet, proposed a reckless tactic. Unfortunately this led to a heavy loss of Dutch soldiers. Leaving the fleet behind, Van Liesvelt and some twenty soldiers went to Champullo (Cù Lao Chàm), off the Hội An coast, on a small boat in order to launch a sudden attack and capture local people. The Quinamese, having been warned by the local authority about the Dutch hostility, were very vigilant in their look-out for the arrival of these Dutchmen. They therefore made a surprise attack on the Dutch vessel and immediately killed Van Liesvelt and ten more men. The others were badly injured and died later as a result of their wounds.⁵⁹ Despite this heavy loss, Van Linga did not break off negotiations with the Nguyễn rulers. But after all further attempts to free the last Dutch captives at Hội An failed, the Dutch commander took the fleet to the Gianh River to join the Trịnh armies.⁶⁰

To Van Linga's surprise, there was no Tonkinese army at the Gianh River; *Chúa* Trịnh Tráng had not mounted the campaign as he had informed Batavia he would do. Disappointed in the Trịnh ruler, Van Linga and the Dutch fleet sailed northwards to Tonkin. In his letter to *Chúa* Trịnh, Van Linga exaggerated the Dutch actions off Hội An and expressed his disappointment with the non-appearance of the *Chúa*'s armies. *Chúa* Trịnh Tráng justified himself to Van Linga, stating that he had been there in April to await the Dutch fleet. Because the Dutch did not come when they said they would, he finally withdrew.⁶¹ His intention now was to campaign during the following spring; he exhorted the Dutch fleet to arrive in time to put itself under his command. After having settled the final agreements about the next campaign with the *Chúa*, Van Linga took the fleet to Formosa.⁶²

In its instruction to the fleet, the High Government had anticipated the possibility that the Trịnh armies might not campaign, and hence had instructed Van Linga that, should the Trịnh ruler fail to show up, he should either sail to Tonkin or continue to raid along the coast of Quinam before proceeding to Formosa.⁶³ After the first unsuccessful attempt at co-operative action, Batavia grew suspicious of the ambivalent behaviour of the Trịnh ruler and wary of the somewhat unusual nature of the military alliance proposed by Tonkin. Nevertheless, its losses in Quinam were so heavy that Batavia could arrive at no better a solution than pursuing vengeance. With some perception of the way matters stood, the High Government was aware that even the least concession

⁵⁹ MacLeod, *De Oost-Indische Compagnie*, Vol. 2, 320.

⁶⁰ NA VOC 1140: 347-395, Reports, resolutions, declarations, diaries, and documents of Captain Van Linga during the voyage from Batavia to Quinam.

⁶¹ *Chúa* Trịnh clearly lied to Van Linga because the Vietnamese annals recorded no such campaign in the spring and summer of 1642.

⁶² NA VOC 1140: 347-395, Reports, resolutions, declarations, diaries, and documents of Captain Van Linga during the voyage from Batavia to Quinam.

⁶³ Buch, "La Compagnie" (1936): 175.

to Quinam would irritate the Trịnh rulers, probably severely disrupting its lucrative exportation of Tonkinese silk to Japan.

In his letter to *Chúa* Trịnh Tráng of December 1642, Governor Paulus Traudenius in Formosa expressed his regret that Van Linga's fleet had not met the armies of Tonkin at the Gianh River to mount an attack on Quinam. The Governor also confirmed that, as the *Chúa* had demanded, a fleet of five ships would be in Tonkin in the coming spring to join the campaign.⁶⁴ As planned, a fleet of five ships (the *Kievit*, *Wakende Boei*, *Zeeuwsche Nachtegaal*, *Wijdenes*, and *Zandevoort*) and 290 soldiers (130 infantry and 160 mariners) under the command of Johannes Lamotius left Formosa for Tonkin in January 1643. According to Traudenius's instruction to Lamotius, the fleet was to garrison near the islands of the Fishers at the estuary of the Thái Bình River. There, Lamotius should fire his guns to inform the people of Tonkin of the arrival of the Dutch fleet. Detailed instruction for the campaign would be given by Antonio van Brouckhorst, the chief of the Tonkin factory. If the *Chúa*'s armies were again not ready to attack Quinam, Lamotius should wait for a maximum of ten days and then set sail for Batavia before the north-east monsoon ended.⁶⁵

To the disappointment of Lamotius, the *Chúa* was again not ready for the campaign. After a few days lying at anchor in the Gulf of Tonkin, Lamotius decided to sail the fleet to Batavia. This displeased *Chúa* Trịnh Tráng who insisted that these ships remain in Tonkin in order that their companies would march to Quinam with him. Lamotius refused to wait as Governor Traudenius had instructed him to sail to Batavia should the armies of Tonkin not be ready. Having failed to persuade Lamotius to wait for his troops, *Chúa* Trịnh demanded that the *Wakende Boei* and fifty gunners be left behind in order to depart to the Gianh River with him in the summer. Lamotius agreed. At the end of February, the remaining four ships left Tonkin for Batavia. Within a few days, the *Zeeuwsche Nachtegaal* and the *Kievit* were forced to return to Tonkin because the monsoon had changed. The return of these ships delighted the *Chúa* but worried the High Government because Batavia feared another shipwreck. Lamotius was severely reprimanded for his irresponsible command as well as his ill-judged agreement with the *Chúa* to leave the *Wakende Boei* behind.⁶⁶

Despite two failed campaigns, Batavia was still prepared to send another fleet to ally with the Trịnh to attack Quinam in the summer of 1643.⁶⁷ In its letter to *Chúa* Trịnh Tráng in the spring of 1643, Batavia confirmed that the Dutch fleet would appear at the Gianh River in the summer and await his armies. This letter was brought to Thăng Long by President Jan van Elseracq on his way to Japan. The Governor-General's letter

⁶⁴ NA VOC 1146: 722-723, Paulus Traudenius to *Chúa* Trịnh Tráng, 15 Dec. 1642.

⁶⁵ NA VOC 1146: 720-721, Instruction for Lamotius, 12 Jan. 1643.

⁶⁶ NA VOC 1145: 99-103, Antonio van Brouckhorst to the Governor-General, 1 Oct. 1643; Buch, "La Compagnie" (1936): 181.

⁶⁷ NA VOC 1145: 146-149, Resolution of Johan van Elseracq off the coast of Tonkin and Japan, May, Jun., Sep. 1645; Buch, "La Compagnie" (1936): 182.

reinforced by Elseracq's visit certainly encouraged the Trịnh ruler to dispatch his troops to the Gianh River. Therefore, in the third lunar month (around April) of 1643, *Chúa* Trịnh commanded 10,000 soldiers and a large warship fleet to set out to attack Quinam.⁶⁸ While waiting for the arrival of the Dutch fleet to pursue the campaign at sea, Tonkinese infantry tried to capture some forts but to no avail. According to *Chúa* Trịnh's letter to Governor-General Van Diemen, his soldiers secretly strewed caltrops to trap the Nguyễn armies on the battlefield. This tactic proved abortive because the southern soldiers discovered what had been done and hence did not venture onto the battlefield. The Tonkinese army was already depleted as a large number of Tonkinese soldiers had died in attempts to conquer several forts. Because many of his soldiers were dying every day, falling victim to the hot summer climate and because no Dutch fleet show up as Batavia had promised, the *Chúa* eventually withdrew his troops in August 1643.⁶⁹

In the meantime, because of the non-arrival of the *Kievit*, *Wakende Boei* and *Zeeuwsche Nachtegaal*, Batavia had to select other ships for the campaign. These were the *Wijdenes*, *Waterhond*, and *Vos*, carrying 200 soldiers under the command of Pieter Baeck but the ships could not leave Jambi for the Gianh River until the end of June. Commander Pieter Baeck was instructed that should *Chúa* Trịnh Tráng be disparaging about this small fleet, he should justify himself by explaining that the High Government really had planned to send a larger fleet to ally with Tonkin, but the absence of the three afore-mentioned ships had upset the scheme. The Governor-General believed that the fleet, although consisting of only three ships, would still be effective in the campaign if the *Kievit* and *Zeeuwsche Nachtegaal*, which Batavia supposed had had to return to Tonkin because of contrary wind, would join up with the *Wakende Boei* to sail with the *Chúa*'s armies to the Gianh River. The High Government also carefully instructed Baeck how to negotiate with the Nguyễn rulers should they propose the Company a ceasefire.⁷⁰

On 7 July, the fleet was just around five miles from the Gianh River when they were engaged in a fierce battle with some sixty warships of the Nguyễn navy. The *Wijdenes* caught fire and exploded, killing Commander Pieter Baeck and most of the people on board. Those who managed to jump from the ship were captured and executed by the Nguyễn soldiers. The other two ships were heavily damaged; Captain Jan Erntsen of the *Waterhond* also died during the fight.⁷¹ Shocked by this fierce battle, the *Waterhond* and the *Vos* managed to escape. Not daring to call at the Gianh River to look for the Trịnh armies who were garrisoned so near the battle that they could even hear the gunfire, the

⁶⁸ On the 1643 campaign of Tonkin: *Cương mục* II, 253; *Toàn thư* III, 237; NA VOC 1149: 683-685, *Chúa* Trịnh Tráng to Governor-General Antonio van Diemen, 1643.

⁶⁹ NA VOC 1149: 683-685, *Chúa* Trịnh Tráng to Governor-General Van Diemen, 1643.

⁷⁰ NA VOC 666, Batavia Resolution, 11 May 1643.

⁷¹ *Thực lục* I, 55-56; C.C. Van der Plas, *Tonkin 1644/45, Journaal van de Reis van Anthonio van Brouckhorst* (Amsterdam: Koninklijk Instituut voor de Tropen te Amsterdam, 1955), 18-25.

Waterhond and the *Vos* fled to the Gulf of Tonkin. On July 19, these ships accidentally encountered the *Meerman*, a Company ship *en route* to Japan from Tonkin with a large cargo of silk.⁷² Hearing of the new defeat, Antonio van Brouckhorst immediately sent a message to the Dutch factors in Thăng Long to instruct them how to deal with the Trịnh rulers, especially with the *Chúa* when he returned from the battlefield. Afterwards the *Meerman* sailed to Japan. At the end of July, the *Waterhond* and the *Vos* also left Tonkin for Formosa. The Prince had tried in vain to detain the Dutch ships until the *Chúa* returned so that they could justify their failure to ally with his father's armies at the border.⁷³

The Dutch officials in the Northern Quarters (Japan, Formosa, and Tonkin) believed that the defeat of Pieter Baeck's fleet would arouse strong opposition to the Company trade in Thăng Long and plant the seeds of doubt about Dutch naval power in the Trịnh minds. The dilemma which the Dutch officials in the Northern Quarters were facing was how to confess their defeat to the Trịnh rulers without harming the reputation of the Company. In his letter to *Chúa* Trịnh Tráng in October 1643, President Van Elseracq of the Nagasaki factory exaggerated the "victory" of the *Vos* and the *Waterhond*, simultaneously stretching the heavy loss of the Nguyễn navy up to at least seven warships and around eight hundred soldiers. And, in order to assuage the *Chúa's* discontent with the Company, Elseracq admitted that the non-appearance of the fleet at the Gianh River was blameworthy. Those who had made such a terrible mistake would be severely punished by the "King of Holland".⁷⁴

In fact, the Dutch factory in Thăng Long suffered much less obstruction than the Dutch officials had generally presumed; there followed no maltreatment of the Dutch factors. The business transactions of the factory were maintained peacefully perhaps because of the *Chúa's* expectation that the military alliance with the VOC would be continued. Shortly after his arrival in the capital, *Chúa* Trịnh summoned to his palace Merchant Isaacq Gobijn, whom the Prince had kept as hostage after Van Brouckhorst's departure for Japan in July. The *Chúa* wanted to hear the complete story about the incident from the Dutch representative. After a peaceful discourse, Gobijn was allowed to sail to Formosa with the *Kievit* and the *Wakende Boei*.⁷⁵

After Gobijn's departure, *Chúa* Trịnh sent a long letter to the Governor-General. He informed the "*Hollantschen Prins*" ["Prince of Holland"] about the failure of the co-operation and described the unsuccessful campaigns of his soldiers in their assaults on some well-built forts in Quinam. The *Chúa* blamed the failure on the Dutch side:

⁷² NA VOC 1145: 99-103, Van Brouckhorst to Governor-General Van Diemen, 1 Oct. 1643.

⁷³ NA VOC 1144: 694-714, Diary kept by Junior Merchant Isaacq Gobijn, 13 Jul.-30 Oct. 1643; Van der Plas, *Tonkin 1644/45*, 18-25.

⁷⁴ NA VOC 1148: 138-139, President Johan van Elseracq to *Chúa* Trịnh Tráng, 30 Oct. 1643; MacLeod, *De Oost-Indische Compagnie*, Vol. 2, 322.

⁷⁵ NA VOC 1144: 694-714, Diary kept by Junior Merchant Gobijn, 13 Jul.-30 Oct. 1643.

I had expected that you would assist me with ships and soldiers but none arrived. I provisioned the three ships which remained in my country so that they could accompany me on my march to Poutsin adequately and respected the soldiers on board because they were mighty fighters. But they did not help me and were wanting in courage to fight against the enemy. When I ordered them to do battle with and destroy the Quinamese armies, they simply excused themselves and sailed their ships back and forth on the deep sea, so far from the coast. Therefore the people of Quinam all laughed at your soldiers.⁷⁶

After having reminded the Governor-General one more time of the “true story”: that those cowardly Dutch gunners had been “laughed” at by the Nguyễn soldiers, the *Chúa* provoked him:

So, please come here with your ships and 5,000 men to fight against Quinam until the final victory has been achieved. But you should send brave soldiers, not merchants, because even if you send twenty ships to the coast of Quinam, they could not do the Quinamese any harm because they are far from the sea. Therefore you should send well-trained soldiers to fight on land.⁷⁷

Despite or perhaps because of the *Chúa*’s letter, Batavia ended its military alliance with Tonkin. The short-lived coalition only resulted in three unsuccessful campaigns because of the following reasons. Most certainly, Batavia had underestimated the strength of the Nguyễn army. In its instructions to the fleets destined for Quinam, Batavia often gave the commanders guidelines about how to negotiate with the Nguyễn rulers should the latter surrender or propose a ceasefire with the Company. It is rather ironical that, even after the 1642 defeat in which Van Liesvelt and some twenty soldiers died, Batavia still clung to its arrogant belief in its superiority when it again advised Pieter Baeck how to bargain with the Nguyễn, should the latter propose the Company a truce. Moreover, and as a consequence of the serious underestimation of Batavia, the Dutch commanders and soldiers were overconfident and hence too impulsive when they set about attacking Quinam. Van Liesvelt and his companions died as a result of their reckless tactics. In the summer of 1643, the fleet of Pieter Baeck simply swaggered past the shore of Quinam without taking any precautions. Therefore, when some sixty Nguyễn warships suddenly surrounded and attacked the Dutch fleet, the *Wijdenes* caught fire and exploded immediately. The *Waterhond* and the *Vos* had only eight and six cannon respectively on board; the rest were reportedly lying dismantled in the hold.⁷⁸

Finally, the ambivalence allied with the hesitation of the Trịnh rulers during these allied campaigns was another critical cause which led to the final failure of the alliance.

⁷⁶ Excerpted from NA VOC 1149: 683-685, *Chúa* Trịnh Tráng to Governor-General Van Diemen, 1643.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Van der Plas, *Tonkin 1644/45*, 18-25

Hamstrung by the consecutive failures of the Trịnh armies to appear in the summer of 1642 and spring of 1643, the two Dutch fleets were sent there to no purpose. The Dutch gunners who had travelled to Nhật Lệ with the Trịnh armies in the summer of 1643 described the *Chúa* as being so faint-hearted that he dared not attack the enemy who were very close to his garrison. When the Dutch soldiers urged him to fight, he refused, giving as his justification that he did not want to put the Dutch gunners in danger. What the *Chúa* was expecting was a powerful Dutch fleet from Batavia. Therefore, when no fleet arrived as he expected, he withdrew his forces, leaving the *Wakende Boei* and *Kievit* stranded in the shallow estuary vulnerable to the threat of the Nguyễn armies.⁷⁹

4. *The Quinam interlude and frigid relations with Tonkin, 1644-1651*

The VOC's unilateral war with Quinam, 1644-1651

The defeats of the Company by Quinam, not counting the heavy losses incurred prior to this war, aroused more hatred against the Nguyễn. The High Government in Batavia unanimously agreed to continue the prosecution of military revenge on Quinam. But now distrusting the Trịnh rulers, Batavia decided to act on its own. The unilateral war waged against Quinam had three aims. The primary motive was that Batavia wanted revenge on Quinam for its heavy defeats in 1642 and 1643 and felt it necessary to save the Company's reputation which had been recently blackened. Batavia was also anxious to liberate the rest of the Dutch captives who were still held prison in central Vietnam. Finally, if possible, the High Government was desirous of seeking compensation for all the losses the Company had suffered at the hands of the Nguyễn rulers.

In 1644, Hendrik Dircsz. van den Graeff (or Platvoet), in command of the *Lillo* and the *Haring* carrying 115 soldiers, blockaded the coast of Quinam. The fleet was under orders to raid all ships trading with Quinam and capture as many inhabitants as it could. Having sailed from Batavia in June, Platvoet's fleet met the *Kievit*, *Leeuwrik*, *Dolfijn*, and *Wakende Boei* returning from Phnompenh one month later. In Cambodia, a fierce battle between these Dutch ships and the Cambodian armies had broken out in which Captain Hendrik Harouze had been killed and the Dutch fleet had suffered severe damage. After the unexpected meeting, Sijmon Jacobsz. Domkes, the interim Commander of the fleet returning from Phnompenh, and Platvoet went to visit the King of Champa, who had been maintaining good relations with the Company and had even adopted Pieter van Regemortes, the former chief factor of the Cambodia factory, as his son.⁸⁰ Afterwards, Domkes joined Platvoet to launch an attack on Quinam. From 24

⁷⁹ Buch, "La Compagnie" (1936): 184.

⁸⁰ Buch, "La Compagnie" (1937): 221.

July, a fleet of four ships consisting of the *Kievit*, *Leeuwrik*, *Lillo*, and *Haring* began to cruise along and raid the coast of Quinam. Apart from the sporadic forays, this united fleet could not find any considerable target because the littoral of Quinam was quiet. Whether it was safe was another matter and a landing was neither safe nor had instructions for it been issued. Therefore, after a few days of patrolling the coast of Quinam without achieving anything, the fleet sailed to Formosa.⁸¹ After this 1644 fiasco, Batavia launched no official attack on the Nguyễn territory any more. Despite this apparent withdrawal, the VOC-Quinam relationship remained hostile. The Company ships sailing through Nguyễn waters were instructed to capture any ship whatsoever trading with Quinam.

In the years leading to the 1651 peace agreement, there were several attempts by both sides to exchange captives. By the end of 1643, there were nineteen Dutch prisoners at Hội An. One year later, this number had been reduced to fourteen: five had died of disease. For its part, the VOC held seventeen Quinamese captives in Formosa; the number of them at the other places is unknown.⁸² Despite their imprisonment, the Dutch prisoners at Hội An managed to send several letters to their masters in Formosa, Siam, and Batavia, requesting them to arrange an exchange of captives.⁸³ These letters may have contained indirect signals from the Nguyễn rulers to the Company, calling for a dialogue and for an end to the harmful hostilities. This did not elicit any positive reply from the Dutch side, although several letters were sent to the Dutch captives at Hội An by the Dutch officials.⁸⁴ In 1644, the crisis could have been defused with the active assistance of the French priest Alexandre de Rhodes. Having received permission from *Chúa* Nguyễn Phúc Lan, the French priest, who was then preaching in central Vietnam, proposed to act as a mediator in a reciprocal exchange of captives. He urged the Dutch captives at Hội An to write a letter to their Governor-General on 26 June 1644 requesting him to arrange the exchange.⁸⁵ Meanwhile the Quinamese captives in Formosa also sent a similar letter to Governor François Caron, petitioning that one of them be allowed to return to Quinam to appeal their *Chúa* for a complete exchange of captives, while the rest remained in Formosa as hostages until all Dutch prisoners at Hội An had been freed.⁸⁶ The Dutch officials turned a deaf ear to these petitions, and this matter was ignored until the early 1650s.

⁸¹ Buch, *De Oost-Indische Compagnie*, 100-103; L.C.D. Van Dijk, *Neerlands vroegste betrekkingen met Borneo, den Solo Archipel, Cambodja, Siam en Cochinchina* (Amsterdam: J.H. Scheltema, 1862), 328-329.

⁸² *Dagh-register Batavia* 1643-1644, 25; Buch, "La Compagnie" (1936): 190.

⁸³ NA VOC 1140: 295-298, Dutch prisoners in Quinam to Paulus Traudenius, 19 Jul. 1642; NA VOC 1164: 469-470, Dutch prisoners in Quinam to President Overtwater, 13 Jul. 1647. NA VOC 1170: 477-480, President Overtwater to the Dutch prisoners in Quinam, 1648.

⁸⁴ NA VOC 1164: 465, President Overtwater to the Dutch prisoners in Quinam, 30 Mar. 1647; NA VOC 1170: 477-480, President Overtwater to the Dutch prisoners in Quinam, 1648.

⁸⁵ NA VOC 1148: 522-523, Dutch prisoners in Quinam to Governor-General Van Diemen, 26 Jul. 1644.

⁸⁶ NA VOC 1149: 634, Quinamese prisoners to Governor François Caron, 20 Nov. 1644.

Was this because the High Government still believed that it could solve the crisis by force? Or was Batavia afraid that the Company's reputation might be disgraced by proposing a ceasefire? These questions still remain unanswerable. Nevertheless, several events relevant to the Company trade in the Indo-Chinese Peninsula may provide clues about what influenced Batavia's attitude towards Quinam. The tension between the VOC and Cambodia is the first to spring to mind. In the wake of the escalating tension with the Cambodian court, in September 1643 chief factor of the Dutch factory, Pieter van Regemortes, and most of the Dutch merchants in the capital Phnompenh were murdered and imprisoned; the factory was looted. To avenge this assault, a fleet of five ships commanded by Admiral Harouze sailed up the Mekong River to attack Phnompenh in 1644. This mission failed miserably; the Admiral was killed during the battle. The following year, the King of Cambodia stepped up to challenge the Company by sending it an impertinent letter.⁸⁷ It was just at this juncture that the relationship between Batavia and Tonkin entered a difficult phase after the Company's withdrawal from the military alliance. Despite the erosion of the court-factory relationship, the Company's export of Tonkinese silk to Japan yielded high profits. As the "Quinam issue" remained sensitive, Batavia obviously avoided dealing with this matter in order to protect its vulnerable commercial relations with the Trịnh domain. Finally, the exchange of captives was no longer an important issue for Batavia because, after a successful gaol-break of six Dutchmen in 1645, there were only eight Dutch captives left in Hội An. By 1650, only three men were reportedly still alive.⁸⁸ These were perhaps the major reasons which reduced the interest of Batavia in negotiating with Quinam as it was careful not to tread on toes and thereby avoided irritating the Trịnh rulers in Thăng Long.

The peace agreement with Quinam, 1651

In 1648, *Chúa* Nguyễn Phúc Tần was enthroned. The political transformation in Quinam paved the way for a new dialogue with Batavia. Shortly after succeeding to power, the new *Chúa* stated that he was willing to release the remaining Dutch captives and sign a truce with the Company to end the current hostility between the two parties provided that Batavia showed its willingness to negotiate.⁸⁹ The Nguyễn ruler's proclamation was cordially welcomed in Batavia. In fact, by the late 1640s, the Gentlemen XVII had been urging the High Government to look for an appropriate

⁸⁷ H.P.N. Muller, *De Oost-Indische Compagnie in Cambodja en Laos* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1917), 348, 352, 355; MacLeod, *De Oost-Indische Compagnie*, Vol. 2, 317; Buch, "La Compagnie" (1937): 219-220; Carool Kernsten, *Strange Events in the Kingdoms of Cambodia and Laos* (Chiangmai: White Lotus Press, 2003), 1-17, 47-49.

⁸⁸ *Generale Missiven* II, 391

⁸⁹ *Chúa* Nguyễn Phúc Tần (1648-1687) succeeded his father *Chúa* Nguyễn Phúc Lan (1635-1648) on the throne.

occasion to end the tenacious and harmful confrontation with Quinam. This order was indeed mentioned again in their letter to Batavia in 1650.⁹⁰

In early 1650, the Nguyễn rulers stepped up the process of normalizing the relationship with the VOC when a high-ranking mandarin from the Nguyễn court stated in his letter to Bingam, the chief of the Chinese community in Batavia, that the Nguyễn rulers were now ready to release all Dutch captives and sign a peace agreement with the Dutch Company. In January 1651, Batavia freed some Quinamese captives as a gesture towards commencing the process of normalization with the Nguyễn kingdom. In April of the same year, Batavia concluded the “Quinam issue” when it assigned Willem Verstegen, the former chief factor of the Dutch factory in Japan, as the Company representative in the negotiations with Quinam. In June, Batavia sent a letter to the Dutch captives at Hội An, asking them to inform *Chúa* Nguyễn of the final decision of Batavia. Simultaneously, another letter was dispatched to the Quinamese mandarin via Bingam, informing him of Batavia’s plan to send an ambassador to Quinam at the end of the year.⁹¹

The commission to Quinam was successful. Leaving Batavia in April 1651, Verstegen arrived in Tonkin in July, where he visited *Chúa* Trịnh Tráng with a view towards enhancing the mutual relationship, and where he inspected the Tonkin factory.⁹² In the summer of 1651, Verstegen sailed for Formosa, from where he departed for Quinam in November. Off the Quinam coast, Merchant Hendrick Baron was sent ashore to inform the local authorities about the arrival of the Dutch commissioner. The Dutch delegates were cordially received. When Baron returned to the ship, ten mandarins accompanied him to inform Verstegen that *Chúa* Nguyễn was awaiting his arrival; coastal inhabitants had been ordered to welcome any Dutch ship arriving in their country warmly. After this short and pleasant prelude, Baron travelled to the *Chúa*’s palace. A few days later, Baron returned with a local mandarin, who had been entrusted by *Chúa* Nguyễn to discuss preparations for a peace treaty with Verstegen. The preliminaries for the treaty ran smoothly. Verstegen also returned thirty-three Quinamese prisoners and handed the Governor-General’s presents to the *Chúa*. On 27 November 1651, Verstegen went to the court and was entertained in style by the Nguyễn rulers. The *Chúa* also returned the last three Dutch prisoners, granted the Company free trade in his country, and allowed Verstegen to seek out a plot of land on which to build a factory at Hội An. On 8 December 1651, the ten-article treaty was completed and signed.⁹³ In the days thereafter, the chief of the Japanese community

⁹⁰ Van Dijk, *Neerlands vroegste betrekkingen*, 119; *Plakaatboek*, Vol. 2, 143.

⁹¹ Buch, “La Compagnie” (1936): 193-194.

⁹² NA VOC 1182: 71-126, Verstegen on his mission to the Northern Quarters: Tonkin, Formosa, and Quinam, 20 Jan. 1652.

⁹³ NA VOC 1187: 506-508, Agreements and relations between the VOC and the King of Quinam, 9 Dec. 1651. For a translation of this treaty into modern Dutch and English: Buch, *De Oost-Indische Compagnie*, 112-113; Anthony Reid, “The End of Dutch Relations with the Nguyen State, 1651-2”, in Li Tana and Reid (eds), *Southern Vietnam under the Nguyễn*, 33-37.

assisted Verstegen in buying a house at Hội An in which to re-establish the Company factory. Having successfully concluded his mission, Verstegen departed for Batavia. The newly-established factory was managed by the Chief Factor Hendrick Baron and several Company servants.⁹⁴

The 1651 treaty ended a decade of unremitting crisis between the VOC and Quinam, but the pleasant interlude was short-lived. Right after Verstegen's departure, the newly revived relationship was torn apart. Upon hearing the rumour that Verstegen had had some Tonkinese ambassadors on board his ship, the *Chúa* immediately ordered his officials to inspect the Dutch vessel. By the time the inspectors arrived at the harbour, Verstegen had already sailed away. The Japanese chief in charge of checking foreign vessels insisted that he had inspected the ship carefully and he had found no such people. Despite the Japanese chief's assurance, *Chúa Nguyễn* still kept Baron and four Dutch factors imprisoned and was even toying with the idea of executing them. It was said that the *Chúa* changed his mind and reprieved the Dutch prisoners only minutes before the planned execution. In January 1652, the Dutch factors and their property were shipped to Batavia on a Chinese junk. *Chúa Nguyễn* sent an equivocal letter to the Governor-General, stating that, despite all the negative developments after Verstegen's departure, he still felt bound to the newly signed treaty and hence expected Batavia to continue to send ships to trade with his country. In Batavia, the incident was interpreted negatively: the High Government considered the *Chúa's* maltreatment of its servants a "devious play" to insult the Company. Pushing aside the newly renewed relationship, Batavia again declared war on Quinam.⁹⁵

Frigid relations with the Trịnh, 1644-1647

The negotiations for a military alliance between Tonkin and the VOC which had lasted five years (1637-1641) ended quickly after three unsuccessful allied campaigns. After the disastrous summer of 1643, the Tonkin-VOC military alliance was automatically terminated. No further co-operation was openly discussed although *Chúa Trịnh* kept asking for support in the form of weapons and ammunition from the Company. In his letter to Governor-General Van Diemen in 1643, *Chúa Trịnh Tráng* asked the High Government to provide him with ships, weapons and, above all, 5,000 infantry men to fight on land in the next campaign.⁹⁶ The *Chúa's* extravagant demands could not be answered in time because his letter was carried to Formosa and the translated version

⁹⁴ A full description of Verstegen's mission in 1651 to Tonkin, Formosa, and Quinam can be found in his log: NA VOC 1182: 71-126, Verstegen on his mission to the Northern Quarters: Tonkin, Formosa, and Quinam, 20 Jan. 1652. See also: Buch, "La Compagnie" (1936): 194-196.

⁹⁵ NA VOC 1188: 623-633, Hendrick Baron on the institutions in Quinam, 2 Feb. 1652; NA VOC 1188: 634-648, Diary of the Chief Merchant Hendrick Baron in Quinam, 15 Dec. 1651-2 Feb. 1652; Reid, "The End of Dutch Relations", 35-37.

⁹⁶ NA VOC 1149: 683-685, *Chúa Trịnh Tráng* to Governor-General Van Diemen, 1643.

did not arrive in Batavia until 1645.⁹⁷ The silence of Batavia annoyed the *Chúa*. According to the Dutch factors in Thăng Long, perhaps to prove to the Company that Tonkin could prosecute the war with its own means, *Chúa* Trịnh sent a large force of thirty-one galleys, 15,000 soldiers, and a large number of elephants, horses, and other equipments to attack Quinam in May 1644. Another army of 30,000 soldiers under his command was held in readiness in the capital to assist the frontier troops if needed.⁹⁸

Notwithstanding its unilateral war against Quinam and the Trịnh insistence that the alliance be upheld, Batavia still decided to end the military co-operation with Tonkin. After all the misfortunes, Batavia now realized that a final victory over Quinam was an illusion. It also recognized the correctness of the predictions of Hartsinck and Couckebacker on the nature of the alliance which *Chúa* Trịnh Tráng wanted to create with the Company. In 1643, Hartsinck insisted to the Gentlemen XVII in Amsterdam that the Company should never trust the Trịnh promises. Therefore, it did not make any sense to ally with Tonkin.⁹⁹ The following year, *Chúa* Trịnh Tráng openly stated that the Company had played a too minor role in the military alliance and, taken as a whole, it was rather Tonkin which had assisted the Company during the conflict with Quinam than the other way around. When this haughty statement reached Batavia, the High Government concluded that the Trịnh rulers had accepted the fact that the military alliance between the Company and Tonkin had officially ended.¹⁰⁰

The end of the intimate stage marked the commencement of a period of a frigid relationship between the VOC and Tonkin. On his arrival in Tonkin in December 1643, Van Brouckhorst soon sensed the distant attitude of the local mandarins. The eunuchs of the *Chúa* demanded 50,000 taels of silver for their master in exchange for raw silk at a price of 15 *faccaar*, while the market price was currently 35 *faccaar*. After numerous repudiations, Van Brouckhorst offered 12,500 taels, giving as his excuse that the factory had been supplied with only 20,000 taels this year. The *Chúa* accepted this small amount in the end but warned Van Brouckhorst that the amount of 25,000 taels was now fixed for the arrival of every ship.¹⁰¹ On his return to Tonkin in December 1644, Van Brouckhorst was stopped at the estuary: the *Chúa* had decreed that if the Dutch were unable to advance him the fixed amount of 25,000 taels of silver for the silk delivery, in order to avoid unnecessary quarrels they should not enter Tonkin. Van Brouckhorst had to acquiesce in the demand in order to secure the relationship.¹⁰² It was also agreed that

⁹⁷ *Dagh-register Batavia* 1644-1645, 108-122.

⁹⁸ *Dagh-register Batavia* 1644-1645, 111. However, the Vietnamese annals mention no such military campaign by Tonkin against Quinam in 1644.

⁹⁹ NA VOC 1141: 359-374, Carel Hartsinck on some points related to the present trade with Japan, China, and Tonkin and some suggestions on Quinam [...], 26 Aug. 1643.

¹⁰⁰ NA VOC 1156: 147-148, Antonio van Brouckhorst to Batavia, 26 Jan. 1644; *Dagh-register Batavia* 1643-1644, 141-143.

¹⁰¹ NA VOC 1156: 147-148, Van Brouckhorst to Batavia, 26 Jan. 1644; Buch, "La Compagnie" (1936): 187.

¹⁰² NA VOC 1156: 223-228, Van Brouckhorst to Batavia, 24 Oct. 1645.

from that year onwards, the annual amount of silver the Dutch factory had to advance to *Chúa Trịnh* would be 25,000 taels. The excuse that the Company had been supplied with only a small amount of silver from Japan would no longer be tolerated. Disputes over the silver advance were still not played out as the *Chúa* sometimes demanded extra silver in the event that more Dutch vessels should arrive in Tonkin. Such an instance speedily presented itself, in June 1645, the *Gulden Gans* was sent to Tonkin to assist the *Zwarte Beer* to convey the silk cargo to Japan. *Chúa Trịnh Tráng* asked the Dutch factory for a surcharge of 12,000 taels for the arrival of the *Gulden Gans*. The Dutch factors rejected the *Chúa's* demand and explained to him that the ship had been sent to Tonkin to replace the *Zwarte Beer*, which was not seaworthy enough to sail between Tonkin and Japan. Therefore it carried neither silver nor merchandise but only the Governor-General's presents to him. The *Chúa* later withdrew his demand but his discontent with the Dutch factory clearly increased.¹⁰³

The cool relationship was further exacerbated by the misbehaviour of the Company servants. In January 1645, a scuffle occurred between two drunken Company servants and a group of local people. One factor was killed in the fight. A dozen of the *Chúa's* servants were badly injured. The fight landed the factory in a sea of trouble. The *Chúa* insisted on having the second Dutch rowdy executed and fined the Dutch factory 1,000 taels to compensate for the loss of his servants. The Dutch factory delayed handing the second Dutch rabble-rouser over to the court and liberally bribed the chief mandarins in charge of investigating the scuffle. During the New Year festival, Van Brouckhorst also offered the courtiers lavish presents. The trouble was finally resolved by conciliatory Dutch actions. The bribes, however, cost the factory an excessive amount of money.¹⁰⁴ In January 1646, this kind of trouble erupted again. The Junior Merchants Heycoop and Harten were seriously assaulted by some Chinese belonging to the merchant fleet of the Chinese mandarin Iquan (Zheng Zhilong). Merchant Jan van Riebeeck appealed to the court, demanding the Chinese villains be punished and compensation for the Dutch factors. The Dutch petitions were entirely ignored. It was said that the *Trịnh* rulers did not dare to deal with Chinese merchants trading under the auspice of Iquan.¹⁰⁵

After the quarrels had been settled, the instability of the local politics threatened the safety of the Dutch factory and greatly hindered its trade. In April 1645, *Trịnh Tạc* was raised to the status of Crown Prince and *Chúa Trịnh Tráng* offered him the absolute control over the state army. When the *Chúa* fell gravely ill in May, other princes rebelled to overthrow the Crown Prince.¹⁰⁶ The struggle quickly turned the capital *Thăng Long* into a bloody battlefield where, according to some sources, around 4,000 people were killed. During the insurrection, the Dutch Company servants hid

¹⁰³ *Generale Missiven* II, 300

¹⁰⁴ NA VOC 1156: 223-228, Van Brouckhorst to Batavia, 24 Oct. 1645; *Dagh-register Batavia* 1644-1645, 108-122.

¹⁰⁵ NA VOC 1161: 705-746, Tonkin factory records, 29 Nov. 1645-31 Jul. 1646.

¹⁰⁶ *Cương mục* II, 256; *Toàn thư* III, 238-239

themselves fearfully inside the factory. Although the rebellion was eventually extinguished, the local trade was badly affected. Trade in the capital had completely stagnated and its resumption took months to revive.¹⁰⁷

Observing the *Chúa*'s discontent with the Company, local mandarins, especially the *capados* (eunuchs) openly obstructed the Dutch factory trade. They tried in whatever way they could contrive to squeeze silver out of the factory by delivering low quality silk at high prices. In 1650, for instance, besides the 25,000 taels advanced to the *Chúa* and the 10,000 to the Crown Prince, the Dutch factory had to provide 10,000 taels more for five chief *capados*: 7,000 to Ongiatule; 1,000 to Ongiavun; 1,000 to Ongsjadert; and 1,000 each to Ontjenudgween and Tun.¹⁰⁸ The delivery price of silk varied from person to person according to their position at court and their relationship with the Company. It is certain that payment received from the *capados* was often more liberal than that from the royal family but still much worse than that which the free merchants were offering. Despite the concessions the factory made on the silver advance, the relationship of the factory with the *capados* was not always peaceful. In 1647, for instance, dissatisfied with the Dutch factory, some *capados* spread the rumour that the court had forbidden the local people to trade with the Dutch factors. The factory trade consequently stagnated as local sellers, fearful of trouble, stopped dealing with the Dutch. The Dutch factors appealed to the court and won: the *Chúa* approved the free trade of the factory.¹⁰⁹ In the same year the *capados* presented *Chúa* Trịnh with a plan to monopolize the silk supply to the Dutch factory. According to their proposal, the Dutch procurement of silk and other sorts of local products should be confined to some specially appointed merchants at fixed prices. The factory lodged a strong protest about this plan and put a serious complaint to the High Government in Batavia saying that the *capados* had obviously learnt about the Japanese *itowappu* system and now wanted to apply it in their own country.¹¹⁰ Had the *Chúa* approved this proposal, the Company's Tonkin trade would no longer have been feasible. Determined to prevent the *Chúa* from approving the *capados*' plan, Van Brouckhorst went to the court to offer the *Chúa* 5,000 taels and requested that the Dutch free trade be renewed. His petition was granted. The *capados* refused to relinquish their idea to persuade the *Chúa* to approve their monopoly plan in the following years.¹¹¹

While all this manoeuvring was going on, the Chinese competition in purchasing local silk had become more heated from the mid-1640s. Besides the great quantity of Chinese silk exported to Japan directly from mainland China, Chinese merchants now also increased their export volume of Tonkinese silk to the Japanese market. Some Japanese officials in Nagasaki also had shares in Chinese junks sailing between Tonkin

¹⁰⁷ *Toàn thư* III, 238-239; *Generale Missiven* II, 281; Buch, "La Compagnie" (1937): 122

¹⁰⁸ *Generale Missiven* II, 527-528

¹⁰⁹ Buch, "La Compagnie" (1937): 127

¹¹⁰ On the *itowappu* system, see note 35 in Chapter Two.

¹¹¹ *Generale Missiven* II, 308

and Nagasaki and they offered Chinese merchants large capitals to run the Tonkin-Japan silk trade. In 1646 and 1647, the Chinese arrived in Tonkin with 80,000 and 120,000 taels respectively. By offering local sellers twenty taels more per picul of raw silk, the Chinese quickly procured large cargoes and left for Japan.¹¹²

The relationship deteriorates, 1647-1651

Carel Hartsinck (1637-1641) and Antonio van Brouckhorst (1641-1647) were both capable and experienced directors. During their terms of office, the factory established and maintained a good relationship with the court despite the *Chúa's* displeasure with the Company after the termination of the military alliance in 1643. After the retirement of Van Brouckhorst in 1647, however, the relations of the factory with the court deteriorated.

Perceiving the importance of the personality of the director in managing the Tonkin trade, in the mid-1640s, Van Brouckhorst began to train Jan van Riebeeck to be his successor. The chief was convinced that Van Riebeeck was ideally suited to the position on account of his knowledge of the local language and his civil behaviour towards the local people. When Van Brouckhorst sailed to Japan in the autumn and winter of 1646, Van Riebeeck managed the factory skilfully in his absence. In order to circumvent the *capados'* hindrance in buying silk, Van Riebeeck went to silk-producers in the evening when his presence would not be greatly remarked upon, to advance money and buy silk.¹¹³ Instead of applauding his initiative, the High Government was irritated by his private trade. In the summer of 1647, Van Riebeeck was summoned to Batavia to justify his private undertaking. Philip Schillemans became the third director of the Dutch factory in Tonkin (1647-1650).¹¹⁴

The new director proved incapable of managing the trade of the factory. During his term, the Dutch political and commercial position in Tonkin markedly deteriorated. The *Chúa* and the Crown Prince refused to pay the full sum which often occasioned the factory grievous losses. The size of the annual cargoes of silk which the Tonkin factory sent to Japan shrank and was less stable. In the spring of 1649, the factory was demolished and moved to another site because the Prince wanted the ground on which it stood to build a shooting range. This removal cost the factory an excessive amount of money.¹¹⁵

¹¹² *Generale Missiven* II, 325-326; NA VOC 1166: 669-684, Jan van Riebeeck to the Gentlemen XVII concerning the Tonkin trade, 1648.

¹¹³ Buch, "La Compagnie" (1937): 124.

¹¹⁴ NA VOC 1169: 395-397, Instruction for Senior Merchant Philip Schillemans as *opperhoofd* to Tonkin, 29 Nov. 1647.

¹¹⁵ *Generale Missiven* II, 389.

As the *Chúa* grew more hostile towards the Company, local mandarins imposed draconian measures on the Dutch factors. Having failed to monopolize the silk supply to the Dutch factory, some *capados* tried to hinder the Dutch free trade. They sent servants to prowl around the Dutch residence and thrashed local people coming to trade with the Dutch factory. When the Dutch complained about the damages they had suffered, the *Chúa* gave a cool reply: “*Ick en heb uw niet in mijn landt geroepen*”.¹¹⁶

In 1650, the factory again suffered a series of losses and setbacks. On Whit-Monday, the crews of the *Maasland* and the *Beer* went ashore to enjoy the festivities. Upon return, they were assaulted by Chinese merchants sailing upstream. Both sides were embroiled in a noisy scuffle in which a boatswain of the Company was killed and four more sailors were badly injured. The *Chúa* strongly condemned the misbehaviour of the Dutch in his country and fined the factory 50 rials for its rowdiness. The Dutch lodged a protest against the unreasonable fine, but to no avail.¹¹⁷

During this conflict, another problem arose as a result of a false accusation made by the great eunuch Ongiatule.¹¹⁸ This *capado* had a large share in a junk owned by the Japanese free merchant Resimon. Because of the late arrival of the junk, he accused the Dutch Company of having attacked and destroyed the vessel at sea. Upon hearing this accusation, the *Chúa* threatened to behead all the Dutch factors if the allegation was proved true. Although it soon transpired that the claim was false, the factory business transactions ground to a complete standstill because the local people, sensing the tension, dared not trade with the Dutch factors. Caught in a cleft stick, the factory had to advance most of its silver to the court to be exchanged for the delivery of 355 piculs of raw silk.¹¹⁹ Worse still, the Japan-bound ship ran into a heavy storm at sea which soaked most of the merchandise on board. Consequently, the profit margins of the cargo for this year varied between only 35 and 40 per cent.¹²⁰

Discouraged by all troubles the factory had encountered during the past few years, beginning in 1649, Philip Schillemans frequently requested the High Government to be allowed to resign. To justify his resignation, the chief asserted the Tonkin factory was currently facing three major difficulties: i) the confrontations with local rulers, especially with the Trịnh court, ii) the limitation on buying capacity which meant that part of the investment capital was unspent, and iii) the large-scale private trade arranged by factors of the Northern Quarter. Besides his request to resign, Schillemans also recommended Merchant Willem Bijlvelt to succeed him in his post. The chief complimented Bijlvelt on his intelligence and dexterity in handling affairs.¹²¹ In

¹¹⁶ “I did not summon you to my country”, *Generale Missiven* II, 389.

¹¹⁷ NA VOC 1175: 448-494, Tonkin factory records, 25 Feb.-4 Sep. 1650; *Generale Missiven* II, 450-452.

¹¹⁸ On Ongiatule, see note 10 in Chapter Four.

¹¹⁹ NA VOC 1175: 448-494, Tonkin factory records, 25 Feb.-4 Sep. 1650; Buch, “La Compagnie” (1937): 129-130.

¹²⁰ *Generale Missiven* II, 422.

¹²¹ Buch, “La Compagnie” (1937): 130-132.

Batavia, the High Government was greatly displeased with Schillemans' reports and severely reprimanded him for his lacklustre management. Junior Merchant Jan de Groot was appointed the fourth director of the Tonkin factory. In order improve the management there, Batavia decided to send De Groot first to Japan, where Van Brouckhorst, the former director of the Tonkin factory, could advise him how to manage the Tonkin trade. Afterwards, De Groot would sail to Tonkin to succeed Schillemans.¹²²

While the accumulated difficulties of the factory were as yet not solved, Schillemans died in June 1650. Jacob Keijser succeeded him and managed the business smoothly in this interim period, despite stiff competition from foreign merchants. That year three junks from Japan and another three from Batavia brought a large amount of capital to Tonkin which was exchanged for 820 piculs of raw silk and a considerable quantity of silk piece-goods.¹²³

In the summer, the court issued a placard proclaiming that, within a short time, all foreigners would be moved to a new place outside the capital. Under the court's new arrangement, the Dutch factory would be removed to the area governed by the eunuch Ongiatule. The Dutch factors were anxious because the move would undoubtedly cast upon the Company an unbearable expense because of having to rebuild residences and storehouses. An even worse prospect was that should the factory be moved to the area governed by Ongiatule, its import and export trade would sooner or later be manipulated by this powerful *capado*. Before his departure to Japan, Keijser petitioned the *Chúa* to allow the factory to remain in Thăng Long in order to avoid incurring excessive building costs. After his petition had been rejected, the Dutch chief appealed to the *Chúa*, asking him to delay the move until he had returned to Tonkin from Japan. *Chúa* Trịnh Tráng and Crown Prince Trịnh Tạc "encouraged" the chief to leave and not to worry about the factory. The *Chúa* ordered Keijser to buy ten cannon for him and two more iron pieces for the Crown Prince. In July, Keijser departed for Japan. The management of the factory was entrusted to Hendrick Baron assisted by eight assistants and gunners.¹²⁴

Understanding the importance of satisfying the *Chúa* and the Crown Prince in their demand for goods, the Tonkin factors urged the High Government to do its utmost to provide the goods ordered by the Trịnh rulers. The Zeelandia Castle was entrusted with arranging such commodities for ships leaving for Tonkin. In March 1651, the new director, Jan de Groot, arrived in the capital Thăng Long. His reception was not very cordial as the *Chúa* was disappointed with the objects which the Company offered him and complained that the Dutch had been bringing less merchandise and fewer rarities to

¹²² NA VOC 672, Batavia Resolution, 14 Jun. 1650; Buch, "La Compagnie" (1937): 130-131.

¹²³ NA VOC 1175: 448-494, Tonkin factory records, 25 Feb.-4 Sep. 1650; *Generale Missiven* II, 450.

¹²⁴ NA VOC 1175: 446-447, Instruction to the First Assistant residing in Tonkin, 27 Jul. 1650; NA VOC 1184: 20-22, Merchant Jacob Keijser to First Assistant Hendrick Baron, 27 Jul. 1650; *Generale Missiven* II, 450-451.

his country. As the *Chúa* showed even less good will towards them, the Dutch factors suffered more difficulties in their efforts to buy and sell goods. In 1651, despite their constant petitions, the Dutch were still not allowed to maintain their factory inside the capital. Observing the *Chúa*'s hesitation, the *capado* Ongiatule, assisted by the Japanese merchant Resimon and supported by the Crown Prince, continued to importune the Trịnh ruler to move the Dutch factory to an area under his authority.¹²⁵

Reporting to Batavia in 1651, Chief De Groot explained that unless the factory remained in the capital, the Tonkin trade would no longer be profitable for the Company. Excessive expenses would be incurred for building a new factory. This would be compounded by the handicap that the appointed area was quite far from the centre of the capital so that there would be fewer merchants coming to trade with the factory, especially during the rainy season. Worst of all, once the factory was under the mandarin Ongiatule's authority, the Company would have to sell foreign merchandise to and buy local goods from him. At long last, his persistent attempts to monopolize the Company trade would be crowned with success.

Another concern to which De Groot referred in his report was the political instability in Tonkin. *Chúa* Trịnh Tráng was now seventy-four years old and physically enfeebled. It was widely rumoured that, upon the *Chúa*'s death, the capital would likely be embroiled in a fierce rebellion. The Dutch factors worried that in any such insurrection the factory would be looted. Even if the factory were to survive such a pillaging, the risk of losing the advance money which the factors had already handed over for the silk delivery was still high. Not a single penny from the annual advance of around 60,000 taels of silver could be guaranteed to be received back, even after peace would have been restored. Taking these risks into consideration, De Groot suggested that the Company should suspend its Tonkin trade for a few years.¹²⁶

Despite the chief's cautions, the High Government resolved to maintain its Tonkin trade. Batavia expected that although the *Chúa* was elderly, he would still live for many years to come. Upon his death, the Crown Prince would succeed to the throne peacefully because the *Chúa*'s brother, the most dangerous threat to the succession of the Crown Prince, had been poisoned the year before.¹²⁷ The High Government therefore urged its factors to improve the relationship with the Trịnh rulers in order to facilitate the Company trade. To assist its servants to overcome all present difficulties, especially to maintain the factory in the capital and to shore up the eroding relationship with the Trịnh court, in the summer of 1651, Batavia decided to send an extraordinary ambassador to Tonkin.¹²⁸

¹²⁵ Buch, "La Compagnie" (1937): 132.

¹²⁶ *Generale Missiven* II, 527-528.

¹²⁷ None of the Vietnamese annals recorded this event.

¹²⁸ *Generale Missiven* II, 528-529.