



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 FOUR

VICISSITUDES, DECLINE AND THE FINAL END

1. *Revival of the relationship, 1651-1660*

Verstegen's commission to Tonkin, 1651

As mentioned in Chapter Three, by the early 1650s, constrained by the Gentlemen XVII's insistence on ending the harmful conflict with Quinam, the High Government in Batavia decided to sign a peace treaty with the Nguyễn rulers. Batavia assigned Willem Verstegen, the former chief factor of the Nagasaki factory, the Company representative to negotiate with the Nguyễn government. Before visiting Quinam during the winter, Verstegen would sail first to Tonkin as the Company's extraordinary ambassador with a fourfold mission: to assist the factors to obtain permission from the *Chúa* to retain the factory in the capital; to negotiate with the *Chúa* to obtain more trading privileges for the Company so that the factors would be able to commence their transactions straight after the Company ships had arrived and dispatch their ships as soon as they had finished business; to sign a contract with the Crown Prince to buy all the raw silk and silk piece-goods should the Trịnh ruler repudiate the previous points; and to inspect the factory, because the Gentlemen XVII had been complaining about the rumour then widely circulating that private trade in the Northern Quarters (Tonkin, Japan, and Formosa) had been flourishing on a very large scale.¹

Leaving Batavia in April, Verstegen arrived in Tonkin in July 1651. His sudden visit helped him to discover an extensive private trade rampant among most of the Tonkin factors. On board the *Kampen* and the *Witte Valk* anchored at Doméa, the inspector found and confiscated large amounts of private goods loaded for Japan. Inside the factory, factors audaciously stored their private goods alongside the Company's commodities. The bookkeeping at the factory was neither accurate nor updated; some entries of De Groot's private goods were even mistakenly entered in the Company records. Taking good note of De Groot's deplorable mismanagement, Verstegen dismissed him and sent him to Formosa to be prosecuted by the legal branch there.

¹ *Generale Missiven II*, 485; Buch, "La Compagnie" (1936): 194-196.

Jacob Keijser, who was also accused of indulging in private trade but on a minor scale, was appointed interim director of the factory.²

The Dutch ambassador and entourage were royally entertained at court. The *Chúa* delightedly accepted the Governor-General's letter and presents to him, as did the Crown Prince and the highly influential mandarin Ongiatule. Pleased with the appearance of the Dutch ambassador as well as the Governor-General's apparent partiality towards his country, *Chúa* Trịnh Tráng acquiesced in most of Batavia's requests. He allowed the Dutch to retain their factory in the capital itself and promised to facilitate their transactions. He also bestowed a high-ranking mandarin title on Verstegen which was engraved on a gold plate. Both the *Chúa* and the Crown Prince made plans to send their ambassadors to Batavia in the winter to congratulate Governor-General Carel Reniers on his taking office and to consolidate the mutual relationship with the Company.³

Upon his return, Verstegen wrote a long, detailed report on his inspection of the Tonkin factory. The commissioner assessed that prospects for the Tonkin trade were more optimistic and promising than had been reported by the factors and the trade itself was still profitable, despite the hindrances and obstructions it had to suffer. He therefore disagreed with De Groot's earlier suggestion to suspend the Tonkin trade. The report was also highly critical of De Groot's management. His own observation had shown him that De Groot, as his predecessor Schillemans, was not respected by the local people. At the meeting with the *Chúa*, a mandarin had even severely castigated De Groot for his insolence and accused the chief of selling the Governor-General's presents to the *Chúa* to local people. Verstegen therefore advised the High Government to send only skilfully diplomatic and highly responsible chiefs to Tonkin. In order to curb the private trade between Tonkin and Japan, Verstegen suggested that from then on the chief should no longer travel to Japan but remain in Thăng Long to direct the factory trade during the off season.⁴

The relationship between the factory and the court was remarkably improved after Verstegen's visit. The chief was often invited to the royal festivities and to attend audiences, while the factors had more liberty to trade. When the *Delfshaven* departed for Batavia in November 1651, the *Chúa* sent his ambassador and fifteen mandarins, and the Crown Prince sent his own ambassador and another ten officials to revitalize the relationship with Batavia and to congratulate Governor-General Carel Reniers (1650-1653) on his appointment to office. *Chúa* Trịnh Tráng informed the High Government that he had adopted the Governor-General as his son and granted him the title *Theuwv Baeuw Quun Congh* (Thiếu Bảo Quận Công: 少保郡公) being, in the *Chúa*'s words,

² NA VOC 1184: 62-68, Commissioner Verstegen to Merchant Jacob Keijser as the *opperhoofd* of the Tonkin factory, 11 Jul. 1651.

³ *Generale Missiven* II, 530-532.

⁴ NA VOC 1182: 71-126, Verstegen on his mission to the Northern Quarters: Tonkin, Formosa, and Quinam, 20 Jan. 1652; *Generale Missiven* II, 530-532.

“the highest rank in the mandarin system of Tonkin”.⁵ The title was engraved upon a gold plate weighing 20 taels. The Crown Prince also presented the Governor-General, now his “brother”, a mandarin’s cap and three princely parasols as “a proof of his eternal love”. The Tonkinese delegates were entertained cordially. In June 1652, they returned home on board a Company ship leaving for Tonkin.⁶

A short-lived permanent factory, 1651

Shortly after Verstegen’s visit, Batavia promoted the Tonkin factory to a permanent rank in order to enable its factors to reside there with a substantial capital with which to trade during the off season. It is possible this decision was taken on the basis of at least two deliberations. First, the improvement in the relationship between the High Government and the Lê/Trịnh court after Verstegen’s mission meant that the factory would enjoy a favourable position in the years to come. Second, the annual cargoes of Tonkinese silk exported to Japan had yielded high profits in the past few years. By leaving more factors residing in Thăng Long, Batavia hoped to increase the purchasing capacity of the factory and maximize the profit in the Company’s Tonkinese silk trade. Indeed, in the mid-1640s, Antonio van Van Brouckhorst had already urged Batavia to assign at least one or two junior merchants and several gunners to take charge of the factory after the Company ships had departed for Japan.⁷ The rub was that it seemed that most of the Company servants wanted to sail to Japan rather than remain in Thăng Long. Such a decision was reinforced by the fact that *Chúa* Trịnh had sometimes ordered the chief not to leave many factors behind after the Company ships had sailed away.⁸

After such high expectations, the life-span of the Tonkin factory was ephemeral. In the spring of 1652, the High Government decided to withdraw the project. This abrupt annulment was made after due consideration was given to the risk of leaving a large amount of capital in Thăng Long in the hands of a few servants. It was buttressed by the fact it was reported by the Deshima factory that profits on Tonkinese silk had begun to decline in Japan, overtaken by the strong competition of the Chinese, who also actively participated on the Tonkin-Japan shipping route. It was therefore impractical to maintain a permanent factory in Tonkin at this time.⁹

⁵ *Generale Missiven* II, 575.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ E.C. Godée Molsbergen, *De Stichter van Hollands Zuid-Afrika Jan van Riebeeck (1618-1677)* (Amsterdam-S.L. Van Looy, 1912), 32.

⁸ *Generale Missiven* II, 528, 308.

⁹ Buch, “La Compagnie” (1937): 135-136. See Chapter Six for a detailed account on the Company silk trade with Tonkin.

The abolition proved to be the right decision. In these years, the Chinese competition was so fierce the Dutch factors could only commence their transactions after the Chinese had spent their capital on local products and left for Japan. Sadly, the improvement in the mutual relationship with the Trịnh rulers was also transient. A few months after Verstegen's visit, the Crown Prince and his mandarins again squeezed the factory to pay excessive amounts of silver for silk at high prices. If their demand was not met, they would find some way or other to obstruct the factory trade. In 1653, the factory suffered a serious loss after the execution of the chief *capado* Ongiatule. This eunuch still owed the factory 14,499 guilders and the *Chúa*, who had confiscated his fortune, declined to pay the debt.¹⁰ Matters deteriorated when, after succeeding to the throne, Crown Prince Trịnh Tạc informed the factory that from now on he would continue to enjoy 25,000 taels of silver every year as his predecessors had done. He also demanded another 7,000 taels, the amount that the factory had often offered to Ongiatule. Over and above this, the Company had to provide him with four long iron cannon at the cost of 14,000 taels. These would be paid for in silk. The Dutch factors complained that the erstwhile Crown Prince was obviously imitating the Japanese Shogun in dealing with foreign merchants.¹¹ Although the amount was later reduced to 22,000 taels, the High Government was still disgusted with his demand because, as well as 25,000 taels the factory had to offer *Chúa* Trịnh Tráng, almost half of its annual capital went to the Trịnh rulers, who invariably delivered bad quality silk at excessively high prices. Batavia hoped that *Chúa* Trịnh Tráng would soon stop dealing with the factory so that the factors could reduce the amount of silver advanced to local rulers in order to reserve more capital for buying silk on the local market.¹²

The first phase of decline, the 1650s

Despite the competent management of the interim director Jacob Keijser (1651-1653), the Tonkin trade of the Company began to show a decline in these years. In Japan, the profit margin on Tonkinese silk gradually fell, as it failed to match the marketability and profitability of Bengali silk.¹³ There was no let-up in the private trade of the Dutch merchants and Keijser too was accused of conducting illegal trade as well as mismanagement. He also made the mistake of promising the Trịnh rulers to declare in detail all commodities and capital shipped to Tonkin, not a very smart move by a merchant who wanted to negotiate. As well as this concession, the factory would

¹⁰ Ongiatule (Ông già Tư lễ) was the eunuch Hoàng Nhân Dũng who was executed in 1652 for attempting to murder the *Chúa: Toàn thư* III, 242-243; *Cương mục* II, 262; NA VOC 1197: 598-611, The Tonkin Council to Batavia, Nov. 1653; *Generale Missiven* II, 650-651, 654-655.

¹¹ NA VOC 1220: 839-897, Report of Merchant Nicolaes de Vooght, 7 Dec. 1657.

¹² *Generale Missiven* II, 655-656.

¹³ Klein, "De Tonkinees-Japanse zijdehandel"; Om Prakash, *The Dutch East India Company*.

present them with very valuable goods. The High Government heavily reprimanded Keijser for making this agreement, saying that this would be too costly for the Company and troublesome for his successors. In April 1653, the Governor-General dismissed Keijser and recalled him to Batavia to account for his private trade and alleged wrongdoings. Louis Isaacszn Baffart was appointed chief of the Tonkin factory (1653-1656).¹⁴

Baffart succeeded in improving personal relations with some *capados*, thereby facilitating the procurement of local goods for the factory. The *capado* Ongiadee helped Baffart negotiate with the Trĩnh rulers to reduce the amount of silver advanced to them for silk. He also agreed to sell all the Laotian musk he could procure in the area he governed to the factory.¹⁵ Despite these achievements, the Dutch Tonkin trade was facing a long-term decline. From the mid-1650s, Tonkinese silk became less profitable and marketable on the Japanese market. This co-occurred with the deterioration of the local trading situation in Tonkin. A series of natural disasters ravaged the annual production of Tonkinese silk. The 1654 flood ruined most of the mulberry groves, causing a severe shortage of silk on the local market. Worse still, the shortage of copper coins led to a severe loss in purchasing power of silver, the main form of investment capital the Company had set aside for its Tonkin trade. Reporting to Batavia on the loss on the silver/cash exchange in April 1654, the Tonkin factory lamented that the exchange rate per tael of silver had slumped from 1,600-1,700 cash during the last three months to only 800 cash. There was a gloomy prediction that within a short time one tael of silver would likely drop to 700 to 600 to 500 cash only.¹⁶ Because of the silk shortage and the devaluation of silver, the purchase price soared. In 1653, the Dutch factors were already aware that the purchase price of Tonkinese silk had increased by 20 per cent on average. Consequently, out of the cargo worth 300,000 guilders the Tonkin factory dispatched to Japan in 1653, silk occupied only roughly 55 per cent of the total. In 1654, the Tonkin cargo to Japan was valued at 174,531 guilders only; the unspent capital had to be shipped to Formosa. Considering the meagre profit margin which Tonkinese silk yielded in Nagasaki this year, Baffart suggested to the Governor-General that the High Government should suspend the Tonkin factory for a while.¹⁷ Batavia disapproved of this suggestion. Instead, it reduced the investment capital destined for the Tonkin trade in 1655 and ordered the factors to buy no Tonkinese yarn for the Japan market. Therefore, only 25,773 guilders were sent to Thĩng Long to buy silk piece-goods for the Netherlands.¹⁸

¹⁴ *Generale Missiven II*, 697-702; Buch, "La Compagnie" (1937): 138.

¹⁵ NA VOC 1197: 598-611, The Tonkin Council to Batavia, Nov. 1653; *Generale Missiven III*, 69.

¹⁶ NA VOC 1206: 65-90, Louis Isaacszn Baffart from Formosa to Governor-General Joan Maetsuycker, Mar. and Nov. 1654.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*; *Generale Missiven II*, 696, 697-702.

¹⁸ NA VOC 677, Batavia Resolution, 27 Apr. 1655; *Generale Missiven III*, 2.

Mindful of the irregular silk production in Tonkin in recent years, in an attempt to lessen the dependence on the procurement of silk for Japan, Batavia decided to import Tonkinese and Bengali silkworms to produce silk in Batavia. In 1653, the High Government ordered the Tonkin factory to transport local silkworms to Batavia. The first shipment was pretty much of a disaster because most of the silkworms died during the long voyage to Batavia. Those which survived as well as the samples of Tonkinese mulberry flourished in Batavia. The High Government hoped that abundant mulberry groves would produce opulent silk crops.¹⁹ In 1654, Batavia again sent a demand for Tonkinese silkworms. This time the factory failed to fulfil this order because the superstitious Vietnamese farmers, fearing that their silkworms would die should the strangers watch them, wanted neither to show nor sell their silkworms to the Dutch.²⁰

The High Government not only attempted to solve the shortage in the silk supply, but it tried at the same time to reduce the losses of the Tonkin factory on the silver/cash exchange as well. It is important to point out here that although the Vietnamese had been using copper cash for centuries, as a rule Vietnamese feudal dynasties could not mint sufficient coins to meet the demand of the local market. They therefore had to rely partly on the copper coins minted in China. Because of the current political and economic chaos in mainland China, the regular supply of Chinese coins to northern Vietnam had virtually drawn to a standstill, causing a serious shortage of copper coins. The situation was the same in the southern kingdom of Quinam.²¹ In order to cut their losses on the silver import and reduce their dependence upon these coins, the Portuguese had been importing copper coins minted by Chinese in Macao into Tonkin.²² In 1654, Batavia made its first attempt towards solving the copper cash shortage in Tonkin when it had coins minted locally in order to send them to northern Vietnam. It was a good try but the experiment failed because the Trịnh rulers devalued these coins.²³ The shortage of copper coins in Tonkin went on until the following decade. In the early 1660s, however, the Company successfully dealt with the copper cash equation when it began to import Japanese *zeni* (copper cash) into Tonkin in great quantities.²⁴

Despite all the exertions of the High Government, the VOC's Tonkin trade continued to lose ground in the latter half of the 1650s. After a temporary suspension, the Company once again exported Tonkinese silk to Japan in 1656, but the profit

¹⁹ NA VOC 1197: 598-611, The Tonkin Council to Batavia, Nov. 1653; *Generale Missiven II*, 759.

²⁰ NA VOC 1206: 65-90, Louis Isaacszn Baffart from Formosa to Governor-General Joan Maetsuycker, Mar. and Nov. 1654; *Generale Missiven II*, 779.

²¹ On the shortage of copper coins in Quinam: Buch, *De Oost-Indische Compagnie*, 25; Li Tana, *Nguyễn Cochinchina*, 90-93.

²² *Generale Missiven II*, 777-778. On the Vietnamese monetary system: Whitmore, "Vietnam and the Monetary Flow", 363-396. See also Chapter Eight on the usage and production of copper coins in Vietnamese history.

²³ NA VOC 1206: 65-90, Louis Isaacszn Baffart from Formosa to Governor-General Joan Maetsuycker, Mar. and Nov. 1654.

²⁴ See Chapters Five and Eight for more detailed discussions on the shortage of copper cash in Tonkin in the mid-1600s.

margins were so slender that the Company again cancelled the importation of Tonkinese silk to Japan between 1658 and 1660.²⁵ The capital which Batavia destined for its Tonkin trade was consequently reduced.

There were internal causes as well. The unstable political situation in Tonkin also contributed to the decline in the factory trade. In 1655, the other princes prepared an insurrection to supplant the Crown Prince. The rebels threatened to burn down the capital. Had the *Chúa* failed to defuse the insurrection at the very last moment, the city would have been subjected to bloodshed. A great number of the inhabitants of the capital fled to the countryside for fear of a bloody massacre. The panic-stricken Dutch and other foreigners remained in the capital. Although the rebellion was eventually prevented, it took months to restore the commercial rhythm of the city.

Right after this political turmoil, the Tonkinese armies marched south to attack Quinam. The fifth Tonkinese military campaign against Quinam dragged on for almost six years (1655-1660), being the longest and most costly campaign during the half century of war between the two kingdoms. This time, the Nguyễn armies not only stood their ground and successfully defended their fortresses but also overran some parts of the Trịnh's southern province of Nghệ An and occupied this until 1660. Attacks and counter-attacks happened every year during the period 1655-1660, causing heavy losses on both sides. At the end of 1660, the southern armies were forced to withdraw behind the former border, the Gianh River. The Trịnh troops overran the frontline but were unable to achieve a decisive victory and conquer the whole southern kingdom.²⁶ In 1661, the Trịnh armies again attacked Quinam but gained no result.²⁷ The economy of Tonkin was seriously devastated during this protracted campaign harassed by subsequent natural disasters and the voracious demand for soldiers, which led to a shortage of labour. In 1660, the Dutch factors estimated that around one-fifth of the population of Tonkin was forcibly conscripted. Most of them reportedly became impoverished after returning home from the battlefield.²⁸

Trying to come to terms with these military problems prompted the Trịnh rulers to consolidate their relationship with Batavia in order to secure a supply of weapons and ammunition. As reflected in the VOC records, from 1655, the Trịnh rulers regularly sent letters to Governor-General Joan Maetsuyker demanding military equipment. When armament was urgently needed, the Trịnh rulers even confiscated cannon from the Company ships anchored at Doméa. To prepare for the 1656 attack, *Chúa Trịnh Tạc* asked for the nine cannon on board the *Cabo de Jacques* when this ship arrived and

²⁵ Klein, "De Tonkinees-Japanse zijdehandel", 152-177.

²⁶ According to the records of the Dutch factory, the Tonkinese troops flooded the southern kingdom. *Chúa Nguyễn* had to flee to the "southwest mountains near Cambodia" to hide from the Trịnh armies (*Dagh-register Batavia* 1661, 50-51). The Vietnamese annals also recount that the Trịnh armies could defeat the Nguyễn in southern Nghệ An but could not overrun the border.

²⁷ *Cương mục* II, 262-291; *Toàn thư* III, 244-259; Cadière, "Le mur de Đồng-Hới": 87-254.

²⁸ Buch, "La Compagnie" (1937): 143.

went on to “confiscate” seven more pieces when she left Tonkin.²⁹ Despite such importunity, the High Government would not and could not fully satisfy the Trịnh demands. Most certainly, Batavia did not want to change its non-aligned attitude towards the Trịnh-Nguyễn wars and, undeniably, it was itself burdened by its military involvement throughout Asia. In Europe, the Dutch were still at war with the English. Just at this juncture, the Dutch Twelve-Year Truce with the Portuguese was drawing to a close. After a period of relative quiet, an offensive episode in Asia erupted with the commencement of the term of office of Governor-General Joan Maetsuyker (1653-1668).³⁰ In the Indonesian Archipelago, the hostile relationship with various sultans remained unmitigated. In Indo-China, the war with Cambodia had not ended, and a new confrontation with the Nguyễn broke out again shortly after the 1651 peace treaty. Elsewhere in parts of South Asia, such as Ceylon and India, the Company’s military attempts to supplant the Portuguese went temporarily into abeyance, but a prosecution was to take place once the truce ended.³¹

2. Attempts to expand the Tonkin trade, 1660-1670

In fine, it is pity so many conveniences and opportunities to make the kingdom rich and its trade flourishing should be neglected; for if we consider how this kingdom borders on two of the richest provinces in China, it will appear that, with finall difficulty, most commodities of that vast Empire might be drawn hither [...]; nay, would they permit strangers the freedom of this inland trade, it would be vastly advantageous to the kingdom; but the Chova [*Chúa*] [...] has, and will probably in all times to come, impede this important affair.

Samuel Baron (1685)³²

In the early 1660s, political and military tensions challenged Tonkin on both sides. Even as its fifth campaign against Quinam could make no break-through on the southern frontier, Tonkin was increasingly being challenged by the Manchu armies on the northern frontier with China. After gradually beating back the restored Ming forces, the Qing armies approached the China-Tonkin border and demanded the Lê/Trịnh government send tribute to Peking.³³ Being exceedingly preoccupied with the conflict with Quinam, Tonkin could not dispatch its first tribute to Peking until 1663.³⁴ Consequently, the Manchu soldiers attacked Vietnamese merchants trading to southern China and hindered the Chinese in exporting such merchandise as Chinese gold and

²⁹ *Dagh-register Batavia* 1656-1657, 49; 1663, 71 and passim.

³⁰ Gaastra, *The Dutch East India Company*, (Chapter 2).

³¹ Hall, *A History of Southeast Asia*, 312-325.

³² Baron, “Description of Tonqueen”, 664.

³³ *Dagh-register Batavia* 1661, 49-55.

³⁴ *Cương mục* II, 296.

musk to Tonkin. Bowing to this escalating tension, the Tonkin-China border trade stagnated, which greatly impeded the import and export trade of the Dutch factory. Calamity followed calamity and the Company lost Formosa to the Zheng family in 1662. All these negative developments forced the VOC to readjust its strategy towards the Tonkin trade in the first half of the 1660s.

The decline in the Tonkin-China border trade and the loss of Formosa

In the mid-1640s, China became embroiled in a dynastic war between the newly established Qing and the waning Ming, which lasted until the early 1660s. Since the Ming-Qing conflict was largely fought out in the southern provinces of China, it exerted an enormous impact on the politics and economy of Tonkin. At Cao Bằng, the Mạc clan sought the spiritual protection of the Ming dynasty in their efforts to continue their rivalry with the Lê/Trịnh in Thăng Long. The Ming intervention was the deciding factor which prevented the Lê/Trịnh rulers from toppling their Mạc rivals until the late 1670s.³⁵

The long-lasting conflict in southern China also affected the commerce of Tonkin, and as stated, the border trade between the two countries was the chief victim. Despite the Trịnh's restriction on the border crossing, both Vietnamese and Chinese merchants still could exchange their commodities on a quite large scale. For the most part the goods exported to China from Tonkin included South-East Asian spices and European textiles which were imported into Tonkin by the Dutch, Chinese and other foreign merchants. In return, Chinese gold and musk were among the miscellaneous goods which merchants brought to northern Vietnam. From the late 1650s, the Chinese gold exported to Tonkin became one of the most important products on which the VOC set its sights for the Coromandel trade. The reason was that Chinese gold had become scarce in Formosa reflecting the economic stagnation of the China-Formosa trade. The High Government therefore ordered the Tonkin factory to purchase as much Chinese gold as possible for the Coast factories. Chinese musk was bought for the Netherlands.³⁶

Before long, these two items grew scarce in Tonkin as the border trade declined. In 1655, the Tonkin factory reported to Batavia that, although the civil war in China had not caused a complete stagnation in the exportation of Chinese goods over the China-Tonkin border, it had reduced the flow of Chinese gold to northern Vietnam to a remarkable extent.³⁷ The annual volume of the border trade had fallen steadily by the

³⁵ *Lịch triều*, Vol. 4, 147-150, 204. On the Ming-Qing transition: John E. Wills Jr., *Pepper, Guns, and Parleys, The Dutch East India Company and China, 1662-1681* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974), 1-28; Lynn A. Struve (ed.), *Time, Temporality, and Imperial Transition: East Asia from the Ming to Qing* (Honolulu: Association for Asian Studies and University of Hawaii Press, 2005).

³⁶ A detailed account of the export of Chinese gold and musk by the Tonkin factory will be given in Chapter Seven.

³⁷ *Generale Missiven II*, 881.

early 1660s. In 1661, Peking reminded the Lê/Trịnh court that should the latter fail to send tribute to Peking within a short time, the border would be violated.³⁸ Because Thăng Long could not dispatch its first tribute to Peking until the summer of 1663, Chinese soldiers attacked the Vietnamese merchants travelling to the border to buy Chinese gold and musk in 1662, confiscating all their capital and commodities.³⁹ These merchants were later released and ordered to return to Thăng Long to inform the Lê/Trịnh court that tension on the border would not be resolved until their tribute had arrived at Peking. Consequently, the Tonkin-China border trade was temporarily interrupted. The Tonkin factory therefore failed to procure the much wanted Chinese gold and musk.⁴⁰

While the stagnation in the Tonkin-China border trade had not yet improved, the Far Eastern trading network of the VOC was severely affected by the loss of Formosa to the Zheng family in 1662. Indeed, the Dutch Formosa trade had already been in a decline from the mid-1640s because of the fall in the annual export volume of Chinese goods to the island.⁴¹ In 1656, in an attempt to control the export of Chinese goods and to monopolize the lucrative trade between China and Japan, Zheng Chenggong (alias Coxinga), alleging that the Dutch had molested his junks in the South-East Asian waters, imposed an economic embargo on Dutch Formosa, driving the Company's Formosa trade into a complete standstill. In early 1660 there were rumours that the Zheng armies would invade the island sometime in April of the same year. After gathering enough evidence to convince themselves of this eventuality, Governor Fredrik Coyett and the Council of Formosa prepared for an invasion and requested assistance from Batavia. The Governor-General and the Council of the Indies reacted quickly and in late July a fleet of twelve ships arrived in Formosa from Batavia. As the months passed without any invasion from the mainland, the commander and most of the experienced officers in the fleet left Formosa for Batavia in two of the ships despite the vigorous protests of Coyett and the Formosa Council; the rest remained on the island. At the end of April 1661, the Zheng troops invaded the island. After resisting for nine months, the Dutch surrendered. The loss of Formosa was a severe blow to the Company's East Asian trading network.⁴²

³⁸ *Dagh-register Batavia* 1661, 49-55.

³⁹ *Dagh-register Batavia* 1663, 71 and passim. The first Tonkin tribute to Peking was recorded in June 1663: *Cương mục* II, 296. *Toàn thư* (III, 264) however noted that the 1663 Tonkin tribute was to Ming China. This must have been mistakenly recorded.

⁴⁰ NA VOC 1240: 1355-1374, Hendrick Baron to Batavia, 12 Nov. 1662.

⁴¹ NA NFJ 57, 1 Aug. 1644; NA NFJ 61, 15 Sep. 1648; *Generale Missiven* II, 452; Ts'ao Yung-ho, "Taiwan as an Entrepôt": 94-114.

⁴² On the Dutch loss of Formosa to the Zheng in 1662: *Generale Missiven* III, 386-389; Wills, *Pepper, Guns, and Parleys*, 25-28; Leonard Blussé, *Tribuut aan China, Vier eeuwen Nederlands-Chinese betrekkingen* (Amsterdam: Cramwinckel, 1989), 65-72; Tonio Andrade, *Commerce, Culture, and Conflict: Taiwan under European Rule, 1624-1662* (PhD Dissertation, Yale University, 2000), 314-324.

The VOC's "Tinnam strategy", 1661-1664

In its efforts to recover from the heavy loss of Formosa to Zheng Chenggong in 1662, the VOC formed a naval alliance with the newly established Qing dynasty, principally to take revenge on the Zheng clan, but also to obtain trading privileges from the Chinese Court to compensate for the loss of Formosa. Despite sporadic joint naval operations in the years 1662-1664, which effectively reduced Zheng power in Amoy and Quemoy, the final goal of conquering Formosa did not materialize owing to Peking's hesitation. The trading privileges which the Chinese granted the Company in the early years of the mutual relationship were consequently revoked.⁴³

Another way of gaining a niche in the China trade was to attempt to penetrate China from Tonkin. The Company records reveal that besides using the diplomatic channel to Peking, Batavia also instructed its Tonkin factors to cruise along the coastline to explore the seaport system of north-east Tonkin, near the Chinese border, and to look for possibilities to establish a permanent factory there for direct trade with the Chinese. In April 1661, Batavia sent the *Meliskerken* to Tonkin, where she was ordered to obtain a licence from the Trịnh rulers to explore the area called Tinnam in the present north-eastern province of Quảng Ninh.

What was the major aim of this exploration? The answer is directly related to the Company's demand for Chinese gold and musk. Prior to the 1650s, the Zeelandia Castle had regularly been sending Chinese gold, as well as silver imported from Japan, to Coromandel.⁴⁴ The annual volume of this precious metal supplied by the Zeelandia Castle fell sharply from the mid-1650s owing to the competition from the Zheng, especially after the latter decreed a complete embargo on the Formosa trade in 1656. With the loss of Formosa in 1662, the Company's shortage of gold became even more exigent. Batavia therefore turned its attention to the Tonkin factory, urging the Dutch factors in Thăng Long to import Chinese gold for Coromandel, where the latest profit was reportedly 25½ per cent.⁴⁵

As vividly reflected in the records of the Tonkin factory, from the beginning of the Company trade with Tonkin gold had been purchased there sporadically mainly to be re-exported to India. The major part of the gold the Dutch factors procured in Tonkin was, however, not locally produced, although Tonkin had several gold-mines in the north-western region.⁴⁶ Besides these, Tonkin also mined gold in the present-day northern province of Thái Nguyên, and copper and silver in modern Tuyên Quang, Thái Nguyên, Hưng Hoá, and Lạng Sơn. The annual output of these metals, particularly gold,

⁴³ On the vicissitudes of the Sino-Dutch relationship in the 1662-1681 period: Wills, *Pepper, Guns, and Parleys*.

⁴⁴ Raychaudhuri, *Jan Company in Coromandel*, 186-189.

⁴⁵ *Generale Missiven III*, 386-389.

⁴⁶ *Dagh-register Batavia 1661*, 49-55.

was far from substantial, however.⁴⁷ Most of the gold available in northern Vietnam, besides a small part which came from the western kingdom of Laos, originated from the southern Chinese provinces of Yunnan and Guizhou.⁴⁸ This Chinese gold and also the much sought-after musk were transported mainly by Chinese and Vietnamese merchants. As for the gold price, in 1661 it was recorded by the Tonkin factors that the purchase price of the best gold in Gingminfoe, the chief city of Yunnan, reached a maximum of 90 taels, resulting in a profitable gold/silver ratio of 1:9. The Vietnamese merchants who often traded to China also affirmed that the gold price in Tonkin was generally lower than that in Guangzhou.⁴⁹ The High Government therefore wanted to establish a second factory in Tonkin, near the border with China precisely to procure Chinese gold for the Coromandel Coast and, in the long run, to obtain a direct access to mainland China. This was something that the Company had set its sights on ever since its first arrival in Asia.

It was, however, neither safe nor easy to make such exploratory voyages in the northern part of the Gulf of Tonkin in the early 1660s. This area had a reputation of being a dangerous place for trading vessels, made unsafe by the daring raids of the pirate Thun. Because of political chaos in southern China, what were known as “Chinese long-hair pirates” gathered around the north-eastern Tonkin-China border to raid trading vessels sailing between Tonkin and such southern Chinese ports as Macao and Guangzhou. In July 1660, the Prince of Tonkin commanded a large fleet of some seventy well-armed ships to attack the Thun gang. Although a large number of his men were captured, Thun himself managed to escape.⁵⁰ The region was therefore still not completely safe for ships making passage there.

Despite this risk, the Tonkin factory still managed to explore the area called Nova Macao. After obtaining a licence from the Prince to undertake the voyage, Hendrick Baron and his colleagues carried out an exploratory voyage in March 1662. From Doméa, the *Meliskerken* sailed northwards, wove a course among the *Archipel* islands, and finally arrived at Tinnam. On 18 April, Baron left Tinnam to travel overland to the province of Loktjouw from where he continued to travel to Tjoeang, a place in the province of Ay, on horseback. At a meeting with the governor of Loktjouw, he was advised to return to the capital because the ambassadorial road was unsafe. Heeding the

⁴⁷ On mining in Tonkin in the seventeenth-century: *Lịch triều*, Vol. 3, 76-79; Trương Hữu Quỳnh *et al.*, *Lịch sử Việt Nam*, Vol. 1, 370-371; Whitmore, “Vietnam and the Money Flow”, 370-373.

⁴⁸ *Dagh-register Batavia* 1661, 49-55; Baron, “Description of Tonqueen”, 663; Dampier, *Voyages and Discovery*, 49; Van Dam, *Beschryvinge*, Vol. 2-I, 361-365.

⁴⁹ On the export of Laotian gold to Tonkin: Nguyen Thanh Nha, *Tableau Économique du Vietnam*, 160, 170. A general account of the exportation of Chinese gold to Tonkin via the border can be found in *Dagh-register Batavia* 1661, 49-55.

⁵⁰ *Dagh-register Batavia* 1661, 49-55.

advice, Baron decided to return to Loktjouw and then to the capital Thăng Long, where he and his men arrived safely on 3 May 1662.⁵¹

Despite its safe return to Tonkin, the mission was far from successful: no factory was set up mainly because of the chaotic situation on the border and the disapproval of the Tonkin court. Nevertheless, after this voyage of exploration, the Dutch factory continued to observe the area and nourished the hope of making a break-through into mainland China from that border market.

Upon his return, Baron made a meticulous report on the expedition and presented his thoughts on the Tinnam trade. He believed that establishing a permanent factory in that area would in the long run be commercially profitable and strategically important for the Company. He set out a detailed analysis of every place in the area. Ay and Loktjouw were located relatively close to some important provincial cities along the border and would attract local merchants coming to trade with the factory. The drawback was that these places were located relatively far from a waterway, hence, the challenge would be to find ways of reaching them and transporting goods. Tinnam was therefore considered to be the most suitable location. Having a permanent factory there would be ideal for the Company for a number of reasons. Principal among them was that Tinnam was close to Thenlongfoe therefore travelling between the two places would not be inconvenient. This support was bolstered by the fact that local merchants preferred travelling to Tinnam rather than to other places. As nobody disputed, Tinnam had a good harbour; the Company ships could anchor conveniently in front of the factory. They would have no difficulty reaching there as the coastal area and its adjacent islands, including the area lying between Vanning and the mouth of the River Tinnam, had been carefully sounded, and was said to be very navigable. Then there was the fact that Tinnam was not so far from Nanning. Those who travelled between these places said that they normally needed twenty-seven days to complete a trip, either on foot or by boat. Finally and also importantly, if a factory were to be founded at Tinnam, not only would goods pour into this place from the south-western provinces and Nanning, but gold would also arrive from Yunnan in a more substantial quantity than ever before. Musk could also be procured without the competition which complicated this trade in the capital Thăng Long. There, Resimon, enjoying the auspices of the local mandarins, often bought up all the musk before the factory could even enter the market. In 1662, for instance, the Tonkin factory failed to procure any musk because the *capado* Ongia Haen had assisted the said speculator to make a clean sweep of all musk which was carried to the capital Thăng Long from Ay and Loktjouw.⁵²

⁵¹ NA VOC 1236: 829-855, Missive from Hendrick Baron to Batavia, 13 Nov. 1661; *Dagh-register Batavia* 1661, 89-91. Most of the place-names found in the Dutch records remain unidentified because of the odd pronunciation and hence orthography.

⁵² NA VOC 1240: 1355-1374, Hendrick Baron to Batavia, 12 Nov. 1662; *Dagh-register Batavia* 1663, 71 and passim.

The precautions taken by the Trịnh rulers, however, turned the Dutch “Tinnam strategy” into nothing but a distant dream. Highly conscious of the current chaos in southern China, the Trịnh rulers were not happy with the Dutch plan to trade on the north-eastern border, and hence delayed granting them permission to trade at Tinnam. Despite the courtesy shown by Governor-General Joan Maetsuycker in sending several letters to him concerning the Company’s application for the Tinnam trade, the *Chúa* still procrastinated about allowing the Company a licence to commence its trade on the border. In August 1663, *Chúa* Trịnh summoned several Dutch factors to his palace for a discourse on the Tinnam trade.⁵³ After the dialogue, the *Chúa* promised to consider the Dutch petitions, but no official approval was forthcoming. In 1664, the Dutch application to commence trading in Tinnam succumbed to a complete failure. The Dutch factors lamented to their masters in Batavia that the *capados* in charge of conducting the application for the factory were too timorous to intercede with the *Chúa*, and the mandarin Ongdiu had “maliciously” interpreted the Company’s “Tinnam strategy” as “very harmful” to Tonkin. Expressing his opinions on this matter during his audience with the *Chúa*, the mandarin said that the Dutch presence on the border would undoubtedly entail political disorder, hence, threaten the security of the country. The Trịnh’s hesitation to approve the Dutch petition therefore dragged on interminably. Reporting to the High Government in early 1664, the Dutch factors in Thăng Long wrote that, while any chance of the Tinnam trade was extremely doubtful, the only thing that they could endeavour to do at this moment was to attract the attention of Chinese merchants coming to Tonkin. In their letter to Batavia at the end of 1664, the factors sadly confirmed that it was absolutely hopeless to cherish any hope for the eventuation of the Tinnam strategy. The *Chúa* had hinted several times that he would never allow any foreigner to trade at Tinnam.⁵⁴ With the said confirmation, the “Tinnam strategy” of Batavia finally ended.

Tonkin as a permanent factory, 1663

As the Tinnam project soon proved to be a great delusion, the Dutch factors suggested that the High Government should repromote the Tonkin factory to the rank of permanent. They argued that since the Company’s Tonkin trade had been in rapid decline, repromotion would help to improve the situation. The argument was set out in the following points. As the Tinnam plan had been disapproved by the Trịnh rulers, the

⁵³ The *Chúa* wanted to know how far Tinnam and Vanning were from the capital, Thăng Long, and whether his subjects at those places were vulnerable to the Chinese threat. The Dutch answered the first question, saying that those places did not seem to be terribly far, but did not answer the second. *Dagh-register Batavia* 1663, 689-692.

⁵⁴ NA VOC 1241: 356-366, Tonkin factory to Batavia, 6 Nov. 1663; *Dagh-register Batavia* 1663, 689-692; 1664, 202-204, 548-550.

Company should nurture its only factory in Thăng Long. In order to improve the current limitation on purchasing capacity, the factory needed more personnel to conduct the trade, especially to procure Chinese goods which arrived sporadically in Tonkin during the off season. A second hurdle was that the annual production of Tonkinese silk had rapidly decreased in the past few years. Because of the Zheng belligerence in regional waters, various junks sailing between Tonkin and Japan were forced to suspend their voyages. In view of this suspension and because they were doubtful about the buying capacity of the Dutch factory, Tonkinese silk-producers turned part of their mulberry grounds into paddy-fields. The factors therefore hoped that the repromotion of the factory would not only foster the factory's purchasing capacity but also encourage local people to maintain their silk production.⁵⁵

The factors' arguments were simultaneously reinforced by recommendations from the Company's trading partners in Tonkin. In his letter to the Governor-General at the end of 1662, the Tonkinese mandarin Plinlochiu informed Batavia that Tonkinese winter silk had been produced abundantly during the past few years, but there had not been enough customers to buy up those great quantities and the purchase price had also been considerably reduced. If the Company ships arrived in Tonkin only in May and left for Japan shortly afterwards as they had been doing hitherto, how could the factors procure enough silk in such a short time? Plinlochiu therefore advised the Governor-General to keep ships, factors, and a substantial capital sum in Tonkin to purchase winter silk to make the silk cargoes for the Japan-bound ships ready before the summer.⁵⁶ At the same time, Resimon sent a letter to Director-General Carel Hartsinck. According to the Japanese middle man, the annual silk production of Tonkin had been quite unstable in recent years because for safety's sake local silk-makers only began to work after foreign ships had arrived and the merchants had advanced them money. He therefore advised the High Government to hold one ship back in Tonkin to encourage local people to produce silk for the Company. Otherwise, Tonkinese farmers would switch over to planting rice and beans which were the staple provisions of the local inhabitants.⁵⁷

On the basis of these recommendations it was decided on 24 April 1663 to repromote the Tonkin factory to a permanent station for three cogent reasons: to stimulate the Tonkinese to maintain their annual production of silk for which the Company still had a great demand in both the Netherlands and Japan; to help the factors to select raw silk and silk piece-goods more carefully; and to attract more Chinese merchants to come to Tonkin with gold and musk in order to increase the export volume of these products of the Tonkin factory. The Tonkin factory would be staffed with fourteen people residing there permanently to conduct the trade. Besides the increase in

⁵⁵ NA VOC 1240: 1355-1374, Hendrick Baron to Batavia, 12 Nov. 1662; Buch, "La Compagnie" (1937): 160.

⁵⁶ Plinlochiu to Governor-General Joan Maetsuycker, in *Dagh-register Batavia* 1663, 71 and passim.

⁵⁷ Resimon to Director-General Carel Hartsinck, in *Dagh-register Batavia* 1663, 71 and passim.

personnel, annual investment capital would also be increased in order to save a certain amount of money for the winter trading season. It was also agreed that half of the annual capital for the Tonkin trade, which consisted mainly of silver and copper coins, would be supplied by the Deshima factory; the rest would be provided by Batavia.⁵⁸

Continued decline, the 1660s

As the Tinnam strategy did not work out as expected, the decline in the Company's Tonkin trade which had begun in the latter half of the 1650s continued inexorably. During the first three years of the 1660s, the annual export volume of the Tonkin factory stood relatively low largely in view of the meagre profit margins the Tonkinese silk cargoes brought on the Japanese market. Because the Tonkinese silk cargo valued at 185,372 guilders sent to Japan in 1659 produced only a 25 per cent profit,⁵⁹ Batavia informed the Tonkin factory in 1660 that the investment capital for the Tonkin trade that year would be reduced.⁶⁰ Notwithstanding the paucity of the available funding, only 12,038 guilders could be spent on local goods. This depressing export volume was said to be due to the Trịnh's fifth military campaign against Quinam which had absorbed most of the country's labour forces into the army. Likewise, fearful of sudden conscriptions, a large part of the inhabitants of the capital fled to the countryside.⁶¹ The investment capital for the 1662 trading season was sharply increased, totalling 405,686 guilders. Batavia urged its factors in Thăng Long to spend at least 100,000 guilders on gold which was in high demand for the Coromandel trade. The rest should be invested in raw silk and silk piece-goods for both Japan and the Netherlands. The Tonkin factory failed to fulfil these orders. Because the Qing armies had raided merchants trading across the border in retaliation for the Lê/Trịnh's failure to send their first tribute to Peking, there was hardly any Chinese gold or musk on offer on the Tonkin market. The Dutch factors therefore had no choice but to spend only 22,761 guilders on gold. The silk cargo for Japan was also much smaller than expected, valued at only 150,000 guilders. The reason for this limited cargo was that a devastating typhoon and subsequent rains had destroyed most of the mulberry groves in the country. The capital Thăng Long was also flooded. The bulk of the silk stored in the Dutch factory was soaked because of the rain. Nor were these natural calamities the only reason. The local silk industry had been heavily eroded in the past few years because of the impoverishment of the people.⁶²

⁵⁸ NA VOC 678, Batavia Resolution, 24 Apr. 1663; *Dagh-register Batavia* 1663, 338; 1664, 204.

⁵⁹ *Generale Missiven* III, 305, 307.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 346-347.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 377, 378.

⁶² NA VOC 1236: 829-855, Hendrick Baron to Batavia, 13 Nov. 1661; NA VOC 1240: 1355-1374, Hendrick Baron to Batavia, 12 Nov. 1662; *Generale Missiven* III, 450-451.

All this hit just at a time when the economic depression in Tonkin was worsened by the shortage of copper cash which led to a devaluation of silver. The rapid fall of the silver/cash ratio which began in the early 1650s went on into the first half of the 1660s and caused the Company heavy losses. As mentioned previously, in 1654, the High Government had made an unsuccessful attempt to right the cash equation when it had sent copper *zeni* coins minted in Batavia to Tonkin.⁶³ Since then, Batavia had found no appropriate solution to cut the loss of silver imported until 1663, when it began to export Japanese copper *zeni* to Tonkin in great quantities.⁶⁴ In 1660, Resimon blamed the current silver devaluation on the VOC, arguing that the great amounts of silver imported into Tonkin by the Company had caused the rapid fall in the silver/ cash ratio.⁶⁵ This accusation was not ungrounded although it was not the main reason for the distortion of the exchange rate. While the shortage of these copper coins was the major factor in the rapid fall of the silver/cash ratio, the large quantities of Japanese silver annually imported into Tonkin by both the Dutch and by the Chinese also contributed to the depression of the exchange rate. Batavia was by no means bothered with such a harmless indictment. It was more concerned with how to cut the loss of silver imported into Tonkin and reduce the dependence of the Tonkin factory on the local copper coins. As the sum of 400,000 Japanese copper *zeni* sent to Tonkin in 1661 turned out to be profitable, these denomination coins were thereafter regularly imported into Tonkin until the second half of the 1670s.⁶⁶

The “discovery” of the efficacy of importing Japanese copper *zeni* into Tonkin did help to relieve the Company’s dependence on local coins and to reduce the losses on the importation of silver, but it could not revive the steadily declining Company’s Tonkin trade. The repromotion of the Tonkin factory in 1663 did not work out as expected either. During the summer 1663, Tonkin again suffered from heavy rains and high water. Most of the provinces, including the capital Thăng Long, were flooded, which considerably reduced the production of summer silk. Consequently, out of the 373,465 guilders the Company had sent to Tonkin, the factory could spend only 198,974 on silk for the Japan-bound ship. As the Tonkin-China border trade had ground to a complete standstill, the Company’s demands for cargoes for Coromandel and Europe could not be fulfilled either.⁶⁷

The decline of the VOC’s Tonkin trade intensified in these years despite the fact the High Government poured a substantial amount of investment capital into Tonkin. When those large sums of money could not be spent entirely during the trading seasons, this stimulated the factors to embezzle, to misuse money, and to pursue private trade.

⁶³ NA VOC 1206: 65-90, Tonkin factory to Batavia, 18 Nov. 1654.

⁶⁴ On the exportation of Japanese copper coins to Tonkin by the VOC: Shimada, *The Intra-Asian Trade in Japanese Copper*, 95. See also Chapters Five and Eight for detailed analyses on this subject.

⁶⁵ *Generale Missiven III*, 346-347.

⁶⁶ NA VOC 1236: 829-855, Hendrick Baron to Batavia, 13 Nov. 1661; *Generale Missiven III*, 450-451.

⁶⁷ *Dagh-register Batavia* 1663, 689-692.

Despite his skilful management, the Chief, Hendrick Baron, was suspected of indulging in private trade. His successor, the interim Director Hendrick Verdonk, was even recalled to Batavia to justify himself before the Justice Council for the same crime.⁶⁸ Corruption such as this considerably eroded the Tonkin trade in the later years.

In order to foster the Tonkin trade after the 1663 repromotion, Batavia instructed its Tonkin factors to eliminate several stiff competitors, even if they had to resort to dirty tricks. The first target was the free Dutch merchant Bastian Brouwer. This man had bribed some high-ranking *capados* in order to procure their auspices to speculate in goods which seriously harmed the import and export trade of the factory. In 1664, the High Government ordered Brouwer to return to Batavia but he refused to do so.⁶⁹ The second target was the great Chinese merchant Itchien who had been among the most feared competitors of the Tonkin factory for many years. This merchant not only possessed substantial trading capital which he either owned himself or with which he was provided by Japanese officials at Nagasaki, he also had constructed a strong trading network between Tonkin and Japan. His brother resided in Tonkin and acted as an agent in purchasing goods and making the cargoes ready for him. Batavia therefore wanted to obstruct this merchant's trade in order to boost the Company's Tonkin-Japan silk trade. In March 1664, Itchien returned to Tonkin from Japan with a large capital of 200,000 taels. Shortly before his arrival, the factory made great exertions to advance a large part of its money for raw silk and silk piece-goods. The Dutch chief presented the *Chúa* with two iron cannon and submitted a petition, requesting that the court prohibit Itchien from commencing his business until the Dutch factors had finished theirs. The petition was rejected. The *Chúa* said that he wanted foreigners trading freely and equally in his country, hence, he would not favour one above another.⁷⁰

Desperately trying to prevent Itchien from sailing back to Japan, the Dutch factors sent the *Hooglanden* to the entrance of the river and spread the rumour that the crew had been ordered to capture any foreign ship coming to and going out of Tonkin. Frightened by this rumour, two Chinese junks did not dare to depart for Japan in the summer of 1664.⁷¹ The Tonkin factory therefore could assemble a large silk cargo for Japan, valued at 387,135 guilders. Despite all the hard work, this considerable cargo made a profit of scarcely 19 per cent in Nagasaki.⁷² In the following year, Batavia stepped up its project to eliminate the Company competitors in Tonkin when it ordered the Tonkin factors to attack and capture the Chinese junks trading between Tonkin and Cambodia, and to intercept the Siamese vessels sailing between Tonkin and Japan.⁷³ The problem was that this was a double-edged tactic. The Trĩnh rulers were displeased with the Dutch factors'

⁶⁸ *Dagh-register Batavia* 1665, 108.

⁶⁹ NA VOC 679, Batavia Resolution, 14 Jun. 1664; *Generale Missiven* III, 450-451.

⁷⁰ *Dagh-register Batavia*, 1663, 689-690.

⁷¹ NA VOC 1252: 209-248, Hendrick Verdonk to Batavia, 23 Feb. 1665.

⁷² *Dagh-register Batavia* 1664, 506, 581.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 143-144.

aggression and ordered them to cease perpetrating such hostile actions in their country. The Japanese reaction was reportedly even more harmful to the Company, because these junks contained large shares belonging to Japanese officials in Nagasaki. In April 1665, Batavia wrote to the Deshima factory that it had ordered the Tonkin factors to end the blockade of these junks in order to avoid fermenting discontent among the Japanese.⁷⁴

The factory's relationship with the court, apart from the *Chúa*'s displeasure with the factors because of their hostility towards Itchien, passed smoothly during the 1660s. It was their need of weapons and ammunition that inclined the Trĩnh rulers to consolidate the relationship with Batavia. Prior to 1672, when Tonkin campaigned against Quĩnam for the last time, the *Chúa* and the Crown Prince regularly dispatched letters and presents to the Governor-General. In return, they often demanded, besides various miscellaneous items, more martial paraphernalia as ordnance, bullets, ammunition, saltpetre, and sulphur. The court also dealt more reasonably with the factory in terms of payments. In 1666 and 1667, for instance, in order to persuade the High Government to provide him with ordnance for the forthcoming campaigns against both the Mạc in the north and the Nguyễĩn in the south, *Chúa* Trĩnh Tạc willingly paid the factory for saltpetre at prices which were even higher than those on the market.⁷⁵ In Batavia, the High Government also tried to satisfy at least some of the Trĩnh's demands in order to avoid their displeasure which might lead them to impede the VOC trade. Saltpetre and sulphur were often sent to Tonkin in great quantities, but the demands for cannon and ammunition proved more difficult to satisfy. Batavia lamented the current shortage of these commodities, saying that the wars against France and England in Europe had lessened the supply considerably in recent years, while the limited number of weapons the Company currently possessed was desperately needed for the defence of its fortresses throughout Asia. In general the *Chúa* "sympathized" with the Governor-General, but he occasionally reacted irately and rhetorically argued: "I have absolutely no doubt that the Governor-General needs them [pieces of ordnance and cannon balls] for the defence of your fortresses. But you should be aware that I also badly need them to defend mine [...]. I am certain that my demands are not at all beyond your supply capabilities".⁷⁶ In 1671, when he was preparing for the last campaign against the Nguyễĩn, *Chúa* Trĩnh Tạc asked the High Government to provide him not only with weapons, as he had often requested, but also with a skilled constable, who should reside in Tonkin to assist him.⁷⁷ Batavia again apologized for its inability to satisfy the *Chúa*'s demands. The Governor-General expressed his hope that the Company's failure to

⁷⁴ *Dagh-register Batavia* 1665, 89.

⁷⁵ *Chúa* Trĩnh Tạc to Governor-General Joan Maetsuycker, 1666 and 1667, in *Dagh-register Batavia* 1666-1667, 221-222, 400.

⁷⁶ *Idem*, 1667, in *Dagh-register Batavia* 1666-1667, 400-401.

⁷⁷ *Idem*, 1671, in *Dagh-register Batavia* 1672, 9-10.

satisfy the *Chúa*'s demands would not affect their mutual friendship.⁷⁸ The *Chúa* again replied that he entirely "sympathized" with the difficult situation in which the Company found itself and promised to continue his support for the Company servants in his country.⁷⁹

3. Towards the final end, 1670-1700

The eventful 1670s

The 1670s witnessed several remarkable transformations in Tonkin which, in the long run, reversed the Trịnh's attitude towards the foreign trade of the country in general and their relationship with the VOC in particular. In 1672, the last campaign mounted by Tonkin against Quinam ended without achieving any breakthrough. Exhausted by the costly and protracted conflict both sides resolved to put an end to the rivalry.⁸⁰ Tonkin now turned its efforts towards pacifying the Mạc clan. After the Nan Ming dynasty was finally defeated and the Zheng family fled to Formosa in the early 1660s, the Mạc were isolated and weakened. Therefore, in 1677, the Tonkin armies easily vanquished their Mạc rivals and completely pacified Cao Bằng Province. Some members of the Mạc family fled to southern China but were later captured by the Qing armies and extradited to Tonkin in 1683.⁸¹ Gradually peace was restored in northern Vietnam after almost two centuries of civil war. The cessation of military activities by Tonkin by the early 1680s saw a remarkable reduction in its demands for weapons and martial paraphernalia from the Company.

On paper, there seemed to be no obstruction to the revival of the economy after peace prevailed in the country. Ironically though, the situation declined in a totally opposite direction. The country suffered a series of regularly recurring crop failures during the last quarter of the seventeenth century. The decline in the agriculture-based economy of Tonkin dragged on and intensified during the first half of the eighteenth century which led to subsequent peasant rebellions and social disorder.⁸² This grave situation was not helped by several reforms introduced by the court that compromised the efficiency of the administrative system. After the end of the conflict with the

⁷⁸ Idem, 1672, in *Dagh-register Batavia* 1672, 193-197.

⁷⁹ Idem, 1668 and 1673, in *Dagh-register Batavia* 1668-1669, 239; 1673, 72-73.

⁸⁰ *Toàn thư* III, 288-290; *Thực lục* I, 84-88; *Cương mục* II, 329-330.

⁸¹ *Cương mục* II, 340, 349-350.

⁸² According to Vietnamese historiography, out of the twenty-four-year period between 1675 and 1698, there were eight years in which Tonkin experienced severe natural disasters such as drought, flood, heavy hail, and dike-breaks which all led to large-scale famines (*Cương mục* II, 335-378; Trương Hữu Quýnh *et al.*, *Lịch sử Việt Nam*, 394-398). This period was therefore as miserable as the years 1561-1610, when fourteen years out of sixty saw agricultural failures. Lieberman, *Strange Parallels*, 396-397.

Nguyễn and the complete pacification of their Mạc rivals, there was a remarkable transfer of power from military officials to the literati.⁸³ The orthodox Confucian ideology revived, a school of thought which scorned trade, foreign trade in particular. These negative developments discouraged foreign merchants. Under the combined yoke of the depression of the economy and the court's harsh measures against them, a large part of the local Chinese population began to leave Tonkin in the late 1680s, followed by the English and the Dutch in 1697 and 1700 respectively.⁸⁴

The VOC's Tonkin trade was severely affected by those transformations. Because of the current low profits of its Tonkin trade, the High Government resolved to take measures. In the summer of 1670, the *Hoogcappel* was wrecked at sea while *en route* to Japan from Tonkin. Seizing this accident as an opportunity, Batavia decided to close the Tonkin-Japan direct shipping route in an attempt to cut the excessive charge of maintaining this trade as well as ending the large-scale private trade arranged for their own benefit by factors.⁸⁵ From 1671, all cargoes prepared by the Tonkin factory were ordered to be shipped to Batavia, from where they would be distributed to different destinations. This reform of the Tonkin-Japan silk trade marked a milestone in the history of the VOC commerce with Tonkin. The meagre profit margin yielded by the Tonkinese silk cargoes in Japan continued to decrease after 1671. In 1678, for instance, the Deshima factory reported to Batavia that Tonkinese raw silk and silk piece-goods had made a profit respectively of only 16 and 14 per cent, hardly enough to cover the transport costs. Discouraged by the report, Batavia decided to reduce the export volume of Tonkinese silk to Japan, conceding its failure to revive the regular export volume of Tonkinese silk to Japan throughout the 1660s. In 1679, the High Government informed the Tonkin factory that, as the Tonkin trade continued to slump, it had been forced to reduce both the annual amount of investment capital for the factory as well as the number of factors residing in Thăng Long in a move to cut unnecessary expenses.⁸⁶

The 1671 reform could not prevent the further decline of the Tonkin trade. While the sale of Tonkinese raw silk stagnated in Japan, this yarn was unmarketable in Europe because of its low quality. The Company's import and export trade with Tonkin was therefore reduced to a minimal volume. Worse still, the stagnation of the Tonkin-China border trade dragged on, preventing the transportation of such import goods as South-East Asian pepper and European textiles from northern Vietnam to southern China. It also obstructed the flow of such Chinese goods as gold and musk into Tonkin.⁸⁷ Consequently, from this time the Tonkin factory often made a deficit as its daily

⁸³ Keith W. Taylor, "The Literati Revival in Seventeenth-Century Vietnam", *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 1 (1987): 1-23.

⁸⁴ See Chapter Two for a general account of the presence, activity, and departure of foreign merchants in seventeenth-century Tonkin.

⁸⁵ *Generale Missiven III*, 741.

⁸⁶ NA VOC 694, Batavia Resolution, 10 Jun. 1679.

⁸⁷ NA VOC 1294: 522-537, Albert Brevinck and the Tonkin Council to Batavia, 1673.

expenses exceeded its yields. In 1678, for instance, the factory spent 24,049 guilders while it profited only 3,016 guilders, suffering a deficit of 21,036 guilders. This situation never again improved before in the end of the Company trade with Tonkin.⁸⁸

The stiff competition from the other foreign merchants in Tonkin in the 1670s caused the Dutch Tonkin factory more difficulties. Besides the Chinese, and occasionally the Portuguese and Spanish from Macao and Manila, the French and English also appeared on the scene. In 1669, the first French ship visited Tonkin in order to seek permission to trade and to make propaganda for the Christian faith in northern Vietnam. Although any activity by the French mission was forbidden by the Lê/Trịnh court, the French priests who had arrived in Tonkin earlier continued to live in the coastal area, preparing the way for another group of French merchants and missionaries in Tonkin in the early 1680s.⁸⁹ The English arrived in Tonkin in the summer 1672. After a few years of being forced to live in the small town of Phố Hiến, the English were finally allowed to reside and trade in the capital Thăng Long, competing with the Dutch factory in the buying and selling of goods.⁹⁰

Decline intensified, 1680-1690

During the 1680s, the VOC's Tonkin trade slid even further into a decline for various causes. In 1680, a big flood ravaged the vast province of Thanh Hoá and caused a severe famine in the southern region. In the following year, a protracted drought which afflicted the major provinces of the country again led to another famine, causing hundreds of deaths everyday. So severe was the 1681 famine that, according to Dutch observers, starving people had to eat dead bodies lying unburied in order to survive. *Chúa* Trịnh Tạc urged the Dutch factory to import rice and whatever other provision it was possible to acquire.⁹¹ Two famines within two years largely destroyed the economy of Tonkin, especially the handicraft industries. After these famines, prices rose sharply reflecting the scarcity of goods available.⁹² Natural disasters continued to devastate the economy of Tonkin in the following years, exacerbating the country's economic decline. In 1688, another large-scale famine hit the country. Consequently, *Chúa* Trịnh Căn again had to request the Dutch Company to provide his country with rice. The

⁸⁸ *Generale Missiven* IV, 344. On the profits and expenses of the Tonkin factory in the last decades: Klerk de Reus, *Geschichtlicher Überblick der Administrativen, Rechtlichen und Finanziellen Entwicklung der Niederländischen-Ostindischen Compagnie* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1894), Appendix IX.

⁸⁹ *Generale Missiven* III, 712; Maybon, *Histoire moderne du pays d'Annam*, 77.

⁹⁰ Hoang Anh Tuan, "From Japan to Manila and Back to Europe": 73-92.

⁹¹ NA VOC 1362: 996-1005, Leendert de Moij and the Tonkin Council to Batavia, 8 Jan. 1681; NA VOC 1377: 556-564, Leendert de Moij and Johannes Sibens to Batavia, 5 Jan. 1682; *Generale Missiven* IV, 539-541. On Tonkin's natural disasters and famines: *Cương mục* II, 347.

⁹² BL OIOC G/12/17-7: 286, Records of the English Factory in Tonkin, 22 Jun. 1682.

arrival of the *Gaasperdam* in the summer with eighty bales of Javanese rice was therefore warmly welcomed.⁹³

Punishing competition from other European merchants contributed, just as before, to the decline of the Company's Tonkin trade. By the early 1680s, the French Tonkin trade had been consolidated considerably. In 1680 and 1682, two French missions arrived in Thăng Long to negotiate with the Trịnh rulers about trading privileges and to disseminate Christian propaganda. The French priests who had arrived in Tonkin in the early 1670s were also involved in trading activities.⁹⁴ In 1683, the English began to run their factory in the capital and competed fiercely with the Dutch. They arrived with a trading capital of 80,000 rials and offered higher prices to local weavers to buy *pelings* for their homeward-bound ship.⁹⁵ By offering copious presents and satisfying most of the Trịnh's demands, the English acquired more favourable trading privileges than the Dutch. In the late 1680s, the Dutch factors realized that the Trịnh rulers were more inclined to deal with the English than with themselves. The reason was that the English had offered *Chúa Trịnh Căn* better cannon. The Tonkin factory therefore urged the High Government to send more superlative presents to the court next year. In 1689, the Governor-General wrote to the *Chúa* and asked him to protect and facilitate the Dutch factors. Batavia's letter and presents placated the *Chúa* for a while. After the Company failed to supply him with the objects demanded, the relationship between the factory and the court deteriorated again.⁹⁶

After Batavia decided to reduce the annual investment capital for the Tonkin trade in 1679, approximately 150,000 guilders were remitted to the Tonkin factory every year, less than half of the amount that Batavia had often sent to Tonkin in the years up to the mid-1650s. Because Tonkinese raw silk fetched virtually no profit on the Japanese market, in 1681, Batavia ordered the Tonkin factory to restrict its purchase to musk and silk piece-goods for the Netherlands. The Governor-General also requested *Chúa Trịnh Căn* to deliver no raw silk to the factory.⁹⁷ In 1686, the bottom dropped out of the Tonkinese raw silk market in Japan because of the change in the regulations on the import and export trade issued by the Japanese government in 1685.⁹⁸ A Chinese junk carrying Tonkinese raw silk to Japan this year even had to return with its complete

⁹³ NA VOC 1453: 299-312, Johannes Sibens and Dirck Wilree and the Tonkin Council to Batavia, 2 Jan. 1688.

⁹⁴ Maybon, *Histoire moderne du pays d'Annam*, 82, 84.

⁹⁵ Buch, "La Compagnie" (1937): 180.

⁹⁶ NA VOC 1453: 313-315, Tonkin factory to Batavia, 26 Nov. 1689; NA VOC 1462: 8-9, Sibens to Batavia, 26 Nov. 1689. See also Chapter Two for detailed accounts on foreign merchants in seventeenth-century Tonkin.

⁹⁷ *Generale Missiven IV*, 435-436.

⁹⁸ In 1685 the Japanese Government issued regulations to limit the maximum value of goods the Dutch and the Chinese could import. Accordingly, the Chinese were limited to a total of 6,000 *kanme* in silver (600,000 taels of silver) while the Dutch were restricted to 3,400 *kanme* (340,000 taels of silver). Discussions on the Japanese regulations on the import and export trade can be found in: Innes, *The Door Ajar*, 319-327; Om Prakash, *The Dutch East India Company*, 134-135.

cargo unsold.⁹⁹ The Governor-General again reminded the *Chúa* that the transformation in the Japan trade had forced the Company to end its exportation of Tonkinese silk to the island market. He therefore expected that the *Chúa* would pay the factory in either cash or silk piece-goods such as *pelings*, which could still be sold in the Netherlands. The requests from Batavia fell on deaf ears. The Trịnh ruler forced the Dutch factors to accept raw silk, asking why he should change the regular mode of payment which his predecessors had practised for so many years. Because of the low purchase price for Tonkinese raw silk, Batavia ordered the Tonkin factory to have some samples of local raw silk spun using the Chinese and Bengali methods in order to forward them to the Netherlands. It seems that the experiment failed and the project of spinning Tonkinese yarn by new methods was eventually revoked.¹⁰⁰

The deteriorating relationship between the factory and the court caused even more concern than the trade problems. Since *Chúa* Trịnh Căn (r. 1682-1709) had succeeded to the throne, the relationship between the factory and the court rapidly worsened. Because the Tonkin trade yielded such meagre returns, Batavia reduced the value of presents sent to the *Chúa*, something that displeased him. In 1682, the *Chúa* informed the factory that were the presents to continue to be of such a low value, the Company would have to leave his country in order to avoid a dispute.¹⁰¹ In 1688 and 1689, *Chúa* Trịnh Căn stopped sending letters to the Governor-General as Batavia had failed to send him the objects he demanded.¹⁰² In 1691, *Chúa* Trịnh threatened to deport the Dutch factory from the capital because Batavia had failed to send the crystal ware which he had ordered in the past few years. In order to please the Trịnh ruler, the Dutch factors offered him more gifts and promised to present him with a fixed amount of goods every year.¹⁰³ The *Chúa*'s discontent with the Company probably reached its nadir in 1693 when he had the chief, Jacob van Loo, and the captain of the *Westbroek* imprisoned because Batavia had failed to send him amber. The Dutchmen were not released until the factory had signed an agreement to guarantee the delivery of amber and other objects which the *Chúa* had ordered on the next ship.¹⁰⁴

Because of the detention of Van Loo and the captain, the departure of the *Westbroek* was delayed until January 1694. A few days after her departure for Batavia, she was forced to return to Tonkin by contrary winds. In the meantime, the Chinese arriving in Batavia from Tonkin had informed the High Government about the *Chúa*'s insults to the Dutch factors. The Governor-General and the Council of the Indies therefore resolved to

⁹⁹ Buch, "La Compagnie" (1937): 183-184.

¹⁰⁰ Buch, "La Compagnie" (1937): 183-184.

¹⁰¹ NA VOC 1377: 565-567, Leendert de Moij and the Tonkin Council to Batavia, 2 Jan. 1683.

¹⁰² NA VOC 1485: 181-183, *Chúa* Trịnh Căn to Batavia, 1691.

¹⁰³ The annual gifts included 7 pieces of red felt, 2 pieces of black felt, 3 pieces of blue felt, 4 pieces of red *pepertuanes*, 20 pieces of red *bethilles*, 30 pieces of woollen cloth, 20 pieces of fine *salemporis*, 10 cattles of fine amber, some *aloewood*, some parrots, and 2 thoroughbreds aged 5 or 6 years. NA VOC 8364: 1-3, Sibens to Batavia, 10 Jan. 1692.

¹⁰⁴ NA VOC 8365: 1-3, Jacob van Loo to Batavia, 23 Nov. 1693.

send Johannes Sibens, the former chief factor of the Tonkin factory, to Thăng Long to assist the factors to resolve the problems. Batavia also urged the directors in the Netherlands to send the red amber and crystal ware that they had ordered for the *Chúa* in the past few years as quickly as possible.¹⁰⁵

Sibens' arrival in Thăng Long did ease the tension for a while.¹⁰⁶ In the summer of 1695, the amber and crystal ware which the *Chúa* had ordered finally arrived, but to the factors' disappointment, he was unimpressed with his gifts which the Company had ordered for him from the Netherlands with so much difficulty. The *Chúa* seized a large part of the factory's silver and goods in payment for raw silk, and heaping insult upon injury, the Crown Prince also insulted the Dutch factors. In 1694, he asked the factory for 200 taels of silver for which he would pay in silk. The Dutch excused themselves explaining that they had no silver with them at that moment. Merchant Gerrit van Nes and the interpreter of the factory were immediately summoned to his palace, where they were detained for ten days and were not released until they had paid "fines".¹⁰⁷ In 1695, the *Chúa* again imprisoned the factory interpreter and confiscated a part of the factory silver in order to compensate himself for the insignificant gifts that Batavia had offered him that year. The current tension with the court confused the factors.¹⁰⁸ On the departure of the *Cauw* to Batavia, the *Chúa* and the Prince again sent letters to the Governor-General demanding various sorts of merchandise.¹⁰⁹

The last ship, 1699/1700

After the imprisonment and the detention of Company servants, in the mid-1690s the High Government began to consider the possibility of ending the Company's unprofitable trade with Tonkin. In their missive to the Gentlemen XVII in 1695, the Governor-General and the Council of the Indies suggested to put an end to the trading relations with the Lê/Trịnh kingdom. But for as long as no official reply from the Board of the Directors was forthcoming, the High Government was obliged to continue the Tonkin trade. In its missives to the Tonkin factory, Batavia always ordered its factors to behave circumspectly in order to avoid any confrontation with the Trịnh rulers. The Governor-General also requested the *Chúa* to grant the Company more trading privileges as well as to protect its servants currently trading in his country.¹¹⁰

When the *Cauw* arrived in Tonkin in the summer of 1696, the *Chúa*, dissatisfied with the modest presents Batavia offered him, again seized part of the factory's silver.

¹⁰⁵ *Generale Missiven V*, 687.

¹⁰⁶ NA VOC 1557: 219-224, Sibens on his mission to Tonkin, 13 Dec. 1694.

¹⁰⁷ NA VOC 1580: 1-7, Van Loo and Leendertsz to Batavia, 24 Dec. 1694; *Generale Missiven V*, 721.

¹⁰⁸ NA VOC 1180: 12-35, Van Loo and the Tonkin Council to Batavia, 25 Nov. 1695.

¹⁰⁹ NA VOC 1580: 37-39, Prince of Tonkin to Batavia, 1695.

¹¹⁰ Buch, "La Compagnie" (1937): 190-195.

All the while, the Dutch factory continued to suffer increasing snubs and insults: the interpreters were detained for twenty days while the factory was ransacked by some twenty-five soldiers. Their intransigence brought the business of the factory almost to a complete standstill. Consequently, the cargo which the *Cauw* carried to Batavia at the end of this year was valued at around 57,000 guilders only.¹¹¹

During their meeting in the summer 1697, the Governor-General and the Council of the Indies again considered abandoning the Company's Tonkin trade. It was argued that since the Tonkin trade had yielded no profit in recent years and the factors had often been humiliated, there was no point in maintaining such a fraught trading relationship. Their only concern was that once the relationship had officially been terminated, it would be extremely difficult for the Company to return in the future. Moreover, since no official reply from Holland had arrived, the High Government did not want to take responsibility for such an important decision. Hence, no final conclusion on the fate of the Tonkin trade was made.¹¹²

The relationship between the Company and Tonkin deteriorated further in 1697 and 1698. Despite the Governor-General's reconciliatory letters to them, the Trĩnh rulers continued to make extravagant demands on the factory. They also neglected to reply to the Governor-General in 1698.¹¹³ During their meeting in January 1698, the Governor-General and the Council of the Indies again agreed that the Company should withdraw from Tonkin.¹¹⁴ In the same year, the Gentlemen XVII's reply on the Tonkin issue arrived in Batavia: the Gentlemen XVII still wanted to maintain the Tonkin trade. If the Company abandoned its trade with the Lê/Trĩnh kingdom, where else could it buy such silk piece-goods as *pelings*, *hockiens*, and *chiourongs* for *Patria*? Unswayed by these arguments, the Governor-General and the Council of the Indies continued to defend their opinion that the Tonkin factory should be closed. They argued that, if the Company could not purchase *pelings* and other such textiles from Tonkin, it could expediently spend that investment capital on the other products at the other trading-places such as Bengal and Batavia, with the prospect of making a much more promising profit. Nevertheless, at this moment, Batavia wanted to wait for the official reply from the Trĩnh rulers before making any final decision.¹¹⁵

When it became aware that the Trĩnh rulers had neglected to reply to the Governor-General when the *Cauw* left for Batavia in the winter 1698/1699, the High Government concluded that the Company had no reason whatsoever to delay the abandonment of the Tonkin trade.¹¹⁶ In June 1699, the decision to give up the Tonkin trade was finalized.¹¹⁷

¹¹¹ *Generale Missiven V*, 820.

¹¹² Buch, "La Compagnie" (1937): 190.

¹¹³ *Generale Missiven V*, 830.

¹¹⁴ NA VOC 713, Batavia Resolution, 28 Jan. 1698.

¹¹⁵ NA VOC 713, Batavia Resolution, 10 Jun. 1698.

¹¹⁶ NA VOC 1609: 1-12, Van Loo to Batavia, 3 Dec. 1698; *Generale Missiven VI*, 54.

¹¹⁷ NA VOC 714, Batavia Resolution, 2 Jun. 1699.

The *Cauw* was sent to Tonkin for the last time to bring the Company servants and property back to Batavia. In letters to the *Chúa* and the Crown Prince to explain the Company's decision, the Governor-General confirmed that the Company might consider returning to Tonkin if the *Chúa* thought that it was necessary.¹¹⁸

In contrast to Batavia's expectation, *Chúa* Trịnh Căn was not at all discomposd about the Company's withdrawal. After removing all Company's property, Chief Factor Van Loo handed the factory keys over to the *capados*. And without a formal farewell or any such ceremony, the Dutch quietly left the capital Thăng Long for Doméa to prepare for their departure. In the winter of 1699/1700, the *Cauw* left for Batavia, carrying all the Dutch factors, the Company's assets, and a small cargo valued at 58,956 guilders. Before the *Cauw*'s departure the *Chúa* sent the following letter to the Governor-General:¹¹⁹

I am the King whom Heaven empowers to govern and protect my subjects. Because I govern according to the mandate of Heaven, foreigners come to my country from different places to reside and trade. All foreign merchants arriving in my land from faraway countries receive my beneficent protections.

You complained that I had not replied to your letter last year. It was neither because I was displeased with you nor because I disrespected you. On the contrary, my respect for you was as much as it ever had been. I did not do so because I did not want you to waste time replying me. You must have already known that although Heaven neither speaks nor writes to us, yet governs the Earth with four seasons. What is the use of exchanging letters? They are nothing more than papers that make nonsense and trouble sore eyes.

While all foreign merchants had to reside outside the capital Thăng Long, your people were allowed to live inside. They were even allowed to build a stone factory. These favours are evidence that I always favoured your people above other foreigners.

You complained about my strictness towards your people. I accept that truth. But your people caused all such strictures. Anyone who lives in my country has to obey the local laws; as those living in your country should obey your laws. The Dutch forgot this. They often declared only half of the cargoes they shipped to my country. This caused me great losses.

I do not oppose the decision to recall your people and abandon your trade in my country, but I hope you will change your opinion.

¹¹⁸ *Generale Missiven* VI, 75-76.

¹¹⁹ NA VOC 1623: 15-16, *Chúa* Trịnh Căn to Governor-General Willem Outhoorn, 1699. See also in Buch, "La Compagnie" (1937): 194.

Concluding Remarks

Just as elsewhere in Asia, the commercial relations of the VOC with Tonkin were closely interwoven with local political ambitions. After a few years of hesitation, the High Government agreed to ally with Tonkin to attack Quinam, responding to the Trịnh rulers' intolerable pressure, not to mention the Dutch desire for revenge on Quinam. But Batavia sent fleets to Tonkin in 1642 and 1643 to no avail.

The Dutch revocation of the military alliance with Tonkin displeased the Trịnh rulers and contributed to the steady erosion of the Tonkin-VOC relationship. In order to facilitate the import and export trade of the Tonkin factory, the Governor-General and the Council of the Indies continued to send presents and letters to the Trịnh rulers and maintain fairly favourable political relations with Thăng Long until the early 1680s. From then on the rapid decline of the Company's Tonkin trade and the Trịnh's dismissive attitude towards the factory discouraged the High Government from maintaining its relationship with Tonkin and eventually forced it to abandon the Company's factory in Tonkin.