

Revisiting the Fourteenth Century Crisis of Đại Việt Against the Background of the Yuan-Ming Transition in Eastern Eurasia

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This paper deals with the fundamental changes of the state and society of Đại Việt (Việt Nam) during the fourteenth century. The topic has been studied by many scholars from both politico-cultural and socio-economic viewpoints, but usually with little consideration of regional contexts. This paper aims to re-examine the transformation by focusing on one of the middle-sized charter polities (in Lieberman's sense) during the general crisis of the fourteenth century against the background of the Yuan-Ming transition in Eastern Eurasia.

First, the evolution of Đại Việt's charter polity in the early Trần period (1226-c.1330) will be briefly reviewed with attention to the impact of the "Anti-Mongol War." The Trần rulers tried to reform the systems of their predecessors, with regard to both the Tang-model of the administrative system and the ideological foundations which had formed during the period of Ten Kingdoms.

Second, the crisis in the late-Trần Period (c. 1330 to the reign of Hồ Quý Ly in 1400-7) will be examined from the perspective of political, economic and social systems. Village society witnessed an apparent advance in terms of the status and rights of villagers, including those of dependent people. At the same time, however, the village faced serious problems caused by rapid population increase and the resulting scarcity and fragmentation of arable lands. The climatic change in the mid-fourteenth century worsened the situation. The state itself was threatened by the fierce attack of Champa and the unprecedented pressure of the Chinese tributary system under the Ming.

Third, the invention of cultural and ideological traditions which occurred during the crisis will be discussed. As the Mongol-War generation disappeared, a new order was created. Alongside political reform, this order showed a marked interest in "national" territory and "imperial" history in many ways, including poems, legends of deities, the biographies of Buddhist monks, geomancy and so forth. In line with these interests, templates of historiography were modified. Trần rulers also wished to establish their own tributary system.

Finally, this paper will re-examine the debates on the total reform of Hồ Quý Ly. The latter sought to synthesize earlier reformist ideas in order to realize a political and cultural integration that might be as powerful as those of the Ming not simply by

importing the Ming system itself but rather by combining it with pre-Tang and Song models.

In sum, models formed and expressed during the fourteenth-century crisis (many elements of which were completed in the early Lê period in the fifteenth century after the independence from Ming occupation) became the charters in the narrow sense of Đại Việt and Vietnam, while earlier models were often forgotten in early modern Vietnam.