

## 'Tracherous Factions': Shifting Frontier Alliances in the Breakdown of Sino-Vietnamese Relations on the Eve of the 1075 Border War

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### **Abstract:**

Neither the Vietnamese court in Thăng Long nor the Chinese court in Kaifeng could likely have imagined that the suppression of the insurgency of Nùng Trí Cao (Nong Zhigao) (1025–53) would lead to war. However, the official containment of the frontier chieftain's three ambitious attempts to establish a frontier kingdom in 1042, 1048 and 1052, eventually had the effect of escalating tensions along the Sino-Vietnamese frontier region to the point of major conflict. Indeed, the pacification campaign launched against Nùng Trí Cao's followers in the 1050s and the subsequent submissions of strategic Tai-speaking frontier communities to direct control of the Song dynasty (960–1279), contributed directly to the outbreak of the Sino-Vietnamese border war of 1075–77.

**Keywords:** Song dynasty | Sino-Vietnamese | Đại Việt | Lý

### **Book chapter:**

Neither the Vietnamese court in Thăng Long nor the Chinese court in Kaifeng could likely have imagined that the suppression of the insurgency of Nùng Trí Cao (Nong Zhigao) (1025–53) would lead to war. However, the official containment of the frontier chieftain's three ambitious attempts to establish a frontier kingdom in 1042, 1048 and 1052, eventually had the effect of escalating tensions along the Sino-Vietnamese frontier region to the point of major conflict. Indeed, the pacification campaign launched against Nùng Trí Cao's followers in the 1050s and the subsequent submissions of strategic Tai-speaking frontier communities to direct control of the Song dynasty (960–1279), contributed directly to the outbreak of the Sino-Vietnamese border war of 1075–77.

In the breakdown in relations leading to warfare between the Chinese and Vietnamese states, the factor of shifting alliances between the two courts and their respective frontier communities was key but hardly all-determinative. Among the other crucial influences were the Chinese court's efforts to increase frontier economic activity under the Song court-sponsored reforms of the

New Policies (*xinfa*) (1068–85) that were authored by its grand councilor Wang Anshi (1021–86) and the consolidation of peripheral fiefdoms by the Vietnamese Lý (1010–1225) court during an accelerated period of state-building. Nevertheless, despite these other factors that exacerbated regional tensions, in the aftermath of open hostilities, the two courts ultimately did conduct talks to negotiate a fixed border between the Đại Việt kingdom and the Song Empire.<sup>1</sup> These talks and the establishment of a fixed border marked a diplomatic watershed in middle-period Sino-Vietnamese relations. In these negotiations one must consider the role the frontier Tai-speaking communities played in shaping this firm dividing line between Chinese and Vietnamese domains. Control of these communities and their resources was an important consideration in the positions taken by both the Song and Lý negotiators. Moreover, the line of demarcation established upon the conclusion of these talks would largely remain in place through to the present day.

However, a preliminary reading of existing historical sources mostly reveals only a struggle between two imperial powers staged among dispossessed Tai-speaking communities. Thus, discerning the true nature of frontier relations in this period proves to be a difficult task. The available Chinese sources do not readily disclose local concerns, because most of the language used even by Song frontier officials in their memorials to the court couched matters in court-centered contexts. Likewise, extant imperial Vietnamese sources view this period from the perspective of the Lý ruler and his closest advisors at court. In our efforts to gain a clearer understanding of regional interaction along the frontier in the premodern period, we owe a great deal to Vietnamese scholars working in the Democratic Republic of Vietnam after 1954. These scholars were the first to question the paradigm of a Chinese political and cultural monolith that was inherited from French colonial writers. As Patricia Pelley notes, “by emphasizing the ethnic heterogeneity of China, by underscoring the tenacity of regional politics in China, and by calling attention to South China’s historic links to Southeast Asia, revolutionary scholars managed to reduce the apparently monolithic and overwhelmingly Han dimensions of China.”<sup>2</sup> However, whereas they saw a diversity of interests among the subjects of Chinese rulers, these historians unfortunately often also chose to see the subjects of Vietnamese kings as unified in their interests. It is foremost their almost invariant depiction of an eleventh-century Vietnamese society filled with Kinh and non-Kinh engaged in a “United Front” against Chinese aggression from the north with which this chapter takes issue.

These same scholars have also assumed that the Lý court prevailed in its efforts to woo the Tai-speaking communities of the region over to the Vietnamese. One can easily draw this conclusion from existing sources, but there is no denying a strong nationalist bias to these findings. Patriotic Vietnamese scholars in the twentieth century have long been interested in countering the picture of Vietnamese regional and ethnic disunity promoted in earlier French colonial scholarship. Shortly after the seizure and colonization of Vietnam in the late nineteenth century, much French colonial academic effort was devoted to the reconstruction of Vietnamese premodern society and this fact helps in explaining the relative ease with which Vietnam fell to French domination.

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<sup>1</sup> Đinh Bộ Lĩnh (923–80) founded his independent Vietnamese Kingdom with the title Đại Cồ Việt (968–1054). The Lý dynasty ruler Lý Nhật Tôn (b. 1023) would later rename the kingdom Đại Việt (1054–1400). This title would remain in use until the end of the Trần dynasty (1225–1400).

<sup>2</sup> Patricia Pelley, “‘Barbarians’ and ‘Younger Brothers’: The Remaking of Race in Postcolonial Vietnam,” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 29.2 (Sept. 1998), p. 376.

Pelley further observes that, “to overcome this characterization, revolutionary writers were supposed to recite haranguing clichés about the essential unity and homogeneity of (Vietnam) and its indomitable spirit in the fight against foreign aggression.”<sup>3</sup> Regarding the eleventh century, an influential voice that inspired this group of revolutionary scholars was the historian Hoàng Xuân Hãn (1908–96), who had argued in his 1949 seminal work *Lý Thường Kiệt* that the Lý court had a special ability in “giving heart to (phủ dụ)” the uplands peoples, promoting the Lý court’s prestige among “the mountain dwellers” further north and helping to maintain peace along the Đại Việt kingdom’s inland frontier.<sup>4</sup> Later when Thăng Long sought to attract supporters among Tai-speaking communities on the eve of the general Lý Thường Kiệt’s (1019–1105) invasion of the Song frontier, Hoàng Xuân Hãn argued that the Vietnamese court soon benefited from the local knowledge and logistical support provided by these communities.<sup>5</sup>

In his book, the late Professor Hãn described the Nùng clan as the local representatives of the Lý court and the lands they occupied as sovereign Vietnamese territory. At one point he wrote that although the frontier leader and Nùng Trí Cao’s kinsman Nùng Tông Đán (1013–?) and his relatives had approached the Song court and had offered the local động settlements of Lôi Hỏa and Kê Thành, both of which would later be incorporated into the Song’s “Pacified Prefecture” (*shun’an zhou*) on the northern side of the frontier, to the Song authorities, “the family of Tông Đán still maintained control of his old territory, which therefore was territory that still belonged to Vietnam.”<sup>6</sup> Following the publication of *Lý Thường Kiệt*, Hoàng Xuân Hãn’s opinions continued to influence future generations of Vietnamese scholars, who saw an undeniable unity of purpose between the Vietnamese court and the uplands frontier peoples in the face of Chinese aggression of the mid-eleventh century.

Other Vietnamese historians have emphasized Nùng Tông Đán’s participation in Lý Thường Kiệt’s preemptive attack on Song territory as a clear sign that the Lý court had wisely cultivated strong relations with its Tai-speaking neighbors. Conservative scholar and former prime minister Trần Trọng Kim (1883–1953) noted in his influential historical survey *Việt Nam Sử Lược* that Tông Đán held a high leadership position in the Lý military force, perhaps even ranking him on par with Lý Thường Kiệt.<sup>7</sup> Nguyễn Ngọc Huy (b. 1924) notes in his work on the Lê Code that “one result of (the LM court’s) benevolent policy toward minority leaders was their effective support for the dynasty in the successful campaigns against the Sung.”<sup>8</sup> Lê Thành Khôi contends that the Lý policy of fostering alliances with the uplands communities eventually “bore its fruits,” and he notes Tông Đán’s leadership role in Lý Thường Kiệt’s military force as a prime example of this success.<sup>9</sup> Professor Phan Huy Lê of Hà Nội National University, in turn quoting Hoàng Xuân Hãn, has written, “Generally speaking, all of the Lý court’s wise policies (regarding local chieftains) were successful and they held a important significance during preparations for

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Hoàng Xuân Hãn, *Lý Thường Kiệt: Lịch Sử Ngoại Giao Triều Lý* (Hanoi, 1949), p. 94.

<sup>5</sup> Hoàng Xuân Hãn, *Lý Thường Kiệt*, p. 260.

<sup>6</sup> Hoàng Xuân Hãn, *Lý Thường Kiệt*, p. 122.

<sup>7</sup> Trần Trọng Kim, *Việt Nam Sử Lược* (rpr. Glendale, CA, 1982), 1:103.

<sup>8</sup> Nguyễn Ngọc Huy, *The Le Code: Law in Traditional Vietnam: A Comparative Sino-Vietnamese Legal Study with Historical-Juridical Analysis and Annotations*, vol. 1 (Athens, OH, 1987), p. 10.

<sup>9</sup> Lê Thanh Khôi, *Histoire du Viet Nam* (Paris, 1981), pp. 158, 160.

the victorious battle with the Song during the years 1075–77.”<sup>10</sup> In another recent study produced by the Bureau for National Defense in the Vietnamese Institute of Military History Lê Đình Sỹ writes, “The Lý were concerned to protect ‘the silk and brocade’ (i.e. our beautiful) fatherland’s territorial integrity, as well as the independence and the autonomy of our people.”<sup>11</sup> Ethnologists working on the history of Tai-speaking groups in Vietnam have voiced similar opinions. Hà Văn Thù and Lê Văn Lô wrote in 1984 that “when the Song invaded our country, all of the local militia (comprised of uplands people) joined together in the cause at strategically important sites, carrying out surprise attacks on the military gatherings and supply lines of the enemy.”<sup>12</sup> A more recent ethnographic work reiterates this same event in the historical introduction.<sup>13</sup>

I believe that the abovementioned historiographical imperative for solidarity has unduly influenced many of these Vietnamese scholars to claim that, when the two courts clashed in open conflict in 1075, the Lý leadership benefited more from uplands support than did the Song leadership. On the contrary, I maintain that the Chinese authorities successfully cultivated relations with these uplands communities, particularly with the declared followers of Nùng Trí Cao and his clan, and that this change in frontier policy alarmed the lowlands Vietnamese court and its uplands supporters to such a degree that the “offense as the best defense” military strategy promoted by the Lý military aide Lý Thường Kiệt was eventually adopted.

### **Growing Chinese Interest in the South**

Through the 1060s, longstanding political institutions shaped the respective frontier policies of the Song and Lý courts. For the Chinese leadership, frontier policy served the “centering” function of the traditional tribute system.<sup>14</sup> Ideally, the Chinese court’s frontier administration, known as the system of ruling with “loose reins” (*jimi*), sought to introduce to its “uncultured” inhabitants all the benefits of life at the “civilized” center.<sup>15</sup> This zone system of frontier management had served the Chinese leadership adequately in the southwest since the Tang dynasty (618–907), and there had been little incentive to change the status quo. The Đại Việt leadership, unlike the Song, did not follow a center-periphery zonal arrangement, but instead maintained personalized “patron-client” relationships with each of its “satellite” partners along the frontier region.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, for economic and political purposes, Vietnamese leaders

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<sup>10</sup> Phan Huy Lê, “Nùng Trí Cao Nhân Vật Lịch Sử và Biểu Tượng Văn Hóa” in *Nùng Trí Cao: kỷ yếu hội thảo khoa học*, ed. Trần Văn Phương (Cao Bằng, 1995), p. 178. See also Hoàng Xuân Hãn, *Lý Thường Kiệt*, pp. 81–97.

<sup>11</sup> Lê Đình Sỹ, *Kế sách giữ nước thời Lý-Trần* (Hanoi, 1994), p. 9.

<sup>12</sup> Hà Văn Thù and Lê Văn Lô, *Văn hóa Tày Nùng* (Hanoi, 1984), p. 9.

<sup>13</sup> Bế Viết Đăng, *Các dân tộc Tây, Nùng ở Việt Nam* (Hanoi, 1992), p. 54.

<sup>14</sup> James L. Hevia, *Cherishing Men from Afar: Qing Guest Ritual and the Macartney Embassy of 1793* (Durham, 1995), p. 123.

<sup>15</sup> I have located the first recorded reference to this institution of frontier management in the Confucian classic Book of History (*Shangshu*) in the following passage: “Beyond the Nine Principalities (i.e., the North China Central Plain) was barbarian territory. Here the (Zhou) ruler had installed barbarians who ruled with a loose rein and nothing else. This was because these people could not be made the same as those who accepted Central Plain (Hua Xia) ways.” Cited in Ruan Yuan, *Shisan jing zhu* (Beijing, 1980).

<sup>16</sup> Although this statement refers to Wolters’s work, I nonetheless note that in the second edition of *History, Culture, and Region in Southeast Asian Perspectives*, Wolters does not contend that premodern Vietnam followed his well-known “mandala” model of Southeast Asian political organization. Cited in O.W. Wolters, *History, Culture, and Region in Southeast Asian Perspectives* (Ithaca; Singapore, 1999), pp. 143–44.

depended on controlling the resources of the frontier, whether material and human. To achieve this control, they employed a combination of marriage alliances and military excursions to ensure their supremacy in the region. Moreover, successive Vietnamese courts took the projection of influence along the frontier as indicative of their efficacy, which was measured primarily in resources extracted rather than the “centering” of loyalty among frontier vassals.

However, by the eleventh century, both Chinese and Vietnamese courts viewed these frontier communities as a ready pool of able personnel to contribute to what Jeffery Barlow has termed the “military labor market.”<sup>17</sup> Chinese regimes had in the past used militia assembled from the Tai-speaking frontier communities in their armed conflicts with Vietnamese forces based in the Hung River Delta region. During the period of the Five Dynasties (907–60) and Ten Kingdoms (907–79), the Southern Han (907–71) founder Liu Yin (r. 907–11) recruited troops from the southern Guangxi region, among them archers, for assist in the war then being waged against the kingdom of Chu (927–56).<sup>18</sup> These troops were well known for their ferocity. In 930, the Southern Han ruler Liu Gong (r. 911–42) recruited more local militia to help with the invasion of northern Vietnam, then under the command of the Vietnamese strongman Khúc Thừa Mý (917–30). Fifty years later, when the Song court launched its punitive attack on Lê Hoàn (r. 980–1005), the Chinese army gathered up another contingent of southern militia from the frontier region to supplement its northern forces.<sup>19</sup> Given the reputation for bravery in battle, this Tai-speaking militia was considered a valuable military asset and a worthy ally in frontier conflicts. By 1065, some 44,500 militia soldiers from these communities were enlisted by local Song authorities.<sup>20</sup> These numbers could suggest that the Chinese court was eager to tap this source of military manpower. However, this increase in recruitment could also reflect a rapid shift in political loyalties in the region.

The successful expedition of the Song general Di Qing (1008–61) against the Nùng Trí Cao’s rebel army and the Lý court’s refusal to intervene on either side brought a tentative peace to the frontier region. For nearly twenty years after Nùng Trí Cao’s defeat, frontier disturbances rarely occurred, and Chinese and Vietnamese military resources contained whatever disorder that did occur swiftly. Han homesteaders and discharged soldiers also moved to the area at this time, and settled in existing Chinese communities and on the outskirts of *jimi* regions. Simultaneously, new local leaders took control of the decimated but still remaining frontier communities. However, the regional peace would not last. The ethnic balance along the frontier was changing and the Song imperial presence along the edges of a frontier that the Lý leadership itself desired to control was growing. Several influential Nùng leaders sided with the Vietnamese court in the emerging confrontation and, in the ensuing conflict, Kaifeng realized that an entirely new arrangement for frontier relations had to be established.

## Manipulating the Frontier

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<sup>17</sup> Jeffery G. Barlow. *The Zhuang* [online]. Pacific University, 2000. [Cited July 16, 2001]. Available from World Wide Web: (<http://mcel.pacificu.edu/as/resources/zhuang/zhuang8.htm>).

<sup>18</sup> Barlow. *The Zhuang* [online], [Cited July 4, 2001].

<sup>19</sup> Li Tao, *Xu Zizhi tongjian changbian* (Beijing, 1985), 22.490–91. This work is hereafter referred to as *XZZTJCB*.

<sup>20</sup> Toghto [Tuotuo], *Songshi* (Beijing, 1983), 191.4746. This work is hereafter referred to as *SS*.

Although it was unsuccessful in establishing an autonomous frontier state equal in political resilience to the late Tang-period Uyghur state of the Tarim Basin alluded to by Michael Brose in this volume, the revolt of the 1050s Tai-speaking leader Nùng Trí Cao's had nonetheless exposed weaknesses in the Song administration of its southern region. Furthermore, frontier unrest threatened to begin anew with a new generation of Nùng leadership. In tenth month of 1060, the frontier administrator Wang Han (fl. 1043–63) memorialized the throne, stating that Nùng Trí Cao's fellow clansman, Nùng Tông Đán had already crossed back into Song territory in 1057.<sup>21</sup> Tông Đán had since assembled a following and was now threatening to plunder the region. Following rumors that Nùng Trí Cao was actually still alive, Wang visited Tông Đán's camp at Lôi Hòa, and spoke with Trí Cao's son Nùng Nhật Tân (fl. 1050–78). According to the History of the Song (*Songshi*), Wang said the following to the frontier leader's son, "If you seek "Interior Dependency" (*neifu*) status with the Song court, the Vietnamese will see you as an enemy. If you remain outside (China proper) as a loyal frontier militia leader, you can expect to be rewarded with tempting profit. Therefore, there is no need for scheming. Now, return home to report this news to your father, and then to choose the path that offers the greatest benefit."<sup>22</sup>

As the Guangnan West circuit Fiscal Commissioner (*zhuanyunshi*) Wang Han feared that the Nùng clan's resurgence could spell the end to peace on the frontier. Therefore, he requested that a new policy be enacted. The Song court responded by ignoring Wang's specific recommendation and instead requesting that the Nùng communities, along with other ethnic groups, be made interior dependencies of the Song Empire. In this manner, the troubles between the Song and its frontier temporarily subsided. Nùng Trí Cao's followers had achieved the elevated "Interior Dependency" status Trí Cao and his father had initially been seeking, although at the cost of many lives. However, Nùng Trí Cao had later fought for no less than his own kingdom stretching across southern China. Such an independent polity within China's borders would not emerge until the "Warlord Period" (1916–28) of the early twentieth century.

Moreover, the Song court acknowledged the Nùng clan's continued regional influence by accepting Tông Đán's renewed local leadership. Xiao Gu, then the court-appointed military commissioner (*jinglueshi*), advised the court to return Tông Đán's followers to official service by peaceful means, including a treaty alliance and new honorary titles. By the summer of 1061, however, even the emperor was lamenting the fact that the "Nùng Bandit (Tông Đán)" and his family had strayed so far from the observance of their frontier duties that the Chinese ruler thought they might never really return to the imperial fold.<sup>23</sup> Yet, when Tông Đán in 1062 requested that the territories under his authority be incorporated into the Chinese empire, Emperor Renzong (r. 1022–63) accommodated this request.

The Chinese ruler then extended a new set of titles and nominal positions to leading members of frontier communities, at a level of authority below the titles granted to the Vietnamese court and its officials. The Draft of Documents Pertaining to Song Official Matters (*Song huiyao*) records that the "Loyal Warrior" (*wuzong jiangjun*) Tông Đán, regarded by the Song court to be the prefect of Lôi Hòa, recently renamed "Pacified Prefecture" (*shun'an zhou*), was granted the title

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<sup>21</sup> SS, 12.241.

<sup>22</sup> SS, 312.10244.

<sup>23</sup> SS, 12.247.

“Personal Guardian General of the Right” (*you qianniu weijiangjun*).<sup>24</sup> Nùng Trí Cao’s younger brother Nùng Trí Hội (fl.1062–85) received the title “Personal Guardian General of the Left” (*zuo qianniu weijiangjun*). Other members of the Nùng clan, and former followers of Trí Cao, also received official recognition. Nùng Bình (?–?), Nùng Lượng (?–?), Nùng Hạ Khanh (?–?), local leaders from the Temo *jimi* prefecture, which encompassed territory from modern-day Wenshan in eastern Yunnan to Jingxi in southern Guangxi, swore their loyalty to the Song court.<sup>25</sup> Nùng Hạ Khanh was almost certainly Nùng Trí Cao’s mother A Nùng’s third husband, a fact that may or may not have been known to Xiao Go and the other Song officials, who administered the area. However, Trí Cao’s own former rebel commanders Lư Báo (?–?), Lê Mạo (?–?), and Hoàng Trọng Khanh (?–?) were all granted official titles that denoted service at the local level to the Song court.<sup>26</sup> In all of these titles, there is an element of reorienting local authority to a position much more dependent on the centralized authority of the Song court, suggesting integration that was similar to the alliances of local Uyghur military leaders and Tang military officials that David Graff describes in his chapter. These titles were granted with the condition that they might be withdrawn at any point that their holders do not live up to the official obligations that these titles implied.

In the wake of all these administrative appointments, the *jimi* prefectures had lost their autonomous status in the eyes of the Song leadership. The change was not limited to new titles alone. Local militia along the southwestern frontier were reorganized and trained to comply with new court standards for frontier defense. In 1065, the local military commission (*anfu si*) of Guangnan West circuit (*Guangnan xilu*), under the direction of the new Guizhou prefect Lu Shen (1012–70), took charge of the organization of communities along the southwestern frontier.<sup>27</sup> The forty-five grotto settlements in the Left and Right Rivers (*Zuoyou jiang*) region were all appointed a grotto militia leader (*dongjiang*). The commissioner then surveyed the region’s population of able-bodied men, from which he selected groups to be led by a guard commander (*xiaochang*) from the area’s prominent households. Each guard commander then received a specific signal banner (*qihao*) for his group’s distinction. Groups of thirty men were organized into self-regulating units of local governance known as “tithings (*jia*).”<sup>28</sup> Tithings received different leaders when they were organized in groups of five led by a troop commandant (*dutou*), groups of ten led by an aboriginal commander (*zhijunshi*), and groups of fifty led by a commander-in-chief (*duzhijunshi*).

As noted above, some 44,500 local men along the southwestern frontier may have been registered under this new system. At least on paper, these efforts to organize frontier militia went far beyond any previous attempts under the existing *jimi* frontier system of management. The

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<sup>24</sup> Xu Song, *Song huiyao jiben* (Taipei, 1964), 198.7799. This work is hereafter referred to as *SHY*.

<sup>25</sup> *SHY*, 198.7799. An interesting question involves whether these Nùng leaders were expressing personal loyalty to Emperor Yingzong. The *SHY* account is ambiguous and therefore does not provide us with a clear answer to this question.

<sup>26</sup> The *SHY* account mistakenly conflates the names of LD Báo and Li Mao as “Lu Mao.” See Shen Kua’s account for the proper listing of names. Shen Kua, *Mengxi bitan* in *Wenbai duizhao Mengxi bitan quanyi*.

<sup>27</sup> *SS*, 191.4746.

<sup>28</sup> See Charles Hucker, *A Dictionary of Official Titles in Imperial China* (Stanford, 1985), p. 137. Hucker contends that the leaders of “tithings” were known as “tithing chiefs” (*jiazhang*) or “tithing heads” (*jiatou*), while the *SS* account uses an older Han-period title “guard commander” (*xiaozhang*). See Hucker, *Dictionary of Official Titles*, p. 234.

military reorganization of the frontier and the recruitment of local militia resembled what Michael McGrath herein describes as the 1041 efforts of Emperor Renzong to fortify Shaanxi against military attack by the neighboring Tanguts. Perhaps for that reason, this tightening of frontier defenses on the Song side did not bode well with the Vietnamese court, which saw its own flexible and personally orientated systems of local control being gradually undermined.

Moreover, greater numbers of Song subjects from the north were moving into the region during this period. Scholars have noted a sharp increase in population numbers along China's southwest frontier by the end of the eleventh century. During the period 976–84, the total population of the prefectures of Yongzhou, Binzhou, Xiangzhou (modern-day Xiangzhou county in central Guangxi), Rongzhou (modern-day Rongan county in Guangxi), Hengzhou, Liuzhou (modern-day Liuzhou city) and Yizhou was estimated to be in the area of 17,760 households, and by the period 1078–85 populations for the same area had increased to 56,596 households.<sup>29</sup> Moreover, figures for the entire Guangnan West circuit for 1080 place the region's population at 287,723 households, a 133 percent increase from an earlier Tang census in 742.<sup>30</sup> One should note that these figures included both indigenous communities and the more recent Han settlements. Moreover, improved methods of recording household registration may indeed accord for some of the increase. However, the trend toward increased Han settlement remains clear through these changes; an increase accounted for by both the community of soldiers who had followed Di Qing in his campaign against Nùng Trí Cao's forces, and the merchants who provided support for the Song military.

The Republican period gazetteer *A Record of Fengshan County (Fengshan xianzhi)* makes this point; "Before the Tang, this county was settled by the Miao barbarian people. There were no traces of Han settlers. In 1053, The 'Great Martial Leader' Di (Qing) put down the rebellion of the Quang Nguyên barbarian Nùng Trí Cao, the troops following the general's expedition remained in the region to open up and settle the wasteland. Their settlements extended throughout this county."<sup>31</sup>

Li Wenxiong in his early-twentieth-century gazetteer *A Record of Longjin County (Longjin xianzhi)* (modern-day Longzhou county in Guangxi) extends this population shift right down to the frontier in his observations:

Longjin county before the Tang was a part of Giao Chi (or Vietnamese) territory. Its inhabitants were subjects of Giao Chi. In 1052, Zhao Ding (?-?),<sup>32</sup> following the success of the Di (Wuxiang) Qing in his campaign against the barbarians, was appointed to the

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<sup>29</sup> The Taiping xingguo period figures may be found in Yue Shi, *Taiping huanyu ji* (Record of the Empire's Borders and Dimensions during the Taiping Period). The Yuanfeng period figures may be found in Wang Cun, *Yuanfeng jiuwu ji*. This information is cited in Huang Xianfan, *Nong Zhigao* (Nanning, 1983), p. 91.

<sup>30</sup> These regional figures are cited in Huang Xianfan, *Zhuangzu tongshi* (Nanning, 1988), p. 52. The Song number is contained in Wang Cun's *Yuanfeng jiuwu ji*, while the Tang figure is available in the "geography" (*dili*) section of the New History of the Tang (*Xin Tangshu*) of Ouyang Xiu (1007–72). A graph in Huang's book (p. 53) offers a Song population figure of 387,723 households, which appears to be a mistake.

<sup>31</sup> Fengshan county in this gazetteer entry was comprised of today's Donglan and Fengshan counties, located in northwestern Guangxi province. This information is cited in Huang Xianfan, *Nong Zhigao*, pp. 91–92.

<sup>32</sup> Li Wenxiong may have been mistaken about Zhao Ding's participation. Zhao was a Song official, but he lived from 1085 to 1147.

hereditary position of local administrator. A division of General Di's soldiers from the Shandong region entered the area to settle down. Because of this event, many settlers from north of the Yangzi River moved into the area to live. After the barbarian wastelands had started to be controlled (by the Song court), settlers from Fujian (*min*), Jiangxi (*gan*), Hunan (*xiang*), and the Guangdong (*yue*) region daily flocked to the region. Some came to take positions as local officials, and they married into the local community. Some came as merchants, marrying into the region as well. Most of these Han homesteaders settled in the larger towns or the marketplaces. However, there were certainly those gathered in the rural villages to conduct their business.<sup>33</sup>

Throughout the Song Empire the word had spread that new opportunities could now be found in this southernmost outpost of imperial control, and many now were more than willing to try their luck in its settlement.

A cultural shift had also begun to take place in the region, with an increased emphasis on North Chinese or "Central Plain" (*zhongyuan*) practices. A Record of the Empire's Borders and Dimensions during the Taiping Period (*Taiping huanyuji*) by Yue Shi (930–1007) describes the earliest signs of change. Huang Xianfan contends that this trend accelerated during the period after the fall of North China to Jürchen armies, as noted in A Record of This Region's Merits (*Yudi jisheng*) by Wang Xiangzhi (d. after 1221); "following the Song's 'Southern Push' (*nandu*), i.e., fall to the Jin, when many northerners moved south to escape their homelands, clothing styles, ceremonial caps, rituals and music then became the same as those practices in North China."<sup>34</sup> However, these social practices were actually brought into the region by Di Qing's troops and the accompanying cadre of local officials. If the Guangnan region had not had strong ties with court culture during the early Song period, these ties were laid in place and strengthened with each wave of northern settlers that poured into the frontier.

Meanwhile, the Vietnamese court pursued a policy of expansion, with military expeditions to the south against neighboring Champa, along with pacification campaigns to assert direct court control over indigenous communities located along the northern frontier. Lý Phật Mã died late in 1054, and the Khai Hoàng prince Lý Nhật Tôn ascended the throne to preside over a Vietnamese Kingdom that had become increasingly "united and self-assured."<sup>35</sup> Lý Phật Mã had already started a court-organized movement toward frontier settlement and control, and this trend continued unabated throughout the period of unrest involving Nùng Trí Cao.

Soon there was more evidence of Viet expansion in the frontier region. In 1059 the Lý court made the additional effort to take direct control of its frontier and the local manpower. The court divided the northern frontier in the Left and Right Rivers region into the new administrative units; Ngự Long, Vũ Thắng, Long Dục, Thần Điện, Bồng Thánh, Bảo Thắng (Bảo Thắng county in modern-day Lào Cai province), Hùng Lược, and Vạn Tiệp.<sup>36</sup> To each of these units the court

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<sup>33</sup> Li Wenxiong, *Longjin xianzhi* (hand-etched rpr. Nanning, 1960), p. 39. Longjin county was the early-twentieth-century name for today's Longzhou county.

<sup>34</sup> Wang Xiangzhi, *Yudi jisheng* in Huang Xianfan, *Zhuangzu tongshi*, p. 50.

<sup>35</sup> Keith Taylor, "Madagascar in the Ancient Malayo-Polynesian Myths" in *Explorations in Early Southeast Asian History: The Origins of Southeast Asian Statecraft*, ed. Kenneth Hall and John Whitmore (Ann Arbor, 1976), p. 179.

<sup>36</sup> Ngô Sĩ Liên, *Đại Việt sử ký toàn tập* IV. Quyển 3.2b. Chính Hòa thu' 18 (1697) ed. Vietnamese tr. and annot. Phan Huy Lê, Ngô Đức Thọ and Hà Văn Tấn (Hanoi, 1993), p. 129. Hereafter referred to as *DVSKTT*.

assigned an official serving Thăng Long's interest. In the most expressive gesture on regional dominance, Lý Nhật Tôn ordered that militia units be established among the local communities and that conscripts all have the characters "Army of the Son of Heaven" (*tianzi jun*) tattooed on their foreheads.<sup>37</sup> This practice had existed since early times, and had last been practiced by Lê Hoàn in assembling his own militia forces. The emphasis on the control of regional manpower reflects a distinctly Southeast Asian system of statecraft.<sup>38</sup> Most importantly, it indicated that the Lý desired to tap its frontier resources in a novel manner to fuel efforts at regional expansion. Resources at this point in time largely referred to human resources.

During the early 1060s, the Sino-Vietnamese frontier experienced numerous local disturbances among the indigenous communities, in response perhaps to the influx of settlers from the north. Moreover, there were clashes between troops serving both the Chinese and Vietnamese courts. In the spring of 1060, the elderly chieftain of the frontier prefecture Lạng Châu and imperial in-law through a marriage alliance Trần Thiệu Thái (?-?) crossed into Song territory to raid frontier settlements for cattle and new militia recruits.<sup>39</sup> Thiệu Thái also captured the local Song military leader Yang Baocai (?-?) in the attack. In the autumn of 1060, Song troops crossed the frontier. However, the Chinese were unsuccessful in their attempt to bring Yang back.<sup>40</sup>

Kaifeng soon dispatched the newly appointed military commissioner (*anfu shi*) Yu Jing (1000–1064) to the Guangnan region to quell unrest stirred up by Giap Đông natives led by Thiệu Thái. Fighting there had already claimed the lives of five military inspectors (*xunjian*).<sup>41</sup> Once he reached the south, Yu Jing also sent a court representative secretly to Champa to enlist Cham support for a possible allied attack on Vietnamese communities in Guangnan.<sup>42</sup> This increased activity along the frontier naturally caught the attention of the Vietnamese court, which reportedly had also caught wind of the Cham plot. As the Song court took a greater interest in the frontier region, a new court policy emerged of courting local leaders directly, rather than relying on the assistance of their tribute representative in the Vietnamese court. Such a shift in behavior undercut the local authority that official tributary relations with the Chinese had once afforded Thăng Long. As the Song court began to seek local leaders to implement its regional interests, even in opposition to Vietnamese interests, the Đại Cồ Việt court sought ways to make their own presence felt along the frontier.

However, the Lý court likely saw merit in defusing what had become a tense relationship with the Song. In the following year, a delegation from Thăng Long led by Bi Gia Dụ (?-?) traveled to Yongzhou to negotiate terms for peace with Yu Qing himself.<sup>43</sup> Lý Nhật Tôn instructed his court "send an envoy into China to convey thanks (for quelling the earlier disturbances), but continue to collect more intelligence on Cham troops, Yu Qing's forces, and other troops

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<sup>37</sup> Phan Huy Chu, *Lịch triều hiến chương loại chí*. Tập 4. *Binh Che Chi*. (Hanoi, 1960–61), p. 5. *DVSKTT* (1993), 3.2b.

<sup>38</sup> Wolters, *History, Culture, and Region*, pp. 113–14.

<sup>39</sup> *DVSKTT* (1984), 3:242.

<sup>40</sup> *DVSKTT* (1984), 3:242.

<sup>41</sup> Yi Xingguang, *Yu Jing puzhuan zhilue* (Guangzhou, 1993), p. 78. Military officers of the military inspector rank were often used to patrol frontier regions, and these officials (including Yang) may have been in the area to train the local militia.

<sup>42</sup> *SS*, 288.14068.

<sup>43</sup> *DVSKTT* (1984), 3:242.

stationed in the Guangnan Western circuit.”<sup>44</sup> The Chinese delegation again requested the return of Yang Baocai, but this requested was denied.<sup>45</sup> Given the recent unrest, however, the Chinese emperor Renzong hesitated to raise tensions further along the southern frontier, and he ordered his delegated military leaders of his local military commissions to refrain from assembling troops in the region. The Song ruler then allowed a tribute mission from Thăng Long to travel to Kaifeng for an imperial audience. On February 8, 1063 (by the Western calendar), the two Vietnamese envoys offered tribute to the Song emperor that included nine tamed elephants, a gift that the Vietnamese leaders then considered their most precious offering.<sup>46</sup> Sino-Vietnamese relations appeared at this stage to have reached a new equilibrium.

However, within months, the relationship between the two courts had changed once again. On March 30, 1063 the Song emperor Renzong passed away, and the heir-apparent Zhao Shu (Yingzong, r. 1063–67) came to power. Vietnamese envoys soon arrived in Kaifeng to congratulate the ascension of the new emperor. On April 7, 1063 Yingzong made an important imperial gesture by sending gifts, such as calligraphic compositions in the hand of the late ruler Renzong, to the Vietnamese court. Such gift was likely an acknowledgment that the Vietnamese ruler and his advisors were learned enough to appreciate the literary refinement of these works and that they fell within the wider circle of *zhongyuan* culture. Yingzong also granted the ruler Lý Nhật Tôn the post concurrent manager of governmental affairs in the Secretariat-Chancellery (*tongzhong shumen xiaping zhangshi*).<sup>47</sup> The Song emperor’s purpose for granting this office was likely to reinforce from the outset of his reign the image of the Vietnamese court as an extension of the Chinese central court and to preserve the position of Lý Nhật Tôn as both a frontier official and a participant in the formulation of central court policy. However, this gesture on the part of the Song court did not completely ameliorate tensions on the frontier.

On the same day that the Vietnamese envoy Lý Kế Tiên (?–?) prepared to depart Kaifeng, news arrived from the south that a frontier militia under the leadership of errant clan leader Trần Thiệu Thái had engaged in yet another attack on settlements within Guangnan West circuit.<sup>48</sup> A Guangnan official sent an urgent plea to Kaifeng for an immediate punitive attack on the southern intruders. However, Chinese sources record that the Song court had come to the conclusion that Trần Thiệu Thái was “reckless and mad,” perhaps as a conscious effort to divorce his actions from those of the Vietnamese court. In any case, an envoy from Thăng Long had already been dispatched to Kaifeng to ask forgiveness for the attack. Yingzong, therefore, did not raise an army to deal with this problem. Local Song officials may have wanted a stronger response from Kaifeng, but the Song ruler maintained that his vassals were still capable of self-regulation.

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<sup>44</sup> *SHY*, 197.7730.

<sup>45</sup> *DVSKTT* (1984), 3:242.

<sup>46</sup> *SHY*, 197.7730.

<sup>47</sup> During the Tang and Song dynasties, the Chinese court granted this title to high officials at court who, along with their prescribed official duties, also participated in decision-making sessions as Grand Councilors. See Hucker, *Dictionary of Official Titles*, p. 554.

<sup>48</sup> *SS*, 488.14068. Hucker notes that the title of administrative aide was granted in the Song to palace eunuchs assigned to special tasks outside of the imperial household. Lý Kế Tiên had earlier traveled to Kaifeng with Mai Cảnh Tiên, who had also been labeled with a title commonly granted to eunuchs at the Song court. The Vietnamese court in this period was not known to have employed eunuchs at court, and so this title reflects perhaps a Song scholarly inclination to label as eunuchs any rogue officials misappropriating court authority.

More than a year passed before any further troubles arose. On November 18, 1064, the Guizhou prefect Lu Shen memorialized the throne during a court visit by Vietnamese envoys. Lu reported a military delegation from Thăng Long had allegedly come across the frontier in search of Nùng Tông Đán's son Nùng Nhật Tân and his followers, but this same delegation show an interest in taking control of a section of Song territory, including the Wenmen dong (Wenmen Grotto, located near Hurun village in modern-day Jingxi county) *jimi* district.<sup>49</sup> Although the court took no specific action as a result of this memorial, Lu appeared determined to expand the Song's military presence in the south.

After delivering his memorial, Lu Shen set out along the frontier to Yongzhou. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, he commissioned forty-five local aboriginal leaders from the Left and Right River region as military officers in his growing militia. When he had assembled the abovementioned 44,500 seasoned troops, he ordered his force to repair and fortify military installations in the region. He also requested that local Song administrators cast special seals for his militia leaders. Lu also petitioned the Song court with a request that the Left and Right River region be exempted from the payment of all back taxes.<sup>50</sup> Lu took all these measures to gain the loyalties of those communities that one generation previously had joined Nùng Trí Cao in his rebellion against the throne. The effort to provide military training for the leaders of this frontier militia was a variation on existing court policy, but Lu's methods built on Kaifeng's growing interest in a more direct incorporation of these frontier areas.

After witnessing these events along the frontier, Vietnamese officials became quite concerned. Thăng Long immediately sent a tribute-bearing envoy to Kaifeng to "send their greetings" as well as to remind the Chinese court of the precedent of relying on Vietnamese authorities to settle frontier matters. Meanwhile, Lu had again memorialized the throne, requesting that the court offer special training and indoctrination to one local chieftain (*tuding*) each year. Following this training regime, after three years this chieftain would be made a member of the official bureaucracy.<sup>51</sup>

At about this same time, it appears that Nùng Tông Đán had decided to switch allegiances. It may have been that the local chieftain saw his traditional base of power eroding rapidly under the new system of frontier management set in place by Lu Shen. The evidence is rather scanty; however, according to the *Songshi*, at some point after late 1065, Tông Đán made overtures to join in an alliance with Lý Nhật Tôn and the Quảng Nguyên chieftain Lưu Ký (?-?).<sup>52</sup> Fearing a potentially hostile coalition so close to home, Lu Shen sent an envoy to announce this news to the Song court. Emperor Yingzong, a mentally weak and distracted ruler by this point, apparently took no other action than to reassign Tông Đán his honorific titles. This lack of attention from the center was to have a harmful effect regarding the vitality of the Song presence along the frontier. As highlighted in the Vietnamese sources, at this point, Tông Đán became a willing and able ally of the Lý court to perform a key military role in the 1075–77 conflict.

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<sup>49</sup> SS, 488.14068.

<sup>50</sup> XZZTJCB, 203.4923.

<sup>51</sup> XZZTJCB, 203.4923.

<sup>52</sup> SS, 495.14218.

This alliance between Tông Đán and the Quảng Nguyên chieftain Lư Ký had its roots in the third rebellion of Nùng Trí Cao. Shen Kua argues in *Mengxi bitan* that among Trí Cao's chief supporters for his initial assault on the Hengshan Garrison prior to the attack on Yongzhou were Lư Báo, Lê Mạo and Hoàng Trọng Khanh and Liêu Thông (?-?).<sup>53</sup> When the rebellion was finally suppressed, Lư Báo called together Trí Cao's disbanded rebel army and eventually returned to Quảng Nguyên, where the entire group had pledged its loyalty to Lư Ký. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the Song court rewarded this group with official titles, despite their direct participation in Nùng Trí Cao's insurrection and their ties to Lư Ký. The Song support for these local leaders would have mixed results. By 1069, Lư Báo and another of Trí Cao's kin Nùng Trí Hội had announced their support for the Song court, while Nùng Tông Đán and Lư Ký would cast their lot with the Vietnamese court. The greatest change in the balance of relations in this period came with the rise in Kaifeng of the young emperor Shenzong, who ushered in a new approach to frontier management.

On January 8, 1067, Yingzong passed away and his son Zhao Xu, posthumously known as Song emperor Shenzong. (r. 1067–85), ascended to the throne. Shenzong followed his father by rewarding all well-wishers generously during the first days of his reign. However, he appeared to pay special attention to the Vietnamese delegation. When Thăng Long dispatched a mission to greet the new emperor, Shenzong presented the envoys with a lavish array of gifts: set of official robes for the Lý household, a golden belt, 200 *liang* of silver ingots, three hundred bolts of silk, two horses, and a saddle inlaid with gold and silver plating.<sup>54</sup> On February 9, 1067, Shenzong decreed that Lý Nhật Tôn should be granted the title “King of the Southern Pacified Region” (*nanping wang*). Reestablishing the tribute relations between the two courts according to terms set at the beginning of the dynasty appears to have been the initial aim of the young emperor. However, Chinese frontier officials in the emperor's service at the same time were training for military action along the southern edge of the empire.

By late 1067, there was more movement on the Song side of the frontier region. The new Guizhou prefect Zhang Tian (fl. 1068–77) reported that “through interviews I have heard that the Quảng Nguyên Châu official Lư Ký maintains ties with Lư Báo, despite the fact that Lư Ký is an official in the service of Lý Nhật Tôn. Lư Báo is a member of Nùng Trí Cao's treacherous faction, still located in Quảng Nguyên Châu. Lư Ký is currently planning to cause mischief of some sort, and Lư Báo now intends to seek personal glory by crossing over into Chinese territory. I want to halt Lư Báo and crush his followers.”<sup>55</sup> The Song court's Bureau of Military Affairs (*qumiyuan*) replied to this report with the following,

Lư Báo is certainly a member of Nùng Trí Cao's treacherous faction. However, any action against Lư Ký cannot be allowed. If commoners chose to cross the frontier (into Song territory), they will be targeted and executed. However, it is not necessary to send military officials to pursue their leaders and the Vietnamese army. The court does not treat prisoners according to the ritual protocol expected of outer barbarians (*waiyi*). If this Lư Ký chooses to transfer the administration of his prefecture back to China, such action ought to be accepted. Therefore, it is not necessary to attract these people, but

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<sup>53</sup> Shen Kua, *Mengxi bitan*, annot. Li Wenzhe and Wu Hongze (Chengdu, 1996), p. 347.

<sup>54</sup> *SHY*, 197.7730.

<sup>55</sup> *SHY*, 197.7730.

instead officials should record the fact that Lư Kỵ is approaching, and that Quảng Nguyên has no other leader. It is not necessary to launch a defense of our territory until Lư Kỵ has advanced into Han-controlled territory. If he doesn't, then let the situation settle and the problem will fade.<sup>56</sup>

The Song court chose to follow this policy, suddenly abandoning the balance of power along the frontier that the court had always advocated in its tribute relations with the Vietnamese leadership.

By 1069, however, Lư Báo had instead offered his allegiances to the Song court, while Lư Kỵ had remained in the Quảng Nguyên region, nominally under the control of Thăng Long.<sup>57</sup> In the late summer, the Vietnamese court sent a tribute mission north to maintain good relations with the court at Kaifeng. Shortly thereafter, perhaps to counter Tông Đán's defection, the young Chinese emperor confirmed the Nùng clan's frontier status by conferring on Nùng Trí Hội, now seen by the Chinese as the sole leader of Quảng Nguyên's adjoining settlements of Guwu and Shun'an (Lôi Hóa), a variation on Tông Đán's former title "Great General and Personal Guardian General of the Right" (*dajiangjun wei youqianniu*).<sup>58</sup> The Chinese leadership hoped to maintain a solid ally in the region, even through this period of rapid change.

In late 1071, local Song officials again appraised the court of the shifting allegiances among local leaders. The Guangnan military commissioner Xiao Gu reported to Kaifeng, "the Vietnamese official Lư Kỵ has been sighted at the head of more than two hundred men in the vicinity of Shun'an prefecture. We have not yet determined how many Vietnamese have joined his entourage."<sup>59</sup> Lư Kỵ's action had been deemed as particularly interesting, given his earlier overtures and the recent alliance forged with Quảng Nguyên's other influential leader Nùng Trí Hội. The Song court responded to Xiao Gu's memorial, "Recently I have received repeated reports that Quảng Nguyên's "barbarian bandits (*manzei*)" have been gathering (for unlawful reasons), and there seems to be no end in sight for these occurrences. These disturbances have now unsettled the general populace in the grotto settlements. However, I'm concerned that the bandits cannot help but to act in a crafty manner."<sup>60</sup> The Song court was well aware of the effect that locally influential leaders still had in a region that Kaifeng now wished to have some say. However, the only effective strategy appeared to be the manipulation of chieftains with significant followings, and hope that these individuals would not one day switch sides.

Political changes on the Vietnamese side of the frontier resulted in further changes to the extant network of relations and, by the 1060s, Lý rulers had become more comfortable viewing themselves as a dynastic power with the imperial authority and apparatus of power needed to maintain a long-term command over their expanding territory. Lý Phật Mã, second ruler of the dynasty, had set an important precedent for his successors with his ambitious efforts in territorial expansion and the court's establishment of regional dominance over the leaders of local communities, and his son sought to follow and improve upon his father's reign.

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<sup>56</sup> *SHY*, 197.7730–31.

<sup>57</sup> Shen Kua, *Mengxi bitan quanyi*, p. 347.

<sup>58</sup> *SS*, 14.272.

<sup>59</sup> *XZZTJCB*, 228.

<sup>60</sup> *XZZTJCB*, 228.

An important aspect of regional dominance was the maintenance of free passage through the frontier region. On November 26, 1068, Lý Nhật Tôn made this declaration at court,

The military commanders of Guangnan and Jiangnan prefectures always make their presence known along the main route by which we carry memorials to the Song court. Persons travelling this route face difficult obstacles. The high official Nguy Trọng Hòa (?-?) reports that people taking this route face disruption in many counties and prefectures, including all kinds of fees that they must pay. I have ordered the commander of the Sea-based Second Circuit Prefectural Army to act according to ancient rules of protocol when receiving persons along this major thoroughfare. However, in the event that this route is disrupted or cut off, we must not show fear, but instead launch a vigorous defense of the Việt Kingdom.<sup>61</sup>

In that year, Lý Nhật Tôn established new offices for his own government to strengthen the institutional control of his family. Lý dynastic power would remain strong through the end of his reign.

However, with Lý Nhật Tôn's death on February 2, 1072, a succession crisis in the imperial household nearly broke down the imperial authority that the earlier generations had managed to build up. The Crown Prince Lý Can Đức (r. 1072–1127), son of a commoner consort Ý Lan (1044–1117) was only six years old when he took the throne.<sup>62</sup> The young Vietnamese ruler and his regents, including the defender-in-chief (*thái úy*) Lý Thường Kiệt, were soon busy consolidating his authority in the face of court opposition from Lý Nhật Tôn's principal wives. Toward this end, the young ruler turned to the frontier for political backing. The court of Can Đức soon announced a general amnesty for all “outlaws (*tù*)” in the “protected prefectures (*đồ hộ phủ*),” referring to the frontier region.<sup>63</sup> The anonymously authored thirteenth-century court chronicle *A Survey of the History of Việt (Việt Sử Lược)* records that, in gratitude, the local chieftain of Lạng Châu Dương Cảnh Thông (?-?) presented a white deer to the court as tribute followed by numerous officials paying their respects.<sup>64</sup> The emperor ordered that Cảnh Thông be granted the title Grand Guardian (*thái bảo*), following the precedent by Lý Phật Mã of cementing ties with frontier officials with this ancient Chinese honorific title. By the late summer of 1072, Can Đức appears to have felt that his mandate to rule was clear, and he embarked on numerous imperial activities, all of which culminated in the construction of five additions to the imperial palace complex.

### **Wang Anshi's Economic Activism and a New Vision of the Frontier**

By early 1073, some of the most important changes in the Sino-Vietnamese relationship during the Song period were now just beyond the horizon. These changes were influenced by two main factors; the increasing self-confidence of the Lý court in the projection of its autonomous regional authority, and the elements of Song court-sponsored programs of economic activism

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<sup>61</sup> *SHY*, 197.7731.

<sup>62</sup> Lý Can Đức would be known posthumously as Lý Nhân Tông.

<sup>63</sup> Anon., *Việt Sử Lược*, annot., Chen Chinghe (Tokyo, 1987) 2:61.

<sup>64</sup> Anon., *Việt Sử Lược*, annot., Qian Xizuo (Taipei, 1968), p. 38.

and military enhancement, at the urging of reform-minded official Wang Anshi, that touched on the frontier region. Wang's vision of a single centrally directed state enterprise for the management of the empire's resources eventually came into conflict with the Vietnamese court's notion that it should manage the frontier as its rulers saw fit. When the Song leadership was no longer content to administer frontier matters from a distance through its vassal representative, conflicts along the frontier quickly escalated into open, armed hostilities.

Wang Anshi had a vision for an economically and militarily revived Song imperial order that could once again make manifest the grand principles of "original intent" proclaimed by the sage rulers of antiquity.<sup>65</sup> As Peter Bol observes, because Wang Anshi maintained, "all things are in principle part of the greater whole," it became necessary for the state to reconcile and ultimately unite the individual interests of various social groups under the court's leadership. As Bol further notes, where conservatives such as Sima Guang saw a distortion of underlying principle in the trend toward greater commercialization of Song society, for example, Wang Anshi saw an opportunity to use this trend to combine the energies of public and private interest in a more efficient and constructive manner. Extending the state's reach to the frontier region was an extension of Wang's vision of holistic order to the Song Empire and a rationalization of that empire's potential.

What had changed in the interim between Nùng Trí Cao's rebellion and these events was that the Song court had been forced to reevaluate its traditional frontier policy, and the choice was made for more direct administration of the area. Recent scholarship has identified the personal political ambitions of the Shenzong emperor as the motivational forces behind most changes in frontier management during this period. As Paul Smith writes, "fanned as they were by imperial passion, irredentism and frontier adventure emerged during (Shenzong's) reign as a potent form of political capital that swept a new constellation of men—including general, eunuchs, and hawkish bureaucrats—into power."<sup>66</sup> Vietnamese scholarship for this period has traditionally fixed the blame on Wang Anshi and his immediate supporters for territorial expansion in the Sino-Vietnamese frontier region. However, the emperor himself had called for a more aggressive frontier policy wherever the Song bordered on lands formerly under Han Chinese control. Throughout the 1060s military officials were dispatched from Kaifeng to the prefectures of southeastern Guangxi to take up positions as local administrators. Imperial troops were transferred to the region, and the number of war-horses was increased considerably.<sup>67</sup> During this same period, Shenzong's court had closed down the border markets along the Song frontier with the Tangut-led Xi Xia kingdom, and the emperor himself had commended a Song general who had led an unprovoked attack on a Xi Xia border town.<sup>68</sup> The emperor's own desire to recover "lost" territory opened the possibility for experimentation with Wang Anshi's policy for strengthened frontier administration.

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<sup>65</sup> Peter K. Bol, "Government, Society and State: On the Political Visions of Ssuma Kuang and Wang An-shih" in *Ordering the World: Approaches to State and Society in Sung Dynasty China*, ed. Robert P. Hymes and Conrad Schirokauer (Berkeley, 1993), p. 186.

<sup>66</sup> Paul Jakov Smith, "Introduction," draft chapter, in *The Cambridge History of China*, vol. 5, part 1: *The Sung Dynasty and Its Precursors, 906–1279*, ed. Denis C. Twitchett and Paul Jakov Smith (Cambridge, forthcoming), p. 24.

<sup>67</sup> Huang Xianfan, *Nong Zhigao*, p. 101.

<sup>68</sup> SS, 471.13712, 494.14189–90. Smith, "Introduction," pp. 22–23.

One aspect of Wang Anshi's 1060s program of "economic activism" that affected this general region was the court's extended reach into the frontier area for new sources of revenue and strategically valuable items. As Paul Smith notes in a discussion of the Tea and Horse Agency (*duda tiju chama si*) in Sichuan, "by grafting native recruitment onto the strategy of bureaucratic entrepreneurship, reform policymakers decentralized operational and personnel authority to the men who had most to gain from state economic activism and thus acquired for the state unprecedented access to Szechwan's surplus product."<sup>69</sup> Although the Guangnan West circuit region had less to offer the court economically, horses and precious minerals either passed through or were found in close proximity to this area. One of Wang's earliest reform measures in mid-1069 was to grant fiscal intendants in six of the Song's southern circuits the right to disregard local quotas on tribute items, and instead to fill government orders by buying and selling these items according to their prices on the open market.<sup>70</sup> Under Wang Anshi's New Policies reforms, greater attention was paid to seeking out loyal supporters of the Song Empire who could assist with the systematic extraction of these resources.

As historians have explored quite extensively in the past, Wang Anshi's policies did not proceed uncontested at court, and this news spread beyond the frontier. Chinese officials also heard the news that Lý Thường Kiệt had argued publicly in Thăng Long that Wang Anshi, in his plans to expand the training of militias into the frontier region, had already demonstrated that the Song court desired to take control of the frontier, and ignore the precedent of tribute responsibilities. Wang had recently sent a memorial to the Song emperor Shenzong, calling for action from Song imperial troops.<sup>71</sup> For these reasons, Chinese officials announced that the Vietnamese court was once again in danger of losing legitimacy. Cross-frontier tensions had reached a breaking point, and any single event could have sparked a violent reaction.

In 1075, the Quảng Nguyên chieftain Lư Ký unexpectedly launched an attack on Yongzhou; however, Nùng Trí Hối, now ruling from Guihua prefecture (or Wuyang grotto settlement), was able to ward off the attackers.<sup>72</sup> As a result of this attack, or perhaps to preempt future disturbance, emperor Shenzong issued an edict that the members of the native "Five Clans" (*wu xingfan*) of northern Guangnan should present tribute to the court every five years.<sup>73</sup> In 1073, a group from these communities had made a large tribute offering to the Chinese court, and thereafter missions had continued on an erratic schedule. The Song emperor likely desired to standardize relations with these communities without alienating them, given the defection of other groups across the frontier in this period. The *Songshi* estimates that the Five Clans amounted to a sizable population, because they were able to muster a delegation of eight hundred and ninety for their 1073 tribute mission.<sup>74</sup> The Chinese emperor would need a large number of local allies, if he chose to mount a successful attack in the region.

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<sup>69</sup> Paul J. Smith, "State Power and Economic Activism during the New Policies, 1068–1085: The Tea and Horse Trade and the 'Green Sprouts' Loan Policy" in *Ordering the World*, ed. Hymes and Schirokauer, p. 110.

<sup>70</sup> Peter K. Bol, "Government, Society and State," p. 168.

<sup>71</sup> Wang Anshi, "Chibang Jiaozhi" in *Wang Wengong wenji* (Shanghai, 1974), 1:108–9.

<sup>72</sup> *SS*, 15.288.

<sup>73</sup> The "Five Clans" included the Long Fan, Fang Fan, Zhang Fan, Shi Fan, and the Luo Fan. Their home region would be located near modern Guilin. Cited in *SS*, 496.14241.

<sup>74</sup> *SS*, 496.14241.

Given the changing conditions and shifting alliances along the frontier, by 1075 relations between Song and Đại Việt authorities had soured considerably. One local indication of deteriorating relations was the Chinese court's interest in further militarizing the frontier region north of the Nùng clan's home region. In the spring of 1075, Shenzong sent two officials, Hanlin Academy member and director in the Ministry of Justice (*xingbu langzhong*) Shen Qi (1017–88) and former prefect of Qianzhou (today located in southern Jiangxi) Liu Yi (1017–86) to take up the administration of Guizhou, at the site of modern-day Guilin.<sup>75</sup> Shen and Liu were instructed by the court to train the local militia in techniques of riverine warfare. Moreover, the court ordered the local people to cease all trade with subjects of the Đại Việt court, further insulating communities that lay on the northern and southern edges of the frontier.

The Vietnamese court was well aware of these activities, and it prepared a response. As is well known to Vietnamese readers, Lý Thường Kiệt had anticipated an attack from the north, and he chose what later Vietnamese historians would call an “attack in self-defense.” He divided his army into two groups. The objective of the first unit, under the control of his new frontier ally Tông Đán and with a strong contingent of uplands inhabitants, was to invade Guangxi to attract Song troops stationed at Yongzhou south into the frontier.<sup>76</sup> At this same time, the principal army, under the command of Lý Thường Kiệt himself, would deploy along the South China coast to occupy those places then left defenseless.

In the autumn of 1075, Tông Đán took control of the Guwan, Taiping, Yongping, and Qianlong garrisons.<sup>77</sup> During advance of Tông Đán's forces, the fleet of Lý Thường Kiệt, having seized the two prefectures of Qinzhou and Lianzhou, advanced further into Song territory.<sup>78</sup> To alleviate fear and to keep (local Song subjects) off on his rearguard, Thường Kiệt proclaimed that he came only to apprehend a rebel (Luu Ký perhaps?) who had taken refuge in China and whom the Chinese prefect had refused to repatriate. Thường Kiệt also was presented as a liberator of the Chinese people, who had been impoverished and oppressed by the reforms of Wang Anshi.<sup>79</sup>

Lý Thường Kiệt, with Tông Đán, arrived in the early spring of 1076 at Yongzhou and devastated a local Song militia force under the leadership of Zhang Shoujie (d. 1076), the governor-general (*dudu*) of Guangnan West circuit. Zhang himself was beheaded in the fighting at the Kunlun guan (Kunlun Pass).<sup>80</sup> After forty-two days of intense resistance and at the end of their resources, the defenders of the Yongzhou succumbed under a furious attack. Thousands had died in the fighting. The city fortress was completely razed to the ground, and its commander Su Jian (fl. 1071–76) had killed his own family and committed suicide by refusing to leave the blazing

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<sup>75</sup> *DVSKTT* (1993), 3.8. SS, 334.10728. Shen had had experience training frontier militia elsewhere in the empire, and Liu was known to the court for his book *Methods of Distinguishing the Orthodox from the Heterodox* (*Zhengsu fang*), in which the scholar-official described a strategy for encouraging common people to turn from local practices to court-sanctioned ways.

<sup>76</sup> Le Thanh Khoi, *Histoire du Viet Nam: des origines à 1858* (Paris, 1981), p. 159.

<sup>77</sup> Guwan prefecture's location is not easily determined. The Taiping garrison was located in Thât Khê prefecture in modern-day northern Cao Bằng. The Yongping garrison was located between Siming prefecture and Môn Châu or modern-day Na Cham. The Qianlong garrison was located at modern-day Shangsi county in southern Guangxi.

<sup>78</sup> *DVSKTT* (1993), 3.8b.

<sup>79</sup> Le Thanh Khoi, *Histoire du Viet Nam*, p. 159.

<sup>80</sup> Phan Huy Chú, *Lịch triều hiến chương loại chí*. Tập II. Nhân Vật Chí, 2b.

building.<sup>81</sup> However, a large unit of the Song army soon approached, and the LM forces withdrew, taking along an enormous amount of spoils and thousands of prisoners.<sup>82</sup>

Shortly before launching the attack of the Song, Lý Thường Kiệt had also led a successful campaign in 1069 against the southern Cham Kingdom. Therefore, the Song court called on Cham and Khmer forces to join the Chinese in retaliating against Vietnamese aggression.<sup>83</sup> In late 1076, the combined forces under the command of Guo Kui (1022–88), acting as the Annan circuit punitive expedition officer (*Annandao zhaotaoshi*) and his assisting officer Zhao Di (?–?) launched a counter-attack.<sup>84</sup> The combined Chinese army included more than 100,000 men.<sup>85</sup> One hundred mounted cavalymen under the command of Tao Bi (1015–78) entered the frontier by way of the Left River region.<sup>86</sup> The frontier was penetrated at three points. The Song force quickly took possession of the Quảng Nguyên prefecture, crushing resistance among the Đại Việt loyalists and capturing the region's leader, the aforementioned Lư Ký, and setting fire to the *dong* dwellings.<sup>87</sup>

By the beginning of 1077, the combined Song land forces had crushed Lý resistance from Cờ Lang and Quyết Lý, and the Chinese forces were rapidly approaching Thing Long. The Song armies met on northern bank of the Như Nguyệt (or Cầu) River, also known in Chinese sources as the Fuliang River, in modern Bắc Ninh Province.<sup>88</sup> Lý Thường Kiệt regarded the defense of this river to be absolutely crucial to the Vietnamese cause, not only because the Như Nguyệt provided the last possible opportunity to protect the delta region in which the capital was located, but also because this region contained the home village of the dynasty's founder, as well as the tombs of former rulers at Thiên Đức.<sup>89</sup> Lý Thường Kiệt had ordered his men to construct on the river's southern bank a wide earthen rampart protected by several lines constructed from piles of bamboo. Most of his fleet crossed at the mouth of the Bạch Đằng River in order to prevent the Chinese fleet from joining its supporting infantry units.<sup>90</sup>

Nevertheless, the Song front line was able to cross the river, and soon their cavalry riders were no more than several miles from Thăng Long. To encourage the counter-attack, Lý Thường Kiệt ordered one of his officers to hide in the temple of the god of the river, Trương Hát, and to recite the following stanza, known to Vietnamese schoolchildren worldwide:

Over the peaks and rivers of the South reigns the emperor of the South.  
Such is the destiny fixed forever on the Celestial Book.  
How dare the Barbarians invade our land?

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<sup>81</sup> *SS*, 446.13157.

<sup>82</sup> *DVSKTT* (1993), 3.8b.

<sup>83</sup> *SS*, 15.290.

<sup>84</sup> Phan Huy Chú *Lịch triều hiến chương loại chí*, 2b. See also *SS*, 15.290. The compilers of the *SS*'s "Basic Annals" (*benji*) appear to believe that Thường Kiệt's name was Lý Hiến.

<sup>85</sup> *SS*, 303.10051.

<sup>86</sup> *SS*, 334.10736.

<sup>87</sup> *XZZTJCB*, 279.6831.

<sup>88</sup> *XZZTJCB*, 279.6843.

<sup>89</sup> Hoàng Xuân Hãn, *Lý Thường Kiệt*, p. 285.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 285.

Their foolish audacity will witness their bloody rout!<sup>91</sup>

As legend has it, Thường Kiệt's troops were so inspired by this stirring verse; they held their ground to beat back the first wave of Song attackers. The Chinese tried again to cross the river and were again pushed back, sustaining one thousand casualties.<sup>92</sup> Meanwhile the invading naval fleet was held back by Vietnamese defenders at the coast, and so was prevented from providing the necessary backing to continue the attack. The Song foray into Vietnamese territory came to a standstill.

At this point, the two opposing forces faced each other on the banks of the river. The Song forces bombarded Lý positions and their supporting junks. When Lý Thường Kiệt tried to take the offensive, he suffered a significant defeat, in which two Lý princes perished, at the Kháo Túc River.<sup>93</sup> However, logistical problems, the tropical climate, and disease had decimated the Song army, which had lost more than half of its effectiveness. On the other side of the conflict, the Vietnamese court feared that a prolonged war would not produce any positive result. At this point Lý Thường Kiệt made peace overtures. The Song agree to withdraw their troops, but it retained control of five disputed regions of Quảng Nguyên (then renamed Shun'an Zhou, as mentioned earlier), Tư Lang Châu, Môn Châu, Tô Mậu Châu, and Quang Lang, which comprised a major part of the modern Vietnamese provinces of Cao Bằng and Lạng Sơn. The leader of the Chinese assault Guo Kui had left Shun'an Zhou under the administration of his cavalry commander Tao Bi.<sup>94</sup> Chinese sources note that the Vietnamese had seized a section of Song territory along the frontier as well. The war had lasted fifteen months. When the dust had settled, the Đại Việt armies had managed once again to hold off a well-equipped Song military force.

### Border Negotiations and Demarcation

After a long period of strained silence between the two courts, Thăng Long agreed in 1082 to return the captured prefectures of Yong, Qin, and Lian, along with their inhabitants and prisoners-of-war, to Kaifeng. In return, Chinese authorities returned four prefectures and one county seized from the Vietnamese court, including Nùng Trí Cao's birthplace and the Nùng clan home base Quang Nguyên.<sup>95</sup> In the aftermath of these concessions, a poem circulated throughout the Song Empire, one line of which read "Because we had a hankering for Giao Chi elephants, we gave up Quảng Nguyên gold (*Pin Jiaozhi xiang, que shi Guangyuan jin*)."<sup>96</sup>

This resolution of the border dispute did not come without a few revengeful acts by both courts. In the late spring of 1079, Song authorities in Guangnan captured and beheaded Nùng Trí Xuân (d.1079) and took his wife and children as hostages.<sup>97</sup> In 1083, under the pretence of pursuing

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<sup>91</sup> The Vietnamese text reads: "Nam quốc sơn hà Nam đế cư, Tiệt nhiên định phận tại thiên thư, Như hà nghịch lỗ lai xâm phạm, Nhữ đẳng hành khan thù bại hư." Cited in Editorial Board of the Institute of Literature in the Committee for the Social Sciences of Viet Nam. *Tho van Ly-Tran* (Hanoi, 1977–88), p. 321.

<sup>92</sup> *DVSKTT* (1993), 3.9b.

<sup>93</sup> Hoàng Xuân Hãn, *Lý Thường Kiệt*, p. 291.

<sup>94</sup> *SS*, 334.10736.

<sup>95</sup> Li Tao, *Xu Zizhi tongjian changbian* (Taipei, 1961), 297.15.

<sup>96</sup> *DVSKTT* (1984), 3:251.

<sup>97</sup> *SS*, 15.297.

Nùng Trí Hội, Vietnamese troops attacked his home prefecture Guihua. The *Songshi* reports that when Trí Hội approached the military commissioner (*jinglueshi*) Xiong Ben (1026–91) to plead for fresh troops to fight off the Vietnamese, Xiong instead had the chieftain brought into custody for questioning. Lý Can Đức then assembled for troops to “thank” Xiong Ben, and to request the return of “the eight động,” that is, the six counties of Bảo Lạc and the two aboriginal settlements of Susang.

However, the two courts soon recognized that the time had come to resolve their differences regarding sovereignty over the border regions of Quảng Nguyên and Guihua. In 1084 the Vietnamese court sent the Director of Military Personnel (*binh bộ thị lang*) Lê Văn Thịnh (fl. 1075–96) to negotiate border issues with the Chinese. Xiong Ben sent the Left River Region’s military inspector and a Wang Anshi supporter Cheng Zhuo (?–?) to argue the Song’s case. In the vicinity of the Left River, surveying delegations from both courts inspected the area separately and then convened at the Song-held Yongping garrison in southernmost Guangnan.<sup>98</sup>

Negotiations proceeded from July 6 to August 8, 1084. The Vietnamese delegation spoke of designating Quảng Nguyên and Guihua prefectures as two sides of a fixed border (*qiangjie*) region between the two states. Lê Văn Hưu’s *History of the Great Viet (Đại Việt Sử Ký)* contains these comments about the Vietnamese negotiator: “Lê Văn Thịnh should be regarded as a good official. He was someone who got along with others. He did not seek to vex (his Chinese counterparts) or cause trouble, and so he was able to change the attitude of the Song emperor. As for the six counties that Đại Việt troops had invaded, the resources of this territory had not yet been utilized by anyone. The leader of the Vietnamese delegation chose a negotiation strategy that avoided the ill-will which might have emerged from China’s defeat at the hands of Vietnamese troops.”<sup>99</sup>

However, Lê Văn Thịnh proved also to be a tough negotiator, and the Chinese officials present found it very difficult to challenge his points.<sup>100</sup> When the Song emperor heard of the proposal made by the Vietnamese court, he ordered his officials to look into Lê Văn Thịnh’s reasons for wanting to retain control of Quảng Nguyên. He then offered Lê Văn Thịnh the lavish gift of an ornamental belt, a robe, and five hundred bolts of thick silk. By the end of the negotiations, however, Lê Văn Thịnh had retained control for the Vietnamese court of the area beyond the Eight Passes (*bát ái*), that is, Bảo Lạc and Susang. With the successful conclusion of the negotiations, the *Songshi* compilers noted, “the South’s turmoil was thus quelled.”<sup>101</sup>

The Song court quickly placed the overtures for negotiations in the context of tribute protocol. Concerning the prefectures and counties seized by Song troops, the Chinese emperor issued the following edict,

You, my nobleman, as the administrator of the southern kingdom of Giao Chi (Nanjiao), have for generations maintained hegemony over this region. However, you have now lapsed in virtue by disobeying my orders and by robbing the frontier towns. You have

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<sup>98</sup> *DVSKTT* (1993), 3.11.

<sup>99</sup> Lê Văn Hưu, *Đại Việt Sử Ký* (Hanoi, n.d.), A. 1272/1, p. 140.

<sup>100</sup> Hoàng Xuân Hãn, *Lý Thường Kiệt*, p. 338.

<sup>101</sup> *SS*, 334.10732.

cast aside the notions of paying heed to your ancestors and to assumptions of loyalty and obedience. And you have added annoyance for this court by launching your attack. Your troops have advanced deep into Song territory, and they are on the verge of heading home only after becoming exhausted. The signs of their crimes are many, and there is no need to list more of your transgressions. Now you are sending envoys to reestablish tribute relations. I have examined your messages, and opinions. Clearly, you have repented. I am in charge of a myriad of kingdoms, and I do not distinguish between those kingdoms close at hand and those far away. However, I see the people of Yongzhou and Qinzhou, displaced by fire and theft, long ago lost their native lands. I will wait until I have sent these people back to their border region before I give Quảng Nguyên and the other lands back to Giao Châu.<sup>102</sup>

The *Songshi* compilers had this comment, regarding the territory, considered during the negotiations:

Shunzhou (or Quảng Nguyên) is located in the extreme southern region, and this region was used to defend (the Song Empire's) frontier. Due to the dense fog and pestilent conditions, and many of the region's inhabitants died of illness. Tao Bi actually died while posted here. The court knew that this area was of no use, so the Chinese negotiator returned a total of four prefectures and one county. However, Quảng Nguyên was formerly attached to the Yongzhou administration region as a *loose rein* aboriginal district. It originally did not belong to Giao Chi.<sup>103</sup>

Although all Song rulers through the period described above had allowed Vietnamese leaders to regulate frontier affairs in this region, the thirteenth-century Yuan-period compilers of the *Songshi* had already altered this perception to claim a precedent for direct control of this territory in question by Chinese authorities.

By the end of the Northern Song in 1126, rulers in Kaifeng understood that the Đại Việt region occupied a place one step further away from the influence of the Chinese central court. According to the map *An Illustration of Prefectures and Commanderies Beyond the Influence of Our Dynasty* (*Benchao huawai zhoujun tu*), the region labeled An Nam on this map is clearly left within the Song Empire, the prefectures making up the Đại Việt territory are placed outside of China, retaining the same status the well-known Sixteen Prefectures (Shiliu zhou) that had once been lost to the Liao.<sup>104</sup>

## **FIGURE 7.2 IS OMITTED FROM THIS FORMATTED DOCUMENT**

**Figure 7.2** An Illustration of Prefectures and Commanderies Beyond the Influence of Our Dynasty (*Benchao huawai zhoujun tu*) from a Song-period edition historical atlas.

*Source:* Tôyô Bunko edition; Shanghai: Guji, 1989, pp. 80–81.

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<sup>102</sup> *SS*, 488.14069.

<sup>103</sup> *SS*, 488.14069.

<sup>104</sup> According to the legend on the Ming edition of this map, the “lost” southwestern prefectures include Giao, Phong, Nhung, Nghiêm, Điền, Ái, Hoan, Lục, Phúc Lộc, Trường, Việt, Ôn, Diễn, Lâm, Cảnh, Hoàn, Bình, Cầm, Sơn, and Vũ An. The home region of Nùng Trí Cao, Quảng Nguyên, has been placed back within Song territory. For a useful source on Vietnamese historical geography, see Nguyễn Văn Siêu, *Đại Việt địa dư toàn biên* (Hanoi, 1997).

## Conclusion

Historians have certainly not been in total agreement when describing the state of affairs along the frontier in the aftermath of Nùng Trí Cao's rebellion. The clearest discernable "school" of scholarship may be found among modern Vietnamese historians, who argue that the frontier communities rallied in support of the nation-building efforts of the Lý leadership. Much of this scholarship begins with the assumption that the Sino-Vietnamese frontier region had remained vaguely defined with the advent of the Đại Việt Kingdom and its recognition by China.<sup>105</sup>

However such a statement depends heavily on very modern notions of political boundaries and the rights and responsibilities of nation-states, which maintain these boundaries. As I have argued in this study, a premodern frontier can lack a clearly delineated physical demarcation, and still be divided into unambiguously understood spheres of administration. In the case of the Sino-Vietnamese frontier before Nùng Trí Cao's revolt, the Song court through the precepts of tribute protocol expected the Vietnamese court to manage affairs in the Chinese court's name in this region. When disturbances arose, the Chinese leadership would turn to Vietnamese authorities for rectification.

However, the Nùng Trí Cao rebellion and its aftermath would change everything. The Chinese court's response to the regional tensions also reflected the increased interest of Kaifeng in the resources of the Guangnan region. The Song court, facing border opposition both in the northern and southern regions of the young empire, implemented new policies that emphasized the stricter definition and regulation of its internal territory.<sup>106</sup> Changes even in the content of questions for the civil service examinations reflected this shift toward a more aggressive border policy.<sup>107</sup> The Vietnamese court, however, viewed Nùng Trí Cao's insurgence as an interruption in the orderly conduct of tribute relations. Drawing specifically on the Chinese model of tribute as signifier of political submission, the Đại Việt emperor saw Nùng Trí Cao and his followers as disloyal subjects of his domain, worthy of punishment for this reason.

In his summary of changes to frontier policy in the late Northern Song, Okada Koji has argued that between 1068 and Song Huizong's Chongning reign period (1102–6), through the border negotiations with the Lý court, the Song court attempted to pursue a more assertive frontier policy by abandoning the *jimi* prefecture system in favor of opening up *jimi* territories for economic development, but that is new policy ultimately failed.<sup>108</sup> Okada attributes the failure to two factors. First, abandoning the existing *jimi* system necessarily involved the establishment of a formal administrative arrangement that included the posting of officials to these outlying areas. The funding of such new positions put a greater strain on court resources at a time when Kaifeng could not afford the extra financial burden.<sup>109</sup> Secondly, the Song court for purposes of taxation treated similarly Han settlers and non-Han frontier inhabitants outside *jimi* administrative regions. These non-Han communities were soon expected to should the greater tax burden that resulted from the construction of new fortification and road systems along the frontier. For this reason, the Tai-speaking residents of the frontier protested violently when large groups of Han

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<sup>105</sup> See Le Thanh Khoi, *Histoire du Viet Nam*, p. 158.

<sup>106</sup> Okada Koji, *Chûgoku kanan minzoku shakaishi kenkyu* (Tokyo, 1993), p. 246.

<sup>107</sup> Okada, *Chûgoku kanan minzoku shakaishi kenkyu*, p. 249.

<sup>108</sup> Okada, *Chûgoku kanan minzoku shakaishi kenkyu*, p. 20.

<sup>109</sup> Okada, *Chûgoku kanan minzoku shakaishi kenkyu*, p. 20.

settlers began to flood into the region.<sup>110</sup> By the beginning of the twelfth century, this shift in policy was suspended and the earlier *jimi* administration was reinvigorated.



**Figure 7.1** Map of 1075 Song-LM frontier war (including contested territories).

Source: Map created by James Anderson.

To the south of these *jimi* areas, the Vietnamese leadership also changed its frontier policy to adopt a less territorially aggressive approach. Thăng Long's northern expansion was reversed after the 1075 conflict, which altered the Vietnamese court's direct control over local communities as well. The *Songshi* notes that soon after the frontier war Lý Nhân Tông agreed in 1082 to return the three captured Song prefectures Yongzhou, Qinzhou and Lianzhou along with one thousand prisoners-of-war, he also sent a group of 221 persons to the Song. Men over the age of fifteen all bore the aforementioned tattoo saying "Army of the Son of Heaven" and men over twenty bore the mark "conscripts of the Southern Court" (*tou nanchao*). Women bore the tattoo "official guests" (*guanke*) on their left hands.<sup>111</sup> While the Vietnamese court had earlier regarded this population as servants in the Lý cause of expansion, turning them over to the Chinese authorities as a gesture of goodwill was also a sign that these frontier communities no longer held great importance by the 1080s.

<sup>110</sup> Okada, *Chûgoku kanan minzoku shakaishi kenkyu*, p. 20.

<sup>111</sup> *SS*, 488.14069.

However, the successful conclusion of border negotiations was indicative of more than a provisional resolution of differences between the three parties along the frontier. Chinese imperial might no longer served as a strong deterrent in the face of the Vietnamese court's expansion of regional power, and the Song could do little to control or impede the refashioning of the Lý in the image of the Chinese imperial model. Nevertheless, the Chinese remained the stronger of the two parties, and Vietnamese leadership carefully maintained its tributary ties with the Song court out of the conviction that this system was, in the final analysis, the best option available. Once clear boundaries had been drawn, major military tensions quickly subsided. Trade issues, and not border conflict, would define the Sino-Vietnamese exchanges by the late eleventh century. The bonds of the tribute system would remain strong, but both sides now regarded the material benefits of close ties to be more important than the quest to iron out political differences. Lý leaders, for their part, turned their attention inward, concentrating on the expansion and elaboration of their own empire. The Chinese leaders also redirected their attention, now having more than enough to occupy their concerns along their northern, rather than southern, frontier.

### Note

This chapter is adapted from the corresponding chapter in the author's *The Rebel Den of Nùng Trí Cao: Loyalty and Identity along the Sino-Vietnamese Frontier* (Seattle; Singapore, 2007). All translations are mine unless otherwise noted.

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