

The Formation, Institutional Structure and Integration of the Minh Hương Community (*Minh Hương xã*) in Hội An from the Mid-17th to the Mid-19th Centuries

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Abstract: This paper focuses on the formation, institutional structure, and integration of the Minh Hương community (*Minh Hương xã*) in Hội An from the mid -17th to the mid - 19th centuries. The study analyzes a number of issues, such as the wave of Chinese migrants from China to Hội An, especially during the political movements and uprisings of the anti-Qing movement to overthrow the Qing and restore the Ming. Given this situation, many Chinese refugees and Ming officials fled to Hội An, escaping the wars and disturbances in mainland China. They established the Chinese *Minh Hương xã* in Hội An trading port. The Minh Hương (明香) understood this term to mean “maintaining joss-sticks for the Ming dynasty,” but in 1827 the Vietnamese Court took it to mean the “Minh village” (明鄉) - the character for “village” (鄉) being a homophone of that for “joss-stick” (香). Hence, members of a Minh Hương village included Chinese men married to Vietnamese women, and their descendants. This paper also focuses on the institutional structure and organization of the Minh Hương xã, as well as its relations with local society and local government.

Keywords: *Minh Hương xã*, Chinese diaspora, Hội An, Nguyễn lords, Nguyễn dynasty.

Subject classification: History.

1. Introduction

Historically, there are documents showing that a Chinese community already existed in Hội An trading port before the Ming dynasty was taken over by the early Qing rulers (1644). Nevertheless, the first *Minh Hương xã* (i.e. Minh Hương village - 明香社, later known as 明鄉社) was established in this port, around the mid-17th

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century. Numerous local written items in Chinese characters still exist today such as inscriptions, epitaphs, tombstone markings, information on family clans, purchase contracts and rental agreements, various reports, records of taxpayers, and other historical documents, which have been preserved in vestiges of the *Minh Hương xã* in Hội An. In addition, up to now vestiges of the *Minh Hương xã* have been preserved and are relatively intact. The complex includes religious and architectural works such as village halls, pagodas, assembly halls, altar-houses, tombs and historic graves. However, in addition to some studies on the Minh Hương village introduced by the late Prof. Chen Ching-ho (Chingho, 1974; Chingho, 1969; Chingho, 1962; Chingho, 1959; Chingho, 1957), several other studies have been written on this topic (Nguyễn Thiệu Lâu, 1941; Charles, W., 2021; Charles, W., 2015: 141-166; Nguyễn Ngọc Thơ, 2018; Taiffao Wi-Vu Chiung, 2013: 87-114; Li Qingxin, 2009: 205-225; Lee, K. C., 2013; Nguyễn Trí Trung & Trần Văn An, 2005; Lê Vĩ Phụng, 2015: 69-77; Trịnh Thị Lệ Hà, 2013: 60-67). Consequently, I conducted several fieldwork sessions in *Minh Hương xã* in Hội An for various years, such as 2004, 2006, 2011, and 2023. I collected a number of local Chinese resources, based on which this article refers to some issues about the *Minh Hương xã* during the period of the Nguyễn lords and the early Nguyễn dynasty. The objectives of this paper are to provide an overview of Hội An's *Minh Hương xã* by analyzing its establishment and organization, as well as noting the interaction between the Minh Hương people and the local people throughout history.

2. The formation and institutional structure of the *Minh Hương xã* in Hội An

2.1. The formation of the Minh Hương xã in Hội An

With the development of foreign trade in Hội An since the end of the 16th century, and with the full consent of the Nguyễn lords in Quảng Nam, a Chinese quarter was established in this port town. Its existence has been proved to date back as early as the beginning of the 17th century. The Italian Jesuit missionary Christophoro Borri, who lived in *Đàng Trong* [or Quinam, kingdom of Cochinchina] from 1618-1621, wrote about the Chinese quarter (Borri, C., 1998: 89). (In this article, the author refers to a number of places such as *Đàng Trong*, Cochinchina, Quinam, and Quảng Nam to illustrate the territory of the Nguyễn lords). Also, a Chinese monk, *Thích Đại Sán* (Shi Dashan), who arrived at the royal capital on March 13, 1695, left his pagoda to go to Hội An in order to return to *Guangdong* (廣東). He stated: “Hội An is an international port, with a street following the course of the river for three to four *li* (i.e. *dặm*, 1.5-2km) named *Đại Đường nhai* (大唐街 - Great Tang Street, today's Trần Phú street). The people who lived on this street all came from Fujian (福建), and dressed in the Ming fashion. The local women were very good traders, so the merchants who came here married them to help them with their trading” (Thích Đại Sán, 1964:154; Li, T. & Anthony, R., 1993: 58).

The Ming dynasty fell in 1644, having been ousted by the Manchus who established the Qing dynasty. Subsequently, many mainstream political movements and uprisings arose to “*Oppose the Qing, Restore the Ming*”. Thus, the Qing dynasty was decried as having destroyed traditional Chinese culture by banning traditional Chinese clothes and forcing Chinese people to wear their hair in a queue in the Manchu style. Given this situation, many Chinese refugees and Ming officials fled to Hội An to escape the wars and disturbances on the Chinese mainland. They subsequently established the Chinese *Minh Hương xã* in Hội An port. *Minh Hương* (明香) understood this term to mean “*maintaining joss-stick for the Ming dynasty*”, but in 1827 the Vietnamese court took it to mean “Ming village” (明鄉) - the character for “village” (鄉) being a homophone of that for “joss-stick” (香). (*Đại Nam thực lục chính biên, đệ nhị kỷ* - Primary compilation of the veritable records of the second reign of imperial Vietnam, 2007: 649).

The term *Minh Hương* is now commonly used to indicate the people of Sino-Vietnamese parentage or the village [i.e. *xã*] where these people live collectively. As for its original meaning, Gustave Hue defined it as “the Ming refugees who came to Annam when mainland China was occupied by the Manchus” (Gustave Hue, 1937:573). Furthermore, A. Schreiner claimed that it originally meant “the people maintaining the ‘*huang hwa*’ [cult] of the Ming dynasty”, and that it also indicated “the *métis* (i.e., mixed-race people) born by the marriage between the Vietnamese women and Ming people who took refuge in Cochinchina in the 17th century” (Schreiner, 1900-1902; Chingho, 1974: 36-37). According to a stele preserved in the *Minh Hương Tụ tiên đường* (明鄉萃先堂 - the Ancestral Temple of *Minh Hương xã*), this is where gatherings for villages take place, *Tụ tiên đường* (hereafter) of the *Minh Hương xã*: “When the Ming dynasty collapsed, many people, refusing to serve the ensuing dynasty [i.e. the Qing], escaped to the south without revealing their official titles and real names. They joined together with other Chinese residing in the South, and in the naming of the village, the character *Minh* was adopted with the implication of commemorating the name of the destroyed dynasty to which they had been attached”. Stone Inscription at the *Minh Hương Tụ tiên đường* (明鄉萃先堂 - the Ancestral Temple of *Minh Hương xã*’s former generation gathering), the origin was 明祚既遷，心不肯貳，遂隱其官，避地而南至，御名字，則會唐人在南者，冠以明字存國號也。

So, as the descendants of the Ming loyalists, the Chinese were called “*Minh Hương*”. The term, *Mingxiang* in Chinese, meant maintaining joss-sticks for the Ming dynasty. In 1827, Emperor Minh Mạng took it to mean “Ming village”- the character for “village” is a homophone of that for “joss-stick” (*Đại Nam thực lục chính biên đệ nhị kỷ* - Primary compilation of the veritable records of the first reign of imperial Vietnam, 2007: 649). *Minh Hương xã* included, as their members, Chinese who were married to Vietnamese women, and their descendants. Prior to the late 19th century, women were simply not permitted to leave China; hence, when overseas, male immigrants out of necessity had turn to women in the new arrival.

What was distinctive about the development in Vietnam is that the offspring of these mixed relationships were not integrated into the new society, but rather they tended to avoid further intermarriage and to emphasize those aspects of their mixed heritage that set them apart from the mass of indigenes (Skinner, 1996: 52).

Roughly speaking, the *Minh Hương xã* are somewhat similar to traditional Vietnamese villages in terms of their organizational structure and managing apparatus. Community alliance was a specific form of organization and integral to success in the hands of the Chinese in their endeavors to assert themselves into socio-economic life of their resident country. Although originally applied to registered Chinese, in the 19th century the term *Minh Hương* came to refer specifically to the offspring of Sino-Vietnamese intermarriage - the *Ming Hương* who were the offsprings of intermarriage between the Ming refugees and the Vietnamese (Nguyễn Cẩm Thúy, 2000: 38). Yet, unlike the Peranakans in Malaya and the Dutch Indies, or the Metstizos in the Philippines, the *Minh Hương*, as a group, were not culturally distinctive; they did not develop a particular style of dress, cuisine, or language. The cultural distance traversed by the Chinese integrating with the Vietnamese was short and smooth, and no intermediate group emerged.

Thus, from the 17th to early 19th centuries, the *Minh Hương xã* in Hội An was a Chinese community that maintained joss sticks for the Ming dynasty. Also, from 1827, the *Minh Hương xã* was officially recognized by the government to include Chinese who were married to Vietnamese women and their descendants.

Regarding the date the *Minh Hương xã* in Hội An originated, we must first define the meaning of the name. As for the meaning of the appellation it relates to: “the partisans of Ming, who observe the cult of the late emperor [of Ming]”, or “the people who continue to be faithful to the (destroyed dynasty of) *Ming*”. In addition, the *Minh Hương xã* had never existed before the dissolution of the Ming. Secondly, after an investigation of the troubled situation in the southern part of the Chinese mainland, two groups of Chinese arrived in Vietnam; in particular, they came to Hội An after the rise of the Qing emperor. The first was a group of Chinese merchants [mostly Fukienese], siding with the government of the Zheng [i.e. Koxinga]; they came principally from Taiwan, the most powerful base of the partisans of Ming. They followed the policy of “anti-Manchus”, and traded with Vietnam during the blockade on the continent, viz. 1661-1685.

As the majority were merchants, tasked with purchasing rice and weapons for the Zheng government, a few of them settled permanently in Hội An. The other group consisted of refugees who arrived in Vietnam from southern China during the period immediately succeeding the invasion by the Qing army, viz. 1645- 1661.

As long as the term *Minh Hương* is related to the idea of inheriting the *Ming* (Vietnamese: *Minh*) tradition or the cult (*Hương hỏa*) of the Ming emperors, it is reasonable to assume that the *Minh Hương xã* was established after the fall of the Ming dynasty. Therefore, the question remains, what date was the *Minh Hương xã*

established? According to Chen Ching-ho, the *Minh Hương xã* of Hội An was established by a group of Ming refugees several years after the issue of the pigtail ordinance in 1645, probably around 1650 (Chingho, 1960: 18). In addition, Mr. Nguyễn Thiệu Lâu also stated that: “there came from China three persons: Tây Quốc Công, Ngô Đình Công, and Trương Hoàn Công who were known as Tam Gia among the villagers of the *Minh Hương xã*.... Their primary contribution to the community was that they obtained the official recognition from the Nguyễn court for the establishment of their village, thus the name *Minh Hương xã* first appeared in the middle of the 17th century” (Nguyễn Thiệu Lâu, 1941: 359-367).

Following these considerations, the date of the foundation of the *Minh Hương xã* must have been in the period between 1645 and 1661. However, considering that a wooden plaque dated as early as 1653 preserved in the temple of *Quan Công* (關公廟) in Hội An, already bore the name “*Minh Hương*”, it can be concluded that the *Minh Hương xã* of Hội An was founded between 1645 and 1653, probably several years after 1645 as the first village in Vietnam for Chinese refugees of the Ming dynasty (Chingho, 1960: 30).

2.2. The institutional structure of the *Minh Hương xã* in Hội An

According to the legend of the *Minh Hương xã*, there were a number of distinguished personages who had promoted the welfare of the commune as “*Tiền Hiền*” (前賢 - Meritorious Predecessors), and placed their mortuary tablets on the altar located in the *Tụy tiên đường* of their commune built in 1820 as a place to hold memorial services in the Spring and Autumn every year to honor them. So far, these *Tiền Hiền* have been divided into three groups: (1) “*Thập Lão*” (十老 - Ten Elders), (2) “*Lục Tính*” (六姓 - Six men of Six Clans), and (3) “*Tam Gia*” (三家 Three - Families or Three Squires) and individuals. They were worshiped vaguely as founders of the village, but nobody has exact information about their lives and professions.

First of all, a general description on the meritorious deeds of *Tiền Hiền* was inscribed on the second stone tablet of *Tụy Tiên đường*, which reads: “Our village has enshrined *Thập Lão* belonging to the clans of Ngụy (魏), Trang (莊), Ngô (吳), Thiệu (邵), Hứa (許), and Ngũ (伍). They were officials in the former Chinese Ming dynasty. When the dynasty collapsed, they refused to serve the subsequent dynasty [i.e. Ch’ing or Qing] and escaped to the south without revealing their official titles and real names. They connected with other Chinese residing in the south, and in the naming of the village, the character ‘*Minh*’ (明 - Chinese: *Ming*) was adopted as a way to commemorate the name of the fallen dynasty to which they had been attached. Similar villages were thus established all over the country, but the one in Quảng Nam was the first among the thirty-six provinces, namely *Minh Hương xã Tụy Tiên Đường Bi ký* (明鄉社萃先堂碑記 Stone inscription at the Ancestral Temple of *Minh Hương xã*. As a matter of fact, in 17th century Hội An not only was there the *Thập Lão* group, but most certainly many other Ming

Chinese who made up the primary part of the early Chinese settlers.

It is important to note that the *Tụy tiên đường* inscription, by not distinguishing clearly between the two groups of *Thập Lão* and *Lục Tính*, tends to give a false impression that *Thập Lão* means the ten persons belonging to the six clans of *Nguy* (魏), *ngô* (吳), *Hứa* (許), *Ngu* (愚), *Thiệu*, and *Trang* (莊). It is interesting to observe that in the list of *Thập Lão*, the Chinese term “*Lão gia*” (老爺) was given to each person. As *Lão gia* has been used in China as a honorific appellation applied to officials or high-ranking figures since the Ming period, it seems reasonable to consider that the ten Chinese they served in government so-called *Thập lão* which was doubtlessly an abridgement of *Thập lão gia* that corresponds to the *Thập đại lão* (十大老) evident in the *Tụy Tiên đường* inscription.

One more fact that emerged from this tablet is that the *Thập lão* were actually Chinese immigrants who had either held office under the Ming dynasty or entered government service under the Nguyễn lords after taking refuge in Quảng Nam, rather than the ten Chinese merchants who settled in the *Ming Hương xã*, after their short stays in *Thăng Bình*, *Trà Nhiêu*, and *Thanh Hà* as suggested by Nguyễn Thiệu Lâu (Nguyễn Thiệu Lâu, 1941: 359-367).

Turning to the *Lục tính* group, the existing tombstone bears some indications that prove the existence of the two *Ngô* (吳) and *Nguy* (魏) clans. In *Hậu Xá áp* of *Thanh Hà xa* there is the tomb of *Ngô Dụng Minh* (吳孕明), which was erected “on the auspicious day of the 12th lunar month of *Tân Mùi*. Since the year of *Tân Mùi* is believed to be the 30th year of the reign of *K'ang-his* (康熙) (i.e. 1691), the man with the clan name *Ngô* (吳) in the list of *Lục Tính* can, with all probability, be identified as *Ngô Dụng Minh* who was in the office of *Cai phủ tàu* (customs inspector) who was given the title of Marquis of *Minh Đức*.

With regard to the *Tam Gia*, more historical documentation is available to describe them. In this connection, a general description was given in the inscription commemorating the first extensive renovation of *Quan Thánh* (關聖) temple in 1753. The inscription stated: “In view of the deteriorating situation of the temple, the village community suggested that the temples should be renovated; however, they realized that the plan required a large amount of money and a long period of time, if they merely relied upon the customary contribution of *Tam Ly* (三厘 - Three Ly, raised on the merchant junks trading in Hội An). Fortunately, there are three distinguished gentlemen in our village: *Tây Quốc Tường*, *Ngô Đình Khoan*, and *Trương Hoảng Cơ*, who have long been regarded as local leaders and patrons of the temples by continually doing good deeds and helping the poor, without regard for increasing their personal fame. These three gentlemen contributed the expenses for the renovation out of their own purses, in order to cover the expenditure involved. The notables of this village were very happy to collaborate with them, so that the completion of the renovation would be accelerated, as mentioned in *Hội An Minh Hương Quan Thánh miếu trùng tu bi ký* (會安明香關聖廟重修碑記 - Stone

Inscription erected in Commemoration of the Renovation of Quan Thánh temple at *Minh Hương xã*, Hội An), erected in the 2nd lunar month of the year of Quý Dậu (1753).

In addition, Nguyễn Thiệu Lâu has been able to prove that the *Thập lão* were ten Chinese immigrants, who served as officials (mainly as customs officers) in the Nguyễn court. The most famous were *Khổng Thiên Như* and *Châu Kỳ Sơn*, both of whom were appointed to the post of “*Cai phủ tàu*” (customs inspector). They lived in the early days of the *Minh Hương xã* and died respectively in 1695 and 1694. On the other hand, the *Lục Tánh* are regarded as six notables of the village. They lived in the same period with the *Thập Lão*, and their names can be identified on some of the old tombs that still exist in Hội An’s suburbs. As evidence of the *Tam Gia*, one can concur that the inscription of 1753 found in the temple of *Quan Công* (關公廟) clearly mentions their names: *Tây Quốc Tường*, *Ngô Đình Khoan*, and *Trương Hoàng Cơ*, as well as describing their contributions to the 1753 temple reconstruction. Therefore, the *Tam Gia* are regarded as three wealthy notables of the village who lived in the mid-18th century (Nguyễn Thiệu Lâu, 1941: 359-367).

For administrative purposes, the *Minh Hương xã* was divided into two “*xứ*” (處 - Section). The *Hương Thắng* and *Hương Định*, with ten “*lân*” [dependency] in neighboring districts. See following table of *lân*s:

Table 1: “*Lân*” (Dependency) of Hội An’s *Minh Hương xã*

	<i>Name of Lân</i>	<i>Distribution</i>
1	Hương Hưng Lân (香興鄰)	Việt An commune
2	Hương Khánh Lân (香慶鄰)	Khánh Thọ commune, Tam Kỳ district
3	Hương Thịnh Lân (香盛鄰)	Hương An commune, Quế Sơn district
4	Hương Kỳ Lân (香歧鄰)	Tam Kỳ district
5	Hương Long Lân (香隆鄰)	Trà Nhiêu commune
6	Hương Thuận Lân (香順鄰)	Bàn Thạch commune
7	Hương Hoà Lân (香和鄰)	Hà Nhuận commune
8	Hương Thắng Lân (香勝鄰)	Hương Thắng section
9	Hương Định Lân (香定鄰)	Hội An town
10	Hương An Lân (香安鄰)	Hội An (former Cổ Trai commune)
11	Hương Mỹ Lân (香美鄰)	?
12	Hương Xuân Lân (香春鄰)	Quảng Ngãi Province

The following is a list of officials and leaders in the village in order of importance as noted in *Hội An Minh Hương Quan Thánh Miếu trùng tu bi ký* (會安明香關聖廟重修碑記 - Stone inscription erected in commemoration of the renovation of the Quan Thánh temple at Minh Hương village, Hội An) erected on

the 6th lunar month of the year of Đinh Hợi, i.e. the 8th year of the reign of Minh Mạng (1827).

Cai xã (該社) means *village chief*, was equivalent to the “*Lý trưởng*” of ordinary Vietnamese villages. The *Cai xã* was the administrative head of the *Minh Hương xã*, and who, as representative of his village had, contact with the local authorities.

Hương quan (鄉官 or *Viên quan*, mandarins native to the village);

Hương lão (鄉老 or 鄉耆老) means the elder resident or councilor of the *Minh Hương xã*. It is equivalent to the *Kỳ Lão* of ordinary Vietnamese villages.

Hương trưởng (鄉長) means notable, and he was the representative of the *Minh Hương xã* residents. As a rule, those with some elementary knowledge of writing and accounting, and who were relatively well off, were elected to the position of *Hương trưởng*.

Thủ vụ Tam Bảo (守務三寶) or *Lý Tam Bảo Vụ* (理三寶霧) or *Hương cúng* (香供), the person responsible for the veneration and maintenance of the temple and pagoda in the *Minh Hương xã*;

Chính trưởng” (政長 - Chief of *Lân*);

Phó Trưởng” (副長 - Assistant chief of *Lân*);

Thông ngôn” (通言 or “*Thông sự*”, interpreter - 翻譯者) (Dương Văn Huy, 2010), one of the staff members of the *Tàu Ty* (艚司 - Office of Trade and Shipping Affairs), the post had been occupied successively by the inhabitants of the *Minh Hương xã* since its establishment.

Regarding religious centers in the *Minh Hương xã*, the first Chinese temples were Buddhist ones - the earliest dating back to the 1620s. These temples provided important ritual services to merchants, perhaps most importantly for proper burial rites, but they also gave shelter to itinerants who lacked a clan connection. In the 1640s, the *Quan Công Miếu* (關公廟 - Guan-gong temple, or *Quan Thánh Miếu* 關聖廟) was founded, and it operated as the center of the merchant community throughout the 17th century. Adjacent was the Maitreya temple [*Di Đà*], which was dedicated to *Quan Âm* (觀音 - the Goddess of Mercy). It was hard to separate religion from trade in the case of the sea goddess *Thiên Hậu* (天后 or 媽祖). Sea goddess altars were a feature on every sea-going vessel, and the first altar established in the town itself dates back to sometime in the mid-17th century (Charles, 2001: 157).

In Hội An, *Quan Thánh* occupies the main altar of *Quan Thánh* temple. Immediately behind this temple is the Buddhist temple of *Quan Âm*, believed to have been erected in the mid-17th century along with *Quan Thánh* temple. *Bao sinh Đại Đế* (大帝) has long been enshrined in *Cẩm Hà* temple, while *Thiên Hậu Thánh*

Mẫu (天后聖母 - Queen of Heaven or Holy Mother) and other subsidiary deities have been worshipped mainly in *Hải Bình* temple, while *Trung Hoa Hội quán* (中華會館 - Chinese Assembly Hall) has been dedicated to the cult of *Thiên Hậu* and *Quan Thánh*.

Apart from the *Quan Thánh* temple of *Trà Nhiêu*, believed to be the oldest historical structure ever built in *Hội An* and the vicinity, the *Quan Thánh Miếu* (also known as the *Quan Công Miếu* or *Quan Đế Miếu* (關帝廟), *Trừng Hán Cung* (澄漢宮), or simply *Chùa Ông* (翁寺)), situated at today's 24 Trần Phú street, *Hội An* town, from a historical viewpoint is the most important and intriguing monument in *Hội An*. *Đại Nam Nhất thống chí* (Đại Nam gazetteer) under the item “*Quan Công tự*” (關公寺) stated: “The temple is situated in the town of *Hội An*. It was established by the *Minh Hương* people on a magnificent scale. In the fifth year of his reign (1824), Emperor Minh Mạng visited the temple during his inspection tour of the South, and donated 300 *lạng* (兩 - tael) of silver to the temple.” (Đại Nam nhất thống chí, 1992).

Though this document does not refer to the date the temple was established, the stele erected in 1753 clarifies that the *Quan Thánh Miếu* and *Quan Âm tự* were built by the *Minh Hương xã* more than 100 years before the erection of the memorial, as mentioned in some Inscription erected in Commemoration of the renovation of *Quan Thánh* temple at *Minh Hương xã*, *Hội An* (會安明香關聖廟重修碑記), Erected on the auspicious day in the 2nd lunar month of the year of Quý Dậu (1753) during the era of Long Phi. Although we are still unable to ascertain an accurate date, it is certain that the two temples occupied the present site by 1653 (Chingho, 1974: 60).

It should be emphasized that the *Quan Thánh* and *Quan Âm* temples undoubtedly played an important role in the social and religious life of *Hội An*'s residents during the 17th and 18th centuries, regardless of their civilian status as either commuting Chinese traders or settlers in the *Minh Hương xã*. In 1695, *Thích Đại Sán* (Shih Ta-Shan) mentioned in the account of his travels, *Hải ngoại ký sự* (海外記事 - Record of countries overseas): “There is the *Quán Phủ Từ Miếu* (*Quan Thánh* temple) on the right of *Di Đà Tự* (*Di Đà* pagoda, where I was lodging). The *miếu* [shrine] serving as the *Hội Quán* (the Assembly Hall) of the Min people (閩南人) [i.e. *Fujianren*], was the object of the most prosperous religious rites.” (Thích Đại Sán, 1964: 157).

In addition, it is widely known that in 17th century *Hội An* there was a pavilion called the *Văn Thọ Đình* (Pavilion of Longevity) and a Buddhist temple called *Quảng Yên Tự*. Though they were located, in the words of the towns people, on a site immediately behind the present day *Trung Hoa Hội quán*, they have both long since disappeared. According to Chingho A.Chen's research, the *Văn Thọ Đình* was established in the late 17th century. Judging from its name, it seems to

have been erected for the purpose of praying for the longevity of the Nguyễn lords. As for *Quảng Yên Tử* temple, which had obviously existed prior to the *Văn Thọ Đình*, it seems to have been destroyed during the disturbances caused by the Tây Sơn uprising in the late 18th century. However, there are still several remnants that testify to its existence in the 1670s (Chingho, 1974: 63).

Other religious centers were established in the 19th century, such as *Minh Hương Tuy tiên đường* (明鄉萃先堂 - the Ancestral temple of the *Minh Hương* xã's former generation gathering) (Tuy (萃): Gathering; Tiên (先): Former Generation) and *Văn Thánh Miếu* (文聖廟 - Văn Thánh temple). In the 20th year of the reign of Tự Đức (1867), the *Minh Hương* xã built the *Văn Thánh Miếu*, a shrine dedicated to worship east of *Hương Định Ấp*. Under the supervision of *Trương Hoài Đình*, *Tú tài* (秀才 - Successful candidate of the provincial mandarin examinations) and holder of the senior grade of the ninth rank the court, construction work began in the ninth lunar month of the year of *Đinh Mão* (1867) and was completed in the third lunar month the following year (*Tuất Thìn*, 1868). The inscription compiled by *Đặng Huy Trứ* in 1872 recorded not only the process of the construction, but it also referred to several important events of the *Minh Hương* xã that occurred in the mid-19th century (Chingho, 1974: 65).

Among them, notably *Minh Hương Tuy tiên đường* was built in the first year of the reign of Emperor Minh Mạng (1820) to the east of *Quan Thánh* temple in order to house the spirit tablets of *Thập Lão*, *Lục Tính*, and *Tam Gia*. Later the *Truy Viễn Đường* was incorporated into the *Tuy Tiên Đường* hall and the whole compound was renamed *Minh Hương Tiên Tự* or *Minh Hương Hội Quán*. *Tuy Tiên Đường* hall seems to have served as the temple of *An Tử Đồng* (桉梓潼), designed for the cult of *Bắc Đế* (北帝) or *Đế Quân* (帝君) as well as the site of the *Minh Văn Hội* (Association of Letters) organized in 1853 by a group of gentry in the *Minh Hương* xã. *An Tử Đồng* (桉梓潼) was a prefecture within the jurisdiction of the Sichuan province (China), as recorded by *Minh Hương xã Tuy tiên đường bi ký* (明香社萃先堂碑記 - Stone inscription at the ancestral temple of *Minh Hương* xã, in the year of Quý Sửu (1853). Furthermore, *Minh Hương Tiên Tự* possesses a genealogical record, known as “*Tuy Tiên Đường Tiên Hiền Hương phả đồ bản*” (a pedigree showing the genealogical data concerning our community's elders worshipped at *Tuy Tiên Đường*), copied by temple-keeper *Lý Thành Ý* (李成意) in the year of *Canh Thìn* or the 33rd year of the reign of Tự Đức (1880). This document contains the names of the *Thập Lão*, *Lục Tính*, and *Tam Gia* for the period prior to the first Emperor of the Nguyễn dynasty of Vietnam, namely Emperor Gia Long (1802-1819), and the list of the *Minh Hương* xã elders as well as notables for the period after Gia Long (Chingho, 1974: 65).

Significantly, these temples are a feature of every maritime Chinese

merchant community at that time. They not only helped to create local community, but also contributed to building a transregional community of maritime Chinese beyond the Chinese state (Charles, 2001: 158). Most of the Sea Goddess temples recorded in Chinese gazetteers, like the temples built in Nagasaki, *Phố Hiến*, and Batavia (Jakarta), claim to have been set up the Kangxi era. These are evidence of Chinese merchants trading in Nagasaki and Hội An, for example, supporting temples in both places.

3. The integration of the *Minh Hương* people into local society

The Chinese were an important economic, alien power; however, they were never isolated in Hội An, as they were in Đàng Trong (Cochinchina or Southern Vietnam) and Japan, or marginalized as was the case in European ports. Nor did the Chinese merchants become powerful enough to control the state, unlike the Chaozhou (潮州) merchants in Thailand. The Nguyễn Lords in Đàng Trong developed their own new strategy, which contained some of the self-regulating elements of the *kapitan* system yet gave the state greater control over the foreign merchant community as a whole. Perhaps the Nguyễn lords would never have charted this new path had not China's fate provided it; in any case, the lords exploited a political disaster in China – the fall of the Ming dynasty to the Qing – to the full benefit of Đàng Trong's foreign trade and the Đàng Trong state. With the Chinese, the Nguyễn lords chose not to continue their hands-off approach to trade, as they had done with the Japanese. Neither did they select a strategy of dealing with Hội An's merchants that could be characterized as directly invasive (Charles, 2001: 167).

Besides, by creating the *Minh Hương xã* in Hội An, the Nguyễn lords incorporated elements of the *kapitan* system that had worked to the state's advantage. They would select a particular group of foreign merchants to administer the town's trade and oversee the foreign merchant community, granting them special privileges in exchange for guarantees of sustained loyalty and a steady flow of customs revenue. The Nguyễn lords could continue to benefit from the presence of ethnic Chinese merchants in their midst, with their family ties, homeland, and religious connections to the Chinese mainland, and with all the strategic and tactical advantages that a long distance relationship afforded. The Nguyễn lords' system, however, was not identical to the *kapitan* one (Charles, 2001: 167-168).

The most important difference was the constitution of the privileged merchant group. In contrast to merchant enclaves throughout Southeast Asia, the new group of foreign merchants ruling over Hội An were not truly foreign. By their very name, their Ming style of dress and haircut, and the story of their origins, the Chinese who formed the *Minh Hương xã* were Chinese only in part, owing to their intermarriage with the local Vietnamese. This ensured that the merchants who

handled foreign trade would always be distinct from the local population; and that the *Minh Hương* would continue to be seen as a foreign group, for emphasis was placed upon their Chinese lineage. But they were *personae non grata* in China, and dependent upon the Nguyễn lords for their survival. Politically, their very existence was an act of defiance against the Ch'ing regime, and practically speaking, a renunciation of subject status within the Chinese empire. The Qing government was aware of their existence and was not happy about it. Any Chinese who joined the *Minh Hương xã* accepted the suzerainty of the Nguyễn lords. The *Minh Hương* strategy afforded the Nguyễn lords effective control over merchants and their foreign trade, but the privileges enjoyed by the *Minh Hương* also offered opportunities to the Chinese merchant community to exert influence over the state. In combination with their authority over foreign trade and shipping, the *Minh Hương* could join the Nguyễn bureaucracy, exercise pervasive influence over the machinery of government, and many *Minh Hương* joined the Nguyễn court. This provided the *Minh Hương* and their expatriate allies with greater power to shut down competition and maintain advantages in *Đàng Trong*'s foreign trade. The *Minh Hương* also enjoyed the privilege of owning land, and so mercantile profits could be invested through *Minh Hương* families in ways that anchored the merchant community firmly into local society, such as the development of inland commercial enterprises, or establishment of temples (Charles, 2001: 169).

Throughout the period of the Nguyễn lords and the early Nguyễn dynasty, the inhabitants of the *Minh Hương xã* were granted the privilege of exemption from conscription, they were freed from the obligation to carry out various labor tasks, such as river transportation or periodically cleaning the market, with the stipulation that they would be responsible for measuring the weight and quantity of all imported goods, as well as acting as interpreters for those frequently arriving each year on foreign ships.

They were also excused from paying the ordinary poll-tax. It was, however, a traditional custom for the *Minh Hương xã* to present a certain amount of money (*Ngân lệ*) to the emperor; the total amount was 80 “*quan*” eight “*lạng*” or “*lượng*” (兩) per year. 01 *lạng* (*lượng*, tael) equal to 10 *tiền* (錢 - coin). This was on celebratory occasions such as the lunar new year, the Imperial birthday, *Tết Đoan Ngọ* (端午節 - Duanwu Festival, or the Dragon Boat Festival), *Tết* of *Tiểu Thương*, or on the anniversary of an emperor's death. During the *Tây Sơn* period, some additional taxes were levied. For example, every male inhabitant was required to pay two “*so*” [36 meters] of cloth to the court. From the beginning of the *Gia Long* era, these regulations were not only maintained, but an obligatory poll tax of two *lạng* was also imposed on the *Minh Hương* villagers. Obviously, the burden of taxes on them was much heavier [about 25% higher] than on ordinary village dwellers (Chingho, 1960; Nguyễn Thiệu Lâu, 1941: 359-367; Trần Kinh Hoà, 1981).

The report of the *Minh Hương xã* for officials in the 39th year of the reign of

Cảnh Hưng (1778) stated: “Previously our ancestors arrived in your country to do business, dispersed throughout districts, and then gathered together to establish the *Minh Hương xã*. We were responsible for checking weights and measures of goods on ships and were interpreters there”, as noted in *Minh Hương xã*’s Chinese materials, No. KH: A18-MH, kept in The Hội An Relics Restoration and Management Board, Hội An. According to *Phủ Biên tạp lục* (Miscellaneous Chronicles of the Pacified Frontiers), the office in charge of overseas trade under the Nguyễn lords was known as *Tàu bộ* (艚部) or *Tàu ty* (艚司) whose senior staff consisted of the following officials: 1 *cai tàu* (該艚) (or Ông *cai tàu* - 翁該艚), 1 *tri tàu*, 2 *cai bạ tàu* (該簿艚) 2 *cai phủ tàu* (該府艚), 2 *ký lục tàu* (記錄艚) and 2 *thủ tàu* (守艚) (Lê Quý Đôn, 1964). *Cai tàu* was regarded as the chief of the office, the equivalent to a combination of the roles of customs superintendent, the Director of the international trade bureau, and Director of Immigration. This high ranking official was very often referred to as Ông *Cai tàu* [i.e. Mr. *Cai tàu*] in the correspondence and records of European traders and missionaries (Chingho, 1974: 47). The term *Cai tàu* was also mentioned by Chu Thuần Thuỷ (Zhou Shun-shui - 朱舜水) in his *An Nam Cung dịch ký sự* (安南供役記事 - Memory of Service in Annam), “the office of *Cai tàu* took charge exclusively of supervising the Chinese residents and controlling shipping affairs; usually *Cai bạ* (該簿 i.e. *Cai bạ tàu*) was appointed to the post” (Chu Thuần Thuỷ, 1999: 28-29; Chingho, 1974: 47).

One thing that should also be mentioned in this connection is that the offices of *Cai phủ tàu*, or *Ký lục tàu*, were occupied, as a rule, by inhabitants of the *Minh Hương xã* or Chinese merchants residing in Hội An. Besides, the Book of the Châu Family Tree (周族家譜) also stated: “the employees of the office in charge of overseas trade were almost all *Minh Hương* people such as *Cai phủ tàu*, *ký lục tàu*, *tri bộ tàu*, and *thông ngôn* (interpreter),... cooperated with the officials in *Trấn dinh* (chief town or headquarter) of this *Tỉnh* (province) to manage and tax the foreign merchant ships”, as recorded in Châu Mỹ Xuyên (周美川) - Châu Family Tree Book (周族家譜), kept in The Hội An Relics Restoration and Management Board, Hội An.

Furthermore, in the year of Tân Mùi (1691), the man with the clan name Ngô (吳) featured in the list of *Lục Tính* can be identified in all probability as Ngô Dụng Minh, who was in the office of *Cai phủ tàu* with the title Marquis of Minh Đức. Like Ngô Dụng Minh, Châu Kỳ Sơn also served as a *Cai phủ tàu* in the Nguyễn lords’ government. Therefore, the village, like other Annamese villages, the *Thập Lão* of the *Minh Hương xã* served as government officials.

On the other hand, to reciprocate the Nguyễn lords’ generous treatment for themselves, the *Minh Hương xã* people were always helping the government by looking for, and purchasing, various kinds of goods from China. In 1747, officials asked the *Minh Hương xã* to purchase 21 kinds of goods, including valuable products such as Shanghai pink velvet, *ngân châu* (cinnabar), *thần châu* (vermilion), face powder, etc. On December 26th in the 25th year of the reign of Cảnh Hưng (1764), the

Nguyễn lords gave orders: “to ask the Toàn Canh fleet to appoint a person to quickly go to Hội An town in order to convey an order from the lord for the *Minh Hương xã* to look for, and purchase, 20 *cân* of the best quality ‘*kim hoa thạch mộc*’ (a kind of Chinese medicine) in the *Tang* people’s street, no need for ‘*hộc mộc*’ (Thạch hộc’ and ‘*hộc mộc*’ are kinds of Chinese medicinal herb, ‘*thạch hộc*’ is growth on stone, and ‘*mộc hộc*’ is growth on wood. ‘*kim thoa thạch mộc*’ is valuable and rare medicine; ‘*đại ba kích*’ is also a kind of Chinese medicinal herb). In addition, to purchase 30 *cân* of ‘*đại ba kích*’ (a kind of Chinese medicine), to give to the Toàn Canh fleet and return quickly. This must be completed within 10 days. Lord Nguyễn issued an order punishing anyone who hid Chinese medicine, and the same goes if the Toàn Canh fleet was late.” (*Minh Hương xã*’s Chinese materials, kept in The Hội An Relics Restoration and Management Board, Hội An).

Moreover, in the fifth year of the reign of Cảnh Thịnh (1797), the officials asked the *Minh Hương xã* to purchase two *gánh* (擔 – picul) of Chinese medicinal herbs; however, the real price was 378 *quan* four *tiền* 52 *đồng*; and officials only paid 338 *quan* four *tiền* 52 *đồng* (Trần Văn An, Nguyễn Chí Trung & Trần Ánh, 2005: 54).

Hence, by creating the *Minh Hương* village, the Nguyễn lords effectively solved the problem of foreign merchants by creating a new mercantile ethnic identity. The *Minh Hương*, through their ancestry, kin, home country, and religious ties, would continue to provide the Nguyễn authorities with access to the Chinese market, as well as other Chinese-dominated ports throughout East and Southeast Asia. They could not suddenly disappear, unlike the Japanese merchants had done, for they were Nguyễn subjects, and neither merchants nor Nguyễn monarchs were subject to the whims of other foreign rulers. Nor could they suddenly turn against the Vietnamese, unlike what the Dutch appeared to have done or pose some unforeseen threat from outside Đàng Trong because of their political status, as with Chinese expatriates. By creating an ethnic group that could inhabit the worlds of the state and the foreign merchants, the Nguyễn lords could very effectively secure the loyalty of merchants and a reliable flow of commerce (Charles, 2001: 167-169).

Under the Tây Sơn rule, especially when the Tây Sơn uprising, and the subsequent civil war, led to the decimation of Chinese communities throughout the country, Hội An was totally destroyed. The name Tây Sơn is used in many ways to refer to the period of peasant uprisings and decentralized dynasties established between the eras of the Later Lê and Nguyễn dynasties in the history of Vietnam between 1770 and 1802. However, as soon as the Tây Sơn leaders settled down to rule the region, it was clear they began working to promote the reconstruction of Hội An and other ports. To that end, the *Minh Hương* system was resurrected and their rights reconfirmed.

In this period, many of Hội An’s *Minh Hương* who were able to evade the Tây

Son navy escaped to the Mekong Delta region to support Nguyễn Phúc Ánh's attempts to return to power. Some of them remained there, since Saigon experienced massive growth during its years as Nguyễn Phúc Ánh's capital, and now looked to assume Hội An's former role as an international entrepot. A number of Hội An's *Minh Hương* families did return, or at least sent one of their sons there, after Nguyễn Phúc Ánh re-conquered the area in 1801. These families built new family temples in Hội An, preserving the port town as their native place, and sent their family members to other important commercial towns in Quảng Nam Province such as *Thăng Bình*, *Duy Xuyên*, *Đà Nẵng*, *Chiên Đàn*, and *Trà My* (Charles, 2001: 202).

In the early years of the Nguyễn dynasty, the *Minh Hương xã* were incorporated into separate villages, just as before, but they were kept distinct from the five *bang* (幫 - congregation) that established separate Chinese ethnic groups as distinct enclaves governed by a coalition of *bang* leaders. The Nguyễn dynasty was established in 1802 after annihilating the Tây Sơn dynasty and conquered all Vietnamese territories, and declared the Empire of Đại Nam. The *Minh Hương xã* were established all over Vietnam. They were still quite a powerful group, and had control over foreign and domestic seaborne commerce within the new Vietnamese empire. Also, to further the process of assimilation of Chinese settlers in Vietnam, the Nguyễn authorities established an intermediate agency to facilitate interaction with Chinese. The *Minh Hương xã* was to be a mediating body between the *Thanh nhân* (清人 - Qing people) and the Vietnamese.

In 1829 the Nguyễn government prohibited *Minh Hương* families from returning to China, and in 1842 registered them separately from immigrant Chinese. This was not too high a price to pay; the *Minh Hương* were allowed to sit the civil service examinations, which opened the door to higher social status.

Under his reign, particularly after the Lê Văn Khôi rebellion (Choi, 2004: 95-97; Minh Mệnh chính yếu, 2010), Emperor Minh Mạng used the opportunity of the rebellion to greatly diminish the power of the *Minh Hương*. The community was transformed into a Vietnamese village, complete with a Vietnamese *Đình* (亭 - village communal house) or village hall, and its rights and privileges were circumscribed. Even its name changed, in order to erase the political connotations of the name and the refugee status it implied. Following this, the organization of the *Minh Hương xã* in Hội An became more aligned to the traditional Vietnamese village by establishing the *Minh Hương Tụ tiên đường* in 1820 as a *Đình* of the community. However, some documents written by the Nguyễn court showed that the *Minh Hương xã* in Hội An still had a little importance in the Quảng Nam region. According to *Khâm Định Đại Nam Hội Điển Sự Lệ* (钦定大南汇典事例 - the official compendium of institutions and usage of Imperial Vietnam) (hereafter known as *Hội Điển*), "in the fourth year of the reign of Gia Long (1805), central

government approved the report on the *Minh Hương xã* that the *Minh Hương* in the Quảng Nam area must pay two pieces (*tấm*) of textile fabric per capita to the government per year, and would be exempt from the poll-tax as before". And, "in the first year of the reign of Emperor Minh Mạng (i.e. 1819), the *Minh Hương* in the Quảng Nam area each year must pay two *lạng* of silver per capita, and tax exemption for other terms; however, this *Minh Hương* is still undertaking to be interpreter, and served as official staff of examination and assessment of goods as before" (Khâm định Đại Nam hội điển sự lệ, 1993: 304). During his reign the *Minh Hương* were not permitted to participate in the election of the Chinese *bang*. They, and their children, were prohibited from returning to China and they were also required to dress like Vietnamese. Therefore, the *Thanh Nhân* in the *bang* in Hội An were managed by the *Minh Hương xã* there.

In addition, in order to strengthen conversion of the *Thanh nhân* to the *Minh Hương* people, the government's attempts to assimilate the Chinese continued throughout the reign of Thiệu Trị (1841-1847), who implemented a number of different strategies. In 1842, a new regulation was decreed, intended to convert *Thanh nhân* members into the *Minh Hương xã*. According to this law, a *Thanh nhân* Chinese who had newly immigrated to Vietnam could live as a member of one of the *Thanh nhân* associations. However, if he had a son or grandson born after he had immigrated, that son or grandson would not be allowed to wear a pigtail, as his father or grandfather had. Once the child reached 18 years of age, the head of the appropriate *Thanh nhân* association had to register him as a member of a *Minh Hương xã*. If, in that region, a *Minh Hương xã* did not exist, then a new one had to be established when at least five male children of *Thanh nhân* members reached maturity (Choi, 2004: 147; Khâm định Đại Nam hội điển sự lệ, 1993: 311).

It can be said that until 1827, the children of the *Minh Hương* were considered to be Chinese, but later they were regarded as Vietnamese and were granted political rights. Besides, at the very least, Theravada Buddhism raised no barrier to assimilation, for the descendants of Chinese have assimilated at a relatively rapid rate in all Theravada Buddhism countries. The case of Vietnam serves to weaken the argument that closeness of fit between the religious system of the Chinese immigrants and that of the receiving society lies at the crux of the matter. In Vietnam, where the religious system, derived in a large part from China, is very similar to that of the Chinese, the descendants of Chinese immigrants assimilated slower compared with various Theravada countries (Skinner, 1966: 73). However, this issue has to be analyzed further by examining Sino-Vietnamese relations.

On the other hand, intermarriage between Chinese settlers and Vietnamese was quite common in Vietnam in general and in Hội An in particular, so much so that one visitor from China called (Cai Ting-lan - 蔡廷蘭) writing in 1835, claimed

that “Vietnamese women love to marry Chinese men” (Thái Đình Lan, 1836: 36; Trần Ích Nguyên, 2009: 244). According to some family records of the *Minh Hương* families in Hội An during this period, numerous Chinese settlers married local women and their children and became members of Hội An’s *Minh Hương xã*. The family record of the Trang (莊), Châu (周), and Thái (蔡) clans living in Hội An included the names of Chinese merchants who had married local women. For instance, a man named Châu Duy Bửu, alias Minh Tân, and Châu Tích, a native of Canton [in Guangdong] who had married a woman from his home country, got married to a local woman after he arrived in Vietnam, who gave him very effective assistance in his activities.

The family record of the Chau clan in Sơn Phong ward states that, “Mrs Nguyễn Thị [his wife] was the younger daughter of Mr. Nguyễn Thái of the village of Sơn Phô [formerly Hoa Phố or Ba Phố, now Sơn Phong] and the granddaughter of Nguyễn Hiền, the marquis of Hiền Tài. He was a native of Giáp Tự in Châu Hương commune, Hà Nông Trung canton, Điện Bàn prefecture. Nguyễn Hiền was a military official serving in the army of the Nguyễn lords. After the latter’s victory over the Tây Sơn uprising, he was made a marquis. Nguyễn Phúc Ánh took the name Gia Long when he became the 1st Nguyễn dynasty king. When Emperor Gia Long was enthroned, Nguyễn Hiền’s native home in Giáp Tự had disappeared, so he took up residence in Ba Phố where he raised his family. Mrs Nguyễn Thị was skilled in both farming and commerce. Her lines of business included: sea-swallow nests [bought in Thanh Châu and exported to China]; dried areca nuts [bought locally and taken to Hanoi for sale]; Chinese commodities [from her own stock or bought from others, taken to Tam Kỳ and various other merchandise for sale]; salt [stored in Sa Huỳnh and Cù Mông in Phú Yên, then sold to owners of fishing vessels]; *sang suc* [bought in the upper reaches of the Bung River, to be sold at the harbor]; and land rented to local farmers, etc.” (Phan Đại Doãn, 2003: 237-238).

In addition, *Thích Đại Sán* showed that [the Chinese merchants operating in Hội An] “dispatch their wives to conduct trade and cannot do business without them” (Thích Đại Sán, 1964: 80-81). Typically, guest merchants sought out their wives among local women by random. However, in matters of foreign trade, merchants would probably have preferred to find a wife among the very community empowered to administer that trade, i.e. the *Minh Hương*. “First, if you take a mistress, it will be better if she is a Chinese man’s widow [i.e. a *Minh Hương*], and she should be introduced by her parents or friends” (Charles, 2001: 145-146).

In fact, intermarriage with Vietnamese, one of the many *Minh Hương* privileges, obviously influenced the assimilation of Chinese settlers. However, Vietnamese elements of *Minh Hương* culture have been ignored, despite their evolution moving away from Chinese and toward Vietnamese cultural norms. Both

the content and the context of the *Minh Hương* identity changed significantly over time, in ways that altered their culture; hence, the *Minh Hương* of the 19th and 17th centuries differed fundamentally. Through intermarriage between Chinese immigrants and local women, the Chinese poured a great deal of new blood into Vietnamese society, which formed the Vietnamese and Chinese lineages into a close relationship.

4. Conclusion

As the intermediate social system in Vietnam (at least during the period of the mid-17th to mid-19th centuries), the *Minh Hương xã* established in Hội An essentially showed how to form the *Minh Hương xã* in Vietnam, in general, including their socioeconomic position in Vietnamese society, as well as the process of interaction between Chinese settlers and local people. Economically, Hội An's *Minh Hương* played a huge role in the development of Hội An and Đà Nẵng. By creating the *Minh Hương xã*, the Nguyễn lords effectively solved the problem of foreign merchants by creating a new mercantile ethnic identity. The *Minh Hương*, through their ancestry, their kin, native homeland, and religious ties, would continue to provide the Nguyễn lords with access to the Chinese market, as well as Chinese-dominated ports throughout East and Southeast Asia.

However, Hội An was already beginning to lose its entrepôt status to Saigon before the Tây Sơn wars; the latter seems to have accelerated this change. By the time of the Nguyễn dynasty, Saigon had far surpassed Hội An in population size and economic status within the Nguyễn realm, and Hội An became a local port. Given this situation, numerous *Minh Hương* left Hội An for Saigon and other localities in Vietnam. Culturally speaking, the *Minh Hương's* mixed culture was expressed in its social organization and intermarriages between Chinese settlers and Vietnamese, as well as the role played by the Vietnamese wives in *Minh Hương* families. By the early 19th century, the economic position of the *Minh Hương* in Hội An was small. However, Hội An's *Minh Hương xã* remained an important part of the *Minh Hương xã* in Vietnam by maintaining their kin network and economic relations.

In short, the author's knowledge is still insufficient to allow an assessment of the overall significance of the *Minh Hương* community in Hội An's history. In addition, there is a lot of local material on Hội An's *Minh Hương xã* that has not yet been fully scrutinized. However, based on the author's current knowledge, some generalizations can be made and suggestions proposed for future study.

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