

The Destruction of the English East India Company Factory on Condore Island, 1702–1705

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Abstract

The English East India Company established a factory on the island of Condore, off the coast of southern Vietnam, in 1702 as part of its plan to maintain a settlement to direct shipping activities between trading ports in China and Southeast Asia and India. For three years, the settlement thrived and was an important part of the China trade network, especially as a stopping point for ships plying the China route. The island settlement also carried out trading activities with neighbouring ports along the Indochina coast and the Malay Archipelago. The setting up of the factory, however, coincided with the emergence of the new entity of southern Vietnam under the Nguyễn family who were expanding their power-base to the south. In the process, the Nguyễn had already subdued the Chams and were coming face-to-face with the Khmers when the English factory was established. This paper will trace the English venture on Condore Island and the reaction of the Nguyễn ruler towards this venture which culminated with the destruction of the factory in 1705. This paper will attempt to explore the following questions: the shifting importance of the islands in the Nguyễn's security and foreign relations *vis-à-vis* the English factory, and will also investigate the circumstances that brought about the massacre and destruction of the English factory on Pulo Condore—a historical event that has not been properly explained thus far.

Introduction

There are numerous works that look into Vietnam's relations with Britain. The early works include contemporary travel accounts by British subjects and officials who either stopped at or passed by Vietnam during their voyages, most of which were between India and

China.¹ There are also narratives of British officials who were sent on specific missions to Vietnamese courts seeking trading opportunities.² Finally, there are studies conducted by scholars in the field, who ventured into Vietnam between the late seventeenth and early nineteenth centuries, when Vietnam-British contacts were at their peak.³ A brief survey of these works reveals that one of the most tragic events during the period related by Vietnam-British contacts was the massacre in 1705 of English settlers by Macassarese mercenaries⁴ on the Vietnamese islands of Condore (Pulo Condore)⁵. This event had an equally lasting effect on the English East India Company's involvement in Indochina as it had previously on the Company's involvement in Southeast Asia in the aftermath of the Amboyna Massacre of 1623.⁶

¹ These include: William Dampier (1699), *Voyages and Discoveries*, London (Reprinted, Argonaut Press, London, 1931); John Pinkerton (1811), *A General Collection of the Best and Most Interesting Voyages and Travels in all Parts of the World*, London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme; Captain Alexander Hamilton (1727), *A New Account of the East Indies*, Edinburgh (Reprinted, Argonaut Press, London, 1930); John Barrow (1806), *A Voyage to Cochin China in the Years 1792 and 1793*, London: T. Cadell and W. Davis.

² The history of British Missions to Vietnam is treated by Alastair Lamb in his edited work, Alastair Lamb (1961), *British Missions to Cochin China: 1778–1822*, *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, (herein after *JMBRAS*) 34 (3, 4). Part of the work was later incorporated into his second work on Anglo-Vietnamese Diplomacy, Lamb (1970), *The Mandarin Road to Old Hue: Narratives of Anglo-Vietnamese Diplomacy from the 17th Century to the Eve of the French Conquest*, London: Chatto and Windus; C. Chapman (1852), *Narratives of a Voyage to Cochin China*, *Journal of Indian Archipelago and Eastern Asia*, 6; John Crawford (1818), *Journal of an Embassy from the Governor General of India to the Courts of Siam and Cochin China*, London (reprinted in Kuala Lumpur, 1967).

³ See Nicholas Tarling (1967), *British Relations with Vietnam*, *JMBRAS*, 39(1); C. B. Maybon (1910), *Une Factorie anglaise en Tonkin au XVII^e Siècle (1627–1697)*, *Bulletin L'École française d'Extrême-Orient*, (herein after *BEFEO*) 10(1). For the British East India Company involvement in Cambodia, see D. K. Bassett (1962), 'The Trade of the English East India Company in Cambodia, 1651–1656', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*.

⁴ Another such event took place in 1613 when Tempest Peacock and Walter Cawarden, both officials of the English East India Company, were lost during their stay in Nguyen Southern Vietnam, see Lamb, *The Mandarin Road to Old Hue*, pp. 12–15.

⁵ Pulo Condore or Condore Islands, present day Côn Đảo, also called Côn Lôn, Côn Sơn, Côn Nôn, Condur, is a group of 12 islands situated off the southeastern coast of Vietnam, 280 km from Saigon and 180 km from the point of Vũng Tàu. This paper uses the two terms of Pulo Condore and Condore Islands interchangeably.

⁶ See D. K. Bassett (1960), *The Amboyna Massacre of 1623*, *Journal of Southeast Asian History*, 1(2): 1–19. Bassett, however, argues that the massacre at Amboyna had no major effect on subsequent East India Company involvement in the East and Southeast Asia. Nevertheless, it is believed that it did have some psychological effect in the thinking of the East India Company officials.

This paper will investigate the English venture on Condore Islands and the reaction of the Nguyễn ruler towards it which brought about the massacre of the Englishmen and the destruction of the factory in 1705. The following questions are also explored: the shifting importance of the islands in the Nguyễn's security and foreign relations; the attitude of the Nguyễn Lords towards the presence of the Englishmen on Condore islands; and finally, the circumstances that brought about the massacre and destruction of the English factory on Pulo Condore.

It is hoped that by investigating this particular event, a larger picture can be painted of the nature of the Nguyễn's relations with foreigners as well as providing a picture of the early modern era (seventeenth to eighteenth centuries) in Southeast Asia.

Pulo Condore

Pulo Condore is a group of twelve islands (16 including four islets that are submerged during high tides) about 150 miles off Vũng Tàu (Cape de Saint Jacques) on the coast of southern Vietnam. The islands were already known to Chinese navigators from very early times. Chinese references to Kunlun can be traced as far back as 527 AD. Li Daoyuan's *Suijing Shu* mentioned how an army, led by the Chinese Commandant of Jiaozhou (Vietnam), pursued the Linyi navy until Kunlun. I-Ching, the Chinese Buddhist monk of the Tang Dynasty who travelled to India for scriptures, also pointed out that there was an island along the coast of the route between Guangzhou and Jiaozhou known as Kunlun.

In *Hanghai Dou*, the general navigation handbook refers to the island as a navigation point that one would refer to when travelling southwards, yet the handbook also warned ships to steer clear of the islands: 'Upon passing the island of Pulau Aor, steer straight the ship should pass through the outer extent of Kunlun Shan (Condore Island)'. This suggests that the Chinese regarded the island as a main navigation point which needed to be circumvented instead of passing close. The Tang Dynasty text of *Guangzhou Tonghai Yidao* (Guangzhou's Maritime Route to the Barbarians) called the island Jiunhu Longshan, and highlighted the treacherous reefs surrounding the island. The same could be said of Wang Dashen's famous *Daoyi Zhile* (Record of the Island Barbarians) which refers to the island and its surrounding

seas as ‘dangerous waters’. It was mainly due to such records that Condore Island was described in detail in most Chinese sources.

According to *Daoyi Zilie* (Description of the Islands Barbarians), compiled during the Yuan Dynasty, the islands are in the southern part of the journey from China to the west. At that time it was reported that the islands were sparsely inhabited and that the people who lived there did not live in houses. The small population were said to be living in caves. The same people were said to be of ‘strange appearance and went around unclothed. . . . Whenever ships stopped at the bay, these islanders would gather to jeer them. . . .’⁷ By the seventeenth century, the same direction given by the *Daoyi Zilie* had become a standard navigation direction to pilot Chinese ships.⁸ Likewise, the Vietnamese also used the islands as a point of reference for navigation purposes.

Three other islands of the small archipelago are also known to the Chinese by specific names. First, there is Da Heng Dao (Big Heng Island) and Xiao Heng Dao (Small Heng Island), which are also known as Da Dan and Xiao Dan islands (Big Egg and Small Egg islands). In the *Shiyi Guangji*, compiled during the Ming Dynasty, the islands’ names were given as Da Heng Dao and Xiao Heng Dao. Both islands were important to ships sailing from Annam to Siam; they would usually stop at Da Heng Dao for fresh water.⁹ These islands were the largest after the main island. In the navigation plans of Zhenghe and his armada, the islands of Da Heng Dao and Xiao Heng Dao featured as important navigation points where the armada would stop (especially at Da Heng Dao) for fresh water before proceeding to other destinations. The third small island known to the Chinese is called Xiao Kunlun (Small Kunlun). This island is situated immediately south of the main island of Kunlun Shan. Due to its proximity to the main island, the island was compared with the latter by reference to its smaller size.¹⁰

For some years, the ‘Island of the Chams’ was erroneously identified with Condore Island. In the *Akhbar al-Sin Wa’l-Hind* (Relations de la Chine et d’Inde), Sauvaget (who conducted a detailed study of the text) points out that during the ninth century Muslim traders

⁷ Wang Da (2000), *Daoyi Zilie*, Beijing: Zhonghua Shuji Chubanshe, p. 218.

⁸ See Zhang Xie (2000), *Dongxi Yangkao*, Beijing: Zhonghua Shuji Chubanshe, Vol. 9, p. 175.

⁹ *Shiyi Guangji*, (Records of the Four Barbarians), Vol. 7, Taipei: Guwen Publishing, 1969, pp. 1575–1577.

¹⁰ Han Zhenhua (1999), *Zhongwai Guanxi Lishi Yanjiu* (Research on China’s Historical External Relations). Hong Kong: Hong Kong University, pp. 458–459.

maintained a habit of stopping there whenever they travelled between India and China. Beyond Tioman Island, along the east coast of the Malay Peninsula, ‘the ships cast off for a place called Panduranga, which can be reached in ten days where it is possible to find fresh water’. The text continues: ‘The ships go to a place called Champa; ten days of travel; water is found there. It is from here that the so-called eagle-wood came . . . having taken on water, sail is set for a place called, The Island of the Chams, which is an island in the sea. . .’.¹¹

Even though there was confusion about the exact location of the island, it is obvious that Condore Island was important for navigation. By the time of the Ming Dynasty, when a Chinese armada under Admiral Zhenghe and his colleagues sailed to Southeast Asia, Condore Island was one of the main stopping points before the ships proceeded to other parts of Southeast Asia. Zhenghe’s armada stopped at Condore in 1405, 1407, 1411, 1417 and 1424.¹²

Condore to the Vietnamese

When the French visited Condore in the 1760s, the main village was known as Campong Kerbu. While it is difficult to determine who were the original inhabitants of the islands, clearly the name denotes something similar to the Malay way of naming a village —although inconclusive, there is a great possibility that those who resided on the islands were either Cham or Malay. However, at the time the English factory was in operation on the island there was no indication—even from the English reports—that the island was occupied by people of Malay descent, something which the officers from the English East India Company would have been able to identify.

It is not clear when the islands came into Vietnamese possession. It is most likely that the islands were taken by the Vietnamese after the setting up of the garrison of Trấn Biên in 1698. The name, however, was used to describe the furthest point of the Vietnamese territorial expansion, and thus was used to refer to different places at different times.¹³ In 1702, Trấn Biên actually denoted the area around Baria,

¹¹ Michel Jacq-Hergoualc’h (2002), *The Malay Peninsula: Crossroad of the Maritime Silk Road*. Leiden: Brill, pp. 268–269.

¹² Yang Ju (2006), *Zhenghe Xia Xiyang Shitan* (Zhenghe’s Voyages to South Seas), Shanghai: Shanghai Jiaotong University Press, pp. 33–45.

¹³ See *Đại Nam Thực Lục Tiền Biên* (Veritable Record of Early Đại Nam, hereafter *Tiền Biên*), 7:14.

including the region around Vũng Tàu and that north of the Bassac River. If the islands only came into Vietnamese hands in 1698, it was a recent acquisition whose full potential had not yet been realized. The islands were under the administration of Gia Định prefecture until 1839, when they were transferred to the Vĩnh Long district.¹⁴ However, there are few records available concerning the period before the nineteenth century.

According to the nineteenth century Vietnamese gazetteer, *Đại Nam Nhất Thống Chí* (DNNTC), ‘the islands are two days’ sailing from the port of the Bay of Canh Ray at the mouth of the Saigon River and one day of the river mouth of Cua Chien at the Bassac River’. The main island was fertile enough for planting paddy and beans and for rearing livestock. The island was also free of wild beasts. During Emperor Minh Mạng’s reign (reign 1819–1838), the people on the eastern side of the island were called Thanh Hải Đội (team of Green Eastern Seas). They garrisoned the islands and were involved in the collection of bird nests, mother of pearl, and tortoise shells, which they submitted to the court as tribute and taxes. Grass also grew well in the centre of the islands, and official horses were bred there. The island also continued its role as a navigation sign for ships passing along the southern coasts of Vietnam.¹⁵

The *Gia Định Thành Thống Chí* (Complete Gazette of the Province of Gia Định) by Trịnh Hoài Đức, upon which much of the official Gazetteer, *Đại Nam Nhất Thống Chí*, was based, especially regarding information about the southernmost six Vietnamese provinces, provides a slightly different account of the condition of the islands. According to Trịnh Hoài Đức, the paddy planted on Pulo Condore was actually hill rice, and the island was not self-sufficient in rice production. It had to import rice from Gia Định on the mainland. John Crawford who visited the islands in 1822 also made the same observation regarding rice planting activities on the islands which, according to him, were insufficient and the natives had to import from Saigon.¹⁶ Apart from rice, the islanders also planted beans, yams and wheat.¹⁷ The islanders were settled there as garrison troops. They were divided into three units with the specific task of defending the waters

¹⁴ *Đại Nam Nhất Thống Chí* (Gazetteer of the Đại Nam hereafter, DNNTC), 14:13.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 13–14.

¹⁶ John Crawford (1828 reprinted 1987), *Journal of an Embassy to the Courts of Siam and Cochín China*, Singapore: Oxford University Press, p. 200.

¹⁷ *Gia Định Thành Thống Chí* (hereafter GDTTC), 2:33–34.

between Pulo Condore and the Bay of Cam Ranh. They were also there to prevent raiders from Đò Ba (Java or the Malay Archipelago)¹⁸ from stealing the produce of the islands, namely birds nests, tortoise shells, salted fish and mother of pearl.¹⁹ Judging from the list of products, it is clear that the islands had some economic value to the Vietnamese, though they only realized the islands' strategic value much later.

During the time of Emperor Minh Mạng, the garrison on Pulo Condore was equipped with gun emplacements for guarding the sea route as well as the approach to the Mekong River mouth. The gun emplacements were built on a fort named Côn Lôn Bảo (Fort of Condore). The islands' strategic value was first noticed by the British in 1695 and this eventually led to the establishment of the English factory there in 1702.

When John Crawford's mission to Huế passed through the islands in 1822, a team was sent ashore on 22 August.²⁰ According to George Finlayson, the ship's surgeon, the inhabitants of the islands numbered around 800; the largest village had about 300 inhabitants.²¹ There was no mention of a fort, nor any military presence. However, they found the decayed ruins of the English factory.

The English Factory on Pulo Condore

Prior to the English attempt to establish a settlement on Pulo Condore, several European powers had also indicated an interest in making the islands their strategic port. The French East India Company had expressed interest in occupying the islands in 1686. They requested the French priest in Ayudhya, Bishop Laneau, to investigate the suitability of the island. Laneau then instructed one of his priests,

¹⁸ Until the early nineteenth century, Vietnamese writings normally refer to the people from the Malay Archipelago as Đò Ba or Trao Oa, a variation of the term Java. According to *GDTTC*, the term is used to describe people from Malacca and 36 other ports in the Malay Archipelago. See *GDTTC*, 5:3. The term is also used by the Cambodians and Cham people. In the case of the Cham, the term Jawa refers to Malay speakers and those from the maritime Malay, see Po Dharma (comp.) (1999), *Quatre Lexiques Malais-Cam.Anciens, rédigés au Campā*, Paris: Ecole Française D'Extrême-Orient, p. 323.

¹⁹ *GDTTC*, 2:34.

²⁰ Crawford, *Journal of an Embassy to the Courts of Siam and Cochin China*, pp. 195–196.

²¹ George Finlayson (1826 reprinted 1988), *The Mission to Siam and Hue, 1821–1822*, Singapore: Oxford University Press and The Siam Society, p. 290, 292.

Father Charriot to seek information on the geography and commerce of Pulo Condore and the nearby coast in relation to the island.²²

The English attempt to negotiate for trade with the Nguyễn took place during the visit of Thomas Bowyear, a comprador acting under the orders of Nathaniel Higginson, the Governor of Madras Presidency. Thomas Bowyear was instructed to negotiate with the Nguyễn to allow the English to open a factory on an island within the jurisdiction of Nguyễn territory.²³ However, during his negotiations with the Nguyễn, Bowyear was keen to have the factory built at Hội An (Faifo).²⁴

After much trouble, including the recurrent problem of payment for cargoes and numerous efforts to lobby for favour from the mandarins of the Nguyễn Court, Bowyear finally obtained permission from Nguyễn Phúc Chu to set up a factory in the Nguyễn domain, but failed to stipulate the actual place. However, it was not to be in Hội An as requested by the English.²⁵ Nguyễn Phúc Chu's decision was probably influenced by the desire to keep Hội An free from permanent Western factories. In fact, ever since their unpleasant experience with the Dutch in 1643,²⁶ the Nguyễn had never trusted any Westerner to have a factory or settlement so close to their main trading port of Hội An, which is also not very far from Phú Xuân, the seat of Government. In 1643, the Dutch, who maintained a factory at Hội An, joined hands with the Trịnh to attack the Nguyễn. A Dutch flotilla was defeated by the Nguyễn navy and the Dutch factory was closed. Since then, no foreign factory had been allowed in Hội An.

When Bowyear was ready to leave after selling off his cargo, he faced difficulties in collecting money due to him. According to Bowyear, the King (Nguyễn Phúc Chu) had settled his payment with Bowyear, and

²² Instructions from Bishop Laneau to Father Charriot, December 1686, Archives des Missions Etrangères de Paris (hereafter AMEP): Siam, 859:503.

²³ Instructions from Nathaniel Higginson to Thomas Bowyear, 2 May 1695 in Lamb, *The Mandarin Road to Old Hue*, p. 42.

²⁴ Bowyear's Narrative, 30 April 1696 in Lamb, *Ibid.*, p. 50.

²⁵ Father Pierre Langlois to his superior (possibly Mgr. Perez), 15 March 1699, Archives Missions Etrangères de Paris (AMEP): Cochinchine, 726:269.

²⁶ For a study on the Dutch venture in Nguyễn Southern Vietnam in 1642–1643, see *Đại Nam Thực Lục Tiền Biên* (hereafter *Tiền Biên*), 3:8; W. J. M. Buch (1929), *De Oost-Indische Compagnie en Quinam*, Amsterdam: H. J. Paris, p. 80; Li Tana (1998), *Nguyễn Cochinchina*, Ithaca: Cornell University, Southeast Asian Program, pp. 176–179; see also *Dagh Register gehouden int Castel Batavia Vant*, Chinese translation by Guo Hui and Chen Da Xue, Vol. 2, Taipei: Taiwan Sheng Wen Xian Wei Yuan Hui, 1989, pp. 364–365, 369–370, 398.

had ordered all in the government service to pay him, by threat of demotion or sack from the service.²⁷ But it was mainly the Japanese traders who did not pay. The Japanese were induced by Nguyễn Phúc Chu to buy from Bowyear, but were unable to settle the account.²⁸ The Japanese were major traders in Hội An during the early seventeenth century, but declined in number after the Tokugawa Shogunate decided to shun trading in 1635.

Before leaving Hội An, Bowyear appointed Clement de la Croix, possibly the son of Jean de la Croix (Joao Da Cruz), the Portuguese gun-founder in the service of the Nguyễn, as his debt collector. He also left instructions for de la Croix to leave the money with the French priests to be forwarded to Madras.²⁹ But, according to Father Pierre Langlois, a member of the French Foreign Mission living in southern Vietnam at that time, no money actually changed hands.³⁰

Failing to obtain permission to set up a factory at Hội An, Bowyear returned to Madras where he wrote a favourable report on the possibility of reviving the English factory in Cambodia. The East India Company had had a factory there from 1651 to 1656, but had closed it because of the frequent internal struggles between the royal families.³¹ While he was in Phú Xuân, Bowyear was approached by someone whom he identified as the Cambodian ambassador to Phú Xuân, who had 'endeavoured to persuade him (Bowyear) to open a trade with their country, assuring him he would be free from the restrictions and difficulties met with in Cochin China (Nguyễn Southern Vietnam)'.³² The fact that Bowyear was looking beyond Nguyễn Vietnam for his trading activities, including the possibility of trading in Cambodia, was manifested in his request to Nguyễn Phúc Chu; one of his requests was for permission to send two ships annually to places like Champa and Cambodia.³³ Apart from consenting to the request to set up a factory in his domain, Nguyễn Phúc Chu did not respond to the question relating to the sending of ships to Cambodia.

²⁷ Bowyear's Narrative to Nathaniel Higginson, 30 April 1696, in Lamb, *The Mandarin Road to Old Hue*, p. 45.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Langlois to his Superior, 15 March 1699, AMEP: Cochinchine, 726:269.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ For a study on the English factory in Cambodia, see Bassett, 'The Trade of the English East India Company in Cambodia, 1651–1656'.

³² See Lamb, *The Mandarin Road to Old Hue*, p. 55.

³³ Bowyear's Narrative, 30 April 1696 in Lamb, *Ibid.*, p. 50.

From the outset, it seems that Thomas Bowyear's efforts and recommendations had come to naught.³⁴ However, there were linkages between Bowyear's mission and the attempt to set up an English factory on Pulo Condore six years after Bowyear's return to India.

Allen Catchpoole's 1702 decision to move the factory from Chusan to Pulo Condore was most likely the result of his knowledge of Thomas Bowyear's success in obtaining permission from the Nguyễn Lord to set up a factory, and Bowyear's 1696 recommendations to the East India Company to conduct trade with Cambodia.

Prior to the venture on the Condore islands in 1702, Allen Catchpoole had been President of the Chusan Council, supervising the company's factory at Chusan Island near the port of Ninbo on the central coast of China. Allen Catchpoole had received a commission from the King of England appointing him and his successors to the office of President, as England's Consul General. With these appointments, Catchpoole's jurisdiction extended over the empire of China and the adjacent islands.³⁵ The settlement at Pulo Condore was meant to succeed Chusan, which was becoming unprofitable, and the English factory at Tonkin which was abandoned in 1697.³⁶

A letter dated 2 August 1703 from the ruling Nguyễn Lord, Nguyễn Phúc Chu (reign 1691–1725), who was also known as Chúa Minh (Minh Lord), to Allen Catchpoole seems to suggest that the English factory on the islands was an entirely new adventure by the Englishmen.³⁷ The 1703 letter was written a year after Catchpoole occupied Pulo Condore and set up a settlement, which took shape most probably in the second half of 1702 as the

³⁴ Howard T. Fry (1970), *Alexander Dalrymple (1737–1808) and the Expansion of British Trade*, London: The Royal Commonwealth Society, Frank Cass and Co, p. 166; see also Lamb, *The Mandarin Road to Old Hue*, p. 55.

³⁵ See Hoses Ballou Morse (1928), *The Chronicles of the East India Company Trading to China, 1635–1834*, London: Oxford at the Clarendon Press, p. 109.

³⁶ The English factory at Hanoi was abandoned on 29 November 1697 when Richard Watts, the last chief of the Hanoi establishment, left with his staff. A. Lamb suggested that the main reason to withdraw from Tonkin was the East India Company's policy of seeking more profitable trade in silk, which the Company felt was on the China coast, thus the founding of the Chusan Council in 1700. Lamb, *The Mandarin Road to Old Hue*, pp. 26–37; for a study on the English factory in Tonkin see also Maybon (1910), *Une factorie anglaise au Tonkin au XVII^e siècle (1627–1697)*, *BEFEO*, 10:1.

³⁷ A copy of this letter was deposited at the India Office Records, *Home Miscellaneous Series*, 628:469–478; There was, however, no further correspondence on the same subject in the series.

Chusan factory was abandoned during the early part of that year.³⁸ The letter was written in response to Catchpoole's earlier letter to the 'King of Cochinchina',³⁹ sent to inform the Nguyễn Lord of the English occupation of the islands. Catchpoole's letter was delivered by a delegation to the Nguyễn Court, possibly in early 1703.⁴⁰

Nguyễn Phúc Chu was the sixth Nguyễn Lord who had controlled the southern region of Vietnam since 1558, under the reigning Lê Dynasty. The northern region was under the control of the Trịnh family, who had been bitter rivals of the Nguyễn since 1600. The rivalry between the two families turned into open warfare during the period 1627–1672. A military impasse between the two conflicting parties in 1672 created a status-quo which lasted into the late eighteenth century. It was partly due to this civil war that the two Vietnamese families' relations with foreigners, including Europeans, accelerated. In their attempts to defeat one another, the Nguyễn and the Trịnh engaged in international trade by encouraging foreign merchants to trade in their ports. From these trading activities, both the Nguyễn and the Trịnh were able to exchange their local produce for arms and other war materials.

After 1672, the Trịnh began to withdraw from active external trading activities and reverted to the agriculture-based society that had dominated Vietnamese life since earlier times. This resulted in the closure of Western enterprises in the Tonkin area, the English factory in 1697 and the Dutch factory three years later. The Nguyễn, however, continued their active engagement in foreign trade in order to strengthen its relatively weaker military position *vis-à-vis* the Trịnh.

The Nguyễn's consolidation of power in southern Vietnam also involved territorial expansion in the form of war against its southern neighbours, Champa and Cambodia. By the time the English factory on Pulo Condore was established, the Nguyễn Lords had emerged victorious in their war against the Kingdom of Champa in 1693. The

³⁸ Lamb, *The Mandarin Road to Old Hue*, p. 37.

³⁹ The term 'Cochinchina' was used by the Europeans when referring to the region of southern Vietnam during the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries. The term continued in use after the French began their colonization of Vietnam. The Chinese used the term 'Guangnan', which refers to Quảng Nam, the main province which dealt with foreigners, whereas the Dutch used the term 'Quinam'.

⁴⁰ See Letter from Chúa Minh to Catchpoole, 2 August 1703, India Office Records, *Home Miscellaneous Series* (hereafter, *Home Misc.*), 628:469.

campaign effectively ended the old Cham kingdom.⁴¹ In 1698, the Nguyen annexed a large portion of the Cambodian territory north of the Bassac River in the Mekong Delta. The area annexed included Gia Định and Saigon. It was probably at this time that Vietnamese official control was extended to Pulo Condore, following the establishment of Trần Biên garrison in the Baria area and the setting up of the Gia Định prefecture.

Throughout its existence, the settlement or factory on Condore Island served as a port of call at which the East India Company's ships en route to China reported for orders and for exchange of commerce intelligence. A fort had been built to serve as the centre of activities.⁴²

The English factory on Pulo Condore, which was the last British settlement in Vietnam, lasted until 1705 when Catchpoole and his council were massacred by their own hired mercenaries from Macassar (Celebes).

Nguyễn policy towards the English on Pulo Condore

The Nguyễn's attitude towards Western traders was pragmatic. They were fully conscious of the need to attract Western traders, who not only brought with them valuable goods that were important to the Nguyễn Lords, but were also an important source of revenue through the collection of harbour duties. Under Nguyễn Phúc Chu, rates for European ships entering southern Vietnam were higher than those for ships from other places. European ships were charged 8,000 cash compared to a mere 2,000 cash for ships from Cambodia.⁴³

The Nguyễn Lords' dependence on Western technology, particularly for military purposes, did not decline with the ending of active hostility with the Trịnh in 1672. In fact, the Nguyễn were always conscious of their vulnerability to the threat from the Trịnh, thus their need to be vigilant and well prepared. The Nguyễn also needed better firearms to pursue an expansion policy of advancing into Champa territories and, later, Cambodia. Thomas Bowyear related in his narrative how after the settlement of an agreement with Nguyễn Phúc Chu regarding the permission to set up a settlement, the following took place:

⁴¹ For a study on Nguyen-Champa relations during this period, see Danny Wong Tze Ken (2007), *Nguyen-Champa Relations during the 17th and 18th centuries*, Paris-San Jose: International Office of Champa.

⁴² See Morse, *The Chronicles of the East India Company*, p. 127.

⁴³ *Tiền Biên*, 8:13.

The answer was that in case of a settlement the proposal should be granted, and if I would, might make them choice of ground for a factory; and Ung Coy Backe Lorke was ordered to show me the guns about the palace, to know if his honour (Nathaniel Higginson) could send the king such guns⁴⁴

Thus, European traders were still being well received, and profits derived from trading with Europeans traders were also higher than those from Asian traders.

When Allen Catchpoole set up his factory on Pulo Condore, he did not send a delegation to the Nguyễn Court. He only did so after being asked by the Governor of Trấn Biên (Baria), Trương Phúc Phan, who had learned of the English presence through reports received from the local populace of Pulo Condore.⁴⁵ In his letter to Catchpoole, Nguyễn Phúc Chu was tolerant of the English presence. He also sought Catchpoole's help in countering piracy in the vicinity of the islands and was exploring the possibility of forming a strategic alliance with the English. As a sign of good faith, Nguyễn Phúc Chu exempted the English on Condore Islands from paying taxes and duties, impressing upon the English that even the locals on the islands were not exempted. He also sent some local produce to Catchpoole, which included five pieces of silk, two fans, 30 painted canes and 30 clouded ones.⁴⁶

The occupation of the island was likely to have been a follow-up to the permission granted to Thomas Bowyear in 1696 to open a factory in the Nguyễn domain, though the permission never stipulated the actual location.⁴⁷ Nevertheless, for a time, Nguyễn Phúc Chu was patient with the English settlement on the Condore islands. Thus, no action was taken until August 1703 when Nguyễn Phúc Chu replied to Catchpoole's letter to him sent through a delegation of Vietnamese who lived on the main island of Condore.⁴⁸ In his letter, Nguyễn Phúc Chu reiterated his permission to the English to set up their factory.⁴⁹

⁴⁴ Thomas Bowyear's Narrative in Lamb, *The Mandarin Road to Old Hue*, p. 51.

⁴⁵ Letter from Chúa Minh to Catchpoole, 2 August 1703, India Office Records, *Home Miscellaneous Series*, 628:469. The letter consulted here is written in English. It is not known if it is an original from the Nguyễn court or a translated version.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ See Thomas Bowyear's Narrative, 30 April 1696, in Lamb, *Mandarin Road to Old Hue*, pp. 50–51.

⁴⁸ There is no trace of Catchpoole's letter, but Nguyễn Phúc Chu's opening statement in his letter suggested the existence of such a letter: 'The King of Cochin China gives this answer to the great general in pullo Condore his letter, and to those of his council. Letter from Chúa Minh to Catchpoole, *Home Miscellaneous Series*, 628:469

⁴⁹ Ibid.

Nguyễn Phúc Chu's decision to allow the Englishmen to stay on the island was most probably governed by the Nguyễn's desire to have the English on their side. During this time, the Nguyễn were fresh from their war against the Cambodians, and were definitely desirous of better trade and acquiring better armouries. Thus permission was granted to the English. In his letter to Catchpoole, Nguyễn Phúc Chu made no secret of his desire to have the English assist the Nguyễn to overcome 'robbers' and pirates. He also hoped the English would help him in defence against any eventualities.⁵⁰

Nguyễn Phúc Chu agreed to allow the English to trade in Nguyễn ports and waters with three conditions. First, to assist the Nguyễn in fighting piracy; second, to behave civilly and to be properly attired when conducting negotiations with the Vietnamese Court; and third, that the English allow their ships to be boarded and examined by Vietnamese officials.⁵¹

Two interesting points stand out in the conditions set by Nguyễn Phúc Chu. First, the Nguyễn were definitely hoping for the English to lend a hand in defence. 'We are confident ye'll exert your teeth and hoofs against our enemies and on this account you will do considerable piece of service and worth of you. . .'.⁵² Second, the Nguyễn Lord had commented on the attire of the English delegation for the need to 'be apparelled with your cloaths. . .', thus the second condition of behaving civilly and being properly attired. A report by James Cunningham, the fifth member of Catchpoole's five-man council, revealed that no Englishmen were included in the envoy to the court of Phú Xuân. The presents were sent on their behalf by a certain 'Chinese captain' named Swee Qua.⁵³ Thus, in many ways, Catchpoole and his council had not observed the proper channel of conducting affairs with the Nguyễn, especially in not having any member of the Council presenting himself at Court.

All the conditions demonstrate the pragmatism of the Nguyễn Lords in conducting their foreign relations. One of the most consistent features in the Nguyễn's policy *vis-à-vis* Westerners was their ever-willingness to establish trade relations with the West whilst at the

⁵⁰ Ibid., 628:474.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid., 628:477.

⁵³ James Cunningham to Baldwyn and Wingate, 4 May 1705, *MS Bradley 24* (Bodleian Library), f. 162. Cunningham was later executed by the Nguyễn in Phú Xuân.

same time further developing the relationship into attempts to acquire military technology or even an alliance. In pursuing such a policy, Nguyễn Phúc Chu was willing to compromise, including granting exemption of trade tariffs for the English should they enter a defence pact with the Nguyễn.

As there was no answer to Nguyễn Phúc Chu's letter from Catchpoole and his council, it is conceivable that the Nguyễn's offer was either accepted without further debate or simply ignored by Catchpoole. But two years later, the English factory on Condore Island was abandoned after Catchpoole and members of his Council were massacred.

The massacre on Pulo Condore

Many explanations were offered on the actual events before and during the massacre of Catchpoole and members of his Council in March 1705. The most common answer provided by Western sources was that they were killed by a group of their own Macassar lascars who were hired and had been detained by Catchpoole beyond their term of service of three years. Apparently, their dissatisfaction was already known to the Council.⁵⁴ This view is echoed by Captain Alexander Hamilton, who was sailing the South China Sea during this period. Hamilton reported that Catchpoole, having detained the Macassarese mercenaries beyond the time of their three-year agreement (possibly taking the two years at Chusan into account), enraged the latter, who murdered the Englishman and his white subordinates who were staying at the fort. Only some of those who lodged outside the fort managed to flee in a boat and escaped to Johor. Among those who survived were Reverend Dr Pound and Solomon Lloyd.⁵⁵

The *Tiền Biên* offers a different view on the matter. The chronicle actually refers to Catchpoole as a pirate who had illegally occupied Pulo Condore.⁵⁶ It also mentioned how the English had stayed on the islands for several years without ever reporting to the governor at Trân Bien. Li Tana is of the opinion that the *Tiền Biên* was correct in most instances except for the year of the massacre. The *Tiền Biên*

⁵⁴ See Dr James Pound to Court of Managers, East India Company, 3 May 1705, *MS Bradley* 24, f. 8.

⁵⁵ Alexander Hamilton, A New Account of the East Indies, as cited in Lamb, *The Mandarin Road to Old Hue*, pp. 39–40.

⁵⁶ *Tiền Biên*, 7:21.

gives 1703 as the year, whereas all other sources, including accounts of survivors, clearly indicate 1705.⁵⁷ There are reports that in May 1704 the East India Company ship *Stretham* left Madras and called at Pulo Condore, where it was directed by Catchpoole to proceed on to Canton (Guangzhou). Two months later, another ship, the *Catherine*, arrived at the islands.⁵⁸ All this could only mean that Catchpoole was still very much alive at that time. This, in turn, brings us to the conclusion that the *Tiền Biên* made a mistake in recording the year.

As for the question of a possible Vietnamese-Macassarese conspiracy, the *Tiền Biên* relates how Trương Phúc Phan, the governor of Trấn Biên, then directed 15 men from 'Đô Ba' (Java)⁵⁹ to set fire to the factory and to help the Vietnamese to rid the island of the Englishmen, whom they termed 'pirates'.⁶⁰ The *Tiền Biên* also relates how, after the massacre, Trương Phúc Phan rewarded the Macassarese who had taken part in the massacre. He also brought back prisoners and booty from the islands.⁶¹ All these facts were confirmed by accounts of the English survivors. According to James Cunningham, the fifth member of the Council, Trương Phúc Phan arrived on Pulo Condore shortly after the massacre, ostensibly to re-establish Nguyễn authority over the islands. His force consisted of four galleys and 65 *proes* (*perahu* or boat in the Malay language) with 300 soldiers. Upon disembarking, they carried off every valuable item, including livestock.⁶²

However, Cunningham also provides another dimension to the question of possible Vietnamese-Macassarese conspiracy. According to him, the local Vietnamese on Pulo Condore, together with the newly landed Vietnam forces, tried to search for the Macassarese, and found them near Fresh Water Bay, where they had built a house. The Vietnamese had four of the Macassarese killed, and took away 300 Spanish dollars and two bags of rice. No explanation was offered for the incident, but it is most likely that either the Vietnamese just took

⁵⁷ Li Tana, *Nguyễn Cochinchina*, pp. 75–76.

⁵⁸ Morse, *The Chronicles of the East India Company*, pp. 127, 130.

⁵⁹ The term 'Java' need not necessarily mean the island of Java *per se*. The term was commonly used by the indigenous people of Indochina when referring to people from the Malay archipelago. In the case of the Cham, the term refers to Malay-speakers and those from the maritime Malay, see Po Dharma (comp.), *Quatre Lexiques Malais-Cam Anciens*, p. 323. See also Dr James Pound to Court of Managers, East India Company, 3 May 1705, *MS Bradley* 24, f. 8.

⁶⁰ *Tiền Biên*, 7:21.

⁶¹ *Tiền Biên*, 7:23.

⁶² Cunningham to Baldwin and Wingate, 4 May 1705, *MS Bradley* 24, f. 161.

the opportunity to plunder, or the group of Macassarese described took no part in the massacre.

No satisfactory answer can be found for the sudden Nguyễn hostility to the English factory on Pulo Condore. The letter of the Nguyễn Lords clearly demonstrated the willingness of the Nguyễn to engage the English in trade, and could hardly suggest otherwise.

The most likely explanation for Nguyễn Phúc Chu's action in allowing the massacre to take place, or plotting to expel the Englishmen from the island, as suggested by the *Tiền Biên*, is found in Reverend Dr James Pound's account to the East India Company. Reverend Pound was the chaplain to the English factory. According to him, in January 1705, the King of Cambodia sent a vessel with a mandarin (official) and some presents, including cattle, to Catchpoole, and a letter to invite the English to trade and settle in Cambodia.⁶³ When the massacre took place, there were 38 Cambodians staying in the settlement—the same Cambodians who came bearing gifts. Dr Pound mentioned how these Cambodians had sided with the Englishmen during the fight, but were annihilated by the Macassarese and the 200 Vietnamese who lived on the islands. Pound also noticed how these Cambodians were not on good terms with the Vietnamese, and the two sides were mutually suspicious of one another.

It was not to be doubted but that the Cochinchina Quansy [official], who was on the island sent from the governor of Barea [Baria] would also be bold of this opportunity of exerting himself in cutting off the Cambojas, by which he would certainly gain much honour. . . .⁶⁴

Hence the *Tiền Biên*'s assertion of a conspiracy is partly true as the Vietnamese were clearly wary of the presence of the Cambodian embassy on Pulo Condore. The thought of allowing Cambodia, considered by the Nguyễn as its vassal state, to form a military alliance with the English on Pulo Condore was probably the chief reason for Nguyễn Phúc Chu and Trương Phúc Phan to act against the Englishmen.

The unfortunate James Cunningham's letter helps us to confirm the Cambodian factor. Cunningham, who was captured by the Macassarese during the massacre, was turned over to the Vietnamese and was taken back to Phú Xuân along with the loot from the factory. There he was interrogated before being executed. In a farewell letter

⁶³ Dr James Pound to Court of Managers for the East India Company, 3 May 1705, *MS Bradley* 24, f. 1–2.

⁶⁴ Dr James Pound to Court of Managers for the East India Company, *Ibid.*, f. 6

to his colleagues Baldwin and Wingate who managed to escape to Cambodia after the massacre, Cunningham outlined three reasons for the massacre. According to him, first, the English were arrogant for failing to inform the Nguyễn authority prior to their occupation of the islands. Second, Nguyễn Phúc Chu was upset that no Englishmen were included in Catchpoole's delegation to the Nguyễn Court. Naturally the Nguyễn Lord felt insulted. Third, Catchpoole had failed to inform the governor of Trấn Biên that he had sent a ship to Cambodia.⁶⁵

The Cambodian factor was clearly the chief reason for the Nguyễn's decision to turn against the Englishmen. Cunningham related how he was asked by Trương Phúc Phan upon his arrival in Trấn Biên why he (Cunningham) had sent two Englishmen to Cambodia, and how much money had been given to them.⁶⁶

Nguyễn Phúc Chu's decision to destroy the English settlement on Pulo Condore reflected a consistent reaction by the Nguyễn in dealing with foreigners who were perceived to be in league with their enemies, in this case, the Cambodians. Had Catchpoole and his Council refrained from dealing with the Cambodians, the massacre might not have taken place. The Nguyễn's sensitivity towards the possibility of an Anglo-Khmer alliance is reflected in the timing of the massacre, which coincided with the visit of the Cambodian delegation to Catchpoole. Nguyễn Phúc Chu was clearly wary of the Englishmen's action in opening up trade with Cambodia, that had only recently been at war with the Nguyễn.

The Cambodians had every reason for wanting to forge closer ties with the Englishmen in order to strengthen their trade as well as to acquire military support. Nguyễn concern over this potential English-Cambodian connection is reflected in its attack on Cambodia in August 1705, barely four months after the massacre on Pulo Condore.⁶⁷ The attack was launched from Gia Định in order to install a Nguyễn nominee on the Cambodian throne.⁶⁸ Thus it is likely that the massacre on Pulo Condore was part of the Nguyễn preparations for the attack on Cambodia and also part of the programme to neutralise any potential threat to the success of the Nguyễn's long-term goals in the Mekong Delta.

⁶⁵ James Cunningham to Baldwin and Wingate, 4 May 1705, *MS Bradley* 24, f. 162.

⁶⁶ See *Ibid.*, f. 163 and Diary of Ambrose Baldwin Relating to the Transactions at Condore, 24 August 1705, *MS Bradley* 24, f. 153.

⁶⁷ *Tiền Biên*, 7:24b.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

The decision to get rid of the English from Pulo Condore was a clear indication of the pragmatism of Nguyễn Phúc Chu to ensure the Nguyễn's interests in the Mekong Delta remained intact. Suspicions of possible English-Cambodian ties through the presence of a Cambodian ambassador at the English settlement and the decision of the English to send a trading ship to Cambodia led to the decision to strike first. Any links forged between the Cambodians and the English might prove detrimental to the Nguyễn's plans.

There is no evidence that Catchpoole and his Council were aware of the problems that were brewing between the Vietnamese and the Cambodians. While it is possible to suppose that Catchpoole knew that the Nguyễn and the Cambodians were not exactly on good terms, he was unable to gauge the dynamics of this relationship which was heading towards war. Clearly, given his lukewarm response towards the Nguyễn, Catchpoole was treating his position on Pulo Condore as an enterprise that was independent of the Nguyễn. Hence his acceptance of the Cambodian delegation and his sending of a ship to Cambodia were in total disregard of the Nguyễn's position or sensitivity.

Conclusion

The English venture on Pulo Condore from 1702–1705 has thus far been treated by most scholars as a minor incident in the larger chronicles of events relating to Vietnam's foreign relations. This paper, however, shows that the event is important to a meaningful understanding of the dynamics of foreign relations as practised by the Nguyễn Lords who ruled over southern Vietnam during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The flexibility of the Nguyễn Lords in exercising their foreign relations is reflected in the manner Nguyễn Phúc Chu turned against the English on Pulo Condore in order to protect Nguyễn interests from what he perceived to be a possible alliance between the English and the Cambodians. Barely two years previously, the Nguyễn Lord had welcomed the Englishmen's presence in that part of the waters.

This paper also demonstrates how Vietnam's diplomatic history has to be reconstructed from diverse sources. Identifying the Cambodian factor as the main reason for the Nguyễn to act against the Englishmen in 1705, for instance, came from the accounts of the survivors rather than from Vietnamese sources. This new dimension to the Pulo Condore massacre shows a case of the inability of the Europeans, in this instance, the English, to perceive the dynamics of a Việt (Nguyễn)-Khmer border in a volatile phase of formation.