

Transition of governance in Vietnam's Northern uplands in the early Nguyn period

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Abstrak

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Vietnamese dynasties attempted to extend their reach to Vietnam's northern uplands—one of the most important regions in the integration of the state. This study examines local governance in the northern uplands during the early Nguyn period, through an analysis of official documents—particularly the report submitted by the governor-general of the northern provinces (tng trn Bc Thành) in the tenth month of the tenth year of Gia Long (1811). During the eighteenth century, the Lê Dynasty (r. 1428–1527, 1533–1789) depended on local chieftains to administer tax collection and military service in each commune of the northern uplands. After occupying northern Vietnam, the Nguyn Dynasty found it difficult to gather information on the local chieftains in the northern uplands. It was unable to allocate sufficient resources and manpower to gather this information. In addition, regional officials (such as the governor-general of the northern provinces) did not provide this information to the Nguyn court, and only some local chieftains cooperated with the Nguyn Dynasty. Until 1810, the number of chieftains who took on the responsibility of tax collection, drafting soldiers in each commune, and gathering information on the northern uplands—thus cooperating with the Nguyn Dynasty's local system of governance—was smaller than the number during the Lê Dynasty. In 1810 the Nguyn court compiled a list of local chieftains in the northern uplands; this list included the chieftains' names, the communes where they were registered, and the communes where they collected taxes and drafted soldiers. This indicates that the Nguyn court attempted to govern the upland provinces by consolidating information on the chieftains. However, it was still difficult for the Nguyn court to gain full information on the local chieftains since the governor-general of the northern provinces and provincial officials appointed them without reporting to the court. This continued until the Minh Mng emperor's (r. 1820–41) well-known reforms, including abolishing the post of governor-general of the northern provinces and the hereditary status of local chieftains. Thus, through examining the transitioning local governance in the northern uplands, this study clarifies the Nguyn Dynasty's difficulty in integrating the state during its early years.