

# THE PROCESS OF ESTABLISHING SOVEREIGNTY OVER THE TWO ARCHIPELAGO HOANG SA AND TRUONG SA ISLANDS OF VIETNAM UNDER THE NGUYEN DYNASTY

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## Abstract

Since the beginning of the 19th century, the Nguyen Dynasty has inherited the sovereignty over the islands from the Nguyen and Tay Son lords. The Hue Dynasty managed, exploited the economy and exercised sovereignty over the Hoang Sa and Truong Sa archipelagos by the regular army and the central government apparatus with the participation of localities, implemented through royal decrees and recorded in the National History and National Maps of the Nguyen Dynasty. The sovereignty over the islands under the Nguyen Dynasty has also been internationally recognized through a massive set of documents recorded on the Woodblocks (2009) and the Imperial Records (2014). These are full, accurate, transparent evidences, affirming that Vietnam was the only country before World War II (1945) to have this advantage.

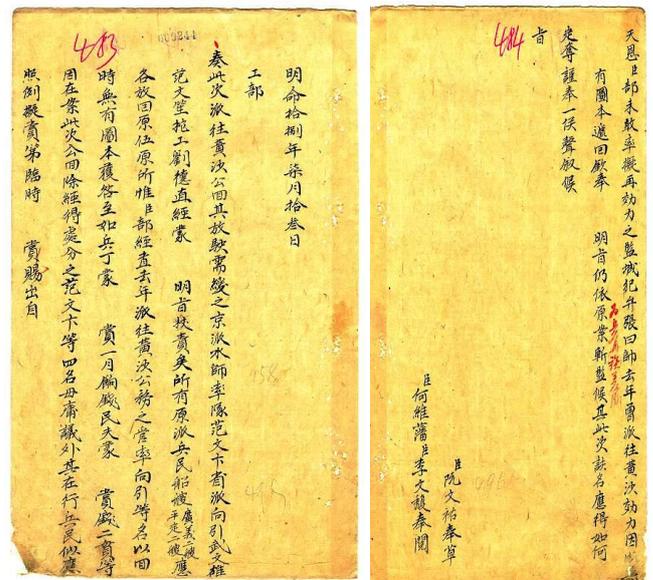
**Keywords:** Sovereignty, Vietnam, Hoang Sa, Truong Sa.

## INTRODUCTION

### 1. The Nguyen Dynasty managed sovereignty over Hoang Sa and Truong Sa through state documents with international legal value

#### 1.1. Chau ban

Chau ban is a document with the highest legal value of the court approved by the Nguyen Dynasty kings in red ink. In addition, there are documents related to sovereignty over seas and islands on behalf of the state compiled by the National History Institute of the Nguyen Dynasty in the National History books such as Dai Nam Thuc Luc, Dai Nam Nhat Thong Chi, Dai Nam Chinh Bien LietTruyen... or the national map of Dai Nam Nhat Thong Toan Do, the erection of sovereignty steles according to international practices, the construction of temples according to Vietnamese customs... all have national and international legal value. Documents of the Ministry of Public Works, the Ministry of War, the Imperial Astronomical Observatory, the Navy, and the City Inspectorate; of the provinces of Quang Ngai, BinhDinh, Quang Nam, ThuaThien... submitted to Emperor Gia Long, Minh Mang, Thieu Tri, TuDuc on protecting sovereignty and exploiting the economy in the Hoang Sa and Truong Sa archipelagos, approved by the Emperor, all have legal value and international value. The Hue court was the only State organization in the 19th century, in the first half of the 20th century, there were many documents approved by the Emperor mentioning the tasks of units and officials managing Hoang Sa and Truong Sa, which are evidence affirming the sovereignty of Vietnam over this archipelago. Currently, there are 18 Chau Ban documents in storage related to Hoang Sa and Truong Sa. Here are 3 Chau Ban documents related to Vietnam's sovereignty over these two archipelagos.



July 13, 18th year of Minh Mang (1837)  
Origin: Ministry of Public Works  
Place of storage: National Archives Center  
Code: volume 57, page 244

### The Ministry of Public Works reported:

The naval officers Pham Van Bien, who were sent by the capital, the guides Vu Van Hung and Pham Van Senh, and the boat captain LuuDucTruc, who were sent by the province to Hoang Sa, returned late, and were punished and beaten. All the soldiers and civilians who were sent (2 boats from Quang Ngai, 2 boats from BinhDinh) were sent back to their old units and places. The only thing that the Ministry of Public Works has reviewed last year's work is that the officers and guides who were sent to Hoang Sa to carry out official duties, when they returned, did not bring the map, were punished, while the soldiers and civilians were rewarded with 1 month's salary, and the civilians were rewarded with 2 quan. This time, when returning, except for the four officers, Pham Van Bien and his group, who were punished without further discussion, the

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remaining officers were rewarded and given grace according to the rules, but the matter of rewarding was decided by the superiors, the ministry did not dare to think about it, only the Inspector Truong Viet Soai committed a military crime, was sent to enforce, last year was sent to enforce in Hoang Sa, when returning he did not bring a map to present, obeying the order to keep the original sentence of beheading and imprisonment (beheading but imprisoned until autumn to be tried), how to judge that officer this time, please report and wait for the order.

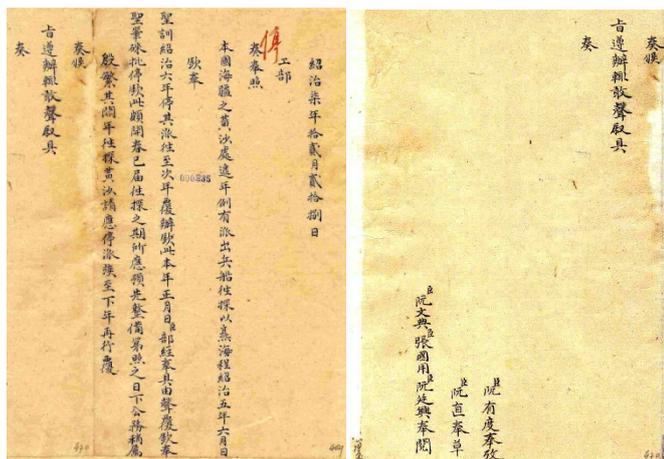
Chau Phe:

Vibinh tai sisaiphai (to return to serve as soldiers, waiting for further orders) (1).

The minister Nguyen Van Huu drafted the order;  
The minister Ha DuyPhien and the minister Ly Van Phuc read and approved the order;

Note:

1- The Chau Phe line is written next to the name Truong Viet Soai.



December 28, 7th year of Thieu Tri (1847)  
Origin: Ministry of Public Works  
Place of storage: Central Archives  
Code: volume number: 51, page 235.

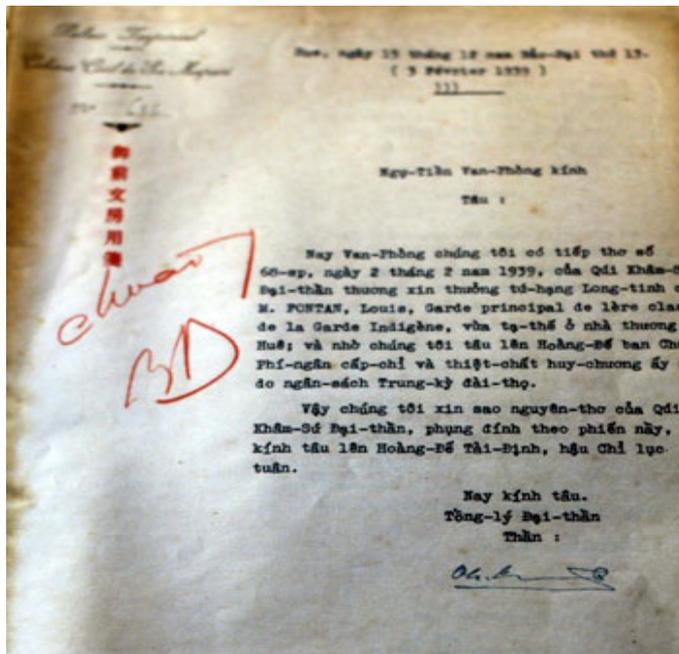
**The Ministry of Public Works reported:**

According to the custom, Hoang Sa is the maritime border of our country, every year we send soldiers and ships to survey and learn the sea route. On the 6th day of the 6th month of the 5th year of Thieu Tri (1845), following the instruction: on the 6th year of Thieu Tri (1846), postpone sending soldiers and ships [to survey], and report back next year. Please obey the order. On the 1st day of the 1st month of this year, the Ministry has reported in full, and the Governor has approved: pausing (stopping).

In early spring, it is time to survey. It is necessary to prepare fully in advance. But considering that this time is too busy with public affairs, please stop surveying in early spring this year, and wait for the report back next year. So please report and wait for the order, [to] follow the implementation.  
So please report.  
I, Nguyen Huu Do, am ordered to examine.

I, Nguyen Truc, am ordered to draft.  
I, Nguyen Van Dien, am ordered to review.  
[Chau Phe] Dinh.

By the beginning of the 20th century, despite the encroachment of Guangdong (China) authorities through the unilateral flag planting by Admiral Li Chuan (1909) or the subsequent violation by the Japanese Fertilizer Exploitation Company, sovereignty over the Hoang Sa and Truong Sa archipelagos still belonged to the Hue court, as shown in the Chau Ban in 1939 under the reign of King Bao Dai.

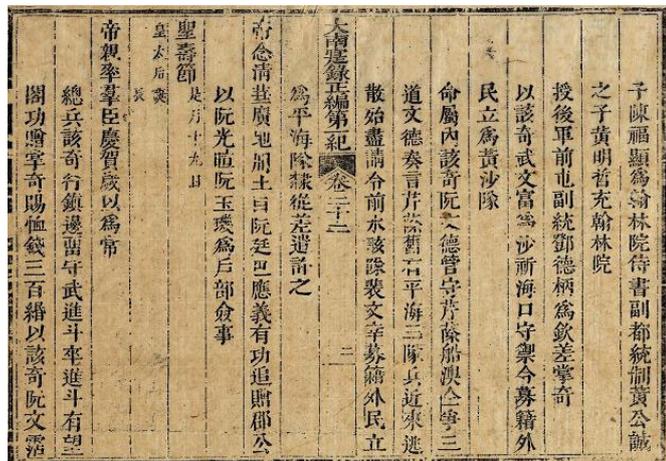


Royal documents of King Bao Dai's reign affirming Vietnam's sovereignty over the Hoang Sa and Truong Sa archipelagos, donated by the family of researcher PhanThuan An to National Archives Center I.

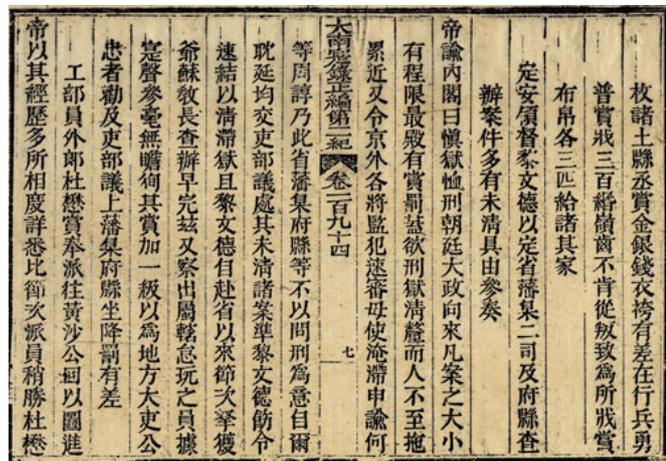
**1.2. Woodblocks and Official History of the Nguyen Dynasty compiled by the National History Institute**

The National History Institute was an important organization in the central government apparatus of the Hue court. The National History Institute was established in the first year of the Minh Mang Dynasty (1820), headed by a General Secretary, who was concurrently a high-ranking mandarin of the court, and two Deputy General Directors, who were concurrently the Ministers of two ministries with the rank of first-rank mandarin. The reports sent to the court were reviewed by the Cabinet before being submitted to the king for approval. The original with the king's red approval was called Chau Ban, and the two copies were copied by the Cabinet in black ink, including the king's handwriting, one of which was sent to the National History Institute to be used as a document for compiling the National History. Therefore, the works of the National History Institute all bore the official name of the Nguyen Dynasty monarchy. Works compiled by the National History Institute related to sovereignty over seas and islands include Dai Nam Thuc Luc, Dai Nam Nhat Thong Chi, Dai Nam Chinh Bien LietTruyen, Dai Nam Dia Du Chi Uoc Bien... Some pages in the Dai Nam Thuc Luc book printed from woodblocks show the documentary value of Vietnam's sovereignty over the two archipelagos of Hoang Sa and Truong Sa under the Nguyen Dynasty.

Dai Nam Thuc Luc Chinh Bien, first period, volume 22, page 2, year Gia Long 2 (1803) recorded: "In July, appointed Cai Co Vo Van Phu as the Governor of Sa Ky seaport, ordered to recruit foreign nationals to form the Hoang Sa team".



The woodblock print tells about King Gia Long ordering Captain Vo Van Phu to recruit people to join the Hoang Sa fleet. The Nguyen Dynasty woodblock used to print the book Dai Nam Thuc Luc Chinh Bien, Volume 194, pages 7 and 8, Minh Mang 20 (1839) recorded: "In July, the Minister of Public Works, Do Mau Thuong, obeyed the order to go on a mission to Hoang Sa and returned with a map. The king thought that he had been to many places and had measured them thoroughly, which was better than other envoys. Do Mau Thuong and those who went with him were all rewarded with clothes and money."

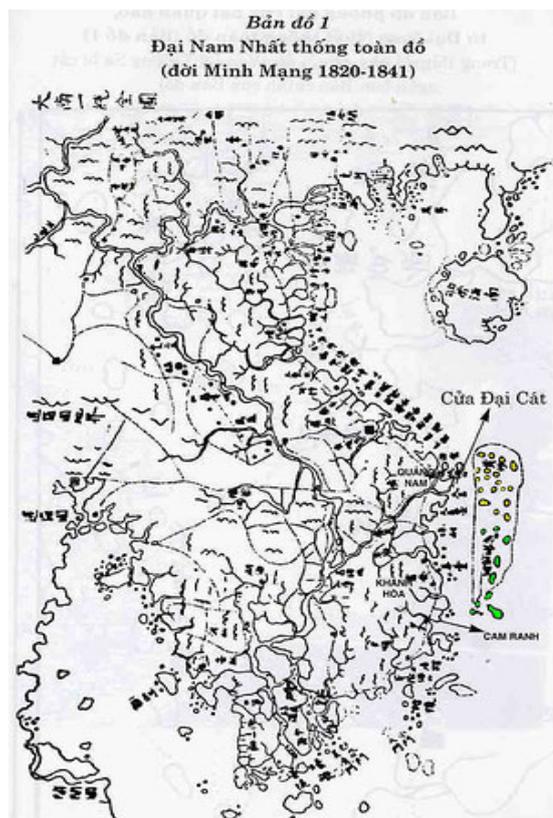


Nguyen Dynasty woodblocks record King Minh Mang rewarding Do Mau Thuong for returning from Hoang Sa after completing the map drawing and other assigned tasks. The National History Institute of the Nguyen Dynasty compiled the book Dai Nam Nhat Thong Chi, Quang Ngai province, with an entry about Hoang Sa island: "Minh Mang often sent people on public ships to explore the sea route there, and saw a place with a white sandbank with a circumference of 1,070 trung, with lush trees and a well in the middle of the sandbank; to the southwest of the bank there was an ancient temple, it is not clear when it was built, and there was a stele engraved with the four words "Van lybabinh" (thousand miles of calm waves). In the 16th year of Minh Mang (1835), he sent public ships to carry bricks and stones to build the temple, erected a stone stele on the left side of the temple to mark it and planted seeds of various plants on the left, right and back. Soldiers building

the temple foundation dug up more than 2,000 pounds of copper and iron sheets". When writing the book Dai Nam Dia Du Chi Uoc Bien (1908), the General Director of the National History Institute, Cao Xuan Duc, also confirmed the exploitation and management of Hoang Sa by the Nguyen Dynasty: "Hoang Sa Island is in Binh Son. From the coast, with favorable winds, it can be reached in 3 or 4 days and nights. On the island, mountains spread everywhere, with up to 130 peaks. In the middle, there is a golden sandbank, countless thousands of miles long, commonly called Van Ly Truong Sa. On the bank there is a well, the well water is sweet". Through the Woodblocks and Dai Nam Thuc Luc, it shows that: "The Nguyen Dynasty mobilized a large force including officials from the central agencies of the Cabinet, the Ministry of Public Works, the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of War, the Ministry of Justice, the City Supervisor, the Imperial Astronomer, the Navy... to coordinate with local officials and fishermen of Quang Ngai and Binh Dinh provinces to annually carry out public duties on Hoang Sa such as drawing maps, inventorying resources on the island, measuring sea routes, planting markers, planting trees, building temples, erecting sovereignty steles, building a system of warehouses, fortifications, setting up tax stations, observing astronomy and forecasting weather... Every year, the force performing the Hoang Sa mission is present on the archipelago for more than 6 months to carry out the task of economic exploitation and protecting sovereignty. During stormy months, although not regularly present on the island, the Nguyen Dynasty's measures to protect sovereignty still maintain continuity in history".

1.3. State and international map system

More than all countries in the region and internationally, Vietnam has a complete system of international maps and national maps affirming the sovereignty of the Hue Dynasty over the two archipelagos of Hoang Sa and Truong Sa in the 19th century, listed below:



The Complete Unification of Dai Nam was painted in 1838, under the reign of King Minh Mang.

There is the Hoang Sa-Truong Sa archipelago.

Latino Map - Anamiticum of Bishop



Latino Map - Anamiticum of Bishop Taberd

This map is attached to the back of the Vietnamese-Latin dictionary, Bishop Taberd was an interpreter for King Minh Mang from November 1826, published in 1838. The map is 80cm long and 44cm wide, printed on regular paper for printing maps. The title of the map is printed in three languages: Chinese, Vietnamese and Latin. Previously, in 1833, Bishop Jean Louis Taberd in his book *Univers et description de tout les peuples de leur religions, moeurs et coutumes* affirmed the event of King Gia Long's sovereignty marking in the Hoang Sa archipelago: "We do not know whether they established any base there; but what we know for sure is that Emperor Gia Long deliberately added that strange flower to his crown. Therefore, he considered it appropriate to personally cross the sea to take over the Hoang Sa archipelago, and in 1816, he solemnly hung there the flag of Dang Trong."

### Conclusion

Under the Gia Long dynasty, the king established sovereignty over the Hoang Sa and Truong Sa archipelagos as an obvious fact recognized internationally. The sovereignty of the Vietnamese state over Hoang Sa and Truong Sa in the 19th century was raised to the status of national policy by King Minh Mang and continued to be implemented by King Thieu Tri and King TuDuc in terms of management, economic exploitation, culture, and education, becoming a traditional value, a historical evidence and an international legal basis in the struggle for sovereignty over the islands. Through the official historical evidence of the Hue court with national and international legal value such as Chau Ban, Moc Ban, Quoc Do, and Quoc Su recognized internationally, Vietnam is the only country to establish sovereignty over the two archipelagos of Hoang Sa and Truong Sa. Historical documents also do not record any disputes with countries in the region. Hoang Sa and Truong Sa were firmly and inviolably established by the Nguyen Dynasty throughout the 19th century. Among the countries that currently have ambitions to dispute sovereignty over the islands with Vietnam in Hoang Sa and Truong Sa, no country has a set of Chau Ban, Moc Ban, official history of the State and a set of national maps that are recorded and internationally recognized like Vietnam. This is an advantage in the history of sovereignty of the Vietnamese State from the 19th century to 1945.

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