CONTENTS

ANCL	*An Nam*
ANOM	Archive
ARVN	Army of
Bajaraka	Political ethnic g
BEFEO	*Bulletin*
CC	Central
Ch.	Chinese
CIDG	Civilian I
COSVN	Central
DNTL	*Đại Nam*
DVSK	*Đại Việt s*
DVSKTT	*Đại Việt* Việt, 147
DRV	Democra
FBIS-APA	Foreign and Pacif
FEER	*Far Easte*
FULRO	Front Un
GBA	General I
GGI	Gouvern
GVN	Governm
ICP	Indochin 1930–51
MAAG	(U.S.) Mil
MACV	(U.S.) Mil
MOS	(CIA) Mil
NLF	National
NYT	*New York*
PAVN	People's A

CHAPTER 2

Calming the Waves

Imperial Conquest and Indigenization, 221 BCE to 540 CE

The earliest document to describe people living in what is now Việt Nam appears to be a Chinese text dating from the 220s BCE. Reporting "unorthodox customs" of the Yuè in a part of the Lạc Việt region, it states: "To crop the hair, decorate the body, rub pigment into arms and fasten garments on the left side is the way of the Bakviet. In the country of Tai-wu [*V.* Tây Vu; see ch. 1] the habit is to blacken teeth, scar cheeks and wear caps of sheat [catfish] skin stitched crudely with an awl."[1]

In the late third century BCE, these people of the Lạc Việt region stood on the threshold of a new era, one of imperial subjugation, bitter resistance, flourishing trade, and mutual cultural accommodations on the part of both invaders and indigenes. By the sixth century CE, these changes had transformed both Lạc Việt society and its Chinese colonists. A complex new society emerged in the southern reaches of a northern empire.

That emerging empire commenced its conquest of the Yuè and Lạc regions in 221 BCE. Its expansion south of the mountain passes overlooking lowland south China into the plains and coastal areas that Chinese called Lingnan ("south of the ridges" or "passes"), continued to propel Yuè refugees southward into the Lạc Việt territory. It also for the first time brought the new northern empire into direct contact with the lucrative trade networks of the South China Sea.[2] The founding emperor of the Qin dynasty (255–206 BCE), Qin Shi Huangdi, coveted "the round and irregular pearls of Yuè," as well as its rhinoceros horn, elephant tusks,

and kingfisher plumes.[3] Only the south could supply these tropical items, not only from the Yuè and Lạc Việt regions but also other Mon-Khmer and Cham realms, whose river ports served the eastern mainland of Southeast Asia and the north-south maritime trade that thrived along its coastline.

Conquest of the northern coast of the South China Sea only strengthened the imperial temptation to take control of this commerce. A rising domestic Chinese market for these luxury goods made the trade profitable, not only to the empire and visiting foreign merchants but also to imperial officials on southern appointments. Indeed, the latter's private acquisition of wealth would often disrupt the stability of northern rule. Along with imperial domination and official corruption, persistent cultural differences between Chinese and Lạc Việt eventually provoked a succession of serious revolts. Yet, over seven centuries of Chinese administrative imposition, the empire's cultural influence also penetrated the indigenous population, which demonstrated an openness to some features of northern society. Meanwhile the new Sinic ruling class put down local roots and retained power even when imperial political controls eventually began to loosen. Periods of full Chinese authority became intermittent and progressively briefer.[4] By the sixth century CE, the imperial outpost of Jiaozhi was demonstrating local administrative capacity as well as fulfilling its commercial potential.

QIN AND YUÈ

During its fast rise and brief reign, the Qin dynasty's conquests set the southern boundaries of classical and eventually of modern China. It imposed central control first over the inland kingdom of Chu in 223 BCE, and then moved on the Yuè realms of the south. On the east coast the next year, Qin forces overran the rump Yuè polity in Zhejiang. Finally, in successive campaigns from 221 to 214, they stormed south across the five mountain passes into Lingnan. The Qin conquered the Min-Yuè kingdom and overran other areas inhabited by the "Hundred Yuè" (Bai Yuè) across what would soon become south China. These conquests drove another stream of Yuè refugees further southward.

Yuè cultural differences were more difficult to uproot. Along with the institutions of kingship, one or more of the Yuè polities may have already developed writing systems to record their own languages in Chinese characters. If so, historian C. Michele Thompson writes, Qin officials would have moved to destroy most such texts. In 213 BCE Qin Shi Huangdi

ordered the destruction of all books on the histories of states other than the Qin, as well as all their historical records and metal inscriptions. Rebels who overthrew the Qin in 206 burned many more documents. Until 191 BCE, criminal laws of the succeeding Han dynasty banned private ownership of books on most subjects other than medicine, pharmacy, and agriculture. The imperial library was again destroyed during the Han interregnum of 9 to 24 CE.[5]

As a result, Yuè texts of any kind survived only in earlier tombs. Modern archaeological finds at Yuè sites include bronze swords bearing inscriptions using Chinese characters to record Yuè names and, Thompson writes, "inscriptions on ritual bronzes, long and complex for such a medium."[6] Even Yuè texts written on perishable materials like wood, bamboo, and silk have come to light. Maps dated between 207 and 168 BCE were found during excavations of a classical tomb in south China.[7] Also in that tomb was the largest collection of ancient documents ever excavated in China, including fourteen medical texts, dating from as early as 300 to 168 BCE.[8] These were written in a nonstandard Chinese script emphasizing phonetic representation that apparently reflected local Yuè pronunciations. Thompson argues that this shows the presence of literacy among Yuè people "closely connected by legend, history and archaeology to the people of the Red River Delta." People of Yuè and some of their neighbors, she concludes, employed the script "not only to write Chinese but also to transcribe personal and place names in their own languages." Thus, "the written form of Yüeh/Viet appears to have been but one part of the indigenous culture" that was later "driven underground by the Chinese imposition of direct rule."[9] In the Lạc Việt region itself, the earliest indications of writing are an imperial report of population records compiled locally in an unidentified script sometime before 111 BCE and a short Chinese inscription on the Cổ Loa bronze drum from the early first century CE.[10]

More exotic Yuè cultural differences made a greater impression on the Chinese. A mid-third-century Qin text commented that the people of Chu fear ghosts "but the people of Yue seek blessings from them."[11] Chinese writers noted the Yuè preoccupation with aquatic life. One text, the *Huai nan zi*, stated in 135 BCE that in Nán Yuè ("Southern Yuè"), which then included the Red River delta, "people carry out few occupations on land and many on water." The inhabitants even cut their hair and "tattoo their bodies in order to resemble the scaly-skinned aquatic animals."[12] With their pervasive sense of cultural superiority, or perhaps a more general paternalism, Chinese who ventured south may have found a more complex society than they anticipated.

THE QIN CONQUEST OF YUÈ

A second-century BCE Chinese account describes Qin Shi Huangdi's campaigns against the Yuè. In 221 BCE he sent the military governor of a commandery, a commissioner (*wei*) named Tu Ju, "at the head of five hundred thousand men, divided into five armies."

> For three years [221–219 BCE], men wore their armor and held crossbows at the ready. The superintendent Lu, sent [by the Qin], lacking the means to effectively transport supplies, then had his troops dig a canal, and the grain was delivered by that route. Thus it was possible to make war on the people of Yuè. [Yi Xu Song], the lord of Western Âu, was killed. So all the Yuè people took to the forest and lived there with the animals; none agreed to be a slave of the Chinese. [The Yuè] chose courageous men from their ranks, and made them their leaders. Then they attacked the Chinese by night, inflicting on them a great defeat and killing the commissioner [Tu Ju]. The dead and wounded were very many.[13]

Resistance continued. The Chinese complained: "The people of Yuè having fled deep into the mountains and thick forests; it was impossible to fight them. The troops were kept in garrisons to watch over these abandoned territories. This went on for a long time. The troops became tired. The Yuè then came out and attacked them."[14] In their isolated garrisons, the Chinese faced a strong military challenge: "The sick could not be treated, and the dead could not be buried."[15]

Eventually northern numbers carried the day. The invasion was demographic as well as military. First, in 214, Qin Shi Huangdi sent reinforcements, "criminals, banished men, social parasites, and merchants," to "maintain the garrisons to defend against the people of Yuè." With difficulty, Qin forces occupied the lands that now became China's three southern commanderies.[16] The emperor's prestige "made the four oceans tremble. In the South, he occupied the territories of the Hundred Yuè" and renamed them Guilin and Xiang. A Chinese source records the humiliating defeat of these local leaders: "The princes of the Hundred Yuè, their heads bowed and ropes around their necks, delivered their fate into the hands of subordinate officers."[17]

To stabilize the military occupation, the Qin dispatched a new commissioner from north China, Zhào Tuó (*V.* Triệu Đà), who requested that thirty thousand maidens and widows be sent south for his men to marry.[18] Zhào Tuó later took up a post in the third new commandery, Nanhai (South Sea), headquartered at Panyu, modern Guangzhou (Canton). The empire had reached the South China Sea and intended to stay. It now held the entire coastline of modern China.[19]

In half a century, the Qin dynasty had forcefully unified China, incorporating into its new empire many former refugees from the north and indigenous peoples of the south. Further south, the Lạc Việt lands faced the same threat of conquest and incorporation into an expanding trade network as a key commercial outpost. However the Qin armies stopped short of the Lạc Việt region and penetrated no farther south in the Yuè lands.[20] Instead, possibly under the weight of its own expansionist campaigns as well as widespread internal revolts from 209 BCE, Qin authority disintegrated. The first imperial dynasty came to an early end in 206.[21]

NAN YUÈ

During the Qin collapse, the empire's southernmost commandery, Nanhai, transformed itself into a new Yuè kingdom. The ailing Qin commander at Panyu advised his lieutenant, the former imperial commissioner Zhào Tuó: "The Middle Kingdom is in turmoil.... Nanhai is remote, but I fear that bandit soldiers will raid this far. I wish to raise troops and block up the new roads, in preparation.... Panyu occupies a strategic mountainous location. Relying upon Nanhai, east and west for several thousand *li* [roughly six hundred miles] we have the support of many people from the Middle Kingdom. This [place and its commander] is also the lord of a region, and can be used to establish a kingdom."[22]

Zhào Tuó founded that independent kingdom in Nanhai in 207 BCE, after his commandant died and just before the final Qin collapse. The imperial grip on the Yuè lands had proved transitory. Zhào Tuó's new polity occupied the far south of China, and he renamed it the kingdom of Nán Yuè. Nán Yuè was based in the coastal region around Panyu. It was not far northeast of the Red River delta, but did not yet include it, nor all of the Hundred Yuè to the west.

In the north, China's new Han dynasty established itself the next year. It viewed this new southern kingdom, Nán Yuè, with concern. But the founding Hàn emperor, Han Gaozu (r. 206–195 BCE), was prudently circumspect toward the Yuè peoples and apparently sought first to divide them by winning some over. In a 202 edict rewarding those who had helped him overthrow the Qin, Han Gaozu restored to his throne in Fujian the king of Min-Yuè, who "for a generation has been perpetuating the ancestral sacrifices of Yüeh." And for leading "the troops of the many Yüeh" to perform "very signal service" against the Qin, the emperor appointed another former Yuè monarch as king of Changsha, a territory once part of Chu, and additionally granted him, on paper, authority over "Xiang Commandery,

Guilin, and Nanhai"—that is, over all of southern China including Zhào Tuó's realm of Nán Yuè.[23] The Han Empire had not relinquished its claim to the Yuè territory, but it was not yet prepared to renew that claim by force.

At this stage the imperial policy sought diplomatic incorporation. Emperor Han Gaozu quickly recognized the autonomy of three Yuè kingdoms: Min Yuè in 202, Nán Yuè in 196, and Dong Ou in southern Zhejiang in 192.[24] Acknowledging Zhào Tuó as king of Nán Yuè, the emperor proclaimed:

> According to the customs of the people of Yüeh, they like to attack each other. At a previous time, [the Qin] moved [Chinese] people from the central prefectures to the three commanderies of the southern quarter, and sent them to live intermixed with the many [tribes of] the Yüeh. It happened that when the world punished [the Qin], the Commandant of Nan-hai [Zhào Tuó] was living in the southern quarter and ruling it as its chieftain. He has made an excellent arrangement [of his government, so that] the people from the central prefectures have hence not diminished [in number] and the custom of the people of Yüeh to attack each other is progressively ceasing. For all [this, the region] is in debt to his ability. Now We establish [Zhào Tuó] as King of Nan-Yüeh.

The emperor then sent an ambassador to Zhào Tuó to "transmit his kingly seal."[25] He chose a hard-talking emissary, Lu Jia, who hailed from the defunct kingdom of Chu. Lu noted condescendingly that Zhào Tuó received him with his hair in a bun, "squatting, with his legs spread wide."[26]

A Chinese account of Lu Jia's meeting with Zhào Tuó at Panyu in 196 BCE records the imperial combination of cultural superiority, diplomacy, and threat. Lu began by softening up the king of Nán Yuè, reminding him how far he had fallen. The Han envoy sniffed that "your people number no more than a few hundred thousand, and they are all southern savages."[27] By contrast, he added, "You sir, are a man of the central states, and the graves of both the senior and cadet branches of your family are in Zhending. But now you have abandoned the qualities instilled in you by Heaven, have cast aside your cap and sash, and want to use this little place called Yuè to make yourself the equal and the rival of the Son of Heaven. Disaster will befall you!" Later in their conversation, Lu again accused Zhào Tuó of wanting "to use this newly created and still unformed land of Yuè to live in belligerent disobedience." But China could threaten war: "If the ruler of Han were to hear of this, he would dig up and burn the graves of your lordship's ancestors. He would wipe out your clan, and he would have a general lead a hundred thousand troops right up to the borders of Yuè, and the people of Yuè would kill you in order to have a means of surrendering to Han."

The admonishment worked: "*Wei* Tuó suddenly sat up straight and apologized to Master Lu." He replied contritely: "I have lived long among the southern savages, and have become extremely negligent in my observance of the rites."

Yet Zhào Tuó stood his ground. He still insisted on asking, "How do I compare to the Emperor? Am I as worthy?" And when Lu responded, "Sitting astride an area between the mountains and the sea, you rule a land that might be likened to a single Han commandery," Tuó laughed. He even retorted, "If I had lived in the central area, how could I not be as great as the ruler of Han?" Having asserted his claim, Tuó switched to effective diplomacy. He "showed the greatest affability" to Lu and "entertained him at drinking banquets for several months." The king confided in Lu: "Here in Yuè, there is no one worth talking to. Now that you have come, I hear new things every day." Tuó also showed his potential value to China by presenting Lu with "a thousand gold pieces" and goods of equal value. The envoy returned to the imperial court, having prevailed upon Zhào Tuó to "proclaim himself a loyal vassal"—but only after Lu had confirmed him in the post of "King of Nan Yuè, bowing to him as he did."[28]

Despite this diplomatic modus vivendi, Han China's relations with Nán Yuè and the other Yuè polities remained turbulent. In 195 the emperor again anointed a Yuè rival claimant to Zhào Tuó's throne: "The Marquis of Nan-wu, Chih, is also a descendant of Yüeh; We establish him as King of Nan-hai." But Han Gaozu died that year, and Zhào Tuó seized his chance. The Han historian Ban Gu recorded that in 192, once again, "The King of Nan-yüeh, Zhào Tuó, pronounced himself a subject and presented tribute." Yet Han dominion over Nán Yuè was tenuous. In 185 the Han empress dowager, perhaps viewing it as a potential rival power, banned the export of iron, gold, weapons, horses, and cattle to Zhào Tuó's kingdom. He responded by declaring himself no mere king but now emperor of Nán Yuè. In 181 he marched north on Changsha, ruled by another Yuè rival. The empress dowager sent troops to repel the Nán Yuè invaders.[29] Maps sealed in the tomb of a Han official who died after helping fortify Changsha against Zhào Tuó's attack document its defenses.[30] Zhào Tuó had to abandon his northern offensive and relinquish his title of emperor, but apparently "continued to use it locally."[31] He now turned south.

NÁN YUÈ INCORPORATES THE LẠC VIỆT REGION

In 180 BCE, Zhào Tuó brought the Lạc Việt region of the Red and Mã River deltas under the suzerainty of his Nán Yuè realm.[32] He was Chinese, but his