

Nguyen dynasty's implementation of international responsibility in the South China Sea (1802 - 1884)

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Abstract: The South China Sea is one of the largest seas in the world. Vietnam owns up to 30% of the area of this sea. The Nguyen Dynasty unified the country and managed a large territory not only on land but also extending into the South China Sea in the 19th century. Inheriting the previous dynasties' sea and island organization and management experience, the Nguyen Dynasty not only focused on protecting the national sovereignty of seas and islands but also demonstrated its increasing international responsibility. Having reviewed ancient documents, especially the Imperial Records of the Nguyen Dynasty (Châu bản Triều Nguyễn), and built upon the research achievements of domestic and foreign authors, while simultaneously applying two main historical research methods (historical and logical methods) along with other methods (systematic, analytical, synthetic, and comparative methods), the article focuses on analyzing and objectively evaluating the actions that demonstrate the international responsibility of this dynasty for peace and maritime safety in the South China Sea. In addition, it also shows that the Nguyen Dynasty made significant efforts in addressing maritime security challenges with many countries in the region and the world, as well as the relationship between national interests and international interests at that time.

Keywords: *International responsibility, Nation and seas and islands, Nguyen Dynasty, South China Sea.*

1. Introduction

The South China Sea¹ is rich and abundant in natural resources, connects the Pacific Ocean and the Indian Ocean, and is also a hub of the largest maritime trade routes in the world. Vietnam's seas and islands account for nearly 30% of the area of the South China Sea (1 million km²) with 48 bays and gulfs, about 3,000 large and small islands and especially two archipelagos of Hoang Sa (Paracel) and Truong Sa (Spratly) in the middle of the South China Sea. Since the 17th century, the Nguyen Lords, with a vision towards the sea, have been conscious of reaching out to the sea to form their sovereignty over coastal islands, and more importantly, to control the Hoang Sa and Truong Sa archipelagos in the South China Sea. In the 19th century, the Nguyen Dynasty not only focused on consolidating national sovereignty, exploiting and strictly managing the seas and islands, but also demonstrated its international responsibility in resolving maritime security challenges with many countries in the region and the world and initially harmonized the relationship between national interests and international interests at that time.

¹Vietnam calls this sea the East Sea.

2. Research Content

2.1. Concept of “International Responsibility”

The international responsibility of a country today reflects its contributions to common regional and global causes, basically: (i) maintaining regional and global peace and security; (ii) promoting economic prosperity and sustainable development; (iii) developing fair, democratic and civilized political, economic and cultural cooperation frameworks; (iv) dealing with regional and global threats (Do Thanh Hai).

In the 19th century, the international law was not yet clearly established as it is today and there was also no close relationship between countries in the region or in the world, hence, the meaning of “international responsibility” mentioned in this article was not understood completely as it is today. In our view, with its contributions to maintaining general peace and stability in the South China Sea, ensuring the maritime safety, rescuing international ships, and dealing with the dangers of piracy and natural disasters in the South China Sea, the Nguyen Dynasty demonstrated its international responsibility in the South China Sea issues.

2.2. The Nguyen Dynasty's demonstration of international responsibility in the South China Sea issues

The South China Sea is located at the four-way crossroads of international maritime trade routes with many islands, archipelagos and seaports, etc. and has busy trade and business with frequently traffic of ships of various countries. On their global maritime journey passing Vietnam's territory, the ships encountered many risks and accidents of storms, reefs, shoals, pirates, etc., causing them to be in distress and unpredictable dangers at sea. The Nguyen Dynasty², with its position in the region and international relations, proactively and actively implemented many activities to ensure the safety of ships passing this sea area throughout the 19th century. As recorded in *Imperial Records of Nguyen Dynasty* (Châu bản triều Nguyễn), *Annals of Dai Nam* (Đại Nam Thực lục), *Minh Mang's Key Essentials* (Minh Mạng chính yếu), *Repertory of the Administrative Regulations of Dai Nam* (Khâm định Đại Nam Hội điển sự lệ) and *An Abbreviated History of Our Dynasty* (Quốc triều Chính biên Toát yếu)³, these activities were very diverse and took place continuously for many years. The Emperors of Nguyen Dynasty set clear regulations on search and rescue acts as well as preventive activities and early warnings to limit accidents to ships, especially international ships with limited understanding the characteristics of this sea area.

2.2.1. Preventing Accidents at Sea for Ships

Hoang Sa and Truong Sa archipelagos⁴ are located in the middle of the South China Sea and partially submerged, so it is difficult for ships to detect at a distance, leading to many ship stranding. In

²The Nguyen Dynasty was the last feudal dynasty in history of Vietnam with more than a century (1802 – 1945); it started when Nguyen Anh ascended the throne taking the reign name Gia Long (1802) and ended when Bao Dai abdicated in 1945.

³ Imperial Records of Nguyen Dynasty (Châu bản Triều Nguyễn) are administrative documents generated during the state management process of the Nguyen Dynasty (1802 – 1945), including documents submitted to the Emperors for approval by the central and local governments; documents issued by the Emperors, and diplomatic documents and royal poems.

Annals of Dai Nam (Đại Nam Thực lục), is the largest and most important national historical document of the Nguyen Dynasty and compiled by the National History Institute. This historical document was compiled and engraved by successive historians over a period of 88 years to complete, from the 2nd year of Emperor Minh Mang (1821) to the 3rd year of Emperor Duy Tan (1909). *Minh Mang's Key Essentials* (Minh Mạng chính yếu) was compiled by the National History Institute of the Nguyen Dynasty in the 18th year of Emperor Minh Mang (1837), recording the applied major policies at that time. *Repertory of the Administrative Regulations of Dai Nam* (Khâm định Đại Nam Hội điển sự lệ) was compiled by the Nguyen Dynasty's Cabinet over 12 years and contains a huge amount of accurate knowledge and historical documents, especially about the institutions and operations of the Nguyen Dynasty's structure. *An Abbreviated History of Our Dynasty* (Quốc triều Chính biên Toát yếu) was compiled by the National History Institute of the Nguyen Dynasty in 1908, recording many ups and downs of the Nguyen Dynasty's history, especially the French invasion in the mid-19th century.

⁴Hoang Sa (Paracel) archipelagos is located in the sea area from about 15015' North latitude, 1110 to 1130 East longitude, including over 30 islands, rocks, coral cays, reefs and sandbanks, about 120 nautical miles from Ly Son Island, Quang Ngai Province, Vietnam. Total land area of the archipelago is about 10 km².

1833, in order to make it safer for ships passing this sea, Emperor Minh Mang instructed the Ministry of Public Works to assign soldiers to build temples, erect steles, and plant many trees on these archipelagos. “There is a strip of Hoang Sa archipelago located in Quang Ngai's territorial sea. With the same sky and water color viewed in a far distance, making it impossible to distinguish between shallow and deep water. Recently, merchant ships have often been damaged. Now, we should prepare for the ships and boats so that next year, we will send soldiers to build temples, erect steles, and plant many trees here. In the future, when the trees are big and green, and they look as signs for ships observe and navigate so as to avoid the ship stranding. That is also a benefit for all generations later” [1]. The Nguyen Emperors were also very interested in drawing maps, compiling the documents to describe the geographical characteristics of the sea, especially to give warnings about locations with rocky beaches, shoals, and other natural conditions that affect maritime activities. At the end of June of the year of Dinh [2] Gia Long directed the Right Assistant Administrator Nguyen Duc Huyen and the Left Assistant Administrator Doan Viet Nguyen of Ministry of Public Works wrote the book titled *Coastal Records* (Duyên Hải Lục). From the South to Ha Tien, from the North to Yen Quang, all the seaports, no matter how deep or shallow the water level was at high or low tide, or how far or near the miles were, were all recorded (they are made into 2 volumes, including 4 palaces, 15 towns, 143 seaports; taking 540 trượng (unit of length) as a mile and the total was more than 5,902 miles)” [1]. In 1831, the Emperor Minh Mang enacted the rules to measure the coastal ports, “Local officials are ordered to ask port station guards in the district that from this year, the local seaports, no matter how wide, narrow, shallow or deep they are, must be examined and measured more thoroughly; for the coastal ports near the shore, if there are piles of rocks, rocky reefs, shallow sandbanks, or submerged sandbanks to be avoided, they must be clearly stated that how many trượng or thước (unit of length) they are from the shore; if they are far from the shore and difficult to examine and measure, they must also be roughly estimated how many miles it is, how many hours and minutes it will take to move to reach the shore, and from there, look up to the mountains on the shore to see whether how big or small it is, what it looks like; everything must be listed out for easy recognition. Every year, around the months of June and July, the local authorities shall submit that list to the Ministry of Public Works to check and hand it over to the navy and the towns for reference as a copyright deposit. This action is to make maritime activities more convenient; If they do wrong, the officers stationed at the seaports will be severely punished as prescribed by the rules. Then, the Ministry of Public Works are ordered to come the localities to draw maps in accordance with the sea areas in the districts and submit them to the Ministry for consideration and use” [1].

Discovery, survey, measurement and mapping, especially in two large Hoang Sa and Truong Sa archipelagos located in the middle of the South China Sea with harsh weather conditions, had to be carried out for many years to understand and draw the maps and maritime routes to these two archipelagos. These are truly typical and great contributions of the Nguyen Dynasty Emperors in ensuring the maritime safety and security in the South China Sea.

2.2.2. Rescuing International Ships in Distress

Reviewing historical sources of the Nguyen Dynasty, especially the *Imperial Records of Nguyen Dynasty* (Châu bản triều Nguyễn), many records of timely humanitarian relief activities of the Nguyen Dynasty to the international ships in distress in the South China Sea were found. These activities not only demonstrated the noble humanitarian spirit but also vividly and truthfully reflected the results of the implementation of the obligations and responsibilities of rescue at sea by the Vietnamese State and people. The Nguyen Dynasty did not implement this responsibility in a spontaneous, passive, or half-hearted manner, but had a clear awareness, included this responsibility into a law so that both local to

Truong Sa (Spratly) archipelagos is located in the sea area from about 60050' – 120 North latitude, 111030' – 117020' East longitude, including over 100 islands, rocks, coral cays and sandbanks, about 248 nautical miles from Cam Ranh (Khanh Hoa Province), about 203 nautical miles from Phu Quy Island (Binh Thuan Province). The total land area of the archipelago is about 3 km².

central authorities could all implement it unanimously in case of accidents at sea. As early as the second year of Gia [3] there were general rules for rescuing international ships in distress at sea: "Based on the number of crew members on the ships in distress, provide rice and food to each crew of such ships to survive, and wait for a favorable wind condition to follow to another merchant ships to return home. So, a compassion to the foreign victims was paid attention" [4]. As for the Qing Dynasty's government ships, the Gia Long Dynasty stated that: "All Qing Dynasty government ships that were blown over by the wind will be helped to return the home, and then an official document was sent to the Qing Dynasty governor's office to inform. If they are private ships, they were given money and rice in accordance with the rules, and allowed to return at will, or stay and make a living, and are not sent away" [4]. The reason for making special rules with many incentives for Qing Dynasty ships is because they are also the ones encountering the most disasters in this sea area and especially due to a traditional relationship between two neighboring countries Vietnam – China. At the beginning of Minh Mang's reign, the rescue rules were re-enacted. In these rules, a paragraph clearly explained: "*Currently, the sea route is arduous and dangerous, with unpredictable waves and winds arising. Recently, officials, soldiers and people either on public affairs or on business trips, have ventured into dangerous and deep places out of necessity. Or by chance, they accidentally encounter disasters; if they survive, they have no place to stay, and if they die, no one will bury them etc. The local officials in seaports must reserve money and rice in case that someone encounters a disaster, and then they shall support and allocate based on public or private categories*" [5]. In January of the first year of Emperor Tu Duc (1848) the rules applicable to Qing Dynasty's ships were changed: "*For the Chinese merchant ships that were blown away by the wind, each crew is supported a phuong (unit of measurement) of rice. He issued an order that from now on, if any ship was in distress, this rule will be based to provide the support*" [5]. The fact that the Nguyen Dynasty under the reigns of Emperor Gia Long, Emperor Minh Mang, and Emperor Tu Duc continuously made adjustments to the rules regarding the rescue of ships in distress at sea which proves that the Nguyen Emperors paid attention to this rescue and regularly directed officials and soldiers to proactively prepare for timely rescue and, above all, it showed a humane spirit, sympathy with the difficulties and losses of the victims; this was a valuable quality of the head of the Vietnamese monarchy in particular and the Vietnamese people in general.

In the 19th century, the international ships in distress in the South China Sea were quite abundant and diverse. In terms of origin, the ships in distress that were rescued by the Nguyen Dynasty were mostly from China, followed by Southeast Asian countries and even Western countries. In terms of type and mission, the ships in distress could be divided into government ships, military ships and merchant ships, etc. Regardless of private or public sectors, when the ships were in distress, the Nguyen Dynasty Emperors paid attention to them, searched for them, and carried out the rescue activities. Based on the ships in distress, the Nguyen Dynasty would base on the specific case to have special standards for each subject. In this activity of the Nguyen Dynasty, foreign government ships (ships sent by the government to carry out missions) in distress in Vietnamese waters received the most support when the incidents occurred at sea. Foreign crews and merchants were brought to the mainland and provided with shelter, food, language support, and transported to international ports in neighboring countries so they could return their home. In 1835, Cai TingLan, a Qing writer, boarded a merchant ship from Fujian to Taiwan, and unfortunately the ship encountered a storm and drifted to Lai Can, on the coast of Quang Ngai on October 13, 1835. Emperor Minh Mang believed that this victim was a literator, but unfortunately encountered a big storm and had run out of money for the trip and he ordered such province that, in addition to providing money and rice, the victim will be supported 50 quan (units of Vietnamese currency) in cash, 20 phuong of rice ... In addition, based on number of pax, the crew on the ship was given one phuong of rice per month. Cai TingLan was treated very kindly by local officials and soldiers, and he recorded this special help in his work titled *Hainan Miscellany* (Hải Nam tạp trứớc). Professor Dai KeLai said that: "Before and after Cai TingLan drifted to Vietnam, many literati, merchants, soldiers, officials and their relatives also were in distress and the Nguyen Dynasty made proper arrangements. The merchants were returned their home by land, while officials, literati and

soldiers were transported by sea to the north to return their home” [6]. For Chinese government ships in distress, the imperial court especially favored them with more support. The Nguyen Dynasty's historical documents recorded *"A patrol boat of the Qing Dynasty's Guangdong Province drifted to Tra Son Bay in Quang Nam Province because of a storm. The provincial official reported the incident to the Emperor. And the Emperor said: "That is a government boat; it does not like a merchant ship in distress". So he ordered to provide 300 "quan" in cash and 300 "phuong" of white rice. He also ordered the Bureau Director of the Ministry of Finance, Le Truong Danh, to visit, console and treat them well with buffaloes and wine. If there was any damage to such boat, it would be repaired. It was also heard that many of the weapons and regalia brought along were no longer usable, so he ordered to give 40 Chinese machine guns and 40 rifles along with enough ammunition"* [1]. While the whole country was dealing with the invasion of French colonialism, Emperor Tu Duc still did not forget to rescue the boats and ships in distress in the imperial sea territory. For example, in May 1815, the Siamese envoy's ship to pay tribute to the Qing Dynasty encountered a storm and docked in the waters of Binh Dinh. In June 1817, the Siamese envoy's ship to the Qing Dynasty encountered a storm and had to dock in Da Nang, then it caught fire and was completely lost. The incident was reported to the Emperor and he said: *"The envoy's ship on fire was also treated as a merchant ship in distress"*. The Quang Nam Palace was ordered to support more than 200 phuong of rice and food" [1]. Besides the Siamese ships were in distress while on a tribute mission, during the Nguyen Dynasty, it was also recorded that in 1872, a ship of a small country, a vassal of Ryūkyū, was in distress and drifted into the La Han sea, Binh Thuan and it was rescued. After supporting money and rice and repairing the mast, the Emperor also specially assigned Tran Hy Tang along with Nguyen Van Thuy and Ho Van Long to use the Tiep Hoa ship to take them to Guangdong Province, then they moved to Fujian Province, waited to other ship to return their home [1]. Similar cases like this were recorded a lot in the history of the Nguyen Dynasty.

The Nguyen Dynasty, like most countries in Asia at that time (China, Japan), implemented a policy of strict control over ships, merchants, and missionaries from Western countries due to concerns about national security issues in the context of Western colonialism increasing its colonial expansion, actively seeking opportunities to intervene and invade Eastern countries. During the reign of Emperor Minh Mang, the ships from Western countries were only allowed to enter through the seaport in Da Nang. *"Moreover, there was no vital place than Son Tra lagoon. Foreign ships are only allowed to anchor this area"* [1]. However, it did not mean that the Nguyen Dynasty was indifferent and did not help the Western ships in distress. On the contrary, its help was still very enthusiastic and thoughtful, not inferior to that for ships from Southeast Asian countries in distress. The typical examples included the incident of a French merchant ship in Hoang Sa in 1830 or the British merchant ship passing Hoang Sa archipelagos with running aground and sinking in 1836, rescued by the Nguyen Dynasty. There are 4 Imperial Records dated June 27, in the 11th year of Minh Mang (1830) recording and describing quite specifically the incident of a French merchant ship in Hoang Sa archipelagos. As shown in the report of the Coastal Defense Commander of Da Nang Estuary named Nguyen Van Ngu, this was a merchant ship owned by a French ship owner named D'Ochilie...; it was carrying a royal envoy named Le Quang Quynh to Lu Tong that was Luzon of the Philippines to trade. The ship left the seaport on the 20th day; The next day, the ship reached the west of Hoang Sa and ran aground; the water flooded the ship more than 8 thước (3.2m). Upon being informed, the Coastal Defense Commander of Da Nang Estuary immediately sent patrol boats at the seaport to bring fresh water to the sea to seek them and bring them back to the seaport; all people and assets were safe. Annals of Dai Nam (Đại Nam Thực lục) also recorded the incident in 1836 that a British merchant ship was passing through Hoang Sa and ran aground and sank; more than 90 people clung to the ship planks and drifted to the coast of Binh Dinh. After hearing the incident, Emperor Minh Mang ordered the province to take care of the accommodation, provide money and rice, and assigned the Imperial Guard acting as interpreter to visit and give each captain and leader a colored shirt, a pair of western cloth pants, a cloth blanket, and each attendant a set of colored cloth clothes. Then he assigned the envoys who had

been to the West named Nguyen Tri Phuong and Vu Van Giai to take them to Ha Chau to return home [7].

During the reign of Emperor Tu Duc, when the whole country was struggling to the French colonialists' invasion of the territory, the rescue activities to Western ships in distress were still carried out by the royal court. In the 12th year of Emperor Tu Duc (1859): *“A Western sampan boat was in distress and drifted to Dai Ap Estuary of Quang Nam Province. There were 12 Western men and women on the boat. The Conseil privé requested Emperor Tu Duc to provide food, clothing, and a travel document to allow them to board the shift to return home and let them know the court's intention. Emperor Tu Duc approved all”* [1].

It can be seen that the Nguyen Dynasty Emperors were clear-headed in resolving the relationship between national defense and security with international maritime safety. Western sailors who came to this sea area for any purpose would still be rescued when in distress because of the common international responsibility of the country that owned a part of the South China Sea. This humanitarian action of the Nguyen Dynasty created an opportunity to connect in international relations between countries with common interests in this sea area.

2.2.3. Coordinating With Domestic and International Forces to Regularly Patrol and Chase Pirates to Ensure Security and Safety in the South China Sea

Vietnam's sea area is located on the vital traffic route connecting the Pacific Ocean – Indian Ocean; Europe – Asia and Middle East – Asia, with many islands, estuaries and long coastlines, coastal localities which are rich in products with busy maritime trade activities. Therefore, this was also an attractive location for pirates from other countries to operate here, often threatening the safety of ships moving in this sea area. Faced with the piracy context, the Nguyen Dynasty had always attached importance to patrolling and controlling the sea area to promptly detect and prevent the pirates from attacking and robbing ships, ensuring the safety of passing ships, contributing to maintain the general stability of the South China Sea. In order to carry out this action, the Nguyen Dynasty mobilized many forces with clear rules. The forces directly carrying out patrols and pirate capture activities under the Nguyen Dynasty were very diverse, including regular forces in the State payroll, militia forces in coastal localities, and even in coordination with international forces.

The navy was a regular force in charge of patrolling and capturing pirates and organized and professionally trained by the State. The navy of the Nguyen Dynasty consisted of units stationed in the capital and the provinces. The navy stationed in the capital was called the Imperial Navy. This was the key force of the Nguyen Dynasty navy. Local navies were located in 21 provinces⁵. The provinces without a navy were all non-coastal provinces, except Hanoi and Hung Yen⁶. The mission of the navy was to patrol and protect the security of the islands, capture pirates, and serve the transportation of public goods. The importance of the navy in this action was affirmed by Emperor Minh Mang through the Decree to the Ministry of War in 1841: *“In the past, when sending public ships, the number of infantry usually accounted for more than half of the troops sent. The effectiveness of the sea route was entirely in the navy, while the infantry was only used to merely fight. Why do we need it so many? From now on, when sending by sea, we will send both navy and infantry, with the number of navy troops being twice as many as the number of infantry troops”* [1]. The naval forces in the capital and the locality often coordinated with each other in patrolling and capturing the pirates. In urgent cases, when the locality reported the pirates, the court immediately assigned its troops and boats to the locality to support. The Imperial Records dated April 17, in the year of Emperor Thieu Tri [8] stated that that Truong Dang Que received an imperial edict to dispatch boats to patrol the seas of Nghe An and Thanh Hoa. The edict stated: *“Regarding the sea patrol, we have previously ordered the coastal defense commanders of the Northern and Southern seaports and the provinces to send troops and boats back and forth to patrol. Now, Nghe An Province makes the report that in the*

Quang Nam, Quang Ngai, Binh Dinh, Phu Yen, Khanh Hoa, Binh Thuan, Bien Hoa, Gia Dinh, Dinh Tuong, Vinh Long, An Giang, Ha Tien,⁵ Quang Tri, Quang Binh, Nghe An, Thanh Hoa, Hanoi, Nam Dinh, Hung Yen, Hai Duong, Quang Yen and Thua Thien province. Son Tay, Bac Ninh, Ha Tinh, Hung Hoa, Tuyen Quang, Thai Nguyen, Lang Son, Cao Bang⁶

sea area administered by the seaport of that district, there were bandits from the Qing people taking the advantage of loopholes to rise up; it is truly infuriating. We must immediately dispatch warships to patrol so that the sea can be peaceful” [9].

In addition to the public naval forces assigned to patrol, the people living on the islands and coastal areas were also assigned by the Nguyen Dynasty to coordinate with the army to ensure the security and stability of the seas and islands. As prescribed in the Military Law under the Nguyen Dynasty, people living on islands and coastal areas were strictly prohibited from selling or supplying the food to pirates and smugglers, and were responsible for patrolling and guarding the sea and islands. For such cooperation, they received certain benefits from the State such as exemption from personal tax, exemption from military service and hard labor. The Imperial Records dated February 8, in the 7th year of Emperor Minh Mang [10] recorded the petition of the people on Cu Lao Cham island to be exempted from tax and military service because they had simultaneously guarded the fire tower and patrolled the Cu Lao Cham sea [9]. The people in Tan Hop Ward, Vong Nhi (Dien Ban District, Quang Nam Palace) had been patrolling the sea and the fire tower since 1826 and were exempted from hard labor [1]. In 1834, Minh Mang issued an edict to coastal localities to examine the islands with inhabitants living in their territorial seas to “*encourage the people in these areas to quickly repair their fishing boats so that they can work well. For the places with large population, 3 fishing boats can be repaired; for the places with a small population, 2 fishing boats can be repaired. Each boat can accommodate more than 20 crews. The State will fund the repair costs. Also, long spears, rifles, and ammunition will be provide to them for patrolling. When encountering pirates, on the one hand, they must fight together; on the other hand, they must run to report, so as not to be late or unable to keep up with the work*” [1]. With this policy, the Nguyen Dynasty on the one hand added militia to the guard force, reduced the regular patrol force. On the other hand, the activities of localities were quite flexible; in case of emergency, they could both defend and report to the regular forces for timely support. That was the State's rules, and the people, the residents themselves living on islands and coastal areas were aware that protecting security and order on the islands was not only their responsibility and obligation but also their benefits. Those activities would help them protect their own interests, protect the peace where they were living and working. That was reason why many fishermen on the island proactively asked the imperial court for permission to “*construct their own boats and receive weapons from the State to patrol when the scheduled period comes*” as in the case of the residents of Ly Son (Quang Ngai).

In the fight against pirates, the Nguyen Dynasty soon had the awareness of international cooperation when joining forces with the Qing Dynasty and France to fight pirates. As our country shared a maritime border with the Qing Dynasty, and it was also a sea area with many islands that are favorable for pirates to hide, in the process of catching pirates, it was necessary to mobilize the people and soldiers of this country to participate many times. For example, in 1882, the guard force in Y Bich seaport (Thanh Hoa Province) including Tran Van Tuyen and Hoang Ngoc Quang corporated the Qing Dynasty's fishing boat commander named Li Jin Huang to capture 18 pirates, seized 2 boats and many guns and weapons [1]. In 1859, when the pirate ships (9 ships) hijacked merchant ships in the Phan Thiet sea area (Binh Thuan), Ham Thuan District Governor Nguyen Cong Quyen coordinated with 3 Qing Dynasty's ships (1 patrol ship, 2 fishing boats blown by the wind) to chase and shoot at the pirate ships and saved the merchant ships [1].

During the reign of Emperor Tu Duc, the French also participated in the capture of pirates. The sea area of Vietnam had long been an indispensable target of the French colonialists. The seaports had always been included in the terms of negotiations between France and the imperial Hue court from the first treaty (the Treaty of Versailles) to the treaties of Nham Tuat, Giap Tuat and Patenotre ... Therefore, it is not surprising that French colonialists had always been proactive and active in helping the Nguyen dynasty in patrolling, controlling the sea area and even capturing pirates. The Imperial Records dated June 10, in the 20th year of Emperor Tu Duc (1867) stated that France requested cooperation in patrolling and eliminating the pirates: “*In the sea of our country, wherever there are pirate ships coming to harass, please immediately report so that when those ships return, they must be hunted down In*

the southern to northern sea of our country, two countries have joined forces to eliminate all pirates. Now, the officials of assigned Western ships request to joint, it is impossible to refuse. Affixed red royal mark” [11]. During the reign of Emperor Tu Duc, the imperial court's officials and soldiers coordinated with the French many times in capturing many pirate groups. There were also cases where the French army did this alone. As shown in the report of the Ministry of War dated October 2, in the 25th year of Emperor Tu Duc (1872), in Ha Tinh, a Western ship fought with two pirate ships in the marine waters of Ky Anh District, a commanding official stationed at An Ao station brought militia to prevent the shore and sent a message to mobilize more members of Ky Anh District to arrest the pirates. The effect of this coordination to fight the pirates was that 1 pirate ship was sunk. The pirates who enter ashore were killed by the people; 8 of them were killed and 2 were captured [11].

The above evidences showed the cooperation and coordination between the Nguyen Dynasty, the Qing Dynasty and France in common goal of fighting the pirates, ensuring the safety of domestic and international merchant ships at sea. In this coordination, as the "host", the Nguyen Dynasty proactively called for the support and coordination of neighboring countries and international forces to fulfill the international responsibility, contributing to maintaining the peace, security and safety in the South China Sea. These actions clearly demonstrated the real ownership of the Nguyen Dynasty over the seas and islands belonging to the territorial sea of Vietnam. Meanwhile, at the same time, attitude of the Qing Dynasty towards protecting the security and safety of the South China Sea was different. Much evidence showed that until the 19th century, China still advocated passive defense on shore and did not pay much attention to preventing piracy and protecting the security and safety of the South China Sea. A typical example was when on December 30, 1807 the Governor-general of Liangguang named Wu Xiong Guang requested to construct many ships and boats to go out to sea to catch the pirates: “The pirate ships must wait back and forth to contact the bandits on land. If the soldiers urgently followed the wanted group, they would not be able to use their tricks. So, in order to prevent them from supporting together, we should construct many ships and boats to go out to sea to capture them” and the Emperor Jiaqing objected: "If I approve your proposal, we will construct many ships and boats to fight, capture, closely observe, track the pirate boats, and not let them time to conduct their actions. However, we do not know how many pirate ships there are on the sea to observe and track; moreover, the sea has erratic currents, unpredictable winds and storms, it is difficult to assign which of our ships to observe which of the pirate ships [12]. Later, the Governor-general named Hao Yu Lin also emphasized: “If all incoming ships are not allowed to dock, and those leaving are not provided with support; then the coastal people can all sleep peacefully” [12]. Obviously, from the Qing Dynasty backwards, China applied a passive defense policy on the coast, and had not fulfilled its national and international responsibility in the offshore waters. As Ho Bach Thao said: “In the South China Sea, China limited its responsibility to the territorial sea near the shore; and the rest belonged to An Nam, so that this country could take charge of fighting and capturing pirates offshore” [12].

3. Several Comments

1. As a country with a large area in the South China Sea throughout the 19th century, the Nguyen Dynasty actively fulfilled its responsibility in ensuring the maritime security in the South China Sea with specific and practical activities such as: i) planting the trees, compiling the geography books, drawing the maps to describe natural conditions, warning of rocks and shoals; ii) rescuing the ships in distress and accidents at sea; iii) preventing the piracy. These positive actions of the Nguyen Dynasty were widely recognized and highly appreciated by the international community. Western documents published in the first half of the 19th century stated that the British colonial government in Bengal (India) once assigned its representatives by ship to Dai Nam (Cochinchina) to express its deep gratitude for the rescue activities and humane treatment of their ships by the Nguyen Dynasty [13]. Or in case of Edward Brown, a British sailor was blown to Varella Cape (now known as as Vung Ro, Khanh Hoa) and unfortunately attacked and captured by pirates. He escaped, got lost on Hon Khoi Island and received much help from the local people. In his memoirs, Brown always praised the kindness of the Vietnamese

people: "He felt ashamed and thought that if a Vietnamese sailor had suffered a shipwreck near the coast of England, he would certainly not have received the same help and support as the Vietnamese people had helped him" [14].

2. In the 19th century, facing a threat of invasion from Western colonialists, many countries in Asia implemented a "closed-door" and passively onshore defense policy. In that general context, Vietnam also strengthened strict control of seaports, limited contact with the West; however, we did not refuse and were indifferent to people in distress at sea, or did not neglect patrolling, controlling, and rescuing at sea because of that. At no time before, activities demonstrating the awareness of international responsibility for the South China Sea had been as high as those during the reign of the Nguyen emperors in comparison with previous dynasties. This also showed that the Nguyen Dynasty was successful in harmoniously resolving the relationship between national interests and international interests, joining hands with countries around the world to protect the peace and security in the global fourth largest sea.

3. In the process of implementing its international responsibility, the Nguyen Dynasty clearly demonstrated its role as a "host", proactively requested the coordination of many forces including international forces to rescue and fight the pirates. This is a strong evidence affirming the sovereignty of Vietnam over the seas and islands, especially over the especially two archipelagos of Hoang Sa (Paracel) and Truong Sa (Spratly). This evidence shows that in history, Vietnam not only acquired these two archipelagos in accordance with the principal mode of discovery but also acquired them in accordance with the principal mode of actual occupation and this is an important basis for Vietnam today to firmly affirm the sacred sovereignty over the seas and islands of our Fatherland.

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Transparency:

The author confirms that the manuscript is an honest, accurate, and transparent account of the study; that no vital features of the study have been omitted; and that any discrepancies from the study as planned have been explained. This study followed all ethical practices during writing.

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