

**EXCERPT FROM LÊ THÁNH-TÔNG'S EDICT TO THE ANCESTRAL
TEMPLE ON THE CHAMPA WAR, 1470**

Introduction

Đại Việt fell increasingly into constant troubles through the fourteenth century, particularly as its southern rival Champa grew in power. For twenty years (1370-1390), the Chams dominated and almost destroyed Đại Việt. The Vietnamese were finally able to defeat them, and a powerful minister, Hồ Quý Ly (1336-1407), gained power and then the throne, steering the royal ideology away from Buddhism and towards the growing belief in Chinese-style classical thought.

Hồ antagonized the rising power of the new Ming dynasty in China, which conquered Đại Việt in 1407 and made the Vietnamese part of their empire for two decades. With all resistance to the Ming within reach crushed, only local forces deep in the mountains to the southwest were able to survive and eventually, over ten years, to drive the Ming out and establish the Lê dynasty (1428-1788).

The new Lê dynasty, consisting of men from the backwoods joined by lowland scholars, came to embrace the modern bureaucratic government of Ming China and its Confucian ideology for Đại Việt. This marked a dramatic change from previous governance, thought, and foreign relations for the Vietnamese. The main person behind this change was the ruler Lê Thánh-tông (1442-1497; r. 1460-1497). In this edict of 1470, Thánh-tông justifies his attack on and destruction of Đại Việt's southern rival Champa, a rivalry that had gone on for a thousand years.

Document Excerpt with Questions (Longer selection follows this section)
From *Vietnamese Chronicles*, translated by John K. Whitmore (2008).

*Excerpt from Lê Thánh-tông's Edict
to the Ancestral Temple on the Champa War, 1470*

... We have discussed (this) in the court and the temple and again ask the people — all say, 'The poisonous snake is cruel and brutal, causing the people great worry.' (We) must seize (this) opportunity to take the army and inquire after (their) crimes, hanging (their) heads beside the road as examples. We reluctantly follow the heart of every man and bring the army to inquire after (their) crimes.

Questions:

1. Whom did the king involve in his decision to make war?
2. How was the enemy depicted? Why?
3. What was the resolution of the problem? Why the reluctance?

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And at the Ancestral Temple, Thánh-tông also explained his need to go to war and requested the support of his deceased predecessors.

(11th month), 7th day, the king reported to the Ancestral Temple, "I am a person of few years and little talent, thrust into a great task. (I) only wish to keep the people at peace and maintain the country. (Otherwise I) would not dare foolishly to employ the troops — only because Champa is stubborn and stupid, and the enemy is crazy and furtively spies (on us). (I) am not afraid that Heaven, temporarily engaged(?), will be angry with our land. Earlier, (I) continued to attack Hao Chau (on our southern coast), our land, and only hope to seize (it); later, (they) also reported to the Ming and only desired to disrupt our Ancestral Temple. They are a guild of dog fathers and pig mothers, filthy and unclean — usurping (their) country and killing (their) king is cruel and perverse. (The Throne) wants Thị Nại [the port of Champa] to be 'fat and greasy' (?) and to make Thượng Quan full of sorrow. (They) harbor cruelty that fills to heaven and bring harm all over the land. We have discussed (this) in the court and the temple and again ask the people — all say, 'The poisonous snake is cruel and brutal, causing the people great worry.' (We) must seize (this) opportunity to take the army and inquire after (their) crimes, hanging (their) heads beside the road as examples. We reluctantly follow the heart of every man and bring the army to inquire after (their) crimes.

The great army is moving out to (this) foreign land; its power is most definitely not mercenary. On the Canh thin day, the sixth of this month, (the throne) sent the generals Đinh Liệt and Lê Niêm to take ten ten thousand (100,000) sea forces there; on the sixteenth (Canh dan) day, the Throne shall command fifteen ten thousand (150,000) sea troops to join (them). Going deeply into enemy territory, (we) shall not miss the opportunity. Above, (we) join the furious hearts of our ancestors, the kings and fathers; below, (we) save from misery the thousand ten thousands of the people. Planning for our descendants, (we) slay the enemies of (our) ancestors. Bowing down, (we) hope for the sacred power of our ancestors up in Heaven and (their) [spiritual] support of (our efforts) so that in the time when (our) armies and (our) people set forth, (they) will be able to depend on a quiet sea and a calm wind. (Our) armies go out with authority (like) the bear and the tiger; the enemy builds tombs and is astounded in its opposition. As (we) seek to clean it all up, the Ancestral Temple reports success. With all the merit of the troops, (they) will be able to establish (themselves) quickly, relying on (you) sacred spirits for aid. We respectfully request to place this report before (you)."

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Questions:

1. What was the (new) view of the Vietnamese toward their southern neighbors and rivals in Champa?
2. What ideology did the edict portray?
3. In what forms did the Vietnamese king portray the men of Champa? The men of Đại Việt?
4. How did the king justify his war on Champa?