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The Annan Protectorate in northern Vietnam during the Tang period (679–907)

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Abstract

The Annan Protectorate was an administrative division established by the Tang Dynasty in northern Vietnam during the era of Northern Domination, spanning from 679 to 907. Prior to 679, as the Tang Dynasty began its rule in Jiaozhou, governance was initially organised as the Jiaozhou General Administration (622–624) and later as the Jiaozhou Area Command (624–679). From the establishment of the Annan Protectorate until 757, it was locally administered as one of the five defence commands within the Lingnan Circuit. After 757, Annan came under the authority of the military commissioner (*jiedushi*) of Lingnan until 862, when the Lingnan Circuit was divided into East and West Circuits, placing Annan under the Lingnan West Circuit. In 866, the Jinghai Military Command was established in Annan, marking its role as a frontier defence command (*fangzhen*). In terms of bureaucracy, from 679 to 866, the Annan Protectorate was led by a protector general, with a frontier commissioner appointed during times of rebellion or unrest. From 866 to 907, the head official held the title of *jiedushi*, while also retaining the role of protector general.

Keywords: Annan; Northern Domination; Northern Vietnam; protectorate; Tang Dynasty

Introduction

The Annan Protectorate (安南都護府, An Nam đô hộ phủ) was an administrative division established by the Tang Dynasty (618–907) in northern Vietnam during the era of Northern Domination.¹ This topic is closely linked to the histories of both mediaeval Vietnam and China. Apart from earlier research by Paul Pelliot (1904),² Henri Maspero (1910),³ Đào Duy Anh (1964),⁴ and Keith Weller Taylor (1983)⁵ on the boundaries and administrative units

¹ Northern Domination (Bắc thuộc), also known as the ‘thousand years of Chinese domination’, is a historical term used by Vietnamese historians to describe the nearly millennium-long period during which Vietnam was under the rule of various Chinese dynasties, spanning from 179 BCE (or 111 BCE) to 905 CE. For further information on this topic, refer to Ngô Thì Sĩ, *Việt Sử Tiêu Án* (Sài Gòn, 1960), p. 34; Nguyễn Phương, *Việt Nam thời khai sinh* (Huế, 1965), p. 248; Phan Huy Lê, Trần Quốc Vương, Hà Văn Tấn, and Lương Ninh, *Lịch sử Việt Nam, tập 1: Thời kỳ nguyên thủy đến thế kỷ X* (Hà Nội, 1991), p. 153; G. Dutton, J. Werner, and J. K. Whitmore (eds.), *Sources of Vietnamese Tradition* (New York, 2012), p. 9.

² P. Pelliot, ‘Deux itinéraires de Chine en Inde à la fin du VIII^e siècle’, *Bulletin de l’École Française d’Extrême-Orient* 4 (1904), pp. 131–413.

³ H. Maspero, ‘Le Protectorat général d’Annam sous les T’ang: essai de géographie historique’, *Bulletin de l’École Française d’Extrême-Orient* 10 (1910), pp. 539–584, 665–682.

⁴ Đào Duy Anh, *Đất nước Việt Nam qua các đời* (Hà Nội, 1964).

⁵ K. W. Taylor, *The Birth of Vietnam* (Berkeley, 1983).

of Annan during the Tang period, there has been limited exploration of further issues concerning the Annan Protectorate. Consequently, this article aims to examine the historical processes, organisational structure, bureaucracy, key features, and roles of the Annan Protectorate.

The sources referenced in this article are based on a comparative analysis of both Chinese and Vietnamese historical texts, including the *Old Book of Tang* (舊唐書, *Jiu Tang shu*), the *New Book of Tang* (新唐書, *Xin Tang shu*),⁶ *Abbreviated Records of An Nam* (安南志略, *An Nam chí lược*),⁷ *Abridged Chronicles of Việt* (越史略, *Việt sử lược*),⁸ *Complete Annals of Đại Việt* (大越史記全書, *Đại Việt sử ký toàn thư*, hereinafter referred to as *Toàn thư*),⁹ and *The Imperially Ordered Outlines and Essentials of the Comprehensive Mirror of the History of Việt* (欽定越史通鑑綱目, *Khâm định Việt sử thông giám cương mục*, hereinafter referred to as *Cương mục*).¹⁰ Vietnamese historical sources were compiled relatively late compared with Chinese sources and are often dated to long after the events that occurred in Annan during the Tang period. This has led to scepticism regarding their accuracy and reliability. However, in recording events from the Northern Domination era in general, and Annan under the Tang Dynasty in particular, Vietnamese historiographers relied on Chinese sources for reference while also incorporating their own interpretations. This approach preserved the originality of these historical records.¹¹

The term ‘protectorate’ (都護府, *dūhù fǔ*, *đô hộ phủ*) was likely first recorded in the *Book of Han* (漢書, *Hanshu*), in the story of Zheng Ji (鄭吉).¹² It has been interpreted in various ways. During the Tang period, the term referred to a military-administrative organisation established by the Tang Dynasty in frontier regions inhabited by ethnic minorities.¹³ The character ‘hù’ (護) can be viewed from two perspectives: in the modern sense, it means ‘protection’, but, in its ancient context, ‘hù’ means ‘to govern and dominate’ (統轄, *tǒngxiá*).¹⁴ The concept of a protectorate can be understood in three main ways: (1) In the official system, a protectorate referred to an official position within the Tang Dynasty’s bureaucratic structure—specifically that of the protector general (都護, *dūhù*).¹⁵ (2) As an administrative unit, a protectorate was a government-level division within the Tang Dynasty, equivalent to the area command. (3) In essence, a protectorate was a military system established by the Tang Dynasty to manage newly conquered territories in borderland areas.¹⁶ For the purposes of this article, the term ‘protectorate’ refers to all of these meanings, functioning

⁶ The *Old Book of Tang*, compiled by Liu Xu in the tenth century, and the *New Book of Tang*, compiled by Ouyang Xiu and Song Qi in the eleventh century, are part of the *Twenty-Four Histories*, the classical corpus of Chinese historiography that records the history of the Tang Dynasty.

⁷ The *Abbreviated Records of An Nam*, written by Lê Tắc during his exile in China in the early fourteenth century (circa 1335), documents the geography, history, and customs of Vietnam from its origins to the Trần period.

⁸ The *Abridged Chronicles of Việt*, compiled by an anonymous author circa 1377, records the history of Vietnam from its origins to 1224 and is now regarded as the earliest surviving chronicle of Vietnam.

⁹ The *Complete Annals of Đại Việt* was compiled over time by historiographers of the Bureau of National History during the Later Lê Dynasty, spanning from the fifteenth century to 1697. It chronicles Vietnam’s history from its origins up to 1675.

¹⁰ The *Imperially Ordered Outlines and Essentials of the Comprehensive Mirror of the History of Việt* was compiled by the Bureau of National History under the Nguyễn Dynasty in the nineteenth century, documenting the history of Vietnam up to 1789.

¹¹ K. W. Taylor argues that Vietnamese historical sources, such as *Việt sử lược*, *Toàn thư*, and *Cương mục*, concerning the Chinese domination period, are essentially syntheses of Chinese historical sources. See Taylor, *Birth of Vietnam*, pp. 350–352, 358–359.

¹² *Hanshu* 漢書, Ban Gu 班固 et al. (comp.) (Beijing, 1962), 70.3006.

¹³ Zhou Fazheng 周发增, Chen Longtao 陈隆涛, and Qi Jixiang 齐吉祥, *Zhongguo gudai zhengzhi zhidushi cidian* 中国古代政治制度史辞典 [Dictionary of the History of Political Systems in Ancient China] (Beijing, 1998), p. 41.

¹⁴ Li Dalong 李大龙, *Duhu zhidu yanjiu* 都护制度研究 [Research on the Protectorate System] (Harbin, 2003), p. 2.

¹⁵ C. O. Hucker, *A Dictionary of Official Titles in Imperial China* (Taipei, 1985), p. 540.

¹⁶ Đỗ Văn Ninh, *Từ điển chức quan Việt Nam* (Hà Nội, 2002), p. 223.

both as a government-level administrative unit led by a protector general and as a military system established by the Tang Dynasty to manage the border regions.

During the Tang Dynasty, the protectorate system flourished, reaching its peak in scale, organisational structure, functions, and operational roles. From the reign of Emperor Taizong (626–649) to that of Empress Wu Zetian (690–705), the Tang Dynasty established a total of six major protectorates: Anxi (安西) in 640, Yanran (燕然, later renamed Hanhai 瀚海 and Anbei 安北) in 647, Chanyu (單于) in 650, Andong (安東) in 668, Annan (安南) in 679, and Beiting (北庭) in 702.¹⁷ The Tang Dynasty classified protectorates into grand, superior, and central ranks. Notably, the grand protectorate was nominally headed by a prince (親王, *qīnwáng*), while the deputy protector general managed the actual administration.¹⁸

Before the Tang Dynasty established its rule in northern Vietnam, the region was initially called Jiaozhi (交趾, Giao Chỉ) and later Jiaozhou (交州, Giao Châu), spanning over seven centuries from 111 BCE to 621 CE under various Chinese dynasties. During the Han Dynasty (111 BCE–203 CE), Jiaozhi referred to northern Vietnam (formerly Âu Lạc) and the former Nanyue (南越, Nam Việt) kingdom, which had been annexed by Han forces. This area, known as the Jiaozhi Circuit (交趾部, bộ Giao Chỉ), was subdivided into nine commanderies, three of which corresponded to modern Vietnamese territories: Jiaozhi, Jiuzhen (九真, Cửu Chân), and Rinan (日南, Nhật Nam).¹⁹ The administrative centres of Jiaozhi Commandery shifted over time, from Mê Linh (滎冷) to Luy Lâu (羸樓) and later to Long Biên (龍編).²⁰ From the late Eastern Han Dynasty (203 CE) until the early Tang Dynasty (679 CE), northern Vietnam was known as Jiaozhou.²¹ comprising six commanderies: Jiaozhi, Xinchang (新昌, Tân Xương), Wuping (武平, Vũ Bình), Jiuzhen, Jiude (九德, Cửu Đức), and Rinan.²² Direct Chinese rule primarily occurred during the Han and Eastern Wu periods. However, following the collapse of the Eastern Han Dynasty, China entered a prolonged era of political disunity and chaos, known as the Six Dynasties (六朝).²³ During this period, the governance of Jiaozhou by ruling Chinese dynasties such as the Jin (265–271 and 280–420), Liu Song (420–479), Qi (479–505), and Liang (505–541) was relatively loose.²⁴ Against this backdrop, several significant uprisings against Chinese rule occurred in Jiaozhou, the most notable being the Lý Bí (李贲) uprising, which led to the establishment of the ‘Ten Thousand Springs’ (萬春, Vạn Xuân) kingdom in 544.²⁵

The name Annan first appeared in 679 when the Tang Dynasty established the Annan Protectorate to govern northern Vietnam. The characters in the name hold symbolic meaning: *An* (安) signifies ‘peaceful’ or ‘secure’,²⁶ while *nan* (南) means ‘south’. Thus,

¹⁷ *Tang huiyao* 唐會要, Wang Pu 王溥 comp. (Shanghai, 1935), 73.1309, 73.1311, 73.1318, 73.1320, 73.1322, 73.1329. See also V. Cunrui Xiong, *Historical Dictionary of Medieval China* (Lanham, 2009), pp. 41, 43, 44–45, 58.

¹⁸ Zhou et al., *Zhongguo gudai zhengzhi*, p. 41.

¹⁹ Ngô Sĩ Liên, *Dại Việt Sử ký Toàn thư* (Hà Nội, 1998), Ngoại kỷ, II.17a; Quốc sử quán triều Nguyễn, *Khâm định Việt sử Thông giám Cương mục* (Hà Nội, 2007), Tb.II.3.

²⁰ Đào, *Đất nước Việt Nam*, p. 49. See also C. Madrolle, ‘Le Tonkin ancien. Lei-leou 羸 (音蓮) et les districts Chinois de l’époque des Han. La population. Yue-chang’, *Bulletin de l’Ecole Française d’Extrême-Orient* 37 (1937), pp. 279–283, 288–290, 296–303, 330–332.

²¹ Quốc sử quán triều Nguyễn, *Cương mục*, Tb.II.30.

²² Đào, *Đất nước Việt Nam*, p. 57.

²³ A. E. Dien, *Six Dynasties Civilization* (New Haven, 2007), pp. 1–14; A. E. Dien and K. N. Knapp (eds.), *The Cambridge History of China, vol. 2: The Six Dynasties, 220–589* (Cambridge, 2019), pp. 1–24.

²⁴ Ngô, *Việt Sử Tiêu Ấn*, p. 49. For more detailed information regarding the administrative divisions and governance of Chinese dynasties in northern Vietnam during the Six Dynasties period, refer to J. Holmgren, *Chinese Colonisation of Northern Vietnam: Administrative Geography and Political Development in the Tongking Delta, First to Sixth Centuries A.D.* (Canberra, 1980), pp. 87–179.

²⁵ *Toàn thư*, IV.15a–b; Quốc sử quán triều Nguyễn, *Cương mục*, Tb.IV.2. See also Taylor, *Birth of Vietnam*, p. 138; B. Kiernan, *Viet Nam: A History from Earliest Times to the Present* (New York, 2017), p. 102.

²⁶ Đào Duy Anh, *Hán-Việt từ điển giản yếu*, quyển thượng (Tp. Hồ Chí Minh, 1992), pp. 7–8.

Annan translates into ‘the pacified South’²⁷ or ‘the peaceful South’,²⁸ reflecting the Tang Dynasty’s intention to stabilise its southern borderlands through this administrative division. Additionally, with the establishment of the Annan Protectorate, the former Jiaozhou was reorganised: Jiaozhi Commandery was renamed Jiaozhou, becoming one of several prefectures within the new Annan Protectorate. In essence, the Jiaozhi Circuit from the Han era evolved into Jiaozhou during the Eastern Wu period and the early Tang period, before finally transforming into the Annan Protectorate. Throughout these transitions, Jiaozhi Commandery gradually developed into the prefecture known as Jiaozhou within the administrative structure of the Annan Protectorate.

The historical periods of the Annan Protectorate

In 621, after pacifying Jiaozhou, the Tang Dynasty inherited a substantial land area that had been acquired through the extended process of domination and expansion by earlier dynasties. This territory corresponds to the Northern Delta and the Bình Trị Thiên region in present-day Vietnam. Building upon this, in 622, the Tang Dynasty established the Jiaozhou General Administration (交州總管府), led by a supervisor-in-chief (總管, *zongguan*), to govern 10 prefectures (州, *zhōu, châu*): Jiao (交, Giao), Feng (峰, Phong), Ai (愛, Ai), Xian (仙, Tiên), Yuan (鵝, Diên), Song (宋, Tống), Ci (慈, Từ), Xian (險, Hiểm), Dao (道, Đạo), and Long (龍, Long).²⁹ The *Comprehensive Mirror in Aid of Governance* (資治通鑑, *Zizhi Tongjian*) records: ‘In the fifth year of the Wude era [622], Qiu He (丘和, Khâu Hòa), the prefect (刺史, *cishi*) of Jiaozhi under the Sui Dynasty, was appointed as the supervisor-in-chief of Jiaozhou (交州總管).’³⁰ *Toàn thư* also documented this event in 622,³¹ although *Cương mục* noted it in the fourth year of the Wude era (621).³² In the seventh year of the Wude era (624), the Tang Dynasty replaced the Jiaozhou General Administration with the Jiaozhou Area Command (交州都督府). By 627, the Jiaozhou Area Command had been placed under the jurisdiction of the Lingnan Circuit (嶺南道).³³ From 624 to 679, the Jiaozhou Area Command functioned as the Tang Dynasty’s high-level governing system in northern Vietnam, led by a commander-in-chief (都督, *dūdū*). The Jiaozhou General Administration and the Jiaozhou Area Command served as precursors to the Annan Protectorate, operating as experimental governing models. These temporary administrative structures were established while the Tang Dynasty worked to identify and gradually implement a more refined system suited to the characteristics of Annan. The aim was to develop a comprehensive and manageable system for effective governance and control. Ultimately, the Annan Protectorate emerged as one of the six key protectorates of the Tang Dynasty.³⁴

After establishing the Anxi Protectorate in the west, the Anbei and Chanyu Protectorates in the north, and the Andong Protectorate in the east, the Tang Dynasty renamed the Jiaozhou Area Command as the Annan Protectorate in the eighth month of the first year of the Tiaolu era (679). This renaming aligned with the directional naming of each region, as

²⁷ Taylor, *Birth of Vietnam*, p. 171.

²⁸ C. Holcombe, ‘Early Imperial China’s Deep South: the Viet regions through Tang times’, *Tang Studies* 15/16 (1997–1998), p. 125.

²⁹ *Jiu Tang shu* 舊唐書, Liu Xu 劉昫 et al. (comp.) (Beijing, 1975), 41.1749.

³⁰ *Zizhi Tongjian* 資治通鑑, Sima Guang 司馬光 comp. (Beijing, 1956), 190.5948.

³¹ *Toàn thư*, V.3a.

³² *Quốc sử quán triều Nguyễn*, *Cương mục*, Tb.IV.17.

³³ *Jiu Tang shu*, 41.1749.

³⁴ Wu Xiaohua 乌小花 and Li Dalong 李大龙, ‘Youguan Annan duhufu de jige wenti’ 有关安南都护府的几个问题 [Several issues regarding the Annan Protectorate], *Zhongguo bianjiang shi di yanjiu* 中国边疆史地研究 [*China’s Borderland History and Geography Studies*] 13.2 (2003), p. 27.

recorded in the *Old Book of Tang* and the *Institutional History of Tang* (唐會要, *Tang Huiyao*).³⁵ Among Vietnamese historical sources, only the *Abridged Chronicles of Việt* and *Cương mục* record this event as occurring in 679. The *Abridged Chronicles of Việt* further notes: 'In the first year of the Tiaolu era (679) of the Tang Dynasty, the prefect of Jiaozhou was appointed as the protector general of Annan.'³⁶ *Cương mục* adds: 'In the first year of the Tiaolu era under Emperor Gaozong of the Tang (679), the Tang Dynasty established the Annan Protectorate, with its administrative centre in Jiaozhou.'³⁷ However, the *Prequel Annals of Đại Việt* (大越史記前編, *Đại Việt sử ký tiền biên*) and the *Collected Records of Constitutional Precedents Across Dynasties* (歷朝憲章類誌, *Lịch triều hiến chương loại chí*) record that Jiaozhou was designated as the Annan Protectorate in the first year of the Yonghui era (650).³⁸ The reason for this date discrepancy—nearly 30 years earlier than other sources—is unclear. Following the principle that historical documents compiled closer to the date of the event are typically more reliable, the *Old Book of Tang*'s record that the Annan Protectorate was established in 679 is likely the most accurate.

Although the Tang Dynasty's rule over Jiaozhou began in 621, the Annan Protectorate was not officially established until 679, following a lengthy process that involved several name changes. From this point until 907, the Annan Protectorate existed for more than two centuries. To fully understand its historical progression, the history of the Annan Protectorate can be divided into three key periods, defined by changes in administration, names, and head officials, with significant turning points in 679, 757, and 866.

The period 679–757

In terms of geographical area and administrative divisions, the *New Book of Tang* and *Cương mục* indicate that the Annan Protectorate administered 12 prefecture-level areas (州): Jiaozhou (交州, Giao Châu), Luzhou (陸州, Lục Châu), Fengzhou (峯州, Phong Châu), Aizhou (愛州, Ái Châu), Huanzhou (驩州, Hoan Châu), Zhangzhou (長州, Trường Châu), Fuluzhou (福祿州, Phúc Lộc Châu), Tangzhou (湯州, Thang Châu), Zhizhou (芝州, Chi Châu), Wuezhou (武峩州, Vũ Nga Châu), Yanzhou (演州, Diễn Châu), and Wuanzhou (武安州, Vũ An Châu).³⁹ However, a geographical account compiled in 813 during the Yuanhe era, titled *Yuanhe Maps and Records of Prefectures and Counties* (元和郡縣圖志, *Yuanhe junxian tuzhi*), records that the Annan Protectorate governed 13 prefectures: Jiaozhou (交州), Aizhou (愛州), Huanzhou (驩州), Fengzhou (峰州), Luzhou (陸州), Yanzhou (演州), Zhangzhou (長州), Junzhou (郡州), Liangzhou (諒州), Wuanzhou (武安州), Tanglinzhou (唐林州), Wudingzhou (武定州), and Gongzhou (貢州).⁴⁰ An analysis of the boundaries within these records reveals that, among the 12 prefectures listed in earlier sources, four—Tangzhou, Zhizhou, Wuezhou, and Wuanzhou—are located in present-day Guangxi, while the remaining eight prefectures are situated within the territory of modern Vietnam.⁴¹

From 679 to 757, the Tang Dynasty maintained relatively stable rule over the Annan Protectorate, with few major administrative disturbances. Historical records from this period, both Chinese and Vietnamese, are sparse, focusing primarily on local uprisings rather than detailed governance. Although the Tang era was generally prosperous, the

³⁵ *Jiu Tang shu*, 41.1749; *Tang huiyao*, 73.1320.

³⁶ Khuyết danh 佚名, *Việt sử lược* 越史略 (Shanghai, 1936), 1.10.

³⁷ Quốc sử quán triều Nguyễn, *Cương mục*, Tb.IV.18.

³⁸ Ngô Thì Sĩ, *Đại Việt Sử ký Tiền biên* (Hà Nội, 1997), VI.4a; Phan Huy Chú, *Lịch triều hiến chương loại chí* (Sài Gòn, 1972), 1.10b.

³⁹ *Xin Tang shu*, 43A.1112–15; Quốc sử quán triều Nguyễn, *Cương mục*, Tb.IV.18–20.

⁴⁰ *Yuanhe junxian tuzhi* 元和郡縣圖志, Li Jifu 李吉甫 comp. (Beijing, 1983), 38.955.

⁴¹ Đào, *Đất nước Việt Nam*, p. 82; Taylor, *Birth of Vietnam*, p. 171.

administration in Annan concentrated on solidifying control and suppressing local resistance, which the Tang authorities often regarded as rebellious activity. One early instance of local resistance was the suppression of the Lý Tự Tiên (李嗣先) and Đinh Kiến (丁建) uprisings in 687,⁴² marking the first recorded rebellion in Annan under Tang rule.⁴³ This event underscored the resilient spirit of the local population and foreshadowed future resistance. The most notable uprising during this period was led by Mai Thúc Loan (梅叔鸞), which likely occurred in 713 or 722.⁴⁴ This rebellion significantly disrupted the stability of Annan for nearly a decade, highlighting the persistent tensions between the Tang authorities and the local population.⁴⁵

Following Mai Thúc Loan's uprising, in 756, the Xiyuan Man (西原蠻, Tai) leaders Huang Qian'ao (黃乾曜, Hoàng Càn Diệu) and Zhen Chongyu (真崇鬱, Chân Sùng Uất)⁴⁶ led the people of Luzhou (陸州) and the surrounding areas in a rebellion that lasted for more than 20 years.⁴⁷ At around the same time, in 757, Persian and Arab forces (referred to as Dashi 大食 in Chinese sources) surrounded Annan, killing the protector general and subsequently launching a raid on Guangzhou. Zhang Shun (張順, Trương Thuận)—a general of the Tang Dynasty stationed in Jiaozhou—led his army to successfully defeat the Arab and Persian forces in Luzhou. As a result, Zhang Shun was promoted to protector general of Annan.⁴⁸ However, doubts remain regarding this event. Chinese historical texts, such as the *Old Book of Tang*, briefly mention the Persians and Arabs attacking Guangzhou in 758, but do not refer to any attacks on Annan in 757.⁴⁹ In Vietnamese historical texts, only the *Abridged Chronicles of Việt* notes Zhang Shun as a protector general during the reign of Emperor Suzong (r. 756–762) and does not mention his defeating the Arabs.⁵⁰ Research by Guo Zhenduo and Zheng Xiaomei suggests that Zhang Shun became protector general in 756, with his son Zhang Boyi (張伯儀, Trương Bá Nghi) being appointed as his replacement in 757. This research likewise makes no mention of any Arab or Persian attacks on Annan.⁵¹ Jacques Gernet posited that Arab and Persian pirates based on Hainan attacked Guangzhou in 758.⁵² Given the geographical proximity between Annan and Hainan, and Jiaozhou's connection with Guangzhou along the trade route at that time, it seems plausible that the attackers on the Annan Protectorate in 757 were also these Arab and Persian pirates.

These upheavals led to instability in the Annan Protectorate. Consequently, in 757, the Tang Dynasty decided to rename the Annan Protectorate as the Zhennan (鎮南, Trấn Nam) Protectorate. The *Old Book of Tang* records this event as follows: 'In the ninth month of the second year of the Zhide era [757], its name was changed to the Zhennan Protectorate.'⁵³ The *New Book of Tang* also confirms that Annan was renamed Zhennan in 757.⁵⁴ However, the *Toàn*

⁴² *Toàn thư*, V.4b; *Tiền biên*, VI.6a.

⁴³ Li, *Duhu zhidu yanjiu*, p. 280.

⁴⁴ Lê Tấn 黎則, *An Nam chí lược* 安南志略 (Qinding siku quanshu ben), 8.5b; *Toàn thư*, V.4b; *Tiền biên*, VI.6b.

⁴⁵ Phan Huy Lê, 'Khởi nghĩa Mai Thúc Loan: Năm khởi đầu và kết thúc', *Nghiên cứu Lịch sử* 04 (2013), p. 19.

⁴⁶ For information regarding the Tai ethnic identity of the leaders in this uprising, refer to J. Took, *A Native Chieftaincy in Southwest China: Franchising a Tai Chieftaincy Under the Tusi System of Late Imperial China* (Brill, 2005), p. 46.

⁴⁷ *Xin Tang shu* 新唐書, Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修 et al. (comp.) (Beijing, 1975), 222B.6329.

⁴⁸ Viện Sử học, *Việt Nam những sự kiện lịch sử: từ khởi thủy đến 1858* (Hà Nội, 2006), p. 41.

⁴⁹ *Jiu Tang shu*, 198.5313.

⁵⁰ *Việt sử lược*, 1.11.

⁵¹ Guo Zhenduo 郭振铎 and Zheng Xiaomei 张笑梅, *Yuenan Tongshi* 越南通史 [Comprehensive History of Vietnam] (Beijing, 2001), p. 209.

⁵² J. Gernet, *A History of Chinese Civilization* (New York, 1996), p. 289.

⁵³ *Jiu Tang shu*, 41.1749.

⁵⁴ *Xin Tang shu*, 43A.1111–12.

thư documented this change as occurring in 758,⁵⁵ while both the *Abridged Chronicles of Việt* and *Cương mục* recorded it as taking place in 757.⁵⁶ Doubts persist regarding the appointment of Zhang Boyi as protector general in place of Zhang Shun in 757. Among Vietnamese historical texts, only the *Abridged Chronicles of Việt* mentions this event, as noted above.⁵⁷ The *Old Book of Tang*, however, records that Zhang Boyi became protector general of Annan in 767, not 757.⁵⁸ Yu Xianhao also supports the view that Zhang Boyi took office in 767, with the period from 761 to 767 being held by a Japanese protector general named Abe no Nakamaro (朝衡, Chao Heng).⁵⁹

Thus, it is evident that numerous historical events related to the Annan Protectorate during this period are inconsistently recorded in Chinese and Vietnamese historical sources. These discrepancies lead to confusion and complicate efforts to accurately understand the historical development of the Annan Protectorate.

The period 757–866

The second phase of the Annan Protectorate's history began with the Tang Dynasty's temporary renaming of Annan as Zhennan, signalling a period of intensified defence and suppression. This shift marked an increased military focus in the South, as the region was no longer viewed primarily as a peaceful zone. While *Annan* translates it as 'the pacified South' or 'the peaceful South', *Zhennan* means 'pacifying the South'. This renaming was not unique to Annan; similar changes occurred in other regions under Chinese administration.⁶⁰ The change from Annan to Zhennan may have also been influenced by sensitivities surrounding the word 'An', due to its phonetic association with An Lushan (安祿山), the leader of the An Lushan Rebellion (755–763), which had profoundly shaken the Tang Dynasty.⁶¹ By renaming Annan, the Tang court may have sought to distance the protectorate from any negative symbolic associations linked to this rebellion, emphasising how major historical events could shape administrative identities. Importantly, the name change did not alter the administrative structure within the protectorate. Instead, this phase saw significant adjustments in governance aimed at strengthening the Tang Dynasty's control over Annan, marking it as a period of greater organisational rigour and military engagement, rather than a mere nominal shift.

According to the *Old Book of Tang*, following the Yonghui era (650–655), five key regions—Guangzhou (廣州), Guizhou (桂州), Rongzhou (容州), Yongzhou (邕州), and Annan—were placed under the jurisdiction of the Lingnan Circuit, collectively referred to as the Lingnan Five Defence Commands (嶺南五管).⁶² In 757, with the establishment of a military commissioner (節度使, *jiédù shǐ*) position for the Lingnan Circuit,⁶³ Annan became one of the five administrative units under the command of the Lingnan *jiedushi*, thereafter known as

⁵⁵ *Toàn thư*, V.4b.

⁵⁶ *Việt sử lược*, 1.11; *Quốc sử quán triều Nguyễn, Cương mục*, Tb.IV.23.

⁵⁷ *Việt sử lược*, 1.11.

⁵⁸ *Jiu Tang shu*, 11.287.

⁵⁹ Yu Xianhao 郁贤皓, *Tang cishikao quanbian* 唐刺史考全编 [Complete Compilation of the Tang Dynasty Prefects] (Hefei, 2000), pp. 3343–3344.

⁶⁰ According to the *Old Book of Tang*, the name of Annan County (安南縣) during the Sui period was changed to Zhennan County (鎮南縣) in 757. This county, which is unrelated to the Annan Protectorate in Vietnam, was located near present-day Luoding in Guangdong. See *Jiu Tang shu*, 41.1720. I would like to extend my sincere thanks to the referee for their insightful comments on this matter.

⁶¹ E. G. Pulleyblank, 'The An Lu-shan rebellion and the origins of chronic militarism in late T'ang China', in *Essays on T'ang Society: The Interplay of Social and Political and Economic Forces*, (eds.) J. C. Perry and B. L. Smith (Leiden, 1976), pp. 33–60.

⁶² *Jiu Tang shu*, 41.1712.

⁶³ *Tang huiyao*, 78.1431.

the *jiedushi* of the Five Defence Commands (五府節度使). Charles Holcombe suggests that, while the Annan Protectorate was initially intended to serve as a direct extension of the Tang court's authority, it remained functionally connected to the broader Lingnan Circuit.⁶⁴ The administrative link between Annan and Lingnan was significant, as the Lingnan Circuit was a crucial governing region in southern China throughout the Tang period. A pivotal moment reflecting this administrative arrangement occurred in the twelfth year of the Dali era (777), when Zhang Boyi was reassigned from his position as protector general of Annan to serve as the prefect of Guangzhou, while concurrently assuming the role of *jiedushi* for Lingnan.⁶⁵ By aligning the administration of Annan with the Lingnan *jiedushi*, the Tang Dynasty aimed to reinforce its southern frontier, even as signs of internal political instability began to surface. This arrangement underscores the strategic significance of the Annan Protectorate to the Tang's southern frontier, emphasising its role as both an administrative and a military stronghold within the empire's broader border management system.

Several years after the initial name change, the Tang court reverted the name from Zhennan back to Annan. However, inconsistencies between Chinese and Vietnamese historical texts arise regarding the timing of this event. The *Old Book of Tang* records that the Zhennan Protectorate was renamed back to the former Annan Protectorate in the second month of the second year of the Yongtai era (766).⁶⁶ Conversely, the *New Book of Tang* places this change two years later, in 768.⁶⁷ Both the *Abridged Chronicles of Việt* and *Cương mục* document the event similarly: 'In the third year of the Dali era [768], the Tang Dynasty renamed Zhennan back to the Annan Protectorate.'⁶⁸ *Toàn thư*, however, provides a slightly different account: 'In the third year of the Dali era [768], the Tang Dynasty renamed Jiaozhou as the Annan Protectorate.'⁶⁹

During the latter half of the eighth century, Annan faced attacks from neighbouring states, including Hoàn Vương (環王)⁷⁰ and the Sailendra Dynasty of Java.⁷¹ In 767, forces from K'ouen Louen (崑崙, Côn Lôn) and Java (闍婆, Đồ Bà) launched an attack, looting and besieging the centre of the Annan Protectorate.⁷² Against this turbulent backdrop, an uprising led by Phùng Hưng (馮興) took place in 791.⁷³ According to the *Old Book of Tang*, this revolt was reported to have occurred between 766 and 791, with Du Yinghan (杜英翰, Đỗ Anh Hàn) noted as a leader.⁷⁴ This revolt was particularly significant for the active participation of ethnic minorities, especially the Di Lão (Klao) people,⁷⁵ and was strongly supported

⁶⁴ Holcombe, 'Early Imperial China's Deep South', p. 125.

⁶⁵ *Jiu Tang shu*, 11.312, 12.332.

⁶⁶ *Jiu Tang shu*, 11.282.

⁶⁷ *Xin Tang shu*, 43A.1112.

⁶⁸ *Việt sử lược*, 1.11; *Quốc sử quán triều Nguyễn, Cương mục*, Tb.IV.25.

⁶⁹ *Toàn thư*, V.5a.

⁷⁰ Hoàn Vương (Huanwang) was the new name for the Lâm Ấp (Linyi) kingdom, one of the precursor states to the Champa kingdom. See Momoki Shiro, 'Mandala Champa seen from Chinese sources', in *The Cham of Vietnam: History, Society and Art*, (eds.) Trần Kỳ Phương and B. M. Lockhart (Singapore, 2011), p. 124.

⁷¹ The Sailendra Dynasty, which emerged in eighth-century Java, is often referred to in Vietnamese historical texts as Đồ Bà or Chà Bà (Chôp'o). During this period, the Sailendra conducted several attacks on neighbouring regions, including Chenla, Champa, and Annan. Notably, these attacks targeted Jiaozhou in 767, Aya Tran (modern-day Nha Trang) in 774, and Panra (Phan Rang) in 787. For further details, see G. Coedès, *The Indianized States of Southeast Asia* (Canberra, 1975), p. 88; and P. M. Munoz, *Early Kingdoms of the Indonesian Archipelago and the Malay Peninsula* (Singapore, 2006), pp. 128, 227.

⁷² *Toàn thư*, V.4b–5a; *Tiền biên*, VI.7a.

⁷³ *Toàn thư*, V.6a; *Quốc sử quán triều Nguyễn, Cương mục*, Tb.IV.25.

⁷⁴ *Jiu Tang shu*, 13.365.

⁷⁵ For information on the Di Lão (Klao) people in the south during the Tang period, refer to E. H. Schafer, *The Vermilion Bird: T'ang Images of the South* (Berkeley, 1967), pp. 48–69.

by indigenous leaders.⁷⁶ During this period, although the central authority of the Tang Dynasty had begun to wane, the military strength of the frontier defence command (方鎮, *fāngzhèn*), under the *jiedushi*, remained sufficiently robust to subdue resistance forces. This highlights the efforts of protectorate officials to fortify and maintain their governance by aligning closely with the formidable military power of the frontier commands.

From the ninth century onwards, the Annan Protectorate faced increasing threats from incursions by Hoàn Vương in the south and Nanzhao (南詔, Nam Chiếu) in the north-west, with Hoàn Vương's aggressions marking the onset of these pressures. Chinese historical records consistently document Hoàn Vương's repeated attacks on the protectorate in 803,⁷⁷ 809,⁷⁸ 824,⁷⁹ and 865.⁸⁰ In 803, Hoàn Vương led an invasion into the Huan and Ai prefectures within Annan, where the protectorate forces were unable to mount a successful defence. This vulnerability provided an opportunity for soldiers led by the local general Vương Quý Nguyên (王貴元) to rebel. His forces attacked the Tống Bình citadel (宋平, Songping; present-day Hanoi), the protectorate's centre, ultimately forcing the protector general to retreat to China.⁸¹

In 819, Annan experienced a significant uprising led by Dương Thanh (楊清), the prefect of Huanzhou.⁸² According to the *Old Book of Tang*, the event unfolded as follows: 'In the tenth month of the fourteenth year of the Yuanhe era [819], the Annan army rebelled, killing the protector general Li Xianggu (李象古, Lý Tượng Cổ) along with his family, and injuring more than 1,000 people.'⁸³ This marked the first recorded instance of a rebellion by garrison forces directly within the protectorate's centre. Although Dương Thanh's uprising ultimately failed, and he was killed, it underscored the growing vulnerability of the Annan Protectorate as the Tang Dynasty approached its decline. Following Dương Thanh's uprising, a series of military rebellions broke out in rapid succession in 828,⁸⁴ 843,⁸⁵ and 858.⁸⁶ These repeated uprisings in Annan highlighted the growing discontent among soldiers with the protectorate's ruling regime. Simultaneously, these disturbances weakened Annan's security and defence systems, creating openings for Nanzhao to exploit through intensified invasions. Consequently, Annan entered a turbulent period that lasted for over a decade. Taking advantage of the protectorate's internal strife and the Tang court's waning authority, Nanzhao launched successive attacks on Annan, beginning in 846.⁸⁷ The harsh policies and greed of Annan Protectorate officials fostered resentment among ethnic minorities along the north-western border, prompting these groups to form alliances with Nanzhao. As a result, Nanzhao's influence eventually extended into the heart of the Annan Protectorate.⁸⁸

From the end of the Dazhong era (847–860), Nanzhao emerged as a significant threat to the Annan Protectorate. The *Zizhi Tongjian* describes the origins of this conflict in the twelfth year of the Dazhong era (858), stating:

⁷⁶ *Xin Tang shu*, 170.5175; *Zizhi Tongjian*, 233.7524.

⁷⁷ *Xin Tang shu*, 7.204.

⁷⁸ *Jiu Tang shu*, 14.428; *Zizhi Tongjian*, 238.7665.

⁷⁹ *Jiu Tang shu*, 17A.512; *Zizhi Tongjian*, 243.7839.

⁸⁰ *Jiu Tang shu*, 19A.659.

⁸¹ *Toàn thư*, V.7a; Quốc sử quán triều Nguyễn, *Cương mục*, Tb.IV.27.

⁸² *Toàn thư*, V.7a; Quốc sử quán triều Nguyễn, *Cương mục*, Tb.IV.29.

⁸³ *Jiu Tang shu*, 15.470.

⁸⁴ Quốc sử quán triều Nguyễn, *Cương mục*, Tb.IV.32.

⁸⁵ *Xin Tang shu*, 8.243.

⁸⁶ Quốc sử quán triều Nguyễn, *Cương mục*, Tb.IV.38.

⁸⁷ *Xin Tang shu*, 8.246; *Toàn thư*, V.8a; Quốc sử quán triều Nguyễn, *Cương mục*, Tb.IV.35.

⁸⁸ Trần Quốc Vượng and Hà Văn Tấn, *Lịch sử chế độ phong kiến Việt Nam* (Hà Nội, 1960), vol. 1, p. 184.

Previously, Li Zhuo (李琢, Lý Trác), the protector general of Annan, ruled with cruelty and tyranny, compelling the Man (蠻) people to exchange their horses and cattle at an unfair rate—a mere *dou* (斗, decaliter) of salt per animal. He also executed the Man leader Du Cuncheng (杜存誠, Đỗ Tôn Thành), inciting resentment among the Man people and prompting Nanzhao to attack the Annan Protectorate.⁸⁹

Vietnamese historical texts, such as *Toàn thư* and *Cương mục*, document these events similarly.⁹⁰ The *New Book of Tang* also recounts this incident, noting Li Zhuo's title as frontier commissioner (經略使, *jīnglüè shǐ*) and referring to the Man people as the Yi people.⁹¹ From this point onwards, historical records frequently mention Nanzhao's invasions of Annan. Just two years later, in the twelfth month of the first year of the Xiantong era (860), Nanzhao forces attacked and captured the Annan Protectorate. The protector general Li Hu (李鄠, Lý Hộ) was forced to abandon the citadel and retreat to Wuzhou (武州). In 861, the Tang Dynasty mobilised troops from Yongzhou (邕州, present-day Nanning) and neighbouring circuits to reclaim Annan and resist Nanzhao's advance. By the sixth month of that year, the Tang court had appointed Wang Kuan (王寬, Vương Khoan) as the frontier commissioner of Annan.⁹²

In the early third year of the Xiantong era (862), Nanzhao launched another attack on Annan. In response, the Tang court dispatched Cai Xi (蔡襲, Sái Tập), the Hunan surveillance commissioner (觀察使), along with a force of 20,000 troops to defend the region, prompting Nanzhao to retreat.⁹³ Amid this turmoil, in the fifth month of 862, the Tang Dynasty restructured the Lingnan Circuit, dividing it into eastern and western divisions. Guangzhou became the administrative seat of the Lingnan East Circuit (嶺南東道), while Yongzhou served as the seat for the Lingnan West Circuit (嶺南西道).⁹⁴ Under this new structure, Jiaozhou was placed under the jurisdiction of the Lingnan West Circuit.

In the tenth month of 862, Nanzhao launched a large-scale attack on Annan, with Vietnamese historical texts noting a force of 50,000 troops.⁹⁵ In response, the Tang court deployed a similar number of soldiers, focusing their defensive efforts on Yongzhou.⁹⁶ However, the Annan Protectorate's administrative centre, Jiaozhou, quickly became encircled by Nanzhao forces. By the first month of 863, Tổng Bình citadel, the protectorate's centre, had fallen and Cai Xi was killed in the battle. Nanzhao left 20,000 troops stationed in Jiaozhou to maintain control.⁹⁷ Faced with an urgent need to secure Yongzhou, the Tang court decided to abandon Annan, issuing an imperial edict directing the protector general to withdraw and relocate all military forces to Haimen (海門, Hải Môn, present-day Bobai County, Guangxi) to strengthen the western Lingnan Circuit's defences. Consequently, Annan's officials and generals retreated in disorder to Haimen. By the sixth month of 863, the Tang Dynasty had formally abolished the Annan Protectorate, transferring Jiao Prefecture's administrative seat to Haimen.⁹⁸ In response to the upheaval, the Tang

⁸⁹ *Zizhi Tongjian*, 249.8070.

⁹⁰ *Toàn thư*, V.9a; *Tiền biên*, VI.14a; Quốc sử quán triều Nguyễn, *Cương mục*, Tb.IV.38.

⁹¹ *Xin Tang shu*, 222B.6282.

⁹² *Toàn thư*, V.10a; Quốc sử quán triều Nguyễn, *Cương mục*, Tb.IV.39.

⁹³ *Xin Tang shu*, 222B.6283. However, Vietnamese historical records cite the number of Tang troops as 30,000. See *Toàn thư*, V.10b; *Tiền biên*, VI.15b; Quốc sử quán triều Nguyễn, *Cương mục*, Tb.V.1.

⁹⁴ *Tang huiyao*, 78.1431; *Tiền biên*, VI.15b; Quốc sử quán triều Nguyễn, *Cương mục*, Tb.V.2.

⁹⁵ *Toàn thư*, V.11a; *Tiền biên*, VI.16a; Quốc sử quán triều Nguyễn, *Cương mục*, Tb.V.3.

⁹⁶ *Xin Tang shu*, 222B.6283.

⁹⁷ *Toàn thư*, V.11b; *Tiền biên*, VI.16b–17a; Quốc sử quán triều Nguyễn, *Cương mục*, Tb.V.2–3.

⁹⁸ *Xin Tang shu*, 222B.6284; *Việt sử lược*, 1.13; *Toàn thư*, V.12a; *Tiền biên*, VI.17a; Quốc sử quán triều Nguyễn, *Cương mục*, Tb.V.4.

court suspended taxes in Annan for two years.⁹⁹ The following month, the Tang Dynasty re-established the Annan Protectorate in Haimen, appointing Song Rong (宋戎, Tống Nhung) as the frontier commissioner.¹⁰⁰

The *Zizhi Tongjian* and various Vietnamese historical sources document that, during Nanzhao's two major invasions of Annan, around 150,000 people were either captured or killed.¹⁰¹ These figures highlight the devastating impact of Nanzhao's aggression on the Annan Protectorate, underscoring the violence and turmoil characterising this period of conflict. In the seventh month of 864, the Tang Dynasty appointed Gao Pian (高駢, Cao Biền) as the governor general responsible for military affairs and the pacification of Annan (安南都護、本管經略招討使, An Nam Đô hộ bản quản kinh lược chiêu thảo sứ), instructing him to advance against Nanzhao to reclaim the region.¹⁰² However, it was not until the seventh month of 865 that Gao Pian, leading an army of 5,000 troops, initiated his campaign toward Annan. In the ninth month of the same year, Gao Pian achieved a significant victory in his battle against 50,000 Nanzhao troops at Fengzhou.¹⁰³ This battle marked an essential step in the Tang Dynasty's efforts to reassert control over the Annan Protectorate and reduce the Nanzhao threat that had persisted for several years. By the autumn of the seventh year of the Xiantong era (866), Tang forces had successfully defeated Nanzhao, reclaiming the protectorate's centre in Jiaozhou. The Nanzhao threat, which had endured for nearly a decade, was temporarily subdued.¹⁰⁴ Following Nanzhao's three-year control of the region from 863 to 866, the Tang court re-established its authority in Annan. This temporary loss of the protectorate was primarily attributed to internal discord within the Tang court, highlighting both the decline of the Tang Dynasty and the deteriorating administration of the Lingnan *jiedushi* overseeing Annan. These events served as key indicators of the impending fall of the Annan Protectorate.

The period 866–907

After successfully repelling the Nanzhao invasion, the Tang Dynasty established the Jinghai Military Command (靜海軍, *Jinghǎi jūn*, Tĩnh hải quân), meaning 'Peaceful Sea Army' or 'Sea-Pacifying Army', in Annan in the eleventh month of 866.¹⁰⁵ The *New Book of Tang* records this event as follows: 'In the seventh year of the Xiantong era [866], Annan was promoted to the status of military commissioner (*jiedushi*) of Jinghai Military Command (靜海軍節度使, Tĩnh hải quân Tiết độ sứ).'¹⁰⁶ Vietnamese historical sources, including *Toàn thư* and *Cương mục*, similarly document this event: 'In the eleventh month, the Jinghai Military Command was established in Jiaozhou, with Gao Pian appointed as the *jiedushi*. From this point until the Song period, Annan was referred to as the *jiedushi* of the Jinghai Military Command.'¹⁰⁷

⁹⁹ *Jiu Tang shu*, 19A.654; *Xin Tang shu*, 222B.6284.

¹⁰⁰ *Toàn thư*, V.12a; Quốc sử quán triều Nguyễn, *Cương mục*, Tb.V.5.

¹⁰¹ *Zizhi Tongjian*, 250.8103; *Toàn thư*, V.11b; *Tiền biên*, VI.17a; Quốc sử quán triều Nguyễn, *Cương mục*, Tb.V.3. The *Abbreviated Records of An Nam* notes that Nanzhao captured 100,000 people, leaving 120,000 troops to maintain control. See *An Nam chí lược*, 9.10b.

¹⁰² *Zizhi Tongjian*, 250.8110; *Xin Tang shu*, 9.258. Vietnamese historical sources record Gao Pian's title as *Đô hộ tổng quản kinh lược chiêu thảo sứ* (都護總管經略招討使). See *Toàn thư*, V.12b; *Tiền biên*, VI.18a; Quốc sử quán triều Nguyễn, *Cương mục*, Tb.V.6.

¹⁰³ *Zizhi Tongjian*, 250.8112; *Toàn thư*, V.13a; *Tiền biên*, VI.18a; Quốc sử quán triều Nguyễn, *Cương mục*, Tb.V.7.

¹⁰⁴ *Jiu Tang shu*, 19A.659; *Tang huiyao*, 73.1322; *Toàn thư*, V.13b; *Tiền biên*, VI.18b–19a; Quốc sử quán triều Nguyễn, *Cương mục*, Tb.V.8–9.

¹⁰⁵ Taylor, *Birth of Vietnam*, p. 254.

¹⁰⁶ *Xin Tang shu*, 69.1949.

¹⁰⁷ *Toàn thư*, V.14b; *Tiền biên*, VI.19b; Quốc sử quán triều Nguyễn, *Cương mục*, Tb.V.10.

Furthermore, due to Gao Pian's significant role in the history of the Annan Protectorate during this period, Franciscus Verellen argues that both the name of the army and Gao Pian's new position evoke the title 'Wave-Subduing General' (伏波將軍, Phục ba tướng quân), previously held by Lu Bode and Ma Yuan—two prominent figures in the pacification of the south (Jiaozhi) in 111 BCE and 43 CE.¹⁰⁸

The establishment of the Jinghai Military Command in Annan marked the Tang Dynasty's formal recognition of the region as a frontier defence command (*fangzhen*), with its official holding the title of military commissioner (*jiedushi*). Although this title was originally military in nature, the *jiedushi* also assumed the responsibilities of the protector general, similar to the role of frontier commissioner during times of unrest or conflict in Annan.¹⁰⁹ Thus, while the position continued to function as the head of the Annan Protectorate, it was now designated with a military rank. This shift aimed to strengthen the Tang court's administrative control in Annan following a period of prolonged instability. However, the transformation of Annan into the Jinghai Military Command also indicated a growing tendency toward autonomy, as the region increasingly distanced itself from Tang governance, ultimately leading to the decline of the protectorate structure. By the end of the Tang period, the Jinghai Military Command in Annan had begun to emerge as one of the autonomous powers in the region.

By the early tenth century, Zhu Quanyu (朱全昱), the brother of Zhu Quanzhong (朱全忠), who was then manipulating the Tang court, was holding the position of head of the Jinghai Military Command in Annan.¹¹⁰ Regarded as incompetent, Zhu Quanyu relied on his brother's influence for promotions. In practice, he held the post merely in name and had never actually been to Annan to command. In the second year of the Tianyou era (905), Zhu Quanzhong deemed it necessary to dismiss his brother¹¹¹ and appointed Dugu Sun (獨孤損) as his replacement.¹¹² Dugu Sun, who had previously served as prime minister during Emperor Zhaozong's reign (901–904), was later demoted to Lingnan and became the last *jiedushi* that the Tang Dynasty sent to Annan.¹¹³ At this time, the Tang court was weakened by corruption and exhaustion, with all power centralised in Zhu Quanzhong's hands. In 907, he deposed Emperor Aidi and declared himself emperor, ushering in the turbulent period known as the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms (907–960). This upheaval provided a significant opportunity for the people of Annan to strive for independence.

When Dugu Sun was dismissed and subsequently killed,¹¹⁴ Annan found itself without a designated ruler. Seizing this opportunity, Qu Chengyu (曲承裕, Khúc Thừa Dụ), a powerful leader from Hồng Châu (洪州, present-day Hải Dương and Hưng Yên), swiftly mobilised forces to take control of Tống Bình citadel, declaring himself *jiedushi*.¹¹⁵ Recognising the decisive actions taken by the Viet people, the Tang court officially acknowledged Khúc Thừa Dụ as the *jiedushi* of the Jinghai Military Command in early 906, also conferring upon him the title of Chancellor Designate (同平章事).¹¹⁶ Khúc Thừa Dụ's rise to autonomy and his

¹⁰⁸ F. Verellen, 'Gao Pian (高駢), the last protector general of Annam', in *Discovering Vietnam's Ancient Capital: The Archaeology and History of the Imperial Citadel of Thăng Long—Hanoi*, (eds.) A. Hardy and Nguyễn Tiến Đông (Singapore, 2024), p. 151.

¹⁰⁹ Wu Tingxie 吳廷燮, *Tang fangzhen nianbiao* 唐方鎮年表 [Chronology of the Tang Frontier Defence Command] (Beijing, 1980), 7.1115.

¹¹⁰ *Việt sử lược*, 1.14; *Toàn thư*, V.17a; *Tiền biên*, VI.23a. According to *Cương mục*, Zhu Quanyu assumed office as *jiedushi* in the first year of the Jingfu era (892). See *Cương mục*, Tb.V.13.

¹¹¹ *Zizhi Tongjian*, 265.8640; *Toàn thư*, V.17a; *Tiền biên*, VI.23a.

¹¹² *Zizhi Tongjian*, 265.8641.

¹¹³ *Việt sử lược*, 1.14.

¹¹⁴ *Xin Tang shu*, 10.303.

¹¹⁵ *Quốc sử quán triều Nguyễn*, *Cương mục*, Tb.V.14.

¹¹⁶ *Zizhi Tongjian*, 265.8656; *Tiền biên*, VI.23a; *Quốc sử quán triều Nguyễn*, *Cương mục*, Tb.V.14.

self-declaration as *jiedushi* marked a significant turning point in the history of the Annan Protectorate. He became not only the last *jiedushi* of Annan under the Tang Dynasty, but also the first Viet *jiedushi*. However, the dissolution of the Annan Protectorate requires clarification. While the formal end of the protectorate aligns with the fall of the Tang Dynasty in 907, Annan had, in practice, asserted its independence by around 905. Although Khúc Thừa Dụ took advantage of the political turmoil to secure control of Annan, official Chinese records continued to list him as a Tang-appointed *jiedushi*.¹¹⁷ Nevertheless, Annan had effectively taken over the region's governance, dismantling the Tang Dynasty's influence through complete control of the protectorate's administration, operations, and local support. This marks the true collapse of Tang authority in Annan by 905.

In summary, the history of the Annan Protectorate is marked by three key administrative transformations, each reflecting its evolving role within the Tang Dynasty's governance strategy. Initially, Annan was administered as one of the five defence commands within the Lingnan Circuit. In 757, governance shifted to fall under the authority of the military commissioner (*jiedushi*) for Lingnan. Finally, from 866 to 907, the establishment of the Jinghai Military Command in Annan signified the Tang court's formal recognition of the region as a *fangzhen*, with its head official holding the title of *jiedushi*. Throughout this period, the Annan Protectorate underwent several changes to its name: Jiaozhou General Administration (622–624), Jiaozhou Area Command (624–679), Annan Protectorate (679–757 and 768–863), Zhennan Protectorate (757–768), Itinerant Jiao Prefecture (行交州, Hành Giao Châu, 863–866), and, finally, Jinghai Military Command (866–907).

The organisational structure of the Annan Protectorate

The Tang protectorates were classified into three ranks: grand (大), superior (上), and central (中). Among the protectorates established during this period, the *Old Book of Tang* mentioned only the grand protectorates, such as Anbei, Chanyu, and Anxi.¹¹⁸ However, the *New Book of Tang* expanded the list to include Anbei, Chanyu, Beiting, and Anxi as grand protectorates,¹¹⁹ with Andong designated as a superior protectorate¹²⁰ and Annan classified as a central protectorate.¹²¹ When detailing the official ranking system for protectorates, both the *Old Book of Tang* and the *New Book of Tang* recorded only two ranks: grand protectorate (大都護府) and superior protectorate (上都護府).¹²² The *Yuanhe Maps and Records of Prefectures and Counties* stated that Annan belonged to the superior protectorate.¹²³ Thus, there is no consistency between Chinese historical sources regarding the rank of the Annan Protectorate. Although no definitive classification is confirmed, it is possible that Annan was considered a central protectorate in terms of rank, while, bureaucratically, it followed the structure of a superior protectorate.

The bureaucracy of the Annan Protectorate

The bureaucracy of the Annan Protectorate was meticulously organised according to specific administrative ranks. The chief official of the Annan Protectorate, known as the prefect (刺史, Thứ sử), also held the title of protector general (都護, Đô hộ), ranking third among

¹¹⁷ Yu, *Tang cishikao quanbian*, p. 3355.

¹¹⁸ *Jiu Tang shu*, 38.1420, 39.1488, 40.1647.

¹¹⁹ *Xin Tang shu*, 37.976–77, 40.1047.

¹²⁰ *Xin Tang shu*, 39.1023.

¹²¹ *Xin Tang shu*, 43A.1111.

¹²² *Jiu Tang shu*, 44.1922; *Xin Tang shu*, 49B.1316–17.

¹²³ *Yuanhe junxian tuzhi*, 38.955.

officials.¹²⁴ Before the establishment of the Annan Protectorate, this official was initially titled supervisor-in-chief (總管, Tổng quản) from 622 to 624, and later commander-in-chief (都督, Đô đốc) from 624 to 679. From 679 onwards, the title was officially recognised as protector general. During times of war and unrest, this official also assumed the role of frontier commissioner (經略使, Kinh lược sứ) while simultaneously serving as protector general.¹²⁵ After the second renaming in 768, the appointed official typically held both roles of frontier commissioner and protector general of Annan. In 866, with the establishment of the Jinghai Military Command in Annan, the chief official was referred to as military commissioner (節度使, Tiết độ sứ) while continuing to hold the title of protector general of Annan. Although the title evolved over time, the role consistently embodied the responsibilities of the 'protectorate and dominion' official of the Tang court in Annan. The duties of the Annan Protectorate were succinctly outlined in the *New Book of Tang* as follows: 'The protector general oversees the counties, encompassing tasks such as appeasing, suppressing, rewarding, punishing criminals, and making overarching decisions on affairs within the protectorate.'¹²⁶

Assisting the protector general was the deputy protector general. In grand protectorates, this position was held by four individuals, while, in superior protectorates such as Annan, two individuals typically ranked as the fourth among officials. Additionally, there were assistant officials entrusted with specific tasks (see Figure 1). Notably, a chief secretary or aide (長史, Trưởng sử) held the fifth rank, as did a commander (司馬, Tư mã), who led the protectorate's soldiers. An administrative supervisor (錄事參軍事, Lục sự tham quân sự) of the seventh rank served as the main expert in the protectorate's administrative centre. Moreover, there were specialised officers responsible for various functions: a public works officer (功曹, Công tào) oversaw construction and repairs; a commerce officer (倉曹, Thương tào) managed commercial activities; a taxation officer (戶曹, Hộ tào) handled household registration and taxes; and a military affairs officer (兵曹, Binh tào) was in charge of military matters. All these positions were classified under the seventh rank. Additionally, there were three administrators (參軍事, Tham quân sự) who held the eighth rank.¹²⁷

Methods of appointment and the salary regime in the Annan Protectorate

From the time at which the Tang Dynasty established its rule in Jiaozhou and appointed Qiu He as supervisor-in-chief in 622 until Khúc Thừa Dụ proclaimed himself *jiedushi* in 905, a total of 77 Tang officials served in Annan in various capacities.¹²⁸ Among them, 58 held the position of Annan protector general.¹²⁹ The appointment of the head of the Annan Protectorate occurred through eight distinct methods: (1) Appointment from prefects of the prefectures: 20 of the 58 recorded protector generals were prefects from various prefectures who assumed the role of protector general of Annan, accounting for 34.5 per cent of the total appointments. (2) Court appointments: some officials, such as Pei Tai (裴泰), Zhao Chang (趙昌), Wang Shi (王式), and Dugu Sun (獨孤損), were directly appointed by the Tang court. (3) Military general appointments: generals such as Song Rong (宋戎), Gao Pian (高駢), and Wang Yan Quan (王晏權) were appointed as protector generals. (4) Frontier and surveillance commissioner appointments: figures such as Zhang Zhou (張舟),

¹²⁴ *Jiu Tang shu*, 41.1749, 44.1922.

¹²⁵ Phan, Trần et al., *Lịch sử Việt Nam*, p. 282.

¹²⁶ *Xin Tang shu*, 49B.1317.

¹²⁷ *Xin Tang shu*, 49B.1317.

¹²⁸ Yu, *Tang cishikao quanbian*, pp. 3338–3355.

¹²⁹ Li, *Duhu zhidu yanjiu*, p. 292.

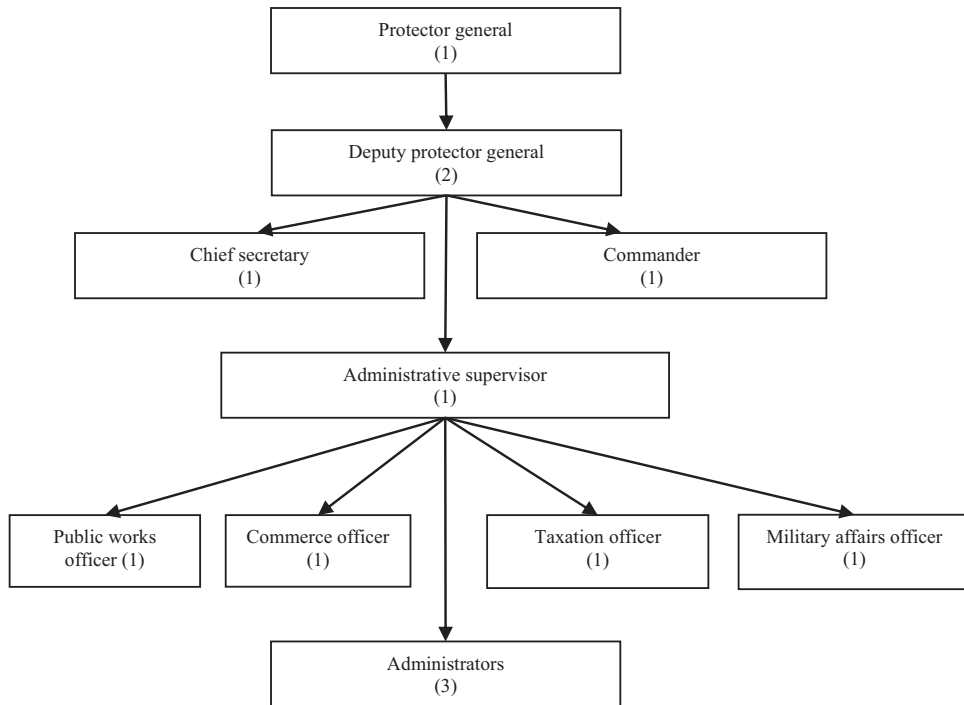


Figure 1. The bureaucracy of the Annan Protectorate. Source: Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修 et al. (comp.), *Xin Tang shu* 新唐書 (Beijing, 1975), 49B.1317.

Pei Xingli (裴行立), Cai Xi (蔡襲), and Zhang Yin (張茵) were selected from these roles. (5) Reappointments of former protector generals: some officials, including Gui Zhongwu (桂仲武), Gao Pian, Pei Xingli, and Zhao Chang, were reappointed to the role of protector general. (6) Recommendations from former protector generals: successors such as Gao Xun (高潯) and Ceng Gun (曾袞) were recommended by their predecessors. (7) Nominations by foreigners: some foreign officials, including Kang Qian (康謙) from the Western Regions and Abe no Nakamaro from Japan, were nominated for the position. (8) Special appointments: certain appointments were unique, such as that of Zhu Quanyu.¹³⁰

The *Institutional History of Tang* details the salary structure for third-rank officials of the Tang court as follows: a monthly salary of 5,000 *qian* (錢), a food allowance of 1,100 *qian*, 10,000 *qian* for security-related expenses, and 900 *wen* (文) for miscellaneous purposes, totalling 17,000 *qian*.¹³¹ This salary level was standard for third-rank officials within the Tang central court. While a third-rank position, such as the protector general of the Annan Protectorate, would likely have commanded a similar salary, no surviving records specifically document the salaries of officials stationed in Annan. Consequently, although rank equivalency suggests parity, actual salaries for officials in frontier regions such as Annan may have varied, potentially adjusted for the unique conditions and fiscal constraints associated with managing such border areas. Moreover, Annan's wealth in resources and local products meant that Tang Dynasty protector generals stationed there benefitted considerably from local tax revenues and tribute. According to the *Comprehensive Institutions* (通典, *Tongdian*), tribute items from the Annan Protectorate included 10 pieces of plantain cloth,

¹³⁰ Li, *Duhu zhidu yanjiu*, pp. 292–295.

¹³¹ *Tang huiyao*, 91.1654.

2,000 betel nuts, 20 *jin* (斤) of fish skin, 20 python gallbladders, and 200 *hé* (合) of kingfisher feathers.¹³² Some Tang officials in Annan were noted for their significant wealth and greed. For example, Qiu He (丘和) was described as ‘rich as a king’,¹³³ Liu You (劉祐) as ‘a wealthy man’, Li Xianggu (李象古) was notorious for his greed and disregard for rules, and Li Zhuo (李琢) was similarly noted for his avaricious nature.¹³⁴

Fundamental features and principal roles of the Annan Protectorate

Distinctive features of the Annan Protectorate

An analysis of historical periods and the organisational structure of the Annan Protectorate reveals several fundamental features of this administrative system.

The first feature is that the Annan Protectorate represented the pinnacle of political evolution in administrative systems during the Northern Domination era, spanning the Han Dynasty, the Six Dynasties, and the Tang Dynasty. It embodied the comprehensive development of both the organisation and functions of administrative levels. As the highest level of administrative management in Annan, the protectorate succeeded Jiaozhi during the Western Han period and Jiaozhou at the end of the Eastern Han period. Simultaneously, the prefecture (州, *zhōu*), as a provincial subunit, evolved from the commanderies (郡, *jùn*) established during the Han and Eastern Wu periods. During the Liang period, these commanderies transformed into smaller divisions, still referred to as *zhōu*. This evolution is evident in the changes to the number, boundaries, and names of the prefectures. The number of administrative units expanded from three commanderies during the Han period to six under the Eastern Wu, and then to seven smaller divisions during the Liang period. This growth continued with six commanderies under the Sui period and, eventually, 12 prefectures during the Tang Dynasty.¹³⁵ The commanderies of Jiaozhi, Jiuzhen, and Rinan from the Han period became Jiaozhou, Aizhou, and Huanzhou under the Tang Dynasty. Notably, the Annan Protectorate adopted the Liang Dynasty’s method of creating smaller *zhōu* to establish and maintain prefectures. This enabled the Tang Dynasty to exercise tighter administrative control and broader coverage across Annan. Additionally, the Tang Dynasty utilised indirectly administered prefectures under the ‘loose reins’ system, known as *jimi* (羈縻州, *châu ki mi*), meaning ‘halter’, to govern native tribal populations in mountainous regions.¹³⁶ According to the *Old Book of Tang*, the Annan Protectorate contained 41 *jimi* prefectures, 18 of which were under the Fengzhou Area Command (峰州都督府).¹³⁷ However, the *Yuanhe Maps and Records of Prefectures and Counties* states that the Annan Protectorate governed 32 *jimi* prefectures, with 28 under Fengzhou’s control.¹³⁸ The ratio of plains to *jimi* prefectures was 1:4, indicating an average of one prefecture in the plains for every four in midland and mountainous regions. This substantial number of administrative units reflects the extensive coverage of both the plains and mountainous areas within the Annan Protectorate.

¹³² Du You 杜佑, *Tongdian* 通典 (Qinding siku quanshu ben), 6.24a.

¹³³ *Jiu Tang shu*, 59.2325.

¹³⁴ *An Nam chí lược*, 8.5b, 9.8a, 9.9b.

¹³⁵ Quốc sử quán triều Nguyễn, *Cương mục*, Tb.IV.18; *Loạt chí*, 1.7a, 1.10b, 1.11a. See also Đào, *Đất nước Việt Nam*, pp. 29, 57, 66–67; Nguyễn, *Việt Nam thời khai sinh*, pp. 249, 253–254, 258–260.

¹³⁶ Maspero, ‘Le Protectorat général d’Annam sous les T’ang’, p. 551; Taylor, *Birth of Vietnam*, p. 171.

¹³⁷ *Xin Tang shu*, 43B.1145–46. See also Song Jianying 宋建莹, ‘Lun Tangdai Annan duhufu jiqi shuzhou jianzhi de yanbian’ 论唐代安南都护府及其属州建制的演变 [On the evolution of the Annan Protectorate and its subordinate provinces during the Tang Dynasty], *Xi’an wenli xueyuan xuebao* 西安文理学院学报 (社会科学版) [Journal of Xi’an University of Arts and Science (Social Sciences Edition)] 13.2 (2010), p. 15.

¹³⁸ *Yuanhe jianxian tuzhi*, 38.955, 38.962.

At the county level (縣, *xiàn*) within the Annan Protectorate, there was a consistent increase in the number of counties over time. Beginning with 22 counties during the Han Dynasty, this figure rose to 45 counties under the Eastern Wu Dynasty and then decreased to 36 counties during the Sui Dynasty.¹³⁹ According to the *New Book of Tang*, the number of counties expanded further to 59 under the Tang Dynasty.¹⁴⁰ The *Cương mục* also recorded 59 counties within the Annan Protectorate, while the *Collected Records of Constitutional Precedents* noted only 50.¹⁴¹ However, the *Yuanhe Maps and Records of Prefectures and Counties* listed just 39 counties in the protectorate.¹⁴² Notably, the Annan Protectorate extended its administrative structure by incorporating townships (鄉, *xiāng*), representing a significant development from earlier dynasties. During the Kaiyuan era (713–741), there were 55 townships, which had increased to 56 by the Yuanhe era (806–820).¹⁴³ According to the *Records of Annan* (安南志原), by the middle of the Xiantong era (860–874), the Annan Protectorate was governing a total of 159 townships.¹⁴⁴

In terms of population within the Annan Protectorate (Jiaozhou) during the Tang Dynasty, records from the *Yuanhe Maps and Records of Prefectures and Counties* indicate 25,694 households during the Kaiyuan era, increasing to 27,135 households by the Yuanhe era.¹⁴⁵ According to the *Old Book of Tang*, the Annan Protectorate initially included 17,523 households and 88,788 residents, which had grown to 24,230 households and 99,652 residents by the Tianbao era (742–756).¹⁴⁶ The *New Book of Tang* similarly records these figures for Annan's population during the Tianbao era.¹⁴⁷

The Annan Protectorate represented the development of a strictly organised bureaucracy, with clearly defined staffing corresponding to each administrative level. The head of the Annan Protectorate served as the highest authority appointed by the Tang court to govern Annan, acting as the Tang emperor's representative in overseeing the land and people of China's southern border regions. The role and authority of the Annan protector general clearly surpassed those of the prefects of Jiaozhi and Jiaozhou during the Han to Sui periods. Over time, the title, role, and authority of the protector general evolved. Whether serving as the frontier commissioner during wartime or as the military commissioner (*jiedushi*) with the establishment of the Jinghai Military Command, this official consistently held the title of protector general. The *Old Book of Tang* describes the responsibilities of the *jiedushi* of the Jinghai Military Command as follows: 'The *jiedushi* of Annan, acting as protector general, ruled the Annan Protectorate and managed other prefectures.'¹⁴⁸ Notably, key positions—particularly that of protector general—were held exclusively by Han Chinese officials appointed by the Tang Dynasty, while Viet individuals could attain only the position of deputy protector general.

The bureaucratic structure of the Annan Protectorate remained unchanged at the county level, with the county magistrate continuing in the same role. However, at the prefecture level—corresponding to the earlier commandery level—the title of the leading official underwent a change. During the Han Dynasty, the head of a commandery was known as the governor (太守, *tàishǒu*). By the Tang Dynasty, with commanderies reorganised into

¹³⁹ *Loại chí*, 1.7a, 1.10b. See also Đào, *Đất nước Việt Nam*, pp. 29, 57, 66–67; Nguyễn, *Việt Nam thời khai sinh*, pp. 249, 253–254, 258–260.

¹⁴⁰ *Xin Tang shu*, 43A.1112–15.

¹⁴¹ Quốc sử quán triều Nguyễn, *Cương mục*, Tb.IV.20; *Loại chí*, 1.11a.

¹⁴² *Yuanhe junxian tuzhi*, 38.955.

¹⁴³ *Yuanhe junxian tuzhi*, 38.955.

¹⁴⁴ Cao Hùng Trưng 高熊徵, *An Nam chí nguyên* 安南志原 (Hanoi, 1931), 1.60.

¹⁴⁵ *Yuanhe junxian tuzhi*, 38.955.

¹⁴⁶ *Jiu Tang shu*, 41.1749.

¹⁴⁷ *Xin Tang shu*, 43A.1112.

¹⁴⁸ *Jiu Tang shu*, 38.1392.

prefectures, this role had transitioned to that of the prefect (刺史, *cìshǐ*).¹⁴⁹ Historically, *cìshǐ* was also the title for the lead official of Jiaozhi and Jiaozhou in earlier dynasties, which could create a misconception that the Annan Protectorate held a higher rank than the Jiaozhi Circuit or Jiaozhou Province. However, it is important to note that the title *cìshǐ*, better translated as ‘regional inspector’ in earlier periods, was distinct from the *cìshǐ* (prefect) of the Tang era, reflecting different administrative structures and responsibilities. In reality, the administrative hierarchy of the Tang period followed the order protectorate—prefecture—county, as opposed to the earlier circuit—commandery—county system of the Han period and the large *zhou* (acting as a province)—commandery—county hierarchy from the end of the Eastern Han to Sui periods. Jiaozhou Province, the successor to the Jiaozhi Circuit of the Western Han Dynasty, functioned as an administrative level equivalent to the Tang Dynasty’s protectorate. However, Jiaozhou’s designation in the Tang Dynasty was distinct from its meaning during the late Eastern Han to Sui periods. Under the Tang, Jiaozhou was one of the 12 prefectures administered by the Annan Protectorate and served as the protectorate’s seat. This contrasts with the transition of Jiaozhou Province to the Annan Protectorate. Additionally, the protector general of the Annan Protectorate also held the role of prefect of Jiaozhou.

The second feature is that the Annan Protectorate operated as a flexible administrative system, combining centralisation and unity at the higher levels (protectorate, prefectures, and counties), while allowing a more loosely connected structure at the grassroots level (townships and *jimi* prefectures).

At the primary levels—protectorate, prefecture, and county—the Tang court applied operational principles based on ordinances, reinforcing authoritarian centralisation from the interior to manage and control foreign territories. A centralised and unified centre of power was progressively strengthened, particularly within the prefectures of the Annan Protectorate. The development of Annan’s governance structure evolved from direct dependence on the Tang court to a reliance on the *jiedushi* of the Lingnan Circuit, eventually leading to the transition of its *jiedushi* to the Jinghai Military Command. While this change may have appeared to enhance governance, it also clearly indicated a departure from the orbit and control of the central Tang court. The *jiedushi* of the Jinghai Military Command not only represented the Tang emperor in Annan, but also wielded significant authority, making independent decisions on all matters in Annan without requiring central court approval. Over time, this system took on the characteristics of an autonomous political entity, setting the stage for a transfer of power from a Han Chinese identity to a local Viet identity in Annan. This shift simultaneously severed the dependency between Annan and mainland China, ultimately transforming this southern borderland into an independent kingdom. By the early tenth century, Annan had not only resisted assimilation into mainland China, but also entirely slipped from the grasp of the Han Chinese ruling class.

At the grassroots level of townships and villages, achieving complete control by the protectorate proved challenging. As a result, township and village operations continued to follow a principle of self-management, supported by a service system elected by local communities. These villages played a crucial role in preserving the traditional political and social institutions of the Viet people. This demonstrates that, while the Tang Dynasty exercised rigorous control over the protectorate at higher administrative levels, a parallel sphere of indigenous life, deeply rooted in traditional practices, persisted.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁹ *Tang huiyao*, 68.1196.

¹⁵⁰ Phan, Trần et al., *Lịch sử Việt Nam*, p. 282.

The principal roles of the Annan Protectorate

With its long tenure, the Annan Protectorate played significant historical roles and left enduring impacts, not only on Tang China, but also on the region of Annan. Its roles and influence are evident in areas such as taxation, commerce, and political security. For Tang China, the functions of the Annan Protectorate can be summarised in six main points: (1) organising the defence system and deploying troops; (2) collecting taxes; (3) promoting Confucian values through moral governance; (4) suppressing rebellions and defending against foreign threats; (5) implementing the strategy of ‘using indigenous people to govern indigenous people’ (以夷治夷); and (6) opening sea routes, improving roads, and fostering economic development.¹⁵¹

Roles in the management of tax and commerce

Economically, the Annan Protectorate became a vital source of revenue for the Tang Dynasty through various forms of exploitation, including taxes and tribute goods. Upon taking office in Annan, protector generals often sought to amass wealth, with some engaging in commercial activities to enrich themselves.¹⁵² From the early eighth century, the Fengzhou Area Command was characterised by bustling horse-trading activities, involving not only Han Chinese participants, but also traders from the Man and Chenla communities.¹⁵³ In Jiaozhou, Han Chinese traders exchanged salt for cattle and horses.

The Annan Protectorate played a crucial role in both overland and maritime commerce for Tang China. Overland routes connected the protectorate to southern border regions, including Yongzhou and Yunnan,¹⁵⁴ while, from the mid-Tang period onwards, the prominence of the sea route across the South China Sea (referred to as Biển Đông in Vietnamese) grew due to Tibetan influence in the Western Regions and Arab expansion in West Asia. This maritime route linked mainland China with Southeast Asia and extended further to India, Persia, and Arabia, fostering a dynamic trade network.¹⁵⁵ The *Route to Foreign Countries across the Sea from Guangzhou* (廣州通海夷道), compiled by Jia Dan (賈耽) in 801, highlights the pivotal role that this maritime route—passing through Jiaozhou and Champa—played in eighth-century trade between Guangzhou and the Arab world.¹⁵⁶

Positioned strategically along this international trade route, Annan (Jiaozhou) emerged alongside Guangzhou as one of the two most significant southern gateways for Tang commerce.¹⁵⁷ From the early eighth century, Annan’s shipbuilding industry experienced substantial advancements, supported by an efficient port system. Merchant ships from diverse regions navigating the southern seas en route to Guangzhou frequently stopped in Annan, underscoring its strategic importance. The Annan Protectorate played a key role in maintaining the waterways connecting Guangzhou to the mainland, facilitating the Tang

¹⁵¹ Wu and Li, ‘Youguan Annan duhufu’, pp. 35–38.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 36.

¹⁵³ The *Gazetteer of Yunnan* (雲南志), or *Book of Man* (蠻書), compiled by Fan Chuo in 863, records that the Man people came to Annan to trade cattle and horses. See Fan Chuo 樊綽, *Manshu* 蠻書 (Qinding siku quanshu ben), 4.12a. Additionally, Lê Tắc’s *Abbreviated Records of An Nam* notes that the Annan protector general was responsible for guarding the routes to prevent the Chenla people from entering Lingnan to purchase weapons and horses. See *An Nam chí lược*, 16.1a.

¹⁵⁴ Pelliot, ‘Deux itinéraires de Chine en Inde’, pp. 364–372, 374–376.

¹⁵⁵ The *Old Book of Tang* records that, since the time of Emperor Wu of the Han Dynasty, the southern sea countries that paid tribute to China followed the Jiaozhi route (*Jiu Tang shu*, 41.1750). See also Li Tana, *A Maritime Vietnam: From Earliest Times to the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, 2024), pp. 54, 68.

¹⁵⁶ Li, *Maritime Vietnam*, p. 142.

¹⁵⁷ Wang Gungwu, ‘The Nanhai trade: a study of the early history of Chinese trade in the South China Sea’, *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 31.2 (1958), pp. 72–73.

Dynasty's effective utilisation of these critical trade routes.¹⁵⁸ Until the late eighth century, Jiaozhou's commercial significance rivalled—and at times challenged—that of Guangzhou, China's largest foreign trade port during the Tang period.¹⁵⁹ According to the *Abbreviated Records of An Nam*, the *jiedushi* of Lingnan submitted a petition to the Tang court requesting a trade inspection in Jiaozhou, as most merchant ships were now trading there, undermining Guangzhou's status as a major trade hub.¹⁶⁰ This period of competition between Jiaozhou and Guangzhou reflected a broader rivalry between Chinese officials and merchants in these regions. However, Guangzhou's superior economic development and strategic geographic position ultimately secured its commercial dominance over Jiaozhou.

Roles in the management of political security

In the context of Tang China, the Annan Protectorate played a pivotal role within the empire's border defence system. Its establishment allowed the Tang Dynasty to secure stability in the southern border regions while consolidating its authority over the territory. Together with the Yongzhou Area Command (邕州都督府), the Annan Protectorate formed a robust defence network that safeguarded the southern and south-western borders of the Tang Dynasty. Notably, the Yongzhou Area Command served as a strategic base for overseeing the Annan Protectorate, while the Annan Protectorate itself functioned as a key outpost for managing and defending the south-western border.¹⁶¹

Among the responsibilities entrusted to the Annan Protectorate by the Tang Dynasty, the foremost was defending against foreign invaders. During the Tang Dynasty's confrontations with Nanzhao, the Annan Protectorate became the empire's front line in countering the threat posed by this powerful south-western kingdom. In this period, the protectorate not only served as a strategic base for managing the south-west border, but also acted as a critical deterrent against Nanzhao's encroachment into Chinese territories. To secure control over Annan, Tang troops were stationed in the region and Yongzhou's defences were significantly reinforced. In turn, Nanzhao frequently targeted Annan, directing most of its attacks toward Yongzhou. This interdependence between the two regions meant that any instability in Annan directly endangered Yongzhou's security.¹⁶² This dynamic underscores the vital security role played by the Annan Protectorate, particularly in the late eighth century when Nanzhao's growing strength posed a direct challenge to Tang sovereignty. The Annan Protectorate's efforts were instrumental in safeguarding Tang interests in the region, contributing not only to the stability of the southern borders, but also to the broader prosperity of the Tang Dynasty. In essence, the Annan Protectorate was a cornerstone of the Tang Dynasty's vision for its southern frontier.

The Annan Protectorate also contributed to the weakening of the Tang Dynasty's central authority, leading to instability towards the end of the dynasty and into the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms period (907–960). After its transformation into the Jinghai Military Command, Annan, like other frontier defence commands, increasingly operated beyond

¹⁵⁸ Chen Guobao 陈国保, 'Lun Nanzhao renfan Annan dui Tangdai guojia anquan de yingxiang' 论南诏人犯安南对唐代国家安全的影响 [The effects of Nanzhao's invasion into Annan on the national security of the Tang Dynasty], *Yunnan minzu daxue xuebao (zhexue shehui kexue ban)* 云南民族大学学报 (哲学社会科学版) [*Journal of Yunnan University of Nationalities (Philosophy and Social Sciences Edition)*] 28.1 (2011), p. 118.

¹⁵⁹ Wang, 'Nanhai Trade', p. 84.

¹⁶⁰ *An Nam chí lược*, 16.2b–3b.

¹⁶¹ Chen Guobao 陈国保, 'Annan duhufu yu Tangdai bianjiang fangyu tixi de goujian ji yingxiang' 安南都护府与唐代边疆防御体系的构建及影响 [The construction and impact of the Annan Protectorate on the frontier defence system of the Tang Dynasty], *Zhongguo bianjiang shidi yanjiu* 中国边疆史地研究 [*China's Borderland History and Geography Studies*] 20.3 (2010), p. 29.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 26.

Tang control. Local power bases emerged and the 10 circuits of the Tang Dynasty eventually became autonomous, evolving into independent kingdoms. In Annan, the rise of Khúc Thừa Dụ's influence in Hồng Châu exemplified this trend. The Khúc clan, having secured local autonomy, later faced opposition from the Southern Han Dynasty.¹⁶³ Annan's path to full independence culminated in 938 with Ngô Quyền's victory over Southern Han forces at the Battle of Bạch Đằng River.¹⁶⁴ This decisive victory marked a turning point in Vietnamese history, securing complete independence for Annan.

Conclusion

The Annan Protectorate, established by the Tang Dynasty in northern Vietnam, represents a crucial chapter in Vietnamese history, embodying the highest level of political administration during the Northern Domination era. Its three distinct phases correspond to shifts in the management of this administrative unit, with the final phase marking the end of the Northern Domination era and ushering in a new period of Vietnamese independence and autonomy. Although the terms *Jinghai Military Command* and the title *jiedushi* continued to appear in royal decrees conferred by Chinese dynasties on Vietnamese kings until the Song period, the actual administrative structure and operations of the Jinghai Military Command dissolved with the end of the Annan Protectorate.¹⁶⁵ Throughout its existence, the Annan Protectorate played a critical role in political, security, and economic functions along the Tang Dynasty's southern border. This historical episode not only is integral to Vietnamese history, but also holds significant importance within the broader context of China's border history. Comparing the Annan Protectorate with other Tang protectorates offers a valuable opportunity for further research, providing deeper insights into these institutions' organisational structures, unique characteristics, and broader historical roles.

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Conflicts of interest. None.

¹⁶³ *Toàn thư*, V.18a; *Tiền biên*, VII.1b–2b; *Cương mục*, Tb.V.16.

¹⁶⁴ *Toàn thư*, V.20b; *Tiền biên*, VII.6a; *Cương mục*, Tb.V.20.

¹⁶⁵ The title *jiedushi* of the Jinghai Military Command occasionally appeared in royal decrees issued by the Song Dynasty to the kings of the Đinh, Former Lê, and Lý Dynasties, specifically in the years 973, 986, 1007, and 1010. See *Toàn thư*, Bản kỷ, I.4a, 17a, 28b, II.4b.

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