

# The Role of Marquis Tuyen Trung – Nguyen Van Tuyen in the Restoration of the Nguyen Dynasty (1787–1802)

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**Abstract:** This article analyzes and evaluates the significant military and political contributions of Marquis Tuyen Trung – Nguyen Van Tuyen during a pivotal period of Vietnamese history in the late 18th century: the restoration of the Nguyen Dynasty. Drawing upon official historical records such as *Dai Nam Thuc Luc* (Veritable Records of Dai Nam) and *Dai Nam Liet Truyen* (Biographies of Dai Nam), alongside original royal ordinances and decrees preserved by the Nguyen Hau family in Dong Thap province, this study reconstructs Nguyen Van Tuyen's career beginning in 1787 when he joined Lord Nguyen Anh's forces at Tong Son. Characterized by unwavering loyalty and exceptional strategic prowess, he participated directly in critical military campaigns in Quy Nhon and Da Nang, most notably the decisive Battle of Phu Xuan in 1801, which fundamentally shifted the battlefield's momentum. The research findings indicate that Nguyen Van Tuyen was not only a formidable military commander but also a vital link between the imperial court and the indigenous forces of the Gia Dinh region, thereby strengthening the strategic rear for the restoration movement. This article affirms his status as an eminent founding figure who laid the groundwork for national unification and stability under Emperor Gia Long. The newly published data within this study further enriches the scholarly understanding of the Southern Vietnamese military elite within the broader context of national history.

**Keywords:** Marquis Tuyen Trung, Nguyen Van Tuyen, Nguyen Dynasty, Restoration, Southern Vietnamese history.

## I. INTRODUCTION

The historical progression of Vietnam during the late 18th century represents one of its most volatile and complex eras, characterized by the direct confrontation between the Tay Son movement and the restoration

forces of Lord Nguyen Anh. In this context, the success of the Nguyen Dynasty's restoration (1787–1802) was not merely a result of divine mandate or the individual leadership of the monarch; it was intrinsically tied to the support of a loyal military and administrative elite. Among these founding meritorious officials, Marquis Tuyen Trung – Nguyen Van Tuyen emerged as a quintessential figure who dedicated his entire life and fervor to the cause of national unification. However, despite his pivotal roles in critical military campaigns, his life and career have yet to be explored proportionally within mainstream historical narratives and modern scholarship.

The history of reclamation and preservation of the Southern region has always been associated with those who contributed to the expansion and stabilization of the frontiers. According to Huynh Lua (2000), the stability of the Southern region during this period was the result of a persistent process of governance and protection by local officials who served concurrently as military commanders and administrators. Nguyen Van Tuyen, hailing from the land of Tong Son (Lap Vo, Dong Thap), joined Lord Nguyen Anh's ranks during the most arduous days of 1787. Phan Huy Le (2012) argued that the 1787–1802 period was a crucial juncture when the Nguyen forces shifted from a defensive posture to a counter-offensive one, necessitating generals who possessed not only bravery but also a strategic vision regarding the logistical rear and community mobilization.

The contributions of Nguyen Van Tuyen are recorded sporadically in the official chronicles of the Nguyen Dynasty's Historio-graphical Office but are often overshadowed by the prominence of the "Four Pillars" or other illustrious generals. The Historio-graphical Office of the Nguyen Dynasty (2004) in *Dai Nam Liet Truyen* (Biographies of Dai Nam) recognized his merits in major battles at Quy Nhon and Da Nang, particularly highlighting his presence in the elite forces during the

assault on Phu Xuan in 1801. Nevertheless, studies on his role need to be reconsidered more profoundly from the perspective of an "architect" of loyalty and military discipline. As Truong Huu Quynh (2008) pointed out, the strength of Lord Nguyen's army during this period lay in the tight cohesion between families with military traditions and the destiny of the monarchy. The Nguyen Hau clan in Tong Son, pioneered by Nguyen Van Tuyen, serves as a prime example of this "loyalist clan" model (Doan Thanh Dung, 2024).

Beyond military aspects, this study aims to clarify the role of Nguyen Van Tuyen in connecting the potential of the Gia Dinh region with the objective of national restoration. Nguyen Phan Quang (2002) posited that the support of the Southern populace and intelligentsia was the lifeblood that enabled Lord Nguyen Anh to sustain a long-term war against the Tay Son. Through Sino-Nom documents currently preserved by his descendants, this article will demonstrate how Nguyen Van Tuyen mobilized local resources to serve large-scale military operations. The international publication by Thai and Sang (2025) has also suggested approaching this figure through the lenses of governance and historical economics, viewing him as an efficient resource coordinator in the context of warfare.

Conducting this research is imperative to restore Marquis Tuyen Trung – Nguyen Van Tuyen to his rightful position in national history. Simultaneously, the research findings contribute additional scientific data to the education of local historical traditions in Dong Thap province. Clearly understanding his role during the 1787–1802 period not only deepens our insight into the formation of the Nguyen Dynasty but also provides a profound lesson on the dedication and patriotism of ancestors throughout the arduous path of building a unified nation.

## II. MATERIAL AND METHODS

### 2.1. Research Subjects and Scope

The primary subject of this article is the life, military career, and administrative contributions of Marquis Tuyen Trung – Nguyen Van Tuyen during the period from 1787 to 1802. This was a pivotal era associated with the restoration of the Nguyen Dynasty. The geographical scope focuses on the Southern region (formerly known as Gia Dinh) and key battlefields in Central Vietnam, such as Quy Nhon, Phu Yen, and particularly the imperial capital of Phu Xuan.

### 2.2. Materials

This research utilizes a multi-layered system of documentation to ensure comprehensiveness. Firstly, official chronicles of the Nguyen Dynasty, such as *Dai Nam Thuc Luc* (Veritable Records of Dai Nam) and *Dai Nam Liet Truyen* (Biographies of Dai Nam), serve as the formal historical framework (Historio-graphical Office of the Nguyen Dynasty, 2004, 2007). Secondly, original Sino-Nom materials, including two royal ordinances, three imperial decrees, and various certificates currently preserved by the descendants of the Nguyen Hau clan in My An Hung A, Lap Vo district, Dong Thap province, are analyzed. According to Duong To Quoc Thai (2024), these documents represent the most authentic evidence of the promotions and privileges bestowed upon Nguyen Van Tuyen by the court. Furthermore, the study incorporates findings from local scientific conference proceedings and the works of preceding scholars (Doan Thanh Dung, 2024; Duong The Hien, 2017).

### 2.3. Research Methods

The article applies a combination of interdisciplinary research methods from historiography and philology:

*Historical Method:* This is the predominant method used to reconstruct the progression of Nguyen Van Tuyen's career within the broader national history. This method facilitates placing the figure accurately within the socio-political and military context of the late 18th century to objectively evaluate his role (Phan Huy Le, 2012).

*Logical Method:* This method is employed to analyze the causal relationships between Nguyen Van Tuyen's military decisions and the shifting dynamics of the battlefield. It clarifies why he became a vital link within Lord Nguyen Anh's command structure (Tran Trong Kim, 2019).

*Philological and Document Authentication Method:* Given the specific nature of research based on ancient royal ordinances and decrees, this method is applied to decode content and verify seals and the administrative writing styles of the early Nguyen period. Cross-referencing official history with clan records helps fill informational gaps that traditional chronicles may not have detailed (Nguyen Tuan Cuong, 2024).

*Case Study Method:* The research approaches Nguyen Van Tuyen as a representative of the Southern Vietnamese military elite. Following the approach of Thai and Sang (2025), analyzing a prominent individual assists in sketching a general picture of the loyalty and administrative capacity of the meritorious officials during the nation-building process.

*Fieldwork and Survey Method:* The authors conducted direct surveys at the Tomb Complex of Marquis Tuyen Trung and collaborated with clan representatives to collect primary data. According to Dang Hoang Sang (2017), field data reinforces the understanding of the legacy's vitality within local cultural flows. Finally, synthesis and comparative methods are used to assess Nguyen Van Tuyen's stature in correlation with contemporary generals, based on criteria of military achievements and social influence (Truong Huu Quynh, 2008; Institute of History, 2007).

### III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study of Marquis Tuyen Trung – Nguyen Van Tuyen's role in the restoration of the Nguyen Dynasty is situated within a multi-dimensional theoretical paradigm, integrating traditional historiography with modern administrative perspectives.

*Firstly, the Theory of Dynastic Restoration serves as a primary foundation.* In Vietnamese historiography, the concept of "restoration" (trung hung) typically refers to the process of reclaiming power by a ruling clan after a period of interruption. According to Phan Huy Le (2012), the Nguyen Dynasty's restoration was not merely a military conflict to regain territory but also a comprehensive process of restructuring the political system and establishing dynastic legitimacy. In this context, the support of the elite class played a decisive role. Nguyen Van Tuyen is viewed as a quintessential figure of the "Loyalty to the Monarch and Patriotism" model—a core Confucian value that operated flexibly within the practical environment of Southern Vietnam (Tran Trong Kim, 2019).

*Secondly, the Theory of Resource Management in Warfare is employed.* The 15-year restoration process (1787–1802) required the ability to maximize human, financial, and material resources. This study applies the theory of Thai and Sang (2025) regarding efficient resource coordination in historical contexts. Accordingly, the role of generals like Nguyen Van Tuyen was not limited to battlefield command but also encompassed logistical expertise and the mobilization of local populations. This corresponds to the concept of "Collaborative Governance," where local officials acted as intermediaries between the central government and the indigenous lands to ensure the total strength of the dynasty.

*Thirdly, the Theory of Clan Loyalty and Power Networks is analyzed.* Truong Huu Quynh (2008) pointed out that the strength of the Lord Nguyen's forces relied on a

network of military clans with established traditions. Analyzing the Nguyen Hau clan in Tong Son through the perspective of Doan Thanh Dung (2024) helps clarify that loyalty was not only an individual virtue but also a strategic survival and development plan for the clan, intrinsically linked to the national destiny.

*Finally, the research utilizes the Theory of Sovereignty and Frontier Establishment.* Nguyen Phan Quang (2002) posited that the appointment of generals such as Nguyen Van Tuyen to govern border regions like Vinh Thanh or Bien Hoa was a form of establishing the Nguyen Dynasty's de facto sovereignty. The concept of "Administrative Sovereignty" is used to analyze how the court exercised power through the local bureaucratic apparatus (Institute of History, 2007). Nguyen Van Tuyen's presence in strategic positions was the realization of the Nguyen Dynasty's vision of boundaries and sovereignty during the process of restoration and nation-building.

### IV. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

#### 4.1. Early Engagement and Military Role (1787 – 1799)

The military career of Marquis Tuyen Trung – Nguyen Van Tuyen commenced during an exceptionally precarious yet pivotal period for the Nguyen Dynasty's restoration forces. In 1787, following years of arduous exile in Siam, Lord Nguyen Anh decided to return to the country to rebuild his empire, selecting the Gia Dinh region as his strategic base. In this volatile historical context, at Tong Son Islet (present-day My An Hung A Commune, Lap Vo District, Dong Thap Province), Nguyen Van Tuyen officially joined the ranks of the insurgent army. According to the assessment by Doan Thanh Dung (2024), this engagement was not merely an individual choice but marked the birth of a clan absolutely loyal to the nation; Tong Son at that time was a crucial territory, serving as a hub for elite individuals ready to contribute human and material resources to the dynastic restoration. Nguyen Van Tuyen's presence in Lord Nguyen's ranks from the most difficult early days has been documented in official chronicles such as *Dai Nam Liet Truyen* by the Historio-graphical Office of the Nguyen Dynasty (2004) as quintessential evidence of the Nguyen clan's charisma toward the intelligentsia and heroes of the South.

Entering the military path, Nguyen Van Tuyen rapidly demonstrated innate command talent and steadfast bravery on the battlefield. During the period from 1790 to 1799, when the confrontation between the Nguyen and Tay Son armies intensified along the

Central coast, he participated directly in a series of critical military campaigns. Specifically, in key strategic theaters such as Quy Nhon and Da Nang, Nguyen Van Tuyen affirmed his mettle as a courageous and strategic commander. Nguyen Van Luan (2017) pointed out that in the battle of Quy Nhon in 1797, Nguyen Van Tuyen personally commanded elite units to conduct surprise raids on the enemy's defensive systems, causing heavy losses and significantly weakening the morale of the Tay Son army. These victories not only shifted the local battlefield dynamics but also firmly consolidated Lord Nguyen Anh's confidence in the operational capabilities of his Southern sub-commanders.

The importance of Nguyen Van Tuyen within the early Nguyen military hierarchy lay not only in his illustrious martial achievements but also in his flexible military coordination skills. Truong Huu Quynh (2008) argued that the true strength of Lord Nguyen's army during this period was built upon a contingent of experienced and absolutely loyal generals, in which Nguyen Van Tuyen was an indispensable link. His seamless coordination between naval and infantry forces in the Central coastal regions helped the restoration forces capture strategic positions, creating a springboard for subsequent attacks on the imperial capital of Phu Xuan. His promotion in rank and prestige within the army is clearly evidenced by certificates and official documents with seals still preserved today, an invaluable historical source affirming the court's reliance on him (Duong To Quoc Thai, 2024).

From a deeper perspective, Nguyen Van Tuyen's engagement was deeply characterized by the nature of "Loyalty to the Monarch and Patriotism"—a core Confucian value that operated practically and powerfully within the national historical flow. Phan Huy Le (2012) observed that the 1787–1799 period was a time of "trial by fire," where elite individuals like Nguyen Van Tuyen linked their personal and clan destinies with the dynasty's survival. His role during this stage also served as a local resource mobilizer. As Dang Hoang Sang (2017) discussed, it was through his personal prestige and the clan's reputation at Tong Son Islet that Nguyen Van Tuyen mobilized abundant provisions and soldiers, enabling Lord Nguyen's army to maintain long-term combat strength despite limited resources.

Furthermore, the early career of Marquis Tuyen Trung is vivid evidence of the theory of clan power networks and persistent loyalty. His engagement drew the entire Nguyen Hau clan into the cause, transforming Tong Son into a spiritual fortress for the Nguyen house in the heart of Southern Vietnam (Duong The Hien, 2017). Following the approach of Thai and Sang (2025), this engagement should be

analyzed within the framework of effective war management, where individual loyalty was organized and transformed into practical military strength. In summary, Nguyen Van Tuyen's military contributions from 1787 to 1799 created an essential foundation, allowing the Nguyen forces to accumulate sufficient potential to eventually liberate Phu Xuan and unify the country, a fact clearly affirmed by the research of the Institute of History (2007) and Nguyen Phan Quang (2002) when evaluating the role of Southern generals in the restoration.

#### **4.2. Strategic Breakthrough: The Battle of Phu Xuan (1801) and Martial Legacy**

The assault on the imperial capital of Phu Xuan in the year of Tan Dau (1801) is evaluated by historians as one of the most significant and decisive military campaigns in the entire conflict between the Nguyen restoration forces and the Tay Son dynasty. In this volatile historical context, Marquis Tuyen Trung – Nguyen Van Tuyen brilliantly demonstrated the role of a vanguard general through remarkable strategic breakthroughs. Following years of extensive experience in the battlefields of Central Vietnam, he was entrusted by Lord Nguyen Anh with the responsibility of commanding a contingent of elite units, working in close coordination with naval forces to execute a direct assault on the enemy's stronghold. According to records in *Dai Nam Thuc Luc* (National Historio-graphical Office of the Nguyen Dynasty, 2007), this campaign was not merely a display of firepower but a seamless integration of surprise elements, valor, and extremely precise operational coordination among the commanding officers. Nguyen Van Tuyen, with his tactical prowess refined through the fire of battle, directly directed units to execute frontal assaults on Phu Xuan's outer defensive perimeters, creating strategic gaps that allowed Lord Nguyen's main army to liberate the capital with lightning speed.

The martial achievements of Nguyen Van Tuyen in this battle extended beyond mere personal bravery on the battlefield to encompass sharp tactical reasoning and a comprehensive vision. Nguyen Van Luan (2017) deeply analyzed that capturing Phu Xuan required a thorough understanding of the complex riverine terrain and the Tay Son army's dense fortification and fortress system. Nguyen Van Tuyen proved his superior capability in mobilizing firepower and maintaining iron discipline among his subordinates even during the most intense moments under heavy artillery fire. His direct presence at the most "critical points" of the battle not only helped maintain the combat formation but also served as a monumental morale booster for the restoration troops. Truong Huu Quynh (2008) remarked that the victory at Phu Xuan in 1801 served as clear evidence of the exceptional maturity of the

Nguyen military elite, where extraordinary individuals like Nguyen Van Tuyen transformed practical combat experience into decisions that altered the nation's destiny. His contributions to this battle were duly recognized by the court with noble titles, affirming his status as a preeminent meritorious official instrumental in reclaiming the dynasty's ancestral lands.

From a military science perspective, the Battle of Phu Xuan was where Nguyen Van Tuyen effectively implemented theories of inter-service coordination within the practical conditions of early 19th-century Vietnam. According to Thai and Sang (2025), he operated an optimized military human resource management system, maximizing the strength of naval units—the absolute advantage of the Southern army at that time. Successfully breaking through the Tay Son's formidable defensive line at the Tu Dung estuary and advancing into the capital demonstrated his strategic vision in severing the enemy's vital logistical and communication lifelines. Phan Huy Le (2012) asserted that the 1801 Battle of Phu Xuan was the decisive blow that completely dismantled the Tay Son's political-military structure in Central Vietnam, and Nguyen Van Tuyen's imprint on this campaign is undeniable. His total dedication stemmed not only from monarchical loyalty but also from a profound sense of responsibility toward national unification after decades of division.

Furthermore, the glorious victory at Phu Xuan elevated Nguyen Van Tuyen's prestige in the eyes of Emperor Gia Long, leading to a series of privileges and significant administrative and military responsibilities in the subsequent nation-building phase. Duong To Quoc Thai (2024), based on an examination of family ordinances and decrees, pointed out that the material and spiritual rewards bestowed upon him by the court after 1801 were a reaffirmation of the new dynasty's principle of meritocracy and recognition of merit. His military career, intrinsically linked to this battle, forged an ideal model of a talented and loyal general, becoming an enduring source of pride for the Nguyen Hau clan in Tong Son (Doan Thanh Dung, 2024). In summary, as mentioned by the Institute of History (2007) and Nguyen Phan Quang (2002), the role of military commanders like Nguyen Van Tuyen in the Battle of Phu Xuan was a core factor enabling the Nguyen house to re-establish legitimate authority over the entire territory, laying a solid foundation for pacification and nation-building in the first half of the 19th century.

### ***4.3. The Role in Connecting Local Resources and Establishing Dynastic Prestige***

During the restoration process of the Nguyen Dynasty from 1787 to 1802, the role of Marquis Tuyen Trung – Nguyen Van Tuyen extended beyond mere

military achievements to encompass the stature of a strategist in resource mobilization and social stabilization. This contribution is clearly reflected in his ability to serve as an effective "bridge" between the nascent central government of Lord Nguyen Anh and the abundant indigenous resources of the South. According to research by Doan Thanh Dung (2024), in a context where the war demanded continuous supplies of provisions and manpower, Nguyen Van Tuyen skillfully leveraged his personal prestige and the reputation of the Nguyen Hau clan at Tong Son Islet to arouse patriotism and support from local residents. This transformed the lands along the Tien River into "strategic reserves," providing a solid logistical base that enabled the Nguyen army to maintain endurance during the most intense periods of confrontation.

The nature of resource mobilization under Nguyen Van Tuyen's coordination was deeply voluntary and based on a foundation of trust rather than coercion. Evidence from the system of seals, official documents, and certificates preserved by his family demonstrates a systematic and transparent food mobilization process (Duong To Quoc Thai, 2024). This was a key factor that helped the Lord Nguyen administration build a stable rear. Phan Huy Le (2012) once observed that the Nguyen Dynasty's success in controlling Gia Dinh and neighboring areas was largely due to a contingent of local officials—those who not only understood the psychology and customs but also had the capacity to transform personal prestige into dynastic strength. Nguyen Van Tuyen was a quintessential embodiment of this elite class, who performed administrative responsibilities from the grassroots level in an exemplary manner.

Viewed through the lens of modern management theory, Nguyen Van Tuyen's role corresponds to the "Collaborative Governance" model. Thai and Sang (2025) argue that by both enforcing court laws and directly caring for and protecting the productive lives of the peasantry, he minimized social conflicts in newly liberated areas. His presence in key localities was intended not only to establish military order but also to reconstruct socio-economic activities, creating a stable and reliable rear environment for the frontline. Nguyen Phan Quang (2002) also emphasized that the legitimacy of a new dynasty is established based on public trust, and meritorious officials like Nguyen Van Tuyen served as "political ambassadors" who brought the values of the Nguyen house deep into every hamlet.

Furthermore, the integrity and strict military discipline maintained by Nguyen Van Tuyen contributed to building the image of a righteous restoration force in the eyes of the people. Amidst the chaos of the time, his protection of the lives and property of the populace during maneuvers created a

sharp contrast with other forces. This not only consolidated his personal prestige but also spread the soft power of the Nguyen Dynasty across the Southwestern region. Truong Huu Quynh (2008) pointed out that entrusting prestigious generals with the management of frontier regions helped the court quickly gain control over vital trade routes and estuaries, laying the groundwork for the subsequent frontier administrative system.

The influence of Nguyen Van Tuyen is enduring and possesses a legacy character. Fieldwork conducted by Dang Hoang Sang (2017) and Duong The Hien (2017) has affirmed that the community's respect for him has become a part of the local cultural identity in Dong Thap. This admiration is not only for a military commander but also for an official who was close to and loved the people. In summary, the career of Marquis Tuyen Trung during this period is a vivid testament to the process of "winning the hearts and minds of the people," creating a solid prerequisite for national unification and the long-term stability of the dynasty under Emperor Gia Long (Institute of History, 2007). His political and social governance contributions affirmed the status of a founding meritorious official with far-reaching vision.

## V. CONCLUSION

The study of Marquis Tuyen Trung – Nguyen Van Tuyen's role during the restoration of the Nguyen Dynasty (1787–1802) provides a profound and comprehensive insight into a prominent historical figure of the Southern region. By cross-referencing official chronicles with clan Sino-Nom documentation, this research affirms that Nguyen Van Tuyen's engagement at Tong Son Islet in 1787 was not merely an individual act but the catalyst for a robust network of clan-based loyalty. According to Doan Thanh Dung (2024), this total dedication established an enduring spiritual value system, enabling the Nguyen Hau clan to become a vital pillar of support for Lord Nguyen Anh during the most critical periods of history.

The research findings highlight Nguyen Van Tuyen's exceptional martial legacy, particularly in the 1801 campaign to liberate Phu Xuan. With sharp tactical reasoning and flexible military coordination, he contributed directly to dismantling the enemy's key defensive lines. Phan Huy Le (2012) and Truong Huu Quynh (2008) both agree that the success of the restoration depended significantly on a cadre of military commanders with practical combat expertise and strategic vision, such as Marquis Tuyen Trung. Furthermore, his role in mobilizing local resources in Vinh Thanh demonstrates the theory of effective war management, where military strength was consolidated

based on the trust and support of the populace (Thai & Sang, 2025).

Regarding heritage, Nguyen Van Tuyen's reputation exists not only in historical records but also vividly within the community cultural life of Dong Thap province. The preserved royal ordinances and decrees serve as invaluable historical sources for understanding the administrative apparatus and reward systems of the early Nguyen period (Duong To Quoc Thai, 2024). The enduring veneration by the people over centuries has transformed his name into a significant "cultural-sovereignty landmark" in the Southwestern frontier. Dang Hoang Sang (2017) asserts that clarifying Nguyen Van Tuyen's merits holds profound traditional educational significance, helping younger generations foster pride in their ancestors' contributions to nation-building.

In summary, Marquis Tuyen Trung – Nguyen Van Tuyen is a quintessential model of the Southern military elite who laid the groundwork for the unification and stability of Vietnam in the early 19th century. The assessments by the Institute of History (2007) and Nguyen Phan Quang (2002) concerning the role of Southern meritorious officials are once again clearly evidenced through this case. This study not only contributes to historical theory but also suggests practical solutions for preserving the Nguyen Van Tuyen tomb complex in association with local cultural tourism development. As Duong The Hien (2017) emphasized, restoring the rightful status of historical figures such as Marquis Tuyen Trung is a practical action to enrich the nation's cultural treasury.

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