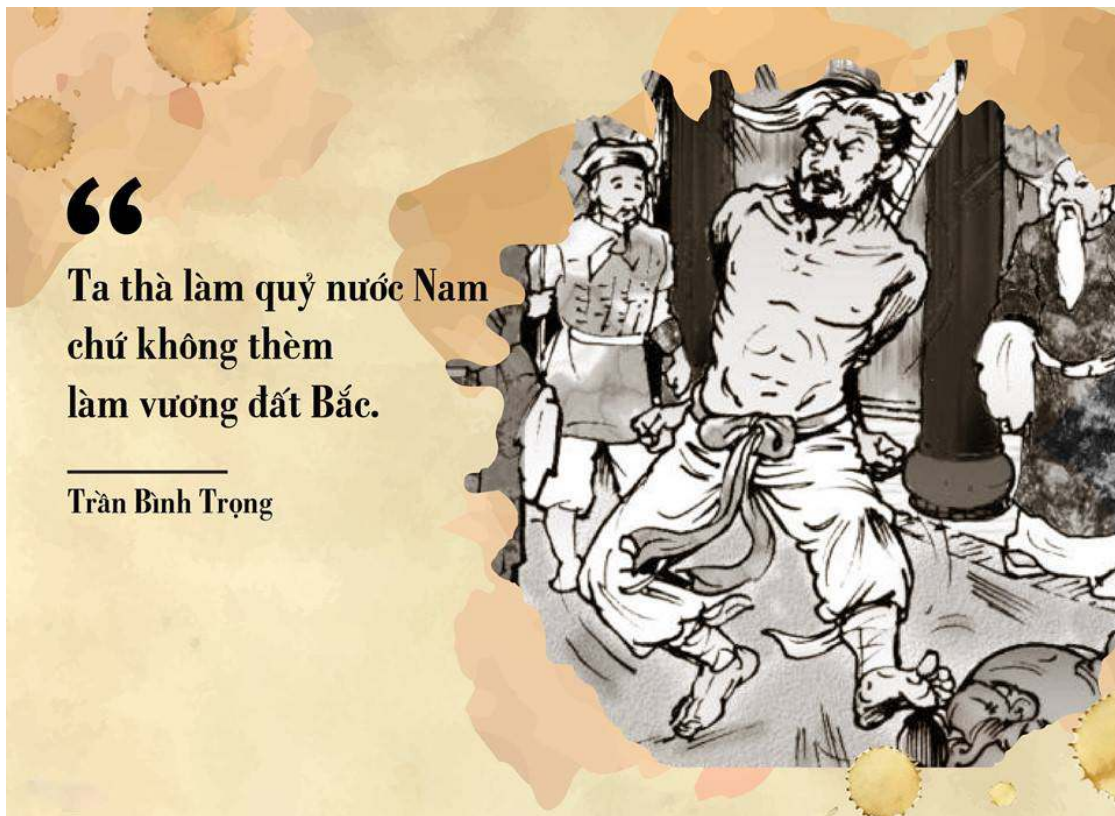


## THE HEROIC SPIRIT OF THE RENOWNED GENERAL TRAN BINH TRONG

Throughout the history of struggle and defense of the nation, from the time of Hung Kings, An Duong Vuong to the period of Northern Domination, to the era of building an independent feudal state spanning the dynasties of Ngo-Dinh-Ancient Le, Ly, Tran, Later Le, Tay Son, to the Nguyen dynasty... our country has produced many national heroes who sacrificed themselves for the nation, bravely fought against foreign invaders. The history of resisting foreign invasion of our nation under the Tran dynasty recorded our army defeating the powerful Mongol – Yuan invaders 3 times, and in those resistance campaigns, there emerged talents who brought glory to the spirit of the Vietnamese people, among them was the famous general Tran Binh Trong – who elevated the heroic spirit with his famous quote: *“Ta thà làm quý nước Nam, chứ không thềm làm vương đất Bắc!”*



## **1. A brief overview of Tran Binh Trong's background:**

Tran Binh Trong was born in the year of Kỷ Mùi (1259) in Bao Thai commune, Thanh Liem district (Ha Nam), into the Le family lineage. Due to his family's significant contributions to the Tran dynasty, he was granted noble status. He belonged to the lineage of Le Hoan, originally from Tho Xuan district, Thanh Hoa province. His father, the renowned general Le Tan, served under two Trần kings, Trần Thái Tông and Trần Thánh Tông. Due to his merits in assisting King Thái Tông during the resistance against the Mongol invasion in 1258, he was granted noble status by the king and his name was changed to Le Phu Tran, along with the title of Bao Nghia Hau (later, he was given in marriage to Princess Ly Chieu Hoang of the Ly dynasty).

From a young age, Tran Binh Trong received careful education and upbringing from his father. As he grew up, he displayed a noble appearance, surpassing intelligence, and excelled in both literary and martial arts, quickly becoming a military leader of the Tran dynasty. Later, he was bestowed the noble title of Bao Nghia Vuong by the king. Tran Binh Trong's wife was Princess Thuy Bao. Their daughter, Chieu Hien Hoang Thai Hau, became the wife of King Tran Anh Tong and the mother of Tran Minh Tong, the fifth king of the Tran dynasty.

## **2. Tran Binh Trong's integrity during the second Mongol invasion (1285):**

A. The Mongol - Yuan army was determined to conquer Dai Viet after the first failed invasion in 1258. In 1271, Kublai Khan established the Yuan dynasty after conquering Southern Song, and by 1279, all of China fell under the control of the Mongol forces. Seeking revenge for the previous failed invasion of Dai Viet in 1258, at the end of 1284, Kublai Khan mobilized a large and powerful force, comprising over 500,000 troops, including renowned Mongol generals such as Ariq Qaya, O Ma Ni, Toa Do, and appointed his ninth son Toghan (also known as Prince Tranh Nam Vuong Thoat Hoan) to command the invasion of Dai Viet for the second time. This invasion featured a significantly larger army compared to the first one, coupled with extreme brutality and ferocity at its highest level.

In January 1285, fifty thousand Mongol-Yuan troops led by Prince Tranh Nam Vuong Thoat Hoan divided into two wings to attack Dai Viet. The first wing, commanded by Bolqadar, advanced along the Khau On route (now On Chau, Lang Son), while the second wing, led by Satartai and Ly Bang Hien, moved along the Cap Linh mountain route (from Loc Binh, Lang Son province to Son Dong, Bac Giang province today). Thoat Hoan's main force followed behind the second wing

of Satartai and Ly Bang Hien to direct the attack. This was the primary expeditionary force commanded by Thoat Hoan and his deputy Ariq Qaya.

In addition to the primary expeditionary force, there were two other Mongol-Yuan expeditions advancing towards Dai Viet from the northwest and Chiem Thanh. The second expedition consisted of over 1,000 Mongol troops and troops from Yunnan led by General Nasirud Din, advancing from Yunnan into Dai Viet through the Tuyen Quang region towards the capital Thang Long. The third expedition was fighting in Chiem Thanh, commanded by Toa Do, advancing to attack Dai Viet from the south. This expedition started later than the two wings mentioned above, around March 1285. Thus, the three Mongol-Yuan expeditions advancing towards Thang Long from the northwest, northeast, and south formed three formidable pincers with tremendous strength, besieging Dai Viet.

The Mongol-Yuan expeditions were extremely combative, quickly gaining absolute advantage over Dai Viet, which had fewer troops. After initial defeats, the overall commander of the Tran dynasty army, Hung Dao Vuong Tran Quoc Tuan, decided to retreat the army to defend Van Kiep (now in the Van Yen region, Chi Linh, Hai Duong). Later, the Dai Viet army retreated to Thang Long but could not withstand the massive onslaught of the enemy's attack.

In the face of the invasion by the Mongol-Yuan army, our Tran dynasty king actively prepared for resistance. Through the Binh Than Conference (1282) and the Dien Hong Conference (1285), the Tran people demonstrated the spirit of "Sat That", determined to fight to the end with the enemy, creating a powerful East Asian prestige, with tremendous encouragement and displaying the sky-high morale of the patriotic spirit against foreign aggression under the Tran dynasty.

Faced with the aggressive advance of the Mongol-Yuan army, to avoid the initial strength of the enemy and await the opportunity for counterattack, the Tran court implemented the policy of "empty garden, no empty house", strategically withdrawing and dispersing the royal court to Thien Truong (Nam Dinh) and Truong Yen (Ninh Binh). This was one of the correct strategies suitable for the country's situation at that time that the Tran dynasty implemented to protect the country and its people.

When Hung Dao Vuong decided to withdraw from Thang Long and retreat to Thien Truong, Tran Binh Trong was entrusted by Hung Dao Vuong and the two Tran kings (Tran Thanh Tong, Tran Nhan Tong) with the important task of holding

the Da Mac - Thien Mac region, blocking and detaining the Yuan army to ensure the safe and secret withdrawal of the resistance army's command, leaving no trace behind. This was an extremely difficult task, involving even sacrificing lives, but Tran Binh Trong still requested to lead troops to the battlefield to support the country.

**B. Tran Binh Trong organized the defense against the enemy in the Thien Mac region, displaying the noble character of a national hero devoted to the country:**

To protect the safe retreat route of King Tran and the Prime Minister, Tran Binh Trong was tasked with commanding and organizing the defense against the enemy at Thien Mac, a strategically important location along the water route in the Thien Mac region.

The Thien Mac area (or Da Mac, Man Tru now located in Duy Tien district, Ha Nam province) is a vast silted area south of the Red River, where the silted water of the Red River divides into two branches surrounding the Thien Mac islet. This is the location chosen by Tran Binh Trong to set up his defense, blocking the enemy's advance.

After the Mong-Nguyen army advanced into Thang Long, they found themselves in a situation of "an empty garden with no house." Thoat Hoan hastily ordered O Ma Nhi to chase after King Tran Thanh Tong and King Nhan Tong who were on their way down to Thien Truong. Upon reaching Thien Mac, the Mong-Nguyen army encountered the resistance of Tran Binh Trong's troops. A fierce battle ensued between the Dai Viet people and the invading Mong-Nguyen army, aimed at prolonging the pursuit time of the Mong-Nguyen forces. Ultimately, with the reinforcement of the Mong-Nguyen troops, the Thien Mac defensive position was breached. Tran Binh Trong fell into the hands of the enemy. Despite the defeat, with the battle at Thien Mac, Tran Binh Trong contributed to protecting the safety of the two Tran kings. From this point on, the Mong-Nguyen army completely lost track of the retreat route of the Tran dynasty.

When captured by the enemy and subjected to torture, Tran Binh Trong maintained his dignity. He went on a hunger strike and remained silent in the face of enemy interrogation about our military situation. The enemy general recognized him as a brave and dignified warrior, so he tried to tempt and bribe him, promising him titles in the Mong-Nguyen court. However, Tran Binh Trong replied as follows: ***“Ta thà làm ma nước Nam, chứ không thềm làm vương đất Bắc”***.

The Mong- Nguyen invaders, unable to shake the steadfast and resolute heart of Tran Binh Trong, murdered him on February 26, 1285, in front of the admiration of Tran's generals and the people of Dai Viet.

After the victory in the second war against the Mong- Nguyen invaders, out of compassion for his noble spirit, four years after Tran Binh Trong's death, during the "promotion of generals" in April 1289, under the reign of King Tran Nhan Tong, concurrently with the renowned general Tran Hung Dao being elevated to "Great Duke," Tran Binh Trong was also posthumously honored, advancing from "Marquis" to "Duke," becoming "Duke Bao Nghia." The Trần dynasty's posthumous promotion of Tran Binh Trong to the rank of Duke, the highest rank among the marquis, demonstrated that such an elevation was well-deserved for his accomplishments and fierce sacrifices for the nation of Dai Viet.

Tran Binh Trong is a shining example for future generations to follow. He contributed significantly to the resistance against the Mongol- Nguyen invasion in the second campaign of 1285 and sacrificed himself for the homeland. His indomitable spirit and courage are epitomized in his famous words: "I would rather be a demon of the Southern land than a lord of the Northern land." This immortal saying has been etched into the memory of the Dai Viet people and has become a symbol of the national spirit against foreign aggression. Tran Binh Trong's unwavering spirit and fiery death ignited the flames of hatred against the invaders among all Dai Viet people during the Tran dynasty, contributing to the glorious victory over the Mongol- Nguyen invaders in the nation's history. He forever remains a beacon of indomitable spirit in the face of all power, uncorrupted by wealth and fame, ready to sacrifice his life for the homeland.

*“Trần Bình Trọng là tôi trung,  
Thà làm Nam quý, chẳng lòng Bắc vương”*

Tran Binh Trong is one of the outstanding heroes shining brightly in the golden annals of national history.

