

EMPEROR LE THANH-TONG (1448-1497)

MERCHANTS

Twenty-four hours a day they're on the go,
Importing ship-loads, stuffing their godowns full.

Their snake-cold hearts can simulate a glow,
Their viper-tongues exude the smoothest bull
As, country-wide, they sell the simple short.

But cheats are cheats, no matter where or when;
And though we laugh at monkeys of their sort,
I see no joke in monkeys cheating men.

(Translated from the Vietnamese by Graeme Wilson)

THAI THUAN (c. 1475)

RIVER LANDING

Blue cooking-smokes obscure the sagging thatch
Of the few crude dwellings beyond that landing-plank
Where a single boat, bound down-stream, briefly lolls.

Three of the rat-like children crouched to catch
Crabs in the mud-flats of the river-bank
Carry banana-leaves as parasols.

(Translated from the Vietnamese by Graeme Wilson)