

The Position of Cochinchina (Vietnam) in the Trade with Portugal in the XVI-XVII Period



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ABSTRACT: The sixteenth century is considered the beginning time of trade activities between Vietnam and Western countries after great geographical discoveries in the world, in which Portugal was the pioneer country to establish trade relations with Vietnam. Cochinchina, with many favourable factors in terms of human, geography, and goods, was the place to attract Portugal on the way of exchange and establishment of Intra - Asian marine trade network. Thus, what factors led Cochinchina to a strategic position in this trade network, and Portugal had come here to trade with specific characteristics are, and the consequences of this trade process are, is the purpose of this article. Based on analyzing objective and subjective factors, generalizing and systematizing commercial activities between Cochinchina and Portugal, the author provides objective assessments of the role of Cochinchina in the voyage to The East of the Western countries in the contemporary time.

KEYWORDS: Portugal, Cochinchina, Trade, Vietnam

I. THE FACTORS IMPACTING ON TRADE OF COCHINCHINA IN THE XVI-XVII CENTURY

Firstly, regarding international, it is a change in the global trade context, the formation of the East-West maritime network that Vietnam has chosen as a geostrategic location. The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries are considered the period of the "age of commerce" and the first stage of the connection of world trade broadly and systematically. A long time ago, maritime trade routes in the region and across the continents were conducted by the Malays, Chinese, Indians, and Arabs in the middle Ages. Nonetheless, it is until after the critical discoveries of the late 15th century and early 16th century, with the development of the capitalist economy of Western Europe, the maritime trade routes were truly international and global.

At this time, the countries of Western Europe and the Atlantic Ocean, with the advantage of their fleets, stepped up their search for lands and trading markets, reaching out to continents such as Asia, America, Africa, Australia... Along with that was the Christian mission of the Roman Church. Since the Treaty of Tordesillas (1494), the stipulation of the regional division influenced on a global scale, which led to the shape of two main transoceanic international trade routes: Europe - Africa - America triangle and Europe-Asia route, creating the Asian trading system. In the Pacific Ocean region, there are maritime trade routes that intersect. The West-East line lies on the Eurasian route, from India through the Strait of Malacca, up to Macao (China), across Manila (Philippines), down to Batavia (Indonesia). The North-South axis connects East Asia and Southeast Asia countries, from Japan crossing the coast of China, Taiwan island, Vietnam to Siam (Thailand), Malaysia, Indonesia (Indonesia).

Secondly, at the same time, Vietnam was divided into two countries, Tonkin and Cochinchina, where the Asia-Pacific trade routes met. Vietnam did not stand outside the general situation and historical trend, the external international influences combined with the internal socio-economic changes created the flourishing of the coastal port areas of both regions, of which Cochinchina was a typical representation.

The change in the socio-economic aspect of Cochinchina was driven by the sensitive and flexible foreign trade policy of the Nguyen Lords, which made Portugal want to penetrate the coastal and inland trading market of Dang Trong.

Nguyen Lord expanded foreign trade with Western countries to make profits; as evidenced by the 16th century, Nguyen Lord conducted the opening to foreign trade with the target of economic and military development. G. Tabule, in his notes on the "India and Indochina Company", commented: "The Lords of Cochinchina and Tonkin satisfied when witnessing Europeans coming to their countries to trade" (Tabule, 1981). Nguyen Hoang Lord also actively sent letters to the heads of East India companies, specifically in a letter to the Governor-General of Batavia, Nguyen Lord wrote: "I earnestly hope that people will come to trade in the ports of my country. If Sir do not mind, please let people come to the country to do commercial activities. That would make me feel good as well as I do business with other countries" (Thanh, 1961). The positive attitude of Nguyen Lord proved that the Lords realized the benefits of the expansion of trade relations with the West in many aspects of the country and the feudal court. The business "one cost brings ten thousand profit" is not only attractive to the people but also feudal mandarins. Author C.B.

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Maybon commented: “*The Lords made great profits in these exchanges, not only because they received beautiful gifts and took for themselves the most precious part of the goods carried by the ships but also because ships entering and leaving the port were heavily taxed*” (Maybon, 2011).

Nguyen Lord took advantage of foreign trade activities to serve political purposes and strengthen military power. In the early period, Nguyen Lord aimed to establish a commercial relationship, but at the starting of the 17th century, when the Trinh - Nguyen civil war was tense, the governments of both sides sought to attract aid from outside. Lord Nguyen ordered weapons with merchants who came to trade with Vietnam. Therefore, Portuguese merchants brought to sell weapons and materials needed for war such as matches, birthstones, zinc, copper, guns... They also dispatched technicians to assist Lord Nguyen to make weapons.

Nguyen Lord also wanted to employ foreign trade as a lever for economic development, the state's permission to expand trade relations with other countries and contact with capitalism stimulated domestic trade development, creating new vitality for trading activities of Vietnam in general and Cochinchina in particular. The foreign trade improvement created favourable conditions for promoting domestic economic sectors such as weaving, silk-making, and sugar-making... The trade and exchange with foreigners also accelerated the circulation of goods in the country, impulsing commercial activities and increasing capital and experience for Vietnamese merchants.

In terms of mechanics, the goods Western merchants bring are mainly those serving the aristocracy, feudal mandarins, and weapons. So they did not disrupt the domestic goods system but created a stimulus for production activities in Cochinchina, mainly for exports such as silk and sugar. While the advantage of Tonkin was raw silk, in Cochinchina, many kinds of sugar were exported. According to Li Tana's statistics, the amount of sugar originating from Cochinchina exported to Japan in 1636 was very large: 36,130 kg of white sugar, 72,500 lung sugar, 525 kg of rock sugar (Tana, 1999).

Obviously, the foreign trade activities have contributed significantly to the development of the economy in general and the production of goods in particular. The expansion of foreign trade relations has impeded the development of some handicrafts in the country, especially silk-making, silk-weaving, sugar-making... Natural products in the country also were sold at a higher value. The prosperity of the economy made handicraft and agricultural production in the country decreasing self-sufficient and backward. Trade with the West has made the domestic market vibrant, the activities in cities and ports have been prosperous, which gradually changed to a new face than before.

Compared to Cochinchina, the implementation of the foreign trade policy of Cochinchina was quite flexible. The government has used foreign trade as leverage, raising economic strength and national potential. Li Tana said: “*Foreign trade has become a decisive factor in the development of Cochinchina. Except for commerce, nothing could help the Nguyens quickly build this land with poor human resources to cope with the land (mentioned to Cochinchina) that was double and triple potential in all aspects compared to that of Cochinchina. For other Southeast Asian countries, foreign trade could only be a matter of getting rich, but for Cochinchina in the beginning, it was a matter of life and death*” (Tana, 1999).

These objective and subjective factors facilitated and promoted foreign trade relations between Cochinchina and Western countries, including Portugal.

II. COCHINCHINA IN COMMERCIAL ACTIVITIES WITH PORTUGAL

After building a trading network in Asia, specifically at Goa in India (1510), Malacca (1511), Malaya, Indonesia, China and Japan, the Portuguese came to Cochinchina. The Portuguese created a trading system throughout Asia, which aimed to create a powerful trading network in the sixteenth century, leading to a great foundation for trade between the East and the West. Vietnam is one of the trading ports that is attractive a significant concern from Portugal because Vietnam is a lifeline in the trade penetration of mainland Southeast Asia.

The Portuguese maritime trade route from Malacca to China and Japan was close to the coast of Vietnam. Two main places traders often chose to stop were Con Dao and Cu Lao Cham to get fresh water and rest for a few days before continuing the journey. The Portuguese arrived at Cu Lao Cham around 1516, and *then an official "discovery" with Cochinchina was made in 1523* (Maybon, 1972). They move along the monsoon time from March to September when the wind blows from south to north and from September to December when the wind blows from North to south.

The Portuguese were present in Vietnam when the Vietnamese feudal government was divided into three forces: the Mac Dynasty, the Le King and the Trinh Lord. Therefore, although the Portuguese came to the North in 1523, the merchants did not have the conditions to contact and build trade relations with the feudal government of Vietnam. This could be explained by the fact that Vietnam did not have a strong centralized state to establish official relations with the outside world.

Although not officially established, but according to Birdwood, the Portuguese began trading activities with Cochinchina around 1540, until Nguyen Hoang Lord left the North to the South (1558), Nguyen Hoang Lord needed money and weapons to strengthen his forces, so the Lord allowed the Portuguese to trade in Cochinchina officially. Specifically, Portuguese traders from Macao or Nam Duong came to Hoi An in December or January to sell and buy goods such as silk, pepper, precious wood from Chinese or Japanese agents in Hoi An and then turned to the above bases (Macau, Indonesia). During the trading time, Portugal did not set up any trading post, but they desired to monopolize trade with our country. The evidence could be shown through they

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tried to satisfy Lord Nguyen by regularly sending gifts and asking the Lord not to do business with the Dutch, however, their target was failed (Vu, 1988).

In 1584, many Portuguese lived in Cochinchina, but the trade depended on the relationship between Macao and Japan. On the Portuguese side, trade with Cochinchina became important from 1640, when they reduced their trade with Japan and turned to Southeast Asia. On the Nguyen Lord's side, trade with Portugal only had real meaning when there was a war with Trinh Lord because cannons were the most critical commodity in exchange with the two sides. According to Boxer, Nguyen Lord was very worried about how to get guns from Bocarro's famous gun foundry in Macao. This factory operated from 1627 to 1680 and produced weapons considered the finest bronze gun in the East (Tana, 1999).

The foundry in Macao was established at the time of the war between Nguyen Lord and Trinh Lord (1627). Copper and steel cannons cast in Macao had the available market as two big customers, namely Cochinchina and Tonkin. The goods carried by the Portuguese from Cochinchina *were high-quality and cheap gold silk, some aloeswood, although very rare, and a few benzoin...* That were local products and a large amount of copper brought here by the Japanese, according to Antonio Bocarro - India's chief national secretary (Tana, 1999). Hoi An was the center of concentration and distribution of goods. Hoi An exported several local products, led by aloeswood and gold. Aloeswood is a precious oil described as follows: "*Aloeswood is black, oily and costs 50 cruzados a catty in the Portuguese while at the place of production it is worth as much as silver, how many aloeswood is the same amount of silver*" (Tana, 1999). Portuguese traders did not come to Vietnam on behalf of any company or come to reside or open merchant ports, instead of through intermediaries to collect goods or trade. They bought many cheap goods in Vietnam and sold them in European countries.

Besides, knowing that the Nguyen Lord needed weapons to fight the Trinh Lord, they brought guns, saltpetre, zinc, copper... with technicians to trade with Cochinchina. A worker named Joao da Cruz taught Nguyen Lord the technique of gun casting and opened a gun foundry in Cochinchina in 1631. As a result, the Portuguese were respected and favoured by the Nguyen lords. A British merchant, called Bowyear, came to Cochinchina in 1695, met Minh Vuong Lord and was also led by the Lord to "*see the cannons inside the palace to know if the company could supply such guns. Those are ancient cannons that shoot bullets weighing 7 to 8 livre*" (Maybon, 2011). Cochinchina had a gun foundry and paid much attention to asking the West to buy guns made the Cochinchine army, although not as numerous as the Tonkinese army, to be considered superior in terms of weaponry especially was the cannon. Therefore, in the battles with Tonkin, although Trinh Lord had the support of the Netherlands, Cochinchina still won the victory in 1642 and 1643.

By helping for Nguyen Lord, the Portuguese were partly favoured by The Lord by accepting the construction of business establishments in Hoi An, such as building streets and warehouses, but they did not.

After conducting regular trade in Hoi An, the Portuguese developed into Tonkin, but the results were not as desired due to the competition with the Dutch and British here.

Begin the early seventeenth century, to avoid being dependent on a trading partner, while the Portuguese gradually weakened and the Dutch, with the strength of the East India Company and emerging maritime potential, Nguyen Lord opened the door for the Dutch to trade. The Portuguese gradually lost their monopoly in Cochinchina. Not only in Cochinchina, the trading network that the Portuguese established in India, Japan, China, Malacca... also gradually declined in the second half of the seventeenth century. Finally, the Portuguese withdrew from Vietnam to make way for Britain, the Netherlands, and France later.

Through the commercial activities between Portugal with Cochinchina in the 16th - 17th centuries, it can be seen that *Vietnam participated in a network of maritime trade with Intra-Asia and the West since the Middle Ages*. The East Sea has been recognized by Western merchants as the lifeline in the maritime trade from South Asia to North Asia. This route is considered a short and safe distance because this is a closed sea with small islands to supply food, fresh water and firewood. The sea belonging to Cochinchina soon participated in a continuous trade network from West to East, North to South.

Nguyen Lord established a trade relationship with Portugal, leading to a new trading system between Vietnam and new trading partners such as Portugal, the Netherlands, England, France,... instead of traditional partners like China, Siam, Japan... Through Western merchants, goods from other Southeast Asian countries can also exchange and trade in Vietnam.

With the presence of Portuguese merchants, Nguyen Lord was flexible in policies, taking advantage of foreign trade as a lever for economic development. This factor is objective and affects the subjective because Lord Nguyen could not make a policy by himself without impacts from Western factors, at the time when the Lords were still unfamiliar with the newly reclaimed land. The expansion of foreign trade impeded domestic handicraft development and raised the prices of Vietnam's forest and local products, a harmonious combination of mountains and sea that Cochinchina took. Thanks to the sea, foreign merchants can access the port, based on forest products, they can attract ships to buy goods, so this relationship is the mutual relationship between the two factors of sea and mountant, which Vietnam has always been considered a geostrategic location.

Although Portugal got permission from Nguyen Lord to build trading ports, they did not do. This is explained because Portugal did not have enough human force due to a small population (1.5 million people in the 17th century) while they also had to guard other existing trading places such as Macao (China), Kyushu (Japan), Cochin (India), Goa (India), Malacca... Therefore Cochinchina was considered a transit station in the maritime trade voyage, where the Portuguese came to buy, sell and supply

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food according to the monsoon time. Vietnam's Cham Islands also contributed to the maritime trade, serving as a satellite for Hoi An to integrate into the global trading network. Cu Lao Cham is not a Sea Port, or a Littoral Port, or Estuary Port, but Cu Lao Cham is first of all "*a resting place for boats and a place where transshipment of import and export goods (aloeswood). Cu Lao Cham is attached to Cua Dai (Dai Chiem Haikou) and other berths along the coastal island (Ly Son of Quang Ngai) and is an outpost for a coastal port to transport goods inland and export goods abroad*" (Lam, 2007).

Cochinchina was not an independent subject in trade with Portugal but constantly connected to other trading posts throughout Asia because Cochinchina was a monsoon-dependent trading point and depended on the maritime trade route from Malacca to Japan. The Portuguese goods collected by the Portuguese in Cochinchina were brought to the host country but also sold to Japan, the weapons and ammunition brought in were guns cast from Japan. When the Portuguese trading system in Asia developed enormously in the East, it was time when trade in Cochinchina was thriving and spirited, and Cochinchina was considered an important link in that trade relationship, so it was not outside the general trend of the region.

Although trade activities between Portugal and Cochinchina only took place from the beginning of the sixteenth century until the second half of the seventeenth century, at any time in history, or any object related to Vietnam, Cochinchina was still considered a key position in the voyage to the East of Western countries in the medieval period.

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