

VIETNAM – JAPAN RELATIONSHIP A VIEW FROM THE SEA SPACE

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Abstract: For many Asian countries, the sea and cultural-economical space of the sea have always played an important role in the development process, and contribute to creating socio-cultural features of that country. Through the historical-cultural approach, view from the sea and area studies, the paper tries to clarify the development process of Vietnam-Japan relationship with specific features of each period and at the same time gives explanations for the interaction between the sea and the land, clarifying the role of the sea in the development process of each country.

Key words: Vietnam, Japan, sea, sea cultural space.

1. The sea and sea cultural space

Thinking of Japan, a country, a culture which is in the Northeast Asia, it is usually considered that Japan is an island-country. Moreover, when talking about the role of island-country of Japan (as a member of the oriental society), it is obvious that it is not enough if we mention only its geographic position, latitude and altitude. It is also important to address cultural structure and historical features of Japan in its continuous movement and changes. As such, classification of Japan as an oriental country implies not only its geographic position and natural conditions but also the impact of natural environment on its historical and cultural development. On the other hand, it is important to understand Japan in the historical space, cultural and political situation of the region.⁽¹⁾

In fact, not only in Japan, in Northeast as well as in Southeast Asia there are islands and archipelagos with their long history. In the middle age, to the South of Japan there was Kingdoms of *Hokuzan*, *Chuzan*, and

Nanzan which belonged to Ryukyu⁽²⁾. In addition, together with Kuril islands in the North (which borders the Far East) and Ogasawara archipelago to the East, to the South of Japan there are also big islands such as Taiwan and Hainan, etc. These islands and archipelagos have created an area of unique sea culture in the Asia. In order to get a deep insight into the history and culture of Vietnam and Japan in the context of culture and politics in East Asia, it is important for us to acquire new knowledge of the sea, clarifying the role of culture and people living by the sea from the disciplinary and intersectoral perspective and approach.

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(1) Tadao Umesao (2007), *An Ecological View of History: Japanese Civilization in the World Context*, World Publishing House, Hanoi, p.88.

(2) Nguyen Van Kim (2003), *The Relationship between Japan and Southeast Asia during the 15th – 17th Centuries*, Hanoi National University Publishing House, Hanoi, pp.61-102.

Situated offshore, to the East of Asia, during its development history, Japan was closely related to the common historical and cultural development steps in the region, and at the same time, Japan had its unique cultural identity with its unique local imprints. From prehistoric time, through different ways of communication (most often by the way of sea), Japan had quite a lot of cultural exchange with Northeast Asia, Southeast Asia and other far away regions. Those cultural values had integrated with the local culture, creating a general, and at the same time distinctive culture of this island-country.

Based on archeological and palaeontology research results, many scientists believed that in the Paleolithic time residents from different other regions in Asia moved to Japan and settled here. At the time of Pleistocene, the sea level was about 120 meters-130 meters lower than that of today, Japan was still a part connected to Asia. At the time of the late Pleistocene, which was about 18,000-12,000 years ago, Japan gradually separated from Asia and at the time of Holocene, it became a separate archipelago with the main islands being Hokkaido, Honshu, Shikoku and Kyushu.⁽³⁾

As an inevitable consequence of the time when ice melted down, between the Japanese archipelago and Asia a channel was formed which was called Japanese sea (*Nihon kai*), separating the archipelago with the mainland. Still, there are a number of islands in that channel, playing the role of a bridge, helping Japanese keep the connections with neighboring communities and countries in East Asia over many

centuries. These relationships took place in both axis – East-West and North-South. During many centuries, though they had to face with a lot of difficulties from the sea, Japanese people managed to take advantages of the islands to go to China. Vice versa, residents from Siberia, North of China and Korea also regularly came to Japan. Similarly, residents of Ryukyu archipelago and Taiwan had multidimensional relationship with countries in Northeast Asia and Southeast Asia.⁽⁴⁾

From an ecological perspective, professor Tadao Umesao has put forward an “untraditional viewpoint” of the position and historical features of Japan. Holding the viewpoint that the world is created in the form of an ellipse, consisting of two regions - “Region 1” and “Regions 2”. Tadao Umesao believes in Asia, Region 1 is smaller, existing only around the Eastern border and Western border of the ellipse, which means only a very small proportion, while Region 2 makes up most of that ellipse. As such, ecological conditions of the Eastern border (Chinese sea or Japan) and Western border (consisting of the Western countries) of Asia-Europe are quite similar. In the center of the land, the Region 2 is the “grass sea”, territories, deserts and at the same time it is also the place where great empires, ancient cultures such as China, India, Ottoman, Russia, etc. were formed. Meanwhile, residents of Region 1, which were considered to be

⁽³⁾ C. Melvin Aikens and Takayasu Higuchi (1982), *Prehistory of Japan*, Academic Press, INC. London LTD, pp.27-29.

⁽⁴⁾ George H. Kerr (1960), *Okinawa - The History of an Island People*, Charles E. Tuttle Co. Publishers, Tokyo, pp.21-35.

Barbarians, lived in the “outside” of great cultures. These countries in the past received a lot of cultural elements from Region 2. Nowadays, they have become the countries at the high level of development of the modern civilization.⁽⁵⁾

While emphasizing similarities between the West and Japan in terms of social structure and function, the author believes that under influences of ecological environment, the countries in Region 1 are all situated near the sea and bear the characteristics of the coastal area. As such, the Chinese sea have features and position quite similar to that of the Mediterranean and this ecological environment has played a crucial role for countries in that region to develop a culture absolutely different from that in the Classic continental empires of Asia. In other words, similarity in environmental and ecological conditions between Japan and the West Europe has created similarity in an advanced culture.⁽⁶⁾

Trying to understand Japan’s history and culture from ecological perspective, Tadao Umesao criticizes the perspective that too emphasizes the importance of the mainland by some Japanese regimes and advises that Japanese government should develop a vision towards the sea. As he believes, the sea is the future of Japan because “the sea plays the role of connecting people rather than separating them. The connection over the sea allows things to be disseminated.”⁽⁷⁾ Historical reality has showed that Japan has the history of emphasizing the importance of the sea. Since the time of the Jomon culture (about 10,000 to 300 years BC), to the time of Yayoi and Kofun cultures –

owners of these cultures were really people who tried to sail and were experienced sailors. They demonstrated their competence in exploiting the sea and expanding communication over the sea. From the prehistoric period, also through the sea economic environment, certain sea long distant trades were established.⁽⁸⁾

As such, since the time when the first cultures were established in Japan’s archipelago, the sea had always been the living environment, playing an important role, creating the Japanese identity and historical and cultural features. However, it is important to note that like many other countries in the world, the sea space and position of Japan’s sea space faced a lot of changes over time. Being an island-country with the sea surrounding all the borders, however, by the beginning of the 15th century, though they were the owner of a great sea space, the main interest of

⁽⁵⁾ According to Arnold Toynbee’s viewpoint, Japan has reached a high development level of a “civilization satellite” of a central, enormous civilization of China: “There is a much closer relationship between on the one hand the Chinese civilization and on the other hand the civilization of Korea, Japan and Vietnam. These three civilizations simulated the Chinese culture. However, they adopted the Chinese culture in specific ways that it is possible to consider that they belong to distinctive cultures – they can be considered as belonging to a sub group called Civilization satellites. Arnold Toynbee (2002), *Research on History – A Way of Interpretation*, World Publishing House, Hanoi, p.61.

⁽⁶⁾ Tadao Umesao, *op.cit.*, p.248.

⁽⁷⁾ Tadao Umesao, *op.cit.*, pp.252-253.

⁽⁸⁾ Karl Reinhold Haellquist (chief editor) (1991), *Asian Trade Routes – Continental and Maritime*, Scandinavian Institute of Asian Studies, Curzon Press, pp.117-153 and pp.181-192.

Japanese people still was devoted to the sea of Japan, which means the sea between Japan and China and Korean peninsula. However, since the end of the 15th century, with activities by *Wako*, expanding trades of Kingdom Ryukyu, and especially, the arrival of the Portuguese in Tanegashima island in 1542, Japanese people started changing their thinking of the position of the southern sea and crucial role of this sea in relation to security and trade with Asia as well as with the world.

For the later period, facing new opportunities and challenges, Japanese rulers paid more attention to the potential of the “non-traditional” sea space. As a result, along with maintaining the long-lasting relationship with China and Korea, Japanese people showed more and more interest to Indochina (Southeast Asia sea). At the same time, they expanded interest to the East – Ogasawara archipelago (1675), to the North - Hokkaido region. Then, with the union of Okinawa into Japan in 1879 (Meiji period, 1868-1912)⁽⁹⁾, this island-country affirmed a big sea space – sea territory of the modern Japan.

In comparison with Japan, it can be seen that being a country and a peninsula, the sea has always been a basis and important element in the development process and in history of Vietnam. In Vietnamese thinking, the East sea has been a sacred space associated with the time of country establishment.⁽¹⁰⁾ From the sea space in the past, during the process of developing and expanding the country, awareness and the real ownership of different Vietnamese regimes of the sea has also been changed

and improved. From the sea space of the Gulf of Tonkin, from the 10th century to the 15th century, the sea space of Dai Viet expanded to the North and then to the South of the Central region. During the next three centuries, Vietnamese people tried to expand their vision towards the sea, exploiting resources and affirming their ownership over islands and at the same time exploiting the delta of Mekong River. Thus, they confirmed their ownership over the sea and islands in the sea to the west that was bordered on Cambodia, Thailand and some other neighboring countries in Southeast Asia.

Looking from history, it is clear that from the old time, owners of Dong Son, Sa Huynh, Champa, and Oc Eo - Funan cultures had relationship with the sea. They had knowledge and skills on the exploitation of resources from the sea for maintaining livelihood, developing the

⁽⁹⁾ According to Professor Tran Quoc Vuong's viewpoint: “Politically, Okinawa belongs to Japan, in terms of language and culture Okinawa is Okinawa with Ryukyu which is very close to Southeast Asia with Austrasiatic language, intangible and with sweet potatoes and onions, etc. Southeast Asia is tangible. At present, in Okinawa there is still a species of fighting roasters and kind of ceramics which was imported from the Central of Vietnam since the time of Champa and from the time of ships with permissions *Chau an thuyen* in the seventeenth century. Ryukyu had relationship with Taiwan, Fujian, Guangdong from the very early time”. Tran Quoc Vuong (2004), “Notes on Similarities and Dissimilarities of East Asian Cultural Values between Vietnam and other East Asian Countries”, in *East Asia – Southeast Asia: Historical and Present Issues*, World Publishing House, Hanoi, p.33.

⁽¹⁰⁾ Nguyen Van Kim (chief editor) (2011), *Vietnamese People and the Sea*, World Publishing House, Hanoi, p.14.

society and exchanging culture.⁽¹¹⁾ Though cultures in three regions – the North, the Center, the South, were formed in different natural conditions with different socio-economic features, from the Paleolithic period to the metal age, from the prehistoric period to ancient history, all these cultures demonstrated clear features of the sea culture environment.⁽¹²⁾ The sea nurtured and was a component of traditional cultures. At the same time, the sea was also a dynamic and big environment that was sufficient for its owners to have different channels to communicate with the world.⁽¹³⁾

In history, the sea space of Vietnam was the location for many trade activities – domestic, international and among regions. Together with agriculture, crafts and trade, including trade with foreign countries played an important role, contributing much to the development of Vietnam's economy during many periods of history. Putting Vietnam in the economic space of Southeast Asia and in the relation with Northeast Asia, it might say that the sea and the sea economy was always an important component in history and culture of the nation. In other words, sea was always a wide space, a gate where Vietnamese culture could get out the world and other cultures could get into the Vietnamese society.

During the 16th – 17th centuries – the golden age of the Asian sea trade system, Vietnam had trade relationship with many countries in the world. In the context of competition among different Asian-European business groups, and at the same time, being under political pressure due to the separation of Tonkin, Cochinchin, rulers

managed to deal successfully with complicated international and regional relationship. They managed to select the main partners, being in a neutral relationship with many other international partners. On the other hand, they built strong defensive resources in order to protect the national sovereignty and exclusive economic zone.⁽¹⁴⁾ In the Cochinchin, marine military teams of Paracel Islands and the North Sea exploited and affirming the national sovereignty in the far away islands. In the nineteenth century, several kings of the Nguyen dynasty continued to exploit these islands, putting these islands on the map, and building the epitaph of sovereignty on Paracel and Spratly archipelagoes. The sea space of Vietnam in the East Sea was affirmed.⁽¹⁵⁾

⁽¹¹⁾ Phan Huy Le (2012), *Vietnam History and Culture - the Component Approach*, World Publishing House, Hanoi, pp.22-23.

⁽¹²⁾ Lam Thi My Dzung, The Sea and Islands in the Central of Vietnam – Some Archeological Issues; Lai Van Toi, The Prehistoric Period on Islands along the South Coast of Vietnam in Nguyen Van Kim (chief editor) (2011), *Vietnamese People and the Sea*, World Publishing House, Hanoi.

⁽¹³⁾ Nguyen Van Kim and Nguyen Manh Dzung (2007), "Traditions and Trade Activities of Vietnamese People – The Practice in History and Awareness", *Historical Studies*, Issue 8 (376) and 9 (377), pp.21-37 and pp.19-31.

⁽¹⁴⁾ Duong Van Huy, Foreign Trade Management by Nguyen Lords during the 17th – 18th Centuries; Pham Van Thuy, "Vietnam Marine Force during the 16th – 19th Centuries in the Western Historical Records" in *Vietnamese People and the Sea*, pp.367-384 and pp.506-523.

⁽¹⁵⁾ Ministry of Foreign Affairs – National Border Committee (2013), *Collection of the Nguyen Dynasty's Records of Vietnam Implementing Sovereignty over Paracel Islands and Spratly Islands*, Knowledge Publishing House, Hanoi.

Being a country – peninsula with a long coastal line, Vietnam has a lot of opportunities in developing the sea economy and sea trade. Having 3,260 kilometers of the coastal line extending from the North to the South, Vietnam ranks 27 among 157 countries having borders with the sea. Vietnam's sea index is about 0,01, which means for every 100 km² on the land there is 1 kilometer of the coastal line. This index is 6 times greater than the world average index. As a rule, the high sea index of a country, the more open the culture of that country and more opportunities of trade.⁽¹⁶⁾

As such, in the development of each country, along with proactiveness, the role of leaders, economic and cultural communication and influences of political environment, geographical features play a vital role for the development speed and tendency of each country. In the relation of different aspects, according to researchers, geographical position is more important than space and is evaluated based on three criteria: *Value of the natural geographic position*, *value of economic geographic position* and *value of political geographic position*. Among these three values, natural geographic position has the *potential value*, economic geographic position has *variable values* while political geographic position has the *supporting value*. The coordination and use all these three values in an optimal way will create the *real value* of a resource, creating the position of a country.⁽¹⁷⁾

Mentioning the potential, position and sea space of Vietnam, it is also important to say that according to oceanography experts, in classification of biogeography in Asian

East sea, the sea in the North (Gulf of Tonkin) can be put in China-Japan sub-region of the West Pacific Region which belongs to Indo West Pacific Super Region. Meanwhile, Vietnam's Eastern sea with its typical tropical ecosystem (coral, mangrove, sea weed, etc.) should be put in the India-Malaysia sub-region of the West Pacific Region⁽¹⁸⁾. This has showed the abundance and duality of Vietnam's sea in Asia sea spaces. Similarities and connections in terms of natural conditions and cultural environment among sea spaces have maintained and nurtured cultural development of Vietnam, Japan and many other cultures in the region. Naturally, Vietnam's sea has become the meeting point of the East Asian spaces, two ecological regions. This has demonstrated the diversity and abundance, at the same time this is also a favorable condition and great potential for Vietnam to develop.

2. From *Wako* to the ships with permissions (*Chau An Thuyen*) and *Sakoku*

After being separated from the main land

⁽¹⁶⁾ Sakurai Yumio (1999), "Drafting Historical Structure of Southeast Asia Based on the Connection between the Sea and Land", *Journal of Southeast Asia Studies*, No. 4.

⁽¹⁷⁾ Tran Duc Thanh (2009), "Position Resource of the System of Bays along the Coastal Line of Vietnam", *Journal of Science Activities*, Ministry of Science and Technology, No. 6 (601), p.17.

⁽¹⁸⁾ Le Duc To (chief editor), *The Eastern Sea*, Vol.1, Hanoi, p.290. According to authors, even species living at the sea bed also have this diversity. This means, Vietnam's sea has species living near the tropical region and within tropical region distributed from the North sea (Japan - China) to the sea north to Vietnam. At the same time, Vietnam sea also has typical tropical species distributed in India-Malaysia sea. This group makes up the majority in the Eastern sea, Le Duc To (chief editor), *The Eastern Sea*, p.202.

of Asia, through islands and with simple transportation means, Japanese managed to maintain relationship with China, Korea and several ancient kingdoms such as Ryukyu, Pohai, etc. Being an island-country, Japanese people had a vision towards big sea space from very early time. As mentioned above, right from the 15th century, instead of maintaining the connection with the mainland of Asia through “*Nihon kai*”, Japanese people started focusing their attention on the sea in the South and the West. By the end of the 18th century, beginning of the nineteenth century, along with promoting the exploitation of resources in Hokkaido and Edo, the Japanese government became more aware of their sovereignty in the North.

In history, before Japanese people directly established trade relationship with countries in Southeast Asia, trade ships from Ryukyu came to Great Viet and other countries in East Asia. During fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, taking advantage of new conditions of the early trade in East Asia⁽¹⁹⁾, Kingdom Ryukyu appointed many groups with tributary and trade ships to countries in this region. According to *Minh su (History of the Minh dynasty)*, Kingdom Ryukyu appointed 171 trade ships to China, 89 trade ships to Annam (Vietnam), 37 ships to Java (Indonesia) and 19 ships to Japan⁽²⁰⁾. According to official historical records of Kingdom Ryukyu called *Rekidai hoan*, in 1509 the messenger from Kingdom *Chuzan* appointed messaging ships to Vietnam (it might be Le Tuong Duc, 1509-?), bringing with it 10, 000 kg brimstone and metal armour, swords, cloths, etc.⁽²¹⁾.

Based on findings of Dai Viet's porcelain (the 14th – 15th centuries) in many archeological sites in Kingdom Ryukyu, especially in the area of Naha port, it is possible to confirm that the communication and exchange between Dai Viet with Ryukyu took place early and regularly. As such, Kingdom Ryukyu (via trade activities), was one who built up the foundation and at the same time built the bridge, created the connection between two areas of the Northeast Asia and Southeast Asia. Considering the Kingdom Ryukyu as a component of the modern Japan, the fact that ancient Kingdom Ryukyu established trade relationship with Southeast Asia marked an important stone in the relationship between Japan and with Dai Viet and Southeast Asia near two centuries earlier.⁽²²⁾

⁽¹⁹⁾ Geoff Wade (2009), “An Early Age of Commerce in Southeast Asia, 900-1300 CE”, *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, No.40 (2), National University of Singapore.

⁽²⁰⁾ Fusaki Maehira (2000), *The Golden Age of the Ryukyu Trader*, Pacific Friend – A Window on Japan, April, Vol.27, No.12, pp.28-32.

⁽²¹⁾ Kin Seiki (1999), *Trade with Southeast Asia of Kingdom Ryukyu and Porcelain from Vietnam Found in Okinawa*, Paper at International Conference: Vietnam-Japan Relationship during the Fifteenth-Seventeenth Centuries through Porcelain; Center for Vietnamese Studies and Culture Exchange, Vietnam National University, Hanoi – Center for International Culture Studies, Japan Female University Chieu Hoa, Hanoi. Also see Nguyen Van Kim (2003), “Relationship between Kingdom Ryukyu with Dai Viet during the 16th – 18th Centuries through Some Historical Records”; in *Japan with Asia – Historical Connections and Socio-economic Changes*, Hanoi National University Publishing House, Hanoi, pp.160-178.

⁽²²⁾ Nguyen Van Kim (2003), *Relationship between Japan and Southeast Asia during the 15th – 18th Centuries*, Vietnam National University, Hanoi.

One thing which should be taken consideration is that before and during the period when Kingdom Ryukyu proactively established official relationship with Japan, China and Southeast Asia, while the government under Muromachi dynasty (1336-1573) became weaker, in many areas of the sea of Japan, especially in the Southwest sea, a lot of group of pirates appeared. From their activities, mostly in sea area south of Japan, south of Korea and north of China, in the fifteenth century, the *Wako*, equipped with battle ships and strong weapon, expanded their activities to the East and at the same time expanded to Southeast Asia.⁽²³⁾ Pirates were not only dangers for economic relationship over the sea and security of ports, they were also dangers to sovereignty of many Southeast Asian countries. Though there are different opinions, it is possible to say that *Wako* is the first period, the first form of a non-official Japan tried to get into Dai Viet and Southeast Asia.⁽²⁴⁾

It is also important to mention that during the process of establishing its power in the South, implementing the policy of expanding both in the land and in the sea, the Cochinchin's authorities had to face a problem which was common in the region – the issue of pirates. At that time, *Wako*'s activities "reached the highest level along the coast of China."⁽²⁵⁾ From Asian Northeast sea, in the end of the sixteenth century, many pirate groups expanded their activities towards Southeast Asia, and they even came to the sea of Cochinchin to rob

trade ships.⁽²⁶⁾ *Đại Nam thực lục tiền biên* (*Veritable Records of Pre Dai Nam*) recorded the fact that in 1585, Shirahama Kenchi led a big group of ships to Cua Viet to rob. The marine force of Cochinchin led by Nguyen Phuc Nguyen (1563-1634) tried to defense bravely. Since then, Japanese pirates did not dare to come to this area any more.⁽²⁷⁾ The decisiveness of the Nguyen lords did not only protect successfully the sovereignty of Cochinchin, but also contributed to solving the problem of pirates, maintaining

⁽²³⁾ Kwan-wai So (1975), *Japanese Piracy in Ming China during the 16th Century*, Michigan State University.

⁽²⁴⁾ Evidence shows that Japanese pirates came to Northeast sea of Vietnam in 1404, which was recorded in a Vietnamese mandarin Bui Ba Ky's reporting to King Minh Vinh Lac (the second year). Ba Ky said he "had the honor to serve the King, with the title of *Ngu pham*, and then served as *Ty tuong* to *Vu tiet hau* Tran Khat Chan. In the year Hong Vu 32th, on behalf of Tran Khat Chan, he brought the marine force to the Eastern sea to fight with *Nuy* enemy". As such, if the above reporting is correct, it is likely that since 1399, the last year of the Tran dynasty (1226-1400), "*Nuy khau*" (Japanese pirates) came to Vietnam's sea. *Sea Minh thuc luc: China-Vietnam Relationship during the 14th – 17th Centuries*, Vol.1, Education Publishing House, Hanoi, 2010, p.206.

⁽²⁵⁾ Keith W. Taylor (2001), "Nguyen Hoang and the Start of Coming South by Viet People", in "Issues in Vietnam History", (many authors), *Journal of Past and Present*, Youth Publishing House, p.163.

⁽²⁶⁾ Iwao Seiichi (1962), *Ships with Permissions and Japanese Streets*, Hakusendo Publishing House, Tokyo, p.15; The ship which was robbed in 1578 belonged to a Chinese trader named Tran Bao Tung, shipping copper and porcelain to Quang Nam. Nguyen Van Kim (2003), *Relationship between Japan and Southeast Asia during the 15th – 17th Centuries*, Vietnam National University Publishing House, Hanoi, 2003, pp.43-144.

⁽²⁷⁾ Quoc su quan trieu Nguyen (National Historiographers' Office of the Nguyen Dynasty), *Dai Nam thuc luc tien bien* (*Veritable Records of Pre Dai Nam*), Vol.2, Education Publishing House, Hanoi, 1962, p.32.

the peace of the area. On the other hand, this made Japan be more aware of their responsibility of their relationship with other countries in the region. That decisiveness can also be said created the antecedent and foundation for the way in solving foreign affairs of Cochinchin. All activities by foreigners should obey the regulations by Nguyen Lords. This strong foreign affair policy helped bring the real power and reinforce this power of the Cochinchin rulers.⁽²⁸⁾

After these conflicts and experiences, at the beginning of the eighteenth century, in order to get into and play the proactive role in trade activities in Asia, the Edo authority tried to analyze the position of each country and business partner in the region to have relevant policy. In the context of changes in international and regional relationship, Japan made considerable adjustments in its policy with the core policy being maintaining the peace, establishing good relationship and focusing on economic development. Giving permission which was called “*Chau an*” to foreign trade ships was for many objectives, however, one thing we can know for sure that through the system of giving permission *Chau an thuyen*, Edo authority wanted to affirm its authorization and official position of trade ships. For about four centuries (1592-1635), many Japan’s ships with the permission called *Chau an thuyen* came to Southeast Asia. As calculated, during the period 1604-1634, Edo authority gave in total 355 permissions, among which the number of permissions to Southeast Asia was 331, making up 93,25%

of the total number of permissions.⁽²⁹⁾

Thanks to the development in communication and trade, many Japanese communities came to live in Vietnam and they established Japanese ports and Japanese streets. To a certain extent, Japanese trade agencies also played the role of factories of business groups from the West. Hoi An, Ayutthaya (Thailand), Luzon (Philippines), Batavia and Cambodia were once famous trade centers in Southeast Asia. This was the most prosperous in the trade history between Japan and Southeast Asia.

Through official letters, Japanese authority always asked rulers in other countries to create favorable conditions for Japanese ships with permissions to come for trade and “through trade relationship improve the friendship between the two countries.”⁽³⁰⁾

The third period in the relationship between the two countries was the period of separation called *sakoku* (1635-1853). Some researchers believed that with the implementation of the policy of separation, Japan tried to separate itself from the common development of the region and of the world. However, in practice, the policy of separation of Japan

⁽²⁸⁾ Nguyen Manh Dung (2013), “Looking back at Socio-economic Development Model of Cochinchin during the 16th – 18th Centuries”; in *Vietnam in the Past – Documents and Research*, National Political Publishing House, Hanoi, pp.240-264.

⁽²⁹⁾ Li Tana (1999), *Cochinchin – Socio-economic History of Vietnam during the 17th – 18th Centuries*, Youth Publishing House, Ho Chi Minh City, pp.90-91.

⁽³⁰⁾ Kawamoto Kuniye (1991), “Perception of the World by Nguyen Lords in Quang Nam based on Records of Foreign Affairs”, in *The Ancient City of Hoi An*, Social Sciences Publishing House, Hanoi, p.171.

by nature was only a way to restrict in order to select business partners, re-identifying friends in international relationship. In this sense, Japan maintained relationship with China, Korea and many other Southeast Asian countries. With the West, Edo authority continued to allow Netherland trade ships, a big country in terms of international trade, come and establish trade relationship.⁽³¹⁾

As such, in relationships with Southeast Asian countries, though Japan's trade ships could not go the Eastern sea, trade ships from Netherland, China, Korea and from other Southeast Asian countries could still come to Japan.⁽³²⁾ Therefore, many Japan's crafts which were also famous Japanese cultural products such as Hizen porcelain, swords, *lacquer paintings*, kimono, etc. were brought to different Asian and European markets.⁽³³⁾ Hizen porcelain found in Quang Nam, ports in the Central region or in other archeological sites in Thang Long, Pho Hien (Hung Yen), Lam Kinh (Thanh Hoa), Kim Boi (Hoa Binh), Thanh Ha (Thua Thien Hue), Nuoc Man (Binh Dinh), Bao Loc (Lam Dong), etc. might be products of trade exchange of the period of separation!

Within 218 years of restricted trade, businessmen from China and Netherland really became the intermediate actors and they contributed much to connecting Japan with the outside world. Through trade relationship, Japanese people could get information and rich knowledge of the world and Southeast Asia. The knowledge of Japanese people reached beyond traditional

space of Northeast Asian countries and since then Japanese people gave up the habit of looking only at the mainland of China. Analyzing different aspects of the policy of *sakoku*, some researchers believe that *Sakoku* hindered the process of Japan getting into Southeast Asia about two centuries. And if Edo authority had not implemented the policy of *sakoku*, Japan might have become a great country in terms of trade like Portugal, Spain, or Netherland and part of Southeast Asia could have become bases of Japan.⁽³⁴⁾ Certainly, this is only a hypothesis. Still, this hypothesis makes us think about multidimensional of the policy of *sakoku*. At the same time, it helps us understand better the way Japan tried to get into Southeast in the later periods.

3. Conclusion

- Being a member of East Asia, in history, the sea has always played an important role in economic development and cultural exchange among Japan and other countries. Compared to Vietnam, a country-peninsula, Japan - a country - island, the sea factor has always had deeper influence in many aspects.

In people's awareness, sea is always associated to the mainland. In the two

⁽³¹⁾ Nguyen Van Kim (2000), *The Close Door Policy of Japan during the Tokugawa Period – Causes and Effects*, World Publishing House, Hanoi.

⁽³²⁾ Yoneo Ishii (1998), *The Junk Trade from Southeast Asia (Tosen Fusetsu-gaki 1674-1723)*, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore.

⁽³³⁾ Bui Minh Tri (2011), *Japanese Porcelain in Thang Long Royal Palace*, Social Sciences Publishing House, Hanoi.

⁽³⁴⁾ Tadao Umesao (2007), *op.cit.*, p.177.

dimensions or multidimensional interaction relationship, the mainland has always played an important role, expressed in political power, vision and policy towards the sea space and affirmation of sovereignty of each country. For Japan, a country-island, Honshu island (which is considered to be Japan's *mainland*, making up 60% of the total area of all the islands) has been the most important factor in determining the sea exploitation capacity and thinking towards the sea by Japanese people. Japan had big sea space and Japan's sea is rich of resources. Depending on different historical periods, Japan's relationship with countries in the region was better or worse. Conflicts and disputes over sovereignty with China and Korea in the Senkaku Sea and with Russia over the islands in the North have led to tensions in the relationship between Japan and other countries at the present.⁽³⁵⁾

For Vietnam, the factors related to the land and policies have always played an important role. Expansion of political spaces caused expansion of the sea space. However, position of the sea space also changed over different periods. This difference is not only expressed in the potential and possibility of resources exploitation, but also in affirming one country's sovereignty and position of the sea space for the nation's development. Moreover, it is also important to mention that Vietnam's sea space was always under the pressure of one or many political powers in the region. In history, Vietnam's sea has always played a crucial role not only in the relationship with the North [China],

but also with the Southern countries as well as Western countries. For many centuries, Champa needed a sea path through DaiViet so that it could trade with China. Meanwhile, Cambodia and Laos also needed gates to connect political and economic centers in the mountains and valleys in the West with East Sea. As such, the living environment, political environment, and existence space have always played an important role, and the position and role of each nation in that existence space also has an important meaning to each country.

- In history, due to the needs in communication and exchange of goods, trade path gradually formed both on land in on the sea. While it is impossible to deny the vital role of trade path on land which went through borders, grassland and mountains there is reality that the more the society developed, the more sea path became important. Since the first centuries A.D, because of economic benefits and religious objectives, many explorers, sailors, traders and missionaries came to the Oriental society, among which East Asia countries. Through a long period of exploitation of resources and cultural exchange, in reality, resources of Southeast Asia countries, among which the sea resource, were exploited for the purpose of economic development and reinforcing different political regimes.

⁽³⁵⁾ At present, Japan has disputes over islands Takeshima/ Dokdo with Korea; Senkaku/ Diaoyu Islands with China and Etorofu-to/Itorup, Kunashini-to/Kunashir, Shikotan-to/Shikotan, Habonai-shoto/Habonai with Russia.

During the process of exploiting the sea resources, a lot of local knowledge was created and accumulated. Asian residents living by the sea had knowledge of astronomy, seasons when they could sail, the sea flows, the short, medium and long sea path, sailing techniques, knowledge of building ships for specific sea, the fish movement in the sea, distribution of pearls, coral base, etc. All this contributed to creating social capital and motivation for development of nations.

For Japan, thanks to the sea that this island-country could maintain its local cultural values. And more than that, it could extend its unique cultural values. In addition, thanks to the sea that political pressure from other empires in the regions on Japan was decreased. The sea helped solve many conflicts in the region. In Asian sea spaces, Southeast Asian sea connected India with China and connected these two big cultures with the world. Thanks to the early development of the sea culture that different cultures such as Dai Viet, Champa, Oc Eo - Phu Nam, Srivijaya could develop in Asia. Through the environment and sea exchange path as well as ups and downs of different empires that we can understand big potentials of the sea and its economy together with the position, extension scale and diversity of different cultures and civilizations in the region.⁽³⁶⁾

- While trying to understand and analyze similarities in terms of history and culture among East Asia countries, it is impossible not to pay attention to the reality that

between Japan and Vietnam and other countries in the region, there are a lot of differences in terms of natural conditions, social structure, political formation, the way of organization of economic activities and many other cultural tangible and intangible values. As such, understanding these differences is necessary. However, it is more important to analyze causes leading to those similarities. Then we can have a more objective viewpoint of the potential, features and development of East Asian countries as well as challenges of these countries when they have to face Western forces, who are also Sea forces at the modern time.

In history, until the Edo period, the main flow in Vietnam-Japan relationship came from the South to the North. In that flow, many heritage and marks from ancient cultures as well as techniques in cultivating water rice, and possibly techniques in metal and copper working was brought from Southeast Asia to Japan. Many ancient traditions of Southeast Asia such as the tradition of dying teeth, living on pillar house, tattooing and even language expressions of the South were brought to Japan through the sea path.⁽³⁷⁾ However, at the end of the 15th century when Japan

⁽³⁶⁾ Nicholas Tarling (chief editor) (1992), *The Cambridge History of Southeast Asia*, Cambridge University Press, pp.137-272.

⁽³⁷⁾ Murayama Shichiro (1976), "The Malayo - Polynesian Component in the Japanese Language - The Problems and History of Linguistic Comparison", *The Journal of Japanese Studies*, Vol.2.

started getting into Southeast Asia society and from the end of the 16th century, there was a breakthrough in internationalization of economic activities. At the beginning of the 17th century, the Edo authority focused much on promoting and extending relationship with other countries. The new policy created momentum for the new development tendency and after about half a century being open to the world, Japan started the policy of separation, restricting communication with the outside world.

Looking back at Japan's foreign affair policy during the 15th – 16th centuries, it can be seen that three periods in the relationship between Japan with Vietnam and Southeast Asia in fact were developments with inheritance. That policy showed the sensitivity, dynamic and vision of rulers from Toyotomi Hideyoshi period (1536-1598) to the time of Tokugawa (1600-1868). Through adjusting big foreign affair policies, Japanese government demonstrated their competence in analysis and deep thinking. These personalities have been formed from their historical traditions and politics and are usually expressed when there are challenges or important turning points. For the period of three centuries, Japan adjusted their policies three times so that it could adapt better to the new context. And then, in the nineteenth century, after big changes, Japan decisively gave up the Chinese model and followed the Western model for its development. After the Second World War, understanding the power of history, in

Japan there was a process of self - adjustment. By focusing on economy and aiming at developing peace, this country has managed to created trust and become attractive to many other Asian nations. Japan quickly has become a big economic, scientific and technology center of the world. At the same time, it has become the symbol of an advanced development model of Asia.

Looking back at Vietnam - Japan relationship in history, it can be concluded that the relationship was established very early. Over time, there were ups and downs in this relationship. However, the traditional relationship, mutual understanding and trust between the two nations have created foundation for further development, comprehensive cooperation and strategic partnership between Vietnam and Japan. Some researchers often mention “soft power” in the relationship between Vietnam and Japan. However, exchange in culture, science and technology, the presence and role of water rice, metallurgy and goods such as ivory, condiment, pearls, silk, porcelain once transported to Japan and other countries in the region and the world through sea trade path, and natural geographic position, resources from sea economic space, affirmation and protection of one's sovereignty over the sea has increased cultural awareness, sharing, responsibility, and at the same time, brought the real power to each country as well as the whole community of East Asia.

