

# TRADE RELATIONS BETWEEN THE UNITED KINGDOM AND VIETNAM IN THE 17<sup>TH</sup> – 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURIES

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**Abstract:** In about two centuries (from the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century to the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century), thanks to its important geographical position, Vietnam was a noticeable point in the world trade system. In the time of exploding world and Asian trade, Vietnam was paid attention to many contemporary trade powers, especially by Western capitalist countries. The fundamental line of Western countries including the United Kingdom of Great Britain carried out in Vietnam has been started from commercial exchanges to the intention of establishing diplomatic relations and the step by step infiltration into the politics and society. From the early 17<sup>th</sup> century to the time before the aggression of Vietnam by the French, the British have continually had dynamic to create certain stable stance for themselves through activities such as establishing emporiums, organizing commercial operations, appointing diplomatic missions to present credentials. However, all their efforts had to be stopped after the French attacked and occupied Vietnam in 1858. The ambition was clear and the results were not reached as expected; this was the intention of Britain and the historic reality of trade relations of trade relations between Vietnam and Britain from the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century to the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

**Key words:** Vietnam – Britain trade relations history, the East India Company (EIC,) Tonkin, Cochinchin, East Asia.

In the early 17<sup>th</sup> century many colonial Western countries began the process of infiltration into Asian countries including South East Asian countries and Vietnam. With its very favourable position for activities of navigation traffic (the chief type of communication for commercial and diplomatic activities between the East and the West areas from the 17<sup>th</sup> century to the 19<sup>th</sup> century), Vietnam was one of the attractive spots for Western commercial powers at the time such as Portugal, the Netherlands, Great Britain and France... to

seek the arrival. In fact, since the early 17<sup>th</sup> century both Dang Trong (Cochinchin) and Dang Ngoai (Tonkin) of Vietnam, the commercial activities of Western traders were very bustling through East India companies (VOC – The Netherlands, EIC – Britain and CIO – France). The state, private traders and commercial companies of Western countries coming to Vietnam had the common purposes such as conducting trade, seeking colony, carrying out mission and

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diplomacy and each country had its own way of infiltration. Right from the time they laid their foot on South East Asia, by their East India Company, the British paid attention to Vietnam in order to seek the support of the local authorities to establish their influence in the service of their commercial and political activities. Before the French opened fire in their official aggression against Vietnam, the British had made a lot of efforts to set up stable stance as they had achieved in some other places in the area. However, the occupation of Vietnam by the French aggressive attack made the British stopping all their efforts lengthening in many years. The retrospection of the process of British infiltration into Vietnam before 1858 makes us clearly realize the panorama of the intention of invading Vietnam of another Western force beside the French. Until 1858 the mode of infiltration which the British had successfully applied in the area of South East Asian islands had not been effective in Vietnam. The British were in total failure in their ambition in Vietnam when the French opened fire in the armed aggression against Vietnam. This essay in one aspect retrospects the British commercial, political and diplomatic activities in Vietnam in the three centuries 17<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup> and on other aspect, sets up other thought upon the fate of Vietnam before 1858.

### **1. The situation of Vietnamese foreign trade in the first half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century**

In 1600, the event of Nguyen Hoang crossing the sea to return to Thuan Hoa

began a new chapter in Vietnamese history. In nearly two centuries, Vietnam was split into two regions: Tonkin and Cochinchin with two machines of authorities independent and hostile to each other. On the field of politics and society, the political complexion of Tonkin and Cochinchin was a period of crisis in Vietnamese history. Nevertheless, for the sphere of foreign trade, the 17<sup>th</sup> century was considered the period of *most thriving development*<sup>(1)</sup>.

Adjacent to the East Sea was the condition allowing Vietnam to have very eventful history of sea trade development. Many Chinese sources of historical materials have revealed that from very early time many busy commercial ports had come into existence in the system of area trade in the North Vietnam such as Van Don, Long Bien<sup>(2)</sup>. In the Central and Southern Vietnam, the Middle Ages also had a lot of developing commercial ports of the same level of development such as Hoi An, Thanh Ha and Oc Eo in the period of Phu Nam. Thanks to this, from the Middle Ages, the Vietnamese foreign trade had the opportunity to contact and do business with traders coming from many Asian countries such as China, Japan, India, Indonesia, Thailand and Cambodia. In the 17<sup>th</sup> century,

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<sup>(1)</sup> Tran Thi Vinh (2007), "Le - Trinh State to the Economy of Foreign Trade in the 16<sup>th</sup> - 17<sup>th</sup> Centuries", *Historical Studies*, N° 12/2007, p.24.

<sup>(2)</sup> Nguyen Van Kim and Nguyen Manh Dzong (2007), "The Commercial Tradition and Activities of Viet People; Historical Reality and Awareness", *Vietnam in the Commercial System of Asia in the 16<sup>th</sup> - 17<sup>th</sup> Centuries*, The Gioi Publishing House, Hanoi, pp. 311-350.

the century considered the time of commercial revolution of Asia, based on the available foundation, the Vietnamese commerce rapidly mixed with the commercial system of the world, especially in the commercial relation with the Europeans. Upon arriving in South East Asia, the Europeans have fully present in both Cochinchin and Tonkin; they comprised all constituents including traders, missionaries and sailors..., they came from many European countries such as Portugal, the Netherlands, Great Britain and France. The notes of a number of Western scholars coming to Vietnam at that time have revealed to us the reality of reception attitude by the host country towards them. The general situation was: the Europeans were always warmly welcomed by both the native population and native administration. In the book "The history of Tonkin Kingdom", Alexandre de Rhodes narrated a trip to Tonkin of Catholic Priest Juliano Baldinotti, an Italian on a Portuguese ship in 1626 with the attitude of welcoming in high esteem of the Lord of Tonkin (Trinh Trang): *Hearing the ship was making a landfall, the lord was much satisfied because he wanted to do business with the Portuguese in his country. He immediately ordered the generals everywhere in the country to make an enthusiastic welcome*<sup>(3)</sup>. In Cochinchin, the attitude of Lord Nguyen (Nguyen Phuc Nguyen) towards foreigners was no less open-hearted by the notes of C. Borri: *the Lord of Cochinchin did not close the door in face of any nation, he let them be free and opened the door for all*

*foreigners*<sup>(4)</sup>. According to the remarks by contemporary Western scholars, the aborigines were effusive people; they were easy for union and honest in commercial relations. Jean Baptise Tavernier compared the effects of doing business between the Chinese and the people of Tonkin. According to him the trade with the people of Tonkin was more comfortable and righteous. The Chinese generally had the trick of swindle in doing business, *the people of Tonkin were perfectly round in trade*, the impression of *doing business with them* (the people of Tonkin) was *very comfortable*<sup>(5)</sup>. In the early 17<sup>th</sup> century, in general, in both areas of Tonkin and Cochinchin of Vietnam, the policy towards foreign traders, especially the newcomers from remote Europe was carried out in an unprecedented open-hearted manner, thoroughly different from with the often-observed close - door policy in earlier historical periods. According to W. Dampier, even the ships and sailors of the East India Company were permitted by the authorities to be armed with weapons for self-defence in Tonkin while the boats of aborigines were not allowed to be armed with guns<sup>(6)</sup>.

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<sup>(3)</sup> Alexandre de Rhodes (1994), *History of the Kingdom of Tonkin*, translated by Nguyen Khac Xuyen, Religion Solidarity Committee Publishing House, p. 202.

<sup>(4)</sup> Christophoro Borri (1998), *Cochinchin Region in 1621*, translated by Nguyen Khac Xuyen, Ho Chi Minh Publishing House, p.92.

<sup>(5)</sup> Jean Baptise Tavernier, *The New and Particularly Interesting Travel Story about Tonkin Kingdom*, The Gioi Publishing House, p.40.

<sup>(6)</sup> William Dampier (2011), *A Travel to Tonkin in 1688*, The Gioi Publishing House, Hanoi, pp.110-111.

The historical background of Vietnam in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century created favourable opportunity for commercial transaction operations of Europeans. Therefore in the beginning period of searching for colonial markets in Asia, the British had favourable condition for easy infiltration into Vietnam<sup>(7)</sup>.

## **2. The beginning period in the relations of commercial transaction of the British in Dai Viet**

In the early 17<sup>th</sup> century, the East India Company was an important part of the British history, especially to the process of developing commerce and establishing the British colonial régime in Asia. It was by this reason that Philipp Lawson, taking great pains in studying the East India Company, has judged: *The history of the East India Company was the centre of the process of developing commerce and expanding the overseas territory of Britain at the beginning of the modern period*<sup>(8)</sup>. Established in 1600, the East India Company was the wait of many London traders at the time. The East India Company was the new commercial institution<sup>(9)</sup>, it was founded by the contribution of capitals from many traders and those who had property in London. The task of this company was to carry out the commerce with Eastern countries. In March 1601, the East India Company started the first voyage to Asia. At the beginning period, the East India Company followed the foot of Netherlander traders to come to spots on the South East Asian coast to look for aromatic

spices and by this way they infiltrated into the Asian commercial markets. In early years, the East India Company was able to set up some emporiums in South East Asia, India and Japan. These places were their first residences, at the same time they were their first advance steps on the way of the British to conquer the Asian markets in modern time.

In 1613, from Hirado emporium, Japan, the East India Company appointed two special envoys Tempest Peacock and Walter Cawarden to follow a Japanese merchant ship to Hoi An. Tempest Peacock and

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<sup>(7)</sup> In the early 17<sup>th</sup> century, the feudal authorities in both Cochinchin and Tonkin wanted to make the most of the commercial relations with the Europeans to have recourse to their help in military affairs as well as in weapons in the civil war. Therefore the authorities in both Cochinchin and Tonkin carried out the open-hearted policy towards the Western people when they come for the first time. Read more: Tran Thi Vinh (2007), "Le-Trinh State towards the Foreign Trade Economy in the 16<sup>th</sup> – 17<sup>th</sup> Centuries", *Historical Studies*, N<sup>o</sup>. 12, p. 26.

<sup>(8)</sup> Philipp Lawson (1993), *East India Company: A history*, Longman, London, p.1.

<sup>(9)</sup> The British *East India Company* (1600-1858) was established on the basis of the contributed capital of traders, officials and people having property in London. The operations of the company were directed by two organizations: The Council of owners – having the supreme right of decision and the Board of directors – directly managed it; the interest of the company from its business operations would be divided to the owners (shareholders) according to the rate of their capital contribution. With such structure of organization and form of business operations, the *East India Company* was the completely new model with basic special points similar to the present joint-stock companies. Therefore it is possible to say that the *East India Company* was the forerunner of joint-stock company.

Walter Cawarden representing a commercial organization *for the first time laid the foundation for the history of contact and exchange between two countries Vietnam and Great Britain*. In this journey, two special envoys of the East India Company brought with them a small amount of British goods to sell to the Vietnamese king and dignitaries. However, according to the Director of the British emporium in Hirado Richard Cocks, the first journey of the British to Vietnam met several difficulties, suffering a tragic denouement. In 1617<sup>(10)</sup>, the other representatives of the East India Company in Hirado emporium - two traders with many experiences in commercial activities in Indochina, Emond Sayer and Will Adam came to Hoi An. Their first task was to investigate into the failure of Peacock and Cawarden in Hoi An and then sought to approach to Lord Nguyen authorities. After this journey, the target laid down by the East India Company to the effort to establish the relation with the administration of Cochinchin produced no result, the representatives of the East India Company could not approach Lord Nguyen (Sai Vuong Nguyen Phuc Nguyen). In March 1618, Sayer and Adam returned to Japan, the official commercial relations of the East India Company with Vietnam were not yet established. In the ensuing years, Hirado emporium continued to find the way to infiltrate into Vietnamese commerce. In the years 1622, 1623 they frequently sent merchant ships to come to operate in the

Chinese coastal area, waiting for the opportunity to enter Vietnam.

Although Vietnam was not the first target in Asia, the managers of the East India Company had early seen Vietnam as an important point on the line of business transaction with East Asia. Therefore after being present in Asia about over 10 years, the East India Company had been continually had activities to seek a way of infiltration into Vietnam. Though in these first times the British had not yet achieved any considerable outcome in the relations with Vietnam, they did not give up this intention. In over two ensuing centuries, the British had continual rises and falls in Vietnam, they still tried their best and devoted themselves to have the business transaction relations as their will.

### **3. The commercial transaction of the British with Vietnam through the operations of the East India Company Emporium in Tonkin (1672 – 1697)**

In 1672, the British emporium in Tonkin was built; this was the first British establishment in Vietnam. The emporium in Tonkin performed the task of a liaison base for the export and import of British traders' goods to China, Japan and the South East Asian islands.

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<sup>(10)</sup> The first two British men who came to Vietnam did not go back. (They were lost without any reason). Read more: Alamstair Lamb (1970), *The Mandarin Road to Old Hue*, Chatto and Windus, London, p.13.

On June 25<sup>th</sup> 1672, the Zant ship of the East India Company was sent to Tonkin from Bantam, carrying with it William Gyfford and 5 employees of the East India Company, bringing a letter of Bantam Council<sup>(11)</sup> to Tonkin, expressing its desire to establish the commercial relations. The contents of the letter were solemn words presenting the utmost desire of the British to be admitted to free trade and relations in Tonkin as other Europeans who arrived before. The Bantam Council sends to “*His Majesty great and strong King of Tonkin with the wishes of living to a great age and gaining a victory over the enemy*”; the contents of letter had a following paragraph “*Our British Emperor had ordered the high-principled India Company to beseech His Majesty to bestow a favour to the British and trust them as home insiders, permit them to live and be free in doing business*”<sup>(12)</sup>. Until March 14<sup>th</sup> 1673, Gyfford had the opportunity of meeting the Lord Trinh Tac because during the time before that, both King Le Gia Tong and Lord Trinh Tac participated in a war expedition with Cochinchin. Upon submitting the gift and letter of the Bantam Council to the lords, the British were approved to do business in Tonkin; however they were only allowed to set up their emporium in Pho Hien. The British considered this result (not permitted to set up their emporium in the Royal Capital) their first difficulty.

The reality revealed that the commercial transaction operations of the East India

Company in Tonkin met with a lot of difficulties soon after their emporium was set up in Pho Hien. The first challenge to them was the local mandarins in charge of commerce. They were maltreated and harassed by tax-collecting and goods-examining mandarins; in the name of the royal order, the mandarins took any kind of their goods they wanted. Besides the emporiums here were also the targets of petty thefts<sup>(13)</sup>. In early years, the activities of the British to build commercial transaction with Vietnam through the operations of emporiums in Tonkin were not easy. The losses continually happened. Only after two years from the time of presence here, it was Gyfford, the British emporium head in Tonkin two times proposed to withdraw the emporium from this place because the cost was too high, without any hope of interest. Nevertheless, the other British speculated that Tonkin was the very important market to the East India Company. They realized that besides the economic benefit, Tonkin was also the place manifesting its capability to compete with the Netherlands; moreover this was the market for the East India Company to present

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(11) The highest command of the British East India Company, managing all operations of the British East India Company in Asia from 1602 to 1682.

(12) Charles B. Maybon (2011), *The Europeans in An Nam Country*, The Gioi Publishing House, Hanoi, p.43.

(13) Farrington (1994). “The Documents of the British East India Company Concerning Pho Hien and Tonkin”, *Scientific Seminar “Pho Hien”*, Hai Hung Department of Culture and Information, pp.148,149, 155.

prestige and strength towards China<sup>(14)</sup>.

It was by this awareness that the British did their utmost, overcoming many difficulties to continue to stand firm in Tonkin. In consequence after two first years the commercial activities of British traders in Tonkin began to be stable. Many British merchant ships annually came to Tonkin regularly from Bantam (Indonesia), Japan, Formosa (Taiwan). The purchase and sale of goods of British merchant ships through Tonkin emporium took place very swimmingly and favourably. There were thousands of pieces of silk of various kinds were exported from Tonkin; on the contrary, a lot of commodities were sold by British traders here. According to original sources of materials which were letters, diaries, order forms of the emporium in Tonkin, the commodities which British traders imported were silver, copper of Japan, cloth of India, felt of big size of Britain, big guns<sup>(15)</sup>, lead, saltpetre, brimstone, and the products of South East Asian islands such as coral, pepper, amber and aloe wood. The goods exported from the emporium of Tonkin were raw silk cord, silk, cinnamon, tea, woodwork and porcelain. In general, the commercial process of the East India Company in Tonkin was to export silk cord and silk and to import products of high skill and weapon of foreign countries. Although the commercial value had been defined as not so attractive in Tonkin the British still considered this place to be the site of transition of the commercial system in East

Asia with two large markets which were China and Japan. Therefore they tried to maintain the influence here to aim at the bigger purpose of Chinese market.

However, the span of stable time of the British emporium in Tonkin could not exist for a long time. In 1683, the British emporium was transferred from Pho Hien to Thang Long together with the beginning of their recession period<sup>(16)</sup>. The East India Company again met a lot of difficulties in its relations with the authorities of Tonkin. They were treated in extreme injustice. Maybon wrote: *"The cupidity of the native authorities led to unjust judgments...There was almost no hope of demanding the old debts and what the mandarins had bought, they rarely paid money. It was impossible to directly meet the lord to lodge a*

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<sup>(14)</sup> In an anonymous letter, a member of Director Council of the East India Company in Bantam sent to the emporium in Tonkin, stressing the reasons for not withdrawing from Tonkin as follows: the silk in Tonkin was good, the expense was little; the Netherlander sneered; withdrawing would cause a lot of expenses. Read more: Charles B. Maybon (2011), *The Europeans in Annam Country*, The Gioi Publishing House, Hanoi, pp.220, 221,252.

<sup>(15)</sup> The books of the British emporium in Tonkin wrote that in 1860, they used cannon to exchange for silk cord. Read more: Charles B. Maybon (2011), *The Europeans in Annam Country*, The Gioi Publishing House, Hanoi, pp.69, 70.

<sup>(16)</sup> In 1683, after many years of effort, finally the British emporium was able to be transferred to Thang Long Royal Capital (Ke Cho), nevertheless from this time the British commercial operations in East Asia met with a lot of difficulties because the emporium of the British East India Company in Bantam was obliged to close in 1682. Therefore the establishment of emporium in Tonkin at that time was no longer significant for the British because they were facing a period of commercial depression in East Asia.

*complaint about these behaviours without resorting to the intermediaries who were imperial concubines and this was the severe origin of misappropriation*”<sup>(17)</sup>. Besides these difficulties, they still face the disagreement among the officials of the emporium. The intention of infiltration into the Chinese market from Tonkin of the East India Company also failed because the administration of Lord Trinh prohibited the commercial activities in the North border during the period of Trinh – Mac civil war. The competition and animosity of Netherlander traders – the rivals coming here before the British more than three decades (1637) was also another disadvantageous factor for the British emporium in Tonkin. These successive difficulties made the business activities of the British emporium in Tonkin brought to a standstill, especially after the head office in Bantam stopped its operations. Therefore, in 1697, the East India Company decided to stop the operations of the emporium in Ke Cho.

Although the emporium stopped its operations after 25 years of existence, the British did not thoroughly give up their business activities with Tonkin. Sometimes, there were British merchant ships doing business here until 1720. They realized that though the emporium did no longer exist, the arrival in here for business in some single shipments still brought about profits for the British<sup>(18)</sup>. Therefore they did not disclaim profits from commercial activities in Tonkin. Besides commerce, the British businessmen also paid attention to other

activities such as exploring and listening out for intelligence in commerce and the political situation in Tonkin as well as the degree of relations between Tonkin and other European countries. In the diary of the emporium in Tonkin, dated December 28<sup>th</sup> 1682 there was a notice sent to the Board of Directors of the East India Company about the relations and intention of the French in Tonkin by the detailed notes about the French mission coming from Siam bringing with it the gift and letter of King Louis XIV<sup>(19)</sup> to the lord of Tonkin. The British in the emporium in Tonkin not only took notes in an usual way, they frequently kept a close watch on the activities of the French and had suspicions about the French intentions. Gyfford wrote his doubt about the French as follows: *“Here the French has a house and we do not know whether this house is used for the religious purpose or for trade”*<sup>(20)</sup>

So the possible establishment of the British emporium in Tonkin in 1672 officially brought the British to the relations of commercial transaction with Vietnam. Although it did not achieve so much success, even it could be considered a failure<sup>(21)</sup>, the duration of time in Tonkin

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<sup>(17)</sup> Charles B. Maybon, *op.cit.*, p.45.

<sup>(18)</sup> Charles B. Maybon, *op.cit.*, p.46.

<sup>(19)</sup> Charles B. Maybon, *op.cit.*, pp.224, 252, 253, 254.

<sup>(20)</sup> Charles B. Maybon, *op.cit.*, p.256.

<sup>(21)</sup> Hoang Anh Tuan (2005), “The East Asian Plan and the Failure of the British East India Company in Tonkin in the Seventies of the 17<sup>th</sup> Century”, *Historical Studies*, N<sup>o</sup>. 9.



helped the British realize the important position of Vietnam in the area.

#### **4. The effort to seek support of the administration in Cochinchin**

After the emporium in Tonkin ceased its operations the British did not thoroughly give up their intention to continue to found its firm stance in Vietnam. Their ambition was exposed by many successive envoy visits to Cochinchin of diplomatic missions appointed by the East India Company and later British authorities.

##### **4. 1. The trip of Bowyear in 1695 - 1696**

Facing the danger of possible cease of operations of the emporium in Tonkin, the British carried out their intention of changing the direction of their operations to Cochinchin. From Saint George Fortress, the leader of the East India Company<sup>(22)</sup>, Nathaniel Higginson appointed the sale-manager Thomas Bowyear as an envoy to Cochinchin in order to set up commercial relations.

On August 18<sup>th</sup> 1695, the Delphin ship of the East India Company was sent from India, anchoring near Cham Island. After many days contacting the authorities in Hoi An, then came to Hue, on November 2<sup>nd</sup> Bowyear was allowed to attend the lord's audience (Minh Vuong Nguyen Phuc Chu). The reception ended in a short time after the British sale-manager presented gift to the lord. Seven weeks later, on December 27<sup>th</sup> Bowyear again had the opportunity to attend the audience to present the desires of the company. The letter of Higginson with

solemn words expressed a peaceful attitude to Lord Nguyen, wanting to establish the relations of commercial transaction. The letter wrote: *"The greatly celebrated and powerful aristocrat of Cochinchin Region<sup>(23)</sup>".* After presenting the desire of the company to establish the relations of commerce with Cochinchin, the letter had a concluding part to reassure Lord Nguyen as follows: *"Everywhere on the Indian land where the British people have set up the commercial relations, everybody knows that they have comported themselves impartially and lived peacefully, they have not sought to occupy the land and only tried to manage their work in a way how to bring about the greatest benefit to the region they have come to do business"<sup>(24)</sup>.* Despite the good willing words in the letter, the contents of instructions to the task of Bowyear mission were different. In the instructions of the leader of the East India Company issued on the same day with the letter to Lord Nguyen, the task of Thomas Bowyear was: to investigate the name and title of the king (Lord Nguyễn), the main dignitaries, the people gaining the king's favour; the way of ruling, the operations of trading with foreign countries, the fighting situation with Tonkin, the relations with close countries, the commerce with Japan<sup>(25)</sup>... The specific

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<sup>(22)</sup> The head mandarin of Britain in Bengal Gulf, Coromandel area, Sumatra and the sea areas south of Asia (nearly as the office of Governor-General later).

<sup>(23)</sup> Charles B. Maybon, *op.cit.*, p. 46.

<sup>(24)</sup> Charles B. Maybon, *op.cit.*, p. 46.

<sup>(25)</sup> Charles B. Maybon, *op.cit.*, pp. 47, 48.

instructions to Bowyear revealed that besides the task as an envoy of the East India Company, he also had a very important assignment: catching the intelligence concerning the political, diplomatic, economic, commercial and social situation... of Cochinchin. So the envoy of Bowyear was not only for the pure purpose of establishing the commercial relations but also for listening out for the situation in Cochinchin. This proved that to this time, the British had always stuck close on the Vietnamese situation. Although it seemed that this time was not yet suitable to the ambition of occupying the land as they had confirmed in the letter to Lord Nguyen, their intention exposed by Bowyear's envoy was clear that they wanted to advance deep into Vietnam when they had opportunity.

Now we come to the results of Bowyear's trip to Hue. In March 1696, Lord Nguyen Phuc Chu admitted in principle with the representative of the East India Company, permitting the British to build an emporium in Cochinchin<sup>(26)</sup>. After that, by the impasse of commercial relations with Japan<sup>(27)</sup>, the leaders of the East India Company in Madras decided to stop operations of the emporium in Thang Long (1697); they also did not pay attention to the report of the outcome of Bowyear's envoy to Cochinchin. In 1699, the East India Company managed to establish an emporium on the Chinese coast and in 1702, they built a fortress on Vietnamese Con Dao (Pulo Condore). Although they realized that Con Dao had many favourable conditions for commercial

development, at that time the British were deficient in capability to maintain their forces and effectively develop this island, so in 1705 they had to withdraw.

#### **4.2. The voyage of Charles Chapman in 1778**

In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the relations between European countries and Vietnam had two evident changes. First, the centre of attention of the Europeans in commerce changed from Tonkin to Cochinchin. Second, France stood out to be the principal competitive rival of Britain in place of the Netherlands in Vietnam. In this context together with their new position in Asia, the British again revealed their intention to pursue Vietnam. In 1778, Charles Chapman, an official of the East India Company, was appointed to Vietnam by the British Governor-General in Bengal with the task of establishing the commercial relations with Cochinchin.

Before the envoy mission to Cochinchin of Chapman, the commercial relations between Vietnam and the Western countries were much reduced in comparison with the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The activities of commercial transaction did not take place regularly as before. After occupying a great part of Indian territory, in the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century the British began to return to do

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<sup>(26)</sup> Alamstair Lamb (1970), *The Mandarin Road to Old Hue*, Chatto & Windus, London, p. 36.

<sup>(27)</sup> In this period, the authorities of Mac Phu Tokugawa in Japan was carrying out the policy of prohibiting border line trade with countries in the area, so the East India Company failed in its ambition of exporting silk cord and silk of Tonkin to Japan.

business in the East Asian area. In 1764 and 1777, two merchant ships of the East India Company Pocock and Rumbold came to do business in Hoi An and Da Nang.<sup>(28)</sup> Particularly, the ship Rumbold on its way from China to India called at Da Nang in 1777. Meanwhile in Cochinchin, the fighting was taking place violently between Tay Son and Lord Nguyen. The ship Rumbold let a Portuguese missionary named Loureiro and two mandarins of Nguyen Dynasty to go on board the ship to Sai Gon to look for Nguyen Anh. Nevertheless, because of bad weather, the ship Rumbold sailed straight to Calcutta, bringing with it the hitchhiking guests. The letter of David Kellican, one of the owners of the merchant ship Rumbold to British Governor-General Warren Hastings stating that one of the two mandarins he brought to India was the cousin of the king of Cochinchin (that is Lord Nguyen).<sup>(29)</sup> Immediately the British Governor-General in India received and treated two mandarins of Lord Nguyen affectionately. The dynamics of the ship Rumbold from the arrival in Cochinchin to the carrying of two Nguyen mandarins to India had always been closely watched by a French man named Chevalier who was suspicious about the intention of the British in Cochinchin, so he wrote a letter to the French Governor-General in Pondichery (India) Bellecombe, recommending the French to have actions before the British towards Cochinchin<sup>(30)</sup>. The British Governor-General in India Warren Hastings knew Chevalier's intention in the letter. He

was immediately enlightened about the interests of the British in Cochinchin. He speculated that there was no reason for only the French to have privilege and special advantage in Vietnam. Soon after Hastings ordered the East India Company to assign a ship to carry two mandarins to come back to their native place, at the same time delegated an emissary to Cochinchin to establish the business transaction relations.

About the middle of April 1778, Chapman and a delegation of British businessmen departed in two ships Amazon and Jenny (two mandarins of Cochinchin were on board this ship) to Vietnam. Before that the Board of Directors of the East India Company in Bengal issued a declaration on March 30<sup>th</sup> 1778 stating: Vietnam was the fundamental link in the British business system with China<sup>(31)</sup>. Up to this time, the British openly declared their interests in Vietnam. The time when the Chapman mission arrived in Cochinchin the Tay Son Movement was vigorously developing, the forces of Lord Nguyen were in serious failure and had to withdraw to the South. Chapman arrived in Cochinchin in November 1778 and came back to Calcutta in March 1779. In his report on the trip he wrote: *There was no other country in the East which is rich and diversified in products*

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<sup>(28)</sup> Nguyen Luong Bich (1996), *Summary History of Vietnamese Diplomacy in Former Time*, People's Army Publishing House, Hanoi, p.192.

<sup>(29)</sup> Alamstair Lamb, *op.cit.*, p.71.

<sup>(30)</sup> Alamstair Lamb, *op.cit.*, p.70.

<sup>(31)</sup> Alamstair Lamb, *op.cit.*, p.72.

*beneficial to business as here. There were many kinds of valuable products such as spice, cinnamon, silk, cotton and elephant's tusk... gold is found on mountain tops near the sea...*<sup>(32)</sup> Chapman speculated that the British establishment of their basis in Cochinchin was not too difficult while the fighting situation was going on. Particularly he also stated that there needed only 50 European military officers, 200 Indian soldiers and some artillery to be able to occupy and keep an establishment here<sup>(33)</sup>. Chapman's proposal on Vietnam was not carried out by the British authorities in India because at this time Britain and France had signed peaceful agreements to the East Asian area after short military skirmishes happened between two countries in African and American colonies<sup>(34)</sup>. Therefore, the British had no action to Vietnam after Chapman's survey because the reason from the French. The French wanted to annex Vietnam, so between them and the British there had been agreements on Indochina.

#### **4.3. The Trip of Macartney in 1793**

Chapman's proposals after his travel to Cochinchin in 1778 was not touched upon by the British Governor-General in India. Within 15 years after that, the British had no official dynamic to resume the relations with Vietnam. In 1793, on the occasion of his travel to China to receive his task, the British ambassador Macartney dropped in Da Nang. This was the first official visit of a British diplomatic official to Vietnam.

Arriving in Vietnam this time, in a new posture after the East India Company occupied some important bases in South East Asia such as Penang Island (Malaysia, 1786), the British ambassador brought with him a mighty attaché delegation of 95 people going on two big ships H.M.S. Lion, Hindostan and a sailboat Fackall. Starting on September 26<sup>th</sup> 1792 from Portsmouth, Macartney and the attaché delegation reached Con Dao on May 16<sup>th</sup> 1793, then reached Da Nang on May 25<sup>th</sup>. During the time of staying here for 20 days, Macartney had the opportunity to receive and exchange with the mandarins of Tay Son authorities in friendship and amicability. Macartney had favourable background to organize an official reception with the authorities in Hue<sup>(35)</sup> (at

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<sup>(32)</sup> Alamstair Lamb, *op.cit.*, p.80.

<sup>(33)</sup> Alamstair Lamb, *op.cit.*, p.151.

<sup>(34)</sup> In 1778, in the war for independence, 13 North American colonies allied themselves with France to oppose Britain. After that successively Spain in 1779 and the Netherlands in 1780 also took part in this war in order to scramble for British colonies. Britain lost a number of colonies on African coast, Minorca Base in the Mediterranean Sea, a great part of Florida, two islands in Caribbean Bay. In face of this difficult situation, in 1783 Britain was obliged to sign Versailles treaty with France and Spain. According to the articles of this treaty, Britain had to acknowledge St. Pierre, Miquelon, Tobago and St. Lucia Islands, a number of emporiums on Indian and Senegal coasts belong to France; admitting Florida belong to Spain; Minorca and Bahamas Bases were given back to Britain.

<sup>(35)</sup> At that time, there were three authorities in Vietnam: From Quang Nam to the North belonged to Quang Toan authorities, the royal capital was situated in Hue; the remaining South Central Vietnam belonged to Nguyen Nhac authorities, the royal capital was in Quy Nhon; the South belonged to Nguyen Anh forces, the center was Sai Gon-Gia Dinh.

that time Nguyen Quang Toan was the king) and Macartney did not do so. The secretary of Macartney, George Staunton wrote down as follows: *"In a more stable kingdom, however the ambassador did not think that it was the appropriate condition to negotiate or present credentials"*<sup>(36)</sup>... It seemed he regretted the opportunity of the British. According to the viewpoint of Staunton, this was the time for the British to have the opportunity to interfere in the Vietnamese political complexion to compete with the French. The reason was that in receptions and debates with mandarins of the authorities, Staunton realized that they badly needed the British assistance to oppose Nguyen Anh's forces with the French help.<sup>(37)</sup> He revealed that if the British consented to help them to oppose the alliance of Nguyen Anh – France, the envoy delegation would be enthusiastically welcomed when they came to Hue<sup>(38)</sup>. And so the British would have the opportunity to come closer to the Vietnamese authorities, despite many years earlier they had made efforts and were not successful at all.

Having a good opportunity to approach the authorities, however Macartney expressed his idea of unwillingness to have relations with Tay Son Dynasty. He speculated that there would be no favour for the British if they have connection with Tay Son authorities. Perhaps he thought that Tay Son was unorthodox authorities, it would not exist for a long time, so if striking up a

friendship with it, the mishap would be very high. In reality, in the time of 1793 the political complexion in Vietnam rapidly changed after the death of Quang Trung. From the time when the young king, Quang Toan succeeding Quang Trung to the throne, the disagreement inside Tay Son movement became more and more serious. It was the good opportunity for Nguyen Anh forces to develop rapidly in the South. Upon arriving in Da Nang, the British convoy saw the mighty forces of Nguyen Anh with the support of French war ships preparing to attack the forces of Nguyen Nhac in Quy Nhon. From the facts heard with his own ears and seen with his own eyes, Maccartney realized that the hostilities complexion was advantageous for Nguyen Anh, naturally it would bring about much advantage for the French in Vietnam. Therefore the British hardly had the opportunity to squeeze into Vietnam. So he speculated that the present political context in Vietnam was not appropriate for

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<sup>(36)</sup> Alamstair Lamb, *op.cit.*, p.151.

<sup>(37)</sup> Versailles treaty was signed between the French court and the representative of Nguyen Anh Pigneau de Béhaine in 1787 was considered to be the legal basis officially acknowledging the right to protection of France in Vietnam before Britain and other European rivals. Although the 1787 treaty was not carried out because the French capitalist revolution broke out 2 years later, it still had significance to France; it was the pretext for France to interfere deep into the Vietnamese political situation; on the one hand for the execution of the plot to invade Vietnam, on the other hand to impede the ambition to occupy Indochina of other forces, especially Britain.

<sup>(38)</sup> Alamstair Lamb, *op.cit.*, p.151.

commercial activities and other British strategic interests.

Once more the British did not succeed in establishing the official commercial relations with Vietnam though it was the best opportunity for them. The ensuing years to the time before the French opened fire in their invasion of Vietnam, the British continued to appoint envoys to Vietnam, however the historical conditions were different, the difficulties originated from the subjective awareness of Nguyen Dynasty made the British opportunity become more and more far-away.

#### ***4.4. Other Missions of the British representatives to Vietnam in the time of Nguyen Dynasty***

After staying in Vietnam for fifteen days the British ambassador's convoy, Macartney continued its itinerary to China. On September 5<sup>th</sup> 1794, he returned to London after two years on mission in Asia. Although the mission did not achieve diplomatic target, they knew a lot more facts concerning Vietnam. Particularly they have managed to outline the sketch of Da Nang port and discovered that this was a very good seaport for the operations of vessels. From Da Nang, it was possible to carry out sea voyages easily and rapidly to near places such as Tonkin, China, Japan, Cambodia, Siam, the Philippines, Borneo, Sumatra and Malacca. Moreover, they had been able to verify the facts which Chapman had reported before about the good opportunity

to do business with Vietnam. Besides, they realized France had not yet successfully controlled Vietnam. By this awareness, the British did not yet give up their intention towards Vietnam.

After being founded, Nguyen Dynasty applied closed-door policy, restricting the relations with the West, making the British activities to contact Vietnam become more and more difficult. It has been totaled up that only in the period of Gia Long (1802-1819) and Minh Mang (1820-1840), there were over 30 diplomatic missions of Western countries wanted to establish relations with Vietnam and were repudiated<sup>(39)</sup>. In this context, there was no exception for the British diplomatic corps coming to Vietnam. In 1803, Britain had its envoy arriving to establish relations with Vietnam, King Gia Long neither received his gift nor accepted his proposal. In 1804, Britain again appointed its ambassador Roberts to Hue to offer the letter and presents of the British government to propose the establishment of an emporium in Da Nang and King Gia Long also declined. In 1822, in the period of King Minh Mang, the British again appointed Crawford to Hue to propose the establishment of commercial relations and

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<sup>(39)</sup> Huynh Ba Loc (2008), "Some Problems Govern the Relations between Nguyen Dynasty and France from 1802 to 1858", *Summary Record of the Seminar of Lord Nguyen and Nguyen Royal Dynasty in Vietnamese History from the 16<sup>th</sup> Century to the 19<sup>th</sup> Century*, The Gioi Publishing House, Hanoi, p.322.

the authorities also did not accept. In the years 1847 and 1855, the representatives of the British government Davis and Wade were appointed to Vietnam to establish relations and finally they were also not successful because King Thieu Tri and King Tu Duc continued to apply the closed-door policy, refusing relations with the West.

### **Some remarks**

From commercial activities, the British gradually discovered the important position of Vietnam in the East Asian commercial system. In particular, after realizing that China was the market ensuring the survival of the British economy in India, Vietnam became more and more necessary for the British ambition in Asia. Therefore they pursued the intention to establish the British influence in Vietnam over two centuries before the French monopolized Vietnam.

The British method of approaching Vietnam began from commerce, then they used the diplomatic measure, sometimes the idea of using military forces emerged, however it was not vigorous and evident.

The final result remained the usual commercial activities. Nevertheless the British never wanted this outcome only because from the beginning, upon arriving in Vietnam they defined the commercial value here not great. The British wanted Vietnam because they saw the strategic position in the East Asian commercial system of Vietnam.

After many times of making efforts, the

British did not yet achieve their highest purpose in Vietnam. The following fundamental reasons can explain this result: First, although the British badly wanted Vietnam, they had no such strong attitude as the French. Second, with a large system of colonies over the world the British hardly had enough forces to maintain colony in Vietnam. Third, the Vietnamese commercial value was not as great as that of China (from the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, China was the spine for the economic investment in India). Fourth, the agreement between Britain and France about the areas of influence of these two countries in Asia restricted the enlargement of British colonies in Asia. Fifth, the Vietnamese feudal authority was still very stable. Therefore the British specific way of infiltration which had been very effectively applied in South East Asian countries would not be suitable to the Vietnamese political context in this period.

The British always devoted themselves to this pursuit and the Vietnamese feudal authorities had never once taken initiative in a negotiation of commercial relations with them. The author does not judge responsibilities of the Vietnamese contemporary feudal authorities; He only offers some suggestions for readers, scientists and researchers to have more thoughts about the Vietnamese fate in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. And this is also a precious lesson of experience withdrawn from history for the process of international integration of our country at present.

