

Role of European Merchants in Economic Integration and Development of Đàng Ngoài in 17th Century

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Abstract: In the 17th century, the economy of Đàng Ngoài (Tonkin) developed strongly in both domestic and foreign trade based on prosperous agricultural production, a proliferation of handicraft products, and various occupations aimed at providing products for export. Among many internal and objective forces behind this development, the role of European merchants is noteworthy. It can be said that never in Đại Việt in general, and in Đàng Ngoài in particular, was there such a considerable presence of merchants from Western countries as in the 17th century as well as during the first three decades of the 18th century. This article focuses on analysing the role played by European merchants in Đàng Ngoài's economic integration and development in the 17th century - a period when foreign trade reached its climax under a monarchical era in Vietnam. The role of these merchants is shown in two main aspects: supplying goods to the Đàng Ngoài market and consuming its profitable ones. Given these activities, European merchants not only promoted Đàng Ngoài's economy but significantly contributed to helping its market gradually approach the regional "Eastern Sea trade" and the trend of globalisation in the 17th century.

Keywords: European merchants, 17th century, Đàng Ngoài, economy.

Subject classification: History

1. Introduction

The 17th century in Đại Việt was a century of civil war and strife. There were seven fierce conflicts, interspersed by various truces, causing the war between Đàng Ngoài and Đàng Trong to last for 46 years without a resolution. Finally, in 1672 the two sides decided to call a ceasefire and the Gianh River was made the demarcation line. However, the country was divided even before the Đàng Ngoài-Đàng Trong civil war. In fact, conflicts between feudal groups created the situation in which the Lê-Trịnh and the Nguyễn courts

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co-existed, with each ruling a territory of Đại Việt. From 1672 onwards, the boundary, determined as the area from the Gianh River to the North, was called Đàng Ngoài (or Bắc Hà - 北河, i.e. Northern river). It was ruled by the King Lê - Trịnh Lord, while the Thuận-Quảng area was called Đàng Trong (or Nam Hà - 南河, Southern river) and ruled by the Nguyễn lords. The territory of Đàng Ngoài was controlled by the Lê-Trịnh court but was still shared with other feudal forces, which were remnants of the Mạc family and the offspring of the Lord Bàu (Vũ Văn Mật) in Tuyên Quang. The armies of the Mạc family and lord Bàu were vigorously active during several periods. They sometimes took advantage of the internal problems within the Lê-Trịnh association, such as the time when the Mạc Dynasty sent troops to attack the Thăng Long Citadel, in 1600 (Year of Metal Rat) and 1623 (Year of Water Pig). Due to a complicated political situation and war, the Trịnh lords and the King Lê in Đàng Ngoài and Nguyễn lords in Đàng Trong had to prepare and firmly consolidate their economic and military forces, while at the same time, boost the expansion of external trade to garner military support. Although not as timely as the Nguyễn family, the Lê-Trịnh court also quickly came up with game-changing policies. By the 17th century, European merchants from Portugal, France, the Netherlands, and England actively engaged in trading activities in the Đàng Ngoài market place. This commercial activity brought change and new vitality to Đàng Ngoài's economy at this time.

The commercial activities of Westerners in Đại Việt, and in particular diplomatic relations between Đại Việt and the West in the 16th and 17th centuries, have attracted great attention from scholars within Vietnam and overseas ever since the 1920s and 1930s, and made many achievements in the 21st century. Typical scholars include W.J.M Buch (1936), Alain Forest (1998), Frédéric Mantine (2001), Roland Jacques (1998), Vương Hoàng Tuyên (1959), Thành Thế Vỹ (1961), Nguyễn Thừa Hỷ¹, Nguyễn Quang Ngọc², and

¹ Some studies by Nguyễn Thừa Hỷ on foreign trade: “Sông Đàng Ngoài và Domea - Một đô thị cổ đã biến mất?” “The Đàng Ngoài River and Domea - A lost ancient town?” (Bulletin of *Past and Present*, No.4, 1994); “Phải chăng ngoại thương tư nhân Việt Nam đã phát triển từ thế kỷ XVIII?” (Did Vietnam's Private Foreign Trade Develop in the 18th Century?), *Journal of Historical Studies*, No.7(363), 2006; “Những thương nhân Hà Lan đầu tiên đến Đàng Ngoài và Kê Chợ năm 1637” (The First Dutch Merchants Coming to Đàng Ngoài and Kê Chợ in 1637), *Journal of Historical Studies*, No.4(396), 2009 and No.5(397), 2009; L. Cadière, 1912; Nguyễn Thừa Hỷ, 2010.

² Nguyễn Quang Ngọc has such essays on foreign trade as: “Sông Đàng Ngoài và vị thế phố Hiến xưa” (The Đàng Ngoài River and the Position of the Ancient Phố Hiến), *Journal of Culture and Art*, No.10(208), 2001; “Domea, the Border Port at a Northern Estuary in the 17th century”, printed in *Vietnam on the Road to Development and Integration: Tradition and Modernity*, Second International Conference on Vietnamese Studies, Hồ Chí Minh City, July 14-16, 2004; “Hệ thống cảng biển vùng Đông Bắc thế kỷ XI - XIX - Lịch sử và hiện trạng” (The Northeastern Seaport System in the 11th-19th Centuries - History and Reality) (Key Research Project of VNU, code QGTD.04.10); “Domea (Đô-mê-a) trong hệ thống thương mại Đàng Ngoài thế kỷ XVII - XVIII” (Domea (Đô-mê-a) in the Đàng Ngoài Trading System in the 17th-18th Centuries), *Journal of Historical Studies*, Issue 10 (378), 2007).

Hoàng Anh Tuấn³. The gaps in researching the foreign trade of Đại Việt and Đàng Ngoài during the 17th and 18th centuries have been gradually filled in thanks to an increasing number of foreign material rich and diverse in content. Studies by previous authors mainly focused on analysing trading activities and diplomatic relations, while the role of European merchants was referred to only in part and sporadically. In this article, based on domestic and foreign sources, the author presents an overview of the role European merchants played in the economic integration and development of Đàng Ngoài in the 17th century.

³ “Mậu dịch gốm sứ của Công ty Đông Ấn Hà Lan với Đàng Ngoài nửa sau thế kỷ XVII” (Ceramic trade of the Dutch East India Company with Đàng Ngoài in the Second Half of the Seventeenth Century) in *Đông Á - Đông Nam Á: Những vấn đề lịch sử và hiện tại* (East Asia - Southeast Asia: Historical and Current Issues) (Thế Giới Publishers, Hanoi, 2004); “Kế hoạch Đông Á và thất bại của Công ty Đông Ấn Anh ở Đàng Ngoài thập niên 70 của thế kỷ XVII” (The East Asia Plan and the Failure of the English East India Company in Đàng Ngoài in the 70s of the 17th Century), *Journal of Historical Studies*, Issue 9, 2005; “Mậu dịch tơ lụa của Công ty Đông Ấn Hà Lan với Đàng Ngoài, 1637 - 1670” (The VOC – Tonkin Silk Trade, 1637 – 1670)", *Journal of Historical Studies*, No.3(359), 2006, pp.10-20 & No.4(360), 2006, pp.24-34); “Hải cảng miền Đông Bắc và hệ thống thương mại Đàng Ngoài thế kỷ XVII (qua các nguồn tư liệu phương Tây)" (The Port of the Northeast and the Trading System of Đàng Ngoài in the 17th Century (through Western sources), *Journal of Historical Studies*, No.1(369), 2007 & No.2(370), 2007; “Gốm sứ Đàng Ngoài xuất khẩu ra Đông Nam Á thế kỷ XVII: Tư liệu và nhận thức” (Export Tonkin’s Ceramics to Southeast Asia in the 17th Century: Documentation and Perception), *Journal of Historical Studies*, Issue 11, 2007, pp.28-39; “Công ty Đông Ấn Hà Lan ở Đàng Ngoài, 1637-1700” (Dutch East India Company in Đàng Ngoài, 1637-1700), printed in John Kleinen (Editor), *Sư tử và Rồng: Bốn thế kỷ quan hệ Hà Lan - Việt Nam* (Lion and Dragon: Four Centuries of Dutch-Vietnamese Relations), Thế Giới Publishers, Hanoi, 2008; “Vải lụa và xạ hương xuất khẩu từ Đàng Ngoài sang Hà Lan thế kỷ XVII” (Silk Cloth and Musk Exported from Đàng Ngoài to the Netherlands in the 17th Century), *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, Issue 4, 2009, pp.29-37; “Xuất khẩu vàng từ Đàng Ngoài sang Coromandel thế kỷ XVII” (Exporting Gold from Đàng Ngoài to Coromandel in the 17th Century), *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, Issue 9, 2010, pp.19-24, etc. The book *Tư liệu các Công ty Đông Ấn Hà Lan và Anh về Kê Chợ - Đàng Ngoài thế kỷ XVII* (Documents of Dutch and English East India Companies in Kê Chợ and Tonkin in the 17th Century), Hanoi Publishing House, 2010 was compiled by the author based on notable archival sources from England and the Netherlands, some of which were the first to deal with Thăng Long - Kê Chợ and Đàng Ngoài in the 17th century. In addition to the translated and published archives, the 80-page length of book’s Introduction section demonstrates its value. Author Hoàng Anh Tuấn not only gave an overview of the current state of relevant archival sources, but also provided important information about the trade between Dutch, English merchants and Đàng Ngoài, focusing on Kê Chợ in the 17th century. “Mạng lưới thương mại nội Á và bang giao Hà Lan - Đại Việt (1601-1638)” (Intra-Asian Trade Network and Dutch - Đại Việt Relations (1601-1638), *Journal of Historical Studies*, Issue 422, 2011, pp.22-35) and many articles were published and presented in specialized journals and seminars.

2. Preconditions for Đàng Ngoài's economic integration and development

Firstly, it was the regional and worldwide trend for integration - a trend which begun in the 15th century developing rapidly in the 17th and 18th centuries. At this time, Đại Việt occupied a relatively favourable position for embracing external influences; it was an active commercial hub and was greatly influenced by international and regional circumstances. Olov Jansé (1961, pp.1645-1670) dubbed it the “crossroads of peoples and civilisations”.

Trade between countries was increasingly being strengthened thanks to the achievements of great geographical discoveries, and scientific and technological inventions. Since the 15th century the world has become more closely connected due to international shipping routes established by the former great empires (Hoàng Anh Tuấn, 2016, p.53). Since the 17th century, Western Europe's maritime and commercial centre gradually shifted from the traditional Mediterranean Basin to the eastern side of the Atlantic Ocean and into the West Indies and East Indies. This created a significant pretext for the beginning of a “global trade era” (Hoàng Anh Tuấn, 2016, p.229). The East-West trade route entered a booming period thanks to Spanish, Portuguese, English, and Dutch merchants.

The presence of such commercial powers promoted a period of “Eastern Sea trade” in Asia and Southeast Asia in particular. Regionally, the role of powerful merchants like the Chinese and Japanese was undeniable. The European agency brought about even more exciting activities for countries. Đại Việt was no exception as it gradually entered the early modern era of globalisation.

Secondly, policies of the Đại Việt state towards foreign trade were proactive. The need for territorial unity and concentration of power became indispensable for the Lê-Trịnh court. Political upheavals in the 16th and 17th centuries posed significant challenges for the court of the King Lê - Lord Trịnh. They were struggling to solve internal difficulties in Đàng Ngoài and to suppress other constantly rising feudal forces while maintaining enough strength to build a formidable army to engage with, and conquer, the Nguyễn family in Đàng Trong. Therefore, economic development as a basis for military deployment was an urgent requirement and it also influenced the attitude of the Lê-Trịnh court towards Western merchants during this period.

The external trade policy of the Lê-Trịnh state towards foreigners is hazy and sporadically mentioned in the official histories. However, through Western archival sources - made by merchants and clerics at that time - the attitude of the Đàng Ngoài court towards trade, especially foreign trade, was quite clear. For most of the 17th century, the court implemented an open trade policy but at the same time held a monopoly on foreign trade. According to the records of missionaries, as well as traders, at first the Lê-Trịnh court, especially the Trịnh family, had a remarkably open attitude towards

Westerners coming to Đàng Ngoài, whether for religious or commercial purposes. Lord Trịnh Tráng admitted that: “As for the friendly commercial relations, they are all agreeable and convenient for the people; what else is there to say?”⁴ (L. Cadière, 1912 via Nguyễn Thừa Hỷ, 2010).

The Portuguese were recorded as being the earliest Westerners to reach Đàng Ngoài. By the mid-1640s, the Portuguese merchants in the area became “something that he (Lord Trịnh Tráng) was very proud of and eager to engage with”. In 1626, the popularity of the Lê-Trịnh court led Italian cleric P. Baldinotti to speculate that: “All the graces that he (Lord Trịnh Tráng) has bestowed on us seem to have come from an intent to trade with the Portuguese, for there have been rumours in the kingdom they would bring great profit with what they carry on board” (Baldinotti, 1903, pp.71-78). In 1627, according to the French missionary Alexandre de Rhodes, Lord Trịnh Tráng clearly expressed his wish to engage in trade with the Portuguese: “The Lord of Đàng Ngoài (Tonkin) [on his way to the battle with Đàng Trong (Cochinchina)] noticed a cross when he passed through this port [a specific port in Thanh Hóa] to prepare for the campaign against Đàng Trong. He asked if it was a sign the Portuguese had erected at the port; an attendant, fond of the parishioners, replied that when people saw this sign from afar, they were drawn to it. The lord was pleased that the Portuguese ships were attracted to his port for trading purposes in this way.” (Alexandre de Rhodes, 1994, p.85).

In April 1637, when crossing the Giang estuary (Hội Thống gate, Nghệ An town), Carel Hartsinck - leader of a delegation - told the local authority about why the Dutch had come to Đàng Ngoài: “...through our Japanese colleagues, we were well informed of the goodwill and benevolence of the lord, who is quite willing to allow all the merchants to come to his country and even put them under his protection” (J.M.Dixon, 1883, p.197). Later, Lord Trịnh granted the Dutch many trading privileges in Đàng Ngoài, such as the right to trade directly with Vietnamese commoners (craftsmen and merchants), being given the royal banner and the lord’s seal so that “when returning they do not have to stop at the house/station of the eunuchs/coordinators and are allowed to go upriver on a long boat [of the Tonkin government] (W.J.M.Buch, 1936, pp.136-145; Hoàng Anh Tuấn, 2007a, p.73) and to set up shops in Kẻ Chợ”...

The French arrived in Đàng Ngoài quite early, and in general, things were relatively smooth. The activities of the French were missionary based; at first, the attitude of the Lê-Trịnh court towards Christianity was not harsh or restrictive. Therefore, for both missionary and commercial activities of the French, King Lê and the Trịnh lords basically paved the way for them to operate in Đàng Ngoài’s territory.

⁴ Trịnh Tráng’s Letter to the superiors of the Jesuit Congregation in Macao in 1627.

Thirdly, the economic and social foundation of Đàng Ngoài created a premise for its development and integration. Regarding commerce, a network of markets was established in all Đàng Ngoài localities. Some of the notable flourishing urban trading centres were Thăng Long and Phố Hiến in the 17th century, which promoted domestic and foreign trade. Little is recorded in official history of the waterway and road transport systems, so one mainly learns about this through the state's policy on goods inspection and wharf usage taxes. However, the waterway system was relatively convenient for travel and transport purposes. Archival sources on the road transport system are meagre. In 1663, the court issued 47 articles of the moral development for the villages and communes, in which the roads were recorded as follows: damaged roads, bridges, and sewers that could be arbitrarily repaired and built; in a town, roads had boundaries, so if anyone dared to trespass and made the road narrower, the village chief was allowed to take measurements and reset the boundaries; if he defied the judgment, he would be punished (Nguyễn Ngọc Nhuận, 2011, pp.623, 625). In 1664, the court ordained October every year to be the month when roads and dams were repaired (National History Bureau of the Nguyễn Dynasty, 1998, p.310), creating some favourable conditions for people to expand inter-regional trading activities.

Economic changes led to other significant social developments: the rise in the number of wealthy landowners increased the demand for luxury products and thus spurred the development of cottage industries and commerce (Lê Thành Khôi, 2014, p.313). There were also cultural changes such as the introduction of new religions, the reception of Western scientific and technological achievements, and the expansion of townspeople and craftsmen.

For a country with an agriculturally dominant economy, “agriculture was the livelihood of most people. All the weight of agriculture put pressure on other economic activities and determined their transformation” (Nguyễn Thanh Nhã, 2013, p.85). Agriculture, being the economic sector most developed by the state compared to other sectors, achieved numerous results in the 17th century. In *Vân đài loại ngữ* (芸臺類語 - Classified talk from the study), Lê Quý Đôn affirmed the importance of agriculture and described the fertile land and abundant plant varieties in the Northern Delta (Lê Quý Đôn, 1973, pp.223-249, 267-278). Foreigners coming to Đàng Ngoài in the 17th century retold the facts: “The land was fertile and people never stopped cultivating. People thoroughly understood the value of the land, so they never left it uncultivated. And after harvesting the crops, hard-working housewives immediately ploughed the soil again and sowed fresh seeds. And so, each year they usually yielded two or three crops. In places where rice could not be grown, they planted fruit trees and reaped great harvests. The trees were so lush that they always appeared to be green, and the leaves did not change colour as if in a forest of eternal spring.” (R. Marini, 1666, pp.56&58; Trương Hữu Quỳnh, 2009, p.327). In 1688, William Dampier noticed that: “There was a lot of rice here, especially in the lowlands, where the soil became fertile after being submerged in water. Every year, there were two planting and

harvesting seasons, and they harvested a lot,” and he described a series of fruit trees and vegetables cultivated by the people of Đàng Ngoài (William Dampier, 2007, pp.40-42).

Based on a prosperous agricultural economy, cottage industries and commerce advanced. Agriculture provided raw materials for the former, supplying goods for the latter. Therefore, in addition to market factors, raw materials, sound sources, and the dynamism of merchants, what provided for the flourishing of industry and commerce in this period was the agricultural economy, whose basis was the increasingly more robust development of private land ownership. When this system became widely accepted, the smallholder economy expanded, and surplus agricultural products appeared on the market. Therefore, there was an abundance of raw materials for cottage industries, which in turn provided goods for the market and contributed to developing a commodity economy.

3. Role of European merchants

In the feudal history of Vietnam, there was no other time as the 17th century when commercial development peaked and was deeply influenced by the international situation. Western countries, typically Portugal, the Netherlands, Great Britain, and France, played active and essential roles in implementing and developing Đàng Ngoài’s trade. Being here from the 1530s to the beginning of the 17th century, the Portuguese established wider trading and missionary relations. The Dutch and English merchants were active in conducting transactions and exchanges. The Dutch East India Company (VOC) first established trade relations with Đàng Ngoài in 1637, which lasted until 1700. The English East India Company arrived in Đàng Ngoài later but also established a trading post within 25 years (1672-1697). Merchants also came from regional countries such as China, Japan, and Siam. The proactiveness and initiatives of merchants from other countries contributed to promoting economic integration and development of Đàng Ngoài in the 17th century.

3.1. Supplying goods to Đàng Ngoài market

The first items European merchants brought to the Đàng Ngoài market were weapons and luxury goods for kings and mandarins. The need to find supplies of weapons and war equipment from Western countries - with superior military technology - in the war with Đàng Trong was the main reason for the Lê-Trịnh court’s open foreign trade policy in the 17th century. The court held a monopoly on importing weapons and war equipment but only concentrated on certain items. The English once complained: “We can sell the following goods: lead, sulphur, saltpetre, guns, and English weapons to no one but the lord. We are also not allowed to transport them because the lord fears that we will supply the

goods to his enemies [referring to the Đàng Trong's people]"⁵. The court also intervened in the market prices of these goods. In a letter sent to Bantam in October 1672, an English merchant officer in Đàng Ngoài recalled: "Lord Trịnh Tạc allowed the Dutch to sell potassium nitrate for ten *taels* one picul, sulphur at four *taels*, ammunition at three *taels*, and 200 *taels* for one gun of any type. We do not know the prices of the rifles, but we can send some home so you can try them out."⁶ In fact, weapons and war equipment were seen by European merchants as a means to "please" the King, Lord and mandarins rather than items that brought them high profits. Guns and saltpetre were frequently imported to Đàng Ngoài during this time. According to William Dampier, cannons, especially long-barrelled ones, were the most prevalent (William Dampier, 2007, p.86). In 1650, Lord Trịnh Tạc asked the Dutch to provide two cannons that fired large cannonballs. In 1653-1654, the lord requested three to four large cannons with a fixed price of 14,000 *taels*⁷; in 1655-1656 he asked for eight to ten guns. In 1675, Lord Trịnh Tạc sent samples to the Netherlands to cast six guns. Saltpetre was first imported into Tonkin in 1660 by the Dutch. In addition, Đàng Ngoài imported saltpetre and pepper from the English, Chinese, Japanese, and Siamese merchants.

The transaction method was decided by the lord as he placed orders for merchants and paid in cash or other goods depending on each contract. However, if the goods arrived late or were not to his liking, he would show his contempt - which was not very pleasant for foreign merchants and caused anxiety about their business in Đàng Ngoài.

Western merchants also provided other luxury goods alongside weapons, typically high-class fabrics that Đàng Ngoài could not produce, such as damask, European wool fabrics including Perpetuanes, Salempores, Jamawar, mull-mulls, gamutty, crape, jamewar floral fabric, Indian and Chinese cottons, and canvas. In general, the range of imported fabrics was very diverse.

In addition, the quantity of imported Tonkin fabrics was quite large. The desire for exotic and good-quality fabrics fuelled the transactions. The documents detailed that English felt and large-format fabrics were highly popular in the Đàng Ngoài market. Notably, in 1676, Đàng Ngoài proposed sending up to ten packages of woollen cloth, but the Flying Eagle ship sent 49 packages, which the Đàng Ngoài's people still consumed. The English trading post again ordered Bantam to provide another 30 packages of cloth for Đàng Ngoài.

⁵ Letter from Đàng Ngoài to England dated 7/12/1672 - G/12/17-1, *Tonqueen Journall Register*, 25/12/1672 - 7/12/1672, fos. 1-58.

⁶ G/12/17-1, *Tonqueen Journall Register*, 25/12/1672 - 7/12/1672, fos. 1-58.

⁷ *Tael* also known as the *tahil* and by other names, is one of several unit of weight measures used in East Asia and Southeast Asia one tael is equivalent to 37.5 gr.

There were limited consumers of these luxury fabrics; they were mainly royalty, lords, and mandarins. The most enthusiastic customer was Trịnh lords. Therefore, a fabric's colours regulated the class level: yellow and red were often reserved for kings and lords and were more expensive than blue, black, white, etc. When imported fabrics became more familiar, and the lord possessed a huge amount of cloth, its consumption in Đàng Ngoài dropped sharply. In 1677, an English merchant sent a letter to Bantam about the situation: "The procurement of imported goods is stagnant and slow as we have experienced, especially English [woollen] products, in which the lord only took two packages of large-format cloth this year; next year we believe he will take even less, even if he is satisfied with the quality, for he has an enormous amount of it as well as of other goods"⁸, "the lord's palace is full now and he no longer wants those goods."⁹

The Ming-Qing ceramics (China) and Hizen ceramics (Japan) were the main luxury ceramics of the upper class in Thăng Long - Kẻ Chợ. The Dutch, Portuguese, Chinese, and Japanese merchants were the main importers of these goods into Đàng Ngoài. Other luxury items such as gemstones, diamonds, onyx, crystals, amber, coral, pearls, glassware, mirrors, silver-handled knives, or rare animals such as Arabian stallions, parrots, lions, eagles, and turkeys were brought to Đàng Ngoài but primarily to be given as gifts to king and mandarins.

Spices, medicinal herbs, and forest products in Asian countries also appeared in the Đàng Ngoài market but were consumed in small quantities by a limited number of people. Some typical goods were pepper, agarwood, sandalwood, nutmeg, sugar candy, and beeswax. Information about these small, single items is scattered in Western archival sources.

In the 17th century, when the commodity economy developed strongly, the demand for coins in circulation increased sharply. The Lê-Trịnh court was unable to meet the demand among the people of Đàng Ngoài. Meanwhile, old and chipped coins started to decrease in value. They were replaced by a considerable volume of Japanese metal coins, including silver, copper, and copper coins imported yearly into Đàng Ngoài by the Dutch, Chinese, Japanese, Portuguese, and English. Therefore, these coins acted as currency and were important commodities in the 17th century. They were supplied to the Đàng Ngoài market by European merchants.

Silver was one of the primary commodities imported into Đàng Ngoài by the Dutch. In the 17th century, Đàng Ngoài mainly imported refined silver: kronen (or leeuwendaalders) 24%, Japanese schuytzilver 16%, Dutch rijksdaalder and provintien-daalder 8%, and

⁸ Letter from Đàng Ngoài to Bantam dated 30/11/1677 - G/12/17-4, *Diary and Consultations of T. James and W. Keeling*, 06/6/1677 - 24/6/1678, fos.201 - 224.

⁹ Diary dated 25/12/1677 - G/12/17-4, *Diary and Consultations of T. James and W. Keeling*, 06/6/1677 - 24/6/1678, fos.201 - 224.

Spanish rial 4%. The annual volume of imported silver was relatively stable, averaging 100,000 *taels*/year. During the golden period of the Dutch East India Company - Đàng Ngoài trade relations (1644-1652), each year Đàng Ngoài imported approximately 130,000 *taels*. In the mid-1650s, silver always accounted for about 95% of the total value of goods imported by the company into Đàng Ngoài (Hoàng Anh Tuấn, 2007a, p.129). However, with the decline of trade relations here, the amount of imported silver decreased. Externally, it was because of a decree banning the export of Japanese silver by the Tokugawa shogunate in 1668.

Given the shift in purchasing coinage metals from the Dutch East India Company and the English East India Company, the Đàng Ngoài authorities decided to import copper and copper coins to replace silver. In 1652, a significant amount of copper coins minted by the Chinese in Macao were imported into Đàng Ngoài through Portuguese intermediaries, bringing the Portuguese a profit of nearly 20,000 *taels*. The currency crisis in the 1660s in Đàng Ngoài caused the demand for coins to increase daily. The Japanese zeni gradually gained the upper hand, and the volume of zeni imported into Đàng Ngoài increased rapidly. In 1661, the Kê Chợ trading post successfully consumed 400,000 zeni coins which later, increased every day. The Dutch merchants were the leading importers of Japanese zeni into Đàng Ngoài and in 1675, the Lê-Trịnh court allowed them to monopolise this import into Đàng Ngoài. However, from 1676, Tonkin's reception of zeni coins gradually decreased because the Kê Chợ trading post believed that copper was worth more than zeni. Proposals asking the Dutch East India Company to avoid importing zeni boosted the popularity of silver ingots and coins in the Đàng Ngoài market, just like the past.

Thus, in Đàng Ngoài in the 17th century, foreign currencies circulated in parallel with those of the Lê-Trịnh. In the late 1620s, Alexandre de Rhodes found that the "big coins" imported by Chinese and Japanese merchants into Đàng Ngoài were widely consumed throughout the country. In contrast, the "small coins" minted domestically were only circulated in the citadel and neighbouring provinces (Alexandre de Rhodes, 1994, pp.37-38). Author Hoàng Anh Tuấn commented: "The coinage metal sources had a significant and profound impact on the expansion of Đàng Ngoài's commodity economy and, at the same time, directly and very often affected the structure of labour division and social life." (Hoàng Anh Tuấn, 2009b, pp.18-30; 2010a, pp.53-63).

3.2. Consumption of Đàng Ngoài goods

Western merchants also played the role of collectors and consumers of the goods produced in Đàng Ngoài, typically silk, ceramics, spices, and gold.

Silk was considered the trademark of Đại Việt's market for foreigners as it brought the most significant profit and attracted many merchants from other countries. Dutch and

English merchants were numerous and regular customers in Đàng Ngoài; their interests were closely linked to bringing Tonkin silk to global and regional markets. Dutch merchants bought large quantities of silk and, at times, competed against the Chinese merchants. Silk became the primary commodity of the Dutch East India Company in Đàng Ngoài. Even on the Grol's first voyage to Đàng Ngoài in 1637, Dutch merchants successfully made 190,000 florins worth of goods, including 53,695 catties¹⁰ of raw silk (168,378 florins) and 9,665 pure silk (11,268 florins)¹¹ (Hoàng Anh Tuấn, 2006, p.12). After a trial period (1637-1640), the Dutch officially kickstarted a prosperous development period of the silk trade (1641-1654). Samuel Baron in Đàng Ngoài in 1678 and 1685 commented: "Silk, including raw silk and pure silk, is the most important product and also the most traded commodity in Đàng Ngoài. For raw silk, the Portuguese, the Spanish, the Dutch, and now the Chinese, in turn, sell it in Japan. Pure silk is mainly consumed by the Dutch and the English"¹² (Nguyễn Thừa Hỷ, 2010, p.148). A 1689 letter from an English merchant in Đàng Ngoài stated: "The great business of the Dutch here consists of exchanging saltpetre, sulphur, and cloves for raw silk, which they then send to Japan" (Charles B. Maybon, 2006, p.147).

Members of the king and lord's palaces and, in part, the mandarins were the leading suppliers of silk products for foreign traders. The method of silk trading was decided by the kings and mandarins, which foreign merchants had to follow if they wanted to avoid trouble and hassle. Foreign merchants had to pay silver to the lord's palace to be supplied with silk at a time he determined. In 1674, the English person summed up: "The custom here is that the lord takes the merchant's silver in exchange for silk at a high price." (Hoàng Anh Tuấn, 2010b, pp.300-301). Another ubiquitous method was that the king sends officials to inspect the ships and apprehend the most valuable goods as soon as foreign merchant ships arrived. The lord would exchange these goods for silk. This method of silk trading caused Western merchants to suffer double losses: high-price and low-quality silk¹³. A member of the Dutch trading post in Kẻ Chợ once wished: "If only the silk delivered by the lord was of better quality and cheaper than the market price; perhaps the goods of Đàng Ngoài [sold in Japan] would be at better prices" (Hoàng Anh Tuấn, 2010b, p.181).

¹⁰ Catty (or kati) is a traditional Chinese unit of mass used across East and Southeast Asia, notably for weighing food and other groceries. One catty is equivalent to 16 *taels* or 600gr.

¹¹ Generale Missiven I, p. 585; NFJ 763; Klein (1986), p. 165-166, via Hoàng Anh Tuấn, 2006, p.12.

¹² Samuel Baron, "Description of the Kingdom of Tonkin", via Nguyễn Thừa Hỷ, 2010, p.148.

¹³ The Company made a summary of the situation, prospects and some suggestions for doing business with Đàng Ngoài, dated December 7, 1672 - G/12/17-1, *Tonqueen Journall Register*, December 25, 1672 - 7 12/1672, fos. 1-58.

Foreign merchants could buy silk directly from merchants and producers in Đàng Ngoài, and the Vietnamese merchants proved quite active in approaching customers after they purchased the products from weaving villages, even though the state did not allow it. However, because silk brought significant profits, the Lê-Trịnh court increasingly tended to monopolise it. This became one of the considerable obstacles for European merchants purchasing silk. The archival sources of the Dutch and English East India Companies recorded this phenomenon as follows: "Some officials rumoured that the lord had banned people from selling silk to the Dutch merchants; so, many people refrained from making deals with them again. Only when the merchants appealed to the lord was the above rumour suppressed. However, people were still extra cautious in dealing with the Dutch agents". "On 19 August 1662, the merchants came to an English trading post and asked if they could sell silk there; some carried material samples so we could see if it could be sent to Europe for sale (the quotas were usually based on the trading of Chinese silk). The governor sent someone to ask why we were receiving so many merchants. Director William Gyfford replied that because there was authorisation from the lord to conduct business so we followed through; if not, wouldn't the lord's authorisation be just on paper? (Hoàng Anh Tuấn, 2010b, pp.120, 275)." When foreign merchants directly ordered samples and paid producers a deposit, they could control the quality of silk, samples, and prices, but this transaction method was not always safe. In 1682, the English lost 4,000 *taels* of silver when they ordered a kind of fabric called "*lĩnh*"; the Dutch lost 5,000 *taels* because the broker went bankrupt and evaded debt.¹⁴

In the 1660s, when Đàng Ngoài's silk trade began to decline, its ceramics became an appealing commodity to be exported to the markets of Southeast Asian island countries. It was mainly due to the "Haijin" (Sea ban) issued by the Manchu government; the ceramics of Đàng Ngoài were selected to replace those of South China (made at the kilns in Fujian, Guangdong) (Hoàng Anh Tuấn, 2007a, p.31; 2007b, p.28]. The scarcity of raw Chinese ceramics paved the way for the rise and region-wise popularity of Đàng Ngoài's ceramics.

In the 17th century, ceramic villages were the leading suppliers of ceramic goods for domestic and foreign markets. Bát Tràng ceramics were one of the main ceramic exports during this time (Hoàng Anh Tuấn, 2007b, pp.32-33). W.J. Buch confirmed that in 1661, the Dutch merchants bought a lot of Bát Tràng ceramics, including the village's famous bricks. In 1670, Dutch shipped 214,160 ceramic products from Vietnam (W.J. Buch, 1936). Chu Đậu ceramics were widely traded in Đàng Ngoài and exported to many Southeast Asian countries and the rest of the world. According to a study by Tăng Bá Hoành, the route taken by Chu Đậu ceramics was from the manufacturing site to Vân Đồn or Phố Hiến ports, before being transported to China, Japan, and Western countries by merchant ships

¹⁴ G/12/17-8, Tonkin General to Bantam and London 8 December 1682, fol. 304r-308v.

(Tăng Bá Hoàn, 1993, 2007, pp.19-24). Excavation work proved that many types of ceramics of the centres were present at the wharves of Vân Đồn trading port. Researchers all agreed that Vân Đồn was a port that exported the largest quantity of ceramics and held an important position in the East-West ceramic trade route for many centuries (Hán Văn Khẩn, 2004, p.48). To date, there are 30 sites that feature Chu Đậu ceramics in Southeast Asia (Aoyagi Yoji, 1991, pp.78-82), and shipwrecks are also present in coastal Vietnam and Southeast Asia (Hà Văn Cẩn, 1999, pp.72-90). According to Japanese archaeologists excavations reveal that blue and white porcelain remains have been found in many sites dating back to the second half of the 16th century and the first half of the 17th century in Kyushu, Hokuriku, and Kanto (Kikuchi Seiichi, Yoshida Yasuko, 2007, pp.681-684); this signifies ceramic trade relations between Đại Việt and Japan at that time.

In addition, the export of Đàng Ngoài's ceramics to countries around the world was realised by the important role of foreign merchants: the Chinese, Japanese, Dutch, English, etc. Among them, the Chinese and Dutch merchants played a dominant role. For example, in 1669, the Dutch merchants in Kê Chợ sent Batavia 381,200 of Đàng Ngoài's raw ceramic cups. From that time to the early 1680s, the Dutch exported Đàng Ngoài ceramics to the regional market. According to Dutch archival sources, an estimated 1.5 million pieces of Đàng Ngoài ceramics were exported to Southeast Asia during the 1660s, 70s, and 80s.

Musk and cinnamon were especially appealing spices in the Western European market during the 17th and 18th centuries. In Đàng Ngoài, these were considered rare precious goods, exclusively purchased and traded by the court. Cinnamon could be gathered domestically, especially in the mountains of Đàng Ngoài and the Thanh-Nghệ region: "Đại Việt's unique cinnamon [in the high mountains bordering Đàng Ngoài and Đàng Trong] has a reputation for having the best quality (J. M. Dixon, 1883, pp.185-186). The musk is of foreign origin, mainly from Yunnan, Sichuan (China), and partly from Laos. Due to the scarce and erratic sources, the musk and cinnamon trade only took place at a modest level in Đàng Ngoài. Dutch merchants did their best to buy these goods, but in reality, the small number of transactions could not meet the company's expectations. Although musk and cinnamon were not the main items in the export structure of Đàng Ngoài, by contributing to economic and trade relations with Western merchants, they still had a role to play, especially in the late 17th century. Dutch merchants only started exporting Đàng Ngoài's musk in 1652, but the profit generated encouraged them to continue in the following years. The scarcity of musk in the marketplace would only improve when trading activities across the border between Vietnam and China recovered. In 1665, the Kê Chợ trading hub sent 111 *catties*, 15 *taels*, and one *maas*¹⁵ of musk to Batavia (Hoàng Anh Tuấn, 2009a, pp.29-37).

¹⁵ *Maas* is an unit of weight measurement. One *maas* is equivalent to 0.1 *tael*.

In addition, Western merchants purchased art handicrafts and some local products. William Dampier praised the Đàng Ngoài's lacquerware putting it on a par with other brands and just below the Japanese products that were still considered the best worldwide.

Carpentry products were exported only in limited quantity because the Europeans did not care for their design. According to Dampier's notes, cabinets and other beautiful furniture from Đàng Ngoài were made from a type of softwood that residents called pone, but the final design did not match the aesthetics of the Europeans; the sloppiness of the carpentry also caused the value of wooden furniture to decline.

Foundry products also featured in international trade. Dampier once learned that the staff at the office of the Governor of Phố Hiến confiscated two bells ordered by the King of Siam via an English ship (William Dampier, 2007, pp.82-83, 122).

In addition, Đàng Ngoài also exported other products such as turpentine, saltpetre, and some local products.

In the 17th century, the amount of gold mined in Đàng Ngoài was relatively small, so it could not yet be commercialised to meet the needs of Western merchants targeting the Indian market at that time. Therefore, most of the gold purchased by Westerners came from China, specifically Yunnan and Guizhou¹⁶. However, gold sources were unstable because Đàng Ngoài did not always receive abundant supplies from China, which was the main obstacle to the trading activities of foreign merchants. The Dutch contributed significant gold traders to Đàng Ngoài, but due to supply constraints, the quantity traded was limited. In 1663, the Dutch bought in 148,295 guilders worth of Đàng Ngoài goods, of which there were only 1,900 *taels* of gold. In the spring of 1664, out of 31,211 guilders worth of goods transported by the Bunschoten to Batavia, the Kê Chợ trading post only collected 674 *taels* of gold that was later transferred via Batavia to the trading posts in Coromandel. From the mid-1660s onwards, Đàng Ngoài was no longer a focal point for gold supplies. Therefore, its trade with foreign merchants gradually declined and finally ended.

4. Conclusion

The Lê-Trịnh court's initiative to open trading activities, show goodwill, and invite Western merchants to the Đàng Ngoài market was compatible and similar to the goal of expanding the call to the East of the Western countries. The European merchants in Đàng Ngoài came from Portugal, the Netherlands, England, and France - countries with economic prowess and strong development in maritime trade, so the need for market

¹⁶ Dagh-register Batavia 1661, pp. 49-55. via Hoàng Anh Tuấn, 2010c, pp.19-24.

expansion was huge. However, there were pretty clear differences between the various groups of merchants. The French focused on spreading Christianity and paid little attention to business activities in the Đàng Ngoài marketplace. The Portuguese engaged in missionary and commercial activities which achieved certain results. However, the Portuguese were the only people mentioned above who did not set the goal of establishing trading posts in Đàng Ngoài. Hence, they were free traders. The Dutch and the English developed trading companies in Phố Hiến according to the regulations of the Lê-Trịnh court. However, both these groups made special efforts to apply for permits to set up more trading posts in Thăng Long - Kẻ Chợ. Such were the clear commercial goals of the Dutch and English merchants. According to recorded sources, the Dutch commercial activities in Đàng Ngoài were the most prominent. The Portuguese were the first to start their business but they ended before the other three groups. The English merchants proved to be the most persistent force in conquering the Đàng Ngoài market.

Trading activities of European merchants in Đàng Ngoài focused on importing products that were advantageous in the market and concurrently brought high profits if traded with other countries. The exporting activities of Westerners in Đàng Ngoài mainly focused on goods that could not be produced in Đàng Ngoài itself, such as weapons, war equipment, silk, and luxury items. Thanks to the proactive activities of Western merchants, Đàng Ngoài gained access to new goods and, more significantly, to innovative scientific and technical achievements. Foreign trade was promoted, and goods produced in Đàng Ngoài were brought to regional and international markets by Western merchants. This kickstarted an integration into the world economy and became the driving force for developing Đàng Ngoài's economy in the 17th century. The Lê-Trịnh court, being short-sighted and timeserving, unfortunately missed the opportunity to further advance the country in the 17th century.

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