

Activities of La Compagnie Française des Indes Orientales in Siam in the Second Half of the 17th Century Revisited

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Abstract

Knowledge concerning commercial activities of the French Company of the East Indies in Siam and Dai Viet in the 17th century is plagued by a large gap in research. This article, based on an examination of archives and various later works of research, seeks to fill part of that gap and redraw knowledge of the process of establishing and conducting commercial activities of the French in 17th century Siam. It reviews the ambiguous relations of the Paris Foreign Missions Society (*Les Missions Étrangères de Paris* - MEP) and the French Company of the East Indies (*La Compagnie Française des Indes Orientales* - CIO), the ambitions of the French court and missionaries in Siam, and the vain attempts of the French to enhance their position in Siam. In doing so, the article provides a broad picture of French activities in the Indochinese peninsula giving a comparative perspective of their economic and religious penetration in Dai Viet in the second half of the 17th century.

Keywords: CIO, Siam-Thailand, trade, 17th century, France, Dai Viet-Vietnam, Southeast Asia

บทคัดย่อ

องค์ความรู้เกี่ยวกับกิจกรรมทางการค้าของบริษัทอินเดียตะวันออกของฝรั่งเศสในสยามและได้เวียดในศตวรรษที่ 17 ยังมีช่องว่างอยู่มาก บทความวิจัยนี้มุ่งเติมเต็มช่องว่างขององค์ความรู้ดังกล่าวโดยการตรวจสอบข้อมูลจากจดหมายเหตุและงานวิจัยในระยะหลัง และนำเสนอเค้าโครงความรู้เกี่ยวกับกระบวนการจัดตั้งและการดำเนินกิจกรรมทางการค้าของบริษัทอินเดียตะวันออกของฝรั่งเศสในสยามในศตวรรษที่ 17 บทความนี้ยังได้วิเคราะห์ถึง

ความสัมพันธ์ที่ก่อความระหว่างบริษัทอินเดียตะวันออกของฝรั่งเศสและคณะมิชชันต่างประเทศแห่งกรุงปารีส รวมทั้งความปรารถนาของราชสำนักฝรั่งเศสและคณะผู้เผยแพร่ศาสนาคริสต์ในสยาม ตลอดจนความพยายามที่ไม่บรรลุผลของฝรั่งเศสในการเขียนฐานะในสยาม เพื่อให้เกิดความเข้าใจที่ชัดเจนขึ้น บทความนี้ได้เสนอภาพรวมของการดำเนินการของฝรั่งเศสในคาบสมุทรอินโดจีนและมุมมองเชิงเปรียบเทียบเกี่ยวกับการแทรกแซงทางเศรษฐกิจและศาสนาของฝรั่งเศสในไต้หวันในช่วงครึ่งหลังของศตวรรษที่ 17

คำสำคัญ: บริษัทอินเดียตะวันออกของฝรั่งเศส สยาม-ประเทศไทย การค้า ศตวรรษที่ 17 ฝรั่งเศส ไต้หวัน เวียดนาม เอเชียตะวันออกเฉียงใต้

Introduction

French and Siamese diplomatic relations began the 1680s. Despite the efforts of the Siamese monarch Phra Narai and King Louis XIV to promote good relations, the diplomatic history of the two countries in the late 17th century was a failure. French trade activities with Siam in the second half of the 17th century remain unstudied by both Thai and Vietnamese scholars.¹ This article is intended to redraw our understanding of the beginning of trading activities of the French in Siam from the late 1660s through the three last decades of the 17th century.

¹ In fact, there are a few works of research about Siamese and French relations during the 17th century. Frédéric Mantiene is considered one of the contemporary pioneers thanks to archives discovered at MEP (*Les Missions Étrangères de Paris*), BNF (Bibliothèque nationale de France - National Library of France), AMAE (Annales de la Société des Missions-Étrangères - *Annals of the Foreign Missions Society*), and MAE (Le ministère des Affaires étrangères - Ministry of Foreign Affairs). In his works (particularly *Les relations politiques et commerciales entre la France et la péninsule Indochinoise*), he has paid great attention to reappraising and discussing with other French scholars who had conducted research on the Far East and French interactions such as Adrien Launay, Georges Taboulet, Charles Maybon. Nonetheless, Mantiene focused only on the case of Tonkin (Dai Viet) without descriptions of Cochinchina, which had excellent relations with Tonkin and French missionaries in Dai Viet and the Indochinese peninsula. With an overview of French and Siamese relations under the reigns of Kings Louis, D. Van der Cruysse (1993, 2001a, 2001b) has highlighted diplomatic activities, cultural exchanges and political intentions especially under King Louis XIV and Phra Narai in the 1660s through Siamese envoys to France. In 1995, Michel Hergoualc'h also reconsidered this issue in the essay titled "La France et le Siam de 1680 à 1685. Histoire d'un échec," which was published in *Revue Française d'histoire d'outre-mer*, but without any comments on the 1688 event. Alain Forest and others have mentioned only the French religious activities in Siam and Dai Viet; and Phaulkon is cited but it is impossible to use all this material in this short essay. In this article, I seek to revisit the CIO's activities in Siam, more importantly I wish to put them into a comparative perspective with 17th century Dai Viet-Vietnam.

France and Siam in the regional economic context in the mid 17th century

Standing at the forefront of economic development requirements, especially maritime activities, France and other Western countries came forward to mediate trade. J.B. Colbert, after coming to power in finance (1665), served as the French (Chief) Minister of Finance from 1665 to 1683) and attempted to strengthen the establishment of commercial companies with greater privileges.

In August 1664, the French Company of the East Indies (*La Compagnie Française des Indes Orientales* - CIO)² was founded on the model of the British East Indian Company (EIC) and the Dutch East India Company (Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie - VOC). In 1668, the CIO established its first factories in Surat (Surat), followed by those in Pondicherry, India in 1674. At the same time, Colbert founded the North Company in 1669 for the Baltic countries, and the Levant Company in the east Mediterranean. Pursuing war with the Dutch in 1670s caused difficulties for the French economy, and more seriously under the reign of King Louis XIV (1638-1715), who had to repeal provisions (tariffs) of the Treaty of Nimègue in 1678. Consequently, the North Company was not able to compete with the Dutch in the Baltic region and was dissolved in 1684. Because of the active role of François Martin,³ only the CIO was able to survive in the Far East. In

² The earlier commercial companies were established as follows: in 1604, the French Company for East India was established by Minister Sully (then renamed the Company of Good-Hope Cape in 1611), East India Company (or Malacca Company, founded in 1615), Morbihan Company by Richelieu in 1626, West Indian Company in 1662 (for America, Africa) and so on. In referring to the French Company of East India a number of books written after 1664 used the name French Company (*Compagnie Française*) or India Company (*Compagnie des Indes*) which was called the CIO. Finally, the Company of the West Indies (*Compagnie des Indes occidentales*) was established in 1664, but just 10 years later (in 1674) it was dissolved.

³ François Martin (1634-1706) was the first governor general of Pondicherry, founder of Pondicherry, the future capital of French India, in 1674. He was commissioner of the CIO before holding this post and was preceded by François Baron and succeeded by Pierre Dulivier. There is a street named François Martin in Pondicherry. In Siam and Vietnam (or Dai Viet - 大越 - Great Viet which is most used for the eight centuries from the 11th to the early 19th century, along with other names, such as Đàng Trong - Cochinchina, Đàng Ngoài - Tonkin, Đại Ngu - 大虞; Vietnam was officially used since the early 19th century), he played an important role in connecting the CIO with the authorities of these countries, and strongly promoting the CIO's involvements in Dai Viet in the 17th century.

1674, Martin prevented the Pondicherry factory from being taken over by the Dutch. In 1682, a decree allowed the CIO to trade freely with India, South Asia, and Southeast Asia.

Therefore, prior to the mid 17th century, with rapid changes in the East-West commercial system, the French set out to expand to the Far East. Although scholars have believed that the primary goal of Western countries was limited to the Eastern region, mostly China, Mainland Southeast Asia was also considered important.

Soon after coming to power, King Ekathotsarat, the “White King” (r. 1605-1610), declared an end to military conflicts with neighboring kingdoms and conducted power consolidation and economic reforms, especially trading activities. In 1608, based on the existing relationship, the King gave the Dutch permission to establish a VOC factory in Ayutthaya. Earlier, in 1602, the Dutch had set up a factory in Patani, a Malay kingdom and one of Ayutthaya’s tributary states. The location of the Ayutthaya factory helped the VOC’s connections with Siam’s trading partners, such as China and Japan. Siam at this time was one of the major entrepôts in Asia. Given its important commercial ports on such trade routes as Joncelang, Mergui, and Ayutthaya, along with such well-known commercial products as ivory, elephants, lac, benzoin⁴, and mineral potentials (tin), Siam also continued to rely heavily on forestry and fishery products such as deer, suede, fish, rhino horns, wood, etc. in trading activities at home and abroad. King Ekathotsarat paid great attention to the expansion policy and “fair”⁵ trade development in Siam and the region. The policy also was continued under Ekathotsarat’s son, King Songtham (r. 1610-1628).

In the 1630s, the VOC expanded in Siam. This was the beginning of a time of Siamese political upheaval, as King Prasat Thong (r. 1629-1656) had just unseated Songtham’s son. Taking advantage of this instability, the Dutch improved diplomatic relations in order to monopolize Siam’s trade.

⁴ *Relation du voyage de Mgr de Bérythe* [Mgr de Bérythe’s relation of the voyage], 1662, AME 121 ff. 626 sq and 876 ff. 117 sq (Launay, 1920: 1-5); (Mantienne, 2001: 820).

⁵ According to the French, in Siam the King promoted the fair trade but in fact targeted a monopolized trade

Siamese politics changed fundamentally under the reign of King Narai, who ruled Ayutthaya from 1656 to 1688 and is considered one of the greatest kings in the history of Thailand.⁶ He took advantage of connections with King Louis XIV to create a counter-balance to the Dutch to restrict their range of operations.⁷

In reviewing 16th and 17th century Siamese political life, F. Mantienne made two observations regarding external activities. First, Siam’s international relations needed to expand because of the unconsolidated nature of the government, prolonged wars, and the presence of a large foreign community that included Chinese, Japanese, Portuguese, Dutch and English. Second, external relations had to be continued in order to keep a balance with Western powers through their trade companies in Siam (Mantienne, 2001: 77).⁸

The CIO’s commercial activities in the second half of the 17th century

Going to the capital of Siam in 1664 was beyond the original plan of Bishop Lambert de la Motte (1624-1679).⁹ Indeed, he initially intended to reside briefly in Ayutthaya before going on to Cochinchina (Dai Viet). However, after having failed to make headway into Dai Viet, he and F. Pallu (1626-1684), decided to make Ayutthaya a headquarters for French missionary activities in Siam, Dai Viet or the Far East as whole.

⁶ Narai (in Thai: นารายณ์, or Ramathibodi III (รามธิบดีที่3) or Ramathibodi Si Sanphet (รามธิบดีศรีสรรเพชญ์), the King of Ayutthaya from 1656 to 1688.

⁷ Deslandes to Gayme AME f0 546 (Mantienne, 2001: 154); (Goor, 1991: 453); (Hutchinson, 1985).

⁸ At this time, Siam’s external policy seems to have been influenced by three factors: Buddhist ideology (tolerant and open-minded), the desire for economic expansion and the emergence of xenophobia in the Siamese society (due to the increase of Western influence through both politics and military intervention).

⁹ Following Alexandre de Rhodes who was expelled from Dai Viet (Vietnam) in 1645, F. Pallu and L. de la Motte, two diocesan priests appointed by the Church (Rome) by 1658, left France for Siam. They also were the first apostolic vicars of Indochina. In 1664, they convened a synod in Ayutthaya, then compiled the “Instructions to the Missionaries of Propaganda File” in 1665 in response to The Propaganda File’s Instructions, which were well known under the name “The Instructions of 1959”.

It should be recalled that information about Siam's position in the international commercial system, although excluded from the initial intentions of the French clergy, was increasingly identified after the presence of the CIO and the Paris Foreign Missions Society (*Les Missions Étrangères de Paris* - MEP) in the Far East. As Siam lay on the road to the East, its location played an extremely important role in the Westerners' goals in the 16th and 17th centuries, which included the following: access to Southeast Asian spices; the Southeast-West commercial route starting in the Molucca Islands (including Borneo, Java, Sumatra, Ceylon [Sri Lanka] and Côte de Malabar); a route to the Middle East, the Mediterranean and North Europe; a major supply of water and so on. On the other hand, in terms of inner-Asian commerce, Siam was located on the spice road from north to south, from the southeast to the northeast of East Asia, and towards Japan and China as the maritime trade.

In terms of religion and politics, King Narai allowed the building of churches and seminaries, and facilitated connections between French and Siamese authorities (Gervaise, 1998: 47). He also responded graciously to the demands of the French clergy when Bishop F. Pallu submitted a letter to him from Louis XIV along with one from the Pope. Bishops Lambert and Pallu wanted Narai to immediately appoint a delegation to France with the intention of repaying the favor.

In 1674, the EIC reopened a factory in Ayutthaya. When its trade in Asia declined in the 1680s, its Ayutthaya factory had to be closed and all facilities and staff members were withdrawn to Surat. Meanwhile, availing themselves of this opportunity, the VOC's world-wise merchants reinforced their trade in Siam. C. Phaulkon¹⁰ was disgraced in the EIC, while the French more clearly revealed their intentions in intervening in Siamese political and economic life. Therefore, following Pallu, King Narai decided to send a high-level

¹⁰ Constance Phaulkon, known as *Monsieur Constance*, a Greek adventurer and prime counselor to King Narai, assumed the title of Chao P'raya Vichayen. "He was one of those in the world who have the most wit, liberality, magnificence, intrepidity, and was full of great projects..." wrote Abbé de Choisy, *Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire de Louis XIV* [Memories to serve the history of Louis XIV] (p. 150) (Smithies, 2002: 12).

envoy to France in 1680. The envoy left Siam in December 1680 on the *Vautour*.¹¹ Realizing that the *Vautour* was too small to cross the ocean to Europe, the crew was transferred to the *Soleil d'Orient*.¹² In 1683, Narai decided to appoint an additional envoy to France (Cruysse, 2001a: 72-77).

There are no further documents about the CIO's activities in Siam at that time, unlike the period before 1680.¹³ Pallu came to Ayutthaya in December 1673, establishing official diplomatic relations between the Ayutthaya and Paris courts. After the trip from France back to Siam accompanying Louis XIV's letter, the Siamese king only "asked the Mission about the Pope's health..." (Mantienne, 2001: 113).¹⁴ Narai, impressed with Laneau (Bishop Metellopolis),¹⁵ especially his charitable acts,¹⁶ decided to allow the CIO to open a factory in Ayutthaya in 1680.¹⁷ However, during the first two years (1680-1682), the CIO faced many difficulties and disappointments. Generally, during the years 1682-1688, its trade in Siam remained remarkably weak.¹⁸

Based on archival documents, Mantienne's research provides some evidence about trade activities (Mantienne, 2001: 132, 135, 136-138):

¹¹ Deslandes left Surat on 2 May 1680 on the *Vautour*, a supply ship of six hundred tons. F. Martin had merchandise destined for Siam loaded on this ship, and set sail for Ayutthaya in June. The ship arrived at the bar of Siam in September. This was the first time that a CIO ship showed the French flag at the Chao Phraya.

¹² Furthermore, for the trip, F. Baron had ordered *Vautour*'s captain to sail immediately to Bantam where it would meet the *Soleil d'Orient*, which was to take the envoy to France (Cruysse, 2001b).

¹³ Regarding an event in 1666, Phra Narai was informed by the clergy about the CIO establishment. In the years 1671-1672, on the way to France, anchored in Surat, Pallu persuaded CIO directors Baron and Blot to send ships to Siam.

¹⁴ E.W.Hutchinson noted that at the time there was no evidence about Narai regarding political establishment with France (Hutchinson, 1985: 50).

¹⁵ Laneau was consecrated *Vicaire apostolique* in 1673 and Bishop in 1674. After coming to Siam, his first work was to learn the local language in order to better serve the mission.

¹⁶ They included setting up health centers for free patient care (in 1678, every day 200-300 patients went to the hospital), taking care of wounded soldiers or civilian prisoners (Launay, 1920: 24); (Mantienne, 2001: 116).

¹⁷ Two years before making a factory in Pho Hien (present day Hung Yen province) in Vietnam in 1682.

¹⁸ CIO ships came to Siam: September 1686 the *Coche* from Pondicherry to Mergui; 1687, the *Coche* went back to Pondicherry with rice and sappanwoods; 1687 the *St-Louis* was sent to Siam; August 1687 the *Président* to Mergui; *L'Aigle* and the *Normande* to Siam; in 1687, two Siamese ships named the *Resolution* and the *Saint John* to Pondicherry.

a) CIO bought various goods from Siam

The main items were elephants, benzoin, various kinds of wood (in addition to many products used as samples).

- Tin was preferred by the CIO, taken directly from mines in Joncelang (partly in Mergui and Ayutthaya). In the region, it was mined primarily in Perak, Kedah and Aceh. In 1638, the CIO estimated its total trade was around four million francs (\approx 2,000 tons) of which three million came from Perak, Kedah and Mergui. The rest was from Bangeri and Joncelang. In 1671, the Dutch signed a commitment with the authorities concerning their monopoly of the Siamese tin trade;¹⁹ nevertheless, the French, after the second envoy in 1687, gained the right to trade tin in Joncelang.²⁰

- Sappanwood: used as a dye

- Aloe woods: a gift to King Louis XIV in the Siamese first delegation to France, it was estimated to be 40 times more expensive than silver; it was sent in 1681, on the *Vautour* and valued at 50 piculs (around 60.5 kg) as King Narai's gifts to the company.

- Elephants: as in some other areas in the East Indies, this was an important export of Siam, used mainly for the purpose of war. The Bay of Bengal became a place of both illegal and legal trade, a focal point concentrated on the Malay Peninsula to Coromandel, Ceylon and Bengal. In the case of Siam, Mergui was a major commercial port, and Musulipatam (Masuli Patam) acted as a destination of such goods. In fact, there is no evidence that the CIO imported elephants from Siam; they were imported through the EIC. In 1680, one EIC ship carried 16 elephants, and in 1681 another carried 13, in 1682 there were five ships carrying a total of 52; and in 1684, four ships carried a total of 78 (on each ship the number of elephants did not exceed 20).

- Rice: According to Martin's *Memoirs*, at the end of 1686, 130-160 people died from starvation each day in Madras. This situation

¹⁹ In fact, the VOC monopolized exports only in Ligor (Nakhon Si Thammarat), not in all of Siam.

²⁰ Good results came from trade relations with Joncelang in 1680; two years later (1682), Deslandes decided to choose Joncelang in the CIO's tin trade. Also, Joncelang played an important role as a commercial base in the Bay of Bengal. "AMAE, série, Mémoires et Documents," Vol 4, ff. 35-43 (Mantienne, 2001: 190).

was similar to that of Pondicherry. Siam and Bengal were the two largest rice exporters. In Siam, this food product was controlled exclusively by the Royalty, enabling the export of rice from the border with a special license. A related type of operation was the slave trade. Martin opposed this form of traffic, as did the EIC in 1683 in Madras. Their objection, however, was not only on moral or humane grounds, but was also motivated by the desire to reduce the labor force in the factory.

b) CIO's goods marketed in Siam

- Indian textiles: Siam was considered a major market; this merchandise was usually reserved for the court. The CIO often imported it from Europe, rather than from China or India. In fact, Indian cotton of both 'good and poor' quality was imported from Gujarat, Bengal and Coromandel. It was sold in Siam, and re-exported to the peninsula [Indochina] and island countries (Malaysia, Java), where it was exchanged for spices and tin.

- Products sold in Siam, as well as many other European countries, to evoke curiosity, marketing and demands for luxury goods of the Siamese royal court; these countries often carried a number of valuable goods to serve as gifts. As in 1682, on behalf of King Narai, Phaulkon sent A.F. Deslandes-Boureau a list of presents that "the king wished to have from France." They included items such as mirrors, glass, and crystals (the latter were used to decorate elephants); and goods of lesser value, such as clothing and velvet. Requested gifts and "donations" usually accounted for a significant burden for the CIO.

- Highly-qualified human resources were high demand in Siam, which lacked skilled artisans, especially those able to make products according to Western specifications, such as enamel workers, who specialized in making intricate items. Also needed were senior military specialists, qualified wood craftsmen, carpet weavers, crystal workers, carpenters, glass workers; sailors (artillery) and weapon preservers; and specialists in the making of locks, guns, bombs and grenades.

Another important commodity was pepper; trade in it must have been one of the biggest businesses, bringing profits for the CIO in its

long-term operations in the Indies.²¹ There was no specific figure for the CIO regarding such goods, but its profits from this business were lower than those of the EIC and the VOC.

On the other hand, the pepper trade became the subject of political and military negotiations (*pepper politics*) and the commercial history also recorded the pepper war (*la guerre du poivre*). For the CIO, its late and limited activity on pepper sources was one of the reasons for its losses, which created difficulties in its trade efforts in the Indies. The CIO's pepper trade failed even though prior to the 1690s the French clergy in Siam sent notices that "pepper was cultivated for the company."²² Finally, because it was difficult to establish intra-Asia factories in Siam, Martin and Deslandes were unsuccessful in transforming Siam into the CIO's focal point in the Far East.

In Dai Viet, some commodity markets exported to Tonkin using the CIO's trade ship, *Tonquin*, until 1680. The majority of items consisted of the following:²³ 1) weapons and strategic commodities, including two cannons as gifts, as well as pepper, salt and sulfur; 2) European wool: French silks and textiles of dark red and dark green; 3) *réaux* silver coins: copper and silver coins from Tonkin, including silver ingots; 4) pepper, largely exported to China; 5) Indian cotton, including "*Chitte*" (cotton, painted or printed patterns, originally from Golconda and Masulipatam), Palempur (decorated and painted flowers), Berhampur (cotton, near Surat), dyed fabrics; 6) sandalwood, originally from Timor, put up for sale in China. Meanwhile, cargoes imported by the *Tonquin* and *Saint Joseph* from Tonkinese markets until 1682 were mostly samples, such as silks, musk, gold (Mantienne, 2001: 258-271).

Although we have notes about movement of goods between the CIO and Tonkin (Dai Viet) as above, we have to accept the fact that there is not much evidence or clear data about trade activities. Moreover,

²¹ Deslandes to Baron, 26/12/1682, BNF, Ms.N.A.F. 9380, ff. §35 et §37, pp. 19-20 (Mantienne, 2001:147-151).

²² Information dated 1691 notes that a shipment of 50 tons of pepper was transported by a company to France, where profit rates were up to 400 percent (Kaepelin, 1908: 224); (Mantienne, 2001:152).

²³ The *Conception*, a private trade ship sponsored by Pallu from Siam to Tonkin, was destroyed by a typhoon in the Philippines in 1674.

these products were often used as gifts, samples and re-exported products to China. For the CIO, Tonkin was just an entrepôt to China.

Trade efforts of the CIO with Siam during the last decade of the 17th century

In November 1684, King Narai decided to send two lower mandarins, Khun Phichai Walit and Khun Pichit Maitri,²⁴ to accompany the French priest, Father Bénigne Vachet (1641-1720).²⁵ The mission of this trip was to reciprocate the gesture of Louis XIV and the Pope (Pope Innocent XI, in Latin *Innocentius XI*, r. 1676-1689), and through it Siam attempted to request that a French authority figure with high jurisdiction come to Ayutthaya to sign the treaty between the two countries.²⁶ The ship left the Siamese port in early 1684.

In France, Siamese envoys completely ignored the intention of the Versailles court and Vachet. Under the support of the Jesuits and pressure from many sides, Louis XIV decided to appoint Chevalier de Chaumont as ambassador (and Abbé de Choisy as deputy ambassador) to Siam with the goal of "turning Narai into a faithful follower of Christ" (Hall, 1997: 553).²⁷

²⁴ They met with Louis XIV in Versailles; then Louis XIV sent an embassy led by the Chevalier de Chaumont in response, he then became the first French ambassador for King Louis XIV in Siam.

²⁵ Bénigne Vachet (Le Vacher, 1641-1720) was an MEP missionary, often at loggerheads with the Jesuits, the interpreter accompanying Siamese "mandarins" to France. He was actively involved with CIO and MEP relations and spent most of his Asian career in Cochinchina (Dai Viet) (Donald & Edwin, 1993: 1189-1190), (Smithies, 1994: 175).

²⁶ In addition, in the perception of the bishop (Laneau?), this trip was to promote state-to-state relations (*d'état à état*), ensuring the constant activities of the CIO factory in Ayutthaya, setting up political relations and trade benefits relied on by the mission. AME 878 f^o575 (Launay, 1920: 130-131); Lionne to the séminaire, 28/01/1684, AME 859 f^o295, Laneau to the séminaire, 22 November 1684, AME 859 f^o315; Journal de Céberet, p. 88 (Mantienne, 2001: 160). According to Siamese envoy, the trip was aimed at achieving an exact mandate from France, as Siam was ready for a close relationship between the two countries (Hutchinson, 1985: 96).

²⁷ About this delegation, in January 1685, Choisy noted clearly the purpose: "We will act together and be responsible for gaining privileges from the King of Siam to the Company, for example, Chinese and Japanese goods in true price (no discount), or cheaper than other markets; putting this trade under the company and for his people, creating good markets and higher profits...". Journal de Choisy, Annexes, p. 382 (Mantienne, 2001: 166).

The Siam envoy returned to the capital in May 1685. Apart from the above purposes, De Chaumont did not take into account any agreements. Nevertheless, Phaulkon cleverly restrained Chaumont and quickly negotiated a draft agreement with concessions on trade to the CIO²⁸ that included the following main articles: the French had the right to free trade (but only from the King's factories); the monopoly in tin mining in Joncelang and Singor (Songkhla, Singora) was ceded to France;²⁹ and the monopoly in pepper which had been issued by King Louis XIV and the French in Siam was recalled. Those who returned home with De Chaumont included Kosa Pan, Father Gui Tachard (known as Père Tachard, 1651-1712) and a Siamese senior noble. The ship left Siam in late 1685 and arrived in France in mid-1686.

In Paris, Siam's delegation made contact with such CIO directors as Vitry, Desvieux, and Lagny and discussed with them trade articles, as well as commissions of 25 percent that Siam offered to the CIO, while the CIO required 30 percent and other risks. Finally, the delegation did not know of a plan to send troops to Ayutthaya,³⁰ a scheme of the French court.³¹

In March 1687, a French fleet of six ships, carrying more than 1,300 people (including 600 sailors) under Desfarges's command, headed for Siam. Accompanying the delegation was the company director, Claude Céberet de Boullay, who was a professional trader.³² In September 1687, the delegation arrived in Ayutthaya. In early December, Claude Céberet de Boullay mentioned the signing of trade.

²⁸ With the measures signed earlier in the years 1682-1683 by Deslandes.

²⁹ By the mid 17th century, when rebels occupied Ligor (1649), which was associated with Patani, the Ayutthaya court had to ask for help from the VOC. During the French delegation in Siam in the years 1685-1686, Singor became a topic of lively debate. A letter sent to Paris by Lionne had a paragraph: "... the King of Siam gave a place for the king of Cingor [Singor] to build citadels and ramparts here...", but the representatives of the company aimed to take into account another establishment which was Poulo Condor [Dai Viet's Cochinchina]. Lionne to the Séminaire, 02/6/1686, AME 879 f^o366; Laneau to Seignelay, 1/11/1686, AME 859 f^o414 (Mantienne, 2001: 186-189, 165).

³⁰ The status of Ayutthaya could be compared to Thang Long-Ke Cho of Dai Viet at the time.

³¹ This mission aimed at: 1) occupying two Siamese maritime ports, 2) signing a trade agreement, and 3) favoring religious issues.

³² Claude Céberet du Boullay (1647-1702) participated in the La Loubère-Céberet embassy, co-representative of the mission with the diplomat Simon de la Loubère.

The focus of the convention draft was to clarify four points: 1) reaffirmation of the tin monopoly in Joncelang signed in 1685; 2) completely free trade, without any barriers (unlike in 1685); 3) the problem of the pepper monopoly; 4) strategic products monopolized by the Siamese royal court. Thus, the CIO had the right to be "out and in," to "buy and sell" the remaining goods to anyone, without barriers, including goods originating from abroad (Mantienne, 2001: 176). Nonetheless, considered in context, it seems that this contract remained theoretical only.

As for internal affairs, Siam's political situation at this time changed and its leaders were unfamiliar with Phaulkon's intention.³³ After Phaulkon and Desfarges's political and military schemes in early 1688, the French entered into war with the Thais. Nevertheless, the intention of the French and Phaulkon dissolved completely when they faced a strong nationalistic movement directed by Phetracha (a regent [trusted councilor]) who had a negative attitude towards foreigners. In June 1688, Phaulkon was executed, and in July King Narai died and Phra Phetracha officially came to the throne.³⁴

Obviously the deaths of Phaulkon and Narai caused the "French fall into isolation" because of the schemes of "Pra P'etracha [Phra Phetracha] to isolate French soldiers who were serving the clergy, especially Mgrs Laneau and Lionne" (Mantienne, 2001: 203). In Ayutthaya, after a concerted effort at negotiation, an agreement between Desfarges and Siam was signed, containing an article calling for the complete withdrawal of French troops.

In the Siamese political context, at the end of 1689, Desfarges's attempt to restore French influence by force was a disastrous failure (in early 1689 François Martin was appointed French factory chief in Siam). In fact, a number of French were not trusted in Ayutthaya, a problem

³³ It is noticeable that from August 1687 the Thais had entered officially into war with EIC. Narai and Phaulkon's economic intention was to open the Ayutthaya kingdom to the international community and create diplomatic ties with European countries, whereby they would benefit from foreign trade expansion. Meanwhile, Phetracha was allegedly disgusted by Westerners in Siam.

³⁴ At the time because Narai was seriously ill, Phetracha sent troops to arrest Phaulkon and then had him executed.

that was settled through the negotiation of Tachard³⁵ who was dispatched to come to Siam. However, according to François Martin, this trouble did not affect bilateral trade, as the Siamese were considered *méchants soldats* (vicious soldiers) indeed.³⁶

The defeat in Bengal, especially after Pondicherry had fallen into the hands of the Dutch in 1693, made the French more increase their penetration in Siam. Nonetheless, despite the efforts to link between France and Siam in 1690s and later the Treaty of Ryswick in 1697,³⁷ Father Tachard was able to do nothing on his visit in Ayutthaya in the late 17th century. By the early 18th century, the CIO and Siam no longer had any commercial activities.

Tachard's last trip marked the end of diplomatic relations between France and Siam, although relations continued on a personal level. Siam also went far from the glorious period under the reign of King Narai, and its active foreign trade receded into the past. Meanwhile, the CIO's trade efforts in Dai Viet still remained in 18th Cochinchina, but did not yield significant results. Their contacts came to an end in the mid-18th century as the result of many factors.

³⁵ About this figure in relation to Phaulkon, in "Lettre d'un Anglais Catholique ..." wrote: "Father Tachard, with his nature, is definitely the most dangerous for him [Phaulkon] who is never able to go on the path with the Father [Tachard]". Lettre d'un Anglais Catholique...", AME 854 f0911 (Mantienne, 2001: 210); (Hutchinson, 1985: 247-255).

³⁶ In late 1699, Father Guy Tachard went to the Siamese court to negotiate the establishment of a naval base in Mergui. Nevertheless, the relationship remained purely formal and led to nothing, because the Ayutthaya court had to give reasons for refusing this establishment. A letter circulated among French missionaries proved this refusal "... that is why we say that they do not agree with the French royal company's base in Mergui and its activities." Balcalon's letter to Quemener, 15/11/1700, AME 852 f^o 19 (Launay, 1920: 37-38); (Mantienne, 2001: 198).

³⁷ The treaty ended the Nine Years War. French King Louis XIV agreed to recognize William III as the King of England, give up his attempts to control Cologne and the Palatinate, end French occupation of Lorraine, and restore Luxembourg, Mons, Courtrai, and Barcelona to Spain. The Dutch were allowed to garrison a series of fortresses in the Spanish Netherlands as a barrier against France. Strasburg and some towns of Lower Alsace were the only acquisitions made since the Treaty of Nijmegen that France retained. <http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803100435143>

Concluding remarks

The trade relationship between Dai Viet and the CIO, if considered from the first trip of 1669 to 1769, lasted 100 years. That process can be roughly divided into two major periods: 1) commercial activities between the CIO and Tonkin from 1669 to 1702; and 2) those between the CIO and Cochinchina from 1702 to 1769. Meanwhile, the French trade in Siam consisted of three stages: 1662 to 1680, 1680-1688 and 1688-1690s. Looking back at all of the CIO's activities, the high point consisted of the close links between the MEP and the CIO, the CIO and the Jesuits, and the MEP and the Jesuits. According to some researchers, the MEP was involved most of time in all of the CIO's commercial activities in the Far East (Harcourt, 1862; Taboulet, 1955; Cao Huy Thuân, 2003: 19-20, 38-40; Pichon, 2005; Nguyễn Mạnh Dũng, 2016). The French authorities at first were not able to resolve and separate the close links between trade and religious propaganda in the East Indies. Consequently, the CIO in the Indochinese peninsula was seen as the reinforcement of the French church's penetration into the region.

In the Southeast Asian context, French commercial relations in the 17th century were limited by three factors: 1) time (the relatively late appearance of French trade ships in the Far East); 2) geography,³⁸ and 3) the quantity of goods traded. The biggest drawback to relations between the CIO and Dai Viet, and between the CIO and Siam was the number of cargoes. French merchants were considered inexperienced, which reflected the weakness of both the organization and the trade development of the French court. The CIO's failure in Siam remained a lesson in itself, as well as for the MEP and Versailles because of their "naivety" when they sought to convert Southeast Asian kings [or chiefdoms] and their subjects to Catholicism. France and the CIO then tried to renew their activities in the seas of the Indies in seeking new measures for a penetration into inner and inter East Asian trade.

³⁸ French factories were established exclusively in India, and Pondicherry was considered the headquarters of its trading activities, although the French had a Bantam factory it was later occupied by the VOC.

Compared with Western countries such as the Netherlands and England, whose experienced merchants were viewed as impressive in Dai Viet, the trade activities between the CIO and Tonkin and Cochinchina generally resulted in limitations in the type, quantity and needs on both sides. As with Siam, commercial relations seemed only marginally important, rather than ambitious targets in political and religious life. The objectives of European traders in the 17th century remained those of “seeking profits.” From the 18th century, although the trade exchanges of the Vietnamese authorities continued to be welcome, the world and the regional political context changed. The British and French increasingly took more interest in colonial conquest³⁹ and transforming efficient and close trade relations into aggressive trade commitments.

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³⁹ At the time, trade was changed. In order to seek trade benefits on the spot, they tried a new method: goods circulated from Indies to Indies, as East Asia and India became the ultimate target in trade colonialization and market monopoly.

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