

## Northern Vietnam's overseas Trade in the Seventeenth Century by investigating the British primary Materials

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### Abstract

In the late seventeenth century, both European and Asian merchants arrived to Tonkin for the silk-silver trade. Together with their appearance, they recorded quite clearly the situation of Tonkin, in which commerce was one of the main content of their writing. During the existence of the English factory in Tonkin (1672-1697), the English provided a series of diaries, journals, reports and records mentioning the political, social and commercial issues in Tonkin. By investigating those primary documents in comparison with Vietnamese, Dutch and Chinese sources, the paper wants to clarify the decline of Tonkin trade in the late seventeenth century. After the civil war, Tonkin performed a hard policy towards foreigners and therefore, European merchants gradually paid less attention to this market and finally they withdrew from this place while Asian traders still maintained their influence there. In doing so, the article applied quantitative, qualitative and comparing methods to show the fact of foreigners' activities in Tonkin. Beyond that, the author evaluates the role of Tonkin in the intra-Asian trade, the importance of Asian network towards the development of Tonkin overseas trade. Then after, the paper raises a suggestion of focusing deeply in the trading connection with regional countries.

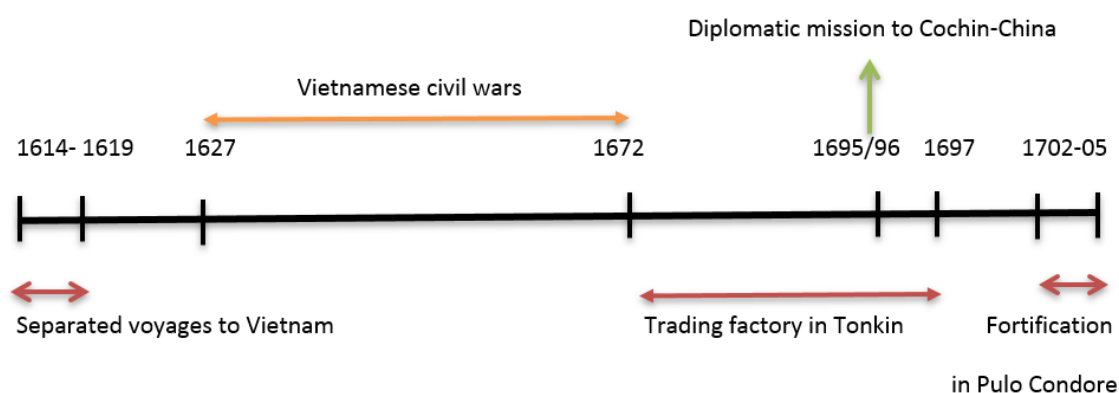
**Key words:** *British primary materials, Tonkin's trade, the English East India Company, age of commerce, trading knowledge*

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### 1. Introduction

The English East India Company (hereafter the EIC) was established in 1600 to compete with the Dutch and other European merchants in collecting spices, pepper, and other Asian commodities (This day in history, 1601, p. 5-6; Lawson, 1993, p. 20). The EIC sailed to Bantam (a famous trading port in Java, Indonesia) in 1602 to find potential goods and settled its first factory there. Because China, Japan, and Vietnam (which was divided into two kingdoms namely Tonkin and Cochinchina) had little or no spices, the EIC did not focus on them in the early seventeenth century. The English only expanded their commercial influence in East Asia and Southeast Asia as spices and pepper found hard to trade in Europe and the EIC wanted to find other regional commodities in exchange for Japanese silver. Accordingly, some voyages were settled to Siam, Tonkin, Cochinchina, and then several factories were established in the region in the late seventeenth century.

The English arrived to Vietnam in the 1610s but they quickly neglected this market in the mid-seventeenth century because it could not serve their aim of exporting goods. They only returned to Tonkin in the late century and formed a factory there in 25 years (1672-1697) as they tried to trade with mainland China and Japan. During this period, the English recorded the change of Tonkin's society after the war with Cochinchina with the appearance of many foreigners from both Asia and Europe. Besides materials of the Dutch, Chinese, Japanese, the British documents are valuable to provide information about Tonkin's political, economic, and social issues. In this paper, we investigate the EIC's sources to understand more Tonkin's overseas trade in the late seventeenth century.



**Figure 1** Timeline of the EIC's appearance in Vietnam (1614-1705)

The seventeenth century is important not only with Southeast Asian countries but also with European Companies in their trading expansion. Reid (1993) argued that Southeast Asia developed overseas trade in the “age of commerce”. This is the first century of European Companies and they still experimented to find suitable trading markets in Asia. The appearance of European merchants together with the expansion of Chinese traders encouraged overseas commerce in Southeast Asia, in which Tonkin and Cochinchina also obtained high profits. Tonkin can be seen as noticeable evidence as this kingdom witnessed the arrival of several merchants from Britain, Holland, Portugal, China, Macao, Japan, Batavia and Siam. Both Asian and European traders tried to exploit the intra-Asian trade to obtain profits and then build a global trading network via the case of Tonkin.

This study partly provides a picture of foreign trading activities in Tonkin to show how they worked, competed and obtained profits in the “age of commerce” via the case study of Tonkin. This research argues that although European merchants had relative advantages to trade in Asia, until the late seventeenth century, Asian merchants, especially the Chinese one still were a large competitor and influencer in trade of Southeast Asia. European traders performed various approaches to trade with Asia but they still faced difficulty and competition from Asian rivals. In the case of Tonkin, both the Dutch and English could not maintain their influence while Chinese merchants were always dominant there. In fact, Tonkin was only an intermediary to help European to connect with mainland China and the English or Dutch did not create an effective intra-Asian network as the Chinese could do.

Previous studies partly supply information about Tonkin's trade with different perspectives in this period. It is noticeable that because Vietnamese primary documents were rare and unsatisfactory to draw a picture of Tonkin's overseas trade, most scholars investigated original documents from the English, Dutch, Chinese, Japanese. Some scholars (Li & Reid, 1993, 1998, Momoki, 1998; Nguyen, 2007; Li, 2012; Hoang, 2006, 2014) indicated that Tonkin played a key role in the regional trade as it was a go-between port to link Japan, China with Southeast Asia. Other scholars argued that Vietnam could provide potential products for Asian merchants in the regional trading network (Vuong, 1959; Nguyen, 2002; Tran, 2007). Nguyen (1970) illustrated that Vietnam witnessed a money economy in this period and it had several advantages to attract overseas merchants. Innes (1980), Tarling (1992) and Li (1998) showed that Chinese and Japanese traders had a large influence in Tonkin's trade in this period. Boxer (1963) and Souza (1986) demonstrated that from the late sixteenth century onwards, the Portuguese traded with Tonkin in the silk-silver line. Other studies of Buch (1936, 1937) and Hoang (2006, 2010, and 2019) focused on Tonkin-Dutch relationship by investigating the VOC's materials. Naoko (2009, 2011) used different sources to research Tonkin-Nagasaki trade and presented a large influence of Chinese merchants in Tonkin. In 1994, an international conference was conducted in Pho Hien including many studies to show the role of this port in history of Tonkin overseas trade and the appearance of foreigners there in the seventeenth century (Association of Vietnamese Historians, 1994). Dror and Taylor (2006) reviewed the situation of Vietnam in the seventeenth century by examining European writing at that time, which also covering the appearance of foreigners. In brief, Tonkin overseas trade in the seventeenth century receives a large attention of many scholars. However, previous

studies often view Tonkin in a large background of Southeast Asian trade, means that they consider Tonkin as a part of the intra-Asian trade. Another researching subject is focused on special relationship between Tonkin and overseas merchants as the Dutch, Chinese or English. Based on the previous studies, the research investigates British primary documents to view the fact of Tonkin overseas trade in the late seventeenth century including its commercial conditions and foreign activities. This research thus fills the gap of previous studies about overseas merchants in Tonkin in early modern period as there was not detail and comprehensive paper to review the appearance of foreign traders in Tonkin in the period 1670s-1690s. By showing the fact that Asian traders were still dominant on Tonkin trade, the paper suggests that local government always needs to have a balanced view about the role of regional traders and conduct welcomed policies towards outside merchants and investors to develop their economy.

## 2. Materials and Methodology

### 2.1 Primary materials

Because Vietnamese historical materials mostly paid attention to issues relating to Kings and their royal family, the situation of trade was partly neglected. As a result, the research mostly investigates primary materials from the EIC, G series keeping in British Library, London. They include Tonkin factory' records, diaries, consultations, and journals in ten parts referenced IOR/G/12/17/1-10 (1005 pages). They include:

IOR/G/12/17-1, Tonqueen Journal Register, 25/12/1672-7/12/1672, fos.1-58.

IOR/G/12/17-2, W. Gyfford's Journal at Tonqueen, 13/12/1672- 28/6/1676, fos. 59-149.

IOR/G/12/17-3, Tonqueen Journal Register, 29/6/1676-26/6/1677, fos.150-200.

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

IOR/G/12/17-5, Tonqueen Journal Register, 02/7/1678- 28/5/1679, fos.225-251.

IOR/G/12/17-6, Tonqueen Journal Register, 1/6/1679-31/5/1680, fos.252-273.

IOR/G/12/17-7, Tonqueen Letters of Consultations, 15/12/1681- 28/7/1682, fos. 274-288.

IOR/G/12/17-8, Diary and Consultations of W. Hodges, 29/7/1682- 26/8/1683, fos. 289-315.

IOR/G/12/17-9, Tonqueen Diary and Consultations, 13/5/1693- 29/7/1697, fos. 316-479.

IOR/G/12/17-10, Tonqueen Diary and Consultations, 27/7/1697- 30/11/1697, fos. 480-503.

This article also uses other documents in the E/3 series including letters relating to Tonkin factory between London and Bantam and Madras (IOR/E/3/87-92 for a period 1666 - 1697). The B series, the Court Books, supplies information about selling Tonkinese goods in London.

### 2.2 Research Methods

The research applies both qualitative and quantitative methods to analysis the EIC's primary materials and secondary data of previous studies about European Companies and Asian traders in Tonkin. While a quantitative approach is useful to narrate and examine both data of number of ships, commodities, value of stock, money in primary and secondary documents, a qualitative method is applied to evaluate the developing trend of foreigners in Tonkin as British primary sources are missing in some important periods (1680-1681, 1683-1693). A comparison method is also useful as the author compares information in British primary materials with those in Dutch and Chinese sources which is researched in previous studies. By doing so, the article expects to provide a comprehensive picture about Tonkin's trade in the late "age of commerce" to argue that Tonkin was a potential and interesting market for both European and Asian merchants. However, the Europeans seemed to gradually give up this market while the Chinese still presented their dominance there.

By using the above methods to investigate British primary documents, the paper challenges the previous view of scholars arguing that European Companies dominated Asian trade which is somewhere presented in "Why Europe grew rich and Asia did not: global economic divergence, 1600-1850" of Prasanna Parthasarathi or "Why did Europe conquer the world?" of Philip Hoffman.

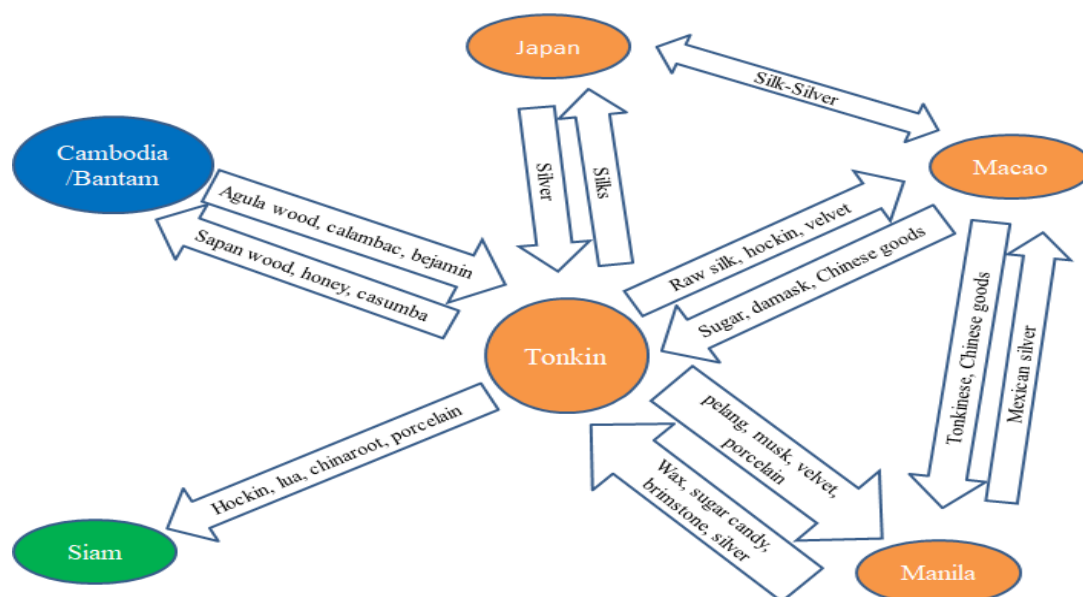
### 3. Research Results

#### 3.1 Tonkin's trading potentials

In this section, the authors argue that Tonkin in the seventeenth century was attractive in the silk-silver trade as it could produce substitutes of Chinese silks and Tonkin played a significant role in the intra-Asian network. However, Tonkinese Court's policies limited its trading potential with foreigners. In the early connection, Tonkin presented a difficult viewpoint towards the EIC as this kingdom paid attention to developing agriculture and it had no demand of expanding its trade. The English arrived to Vietnam and Southeast Asian countries in the 1610s to find substitute goods in exchange for Japanese silver to cover the EIC's regional trade. They sent experienced factors to Tonkin to discover its trading potentials including governmental policies, commodities and the ability of trade with other merchants. On 17/3/1619, the English invested 700 taels of silver in the trading voyage to Tonkin, but its result was quite limited. In the 1610s, the English found little information about Tonkin's potential as they had no direct connection with Tonkin and all knowledge was transferred via the Dutch, Chinese and Japanese merchants in Japan. Most knowledge about Tonkin was recognised in the late seventeenth century as the EIC returned to East Asia.

Tonkin's role in the intra-Asian network was highly evaluated by both regional and global merchants as it could provide a useful way to connect with mainland China and link East Asia with Southeast Asia (Li, 2006, p. 86-90; Li, Cooke, and Andersons, 2011). The English also recognised the role of Tonkin in the regional trading network and in 1658 Quarles Browne, the EIC's former chief factor in Cambodia (1651-1656), supposed a plan to use Tonkin as a go-between to link with Japan and China (IOR/B/26, 1658, p. 142; Bassett, 1955, p. 311). In 1661 and 1664, Browne suggested a new proposal to settle factories in Cambodia, Japan, China, and Tonkin (IOR/G/21/4B, p. 4-8). He argued that the VOC built and obtained a great silk-silver trade between Tonkin and Japan as this kingdom could supply a large number of raw silk, silks and musk (Ibid, p. 8). Although his information was not sufficient to help London to decide to trade or settle a factory there, it still presented the potential of Tonkin in the East Asian trading network.

In 1672, William Gyfford, the first chief factor of the English Tonkin factory sent a 30-page report to London to show the potential of this market. He recognised a possibility of establishing a trade in a land-border between Tonkin and China and Tonkin's Mandarins could be English brokers (IOR/G/12/17/1, 1672, p. 38b). Importantly, he confirmed London's previous knowledge about the potential of Tonkin in the intra-Asian trading network, particularly in the link with Japan of the silk-silver trade (Ibid, p. 46b - 47a). Unlike London's opinion of sending one ship to Tonkin yearly, Gyfford thought that London could send two small ships to Tonkin and they could call at other Southeast Asian trading ports to collect pepper (Ibid, p. 52b). Understanding London's failed attempts to trade with Manila in the 1640s and 1660s, Gyfford considered and proposed a plan to build a new trading system linking Tonkin, Japan and Manila. In 1672, he advised London to negotiate with Madrid government in order to obtain permission to trade between Tonkin and Manila in the silk-silver line (IOR/G/12/17/1, 1672, p. 53a). The Manila-Macao-Tonkin trading model would help the EIC to buy both Chinese commodities in Macao and silver in Manila and then the English could balance the intra-Asian trade and London did not need to export money to Tonkin and Asia.



**Figure 2** Gyfford's suggestion to exploit Tonkin's role in the intra-Asian trade in 1672

Source: This figure is built from the report of Gyfford to the English East India Company, 7 December 1672, in IOR/G/12/17/2, *Tonkin factory*, p. 46a-b; 48a-b.

In the 30-page report from Tonkin to London in 1672, Gyfford demonstrated that the English could build Tonkin as a part of the intra-Asian trade. In which, he focused more on trade with Japan, Macao and Manila while its trade with Cambodia and Siam was supplemental. As the above figure, Tonkin could provide diversified commodities (both local and Chinese products) for Macao and Manila in exchange for silver (rial of eight) (IOR/G/12/17/1, 1672, p. 46b, 48b). It can be seen that, Gyfford's idea was deeply affected by the fact of Dutch trading in Tonkin in that period and it shows the importance of regional trading network towards European Companies. The Portuguese, Dutch and then English had to use Tonkin as an intermediary to link with other potential markets in Asia. And Tonkin's role in the intra-Asian trading chain was not a new subject towards previous scholars about Asian trade. From Gyfford's suggestion, during the existence of Tonkin factory, the English also understood the necessity of building a trading network with regional markets. For example, in 1677, London required English factors to connect with traders from Siam to purchase sapan wood in highest quality (IOR/G/12/17/4, 1677, p. 205a). In 1679, Captain Dedousy of the ship *Formosa* traded privately in Siam and the English wanted to re-connect with Manila (IOR/G/12/7/6, 1679, p. 259a, 264a-b). In 1681, London expected that their commercial branches in Tonkin, Siam, Taiwan and Amoy would create the EIC's East Asian trading network and help the English to balance their long-distant trade (IOR/G/12/17/8, 1681, p. 294b). In 1685, London required Tonkin to find the way to purchase Japanese merchandises, copper and tutenague to export to London and India (IOR/E/3/90, 1685, p. 506-07).

Regarding to Tonkin's commodities, the English and Europeans mostly focused on local silks and other exported goods. The paper argues that Tonkin was only interesting in silk while other local products were in little market or could not serve the demand of foreigners. Although in the mid-seventeenth century, the Dutch and Chinese could purchase porcelain, sugar, money in Tonkin, in the late period, they mostly focused on silks. Even, Tonkinese silks lost their position in the intra-Asian market after China opened its trading ports in 1684 and Bengali silks improved their quality. The EIC expected to export textiles, from England (broadcloth) and India (dungarees, Cambay cloth and chintz) to Tonkin to cover the global trade as those products made up more than 50 per cent of the Zante Frigate's stock in 1672. The English also carried to Tonkin other commodities of lead, brimstone, guns, and luxury ones (coral, ivory, looking glasses) (IOR/G/12/17/1, 1672, p. 7b-8a). However, they quickly recognised that it was hard to cover money by exporting European goods to Tonkin and they had to find information about Tonkin's exported goods to Japan

and Europe to make a trading balance. In 1672, Gyfford mentioned several types of Tonkinese silks such as raw silk, baas, chomongees (chiourons), pelang/lyng/peling, hockin, the thua/loa, Thea Ming Whing and Chinese velvet and musk (Ibid, 1672, p. 45b-46a). In detail, “bass a sort of silk made here very good for Japon, both raw & diet of a pure color”, while “Chomongoos was a sort of wrought silk called by the Dutch chiourons, they are well flomish long ½ well broad & better vety good for Japon”, “Pelangs or Lyngs plained & flowers for merchadise... good for Japon”, “white hockins or lua a few are proper for Japon they are... long & broad... they maybe painted at Japon”, “The Thua in Portuguese called Loa both flower & plain”, “The Lua plain the silk much twifres proper for y<sup>t</sup> coaft for woomans badgoods.” Interestingly, most of those products were raw and simple silk piece-good. He argued that Tonkinese silks could not only serve the demand in Japan but also was available to export to Europe together with Chinese goods collecting in Tonkin (IOR/E/3/33, 1672, p. 10-11).

However, besides positive evaluation, English reports also show that Tonkin’s commodities were quite poor and limited in both quantity and quality. An English customer, Alderman Bathurst returned several pieces of Tonkin’s silk in 1679 because of its poor quality (IOR/B/35, 1679, p. 212). Because Tonkin’s silks were considered as substitutes of Chinese products to serve the market in Japan, the silk industry in Tonkin was a part-time job of farmers and they had no upgraded technics to make satisfactory silks. Tonkin’s labors had no reason to increase the quality of silks (IOR/G/12/17/6, p. 275b; IOR/G/21/7, 1678, p. 35). English reports also demonstrate that natural disasters affected the quantity and quality of Tonkin’s silks negatively and therefore reduced Tonkin’s overseas trade with foreign merchants. Natural disasters were recorded such as floods (in 1679), drought and famine (1681), hunger and epidemic (1682), famine and floods (1683) (IOR/G/21/7, 1682, p. 81; Truong, 1999, 394-398; Naoko, 2009, p. 41-45; 2011, p. 126). Due to the famine, Tonkinese people did not focus on producing silk and therefore in 1683, 1684, 1686 this kingdom could not provide silks satisfactorily for overseas traders (IOR/G/21/7, 1683, p. 87; 1686, p. 93; Naoko, 2009, p. 45). Such terms as “silk was rare and dear” and “insufficient silk” are mentioned many times in Java factory records in the period 1682-1686 as they discussed Tonkin’s commodities.

Via English reports, we recognise that Tonkin’s hard policy on trading with foreigners was one of main reasons led to the decline of European trade there. Previous studies argue that “there was no specific law in this country alongside the arbitrary judgment of the Trinh Lords.... Madanrins could do what they wanted if they knew that the Lord was not vexed with those things” (Hoang, 2010, p. 51). Comparing with Vietnamese materials, we can see that Trinh Lords always controlled all trading activities and there was no specific law for trade. Most documents, decree, edicts tended to prevent foreign traders in living in and near the capital, exported goods or related to monopolied commodities (Tran, 2007, p. 42). When the English arrived to Tonkin in 1672, they recognised that Tonkin maintained a hard policy towards the foreigners and prevented them to stay in Thang Long or important towns, markets due to the problem of national security (Dampier, 1931, p. 18; Do, 2015, p. 49). Gyfford reported that the King of Tonkin (Trinh Lord) kept his power for long time and he did not need or welcome any foreigner in his country (IOR/G/12/17/1, 1672, p. 6b-7a). Foreigners had to answer precisely the reason they came to Tonkin and type, number and value of goods they carried, and of course gifts for the King and his royal family (Hoang, 2006, p. 61-96). Sometimes the King ordered silver as a compulsory condition when foreigners’ ships arrived in Tonkin (IOR/G/12/17/2, 1674, p. 102b; Nguyen, 1995, p. 31). As a result, Gyfford required the EIC to present the King of Tonkin as the VOC had done in order to obtain the same trading privileges (IOR/G/12/17/2, 1674, 1675, p. 122a-b, 137a). Accordingly, previous scholars argued that the EIC trade in Tonkin was under “a system of gifts, perquisites and exactions” (Morse, 1926, p. 36; Ma, 1958, p. 80-84; Lamb, 1970, p. 31; Hoang, 2005, p. 75).

The English primary materials also present the trading monopoly of the Tonkin Court and all overseas traders had to serve royal family and Mandarins before trading with other merchants in Tonkin (IOR/G/12/17/1, 1672, p. 35a). In 1672, Gyfford demonstrated that the King monopolied products of lead, brimstone, salpêtre, and gun (Ibid, 1672, p. 47a). (Baron, 1811, p. 663) illustrated that foreign traders faced difficulty to trade in Tonkin, they had no detail and certain exchanging rate, and sometimes their customers maintained their debt for long time without payment. Due to the monopolised policy of the Tonkinese Court, foreigners needed permission to trade with local and other traders in Tonkin. However, local brokers and traders were quite small in power, few in number and had insufficient money to perform a large purchase. As

Baron (1811, p. 664) stated, no Tonkinese trader could pay 2,000 dollars to purchase European commodities in one time.

In brief, British primary materials illustrate both positive and negative perspectives of trading conditions in Tonkin. This reflection is balanced and meaningful in comparison with records of European adventurers who was bias in potential of Tonkin to serve their own aim at that time. It is no doubt that Tonkin was a necessary and significant part of the intra-Asian trade, especially to connect with mainland China due to its geographic strategy. British materials also demonstrate a fact that Tonkinese silks were only in high demand as China and Japan were in political crisis and closed situation. As Chinese and Bengali products re-appeared, European traders reduced its attention to Tonkin's goods. Moreover, trading situation in Tonkin was not perfect as European Companies expected. Tonkinese commodities were in little quantity and quality as the silk industry was dependent on natural environment while policies of local government made foreigners difficult to trade. All the above factors affected the appearance of European and Asian traders in Tonkin as those led to the decline of Tonkin trade in the 1680s and 1690s.

### 3.2 Foreign merchants in Tonkin

In this section, the authors draw a picture of trading activities of foreign traders in Tonkin, especially the English, Dutch and Chinese in comparing perspective. The paper focuses on the number of ships, the stock of goods, the value of money and commodities foreigners carried to Tonkin. Beyond that, we show the improving trend of outside merchants' trading in Tonkin.

#### 3.2.1 English traders in Tonkin

As this paper investigates British primary materials, it is no doubt that the main information is about the EIC's trade. All sources show that the English only sent 21 ships to Tonkin in the period 1672-1697, less than the number of Dutch ships and Chinese junks in this market (IOR/E/3/87-92; IOR/G/12/17/1-10; IOR/G/21/7; IOR/L/MAR/A; Farrington, 1999, p. 169-70, 549, 611, 655, 724; Hoang 2006, p. 228-229;). They were Zante Frigate (1672), Flying Eagle (1676-1677), Formosa (1678), Advice (1680), Taiwan Frigate (1681), Tonqueen Merchant (1682), Smyrnaote (1683), Dragon (1685), Rainbow, Prospect (1687), Tywan, Bona Vista (?), Rainbow (1688), Saphire Frigate, Curtana (?), Bencollen (?), Pearl Frigate (1693), Mary Bowyer Frigate (1697). However, their trading ships appeared mostly in the period 1676 - 1688 while in other periods the English prevented sending ships to Tonkin due to the effect of wars with Netherlands and France. As other European merchants, the EIC went to Tonkin with the aim of collecting substitute silks to supply Japan and then Europe in exchange for silver.

The EIC "have not yet experienced of the kinds of commodities and merchandizes, which are or will be vendible, or to be uttered in the faid parts of the Eaft-Indies, and therefore shall be driven to carry to thofe parts, ..., which are likely to be returned again into this our Realm" (This day in history, 1601, p. 14). It often exported to Asia woollen textiles, metals, and luxury products which was diversely original from Spain, France, Venice, Leghorn, Amsterdam (Chaudhuri, 1965, p. 26; 1978, p. 220). The EIC's investment in Tonkin was only remarkable in the period 1676-1688 as Tonkin-EIC relationship was fulfilled. In 1672, because London expected to collect Japanese silver to cover their trade in East Asia, no money was directly sent to Tonkin and the English in Bantam had to borrow 10,000 Spanish dollars for the Tonkin factory (IOR/E/3/87, 1671, p. 479-480; Ma, 1958, p. 60-61). In 1676, the Flying Eagle carried a stock of 19,775 rials of eight including money and goods (IOR/G/12/17/3, 1676, p. 180a). In 1677, this number was 43,977 rials and London also sent more 5,000 rials for building a factory in Tonkin (IOR/G/12/17/4, 1677, p. 204a, 205a-b). In 1678, their investment was 32,000 rials together with European goods valued at 2,853 rials and Asian goods valued at 1,255 rials (IOR/G/12/17/5, 1678, p. 227a). The investment was high in 1679 with 35,000 rials as Tonkin's products started to find a market in London in 1678 (IOR/B/34, 1678, p. 451; IOR/G/12/17/6, 1679, p. 254b). However, from the early 1680s, the English investment changed continuously as Chinese market was gradually opened. In 1681, their investment was 39,565 tales of silver (around 52,753 Spanish dollars) but in 1682, it reduced to 62,086 rials (7,760 dollars). In 1683, this number was 87,829 rials (10,978 dollars) and in 1685 was 88,000 rials, but in 1686 it increased to 30 - 40,000 Spanish dollars (IOR/G/21/7, 1685-1686, p. 93, 95). From 1687, no record of English investment was kept so we have no

information about their activity, but the fact is that from the Nine Years War (1688-1697), the English seemed to neglect Tonkin as they found a direct connection between China and India.

In comparison with the Dutch and Chinese, we can see that the EIC invested less money than their rivals. For example, in 1672, London sent only 5 factors and no money to Tonkin to settle a factory while the VOC maintained around 50 employees and 170,000 Spanish dollars (Ma, 1958, p. 89). In the period 1672 – 1700, the VOC decreased its exporting money to Tonkin, but it was still higher than the EIC's investment (more than 100,000 guilders per year). Especially in 1671, 1672, 1675, 1677 the Dutch carried to this market more than 300,000 guilders (Hoang, 2006, p. 226). The Chinese were also a remarkable competition in Tonkin's trade. From 1671 to 1685, they sent 585,000 taels of silver (around 780,000 dollars) to Tonkin, double the EIC's investment (maximum 370,000 dollars) and less than the VOC money of 787,887 taels (Naoko, 2009, p. 240, 242). It is interesting that while Chinese traders maintained their investment in Tonkin, both VOC and EIC reduced their exporting money to Tonkin as the trade in this market was declined.

In the first English cargo to Tonkin, textiles were valued at more than 50%, while weapons, lead, brimstone, and luxury goods were small (IOR/G/12/17/1, 1672, p. 7b-8a). However, during the trade with Tonkin, the English changed their exported goods with the increase of Asian products replacing European commodities. In 1677, London sent only 10 bales of cloth to Tonkin (IOR/G/12/17/4, 1677, p. 201b, 205a-b). In 1678, European and Asian exporting commodities to Tonkin were equal (IOR/G/12/17/5, 1678, p. 227a). In 1679, Tonkin's Mandarins found little textiles and more pepper, brimstone, rose water in the EIC's ship to Tonkin (IOR/G/12/17/6, 1679, p. 263a). Remarkably, the *Pearl Frigate* from Madras in 1693 carried to Tonkin a lot of Asian goods and saltpetre, brimstone, rosewater (IOR/G/12/17/9, 1693, p. 325b). Besides sending more Asian goods, the English also provided weapons for Tonkin during their trade. In 1683 the Court of Committees "desired to send 80 arms to Tonkin" (IOR/B/37, 1682, p. 40). In 1685, the *Rainbow* sent to Tonkin a lot of brimstone and saltpetre (IOR/G/21/7, 1686, p. 95). In 1686, the *Prospect* carried iron guns and saltpetre while in 1688 the *Rainbow* transferred 20 guns to Tonkin (Ibid, p. 114).

The English mostly focused on local silks as substitutes and then Chinese products as luxury goods to export to Europe. English factors in Tonkin were ordered to buy 300 pieces of velvet, 4,000 pieces of damask, 1,000 pieces of satin (all from China) and 25,000 pieces of local silks (IOR/E/3/88, 1675, p. 243). The Company expected that "[Tonkinese] white silk and other wrought silks have in such quantity of all such reasonable rate at might turn to good accompany in Europe" (IOR/G/12/17/3, 1676, p. 154b). The materials demonstrate that the English was failed in the competition with the Chinese and VOC as their ships arrived to Tonkin late in July, and even August, as the trading summer season was nearly finished. Accordingly, they had to purchase Tonkinese "winter silks" with lower quantity and quality (IOR/G/12/17/3, p. 174a-175a). English factors thus gave deposit earlier for Tonkinese brokers to purchase goods before English ships arrived to (IOR/G/12/17/6, p. 256a, 262b, 272b; IOR/G/12/17/8, p. 302b). From the 1680s, the English tried to collect more Chinese commodities of musk, chinaware, lacquer indirectly in Tonkin (IOR/B/37, 1682, p. 9; IOR/E/3/90, 1682, p. 80-82). In 1684, the EIC only wanted pelangs, musk and lacquer while in 1685 it only wanted Chinese musk (IOR/B/38, 1684, p. 92-93; IOR/E/3/90, 1685, p. 506-507; Ma, 1958, p. 192-193).

### 3.2.2 Dutch merchants in Tonkin

The English reported quite clearly and precisely about the VOC's trading activities in Tonkin in 25 years (1672-1697) with information about number of ships, names and value of goods (in general). Noticeably, in the period 1672-1683, all records were quite clear but after 1683, as British materials were missing, we had no detail of the Dutch trade from the English materials. There were 35 Dutch ships arrived to Tonkin in the period 1672-1697 (Hoang, 2019, p. 361), double than the number of English ships there. They are Meliskercken, Bleyswyck, Armuyden (1672); Papegay, Meliskercken (1673); Papegay, Voorhout (1674); Experiment, Marken (1675); Janskercke, Croonvogel (1676); Experiment, Croonvogel (1677, 1678); Croonvogel (1679, 1680, 1681, 1682, 1683); Croonvogel, Bombay (1684); Wachthond (1685, 1686); Gassperdam (1687, 1688, 1689, 1690, 1691); Boswijk (1692); Westbroek (1693); De Wind (1694); and Cauw (1695, 1696, 1697). From 1672 to 1678, 2-3 ships came to Tonkin annually with quite large money and stock (of pepper, brimstone, spices, guns, and rice). In 1672, 3 Dutch ships namely Meliskercken, Bleyswyck and Papegay from Batavia to Tonkin with an investment of 318,327 guilder and a stock of 300 cattles (kg) of pepper, 5,000 round gun-shots, 6 million of Japanese money, and 10,000 tales of silver (G/12/17/1, 1672, pp.



11b, 30b). They came back to Batavia with 337,706 guilder and a lot of silk, raw silk (Hoang, 2019, pp. 544-545). In 1674, two Dutch ships came with 167,386 guilder with copper money, brimstone, spices, saltpetre (Ibid, p. 548) and they called for Batavia on 21-22/1/1675 with Tonkinese silks, bass, pelang (G/12/17/2, p. 127a). In 1675, 2 ships called at Tonkin with a large number of silver, Japanese zen money, spices, saltpetre, and pepper and then they leaved with a stock at 147,668 guilder (IOR/G/12/17/2, p. 135a, 137a; Hoang, 2019, p. 551). In 1676, 2 Dutch ships arrived with 244,933 guilder (Hoang, 2019, p. 555) and the stock of 4 guns (for Trinh Lord), 500 piculs of saltpetre, brimstone, gun-shoot and 1,400 chests of Japanese silver (G/12/17/3, p. 148b). The ship Janskercke obtained a number of goods valued at 135,303 guilder and the Croonvogel got 195,434 guilder (mostly silks) (Ibid, p. 176a). In 1677 and 1678, while British primary materials show that 1 Dutch ship came to Tonkin each year; other studies using Dutch primary materials mentioned the appearance of 2 ships (Ibid, p. 198b; IOR/G/12/17/4, p. 213b, 224a). It seems that the EIC did not know the arrival of the second ship with a little money and investment of 19,284 guilder. However, both English and Dutch resources indicate that trading result was poor due to the political crisis in China and Chinese merchants could not sail to Tonkin for trade with the Dutch or Europeans (Ma, 1958, p. 155; Hoang, 2019, p. 560).

Dutch ships carried mostly copper money, silver, saltpetre, brimstone to serve the Tonkinese Court. From the Dutch investment and their result, it can be seen that Tonkin's overseas trade went down. After 1678, the Dutch only sent 1 ship to Tonkin each year. In 5/7/1679, the ship *Croonvogel* came with an investment of 110,576 guilder and leaved with a stock of 94,922 guilder including musk and pelang (IOR/G/12/17/6, p. 253b; Hoang, 2019, p. 566). From 1687 to 1697, the Dutch reduced a half of number of trading ship to Tonkin and their investment was decreased as Tonkin trade was not attractive enough.

### 3.2.3 Chinese and other merchants in Tonkin

The Chinese and East Asian merchants went to Tonkin regularly in the intra-Asian trade. Under the English viewpoint, Chinese traders were potential competitors as they understood this market, and when their junks arrived to Tonkin, the balance of trade was broken. In the period 1672-1697, 36 Chinese junks came to Tonkin (Hoang, 2019, p. 361). The Chinese did not send trading ships to Tonkin annually but around 3-4 junks arrived in one year. For example, in 1672, the VOC's documents show that 4 Chinese ships sailed to Tonkin while British materials mentioned 5 Chinese junks. On 1/8/1672, 1 Chinese junk arrived to Tonkin with pepper, sugar and sandal wood; on 3/8, 2 Chinese junks came but there was no information about commodities; on 5/10, 2 Chinese junks maybe from Siam and Batavia called at Tonkin with pepper, wood, sugar and candy (IOR/G/12/17/1, 1672, p. 20a, 21b, 36b). In 1687, the English recognised the arrival of 7 Chinese junks from Amoy, Canton and Taiwan (IOR/G/21/7, 1687, p. 105) while Dutch materials show only 4 Chinese junks (Hoang, 2019, p. 363). In years of 1676, 1679, 1680, 1682 and 1695 the EIC recorded that 2 junks came to Tonkin each year.

British sources present the difference between type of commodities the Chinese and European merchants carried to Tonkin. The Chinese carried mostly Asian products and silver which fitted the demand in Tonkin. For example, on 7/4/1675, a Chinese junk from Japan called at Tonkin with 10 chest of silver (the King took 4 chests), 3,500 tales of Japanese money, and 93 chests (100 kg each) Japanese copper coin (Hoang, 2010, p. 311). On 21/2/1680, a Chinese merchant, Nethoe carried a lot of porcelain, medicine, a little of copper coin (G/12/17/6, p. 272b; Hoang, 2010, p. 367). They bought mostly Tonkinese silks as substitute to serve the market in Japan. On 16/7/1677, 2 Chinese junks obtained many types of local silks as pelang, bass, chemonges while the third one invested money to collect winter-silk for the next trading season (IOR/G/12/17/4, p. 211b; Hoang, 2010, p. 344).

Besides recording the activities of Chinese traders, British materials also noted the appearance of Siam, Portuguese and French traders. 1 Siamese ship arrived to Tonkin in 1673, 1676, 1677, 1678 respectively while 2 ships came in 1679 and 1696. They mainly carried dry nuts, saltpetre, silver, wood and Chinese medicine (IOR/G/12/17/2, p. 105a; IOR/G/12/17/3, p. 164b, 165a; IOR/G/12/4, p. 213b; G/12/5, p. 244a). There were 3 Portuguese ships arriving to Tonkin in this period. On 1/2/1673, the first one arrived but the EIC had no information about commodities and money. The second one came in 27/2/1673 to bring the missionary Philipin Mario to Macao. The last one appeared in 6/4/1694 with iron and saltpetre (IOR/G/12/17/2, p. 62b; IOR/G/12/17/9, p. 353a). Spanish ship from Manila arrived in 5/5/1674 with 600 catties of saltpetre, 20 bags of cloth and 8,000 rials of eight (IOR/G/12/17/3, p. 109b) while there was no

French trading ship calling at Tonkin. It means that besides the Dutch, English and Chinese, other merchants still arrived to Tonkin with less number. In which, Siam traders or Southeast Asian merchants broadly came to this market more regularly.

In brief, Tonkin still received foreign merchants as this market was valuable in the intra-Asian trade. In comparison with the VOC and Chinese, the English got the lowest position with 21 trading ships, while the VOC had 35 ships and the Chinese had 36 junks. As the Chinese had advantages in geography and investment, it is easy to understand the reason they could dominate Tonkin's trade. However, their ships and trade reduced in this period which shows that the role of Tonkin in the East Asian and global trade was decreased. British materials also present the difference between European and Asian merchants in their trade with Tonkin. While Asian merchants, especially the Chinese carried most Asian products in exchange for Tonkinese silks, Europeans had to carry more money and European goods to cover the global trade. Especially, the EIC had to export a lot of silver from London to buy Tonkin's silks as their commodities were not suitable with Tonkin.

#### 4. Conclusions

The EIC settled a factory in Tonkin in 25 years (1672-1697) and although they obtained little trading success, their records and reports became valuable materials to understand not only the British – Vietnamese relationship but also the situation of Tonkin's overseas trade with European and Asian traders. Together with the Dutch, Chinese, Japanese materials, the British sources contribute to draw a comprehensive picture about Tonkin in this period. Firstly, they provided a viewpoint about the trading potential of Tonkin including governmental policies, its trading position in Asia, and type of exported and imported commodities. They show that Tonkin in this period was hard to trade because of the effect of civil wars and of the Trinh Lords' opinions about foreigners. About trading ability, British sources provide not only an evaluation of Tonkin's goods but also the fact of local merchants. They show that mostly foreigners tended to collect Tonkinese silks as substitute for Chinese products and they found little market for European commodities. As a result, overseas merchants had to carry silver and ready cash to trade with Tonkin.

Secondly, those materials present quite clearly trading activities of foreigners in Tonkin with information about number of ship, exported and imported goods, investment and type of popular commodities. It is no doubt that the English activities were demonstrated more detail, but in fact the English provided a general view about the appearance and daily-work of other merchants. English sources confirm that Tonkin's products and role were suitable with the intra-Asian trade and its ability to trade with Europe was quite low. Tonkin could only supply some types of silks directly in a short-period in exchange for European silver, several types of goods such as pepper, saltpetre, brimstone, weapons, cloth. As China opened its trading ports in 1684, the role of Tonkin as an intermediary was no longer necessary and Tonkin's overseas trade went down. English materials therefore make clearly the situation of Tonkin's commerce after the "age of commerce", and argue that Tonkin was only valuable with Asian merchants while European traders gradually leaved this market in the late seventeenth century. As such, the late seventeenth century witnessed the decrease of Tonkin's role in East Asian trade as its products were quite poor and limited. Tonkin's advance on substitute and cheap goods was no longer valuable in this period and foreigners reduced their activities in Tonkin.

Beyond the above ideas, the paper argues that the attraction of Tonkin trade was deeply dependent on the situation of China, and it was more valuable in the network of East Asian and Southeast Asian countries. Both previous studies and British primary documents illustrate that European Companies arrived to Tonkin to find a go-between to connect with China, and Japan as those markets were closed towards European Companies. Tonkin's products were mostly suitable and meaningful in the intra-Asian trade, not for Europe. It means that although Tonkin could develop in the "age of commerce", it could not leave the regional environment. The decline of Tonkin's trade happened as this kingdom performed a "prevented policy" towards foreigners while China was tended to open the kingdom. However, trading decrease was only available for Europeans because Chinese merchants still dominated trade in Tonkin and Southeast Asia. That fact raises us a consideration about the role and dominance of China towards Southeast Asian countries' trade and a thought of how to explore this fact to expand overseas trade and improve domestic economy.

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