

The Role of Port-Town Pho Hien in Vietnam's Commerce in Century XVI – XVII

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Abstract: Pho Hien Port-town plays an important role in the progress of Vietnam's history in general, and Vietnam's trade history in particular. In domestic trade relations, Pho Hien together with Thang Long and Domea form a trade triangle on the Dang Ngoai River - the trade route plays a crucial role in the development of the Dang Ngoai internal trade. Not only limited to the scope of Dang Ngoai, Pho Hien also contributed to the development of the trade relations between Dang Ngoai and Dang Trong. Besides, Pho Hien in Dang Ngoai and Hoi An in Dang Trong become two typical foreign trade cities, making an important contribution to the development of Vietnam's foreign trade, a "gateway" for Vietnam to reach international markets. However, bounded by the research done in this article, we only focus on Pho Hien Port-town in Dang Ngoai and its role in Vietnam's commerce in the sixteenth and seventeenth century.

Keywords: Pho Hien, Dang Ngoai, Thang Long, Vietnam

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I. PHO HIEN PORT-TOWN PROGRESS OF ESTABLISHMENT AND PROSPERITY

The original Pho Hien is in present-day Hung Yen province, which is located on the left bank of the Red River, surrounded by a large, low land area, which is considered the umbilical center of the Northern Delta region (Red River Delta). This is an area within the old Son Nam town, which is large and the most densely populated of the four towns (including Kinh Bac, Son Nam, Hai Duong, Son Tay) surrounding Thang Long Citadel [1].

It is still controversial concerning the originality of Pho Hien Port-town. According to geographer and history G. Dumoutier, Pho Hien was born in 1637, at which point Dutch merchants placed trade here. However, according to Korean historian Truong Vinh Kien, Pho Hien was born not earlier than 1663 - the year in which Lord Trinh lured Chinese-originated people to their own area [2]. The reason for the differences in researchers' viewpoints is that they do not recognize Pho Hien as a city of indigenous people, born as a product of a certain level of economic development of Vietnamese goods, instead a common product of the process of migration and foreign traders' work in Thanh Ha, Hoi An. This is incomplete and inaccurate.

According to the stele in Thien Ung Pagoda (also known as the Hien Temple) built in Vinh To (1625), "Pho Hien is famous for being the primary town of Truong An of four directions." Thus, it means that Pho Hien was born and prosperous even before 1625, instead of 1637 or 1663 [3].

The name Pho Hien derived from the word Hien, with other names like Hien Doanh or Hien Nam, serving as the administrative agency of Son Nam Town. More specifically, this is where Hien Sat's residence locates, a specialized provincial agency controlling, inspecting officials and watching local people's lives. This information is revealed by Vietnam's many ancient bibliography, such as: Dai Nam Nhat Thong Chi; Viet Su Thong Giam Cuong Muc; two monuments built in the temple worshipping Mr. Le Dinh Kien, in 1723 and 1727, Son Nam's defender from 1664 - 1704; and the monument built at Hien Pagoda in 1625 [4]...

From the 11th to the 12th century, the Vietnamese economy has flourished and created the basis for the birth of Thang Long under the Ly - Tran period. In the 15th and 16th centuries, "Du Dia Chi" by Nguyen Trai and "Truyen ki man luc" by Nguyen Luong describe the richness and diversity of the craft guilds and harbors in Thang Long. The development of a commodity economy under the Le So led to King Le Thanh Tong's promulgation of "marketplace rules" in 1474, creating the conditions for people to exchange goods. The basis of the economic development at the end of the 15th century creates many new cities, including Pho Hien [5].

At first, Pho Hien was just a group of markets for exchanging agricultural, handicraft products and some other Chinese goods. Next to the Red River and on the pathway to Vi Hoang (Nam Dinh) and to Thang Long (Hanoi), Pho Hien gradually became a port for Chinese and Vietnamese merchant ships to dock. Around the end of the 16th century to the beginning of the seventeenth century, Pho Hien became a crowded port-town - the destination for foreign merchants to exchange goods and establish trade.

This suggests that Pho Hien could have appeared around the end of the 15th century, before the Westerners came here to trade and was a product of Vietnam's economic development of domestic goods.

Along with Pho Hien, Thang Long is also a busy and important city in Dang Ngoai. These two cities are not independently developed. They have an intimate, complementary relationship. Although each city has its own strengths, in this field of foreign trade, Thang Long greatly needs the support of Pho Hien, and so does Pho Hien. Due to the Le – Trinh's government concerns for the security of its capital city, no direct relation with foreign countries was allowed in Thang Long, Pho Hien instead got this task. Thang Long then became the place to supply goods and also the market to consume goods from outside.

This bilateral relationship gradually affected Pho Hien to organize its administration more and more similar to Thang Long. In Pho Hien, there are also 20 wards of Vietnamese people [6]. The appearance of wards, especially handicraft wards (with 8 in Pho Hien) presents the complete nature of a city in the middle age [7].

During the 16th and 17th century, trade exchanges between countries in the East Sea (South China Sea) region developed quite bustling. Chinese, Japanese and then Portuguese and Dutch merchants came to Vietnam more and more, while the Le-Trinh government advocated a ban on the free entry of foreigners in the capital. Therefore, Pho Hien became an important shelter for foreign traders. In particular, in the 17th century, due to a change in the political situation in China when the Manchu replaced the Ming Dynasty, causing people and some scholars opposing the Qing army to follow the merchant boats to Pho Hien to trade, and eventually many of them stayed here. This created Bac Hoa neighborhood, and then a new Nam Hoa [8] Avenue in the northeast area of Bac Hoa, taking up most of the old Pho Hien land, causing many researchers to mistakenly combine Pho Hien and Pho Khach as a whole Chinese community.

Along with the Chinese, from the 70s and 80s of the 16th century, Portuguese and Dutch traders paid attention to Pho Hien. But only until March 1637, the Grol boat of the Netherlands landed at Dang Ngoai. In July 1637, the Dutch was first allowed to establish trade point in Pho Hien. Their trade was also quite favorable and thriving. Then, in the 60s of the 17th century, the French also followed other Western countries to appear in Pho Hien. By August 1670, the French had established their first Episcopal court here. In 1673, the British were allowed to enter Pho Hien, and then established their trade [9]. The emergence and development of foreigners' market streets further contributed to the prosperity of Pho Hien, while the Vietnamese craftsmen and traders also moved here to do business and stayed as residents, not to mention all the officials, dentists, soldiers of Son Nam Defending palace. It was this component that enriched the nature of the *four-direction*- residents in Pho Hien.

Thus, it can be said that the time of Pho Hien prosperity was from the late 16th century to the mid-17th century. At the same time, Pho Hien's scope is no longer framed in the southwest corner of present-time-Hung Yen, but has expanded to its East and Northeast [10].

II. THE ROLE OF PHO HIEN PORT-TOWN IN VIETNAM'S COMMERCE IN THE 16TH-17TH CENTURY

Since the 16th century, Vietnam's commodity economy has developed strongly. Monetary relations have penetrated all aspects of social life. The demand for goods to exchange is growing, which strongly impacts the development of traditional craft villages throughout the country, particularly in Pho Hien. Many craft villages appear to produce their specialized products. For example, Bai Giua village specializes in producing sugar from molasses. After achieving final products, sugar will be transported for consumption in domestic areas or exported foreign countries; Or Van Phuong village specialized in silkworm silk; Dan Loan village specializes in making cloth, silk, field ..; Chu Dau village specializes in pottery. The products of these craft villages have met a great demand for domestic consumption and abroad exportation through Pho Hien port.

During this time, the political situation in the country took complicated turns that affected more or less the overall development of the economy. However, the situation of economic development at this time is relatively favorable. The emergence of Western merchants, like Portugal, Holland, England, France, has made Vietnam's maritime trading system, particularly the East, more and more bustling. Though Pho Hien is not so close to international maritime routes as Hoi An, it is strongly influenced by these international economic and trade relations.

During the 16th – 17th century in Dang Ngoai, Pho Hien and Thang Long are two cities that developed complementing each other. Standing in front of Thang Long, Pho Hien emerged as a port-town of trading, exchanging with foreign merchants. This role even got more emphasized when the Le - Trinh government was politically motivated to control more strictly traders' entry, especially into Thang Long. Hence, Pho Hien – the front port of Thang Long was clearly defined. Foreign merchant boats, when coming to Vietnam, cannot enter Thang Long and are forced to arrive in Pho Hien. Goods of domestic and foreign customers are exchanged at Pho Hien. At this time, Pho Hien highly required Thang Long's support as its supply of rare and manufactured goods on the spot and from the surrounding areas, as well as the place to consume Pho Hien's imported goods.

Along with long-established guild organizations in Thang Long and traditional handicrafts, Thang Long also produces rare and precious items such as silk, tails, cotton, fine art... for customers in Pho Hien. These items are not available in Pho Hien and the localities near Pho Hien cannot produce them [11]. Although Pho Hien has many handicraft wards, producing and trading at the same time, such as: Hang Cau Ward; Hang Giuong Ward, tanning ward, dyeing ward; Hang Su Ward, Hang Son Ward, Hang Noi Ward... [12], but it is only enough to supply the domestic market with moderate needs of localities around Pho Hien. Other sophisticated export-quality-products must be provided by Thang Long and the surrounding areas of Thang Long. Because Thang Long is near the Red River with the To Lich River attached to it, boats from all over the country come here to provide goods to its' market. Therefore, missionary Marini, observing this market, admitted that: "Either domestic or foreign good products, they are all brought here to Thang Long to sell, with quantity larger than than anywhere else." [13]

Also because most of the exported goods in Pho Hien are supplied from Thang Long and some other localities in Dang Ngoai, the handicraft production wards in Pho Hien gradually faded away. Because the handicraft wards of Pho Hien did not create any unique features, leaving no unique legacy, expressing none of its sustainability, along with the decline of the Dang Ngoai market [14]. This is also one of the reasons for the decline of Pho Hien port in the middle of the 18th century.

In addition to its trade relations with Thang Long, Pho Hien also established trade relations with many other cities and port-towns in the country, as well as many countries in the region and the world, making an important contribution to the development of Vietnam's commodity economy.

Relations with other cities and port-towns

During this period, Pho Hien also had relations with other cities and port-towns, such as: Can Hai (Cua Con), Phuc Le, Phu Thach in Nghe An... Goods from these ports came to Pho Hien mainly as: fish sauce, cones, incense, musk, sap, cinnamon and some valuable specialties. Along with that, traders buying from Thang Long and Pho Hien are: waterpipe tobacco, Chinese medicine, rice, Chinese pen and paper, Chinese dye and fan [15]...

In addition, Pho Hien also had relations with Thanh Ha and Hoi An in Dang Trong, and merchant ships from Pho Hien had to sneak into Dang Trong [16] to buy goods to fulfill foreign businessmen's consumption. Because the road from China's Southeastern ports to Pho Hien is only half the time compared to the road from there to Thanh Ha and Hoi An, Pho Hien becomes a center for transporting goods to the whole Dang Trong, in order to fully provide for the neighboring markets in the North.

Relations with the South-East Asia's commerce system

South-East Asia is positioned as the cushion area between the two largest Eastern civilizations, China and India. It also acts as a bridge between the two cultures, two economic and political centers. The most common and convenient way for China and India to interact is by sea. Therefore, Chinese and Indian merchant ships must go through South-East Asia. According to Japanese professor Shigeru Ikuta, from the end of the BC 2nd century until 450, the trade links between India and China were established, in which the sea transport network was spread along the coast of Indochina, across the Malay Peninsula and then reaching India [17].

This road starts from Kancipura in Southern India, crossing the Bay of Bengal to the Northern part of the Malay Peninsula and Sumatra (Indonesia). After resting and taking more food, fresh water and goods from regional ports such as Pasai, Aceh, the group of people will board boats on the Western side of the Malay Peninsula. The most popular land road is via Kra Isthmus in Takuapa. Here, the group continues the journey through Kra waist to Chaiya in the East of the Malay Peninsula. Reaching the East, the group had to take a boat to the Xiem's commercial port, Champa and Dai Viet, and then finally to the Southern ports of China.

Since the 16th century, the South-East Asia Sea has become exciting. Western capitalists find their way to South-East Asia more and more, with the aim of conquering colonies and expanding markets, while also exploiting natural resources. In 1511, the Portuguese occupied Malacca, owned the trade strait, and headed for Guangzhou. Followed by Spanish and Dutch, they occupied Manila and Batavia (Indonesia). The participation of Western countries in the regional market has made the economic life of many South-East Asian countries prosperous, due to the export of goods that used to be only for domestic markets [18].

Vietnam, located on the East-West trade road, also received opportunities to revive its commercial economy. At this time, Pho Hien was a place to exchange goods of many foreign boats. However, Pho Hien mainly plays a passive role in receiving merchant boats to trade with Vietnam. The number of Vietnamese boats going to other countries to export goods and importing other countries' goods was very limited. However, these are also important initial bases to establish Vietnam's two-way economic relations with foreign countries.

Relations with China and Japan

Having the geological position of bordering China with both road and sea, the two countries have a tradition of trading very early. Vietnam's handicraft products and trade items popular among the Chinese market such as silk, honey, sugar, cinnamon, incense...

Usually Chinese merchant boats come to Vietnam at the beginning of the wick season. They come from ports like: Guangzhou, Chaozhou, Shao Zhou, Fujian, riding along the river to Pho Hien. The goods they brought were porcelain, paper, tea, and brimstone, lead, brocade, stalks... Besides, there were items of military use for war and some luxury goods specifically serving the king, lord and aristocracy. When the wind rise, they return. Often, goods taken are: silk, honey, sugar, cinnamon, male, incense [19].

There were also Japanese merchants. Japanese merchants came to our country in the last years of the 16th century. Japanese merchants set foot in Thang Long, Pho Hien as well as Hoi An and were granted by the royalty certain favors.

The time for Japanese merchant boats to enter Pho Hien and some countries in Southeast Asia is from November to April the next year. This period is the dry season, convenient for purchasing, loading and unloading goods. By July or early August, the southeast monsoon blew up to the north, in the direction of the wind, they would return to their country [20]. Japanese merchants purchased goods from Pho Hien as well as Hoi An, such as: fields, tails, velvet, silk, cotton, cinnamon, paint, patchouli, sulfur, tin, areca, porcelain, rice, pepper, fish fins, sugar and even gold. In some cases, silk products can have up to 10 different types [21]. In addition, they also buy metal and handicraft items. In particular, during this period, trade relations between Japan and China were limited, so Vietnamese goods played an important role in meeting the Japanese market's consumption needs.

Vietnam - Japan trade relations developed most successfully in the first 30 years of the 17th century. After 1639, due to the influence of the Japanese National Surround policy, Japanese people no longer went to directly trade with Dai Viet, but through merchant ships of the Netherlands, England and some Asian countries such as China, Siam, bringing raw silk, silk, aromatherapy and forest products to Japan. This relationship was maintained until the eighteenth century. Although, Japanese merchant ships came to Pho Hien to do a lot of business, Pho Hien did not form a Japanese neighborhood similar to that in Hoi An of Dang Trong, Manila in Philippines, or Aythaya in Siam. However, it is possible that in Pho Hien, the Japanese established a relatively stable settlement area. Currently, there are places such as Bac Hoa and Nam Hoa. According to some researchers, these may be the former living areas of the Japanese people. [22]

Commercial relations with Western countries

Among Western merchants coming to Vietnam in the 16th to 17th centuries, Portuguese set foot on our country first (early 16th century), but mainly in Hoi An, Dang Trong. In Pho Hien, no documents have been found regarding any Portuguese trade. Later, in the early 17th century, the Portuguese were competed and dominated by Dutch traders. Initially, the Dutch also placed a merchant point in Quang Nam and developed their trade in Dang Trong. But, after the Japanese implemented the policy of "closing the harbor", the Dutch realized that this was a good opportunity to dominate the Dang Ngoai market. Therefore, the Dutch had gradually established relations with the Le - Trinh government. In 1637, the Netherlands established a trading post in Pho Hien, and 7 years later, established a second base in Thang Long.

In the commercial relationship between Dutch traders and Pho Hien as well as with Dang Ngoai, commodities of silk are considered one of the most important trade items. In addition, there are silk, satin, cloth and ceramics. However, by the end of the 17th century, Vietnam faced the general downtrend of the international trading system, and the Dutch East India companies in Dang Ngoai, started being harassed by King Le - Trinh. By the beginning of 1700, the Dutch abolished their trade in Pho Hien, ending an exciting period in trading relations in Dang Ngoai.

Along with Dutch merchants, there were also British and French merchants who came to Pho Hien to place their trade deals at the end of the 17th century. British trading post were established in June 1672. But, the British trade in Pho Hien was not very prosperous, because of the strong competition of the Dutch who had come before. In 1683, the British established a trading post in Thang Long, on the banks of the Red River, at the entrance of today's Long Bien Bridge. Trade was difficult, the goods were expensive, the debt was irrecoverable, the old debt of the company was all considered lost. The British closed down trade in Ke Cho and left Dang Ngoai in 1697, and then, the British would only trade with Dang Ngoai occasionally and stopped in 1720 [23].

The first French boat arrived in Dang Ngoai in August 1669, carrying several French clergy and claiming to be a ship of the East India Company asking for trade. At that time, in both Dang Ngoai and Dang Trong, there was a strict ban on travelling. The missionaries disguised as merchants to stay to trade. Until 1680, France also placed a business in Pho Hien, which they used to buy musk and silk from Dang Ngoai [24]. Later, considering its bad results, the French closed down its business in Pho Hien and did not stay. Only the clergy

dressed as merchants remained there to conceal religious activities and conduct conspiracy to invade Vietnam. During this period, the development of Pho Hien was shown in the below summary table of the number of times foreign merchant ships arrived and left in Pho Hien from August, 1672 to March, 1680.

Table: Summary of Arrival and Departure Boats at Pho Hien Port-town [25]

Date	Quantity	Arrival	Incoming carriage	Departure	Outcoming carriage
3/8/1672 - 18/10/1672	10	07 Chinese 03 Dutch	- Pepper, sugar, sandalwood, medicine, iron and cotton cooking pan - Matches, round bullets, Japanese money, silver		- Vietnamese porcelains
27/2/1673- 15/8/1673	04	01 Portugese 02 Dutch		01 Chinese	- Damask
26/2/1674- 26/7/1674	06	01 Manila 02 Dutch 01 Chinese	- Match, weaving - Matches, Japanese coins, sugar, betel nuts, pepper - Cotton, sulfur	01 Siamese (hired by French) 01 Manila	
19/1/1675 - 4/8/1675	05	01 Chinese 02 Dutch	- Cash, silver coins - Match matches, bullets, Japanese coins	02 Chinese	- Damask, porcelains, paints
23/2/1676 - 28/7/1676	05	03 Chinese 01 British 01 Siamese	- Cash, silvers, clocks		
21/1/1677 -3/12/1677	11	03 Taiwanese 01 Dutch 01 Siamese		05 Chinese 01 Siamese	
7/2/1678 - 25/12/1678	06	01 Chinese 01 Dutch 01 British		02 Chinese 01 British	
10/3/1679 - 2/12/1679	08	02 Chinese 01 Dutch 01 British 01 Siamse		02 Chinese 01 British	
2/2/1680 - 4/3/1680	02	01 Chinese		01 Siamese	

The above table shows that Pho Hien port-town plays an important role in trading and exchanging goods network between Dang Ngoai and the domestic and regional markets and expanding to the national market. Pho Hien not only attracts foreign merchants to trade and exchange, but also a place to gather residents from every places to come to live and trade. Besides foreigners, there are Vietnamese people from all parts of the country who come to do business with all kinds of goods, for examples: the goods brought to Japan are very much like: silk, fields, tails, sa, velvet, cotton, marijuana, musk, paint, cinnamon, longan, areca, patchouli, sulfur, tin, gold, rice, sugar, pepper, fish fins, porcelain, chinaware, not to mention the handicraft items done there [26].

The role of Pho Hien is so important, partly because Pho Hien has a relatively favorable position for foreign merchants to dock. The position of Pho Hien on the one hand has a great impact on its formation, on the other hand it is itself a positive factor creating a new development direction of foreign trade in Vietnam in this period. . It can be seen that Pho Hien has favorable premises of a medieval port-town to develop multi-dimensional trading system from home and abroad thanks to the location of the estuary and the Red River system. However, the geographical factors and natural conditions are only necessary conditions, but not enough, so that Pho Hien can develop, it is necessary to have the guidelines and policies of King Le - Trinh in Dang Ngoai. At this time, the Le - Trinh government wanted to expand its trade relations with the outside, to build economic potential and buy weapons, to strengthen the defense capacity to counterbalance the Nguyen lords in Dang Trong. But, when he recognized the security risks, King Le and Trinh Lord were careful not to let their customers approach Thang Long Citadel but only allowed them to go to Pho Hien - far away from the Citadel. Therefore, Pho Hien has conditions to develop business, especially foreign trade and becomes the most important trading port of Dang Ngoai at that time.

Pho Hien is also a center for cultural exchange, through trading relations, a process of living... Many influences and cultural elements of the Japanese, Chinese and other foreign residents have received by Pho Hien residents and gradually adapted to the local culture. In particular, the effects of Chinese culture are the longest and most profound.

With all the positive roles in the development of Vietnam's foreign trade in general, Pho Hien acts as the single bridge in the relations of trade between Dang Ngoai and the international market in the 16th – 17th century. . In the Dang Ngoai urban network, Pho Hien has become one of the most developed cities, the port

system - the market - the city has the appearance of a bustling city with a high population density in Vietnamese urban context at the end of the Middle Ages - Nearly Modern Period. However, we also find that there are some limitations and shortcomings from which to draw lessons for later development.

Pho Hien as a focal point to exchange and trade with the outside world. But, the impact of foreign trade in Vietnam, typically Pho Hien, limited to only a certain extent. Because the mandarins hold monopoly on foreign trade and some Vietnamese merchants are backed by strong political power, so it does not create a strong development of industry and trade.

Moreover, the trade community is too passive in dealing with foreigners, only opening ports to welcome foreign merchants to trade, without creating an indigenous merchant class capable of crossing the sea to go abroad to conduct trading activities. It can be said that Vietnam's foreign trade during this period was not only driven by the internal development of a domestic economy - society but also primarily and mainly due to the impact of the regional and international economic environment.

III. CONCLUSION

Through understanding and analyzing the sources of information about Pho Hien, we can see that from the 16th to 17th century, Pho Hien, from a town has not been developed yet, had become a city – a port-town occupies an important position in Dang Ngoai trading system, as well as on the general Dai Viet trading system. Pho Hien together with Thang Long and Domea formed a trade triangle on the Dang Ngoai river. At the same time, Pho Hien is also an "intermediate port" in the traffic route from the seaport - Domea to the trading center - Thang Long, playing a supporting role for Thang Long. In the second half of the 17th century, Pho Hien rose to become the most important foreign trade city in Dang Ngoai, a market that attracted merchants from Western Europe, Japan, China as well as a the number of Southeast Asian merchants traded and traded. It can be said that the prosperity of Pho Hien urban area not only contributes to the development of the economy of Dang Ngoai but the port also contributes to the social development and cultural exchange relations between Dang Ngoai and Western Europe, East Asia and Southeast Asia.

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