

## ВСЕОБЩАЯ ИСТОРИЯ

## The East India Company and Britain's Interest in Vietnam's Trading Ports in the Early Modern Period

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Vietnam's trading port system played a vital role in the pre-modern period from the British perspective. By examining primary sources such as documents from the English East India Company dating back to the 17<sup>th</sup> century, and English journals, diaries, and memos from the 17<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, we can see the importance of Vietnam's trading ports and how the British perceived them differently over three centuries. Initially, the British viewed Vietnam's trading ports as a means to trade indirectly with Japan and China. However, by the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, they recognized the critical role these ports played in connecting their colonial system and controlling the sea route linking East Asia and India. As a result, the English focused on trading with ports on the southern coast of Vietnam and gradually moved towards considering Vietnamese trading ports' political advancement in the region. This article provides a unique insight into the shifting British perception of Vietnam's trading ports and highlights their commercial and political significance. The growth of the British Empire and its competition with other powers influenced their evaluation of Vietnam's trading ports. In the first century of the English East India Company, the British concentrated mostly on commerce. However, in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, they viewed Vietnam from the perspective of a semi-state. This analysis offers an excellent opportunity to understand the significant role Vietnam's trading ports played in the pre-modern period. It gives us a unique perspective on the British perception of Vietnam's trading ports, highlighting their commercial and political importance.

*Keywords:* British viewpoints about Vietnam, English East India Company, Vietnam's trading ports, Vietnam's geopolitical position.

## **Ост-Индская компания и британские интересы в торговых портах Вьетнама в раннее Новое время**

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В британской перспективе восприятия событий и процессов вьетнамская система торговых портов играла огромную роль. Изучение аутентичных исторических источников XVII–XIX вв. (документов Британской Ост-Индской компании, датированных XVII в., а также английских журналов, дневников и мемуаров вплоть до XIX столетия) показывает значение вьетнамских торговых портов и то, как Британия по-разному воспринимала это значение на протяжении трех столетий. Известно, что британские интересы смещались в географическом плане от Тонкина на севере будущего Вьетнама до Кохинкина на юге полуострова Индокитай. На этой территории и возникла целая вереница портов, включая Сайгон (Хошимин). Изначально эти порты воспринимались только как инструмент опосредованной торговли с Кореей и Японией. Однако к концу XVIII столетия британцы осознали ту роль, которую эти порты играют в качестве скрепы их колониальной системы и связующего звена между Восточной Азией и Индией. В результате англичане сосредоточились на торговле в портах южного побережья Вьетнама и постепенно стали понимать важность усиления политического влияния портов в регионе. Данная статья ставит перед собой цель показать этот сдвиг в восприятии портов и усиления их коммерческого и политического значения. Рост Британской империи и ее борьба с конкурентами значительно влияли на оценку значения вьетнамских портов. В первое столетие существования Британской Ост-Индской компании интересы британцев были сосредоточены на торговле. Однако в XVIII и XIX вв. они рассматри-

вали Вьетнам как полугосударство. Этот подход дает уникальную возможность понять степень значимости той роли, которую вьетнамские порты играли в предмодерновую эпоху. Возникает также возможность увидеть характер восприятия британскими властями системы вьетнамских торговых портов и деятельность по усилению их коммерческого и политического значения.

*Ключевые слова:* британские представления о Вьетнаме, Британская Ост-Индская компания, вьетнамские торговые порты, вьетнамские геополитические позиции.

## Introduction

During the 17<sup>th</sup> century, European merchants, including the British, recognized the trading potential of DaiViet (now Vietnam, consisting of Tonkin in the North and Cochinchina in the South) in the intra-Asian trading network. They started trading with Tonkin and Cochinchina in the 1610s to indirectly connect with larger markets of mainland China and Japan. Throughout Vietnam's trading history, various trading ports emerged from North to South, such as Pho Hien (Phố Hiến), Thang Long (Thăng Long), Thanh Ha (Thanh Hà), Hoi An (Hội An), Da Nang (Đà Nẵng), and Saigon (Sài Gòn, now is Ho Chi Minh city). In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the English East India Company (hereafter the EIC or the Company) established a factory in Pho Hien and later in Thang Long as Tonkin could provide Asian commodities indirectly or act as a connection with other Asian markets. However, this factory did not last long, and over the next two centuries, the Company moved southward to different trading ports such as Thanh Ha, Hoi An, and Da Nang. This was due to the British's increasing political demands of controlling the Asian sea routes and linking the British colonial system. During the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the East India Company was a prominent example of transformation. Originally a single commercial company with the primary goal of establishing commercial bases, the EIC was under the first British Empire. However, as time passed, the British government gradually took control of the EIC's markets and replaced it as the governing body. By the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, the EIC had become a fiscal state under the control of the British government with Parliament's charters. During the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the EIC had a single-minded focus on commercial interests in Vietnam. However, in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, the British approach changed. They started sending British officers not only from the EIC but also from the British government in Hong Kong and India. This shift led to a blending of trading and political objectives. As a result, the British viewpoint on Vietnam evolved over time, becoming more nuanced and multifaceted. As capitalism transformed from free competition to imperialism and from expanding commerce to finding a geopolitical strategy to serve military purposes, the British started to look at trading ports in Southern Vietnam to find a suitable place for building a fortification and the British garrison on Pulo-Condore island in the period 1702–1705 was manifest<sup>1</sup>.

This article aims to discover how the British viewed the allure of Vietnamese ports from the 17<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The British East India Company's merchants and envoys were the ones who provided valuable insight into the British perspective during this time. Initially, the British were fascinated by Vietnam's commercial potential in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. However, as the British Empire began to transform into a colonial invasion, their

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<sup>1</sup> Tran N. D. The English East India Company and Cochinchina (1614–1705): from free trade to coercion // Southeast East Asia Research. 2021. Vol. 29, no. 3. P. 365–383.

focus shifted towards using Vietnam as a means to control sea routes in the region, and to connect with regional British colonies. Despite the primary source of data coming from a businessman of the EIC, the British government's increasing involvement in the company's affairs and the EIC's objective of expanding invasion united the commercial and political perspectives. This paper argues that Vietnam was consistently involved in the British expansion and development of the British Empire, but its role evolved over time. The British perspective shifted from a focus on "trading interest" and connection with other Asian ports to a "geo-political strategy" aimed at controlling the entire trading region and protecting British influence in East Asia in the face of competition from other European powers.

This article delves into primary British documents held at the British Library in London, that provide valuable insights into the British involvement in Vietnam. The EIC G class in the India Office Records (IOR) is a treasure trove of information that includes a diary, records, consultations, and journals written by the English chief factors in Tonkin, referenced as IOR/G/12/17/1-10 (1005 pages). Our research also draws on the records of the New English East India Company to explore the British involvement in Cochinchina until the early 18<sup>th</sup> century. To gain a comprehensive understanding of the British viewpoint on Vietnam in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, we analyze several records and diaries of mission leaders such as Chapman, Robert, Macartney, and Crawford. Their documents were collected and published in the manuscript of Lamb, *The Mandarin Road to Old Hue: The narrative of Anglo-Vietnamese Diplomacy from the Seventeenth Century to the Eve of the French Conquest*. This approach allows us to study the British viewpoint through a secondary source that provides a broader perspective on the subject. To provide a more comprehensive analysis of Vietnam's trading ports, we compare English documents with Vietnamese materials. This approach enables us to identify the advantages and attractions of Vietnam's trading ports and provide a more nuanced understanding of the complexities of the British-Vietnamese relationship. By leveraging these primary sources, we can gain a richer understanding of the British involvement in Vietnam, its impact on the region, and the lessons we can learn from this period of history.

### Northern Vietnam's trading ports in the EIC's viewpoint in the 17<sup>th</sup> century

In the year 1600, the EIC was founded with the aim of trading in Asia and competing with other European traders in providing Europe with pepper, spices, and other Asian goods. To achieve this goal, the Company set up factories in Bantam (1602), Japan (1613), and several other locations in Asia before the 1620s<sup>2</sup>. To expand their trade with China and Japan, which were potential markets for British goods and Asian products, British merchants established intermediate factories in Southeast Asia. Tonkin and its trading ports were chosen as intermediaries since both Japan and China closed the countries to

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<sup>2</sup> Those were factories in Bantam (1602), Bencoolen (1603), Macassar (1610), Pulo Run (1616 — now Banda Islands), Ayutthaya (1612), Patani (1612), Sukadana (1612 — Borneo), Hirado (1613), Surat (1613), Celebes (1613), Sandas (1614 — Borneo), Banjernassin (1615), Masulipatam (1615), Amboyna (1620), Ternate (1620), Banda island (1620), Bandar Abbas / Gombroon (1623 — Persia). See: *Wild A.* The East India Company, Trade and Conquest from 1600. London, 2000. P. 86; *Bassett D. K.* The Factory of the English East India Company at Bantam, 1602–1682. Unpublished PhD thesis (History). London, 1955. P. 31.

foreigners. In 1617, an indirect trade between the EIC in Japan and Tonkin was performed by William Adams, a British broker in Hirado. However, the outcome of this trade was not promising<sup>3</sup>. During the late 17<sup>th</sup> century, there was a high demand for intermediate trading ports in Southeast Asia, which led to the reevaluation of the value of Tonkin's trading ports. Quarles Browne, who had previously served as the chief of the Cambodia factory from 1651 to 1656, proposed a plan to establish factories in Cambodia, Tonkin, Japan, and China in 1658, 1661, and 1664 respectively<sup>4</sup>. He believed that Tonkin had the potential to produce a lot of silk, which could be exchanged for Chinese goods and Japanese silver. Merchants from Japan and China often travelled southward to trade with Tonkinese traders. However, the EIC in London refused to approve this plan, as there was not enough knowledge to take risks with factories in Southeast Asia. In 1670, Samuel Baron, a free merchant in Tonkin with a background in both Tonkin's and Europe's trade, appeared. Baron not only confirmed the potential of silk in Tonkin but also demonstrated advancements in Tonkin's trading ports, which would allow them to connect with markets in China, Japan, and Southeast Asia. As a result, the Company decided to send the ship *Zante Frigate* to Tonkin for trade.

The British Tonkin factory operated for 25 years (1672–1697). It was during this time that British merchants realized the potential and attractiveness of Tonkin's trading ports. Because in the 17<sup>th</sup> century the British primarily focused on trade with Asian countries, the EIC only reported commercial issues such as ways to connect with other markets, availability of goods, and appearance of other merchants. It is also understood that in this period the British government did not intervene in the EIC's activities. As a result, British traders just sought economic benefits from Tonkin.

Li Tana has pointed out that Tonkin's ports played a significant role in trade between the hinterlands and the seas, as well as an intermediary role in trade with foreigners<sup>5</sup>. Tonkin's geography was noteworthy as it shared a border with China, which facilitated the nearest travel to South China by land route, while the Tonkin Gulf supplied convenient access to China and Southeast Asia<sup>6</sup>. William Gyfford, the chief factor of the EIC's factory in Tonkin, and other British servants recognized that Tonkinese Mandarins used the geographical advantages of Tonkin to trade with China by both sea and land routes. Therefore, they argued that Tonkin could play the role of a broker to help the British to collect Chinese goods<sup>7</sup>. This meant that British ships called at Tonkin's ports, and from then on, European commodities could travel to the border with China or port-to-port on the sea route by Chinese traders in Tonkin.

The Company had plans to use Tonkin as a bridge to trade with China and Japan and also wanted to take advantage of Tonkin's ports to expand their regional trade. Gyf-

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<sup>3</sup> Purnell C. J. *The Log-book of William Adams 1614–1619, with the Journal of Edward Saris and other Documents Relations to Japan, Cochín-China*. London, 1916. P.75; Farrington A. *The English Factory in Japan: 1613–1623*; in 2 vols. Vol. 2. London, 1991. P. 1164.

<sup>4</sup> Java factory, A Relacon of the Scituation & Trade of Cambodia, alsoe of Syam, Tunkin, Chyna & the empire of Japan from Quarles Browne in Bantam // British Library (BL). IOR/G/21/4B. P.4–8.

<sup>5</sup> Li T. *A View from the Sea: Perspectives on the Northern and Central Vietnamese Coast // Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*. 2006. Vol. 37. P.86–90.

<sup>6</sup> Momoki S. *Dai Viet and the South China Sea Trade: From the 10<sup>th</sup> to the 15<sup>th</sup> Century // Crossroads: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*. 1998. Vol. 12. P.1–34; Whitmore J. K. *The Rise of the Coast: Trade, State and Culture in Early Đai Viet // Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*. 2006. Vol. 37. P.103–122; Li T., Cooke N., Anderson J. A. *The Tongking Gulf through History*. Philadelphia, 2011. P.1–24.

<sup>7</sup> Tonkin factory // BL.IOR/G/12/17/1. 1673. P.38b.

ford believed that Tonkin could connect well with the multilateral intra-Asian trade. It could either form a single operation with Cambodia, Bantam, and Siam or connect with other major players like Japan, China, and Manila. This would have two significant advantages for the Company's trade. Tonkin could provide pelang, velvet, musk, and porcelain in exchange for white wax, sugar candy, brimstone, and silver<sup>8</sup>. Through the Manila-Tonkin link, the British could acquire sugar, damask, satin, Chinese silks, chinaroot, and tutenague from Macao. These goods could be exchanged for raw hockins (Tonkinese yellow silk), velvet, and raw white silk. British ships from Tonkin would sail to Macao and transfer their goods to Manila in exchange for Mexican silver or dispatch to Japan for the silk-silver trade. Despite Japan's refusal to allow British residency and trade, the Tonkin factory was still maintained to collect Chinese commodities indirectly. The British merchants even tried to contact the Japanese government twice (in 1677 and 1682) through Chinese brokers and Tonkinese officials<sup>9</sup>.

The British recognized the potential of Tonkin's ports for trading with Asian markets, owing to Tonkin's strategic location and the emergence of regional traders in its ports. Vietnam and China had long-standing commercial ties, and Chinese merchant communities gradually proliferated in Tonkin, particularly in the capital Thang Long and Pho Hien. In the 1640s, the Chinese dispatched 28 ships from Tonkin and 94 ships from Cochinchina to Japan, which was more than had been dispatched from any trading ports in Southeast Asia<sup>10</sup>. Chinese junks transported various types of silks from Southern China and musk to Vietnam, which became the primary commodities re-exported to Japan and Europe. When the EIC arrived in Tonkin in the 1670s, the Chinese still enjoyed their status and benefits as the Tonkinese had become accustomed to using Chinese and Portuguese languages in trading with Europeans. Recognizing this fact, Gyfford requested the Bantam Council in 1675 to send "a good honest Chinaman from Bantam who writes China well and is of a ready for business"<sup>11</sup>. Moreover, the fact that Japanese traders traded in Tonkin reveals the favourable position that this kingdom held in regional trade. Between 1604 and 1635, thirty-six red-seal ships from Japan arrived in Tonkin, which indicates that this kingdom, along with Cochinchina, played a significant role in Japanese trade<sup>12</sup>. As a result, British merchants discovered that they could connect with Japan's silk-silver trade after calling at Tonkin's ports. The involvement of European traders such as the Dutch and Portuguese in Tonkin's ports also attracted the British to trade there. It appears that during the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the EIC only focused on commerce and did not have any political concerns as they attempted to establish a factory in Tonkin. This was completely different from what happened in the later period, as the EIC also served the British ambition of expanding the British Empire.

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<sup>8</sup> Tonkin factory // BL.IOR/G/12/17/1. 1672. P.46a–46b; 48a–48b.

<sup>9</sup> *Massarella D.* A World Elsewhere: Europe's Encounter with Japan in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries. New Haven, 1990. P.365.

<sup>10</sup> *Li T.* Nguyen Cochinchina: Southern Vietnam in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries. Ithaca, 1998. P.68.

<sup>11</sup> Tonkin factory // BL.IOR/G/12/17/3. 1675. P.168b.

<sup>12</sup> *Innes R.* The Door Ajar: Japan's Foreign Trade in the Seventeenth Century. Unpublished PhD thesis (History). Michigan, 1980. P.58; *Tarling N.* The Cambridge History of Southeast Asia from Early Times to 1800. Cambridge, 1992. P.467; *Li T.* Nguyen Cochinchina. P.62; *Wheeler C. J.* Cross-Culture Trade and Trans-Regional Networks in the Port of Hoi An: Maritime Vietnam in the Early Modern Era. Unpublished PhD thesis (History). Yale, 2001. P.14.

## British viewpoint about Cochinchina's trading ports in the 17<sup>th</sup> century

During the growth of the British Empire, Cochinchina (Southern Vietnam nowadays) played an important role. Initially, in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century, the British were primarily interested in trading and collecting goods in Cochinchina's ports. However, in later years, they saw the potential to control the sea routes from India to China and wanted to establish a fortification on their own land and use force to compete with other European powers such as the Spanish in Malina, the Dutch in Indonesia, and the French in India. This section will outline how the EIC changed its perspective towards Cochinchina's ports and showcase how this transformation impacted the British Empire. The British were shrewd in transferring their focus from a commercial to a political perspective when it came to Cochinchina. This strategic move allowed them to reap greater benefits, unlike their approach towards Tonkin where they only considered its trading potential.

In the 1610s, the EIC sailed from Hirado, Japan to Cochinchina's ports to expand British commerce. However, no factory was established during this period. In 1614, the British Hirado factory sent two merchants to Cochinchina with gifts and a letter to the Nguyễn Lord. Unfortunately, their trading mission faced disaster as the two British merchants passed away, and their stock disappeared under unknown circumstances<sup>13</sup>. In 1617, two other British traders embarked on a second voyage to Cochinchina, where they found both success in trade and diplomacy<sup>14</sup>. The British attempted to return to Cochinchina after 1617 to collect silk for trade, but their efforts were unsuccessful because of ill weather. It is evident that the British believed that Cochinchina had the potential to supply a significant amount of silk to foreign merchants<sup>15</sup>. The ports of Cochinchina were particularly attractive to the British, as they could provide these goods or establish indirect connections with Chinese and other Asian merchants to obtain them.

Besides trading, the British also saw Cochinchina's geopolitical position as strategically significant in controlling the sea route around Southeast Asia. In 1623, British representatives in Bantam suggested that the EIC establish a factory in Pulo-Condore (Côn Đảo island) and the Liqueos (Liuqiu) to facilitate trade with China<sup>16</sup>. In 1627, the Company's representative in Batavia noted that Cochinchina had numerous ports and harbours which could be used to establish a fortification, particularly Champello Island (Cù Lao Chàm)<sup>17</sup>. This shows that British traders were also interested in Cochinchina's trading ports from a political standpoint as early as the 17<sup>th</sup> century. During the period when the Company was primarily focused on establishing trading relationships with Asian countries, the British Empire expanded through commercial means rather than by constructing fortifications. As a result, no fortifications were built in Cochinchina during this time, as the Company's main objective was to establish and maintain profitable trade routes.

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<sup>13</sup> Cocks R. *Diary of Richard Cocks, Cape-Merchant in the English Factory in Japan, 1615–1622*: in 2 vols. Vol. 1. London, 1883. P.28–29.

<sup>14</sup> Massarella D. *A World Elsewhere*. P.181.

<sup>15</sup> Farrington A. 1991. *The English Factory in Japan*. Vol. 1. P.558.

<sup>16</sup> China Material, 1596–1673 // BL.IOR/G/12/1. 1623. P.12–13.

<sup>17</sup> Noel S. W. *Calendar of State Papers, Colonial Series, East Indies, China and Persia, 1625–1629*. London, 1884. P.373.

After China opened trade in 1684, British ships from Madras (India) began sailing to Chinese ports like Amoy and Canton, which became an important trade route<sup>18</sup>. However, the EIC still faced difficulties in trading with mainland China in the 1690s<sup>19</sup>. In this period, the British government aimed to control sea routes and strategic ports in Asia to compete with other European powers. As a result, the EIC returned to CochinChina after almost a century with the aim of both trade and military operations. These efforts marked a significant turning point in the history of trade relations between CochinChina and Britain as the British argued that CochinChina was “a convenient place for building a dock wherein our [British] ships may be laid and repaired, or new ships built”<sup>20</sup>. In 1695, Thomas Bowyear led a mission to CochinChina intending to secure a diplomatic area where they could enact their own laws. They even wanted to build a fortification where they could live and work without any interference from the native people of CochinChina<sup>21</sup>. The EIC also viewed CochinChina as a potential market to collect Asian goods and trade indirectly with regional merchants. It means that the British began to pay more attention to the region’s strategic location and its suitability for building a fort. This was in line with the British aim of controlling the sea route from India to China and competing with other European powers in East Asia.

During the period 1702–1705, the New English East India Company (in which shareholders were full experiences and ambitions of settling colonies) constructed a fort in Pulo-Condore, without seeking the permission of the Nguyen dynasty. The New EIC had been influenced by William Dampier’s assessment of Pulo-Condore as an ideal location to establish a port that would serve as a convenient link to Japan, China, Manila, Tonkin, the Straits of Malacca, and the Straits of Sunda. Catchpoole, the EIC’s chief factor in Chusan (China), reported to London that Pulo-Condore was more suitable than any place in China to build an intercepting port, connect with other Asian markets, and prevent Dutch expansion in East Asia<sup>22</sup>. The New EIC recognized the strategic value of Pulo-Condore as a foothold in Southeast Asia, and a potential competitor to the Dutch. Drawing from their experience in establishing colonies in North America, the New EIC understood the need for a fortified presence in Asia, which would expand their power and commercial benefits. In order to establish this presence, the British dispatched traders from Chusan to Pulo-Condore and ordered additional officers, soldiers, and workers from Britain to build a fortification<sup>23</sup>. This move marked the first time that the British had sent soldiers to Vietnam, underscoring the New EIC’s commitment to reflecting the British government’s opinions and interests in trade with Vietnam and other Asian countries. This fortification

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<sup>18</sup> *Watson B. I.* Foundation for Empire: English Private Trade in India, 1659–1760. New Delhi, 1980. P. 151; *Mentz S.* The English Gentleman Merchant at Work: Madras and the City of London 1660–1740. Copenhagen, 2005. P. 200–206.

<sup>19</sup> *Wills J. E.* China and Maritime Europe, 1500–1800: Trade, Settlement, Diplomacy, and Missions. Cambridge, 2011. P. 195.

<sup>20</sup> Factory records: Miscellaneous — Thomas Bowyear’s mission from Fort St. George to Cochin-China (1695–1696) // BL.IOR/G/40/18. 1695. P. 3.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.* P. 15.

<sup>22</sup> Original Correspondence (Duplicates), 10 March 1701 — 7 February 1709, No. 7487 // BL.IOR/E/3/80. 1709; *Ma Y. Y.* English Trade in the South China Sea 1670–1715. PhD thesis (History). London, 1958. P. 266.

<sup>23</sup> East India Company Original Correspondence, 24 March 1702 — 27 October 1702. No. 7999 // BL.IOR/E/3/64. 1702. P. 5, 11; Letter book XI (New Company), 1699–1709 // BL.IOR/E/94. 1702. P. 332–333; *Ma Y. Y.* English Trade in the South China Sea 1670–1715. P. 269.



was done without the Cochinchinese government's permission and reflected the British standpoint regarding Cochinchina's geopolitical strategy. The British were interested in Cochinchina's ports for free trade and recognized its potential to control the regional sea routes. However, building a fortification without the Nguyen Lord's permission ended disastrously as their garrison was destroyed in 1705, and most of the British there were killed<sup>24</sup>.

### Cochinchina's ports in the British viewpoint in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century

The British had a unique relationship with Vietnam before the French and Spanish invaded Da Nang in 1858. The British showed interest in Tonkin at the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, and from the end of the early 18<sup>th</sup> century, they focused on understanding the market of Cochinchina. British missions, such as those of Chapman (1778), Macartney (1793), Roberts (1804), Crawford (1822), Davis (1847), and Wade (1855), all aimed to explore Cochinchina's trading ports to discover not only their commercial potential but also political and military advances in the context of expanding competition and colonial aggression of Western imperialism. During this period, European countries competed for power in Asia, resulting in the invasion of India, China, and Southeast Asia. Britain, in particular, joined the race with France and other rivalries in the Seven Year War (1756–1763) in Europe, America, and India. The British Empire, with support from the EIC, gradually expanded their invasion in India from 1757. Following the loss of 13 colonies in North America in 1783, Britain sought to acquire more colonies to serve the Industrial Revolution, and thus attempted to invade further into Asia. British traders sailed from India to Cochinchina, eager to discover its potential to control sea routes in Southeast Asia and connect with other regional British colonies.

The EIC did not build any factory in Cochinchina in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, but the attractiveness of Cochinchinese trading ports was still very specific. It's worth noting that in British texts, Hoi An (Hội An) was no longer a typical trading port, and the bay and port of Da Nang (Turon) replaced that role. The commercial port of Hoi An had two entrances — one was from Dai Chiem estuary (Đại Chiêm), and the other was through Da Nang Bay and followed the Co Co River (Cổ Cò). However, by the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Co Co River that connected Da Nang with Hoi An was accreted, while the Dai Chiem estuary gradually dried up, making it impossible for Western ships to trade with Hoi An. Consequently, this trading port declined. It is also that during that period, with the first industrial revolution, Britain and Europe were able to build large steam-powered ships, which required deep-sea ports like Da Nang as a station in the entire commercial system in Asia. As argued, Barrow, Anderson, Staunton, McCartney and other European voyagers considered Da Nang as one the best bay in Vietnam<sup>25</sup>.

In 1778, Chapman's mission embarked from Calcutta and sailed through the Strait of Malacca, then entered the Bassac mouth of the Mekong region and continued northward until the British reached the Quy Nhon port (Quy Nhơn) of the Tay Son court (Tây Sơn). This port was known to provide fresh water, necessary supplies, and a safe haven

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<sup>24</sup> Wong T.-K.D. The Destruction of the English East India Company Factory on Condore Island, 1702–1705 // *Modern Asian Studies*. 2012. Vol. 46, no. 5. P. 1097–1115.

<sup>25</sup> Pham C.M.H. A Maritime Cultural Landscape of Cochinchina: the South China Sea, maritime routes, navigation, and boats in pre-colonial central Vietnam. PhD thesis (History). Perth, 2016. P. 229.

for distant ships trying to avoid storms<sup>26</sup>. Although Nguyen Nhaс (Nguyễn Nhạc), the King of the Tay Son court, suggested that the British could trade with Cochinchina's ports for commodities such as cinnamon, pepper, agarwood, ivory, and tin, Chapman politely declined to answer directly due to the political instability in the region<sup>27</sup>. On July 28, 1778, Chapman and the British delegation arrived at Da Nang port. Before Chapman's mission, the EIC in India was informed that there were around 70–80 ships from Macao trading in Turon each season<sup>28</sup>. However, when the British were there, the weather was unfavourable and therefore they sought shelter at the port and established contact with Portuguese merchants. They observed the Tonkinese people's trading habits and identified various commercial opportunities at this port. However, the British were not interested in trading in the area because they discovered that the surrounding villages were impoverished and had few commodities to offer. On August 13, they left for Hoi An and were surprised to find remnants of a once-great town. They observed a remarkable decline in the commercial port's prosperity. Hoi An was no longer a bustling hub for international traders, as it was in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Instead, the buildings showed signs of deterioration, and there were only vestiges of its past glory. Chapman's significant observation was that the Co Co River, which links Da Nang and Hoi An, had become narrow and challenging to navigate<sup>29</sup>. In November 1778, Chapman embarked on a voyage to Cochinchina with the aim of achieving both diplomatic and commercial results. However, the British mission failed as the local authorities became unwelcoming due to their doubts about the relationship between the British mission and the Tonkinese. Despite this, Chapman's report after the mission emphasized that Cochinchina had great commercial potential, with local products, and was extremely convenient to connect with China, Tonkin, Japan, Cambodia, Siam, Malay peninsula, Philippines, Borneo, and the Strait of Malacca. He stated that "no country in the east, and perhaps none in the world, produces richer, or a greater variety of articles, proper for carrying on an advantageous commerce, cinnamon, pepper, cardamoms, silk, cottons, sugar, aglua wood, (lignum aloes) sapan wood, and ivory are the principal"<sup>30</sup>. Interestingly, instead of Hoi An, Chapman mentioned Da Nang as a safe port for ships in difficult weather conditions. The British had a new awareness of Cochinchina's port system after Chapman's mission, transferring from recognizing the role of the previous Hoi An river port to searching and evaluating the role of seaports such as Da Nang and Quy Nhon<sup>31</sup>. Chapman's mission also had important strategic significance as Britain was looking for a geostrategic position in Vietnam in the competition with France, especially after the 7-year war (1756–1763). Therefore, Da Nang, in particular, and Cochinchina's trading ports, in general, were not only seen in terms of trade but also terms of geopolitics, regional connectivity, and military control.

In 1793, George Macartney embarked on a mission that sailed from India to Batavia, Siam, and Cochinchina, with the ultimate destination being China. This expedition was notable for changing the way the British viewed Cochinchina's trading ports, as they

<sup>26</sup> Lamb A. *The Mandarin Road to Old Hue*. London, 1970. P. 92.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.* P. 99.

<sup>28</sup> *Lords Committees*. Report, Relative to the Trade with the East Indies and China, from the Select Committee of the House of Lords. London, 1829. P. 327.

<sup>29</sup> Lamb A. *The Mandarin Road to Old Hue*. P. 105.

<sup>30</sup> Chapman C. *The Asiatic Journal and Monthly Register for British India and its Dependencies: A sketch of the Geography of Cochinchina*: in 30 vols. Vol. IV. London, 1817. P. 340.

<sup>31</sup> Lamb A. *The Mandarin Road to Old Hue*. P. 133–135.

sought to find sea routes that could connect India and China in the British maritime trade chain. During this voyage, the British made stops at Pulo-Condore island on May 16, 1793, and Da Nang on November 25, where they stayed until June 15. While Macartney's mission was primarily focused on connecting with China, it also aimed to establish British influence in Southeast Asia because the French had already gained a foothold in Vietnam by signing the Treaty of Versailles with Nguyen Anh's (Nguyễn Ánh) representative in 1787. Because "from the reports of former voyages, relative to the different places not very distant from Pulo Condor, Turon Bay in Cochinchina promised the most advantages, as to safety for the ships, and shelter and provisions for the men"<sup>32</sup>, McCartney sailed directly to Turon and stayed there for a long time.

During his first day in Da Nang, Macartney observed commercial activities between the locals and Portuguese traders. They were exchanging cotton cloth, sulfur, guns, swords, weapon materials, pepper, sugar, saltpetre, and zinc<sup>33</sup>. The British mission presented gifts to King Quang Toan (Quang Toản) of the Tay Son court, which created a good impression and paved the way for further relations between the two sides. Like Chapman's mission, Macartney also recognized the importance of Da Nang as a key port in Cochinchina that could help the British control the regional sea routes. He learned about the trading situation in Da Nang and acknowledged the safe port area, which attracted Portuguese ships from Macao, Chinese voyages from Xiamen, and other trading ships from Ostend (Belgium). The British mission also recognized that the Campelo island (Champello, Callao or Cù Lao Chàm) in the south of Da Nang was a safe harbour and easy to defend<sup>34</sup>. It is evident that the British had a comprehensive understanding of the island and port system in and around Da Nang. They recognized that it was a crucial strategic position, both in terms of trade and military. This viewpoint of the British makes sense in the strategic competition between Western countries in seeking and establishing influence in East Asia. It is not surprising that the British looked at Da Nang from a political and military perspective when the French were trying to exert political influence on Nguyen Anh. During the process of trading expansion, the British bourgeoisie always searched for significant trading ports to gain a foothold in the entire international trade system. Therefore, Macartney's way of viewing Da Nang in a strategic position was consistent with the overall trend of the British.

### **British viewpoint about Cochinchina's trading ports in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century**

The 19<sup>th</sup> century marked an era of imperialism wherein Asian and African countries were invaded for the sole purpose of gathering raw materials and establishing markets for the Industrial Revolution. Britain's gradual takeover of Singapore and the Malay Peninsula and the subsequent wars with Burma and China's Opium War were just a few instances of this power struggle. France also attempted to intervene in Vietnam, Siam, and southern China. During this time, trading ports served as a tool for imperialism to expand their political interests. The British, for instance, were concerned with the trading chain in South-

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<sup>32</sup> *Staunton G.* An Authentic Account of an Embassy from the King of Great Britain to the Emperor of China: in 3 vols. Vol. 1. London, 1797. P. 319.

<sup>33</sup> *Lamb A.* The Mandarin Road to Old Hue. P. 160.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.* P. 176.

east Asia, while also seeking more colonies to compete with their European counterparts. However, they had to carefully consider which places were suitable for their situation and ambition.

During his mission in 1804, Roberts found that the political situation in Vietnam had become more stable. Nguyen Anh had won the Tay Son dynasty and unified the entire country, establishing the Nguyen Dynasty in 1802. Despite this, from the British perspective, Vietnam was heavily influenced by the French. The Treaty of Versailles in 1787 and the aid of French missionaries and soldiers in Nguyen Anh's victory over the Tay Son court had a significant impact. The EIC assigned Roberts to ask King Gia Long (Nguyen Anh) to build a trading post on Champello, near Da Nang. The location would be strategic and could control trading ships from Macao, China, and other markets<sup>35</sup>. Before Roberts arrived in Cochinchina, Earl Wellesley instructed him to propose a plan to Gia Long to exploit a coastal area or an island to create an "exclusive economic zone" in which the French did not influence that area. This showed Britain's anxiety in competing with France for influence in Vietnam, particularly after a Vietnamese ship named *Armida* commanded by French captain L. Barisy was captured by the British in Penang when it was on the way to India. Roberts had two missions in discussing with the Nguyen dynasty: to explain how the British caught a Vietnamese ship and to compete with France by trying to acquire a strategic port/island around Da Nang. The British considered Da Nang to be a convenient port and harbour, just like Gibraltar in Spain, because both were secure and ships could refresh and refit there<sup>36</sup>. Roberts also noted that Vietnam had all the important products that were suitable for the Chinese market, which could help the EIC connect indirectly with mainland China in the intra-Asian trade. It's clear that not only British diplomats and traders realized the strategic importance of Da Nang and Vietnam, but geographers like John Barrow and contemporary scientists also recognized its value. As a result, the British had a comprehensive view to control and compete for influence in Southeast Asia in the early nineteenth century.

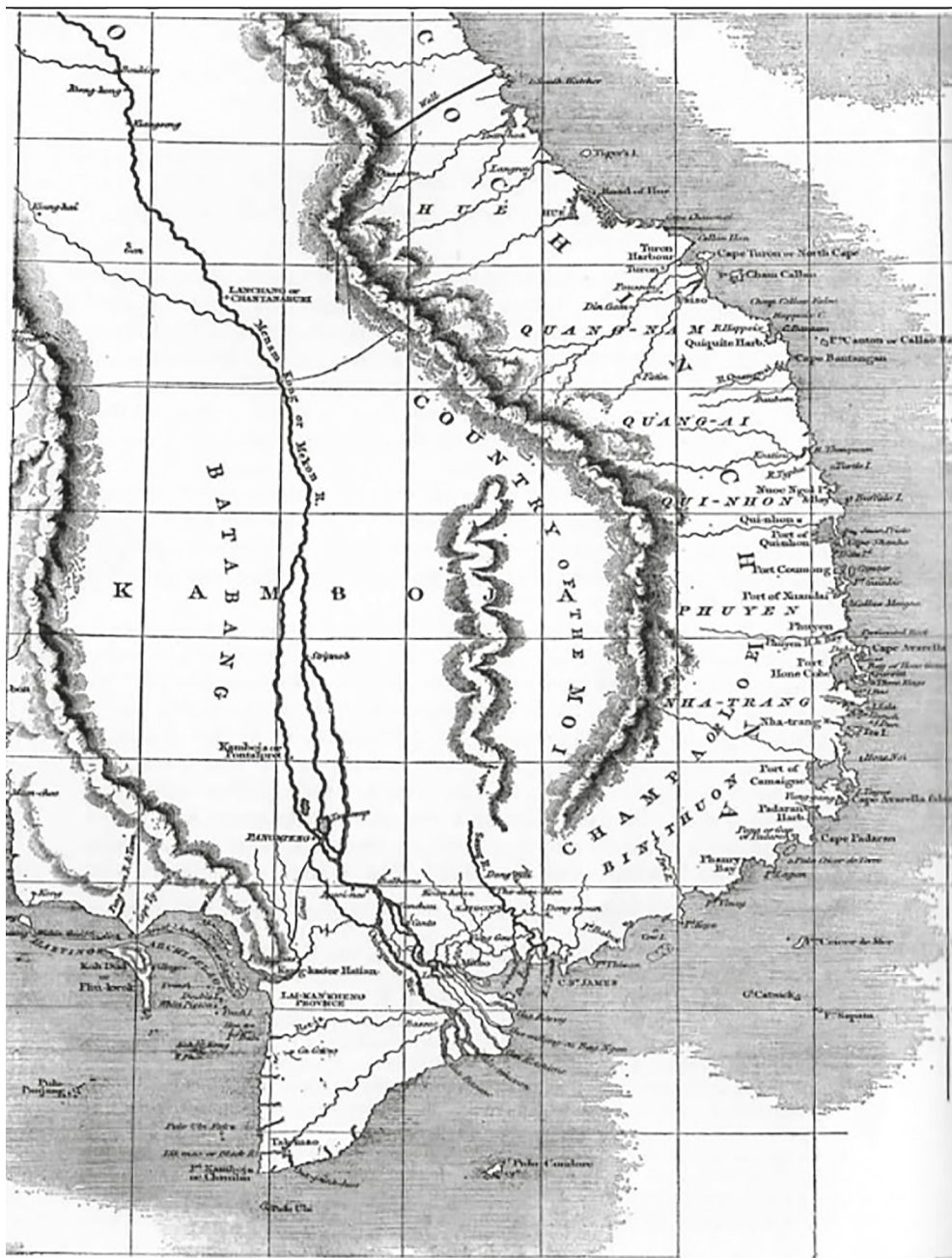
Although Chapman, Macartney, and Roberts highly valued the position of Da Nang and Vietnam's South Central Coast in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, the British faced many internal problems and conflicts in their relationship with the French while attempting to expand their influence in the region. Additionally, in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, the EIC was considering various locations on the trade route connecting the Indo-Pacific, in which Vietnam was one of Britain's options to control the sea route linking India and China.

John Crawford's mission in 1822 is an important highlight as it reveals that the British were still interested in Vietnam's trading ports, even though they had recently captured a free trading port in Singapore in 1819. Crawford and his delegation began their journey in Calcutta and visited Penang, Malacca, and Singapore before arriving in Saigon on July 16, 1822. They then went to Da Nang on September 13, Hue on September 25, and finally left Vietnam on December 19, 1822. Crawford conducted a detailed study of Vietnam, with a focus on important ports in the South, to find a geostrategic location that could connect the sea route between India and China.

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<sup>35</sup> *Lamb A.* The Mandarin Road to Old Hue. P. 190.

<sup>36</sup> *Barrow J.* A Voyage to Cochinchina, in the years 1792 and 1793: Containing a general view of the Valuable productions and the political importance of this flourishing kingdom; and also of such European settlements as were visited on the voyage. London, 1806. P. 335.



Map of Vietnam's southern provinces in Crawford's reports.

Source: Lamb A. The Mandarin Road to Old Hue. P.256

In his post-mission report, Crawford emphasized that there were less than 11 finest harbours to protect ships in storms between Cape St. James Bay (South Africa) and Da Nang, and Cochinchina was fortunate to have fine harbours (see Figure)<sup>37</sup>. Finlayson, a member of the Crawford's mission, observed that Da Nang was a land-locked harbour and one of the best ports in the region for ships<sup>38</sup>. Other ports along Southern Vietnam's coast, such as Phan Ri, Nha Trang, Quy Nhon, and Quang Ngai (Quảng Ngãi), were also noted for their ability to connect with other places in the area, making them important trade bridges. Crawford also pointed out that Vietnam had several strategic islands such as Pulo Condore, Champello, Pulo Canton (Lý Sơn or Cù Lao Ré), and the Paracels archipelago, which were important locations on the international trade route through Southeast Asia<sup>39</sup>. Southern Vietnam's trading ports were particularly attractive to Chinese merchants, as well as to a smaller number of Siamese and other Southeast Asian traders. In which, Hoi An alone received three ships annually from Hainan island, each with 2,750 piculs; six ships from Guangdong (3 thousand piculs each), four ships from Fujian (3 thousand piculs each), and two ships from Jiangnan and Zhejiang. Hue (Huế) receives approximately ten junks annually from Hainan, Guangdong, and Macao, each carrying 3 thousand piculs. Other ports welcome around eighteen merchant ships with a tonnage of 2 thousand piculs<sup>40</sup>. This shows that while Hoi An had gradually reduced its role in the intra-Asian trading system, it remained relatively attractive to regional traders compared to other small ports in Vietnam. Interestingly, Crawford noted that there was a trade between Cochinchina and British ports in the Malay peninsula through Chinese merchants, particularly after Singapore became a free trading port. This trade involved about twenty-six junks (2,500 piculs each) and a total cargo of more than 4 thousand tons, consisting mainly of rice, salt, silk, opium, iron, fabrics, and other goods<sup>41</sup>. This trade was extremely significant in evaluating the attractiveness of Vietnam's trading ports, particularly in helping the British to connect more with Chinese traders.

In addition to Cochinchina's favourable geographical location, Crawford highly appreciated the ability of its trading ports to provide a variety of goods with high quality and high demand. The commodities that were produced included silk, sugar (exporting up to 130,000 piculs a year mainly to China), cinnamon (exporting about 2 thousand piculs), tea, forest products, gold and silver, tin, and some other industrial products. Sugar and tea were considered the two most interesting products because Britain was in great demand for them. In his memoirs published in 1830, Crawford mentioned Cochinchina's provinces with their strengths and good characteristics. In which, Binh Thuan (Binh Thuận) was rich in wood and agarwood resources. Nha Trang had two beautiful ports, namely Cam Ranh and Nha Trang, and also had a very strong European-style fortress which was a place for transshipment of regional goods. Phu Yen (Phú Yên) was rich with rice and corn and had three very good seaports. Quy Nhon was large and well-defended. Quang Ngai was a sugar producer. Quang Nam (Quảng Nam) was famous for sugar, rice, and cinnamon, which were brought to Da Nang to sell to foreign traders. Hue was the capital with rice

<sup>37</sup> Lamb A. *The Mandarin Road to Old Hue*. P. 258.

<sup>38</sup> Finlayson G. *The Mission to Siam, and Hue, the capital of Cochinchina in the year 1821–2*. London, 1826. P. 329.

<sup>39</sup> Crawford J. *Journal of an Embassy from the Governor-General of India to the Courts of Siam and Cochinchina: in 2 vols. Vol. 1*. London, 1830. P. 244.

<sup>40</sup> Lamb A. *The Mandarin Road to Old Hue*. P. 264–265.

<sup>41</sup> Crawford J. *Journal of an Embassy...* P. 322.

products<sup>42</sup>. According to Crawford, one of the highlights of Cochinchina's coast was the locals' expertise in navigation, which could prove useful for the British in regional trade. Finlayson's notes also provide evidence of this fact when he described seeing hundreds of Vietnamese boats which belonged to locals along the coast during his journey from Saigon to Da Nang<sup>43</sup>. Thus, from the British perspective, the Cochinchina was an attractive prospect due to its favourable location, potential for trade, opportunities for international exchange, and skilled seafarers.

One of the different points in Crawford's report in comparison with previous British missions is that he believed that the army's strength, as well as the ramparts and fortresses in Cochinchina, such as Nha Trang, Quy Nhon, Da Nang, and Hue, deserved more attention. Because the British were eager to clarify their ability to defend and control the sea route in Southeast Asia, they were increasingly interested in Vietnam's military and geostrategic factors. This was partly due to the French's strong influence in Vietnam, as well as their active expansion and invasion of the colony. Crawford did not expect direct political relations between Britain and Vietnam, given the long distance between them. However, he considered their relationship to be significant in the context of other Western nations' competition and fight against the British Empire in India or international trade. Therefore, Vietnam was of interest to both European nations and Britain to maintain and expand their positions in Asia<sup>44</sup>.

During the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, Britain had a keen interest in Cochinchina's ports due to the French preparing for an invasion. In 1847 and 1855, the British sent two missions to Vietnam. Along with Con Dao, Da Nang became an important seaport for Western countries because it served as a bridge in the Hong Kong-Da Nang-Saigon-Singapore sea route. After Britain took over Hong Kong in 1841, its trade with Vietnam and Southeast Asia became increasingly important. In the 1830s, commercial exchange between Vietnam and British Singapore was promoted, with approximately 30 ships from Singapore to Vietnamese ports and about 10 ships from Vietnam to Singapore each year. Trade with Vietnam accounted for 21 % of Singapore's total trade in 1825 and rose to 46 % in 1845, valued at \$ 200,000 per year<sup>45</sup>. When France and Vietnam signed the Treaty of Annam in 1874, the British representative in Hong Kong acknowledged that Vietnam had important commercial ports, such as Hue, Da Nang, and Quy Nhon. These ports were used by British, German, Siamese, and Dutch trading ships to import goods such as European goods, opium, rice, medicine, paper, and Chinese porcelain, which were worth about \$ 20–30,000 per voyage. In contrast, Central Vietnam's exports were mainly bird's nests, vegetable oil, and silk, valued at around \$ 70–100,000 each voyage<sup>46</sup>. It seems that until the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, the British were interested in the commercial potential of Cochinchina, particularly in connection with British colonies. However, when they focused on carrying out the opium war to force the Qing to sign peace treaties to open seaports and provide trade privileges, Vietnam's role as an intermediary in the 17<sup>th</sup> century declined. During

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid. P. 237–239.

<sup>43</sup> *Finlayson G. The Mission to Siam... P. 326.*

<sup>44</sup> *Lamb A. The Mandarin Road to Old Hue. P. 273–274.*

<sup>45</sup> *Wong L. K.: 1) The Trade of Singapore, 1819–1869 // Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society. 1960. Vol. 33. P. 157; 2) Singapore: its growth as an Entrepot Port, 1819–1941 // Journal of Southeast Asian Studies. 1978. Vol. 9. P. 55.*

<sup>46</sup> *Tran N. D. British attitude towards Treaty of Annam 1874 // Journal of Historical Studies. 2019. Vol. 11. P. 49–56.*

the emergence of Singapore and Hong Kong, Da Nang was pushed to become a part of the British trade route that connected the Indian Ocean with East Asia. The geopolitical position of Da Nang was significant in connecting the British colonies in the region. As a result, British missions were sent to Vietnam to establish a position and respond to French influence. In 1845, Ross's voyage from Singapore was organized under the direction of the British Governor of Penang. The purpose of the voyage was to thank the Nguyen Dynasty for helping two British ships in distress and to establish Anglo-Vietnamese diplomatic relations. This is an example of the British representative in Southeast Asia being self-aware of the urgency to settle relations with Vietnam.

In 1847, Davis led a voyage from Hong Kong to Vietnam to negotiate a friendly and commercial treaty between Britain and King Thieu Tri (Thiệu Tri)<sup>47</sup>. The British Foreign Office in London was directly involved in this mission, unlike previous missions which were directed and carried out by the East India Company or British representatives in Southeast Asia. This shows that the British recognized and appreciated the important role of Vietnamese ports, especially Da Nang, in the regional competition. Although the British could not directly contact the Nguyen court in Hue during this mission, they still acknowledged the geo-strategic position of Da Nang. This port along with Thuan An (Thuận An), were important seaports from which international ships could anchor and easily travel to Hue. However, the British considered Da Nang to be more convenient than Thuan An for larger foreign ships.

Thomas Wade's mission in 1855 aimed to sign a treaty with the Nguyen dynasty, similar to the Anglo-Siamese trade treaty of 1855 because the British hoped to establish a strategic position in Vietnam. Wade arrived in Da Nang from Hong Kong on August 31, 1855, and noted that the port was safe and wide enough for ships of all sizes to enter and exit smoothly. However, Wade's mission failed to establish diplomacy with Vietnam due to several reasons. This fact prevented Britain from having more opportunities to establish influence there because after three years, in 1858, the France-Spain alliance attacked Da Nang and started to invade Vietnam. It can be seen that unlike the 17<sup>th</sup> century, when the British paid much attention to Hoi An, in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, their main concern was Da Nang. Rather than just having commercial attractions like Hoi An, Da Nang was significant in the great-power competition. Both the French and the British aimed to build a base in Da Nang to control the regional trading system and connect their colonial network in Asia. Therefore, the British gradually shifted their consideration of Da Nang from a "free trade" to a "colonial" perspective. This transformation was consistent with the change in the EIC and the British foreign policy in the context of great power competition in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.

## Conclusions

It can be said that the British were interested in Vietnam's trading ports, including Pho Hien, Hoi An, Da Nang, and Quy Nhon, from the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century until the French invasion of Vietnam in 1858. During each period, they focused on certain ports due to their ambitions of using them as intermediaries in intra-Asian trade or as bases to control the British influence in the region or connect their colonial system. In the

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<sup>47</sup> *Lamb A.* The Mandarin Road to Old Hue. P. 298.



17<sup>th</sup> century, British merchants considered Vietnam's trading ports of Pho Hien, Thang Long, and Hoi An as an indirect bridge to connect with Chinese, Japanese, and regional traders or to collect Asian commodities. From the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, as Western countries viewed Asia from both commercial and political perspectives with the enlargement of the colonial system, the British transferred their interest from Northern Vietnam (Tonkin) to Southern Vietnam (Cochinchina) with seaports of Da Nang and Quy Nhon. However, although British reports pointed to the attraction and role of Vietnam in approaching China from the south or controlling the sea route in Southeast Asia, they only stopped at the "consideration" stage or tried to discover information and settle relations, but not as seriously and aggressively as France did. Considering the situation in which Britain had established an important foothold in Singapore (1819) and then Hong Kong (1842), Vietnam's role was overlooked and underappreciated in terms of strategy. Nicholas Tarling pointed out that Vietnam did not receive as much attention from the British as Siam did<sup>48</sup>. Although Britain sent diplomatic missions to Vietnam in 1847 and 1855, before the French invasion of Da Nang in 1858, they were not able to make a significant impact on French activities and their position in Vietnam. During the French invasion of Vietnam, the British government was aware of Vietnam's geopolitical position but did not have any goals of maintaining or expanding the British influence in the region. Instead, they were only concerned with their commercial connections in the area<sup>49</sup>. It is possible that the British government recognized that Vietnam's ports were not as attractive as other regional places and decided to focus only on commercial benefits, avoiding a fight against France. Eventually, Britain only asked France to open Vietnam's ports of Hai Phong (Hải Phòng), Da Nang, Quy Nhon, and Saigon for free trade, without any mention of political issues by the British foreign policy.

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<sup>48</sup> Tarling N.: 1) British relations with Vietnam, 1822–1858 // *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*. 1966. Vol. 39. P. 19–51; 2) British policy towards Siam, Cambodia and Vietnam, 1842–1858 // *Asian Studies*. 1966. Vol. 4. P. 240–258.

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