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TRADITION AND TRADE ACTIVITIES OF THE VIETNAMESE – HISTORICAL FACT AND UNDERSTANDINGS

In the Vietnam's history and socio-economic history, economic activities and exchange have always played an important role. Being well aware of their importance, many scholars from our country and abroad have, for decades, wholeheartedly studied commercial economy in general and foreign trade in particular. However, there is a fact that, compared with studies in our nation's history of resistance against foreign invaders or the history of rural areas – agriculture – peasants, which are considered three Vietnamese society's constants by some researchers, and other fields, the amount of research into foreign trade as well as marine history accounts for only a modest proportion.

What are the reasons for this reality? 1. Is it true that our nation's economic history always depended on agriculture while trade was only a minor and non-basic sector? 2. Is it because of the lack of references, information or thorough research into information sources (archaeology, history, ethnology...) from home and abroad? 3. Are the society's needs for understanding, academy and development different in each historical period? 4. Is it true that because the historical vision and awareness of research subjects were incomplete (under the influence of Nguyen dynasty, the last feudal dynasty in pursue of "closed-door" policy), and wars for a period of time, and then the regime of "bureaucracy and subsidy"... also have considerable impacts on the views of a part of researchers and the society's consciousness? 5. Has the influence of economic and political environment and international scientific exchanges limited or encouraged new research trends?

We suppose the problem may lie in one, some or all of these basic reasons. The most significant thing is that, for a nation on the coast of the Pacific, near the Indian Ocean, bordering some regional countries on land, research into marine history, marine exploiting tradition, Vietnamese people's diplomatic and commercial relations have been an interesting and necessary research subject. This research subject not only contributes to the re-construction of the real and comprehensive picture of Vietnam's history and culture and our nation's status in the region's relations and power interactions but also has a significant meaning to our nation's current development. Nevertheless, obviously, it is not easy to do research which can provide an useful insight into trade tradition and the role of marine trade activities in the course of our nation's history. It is necessary that many researchers from home and abroad spend a lot of time and make great intellectual contributions, and each researcher (or each group of researchers) needs to apply inter-sectoral and regional research methods.

Therefore, in this article, from historical approach and vision, we would like to primarily study and present Vietnamese people's tradition and foreign trade activities¹ in the course of our nation's history, especially in early Le dynasty (r. 1428–1527), which is usually considered the dynasty that attached the greatest importance to agriculture in our history. At that time, Dai Viet's economy in general and foreign economy in particular was put under pressure by changes in political regimes, typically the shift from *aristocratic monarchy regime* to *centralized bureaucratic monarchy regime*, from *dynamic, tolerant and open Buddhism's ideas* to *Confucianism's ideas with strict, tight and principled rules and regulations*². With that approach, this article would like to generally present trade exchange relations and marine trade

relations, based on which potentials of our nation's foreign economy, trade tradition and marine trade activities in history could be brought to light. However, within the scope of the article, we can only focus on major development trends in Vietnam's economic history to the end of the early Le dynasty without further investigation into typical contributions by "oceanic kingdoms" in central southern and southern areas, our nation's components, as well as the north and the south in the history of regional and international trade exchange in the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries.

1. Maritime history³, legendary history and cultural interaction/acquisition

In the preface of "*A Brief History of Vietnam*", Tran Trong Kim stressed, "The purpose is to make a historical mirror for people of generations to look at to know their ancestors' life and how hard they tried to get a place under the sun. Only by thoroughly understanding our nation's legends can our people be patriotic, try their best to study and work to construct the social base that their ancestors built up and left for them..."⁴.

The author's idea is also ours when we read *Vietnamese history* with elements composing a general historical book. However, up to now, fishermen, ordinary people who travel on ships or boats or those who love and live on rivers and oceans have not been lucky enough to understand the relation between our nation's and people's legends and living activities relating to water. Through annals, readers just get information about living activities and political, social and cultural life of their ancestors, especially kings, aristocrats, generals, celebrities..., but other social classes, the ones that contributed "to make history" only accounted for a limited proportion as the mass in these pages. That way of history writing is in chronicle style⁵, expressing Confucianism's orthodox viewpoints, i. e. attaching importance to the court's political events or problems relating to conscience, agricultural activities and diplomatic relations with regional countries, especially China.

However, sources of historical materials and reality show that, as a coastal nation divided by natural conditions with high mountains ranging northwest-southeastward from the continent of Asia to the East Sea, we have had relatively separated economic and cultural areas for long. Because of divided topography, and high population density in wet and low land areas and coastal towns and cities, transportation by river and sea has always been very important to Vietnamese people. Water transport not only creates connections between economic and cultural areas in united Vietnam but contributes to our nation's integration into the world in the early days as well.

In the natural environment and Southeast Asian typical cultural area, the sea has separated countries and economic centres. However, it seems to be paradoxical that *the sea became the factor connecting residential communities in the region*. From ecological and cultural viewpoints, the sea was the habitat for the East Sea and it is the sea that nourished many cultures, creating the special development of residential communities with high density at the seaside. Moreover, the sea and marine economic environment became a connector and mainstream to lead Southeast Asia to two major civilizations, being two leading economic centres simultaneously. With this meaning, Southeast Asia not only played the role of a transactional place but was also a place to receive, create and recreate many cultural values in "*Chinese World*" (Confucianism) and "*Indian World*" (Brahmanism, Buddhism, then Hinduism). So, it is possible to consider the East Sea as "*Mini Mediterranean Sea*" in Asia and it is this geo-cultural space that created a prosperous civilization (or a region) with many typical characteristics of "*Oriental World*"⁶.

Accounting for three quarters of the earth's area, the vast sea with its great potential and benefits from marine trade created the ability and the need to conquer the sea among many nations and empires in the world. On regional scale, in the first centuries, old Vietnamese people, Champa, Funan, Java, Malay... were famous for boat building techniques, skills and ability to conquer the sea and carry out marine transportation.

In Vietnamese people's conscience, "water" was always included in the concept of nation. Water was not only the source of life but also their awareness of their origin. "Water spirit" was always sacred and inborn conscience, guiding community unity. A well-known historian in Vietnamese studies, Keith Weller Taylor, noticed this characteristic and made a comment "The idea of an aquatic spirit's being the source of political power and legitimacy, which attended the formation of the Vietnamese people in prehistoric times, is the earliest hint of the concept of the Vietnamese as a distinct and self-conscious people"⁷. On the other hand, citing Jean Pryzluski's viewpoint, Keith W. Taylor also noted that "The awareness of marine sovereignty is directly contrary to land civilizations of Indo-Aryan as well as Chinese people and belongs to Prehistoric Maritime Civilization in Southeast Asia"⁸.

According to many researchers, maritime history is a science which was started in European and American countries in early time⁹. Such Asian countries as Japan, China, Thailand, Singapore, and Indonesia... also started these science years ago. However, in our country, the concept of "maritime history" has not been largely known. It is a pity that up to now, apart from some archeological work and navy history, there is not specializing annals which present a wide and general vision of Vietnamese people's life activities with connection to water environment and marine economy¹⁰. Nevertheless, if we look into the vast source of our national culture, we will see quite a few notes about trade exchange activities, the tradition of marine exploitation and marine political relations in different historical periods. The problem here is that *maritime history* has a broad meaning and its bigger research subject is what many research centres and researchers have not paid attention to.

At present, with the assistance from technology and academic exchange, researchers can be well aware of their nation's history. Relating to marine research, the problem concerning the East Sea is always an interesting research topic, even in pre-maritime history. According to researcher Vu Huu San, the concept of "pre-maritime" needs to be considered an important area of study because our long established marine tradition can be seen in every cultural and economic activity. Moreover, the coasts of Vietnam and China are the places where various styles of boats were created and gathered in greater density in comparison with other places in the world. Vietnamese people's boat building techniques were very special and reached high levels of skills right from ancient times. Even in the 19th century, when facing the danger of western invasion, some patriotic Chinese mandarins and intellectuals like Lam Tac Tu proposed the application of Annam's traditional boat styles to increase resistance of the Chinese navy on the sea¹¹.

Based on the regional comparison and Clinton R. Edwards's research, Orang Laut in Southeast Asia were sea nomads. They developed marine tradition before expanding agriculture. This is the concept that was relatively popular in coastal countries or seaward regions. On the other hand, from Bernard Philippe Grosslier's research on Indochina's population (mainly Vietnam), in Southeast Asia, although Java can be the first place where human appeared (typically Java robustus), it is Indochina that played the function of a human resources warehouse to provide labor force to explore the whole region. He also believed that ancient Southeast Asia was the place where coastal lines of marine transportation were set up. In medieval time, or East Sea trade time, this was also the place where routes of intra-Asia trade and trans-continental trade appeared. That academic viewpoint can be seen more clearly in William Meacham's research work with the title "Origins and Development of the Yueh Coastal Neolithic: A Microcosm of Culture Change on the Mainland of East Asia"¹².

Like other nations in the world, our nation's origin and national building period were full of legends and legendary history. Nevertheless, these legends have been partly proved true by many vestiges in terms of materials and diversified spiritual and cultural life of different classes. In those legends, there are many points describing our ancestors' water life in history. Based on legends, our people were born by Lac Long Quan and Au Co with the legend about a pouch with one hundred eggs to give birth to one hundred children, fifty of whom went to mountains and fifty of whom went to the sea; and the legend that fishermen usually painted

themselves to make serpent-like monsters think they were the same for the purpose of protection; the legend about Son Tinh – Thuy Tinh concerning a deluge which late Professor Tran Quoc Vuong believed to contain the idea of dualism between mountain and water, god of mountain and god of water¹³; and then the legend about My Chau – Trong Thuy, the couple of Mai An Tiem offering the king water-melons to express their loyalty and dutifulness..., all of these legends include the factor of water and the period of sea and island exploration. Up to now, coastal people have worshipped whales as the rescuing god. They also have the customs of *seaport opening* in the beginning of spring to praise for a prosperous and peaceful new year. At the seaside of Sam Son (Thanh Hoa), local people worship Doc Cuoc God as the holy god to help, support and bring good luck to their voyages. And the legend about Thanh Giong with the image of Giong riding the iron horse flying into the sky, the most significant symbol on earth, also ends with the factor of water – a lot of ponds and lakes in the suburb of Thang Long – Hanoi.

Based on these legends and customs, we can see that: *First*, most of ancient places are related to water and sea spirit. Ancient Vietnamese people's habitats were full of ponds, lakes and marshes... *Second*, the fields of sea battles were associated with (and reflected) the enduring and hard course of our ancestors' struggle and exploration in the period of country construction; *Third*, the sea and coastal areas were also the choice of migrants to form residential communities on islands and coasts. In history, for many reasons, migrant routes were along the coasts or moved into land. In later centuries, ancient residents from Southeast Asia, China (ranging from different dynasties of Han, Song, Yuan, Ming, Qing), Japan and Europe... came to our country mainly by sea. *Therefore, the sea was always the open economic environment with non-stop changes and activeness. The sea was also the environment for cultural exchange and acquisition and coastal residents usually had to cope with political challenges, they themselves also showed adaptation ability, quickest and greatest response to external cultural environment.*

In the opinions of some scholars from home and abroad, ancient Vietnamese residents in Dong Son cultural time were highly skilled in marine and boat building abilities. This point reflects their own creativity and also tradition inheritance of Southeast Asian people. According to Wilhelm G. Solheim "1,000 years before our Common Era, Southeast Asian people used boats to cross the sea to go to Taiwan and Japan, bringing planting techniques of *taro* and other crops to Japan"¹⁴. Besides, during his research, Peter Bellwood took the materials of Badner (1972) to prove and concluded that Dong Son's significant marks were also found in such areas as Sepik, Admiralties islands, New Ireland, and Trobriand Islands...¹⁵ More broadly, in W. G. Solheim's viewpoints, the East Sea in Southeast Asia in ancient time was the place where sea routes started in order to communicate with the coasts of Asia, Europe, Africa, Oceania and even America, based on which he presented the theory of cultural diffusibility so as to give an explanation for the appearance of similar cultural values in broad cultural space¹⁶.

In terms of Vietnamese people's living environment and traditional activities, we can see that "The space of Van Lang – Au Lac society is the space of Dong Son culture, also the area where the highest number of Dong Son drums was found and the highest number of ancient drums existed. These areas include the north of Vietnam and the south of China"¹⁷. Drums were considered sacred symbols and their sounds could unite community's conscience, and pictures on drum's surfaces and sides describe many people's daily activities in the early days of the national formulation. Late Professor Tran Quoc Vuong believed that "Bronze drums and big drums. Bronze drums and toads. Bronze drums and customs of boat racing. Bronze drums and the river god. Bronze drums and dragon boats. Bronze drums and the deluge. In addition, in *Thủy kinh chú*, *Thái Bình ngữ lãm*, *Nguyên Hòa quận huyện chí*, *Thái Bình hoàn vũ ký* there are a lot of legends about places where Lac Viet bronze drums and Vietnamese Kings' boats were found in ponds, lakes and marshes. On the surface of bronze drums and boats, there are scenes of people being arrested, spears pointing to people's heads..., all of

these show the relations between bronze drums and agricultural festivals, ceremonies praising for rains, for good crops, reproduction activities...¹⁸. Some scholars also noted that pictures and decorations on Dong Son bronze drums created ideas about symbols of aquascaping, or, more broadly, marine life, they also definitely proved the effects of a power which was based on the sea and rivers. Especially, symbols of paddles and steering wheels on bronze drums (e. g. Huu Chung bronze drums) are clear evidences for the development of boat building techniques, abilities to conquer water and rivers of some residential communities who were used to and highly adaptable to the environment of *water*.

With broader views and comparison with northern areas of the Asian continent, we see that Bach Viet's ethnic groups had their own origins and habitats but their living environment distributed over a relatively large space involving three geo-economic areas: i> Mountains and forests (mainly exploration of valleys); ii> Conquer of deltas (Red river, Ma river, Ca river...); and, iii> Exploration of coasts, seas and islands. This characteristic is different from the culture in northern China, where residents lived mainly in central land (main land). However, it is also noted that in history, natural changes with the sea incursions or retreat not only affected Vietnamese people's living conditions and environment but also contributed to the training of skills, spirit and high adaptability of the southern people. In addition to agricultural activities, ancient Vietnamese people's life was also based on seafood catches such as clams, oysters, shrimps, fish... in ponds, lakes, rivers and seas. As a result, if culture is considered as adaptability and survival, in that living environment, people needed to travel by rafts, boats, dugout canoes, paddles, outriggers and using trees... These can be seen as creations which our ancestors contributed to human's progress¹⁹.

About 4,000 – 15,000 years ago, the sea level rose, changing the living environment and creating high population density. In this context, Vietnamese people had to continually improve cultivating techniques and conditions. The development of three successive cultural periods of Phung Nguyen, Dong Dau and Go Mun formed the basis and created the bright Dong Son culture with many excellent achievements in culture, cultivating techniques and metallurgy. "Those advances in diversified productions created conditions for *the development of trade relations and exchanges* which archeological findings proved through bronze weights founded in Dao Thinh, Lang Ngam, Dong Son, Thieu Duong, and Ca village... Bags of gemstone jewelry of different sizes which Dong Son people buried in their graves were jewelries on the one hand, but on the other hand, they were also a medium of transaction, like a kind of money. Nevertheless, a clearer sign of this relation is that many Dong Son's items, mainly weapons and luxurious goods, which were produced in an area were found in others in the area of Dong Son culture. Examples are spears with sugarcane leaf shaped handles which were typical in the area of Ma river but also found in Co Loa, Cuong Ha... Similarly, daggers with hilts being human statues, typically seen in the area of Dong Son, Ma river, were found in many places in the area of Red river, such as Thuy Nguyen (Hai Phong), Lang Ngam (Bac Ninh)... Contrarily, short swords with curved blades and straight hand barrier, which were typically seen in Red river delta, were found in Pha Cong (Thanh Hoa), Cuong Ha (Quang Binh)... Belt buckles with the shape of tortoise statues in Dong Van, Van village, Trung Mau... were found in Vac village (Nghe An)...

The exchange relation went even farther away from the original Dong Son area. We found such Dong Son bronze items as daggers with statue hilts in Thu Moc Linh (Hunan, China), bronze jars in Thanh Vien (Guangxi), M14:1 drums in Thach Trai Son (Yunnan). Contrarily, Dong Son's people knew many bronze items and cultural relics outside Dong Son such as Chien Quoc bronze swords found in Dong Son, Nui Beo... Big hooks or belts to carry weapon, typical products of pastoral culture, were also found in Vinh Quang, Dong Son²⁰.

During that period, in the central part of our country, Sa Huynh culture was also a coastal culture with strong seaward character. Archeological documents proved that Sa Huynh culture contained elements belonging to cultures of Southeastern Vietnam areas and Thailand in the metal age. In addition, this culture also had a close relation with the culture of Southeast

Asian islands. In this culture, “commercial-oriented productions and source of products are an index to measure a civilization. Commodities lead to business and exchange. Sa Huynh people produced things to do this. Their products and commodities were metal, glass, ceramic items with high techniques and art. By land, they went to Thailand and to ancient Vietnamese people in northern and northern-central areas. By sea, they went to the Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia, Hong Kong and probably even farther. Therefore, the core of Sa Huynh art was the description of nature, mainly the sea. The sea was deeply internalized in Sa Huynh people’s conscience and they had no difficulty in expressing it”²¹. Sa Huynh people’s language could express vividly each natural state with the sea as the subject. Patterns of water and waves on many cultural products, typically Sa Huynh ceramics, are convincing evidences for these viewpoints.

Also in centuries before and in our Common Era (C.E), in southern areas, along Dong Nai River and western Hau River, Dong Nai culture and then splendid Oc Eo – Funan culture appeared from early time. Having developed from the first centuries C.E, Oc Eo – Funan culture clearly showed the seaward character, marine economic environment and the ability to conquer the sea of the people who spoke Malayo-Polynesian language. From the 3rd century to the 6th century, Oc Eo people had a really developed marine trade. Oc Eo became an “*Interworld centre*” with a significant role in the whole marine trade system in Southeast Asia. Funan Kingdom, through Oc Eo seaport, had relations with the outside world, India, West Asia and maybe even with the cultural and economic centre of Mediterranean Sea. On its thriving days, Oc Eo became a *maritime Kingdom* and Oc Eo seaport became an important international commercial port not only for the Kingdom of Funan but also for many Southeast Asian economic centres²². So, with their splendid achievements, all three cultures which were created and developed in Vietnam’s geographical-cultural-economic space were close to the sea environment and strongly seaward in character. These cultures step by step converged and created an impetus for a diversified and united Vietnamese culture in later centuries.

2. Continuity of tradition and expansion of relations and trade exchanges

Many researchers believe that Southeast Asia is one of the earliest agricultural centres in Asia. Agricultural activities in Southeast Asia are usually classified into two groups: People in high lands cultivated crops which were suitable to dry land. Nevertheless, they also created terraced fields on hillsides and at the foot of mountains and developed the kaingin economy. Meanwhile, the main livelihood for those in low lands was wet rice cultivation. Living in low areas, people had to build dykes to prevent floods and to lead water to their fields. Under natural impacts and demands in life, people in deltas soon developed cultivation techniques and ability of management and organization on large scales. They also had strong community conscience and continually strengthened the community link to limit natural damage, to be active in cultivation and to create an abundant food source after each harvest.

While picturing typical development characteristics of Dong Son, Sa Huynh and Oc Eo – Funan cultures, we see that Vietnamese culture is not only a component but also a supplement to a cultural area which was a complex of “*Southeast Asian world*”. With this thinking, we can also suppose that a united culture is not only the convergence of cultural values from different areas but also the accumulation and harmony of traditions with different elements. From the time of national construction, all of these three cultures were based on that geographical, economic and cultural space with multi-traditions. Those traditions occurred simultaneously, supplemented and strengthened one another. On that basis, with general changes in economy, society and culture, the traditional agricultural economy contributed to form a solid foundation for the establishment of the state.

With the general development, in centuries BC and CE, there appeared many kingdoms in Southeast Asia. They were one type of states which appeared basing on typical characteristics of Southeast Asian society. They could be named *functional states* with their main function of production management. This type of state had characteristics of a *democratic* and *people*

friendly social institution, but it was also *highly mobile, dynamic* and *vulnerable*. In general, this type of state had many different characteristics in comparison with the formation process as well as the nature and function of *dominating state* model in the West in ancient and medieval times. That state was different even to the model of centralized and autocratic states in many Asian societies. Models of major and typical states in Europe and Asia were formed on the basis of highly developed economy and social relations which were clearly divided with fierce struggles.

When considering Southeast Asian context, from the 9th century to the 14th century, international and regional researchers composed volumes of books titled *Southeast Asia in the IXth to XIVth Centuries*²³. In the authors' viewpoints, up to the fourteenth century, in Vietnamese society, many indigenous Southeast Asian cultural elements still remained. Those elements were much more profound than the influence and marks of Chinese culture. However, in early Le dynasty, the social structure with four classes of *Confucian scholars – peasants – Handicraftsmen – merchants* was formed with high distinction. From that time, Vietnamese society was under China's influences. So, at the turning point of history, not only Dai Viet but almost the whole Southeast Asia as well was strongly affected by Indian civilization with the outstanding role of Brahmanism, Buddhism and Hinduism... In fact, the spiritual values and beliefs of those religions became useful information channels of splendid achievements from Indus Valley – *Indus* river civilization to countries in the area. Vietnamese society in Ly – Tran dynasties (eleventh and fourteenth centuries), as well as the societies in ancient kingdoms of Funan, Champa, Srivijia..., from its internal mobilization and existing foundation, found an external energy source for its outstanding developments. Under political influences, Dai Viet continued to have a close link with traditional Southeast Asia in terms of culture and economy and strongly integrated into Northeast Asian political and cultural environment in terms of superstructure. Therefore, it is possible to consider changes in Dai Viet society from different perspectives: it played the role of connecting two worlds of Northeast Asia – Southeast Asia, and it was also a specific development phenomenon, a “dualism entity” in the area.

However, because of the inheritance of cultural values from both areas, Dai Viet quickly became a prosperous nation in Southeast Asia, but also because of this fact, it was put under many pressures from the north. Consequently, as a nation with sovereignty and independence, Dai Viet practiced a flexible foreign affairs policy with principles with the north, and was also well aware of completing its institution of bureaucratic monarchy and expanding its sovereignty towards the south. This policy was to get exploitation potential in a large area (including human resources, commercial seaports and natural resources...) and to strengthen national security in the south and form a strategic defensive position against political schemes of feudal empires in the north.

So, the establishment of the “*four classes*” (*tứ dân*) institution means *the restructuring of the traditional society*, which was formed unpromptedly throughout many centuries. To strengthen its institution and to give prominence to Confucian ideology and morality (the focus was *Morality* theory), Le dynasty attached importance to agriculture. Thanks to higher output and high adaptability to different cultivation conditions, as well as stable periodic development and its ancient philosophies and ideologies about its natural world, agriculture became the major production sector. In that social context, human became increasingly close to land and conscience about land became increasingly profound and complete. Consequently, in the fifteenth century “*a plain bureaucratic political institution*” was relatively completely established. That institution spread out, partly overwhelmed many economic activities and traditional culture which had been Vietnamese people's behavioral habits for generations and a component of our nation's cultural heritage. People in the northern delta had two main jobs – peasants and handicraftsmen – merchants, i. e. wet rice cultivation, handicraft production and merchandizing. The second job brought people many chances to be rich but it was usually difficult for them to hold high positions in the political system. In our nation's history, during many periods, they were considered people who were interested in “insecure jobs”

and non-fundamental, and this might be the reason why they had fewer chances for promotion and success than those who aimed at success by studying and taking national exams.

However, people always had the demand to satisfy what they found necessary and logical in life. Dai Viet's economy and its potential, like those of other countries in the area, had strengths and limitations. Therefore, trade exchange was always an effective way to bring strengths into full play and compensate for what the economy lacked. Although journeys to the north and the south were always considered adventurous, Chinese historical books contained description of Vietnamese (Bach Viet) people's trade activities, particularly activities of some extremely wealthy merchants. The influence expansion to the south of West Han dynasty (206 BC – 25), from the economic perspective, connected two economic centres in northern and southern China. Based on this, the establishment of a business route to the area of Nanhai (Guangzhou) brought great benefits to a part of Chinese mandarins and merchants. *Pre-Han shi* wrote because that area "was near the sea with a lot of rhino horns, ivory, tortoise shells, pearls, gems, silver, bronze, fruit, cloth, most Chinese people who came here for trading became rich"²⁴. Therefore, some researchers when considering the ability to do business of Chinese people believed that some of it was inherited from trade traditions of people in the south, including Vietnamese people (Yueh)²⁵.

With the development basis inherited from West Han dynasty, in East Han dynasty (25–220), the economic relation between Nanhai and Giao Chi continued to develop. Chinese merchants and even Vietnamese people usually brought rice from lower part of Red River delta to trade in districts of Cuu Chan, Hop Pho... They also usually traded pearls and gems in Hop Pho. Based on many material sources, the Chinese scholar Wang Gungwu believed in the first centuries C.E, Giao Chau area was already a big trading centre with an important role to China's marine trade and its relations with the area of East Sea. The author also believed that the areas of Luy Lau, Long Bien used to be important centres of trade exchange because they were the places frequented by fleets of trading vessels and envoys from southern countries²⁶. The findings in Trieu Van De's tombs in Guangzhou showed that the Zhao dynasty already had relations with many remote economies in West Asia and Africa. It can be concluded that the international objects were brought by fleets of trading vessels to the area or through the Gulf of Tonkin. In the work titled *Tê nhân yếu thuật*, Giả Tư Hiệp, a person in Northern Wei time (386–534) had detailed writing: "In Giao Chi there were 30 special species of trees. Many of them had been planted in Qi and So for a long time. Then they became special produce in China." Also in this work, the author revealed that: People in Giao Chi knew how to extract molasses from sugarcane which was called "stone of molasses". They also knew how to condense molasses to make sugar called "ice of sugar". Giao Chi's sugar had to be a rare and high quality product because the King of Wu named Ton Luong *Sun Liang* (Sanguo time) allowed to import this kind of sugar into China²⁷.

Thanks to its geographic position close to the broad area of southern China and in the tropical ecology, the north of our country in general and the northeast in particular soon became strategic areas in terms of politics and important trade exchange. Together with rice and cloth, seafood and salt were continually transported to the north along rivers and by sea. Besides the method of salt production using solar energy, people in Giao Chi soon knew salt cooking techniques. In *An Nam chí lược*, Le Tac described salt cooking method of people in the northeast area: "Sea water was cooked to make snow-white salt. People in border areas came to An Nam just because of the beneficial sources of salt and iron"²⁸. According to *Man thu by* in Tang dynasty time (618–907), groups of people in Dien, Nam Chieu and Dai Ly usually exchanged their horses and buffaloes for salt²⁹. The demand for salt in Chinese market in general and southwestern area in particular was big. Up to the eighteenth century, just Tran An district in Guangxi needed over 1,000 sacks of salt a year. Besides salt, valuable metals such as gold, silver, bronze and tin... exploited in mines along borders also brought great benefits to merchants. Gold and silver were used not only as exchange intermediaries, to produce jewellery and decoration items on luxurious clothes but many wealthy merchants

also used it to gamble and for many luxurious purposes. Because of the phenomenon of “gold draining”, Song dynasty had to ban the export of gold and gold products to Giao Chi³⁰.

Some historic documents such as *Han shi*, *Post-Han shi*, *Liang shi*, *Sui shi* and *new Tang shi*, *Song history* showed that from the ancient time to Song dynasty (960–1279), northern areas of our country like Luy Lau, Long Bien and the Gulf of Tonkin were busy commercial seaports in the area’s trade system. In Han dynasty, Giao Chi district³¹ was a trading place for merchants from many Southeast Asian countries and others. At that time, marine spices route and flavorings roads usually led to central and northern Vietnam before leading to southern China.

After defeating Nam Han invaders in 938, our nation restored our independence. The appearance of a country with sovereignty in the south led to changes in economic relations between countries in the region with Giao Chau and southern China. Many fleets of Asian trading vessels stopped calling at the Gulf of Tonkin, they went straight to seaports in Guangzhou and Fujian instead. Well aware of this change, in order to restore traditional trading relations, on the one hand, dynasties of Ngo, Dinh, Former Le tried to improve and “normalize” their relations with China, on the other hand looked for ways to maintain and develop their traditional trading relations. In 1009, Former Le dynasty, King Le Long Dinh (r. 1006–1009) sent an envoy to give Song dynasty a rhino, asking for a set of gold-inlaid amour and headpiece, and asking for permission to have “a trade supervisor in the market of Ung Chau, but the king (of Song) only allowed trading in the markets of Liem Chau and Nhu Hong”³².

As an independent nation, Ly dynasty (1010–1225) practiced open policy in diplomatic relations and foreign trade activities. After enthroned for two months, in June 1012, King Ly Thai To sent an envoy to China to ask for permission to open a trading market in Ung Chau (Nam Ninh presently). But King Ly Chan Tong of Song dynasty believed that Ly dynasty usually invaded their southern borders and rejected that proposal. The book *Tục tư trị thông giám trường biên* composed by Ly Dao, a person in Nam Tong (Nan Song) dynasty, had it that: “In June, Giáp Ty year, dated the 5th Trung Tuong Phu, Tong Chan Tong (1012) transport officer in West Guangnan reported that: Ly Cong Uan in Giao Chau asked for permission to have people and ships go straight to Ung Chau for trading. King (of Song dynasty) said: People in coastal areas were always afraid of Giao Chau’s invasions, so permission was only given to the establishment of markets in Kham Chau and Nhu Hong district. Moreover, coastal areas were important positions, if they were allowed to get further in land, there might be disadvantages. Officers had to obey previous orders carefully”³³.

As a logical result of the demand for economic exchange, some silver exchange points and trading routes were established along the borders between Vietnam and China. Thanks to this, Vietnamese merchants could get further into China. In the work *Lĩnh ngoại đại đáp* Chu Khu Phi wrote about silver exchange points in bases of Hoanh Son, Vinh Binh, To Mau and Nhu Hong. In Hoanh Son base, merchants from such places as Quang Nguyen (Cao Bang) and Dac Ma of the country of Dai Ly (Yunnan)... usually gathered for trading. Hoanh Son silver exchange point “seduced everybody with low taxes”. In Vinh Binh, “Everyday Giao people brought famous fragrant materials, rhino horns, ivory, gold, silver, salt and money to exchange with our merchants for brocade, chiffon and cloth. Those who went to Vinh Binh were Giao people coming by land. The things they brought were valuable and small, only salt was heavy and could be exchanged for only cloth”³⁴.

As regional economic centres, silver exchange points operated for a long time, connecting the economic area of southern China with our country and some Southeast Asian nations in land. Chu Khu Phi wrote: At silver exchange points, besides people from two countries, there were professional and wealthy merchants, who were called “*tiểu cương*”. There were also “*đại cương*”, who were mandarins going to Kham Chau as envoys, combining this with trade to meet the royal luxurious consumption demands. In Song dynasty, merchants from Shu area (Sichuan) brought brocade to sell in Kham Chau and bought fragrant materials in Kham Chau to bring back to Shu area once a year with commodities worth thousands of trays of money.

With trading routes in land, in 1149, King Ly Anh Tong (r. 1138–1175) established Van Don camp to affirm sovereignty and build fences in the northeast, simultaneously boosting trade exchange relations with regional countries. *Dai Viet su ky toan thu* (Complete History Record of Great Viet, *Toàn thư* for short from here) noted: “In spring, February, trading ships from three countries of Trao Oa, Lo Lac, and Siam came to Hai Dong, asking for permission for residence and trade, then were allowed to set up a camp on an island called Van Don to trade valuable commodities and offer local specialties”³⁵. Archeological findings showed that “After its establishment, Van Don developed to become *a system of seaports* operating continually and became a critical trading seaport in the north of our country up to the eighteenth century”³⁶. In addition, Ly dynasty also maintained and expanded relations with neighboring countries such as Ai Lao, Nguu Hong, Chenla, Champa... In that context, besides Van Dong, in Ly and Tran dynasties, seaports in the area of Thanh – Nghe Tinh, the southern border of Dai Viet, also became an economic and transferring point of trading routes in the area.

In the rising position of a self-reliant nation, in Tran dynasty (1226–1400), Dai Viet still had close trade exchange relations with regional countries. In the country, there were highly professional handicraft production centres with villages of silk weaving, conic hat making, lacquer, ceramics... With traditions from Ly dynasty, ceramics in Tran dynasty, especially that with brown flowers and strong patterns, was one of valuable heritages in Dai Viet’s and regional cultures³⁷. The development of many economic sectors in the country and the relations between mountainous and delta areas, delta economic centres and remote border areas strengthened the potentials and created impetus for the development of foreign trade. “Tran dynasty had policies to encourage craft industry and trade, delayed the application of strict trade control policies like later Le and Nguyen dynasties. There were markets everywhere with regular fairs. The imperial city of Thang Long had 61 wards with busy trading activities, even at nights. Van Don was still an international trade exchange point to exchange goods between Dai Viet and other Southeast Asian and East Asian countries”³⁸. In Tran dynasty, merchants had a rather important role in the society. The viewpoint attaching importance to trade appeared even in aristocracy with Tran Khanh Du (?–1339) as a typical example. Besides, the number of aristocrats and intellectuals who understood languages, customs and traditions of “fairs” and many countries like Tran Nhat Duat (1235–1331) and Tran Quang Khai (1241–1294) was not small. Moreover, Tran dynasty also wanted to strengthen its relations with neighboring countries and its economic power through marriages between some princesses in Tran dynasty and wealthy merchants. In Tran Du Tong’s time (in power: 1341–1369), the King even invited big merchants to the palace for gambling. *Toàn thư* wrote: “Wealthy merchants in the country, such as Dinh Bang village in Bac Giang, Nga Dinh village in Quoc Oai, to the palace to gamble for fun. 300 *piastres* were gambled during an hour, so nearly 900 *piastres* were gambled during three hours”³⁹.

The noteworthy point is that before and after three resistance wars against Mongol-Yuan invaders in the second half of the 13th century, our relations with countries in the area, including China, continued to develop. Historical and archeological documents showed that right after wars, trade exchange relations between two countries continued to take place regularly. In Van Ninh and archeological sites of Cong Tay, Van Don in Quang Ninh province, archeologists and historians discovered many ceramic items from China, including high-grade Yuan ceramics produced by Long Tuyen and dated the end of the 13th century and the beginning of the 14th century. At the end of Tran dynasty’s time and the beginning of early Le dynasty’s time, there had to be close relations between Dai Viet and countries in the area. According to *Toàn thư*, there were more Chinese envoys to our countries in Tran dynasty than in Ly and Le dynasties. Specifically, Chinese envoys came to Thang Long 15 times in Ly dynasty, 36 times in Tran dynasty, and 30 times in dynasties of early Le – Mac – Le Trung Hung. Besides China, neighboring countries in the area also sent delegations of envoys to our country for diplomatic relations. There were regular exchanges between Dai Viet and other regional countries. Consequently, Dai Viet’s culture reached a high level of harmony with

regional culture. In order to preserve our traditional cultural values, in *Dư địa chí* (Historical Geography, finished in 1435) Nguyen Trai (1380–1442) warned: “Our people should not imitate the languages and costumes of countries of Wu, Chiem, Laos, Siam, and Chenla to destroy our customs”⁴⁰. Evidently, the close relations between Dai Viet and regional countries did not stop or had only cultural and diplomatic meanings.

3. Domestic trade – foreign trade and trading relations in Early Le dynasty

Concerning Le dynasty (1428–1527) many researchers believe that Le authority, typically Le Thanh Tong (r. 1460–1497), because of its viewpoints attaching importance to agriculture and Confucianism, practiced many methods which limited non-agricultural economic activities. In the historical context of that period, as a powerful and centralized political institution, the central authority also attached importance to industrial and commercial issues and had policies ensuring their development. In terms of strategy, Le dynasty expanded borders and wanted to control many economic activities of the country. However, under the northern feudal government’s strong pressure, and constantly facing threats from neighboring countries in the southwest, Le dynasty always had policies closely relating to national security and territory protection with the implementation of many methods aimed at protecting our economic sovereignty. Historical documents show that, besides policies attaching importance to agriculture, Thang Long authority also paid special attention to strengthening and establishing international diplomatic relations and bringing into full play the roles of industrial and commercial sectors in order to ensure demands, balanced and stable life for a nation in the prosperous and powerful development period.

Historical facts show that our nation’s specialties and economic potentials always drew attention of neighboring countries, especially the northern authority. Under the Ming’s domination (1407–1427), after basically stabilizing Dai Viet, Ming dynasty implemented many cruel methods to loot natural resources which were also valuable trading goods. In *Dai Viet su ky toan thu*, it was clearly written that: “In 1415, (under the 13th reign of Vinh Lac of the Ming Dynasty), Autumn, in August, Ming dynasty searched and confiscated gold and silver mines, recruited laborers to sift for gold and silver, to seize white elephants and to grope for pearls. There were heavy taxes and exploitation, people were afflicted. People were banned from buying and selling salt, salt fields were controlled by mandarins. There were heads and deputies of each salt field to look after it in turns. Provinces and districts had mandarins in charge of tax offices and treasuries”⁴¹.

After the victory of the resistance war against Ming invaders and the recovery of nation’s union, Le dynasty implemented many strong methods to strengthen our nation. Le authority was also deeply aware of the protection of specialties and natural resources. Only 4 months after being enthroned, on August 10, 1428, Le Thai To (r. 1428–1433) “ordered to have clear enumeration of specialties in each locality such as bronze, iron, mulberry, flax, silk, wax trees, canari sap, beeswax, oil, pepper, rattan”⁴². On November 25, 1428, the king “ordered to examine fields, lands, gold and silver mines, mountainous specialties in districts and old taxes”⁴³. On December 22, Le dynasty’s founder continue to “order heads of provinces, districts and localities to examine private and government-owned fields and lands in their localities, together with kinds of fish, fruit, salt, fish sauce and private fish aquariums in estuaries, kinds of gold, silver, lead, tin, and money”⁴⁴.

To put all social activities in control and management, and to create favorable conditions for economic activities, in March, 1439, King Le Thai Tong (r. 1434–1442) regulated money value, the measurement of cloth and a writing paper sheet. According to the regulations, “In terms of money, 60 dongs make an unit of money, in terms of silk, each block is at least 30 meters long and 1.5 meters wide (*in old measurement*), in terms of flax cloth, each block is at least 20 meters long and 1.3 meters wide, each block of banana tree fiber cloth is 24 meters long, each block of rough cotton cloth 22 meters long, paper is in 100-sheet block”⁴⁵. Like any other powerful and prosperous dynasty, Le dynasty always understood the role of industry and

trade and had strong methods to protect natural resources. In August, 1464, Le Thanh Tong (r. 1442–1497) had the decree that “Whoever violated the law by groping for pearls and casting bronze money will be punished based on two categories: culprits and accessories”⁷⁴⁶. Later, kings of Le dynasty had many decrees on the protection of natural resources such as pearls in Dong Hai, gold, ivory, valuable wood, fragrant materials.

Right after enthroned, on March 19, 1461, Le Thanh Tong had a decree encouraging agriculture “people should not abandon the root for the top, or plan business”⁷⁴⁷. Many researchers believe that the decree clearly shows the kings’ viewpoint of attaching importance to agriculture and the dynasty’s viewpoint of limiting trade. However, in a different perspective, it can be believed that Le Thanh Tong seemed to stop a rather popular trend at that time, many peasants in many places abandoned fields for trade and became wealthy quickly. That social trend would certainly harm and changed the value system that Confucian political institution wanted to establish and strengthen. It is also a concern about the nation’s problems which in 1429, Le Thai To thought about: “Those who fought the invaders are poor, those who just play are rich. Those who fought the invaders do not have any land, but those who are useless to the country have abundant amount of land... It is the reason why nobody is devoted to the country, people only think of becoming rich”⁷⁴⁸.

During 38 years in power, with the desire to construct a law controlled state, Le Thanh Tong was always concerned about the possibilities that the law was not strictly obeyed, the nation’s mainstays were not strong enough for many reasons, including economic ones. With the incident that Minister of Justice (Le Bo) Tran Phong asked the king for permission to let Le Bo, an offender who was punished by being stigmatized on his forehead, pay money, the king thought: “If so, rich people with a lot of money from bribery are exempted from punishment, only poor people are punished”⁷⁴⁹. In fact, in *The National Law* composed by the king, there are many articles, such as articles 21 to 24 in *Danh lệ* section, about detailed regulations about payment for crimes or different responsibilities⁵⁰. Historical records show that *although the law in Le dynasty was famously strict, money could still change or save destinies!*

In terms of external economy, information sources in formal history show that trading activities were diversified, in many cases, it was difficult to distinguish clearly diplomatic relations and tribute from exchange and trade... in their narrower meaning. These activities were always inserted in each other with relations and mutual supports. Le dynasty’s formal history wrote clearly that after Le Thai To passed away, Ming dynasty sent Quach Te, Chu Bat... to show condolence. With a lot of offering on 80 tables, envoys also brought many goods from the north and forced Le dynasty to buy at high prices!⁵¹. The notable thing is: those activities of “heaven dynasty’s” envoys took place when Dai Viet was having deep mourning! It can be concluded that this event could not be rare in history.

Realizing that the method of “diplomacy – economy” could bring practical benefits, in December, 1435, Ming dynasty sent Chu Bat and Ta Kinh as envoys to inform the enthronement of Ming’s king and the bestowment of the king’s grand-mother. However, the economic purpose of Chinese envoy was very obvious. Le dynasty’s historians commented “Bat’s gang was very greedy and scurrilous, they were in fact greedy for money but pretended to be clean-fingered, whenever they were given presents, gold or silver, they refused but looked at the followers hesitantly. The court understood and then took their followers to another room for feasts, and when invited alcohol, Bat’s gang was secretly given gold. Bat’s gang was extremely happy about this. Bat’s gang also brought many northern goods to force the court to buy at high prices. When they returned home, nearly a thousand labourers were needed to carry tribute and their luggage”⁵².

In their turns, on the occasions of envoy’s trips, besides their general duties assigned by the court, some envoy delegations and some envoys took this rare chance to “do business” and plan their own benefits. According to a Japanese historian, a famous expert in Vietnamese history, Momoki Shiro, “In Le dynasty (1428–1527), there were 64 delegations of envoys (including irregular ones) to Ming’s court. Although the tribute was usually gold and silver

(34 times), horses (4 times), ivory and rhino horns (7 times), and valuable wood (3 times), the value and quantity of the goods the delegation brought for exchange was not written down. Those delegations of envoys really did their own business. Therefore, during 1433–1434 they were punished by Le Thai Tong for illegal trading⁵³. In *Toàn thư*, Le dynasty's historians wrote about this event: "At that time, the chief envoys Le Vi and Nguyen Truyen bought a lot of northern goods, up to 30 loads. The court hated them for trading, intended to make them ashamed, then ordered to take all of the goods to display on the ground before giving them back. *Then it became conventional*" (the authors emphasized)⁵⁴. However, in Le Thanh Tong's dynasty, there were still such incidents as those of Nguyen Tong Tru and Thai Quan Thuc, who were sent as envoys to Ming dynasty, but "Tong Tru took a lot of money and silk to the north and bought northern goods to bring back, the king hated Tru for violating regulations, divided all his luggage among mandarins"⁵⁵.

Formal history also released that in Thai Tong's time, many high-ranking mandarins ordered soldiers to build their own houses. Among them, according to Censor (*Ngôn quan*) Phan Thien Tuoc's crime report, *Tiền quân Tổng quản* Le Thu "got married during national mourning time, built huge houses, sent people abroad to trade illegally with foreigners"⁵⁶. As a result, without consulting anyone, the king ordered to investigate Thu's case, and greedy mandarin Le Thu had 15 *taels* of gold and 100 *taels* of silver which were traded illegally confiscated!

The phenomena of distracting from public work, bribery, taking advantage of power to buy things at cheap prices, appropriating goods or concerning about the own benefits... became worries and threats in the court. In this context, in July, 1435, Le Thai Tong had to decree to mandarins of all kinds and levels that "... Those looking after people just concerned their own benefits, did not take care of people, or absolved the rich, punish the poor, bought wood to build houses, judged cases unfairly, built gangs, thought about bribery, worked lazily, interested in feasts and parties. Mandarins at borders sometimes did not concentrate on their work of patrol and examination, let strangers escape, they were just concerned about trading for their own profits"⁵⁷. The inevitable result was that the king had to arrest and question heads of departments of transport, patrol... in localities with the total number of 53 people! In December, 1448, there was a rumor that Ming dynasty sent two special envoys and military to our northeastern borders in preparation for "border examination". King Le Nhan Tong (r. 1443–1459) sent mandarin Trinh Duc to investigate the information. Trinh Duc did not investigate carefully, reported wrongly, which made Le's court mobilize a large number of mandarins, soldiers and resources to protect borders. "The whole eastern area was therefore agitated. When they got to the borders, they stayed there for weeks and months to investigate information but it was really quiet. *Then they spent money buying loads of northern goods to bring back, telling lies that Ming's special envoys had other business so they did not come* (we emphasized – authors). Supervisor Ha Lat colluded with them and did not say a word. So the court did not ask about that offence"⁵⁸. If it was based on *The national law*, just the offence "If mandarins who are sent to investigate things do not report the truth, they will be dismissed or punished with hard labor; if because of close relations or hatred they deliberately do things against the truth, their offence will be punished more heavily based on real situations; if they receive bribes, they will be punished at two higher levels"⁵⁹. It seems that, in our opinions, in Le dynasty's time, *there was some power or authority, in certain cases, which could get out of the law's control*. So, the king could not always use the law to show his power or keep the law strictly obeyed.

In the formal history of Le dynasty, there was also a notable event. In 1476, in Le Thanh Tong's time, there was a drought. In the pray for rain, the head of institution wrote: "From winter to summer, there have been few rains and it has been sunny all the time, people have a lot of difficulties. *Workers and traders have nowhere to rely on, farmers have nothing to expect*. It is only because I am not virtuous, everybody has to suffer great disasters"⁶⁰. So, in the noble pray to the king of heaven for rain, the powerful king expressed his sincere and he

himself identified clearly the positions of workers and traders. It can be “an accident” in a religious document but the king himself mentioned workers and traders before good-natured farmers.

Together with time, it seems that Le Thanh Tong became increasingly well aware of the roles of workers and traders in the united socio-economic institution. Because in the year after that, i. e. in 1477, King Hong Duc issued *Regulations on opening new markets* and decreed that “The number of people in provinces, communes and localities is increasing, if they want to open new markets for convenience, heads of provinces, communes and localities need to consider reality, if it is really convenient for people, they need to write reports and allow people to open new markets, regardless of having old markets or not”⁶¹. Then, on March 10, 1484, the king had a decree on banning business restriction. It was clearly written that “There is a strict law on banning business restriction, but some authorities have not changed the old practice, harming people, harming political situations. From now on, Phung Thien department and *Thịa, Hiến* offices in localities have to review the previous order for prohibition and reminding. Households which have to buy offerings at weddings, if buying things in markets, should pay right prices for any goods, they are forbidden to use power to force people to sell things at lower prices, those who violate the law will be punished in accordance with the previous order”⁶². Article 90 in *The National Law* also had it that «If supervisors in city markets extort money from traders in markets, they will be punished with 50 lashes, “*biếm một tư, lấy thuế chợ quá nặng biếm hai tư*” (as ways of punishment), lose the job of supervisors, compensate people twice; rewards for reporters of those cases are in accordance with regulations. If they ask for higher market taxes, they will be punished with 80 lashes and taken around the village with scandal spread around for 3 days. Those who ask for too high market taxes will be punished at one level higher than regulated». In order to have unanimous units of measurement, to protect the state’s power and role in the management of economic activities, Article 91 in *Hong Duc Law* clearly regulated that “In markets in cities and the country, traders who do not use the right scales, rulers, containers regulated by the state and use their own ones will be punished by not being allowed to trade or by hard labour”⁶³. Another document composed by Le Thanh Tong named *Hồng Đức thiện chính thư* also has detailed regulations about market activities and regulations to open markets. In this regulation, Le Thanh Tong gave a formal “definition” of markets: “in people’s life, *if there are people, there are markets, markets are to exchange goods, trade development is to satisfy people’s demands* (the author emphasized). In communes where there are already markets, it is not allowed to forbid them to open new ones to illogically hinder trade. Villages which trade later, and have markets later, are not allowed to have same fairs with markets nearby or have fairs before markets nearby to get goods from traders. If they want to open new markets, it is necessary to take old ones into consideration and have later fairs than the old ones. If markets are opened without plans, there are competitions without regulations, prohibitions are made for some people’s own benefits, punishments will be made based on the level of violations to stop the prohibitions”⁶⁴. So, these regulations clearly express the viewpoints of the head of Le authority in terms of the role of industry and commerce, it seems that the king always understood the life’s demands as well as his people’s wishes.

Also according to *Toàn thư*, in April, 1484, for the first time, the court had an order to ban rich people from using their power to disturb gold and silver mines. To create favorable conditions for economic flow, on May 1, 1486, Le Thanh Tong decreed that “It is valuable for money to flow everywhere, it is valuable for money to be stored for a long time without being damaged. From now on, offices in every locality, when collecting fines, regardless of private or public ones, need to choose real bronze coins to keep in public stores, although the edge of the coins can be a little broken, the coins are still made of real bronze and can be stored for a long time. In terms of money to pay salary and for people to spend in trade, if they are real bronze coins and can be strung, people have to receive, people are not allowed to refuse them or select them too carefully”⁶⁵. After Le Thanh Tong passed away, the crown

prince Tranh, i. e. king Le Hieu Tong (r. 1498–1504) was enthroned. Just two days after being enthroned, the king had a decree repeating his father's two important decrees: banning the use of power to oppress people in trade and control prices in the market; banning officers and people to select new or old money in exchange and flow. A new king and his first order at that time are certainly not an accidental event in history.

Together with the above mentioned policies, Le authority also kept money stored at Hai Tri lake; strictly banned people from counterfeiting money or using coins to cast objects or to make imitated objects; banned traders and workers from opening shops inside the citadel; banned people from communicating secretly with envoys; banned trading goods, especially forbidden goods, through borders, but if traders who are Man Lieu people (a minor ethnic group – the author) are extorted for presents, authority will be punished and have to compensate twice for the victims; strictly banning selling border lands, maidservants, elephants and horses to foreigners, if people violate this law, they will be executed; boats going to estuaries must be examined, except private boats of high-ranking mandarins from level two; strictly banning the use of the king's objects to make strings for boats, if people violate this law, they will be exiled or sentenced to death⁶⁶. Le authority also banned mandarins and people from using gold, gems and glass to make hats and spittoons; banned trading military hats in markets to avoid confusions between soldiers and people. Le authority also set taxes for salt, mulberry, and allowed some localities to build trading boats to transport paddy and rice, and at the same time determined gold and silver taxes in order to reduce gold taxes and adjust gold and silver prices⁶⁷.

In the Early Le's time, besides the country's relation with China, some Southeast Asian countries such as Siam, Trao Oa, Malacca, Palembang, Champa, Ai Lao... usually allowed traders and envoys to go to our country for trade and tribute. After the event in 1471, "Because the king had defeated Champa and the reputation had spread everywhere, colonized countries in the west in turns hurried to offer tribute"⁶⁸. Although trade relations were rarely written down in formal history, in *Toàn thư* the event in 1437 was also clearly noted: "Old Thailand sent Trai Cuong Lat as envoy to offer tribute. The king gave him the bestowing letter, and reduced trading taxes by 50 % compared with the previous year, getting one proportion out of twenty, and gave a big reward. In addition, he gave that country's king 20 sheets of colored silk, 30 sets of porcelain bowls, he gave the queen 5 sheets of colored silk, 3 sets of porcelain bowls, each set has 35 pieces"⁶⁹. Perhaps, among Southeast Asian countries, the kingdom of Siam (Thailand) was always given priorities.

As a clear-sighted king with the viewpoint of ruling the country by law, after promulgating *Royal regulations for mandarins* in 1471, in 1483, with experience inherited from kings Thai To, and Thai Tong..., king Le Thanh Tong promulgated *The national law*. In this famous law, in terms of foreign relations, Le authority regulated: "Those who illegally get out to other countries will be executed (those following foreign boats to go abroad will be punished in the same way), those looking after border gates (or estuaries), will be exiled to a near locality if they do not know the situation, if they know but still allow people to get through borders, they will be convicted of the same offence, the head will be punished *biếm hai tư*"⁷⁰. For valuable goods, Le authority had very strict regulations "Anyone who sells ironwood, crude gold, cinnamon bark, pearls, ivory to foreign traders will be punished *biếm ba tư*. Mandarins in communes and wards who know the situation but keep silent will be demoted to one level lower positions; mandarins in districts and provinces deliberately keep this secret will be convicted of the same offence, if they do not know this, they will be dismissed or punished"⁷¹. To have monopoly in trade and protect its economic sovereignty, the court also regulated: "If farms on the seaside allow trading boats to unload goods will be punished *biếm ba tư*, and will have to be fined three times the value of the goods, one part of the fine will be used to reward the discoverer. The head of the farm will be demoted"⁷².

As mentioned above, in the 15th–16th centuries, Van Don was still the biggest and most important seaport in Dai Viet. In Vietnamese foreign trade history, Van Don was the seaport that

was established early, operated continually and had an important role through seven centuries⁷³. Writing about Hai Dong area, the author of *Lịch triều hiến chương loại chí* (The Great Encyclopedia of History of the Nguyễn Dynasty) revealed “There was Hong Dam port at sea which was crowded with trading boats...” Moreover “In the region, there was a large area of mountains and sea and a little area of fields, people all traded for profits, few people did farming, tax application was different from other localities”⁷⁴. Van Don was the connection point in terms of foreign trade, and was a politically sensitive area, so Le authority attached special importance to security protection and supervised economic activities at Van Dong seaport. *Quốc triều hình luật* (National Criminal Law) regulated: “Those in Van Don taking Chinese goods to the citadel without permit from *An phủ ty*, getting to Trieu Dong port without being checked at *Đề bạc ty*, trading the goods secretly, or those coming back without permit from *Đề bạc ty*; getting to *Thông mậu trường* without being checked at *An phủ ty*, going straight back to the farm, will be punished *biếm một tư* and will pay a fine of 100 *quan*, reporters of these cases will be rewarded one third [of the fine]. If they trade goods secretly in villages, they will be punished *biếm ba tư*”⁷⁵. In the part about *Hình luật chí* (Criminal law) in Le’s time in *Lịch triều hiến chương loại chí*, scholar Phan Huy Chu wrote clearly that “Mandarins without permit go to farms in Van Don or borders will be put in prison or exiled... People from farms at borders or at seaside taking only foreigners to the citadel will be punished *biếm năm tư*; if they have no positions, they will be sentenced to prison, or have to serve as soldiers, and pay a fine of 100 *quan*... Those at the seaside allowing trading boats to call at to load goods illegally will be punished *biếm ba tư*, pay a fine worth twice the values of the confiscated goods, one part of the fine will be given to reporters. The head of the farm will be demoted... When there is a foreign trading boat calling at Van Don for trade, if *Quan Sát hải sứ* goes to check the boat alone, he will be punished *biếm một tư*. If that boat wants to stay, the head of the farm has to ask *An phủ ty* for permission, if he himself allows it to stay, he will be punished *biếm hai tư*, pay a fine of 200 *quan*; one third of which is used to reward reporters. If people allow foreigners to stay without residence registration, but foreigners do not have enough time limit, they will be punished *biếm một tư*, have to pay a fine of 50 *quan*, reporters are rewarded as mentioned above”⁷⁶.

So, all regulations on economic relations, including foreign trade activities, were all clear and strict. There were no exceptions in terms of the law’s subjects if they traded illegally or planned their own benefits. According to the law, foreigners could trade and exchange goods with registration. With the viewpoint of respecting history and objective facts, we cannot consider this as the illustration of the strict “restricting trade, closing labour” policies of the central authority at that time. Moreover, in Le’s time, together with legal foreign economic activities, there must have been illegal activities which made Thang Long’s authority continually vigilant and have clearly written regulations in laws.

The notable things are that in *Hồng Đức thiện chính thư*, king Le Thanh Tong also had clear regulations on the cases boats had to suffer from storms. According to the regulations, “Those who take the chance of a burning houses, and boats subject to storms, to steal their properties, will be beaten 100 times and put in prison three years; those who beat injured people will be executed; followers will be punished at one lower level. Those taking the chance of storms to destroy boats will be punished the same. Those stealing people’s properties will be punished *giảo* (decapitation); those beat injured people will be executed”⁷⁷. Although the document did not mention the nationality of boats (our boats or foreign boats), if we consider this as general legal regulations, they are really progressive and humane viewpoints of Le authority. The reason is that, as a convention in international diplomatic relations in mid-ancient times, most of strange (foreign) trading boats which were subject to storms, including boats, cargo, and even crew, would be victims of robberies or become “booty” for the central authority or local greedy mandarins!

In international diplomatic relations and trade exchange relations, Le authority also respected objects used in exchange and for presents. Besides costumes, pearls, silk and fragrant

materials..., ceramics and porcelain were Thang Long's authority luxurious goods. Many products of this kind were used as tribute to China or presents for envoys. In *Dư địa chí*, Nguyen Trai wrote clearly that: Bat Trang village, which made bowls and cups, and Hue Cau village (in My Van, Hai Hung province), which specialized in dyeing, were two villages that usually provided tribute to Ming dynasty (1368–1644): “Bat Trang is in Gia Lam province, Hue Cau is in Van Giang province. Those two villages usually provide tribute to China, including 70 sets of bowls and plates and 200 sheets of black cloth”⁷⁸. Based on ceramics relics discovered at boat wreckage in Cu Lao Cham, many researchers believed that 240,000 objects (excluding debris) the boat carried were mainly products of the system of ceramics kilns of Chu Dau – My Xa, Nam Sach, Hai Duong in the 15th century. Those ceramics and porcelain objects were not only at perfect level of techniques, design and art values, those archeological discoveries have also changed the awareness of many researchers in our country and abroad of Chu Dau ceramics as well as the typical contributions of Vietnamese ceramics and porcelain in the 15th century, one of the most prosperous periods of development in Vietnamese ceramics history⁷⁹.

With all his activities and achievements, we can see that “during 38 years in power, Le Thanh Tong created a peaceful and prosperous period in our history. Dai Viet in Le's time became *an independent, united, powerful and prosperous in Southeast Asia*”⁸⁰.

However, after Le Thanh Tong passed away, the feudal authority quickly showed some basic weaknesses and some signs of recession. At the end of Le's time, political situations were in chaos, parties fought for power and had plots to get the throne. The political centre of Thang Long was chaotic in the fight for power. According to *Toàn thư* “At that time, the citadel failed, lands were abandoned, people came into the citadel to fight for gold, silver and valuable properties, eucalyptus, musk, silk and raw silk were everywhere; countless piles of barks, peppers and fragrant materials of all kinds up to 1.2 meters (old measurement) high were thrown in the streets. Strong people fought for gold and silver, some people got three or four hundred *taels*, weaker ones also got over two hundred *taels*. Palaces and stores were therefore completely empty”⁸¹. It was a Thang Long in war, destruction and ruin... but the destruction and ruin also showed a Thang Long which was rich with a lot of valuable properties. That source of properties cannot have been based only on revenues from agricultural activities.

4. Conclusions

– So, after the country's recovery in the 10th century, all of our historical books wrote about the expansion of marine trade activities through seaports such as Van Ninh, Van Don (Quang Ninh), Thang Long, Hoi Trieu (Thanh Hoa), Cua Thoi, Cua Quen, Cua Con, Hoi Thong (Nghe An), Ky Anh (Ha Tinh), Nhat Le (Quang Binh), Tung estuary (Quang Tri)... Together with seaports, there were also connections between our nation's foreign economic activities and exchange systems by river routes and borders, typically silver exchange points along Vietnamese and Chinese borders. Those seaports and trading and exchange systems operated continually in Ly – Tran – Le periods. And, as mentioned above, although importance was attached to agriculture, Le authority still appreciated the roles of industry and trade, including foreign trade. The attraction and the power of monetary economy still secretly flew and partly eliminated barriers and restrictions of Le's bureaucratic monarchical institution and then in Mac dynasty (1527–1592) and Le Trung Hung's time (1583–1788), Dai Viet's economy, including foreign trade activities, developed significantly, integrated comparatively quickly into the general context and the regional and world economic development. On the basis of domestic economic potentials, Dai Viet's external economy contributed to create a splendid development period for Asian commerce in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

– With the view into our nation's history as a united multi-ethnic community, Viet people, in comparison with the area, developed the early marine trade and had a trading tradition with many neighboring countries in the area. Its bordering with many countries in terms of geog-

raphy and various means of communication: by road, river, sea... and even its economy, culture and politics... contributed to create this tradition. Moreover, for the peninsula's residents, at the beginning and the depth of history, human soon adapt to water environment and "*water characteristic* should be considered a typical characteristic of Vietnamese culture". Those cultural elements become usual factors which made Viet people "*identify themselves with water*" and created *high adaptability* in Vietnamese cultural traditions.⁸²

Besides, from the first centuries, together with Viet people, residents in Champa, Funan moved to the sea and really became "*marine kingdoms*". Marine trade activities and sea exploitation ability of those ancient kingdoms not only made an important contribution to the prosperous economic and cultural development but also affirmed those nations' political status in regional relations. However, for many reasons, that marine trade tradition was not developed fully and did not adapt to new contexts. In the multi-dimension interaction, the recession of Funan in the 7th century and of Champa in the 15th century had a big influence on regional economic activities, including Dai Viet. Moreover, under political pressure from many dimensions, and partly because of the limitation in officers' views, although Dai Viet's foreign trade had many signs of development, it could not become the main economic stream, which could dramatically change socio-economic life. However, it can also be seen that although Vietnamese marine trade history did not have great adventurous voyages like those of Chinese and Japanese merchants in Northeast Asia or Java's or Siamese merchants in Southeast Asia, and can not be compared to flocks of European trading boats after geographical discoveries, foreign trade always made an organic component of our national economy and had positive contributions to the general operation of the regional commercial system in terms of geographical position, economic potentials and international trade exchange tradition.

– In the context of the regional and world political life in the 10th–15th centuries with many big changes, Dai Viet's socio-economic picture also had many changes with quite a few absurdities. This is the period which marked the establishment of state models with the core point looking towards the construction of a centralized monarchical institution. It can be supposed that the institution had increasingly complete development but it also made Dai Viet's traditional society with Southeast Asian infrastructure become partly rigid. Nevertheless, seemingly in contrast with the Confucian superstructure with strict regulations, traditional socio-economic elements and even urgent demands of the society created a colorful picture with different trends and traditions. With a look back at Vietnamese economic history, those trends and (formal/informal) traditions did not always have a meeting point or have the most common and unique voice. On a long border (coast) with fights between groups of power and benefits, those diversified economic activities usually occurred simultaneously, there was even an association between them. In those changes and the common development, it is clear that political and international economic environment also had big impacts on the prosperity or the recession of foreign trade as well as economic and political status of a nation in comparison with other regional political bodies.

– When investigating the reasons why there were limitations in Vietnamese trade exchange history, we can see: because of the characteristic of being small farmers who were used to small-scale business and production, to consuming products of *tropical diversified ecology* with two basic characteristics of *multi-cultivation* and *miscellaneous cultivation*, a large part of the society had *the psychology of self-satisfying with the living environment* while the scarce food supply (mainly rice) was a big challenge. The thought of small-scale agricultural production and influences of Confucian morality and regulations were also main reasons which restricted the development of non-agricultural sectors and limited productivity of valuable products in the international market. Besides, together with the fact that some production sectors serving export were not highly developed and stable, the lack of professional traders with state's encouragement and subsidy also made external economic activities lack strengths and competitiveness in the regional and international market. With those above

mentioned reasons, Vietnamese economic history seems to lack deep and systematic thoughts and philosophy about occupations and the role of economy in general and trade in particular. Moreover, the bureaucratic institution's intention of monopoly in trade also restricted the natural development of some areas in external economy in the time when the East Sea trade developed prosperously. Finally, it can be seen that because of continual political pressure from the north and security loss in the south, Vietnamese feudal dynasties had to implement strict methods to protect sovereignty, external economic security, and domestic economy.

In terms of economy, signs of some policies "restricting and forbidding markets", "appreciating agriculture and oppressing trade" of the monarchical institution were partly the illustration of those political thoughts and viewpoints. Therefore, although there was a time the economy prospered a little, external economy could not create a strong motive force which could lead to basic changes in the socio-economic life, which could bring qualitative changes to our economy and helped our country integrate strongly into East Asia like Nihon and Siam.

However, it is fair to say that based on our existing potentials and traditions, Vietnamese people's active participation in Asian trade in the Age of Commerce contributed to the development of many domestic economies, building a considerable status for Dai Viet in its regional relations. Probably, it is time for us to have right and thorough assessments about the role of the sea and coastal areas in the formation of institutions' socio-economic structures in Vietnamese history. From that historical fact and with that historical meaning, "to understand Vietnamese history, we certainly need to have a look towards the sea". On the other hand, to have a thorough understanding of Vietnam's transformation process in the contemporary time, "it is also necessary to have a look towards the sea"⁸³ in an objective and comprehensive way.

The appearance of a *commercial tradition* including domestic and foreign trade activities in the nation's history is undeniable. However, the influence level as well as the role of industry and commerce, including foreign trade, on domestic socio-economic life is one of the focal subjects that needs further investigation and research. The problem is that, to have a thorough and deep understanding about the commercial tradition in our nation's history, it is necessary to have more exploitation of documents in the country and abroad, in association with the viewpoint of *regional comparative research* and objective assessments in *expert method*. Besides, researchers in our country should do early specialized research on each operation field of commerce, the association between domestic and foreign trade, specific features of economic space, the roles of institutions, domestic and international trading routes, economic sectors, handicraft production centres... as well as typical contributions of each kingdom and each period in Vietnamese economic traditions as components in our nation's general historical path.

¹ In this work, the concept of "Viet people" is understood in a broad meaning, i.e. similar to the concept of "Vietnamese people" to refer to a community of a united multi-ethnic nation in the course of history. In other words, that concept is aimed at expressing the integration process of our ethnic groups which continually expands in time.

² John Kremer Whitmore: *The Development of the Le Government in XVth Century Vietnam*, New York, 1968. More reference can be found in USSH – VNU: *Le Thanh Tong (1442–1497) – Person and career*, VNU Press, 1997; or Institute of Literature – Centre of Social Sciences and Humanities: *Emperor Le Thanh Tong: A talented politician, A brilliant culturist, A great poet*, Social Sciences Publishers, Hanoi, 1998; Nguyen Van Kim, *Le Thanh Tong – Life and career through some foreign historians' comments and evaluations; in Japan with Asia – Historical associations and socio-economic changes*, VNU Press, 2003, pp. 58–74.

³ For this part, we consulted Vu Huu San's work titled: *Summary of our nation's maritime history – Navy and water life activities in the nation's life*, <http://e-cadao.com/lichsu/soluoclichsunuoc ta.htm>

⁴ Tran Trong Kim, *A Brief History of Vietnam*, Tong hop Publishers, Ho Chi Minh city, 2005, p. 5.

⁵ Historian Tran Trong Kim noted: “But our way of writing history was in China’s chronological style, i. e. historians just wrote down important events in the order of time. They just noted down events briefly without explaining their origins and their connections with other events.” Tran Trong Kim, *A Brief History of Vietnam*, Ho Chi Minh: Tong hop Publishers, 2005, p. 5. However, water life activities were described many times in historical legends and tales. Besides, in some rare old literature, we see that ancient people also wrote about their daily life activities. In Chinese historical books, it was written that “Ancient Viet people lived on water more than on land, so they were very good at swimming, they knew how to make boats... Viet (Vietnamese) people were skilled in water fighting, they were used to using boats, they lived on land for little time and mainly lived on water. They had hair cut, had bodies tattooed and wore short loin-cloth for the convenience when swimming, short-sleeved shirts for the convenience when paddling”... Vu Huu San: *Summary of our nation’s marine history – Navy and water life activities in the nation’s life*.

⁶ In his work, the famous culturist and historian Arnold Toynbee believed that: In Southeast Asia, together with Chinese civilization, there were civilizations of Korea, Japan and Vietnam. Consult Arnold Toynbee: *Research on the world’s history – An interpreting approach*, The Gioi Publishers, 2002, p. 61. Meanwhile, Japanese professor Tadao Umesao believed that Southeast Asia is a *civilized area*. Consult Tadao Umesao: *History from the perspective of ecology – Japanese civilization in the world’s context*, The Gioi Publishers, Hanoi, 2007, pp. 151–180.

⁷ Keith Weller Taylor: *The Birth of Vietnam*. University of California Press, 1983, p. 7.

⁸ Keith Weller Taylor: *The Birth of Vietnam*. University of California Press, 1983, p. 7.

⁹ Universities usually have specialties of marine studies in general and marine history in particular, besides the appearance of *The Australia Association for Maritime History*, or *The International Journal of Maritime History*.

¹⁰ Consult: Institute of Archeology: *Vietnamese Archeology*, 3 volumes, Social Sciences Publishers, Hanoi, 1998, 1999–2002; or work about cultures of Ha Long, Sa Huynh, Oc Eo... Among books about navy and water wars, in 1983, there was a book titled “*Navy in the history of resistant wars against invaders*” by authors Nguyen Viet – Vu Minh Giang – Nguyen Manh Hung, Military Publishers, Hanoi, 1983.

¹¹ Li Tana: *Boats and boat building techniques in Vietnam at the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th century*. *Past & Present Magazine*, volume 131 (179), January, 2003; Vu Huu San: *The Gulf of Tonkin – The starting point of marine*, *Past & Present Magazine*, volume 131 (179), January 2003 and volume 134 (182), February 2003; And Pietri: *Three little known kinds of sailboats in Indochina sea*, *Past & Present Magazine*, volume 134 (182), February 2003.

¹² William Meacham: *Origins and Development of the Yueh Coastal Neolithic: A Microcosm of Culture Change on the Mainland of East Asia*. Berkeley University of California Press, 1983.

¹³ Consult Tran Quoc Vuong: *Miles of the country – Areas, People, Vietnamese Conscience*, volume I, Thuan Hoa Publishers, Hue, 2006, p. 14.

¹⁴ W. G. Solhiem II: *New Light on a Forgotten Past*, *National Geographic Magazine*, 139 (3), 1971, pp. 330–339; cited from Prof. Ha Van Tan: *Tracing ancient cultures*, Social Sciences Publishers, Hanoi, 1997, p. 26. In the writing “*Boats, graves and grave boats*”, Prof. Ha Van Tan believed that at the end of the Neolithic Age and the beginning of the Metal Age in Vietnam, there was a “marine culture border”. «It was one of Vietnamese culture’s origins. Although it was integrated, it still created a “sea” aspect in ancient Vietnamese culture». And grave boats were not only a way of burying but they were also considered *spirit boats* to take the dead’s spirit to the eternal world. Grave boats and prayers for spirits sung along with paddling proved that viewpoint, as written at p. 717.

¹⁵ Vu Huu San: *Summary of our nation’s marine history – Navy and water life activities in the nation’s life*, *ibid*.

¹⁶ Cited in Vu Huu San: *The Gulf of Tonkin – The starting point of marine*, *Past & Present Magazine*, *ibid*, p. 27.

¹⁷ Vu Huu San: *Summary of our nation’s marine history – Navy and water life activities in the nation’s life*, *ibid*.

¹⁸ Tran Quoc Vuong: *Miles of the country – Areas, People, Vietnamese Conscience*, *ibid*, p. 20.

¹⁹ Notable research by Vu Huu San on propulsion, from the method of letting rafts go along water currents to high technologies such as going against the wind or automatic boat control, all of which were invented by ancient people. The most significant achievements may be the combination of the sail system. Thanks to this, some boats in Vietnam could balance themselves and kept their direction for many days without steering wheel adjustment. Vu Huu San: *Summary of our nation’s marine history – Navy and water life activities in the nation’s life*, *ibid*.

²⁰ Ha Van Tan (et al.), *Vietnamese Archeology*, volume II, *Metal Age*, Social Sciences Publishers, Hanoi, 1999, pp. 279–280.

²¹ Ha Van Tan (et al.): *Vietnamese Archeology*, volume II, pp. 344–354.

²² Sakurai Yumio: *Attempt to Sketch Southeast Asian Historical Structure through the Connection between the Sea and Land*, *Southeast Asian Research Magazine*, volume 4 (25), 1996; Consult more in Ha Van Tan: *Oc Eo – Internal and External Elements*, Social Sciences Publishers, Hanoi, 1997, pp. 833–847; Le Xuan Diem – Dao Linh Con – Vo Si Khai: *Oc Eo culture – New Discoveries*, Social Sciences Publishers, Hanoi, 1995.

²³ David G. Marr – A. C. Milner (Ed.), *Southeast Asia in the 9th to 14th Centuries*. Institute of South-east Asian Studies, Singapore Press, 1986.

²⁴ *Pre-Han shi*, Book No. 28, sheet 21b; cited in Nguyen Minh Hang (et al.), *Trade over Vietnam – China Border*, Hanoi: Social Sciences, 2003, p. 13.

²⁵ During this period, in Vietnamese cultural history, there was a notable legend about Chu Dong Tu becoming a monk, which was written in *Lĩnh Nam chích quái*. According to this legend, Dong Tu and Tien Dzung set up busy markets to exchange business even with foreign traders. Then Dong Tu became a trader. One day, a big merchant came and showed him the way to become rich: “It is necessary to accumulate capital, and when there is capital, it will be easy to become rich. Capital is gold or silk. There is a proverb that *Gold in the garden is like pregnancy, gold going out is like giving birth...* If you follow this plan, you can have hundreds of taels of gold, then you use it to trade valuable specialties, with many trading trips, you’ll have more profits to reinvest in business, then profits will increase dramatically”. Following the advice, Dong Tu and Tien Dzung went by boat to *Nanghai*. They called at a strange mountain named Quynh Vien for fresh water. In the mountain, Dong Tu met a recluse named Phat Quang, titled Dang Hai at the entrance of a cave. Because of the natural bonds, the monk taught Dong Tu his religion and esoteric secrets. Dong Tu came back to his boat and told Tien Dzung the story. Tien Dzung was enlightened, stopped trading, divided all their properties to give the poor and determined to learn the religion. Consult Vu Quynh: *Lĩnh Nam chích quái*, Social Sciences Publishers, Hanoi, 1993, pp. 63–64 (Quynh Vien mountain is in Nam Gioi, Cua Sot, Ha Tinh province at present).

²⁶ Wang Gungwu, *The Nanghai Trade: The Early History of Chinese Trade in the South China Sea*, Singapore: Time Academic Press, 1998. See Hoang Anh Tuan, “Seaports in the Northeast and the North’s Trade System in the 17th Century (through the Western Sources)”, *Journal of Historical Studies*, volume 1 and 2, 2007.

²⁷ Cited in Hoang Giap, “Vietnamese–Chinese Cultural Exchange: Memorable Issues”, *Journal of Chinese Studies* (Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences), volume 3 (19), 1998.

²⁸ Le Tac, *An Nam chí lược*, Thuan Hoa Publishers – Dong Tay Cultural and Linguistic Centre, 2002, tr. 278.

²⁹ *Man thư*, Documents from Faculty of History, USSH – VNU.

³⁰ Consult Nguyen Huu Tam: *Silver exchange points and Ly – Song trade exchange relations in the 11th–13th centuries*, paper at the international seminar: *Vietnam in the Commercial System of Asia in the 16th and 17th centuries*, USSH – VNU on 30 March, 2007.

³¹ Chinese scholar Wang Gungwu studied Chinese marine trade history before the 10th century, basing on Chinese written documents in early times, believed that by the 3rd century, Giao Chi had become a coordination centre of Chinese marine trade in the East Sea. Long Bien used to be the centre of foreign economic activities, receiving delegations of foreign traders coming to China for trade. Then, foreign traders gradually moved to Guangzhou seaport in East such as Fujian and Guangzhou, where political situations seemed to be more stable. Wang Gungwu: *The Nanghai Trade – The Early History of Chinese Trade in the South China Sea*, Singapore: Time Academic Press, 1998, pp. 1–45.

³² *Dai Viet su ky toan thu*, volume 1, Social Sciences Publishers, Hanoi, 1993, p. 235.

³³ Cited in Nguyen Huu Tam, “Silver Exchange Points and Ly – Song Trade Exchange Relations in the 11th–13th Centuries”. University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Vietnam National University, Hanoi, *Vietnam in Asian trade system in the 16th and 17th centuries*, USSH – VNU on 30 March, 2007.

³⁴ Chu Khu Phi: *Lĩnh ngoại đại đáp – Thông đạo ngoại di*, documents from Faculty of History, University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Vietnam National University, Hanoi, Code 1006B, pp. 35–37.

³⁵ *Toàn thư*, volume II, Social Sciences Publishers, 1993, p. 317.

³⁶ Nguyen Van Kim: *Van Don trading port system through historical, field notes and archeological documents*, *Archeology Journal*, volume 4 (142), 2006, pp. 46–65.

³⁷ Pham Quoc Quan – Nguyen Dinh Chien, *Vietnamese Ceramics with brown flowers*, Museum of Vietnamese history, Hanoi, 2005, pp. 13–17. Consult more in Hirumi Honda – Noriki Shimazu, *Vietnamese and Chinese Ceramics Used in the Japanese Tea Ceremony*. Oxford University Press, 1989.

³⁸ Nguyen Thua Hy: *Vietnam from Mid-10th Century to the End of the 14th Century*, chapter III, p. 80 in Nguyen Quang Ngoc (ed), *The Course of Vietnamese History*. Hanoi: Education, 2001.

³⁹ *Toàn thư*, volume II, Hanoi: Social Sciences, 1993, p. 141.

⁴⁰ *Complete Works of Nguyen Trai*, new edition, volume II, Literature Publishers – Research centre of national culture, Hanoi, 2001, p. 481.

⁴¹ *Toàn thư* also revealed salt taking method Ming dynasty: First of all, they asked an officer and his deputy to urge people to cook salt, people had to bring all the salt they made a month to the store. Mandarins in charge of logistics looked for traders who paid money for permits. Big permits were for 10 kilos of salt, small permits were for 1 kilo, only after that salt could be sold. Without those permits, people would be punished at the same level as cooking alcohol illegally. People were allowed to have 3 bowls of salt and 1 bottle of fish sauce. *Toàn thư*, volume II, pp. 236–237.

⁴² *Toàn thư*, volume II, p. 296.

⁴³ *Toàn thư*, volume II, p. 297.

⁴⁴ *Toàn thư*, volume II, p. 298.

⁴⁵ *Toàn thư*, volume II, p. 348.

⁴⁶ *Toàn thư*, volume II, p. 401.

⁴⁷ *Toàn thư*, volume II, p. 393.

⁴⁸ *Toàn thư*, volume II, p. 299.

⁴⁹ *Toàn thư*, volume II, p. 435.

⁵⁰ Vietnamese Institute of History, *The National Law*, Hanoi: Legislation, 1991, pp. 42–43. In terms of the contents of Le dynasty's famous *The National Law*, researchers shared the viewpoints of “the harmony” between external and internal factors. Le dynasty's leaders not only received the model and principles of Chinese history writing (for the ruling purpose), but also had a lot of innovations in changing and making regulations which were suitable with social reality. Moreover, like Ly and Tran dynasties, in law implementation, Le dynasty had a flexible application to avoid “conflicts with original traditions”. Therefore, in the course of constructing the political institution in the bureaucratic monarchical model, it seems that the “nationalization” process made Confucian system more favorable of the authority's management and become “the place where there were many social and political conflicts of the nation and the place which reflected conflicts in benefits and social awareness...” See Insun Yu, *Law and Vietnamese society in 17th and 18th centuries*, Social Sciences Publishers, Hanoi, 1994, pp. 20, 44, 79. Institute of Sino-Nom Studies – Institute of Harvard – Yenching America, *Confucianism in Vietnam*. Hanoi: Social Sciences, 2006, pp. 312–313.

⁵¹ *Toàn thư*, volume II, p. 322.

⁵² *Toàn thư*, volume II, p. 334.

⁵³ Momoki Shiro “Dai Viet and South China Sea Trade from the Xth to the XVth Century”, *Cross-road – An Interdisciplinary Journal of South Asian Studies*, Northern Illinois University, 1998.

⁵⁴ *Toàn thư*, volume II, p. 323.

⁵⁵ *Toàn thư*, volume II, p. 327. This is a notable way of law implementation by Le authority. There were concessions for high-ranking mandarins who were Le dynasty's leaders, they were usually judged more tolerantly.

⁵⁶ *Toàn thư*, volume II, p. 323.

⁵⁷ *Toàn thư*, volume II, p. 330.

⁵⁸ *Toàn thư*, volume II, p. 358.

⁵⁹ *The national law*, p. 71.

⁶⁰ *Toàn thư*, volume II, p. 358.

⁶¹ *Toàn thư*, volume II, p. 469.

⁶² *Toàn thư*, volume II, p. 489.

⁶³ *The national law*, p. 87–88.

⁶⁴ *Hồng Đức thiện chính thư*, Saigon: Nam Ha Publishers, 1959, p. 145.

⁶⁵ *Toàn thư*, volume II, p. 500.

⁶⁶ *The national law*, articles 21–25, 71, 72, 76, 77, 79 và 81.

⁶⁷ *Toàn thư*, Social Sciences Publishers, Hanoi, 1993, volume III, p. 63.

⁶⁸ *Toàn thư*, volume II, pp. 451.

⁶⁹ *Toàn thư*, volume II, p. 346.

⁷⁰ *The national law*, p. 57.

⁷¹ *The national law*, p. 59.

⁷² *The national law*, p. 210.

⁷³ See Li Tana, *A View from the Sea: Perspectives on the Northern and Central Vietnamese Coast*. Journal of Southeast Asian Studies, The National University of Singapore; No. 37 (1), pp. 83–102, Feb. 2006.

⁷⁴ Phan Huy Chu, *Lịch triều hiến chương loại chí*, volume III, History Publishers, 1961, p. 114. About An Bang climate, Le Thanh Tong also wrote: “*Ngư diêm như thổ dân xu lợi - Hòa đạo vô điền thuế bạc chinh*” meaning “*There were as many fish and much salt as soil, people rushed to get benefits - there were no lands for rice fields so taxes were light*” (Cá muối nhiều như đất, nhân dân đua theo nghề đó rất tiện lợi - Ruộng không cấy lúa cho nên thuế má nhẹ) (p. 114).

⁷⁵ *The national law*, p. 211.

⁷⁶ Phan Huy Chu, *Lịch triều hiến chương loại chí*, ibid, p. 151.

⁷⁷ *Hồng Đức thiện chính thư*, p. 83.

⁷⁸ *Nguyễn Trãi toàn tập*, new edition, volume II, p. 464.

⁷⁹ Pham Quoc Quan: *Findings at Ancient Wreckage in Cu Lao Cham (1997–2000)*; Ho Xuan Tinh: *Cu Lao Cham in “Silk route at sea”, Past & present Magazine*, No 76, June 2000, pp. 20–23 and No 134 (182), February 2003, pp. 28–29. Consult the work of Nguyen Dinh Chieu – Pham Quoc Quan – Tong Trung Tin and Do Manh Ha in *Scientific Notice*, Museum of Vietnamese History, Hanoi, 2000.

⁸⁰ Phan Huy Le, “Le Thanh Tong (1442–1497)” in: *Going back to the Origin*, volume II, Hanoi: The Gioi Publishers, 1999, p. 597.

⁸¹ *Toàn thư*, ibid, volume III, p. 77.

⁸² Tran Quoc Vuong, “An Identity of Vietnamese Culture: Adaptability” in *Vietnamese Culture: Study and Consideration*, Hanoi: National Culture – Arts and Culture Magazine, 2000, pp. 42–43.

⁸³ Charles Wheeler: *A Maritime Logic to Vietnamese History? Littoral Society in Hoi An’s Trading World c. 1550–1830*. – <http://www.history.cooperative.org/proceedings/seascapes/wheeler.html>