

French - Vietnamese Contacts in the Seventeenth - Eighteenth Centuries in Retrospect

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ABSTRACT: The paper reviews French-Vietnamese contacts in the seventeenth - eighteenth centuries via the presence of Western Catholic missionaries who were sent to Vietnam by the Society of the Foreign Missions of Paris (MEP). Although French-Vietnamese contacts experienced a long-term journey with rise and fall, with glory and disgrace, it was a “lofty missionary work”. Basing on interesting and rare historical documents, the author indicates that Vietnam, a point on the religious map in the 16th-17th centuries, located in the missionary triangle in India of the Western missions, emerged doubtlessly to be a safe and ideal destination of the Western orders. In the field of historical - religious studies, the MEP’s process of setting up its influence in Vietnam reveals so many interesting issues that need further research.

1. An Overview

In the second half of the seventeenth century, all 19 missionaries belonged to *Society of the Foreign Missions of Paris* (*La Société des Missions Étrangères de Paris* - MEP) who were sent to the Far East, came to Đại Việt (Great Viet). During the eighteenth century, other 72 MEP missionaries were all sent to this country. In the nineteenth century, MEP continuously sent their 634 priests to Vietnam. Among 8 dioceses of Vietnam divided by the Pope in 1850, MEP was responsible for 6 of those.

The above mentioned statistics revealed the process of penetrating and setting up the scope of activities and the gradual centralization of MEP, and also of the French Court, from the middle of the seventeenth century to the end of the nineteenth century. During that formation and practice, the Great Viet is considered as the main area of MEP’s activities. Although French – Vietnamese contacts experienced a long-term journey with rise and fall; mixture of glory and disgrace¹, it was a “lofty missionary work”.

Yet MEP priests were not the first people to do the missionary work in Vietnam. A variety of orders had set foot on Vietnam before them such as the Francisco², the

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Dominican³, and the Jesuits⁴. Nevertheless, there was only different point was the effectiveness of their activities after MEP establishment. In fact, transgression and absolutism in the missionary work according to the Tordesillas Agreement in 1494 forbade missionaries who belonged to the Portuguese Catholic Church in East India to do their job. Thanks to the support of the Roma Church, for a long time, the Portugal made a breakthrough in two domains of religious mission and maritime trade. However, the drastic emergence of the Dutch, English maritime trade through powerful East India Companies directly menaced the status of the Portuguese maritime economy. Rapid decline in all fields of Portuguese economy was one of the basic causes affected on the Portuguese status in East India as well as in the Vatican's eye. In other words, their missionary work lost the most important point of appui, and that gave signal of collapse to their position in the Far East. The French, thanks to important roles of the Louis XIV the Great King, Cardinal A.J.P.Richelieu, Minister J.B.Colbert⁵, F.Pallu and the fervent supports of A.de Rhodes⁶, had quickly grabbed the flag, persuaded the Pope for their replacement of the Portuguese in the Far East.

According to the French's plan, the aim of sending "apostolic vicars" to the East India was in fact for the final destination: China. However, destiny carried these missionaries to deeply engage with Vietnam, due to some favorable conditions at that time.

A very important factor which enabled the French to replace the Portuguese in the Far East, beside the powerful support from the French Court, was the issue of economic interests, especially in the field of maritime trade. The French East India Company was founded in 1664 also for the above-mentioned ultimate aim.

2. MEP and Process of Setting up its Influence in Vietnam

A.de Rhodes greatly contributed to the French Church. He had mobilized the Vatican to entitle the Church to manage Catholic areas in the Far East. He left Macao for France in 1653 and began a tiredless mobilization in order to put the French into place of held by the Portuguese under the right *Padroado* by the Pope in the Far East before. In 1658, the Pope approved three French missionaries as the Apostolic Vicars in the Far East. Being aware of fierce protestation by the Portuguese priests, the Pope advised the French bishops to be very careful, wise and flexible. F. Pallu (Bishop Héliopolis, 1626 - 1684) and Lambert de la Motte (Bishop Bérythe, 1624 - 1679) were suggested to go from France to Indochina. Naturally, religious historians highly

evaluated this event and considered it as a starting-point of the French presence in the Far East⁷.

F.Pallu and Lambert de la Motte came to the Far East in 1663-64 soon after the Pope delimited the areas of management. As the plan to enter Tonkin failed, in 1665 F.Pallu had to appoint F.Deydier to Tonkin working as *Cố chính* (supervisor) to operate missionary works, meanwhile he himself came back to Roma to ask the Pope to define the power of the French bishops before other Catholic missionaries who belonged to various orders from many different countries.

After receiving the Pallu's mandate, Lambert de la Motte returned to go on his inspection in Tonkin. Before the tour, in 1664, for giving advantages while coming to Tonkin, Lambert de la Motte assigned Chevreuil played a role as the advance person and he brought the credential, money and a Nihon interpreter to Faifo (Cochinchina), and then to come to Phú Xuân (Huế). Accompanying with Lambert to Phố Hiến (Tonkin), there was De Bourges and there they got Deydier. In February 1670, Lambert summoned the Nam Định Community, founded the regulations of the House of God, which is named afterwards as the Catholic Church in Tonkinese area. At the same year, Lambert established the indigene woman order named *Les Amantes de la Croix* [The Adorers of the Holy Cross].⁸

Until the early 1670s, Lambert and his other representatives did not yet set up their solid status in Cochinchina.⁹ Meanwhile, in Tonkin, Lambert and Pallu tried to enter in this area as according to the previous mission. At the time, the local administration was implementing strictly the Catholic interdict policy and thus it was very difficult for them to penetrate into.¹⁰ In addition, a route to Tonkin from Manila is protested by the French missionaries in Philippines because of conflicting between the Spanish and French; and other road from the upper Laos is also opposed by the Siamese leaders due to security and political problems.

In 1669, there were three important events in Tonkin related to the religious life. *Firstly*, Lord Trịnh reinforced the edits for the Catholic interdict, ordered to destroy the churches, and prohibited foreign ships going to Thăng Long and all of the ships must gather in Phố Hiến; *Secondly*, there was conflicts of the religious leaders in the religious ruling right towards Tonkin or contradiction between Fuciti - Bishop at Macao and F.Deydier - representative of the Bishop Lambert de la Motte of MEP. *The last one* was the official trip of Lambert de la Motte coming to Tonkin.¹¹

After 1673, the Pope enforced the decree in which asserting the supreme and unique manageable power of the French Bishop as considering as the Pope's official

representative for replacing the Portuguese in the Orient lands. From 1678 until before the Jesuits order is abrogated in 1773 by the Pope, and the Jesuits continued to carry out their missionary in Great Viet, but in all under the leading of the French.

From the 1670, MEP started to rise. In the late 25 years of the 19th century, there were 40 or 50 missionaries sent to Asia a year. The MEP's scope is enlarged so likely after Siam, Tonkin, Cochinchina and other regions of the Southern India. The Vatican consecutively entrusted this Society to new lands for missionary's works such as Korea, Japan... Less than a century, under the reigns of Grégoire XVI, Piô IX and Leon XIII, MEP could set up more 37 religious installations... During this century, the leading missionaries manifested their bravery and enthusiasm for missions likely Reverend father Bonnard, Jean-Pierre Chopard, Jean-Marie Beurel, Pallegoix, Retord, Guillemin, Petitjean, Ridel...

In certain aspects, impossibly there was no mention about the MEP's involvements towards CIO's trade activities. Under the "unwritten" principle, CIO needed to supply finance to MEP's activities in Far East. The reality showed more clearly this mutual relations. In which, trading installations or factories, the English merchants in Tonkin considered it as "a company of the padres". The English factory chief W.Gyfford in 1672 in Tonkin commented: "The French have owned their installation here, but we cannot understand it used for trading or for missionaries".

The Pope must remind the missionaries about their involvements, especially with the Jesuits in Japan on trade activities. Pallu also must admit himself that the MEP's trade "caused numberless of abuse increased everyday, which altered more and more the virtue and vitality of the apostolic workers, eroded, and entirely desolated the good of the missions"¹².

"Right in Society, clearly that is get permission to use trade curtain to cover the own missions, and to play a role of holding talks in temporary time sometimes and for many serious reasons as well, they tried to take care of themselves to stand apart the interested thought and in the beginning time, that caused the consequences on the materials more than the real advantages."¹³ "That money [for humanities - author] is hard to believe that disguising ways, thanks to that religion, bring about benefits for the House of God so much like that."¹⁴

"We must keep in touch relationships with these "padres" most closely in possible conditions without detriment of anything to the Company's profits [EIC-author]; because they exerted strong influence in the masses and especially with one of tax agents their status could be of help us."¹⁵ [An English's report from Bantam in 1673].

3. CIO - A Century of Trading Activities in Đại Việt

Since the King seized the financial administration, he carried out a war of money against all European states... he formed companies which, due to the army, attacked it anywhere.

A new Company [CIO] must manifest "religious duties": "Because we recognize in establishment of promised colonies principally of the God's glory, in procuring the salutations of the Indians and savages, what let us must do for them who know real religion".¹⁶ CIO "is obliged to admit souls"

The above-mentioned links right from the outset showed the intentions of the French Court at the time based on "founding the Company in 1664 after permitted by the Court, hence people, out of the Court, who are the missionaries had got in hand everything, the persons are benefited equally the evolution of the King on the religious absolutism".¹⁷

From the "mercantilism" thought, and based on the politics on the direction to the *centralistic perspective* trend of King Louis XIV and J.B.Colbert, in their guidelines, they emphasized, "glory of France is missions of missionary and profits from trade activities". Here, it was necessary to be awake of strong changes in Europe, that also impacted the diplomatic tendency of France. Before J.B.Colbert, policy of enlarging the maritime trade and expanding the French economy is established from A.J.P.Richelieu's financial ruling. Many scholars think, "Richelieu is the person who fathers a State model of France within its overseas expansion".

Along with Pondichéry (India), the CIO's trade activities in Siam and Great Viet... have been also played important meaning, being in the trade-spreaded plan of the French Government. Towards Great Viet, the French-Vietnamese relations including the first voyage in 1669 until 1769 were calculated fully 100 years. That process could be divided into 2 main stages: The CIO and Tonkinese trade from 1669 to 1702; CIO and Cochinchina from 1702 to 1769.

The CIO's results in Great Viet reduced to minimum. According to the F.Mantienne's study, cargos in Tonkinese market of a merchant ship so-called *Tonquin* sent by CIO in 1680 including essential products:¹⁸ - Weapons and strategic products; - European wool; - Real currency; - Peppercorn; Indian cotton; Sapan-wood. The most products imported by *Tonquin* and *Saint Joseph* ships (in 1682) from the Tonkinese market restricted in specimens such as silk, musk, gold... However, that trading exchange is not yet found the authentic evidences and data. In addition, the above-noted products are mainly used as gifts, specimens and goods re-

exported to China. Hence, for CIO, Tonkinese market is considered as an entrepôt to China.¹⁹ That situation did not ameliorate too after CIO's change into Cochinchina. The plan is consecutively brought out from 1720, or the trade mission of Pierre Poivre in the late of 1740s, and then other schemes into Tonkin, Pulo Condor, Touran (1753, 1755) were also took round, but after all others, nobody could save the ending of the CIO and Great Viet trade relations after 1769.²⁰

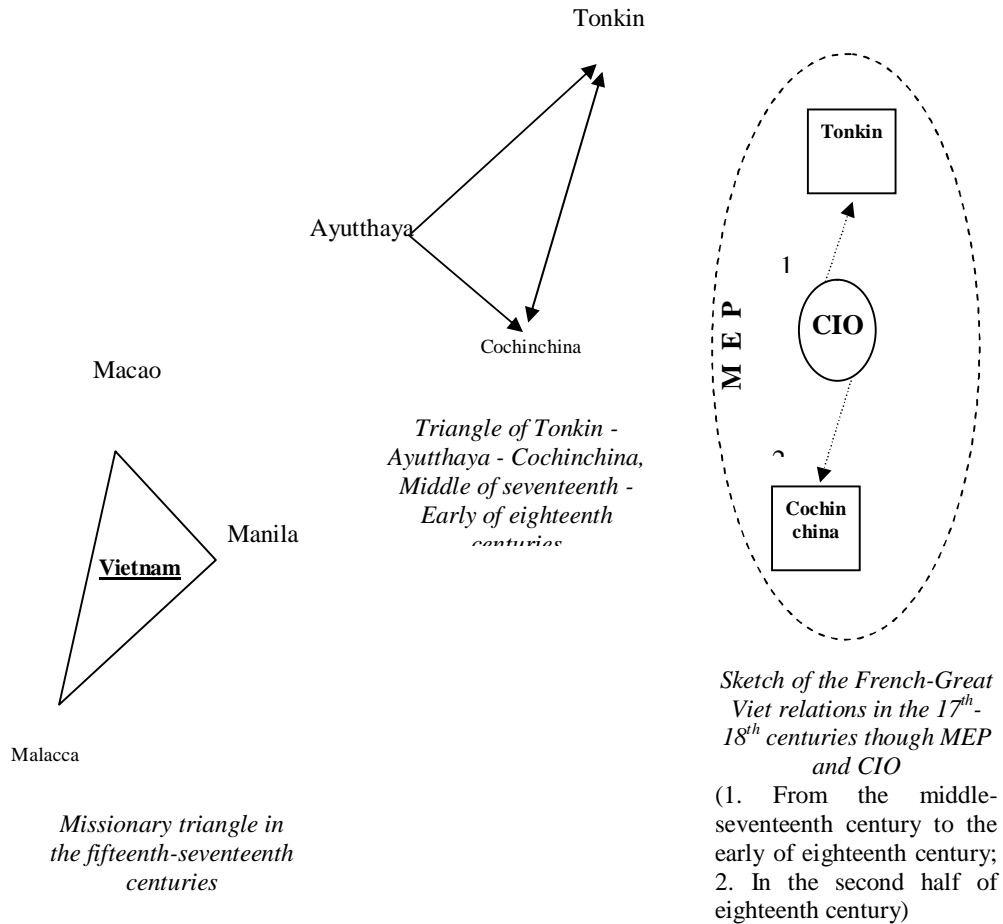
In fact, the CIO trade activities in India are restricted by three causes: 1. On the time; 2. On the geography; 3. The trade cargos.²¹ The French entered in fact quite late and did not gain the necessary understanding on the Great Viet market in comparison with other European countries, and they, the French, were not experiential merchants.

On all trade of CIO in the relationships with MEP, Cao Huy Thuần wrote: "[They] could not compete with English merchants on trade field, France has been hoped to find the place where her missionaries are protected by an instrument which could made certain influence... If bring it to compare the trade exchanges between Europe and China, France was fully bad against England, but our supremacy in China if no saying it better, at least the same. The France, thanks to her religious supremacy, had won her missing on trade field."²²

The European merchants' aims in the seventeenth century were "trading for profits", from the early of eighteenth century, in spite of the merchandise needs still welcomed by Viet authorities, but there were drastic changes in the times and political complexion in the area and the world. The Westerners further took interest in taking possession of lands as being used as colonies, at the time, it was a general phenomenon of the trade style "from India to India" (style of inner trade, gain profits on the spot), establishing trading relations more closely, effectively with trade engagement more definitively.²³ The trade relation is changed in a new stage - let that be one of trade - colonialism.²⁴

4. Conclusions

Vietnam was the point on the religious map in the sixteenth -seventeenth centuries, and located in the missionary triangle in India of the Western missions. Despite many discussions on the time of the Catholic introduction, according to the descriptions of C.Borri, A.de.Rhodes, S.Baron, Richard... Great Viet at that time emerged doubtlessly to be a safe and ideal destination of the Western orders.



Impacts of the orders pointed out the measures at the different areas and dioceses from the Northeast Asia (localities likely China, Japan, Korea...) or Southeast Asia (Vietnam, Lao, Thailand or Philippines, Malaysia, Indonesia...). Vietnam is in fact ruled by many of the Bishop's installations Macao, Malacca and Manila on the line of missionary in India. Therefore, after the penetration into Far East, the MEP's activities, especially in the first time, always “was in trouble” with two dioceses controlled by the Portuguese.²⁵ Alternatively, it needs to keep in live that, in Great Viet, “the Vietnamese Christians was born in the triangle *Touran - Faifo - Quinan* (in Cochinchina); in which Quinan for the long standing is considered the behind base of the Nguyễn Lords”;²⁶ and the French church in Ayutthaya (Siam-Thailand) towards their activities in Đại Việt (*triangle Tonkin-Ayutthaya-Cochinchina*)...²⁷

According to the CIO's founders, the needs of founding a trade company meant in order/due to the development of the faith, out of national commerce. That

company must go in/later with the missionaries, and the King's plan as "the propaganda of the religious faith" as well in Asia.

The CIO's fragile due to many above-analyzed causes, but while mentioning the close involvements of MEP in the CIO's trade activities out of the above reasons, we think that CIO needed to help from CIO because of 2 others: Firstly, "the religious triangle" almost affected trade activities of Western countries on the road of "Easternward". The MEP's activities initiated CIO to perform the favorable trade in there. Secondly, "it seems that the weight of the Anti-Reform²⁸ saddled the trade installations of the French in Asia, and especially in Indochinese peninsula". The CIO's successes were reduced to minimum,²⁹ meanwhile, the MEP's effects, in spite of the temporality in the seventeenth-eighteenth centuries, gradually reinforced and really were necessary to France in the nineteenth century afterwards.³⁰

An "ideal" model possibly created by F.Pallu pointed out almost links of MEP and CIO: *Good acknowledge of Asian countries = MEP = CIO's successes*³¹.

Furthermore, studying on the connections of two above subjects, F.Mantienne thinks "ME engendered a French doctrine in India"; in which there was "the mixture of the Court glory, international power and religion".³²

Thinking of the French invasion in Vietnam, depending on the different periods and stages that show the mutual impacts in multi-level, between politics and religions, native culture and exotic culture. For nature of the French State, it seems during the seventeenth-eighteenth centuries "the religion, politics and commerce however were the tie".³³ That quality based on many appreciations and in different periods governed ways of thinking, changes and strategies of the French Court overseas. A view from the events in the nineteenth century in Vietnam, that today cannot split it with political, social, cultural and thought transformations in France and Vietnam in the late decades of the eighteenth century, especially from the 1820s later on.

Reference:

¹. See Forest, Alain (1998), *Les missionnaires Français au Tonkin et au Siam (XVII^eme -XVIII^eme siècles)* [French missionaries in Tonkin and Siam (17th-18th centuries)]. Analyse comparée d'un relatif succès et d'un total échec. Livre II. *Histoire du Tonkin*, Paris: L'Harmattan.

². Its right name is *L'Ordre des Frères Mineurs* (meaning as the *Order of the Minor Brothers* founded by Francisco d'Assise in 1209, after that, this is divided by 3 parts; and one among which is the order of Franciscans in Vietnam (its Vietnamese name is the Order of Phan Sinh). At the end of 16th century, this order existed in Vietnam. Today, the order consists of more 100 clergymen

(more than 50 priests). See Mai Thanh Hải (2001) "M.E.P và kho tư liệu về Việt Nam" [M.E.P and the archives on Vietnam] *Past and Present Review*. No. 93 in June: 24-26.

³. Under the French abbreviated as the order of O.P (*L'Ordre des Prêcheurs* -The Order of the preachers) founded by Dominique Priest in 1215 in Toulouse (France), this order is get by the Vietnamese as Đa Minh... Today, the order has 54 priests and 8 clergymen. See Mai Thanh Hai (2002) *Từ điển Tôn giáo* [The dictionary of Religion]. Hanoi: Encyclopedia publishers, pp. 201-202

⁴. Founded in France by Ignace de Loyola in 1534, the beginning name was La Société des Jésuites - S.J, after that as *La Compagnie des Jésuites*. In 1615, this order came to Vietnam. It experienced the vicissitudes, and this order in Vietnam now has 19 priests and 16 clergymen... See Mai Thanh Hai (2001) "M.E.P và kho tư liệu về Việt Nam". Ibid.

⁵. See more Bercé, Yves-Marie (1992), *La naissance dramatique de l'absolutisme, 1598-1661* [The dramatic birth of the absolutism] in *Nouvelle histoire de la France Moderne* [New history of Modern France]. Tome III. Seuil Publishers. I give my best thanks to Dr. Gilles de Gantès (Université de Provence, France) for important complements and corrections.

⁶. See Jean Le Pichon, (2005) *France - Indochine. Au coeur d'une rencontre 1620-1820* [France - Indochina. At heart of a encounter]. Jubilé Publishers, p. 13. See more its pages 163-164 about the appreciations and warnings of A.de Rhodes to the activities of the French missionaries in Far East in general and Vietnam in particular.

⁷. Nguyễn Văn Kiệm (2003), *Góp phần tìm hiểu một số vấn đề Cận đại Việt Nam* [Contributions to further study on some issues of Vietnam in the Modern time]. Hanoi: Culture and Information, pp. 16-17.

⁸. See newest research about this order on the Journal of *Religious studies* (VASS) named "Khái quát lịch sử hình thành và phát triển của dòng Mến Thánh giá Việt Nam" [An overview of the foundation and development of the Order of the Adorers of the Holy Cross] by Phuong Lien. N0 6 (48): 50

⁹. Lambert have had to write an open letter to Paul d'Acosta - the Bishop of Malacca at that time in order to getting the "full rights of the missionary works" in Siam; Jacques de Bourges had to return Roma to ask the Pope to bestow "the right" [including at the Portuguese dioceses] on the French missionaries in Far East as well...

¹⁰. The Work "*Khâm định Việt sử thông giám cương mục*" [Text and commentary of the complete Mirror of the history Viet established by Imperial order] wrote: "In October, Winter, saying again the order of Catholic interdicts towards anyone embracing the Catholic heresy... Before, a order issued aiming to expelling those missionaries, but a part among them had deeply entered that religion were not yet casted out, therefore up to this time, the prohibitive order is once again promulgated..." National center of social sciences and humanities, Institute of History (1998) *Khâm định Việt sử thông giám cương mục*. Tome II. Hanoi: Education, pp. 300-301.

¹¹. See more Phan Phát Huân (C.S.SR) (1965), *Việt - Nam giáo - sử* [A religious history of Vietnam] Vol. 1 (1533-1933). Second edition. Saigon: Cửu thế tùng thư. Nguyen Manh Dung (2007), "Quá trình xâm nhập của Pháp vào Việt Nam từ nửa cuối thế kỷ XVII đến đầu thế kỷ XIX" [The Process of French Penetration into Vietnam in the second half of 17th century to the early of 19th century]. Thesis of the MA degree of History, University of Social Sciences and Humanities (VNU).

¹². Maybon, Charles (1919) *Histoire moderne du Pays d'Annam (1592-1820)*, Étude sur les premiers rapports des européens et des Annamites et sur l'établissement de la dynastie Annamite des Nguyễn [*Modern History of the country of Annam (1592-1820)*. Study on the premature rapports of the Europeans and Annam and on the establishment of the Annam dynasties of Nguyen]. Paris: Library Plon, pp. 88-89.

¹³. Maybon, Charles (1919). Ibid, p. 89

- ¹⁴ . Maybon, Charles (1919). *Ibid*, p. 90
- ¹⁵ . Maybon, Charles (1919). *Ibid*, p. 90-91 - note 1. See more the appreciations of an English voyager about the French in Pho Hien in Tonkin in 1688. W.Dampier (2006) *Một chuyến du hành đến Đàng Ngoài 1688* [A voyage to Tonquin in 1688]. Hanoi: World publishers.
- ¹⁶ . Mantienne, Frédéric (2001) *Les relations politiques et commerciales entre la France et la péninsule Indochinoise (XVII^e siècle)* [The politico-commercial relations between France and Indochinese peninsula (17th century)]. Paris: Les Indes Savants, pp. 5-54.
- ¹⁷ . Mantienne, Frédéric (2001). *Ibid*, p.55
- ¹⁸ . F. Mantienne had been mentioned about the *Conception* ship - private trade ship sponsored by F.Pallu on the road from Siam to Tonkin, this ship is wrecked in near Philippines due to the tempest. Mantienne, Frédéric (2001). *Ibid*, pp. 258-271.
- ¹⁹ . See Nguyễn Mạnh Dũng (2006), "Về hoạt động thương mại của Công ty Đông Ấn Pháp với Đại Việt (cuối thế kỷ XVII - giữa thế kỷ XVIII)" [On the trade activities of CIO in Great Viet in the Middle of 17th century - Middle of 18th century]. *Nghiên cứu Lịch sử* [Journal of Historical studies]. NO 9 (365): 51-64
- ²⁰ . According to Y.Tshuboi, there were two main causes which have been restricted the French trade activities in Great Viet in this century. See Yoshiharu Tsuboi (1990), *Nước Đại Nam đối diện với Pháp và Trung Hoa (1847 - 1885)* [The Empire of Annam facing to France and China (1847-85)]. Department of social sciences of Ho Chi Minh city Committee, pp. 84 - 85.
- ²¹ . Mantienne, Frédéric (2001). *Ibid*, p. 333.
- ²² . Comte d'Harcourt: *La première ambassade française en Chine* [The first French embassy in China]. In *Des deux mondes* (Two Worlds) 1-6-1862, p. 673. According to Cao Huy Thuận (2003), *Giáo sĩ Thừa sai và chính sách thuộc địa của Pháp tại Việt Nam (1857 - 1914)* [The missionaries and colonial policies of France in Vietnam (1857-1914)]. Translated by Nguyễn Thuận. Hanoi: Religious publishers, pp. 19-22, 38-40.
- ²³ . See Thanh Thế Vy (1961) *Ngoại thương Việt Nam hồi thế kỷ XVII, XVIII và đầu XIX* [The Vietnam's commerce in the 17th, 18th, early of 19th centuries]. Hanoi: Historical studies publishers.
- ²⁴ See Nguyễn Mạnh Dũng (2007), "Hoạt động thương mại của Công ty Đông Ấn Pháp ở Siam (trong nửa sau thế kỷ XVII)" [Trade activities of CIO in Siam in the second half of 17th century]. *Nghiên cứu Lịch sử*. NO 4.
- ²⁵ . See more Nguyễn Mạnh Dũng (2007), "Quá trình xâm nhập của Pháp vào Việt Nam từ nửa cuối thế kỷ XVII đến đầu thế kỷ XIX" [The Process of French Penetration into Vietnam in the second half of 17th century to the early of 19th century]. Thesis of the MA degree of History, University of Social Sciences and Humanities (VNU).
- ²⁶ . Jean Le Pichon (2005). *Ibid*. p. 9.
- ²⁷ . I give my best thanks to Professor Nguyễn Thừa Hỷ with his suggestion about this academic topic and he kindly revises this article's contents in full.
- ²⁸ . See Bercé, Yves-Marie (1992). *Ibid*, Durouselle, Jean-Baptiste và Mayeur, Jean-Marie (2004), *Lịch sử đạo Thiên Chúa* [A history of Catholicism]. Hanoi: World publishers.
- ²⁹ . Whether the formation or not? In addition, how did CIO trade in the Inner Asian trade system? That is the CIO's interesting issues.
- ³⁰ . Mantienne, Frédéric (2001). *Ibid*, p. 335
- ³¹ . Mantienne, Frédéric (2001). *Ibid*, p. 61
- ³² . Mantienne, Frédéric (2001). *Ibid*, p. 71.
- ³³ . Mantienne, Frédéric (2001). *Ibid*, p. 74