

Portuguese Commercial and Missionary Activities in Hoi An Seaport Town (in 16th and 17th Centuries)

Nguyen Thi Vinh Linh*

* Cultural and Tourism Faculty, Quang Nam University.

Email: nguyenthivinhlinh@gmail.com

Received on 20 April 2021.

Revised on 29 April 2021.

Accepted on 16 May 2021.

Abstract: In the first half of the 15th century, based on the network of trade ports located along the western coast of India, the Bay of Bengal, and Southeast Asia, Portugal began to establish a relationship with Hoi An seaport. For more than a century, the Portuguese made many significant achievements in their maritime commercial and missionary activities in Hoi An. At the same time, Hoi An seaport became one of the places that witnessed the birth of the Latin-based Vietnamese writing system (*Quốc ngữ* - the Vietnamese national script). In this paper, therefore, the author would like to focus on studying the trade and missionary activities of Portuguese merchants and the Jesuits in Hoi An. On this basis, the author analyses the impact of these activities on the development of Hoi An seaport in the 16th and 17th centuries. Regarding the above-mentioned goals, mainly historical and logical approaches have been used in combination with comparative analysis of relevant documents.

Keywords: Hoi An, Portuguese Society of Jesus, trade, mission, national script.

Subject classification: History

1. Introduction

In the 16th and 17th centuries, Hoi An (in Quang Nam Province) was a busy international seaport attracting a large number of foreign merchants who came here to buy goods. Meanwhile, the Portuguese, with their fleets, successfully discovered a new maritime route to India, Southeast Asia, and the Far East. Owing to this historic opportunity and the Nguyen lords' policy of opening up the economy, Hoi An quickly became one of first destinations for Portuguese commercial and missionary activities in *Đàng Trong* (Southern Vietnam, under the rule of the Nguyen lords, later enlarged by Vietnamese southward expansion; hereafter referred to as Cochinchina).

Based on the documents written by foreign scholars and records of the explorers who came to Hoi An during the period, as well as the findings of different research studies, the

author would like to outline the remarkable features of the relationship between Hoi An and Portugal in historical and cultural spheres.

2. First contact between Portugal and Hoi An (in the 16th century)

The fact that Portuguese merchant vessels arrived at seaports in Asia generally and Hoi An specifically, was closely linked with the European political and religious situation in the 15th century, which was seen as the Age of Discovery. In the late period of the Dark Ages, the Catholic Church tried to maintain its unique power by all means possible, despite challenges. As a sign of world domination, the Pope at the time issued a number of edicts allowing the Portuguese and Spanish royal armies to invade various territories around the world. Based on Papal edicts and the strategy of occupying and controlling main strategic positions and promoting trade activities, in 1511 Afonso de Albuquerque (1453-1515), the second governor of Portuguese India, decided to invade Malacca, which at that time was under the domination of Sultan Mahmud Shah (1488-1511). The aim was to generate enough income to maintain overwhelming power and seize the trade advantage in the Indian Ocean (Hall, D.G.E., 1961, p.218). The success in gaining control of Malacca eased the passage of Portuguese merchant fleets to Southeast Asia and helped discover a maritime route to China. Studying historical literature, the author came across some documents mentioning the first contact made by the Portuguese in Hoi An (also also known as the Bay of Cochinchina, in addition to Faifo at the time).

In February 1516, the second governor of Portuguese India sent a fleet led by Fernão Peres de Andrade from Goa to Hoi An. After stopping at Malacca, the fleet arrived at the Bay of Cochinchina in August that same year. Due to headwinds, they stayed there for a few days before sailing back to Malacca (Danvers, F.C., 1894, p.337). Li Tana mentioned this event when she cited Manguin's opinion in her work titled *The Inner Region: A Social and Economic History of Nguyen Vietnam in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*: "The Portuguese had their first contact with the Vietnamese in 1516..." (Li, T.N., 2018, p.120). The second contact took place in 1523, when Duarte Coelho Pereira (1485-1554), a Portuguese navigator, came to Cochinchina for the first time and stopped at the Cham island (Pulo Champeiló) on route to the mouth of the Han River (Da Nang Province) (Fernão, M.P., 2013, p.632). The third contact took place more than 15 years later (in 1540), when a merchant vessel captained by Antonie de Faria (?-1548) sailed from Pattani (Malaysia) to Hoi An seaport. Fernão Mendes Pinto (1510-1583), one of the crew members, wrote about the memorable journey in his diary named *Peregrinação* as follows: "On the fourth day, we left Varela River, usually called Tinacoreu, and the navigator thought the best destination we should come was Pulo Champeilo (Cu Lao Cham), an uninhabited island situated on the way to the Bay of Cochinchina at the latitude of 14° 1/3 North" (Fernão, M.P., 2013, p.74).

Thus, at this time, one can presume that western navigators called Hoi An the Bay of Cochinchina and Cu Lao Cham was an outpost. This was the place where Portuguese

merchant vessels stopped to collect fresh water and firewood on the maritime route from Goa (in India) to destinations in China and Japan. Although contact with the Vietnamese did not take place frequently, it did lay the foundation for the development of commercial and missionary activities in the subsequent periods.

3. Portuguese commercial activities in Hoi An in the 16th and 17th centuries

Despite Portugal being the first western country to make contact with Hoi An, after several more contacts during the first half of the 16th century, the Portuguese did not intend to promote trade activities in Cochinchina, where local produce was really valuable and in abundant supply.

In fact, after Macao was leased to Portugal as a trading post in 1557, the Portuguese started paying attention to the first seaport of Cochinchina, Hoi An seaport (formerly known as the Dai seaport, one of two seaports which made up the Hoi An area at the time - this is referred to later in the paper). The abundance of goods made Hoi An an attractive option for merchants. “The goods come from Thang Hoa, Dien Ban, Quy Nhon, Quang Ngai, Binh Khang and Nha Trang, being carried by ships, boats and horses, by land and by sea, gathered in Hoi An...” (Le Quy Don, p.108). In a report titled *Cochinchina in 1621*, Christoforo Borri remarked: “But the principal port, to which all strangers resort, and where the aforementioned fair is kept, is that of the province of Cacchian; which has two mouths, or inlets from the sea, the one called Pulluchiampello/and the other of Turon...” (Dror, O. and Taylor, K.W., 2006, p.133). However, in the late 16th century, Portuguese trade activities did not prosper at all in Hoi An.

The factor promoting the commercial link between Portugal and Cochinchina generally and Hoi An specifically came from the trade policy of the Shogunate and the gathering of Japanese and Chinese merchants in seaports, especially Hoi An, in Cochinchina. According to Nguyen Van Kim, since 1592 when the Shogunate decided to implement the policy of the Red-seal ships (Shuinsen), maritime trade in Southeast Asia very quickly became lively. An international maritime commercial network was set up enabling Japanese merchants to transport goods from Hirado and Nagasaki in Japan to seaports in Southeast Asia, including Hoi An. Those goods were then transported by Chinese merchants to China. Realising the frequent gathering of many Japanese merchants in Hoi An, the Portuguese government in Macau understood the necessity of coming to the region and expanding trade activities in the seaport. As a result, in 1613 Ferdinand Costa, a Portuguese merchant paid a visit to Lord Sai (Nguyen Phuc Nguyen) in Dinh Cat (Quang Tri Province). Lord Sai expected to rely on Costa to canvass for Portuguese trade activities in the area of the lord’s palace (Tran Nam Tien, 2012, p.39). Thanks to the approval of the Nguyen lord, in 1615 Portuguese Jesuit priests started coming to Hoi An in order to minister to Japanese believers. Each year the latter would come from Japan to Cochinchina for trade and spend the winter (for one or several years) in order to establish better trade relations with people in Cochinchina (Caprio, M. and Koichiro, M., 2017).

During the first two decades of the 17th century, trade relations between the government of the Nguyen lords and Portuguese merchants were established, but trade activities were infrequent. In 1622, the Portuguese brought money to Cochinchina to buy goods, but they actually they bought silver coins instead which they used as a valuable commodity; to a certain extent trade in silver coins was better than trading silk goods (Hoang Thi Anh Dao, 2017, p.28). When trade with Japan completely stopped in 1639, however, Portuguese merchants in Macau suffered increasing pressure due to the shortage of goods for sale on the market in China, as well as severe competition from the Dutch East India Company (Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie, VOC). At that time, the decision to abolish the sea ban (Haijin) policy of the Longqing Emperor, implemented nearly 200 years earlier (1567), became an important factor encouraging Chinese people to re-establish the maritime commercial network in the South China Sea. With permission from the Nguyen Lord, Chinese merchants decided to settle down in Hoi An. After the Ming Qing transition (1618-1683), which led to the collapse of the Ming dynasty, a large number of Chinese people who supported the Ming dynasty migrated to Hoi An. This migration and settlement followed two main patterns: they settled in areas where others of the same native language lived; or they asked the Nguyen lords to naturalise them and to let them establish Minh Huong communes (communes of Ming dynasty immigrants). The formation and development of these two communities of Japanese and Chinese merchants not only made the maritime trade activities busier but also attracted Portuguese merchants from Macau. As a result, in the first part of the 17th century, the Portuguese and Japanese became the two dominant groups among the foreign merchants in Hoi An (Nguyen Chi Trung, 2010, p.98).

Based on the monsoon season, in the early months (from March to May), the Portuguese ships took advantage of the northeast monsoon to travel from Macau to Hoi An for the exchange of goods. When the southeast monsoon set in during the latter part of the trade season (in July and August), before the stormy season started, the merchant ships departed Hoi An on a 20-day journey to Malaysia (Hoang Thi Anh Dao, 2017, p.32). Thus, trade activities in Hoi An started around the time of the Tet holidays and lasted six to seven months (from February to September).

The main goods in which Portuguese merchants traded were quite varied: “Their vessels arrived from Macau in the early trade season, bringing terracotta, porcelain products, silver bars, sulphur, lead, zinc, blue and red wool, etc. Alloy was one of the goods that provided the greatest profit. Portuguese merchants bought swallows’ nests, agar wood, aloe, silk, cinnamon, and sugar... to be transported to Macau or Malacca. They had to pay the highest trade tax, compared to other merchant vessels coming to Hoi An” (Nguyen Chi Trung, 2010, pp.98-99). As mentioned by Le Quy Don in his work titled *Miscellaneous Chronicles of the Pacified Frontier 1776 (Phủ biên tạp lục)*, each Portuguese merchant boat paid 8,000 quan (currency used in Vietnam before the 20th century) for arrival in the seaport and 800 quan for departure, while the corresponding figures paid by a Guangdong merchant boat were 3,000 *quan* and 300 *quan* respectively. According to Antonio Bocarro,

Chronicler-in-Chief of the State of India, “there was good and cheap yellow yarn; agar wood, aloe, and benzoin were found locally, although they were rare; a large quantity of bronze was also brought here by Japanese merchants” (Nguyen Van Kim, 2006). Furthermore, Portuguese merchants were particularly fond of local products in Quang Nam and Quang Ngai provinces: “local people had the habit of selling their own products such as raw yarn, polished yarn, good wood used to make furnishings, aloe wood, sugar, musk, cinnamon, pepper, and rice” (Charles, B. M., 2010, p.35). Portuguese merchants were interested not only in common goods, but also calambac (based on the experience of the Chinese merchants): “It is black and contains oil, and is worth 50 *cruzados* a catty among the Portuguese, while in its own kingdom it passes weight for weight with silver” (Li, T.N., 2018, p.35).

Although trade activities carried out by Portuguese merchants in Hoi An were not comparable to activities in Macau or Malacca, many achievements were made. Keeping trade relations peaceful was an important characteristic of Portuguese activity in Hoi An. On the side of the local government, the Nguyen Lord (Nguyen Phuc Nguyen) provided the most favourable conditions for Portuguese merchants. He allocated them land so that they could build a trade office for work and stay like their Chinese and Japanese counterparts. “Fernando da Costa was one of the envoys respected by the Nguyen lord; thus, Dutch merchants were expelled according to the proposal submitted by Costa relating to the competition between the two European opponents in Hoi An in the early 17th century” (Do Bang, 1996, p.73). Unlike Dutch and English merchants, however, the Portuguese did not set up their trade agents in Hoi An, but instead they rented an office for work, living and buying goods. According to various documents, the building rented by Portuguese merchants was larger than other houses in Hoi An. The front part was used for business, while the inner section was for living and storing goods (Li, Q., 2006, p.157). It meant that Portuguese merchants used intermediaries and representatives to buy necessary goods for them.

4. Portuguese missionary activities in Hoi An (in the 16th and 17th centuries)

In addition to trade activities, Portuguese priests concurrently carried out missionary activities. It was a typical feature of almost all Portuguese activities in Asia. According to the regulations in the Padroado (Patronage), Portugal had the power to take control of all activities in the dioceses, including funding for the congregations. The Portuguese king was responsible for nominating people for missionary work in the East. All those who worked as preachers, bishops, and priests in dioceses received wages from the Portuguese royal government.

Although the Portuguese came to Hoi An in the mid-16th century, missionary activities of Portuguese priests had not prospered by the end of the century as Hoi An was not included in the Portuguese maritime trade strategy. Taking advantage of this, Catholic priests, sponsored

by the Spanish royal government, came to Hoi An. Based on the missionary division between Spain and Portugal, Hoi An belonged to the area under the control of the Portuguese congregation. The missionary work in Hoi An was administered in turn by three dioceses, including the Diocese of Goa (pursuant to the Papal Bull “*Aequum reputamus*” declared on 3 November 1534), the Diocese of Malacca (pursuant to the Papal Bull “*Pro Excellenti Praeeminentia*” declared by in 1558), and the Diocese of Macau (pursuant to the Papal Bull “*Super specula militantis Ecclesiae*” declared on 23 January 1576). To deal with the dispute over the missionary regions, the Catholic Church made a decision in 1586 which included Vietnam, like Macau, in the Portuguese missionary regions of the Franciscan order (founded by Saint Francis of Assisi). Thus, Spanish Franciscan priests from Manila had to leave Vietnam and due to this incident, Hoi An came under the Portuguese missionary region. According to historical documents, “On 6 January 1615, three Jesuits, including Priest Francesco Buzomi (Italian), Priest Diego Carvalho (Portuguese), and Monk Antonio Dias (Portuguese), took a merchant ship from Macau to Indochina and reached Cua Han on 18 January 1615. A few months later, they came to Hoi An” (Dror, O. and Taylor, K.M., 2006, p.40). After arriving, they “held Mass for Japanese believers and a year later, 300 Vietnamese people living in the area converted to Catholicism” (Nguyen Chi Trung, 2010, p.270). In 1615, the Portuguese missionary history was marked with the mission in Hoi An when the first official establishment of the Society of Jesus was set up in Vietnam¹. Realising the missionary potential in Hoi An, the Diocese of Macau sent a number of Jesuit priests to the seaport town over the coming years, including: Father Francisco Barreto and Father Francisco de Pina (1617); Father Pedro Marquez who worked as a chaplain, and Father Christoforo Borri (1618); and Father Giovanni de Leiria (Italian), Father Romano Niti (Japanese), Father Emmanuel Borges and Father Emmanuel Fernandez (1622). “Priest Francesco de Pina (Hoi An) in the Japanese town, as we mentioned above, saw Priest Pietro Marches² and they provided a lot of support for the town. The later priest was very good at Japanese language; over a short period, he made some criminals, who married their servants, and many foreigners convert to Catholicism. The former one, who was good at the Cochinchina language, made many local people and some monks convert to Catholicism; thanks to those people, many others, including both Cochinchina and Japanese ones, started to trust in nice beliefs and a church, which could be compared with those in Europe in terms of the quantity of followers, alms-giving, liturgical and other charity activities, was built in the area” (BAVH, 2002, pp.487-488).

The year 1624 was marked by the beginning of an important period for the Catholic mission in Hoi An, after a congregation consisting of six priests (including A.D. Rhodes) headed by Gabriel Mattos arrived in the town. In 1625, the total number of Jesuit priests in Cochinchina numbered 15, of which six were based in Hoi An. In 1625, the number of people baptised amounted to 325 (Hoang Thi Anh Dao, 2017, p.65). In 1628, “Priest

¹ The two others are Nuoc Man (1618) and Thanh Chiem Palace (1623).

² It is very Pedro Marquez, as cited from the origin.

Gaspar de Amaral and two Portuguese Japanese monks, including Michael Machi and Matthias Machide” (Hoang Xuan Viet, 2012, p.118) moved to Hoi An, as did Father Antonio Barbosa in 1636, The significant role played by the congregation was shown by the activities of Father Gaspa de Amaral and Father Antonio Barbosa, who held important positions in the formation of the Vietnamese national script. The activities, carried out enthusiastically and frequently by the Society of Jesus in Hoi An, resulted in remarkable achievements in the missionary work there. Until the role of Portuguese priests in Hoi An was replaced by the Society of Foreign Missions of Paris (M.E.P), “in the period from 1615 to 1665, there were three Catholic communities, including the Japanese, the Vietnamese, and the Chinese ones. Each of those communities had its own worship place” (Vo Hong Viet, 2014).

In 1625, the missionary activities of the Jesuit priests encountered difficulty in Hoi An due to the ban on Catholic practice imposed by the Nguyen lord at the time. Issuing an proclamation titled Edict on *Catholicism in 1625*, the local government decided to expel all Catholic priests from Cochinchina, forbidding local people from practicing Catholicism. Pursuant to the edict, all Catholic priests in Cochinchina were forced to gather in Hoi An to leave Vietnam on Portuguese ships. The Nguyen lord banned Catholic followers hanging Catholic icons and the Cross in their homes, after which the ban on Catholicism increased in severity.

After being expelled from Tonkin by Trinh Trang in May 1630, A.D. Rhodes left Macau for Cochinchina in February 1640. He came to Kim Long (Hue city), asking for a meeting with Lord Nguyen Phuc Lan. After coming back to Hoi An, however, he was ordered to leave the seaport (20 September 1640). In December of the same year, A.D. Rhodes came to Hoi An for the third time and was expelled again on 2 July 1641. He then came and stayed in Hoi An from January 1642 to September 1643, due to his close relationship with the Catholic church of the Society of Jesus there. Taking advantage of favourable conditions, he set up a group consisting of Vietnamese preachers. Nevertheless, when he came to Hoi An for the fourth time in May 1644, he was arrested by Quang Nam administration commissioner and his soldiers and expelled permanently from Cochinchina on 3 July 1645. The fact that Priest A.D. Rhodes was expelled three times from Cochinchina was just an example demonstrating the Nguyen lords’ ban on Catholicism in Cochinchina. Under the reign of Lord Nguyen Phuc Khoat, this ban was cruelly imposed, many arrests were made and expulsions carried out all over Cochinchina, especially in Hoi An and Cua Han.

Finally, on 26 December 1664, the Nguyen lord ordered all foreign missionaries to gather in Hoi An to await expulsion from the region. At that time, there were Portuguese Jesuit priests in Cochinchina, including: Marquez in Hoi An, Baudet in Da Nang, and Fuciti in Hue. These three left for Thailand on 9 February 1665, after which time, the mission of the Society of Jesus in Cochinchina generally and Hoi An specifically ended. The missionary activities in Hoi An were then carried out by the Society of Foreign Missions of Paris (M.E.P).

5. Impact of Portuguese trade and missionary activities in Hoi An (16th and 17th centuries)

5.1. Hoi An joined the global maritime commercial network of the Portuguese Empire

After moving south and carrying out land reclamation and expansion, Lord Nguyen Hoang (1524-1613), with a strategic vision, started to implement careful measures laying the foundations for a long-term political regime. This was the prosperous period in the world trade system, when Lord Nguyen Hoang built and strengthened the government of Cochinchina. It was a golden age for maritime trade in many countries in the region. To boost development, the government of Cochinchina tried to move away from a traditional model, while restoring the role of the Champa seaport (Hoi An) and a commercial economy was seen as the key. Hoi An therefore became a familiar destination for many regional and international merchants. It was a centre in both domestic and world maritime commercial networks. The impacts of the presence of Western merchants in Hoi An are shown by the following points:

Firstly, the Portuguese merchants' establishment of the first international network of trade posts in the early modern period helped Hoi An integrate into the Asian seaport network. Together with other seaports such as Goa (India), Ayutthaya (Siam), Malacca (Malaysia), Batavia (Indonesia), and Luzon (Philippines), Hoi An was connected to Formosa (Taiwan), Macau, Xiamen (China), and Deshima (Japan) to form a close and fairly complete trade system in Asia. It can be said that the 16th and 17th centuries were an unprecedented thriving commercial period in Hoi An's development with varied and worldwide trade activities. It is unusual in history for West-East integration to have taken place in such a small seaport as Hoi An.

Secondly, trade activities with the Portuguese promoted the utilisation of natural resources in the Quang region (Quang Nam and Quang Ngai provinces) for export via Hoi An seaport. Obviously, the Nguyen lords and foreign merchants undeniably contributed to the development, but the local conditions were the very factors that improved Hoi An's operations in trade and commerce. Western economies needed local products, which were found in abundance in the market in Hoi An. Of these natural products, fragrant woods (such as aloe and cinnamon) and swallows' nests were the top specialities. Due to the scarcity of fragrant woods, the Nguyen lords monopolised trade in these commodities. "Yet the Aquila, though of less price and esteem than the Calamba, is so considerable, that one ship's load of it enriches any merchant for ever: and the best advantage the king can allow the governor of Malacca, is to grant him one voyage of Aquila; because the Brachmans [Brahmans] and Banians of India using to bum their dead with this sweet wood, the consumption of it is continually very great" (Dror, O. and Taylor, K.M., 2006, p.107).

Due to the abundance and the particularity of goods and the waterway transport systems in the Quang region, the supply of goods in Hoi An considerably increased. With a large network of trade posts and the advantage in maritime trade, Portuguese and Dutch

merchants became major purchasers of local products in Hoi An. The goods they bought from 1613 to 1633 were listed in the records of the Nguyen government and the Society of Jesus, including: gold and iron ore; cinnamon, areca, pepper, aloe and construction wood, ivory, rhino horn, and deer skin (which were bought from ethnic minority people); fragrances, silk, ceramics, and wooden products (from local households); herbs and sugar from farms; and sea food, which were bought from people in coastal villages and islands (Charles, W., 2015, p.112). In the early trade season, therefore, Portuguese merchant vessels carried ceramic and terracotta products, silver bars, sulfur, lead, zinc, red and blue wool, etc., from Macau to Hoi An. They then bought yarn, precious wood, cinnamon, sugar, etc., to be shipped to Macau or Malacca. Due to overseas market demand, the capacity of local production improved thanks to the intermediary role of western merchants in Hoi An. As a result, the seaport town became an entrepôt on the busiest maritime trade route in Asia, connecting to seaports in India, Southeast Asia, and the Far East. “Hoi An became the most important entrepôt in Cochinchina and one of the key seaports in the East Asian trade route” (Nguyen Van Kim, 2013). Thus, many products bought by Portuguese merchants in Hoi An were displayed at popular trade fairs in Europe.

5.2. Hoi An was one of the most important places bearing the hallmark of the Jesuit priests who created the Vietnamese national script

To support their mission in the East, Portuguese priests (mainly those of the Society of Jesus) Romanised local languages. By the end of the 16th century, this included Romanising the Japanese written language to create Romaji, which was used to write a number of works such as *Christian Doctrine* (1592) and the *Latin - Portuguese - Japanese Dictionary* (1595), and so on. In the same period, some works on the Romanisation of Chinese were also published, including: the *Chinese Portuguese Dictionary* by Father Matteo Ricci, the *Portuguese Chinese Dictionary* by Father Ruggieri, and *Mirror of Rhymes* by Trigault (1626). All the above show that Romanising local languages to serve the Portuguese mission in Asia was not only carried out in Vietnam. However, the main difference was that the Chinese and Japanese Romanised scripts were used only for missionary work, while the Romanised script in Vietnam was gradually popularised and, after many changes in history, it was adopted as the national script. Portuguese priests in Hoi An played an extremely important role in the process of this script conversion as shown in the following aspects:

Firstly, Portuguese Jesuit priests in Hoi An were the first westerners to be fluent in the Vietnamese language. As analysed above, Hoi An was the first place in Cochinchina where Portuguese priests from Macau stayed; they studied the local customs, habits, and the language before moving on to other places. So, once they had arrived they would therefore try to learn the language in order to communicate with the Vietnamese people.

Francisco de Pina was one of the priests to be the most fluent in Vietnamese and he first preached the Bible in Vietnamese without needing an interpreter. He moved to Hoi An in

1617 where he stayed for a year before leaving for Thanh Chiem Palace (mentioned later in this paper). Being quite adept in Vietnamese, in 1620 Jesuit priests in Hoi An compiled a Catholic doctrine written in Nom script. However, it was difficult to disseminate Catholic teachings and documents to most of the local people, although translated versions were available in Chinese or Nom scripts. Due to the complexities of the latter two, as well as the political situation at the time, most of the local population in Hoi An particularly and Cochinchina generally were illiterate. Those knowledgeable in Chinese and Nom scripts were mainly government officials, Confucian scholars, and Chinese merchants. Portuguese priests had gained valuable experience from their missions in India, Japan, and China. They understood how hard it was to convert people from high social strata due to the preservation of the feudal ideology. Hence, the mission's focus should be the general public, and this would achieve more effective results. Thus, the Portuguese priests in Hoi An decided to preach and explain the word of God directly, instead of using documents. As a result, they realised that it was essential to create an alphabet to "help foreigners learn the Vietnamese language" (Bui Van Tieng, 2016, p.233) while at the same time, disseminate Catholic teachings to Vietnamese followers.

Secondly, Faifo (Hoi An), the first port of call for the mission of the Society of Jesus, was considered to be not only the headquarters of, and the place of shelter for, the missionaries but also the birthplace of the Vietnamese national script. At this point, Faifo's position in the contemporary period needs to be identified.

According to Nguyen Chi Trung, "Faifo, also called Hoi An, was the name of an area, where a seaport trade town was located. The well-known international trade town was established in Central Vietnam during the late 16th century. Geographically, it consisted of two seaports... One was Pullu Ciam pello (Dai Seaport in Hoi An) and the other was Turon (Han Seaport in Da Nang)... They together joined into one, where one saw ships come into this or that seaport... here... called Faifo... European people assumed it was a seaport of Quang Nam (Cacciam/Cham Province). There were several outports (where large ships were moored, waiting for completing customs procedures) such as Touron, Tra Nhieu, and Trung Phuong.... There were also trade wharves such as Da Nang, Tra Nhieu, Thang Binh, Thanh Ha, and Tra My... All of them (seaports, rivers, outports, and trade wharves) were direct satellite stations of Faifo. It was where goods were gathered and a fair was held for nearly four months every year. It extended to the Quang Nam Defence Palace, the second imperial place of the Nguyen lords, and the Quang region in Indochina, to form a well-known international seaport of Cacciam Province in the 16th and 17th centuries" (Nguyen Chi Trung, 2016, p.259). Looking at Hoi An in the whole context, we can see its role and position in the creation of the Vietnamese national script. As an international seaport, Hoi An was not only an entrepôt on the silk and ceramic routes in the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries but also a centre of cultural and linguistic exchange. Various languages were in use at the same time in the area, including Chinese, Japanese, Vietnamese, Portuguese, and Italian, etc. This became an important factor in urging the Portuguese priests to create a popular script to facilitate the effectiveness of their

missionary work. As Hoi An was located near Thanh Chiem Palace, it can be said that the Hoi An - Thanh Chiem region was the cradle of the Vietnamese national script. In the early period, priests Father Francisco de Pina and Father Francesco Buzomi (Italian), Father Diego Carvalho and Father Antonio Dias (Portuguese), and Father Cristoforo Borri (Italian) were the first people who established the basis of using the Latin alphabet to record Vietnamese phoneme. A number of works such as the “Vietnamese Portuguese Dictionary” by Gaspar do Amaral (1636-1645), and the “Vietnamese Portuguese - Latin Dictionary” by A.D. Rhodes (1651) were seen as the hallmarks of the later period, when a complete script incorporating accents with clear application was created and books of Catholic dogmas and dictionaries were compiled. In addition, the contribution made by Vietnamese preachers and their followers in Hoi An and Thanh Chiem in the creation of the national script should also be recognised.

Hoi An’s role in this achievement is further evidenced by the documents kept in many libraries and archives around the world, which record the activities of the Society of Jesus in Hoi An. In 1621, Father João Roiz wrote a “Yearly Letter from the Society of Jesus” to Father Mutio Vitteleschi, Superior General of the Society of Jesus in Rome, based on the reports from Cochinchina. The second chapter titled *Residencia de Faifô na Provincia de Cacham* (“Residence in Hoi An in Quang Nam Province”), which consists of eight pages, describes activities of the Jesuit priests in Hoi An and adjacent areas. During one particular visit to Cochinchina from 1618 to 1623, Cristoforo Borri took notes of local customs, socio-economic and political practices and then published a book in Rome titled *Cochinchina in 1621*. This is a very valuable document that contributes a relatively precise outline of Cochinchina in the first half of the 17th century. In his work, Borri described Hoi An in very impressive terms as the most important international seaport in Cochinchina. Many Vietnamese words in the book were Romanised for the first time; for example, in the sentence “Muon bau dau Christiam chiam” (Want to be Christian?). The outstanding description of Hoi An, together with missionary activities documented in Latin script, shows the influence of the seaport on the creation of the Vietnamese national script in the early period. Reviewing the report written in 1626 by Father Antonio de Fontes to Father Mutio Vitteleschi, Superior General of the Society of Jesus in Rome, one can see that the entire first part refers to Hoi An as “Casa de Taifô” (Hoi An House). In particular, A.D. Rhodes spent a long time living and working in Vietnam (both in Tonkin and Cochinchina) and he came to Hoi An in 1625. Although the town was not directly mentioned in the “Vietnamese-Portuguese-Latin Dictionary” and “Catechism in Eight Days”, one can see that the first steps had been taken in compiling these works, thanks to the linguistic talent of A.D. Rhodes, when he was living and preaching in Hoi An, and the documents of former priests.

Thus, it can be said that missionary activities of the Portuguese Jesuit priests played a decisive role in creating the Vietnamese national script. As recorded in history, the works of Francisco de Pina in Hoi An and Thanh Chiem Palace laid the foundations of Romanising the Vietnamese written language. A.D. Rhodes inherited this achievement which he developed leading to the official formation of the Vietnamese national script. In

the cultural space of Quang Nam Defence Palace in the 17th century, Hoi An was seen as the first Catholic establishment in Vietnam, as commented by Phan Huy Le: “The national script river constituted many streams, of which Nuoc Man was one, Thanh Chiem was one, and Hoi An was one”.

5.3. Contact with the Portuguese has left a valuable source of documents on Hoi An in the 16th and 17th centuries

Contact with the Portuguese has bequeathed a valuable source of documents that help to outline more accurately Hoi An seaport town in the 16th and 17th centuries. Most of these works are in the form of memoirs written by European merchants, sailors, priests, and travellers.

First of all, it is necessary to mention the “Peregrinacao” by Fernao Mendes Pinto (referred to earlier in section 2 of this paper). It consists of three parts: part one was written in Malacca (December 1554); part two was penned in Macau (November 1555); and the third part was written in Almada (March 1571). Although he did not directly moor off the Cochinchina coast, it was the first time the name “Bay of Cochinchina” (Hoi An) had been mentioned in a Western memoir (as per the extract quoted 2. First contact between Portugal and Hoi An (in the 16th century) in this paper).

Another chronicle that plays an important and irreplaceable role in studying Cochinchina in general and Hoi An in particular in the 16th century is “Cochinchina in 1621” by Christoforo Borri (Italian), mentioned earlier in this paper. Borri used to be a Portuguese Jesuit priest sent from Macau to Cochinchina from 1618 to 1622. He stayed mainly in Hoi An and Nuoc Man (Binh Dinh Province). Once back in Europe, he wrote a book in Italian titled *Technique the New Congregation of the Jesuit Missionaries in Cochinchina* (the book has been published in Vietnam with the title *Cochinchina in 1621*). It was first published in Rome in 1631 (a year before his death), consisting of 231 pages. The book is still kept in the Vatican City with the code Barberini H-I-66. It is the first book on Cochinchina written by a western priest. It provides quite a detailed description of various aspects of the region such as borders, climate, plants, animals as well as customs, habits, style of dress, languages, religions, and the social and family structure. Readers have always been and still are interested in his curious and sympathetic view of the Vietnamese people and scenery in Cochinchina compared with Chinese ones. As soon as it was published, it drew great attention in western societies. Immediately in the same year, it was republished in Milan and three versions in French were published in Paris, Lille, and Rennes. Two years later, it was translated into Latin, Dutch, German, and English. The significance of this book can be compared with one written by A.D. Rhodes published 20 years later which first provided an overall picture of Tonkin. When one reads some paragraphs relating to Borri’s book “Cochinchina in 1621” one can realise some interesting features as follows:

In regard to Hoi An seaport, he wrote: “As for their ports, it is wonderful that in a coast little more than an hundred leagues in length, there should be above sixty most convenient

landing-places; which is so, because there are many large arms of the sea. But the principal port, to which all strangers resort, and where the aforementioned fair is kept, is that of the province of Cachian; which has two mouths, or inlets from the sea, the one called Pulluchiampello, and the other of Turon, being at first three or four leagues distant from one another, but running in seven or eight leagues like two great rivers, at last join in one, where the vessels that come in both ways meet” (Dror, O. and Taylor, K.W., 2006, p.133).

“Here the king of Cochinchina assigned the Chinese and Japonese a convenient spot of ground, to build a city for the benefit of the fair. This city is called Faifó, and is so large, that we may say they are two, one of the Chinese, the other of the Japonese; for they are divided from one another, each having their distinct governor, and the Chinese living according to the laws of China, as the Japonese do according to those of Japan” (Dror, O. and Taylor, K.W., 2006, p.133).

He describes the fair in lively terms: “The Chinese and Japonese, drive the chief trade of Cochinchina, which is managed at a fair held yearly at one of the ports of this kingdom, and lasting about four months. The Chinese, in their vessels they call junks, bring the value of four or five millions in plate; and the Japonese, in their ships called *sommes*, an infinite quantity of very fine silk and other commodities of their country” (Dror, O. and Taylor, K.W., 2006, pp.132-133).

Based on western documents written about Hoi An, many researchers agree that the name Faifo is one of the most significant heritage elements, in addition to the religion. They suppose the name was commonly used by Portuguese, Dutch, and English merchants when they came to the seaport in the first half of the 16th century. At the same time, Faifo has many homophones such as Faifo, Haifo, Faicfo, Haiso, Faiso, Faifoo, and so on. The name Faifo is found in a letter about the Mission in Cochinchina (*La mission de Concincina*) written by Father Luis Gaspar³ in 1621, published in 1628 (Diffie, B.W. and Winus, G.D., 1977, p.191). In the document, Faifo was transcribed phonetically as “Facfo” and “Taifo”. However, researchers assume that those words were the result of a mistake made by typesetters, while the correct spelling must have been Faifo (BAVH, 2002, p.531). In 1631 in Christoforo Borri’s memoir, the geographical name “Faifo” was described as the most important trade port of Cochinchina, where Portuguese merchant vessels and congregations often came. In the Vietnamese-Portuguese-Latin Dictionary” by A.D. Rhodes published in 1651, Faifo was noted as “Hoai Pho: A village in Cochinchina, where Japanese people came to live”. In his journey report, Thomas Bowyear wrote: “On 4 October (1695), left Faifo, we travelled along the coast and over high mountains. There was a short cut, but it was restricted and I don’t know why” (BAVH, 2001, p.11).

Since then, on maps produced by foreign cartographers, Faifo was geographically referred to by different names, such as: Fayfoo (on the map of Pieter Goos in 1666) and Faiso (on the map of Robert in 1717). From the 17th century, Hoi An was mentioned as Faifo by western merchants and missionaries. By the late 19th century, under the rule of the

³ It was otherwise transcribed as Gaspar Louis.

French colonist government, Faifo became a name of an administrative area: “Ville de Faifo”, based on the edicts issued by King Thanh Thai on 20 October 1898 and 12 July 1899 as well as the decree issued by the governor-general of French Indochina on 30 August 1899 on the establishment of Faifo Town.

In conclusion, the contact with the Portuguese in the 16th and 17th centuries had a significant impact on socio-economic activities of local people in Hoi An. One of the most important outcomes of the cultural contact was the existence of Catholicism and the name “Faifo” which was the popular name at the time for Hoi An.

6. Conclusion

As the first westerners coming to Hoi An, the Portuguese exerted a strong influence on economic, political, cultural, and social activities in two main spheres: trade and religion. Another feature of the Portuguese activities in Hoi An, compared to those of trade firms in Goa (India) and Malacca (Malaysia), was the establishment of peaceful relations between Estado da India and the Nguyen lords. Like their Japanese and Chinese counterparts, Portuguese merchants came from Macau to Hoi An to purchase commodities during the trade seasons. The abundance of local products and the gathering of merchants from various regions enabled Portuguese merchants to maintain frequent maritime trade activities in the seaport.

Similar to trade activities, due to the changes in the region in the early 17th century, Portuguese priests (mainly of the Jesuit order) came to live in Hoi An where they carried out their missionary work. Starting with the first goal, which was to take care of spiritual life of Japanese believers who escaped from the Shogunate (1614), Jesuit priests then expanded their mission by disseminating Catholic teachings to the Vietnamese community in Hoi An and other areas in Cochinchina. The mission of the Portuguese congregations gained remarkable achievements with the establishment of a Catholic diocese in Hoi An (1615). Furthermore, in order to make the process of preaching Catholicism convenient, the Jesuit priests used the Latin alphabet to record the Vietnamese written language and consequently the Vietnamese national script was created. During the entire period, Hoi An was recognised as one of the places where the first significant steps were taken in the birth of the national script, other places being Thanh Chiem Palace (Quang Nam Province) and Nuoc Man Seaport (Binh Dinh Province). This once again demonstrates the position of Hoi An in the process of flexible and sophisticated cultural exchange and acculturation on the basis of the wet rice agricultural civilisation.

Portuguese commercial and missionary activities in Hoi An (in the 16th and 17th centuries) laid an important foundation for the participation of the seaport town in the Asian and trans-Asian prosperous commercial networks. Hoi An’s thriving period started with its position as an international seaport and an important missionary centre of Portuguese congregations in Vietnam.

Note: This paper was published in Vietnamese in *Nghiên cứu lịch sử*, số 10, 2020, then developed into this English version. Translator: Nguyen Tuan Sinh. Language editor: Stella Ciorra.

References

1. Đỗ Bang (1996), *Phố cảng vùng Thuận Quảng (Hội An - Thanh Hà - Nước Mặn) thế kỷ XVII-XVIII*, Nxb Thuận Hóa, Huế, 199 trang. [Do Bang (1996), *Seaport Towns in Thuan Quang Region (Hoi An - Thanh Ha - Nuoc Man) in the 17th and 18th Centuries*, Thuan Hoa Publishing House, Hue, 199 pages].
2. BAVH (2001), *Những người bạn cố đô Huế*, tập VII (1920), Nxb Thuận hóa, Huế, 596 trang. [BAVH (2001), *Bulletin des Amis du Vieux Huế*, Vol. 7 (1920), Thuan Hoa Publishing House, Hue, 596 pages].
3. BAVH (2002), *Những người bạn cố đô Huế*, tập XVIII (1931), Nxb Thuận hóa, Huế, 515 trang. [BAVH (2002), *Bulletin des Amis du Vieux Huế*, Vol. 18 (1931), Thuan Hoa Publishing House, Hue, 515 pages].
4. Trương Bá Cần (2008), *Lịch sử phát triển công giáo ở Việt Nam*, t. 1 - “Thời kỳ khai phá và hình thành (Từ khởi thủy cho tới cuối thế kỷ XVIII)”, Nxb Tôn giáo, Hà Nội, 603 trang. [Truong Ba Can (2008), *History of Catholic Development in Vietnam*, Vol. 1 - “Era of Exploration and Formation (from the Initial Stage to the Late 18th Century)”, Religion Publishing House, Hanoi, 603 pages].
5. Charles, B. M. (2010) (Nguyễn Thừa Hỷ dịch), *Những người châu Âu ở nước An Nam*, Nxb Thế giới, Tp Hồ Chí Minh, 301 trang. [Charles, B.M. (2010) (translated by Nguyen Thua Hy), *Europeans in An Nam*, Thế Giới Publishers, Ho Chi Minh City, 301 pages].
6. Charles, W. (2015), “Một vùng đất - Hai lịch sử: Tiền tố Chăm trong lịch sử vùng đất Hội An”, trong *Một số chuyên đề Lịch sử thế giới* (t. 3), Nxb Đại học Quốc gia Hà Nội, Hà Nội, tr.109-135. [Charles, W. (2015), “One Region, Two Histories: Cham Precedents in the History of the Hoi An Region”, in *Some World Historical Issues* (Vol. 3), Vietnam National University Press, Hanoi, pp.109-135].
7. Đỗ Quang Chính (2008), *Lịch sử chữ Quốc ngữ 1620 - 1659*, Nxb Tôn giáo, Tp Hồ Chí Minh, 222 trang. [Do Quang Chinh (2008), *National Script History from 1620 to 1659*, Religion Publishing House, Ho Chi Minh City, 222 pages].
8. Hoàng Thị Anh Đào (2017), *Hoạt động thương mại - truyền giáo của Bồ Đào Nha và Pháp ở Việt Nam (thế kỷ XVI – XIX)*, Luận án Tiến sĩ Lịch sử, Huế, 150 trang. [Hoang Thi Anh Dao (2017), *Portuguese and French Commercial and Missionary Activities in Vietnam (from the 16th to the 19th Centuries)*, Doctoral Dissertation on History, Hue, 150 pages].
9. Nguyễn Đình Đầu (1991), “Quá trình hình thành và phát triển phố cổ Hội An”, Kỷ yếu Hội thảo quốc tế *Đô thị cổ Hội An*, Nxb Khoa học xã hội, Hà Nội, tr.179-192. [Nguyen Dinh Dau (1991), “Foundation and Development of Hoi An Ancient Town”, Proceedings of the International Conference on *Hoi An Ancient Town*, Social Sciences Publishing House, Hanoi, pp.179-192].
10. Vũ Minh Giang (1991), “Người Nhật, phố Nhật và di tích Nhật Bản ở Hội An”, Kỷ yếu Hội thảo quốc tế *Đô thị cổ Hội An*, Nxb Khoa học xã hội, tr.205-215. [Vu Minh Giang (1991), “Japanese People, Japanese Town, and Japanese Relics in Hoi An”, Proceedings of the International Conference on *Hoi An Ancient Town*, Social Sciences Publishing House, Hanoi, pp.205-215].

11. Trần Nam Tiến (2012), “Quan hệ giữa chúa Nguyễn với Bồ Đào Nha ở Đàng Trong (từ thế kỷ XVI đến thế kỷ XVII)”, Tạp chí *Nghiên cứu Lịch sử*, số 7, tr.37-48. [Tran Nam Tien (2012), “Relationships between the Nguyen Lords and the Portuguese in Cochinchina (from the 16th to the 17th Century)”, *Journal of Historical Studies*, No. 7, pp.37-48].
12. Bùi Văn Tiếng (2016), “Các yếu tố địa chính trị tạo điều kiện để Dinh trấn Thanh Chiêm trở thành một trong những cái nôi của chữ Quốc ngữ”, Kỷ yếu Hội thảo khoa học *Dinh trấn Thanh Chiêm và chữ Quốc ngữ*, Quảng Nam, tr.231-235. [Bui Van Tieng (2016), “Geo-political Factors Making Thanh Chiem Defence Palace Become one of the Cradles of the National Script”, Proceedings of the Scientific Conference on *Thanh Chiem Defence Palace and National Script*, Quang Nam, pp.231-235].
13. Nguyễn Chí Trung (2010), *Cư dân FaiFo - Hội An trong lịch sử*, Nxb Đà Nẵng, Đà Nẵng, 379 trang. [Nguyen Chi Trung (2010), *FaiFo - Hoi An People in History*, Da Nang Publishing House, Da Nang, 379 pages].
14. Nguyễn Chí Trung (2016), “Dinh Quảng Nam và sự ra đời của chữ Quốc ngữ”, Kỷ yếu Hội thảo khoa học *Dinh trấn Thanh Chiêm và chữ Quốc ngữ*, Quảng Nam, tr.255-260. [Nguyen Chi Trung (2016), “Quang Nam Palace and the Birth of National Script”, Proceedings of the Scientific Conference on *Thanh Chiem Defence Palace and National Script*, Quang Nam, pp.255-260].
15. Hoàng Xuân Việt (2012), *Tim hiểu Lịch sử chữ Quốc ngữ*, Nxb Văn hóa Thông tin, Tp Hồ Chí Minh, 468 trang. [Hoang Xuan Viet (2012), *Study of History of National Script*, Culture and Information Publishing House, Ho Chi Minh City, 468 pages].
16. Caprio, M. and Koichiro, M. (2017), *Japan and the Pacific, 1540-1920: Threat and Opportunity*, Routledge, London and New York, 462 pages.
17. Danvers, F.C. (1894), *The Portuguese in India: Being a History of the Rise and Decline of Their Eastern Empire*, W.H. Allen & co., London, 1,166 pages.
18. Diffie, B.W. and Winius, G. D. (1977), *Foundations of the Portuguese Empire 1415-1580*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 533 pages.
19. Dror, O. and Taylor, K. W. (eds.) (2006), *Views of Seventeenth-Century Vietnam: Christoforo Borri on Cochinchina and Samuel Baron on Tonkin*, Southeast Asia Program Publications, Southeast Asia Program, Cornell University, New York, 290 pages.
20. Fernão, M. P. (2013), *The Travels of Mendes Pinto*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 752 pages.
21. Hall, D.G.E. (1961), *A History of South-East Asia*, MacMillan & Co LTD, 807 pages.
22. Li, Q. (2006) (Translated by William W.Wang), *Maritime Silk Road*, Intercontinental Press, China, 199 pages.
23. Li, T.N. (2018), *Nguyen Cochinchina: Southern Vietnam in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, New York: Cornell University Press, 194 pages.
24. Lê Quý Đôn (Ngô Lập Chí dịch), “Phủ biên tạp lục”, <https://chuaadida.com/Uploads/files/phe1bba7-bien-te1baa1p-le1bba5c.pdf>, truy cập ngày 10 tháng 5 năm 2017. [Le Quy Don (translated by Ngo Lap Chi, typed by Do Huy), “Miscellaneous Chronicles of the Pacified Frontier 1776”, <https://chuaadida.com/Uploads/files/phe1bba7-bien-te1baa1p-le1bba5c.pdf>, retrieved on 10 May 2017].

25. Nguyễn Văn Kim (2006), “Xứ Đàng Trong trong các mối quan hệ và tương tác quyền lực khu vực”, Tạp chí *Nghiên cứu Lịch sử*, số 6, tr.19-35, <https://khoalichsu.ussh.vnu.edu.vn/x-ang-trong-trong-cac-mi-quan-h-va-tng-tac-quyn-lc-khu-vc-pgsts-nguyn-vn-kim/>, truy cập ngày 12 tháng 5 năm 2017. [Nguyen Van Kim (2006), “Cochinchina in Regional Power Relations and Interactions”, *Journal of Historical Studies*, No. 6, pp.19-35, <https://khoalichsu.ussh.vnu.edu.vn/x-ang-trong-trong-cac-mi-quan-h-va-tng-tac-quyn-lc-khu-vc-pgsts-nguyn-vn-kim/>, retrieved on 12 May 2017].
26. Nguyễn Văn Kim (2013), “Mạng lưới giao thương Đông Á trước thời đại mở cửa và những hệ quả phát triển - trường hợp Hội An”, Tạp chí *Đông Bắc Á*, số 3, <http://www.inas.gov.vn/497-mang-luoi-giao-thuong-dong-a-truoc-thoi-dai-mo-cua-va-nhung-he-qua-phat-trien-truong-hop-hoi-an.html>, truy cập ngày 12 tháng 5 năm 2017. [Nguyen Van Kim (2013), “Southeast Asian Commercial Networks before the Open Period and Development Consequences: Case of Hoi An”, *Journal of Northeast Asian Studies*, No. 3, <http://www.inas.gov.vn/497-mang-luoi-giao-thuong-dong-a-truoc-thoi-dai-mo-cua-va-nhung-he-qua-phat-trien-truong-hop-hoi-an.html>, retrieved on 12 May 2017].
27. Võ Hồng Việt (2014), “400 năm Thiên chúa giáo du nhập vào Hội An”, Đặc san *Nghiên cứu lịch sử xứ Quảng*, số 5, <https://hoianheritage.net/vi/trao-doi-chuyen-nganh/chuyen-de-nghien-cuu-trao-doi/400-nam-Thien-Chu-a-gia-o-Du-nha-p-va-o-Ho-i-An-380.html>, truy cập ngày 12 tháng 5 năm 2017. [Vo Hong Viet (2014), “400 Years after Catholicism Was Introduced in Hoi An”, *Special Issue: Study of History of Quang Region*, No. 5, <https://hoianheritage.net/vi/trao-doi-chuyen-nganh/chuyen-de-nghien-cuu-trao-doi/400-nam-Thien-Chu-a-gia-o-Du-nha-p-va-o-Ho-i-An-380.html>, retrieved on 12 May 2017].