

DOCTORAL THESIS IN BRIEF

TRƯỜNG THỊ YẾN. *Trade policies of the Nguyen dynasty in the first half of the 19th century**Branch: Vietnamese history**Code: 5 03 15*

The Nguyen dynasty was established in the early years of the 19th century when capitalism had developed in many countries. This was the last feudal dynasty in Vietnamese history, which reigned in a period of many important and profound upheavals, influencing the survival and development of the country. The study of this historical period has attracted many researchers attention, at home and abroad. Yet, due to the limited availability of documents, the topic of trade, especially “trade policies of the Nguyen dynasty in the first half of the 19th century” as an independent topic has not been focused on. (p.2). Actually, there have been different evaluations on these policies. In order to find reliable information for more objective and scientific evaluations on the Nguen dynasty, and from that, draw out historical lessons to serve the current cause of the nations renovation, the researcher has chosen “Trade Policies of the Nguyen dynasty in the First Half of the 19th Century” as the PhD dissertations topic. She focused on clarifying and analyzing some main points such as: the social and historical conditions in which trade policies of the Nguyen dynasty were formed; their content; and influences of these policies on commercial activities in particular and on the whole economy in this period in general. The author also addressed the question: Did the Nguyen dynasty really impose limitations on trade and apply the closed-door policy as it has long been

asserted? On the basis of exploiting historical data sources, books and newspapers (domestic and abroad) on the Nguyen dynasty and using statistical and logical methods in the spirit of Dialectical materialism, the researcher synthesized, analyzed, and evaluated the Nguyen dynastys trade policies as well as their implementation in the economical life and how they affected the development of Vietnam’s trade in the 19th century.

Besides the Introduction, Conclusion, Reference, and Appendix, this thesis is divided into three chapters (210 pages).

Chapter 1: Historical and social conditions of the trade policies in the first half of the 19th century (page 12- 43)

In this chapter, the researcher reviewed trade policies of feudal dynasties before the Nguyen, with special attention paid to those of the last reign of the Le dynasty (17th, 18th century), which preceded the dynasty in question. The researcher asserted that the Le dynasty had many policies emphasizing economic development, especially agricultural economy. Yet, with regard to trade, that feudal government only laid down as policy closer and more systematic management, and none to encourage development. Foreign trade even had signs of being restricted. The Government's concern about domestic trade activities was shown in common activities such as money minting, market opening, etc. The Le dynasty’s government did not completely close off foreign trading, but blockaded and controlled it strictly. In order to protect economic bases of the feudal regime in the context that commodity economy had developed (but not strong enough to form a new socioeconomic base), this government

attached much importance to agriculture and together with it was “restriction on trade.” (p.14). By analyzing trade policies of the Vietnamese feudal governments in the 17th and 18th centuries, the researcher remarked that besides the traditional trade restriction elements, there appeared positive ones, not many but enough to mark the change in awareness of the Government about the role and effects of trading activities, contributing to the development of trade in this period. About foreign trade, the government had expanded trading relations with countries that wanted to establish business relations with Vietnam” (p.23). Commerce in this period was under the influence of the double-faced trade policies; therefore, it witnessed notable development along with inherent shortcomings.

Also in this chapter, the researcher gave an overview of the social situation in Vietnam in the first half of the 19th century. She also analyzed the influence of outside factors (international and regional situation) as well as the domestic political, social and economic state in this period on the Nguyen dynastys trade policies. The author assumed that in this sophisticated and changeable worlds situation, Vietnam in the first half of the 19th century faced opportunities and choices as well as challenges. The kings of the Nguyen dynasty were aware of building a strong reign of comprehensive development based on the tradition of the Le dynasty and reference of the Qings administrative system. However, their activities were carried out in the condition that Western countries were intending to invade Oriental countries through foreign trade and religion.

Chapter 2: *Domestic trade policies of the Nguyen dynasty in the first half of the 19th century* (pp. 43-103). The researcher believed that the domestic trade policies of

the Nguyen dynasty in this phase were plentiful and dispersed. Hence, based on available data, the author arranged and systemized them into the following categories: tax policies (including “*quan tân*” tax, “*biệt nạp*” tax and market tax); buy and purchase policy; price policy; monetary policy; and policies on measurement unification system, on traffic improvement and goods transportation. For each policy, the author analyzed the government’s objectives and the implementations modes and methods. According to her, some policies played an important role, which were guidelines for development, but some were just supplementary for domestic trade. (p. 43). She pointed out the limitations (shown in the proposal, promulgation and implementation) as well as positive aspects of domestic trade then, believing that domestic trade policies of the Nguyen dynasty were influenced by social and historical conditions and the development level of goods production of the time. The Nguyen, like other feudal reigns, did put emphasis on the “original profession”, (farming), but this does not mean that it intended to “restrict trade” (p. 103). The idea of “appreciating agriculture” was shown in practical policies and methods. For example, the Government carried out land measurement and made out a land list, or came forward to sponsor and organize land reclamation and restoration. Irrigation works such as dykes, dyke-maintenance, and waterways were also restored on a large scale. “Trade restriction” elements raised were just formulaic in the royal decrees.

Chapter 3: *“Foreign trade policy of the Nguyen dynasty in the first half of the 19th century”* (pp. 104-179).

The author asserted that international and regional political upheavals in the first half of the 19th century had a governing role in

the Nguyen's foreign trade relations with Western countries. This influence created the difference in its foreign trade policies towards Oriental and Western countries. That was the open policy in trade relation and transaction with neighboring countries in Southeast Asia, and the conditional relation with the Western world. The researcher analyzed a number of matters such as regulations on tax, etc. in foreign trade activities (e.g. tax, offering declaration procedures) and forbiddances in foreign trade activities (such as those related to crossing the ocean for trade relations, goods, and foreign trade relating to social order and national security). She also mentioned the government's policy towards trading overseas (allowed individuals to cross ocean to trade, using oversea Chinese traders and the Qing people to purchase goods abroad; the royal court appointed people to trade in China and some countries in South-East Asia).

From the above analyses, the researcher brought forward comments on trade policies of the Nguyen dynasty in the first half of the 19th century as follows (pp. 180-188):

The trade policies of the Nguyen dynasty in the first half of the 19th century were inherited and proceeded from those of previous dynasties and were under profound influence of the social, political

and economic conditions of the time.

These policies contained in themselves many conflicts, showing the confusion of the feudal government in planning policies and managing the nation.

Despite many positive elements, there remained a number of limitations, which negatively affected the development of the economy in particular and of the country in general during the first half of the 19th century.

The researcher presented figures in graphs and tables for better illustrations. (For example, tables of "biệt nạp" tax tariff prescribed for handicrafts, of the situation of gold purchase in the Nguyen dynasty; of different types of money circulated at the time; and a table of taxes on foreign ships annually.) The indexes included the report of Vũ Đức Khuê; measurement units of the Nguyen dynasty; products bought by the Government in provinces from Thừa Thiên to Hà Tiên...; salaries and bonuses for those who had official missions abroad; etc.

The thesis was successfully defended with excellent results at the state-level Board at the History Institute in April, 2004.

Summaried by
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