

The Traditional Portion of a Vietnamese Colonial Port City: Commerce, Politics, and the Origin of Hải Phòng (1802-1888)

Aspek Tradisional Bandar Pelabuhan Kolonial Vietnam: Komersial, Politik dan Kemunculan Hai Phong (1802-1888)

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ABSTRACT

This article examines commercial activities, the impact of political interaction between the local powers and foreign colonialists, and other issues in the making of colonial port cities in Asia. By analyzing the formation history of Hải Phòng, one of largest seaports in Vietnam during the nineteenth century, the author of this study argues that indigenous factors played a more important role than other factors of the standard Western requirements for European powers to select places to establish ports in the early colonial period. Therefore, the convenience of an early modern trading center and the inland-connecting ability of Hải Phòng made it quickly become used as the main naval base in early expeditions of the French in Tonkin. Consequently, despite the difficulties of water transport to and from a seaport influenced by rivers and tides, the disagreement of scientist and the lack of infrastructure, the government of Indochina eventually decided to select Hải Phòng as the location to build the major port of northern Vietnam in the late nineteenth century. It is also the reason for this city not only maintaining marine exchange and transport under the domination of French colonialism but also remaining as an irreplaceable port in the northern part of modern Vietnam during the long twentieth century.

Keyword: Hải Phòng; colonial port; commerce; politic; nineteenth century.

ABSTRAK

Artikel ini mengkaji aktiviti komersial, kesan interaksi politik antara kuasa tempatan dan penjajah asing, dan isu-isu lain dalam kewujudan bandar pelabuhan kolonial di Asia. Dengan menganalisis sejarah pembentukan Hải Phòng, salah satu pelabuhan terbesar di Vietnam pada abad kesembilan belas, penulis kajian ini berpendapat bahawa faktor tradisional tempatan memainkan peranan yang lebih penting berbanding dengan factor-faktor lain seperti keperluan pihak Barat dan kuasa Eropah dalam memilih tempat mendirikan pelabuhan mereka pada zaman awal penjajahan. Justeru, Hải Phòng yang memiliki kemudahan pusat perdagangan yang moden dan kemampuan bandar tersebut menghubungkan dengan kawasan pedalaman lantas memunculkannya sebagai pangkalan tentera laut utama dalam ekspedisi awal pihak Perancis di Tonkin. Natiujahnya, faktor sungai dan air pasang yang dihadapi dalam memajukan pengangkutan air, perselisihan saintis tentang lokasi dan kekurangan infrastruktur yang dihadapi, menyebabkan akhirnya pemerintah Indochina mengambil keputusan memilih Hải Phòng sebagai lokasi didirikan pelabuhan utama di Vietnam utara pada akhir abad kesembilan belas. Ini juga menjadi alasan bandar ini tidak hanya kekal sebagai bandar pelabuhan laut di bawah penguasaan kolonialisme Perancis tetapi juga kekal sebagai pelabuhan yang tidak dapat diganti di bahagian utara Vietnam moden dalam masa yang panjang semasa abad kedua puluh.

Kata kunci: Hải Phòng; pelabuhan kolonial; perdagangan; politik; abad kesembilan belas.

INTRODUCTION

At the beginning of the twentieth century, one of the focal points appearing in political debates as well as forms of press and media in Tonkin (the colonial territory of French Indochina that corresponds to present northern Vietnam) was whether Hải Phòng should continue to be preserved and developed as the major port in the area. Hải Phòng, a new

port city established just few decades earlier and considered as a symbol of the French civilizing mission, suddenly stood at the test of survival. The biggest challenge for the development of Hải Phòng port in the thinking of the colonial government was the difficulty of water transportation from the coast to the harbor (which was located somewhat inland), in which large cargo ships had to wait for the highest tide level to cross over the long, complex sand bar

at the river mouth area of Cẩm River and anchor in the port.

In reality, the capacity to build a port in Hải Phòng had been questioned by French engineering experts by the time the city had begun to build. In a technical consulting report sent to the colonial government in 1887, a French hydrography engineer confirmed that the natural conditions of this area were not good enough to build a big city (Renaud 1887, 4-8). Although agreeing with that report, the French officers of the Indochina government in the early twentieth century tried to defend their dreadful mistake when the French delegation signed the treaty with the Vietnamese government to open Hải Phòng for trade. At that time, the types of ships travelling to the Vietnamese coast were mostly medium and small bulk carriers for military purposes, with vessel

draught of 3.5 to 5 meters that could easily enter and exit the port. Additionally, although the areas to the north of Hải Phòng had better conditions for establishing a deep water port, they were viewed as unsafe and they were not familiar to the French, who had not investigated them. To resolve the shipping problem in Hải Phòng, the colonial government of Indochina proposed a plan to look for a new location to replace Hải Phòng. There were several locations considered, mostly in areas north of Hải Phòng like Quảng Yên, Hòn Gai and Tiên Yên. However, up to middle of the twentieth century when French colonization ended in Vietnam, there were no concrete action conducted for that plan. As a result, Hải Phòng has continuously been used as the most important international port of northern Vietnam until now.



FIGURE 1. Hải Phòng in the regional context of early twentieth century Tonkin

Source: Renaud, J. 1887. *Le question des ports du Tonkin*, Paris: Sociétés de Géographie, p.42

In the last century, previous studies by pioneering scholars like Rhoads Murphey and Susan Lewandowski have addressed the importance of colonial port cities, built up by the European in the making and transformation of modern Asia. According to them, “there is indeed some irony in the ultimate confrontation between the sea-oriented West and the land-oriented East, a confrontation for which the Europeans were far better prepared than the Asians. European mastery of the sea, in both commercial and naval terms, gave them the advantage they needed to establish themselves on the coasts of Asia, on sites hitherto little valued by Asians, and in time to transform these settlements

into the port cities which by the end of the nineteenth century had reoriented the entire domestic system of each country” (Murphey 1969,70). However, in recent times, instead of continuing the Eurocentric viewpoint of last generation’s scholarship, the research by many Asian scholars has seemingly paid more attention to the indigenous tradition of colonial port cities in the region. By focusing on the port - hinterland relationships, morphogenesis and the interaction between the local and foreign elites, new studies point out the role of local communities in treaty ports (Basu 1985; Broeze 1989). Throughout the colonial period, Asians remained the overwhelming majority in all of the port cities

and were far from being simply dependent. The tradition business group and their methods proved fully capable of successful operation even in what Western - dominated setting (Broeze 1989, 236).

From that academic context, the story of Hải Phòng, a typical colonial port in northern Vietnam could be considered as evidence to illustrate the traditional portion of colonial port cities in Asia. While most previous studies on this port in Vietnam primarily paid attention to the urbanization and industrial development of the city under French government investment from the late nineteenth century to the present, this paper will examine the early history of the city to explain the reasons for the founding of city. Answering the question of why Hải Phòng was chosen by the French and the durability of its role, Raffi Gilles, a French historian and Nguyễn Thừa Hỷ, a Vietnamese scholar both revealed that Hải Phòng played the role of connecting hub between the inland and coastal areas for a long time before the arrival of the French (Raffi 1994, 56; Nguyễn and Trịnh 1986). This idea is one of the important aspects of Hải Phòng port that this article will explore in detail. Additionally, by analyzing the formation process of this city throughout nineteenth century Vietnam, this article will argue that instead of economic goals, political issues were decisive factors in the founding of the port at the beginning while commercial tradition was the main force helping to develop Hải Phòng in the early period of French colonialism.

HẢI PHÒNG BEFORE THE OPENING (1802-1872): SECURITY AND POLITICAL INSTABILITY

Hải Phòng, a seaport in northeastern Vietnam was considered one of the most important traffic gateways of northeastern Vietnam before the nineteenth century. During the Chinese Han colonial period, Southeast Asian merchants carried almost all commodities from Hải Phòng to Malay entrepôt centers (Simkin 1968:37). In the year 938, Hải Phòng was the place where the Bạch Đằng River victory took place, which ended the domination of the Chinese monarchies in Vietnam after more than a thousand years. According to records of the Yuan dynasty from China, Tuanshan and Jichai (perhaps Đồ Sơn and Cát Hải now) were the two important places in commercial activities between Guangzhou and Jaozhi in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.

Until the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the area south of the current Hải Phòng city was the seaport of the Tonkin commercial system, where many European ships weighed anchor (Đỗ, 2006: 35).

Chen Kuo-tung pointed out that due to marine technical weaknesses, Chinese trading ships mainly took the sea route around Hainan Island and went along the coast of Vietnam, Cambodia, and Thailand, then arrived at the Malay Peninsula and the island states of Southeast Asia since the late eighteenth-century despite the fact that this route was much longer than the offshore route. So the Vietnamese northeastern coastal border area (including Quảng Ninh and Hải Phòng now), between Vietnam and China became a strategic place for trading in the area (Chen 1993:7). Besides, Hải Phòng was also a convenient place for navigation and goods exchange between the coast and the delta because Hải Phòng is served by numerous rivers and stream systems connecting it with the center of northern Vietnam and the uplands of the Red River.

Despite being in an advantageous location, the political situation in this area was frequently unstable. The consequence of continuous civil wars in the latter half of the eighteenth-century and the high tax level and hard labour forced upon farmers under the Nguyễn dynasty negatively affected the economic life of Hải Phòng coastal inhabitants who owned small scale farming lands and were regularly threatened by natural disasters. Those disasters such as famine, epidemic diseases, and homelessness affected farmers everywhere (Trương and Đỗ, 1997: 48-55).

In 1830, a famine occurred throughout the entire northern half of Vietnam, especially Hải Dương province where rice prices increased threefold (TL, 3:75). During the next three years, the number of homeless people in only Hải Dương went up to 13,000. Up to 1834, a widespread epidemic disease in the An Dương district took more than 300 people's lives. Statistics from land register documents in Hải Phòng in the first half of the nineteenth-century showed that up to more than 50% of the farming land in this area was uncultivated.

Farmers were pushed into an impasse and they had no other choice except to take part in the struggles against the authorities. One of the typical struggles was the rebellion of Phan Bá Vành, which took place in the 1820s. Though this movement occurred in an extensive area with the main base located in Trà Lũ village (Nam Định province),

the leaders of this rebellion chose Đồ Sơn Island (Hải Phòng) as the strategic base while building up forces (Nguyễn 1986: 203 - 211). In the 1860s, another struggle led by Lê Duy Phụng attracted a huge number of Hải Phòng residents fighting against the royal army. Hải Phòng nearly became the rebel controlled area (NT, 35). The monograph written about this area by royal researchers admitted that, “most of the inhabitants are cruel, especially those coming from such communes as Quần Mực, Đồ Sơn, Phong Cầu, Đức Phong, and Từ Đồi. Those coming from such communes as Phúc Hải, Minh Liễu, Quế Lâm, and Trà Hương are mostly cunning. And those from Hương Lũng, Đại Trà, Kim Sơn, and Từ Đồi are mostly aggressive (ĐK,1:40). As a sure-fire result, an anarchic situation along the coast of northern Vietnam was created even though these struggles were defeated.

Another factor affecting the security condition of Hải Phòng was the explosion of the number of pirates. According to the investigation by Robert Anthony, most pirates on the northern coast and in Hải Phòng in the 18th and 19th centuries came from the south of China (Anthony 2003: 38-45). Reports were continuously sent to the capital of Huế over many years, acknowledging that pirate groups made sizable surprise attacks at many seaports in the north, such as Hoa Phong (or Nghiêu Phong), Bạch Đằng, Liêu, and Vạn Ninh areas (TL,1:509, 571,613,620). This force once even directly attacked military posts and local authorities' bases. The cooperation between the pirate groups and the peasant rebels united to challenge the royal army (TL,7:140).

In 1826, Nguyễn Hạnh, a general of Phan Bá Vành, was associated with a Chinese pirate group attached to the army-post in Đồ Sơn (Tiên Minh prefecture) and the Thái Bình River mouth. Under Minh Mệnh reign, the marine territory in Quảng Yên and Hải Dương provinces had been dominated by a group of Chinese pirates and Vietnamese pirates, which was led by Nguyễn Bảo (TL,2:558). In the mid-1860s, when bandits under the Qing dynasty from Yunnan, Guangxi, and Guangdong spread to the highlands of Tonkin, the close relationship between bandits and pirates was revealed. Up to 1871, a group of pirates under the leadership of Hoàng Tê working with bandits led by Tô Tứ, came from the sea to make a raid on the communes of Hải Dương province. These two posts were occupied, officers and soldiers were killed and guns and weapons were stolen by their enemies (TL,7:1305). The captain, Senez, described that in 1872, there was

a Chinese village on Cát Bà Island, and in front of this village were about 200 pirate ships, with 10–20 cannons and 7–8000 people in each ship. He said: “This river (Cấm River) and the waterways into the river have been occupied since last January and February by pirates, who even assaulted the capital of the province. People trembled when reporting the heinous atrocities that the pirates had inflicted” (Gilles 1994, 20).

The remaining complicated issues in the coastal area of Hải Phòng in the first half of the nineteenth-century left a marked influence on the state's policy. The authorities of Vietnam itself had to admit that the coastal areas: Hải Dương and Quảng Yên provinces belonged to the northern territory of Đại Nam empire, where there were lagoons for pirates to hide, and in which Đồ Sơn became a more and more important place (TL,2:558). Hence, national defense and security in Hải Phòng were noted to be a priority of the Nguyễn dynasty.

Under Gia Long's reign (1802–1820), the court had increased these activities aimed at wiping out pirates and had gained considerable achievements. However, it did not mean that there would be no threat from the pirate force because many new pirate groups from the south of China were established after that. During the years 1832-1838, the court's army held many big operations which discovered and wiped out pirate groups on small islands of the north-east coast (TL, 3:384-385). Many high-ranking mandarins of the Nguyễn court such as Nguyễn Công Trứ and Nguyễn Tri Phương were appointed to defend this area in different periods to stabilize the situation and put an end to the pirate epidemic.

Along with military strategies, the Nguyễn dynasty soon realised the necessity of building a national security system that had to be powerful enough to protect and control the coast. In 1827, after driving back the uprising of Phan Bá Vành from the coastal north to the south of the Red River Delta, the state established border posts at Minh Liễu and Thù Du communes of Nghi Dương district with 150 soldiers in camp. In the late 1830s, Minh Mệnh (1820-1840), the second emperor of the Nguyễn dynasty asked his officials to investigate and measure all the small islands in the northeast area and to draw maps to serve as a security activities and for sea management (TL,4:337-339). In 1840, another fortress named Ninh Hải was also established in the north of Cấm River (TL, 4:1033). Up to 1864, thanks to Nguyễn Văn Lý's proposal,

fortifications at seaports of Hải Dương province were established in which one fortress was built in Nghi Dương and one in An Dương district, next to the Cẩm riverbank. As a result, there were a series of solid fortification systems, especially those at the Cẩm River's seaport before the 1870s (TL,7:1165).

However, since the beginning of the period of the 1850-1860s, financial difficulties, as well as threats to national security from French colonialists in Huế, Đà Nẵng and southern Vietnam, prevented the success of the endeavor to wipe out the pirates. Besides, the royal fleet was too ill equipped to pursue the pirate's modern warships so the Nguyễn court had to rent Chinese ships (TL,7:909). At the same time, long-lasting peasant insurrections and political upheavals made the security of the coast uncontrollable. When coming to the coast of Vietnam this time, the Europeans reported a bad situation: "Only Chinese bandits are still hitting the North Sea of Vietnam and causing a lot of bloody sins like the previous time. Their junks were armed with many cannons, which went up the rivers in Tonkin. Under the shaky authority, people were banned from possessing any kinds of guns. Left unprotected, the Annamese had no other choice but to run away. Most of the villages were attacked suddenly. At that time, men, women, and children were collected in junks and brought to China. They made the men shave and work as slaves in Cuba or Peru. Women and children were forced to do work that was even more abhorrent" (Caillaud 1880, 35).

SMUGGLING AND THE GROWTH OF UNOFFICIAL TRADING ACTIVITIES

It might be due to unstable security that it wasn't until the 1860s, that trading activities in Hải Phòng were paid attention to. Another reason was that, from the latter part of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth century, Vị Hoàng port (in the present-day Nam Định city) was considered the main port of northern Vietnam (Truong 2003, 132 -135). Meanwhile, high-profit goods such as rice, nonferrous metals, and raw silk were banned in the market. As a result, commercial relations between Vietnam and China only took place on a limited scale, mainly supplying luxury goods for the emperors and noble people. At first, the development of capitalist production required a lot of food and manpower from the northern Vietnamese market. Because of the low-price and convenient transportation, China could provide many kinds

of merchandise for daily Vietnam consumption. However, due to the government trading bans, the amount of official trade between Vietnam and China that took place in Vị Hoàng port was quite small. Because of the suitable conditions in Hải Phòng, it became the land of smuggling and unofficial trading activities.

Due to anxiety towards European expansion after the Opium War in China, the Vietnamese government had decided to restrict foreign trade, and that policy created illegal trading (TL,7:413). In general, under the protectorate of the Nguyễn dynasty and the price regulations, the price of rice in Vietnam was much lower than in south China. Considerable information from documents in Vietnam states that, in 1824, the highest price of rice in Guangdong was 4-5 taels of silver for one *thạch* (*dan* in Chinese) of rice. Therefore, compared to the price of rice in the north of Vietnam at the same time, the price in Guangdong was 10 to 12 times higher (Đỗ 1997, 23). In 1876-1877, the rice price in Tonkin was one tael per one picul rice while the rice price in China was two times higher and the transportation fee from Tonkin to Hong Kong was very low. On the other hand, because the two administrative divisions called Vạn Ninh and Vân Đồn had few farming lands, the inhabitants there were partly subsidized with some rice yearly. Besides, they were entitled by the Nguyễn dynasty to go out to the sea to buy goods in nearby areas, especially in Hải Phòng. Hence, Chinese merchants took this chance to buy rice (TL,3:906-907).

According to the local authority's report, in Nghiêu Phong seaport, there were lots of rich Chinese merchants who hired cargo ships that were docking there, usually up to 300-400 (TL,7:749). They gave money to local smugglers in that province and the surroundings to keep for them; essentially, it was an unspoken deal. At the river area in front of Trục Cát post, An Dương district, Hải Dương province, trading ships of the Qing dynasty docked there to steal rice. Sometimes the number of ships was in the hundreds (TL,7:360).

One of the most popular for illegal trading in Hải Phòng was women. Until the 1870s, according to several missionaries' reports in northern Vietnam, though it was not as obvious as in the past, trading in women was still carried out. It was said that hundreds of Vietnamese women were sold in markets of Gaozhou and Guangzhou prefectures for many years, and those were taken from Hải Phòng and Trà Lý ports (Caillaud 1880,196).

Because of that the Nguyễn court had prompt solutions to force business activities in Hải Phòng into a legal framework. A tax station and a post were established in the Bạch Đằng River mouth. The tax level set up for Chinese merchants was 12 silver taes and they could buy 100 kg of rice for each ship (TL,7:267). A year later, on the bank of the Phương Chử River (a branch of the Cấm River), another check-point station was established to prevent Vietnamese ships from local areas coming there to sell rice to Chinese merchants in Hải Phòng (TL,7:304). However, these efforts still meant nothing when Chinese dealers committed many acts of fraud, from bribing local authorities to faking licenses, disguising themselves as Vietnamese traders, even fighting with the royal army to evade taxes (HĐ,11:490).

The situation became more serious when the local authorities discovered the activities of Chinese traders related to the pirates forces. People said that it is hard to tell the differences between fishing-junks and Chinese pirates' junks. They looked the same, and in time, a fishing-boat could turn into a pirate boat or the other way round at any minute that suited them. According to Nguyễn Công Trứ, a high-ranking officer of the Nguyễn dynasty, the Chinese pirates originated not only from fishing junks but also from trading junks that had incurred losses and were forced to resort to piracy (TL,5:494). Nguyễn Trường Tộ had related the actual situation at that time: "The ships of the Qing people which always enter in estuaries have become a habit Some turned into pirate ships, others turned into trading ships; some enter for trading, but left to rob; some that previously came for commerce, are now robbers, another that failed in commerce became robbers." (Truong 2002, 368). Finally, in 1855, followed the officials' suggestion, the Nguyễn court had to officially forbid Qing's trading ships to deal in Hải Phòng (TL,7:403).

In 1866, after Lê Duy Phụng's insurrection was completely put down, with Chinese merchants' contribution to the pacification process in the coastal area, Emperor Tự Đức used the river tributaries of Lương Quy and Trạm Bạc villages as a dock for Qing's trading ships. Besides, he initiated the tax authority, determined the scale of taxes, and set up a border post under the management of a talented officer appointed by the provincial officials. Almost all Qing's trading junks had to pay taxes except for ships fighting against rebels.

Yet, after a year of implementation, everything was very different from what they had expected.

The number of taxes levied on rice trading ships in Cấm estuary was not one-tenth in comparison to Trà Lý estuary. The reason was that merchants were not allowed to buy and sell directly with local people but mainly through purchasing organizations of the Nguyễn court. Moreover, the tax level that the Nguyễn court levied on trading goods, especially rice, was fairly high. One year later, the court tried to reduce tax levels for Chinese trading ships but the result did not change and the ban on rice trading in Hải Phòng returned (TL,7:1153).

OPENING OR CLOSING?

In reality, the Nguyễn court was fully aware that opening Hải Phòng port for trading would bring many economic advantages to the nation, as well as to ensure the effectiveness of these laws forbidding smuggling. In a proposal sent to Emperor Tự Đức, mandarins Nguyễn Uy and Tôn Thất Đản mentioned that the smuggling activities still happened and said that the trading ban was ineffective and could not protect Vietnam from colonial forces or the growth of smuggling. At the same time, they explained the benefits of reopening the seaport. They said that an open policy would not only help the country collect taxes but also give farmers and traders the chance to make a profit (TL,7:926).

Another innovative plan, including eight tasks to do immediately, was sent to Emperor Tự Đức in which Nguyễn Trường Tộ stated clearly the importance of opening the seaport to promote commercial operations, strengthen marine forces and support traders (Truong 2002, 245). From 1865 to 1867, another official, Phạm Phú Thứ, offered to open a commercial seaport in Hải Dương and Quảng Yên provinces (Thái 1994, 64). In 1872 the official discussion about opening the seaports for free trading continued, and then the highest level trade authorities in the Nguyễn dynasty allowed three ports to open namely Đà Nẵng, Ba Lạt, and Đồ Sơn (TL,7:1272-73). However, in the end, based on an analysis of the advantages, disadvantages; particularly financial, and security issues, this policy did not come into practice.

THE OPENING OF HẢI PHÒNG PORT AND FRANCE-VIETNAM COMMERCIAL AND POLITICAL CONFLICTS (1872-1882)

For many years, French people and other colonial countries always longed to open a road from their

colony to the center of the Chinese empire because of many rumors about the land with natural resources and a big opportunity to do business. The expansion of English people in Burma and Horace Browne and Macarney's exploration of eastern India, which passed through Burma, to the southwestern highland area of China threatened directly the French interest in Indochina. Meanwhile, the English navy and merchant ships controlled almost the entire sea and important ports in the coastal areas of South China and Southeast Asian countries (Gilles 2004, 224-226). On the other hand, after setting up their stations in the south of Vietnam, the French were seemingly attracted by the idea of monopolizing the trading roads to a market with hundreds of millions of people, where they could control the economic life of Tibet and provinces of South China and they considered the opening of the trading road as a prize in the colonial competition between England and France in the Far East (McLeod 1991, 98).

The first expedition started from the lower section of the Mekong river under the instruction of the Naval Commander Doudart de Lagree and Captain Francis Garnier and took place from 1866 to 1868 with the sponsorship of the Paris Geographic Association and Chasseloup Laubat, who along with the Minister of Navy and Colonies always encouraged them to discover trading roads. At the end of the journey, explorers noted that they could not use the Mekong River to travel to inland China but they collected information about a route along the Red River from the Van Nam plateau to the north of Vietnam (SarDesai 1992, 36).

Garnier also discovered that much of the silk, tea, and textiles available in south Yunnan were being imported via Tonkin rather than along the more difficult bandit-infested routes running up the valley of the west river from Canton. He concluded that if the order could be restored on both sides of the frontier and the political barriers to trade along the Red River could be eliminated, Yunnan could provide a rich outlet for French trade and Saigon would eventually rival Shanghai as the great commercial entrepot for eastern Asia (Garnier 1873, 447-448).

For that reason, officials of the French colonies in Indochina appointed the ship Bourayne to explore the estuaries in the Tonkin Gulf in February and October in 1872, believing that by that route they could go upstream on the Red River to the highlands. The exploration team travelled up nearly every main estuary pouring into the Tonkin Gulf and their most crucial discovery was Cửa Cấm River, one of the

most important estuaries that had never been marked on any map (Caillaud 1880, 36-37). On the second trip to the north, the Bourayne from the Cấm estuary followed the Thái Bình River system to the town center of Hải Dương and across the Luộc River to Hanoi. With all the information collected from the voyage of Jean Dupuis from the highland of Yunnan to Lào Cai in 1869, the French possessed nearly all the trading routes from the upper reaches of the Red River to the sea; among them, the Cấm river mouth was a gateway from the sea into the mainland.

However, the subsequent trip to northern Vietnam in November 1872 to persuade the Annam government to open the beneficial trade route along the Red River was strongly opposed by the Nguyễn dynasty and its local mandarin. Dupuis unauthorised business journey in northern Vietnam in 1872 was thought to be a threat to the security of Tonkin (Raffi 1994, 30). Francis Garnier, though sent to deal with Dupuis' case, appeared to be even more obstinate when he violently forced the Nguyễn dynasty to agree to the compromise and then attacked Hanoi and its vicinity before he was killed by Luu Vĩnh Phúc's Black Flag troops. After his death, the French colonial government and the Huế court had to discuss a new peace agreement since the French government was ready for another expedition. Then the case of the opening to trade in northern Vietnam was quickly resolved (Caillaud 1880, 109). The articles in the newly signed agreement provided good conditions to open such seaports as Thị Nại (Bình Định province), Ninh Hải (Hải Dương province), Hanoi, and the road from the Red River to Yunnan, among which Ninh Hải seaport was opened immediately (TL, 8:9-15). Five months later, a new trade agreement was signed by the Vietnamese and French governments in Saigon on September 15, 1875 to issue the official tax rates on certain types of goods, bringing bright prospects for Hải Phòng's free trade development (TL, 8:54-63).

Nevertheless, since Hải Phòng's opening for trade and up until the early 1880s, the role of the French was hardly noticed in the local economic activities. The small number of merchant ships arriving at the seaport and the amount of French goods exchanged there showed that its intervention was only to assert its influence in the north of Vietnam, and Indochina as a whole, to oppose the threats posed by Britain and Germany. During nine months (from September 1875 to June 1876), among the many ships from Britain, Germany and China which landed at Hải Phòng seaport, no French ship was recorded. Moreover, though goods transported

by ship setting off from the Saigon seaport enjoyed tax incentives at half the normal rate, the number of goods from Saigon was an inconsiderable 3,085 tales of silver compared to imported goods from China (mainly from Hong Kong) which was up to 435, 237 tales of silver (Caillaud 1880, 458-466). From 1875 to 1883, among 873 ships from different countries which landed at Hải Phòng seaport, French vessels accounted for only 78 (8.9% and mainly military ships). Meanwhile, the number of English ships, mainly from Hong Kong and China was 235 (27%) and 142 (16.2%) respectively (Raffi 1994, 381).

Besides, the number of French investors in the period of 1875-1883 was still rather limited. After nearly a decade of construction, besides the office building of the tax department and consul, the facilities of Hải Phòng seaport included only a floating fir landing pier, which was built in a rush, a lighthouse at Hòn Dấu and a few float lifebuoys to serve the ships at night. More seriously, piracy and smuggling were common, though the French believed that they could manage better than the Nguyễn dynasty when they signed the agreement to open the Hải Phòng seaport. It was Commander-in-chief Dupree who admitted that, "How can we prevent piracy over the total area of 250 miles of coastline while the English, who have been in Hong Kong for the past 30 years and their naval forces which have been well equipped are even unable to keep sea routes within their zone in complete safety?" (Bouinais and Paulus 1885, 40). However, Hải Phòng had developed rapidly without any remarkable effort by the French. It can be seen from tax authorities' statistics that from January to October, 1878, the average tax amount collected in Hải Phòng harbor was two times higher than in Hanoi and Bình Định (CB, 299:97,301; 300:90,146). It shows that Hải Phòng's development was not greatly affected by French commerce.

Meanwhile, after Hải Phòng opened for free trade, a new foreign trade policy by the Nguyễn dynasty was acknowledged. As soon as the trade agreement was signed, the Emperor Tự Đức sent progressive mandarins, who also had experience in economic management, to control the customs service and trade in Hải Phòng, such as Phạm Phú Thứ, Trần Đình Túc, etc (TL, 8:76,190). The Nguyễn dynasty also planned to build a rice market at An Biên commune and Đồn Sơn commune and open a school for the customs service bureau in Hải Dương to learn foreign languages (TL, 8:175,283). These efforts of the government in opening for free trade not only free trade helped to establish the management

of foreign trade, but also allowed Chinese and French merchants to conduct investigations and initially exploit the rich coal mines in Đông Triều region later (CB, 273:302-314). In 1879, the Nguyễn dynasty signed a commercial treaty with Spain, in which all the articles were similar to those made with France in Saigon, except for the tax incentives enjoyed by French goods in Saigon (TL, 8:385-388). The active movement by the Hue court on policies in Hải Phòng showed that this royal dynasty wanted to maintain its trade benefits at least when northern Vietnam had not completely been secured by the French.

Chinese traders played a principal role in Hải Phòng after the opening. Chinese traders rented most of the Britain ships from Hong Kong to transport commodities. According to statistics, from 15 September, 1875 to 17 June, 1876, 133 overseas ships arrived in Ninh Hải harbor, including 116 Chinese vessels with a total load of 2483 tons (87.2% of the total ships and 43.3% the total load) (Caillaud 1880, 294-296). In the first six months of 1877, 168 Chinese ships came to Hải Phòng with a total load of 5,571 tons and 131 ships leaving with a total load of 4,236 tons (Tsuboi 1987, 207). Chinese traders could also trade products in the Red River, mostly high value but not cumbersome ones, especially tin and củ nâu, a plant used to dye and preserve fabrics. However, due to security issues, the amount was low. Being the main exported product of Chinese traders in Hải Phòng, rice played such an important role. In 1880, exported rice was 25,600 tons with a total value of 5 million francs (Martinez 2007, 86). Although there was a rice export ban for several years, smuggling still appeared in many forms (CB, 273:67).

After the French authorities built the Hải Phòng port on concession land of the lower Cẩm River, the Chinese moved quickly to the new port with the encouragement of the Nguyễn court (TL, 8:67). They built houses of brick along the banks of the Tam Bạc River, of which most were on the left bank to form Hạ Lý, a crowded residential area. The Nguyễn dynasty treated this community with favor when allowing them to have their land (RST, 59134:4). The Chinese areas were in the west of the concession area including the area of Guangdong and Fujian people (now southern part of Hồng Bàng district, Hải Phòng), including houses, warehouses, shops, and even a separate Chinese cemetery.

The failure of the French in their trade operation in Hải Phòng directly threatened their position in

Tonkin. Meanwhile, the position of France in the Far East declined seriously. China did not accept the agreement, which was signed in 1874. Also, the political conflict between the Nguyễn court and the colonial government in Sai Gon was increasing. The French thought that the appearance of the local tax collecting system in Tonkin, Annam's tolerance to gangsters occupying the upper Red River, and the trade policy which gave preference to Chinese traders in Trà Lý prevented the implementation of French trading policies. That was the reason Lieutenant Colonel Henri Rivière came to Tonkin in 1882.

However, like Garnier, instead of punishing Luru Vĩnh Phúc for occupying the upper Red River and dealing with commercial issues, he occupied Hanoi and initiated the second war in northern Vietnam. After Rivière died in the second Cầu Giấy battle, Tonkin's people began thinking of the possibility of driving the French out, but the Nguyễn dynasty wanted to maintain the moderate policy and wait for an established peace like in the year 1874. The Court's irresolution was an opportunity for the French Commander-in-chief Courbet to invade the capital of Huế. Under military pressure, the Nguyễn court had to sign a new agreement, which was called the Hardmand Agreement (1883) and Patenôtre Treaty (1884), admitting the French protectionism over Tonkin so Hải Phòng was officially under French management.

THE FORMATION OF A COLONIAL PORT CITY (1883-1888)

Right before the Hardmand Agreement (1883), a large number of French expeditionary forces were seen in Hải Phòng. There were 750 people, including 300 people in Hải Phòng under Rivière's command. In 1883, the number increased to 2,000 and continued to increase in the next few years. In June 1885, the number of French soldiers was 40,000 people. Hải Phòng became the only chosen place to welcome French soldiers in Tonkin (Baratier 1889, 25-26).

In 1883-1885, there were different opinions among French authorities in Indochina whether to choose Hải Phòng to be the commercial gateway in Tonkin. After studying the northeast part of Hải Phòng, Joseph Renaud, an irrigation engineer said: "Based on the study, building a city in Hải Phòng is not an advantage. There is a large amount of silt in the Cam River and the Bạch Đằng River. The rivers' entrances

will quickly be blocked" (Renaud 1887, 25). Some other areas were suggested, such as Quảng Yên, Hòn Gai. Finally, Hải Phòng was chosen because the French military leaders explained that Hải Phòng has the most convenient route to the centre of Tonkin, and the French needed a propitious place to garrison troops. According to Brunat in his book: "Although Hải Phòng is not a very suitable harbor for our battleships or commercial ships with high water-lines, it is the key of the Tonkin waterway system (...) Hải Phòng will be a commercial harbor for a very long time because there is not any place in that area better than it" (Brunat 1885,8).

The decision of the French authorities in Indochina, together with the formation of a civil authority helped this harbor quickly gain adequate investment from the government. There were central depots with total areas of 20,000 square meters, and new equipment for the harbor such as three wooden mini bridges of 35 meters in length with a rail track leading to depots with three pontoons of 130 meters in length (Raffi 1994, 364-365). These pontoons were placed at the Cấm River mouth to make it easier for ships to moor when the tide changed.

Together with investing in equipment, French authorities in Hải Phòng established a commercial office under the direct management of the French Ambassador (Resident). The Hải Phòng Chamber of Commerce was established under a decree on November 23, 1884. It was then supplemented by the decree on 3 June, 1886, stating that the department would get opinions, show direction and offer trade management. It was also in charge of making plans for commercial development purposes. There were six people and then 13 people working in the Chamber of Commerce. The president of the Chamber of Commerce was the French ambassador. The members were 12 French traders, appointed by the president (BI 1886, 142).

The forming of the Hải Phòng Chamber of Commerce immediately created advantages for French commerce. From 1875 to 1883, it was only 10% of the business. However, from 1884 to 1888, the number of French commercial ships was 34.6% of the total number of ships moored in Hải Phòng. Meanwhile, the end of the China-French war had opened a traded route on the Red River. In reality, the total amount of products trading along this route was low, due to transportation problems. On this route the quantity of imports increased from 1.6% in 1886 to 11.6% in 1892 and the quantity of exports increased from 0.2% to 1% (Raffi 1994, 383-384). Trading

between Hong Kong and Hải Phòng at this time was still maintained with 30 to 40 ships per year, but it made up all of the transit commodities in Hải Phòng.

Besides making Hải Phòng a commercial gateway, French authorities in Indochina also intended to build Hải Phòng to be a modern, western city. A framework for the city's power system was formed. A temporary consulting committee was established which was in charge of studying a plan to create an official city authority committee including six French, four Vietnamese and one Chinese (BI 1886, 8-9). Then, a temporary committee was established to manage the city. Notably, among the

nine members of the temporary committee, there were seven French, a Vietnamese and a Chinese; five of whom were members of the Chamber of Commerce (BI 1886,28). Other organizations were established including police, court, health care, and cleaning with specific purposes. Together with the development of society and the economy, the population of Hải Phòng increased sharply. In 1883, the Hải Phòng population was 2,000 people. In 1890, the number was 15,000 people. Among those, Vietnamese were 58%, Chinese were 37% and European were 4% (BI 1890, 45).



FIGURE 2. The center area of Hải Phòng in 1890

Source: Fonds du Service du Cadastre et de la Topographie du Tonkin (The Archives of Cadastre and Topography in Tonkin), No.812, p.9

In 1887, Hải Dương province was divided into two by the Governor-General of Indochina. The first part included An Dương, An Lão, Nghi Dương districts, and four communes of Thủy Dương district. The Hải Phòng Resident administered these parts. The Hải Dương Resident administered the second part (RST,73881:155). With the 19 July, 1888 event, the Governor-General of Indochina, Richaud signed the decree to establish an organization of Hanoi and Hải Phòng committees (municipalités) (GI, 17:152). On 3 October, 1888, Emperor Đồng Khánh agreed that all the areas of Hanoi, Hải Phòng and Đà Nẵng would officially become French concessions and Hải Phòng would officially become a colonial city (GI 17:235). The area of the city was mainly on the left bank and the right bank of the Cấm River,

together with some outlying villages (BI 1889, 452). It can be seen that Hải Phòng city took the harbor and the Cấm River as the center position of the city to operate its planning and construction.

The French government in Hải Phòng had the effort to construct and improve the environment of the city. Governor-General Bonnal had decided to build a canal connecting the Tam Bạc River with the Cấm River mouth to create a river port to transport goods. This also upgraded the submerged areas to create living lands. Looking at the Hải Phòng map in the years of 1885, 1898 and 1910, a significant change can be seen with straight streets like a chessboard along the two banks of the Tam Bạc River, a part of the Cấm River and Bonnal canal (CT,182:10).

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The development of Hải Phòng in the 19th century has indicated how geo-position and commercial traditions affected the formation of some aspects of the port city. Based on the advantageous location, Hải Phòng was promoted to become a centre of exchange not only between southern China and northeastern Vietnam but also between the delta and the littoral islands under regulation by Chinese merchants despite the foreign trade limiting policy of the Nguyễn dynasty. The illegal trading and the breaking out of piracy detrimentally influenced the security situation and the lifestyle of coastal inhabitants, but it indirectly created a dynamic trading zone for the pirates outside of state control.

All of these reasons explain why Hải Phòng was considered an important part of the reform plan of the royal court, and it also gave a reason for the choice of Paul Philastre, the governor of Cochinchina, to open a port in northern Vietnam. As Resident Bonnal, of Hải Phòng said: "It was believed that even though new seaports were built in the deep water of Quảng Yên or Hòn Gai, Hải Phòng would be the pier that local boats and Chinese ships always landed at. Also, the place moving of a commercial center was not decided by any decrees or edicts" (Bourrin 1935,22). Besides, the characteristics of Hải Phòng's commerce showed that its role related closely to, and depended on, the trading system in southern China. It is the reason why the French were defeated in building Hải Phòng to become a French entrepôt in the Tonkin Gulf that could compete with Hong Kong. Nevertheless, in the end, Hải Phòng itself only developed similar to a transit station of Hong Kong.

Meanwhile, Hải Phòng can be considered the beginning and the place that comprehensibly showed changes in French policies in Tonkin. The original purpose of the French toward Hải Phòng was a commercial problem but the latter decisions were affected more and more by political-military subjects. However, despite various approaches, as well as the discussion among French government officials, scientists and merchants on choosing this place to build a port in Tonkin which had continued, the investment by the French significantly changed the appearance of the land since the late nineteenth century. The traffic system that connects it with other regions has turned Hải Phòng into an important trade bridge of the Indochinese economy. That was the reason why a French official of this city in

early twentieth century proudly proclaimed that: "If anyone wants to see what in Tonkin is possible to be done with strong human will in a shortage of nearly everything, this land must be the one. Hải Phòng nowadays is a piece of perfect evidence against anyone said that the French did not operate their civilizing mission in Indochina" (Bourrin 1935,41).

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