

THE CHANGE OF GATEWAY TO DELTA FROM 12th TO 17th CENTURIES

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I. THE GATEWAY POSITION OF THE AREA BETWEEN RED RIVER AND ĐÁY RIVER

Due to geological structure and directly subject to Red River delta structural formation processus, Nam Định bear in itself an enough particular history and special cultural traditions. Together with lands embracing traces of prehistory period, there were submarine yet areas hundreds years ago from that time. Within between 11th century and 14th century end, corresponding to Lý-Trần dynasties, Nam Định was the important gateway of Delta and all Đại Việt Kingdom. Lý Kings recognized soon the importance of this area. Until 13th century, this was where Trần family rose up and its specific importance relays on that it was likely the second capital thorough Trần dynasty 175 years rule.

1. Hải Thanh division (Lô) of Ứng Phong prefect (Phủ) under Lý dynasty

Overally, this corresponded to today's Mỹ Lộc, Vụ Bản, Ý Yên, Nam Trực districts and part of now Trực Ninh and Nghĩa Hưng district. Ứng Phong Prefect included two important estuaries - Ba Lạt and Đại An. Red River runs into the sea by Ba Lạt. At the time, it was situated at around the confluence where adjoined Trực Ninh and Xuân Trường districts. Đại An (or Đại Ac) was Đáy river estuary,

sited at the time around Độc Bò wharf, the confluence of Đáy river and Đào river. This land area might be considered as the Gateway to Red River Delta.

Adjoining the sea, the area from Quán Các to Ba Lạt estuary which center was Cổ Lê Pagoda site rapidly became a trip of cultural cross. This was named "Keo" - Vietnamese hieroglyph - in words "Giao Thủy" (where sweet-waters and salted waters crossing each other at flood-tide), where fishermen berthed after off-shore operations. They crowded and settled themselves into fish-villages, around which, trade activities frequently bustled. On-land and on-waters sceneries created dynamism in economic life and diversity and abundance in cultural physiognomy.

A Lý stele named "Viên Quang tự bi minh tính tự (圆光寺碑铭並寺) was remained and conserved in Nghĩa Xá Pagoda (圆光寺) of today Xuan Ninh commune, Xuan Truong district. For Stele date, most historians suggested that it was produced by 1122 with underlined words "维天浮睿武三年". Lý Nhân Tông King included 8 dynastic titles, 天浮睿武 was the 7th one promulgated in Canh Tí year (1120), so 1122 was the 3rd year - corresponding to "三年".

However, a careful study showed that the stele text might not be edited by this year.

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Firstly, the stele text engraved: "今圆光寺者即李英宗之所创" that meant "This Viên Quang Pagoda was created by Lý Anh Tông". Lý Anh Tông reigned in 38 years (1137-1175). If the text was carved just in Anh Tông King's 1st year, it would be later than the mentioned date up to 16 years. Moreover, the text used his Posthumous name (Anh Tông), that means that it should be edited after his death, that would be soonest by 1175.

Secondly, the stele text mentioned that the King instructed pagoda embellishment in 1st year of Thiệu Minh (Lý Anh Tông Crown's title-1137). So, creation here shall be understood as restored with the new name "Viên Quang Pagoda" (its former name was Dien Phuc Pagoda).

Thirdly, in the text end, after relating inspection trip of Lý Nhân Tông (仁宗) and Lý Anh Tông (英宗) - Posthumous name, the literature comes to Kim Vương (今王) (existing ruling King). We suggest that this Stele, in respect of content, might probably be erected under Lý Cao Tông dynasty (1176-1210). The editor was Đinh Đạt.

According to the full sentence engraved under the stele name "维天浮睿武三年 觉海大法师刻碑一面", this was not the date of this stele. Only this meant a reason for continuous carving ("维" meaning) of a stele by Giác Hải in 3rd year of Thiên Phù Duệ Vũ (1122), may be in the time of Diên Phúc Pagoda. In our opinion, that was another stele, however, lost ago. The pagoda was originally sited in Giao Thủy fishing village, many times

displaced, then, finally settled as by now existing.

The initial Giao Thủy fishing village location under Lý Dynasty might be nearly Red River bank, between Nam Thắng village to Nam Hồng village of today Nam Trực district. This complies with the text of another pagoda stele constructed latterly by 2nd year of Đồng Khánh (1887). According to this stele, this was a big pagoda in Lý Dynasty consisting of 36 buildings, hundreds of compartments. Where the river stream was changed, the pagoda was threaten of slide, then moved to Bát Dương (Vũ Phong, Vũ Hợp Commune, Vũ Thư District) and finally to the existing site. Bát Dương sited on the opposite Red River, symmetric to Quán Các⁽¹⁾.

The displacement through historic epoches of Viên Quang Pagoda with remaining Lý epoch stele is a reliable evidence and also a proof similar to Keo Pagoda's displacement. The Pagoda wordy name "Thần Quang Tự" is now used in calling the three big pagodas in Red river down stream area⁽²⁾. The displacement of pagoda related to Red River stream change and downstream area expansion process justify the close coherence between culture and natural conditions. This means a critical feature of this land area.

Historic person ages were generated in this cultural space whose careers gone into

⁽¹⁾ As recorded in the Rear Stele erected in 9th year of Chính Hòa (1688), Quán Các at the time was a commune belonging to Giao Thủy district, Thiên Trường Prefect, now Nam Thắng commune, Nam Trực District.

⁽²⁾ Hành Thiên Keo Pagoda, Dũng Nhuệ Keo Pagoda (Thái Bình) and Cổ Lễ Pagoda

legendary tales with miraculous achievements covering not only all the Nam Định land of Lý Dynasty but continuing national-size phenomena. These were Bonze superior Dương Không Lộ, Nguyễn Minh Không and Giác Hải, the personages that had opportunities to travel country-side and abroad. Legend has it that Bonzes Dương Không Lộ and Nguyễn Minh Không and Nguyễn Minh Không frequently were identical or the same⁽¹⁾.

With current analysis, it would be difficult to affirm that these were two different individuals, or only one-one. However, based on the closest Lý epoch bibliographical materials such as "*Thiên uyển tập anh*" (TUTA), "*Lĩnh Nam chích quái*" (LNCQ)... Dương Không Lộ and Nguyễn Minh Không were two distinct personages.

According to TUTA, Không Lộ was native of Hải Thanh (i.e Nam Định and part of today Thái Bình), with unknown DOB, and died in 1119-as recorded. He descended from a fisherman family; grown up, after a time of wandering on the waters, he willing devoted him self to a religion life. He makes friend with Bonze superior Giác Hải and receive training with Bonze Hà Trạch in Mộc Ngưu Shrine of Đốc Bô Village⁽²⁾.

In 1069 Lý Thánh Tông in person commanded the armed expedition to fight Champa, passing and returning through Đại An estuary. Among the prisoners brought back from Champa, was a Chinese Bonze named Thảo Đường who was carrying preaching religion in Vijaya capital. Highly appreciating an eminent Monk, Thánh Tông appointed him "Quốc Sư" - (State Bonze) and caused establishment of a new buddish sect in Đại Việt. And Dương Không Lộ did receive training from Quốc Sư. Just for this, TUTA ranged Không Lộ in the third generation of Thảo Đường Buddish Sect. However, as he committed to Vô Ngôn Thông sect, so Buddhist History of this Meditation Lineage [According to 4,5 and 10].

Không Lộ was a dominantly talentuous bonze superior with high achievements in expansion of cultivated lands, cultural amelioration and, the most important, establishment of a new era for copper casting, a technics with significant role in economic and cultural development not only for Nam Định but for the whole Đại Việt Nation at the time.

Legendary sources said that copper casting and also copper were brought back from China by the Bonze superior. Typical products of copper casting at the time included pagoda bells and big-size Buddha statues. Most of ancient pagodas in Nam Định with Lý structural source worshipped him. Moreover, furtherly most of traditional copper casting professional places raised him as Professional Ancestor for work-ship. In Ngũ Xã, a famous

¹ This confusion may start from Hồ Nguyên Trừng's "*Nam Ông mộng lục*", where in "Minh Không thần di" tale. Hồ Nguyên Trừng makes identical the two men. From this, many books re-quoted and folklore unified the two into one

² According to TUTA, Hà Trạch was a human's name, laterly, peoples named the pagoda constructed by Bonze superior's name. Đốc Bô village was possibly Đốc Bô at Đáy river estuary in Lý epoch. This was one among critical gateways of North Delta at the time

copper casting village, a pagoda named "Thần Quang Tự" (the same name of Hành Thiên Keo pagoda, Dũng Nhuệ Keo pagoda and Cổ Lê pagoda) also workships Không Lộ as Professional Ancestor.

As the native land of Copper casting Restorator, Nam Định in Lý epoch had well known copper craft centers which typical one was Tống Xá village (now belonging to Yên La commune, Ý Yên district). Such a copper cauldron was found in Phổ Minh pagoda - Nam Định - which was ranged in heavy metal class; Legend has it that it was forged by Không Lộ, and for sure, there were efforts contributed from talentanous local casting artists.

Nguyễn Minh Không was not a native of Nam Định, however, he soon settled there, and his career also got prosperous from Giao Thủy land. Minh Không originally was a villager of Đàm Xá - Đại Hoàng (now belonging to Ninh Bình), initial named Nguyễn Chí Thành, born in 1066 and died in 1141⁽¹⁾. From 11-years age, He devoted to religions career, and received training from Bonze superior Từ Đạo Hạnh with religion name Minh Không. Recognized "Chân Không Bát Nhã", he took chair of Giao Thủy Monk⁽²⁾.

He was reputed as a Bonze superior of thorough comprehension not only of sutras and

changes but of traditional medicine, able to cure stubborn diseases. With achievement in medical care for King Lý Thần Tông, he was awarded "Quốc sư". TUTA book classified him in the 13th generation of Vinitaruci Meditation Lineage.

Closely attached to Không Lộ prestigious name was Bonze superior Giác Hải. Also native of Hải Thanh subdivision, in a fishman family, he devoted to religious life at 25-years ago. He was the creator of Diên Phúc Pagoda (furtherly changed into Viên Quang). Under Ly dynasty, this pagoda also was sited nearby Thần Quang Pagoda (Keo Pagoda)

2. Location of Ứng Phong Outer Palace

Under Lý epoch, Nam Định meant not only the gate way of all the Red river Delta but a critical economic center. Lý kings paid a special interest in this area. Through hisporic documents, at least two outer palaces were know to be erected in ancient Nam Định for their temporary stay in inspection trips. The first outer palace might be in around Keo Pagoda a big cultural and economic center at the time. Hành Thiện Commune now pertaining to Xuân Trường district had its original name as Hành Cung (Outer palace) Commune, ago nearby Quán Các wharf, of Nam Thắng Commune, Nam Trực district. With river stream changes, most of ancient Lý architectural relics were drifted away by the river flow and peoples ought to migrate to new lands. "Hành Cung" Land name also was

⁽¹⁾ There were very different records on Nguyễn Chí Thành alias Nguyễn Minh Không's DOB. Above birth year is based on "History of Ly Triều Quốc Sư" Pagoda edited by Venetable Thích Bảo Nghiêm

⁽²⁾ Giao Thủy Pagoda means Keo Pagoda. Its initial name was Quang Nghiêm Tự, then changed into Thần Quang Tự. Legend has it that it was erected by Bonze superior Dương Không Lộ, furtherly hold by Nguyễn Minh Không. Its construction site in Lý epoch corresponds to around today Quán Các

“drifted” with inhabitants was the East and latterly becomes Hành Thiện Commune.

The second Outer-Palace was Ứng Phong as anciently and historically called Lý King's, particularly king Lý Nhân Tông got usually to come there to watch peoples seeding and harvesting.

Thorough 56 years of rule, history recorded in 19 royal corteges at outer palaces the King 11 times watched plunging or harvesting at Ứng Phong Outer-palace. Recapitulating recorded informations in imperial written histories, one may know that in 14 times quoted Ứng Phong outer palaces, only two events related to King Lý Anh Tông and one event related to King Trần Thái Tông royal trip, while the remaining events related to King Lý Nhân Tông.

Above informations showed that Ứng Phong Prefect in general and Ứng Phong Outer Palace in particular took an important position for Lý Dynasty, especially under Nhân Tông reign, where took palace most of Đại Việt country great events under Lý epoch, such as Resistance war against the Tống invader, foundation of Văn Miếu (Temple of Literature), establishment of Quốc tử giám (National University) and organisation of the first Confucianist examination... It was not causeless that the King arrived there two, three time (by 1117 and 1125) and even there was a royal stay during up to two months (April to June 1125).

While easy to agree with the importance of Ứng Phong Outer palace under Lý epoch and

its attachment to King Lý Nhân Tông, the identification of this outer palace actual location remains a not simple issue.

Recording King Lý Nhân Tông's watch over ploughing by 1117, *Cương Mục* had note “Ứng Phong belongs to Nam Định, formerly Hiến Khánh district, changed into Ứng Phong under Lý, then into Kiến Hưng under Trần dynasty, then into Kiến Bình Prefect under Chinese Minh rule, latterly into Nghĩa Hưng Prefect under Lê dynasty, i.e. Nghĩa Hưng Prefect now.”[7, T.4,tr.8].

According to this citation, *Việt Sử lược's* translator noted also “Nghĩa Hưng district, Nam Định Province” [12, tr.20]. *ĐVSKTT* Translators estimated that Ứng Phong Outer Palace was sited in an enough large area, equivalent to Lê's Nghĩa Hưng, i.e. including Nghĩa Hưng, Ý Yên and Vụ Bản districts of Nam Hà Province [6,T.1,tr.288] ; while in the Volume II of the same book, translators noted that “Ứng Phong Outer palace existed in Lý epoch, pertraps Ý Yên district territory” [6,T.2,tr.20]. Thus, up to nowadays, experts do not unify their opinion on Ứng Phong outer palace location.

There was an information worth of interest in *ĐNNTC* when writing on Nghĩa Hưng Prefect - Nam Định province: “Nghĩa Hưng Prefect ... under Chinese Hán's rule pertained to Giao Chỉ district, originally was Hiến Khánh district . Now Thiên Bản district includes also tổng Hiến Khánh which was changed into Ứng Phong district under Lý epoch.” The book also recorded that existed a temple for Lý Nhân Tông

worship in Hiên Khánh commune [2.T.3,tr.339]. These were critical indicators. During field survey in Vu Bản district communes, we paid special interest in Minh Thuận commune with its differently distinctions compared with other district remaining communes. Close to Minh Thuận, remained Hiên Khánh commune where relics of Lý Nhân Tông's temple were conserved. The site might be in Ứng Phong district center under Lý epoch or Nghĩa Hưng prefect under Lê epoch. And relics related to Lý-Trần architecture were recently and continuously discovered in Minh Thuận.

In respect of terrain and traffic network in Lý epoch, there was no more convenient and secured traffic system than riverways. Red river and Đáy river run from Thăng Long to the sea. Many historic and geographical materials shown that at the time, Đáy river played a more important role than Red river. For Nam Định with included Ứng Phong, small rivers connecting these two large rivers played an extremely important role. These were Châu Giang, Ninh Giang, Đào canal and Ba Sát river (Sát river). Sát river meant and ancient and critical one as it linked Châu Giang river with Đào canal near its estuary.

To-day, Minh Thuận commune lays on the cross-road area adjoining the two Ba Sat and Ninh Giang rivers. From there, waterways run easily along Ninh river to Chau Giang river an Lý Nhân Outer palace, then Sat river to get the sea. Minh Thuận was only distant from Hiên Khánh an earthed road (road 56) which was an

ancient horse-service path. In respect of terrain, traffic networks and according to related historic sources, Ứng Phong Outer Palace determined as sited in Minh Thuận and Hiên Khánh area sounds reasonably appropriate.

In respect of palace name, original parts of Minh Thuan Commune (including Bạch, Phu, Phú Cốc, Phú Lão, Phú Vinh, Hướng Nghĩa, Trại Kho villages) under Lê epoch and before borne the name of Hành Cung (行宮) commune. At the time, Hành Cung commune included Điện (殿) and Lục villages comprising 6 hamlets which were developed into 6 villages: Bạch, Phu, Kho (Phú Lão), Trại Kho (Phú Lão camp, Đại Lão), Gộc (Phú Cốc), Khống/ Hống (Phú Vinh).

By 1st year of Minh Mạng (1820) Hành Cung Commune saw its name changed into Hành Nhân and Điện Village into Kính Nghĩa which then borne Hướng Nghĩa name under Thành Thái reign (1889 - 1907). In the early 20th century, Colonialist Authorities had policy on division of communes into smaller units. Except for the merge of Bạch and Phu villages into one, each Hành Cung Commune former village became a commune, however Hành Nhân's name remained [13, tr.611].

Above palace names somewhat suggested a land area once embracing palaces with serious and rigorous rites. Besides, there exist hamlets with Mền, Nén, Dấu ... names or little hills or rise lumps - Gò Ngựa, Đống Dọn ... - the name being related to long ago rites exercised by the Royal Court and mandarins, as explained by local peoples and the ancient wharf close to

Hướng Nghĩa village (Điện village - was named Bền Đền (Temple's Warf)

Worship and cult relies in Minh Thuận included specific aspects. Firstly, the very crowded density of relics; only for communal house, pagoda, shrine, temple (exclusive Christian Church) in 7 villages of ancient Hành Cung commune, one may count 39 relics.

A subject worth of interest in that, in all commune houses of Phú Lão, Bạch, Hướng Nghĩa villages, Hậu Tắc (后稷 / Genie of rice) was worshipped. This was not seem in other villages of the district. Whether there once took palace important farming ritual formalities of the Royal Court?

The discovery of real kinds related to Lý architecture, such as bricks and tiles, decorating ceramics, pier stands decorated with lotus petals... in Temple wharf more affirmed the background of above suppositions. However, the final conclusions on the existence of Ứng Phong Outer palace in Lý epoch in Minh Thuận territories of Vụ Bản district need evidence materials from archeological excavations.

Within the "sacred space" attached to the Outer Palace area, Lý Nhân Tông caused erection on Chương Sơn Mount (now pertaining to Yên Lợi Commune, Ý Yên district) of "Vạn Phong Thành Thiên" sacred tower which was inaugurated in 1117 under his presence. There was an important event recorded in historic annuals: on the occasion of his trip to Ứng Phong Outer Palace in 1123, King Lý Nhân

Tông instructed construction of a bridge crossing over Ba Lạt river. *DVSKIT* wrote: "Quý Mão (1123) ... winter, in October, the King arrived in Ứng Phong Outer Palace to watch harvest. Ba Lạt bridge construction featured this trip." The translator noted: "Ba Lạt river was a Red river segment running to to-day Ba Lạt estuary" [6,T.1,tr.292]. Just for this reason, many historians suggested that Lý Dynasty had caused bridge construction crossing the Red river.

According to historic geographical materials, though of no such big size as existingly, Red river downstream in Lý epoch - the segment running along Nam Định territory to the sea - might not be too small that enable bringing with the technics at the time. Also for this event *Việt Sử lược* recorded: "Construction of Phi Kiều (Flying bridge) crossing Bà Thích river". The different naming of the river recorded in the 2 historic books may be explained as a confusion in letter identification - Bà Lạt and Bà Thích may be confusely inspired, or there were 2 ways of Chinese - Vietnamese transcription of Vietnamese hieroglyph of a river on which a bridge was constructed by order of the Lý King. The interesting thing was that *Việt Sử lược* guessed differently from *DVSKIT* translator: "Bà Thích river may be the Nam Bình river that kinks Red river and runs across Nghĩa Hưng District." [12, tr.229] ,i.e. another river other than Ba Lạt river (Red river). A detail to be interested in was that the two above historic volumes quoted the presence of royal

cortege at Ứng Phong Outer Palace in this recorded event. Therefore, the bridge might be constructed nearby the outer palace site.

In respect of phonetics, Ba Lạt or Bà Thích may be the two ways of transcription of Sắt river or Ba Sắt river⁽¹⁾ running between Vụ Bản and Ý Yên districts. Such guessing had significant background, as the bridge construction occurred some years later after Chương Sơn Tower's inauguration. A bridge linking the Outer Palace area (in Vụ Bản territory) with a Ritual site (Chương Sơn Tower) complied much with Lý architectural style.

Thorough Lý epoch, Ứng Phong always was a strategical territory in all military, economical and cultural aspects, worth of a southern gateway of Thăng Long capital at the time. And in the relations with Champa, this area took a critical position. And just with this gateway position, from there, Trần's family power rose up, and though Trần epoch, this land was considered as Đại Việt second capital.

II. DISPLACEMENT OF GATE WAY TO NORTH

Red river flow with 122 billion m³/ year flow may extend to North Gulf around 40 meters of alluvial soils per year. On the other part, basis Northwest to South East flows plus

impacts from ocean waves, monsoon, wave landing directional refraction ... brought most of alluvial soils to the South of Nam Định seawaters. So, the transgression speed of Southern coastal alluvial embankments to the sea were stronger than that in the North, however, on the other hand, make Red river and Đáy river estuaries rapidly shallow, and this positional gateway gradually effaced itself since late 15th century.

In another respect, Lê Dynasty, mostly during Hồng Đức reign paid great interest in agricultural production and extension of cultivated area. Royal policies pushed up rapidly agriculture in a region originally assuming the role of contact gateway. As a result, wilderness opening up and agglomeration formation in the coastal area bustled through the XVth century.

Togetherwith peoples migration and village foundation Hồng Đức dynasty issued decrees on foundation of plantations in wild lands, coastal and river alluvial soils of North Delta in general and XVth century Nam Định in particular. In the second half of 15th century, on Nam Định coastal area appeared the 1st big size salt dike at the time, frequently and historically named Hồng Đức dike. According to “新編南定省地輿志略” (Geography book of Nam Định, Kiên Trung - Hà Lan dike look like a prolonged earth mountain ridge.

Human actions were pushing up speed of banking and filling of Red river and Đáy river estuaries, and the gateway of Ba Lạt and Đại An estuaries gradually effaced itself. Since 16th

⁽¹⁾ According to linguists, in Việt language, “S” and “L” phones may be interchangeable, so, “Sắt” may be transcribed into “Liệt” or “Lạt”. For example “sức” → “lực” (力), “Sen” → “liên” (蓮), “sáp” → “láp” (蜡), “sâu” → “lâu” (婁). Now, folklore even calls it with script name, as “Sắt” or “Ba Sắt”, which might mean that Ba Lạt or Ba Liet river as recorded in historic books is just this river.

century, the area of Van Úc and Thái Bình estuaries was becoming important. Foreign merchant boats operated trade in Phố Hiến and Thăng Long (Ké Chợ) and others in Đàng Ngoài (Northern area) via this gateways comprising mainly Chinese and South East Asian merchants. Just in these conditions, Mạc Family uprose in Nghi Dương, and appeared an eminent personage in Trung Am - Nguyễn Bình Khiêm - who "only watched high and ebb tide but knew all things at present and in the past."

By 17th Century, European merchant boat fleets operating on the East Sea caused the whole South East Asia and East Asia entering period called "Trade time".

As above mentioned, Đáy river estuary (also called Độc Bộ), though some what important but shallow from alluvial filling, caused hindrances to European big boats in an out operations. As observed by W. Dampier - an English merchant arriving in Đàng Ngoài in 17th century - Rokbo estuary (transcribed from Độc Bộ, Đáy river estuary) was only convenient for Chinese and Siamese small commercial boats. On 17th-18th century European navigation maps, there was a Palace name which in their opinion was that of an important river, that "most of European merchant boats shall run through". This palace name was DOMEA. Most of Vietnam foreign trade researches highly appreciated Domea important position, not only by its gateway linking big urban centers such as Thăng Long, Phố Hiến, but because the area once became a

bustling trade center. Until the 17th century second half, this center remained prosperous.

1. Domea size and role in trade time

As described by W. Dampier, by his time, there were up to around 100 houses. A thing worth of interest was that in a same paragraph, Dampier sometimes wrote it "village" and sometimes "City": Whether at 17th century end, was Domea in the "urbanisation processus"? Also, W. Dampier description included a small but important detail that was "*the village laid on the bank, much closely to the water line so that waves will beat against the walls in tide rise*" [14, tr.16]. Thus, these houses possibly were constructed in a relatively sound way, because earthed walls may not sustain themselves against tide waves. Also, it would be worth of asserting that a street with 100 houses was equivalent to a Chinese street in Hội An by 1695 [1, tr.183]. European merchant boats strongly influencing on Domea development pertained to Netherlands East India Company (VOC). Intimate relationships were established there, so that they "*may be comfortable as at their home*" (W. Dampier wrote). Holland sailors instructed local inhabitants gardening and horticulture skills to supply salad dishes to them. It's too regrettable that we have not opportunity to approach Netherlands East India company documents now, for more information.

As described by European merchants, Domea really became a Preport, where transshipment was done from big merchant ships to local smaller boats, then the goods

were transported to Phố Hiến and Kẻ Chợ by the hired same. Also, there appeared commercial exchanges.

Till late 17th century, Domea port in and out operations were duly organised: foreign merchant ships frequently berthed at around 3 miles from the estuaries, a sufficient distance for visual sight from inland, and cannon fire occurred in foggy days. Pilot small boats will pilot them running the correct stream. Pilots were just fishermen living on an estuary named "Bat Cha". Now, in the southeast of Tiên Lãng district 4 km from the estuary, a village bears Bạch Sa name, pertaining to Bắc Hưng commune. Peoples there traditionally involve in pilot and port operation career. It might be "Bat Cha" said about by W. Dampier and European merchants.

In 18th century, Trinh viceroys gradually implemented interdiction of foreigners' entry to the capital and even their commerce at Phố Hiến, and Domea became a more critical international trade rendez-vous. French Richard in his book described Domea as the 3rd major trade city of Dang Ngoai after Thang Long capital and Phố Hiến: *"There was a city worth entirely of its name "Kẻ Chợ", sited on longitude North 21", this is the capital of the Realm... After the capital, Hean (Phố Hiến) is the biggest city of Đàng Ngoài... 5 or 6 miles from the estuary, there was a city called Domea, smaller than Phố Hiến, but very well-known for foreigners as it laid in a bay formed by a river flow opposite to it. They (the Europeans. The author) dropped anchor and*

only there they could set bases for trade" [8,tr.715]. There was no another city described by Richard. So, after around a century from where Domea was cited in his story about his trip to Bắc Hà (Tonquin) published in 1688, this place was strongly developed so that Europeans called it a city where they set bases for trade.

With such a continuous through centuries development, Domea itself and surroundings substantially influenced on the economy and the culture of the lands between Thái Bình and Văn Úc rivers. This explained why on world navigation map of 17th century European countries, Domea was recorded as an important place name.

2. Where was Domea ?

This is not a simple issue. French scholars also consumed efforts to study its location. Ch. Maybon in 1916 guessed it to be in Tien Lang territory. Till 1939, H. Bernard suggested more concretely that it was Đông Xuyên village, now pertaining to Đoàn Lập commune, Tiên Lãng district. Also, Domea was optionally a variant of Đồ Mía place name (Hải Dương) [11]... It is regrettable that above guesses only were limited to the reduction from the similarity between place names.

In order to determine Domea location, we began from a map drawn by a Britain navigator, then re-drawn by Jacques Nicolas Berlin in 1755 and named "Carte du Cours de la Rivière de Tonkin depuis Ca-ho jusqu'à la mer". Our used map was printed in the "Early

Map of South East Asia" [9]. This surely was the map of Thái Bình and Vân Úc estuaries, because the two place names Mũi Hổ (Pointe des Tigres) and Đảo Ngọc (Ile des Perles) might be defined as pertaining to Đồ Sơn - Hải Phòng. There was a document containing critical informations for determining Domea location. These were detailed descriptions in the cited book of W. Dampier, the man on board of a British merchant boat arriving in Kê Chợ via Đàng Ngoài riverway in around July 1688. The followings shall be taken into account.

- The estuary through which W. Dampier's boat run to a place from 20 leagues from Rokbo (Độc Bộ) in the North East, i.e. over 100 km, was just 17th century Thái Bình river estuary.

- The boat berthed for waiting pilot at a place distant around 3 miles from the estuary and of the same distant from a small island named Ile des perles Pearl Island. This is just Đảo Ngọc (Pearl Island) or Hòn Dấu of Đồ Sơn. On the map, this location was on around 106°46' longitude.

- From there, an inland may be clearly seen: this was Núi Voi (Elephant Mount) This was a landmark as directional orientation for foreign merchant ships.

- Merchant boats after running along a river of around 2-mile wide would turn on a smaller canal of half a mile wide. From anchorago and berthing place for waiting the pilot boat, the boat would run 5 or 6 leagues and pass Domea village. On the map, it was on

around latitude 20°45', which corresponds now to Tiên Lãng Town North.

During field survey in some villages of Tiên Lãng district (Hải Phòng) we paid high interest in some villages in Tiên Lãng district North, close to Thái Bình river: this was An Hổ of Khởi Nghĩa commune. There, "Ship wreck" novels still hand down ... and these on trade prosperity and on a time of "riches and money abundance" of villagers (An Hổ money, Phú Kê feast) still au subjects of talks. As to place name, local inhabitants named the area "Mè". "Mè head, Úc tail" means a word of Tiên Lãng peoples saying about their native land (That means the place begins by "Mè" and ends by "Úc".) Quý Cao ferry landing also was called "Đò Mè" (Me Wharf). There were traces of an ancient river flow from An Hổ down to Đoàn Lập. These may be the canal traces once drawn on the map. On the other bank of the ancient river was Hà Đới village. Just near the river bank, remains a temple originally erected under Lê period for workship of Trần Quốc Thành, a Trần dynasty general, corresponding to "Pagoda" marked on the map.

An Hổ village was also named An Dụ, and till early 19th century, was a precinct. There exists a rising area close by Thái Bình river dike where local peoples cultivate vegetables, and where remain traces with names evoking commercial down towns, trade rendez-vous such as Chùa Vàng (Golden Pagoda) Cầu Bạc (Silver Bridge), and shrines workshipping ceramic merchants with dense ceramic stratas. Upon many ground studies, in the beginning of

July 2002, archeologic experts had caused digging of 2 explorative holes (10 m² per hole) and collected thousands of high quality ceramic fragments (Chu Đậu ceramic, Chinese ceramic) and architectural ruins relics (brick, tile, pier stand, terracotta icons...). Before this explorative digging, local peoples were proposed to drain an ancient pond on the field, where we collected many Chu Đậu ceramic fragments, particularly a bowl bottom with a dragon figure surrounded by scripts determined as Thai scripts. Some Thai studies experts defined as: "A dragon in the waters. Return time" (To long pay tây nậm. Tây Tao).

Carefully considered in many aspects, historic experts and archeologists supposed that An Hồ village took a critical position on the trade route from Thái Bình estuary to Phố Hiến and Thăng Long, and that Domea location recorded on European maps might be this land area. It is hoped that a furtherly more extended archeological excavation may discover more sufficient evidences of the existence of an ancient city which was effaced away within around 200 recent years.

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