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### Ha Tien Trade Port in International and Regional Trade Relations in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> Centuries

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#### Abstract:

Ha Tien, which covered a vast area of southern Vietnam in the past, was the location of one of the most important Vietnamese trade ports during the 17th and 18th centuries. Owing to the trading expertise of Mac Cuu and the Minh Huong people (descendants of Ming loyalist immigrants who settled in South Vietnam during the 16th and 18th centuries) and the strategic vision and open policies of the Nguyen lords, a large trade network was established, connecting Ha Tien with other busy trade ports in Vietnam and abroad. This achievement also sprang from the fact that the Ha Tien trade port was founded during "the Age of Commerce," when systems of international seaports were set up and developed vigorously. Although studies on the Ha Tien trading port were mentioned in Vietnamese and foreign language works, those works just wrote the name of the trade port without deeply analyzing its position and role in the regional and international trade system. Therefore, the article focuses on in-depth analysis, clarifying the contributions of the port to the trade activities of Vietnam and the world in the XVII–XVIII centuries.

**Keywords:** Ha Tien, Mac family, *Đàng Trong* (Cochinchina), maritime trade, Age of Commerce.

### 17 世纪和 18 世纪国际和区域贸易关系中的哈田贸易港

#### 摘要:

河田过去曾覆盖越南南部的广大地区，是 17 和 18 世纪越南最重要的贸易港口之一。由于麦库和明香人（16 世纪和 18 世纪在南越定居的明朝忠诚移民的后裔）的贸易专长以及阮领主的战略眼光和开放政策，建立了庞大的贸易网络，将河田与越南和国外其他繁忙的贸易港口连接起来。这一成就也源于哈田商埠始建于“商业时代”，当时国际海港体系建立并蓬勃发展。虽然越南文和外国著作中都提到了对河田通商口岸的研究，但这些作品只是写了通商口岸的名称，没有深入分析其在区域和国际贸易体系中的地位和作用。

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因此，本文着重深入分析，阐明港口在十七至十八世纪对越南和世界贸易活动的贡献。

**关键词：**哈田，苹果电脑家族，董仲（交趾支那），海上贸易，商业时代。

## 1. Introduction

In the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, commodity trade expanded aggressively, especially after the “*Age of Discovery*” (15<sup>th</sup> to mid-17<sup>th</sup> centuries). As the maritime routes connecting three oceans, “the Maritime Silk Road” linked East Asia with South Asia and West Asia and resulted in the “*Age of Commerce*” (Ried, 1998). It promoted the participation of Vietnam’s trade ports within the international and regional trade system. During this period, in addition to Hoi An and Pho Hien trading posts, Ha Tien, established later (in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century), actively participated in international and regional trade activities. This paper, therefore, focuses on outlining the exchange and trade activities between the Ha Tien trade port and other ports in Vietnam, the region, and globally. Furthermore, based on studying and analyzing the trade activities, the author would like to provide an objective and comprehensive perspective on the role and position of Ha Tien trade port in the international and regional trade networks during the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries.

## 2. Establishment and Development of Ha Tien Trade Port

In the past, Ha Tien covered a vast expanse of land, including the entire areas of present-day Kien Giang, Ca Mau, and Bac Lieu provinces, and a small part of An Giang and Soc Trang provinces. Under the current geographical administration, Ha Tien belongs to Kien Giang province.

The establishment and development of the port of Ha Tien related closely to the policy of the Nguyen lords in *Đàng Trong* (lit. inner land, the region in the south of Vietnam, ruled by the Nguyen clan against the Trinh lords in the north) and the progress made by the Mac clan, particularly the outstanding role played by Mac Cuu, also spelled Mok Kui (1655–1735), and, subsequently, his son, Mac Thien Tu (1708–1780). According to official historical documents, Mac Cuu was born in Ligou commune, Kanghai district, Leizhou prefecture, Guangdong province, China. He was a courtier in the Ming dynasty. After overthrowing the dynasty, he refused to swear allegiance to the subsequent Qing dynasty. In 1680, he fled southwards with his family, eventually settling in the Ha Tien region. He started to carry out a policy of land reclamation in the area with the approval of Lord Nguyen Phuc Tan (1648–1687). Since Mac Cuu’s time, Ha Tien’s history has been well documented. In the “*Geographical Description of Gia Dinh*” (*Gia Định thành thông chí*), Trinh Hoai Duc, a Vietnamese historian, wrote: “Initially, it was established by a person named Mac Cuu, who came from Ligou commune, Kanghai district, Leizhou prefecture,

Guangdong province of the Great Ming. He did not swear allegiance to the Qing dynasty after the Ming dynasty was overthrown. Thus, in the 19<sup>th</sup> year under the reign of the Kangxi Emperor (1680), he kept his hair customs and fled south. Realizing people from China, Chenla, Java, and other lands, who gathered to gamble in the casino, had to pay a gambling tax called “*hoa chi*,” he bought the right to impose the tax. Furthermore, he also found buried treasure. As a result, he became rich. He recruited Viet wanderers to settle and build seven villages in Phu Quoc, Lung Ky, Can Bot, Vung Thom, Rach Gia, and Ca Mau” (Duc, 1998, pp. 200–201). In the “*Annals of the Mac Family*” (*Mac Thị Gia Phả*), however, it is written as follows: “In the late period of the Ming dynasty, great disturbances took place in China. Grand Duke Mac, with the given name Cuu, born in Leizhou on the eighth day of the fifth lunar month in the year of Yi Wei (*Ất Mùi*), in the ninth year of the Yongli reign (1655), could not stand the disturbances caused by Hu invaders (Manchu), so he crossed the sea to the south. The event took place in the year of Xin Hai (*Tân Hợi*) (1671). That year, Grand Duke Mac was 17 years old” (Dinh, 2005, p. 14). There are still different opinions about when exactly Mac Cuu moved to Chenla (Vietnamese: *Chân Lạp*), but what is definite is that he came to the land of Ha Tien in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century, at the time of the transition from the Ming to Qing dynasties in China.

As an experienced merchant, Mac Cuu saw the advantages of establishing a trade port in the area for domestic and regional exchange and trading activities. According to the “*Annals of the Mac Family*,” “the Grand Duke spent days and nights enticing people from foreign countries and encouraging them to come for business. As a result, the land became crowded with merchant boats and ships. Viet, Tang, Liao, and Man people came to resettle there in droves. The population grew rapidly. Day by day, the reputation of the Grand Duke became more illustrious” (Dinh, 2005, p. 15). After settling there, Mac Cuu paid great attention not only to agricultural development but also to the benefits brought by the sea and the trade port. Thus, he made every effort to build a trade port of international stature.

In 1708, Mac Cuu switched allegiance to the Nguyen lord, and Ha Tien’s land was merged into *Đàng Trong*’s territory. After submitting to the Nguyen Lords and with their support, Mac Cuu focused his efforts on building a defensive system, strengthening an impressive compound, and recruiting talented people. In the same year, Lord Nguyen Phuc Chu conferred upon him the role of Commandant (Tong Binh) of Ha Tien and the title of Marquess Cuu Ngoc (*Cửu Ngọc hầu*). He built a military garrison (called *Mang Khâm* by Chenla people, *Phương Thành* by Viet

people), and more people came to settle there (Duc, 1972, p. 80). Mac Cuu and, subsequently, Mac Thien Tu, his son and successor, worked hard to make Ha Tien trade port the most important one on the trade route crossing Phu Quoc Bay.

In the "Geographical Description of Gia Dinh," Trinh Hoai Duc described Ha Tien Town and Ha Tien trading port as follows: "Ha Tien defense citadel faced southeast (the Xun trigram) with Binh Son Mountain as its back support and To Chau Mountain as its front screen. The high sea was seen as a large moat in the south, and Dong Ho as the front. There were earthen ramparts on three sides of the citadel. The rampart running from Duong Chu to the right gate was 112.5 *trượng* (*trượng* is an ancient unit of length in Vietnam, equivalent to 4 m) long, while the rampart running from the right gate to the left gate was 153.5 *trượng* long. The length of the rampart running from the left entrance to the boat-building workshop (*Xưởng Thuyền*) and then to Dong Ho was 308.5 *trượng*. All those ramparts were four *thước* (*thước* is an ancient unit of length in Vietnam, equivalent to 0.4m) in height and seven *thước* thick. The trench was 10 *thước* in width. An office building is located in the center of the citadel. A house called "*vọng cung*," where people bow to the absent king, is in front of the office building with military camps on the right and the left. In the front yard, there is a bridge called Tan Thach. The Envoy Reception and the Treasury are found on the left and right of the front yard, respectively. The Defence Governor's Palace is located at the base of Ngu Ho (Five Tigers) Mountain. A town market was opened up to the left of "*vọng cung*." Quan Thanh Temple was built to the left of the office building. Tam Bao (Three Jewels) Pagoda was located behind the office building. The Mac ancestral temple was built to the left of the pagoda. The market of the east town looked down the lake port, with a fish farm nearby. To the north of the Treasury, there is a shrine called the "Councillor Shrine" (*Miếu Hội đồng*), due north of which a ship dock is located. The citadel is divided into specific areas by main roads. To the left of Quan De Temple is Dieu Kieu Street. In the port, a wooden bridge crosses the sea to Dai Kim's islet. Eastwards from Dieu Kieu Street, there is Old Market Street. Further eastwards is "Progenitor Market" (*Phố chợ Tổ sư*) and then a large main street. All of those were built previously by Mac Ton for trade activities. The citadel is crisscrossed with crowded streets. Viet, Chinese, Chenla, and Java people together gathered and settled there. Many boats and ships sailed in and out on the river and the sea. It is a coastal hub of commerce" (Duc, 1998, pp. 200-201).

Mac Cuu built seven villages along the coast of Phu Quoc Bay. This became the foundation for establishing markets and domestic and international trading activity hubs. Of those markets, My Duc,

Hoang Giang, and Rach Gia were principal. Apart from the markets, a system of seaports also was developed. Due to establishing these networks and the diversity of local commodities, trading activity was developed in Ha Tien and different regions of Tonkin (the name for northern Vietnam in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries) and Cochinchina. Domestic merchants, especially those from Cochinchina, considered Ha Tien a great store and a guaranteed source of goods in times of famine.

After settling in Ha Tien, Mac Cuu paid attention to agricultural development and the benefits of the sea and associated seaports, with a view to domestic and international trade in local products.

During that time, he made every effort to build Ha Tien into an economic, political, and cultural center as a trade port of international stature. Thus, thanks to Mac Cuu's clear-sighted vision, a favorable geographical position, and abundant natural resources, Ha Tien flourished as a busy international trading port. In addition to welcoming cargo vessels to Ha Tien, he proactively dispatched merchant boats from Ha Tien to other seaports around the country and the region. Consequently, a large trade network was established, connecting Ha Tien trade port with other domestic and international trade ports.

### 3. Trade Activities of Ha Tien Trade Port in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> Centuries

Ha Tien was located at an intersection of trade routes, with sources of goods and different political projects, attracting streams of migrating populations and their diverse cultures. The latter included people from mountainous areas in Laos and Cambodia, Malays from the Malay Peninsula and the Indonesian Archipelago, Thais from the west, different Chinese (Hoa) groups from areas around the bay, and Viet people who arrived during the process of Southward expansion. Ha Tien was positioned at the intersection of one of Southeast Asia's most ancient trade routes, connecting the Indian Ocean with the East Sea (the South China Sea) via the Thai Canal (also known as the Kra Canal) in the first centuries AD. The area was part of the ancient kingdom of Funan with its prosperous Oc Eo seaport, the kingdom's most important trade port at that time. Oc Eo was the largest trading center in Southeast Asia and a commercial hub in the region and globally for many centuries. With significant links in the east area of the West Sea, the port had close ties with India, West Asia, many important trade ports and economic centers in Southeast Asia, and the Chinese market (Vietnam Association of Historical Sciences, 2008). Owing to a favorable location and Mac Cuu's experienced management and commercial skill, Ha Tien quickly developed into an important regional and inter-

regional trade port, promoting trade activities and connecting a network with other trade ports in Vietnam, East Asia, and globally.

### 3.1. Domestic Trade Activities

Trade and exchange relations were established between Ha Tien and many other areas in Vietnam, especially Bien Hoa Province and the former neighboring province of Gia Dinh. This can be seen through the marriage of Mac Cuu with Bui Thi Lam, a Viet woman from Dong Mon District, Bien Hoa Province, and that of his younger sister with Tran Dai Dinh, the son of Chinese general Chen Shangchuan (*Trần Thượng Xuyên*), who contributed greatly to land reclamation and territorial expansion into Dong Nai and Gia Dinh Provinces. In 1679, after the military movement "Oppose the Manchus and Resurrect the Ming" failed in China, Chen Shangchuan led more than 3,000 soldiers and their families, sailing across the sea on 50 ships to Dai Viet. He and his followers pledged allegiance to the Nguyen lords. Blessed with high organizational skills Chen Shangchuan and others were asked by Lord Nguyen Phuc Tan to move south to Cochinchina. Here they contributed greatly to the development of the Dong Nai - Gia Dinh region. This evolved into a crowded business and economic center. At that time, the Dong Nai - Gia Dinh area known as Great Town Nong Nai (*Nông Nại Đại Phố*), also called Island Town (*Cù Lao Phố*), became one of the most prosperous regional and international trade ports in South Vietnam. It can be said that the aforementioned marital relationships linked Ha Tien trade port with Dong Nai-Gia Dinh, resulting in a network of rice markets in Southwest and Southeast Vietnam. In 1735, after devoting 27 years to developing Ha Tien, Mac Cuu passed away. His son, Mac Thien Tu, later known as Mac Thien Tich, succeeded his father and continued to govern this prosperous area. Mac Thien Tu was granted more power by the Nguyen lords. For example, he became Lord Commandant (*đô đốc*) of Ha Tien, and three ships holding Nguyen lord's certificate (*Long bài*) were made available for him to perform trade activities with Hoi An and other international trade ports without having to pay taxes. In addition, he was allowed to cast coinage. In the "Miscellaneous Chronicles of the Pacified Frontier" (*Phủ biên tạp lục*), Le Quy Don (1726-1784) wrote, "In addition to the three ships bearing the lord's badge allowing trade activities with a tax exemption, the merchant boats coming from Ha Tien to Hoi An had to pay a very little tax. During this period, a merchant boat coming from Ha Tien to Hoi An only had to pay 300 *quan* (a unit of currency in Vietnam in the past) arrival tax and 30 *quan* departure tax, while Western boats had to pay 8,000 and 800 *quan*, respectively. Meanwhile, a boat coming from Guangdong (China) to Hoi An had to pay 3,000 *quan* of arrival tax and 800 *quan* of departure tax. It meant that the tax imposed on a merchant boat from Ha Tien was equivalent to 0.037% and 0.1% of that

imposed on a merchant boat from the West and Guangdong respectively" (Don, 2008, p. 53). This demonstrates the preferential policy of the Nguyen lords on their close ties with Ha Tien and the proactiveness of expanding Ha Tien's trade with other seaports.

The products traded between Ha Tien and other regions in the country were largely rice, beeswax, elephant tusks, and forest products, which became Ha Tien's main lines of business at that time. Local merchants, especially those in *Đàng Trong*, considered Ha Tien a storehouse on which the people could rely against starvation. Traders also imported certain products in short supply in Ha Tien, such as sugar, black pepper, gold, gems, and amber. At the same time, they imported products that they could sell to other countries for profit. In conclusion, the authorities proactively incorporated Ha Tien into the network of trade ports in Cochinchina, establishing a close connection from Ha Tien to Dong Nai - Gia Dinh and further up the coast to Hoi An.

### 3.2. International Trade Activities

Ha Tien trade port was an important link in the east of the West Sea, blossoming into a regional and inter-regional central trade port in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. This was possible due to its favorable position overlooking the Gulf of Thailand, a busy trade route and gateway between Vietnam, Cambodia, Thailand, and Myanmar, and Mac Cuu's trade-promoting policies. As such, the port was able to satisfy the demand for trade with China and other countries in Southeast and Northeast Asia.

At that time, Ha Tien, known as "Little Guangzhou," was an attractive destination for merchant boats from the Malay Peninsula, Sumatra, Java, Thailand, India, Burma (now Myanmar), Guangzhou, Fujian, etc.

In order to increase the variety of products for trade, Mac Cuu's local government expanded the trade network by building additional ports. According to the "Geographical Description of Gia Dinh," these included:

(1) Can Bot port located 160 Chinese miles (*dặm*) (the Chinese mile is known as a *li*) to the west of Ha Tien Defence Governor's Palace. The port was 49 *trượng* in width and five *thước* in depth. It was also the place where the Java Defence Department was set up. In this location, there are market streets where Vietnamese, Chinese, Chenla, and Javanese gather to do business. A guesthouse also opened where Siamese visitors often stayed;

(2) Kien Giang (Rach Gia) port located over 193 Chinese miles to the east of the Ha Tien Defence Governor's Palace. It was situated west of Kien Giang Province and was crowded with merchant boats and busy market streets;

(3) Dai Mon (Great Gate) port located in the east of Kien Giang. It was 26 Chinese miles from the Ha Tien Defence Governor's Palace and connected to the Kien

Giang River. It was a residential area for local fishers;

(4) Doc Hoang (Ong Doc) port was four *trượng* in width and 10 *thước* in depth. Located 107 Chinese miles to the west of Long Xuyen, the port was crowded with market streets and merchant boats. After sailing 84 Chinese miles from the port, one could reach the Khoa Giang River junction and then the open sea;

(5) Hao Ky (Ghenh Hau) port, located in the east area of Long Xuyen County, was 120.5 Chinese miles to the east of Ha Tien Defence Governor's Palace. It joined the upstream port of Bo De in the southwest and Doc Hoang port in the northwest (Duc, 1998, pp. 70-72).

To encourage local and foreign traders to do business in Ha Tien, Mac Cuu implemented a tax-exemption policy for merchant boats arriving at Ha Tien trade port on the 12<sup>th</sup> day of the 12<sup>th</sup> lunar month (the birth date of his son, Mac Thien Tu). Besides promoting trade activities, the local Mac government was proactive in establishing fleets of merchant boats for overseas maritime trade. For example, in 1728 and 1729, Mac Cuu sent Luu Ve Quan and Quynh Tap Quan to Japan on business. As a result, the Tokugawa Shogunate (also known as the Edo Shogunate 1600-1868) granted them a certificate (*tín bài*) to carry out business. In 1729, another team of merchant boats also sailed from Ha Tien to China to establish trade relations (Xueguo, 2010, p. 91).

Regarding the trade relations between Ha Tien and other trade ports in the region and worldwide, there was rich product diversity. According to the record written by Bowyear, a British merchant, trading boats from Southeast Asia in the 17th century often carried a wide variety of products to Cochinchina, including betel, redwood (used to dye cloth), paint, nacre (mother of pearl), elephant tusks, tin, lead, and rice from Thailand; orpiment (used for pigment), benzoin, Amomum, wax, paint, nacre, redwood, pine resin, buffalo skin, deerskin and tendons, elephant tusks, and rhinoceros horns from Cambodia; silver, eucalyptus wood, betel, red and white spandex fabric, and red dyes from Batavia (capital of the Dutch East Indies); silver, sulfur, redwood, shells, tobacco, wax, and deer tendons from the Mani Peninsula. Meanwhile, the products Cochinchina exported included: gold, iron, yarn, silk, Aloe, myrrh, sugar, rock sugar, swallow's nests, black pepper, and cotton" (Van Kim, 2006). In the "Dai Nam Comprehensive Encyclopaedia" (*Đại Nam nhất thống chí*), it is written that commodities that could be brought into Ha Tien were: "silk, carapaces, tortoiseshell, black amber, beeswax, honey, flowered sedge mats, Aloe, black pepper, swallow's nests, sea cucumbers, swim bladders, fins, and fish sauce" (National Historiographical Office of the Nguyen Dynasty, 1971, p. 33). Of all these commodities, black amber was considered a precious

and popular item with merchants from China, Thailand, and Malaysia. In the "Miscellaneous Chronicles of the Pacified Frontier," Le Quy Don wrote: "Black amber was abundant in Ha Tien. It looked like a lump of copper but had a black color like iron. It was said that one could avoid harmful effects of the wind if carrying black amber; it was very convenient to use black amber to make rosaries" (Don, 2008, p. 238).

In addition to the supply of agricultural, aquatic, and forest products, the Ha Tien trade port was an important source of tin for merchants from Guangzhou. Although tin was not exploited in Ha Tien, it was in abundant supply at the trade port due to commercial activities with other countries in the region. According to the "Guangzhou Clerical Records" of the Dutch East India Company, much of the tin exported to Guangzhou was via the Ha Tien trade port.

From 1758 to 1774, Guangzhou imported 83,267 *đàm* (1 *đàm* 担 is 50 kg)<sup>1</sup> of tin from trade ports in Southeast Asia, of which 24,684 *đàm*, 30%, were imported directly from Ha Tien. In 1769 alone, Guangzhou imported 6,000 *đàm* from the port. In 1774, the amount of tin carried by a sailing boat from Ha Tien to Guangzhou was 1,400 *đàm*; additional amounts of tin were carried by two other boats from Ha Tien to Guangzhou. The total amount of tin carried from Ha Tien to Guangzhou was estimated to be 5,000 *đàm* in that year (Tana & Van Dyke, 2006, pp. 190-209). The yearly amounts of tin imported by Guangzhou from Southeast Asia are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Guangzhou tin imports from Southeast Asia (1758-1774)  
(Tana & Van Dyke, 2006, pp. 190-209)

Year	Siam	Passiack	Cancao	Palembang	Terengganu	Macao
1758			7,000			
1762				5,000		1,500
1763				10,000		
1764				8,000		
1765				10,000		
1766						1,500
1767		3,163	1,984	11,000		
1768	100	1,000	2,700			
1769			6,000			
1770			2,000			
1773					320	
1774			5,000	7,000		

Note: Unit: *đàm* (50 kg)

Table 1 shows amounts of tin imported from trade ports in Southeast Asia to Guangzhou from 1758 to 1774. The amount of tin imported from the Ha Tien trade port, referred to as "*Cancao*" in the table, makes up 30% of the total amount of tin imported by Guangzhou and is ranked second, after the amount of tin imported from Palembang<sup>2</sup>, which was the largest center of tin production in Southeast Asia. This partly

<sup>1</sup> *Đàm* (担) is an ancient Chinese unit of weight equivalent to 50 kg.

<sup>2</sup> Palembang is a city in the Indonesian province (Wikipedia, 2022a) of South Sumatra (Wikipedia, 2022b), presently located in the west of Indonesia. It was one of the oldest metropolitan areas and used to be the capital of a monarchy with great maritime power.

demonstrates the role of the Ha Tien trade port in the international and regional trade networks. It not only provided locally produced commodities but also played an intermediary role in providing commodities produced in other countries.

According to Le Quy Don in the "Miscellaneous Chronicles of the Pacified Frontier," in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, trade ports in *Đàng Trong* were always seen as a destination for international merchant boats from Shanghai, Guangdong, Fujian, Hainan (China), Japan, Thailand, the Philippines, and the Netherlands. Such vessels came to Ha Tien trade port not only to buy commodities but also to sell products in response to market demand in *Đàng Trong* and other regional areas. In order to profit from selling commodities bought in other countries, Western merchants sold goods in *Đàng Trong*, such as Japanese silver and weapons, Chinese silk, porcelain, traditional medicine, Western woolen clothes, cannons, crystal, glass, and so on. Meanwhile, the products they bought in *Đàng Trong* included: porcelain, silk, cotton, spices, food ingredients, sugar cane, and local forest products.

It can be concluded that the diversity of products and favorable natural conditions of Ha Tien contributed to making it one of the busiest trade ports of *Đàng Trong* during the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. Its prosperity was a magnet for international and local merchants and was considered an ideal destination for those who wanted to start a business. Throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Ha Tien's trading activity turned the port into a dynamic hub attracting merchant boats from many regions such as *Đàng Trong*, Malaysia, Java, India, Thailand, China, Japan, and Portugal. Such activity accelerated Ha Tien's integration in the overall development of the "Age of Asian Commerce."

#### **4. Position of Ha Tien Trade Port in International and Regional Trade Networks**

Ha Tien trade port was established during the "Age of Commerce," during the establishment and development of international maritime trade networks (University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Hanoi National University, 2007). Thus, the trade port rapidly integrated and assumed an important role in international and domestic trade, becoming one of the busiest ports in the ancient and early modern period. Although Ha Tien trade port was neither as busy nor developed as its Hoi An counterpart, it was blessed with certain advantages. It was situated in a propitious place by Phu Quoc Bay with abundant supplies of products and the support of the Mac governors' trade-focused policies. As a result, Ha Tien became a commercial center and played a significant role in the economic development of the southern part of *Đàng Trong*. It also solidified its position in the trading network with domestic and international trade ports.

From the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the Southeast Asian sea region was an active center of maritime trade. Western

capitalist powers came to the region to buy spices, precious stones, and metals. In 1511, Portugal captured Malacca, seizing control of the strategic trading strait, before moving on to Guangzhou. Following the Portuguese, Spanish and Dutch occupied Manila and Batavia, respectively. Many significant changes to the maritime trade routes in Southeast Asia were made (Pho, 1994, p. 103). Ha Tien trade port was built along the Dong Ho lagoon, looking out over Phu Quoc Bay, giving it advantages to develop into an international trade port. Phu Quoc Bay, also called the West Sea (*Biển Tây*) or Southwest Sea (*Biển Tây Nam*), was a semi-enclosed sea with access to the South China Sea (*Biển Đông*) and connected to the Indian Ocean by the Malacca and Sunda Straits, to the northwest and southeast of Sumatra, respectively. These straits were lifelines for maritime transport connecting the Western world with the Eastern world, especially after the Maritime Silk Road was formed in the 7<sup>th</sup> century. In reality, there is also the Kra Isthmus to the west of the bay, situated on the narrowest strip of land in the South of the Malay Peninsula. Over the centuries, merchant boats from India, Persia, and West Asia transported goods from the Bay of Bengal through the Kra Canal to Phu Quoc Bay. It can be said that the latter was rich in potential, providing essential routes for cultural and economic exchange between countries in the region.

Therefore, the Ha Tien trade port was an important post in the eastern part of the West Sea, strategically positioned on the Asian maritime trade route, running along the Vietnamese coast to Guangzhou (China) or Luzon (Philippines). In addition to its advantageous location, Ha Tien was blessed with an abundant supply of local products and goods. Moreover, the people in Ha Tien were experienced in exploiting and turning their products into high-value goods for trade. For example, they knew how to make tallow for white candles, which were very popular with Chinese, Thai, and Malaysian merchants. With these advantages, Ha Tien participated in trade activities and played an important role in domestic, regional, and international trade.

Regarding Vietnam's economy, Ha Tien was seen as the southernmost trade port of *Đàng Trong* and an ideal destination for merchants from all over the country. With advantages on land and sea, the agricultural knowledge of the Viet, Khmer, and Hoa communities, under the leadership of the Mac family, especially under Mac Cuu and Mac Thien Tu, who had the minds of traders and a policy attaching importance to trading, coupled with the protection and support of the Nguyen lords, Ha Tien quickly became an economic center and an important trade port in the southern part of Vietnam in the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

It became a place for agricultural supply and trade between regions such as Gia Dinh, Dong Nai, Hoi An, and Thanh Ha. As recorded in Nguyen dynasty's historical documents, there was a network of fairly crowded markets in Ha Tien, including My Duc

market in Hai Chau District with crowded shops, where Vietnamese and Chinese people gathered to do business; Sai Phu market in Kien Giang District, also called Rach Gia market, with its bustling streets and merchant boats; Hoang Giang market in Long Xuyen District, with densely populated streets and comings and goings of merchant boats; and San Chim market in Dong An and Vinh Hoa Villages, Kien Giang District. In addition, there is a haven for birds in the area that attracts thousands of sea birds yearly during the breeding season. When the birds molted, their feathers were collected and sold to Chinese merchants. This was called "a bird-garden tax" (Dai Nam Comprehensive Encyclopaedia, 1997, p. 28).

Regarding regional trade, Ha Tien was important in supplying rice and connecting trade networks between regions. It was located between two major rice-producing hubs: the Mekong Delta and Chao Phraya Delta (also called Mae Nam Delta). Therefore, in addition to local produce, Ha Tien became one of the most important trade ports for rice supply in Southeast Asia in the 18<sup>th</sup> century (Tana & Van Dyke, 2006, pp. 190-209). It was regarded as "the most profuse rice storehouse in the east land of Asia," on which Malays, the Thais, and people in *Đàng Trong*, also called *Nam Hà* (lit. South of the River) would rely for food when facing the threat of starvation.

It was not only an entrepôt, as recorded by Dutch merchants, but also a place where merchants would come to exchange black pepper for salt and rice. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Ha Tien was also a trade center in the lower section of the Mekong River with connections to trade networks not only with the Cardamom Mountains, the Laos Highlands, and Cambodia but also along the trade systems along the canals and the flood plains of the west side of the Bassac River (*Sông Hậu*). In world trade, Ha Tien was seen by Southeast Asian merchants and some Western merchants as a not to be missed destination on the East-West trade route along the Maritime Silk Road. Paul A. Van Dyke, an American scholar, confirmed that Ha Tien had been an important entrepôt for goods exchange between Guangzhou and Southeast Asia in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, based on the records kept by Swedish and Dutch merchants. Around 30 merchant boats would leave Guangzhou yearly, heading to Southeast Asia. About 85-90% of those boats came to Ha Tien and Hoi An (Quang Nam Province) (Tana & Van Dyke, 2006, pp. 190-209). Ha Tien was highly regarded in Western and Chinese documents in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. In a Chinese document titled "*Huangchao Wenxian Tongkao*" (Dynastic Comprehensive Examination of Literature), Ha Tien was called "*Gangkou Guo*" (*cảng khẩu quốc*): "it was a port of a small kingdom in Nanhai with a territory of 100 square Chinese miles. Local people favored literature and Confucian books. There were a Confucius temple and a school for young people.

Local products include sea cucumbers, dried fish, meat, and shrimp. In the 7<sup>th</sup> year under the reign of the Yongzheng Emperor (1729), a maritime trade route of 7,200 Chinese miles in length connecting the realm to Guangdong was established" (Duc, 1973, p. 38). In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Ha Tien was so prosperous that it was not only well-known in China but also in Europe (Gaspardone, 1952, p. 363). Based on these records and judging by the number of merchant boats coming to Ha Tien, it is clear to see how high the Chinese merchants regarded Ha Tien's position and role in international and regional trade.

Thus, for all the reasons previously mentioned - advantageous position, abundant goods, the Mac family's policy placing importance on trading, and support of the Nguyen lords, many people from within Vietnam and abroad were drawn to Ha Tien for long-term settlement and business opportunities.

All these factors created the foundations for establishing and developing Ha Tien as a trade port, making it a political, economic, and cultural center of the region and significantly helping develop Vietnam's trade. It was one of the favored destinations of domestic and international merchants and an important trade post connecting Vietnam with Southeast Asia and the world in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries.

## 5. Conclusions

Through the presentation above, the article has clarified the positions and roles of Ha Tien trading port in Vietnam, the region, and the world, specifically in the following points:

*Firstly*, Ha Tien was seen as a very important entrepôt by Southeast Asian and Western merchants journeying along the Maritime Silk Road. Meanwhile, it was not only the southernmost station of the process of southward expansion but also a gateway for Vietnam to exploit the East Sea via the West Sea.

*Secondly*, it was not only the southernmost station of the process of southward expansion but also a gateway for Vietnam to exploit the East Sea via the West Sea.

*Thirdly*, the above reasons clearly show how important Ha Tien's role was in the regional and international trade networks, which contributed to Vietnam's commercial development in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. It was also a center for cultural exchange and assimilation.

Although there are new documents and studies on the Ha Tien trading port by Vietnamese and international scholars, they used only to conduct general research on trade during this period and have not yet placed Ha Tien commercial port in the international and regional context. Therefore, there is still a lack of multi-dimensional views on the position of the Ha Tien trading port in the regional and

international trade system. Nevertheless, the authors give an objective viewpoint based on available documents and field surveys in this area.

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