

The End of a Commercial Era: From the English Junk Affair to the Vietnamese Maritime Embargo in 1693*

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ABSTRACT

According to the English records, on Christmas Day 1693, the King of Tonkin issued an edict forbidding Vietnamese people from leaving the country on board foreign ships. Subsequent developments depicted the Vietnamese Court's strict regulation, ending an era of relatively liberal maritime trade and travel.

Surprisingly, the Vietnamese Court's maritime embargo was not recorded anywhere in the Vietnamese chronicles. Using new data retrieved from the English archives, this article highlights the "English Junk Affair" in 1693 which subsequently led to the Vietnamese Court's imposition of a maritime embargo, practically ending the commercial era of Tonkin. It also places the English misfortune in the context of local socio-economic changes as well as the transformation of the regional maritime commerce which largely contributed to the English withdrawal from northern Vietnam during the late seventeenth century.

Key Words: Tonkin/Vietnam, East Asia, early modern period, maritime trade,
English East India Company

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I. Prologue

Amidst the chaos and difficulties that beset the English factory in Thăng Long (present-day Hanoi), the capital of the northern Vietnamese kingdom of Tonkin,¹ an English bookkeeper made the following entry on Christmas Day 1693 in the factory's log book:

The Nhamoones² this morneing brought the King's chaup³ both to the Dutch and us. The perrport of which was that wee must not carry any of the Tonqueeners out of the countrey, and that our shippes must be searched at their going away, which fear will create both charges and a great deale of trouble.⁴

Subsequent developments described in the Tonkin Factory Records indicated a hardening attitude of the Vietnamese rulers towards foreign merchants in the aftermath of the so-called “English Junk Affair”. The Court's strict regulation undoubtedly caused extra charges on departing ships and prevented Vietnamese nationals from leaving the country on these ships. For Western itinerant merchants trading in Tonkin, this was the beginning of the end of their no-longer-profitable trade with Tonkin. For native Vietnamese, this brought an end to an era of relatively liberal maritime trade and travel, which had begun in the early seventeenth century.

Surprisingly, the Court's issuance of this important embargo was not recorded anywhere in the Vietnamese chronicles.⁵ The English, and to a lesser extent, the

1 From the early seventeenth century, the Vietnamese Kingdom of Đại Việt was split into two warring kingdoms: Tonkin (or Đàng Ngoài, present-day northern Vietnam) ruled by the Lê-Trịnh Court and Cochinchina (or Đàng Trong, present-day central and southern Vietnam) governed by the Nguyễn Lords. The most significant Western communities trading with Tonkin in the 1600s were the Dutch East India Company (1637-1700) and the English East India Company (1672-1697).

2 *Nhamoones* (old Vietnamese: *Nha môn*): subalterns of mandarins.

3 *Chaup* (Hindi: *chhāp*) an official stamp or permit, by extension any official document bearing a seal-impression or stamp.

4 OIOC, G/12/17-9, Tonkin Factory Record, 24 Dec. 1693, fo. 340r.

5 For instance, *Khâm định Việt sử thông giám cương mục [Text and Commentary on the Complete Mirror of Vietnamese History as Ordered by the Emperor]*, Vol. II, (Nguyễn Dynasty Institute of History, 1998) the most important annals which cover this period, makes no mention of this embargo.

Dutch archives, however, not only mentioned it but also documented rather systematically the transformation of Tonkin's foreign trade policy during the late seventeenth century. On the basis of new data retrieved from the English Tonkin factory records, this paper seeks to highlight the "English Junk Affair" in 1693 which subsequently led to the Vietnamese Court's imposition of a maritime embargo, practically ending the commercial era of Tonkin. Besides, it also places the English misfortune in the context of local socio-economic changes as well as the transformation of the regional maritime commerce which largely contributed to the English withdrawal from northern Vietnam during the late seventeenth century.

II. The Tonkin Trading Environment and the English Tonkin Trade Prior to 1693

Trade, and foreign trade in particular, was tolerated on an unprecedented scale by Vietnamese rulers from the late 1500s onwards in order to accumulate capital and weapons from foreign merchants to gain an edge in their protracted civil wars. By the dawn of the 1600s, the Chinese and Japanese *shuin-sen* (red-sealed) merchants regularly frequented the trading ports of northern Vietnam to exchange their products and to export the local silks to Japan.⁶ Starting from the late 1620s, the Portuguese, having established themselves in China and Japan for over half a century, began to visit Tonkin, albeit on an irregular basis, for both commercial and religious purposes. The Portuguese, however, were not highly regarded by the Tonkinese rulers as a potential ally due to their haphazard comings and goings and, more importantly, their intimacy with the Nguyễn rulers of Cochinchina.

This favoured the Dutch, who were endeavouring to replace Japanese *shuin-sen* merchants in exporting Tonkinese silk to Japan, especially after Japanese merchants were subjected to the Tokugawa "closed-door" (*sakoku*) policy in the mid-1630s. In 1637, the Dutch began their official relationship with Tonkin and quickly enjoyed trading privileges granted by the Tonkinese rulers for their commitment to a Dutch-Tonkinese military alliance to fight against the Nguyễn of Cochinchina. In the next two decades, the Dutch enjoyed the profitable trade of Vietnamese silk-for-Japanese silver trade. By the mid-1650s, however, the Dutch Tonkin silk trade declined

6 The Japanese silver exported to Tonkin by the *shuin-sen* merchants was crucial to the rapid development of Tonkinese handicraft industries and foreign trade during the first three decades of the seventeenth century. It is estimated that around 2,000,000 *taels* or 7.5 tons of Japanese silver were shipped to northern Vietnam by the Japanese *shuin-sen* to be exchanged for Tonkinese silk and other local products. See: Iwao, Seiichi (1958: 49; 269), Hoang, Anh Tuan (2007a: 49).

rapidly as the Bengali silk gradually outclassed the Vietnamese products in the Japanese market. In the meantime, the Dutch also exported coarse Tonkinese ceramics to the insular Southeast Asian markets, gold to Coromandel, and musk and silk-piece-goods to Europe.⁷

Indubitably, the lucrative Dutch Tonkin-Japan trade induced the English to open a trading station in northern Vietnam.⁸ Towards the late 1660s, their so-called “East Asian commercial strategy” was well underway, in which Tonkin would serve as the strategic supplier of silk for their trade with Japan. It seems, however, that the English were not aware of the rapid decline of the Dutch Tonkin silk trade during the 1660s.⁹ Thus, their strategy soon turned sour, because after the establishment of their factories in Tonkin and Formosa (Taiwan) in 1672, the English failed to re-open their trade with Japan in the following year.¹⁰ This put the Tonkin factory into a dilemma, as the silk purchased in Tonkin found no suitable market.

Worse still, the English Company initiated its trade with Tonkin at an unpro-

7 For a general account of the Dutch Tonkin trade, see: Hoang, Anh Tuan (2007a). An account on the chronicle of the Dutch presence in seventeenth century Vietnam can be seen from: Buch (1936: 97-196; 1937: 121-237); Buch (1929).

8 On the early years of the English Tonkin trade: Farrington (1994: 148-161).

9 After a few years of experimenting (1637-1640), the Dutch Tonkin silk trade peaked handsomely during the period of 1641-1654, when the annual profit stood high, averaging 100% and reaching 130% in some successful trading seasons. From the mid-1650s, the Tonkinese yarn lost the Japanese market to the Bengali silk; the profit margin varied between 28% and 58% only. The English, however, were not aware of the rapid decline of the Dutch Tonkin silk trade when they set up their grand East Asian commercial strategy in the late 1660s. On the Dutch Tonkin silk trade, see: Hoang (2007a: 143-164).

10 The English failure to reopen their Japan trade can be briefly summarized as follows. In July 1673, the English ship *Return* was sent to Japan to negotiate the reopening of trade. The magistrate of Nagasaki refrained from granting the English immediate trade permission, and asked for further instructions from the central government at Edo. As religion was still one of the most sensitive matters in Japan, the Dutch were summoned to answer the question of which religion the English practised. “They made answer that”, reported the English Chief Merchant in Tonkin to Bantam, “they knew not our religion. Only this they knew, that our King was married to the Infanta of Portugall”. When the English mission failed to convince the Japanese that their king was not married to a Portuguese princess the request for reopening trade was rejected; the English were asked to leave Japan immediately. OIOC, G/12/17-2, Tonkin to Bantam, 24 July 1674, fos. 110v-116v.

For a detailed account on the Tonkinese trading environment during the 1600s and the early days of the English trade with northern Vietnam during the 1670s, see: Hoang (2005: 73-92).

pitious time, when the northern kingdom's political and economic power was waning. The first English delegates arrived in Tonkin in the summer of 1672 when the Lê-Trịnh rulers were making their final attempt to conquer Cochinchina. The unsuccessful campaign led to an undeclared ceasefire, ending half a century of costly rivalry between the two kingdoms (1627-1672). Now that the civil war had ended, the supply of Western weapons was no longer a priority on the agenda of the Lê-Trịnh rulers, who showed a lack of interest in the newly arrived English merchants and began to neglect their long-time Dutch friends. As for the English, the misfortune they had in Japan, their ill-timed arrival in Tonkin, and the ongoing Anglo-Dutch war in both European and Asian waters placed their Tonkin trade in a precarious position. As a matter of fact, between 1672 and 1676, the English factory in Tonkin was entirely forgotten by the rest of the Company's trading network (Hoang, 2005: 73-92).

Despite this unfavourable situation, especially their failure to re-establish the Japan trade, the directors in London still decided to maintain the Tonkin factory, hoping to purchase Vietnamese products for the English market and to access the Chinese market by using Tonkin as a stepping stone. Between 1676 and the late 1680s, the English factories in Banten and Madras managed to dispatch ships to Tonkin annually to exchange English manufactures for local products. This venture did not bring good results, due mainly to the unstable annual trading volumes and low profit margins. By the mid-1680s, the English Tonkin trade worsened due to protracted infighting among the Tonkin factors as well as persistent disagreements between London and Madras, to which the Tonkin factory was subordinated.¹¹

The discontent between London and Madras probably reached its nadir when the director of Fort St. George planned to remove the incompetent chief merchant of the Tonkin factory, William Keeling. The directors in London, however, strongly opposed this plan, stating in their general letter to Fort St. George on 9 June, 1686 that "the South Sea factoryes are now indeed under your management and will continue them soe, but we absolutely forbid you from displacing our chief Mr. Keling at Tonqueen [who] has lived near 20 years in that place and whom we have never found unfaithfull".¹² According to the directors, among the Company's trading stations in the Far East, the Tonkin factory was still worth maintaining, in comparison with the unprofitable Taiwan factory and the debt-ridden Siam office.¹³ Therefore, in an instruction sent to Tonkin in late 1687, the directors not only fully

11 OIOC, E-3-90, London to Tonkin, 26 September 1684, fos. 214r-215v.

12 OIOC, E-3-91, London to Fort St. George, 9 June 1686, fo. 70r.

13 OIOC, E-3-91, London to Fort St. George, 9 June 1686, fo. 70r.

supported the chief merchant Keeling but also allowed him to spend money for a new building: “we doe accordingly desire you to go on with building of a convenient house & all gowdownes proper for a perpetuall settlement & the management of our affaires in that place. [As for the building cost] we shall not so strictly limit you, but that you may if you think it convenient for our present and future business”.¹⁴ Obviously, by the late 1680s, the directors in London were still optimistic about the future of the Tonkin trade.

This confidence faded quickly, however. The meagre cargo from Tonkin, which arrived in London in the winter of 1689/1690, dashed the high hopes of the directors. In May 1690, they issued a warning to the Tonkin factors: “Be very frugall in your expences especially during this intervall of trade. Your own reason may tell you that a small trade cannot bear a great charge”.¹⁵ Because of the war with France and the precarious situation of England with the Channel under siege, the dispatch of ships to the East was delayed. London, therefore, informed Fort St. George that there would be no ships for Tonkin in 1690 and 1691, urging the latter to take care of the Company’s only factory still left in the Far East by assigning a third country vessel to sail between India and Tonkin.

Also, recalling the Company’s bitter experience in Siam recently, the directors now became alarmed about the mounting losses of the Tonkin trade.¹⁶ The precarious financial situation of the Tonkin factory and worries about the fallout of the Anglo-French war propelled the directors to issue a second warning to the Tonkin office in February 1692:

We find by our books we have a great estate in your hands, not less as it appears to us than 30,000 sterlings. You sent us much miserable short returnes by captain Pool in his last voyage and those goods which came by him turned to such a loosing accompt as gave us no manner of encouragement to send another ship from hence with a fresh stock untill we have received the fruite of the old remains in your hands of what we sent out formerly, which had layn so long dead [...]. Other discouragement [was] the dearness of freight and demorage in this time of war, being 50 percent more than formerly and the low prices of all your silk wares wrought, your raw silk and musk which are cheaper yet here than

14 OIOC, E-3-91, London to Tonkin, 9 November 1687, fo. 225v.

15 OIOC, E-3-91, London to Tonkin, 24 May 1690, fo. 50r.

16 On the English involvement in Siam during the 1680s, see, for instance: Basett (1960: 145-157). See also: Hall (1970: 357-374).

*they were in times of peace.*¹⁷

In order to investigate the Tonkin factory's business transactions, the directors decided to send a competent commissioner from Fort St. George to take temporary charge of the Tonkin office. London decreed further that the commissioner would have full authority to act, that all records had to be submitted to him for inspection, and all remaining accounts were to be shipped to Fort St. George. More importantly, the commissioner would have "further power to place or displace at his discretion our chief or any of our Councill or servants there [in Tonkin] if he shall think it expedient for our interest".¹⁸

Carrying out this instruction, in the summer of 1693 Fort St. George dispatched a commissioner to the Tonkin factory, where he discovered all sorts of mismanagement and embezzlement by the English factors, beginning with his uncovering of the embarrassing "Junk Affair".

III. The English Junk Affair of 1693

As mentioned in passing, in the summer of 1693, the Council of Madras sent Richard Watts on board the frigate *Pearl* heading for Tonkin. Watts was assigned to take over the directorship of the Tonkin factory in order to salvage the Tonkin trade which, according to the directors' complaint in 1692, had been so chaotic for many years. When the *Pearl* called at Achin at the end of May, Watts accidentally encountered a junk fitted out by William Keeling, the chief merchant of the Tonkin factory. This junk had earlier visited Siam and other ports in insular Southeast Asia to dispose of goods and now was returning to Tonkin via Achin. Shocked by the unexpected encounter with commissioner Richard Watts, William Sams, a member of the Tonkin factory and currently manager of the junk, quietly sailed the junk away at night. Earlier, Sams had plainly refused Watts' order to hand in the cargo, valued at around one thousand rials of eight.¹⁹

The testimony of Lamuel Blackmore, the Second of the Tonkin factory and a shareholder of the junk, later shed interesting light on the developments of the affair. The crew of the junk, besides Sams and Blackmore, consisted of Tonkinese and Chinese sailors, twenty in all. The junk was the property of three people: Keeling (Chief), Blackmore (the Second), and Sams (merchant). On the previous trip to

17 OIOC, E-3-91, London to Tonkin, 29 February 1692, fos. 102v-103r.

18 OIOC, E-3-91, London to Tonkin, 29 February 1692, fos. 102v-103r.

19 OIOC, G/12/17-9, Tonkin Factory Record, May-June 1693, fos. 318r-321r.

Southeast Asian ports, presumably in 1692, Keeling owned half of the shares, and Sams and Blackmore a quarter each. Before taking this second trip, Keeling informed Blackmore that he had sold his shares to Sams. Blackmore, however, believed that Keeling still had his shares in this venture, fueling suspicions that Keeling had conspired to give Sams total responsibility of the voyage. Blackmore estimated that the total value of the second voyage was around 5,259 *taels* of silver, a part of which was the Company's money. He also admitted that his shares were valued at around 1,000 rials of eight. However, Blackmore could not tell exactly which sorts of goods were in the cargo because Keeling and Sams had never informed him in detail. Refuting Blackmore's accusations, Sams claimed that the largest shares of this voyage belonged to a number of high-ranking mandarins and noblewomen at the Court of Tonkin.²⁰

In order to catch the junk at Malacca, Watts and the Council of the *Pearl* decided that Blackmore, who had been deliberately left behind at Achin by Sams, would sail first to Malacca in a small boat. In Malacca, Blackmore would intercede with the Governor there to prevent Sams from sailing the junk to Tonkin. Just a short time before Blackmore left the *Pearl*, Watts changed his mind, allowing Sams to sail the junk to Tonkin. The reason was fourfold. First, even if Watts had seized the junk, it was unlikely that crew members of the *Pearl* could have sailed it to Tonkin because they were unfamiliar with junk navigation techniques. Second, since the crew of the junk consisted largely of Tonkinese sailors, it would have been a risky act to capture the junk since the rulers in Tonkin might use it as a pretext to retaliate against the English factory in Tonkin. Third, considering the junk's small cargo, it was not worth bothering the governor of Malacca. Finally, Watts was hopeful that by the time the *Pearl* arrived at Malacca, the junk would still be there.²¹

In mid-July, the two vessels met again at Malacca. Watts tried to force Sams' junk to sail alongside the *Pearl* back to Tonkin, but to no avail. He then decided to leave Malacca at the end of the month. Right after the *Pearl*'s departure, the junk also left Malacca for Tonkin and quickly overtook the *Pearl* as soon as the two vessels crossed the Strait. About a month later, on the 16th of August, Watts and his men spotted a vessel on the horizon. Realizing that their ship was now in the waters of Cochinchina, the men braced themselves for a possible encounter with the local navy. Soon afterwards they saw Sams' junk, floating aimlessly and badly leaking for already six days. Fearful that the junk would sink due to bad weather, Watts

20 OIOC, G/12/17-9, Tonkin Factory Record, May-June 1693, fos. 318r-321r. Subsequent developments in Tonkin, however, indicated that Tonkinese mandarins did not invest in this junk.

21 OIOC, G/12/17-9, Tonkin Factory Record, 24 June-17 July 1693, fos. 321v-322v.

again demanded that Sams hand over the goods and money. Before any treasure could be removed from the junk, however, the ill-fated vessel was driven southwards by strong currents in the morning of 20 August 1693. Having lost sight of the junk, Watts and his people continued their voyage to Tonkin.²²

As soon as he arrived in Tonkin in early September 1693, Watts and his men began to face a great deal of trouble, especially the confrontation with Chief Merchant Keeling. In the first place, Keeling did not recognize Watts as the new manager of the factory, publicly voicing his doubts about the authenticity, and, hence, the legitimacy of the General and the Clause dated from the 3rd of March 1692 which London had sent to Fort St. George. For his part, while investigating the factory's transactions, Watts uncovered numerous wrongdoings. The bookkeeping was scandalous, full of errors and long out of date, containing only transactions up to 1688. The most serious problem was the embezzlement of the Company's money. Before Watts arrived at the Hanoi factory, Keeling had dispatched all disposable money and valuable properties for safekeeping, leaving only some worthless iron and lumber in the stockroom. When Watts demanded cash to pay for the wages and daily expenses for both factors and sailors, Keeling replied that the factory had run out of money,²³ and that the only way to survive was to borrow money from the local dealers at high interest rates.

So as to avoid any punitive action by the Company, Keeling and his Vietnamese concubine managed to bribe some Tonkinese mandarins and obtained written permission from the Court which would allow him to remain in Tonkin at the *Pearl's* departure. This placed Watts and the Tonkin Council in a dilemmatic situation, since forcing Keeling to go to Madras to account personally for his mismanagement would mean that the Company's money and properties which Keeling had hidden away would never be recovered. Additionally, Keeling also threatened that should he be forced to go to Madras, the junk he had earlier dispatched to the South under Sams' management would never return to Tonkin, and thereby could incur an extra loss to the Company.²⁴

Amidst all these perplexities, on 12 December 1693, Blackmore, Sams and some ten Tonkinese sailors of the ill-fated junk returned to Hanoi. According to Blackmore and Sams, in mid-September, seeing that there would be no chance to

22 OIOC, G/12/17-9, Tonkin Factory Record, 16-20 August 1693, fos. 323v-324r.

23 In contrast to Keeling's statement, the Court of Committee in London had earlier calculated that a stock of 30,000 sterling was with the Tonkin factory. See: OIOC, E-3-91, London to Tonkin, 29 February 1692, fos. 102v-103r.

24 OIOC, G/12/17-9, Tonkin Factory Record, 24 June-17 July 1693, fos. 321v-322v.

save the badly leaking junk, they had decided to abandon it somewhere off the coast of Cochinchina. As soon as they landed on shore, they had been seized by the local authorities and sent to Hué for imprisonment and interrogation. All the goods and money they had managed to salvage from the junk had been confiscated. After experiencing horrific incarceration and torture in Cochinchina for nearly three months, they were eventually released and sent hither to Tonkin.

According to Blackmore and Sams, the junk would surely have sunk after they had abandoned it to go on shore. A Cantonese merchant visiting Hanoi in the winter of 1694, however, provided a totally different account of the fate of the vessel. After Blackmore and Sams had left the junk to go ashore, sixteen sailors on board, both Tonkinese and Chinese, managed to sail the vessel northwards and successfully reached the island of Hainan. There, they offered some gifts to the Governor as demanded, and made a detailed report to him about their voyage and applied for a permission to sell the remaining goods on board in order to pay for the maintenance of the vessel.

The English factors in Hanoi were confused by the contradictory claims about the fate of the junk, and thus failed to make the accurate entry in the factory records. Prior to the testimony of the Cantonese merchant, Blackmore and Sams had tried to convince their countrymen of the inevitable fate of the junk owing to its bad condition, adding that the weak southern monsoon would not have allowed the crew to sail northwards to either Tonkin or China. Now at the news of her arrival in China, the English factors recalled the stories of the Tonkinese sailors who had followed Blackmore and Sams to abandon the junk and reached the coast of Cochinchina. These sailors contended that the condition of the junk had not been as critical as Sams and Blackmore had rumoured. Watts and the other English factors now suspected that Blackmore and Sams had deliberately abandoned the junk in order to keep the money and goods away from the factory. Their scheme failed bitterly when they were captured by the Cochinchinese authorities.

Having failed to extract from Sams and Blackmore the truth about what had happened to the junk, Watts decided to close the case, leaving the investigation to his Masters in Madras. There was, however, one truth which emerged from this incident: the strong reaction from the Tonkinese rulers, which led to a “maritime embargo”, marking the end of Tonkin’s commercial era.

IV. The Vietnamese Maritime Embargo

The English junk scandal indubitably annoyed the Tonkinese rulers, who were especially concerned about the fact that Tonkinese sailors were imprisoned in

Cochinchina and exiled in China. When Sams and Blackmore returned to Hanoi on 12 December 1693, they were immediately summoned to the Court and were subjected to a thorough interrogation. Apart from questions about the scandalous voyage, the Tonkinese rulers also wanted to know about the current situation of Cochinchina. Afterwards Sams and Blackmore were summoned to Phố Hiến, some forty miles from the capital, to be investigated further by the governor there. Being their chief *dispatchadore*,²⁵ the governor also pressed the new Chief Merchant Richard Watts to pay the Tonkinese sailors long overdue wages. But Watts plainly refused, arguing that Keeling's business had been a private and illegal affair; therefore the Company bore no responsibility for this.

Ten days after the crew returned to Hanoi, there was still no overt reaction from the Court. The English began to hope that the Tonkinese rulers might let the affair go away. However, on the morning of the 24th of December 1693, the King²⁶ promulgated the aforementioned edict forbidding all Vietnamese citizens to leave the country from now on. To enforce this new law, *dispatchadores* and *nhamoones* in charge of foreign transactions would be responsible for searching every foreign ship before its departure. The English, as much as their Dutch counterparts, were fearful that this regulation would cause them extra cost and trouble.²⁷

As the English factory's bookkeeper had rightly predicted, foreign merchants were to suffer extra burden after the promulgation of the maritime embargo. In winter 1693/4, a foreign ship could not lift its anchor until local mandarins had inspected and issued a *chaup* (written permission) certifying that the vessel carried neither local people nor forbidden goods. In the winter of 1694/5, for instance, the English were made to sweat when dispatching the *Pearl* to India. The mandarin in charge had the *Pearl* "ransacked" for days and only ended the inspection after the

25 *Dispatchadore* (also *despachadore*): a Portuguese word, meaning: a local mandarin, usually a eunuch, who represented the royal family in managing business transactions with foreign merchants. See: Maybon (1910: 174).

26 Throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the political system in Tonkin was fairly similar to that in Japan, as the Trịnh Lords (like the Shoguns in Japan) held the real power instead of the Lê Kings (equal to the Japanese Emperors). The foreigners, thus, submitted themselves to the Trịnh Lords instead of Lê Kings.

It is important to note that, in the English (also the Dutch) records, "King" referred to the Trịnh Lords/*Chúa* (i.e. Trịnh Tạc, r. 1657-1682 and Trịnh Căn, r. 1682-1709) while "Emperor" was used for the Lê Kings/*Vua* (i.e. Lê Gia Tông, r. 1672-1675 and Lê Hy Tông, r. 1676-1705).

27 OIOC, G/12/17-9, Tonkin Factory Record, 24 December 1693, fo. 340r.

English had bestowed him with valuable gifts.²⁸ The Dutch underwent similar hardship when preparing to send their ship, the *Westbroek*, to Batavia.²⁹ This gloomy situation, which lasted for the next few years, was especially disappointing for the Europeans since their trade with Tonkin was no longer profitable as it had been during the first half of the seventeenth century.

Three issues which were directly related to the promulgation of the 1693 edict should be taken into further consideration. First and foremost, was the English junk affair a probable cause or just a timely pretext for the Vietnamese court to impose the maritime embargo? Second, did the English scandal accidentally harm the Dutch trade in Tonkin, as the Dutch factors kept complaining in their reports? Finally, were Vietnamese natives really allowed to travel abroad, either as independent merchants or as sailors and servants on board foreign vessels, prior to said embargo?

The answers to these questions should be considered in the context of the decline in Tonkin's foreign trade during the final quarter of the seventeenth century. The deterioration of the trading environment in northern Vietnam was a corollary of socio-political developments in Tonkin from the early 1670s onward. As mentioned earlier, after the cessation of hostilities between Tonkin and Cochinchina in 1672, foreign trade no longer figured prominently on the agenda of the northern rulers since there was no need for procurement of weapons from Western Europe. When the English arrived in Tonkin in the summer of 1672, they realized that, contrary to their expectations, the Vietnamese rulers received them with little enthusiasm.³⁰ Samuel Baron, a free merchant who had for many years resided and traded in Tonkin, described in 1685 the Vietnamese rulers' frigid attitude toward foreign merchants, pointing out "that strangers at their first entrance into this country, had in many respects, better usage than at present; but not so, as to permit themselves to play

28 OIOC, G/12/17-9, Tonkin Factory Record, 24 December 1694, fo. 417r.

29 Interestingly, in the winter of 1693, the Dutch, too, failed to dispatch the *Westbroek* to Batavia because of the contrary wind. This, together with the detention of the chief merchant Jacob van Loo a few months earlier, caused the Dutch factory a grievous loss of both money and reputation. On the Dutch incident in Tonkin in 1693, see archive of the Dutch East India Company in The Hague: VOC 8365, Missive from Jacob van Loo and the Council to Batavia, 23 November 1693, fos. 1-3.

30 Upon the first encounter with the English, the *dispatchadores* sternly warned Chief Merchant William Gyfford that: "The king was king of Tonkin before wee [the English] came and would be after we were gone, and that this country hath noe neede of any forreigne thing". In the next ten years, in spite of their endless endeavors, the English failed to obtain permission to reside and trade in Hanoi, thus made no considerable breakthrough in their Tonkin trade. OIOC, G/12/17-1, Journal Register of Tonkin Factory, 3 July 1672, fos. 6v-7r. See also from: Hoang (2005: 73-92).

with a foreigner the good companion: at this time they keep their distance to all strangers, making but small account of them” (Baron, 1811: 656–657). Besides the Court’s increasing indifference toward the foreign trade, successive crop failures in the late seventeenth century caused by floods and droughts also contributed to the decline of Tonkin’s economy.³¹ As a result, the annual production of such export items as silk and ceramics fell sharply, which depressed further the activities of foreign traders in Tonkin (Hoang, 2011: 247–282).

In the meantime, the Dutch Tonkin trade had entered a phase of steady decline after the Tonkinese silk lost the Japanese market to the Bengali yarn in the mid-1650s. From the early 1680s, relations between the Dutch Company and the Vietnamese Court also deteriorated. The new king, Trịnh Căn, (r. 1682–1709) often expressed his discontent with the Dutch because Batavia, in view of the diminishing returns of the Tonkin trade, decided to reduce the value of presents sent to him and the Crown Prince. In the late 1680s, the King even stopped sending his annual letter to the Governor General in Batavia, publicly putting the relationship between Tonkin and the Dutch Company to a severe test. The King’s dissatisfaction with the Dutch probably reached its peak in the summer of 1693 when he had the Chief Merchant Jacob van Loo and the captain of the Dutch ship *Westbroek* imprisoned because Batavia had failed to send him amber. The two Dutchmen were not released until their factory had signed an agreement to guarantee the delivery of amber and the other objects which the King had ordered on the next ship. The King’s maltreatment of the Dutch factors and confiscation of the factory’s goods continued in the following years, which led to the Dutch Company’s decision to eventually abandon the Tonkin trade in the early 1700s (Hoang, 2007a: 121–123).

The deterioration of the Tonkinese-Dutch relationship confirms the fact that, prior to the English junk affair in 1693, the Dutch no longer enjoyed the trading privileges which the Court had granted them in the early decades. The maritime embargo of 1693 obviously rubbed more salt into the open wound which the Dutch have been suffering until then. Therefore, the Dutch allegation of falling victim to the Englishmen’s scandalous affair was not perfectly true, although it was by no means groundless (Hoang, 2007b: 37–61).

31 According to the Vietnamese chronicles, during the twenty-four-year period between 1675 and 1698, there were eight years in which Tonkin experienced severe natural disasters such as drought, flood, heavy hail, and dike-breaks which led to large-scale famines (Nguyễn Dynasty Institute of History, 1998: 335–378; Truong et al., 1999: 394–398). This period was comparable to the one between 1561 and 1610, when fourteen years out of sixty saw crop failures (Lieberman, 2003: 396–397).

Finally, from the Court's promulgation of the edict it appears that some Vietnamese people, prior to 1693, had been allowed to travel abroad on board foreign ships. This seems to contradict contemporary documentation as well as current Vietnamese historiography. According to the French priest Alexandre de Rhodes, who resided in northern Vietnam for many years in the first half of seventeenth century, the Lê-Trịnh rulers never allowed his subjects to travel abroad for fear of losing incomes from taxation (Rhodes, 1651: 56). Twentieth-century Vietnamese historians often blamed the Lê-Trịnh Court for turning its back on the tide of international trade and restricting its people from maritime trade, which led to a "weak position" of the state in the sea (Truong et al., 1999). Recent "revisionist" researchers, however, have maintained that throughout the seventeenth century, the Court, in implementing a rather liberal trade policy for strategic reasons, did allow its citizens to travel either as servants, sailors or petty merchants on board foreign vessels (Nguyễn, 2006). The Dutch and English archives sporadically documented Tonkinese people who took passage on board Company ships leaving Tonkin for Southeast Asian ports (Hoang, 2011: 247-282). The maritime embargo in 1693, therefore, not only ended a period of relatively liberal maritime activities for the Vietnamese people, it also signaled the end of Tonkin's commercial era.

V. The Aftermath of an Agonizing Saga: Internal Conflicts, Commercial Losses, and the Miserable End of the English Tonkin Trade

Without a doubt, the junk affair of 1693 dealt a severe blow to the local trade of the English. On paper, the Court's edict would drastically hinder their activities in Tonkin. In reality, the misery which the English would endure in the next four years was mainly caused by internal strife among the local factors, which consequently led to grievous losses, huge debts, and a miserable end to their never-profitable venture in northern Vietnam.

After taking over the management of the factory from Keeling, Chief Merchant Watts was to face a challenging situation. The first and perhaps most serious problem was the conflict between the incumbent and the new Chief. Disputing the legitimacy of Watts' appointment, Keeling and Sams obstructed the new Chief from carrying out his functions. Blackmore and Warren, the other two factors residing in Tonkin for many years, even spread rumours alleging that Watts was nothing but a usurper who arrived in Tonkin without proper authorization from the Company. This brought disgrace on the Chief Merchant and caused serious damage to the reputation of the English factory. In 1695, for instance, the English factory request

to borrow six million copper coins (ca. 3,000 *taels* of silver) from the Court was rejected. The main reason was that the King was hesitant to lend his money because Blackmore kept repeating the “mischievous insinuations” that Richard Watts was not a legitimate Chief, that he was a mere envoy sent by Fort St. George, and not officially appointed by the directors in London.³²

When Watts decided to send Keeling to Madras to be interrogated for his malfeasance, the former Chief and his Vietnamese concubine bribed some high-ranking mandarins to get permission from the Court which would allow him to remain in Tonkin. But Keeling’s bribery was in vain. Before the *Pearl* was due to depart, the Chief Merchant had Keeling detained in the factory after the latter’s plot to escape was foiled. Sams, however, managed to flee just before the *Pearl*’s departure, and only returned to the factory after the Company vessel, having missed the northern monsoon, had to remain in Tonkin for another year. These two troublesome factors continued to plague Watts’ directorship in the next twelve months, until Keeling was forced to leave for Fort St. George on board the *Pearl* in January 1695.³³ In the years leading up to the final abandonment of the Tonkin factory in 1697, Chief Merchant Richard Watts had to be extremely vigilant in order to prevent Sams and Blackmore from sailing out of Tonkin surreptitiously on board Chinese junks trading between Tonkin and Siam and other Southeast Asian ports.

To make matters even worse, the Captain of the *Pearl* frigate, James Howell, also openly confronted Richard Watts. Between September 1693 and January 1695, the Captain used every occasion to challenge the new chief, pressing him to pay his crew’s wages when the factory’s coffer was virtually empty owing to Keeling’s embezzlement. He even staged a sort of strike in order to delay the departure of the *Pearl*. In his account, Watts blamed Captain Howell for having deliberately delayed his work which consequently led to the *Pearl*’s failure to depart in the winter of 1693. A year later, the Chief again accused Howell for using a “malicious and scurrilous” trick to prevent the *Pearl* from leaving Tonkin. The protracted internal conflict only ended in January 1695 when Captain Howell finally sailed the *Pearl* to India.³⁴

The most acute problem which the English factory had to endure during its last three years in Tonkin was a serious shortage of money. According to the Company’s bookkeeping, by the time of Watts’ departure for Tonkin in the summer of

32 OIOC, G/12/17-9, Tonkin Factory Record, 10 November 1695, fo. 434v.

33 OIOC, G/12/17-9, Tonkin’s General Letter to Fort. St. George, 21 December 1695, fos. 440r-442r.

34 The lengthy and intricate confrontation between Howell and Watts can be seen in the Factory Records, December 1695.

1693, the Tonkin factory still possessed around 30,000 pounds. This was why Madras did not send additional funds to sustain its Tonkin trade. As it turned out, before Watts' arrival in Hanoi, Keeling had presumably sent the factory's money to his concubine and failed to update its bookkeeping. As the *Pearl* could not leave Tonkin in the spring of 1694, the factory had to supply provisions and pay wages for the crew for another twelve months, not to mention other problems it had to deal with during the ship's unexpected stay.

As revealed in the Factory Records, as from December 1694 the English factory began to run out of money. The only way to survive until the arrival of the next Company ship was to borrow money from local dealers at very high interest rates. However, before taking such a drastic measure, the English decided to petition the King for an emergency loan, promising to pay back at their next shipment. In doing so, the English bribed a certain *Duckba*,³⁵ who promised the English to deliver the petition and to intercede with the King. However, this plan did not bear fruit because the King was reportedly concerned with the fact that no English ships appeared in Tonkin in the summer of 1694. Besides, the internal strife among the English factors did not help their image in high places, and they had to sell the remaining pieces of broadcloth at low prices and borrow money at high interest rates, around 2½ per cent per month.³⁶ By November 1696, the English factory had contracted a debt of 1,400 *taels* of silver to both local dealers and free Dutch traders in Tonkin.³⁷ In May 1697, the English even had to borrow an extra 200 *taels* of silver from a certain Ungia Thaw, a local mandarin, at the exorbitant monthly interest of 4 per cent.³⁸

The directors in London for their part had long been aware of the failure of their far-fetched Tonkin project. From the Company documents it is apparent that, when Madras appointed Watts as the commissioner and Chief Merchant of the Tonkin factory, the directors had realized that they had for too long been fooled by their dishonest Tonkin factors. In the meantime, the direct trade with China proved to bear fruit after a difficult beginning.³⁹ Thus, before receiving any concrete report

35 *Duckba* (Vietnamese: Đức Bà): a royal lady, normally the King's concubine.

36 OIOC, G/12/17-9, Tonkin Factory Record, December 1694-December 1695, fos. 427v-438v.

According to the Factory records, upon receiving the petition, the King asked his courtiers whether the English had ever borrowed money from the Court. Although there was confirmation that this did happen in the reign of his predecessor, the King still flatly turned down the English request.

37 OIOC, G/12/17-9, Tonkin to Madras, 24 November 1696, fo. 459v.

38 OIOC, G/12/17-9, Tonkin Factory Record, 16 May 1697, fo. 473v.

39 Between 1674 and 1680 when the Cheng (Coxinga) force held Amoy again, the English factors on

on the current situation and prospects of the Tonkin trade from commissioner Watts, the London directors had decided to abandon the Tonkin office altogether. In their General to Fort St. George dated January 1694, the directors urged the Council of Madras to “use all possible endeavours to get home to us the remainder of those our effects yet remaining at Tonqueen”.⁴⁰ It seems that, by the spring of 1695, the directors had completely lost their patience with the Tonkin factors, as evidenced in their Instruction for Fort St. George dated 6 March 1695:

*We find the trade of China directly out and home hence much more profitable than the trade of Tonqueen, considering the constant charge of that place and the remoteness of it that we have no opportunity of corresponding with it otherwise than by sending a ship which how little so ever they can seldome half load, except by filling her up with mean lackred wares that will not pay half freight, and therefore we would have you withdraw that factory by the first opportunity you can, and put a finall end to our charge there if you can sell the buildings before our people come away it may doe well, if not it is better to loose them than stay there any longer.*⁴¹

By the time this Instruction arrived in India, the Madras Council had been informed about the miserable condition of the Tonkin office by the survivors of the *Pearl* crew. Leaving Tonkin in January 1695, the frigate endured a disastrous voyage. It suffered contrary wind, and conditions on board were terrible. In May 1695, the vessel eventually drifted to Johor, where the crew managed to transfer its cargo ashore. When a junk sailing between Johor, and India brought the news of the *Pearl*'s misfortune to Madras, Fort St. George sent a European ship to Johor to

the island of Formosa (Taiwan) were able to trade with mainland China. In 1683, Formosa was eventually conquered by the Manchurian forces; the island was turned into a province of the Great Qing Empire. In the next two years, the Qing granted the English renewed access to trade to Amoy again. The English, having lost their only trading station in insular Southeast Asia after the expulsion from Banten in 1682, persisted with voyages to mainland China by dispatching ships from either London or the Indian factories. It was by and large the success of regular visits to such places in southern China as Chusan, Amoy and Canton during the final decades of the seventeenth century which led to the abolishment of the unsuccessful Tonkin factory in 1697. See: Farrington, 2002: 83–84; Keay, 1991: 197–198.

40 OIOC, E-3-91, London to Fort St. George, 3 January 1694, fo. 154v.

41 OIOC, E-3-91, London to Fort St. George, 6 March 1695, fo. 193v.

rescue the *Pearl's* crew and cargo. The news about the miserable state of affairs at the Tonkin factory and the rapid deterioration of the trading environment in North Vietnam hastened Madras' plan to withdraw the Tonkin office. This plan, however, could not be carried out in the summer of 1696 because there was no ship available for dispatch to Tonkin. To inform the Tonkin factors of London's decision to abandon the Tonkin trade, Fort St. George decided to send a General to the Tonkin factory via the *Elizabeth* sailing to Canton.⁴²

In February 1697, a Cantonese messenger brought the General of Fort St. George to Tonkin. But a month earlier, Richard Watts had already learned about the fate of the Tonkin venture during a conversation with a French bishop. Apart from the General for Tonkin factors, the President of Fort St. George also sent separate letters to the King and the Prince of Tonkin to explain the Company's decision to withdraw from Tonkin. The letters made no reference to the commercial woes which the English suffered in Tonkin, citing the protracted and costly war with France in Europe as the major cause of the severe shortage of ships and sailors in Asia for trading activities. The Company regretfully had to "temporarily close down" the Tonkin office, but did not rule out an eventual return to Tonkin once the trading conditions in Asia improved.⁴³

In July 1697, the *Marry Buoyer* arrived in Tonkin with a cargo valued at 7,849 *pagodas*. The English factors paid their debts totalling around 2,000 *taels* of silver and spent the rest of their money buying local products which Madras had ordered. Realizing that a last-ditch attempt to get back long-standing debts from local mandarins and merchants would be futile, the English quietly left Hanoi on 24 November 1697. And so came to an inauspicious end twenty-five years of Anglo-Vietnamese trade and diplomatic relations.⁴⁴

VI. Epilogue

During the 1680s, the English trade in East Asia was beset by both internal and external problems. The Company had to close its Taiwan factory in 1685 because of unprofitability, and its stations in Banten and Siam in 1682 and 1687 respectively due to fierce competition from Dutch and French rivals. It was perhaps the Com-

42 OIOC, G/12/17-9, Tonkin Factory Record, 10 February 1697, fos. 466v-469r (General of Fort St. George to Tonkin, 30 May 1696).

43 OIOC, G/12/17-9, Tonkin Factory Record, 10 February 1697, fos. 469r-470v (Letters of Fort St. George to the King and the Prince of Tonkin, 30 May 1696).

44 OIOC, G/12/17-10, Tonkin Factory Record, July-November 1697, fos. 480r-501v.

pany's successive loss of trading grounds in East Asia during the 1680s which prompted the directors in London to maintain their Tonkin office despite advice to close it from the Chief Factor in Madras. The fact that the Tonkin factory was the "only" station in East Asia which was placed under London's aegis to avoid Madras' interference testified to the importance that the Court of Committees attached to the Tonkin factory as a last toehold in its forlorn attempt to salvage its Far Eastern trade.⁴⁵ London's high hopes, however, were never realized, since the Tonkin factory was doomed from the start due to the misjudgment of local trading conditions, bad management, private undertaking, and lack of control causing heavy losses of Company stocks. The junk affair in 1693 was symptomatic of the chaotic developments of the English trade in Tonkin. It was not until the early 1690s, when their China trade bore fruit, that the directors in London realized that the Tonkin dream which they had nourished for so long was far-fetched.

As for the Tonkin rulers, with the war against their southern rivals now over and weapon procurement no longer a priority, their tolerance of foreign trade faded rapidly throughout the last quarter of the seventeenth century. Their frigid attitude toward, and sometimes even harsh treatment of, foreign merchants was particularly disheartening. Under such a deteriorating circumstance, the English junk affair offered a timely pretext for them to impose a maritime embargo forbidding Vietnamese nationals from going abroad as well as to tighten their control of foreign trade. Facing this mounting obstacle together with the depressing trade environment, it was only a matter of time before the English and the Dutch decided to wind up their operations, in 1697 and 1700 respectively, thus practically ending the commercial era of Tonkin.

45 OIOC, E-3-91, London to Fort St. George, 12 October 1687, fo. 221v. Additional discussion can be seen from: Basett, 1960.

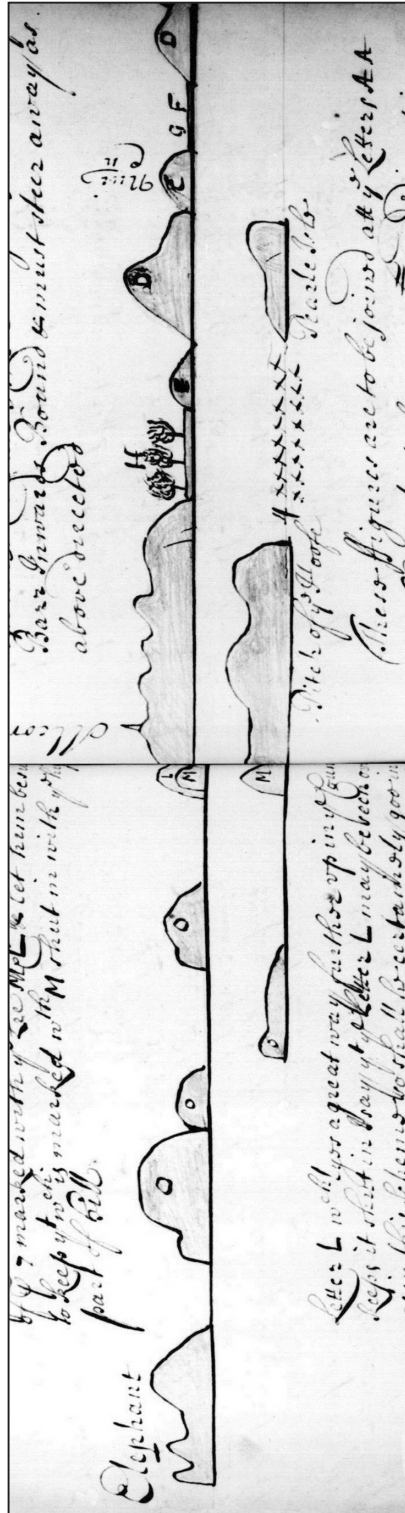


Fig. 1.

The English Tonkin Factory's instruction for the Company ships to enter Thái Binh Estuary. It is described by the English that, unless the captain strictly follows the local pilot's guide, he would hazard his vessel with the risk of "running aground".
 Source: OIOC, G/12/17-5, Journal Register of Tonkin Factory, 12 July 1678, fos. 468, 471.

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貿易時代的終結： 由 1693 年英籍中式帆船事件 談越南海禁年代的開始

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摘 要

據英國文獻記載，東京國王曾於 1693 年聖誕節頒佈命令，禁止人民登上外國船隻出海，並繼之採取更為嚴格之管制措施。一般咸認，越南歷史上向海洋開放、交流之紀元，於焉終止。然而，此一命令卻未曾於越南編年史中留下蛛絲馬跡，難以印證。筆者由英語檔案中蒐羅證據指出，1693 年之「英屬中式帆船事件」，才是導致越南朝廷發佈一系列海禁政策的轉折點。本文並且將當時的社會經濟境況、區域海洋貿易變遷等等，導致英人在十七世紀末，由越南北部撤出的背景因素，納入討論，藉以重構此一不幸英船事件的歷史脈絡。

關鍵字：東京／越南、東亞、近代早期、海洋貿易、英國東印度公司