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MARINE AND ISLANDS MANAGEMENT ORGANIZATION IN THE 15TH AND 19TH CENTURIES EAST ASIA REVISITED

1. Changes of position and views on marine and islands management organization in the 15th and 19th centuries East Asia

East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet
Rudyard Kipling

It is suggested that the two East and West worlds look like the Earth meridian. They come from a pole and gradually go as far apart to the maximal degree at the equator, then gradually approach together to be jointly provided at the opposite pole. In human history, the point crossing the equator is the landmark of the modern era in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. This is also the first stage of the process of globalization with maritime routes linking the two European and Asian continents[2].

In following of explorative itineraries, especially through the great discoveries of geography, it exposed drastically East-West economic and cultural exchanges. After a complicated and difficult dialogue between the two civilizations of East-West cooperation, the faces led to the collision area of conflict in relations which ended with aggressive acts and territorial takeover. Through the tragedy caused by the period of colonization and de-colonialization, two present-day East-West worlds initially come to sit down together in order to seek a meeting somewhat belatedly.

In short, from the late fifteenth century to the nineteenth century, the face of the world undergone profound changes in the balance of forces in international relations. Given a civilized ground somewhat below, learned in some cases from Asia-the East, in fact Europe-the West overcame superiorly their opponents in economic, engineering, military aspects, then it in return exchanged, broke into and victimized Asia-the East. Among them, it must stress supporting roles of seas, which considered as one of the critical factors and means to create changes of balance of those powers[3].

Seas take possession of nearly three-quarters of the Earth's land area, as a largely paradoxical contradiction. Sea moderates as a means of both separation and connection of the countries. It promotes economic momentum in international trade development but also leads the way for the intrusion of territorial aggression and conquest. In East Asia, over 400 years from the late fifteenth century to the late nineteenth century, sea also played both excellent roles of two opposites of the above. The "wise" countries in Asia, if not defeating must be aware of the "Janus face" with two contrasting faces of the sea in perception and action.

In following the Great geographical discoveries opened at the end of the fifteenth century, marine engineering and shipbuilding sailing over the sea of Europe made great progress. The transoceanic ships of large tonnage, 3 masts, metal shells, approaching the birth of steam-powered machinery in Europe, along with oceanographic knowledge and advanced sailing techniques, helped Western nations emerging in both commercial shipping and military, and outperforming in traditional maritime science of East Asian nations. Merchant ships then were equipped with big guns (cannons). Pacific became a vibrant

arena of maritime trade, missionary missions, political and diplomatic activities and military expeditions. That was different forms of infiltration made by the West through the East Asia, and caused by the "potential difference" between two worlds: the West and the East.

Under the circumstance, as a necessary self-defense response, marine and islands organization, management and defense of the East Asian countries were strengthened to meet the new political, military and economic requirements, as well as to deal with "Western barbarian" schemes. A large number of traditional viewpoints, visions, management measures and defense over seas and islands had been still applied, it as yet proved unsuitability and inefficiency. A couple of countries recognized quickly changes, they timely adjusted marine and islands strategy in order to overcome challenges and threats. Some of them remained hesitant among options, consequently they were suffered disadvantageously. The rest was not able to convert their thinking, only enhancing old-fashioned views and measures on seas and islands, which eventually became a victim of the colonial expansion by European colonial powers. Dai Nam / Vietnam during the Nguyen dynasty (1802–1945) was one of the unfortunate victims of such history.

2. Comparative models of marine and islands management organization in some East Asia countries

China

China is a powerful country with a tradition of territorial expansion, in which maritime routes were early formed. The expansion getting a high level of the Chinese marine expansion was marked by seven journeys of Eunuch Zheng He in the first three decades of the fifteenth century under the Ming Dynasty. This considered as both territory exploration and military techniques, political and economic natures. The certain authors (as Gavin Menzies) came further to justify that the Chinese people had to cross the sea to discover America (*New World*) since 1421[4].

Nonetheless, from the sixteenth century, commercial activities of the Chinese junk were still busiest in Southeast Asia, in general, the expansion of this country's marine somewhat came to decline, at least in a narrow area of space, in which Ming "*haichin*" (prohibited navigation) policy was a remarkable agent[5]. China had gradually been repelled by Western colonial capitalism far from the Indian Ocean region to a return to the Pacific region, primarily in East Sea. The most important changes in the marine and islands management organization of the Chinese government in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were behaved in defensive under sea route pressure made by Western powers, or from initiative expands beyond sea retreating passively coastal and harbor defense.

For many reasons, China implemented partial opening of some ports, starting with Macao in 1557, and then in many estuaries especially after two Opium Wars in the mid-nineteenth century[6]. Meanwhile, the Qing government had to implement a policy of closed society in internal affairs, creating multiple conflicts in the country. Consequently, China was torn and broken up by Western empires in coastal regions because the "Chinese cake" was so big for them to monopolize and swallow it alone[7]. Alternatively, the Chinese internal situation was also torn by political forces, increasing peasants' riots, which eventually led to the outbreak of the Xinhai Revolution of 1911, making an end of the Qing dynasty. Generally, the Chinese policy of marine and islands management organization from the late fifteenth century to the late nineteenth century did not come off well.

Japan

Japan, a special case, given the nature of this country is an island country. Seas surround all four sides, the Japanese "eat away at the life together" with seas and islands. Therefore, this country possibly saw earlier reason in the perception and vision on the marine and islands management organization?

Researchers have righteously reasoned the marine and islands management organization of Japan through the policy of "maritime forbiddance" (*haikin*) during the "country

closed policy" (*sakoku*) lasted more than two centuries under the Tokugawa period. It was specified in the order in 1635 which prohibited Japanese to go abroad. Nevertheless, given a closer reappraisal, the main motivation of the stringent measures was of proactive strategy of "closing outside" in order to "open inside" and to create favorable conditions for the internal development on economy, society and culture as the historical fact[8]. Then facing highly sea pressures from European and American powers, the Japanese government wisely reconstructed all. By doing so, finally it enabled to enact proactively the country opened policy under the Meiji era. With this policy, the Japanese know how to cross the sea to learn their opponents who had threatened their island and they came to carry out the building of renovation, resilient nation for their marine and islands protection.

Siam

People often say much about the case of Siam (Thailand) in getting rid of the aggression of West European colonial powers based on the successful management to seas and islands. The Siamese retaining of independent sovereignty was thanks to flexible and practical diplomacy of "reed tree" type (bend with the wind shifting) and to knowing how to exploit the pressure contradictions among forces to create a "buffer zone", taking advantage of counterweight to obtain a stable and secure environment[9]. The Siamese case thence is usually associated and identified itself with an Asian country – Japan.

However, a comparison between Siam and Japan in the management organization to defense maritime sovereignty comes to much be limping. Japan has the dissimilarities from Siam in the geopolitical position in the region as well as on a proactive foreign strategy. In fact, Siam successfully applied tactical line of "reed tree diplomacy" to avoid an invasion, but where is the premise of the geopolitical and cultural positions to form the above mentioned guidelines?

Indeed, Siam covers a long coastline, but isolation in its position. Unlike some other countries which exposed themselves to East Sea where there were the crossing of marine lanes and also expedition routes. It facilitates the marine and islands management organization and defense. Nevertheless, Siamese seas and islands had in common with Indian, Malaysian and Indonesian archipelago worlds, which filled with economic and commercial roles rather than military one?

Historically and geographically, Siam is a Southeast Asian country, long influenced by Indian culture, whether institutional models adapted from Buddhist *mandala*[10], which considered as a loose and flexible nature as opposed to Confucian polity with a "tower" model of the Sinicized closed and rigid world. The Siamese model therefore easily enabled to switch *paradigm*[11] more thinking and behavior. A period of a great country (*Great Thaism*) was given, but under the threat of European colonial powers, primarily British, the Siamese themselves were quickly shifted into position: a small, weak and humble country with a flexible pragmatic thinking, good willing to compromise concessions even submitted to the Westerners' rules if necessary; as long as it was helpful to protect the national independent sovereignty.

With no extensive and initiative reform strategy as Meiji Japan, but Siamese kings who referred to themselves as wise kings, adopted measures to reform the country in order to deal with foreign pressures. They were the liberal-minded monarchs such as Mongkut, Chulalongkorn and so on[12]. At the same time, in contrast to the Nguyen Vietnam emperors, those did know promptly a shift of their thinking, trying to escape from the status of ideological prisoners who locked themselves in an invisible cage of sclerosis, fully-dogma and pointlessly-arrogant Confucian ideology. In Southeast Asia, except Vietnam, Confucianism had never taken a national position of an orthodox ideology.

The other "non-Confucian" Southeast Asian countries, especially island countries pursued also a *mandala* pattern of decentralized institutional authorities, people had lesser attached relationships with leaders and their governments. Besides, there are countries leaning towards open and flexible model of commercial economy and fadedly nationalist

consciousness[13]. It was advantage for the social development, but disadvantage to marine and islands organization, management and defense, as well as resistances against foreign powers which often used stratagem to divide politics in their invasive intrigue. Therefore, European colonial powers easier implemented territorial annexation and they also lesser offered from fierce resistance wars during colonization, unlike a highly centralized countries such as the case of Vietnam[14].

Vietnam

Vietnam is a continental Southeast Asian country, but has a long coastline of over 3,200 km. This is the only Southeast Asian country in the orbit of the Sinicized world[15] with an institutional model of tightly and stiffly centralized hierarchy and a Confucian ideology of conservative orthodoxy. Historically, this country accepted this vassal state position in name to Chinese giant neighbor, but acquired the superiority complex from the "*Huaxia*" (Chinese civilization) which applied for other countries including "Western barbarian" Europe.

With the self-honoring sense of a great country, Vietnamese feudal dynasties in this course of history were not much interested in economic and political relations with beyond Chinese world overseas, except profit-making motivations. The marine and islands management organization thus remained uneconomical or inactive in reaching out to offshore influences.

Facing the invasive intrigue of the Western countries, the Nguyen dynasty (1802–1945) thus retreated to emulate China's passive defense, fully protecting the coasts and estuaries. It is a dual strategy of closing "both outside and inside". The Nguyen Kings implemented strict measures of vital sea-gates management and protection (especially in the sensitive Central Vietnam) but it remained backward disproportionately than its Atlantic rivals[16]. Otherwise, with a loyalty in the Confucian conservative dogma, the dynasty did not accept any proposal for a national reform strategy raised by some radical scholars. Consequently, those firm responses and secures of closing estuaries not only exacerbated determinations and armed invasion schemes of colonial powers. That tough reactions (but quickly transformed into spineless) enabled merely to cause difficulties and prolonged invasion process, however, it did not prevent the results of turning Vietnam into colony such as most countries in contemporary Southeast Asia. Losing the nation, if absolutely it is not inevitable but in the certain conditions and balance of forces at the time possibly remained irresistible.

3. Issues to be raised in management organization

The marine and islands management organization and defense in different forms of some East Asian countries through sea routes, two Eurasian continents faced, clashed and conflicted with each other leading to different impacts (independence keeping, semi-colonialized or formal colonialized fates). Success and failure of the different countries could help us fully awaking of struggles against invasive intrigues made by Western colonial powers in unequal forces. Scenario is asked in which effective measures for the protection of national and territorial sovereignty.

First of all, to deal with globally multifaceted changes, East Asian countries needed to have changes of vision, positions and functions of the sea, to acknowledge the superiority of the Western colonial countries, and to take the updated and reform perspectives to adapt changes. It also must have real respects and modesty of awaking of weakness. It should learn from its rivals, abandoning pointlessly arrogant view or turning to look back the golden period in the past. Above all, it must give up that the East was more civilized than the West, it thus should not need to learn from it.

The Vietnamese great patriot Phan Chau Trinh, in his essays named *Quân trị chủ nghĩa và dân trị chủ nghĩa* in 1925 (*Monarchy and Democracy*), quoted the argument of unlearning from the West of the King Tu Duc. He wrote: «...It has educated men like

Nguyen Truong To, who recommended the King [Tu Duc] a study on the civilization of the West, then should send mandarins to come to study, and the letters are also concerned that, but the king replied: "Japanese are barbarians, Siam is the same. Barbarians learn from each other, and we, the son of the God and the grandson of the saint, why do we learn from barbarians?"»[17]. Eventually this is the name of the complacentism (complacent doctrine), closed country policy on ideology which is the ideology of narrow and dogmatic Confucian Song.

These marine and islands organization, management and defense must be effectively implemented at the strategic level. This management must combine political purposes, economic aim and foreign and domestic relations. In addition to marine and islands defense against aggressions, even when to use temporary solutions to close the outside, it must extend inside reform in order to create enough force to deal with it politically and militarily and the support of the masses. It should also conduct a synchronized change of thinking and wide-open view, firstly in leadership, policy makers and elites, boldly abandoning old and useless beliefs for an updated integration with the general world trend.

In a new world of complexity and diversity of both competitive and cooperation, military operations in terms of marine and islands defense must be accompanied by political diplomatic activities. The Nguyen Vietnam got a big mistake when leaning into the orbit of China, based on the similarities of the Confucian ideology and political institutional model. In foreign relations, marine and islands defense and protection of sovereignty should exploit the counterpoint among countries which differently opposed interests in order to do what foregoing forefathers' direction "power of decreasing a haft but achieving the double". There are no permanent allies but to know how to make friends and to keep faithfulness, truthfulness with friends, avoiding tricks and the need to fully implement commitments.

The measures of marine and islands and coastal management and defense must be reckoned with a general strategy of remote defense, sprawling about on oceans with enough strong force and means and positive and initiative sense. The Nguyen Vietnam had been relatively meticulous and detailed measures in terms of economic exploitation and military defense over coasts and estuaries. Nevertheless that were petty and tactical tricks, just trying to deal with a situation instead of big problems which must be solved strategically.

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The past always leaves its recommended messages, historical lessons for the present. That problem is to promote lucid analyses or avoid negative lessons. Perhaps the marine and islands management organization in the fifteenth and nineteenth centuries East Asia is the problem of the above.

Using the unedited and old scenario to play on a lot changed stage of performance is the worse perspective layout. An analysis of old historical lessons however for programming a new historical action is probably still useful and never unnecessary.

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[2] *Nguyen Manh Dung.* **Vietnam in the Past – Documents and Researches.** Hanoi: National Political Publishers, *2013.*

[3] *Mahan, A. T.* **The Influence of Sea Power Upon History: 1660–1783.** Boston, *1890.*

[4] *Menzies, G.* **1421: The Year China Discovered the World.** London: Bantam Press, London, *2002.*

[5] See more: **Vietnam in the Commercial System of Asia in the 16th–17th Centuries.** Hanoi, *2007.*

⁶ *Baumler, Alan.* **Modern China and Opium: A Reader.** Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, *2001.*

⁷ **The Cambridge History of China, Late Ch'ing 1800–1911.** Part 1 and 2. Cambridge University Press, *1980.*

⁸ *Nguyen Van Kim.* **The Country Closed Policy of the Tokugawa Japan: Causes and Consequences.** Hanoi, *2000.*

⁹ *Bowring, John.* **The kingdom and people of Siam: with a narrative of the mission to that country in 1855.** Vol. 1. J. W. Parker, retrieved, *2011.*

¹⁰ *Wolters, O. W.* **History, Culture, and Region in Southeast Asian Perspectives.** SEAP Publications, *1999.*

¹¹ *"Paradigm"* first introduced by Thomas Kuhn in his book *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (in 1962, published by the University of Chicago Press).

¹² *Winichakul, Thongchai.* **Siam Mapped: A History of the Geo-Body of a Nation.** University of Hawaii Press, *1997.*

¹³ *Lieberman, Victor.* **Strange Parallels: Southeast Asia in Global Context, c. 800–1830.** Vol. 1: Integration on the Mainland. Cambridge University Press, *2003.*

¹⁴ **The Cambridge History of Southeast Asia.** 2 vols. Cambridge University Press, *1993.*

¹⁵ In the book: **Le nouveau monde sinisé,** Léon Vandermeersch has pointed out countries under the cultural orbit (or as civilizations satellites) of the Chinese order, including Southeast Asia Singapore. But according to us, the case of Singapore is the alternative model (*Vandermeersch, L.* **The New Sinicized World.** Paris: Presses universitaires de France, *1986*; *Arnold Toynbee.* **A Study of History.** Hanoi, *2002*).

¹⁶ According to researchers, Kings Gia Long (r. 1802–1820), Minh Mang (r. 1820–1840) had open mind, relatively serious sense on sea and maritime power (*Nguyen Van Kim, Nguyen Manh Dung (Co-Eds.).* **Vietnam – Sea Economic and Cultural Tradition.** Hanoi: National Political Publishers, *2015*).

¹⁷ *Nguyen Q. Thang.* **Phan Chau Trinh – Life and Works.** Hanoi, *2006*. P. 113.

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