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Silk for silver: Dutch-Vietnamese relations, 1637-1700

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PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The writing of this monograph has a complicated history and the two Sino-Vietnamese words “Duyên Phận” (緣份 – fortune) seem the most apt phrase to describe my five years of work to accomplish it. When people all over the world were happily welcoming the new millennium, I started my career as a lecturer in Maritime Archaeology at the Faculty of History, Vietnam National University, Hanoi. Just one month after the beginning of my academic life, in the spring of 2000, I was invited by a group of Japanese archaeologists to participate in the excavations of the remains of the Dutch East India Company (VOC) factory in Phố Hiến. Many cold winter nights lying in the only guest-house in this historical town and staring at the Dutch compound indicated on a nineteenth-century French map of Phố Hiến, I would dream of finding one sunny and lucky day such objects for the daily use of the Dutch factors as tobacco pipes and drinking glasses. Alas the days passed without achieving any significant results and the excavation ended after just one and a half months. The soil was not willing to tell us the forgotten story of the Dutch merchants in Phố Hiến, a Japanese archaeologist consoled me during the farewell party, but perhaps the VOC archive in The Hague would do so sooner or later. How the well-preserved Dutch documents would be induced to speak was none the less an unanswerable question at that time.

Just half a year after my unsuccessful excavation in Phố Hiến, Dr Hendrik E. Niemeijer visited Hanoi to interview Vietnamese students for the TANAP project (Towards A New Age of Partnership: A Dutch-Asian-South African Historical Research Project). Exchanging spade for notebook and diving into huge VOC bundles instead of digging soil, I started my VOC study in the framework of the Advanced Master Program (2002) and then of the PhD Program (2003-2006) at Leiden University, aiming to interrogate the priceless holdings of the VOC archive on Vietnam and making my discoveries known to my readers.

“Không thầy đố mày làm nên” (No teachers, no winners) is a saying that we Vietnamese students learn by heart. I have been indebted to many teachers during the writing of this thesis. The academic mores of Leiden University prevent me from acknowledging the whole-hearted guidance of my promotors and supervisors, but cannot prevent me from expressing my thanks to the other teachers, scholars, and friends, whose assistance and advice were of great importance in many ways at various stages during my research: Arano Yasunori, Felipe Fernández Armesto, Peter Borschberg, Cao Xuân Tứ, Anthony Farrington, John Guy, A.J.E. Harmsen, Kawakatsu Heita, John Kleinen, Gerrit

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I owe a lifelong debt of love and gratitude to my father, who, despite the serious illness he has been suffering over the past ten years, has never failed to encourage his son to pursue his protracted study in Leiden. I thank my wife, Thùy Linh, for shouldering all the laborious work at home and taking care of our little son, Hoàng Lê Phong, when I am away doing research. Their love and yearning have greatly fired me to complete my research on time.

Leiden, 8 August 2006

H.A.T

ABBREVIATIONS

BAVH	Bulletin des Amis de Vieux Hue
BEFEO	Bulletin de l'École Française d'Extrême-Orient
BL	British Library in London
DHQGHN	Vietnam National University, Hanoi – Publishing House
EIC	English East India Company
KCH	Journal of Archaeology, Hanoi
KHKT	Sciences and Technologies, Hanoi – Publishing House
NA	Nationaal Archief (National Archive of the Netherlands in The Hague)
NCLS	Journal of Historical Studies, Hanoi
NFJ	(Archive of the) Nederlandse Factorij in Japan (Dutch factory in Japan), NA
OIOC	(Archive of the English East India Company preserved at the) Oriental and Indian Office Collection, BL
OPB	Overgekomen brieven en papieren: Letters and papers received from Asia, NA
TCKH	Journal of Science, Hanoi
VHTT	Culture and Information, Hanoi – Publishing House
VOC	(Archive of the) Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie, the Dutch East India Company, NA
Vol., vols	Volume, volumes
XN	Past and Present Magazine, Hanoi