

## Tributary Activity in Diplomacy Relations between Vietnam and Mainland Southeast Asian Countries from 938 to 1885\*

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### [ *Abstract* ]

Based on research of documents left by Vietnamese feudal dynasties, the current article reports how it initially reconstructed the process of Vietnamese tribute activity of Southeast Asia from the 10<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> century and demonstrates the significance of these activities to how Vietnam is considered central rather than peripheral as a nation. Tribute activity took place during a period when Vietnam was an independent country; feudal dynasties of Vietnam were independent and autonomous dynasties. Vietnam had just escaped from the 1,000-year invasion of China and more recently gotten out from the control of the French colonialists. From the demonstration of the tribute activity, otherwise called requesting investiture, the current article places it in relation to the contemporary Chinese “tributary system” to draw out the characteristics and its essence. At the time the current article explores the underlying causes that contributed to shaping the core characteristics of this “tributary system” and its significance to power relationships.

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## I . Introduction

For a long time, when referring to requesting investiture or paying tribute, researchers around the world have often considered such things as special activities only found in diplomatic relations between China and neighboring countries. This is true in the case of Vietnam, which is regarded as a good example the use of special activities with its complicated and multifaceted nature (Phan Huy Chu 2017). Fairbank J.K (1941, 1942, 1953, 1968), S.Y.Teng (1941), John E. Wills (1988), Joseph F. Fletcher (1968), Morris Rossabi (1983), Nicola Di Cosmo (2003), Michael H. Hunt (1984), James A. Millward (1998) and Zhang Feng (2009) all emphasized China's "tributary system" and regarded it as a unique form of international relations only found in ancient and medieval times in East Asia. However, in reality, there was an existence of another "tributary system" in the mainland Southeast Asia at that time (also known as the Indochinese Peninsula) whose center was a vassal state of China, which is Vietnam. In the "tributary system" placing Vietnam as the center, tributary activity of some mainland Southeast Asian countries such as Chen La (Cambodia), Van Tuong (Vientiane), Nam Chuong (Luang Prabang), Thuy Xa (Water Heaven, in western Phu Yen province of Vietnam today), Hoa Xa (Fire Heaven, a tribe in the west of Thuy Xa, also in the west of Phu Yen province of Vietnam today), was also included in the tributary system. However, due to the different geopolitical, geo-cultural characteristics between these two "tributary systems", mainland Southeast Asia's "tributary system" would have its own unique characteristics, besides the general features brought about by the nature of the tributary activity. From the reconstruction of the tributary activity between Vietnam and the mainland Southeast Asian nations from 938 to 1885 (around the time the feudal dynasties of Vietnam were independent), the research presented here initially points out the core characteristics of this special "tributary system" - which not only governed diplomatic relations between Vietnam and Southeast Asian countries

at that time but also had a significant impact on such relations at the present time and in the future.

## **II . Causes of tributary activity between Vietnam and mainland Southeast Asian countries from 938 to 1885**

Relations between Vietnam and mainland Southeast Asian countries were limited from the 10<sup>th</sup> century (namely after 983 when Vietnam gained its independence after more than 1000 years of Chinese rule) to 1885 (when France and China signed the Tianjin Treaty, permanently ending the tributary relationship between Vietnam and China. This is when Vietnam ceased to formally be a vassal state of the suzerain state-China) (Documents diplomatiques 1885: 259-60). During this period, Vietnam was a nation, a sovereign nation, and Vietnam existed with two statuses. One was as the tribute-paying country under the tributary system in which China was the center and the second was as the country receiving tributes from several Southeast Asian countries and therefore a center in its own right.

It can be said that the relations between big countries and small ones, between the center and the periphery, have always been one of the most crucial issues in international relations for many years. Here, the words “small” and “big” in the term “small country, big country” only have a relative meaning. The country is smaller when placing it in a comparable position to a country with more territory, a larger population, or having greater military, economic, political, and cultural potential, and more influence and governance over other countries. A country may be bigger than one country, but it also may be smaller than other countries. Similarly, the words “central” and “peripheral” have a relative meaning. A country may be considered a center compared to these peripheral countries, but it may be a peripheral or semi-peripheral country when compared to other centers. In those relations, the center often has many options, plans and a trump card to bind the peripheral countries to be dependent and follow the center’s lead.

Meanwhile, small countries and peripheral countries are often vulnerable. The vulnerabilities of small nations have been

demonstrated countless times throughout history. Therefore, it is no coincidence that Thucydides in *The Peloponnesian War* once said: “the strong do what they have the power to do and the weak accept what they have to accept” (Goodby 2014: 32). Although this statement is not true in all cases, it reminds us of the predominance in many aspects of the center and the disadvantageous position and greater vulnerability of small countries considered to be peripheral.

Here, from the 10<sup>th</sup> to 19th centuries, not all mainland Southeast Asian countries paid tribute to Vietnam. In fact, only some countries such as Ai Lao, Chiem Thanh, Chen La, Van Tuong, Nam Chuong, Thuy Xa and Hoa Xa performed this obligation. The common point in these countries is that they are smaller than Vietnam in terms of territory, population, and military, economic, political, and cultural potential. This is an undeniable fact even though Vietnam at that time was also a smaller country than many other countries in the region, such as China and Japan. Obviously, a country may be small compared to one country, but larger than that country.

Once these Southeast Asian countries decided to pay tribute and requesting investiture, the act means that they accepted their inferior position in their relations with Vietnam. There must be a logical reason for this, otherwise, at the same time, why did Siam not accept paying tribute to Vietnam like many other countries? Unlike Siam - a country equivalent to Vietnam in terms of political, military, and economic potential - the countries of Chen La, Ai Lao, Van Tuong, Nam Chuong, Thuy Xa and Hoa Xa were smaller countries at that time in terms of potential in all aspects. They always fell into civil war, suffered instability and were under pressure of aggression and annexation from the outside. Therefore, they were in the middle of two options. One was being to submit itself to the rule of and pay tribute to the bigger country like Vietnam, for finding support in the life of survival and development. The other being to self-resist oppositions from domestic opposing factions and endure a permanent threat from many of the more prominent surrounding countries. They chose the first option - submit themselves to the rule of Vietnam. It was the inevitable choice of survival like Vietnam when Vietnam was facing the risk of

permanent security threats from China.

On the Vietnamese side, Vietnam was also willing to accept the tributary activities of smaller Southeast Asian countries. It considered it as a way to maintain the uninterrupted “suzerain - vassal” relationship. This is because the existence of this “tributary system” of taking Vietnam as the center not only brought political and economic benefits to Vietnam, but also created an adjacent stable external environment to maintain stability within Vietnam. Moreover, the maintenance of a “tributary system” with a central position for Vietnam also contributed to creating a balanced correlation in terms of potential, at least in terms of form, for Vietnam in relations with its giant neighbor in the North. Therefore, the “tributary system” of mainland Southeast Asia at that time was not merely unilateral, as described by Yu Insun (2009) when he described the Chinese world order, which was operated based on demand from both sides (Vietnam and Southeast Asian countries).

However, while China is the biggest country in East Asia, Vietnam, despite being the center of the mainland Southeast Asia’s “tributary system”, is still not the largest country in the region. It was often under the pressure of aggression from the bigger side of China and from competition with Siam--the country with the same potential. Therefore, Vietnam’s authority in the eyes of vassal states is not as supreme and absolute as China’s supremacy over its vassal states. At that time, besides Vietnam, these mainland Southeast Asian countries could and must have relied on other big countries to ensure maximum security for their country. Moreover, both China and the countries in its “tributary system” were in the same Chinese Cultural Sphere. Both shared the same ideological basis of Confucian ideology; both were deeply imbued with a sense of upholding up-down order between big countries and small ones according to the theory of Righteousness; both honored the “Emperor”; both obeyed “the will of Heaven”, and both considered requesting investiture and paying tribute as the duty of vassals to their Emperor, and “the will of Heaven” to have the righteousness and agreement with God. In contrast, between countries in the mainland Southeast Asian “tributary system”, there was no such coherent adherence in terms of ideology (Nguyễn Thị Mỹ Hạnh

2019: 71-72). Although Confucian culture still affected many countries in the region, the weak or strong influence level in countries was different. Besides Confucianism, many other religions such as Hinduism and Buddhism, among others still played an essential role in the ideological life of both the rulers and the people in feudal society in many countries in this region. Therefore, the power of Heaven (Tian-天) and Divine Son of Heaven (the Emperor) - the invisible force with the theocratic power of Confucianism creating the mutual binds between countries of the “tributary system” taking China as the center was unable to bring into full performance of its functions in the “tributary system” of mainland Southeast Asia. Therefore, the concept of “center” and “suzerain” was defined by Shils as something supreme and extremely sacred in the field of symbolism, values and beliefs (Shils 1961: 117-30; Shils 1975: 3). It was also the convergence of “traditional” values, especially the “rituals” and sacred beliefs, thereby spreading and diffusing culture to the periphery (Winthrop Robert 1991: 83-84)<sup>1</sup> and gaining “credibility” and “respect” from the peripheral countries, which seemed inapplicable when it comes to the “center” of Vietnam in the “tributary system” of mainland Southeast Asia at that time. The characteristics of this geopolitical, geo-cultural context would shape the very unique characteristics of tributary activity between Vietnam and mainland Southeast Asian countries during the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

### **III. The process of tributary activities between Vietnam and mainland Southeast Asian countries in the 19th century**

Through surveys of the Internal Affairs of Nguyen Dynasty, especially the *Annals of Đại Nam* - the annual fully records the diplomatic activities of the Nguyen Dynasty with Southeast Asian countries at that time, a detailed table describing the tributary

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<sup>1</sup> Winthrop Robert wrote: “Versions of diffusionist thought included the conviction that all cultures originated from one culture center (heliocentric diffusion); the more reasonable view that cultures originated from a limited number of culture centers (culture circles); and finally the notion that each society is influenced by others but that the process of diffusion is both contingent and arbitrary”.

activities to Vietnam conducted by Southeast Asian countries under the Nguyen Dynasty is possible and provided as follows.

<Table 1> Tributary activity between Vietnam and mainland Southeast Asian countries

<i>Year</i>	<i>Tribute-paying countries</i>	<i>Content</i>	<i>Vietnam's response to envoys bringing tributes</i>
994	Champa	King Champa sent Che Dong to offer materials. (Ngô Sĩ Liên <i>et al.</i> 1993a: 228)	
1011	Champa	Champa offered lions. (Ngô Sĩ Liên <i>et al.</i> 1993a: 242)	
1014	Chen La	Chen La paid tributes. (Ngô Sĩ Liên <i>et al.</i> 1993a: 244)	
1025	Chen La	Chen La paid tributes. (Ngô Sĩ Liên <i>et al.</i> 1993a: 247)	
1026	Chen La	Chen La paid tributes. (Ngô Sĩ Liên <i>et al.</i> 1993a: 247)	
1033	Chen La	Chen La paid tributes. (Ngô Sĩ Liên <i>et al.</i> 1993a: 255)	
1039	Chen La	Chen La paid tributes. (Ngô Sĩ Liên <i>et al.</i> 1993a: 261)	
1055	Champa	Champa paid tributes. (Ngô Sĩ Liên <i>et al.</i> 1993a: 271)	
1056	Chen La	Chen La paid tributes. (Ngô Sĩ Liên <i>et al.</i> 1993a: 271)	
1067	Nguu Hông <sup>2</sup>	The two countries Nguu Hong and Ai Lao offered gold, silver, aloeswood, rhino's horn, ivory and other local products. (Ngô Sĩ Liên <i>et al.</i> 1993a: 274)	
1068	Champa	Champa offered white elephants, but then harassed the border. (Ngô Sĩ Liên <i>et al.</i> 1993a: 274)	
1069	Champa	King Che Cu (Rudravarman III) would like to offer three districts including Dia Ly, Ma Linh and Bo Chinh to atone for the sin. (Ngô Sĩ Liên <i>et al.</i> 1993a: 275)	
1071	Champa	Champa paid tributes. (Ngô Sĩ Liên <i>et al.</i> 1993a: 275)	
1110	Champa	Champa offered white elephants. (Ngô Sĩ Liên <i>et al.</i> 1993a: 286)	
1112	Champa	Champa offered white elephants. (Ngô Sĩ Liên <i>et al.</i> 1993a: 286)	
1117	Champa	Champa offered three golden flowers. (Ngô Sĩ Liên <i>et al.</i> 1993a: 288)	
1118	Champa	Champa paid tributes. (Ngô Sĩ Liên <i>et al.</i> 1993a: 289)	

1120	Chen La	Champa's envoy paid tributes. (Ngô Sĩ Liên et al. 1993a: 290)	
1120	Champa	Champa's envoy paid tributes. (Ngô Sĩ Liên et al. 1993a: 290)	
1123	Chen La	Chen La's envoy paid tributes. (Ngô Sĩ Liên et al. 1993a: 292)	
1126	Champa	Champa's envoy paid tributes. (Ngô Sĩ Liên et al. 1993a: 294)	
1130	Champa	Champa's envoy paid tributes. (Ngô Sĩ Liên et al. 1993a: 304)	
1132	Chen La	Chen La went to Vietnam and paid tributes. (Ngô Sĩ Liên et al. 1993a: 152)	
1132	Champa	Champa went to Vietnam and paid tributes. (Ngô Sĩ Liên et al. 1993a: 152)	
1135	Chen La	Chen La's envoy paid tributes. (Ngô Sĩ Liên et al. 1993a: 307)	
1135	Champa	Champa's envoy paid tributes. (Ngô Sĩ Liên et al. 1993a: 307)	
1149	Trao Oa <sup>3</sup> , Ai Lao, Lo Lac <sup>4</sup> , Siam <sup>5</sup>	Trading boats from the three countries of Trao Oa, Lo Lac, Siam to Hai Don, applied for residence, trading and offering local products. (Ngô Sĩ Liên et al. 1993a: 317)	
1154	Champa	The King of Champa, Che Bi La But (Jaya Harivarman I) offered his daughter. (Ngô Sĩ Liên et al. 1993a: 321)	
1154	Champa	Champa's envoy paid tributes. (Ngô Sĩ Liên et al. 1993a: 321)	
1159	Nguu Hong	Nguu Hong offered flowers and elephant. (Ngô Sĩ Liên et al. 1993a: 322)	
1164	Champa	Champa's envoy paid tributes. (Ngô Sĩ Liên et al. 1993a: 323)	
1167	Champa	Champa sent envoys to offer pearls and local products to ask for peace. Since then Champa kept its role as a vassal state and fully paid tributes. (Ngô Sĩ Liên et al. 1993a: 324)	
1182	Champa	Champa paid tributes. (Ngô Sĩ Liên et al. 1993a: 328)	
1184	Champa	Champa paid tributes. (Ngô Sĩ Liên et al. 1993a: 328)	
1191	Chen La	Chen La paid tributes. (Ngô Sĩ Liên et al. 1993a: 330)	
1198	Champa	Champa's envoy paid tributes and besought investiture. (Ngô Sĩ Liên et al. 1993a: 331)	
1228	Champa	Champa paid tributes. (Le Quy Don 1978: 11)	



1242	Champa	Champa paid tributes. (Ngô Sĩ Liên et al. 1993b: 19)	
1262	Champa	Champa paid tributes. (Ngô Sĩ Liên et al. 1993b: 33)	
1266	Champa	Chen La's envoys, namely Bo Tinh, Bo Hoang and Bo Su paid tributes. (Ngô Sĩ Liên et al. 1993b: 35)	
1267	Champa	Champa paid tributes. (Ngô Sĩ Liên et al. 1993b: 36)	
1269	Champa	Champa offered white elephants. (Ngô Sĩ Liên et al. 1993b: 38)	
1270	Champa	Champa paid tributes. (Ngô Sĩ Liên et al. 1993b: 38)	
1279	Champa	Champa sent Che Nang and Tra Diep to pay tributes. (Ngô Sĩ Liên et al. 1993b: 45)	
1282	Champa	Champa sent Bo Ba Ma Cac including 100 people to offer white elephants. (Ngô Sĩ Liên et al. 1993b: 47)	
1293	Champa	Champa paid tributes. (Ngô Sĩ Liên et al. 1993b: 70)	
1301	Champa	Champa paid tributes. (Ngô Sĩ Liên et al. 1993b: 86)	
1305	Champa	- Champa sent Che Bo Dai and his subordinates, including over one hundred people to offer gold, silver, Burma padauk, and curiosities to make a marriage proposal. - King of Champa Che Man (Jaya Simhavarman III) brought the land of two districts including O and Chau Ly to make wedding offerings.	The Tran dynasty married Princess Huyen Tran to the King of Champa Che Man. (Ngô Sĩ Liên et al. 1993b: 89-90)
1307	Champa	Prince of Champa Che Da Da (Jaya Simhavarman IV) sent the envoy Bao Loc Ke to offer white elephants. (Ngô Sĩ Liên et al. 1993b: 91)	
1346	Champa	Champa sent envoys to pay tribute; offerings were very simple and inconsiderate. (Ngô Sĩ Liên et al. 1993b: 130)	
1352	Champa	Che Mo, a person of Champa, ran to Đại Việt, offered one white elephant, a white horse, a large ant (1 meter and nine decimeters long) and tributes and asked for beating Tra Hoa Bo De (Maha Sawa) to confer the title on him as King. (Ngô Sĩ Liên et al. 1993b: 133)	
1376	Champa	Che Bong Nga (Po Binasuor) sent subordinates to pay tribute to the Tran Dynasty with 15 gold trays. (Ngô Sĩ Liên et al. 1993b: 216)	
2/1427	Champa	Champa's envoy paid tributes. Le Dynasty	

		gave him bird's nests, horses and silk and told the envoy to return. (Ngô Sĩ Liên et al. 1993b: 265)	
7/1427	Champa	Champa people offered local products. (Ngô Sĩ Liên et al. 1993b: 272)	
7/1427	Ai Lao	Ai Lao offered local products. (Ngô Sĩ Liên et al. 1993b: 273)	
1434	Ai Lao	Ai Lao's Muong Bon sent people to pay tributes. (Ngô Sĩ Liên et al. 1993b: 317)	The Le Dynasty bestowed on the envoy two gold lamé knitwear and five silks.
1434	Ai Lao	Con Co of Ai Lao, sent his subordinates, Quan Long, to offer elephants and gold and silver to ask for reinforcements. (Ngô Sĩ Liên et al. 1993b: 321)	
1434	Champa	Champa's envoy brought letters and gifts for paying tribute to pray for reunification. (Ngô Sĩ Liên et al. 1993b: 321)	
1434	Ai Lao	Ai Lao people surrendered, offered 3 elephants. (Ngô Sĩ Liên et al. 1993b: 323)	
1435	Ai Lao	King of Ai Lao, Du Quan, sent his subordinates to bring gold and silver-made cups for drinking alcohol and two elephants to pay tributes. (Ngô Sĩ Liên et al. 1993b: 324)	
1435	Muong Qua of Ai Lao	Muong Qua of Ai Lao paid tributes. (Ngô Sĩ Liên et al. 1993b: 329)	
1435	Muong Bon <sup>6</sup>	Muong Bon paid tributes including ivory, rhino's horn and silver, and fabric. (Ngô Sĩ Liên et al. 1993b: 333)	
1437	Siam	Siamese trading boats went to pay tributes.	
1437	Siam	Siam sent envoys, Trai Cuong Lat's group, to pay for tribute. (Ngô Sĩ Liên et al. 1993b: 346)	The Emperor gave the imperial edict and told him to take it home, and deducted trade taxes, i.e. decreasing by half the trade taxes of the previous year.
1448	Bon Man	Bon Man sent people to pay tributes including rhino's horn, gold, silver and a three-ivory elephant (Ngô Sĩ Liên et al. 1993b: 359)	Rewarding the Bon Man envoy
1448	Champa	Champa's envoys brought with them national letters and offerings along with Huu Quang's group to Dai Viet. (Ngô Sĩ Liên et al. 1993b: 360)	Le Dynasty rewarded the envoys handsomely.
1449	Champa	Champa people paid tributes including local products. (Ngô Sĩ Liên et al. 1993b: 360))	Le Dynasty issued a royal proclamation, refusing to accept the tributes.
1467	Champa	Chapa's envoy went to pay tributes. (Ngô Sĩ Liên et al. 1993b: 408)	

1467	Siam	Siamese sailing boats offered local products. (Ngô Sĩ Liên et al. 1993b: 427)	The Emperor refused to accept them.
1468	Champa	The chieftain in Sa Boi, Cam Tich, and the chieftain in Thuan Binh, Dao Nhi, came to attend Court and offer local products. (Ngô Sĩ Liên et al. 1993b: 1471)	
1468	Ai Lao	Ai Lao's envoy, defenders of Quan Binh, Lang Le's group brought local products to pay tributes. (Ngô Sĩ Liên et al. 1993b: 1471)	
1471	Ai Lao	Ai Lao sent envoys to pay tributes. (Ngô Sĩ Liên et al. 1993b: 451)	
1510	Ai Lao	Cuc Mong of Ai Lao sent an envoy to Nghe An to ask the Court and pay tributes. (Ngô Sĩ Liên et al. 1993c: 54)	The Emperor issued a royal proclamation refusing to accept the tributes because he had just taken the country and was afraid that they would like to occupy Vietnam.
1564	Ai Lao	At that time, Sa Dau of Ai Lao ordered his subordinates to pay tributes including local products and four male elephants.	The Emperor ordered the Grand Chancellor to bring his daughter to marry Sa Dau to establish the relationship with the neighboring country. (Ngô Sĩ Liên et al. 1993c: 136; Le Quy Don 1978: 11; Nguyen Dynasty's National Historian Office 1998: 649)
1583	Ai Lao	Ai Lao sent envoys to offer local products. (Nguyen Dynasty's National Historian Office 1998: 665)	
1699	Chen La	Losing the Nguyen army, Chen La asked to follow the previous tribute rules. The Dai Viet army withdrew. (Lê Quý Đôn 2018: 137)	
1700	Man Lac Hon people (Ai Lao)	Man Lac Hon people <sup>7</sup> asked for paying tributes. (Nguyen Dynasty's National Historian Office 1998: 763)	The Trinh court did not accept the request because it did not want to "take sides with this person, not do it with another". Moreover, Ai Lao was being divided into many factions.
1706	Ai Lao	Ai Lao paid tributes Trinh Lord.	Trinh Cuong (one of Trinh Lords) brought his daughter to Trieu Phuc, chieftain of Ai Lao. (Nguyen Dynasty's National Historian Office 1998: 767)
1714	Bon Man (Ai Lao)	Bon Man went to pay tributes. (Nguyen Dynasty's National Historian Office 1998: 774)	
1728	Ai Lao	Ai Lao sent envoys to pay tributes. In addition to the usual rules, the number of	When the envoys came to the tribute and returned to

		elephants and native products were paid twice as much as before.	the country, welcome and food were given in a favorable manner. (Nguyen Dynasty's National Historian Office 1998: 807)
1747	Man Lac Hon (Ai Lao)	Lac Hon came to pay tributes, and asked for paying tributes every three years with strong elephants in accordance with the rules of Tran Ninh and Cao Chau. They offered white elephants.	The Court did not accept white elephants. (Nguyen Dynasty's National Historian Office 1998: 872)
1753	Tran Ninh (previously called Bon Man)	Tran Ninh <sup>8</sup> came to pay local products. (Nguyen Dynasty's National Historian Office 1998: 887)	
1755	Tran Ninh	Tran Ninh came to pay tributes. Tran Ninh's letter about paying tribute is an anonymous one. His letter requested paying tributes every six years and forbidding the Ai Lao's envoy from travelling through Tran Ninh's territory.	Courtiers discussed, said that the customs of the Man like that, should not reproach too much and placed regulations for Tran Ninh: every three years to pay tribute (Nguyen Dynasty's National Historian Office 1998: 890)
1756	Ai Lao	In January, Ai Lao came to pay tributes. (Nguyen Dynasty's National Historian Office 1998: 892)	
1756	Ai Lao	In December of bissextile year, Ai Lao offered a paper for paying tribute with two white elephants. (Nguyen Dynasty's National Historian Office 1998: 892)	Trinh Doanh issued a royal proclamation: "The annual ceremony of the tribute is customary; as for precious things, allow them to be kept as treasures in the country; white elephants are free to choose to give, without having to send people to do anything".
1771	Nam Chuong <sup>9</sup>	Nam Chuong came to pay tributes. (Nguyen Dynasty's National Historian Office 1998: 923)	
1772	Ai Lao	Ai Lao came to pay tributes. (Nguyen Dynasty's National Historian Office 1998: 926)	
1776	Lac Hon	Lac Hon came to pay tributes. (Nguyen Dynasty's National Historian Office 1998: 939)	The Imperial Court approved.
1801	Van Tuong	Van Tuong sent envoys to pay tributes including ten bronze gongs and one white rhino's horn.	The Nguyen Dynasty also gave the King four pieces of agarwood, two handguns, lead and tin with a weight of 100 kg for each. (Nguyen Dynasty's National Historian Office 2002: 432)
1802	Van Tuong	Van Tuong sent an envoy to pay tributes.	Nguyen Dynasty granted 100 Guan (貫) and allowed him

			to return. (Nguyen Dynasty's National Historian Office 2002: 530)
1802	Nam Chuong	Van Tuong sent people to pay tributes. (Nguyen Dynasty's National Historian Office 2002: 505-506)	
1803	Nam Chuong	Nam Chuong sent people to pay tributes. (Nguyen Dynasty's National Historian Office 2002: 559)	
1803	Nam Chuong	Nam Chuong sent Nai Khai's group to send a letter to ask for following Chau Bien's way to enter the Court for paying tributes.	Emperor Gia Long issued a royal proclamation, ordering Bac Thanh court to treat the envoy carefully, and wrote a letter in reply. (Nguyen Dynasty's National Historian Office 2002: 559)
1803	Chen La	Chen La sent an envoy to pay tributes. (Nguyen Dynasty's National Historian Office 2002: 571)	Emperor of Nguyen dynasty ordered towns from Quang Tri to the North, to welcome the envoy, and to take him to the temporary residence.
1805	Van Tuong	King of Van Tuong, Chieu A No, sent his envoy to pay tributes (two male elephants, two rhino's horns, 800 kg of Cortex Cinnamomi Cassiae).	When the envoy came, the Court allowed him to access, asked about the customs of their country, and then carefully welcomed them. At the same time, they ordered the Ministry of Rites to discuss a rule of making tributes every three years, the types of tributes and a road. (Nguyen Dynasty's National Historian Office 2002: 649)
1806	Chen La	Chen La sent an envoy to pay tributes.	The Nguyen dynasty ruled tributes to be made every three years, the types of tributes, and objects of envoys applied for Chen La. (Nguyen Dynasty's National Historian Office 2002: 707)
1807	Siam	Siam sent an envoy to pay local products.	When the envoy came, the Nguyen dynasty granted much and told him to return. (Nguyen Dynasty's National Historian Office 2002: 690)
1807	Luong Mang (Muong Luong <sup>10</sup> )	Luong Mang (Muong Luong) sent an envoy to pay tributes.	The Emperor asked the subordinates to send back the tributes, grant much and told the envoy to return" (Nguyen Dynasty's National Historian Office 2002: 687).

1809	Van Tuong	Paid tributes to the Nguyen Dynasty in 1809. (Yoshiharu 1992: 135)	
1811	Van Tuong, Cam Lo	- On February 29, Van Tuong sent an envoy to pay tributes. - Man in Cam Lo came to pay tributes. (Nguyen Dynasty's National Historian Office 2002: 810; Ngô Sĩ Liên et al. 1993a: 810)	
1811	Van Tuong	Van Tuong sent an envoy to pay tributes (Nguyen Dynasty's National Historian Office 2002: 810, 829)	Emperor Gia Long issued the ordinance for praising.
1814	Van Tuong	Van Tuong sent an envoy to pay tributes. (Nguyen Dynasty's National Historian Office 2002: 893; Ngô Sĩ Liên et al. 1993a: 839)	
1816	Chen La	Sentan envoy to pay tributes (Nguyen Dynasty's National Historian Office 2002: 901, 935)	Emperor Gia Long saw that the country had just been peaceful, ordered to collect some tributes and the rest was returned, and then kindly treated him and told him to return.
1817	Van Tuong	Van Tuong came to pay tributes. (Nguyen Dynasty's National Historian Office 2002: 962)	
1818	Chen La	Chen La sent an envoy to pay tributes and pleaded forever for claiming to be a vassal and travelling and trading like they used to. (Nguyen Dynasty's National Historian Office 2002: 973)	Emperor Gia Long approved.
1820	Chen La	King of Chen La sent an envoy to pay tributes and went to the Court to call on Emperor Minh Menh. (Nguyen Dynasty's National Historian Office 2009: 1744-1745)	Minh Menh rewarded the brocade items so that the King enjoyed grace.
1821	Chen La	Chen La sent an envoy to pay tributes. (Nguyen Dynasty's National Historian Office 2004: 1747-1748)	Minh Menh received the tributes without bowing.
1821	Van Tuong	Van Tuong sent an envoy to pay tributes.	Emperor Minh Menh rewarded handsomely. (Nguyen Dynasty's National Historian Office 2004: 122; Cabinet of the Nguyen dynasty 1993: 468)
1821	Thuy Xa (12)	Thuy Xa asked for its envoys to pay tribute. (Nguyen Dynasty's National Historian Office 2004: 138)	Emperor Minh Menh commended that he came with great intentions and agreed. Then the country had troubles; the tributes did not arrive.
1822	Van Tuong	Van Tuong sent an envoy to pay tributes. (Cabinet of the Nguyen dynasty 1993: 486-487)	
1822	Chen La	King Chen La sent an envoy to pay tributes.	The Nguyen dynasty praised their sincerity and gave

			priority to treat them kindly. (Nguyen Dynasty's National Historian Office 2009: 1749)
1823	Chen La	King Chen La sent an envoy to Vietnam to pay tributes as rules.	Emperor Minh Menh issued an order to allow Chen La's delegation to bring tribute items back and the envoys were also exempted from coming to the capital city. (Nguyen Dynasty's National Historian Office 2009: 1752)
1823	Nam Chuong (the first name is Lao Lung) <sup>11</sup>	King of Nam Chuong sent an envoy to submit a letter to ask for a vassal status. (Nguyen Dynasty's National Historian Office 2004: 273)	Emperor Minh Menh ordered Ministry of Rite to rule that paying tributes every three years and selected the expected tributes, rewarded the King, the deputy envoy. However, then the country was busy and could not come to pay tributes.
1824	Chen La	Chen La sent an envoy to pay tributes. (Nguyen Dynasty's National Historian Office 2004: 360)	Emperor Minh Menh issued a royal proclamation, stating that the envoy is exempted from coming to the capital city, gave the King of the vassal state an imperial edict and silk and gave the envoy silver and told him to return.
1824	Van Tuong	Van Tuong sent an envoy to pay tributes.	Because Van Tuong was at war, Emperor Minh Menh decided to exempt the tributes. (Nguyen Dynasty's National Historian Office 2004: 333; Cabinet of the Nguyen dynasty 1993: 487)
1826	Van Tuong	King of Van Tuong, A No, sent his son, Hat Xa Bong, to offer local products to show its gratitude.	Emperor Minh Menh ordered to send back the offerings, took only ten male elephants, rewarded the envoy with much and told him to return home. (Nguyen Dynasty's National Historian Office 2004: 664)
1826	Van Tuong	King of Van Tuong presented treasures of his ancestors including a pair of gold boxes, twenty-three jewels to congratulate the Queen Mother on her longevity.	Emperor Minh Menh also appreciated and gave his gifts back. (Nguyen Dynasty's National Historian Office 2009: 1760)
1826	Chen La	Chen La sent an envoy to pay tributes.	As soon as Chen La's envoy arrived in Gia Dinh province, Emperor Minh Menh ordered not to come to the capital city and to grant the

			King of Vassal state and the envoy some money and silk to bring home. (Nguyen Dynasty's National Historian Office 2009: 1756)
1826	Chen La	King of Chen La offered tributes including various kinds of wood to serve the building of Emperor Minh Menh's boat.	Emperor Minh Menh has "praised. He bestowed rewards, treatment, and gave three boats." (Nguyen Dynasty's National Historian Office 2009: 1756)
1827	Van Tuong	King of Van Tuong, A No, sent his son, Hat Xa Bong, to offer local products to show its gratitude.	Emperor Minh Menh agreed to present the envoy before him, ordered to send back the offerings, took only ten male elephants, rewarded the envoy a lot and told him to return. (Ngo Si Lien et al. 1993b: 664; Nguyen Dynasty's National Historian Office 2004: 621)
1827	Chen La	Chen La sent an envoy to pay tributes.	The Nguyen Dynasty rewarded the Chief envoy and Deputy envoy with hats, clothes, clothes, blankets and cushions. (Nguyen Dynasty's National Historian Office 2004: 684; Nguyen Dynasty's National Historian Office 2009: 1760)
1828	Nam Chuong	Nam Chuong came to pay tributes.	Emperor Minh Menh sent a citadel's guardian to lead the envoy to the citadel, ordered Ministry of Rites to rule that paying tributes every three years and rule types of tribute and pathway (from Tran Ninh to Nghe An to go to the capital city). The Emperor rewarded handsomely and told him to return. (Nguyen Dynasty's National Historian Office 2004: 772-774)
1829	Chen La	Chen La continued to send an envoy to Vietnam to pay tributes.	Minh Menh issued a royal proclamation, exempting the Chen La's envoy from going to the capital city to visit. At the same time, the Emperor also sent an imperial edict and brocade to King of Chen La and rewarded the envoy's delegation. (Nguyen Dynasty's National Historian Office 2009: 1765)



1831	Hoa Xa (13)	Hoa Xa sent an envoy to pay tributes (a pair of ivory, one rhino's horn).	Emperor Minh Menh gave him gold, silk and clothes and allowed the envoy to come back. Ministry of Rites discussed for preparing some tributes (a pair of ivory, two rhino's horns), paying tributes every three years and the Emperor approved. (Nguyen Dynasty's National Historian Office 2007a: 197-98)
1831	Chen La	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Chen La sent an envoy to pay tributes. The envoy came to Gia Dinh.</li> <li>- Nine administrative divisions in Cam Lo district also came to pay tributes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Emperor Minh Menh exempted the envoy's delegation to the capital city and bestowed on the King of vassal state a royal edict, colorful silk, and gave the silver to the envoy's delegation based on the different ranks.</li> <li>- Nine administrative divisions in Cam Lo district came and paid tributes. Emperor Minh Menh rewarded the Head of each division, a set of robes for each one, rewarded handsomely and then told them to return. (Nguyen Dynasty's National Historian Office 2007a: 169)</li> </ul>
1832	Chen La	Chen La sent an envoy to pay tributes.	When the envoy arrived in Gia Dinh province, Emperor Minh Menh issued a royal proclamation stating that the envoy is exempt from going to the capital city, gave the King of the vassal state a royal edict and a flowered piece of silk, and gave the envoy silver, and then told him to return. (Nguyen Dynasty's National Historian Office 2007a: 169)
1832	Muc Da Han in Lac Bien	Man Muc Da Han people in Lac Bien district sent an envoy to pay tributes	Emperor Minh Menh ordered officials of Nghe An province to treat and then told him to return. (Nguyen Dynasty's National Historian Office 2007a: 169)
1833	Chen La	Chen La sent an envoy to pay tributes.	Emperor Minh Menh gave Mandarins' grade attire and drinks. (Nguyen Dynasty's National Historian Office 2007a: 545)

1833	Nam Chuong	Nam Chuong sent an envoy to pay tributes. (Nguyen Dynasty's National Historian Office 2007a: 581; Ngô Sĩ Liên at al.581)	
1833	Nam Chuong	Nam Chuong came to pay tributes.	Emperor Minh Menh rewarded them. ((Nguyen Dynasty's National Historian Office 2007a: 609-10))
1834	Chen La	King of Chen La, Nac Chan, would like to offer three male elephants.	Emperor Minh Menh thought that all the people who paid such tributes are heartfelt, so the Emperor approved and rewarded them, then calculated the price and paid for them (paid 200 Guan for each elephant). (Nguyen Dynasty's National Historian Office 2007b: 276)
1834	Hoa Xa	Hoa Xa sent an envoy to pay tributes.	Emperor Minh Menh ordered Phu Yen province to escort the envoy by waterway to the capital city and was rewarded. (Nguyen Dynasty's National Historian Office 2007b: 306-307)
1835	Chen La		Chen La was exempt from paying tributes because of suffering from the Siamese enemies (Nguyen Dynasty's National Historian Office 2007a: 1776)
1836	Chen La	King's daughter of Chen La, Ngoc Van, sent people to offer local products to the Nguyen Dynasty because she wanted to thank the Nguyen Dynasty for helping Chen La fight against the Siamese enemies.	Emperor Minh Menh greatly praised and rewarded them, but he allowed them to bring the offerings back to the country. (Nguyen Dynasty's National Historian Office 2009: 1782)
1838	Nam Chuong	Nam Chuong sent a family member named Tao Kham Phan to send a letter to Nghe An to admit its guilt and to replace the tributes. (Nguyen Dynasty's National Historian Office 2007c: 261-62)	
1840	Hoa Xa	Hoa Xa sent people to pay tributes. (Nguyen Dynasty's National Historian Office 2007c: 687)	
1841	Hoa Xa, Thuy Xa	The two countries, Thuy Xa and Hoa Xa, jointly paid tributes (the tributes of Thuy Xa were two ivories and two rhino's horns. Hoa Xa's tributes were one ivory and one rhino's horn).	Emperor Minh Menh agreed to let Thuy Xa and Hoa Xa pay tribute every three years jointly. (Nguyen Dynasty's National Historian Office 2007d: 92-93)

1841	Thuy Xa, Hoa Xa	The two countries of Thuy Xa and Hoa Xa came to pay tributes.	Emperor Minh Menh treated them well to show his love for the far away countries. (Nguyen Dynasty's National Historian Office 2007d: 172)
1843	Thuy Xa, Hoa Xa	Thuy Xa and Hoa Xa came to pay tributes. Deputy envoy Kieu Moc was ill and had to stay at the front of the border. Chief envoy Son Thi also became ill when going to the embassy in Phu Yen province.	Emperor Thieu Tri allowed the envoy' delegation to wait in Phu Yen province, there no need to go to the capital city, then gave more rewards. (Nguyen Dynasty's National Historian Office 2007d: 515)
1846	Chen La	Nac Ong Don submitted a letter acknowledging guilt to the Emperor and sent an envoy to bring products to pay tributes. (Nguyen Dynasty's National Historian Office 2007d: 427-428; Lê Quý Đôn 2018, 193)	
1847	Cao Mien	Cao Mien's envoy came to pay tributes.	The Nguyen Dynasty rewarded the mission of Cao Mien. (Nguyen Dynasty's National Historian Office 2007d: 968-73)
1847	Cao Mien	The King of Cao Mien accepted the title bestowal and tributary rules.	The Ministry of Rites discussed and reported to the Emperor paying tributes every three years and then rewarding products. The Emperor approved. (Nguyen Dynasty's National Historian Office 2007d: 1007)
1848	Cao Mien	The King of Cao Mien, Xa Ong Giun, sent an envoy to offer products in the incense-offering ceremony, congratulation ceremony, and tributary ceremony every year.	Emperor Tu Duc agreed to accept offerings of incense-offering ceremony and tributary ceremony, and the offerings for the great rejoicings were waived. (Nguyen Dynasty's National Historian Office 2007e: 54)
1851	Cao Mien	King of Cao Mien, Xa Ong Giun, sent his servant to submit a tributary petition. (Nguyen Dynasty's National Historian Office 2007e: 191)	
1851	Cao Mien	King of Cao Mien, Xa Ong Giun sent an envoy to pay tributes.	Emperor Tu Duc, who was dwelling in Can Chinh palace, allowed the envoy of Cao Mien to pay tributes. (Nguyen Dynasty's National Historian Office 2007e: 198)
1852	Thuy Xa, Hoa Xa	Thuy Xa and Hoa Xa sent envoys, the Kieu Moc's group, to come for paying tributes (ivory and rhino's horn).	Emperor Tu Duc allowed them to perform a ceremony in the palace of Phu Yen province and then gave gifts and told them to return.

			(Nguyen Dynasty's National Historian Office 2007e: 298)
1854	Cao Mien	Cao Mien sent an envoy to pay tributes.	King Tu Duc issued a royal proclamation, rewarding the King, Xa Ong Giun, treated the envoy well and allowed him to return. (Nguyen Dynasty's National Historian Office 2007e: 306)
1855	Thuy Xa, Hoa Xa	Thuy Xa and Hoa Xa came to pay local products. Thuy Xa paid one pair of ivory, two rhino's horns; Hoa Xa paid one ivory and one rhino horn.	Emperor Tu Duc rewarded items to the subjects and interpreters of a vassal state and then agreed to let them return to the country. (Nguyen Dynasty's National Historian Office 2007e: 382)
1865	Thuy Xa, Hoa Xa	Thuy Xa, Hoa Xa sent the envoy, Sơn Ly to pay tributes. (Nguyen Dynasty's National Historian Office 20073: 923)	
1857	Cao Mien	Cao Mien sent envoys to pay tributes (two elephants, rhino's horns, ivory, nutmegs, and other presents).	The Nguyen Dynasty rewarded Cao Mien's envoys. (Nguyen Dynasty's National Historian Office 2007e: 493)
1868	Thuy Xa, Hoa Xa	Thuy Xa and Hoa Xa presented offerings of tribute and celebration. Tributes of Thuy Xa include two ivories, two rhino's horns and one ivory for celebration; tributes of Hoa Xa include one ivory, one rhino's horn and one ivory for celebration).	Emperor Tu Duc approved the army in Phu Yen not to return to the capital city. (Nguyen Dynasty's National Historian Office 2007e: 1111)

<sup>2</sup> Thai clan in Son La, maybe they are *Thái đen people (Tai Dam)*

<sup>3</sup> I.e. Giava island (Indonesia). *Yuan History* wrote Qua Oa, which was also Java, according to the phonetic method used in *Yuan History* and *Ming history*

<sup>4</sup> Lo Lac: unknown country yet. Under the Tran dynasty, there was a trade boat of Lo Hac to Van Don. Perhaps Lo Lac is Lo Hac. Based on the phonetic reading, it can be assumed that Lo Hac is La Hoc mentioned in the Nguyen - Ming Chinese bibliography (see also the comment on Siam below). La Hoc is the Lavo nation of Lopburi, Thailand. Lo Hac is likely to be La Hac mentioned in Macro Polo's travel book

<sup>5</sup> Siam: the country of the Thai people in the upper middle of the Mekong River in the middle ages.

<sup>6</sup> I.e. Bon Man

<sup>7</sup> Lac Hon: I.e. Lac Bien now. Location in the southwest of Nghe An province (Vietnam). In the previous Le Dynasty, Lac Hon always remained tribute according to position. When the Le Dynasty disintegrated, Lac Hon depended on Tiem. In Gia Long (1802-1819), Lac Hon was paid tribute several times; the year of Minh Menh was considered to be the Lac Bien district of Nghe An; then betrayed and returned to Siam.

<sup>8</sup> Lord-Tran Ninh's words: Formerly called Bon Man

<sup>9</sup> Nam Chuong: According to *Thông giám tập lãm*, the Nam Chuong is known as former Man Lao Qua, the southeastern border bordered our country. (Nguyen Dynasty's National Historian Office 1998: 923)

From the aforementioned records of historians in the Vietnamese feudal dynasties, we initially have a general picture of the tributary activities to Vietnam conducted by mainland Southeast Asian countries from the 10th century to the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

*Before the 19<sup>th</sup> century*, there were generally a number of Southeast Asian countries/states that paid tribute to Vietnam, specifically Champa paid tributes to Vietnam 30 times (in 1055, 1071, 1118, 1120, 1126, 1130, 1132, 1135, 1154, 1164, 1182, 1184, 1198, 1228, 1242, 1262, 1266, 1267, 1270, 1279, 1293, 1301, 1346, 1352, 1376, 1427, 1434, 1448, 1449 and 1467), 14 times of offering products that history did not record as "paying tribute" (in 994, 1011, 1068, 1069, 1112, 1117, 1154, 1167, 1269, 1282, 1305, 1307, July 1427 and 1468); Ai Lao paid tributes 17 times (in 1434, 1435 paid tributes two times, 1436, 1448, 1468, 1471, 1510, 1564, 1583, 1700, 1706, 1714, 1728, 1747, 1753, 1755, twice in 1756, 1772 and 1776), including the tributes of Man Lac Hon and Bon Man (later named Tran Ninh) in Ai Lao, five times offering products in 1427, 1434 (twice), 1583, 1735. Van Tuong paid tributes in 1801; Nam Chuong paid tributes in 1771; Chen La paid tributes ten times in 1024, 1025, 1026, 1033, 1039, 1056, 1120, 1123, 1132 and 1191, respectively. Also, Siam paid tributes twice in 1437, two times of offering products in 1149 and 1467. Trao Oa, Lo Lac also offered local products in 1149. Thus, before the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the country with the most tributary presentations to Vietnam was Champa, followed by Ai Lao and Chen La. Except for the only tributary time in 1149 of Trao Oa, Lo Lac, the rest of the tribute-paying countries came from mainland Southeast Asia.

Remarkably, in the 17th century, there was no Southeast Asian tributary activity to the Le - Trinh dynasty except for the tributary time of Chen La in 1699. Le Kings and Trinh Lords in Dang Ngoai (the North-Vietnam) and Nguyen Lords in Dang Trong (the South-Vietnam) were in a similar situation. During this time, Nguyen Lords in Dang Trong miserably used compulsory measures or sent people to other countries to compel these for giving up

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<sup>10</sup> Muong Luong: I.e. Luang Phabang

<sup>11</sup> True records of Đại Nam, Vol.II, p.273.

paying tributes many times (as in 1658, Nguyen Lord forced Chen La to pay tributes after helping to resolve internal conflicts (Lê Quý Đôn 2018: 137): but in 1699, Chen La asked to follow the old rules of paying tributes (Lê Quý Đôn 2018: 137). Furthermore, in 1688, Chen La refused to be a vassal, so Nguyen Lord sent troops to defeat, forced to follow the tributary rules (Lê Quý Đôn 2018: 137). Similarly, in 1693, Champa gave up paying tributes, Nguyen Lord had to send soldiers to compel Champa to observe its obligations (Phạm Văn Sơn 1960: 360-61). No event reflected the tributary activities to Nguyen Lords of Chen La and Champa in this 17th century. Obviously, when compared with the Dai Viet-China relationship in this period, the tributary activities to Dai Viet by Southeast Asian countries did not obey regulations, mainly they were often interrupted, and even stopped for a very long time. In some countries like Nam Chuong, it was not until 1771 that it began to establish friendly diplomatic relations with Dai Viet (Nguyen Dynasty's National Historian Office 1998: 923).

Such a break and even absence of the tribute activity for a long time throughout the century in Vietnam - Southeast Asia relations was due to the complicated political and social context of the Southeast Asian countries at that time. War with foreign countries and civil wars often occurred. This can be seen in internal disputes within the royal Chen La Court (e.g. an uncle and his nephew fought for power) after the King died in 1658 (Lê Quý Đôn 2018: 137); or constant war between Lac Hon and Trieu Phuc - two tribes of Ai Lao (Nguyen Dynasty's National Historian Office, 1998: 763). Another example is Ai Lao's envoy often harassed Tran Ninh (formerly known as Bon Man) (Nguyen Dynasty's National Historian Office, 1998: 891). In particular, during this period, Dai Viet's relationship with some Southeast Asian countries was not merely "peaceful" like the Dai Viet-China relationship. The two sides clashed, causing tensions many times and even the territories of some countries were annexed to Dai Viet during this period. For example, in 1699, when Chen La was chaotic all the time, the King, Nac Ong Thu, brought his army against the Nguyen Lord army in Dang Trong; then the Lord ordered the General Nguyen Huu Kinh to come and fight. Nguyen Lords came to Nam Vang citadel, Nac

Ong Thu fled, Nac Ong Non and Nac Ong Yem subsequently opened the citadel door and surrendered. After that, Nac Ong Thu also surrendered and asked to follow the same rules of tribute (Lê Quý Đôn 2018: 137). Or in 1688, other people in My Tho rebelled, and Nguyen Lords sent Hoang Tien to kill Duong Ngan Dich, then brought them to garrison at Nan Khe, making a ship to cast guns to fight against Chen La. The King of Chen La, Nac Ong Thu, dug up ditches to build a fortification to stand firm and refused to be a vassal of Nguyen Lords (Lê Quý Đôn 2018: 137). After a few years, in 1693, Chiem Lord, Ba Tranh, gave up paying tributes. Minh Vương (Lord Nguyen Phuc Chu) sent General Nguyen Phuc Kinh (son of Nguyen Huu Dat) to bring troops to question the captured courtiers, Ke Ba Tu and Ta Tra Vien and his relatives Ba An to Phu Xuan. The remaining land of Champa was changed to Thuan Thanh by Nguyen Lords.<sup>12</sup> Ta Tra Vien and Ke Ba Tu were appointed chief officers and three children of Ba An were appointed governors in charge of Thuan Thanh. Nguyen Lords forced Chiem's people to change clothes, from which they subsequently dressed like the Vietnamese (Phạm Văn Sơn 1960: 360-61).

In the context of frequent internal conflicts of power between factions as well as the constant pressure of war with larger countries (such as Dai Viet, Siam), these countries were forced to apply for paying tributes to Dai Viet to find “support” in the fight against the opposing forces or considered it as a way of peace with Dai Viet after military defeats. Therefore, the period of peace for Southeast Asian countries to conduct diplomatic activities such as paying tributes and celebrations to Dai Viet was not much. Moreover, as in the case of Chen La, Champa at this stage, they only asked for paying tributes after enduring military defeats and considered it as a means of peace with the Nguyen Lords in Dang Trong (Dai Viet). The state of interwoven peace - war in Vietnam's relations with many Southeast Asian countries at that time made diplomatic

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<sup>12</sup> Champa after this event was no longer a country so tributary activities no longer existed. In 1697, Nguyen Lords moved to Binh Thuan, changed Phan Ri and Phan Rang into Yen Phuc and Hoa Da districts. From there, the position of Champa disappeared on the map, which is after the princes and relatives of Champa became civil servants of Vietnam and the Champa royal family was no longer prestigious. (Phạm Văn Sơn 1960: 360-61)

activities that were “peaceful” like this tributary system often to be characterized by breaks and interruption, and otherwise not following a set rule.

*As of the 19<sup>th</sup> century*, eight countries in the region paid tributes to the Nguyen dynasty during this period. Of these, Chen La paid tributes most frequently for a total of 11 times (in 1803, 1806, 1816, 1818, 1821, 1824, 1827, 1831, 1832, 1833 and 1834), followed by Van Tuong with eight tribute times (in 1802, 1805, twice in 1811, 1814, 1821, 1824 and 1827), Thuy Xa paid eight tribute times (in 1821, 1831 (16), 1841, 1843, 1852, 1855, 1865 and 1868), Hoa Xa paid eight tribute times (in 1834, 1840, 1841, 1843, 1852, 1855, 1865 and 1868), Nam Chuong paid six tribute times (in 1803, 1823, 1828, twice in 1833 and 1838), Cao Mien paid five tribute times (in 1847, 1848, 1851, 1854 and 1857), Muc Da Han in Lac Bien paid tributes once in 1832, Muong Luong (Luong Mang), i.e. Luong Phabang paid tributes once in 1807. In the tribute times of the two countries Thuy Xa and Hoa Xa, in the last six times (in 1841, 1843, 1852, 1855, 1865 and 1868) the two countries jointly paid tributes under the Nguyen Lord’s approval. If based on the number of tributes mentioned above, Chen La, Van Tuong, Thuy Xa and Hoa Xa were the countries that maintained the most regular tributary activities. Nam Chuong and Cao Mien followed it; the rest of the countries such as Muc Da Han and Muong Luong only had one time to pay tributes during the nineteenth century. All were mainland Southeast Asian countries; thereby also partly revealing that the strong – weak degree of the “suzerain-vassal” relationship between Vietnam and mainland Southeast Asian countries was a predominant at this time.

Like the tributary activities to China conducted by many East Asian countries at the same time, the tributary activities to Vietnam conducted by mainland Southeast Asian countries took place according to specific rules promulgated by the Vietnamese feudal courts. Of course, those rules must get the consent of the tribute-paying countries. Based on the records of the National Historian Office and historians of the dynasties, we know the specific provisions on the tribute schedule, the number of objects in each tribute, the number of envoys during each tribute time, the tributary route and time of tribute which the Vietnamese feudal



courts set for the “vassal states”. For example.:

In May 1706, Ai Lao came to Vietnam to offer tributes to the Restored Le dynasty and ask for paying tributes every three years, exempting the annual tributary ceremony. Le Kings - Trinh Lords agreed (Nguyen Dynasty’s National Historian Office 1998: 767). In May 1755, Tran Ninh<sup>13</sup> paid tributes and asked for paying tributes every six years. Courtiers of the Restored Le dynasty discussed and decided that it is required for Tran Ninh to pay tributes every three years. (Nguyen Dynasty’s National Historian Office 1998: 890)

Or in 1805, the Nguyen dynasty decided a tribute rule to Van Tuong, which was once every three years. In December, it was required for Van Tuong to come to the Capital city to attend the Lunar New Year in time. Tributes included two male elephants, two rhino’s horns, two ivories, and 5 kg of cinnamon bark. In terms of the envoy’s delegation, it included one chief envoy, three chieftains, two interpreters and 30 escorts. Nghe An’s station guided roads, and it was forbidden to follow Cam Lo and Ai Lao roads (Nguyen Dynasty’s National Historian Office 2007d: 649).

In 1807, after Nac Chan was crowned King of Chen La by the Nguyen dynasty, the Nguyen dynasty ruled paying tribute once every three years for this country, starting this year. The Nguyen Dynasty also stipulated tributes including two male elephants, two rhino’s horns, two ivories, two buckets of black paint, nutmeg, Amomum vilosum lour, beeswax of 50 kg of each. Also, an envoy delegation was appointed, including one chief envoy and one deputy envoy who arrived in Gia Dinh every April. Gia Dinh sent people to take them to the capital city. Also, ten escorts by road and 20 by sea were allowed (Nguyen Dynasty’s National Historian Office 2002: 707)

In 1828, the Nguyen Dynasty set out tributary rules for Nam Chuong as follows: paying tributes every three years, the tributes (four pairs of ivory, eight slabs of rhino’s meat, two bronze drums) and roads (from Tran Ninh to Nghe An and then to the capital city) (Nguyen Dynasty’s National Historian Office 2004: 772-74)

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<sup>13</sup> Now Hua Phan province of Laos

In 1833, Emperor Minh Menh amended and supplemented the regulations on tributary activities applied to Nam Chuong. Specifically the Emperor ordered the Ministry of Rites to change rules for the envoy's delegation to the capital city (previous rules were that the delegation included 26 people, but only ten people were allowed to the capital city including one chief envoy, one deputy envoy, three headmen, one interpreter, four escorts; meanwhile, for the current rules: the delegation included eight people including one chief envoy, one deputy chief, two headmen, one interpreter, and three escorts. The remaining members were required to stay at the border and would be rewarded (Nguyen Dynasty's National Historian Office 2007a: 581)

In 1831, the Nguyen dynasty also set out rules for Hoa Xa about tributes, including one pair of ivory and two rhino's horns. The tribute time was to be every three years, starting from the 15th Minh Menh year [1834] (Nguyen Dynasty's National Historian Office 2007a: 197-98)

Or in 1847, the Nguyen dynasty set out tributary rules for Cao Mien that it required to pay tributes every three years (including tribute and thanksgiving gifts offered at the same time). Tributes were also prescribed, including two male elephants with two ivories, two rhino's horns, *Amomum vilosum* lour, nutmeg, beeswax, all of 5kg of each and 20 buckets of black paint. The number of assigned envoys was one chief envoy, one deputy envoy, two interpreters, two physicians, nine escorts, and then An Giang's provincial officials review tributes. In the middle of February, it is required to come to An Giang, the provincial officials are responsible for reviewing the tributes then dividing the ivory, rhino and nutmeg into three categories which were brought with the delegation by road, and other categories could get arbitrary transport: elephants assigned to Gia Dinh province to be raised. Ordering two deputy envoys, one interpreter, one physician, three military followers along with provincial officials such as one officer and one interpreter as leader departed by the road. In the middle of April, it is required to come to the capital city to pay tributes in the last ten days of the month, and then stay waiting for Double Fifth Festival and Lunar New Year for worship. When the ceremony is completed, it is required to ask

for permission to go home. Thus, even the tributary route and steps applied to Cao Mien were stipulated quite explicitly by the Nguyen Dynasty (Nguyen Dynasty's National Historian Office 2007d: 1007).

In particular, in 1841, the Nguyen Dynasty also issued an ordinance to the two countries of Hoa Xa and Thuy Xa jointly paying tribute every three years "facilitating for the far-off people to be satisfied". When the ordinance came, both Thuy Xa and Hoa Xa were pleased and asked for sending envoys to the capital city in June (an envoy came to perform an incense-offering ceremony, an envoy went to celebrate the throne). Emperor Minh Menh approved. The tributes were regulated as follows: Thuy Xa's tributes include two ivories and two rhino's horns; Xa Hoa's tributes included one ivory and one rhino's horn. Every year in the Year of the Rat, Horse, Rabbit, and Rooster, Thuy Xa was required to send envoys to bring both countries' tributes to Phu Yen province (Nguyen Dynasty's National Historian Office 2007d: 92-93).

Thus, we can see that, although countries are different, regulations on the route, quantity and items of tribute are also different. However, in general, the tributary products are not much, and they are easy to find in these countries. Moreover, the tributary time for every country is every three years. In particular, through the records of the Nguyen Dynasty's National Historian Office, we also know that the Nguyen Dynasty bestowed gifts on tributary delegations. For example, in 1841, Emperor Minh Menh issued the ordinance: "According to the rules, rewarding the King of Thuy Xa an eight meter-long colored scarf, one pair of blue and white robes; one blue velvet robe with silk lining and narrow sleeves; one thick blue robe; one thick white robe with narrow sleeves; five silk robes with narrow sleeves of all colors, one blue pant, one pink pant, two light brown silk pants, one set of alcoholic drinks with one small bottle of wine, three cups and one tray. The King of Hoa Xa was given an eight meter-long colored scarf, one thick blue robe, one thick white robe, one blue velvet robe in silk lining and narrow sleeves, three silk robes with narrow sleeves of all colors, one blue pant, one pink pant, one set of alcoholic drinks. He also gave the king of both countries two clothing of martial arts; rewarded Nguyen Van Quyen as the captain in that province, Dang Van Hoat as the

nine-grade mandarin, each officer and interpreter a pair of Western fabric and ten taels of silver” (Nguyen Dynasty’s National Historian Office 2007d: 93).

Rewarding the tribute delegations of the countries was promulgated as a rule by the Nguyen Dynasty at the time. This shows the respectful attitude, extraordinary flexibility in the diplomatic conduct of the Nguyen Dynasty to the “vassal” states despite being in the role of a “suzerain” of the Nguyen Dynasty. With the motto of “flexible with far-off land” foreign policy (Nguyen Dynasty’s National Historian Office 2009: 1742), the feudal dynasties of Vietnam, Nguyen dynasty, devoted much favor in the exchange and reception of envoys when they came to Vietnam to pay tributes.

In 1437, when Siam sent a person to pay tribute, Le King sent an ordinance to the envoy and told him to return home and deducted half of the trade tax rate compared to the previous year. He collected 1 from each 20 and rewarded very well. In addition, in regard to the Lord of that country paying tribute, Le King gave 20 colored silk plates, 30 sets of porcelain bowls, and each wife of the Lord was given five colored silk plates, three sets of porcelain bowls, each containing 35 pieces (Ngô Sĩ Liên et al.1993b: 346). Or in 1718, when the Ai Lao’s envoys came to pay tributes, the restored Le Dynasty grasped the spirit “When the envoys came to pay tributes and returned to the country, the welcoming and provision of foods and clothing must all carried out very well so that they feel satisfied” (Nguyen Dynasty’s National Historian Office 1998: 807).

By giving the tribute-paying countries respect, the surplus tributes as per the regulations were returned, the envoys of the countries were well treated before returning to their countries by the Nguyen Dynasty. For example, in 1816, when Chen La sent an envoy to pay tributes, Emperor Gia Long found that that country had just been peaceful, so he ordered his servants to collect a few things and return the remaining, and then well treated the delegation (Nguyen Dynasty’s National Historian Office 2002: 901-35).

Following the tributary activity to Vietnam at that time, it is easy to see the extremely generous policy of treating the envoys of tribute-paying countries as they were implemented by the Nguyen

Dynasty. Typically, in 1821, when Van Tuong's envoy, Phi Chu Pho, came to pay tributes, Emperor Minh Menh encouraged and rewarded very well. In addition to rewarding, as usual, the Emperor further rewarded the King with five segments of brocade, different colors of silk, fine silk, chiffon, ten pieces of each, one set of gold-plated teacups, one gold-plated bowl, one silver-plated bowl, ten silver-plated plates, one big drum. He rewarded the chief envoy with one red Song brocade-made combat shirt. He rewarded the deputy envoy with one blue velvet combat shirt; a brocade dress, a wooden stretcher, a parasol, one set of gold-plated teacups and 20 taels of silver. The chief envoy was rewarded two metal pistols and one silver-plated sword; the deputy envoy received one metal pistol and one silver-plated sword. The King rewarded the chieftain eight taels of silver, the interpreter five taels of silver, a blue fine-silk combat shirt, one man skirt for each one; and rewarded each man three taels of silver (Nguyen Dynasty's National Historian Office 2004: 122). By 1828, when Nam Chuong came to pay tributes that included two male elephants, one pair of ivories, two of rhino's horns, two round cloud-shaped gongs, two bronze drums, 20 sheets of men's fabric and men's fine silk, Emperor Minh Menh treated them well and allowed the delegation to return. Specifically, King Chiem Mang was given four brocade plates, eight raw silk plates, ten silk plates, 40 pieces of chiffon, 30 pieces of fabric; the chief envoy and his followers were rewarded crepe dresses and taels of silver depending on their position (Nguyen Dynasty's National Historian Office 2004: 772-74). Or in 1833, Chen La sent envoys to pay tributes to the Nguyen dynasty. Emperor Minh Menh ordered the civilian to prepare court clothes for the chief envoy, Nha Nha Chiet Tuc, deputy envoys including Nha Bong Sa and Oc Lich Nham. When they returned home, the Emperor rewarded the chief envoy one set of gold teacups and one set of gold-plated crystal cups for alcoholic drinks. He rewarded each deputy envoy a set of silver teacups and a set of crystal cups for alcoholic drinks (Nguyen Dynasty's National Historian Office 2007a: 545). Or in 1834, when Hoa Xa came to pay tributes, in addition to rewarding as usual, the Nguyen Dynasty also rewarded many silk plates depending on different positions (two envoys: two pieces of chiffon, raw silk; one interpreter: two pieces of domestic plain chiffon; three passengers: each one one tussore

piece) (Nguyen Dynasty's National Historian Office 2007b: 306-307). In 1857, when Cao Mien sent envoys (the chief envoy, Oc Nha Bo Ni Doc named Ngoi, the deputy envoy, Oc Kha De Ni Doc called Khet) to bring tributes (two elephants and rhino's horn and ivory, nutmeg and all kinds of gifts), the Nguyen Dynasty gave each of them a four-grade and a martial six-grade cap and robe. When coming back, the Nguyen dynasty also rewarded the chief and deputy envoys and lower positions with gold, silk, chiffon, raw silk depending on their positions. The king of the tribute giving country was given ten brocade of all colors, two plates of raw silk, fine silk, thin silk, fabric, silk, eight-fibre weaved silk, fine bleached silk, white crepe, watered chiffon with dark blue, with a total of 94 plates, and 36 plates including fine & pure silk và thin chiffon, thick chiffon, and bleached silk (Nguyen Dynasty's National Historian Office 2007e: 493).

In particular, in many cases, the number of gifts that the Nguyen Dynasty gave to the King and the envoy-mission of tribute-paying countries was many times higher than the number of tributes received. For example, in 1805, the King of Van Tuong, Chieu A No, sent envoys to pay tributes (two male elephants, two rhino's horns, 800 kg of Cortex Cinnamomi Cassiae). Emperor Gia Long told Dang Duc Sieu that: "Good treatment to the far-away people is our flexible policy. Van Tuong did not give up the worship and respect to the big country, which is praiseworthy, so they were worth being treated well before coming back." He gave the King five plates of raw pink silk, 20 plates of fine white silk, 50 plates of colored thin silk, white silk, small white fabric, and small dark fabric; 43 envoys were given money depending on different ranks (Nguyen Dynasty's National Historian Office 2002: 649). Or in 1847, when King Cao Mien came to pay tributes, the Nguyen Dynasty rewarded the King and the envoys handsomely, particularly with a large number of products. Not only the King, Chief, and Deputy envoys were rewarded, but even the military officers accompanying them and the interpreters were also very well treated and rewarded (Nguyen Dynasty's National Historian Office 2007d: 968-73).

Obviously, the number of Nguyen's gifts in these times to the tribute-paying countries was many times greater than the tributes

the Nguyen dynasty received.

In some cases, seeing the sincerity of the envoys' delegation coming to pay tributes, the Nguyen Dynasty also converted the tributes into money. It gave the corresponding amount back the mission. For example, in 1834, when the King of Chen La, Nac Chan paid tributes, including three male elephants, a servant, Chu Dich Danh Tuan, also offered one elephant. Emperor Minh Menh thought that those were very sincere, so he approved for receiving and rewarding, then converted them into money and paid for them (every tributary elephant paid 200 Guan) (Nguyen Dynasty's National Historian Office 2007b: 276).

Sometimes, when realizing the vassal states were in a lot of difficulty, the Nguyen dynasty did not accept the tributes but gave them back and gave more rewards. For example, in 1827, the King of Van Tuong, A No, sent his son, Hat Xa Bong, to bring animals for paying tributes. Emperor Minh Menh ordered to send back the offerings, and took only ten male elephants. The Emperor rewarded handsomely and allowed him to come back (Nguyen Dynasty's National Historian Office 2004: 664).

Moreover, the Nguyen Dynasty also understood that toil and cold weather were threatening the health of the envoys when coming to pay tributes in the winter. Therefore, it was only in 1827 that the Nguyen Dynasty gave winter clothes and blankets to Chen La's mission (Nguyen Dynasty's National Historian Office 2004: 684).

Moreover, in order to help the envoys reduce strain after their distant journey, the Nguyen Dynasty had many times exempted the envoys not to come to the capital city. For example, in 1824, Emperor Minh Menh issued a royal proclamation in which Chen La's mission was exempt from coming to the capital city (Nguyen Dynasty's National Historian Office 2004: 360). In 1831, Emperor Minh Menh continued to issue the ordinance in which Chen La's envoy was exempt from coming to the capital city (Nguyen Dynasty's National Historian Office 2007a: 169). Or in 1843, when the two countries Thuy Xa and Hoa Xa came to pay tributes, the Deputy envoy Kieu Moc became ill and had to stay at the border. The Chief envoy, Son Thi when coming to the embassy in Phu Yen

province, also got sick, Emperor Thieu Tri gave them sympathy, showing special care by issuing an ordinance in which the envoys were exempt from coming to the capital city, stating: “The two countries are in the far-off place, admired the imperial Court and were listed as long-time vassals. The unchanged heart of being afraid of heaven, worshipping the great country was very worth rewarding. Those envoys had previously been admonished and were given ordinances and products as usual when returning. Now that such envoys came despite far-away land was more and more respectful, so the Emperor approved that they could stay at Phu Yen province instead of coming to the capital city to be relieved of trouble” (Nguyen Dynasty’s National Historian Office 2007d: 515). As of 1852, Emperor Tu Duc also agreed that because these two countries were far –off and faced with crop failure, they only worshipped at the palace of Phu Yen province, then gave them gifts and allowed them to return without going to the Capital city (Nguyen Dynasty’s National Historian Office 2007e: 248-49).

In particular, when the vassal states encountered difficulties due to natural disasters, epidemics, internal reactions, or foreign invasions, the Nguyen Dynasty was willing to exempt the required tribute. Typically, in 1835, due to the death of the King of Chen La, Emperor Minh Menh issued an ordinance to stop the tributary activity “to show the will of the court to share and comfort the old vassal state, not considering it as an outside country” (Nguyen Dynasty’s National Historian Office 2007d: 516).

Despite the flexible treatment with such vassal states, Vietnam was also very careful in this activity. Therefore, in 1449, when the younger brother of the Champa’s King, Quy Do, put his Lord (Quy Lai), and established himself as the King, and sent his subordinates including Giao Nhi Mo and Ban Thao, to Vietnam to pay tributes, Le Trung Hung dynasty refused (Le Quy Don 1993b: 369). In 1700, Man Lac Hon people asked for paying tributes, but the Le Trung Hung dynasty refused because it did not want to “defend one person for another”. Moreover, Ai Lao was being divided into many factions (Nguyen Dynasty’s National Historian Office 1998: 763). Or in 1807, Luong Mang [Muong Luong] sent envoys to pay tributes. As soon as receiving the news, Gia Long



thought that Luong Mang was far-off but came to declare its vassal state, which was not exact, so he asked the subordinates to send back the tributes, rewarded them handsomely and told them to return (Nguyen Dynasty's National Historian Office 2002: 687). Or in 1838, when Nam Chuong sent a family member named Tao Kham Phan to send a letter to Nghe An to expiate its guilt and to replace the tributes, Emperor Minh Menh severely criticized the associated activities with the Siamese invaders, giving up the country's previous tribute payment and pointing out the true motive of Nam Chuong's tribute as "the position of King was not decided, they made use of a position of our country to fight with each other". Accordingly, the Nguyen dynasty decided to "not tolerate" and "agreed to dismiss immediately. Later, when the country was peaceful, the position of King was identified, if they genuinely wanted to apply for merit, it was required to report, then it will be recognized" (Nguyen Dynasty's National Historian Office 2007c: 261-62).

Despite being strict and cautious, when vassal states repented of their sins and surrendered to the Court, the Nguyen dynasty "welcomed them, let the people and soldiers rest, the worries at the border could partly reduce". For example, the Nguyen dynasty accepted the 1847 tribute ceremony of Cao Mien after a long time that the country tolerated the bandits disturbing the border, negatively affecting the Nguyen Dynasty, thereby showing the Nguyen dynasty's generosity and humanity (Nguyen Dynasty's National Historian Office 2007d: 968-73).

In addition to the aforementioned tributary activities, in fact, Vietnam and mainland Southeast Asian countries often maintained a harmonious relationship through irregular visitation. However, only the countries that accepted the "suzerain" proceeded to pay tribute. Therefore, at this time, not every country submitting itself to the rule of Vietnam paid tribute to the Nguyen Dynasty. Thus, although the feudal Vietnamese historian recorded an event in 1437, particularly Siam had performed two tributary times (Lê Quý Đôn 1993b: 345-46); Siam sent envoys to pay local products and reported the funeral" (Nguyen Dynasty's National Historian Office 2002: 690). As a country with a balanced position of potential with Vietnam, to Siam, it was just a conventional ceremony to maintain a

harmonious relationship between the two countries at this time like other times. Moreover, during the nineteenth century Siam regularly sent envoys to Vietnam (in 1803 (Nguyen Dynasty's National Historian Office 2002: 576), twice in 1806 (Nguyen Dynasty's National Historian Office 2002: 675, 682), 1809 (Nguyen Dynasty's National Historian Office 2002: 770-71), 1810 (Nguyen Dynasty's National Historian Office 2002: 792), 1811 (Nguyen Dynasty's National Historian Office 2002: 810-11), 1813 (Nguyen Dynasty's National Historian Office 2002: 858), 1816 (Nguyen Dynasty's National Historian Office 2002: 934), 1820 (Nguyen Dynasty's National Historian Office 2004: 83-84), 1822 (Nguyen Dynasty's National Historian Office 2004: 231), 1830 (Nguyen Dynasty's National Historian Office 2007a: 78-80), 1880 (Nguyen Dynasty's National Historian Office 2007f: 415)). In addition, the Nguyen dynasty regularly sent envoys to Siam to visit and offer products (specifically in 1803 (Nguyen Dynasty's National Historian Office 2002: 550), 1804 (Nguyen Dynasty's National Historian Office 2002: 590), 1808 (Nguyen Dynasty's National Historian Office 2002: 741), 1817 (Nguyen Dynasty's National Historian Office 2002: 956-57), 1828 (Nguyen Dynasty's National Historian Office 2004: 782)). Meanwhile, to other Southeast Asian countries at the same time, the Nguyen Dynasty did not send direct envoys to visit and offer products. Clearly, unlike the countries of Chen La, Van Tuong, Nam Chuong, Thuy Xa and Hoa Xa, Siam was not part of a system of countries that paid tribute to and submit itself to the rule of Vietnam, especially in the Nguyen Dynasty in the 19th century.

#### **IV. Conclusion**

From the evolution of the tributary activities to Vietnam of the Southeast Asian countries mentioned above, a new reality which is entirely different from the previously proved judgments of many domestic and foreign researchers can be noted. Particularly, apart from the "tributary system" considering China as the center in East Asia during East Asia in the feudal times, a second "tributary system" also existed whose center is the peripheral, vassal country of the first "tributary system". If Fairbank and Teng had considered

the tributary system to be only “a means for diplomatic and international relations” in which China was the center and “a framework for the whole structure in which the non-Chinese barbaric areas positioned in the structure embraced all Chinese politics and morals” (Fairbank and Teng 1964: 137, 139; Cranmer-Byng 1973: 68), more thorough research provide in this article shows Vietnam not just a vassal state (albeit a form) in this “tributary system” considering China as a center. Vietnam was also the center of the mainland Southeast Asia’s “tributary system”. The parallel existence of two orders (one considered China as the center and the other considered Vietnam as the center) contributed to helping Vietnam achieve a relative balance of position in a comparative relation with neighboring China for a long time.

The problem was that Vietnam’s “flexible with far-off land” diplomacy and its soft, lenient, and good conduct in relations with other tribute-paying countries has shown us the gap between Vietnam (as a center, suzerain) and Southeast Asian countries (as vassals and peripheries) was much closer in comparison with the gap between China and its vassal states at that time. This soft approach to power is shown in in many forms, such as the willingness to give gifts to the mission many times more than products received by the Court; or approval of joint tribute payment between Hoa Xa and Thuy Xa; willingness to exempt to pay tributes for the vassal states when they encountered difficulties; tolerance of Cao Mien- a vassal state colluding with Siam at the border, neglecting to pay tributes for a long time.)

The number of tributes to Nguyen dynasties paid by the mainland Southeast Asian countries was accordingly more erratic, not following the set rules. Therefore, it can be said that compared to China’s tributary system, Vietnam’s “tributary system” is more loose. This is entirely in line with what Womack identified in *Asymmetry and China’s tributary system*. In his work, he had to admit that China is a “solid center” in comparative relation to other centers in the world: “In contrast to the traditional West that had a ‘liquid center - the Mediterranean—around and through which regimes swirled, China’s has been Asia’s ‘solid center’ of greatest productivity and population” (Womack 2012: 39). The looseness in

the “tributary system” taking Vietnam as the center stemmed from the very looseness in geopolitical and economic ties, especially in terms of culture and ideology between countries in the “system” - which the author mentioned in the first part of this article. It was this looseness that characterizes the relativity of Vietnam’s power in relations with smaller countries in Southeast Asia at that time. The smaller countries themselves in the same region such as Chen La (Cao Mien), Van Tuong, Nam Chuong, Hoa Xa, Thuy Xa, among others, always have a “vulnerable” characteristic - a common characteristic of small countries in general in relation to big countries – which was asserted by Womack in *Asymmetry theory and China’s concept of multipolarity* (Womack 2004: 13). Therefore, if “If larger states are prudent, consultative, and cooperative, smaller states are less likely to be anxious about their vulnerability...tend to accept the international order led by the larger state because it is inclusive of their interests” (Womack 2004: 15).

Conversely, when bigger countries like Vietnam did not cooperate, this threatened the interests of these smaller countries and hurt them, small countries would not be “vassal” states anymore and, accordingly, “the tributary system” taking Vietnam as the center was also broken, Vietnam would lose its “center” position in the region - a position contributing to helping Vietnam strengthen security and safety of the West and Southwest borders, as well as reach a relative balance in relations with many bigger or similar countries in the region. Obviously, as Womack stated: “The key to a peaceful frontier did not lie in dominating neighbors, but rather in managing a mutually acceptable relationship” (Womack 2012: 42). As a bigger country, in a position to keep its “center” position in mainland Southeast Asia, efforts to “manage the mutually acceptable relationships” with small countries was clearly a wise choice of the Nguyen Dynasty at that time. And such ingenious diplomatic behavior of the Nguyen Dynasty will also be valuable suggestions for Vietnam in its relations with Southeast Asian countries today as well as in the future when the cohesion between nations in the region are facing countless unpredictable challenges.

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