

Foreign Policies of China and Japan towards Ayutthaya (Thailand) in 16th - 17th Centuries



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ABSTRACT: China, Japan and Ayutthaya (Thailand) are three countries located in Asia - a cultural, civilized and economic center of the world in history and at present. In the 16th - 17th centuries, building diplomatic relations and implementing foreign policies with Southeast Asian countries were always the concern of major countries in the region, especially China and Japan. In the foreign policy of China and Japan, Ayutthaya was one of the countries that had an important position and brought many economic and political benefits. On the contrary, establishing a good relationship with a powerful country like China and a country with a developed maritime trade like Japan would benefit Ayutthaya in many ways in international relations, expanding its sphere of influence as well as economic and political development in the 16th and 17th centuries. The article delves into the policies of China and Japan towards Ayutthaya (16th - 17th centuries) in order to clarify the similarities and differences in the regional policies of two major countries as well as the role and position of Ayutthaya in Southeast Asia during the pre-modern centuries.

KEYWORDS: Policies of China, Japan and Ayuthaya.

1. AYUTTHAYA'S POSITION IN POLICIES OF CHINA AND JAPAN

Historically, Southeast Asia was a region with an important geopolitical - economic position, especially for major countries in the world. Entering the modern period, Western capitalism became increasingly active and aggressive to head to this area in search of markets, raw materials and flavorings. As two countries with positions in Asia, China and Japan could not help but pay attention to Southeast Asian countries, including Ayutthaya.

In terms of geographical location, Ayutthaya (Thailand), China and Japan were all located in the East of Asia, the West of the Pacific Ocean. China and Japan had geographic coordinates that were very close to Ayutthaya. The Northernmost point of Ayutthaya was 210 degrees North latitude, while the southernmost point of China was 200 degrees North latitude and the Westernmost point of Japan was 24026 degrees North latitude. All three countries had a long coastline, which was very convenient for maritime trade. The West of Ayutthaya was bordered by the Andanam Sea and the entire Eastern coast stretching from Cambodia to Malaya (Malaysia) with a coastline of about 2500 km, while the coastline of China was 9000 km and that of Japan was about 37,000 km. Thus, with such a favorable geographical location and natural conditions, Ayutthaya had an important position in the foreign policies of China and Japan in Southeast Asia in the 16th to 17th centuries.

In addition, it could be seen that Ayutthaya was located in the center of Mainland Southeast Asia, hence right from the 16th to 17th centuries, Ayutthaya became a bridge between major economic, cultural and civilized centers such as China and Japan and India. Thanks to that, Ayutthaya's trading activities also soon developed and was a place to attract merchants from many countries to come here. On the other hand, located in the tropical monsoon area, Ayutthaya had a very favorable condition for agricultural development, especially wet rice cultivation. Ayutthaya also had many natural resources with high economic value such as: teak wood, other forest and tropical products, minerals (tin, tungsten, oil, gemstones...) that were abundant natural resources and the key exports of Ayutthaya to the regional countries.

In political terms, in the sixteenth century, Ayutthaya created a powerful position in both political and economic terms. Attacks against Ayutthaya's neighbors during the 14th, 15th and 16th centuries made the kingdom become one of the most powerful feudal nations in the region. In the early 17th century, Ayutthaya had a large territory with a powerful vassal system including: Cambodia, Laos, the Northern states and the states on the Malacca peninsula. Burma, after many attacks on Ayutthaya, until the beginning of the 17th century also submitted. Thus, Ayutthaya had both an important geographical position (as an economic and commercial center) and a large influence on other countries in the region. Therefore, the policy towards Ayutthaya, establishing relations with Ayutthaya in terms of diplomacy and trade would help China and Japan expand their markets to and influence on the Southeast Asia. China alone also had strategic significance in terms of politics and military because the Thai territory had two parts adjacent to mainland Southeast Asia regions (Indochina and Burma) and island Southeast Asia (the islands and archipelagos of Indonesia and Malaysia). From the territory of

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Ayutthaya, it could reach any part of Southeast Asia easily and quickly. Moreover, if the Gulf of Thailand was owned, it would create favorable conditions in the process of controlling the sea route from the East to the West, gradually expanding trade activities in the territory of China and Japan.

During nearly four centuries, Ayutthaya (1350 - 1767) really became a powerful kingdom, an international trading port located in a bend near the lower Mekong Basin, 80km North of Bangkok. There was a workshop for building and repairing wooden ships, an elephant training ground, streets and 10 areas for foreigners such as Japan, France, Portugal, the Netherlands, England, France, and Vietnam, of which the largest were Chinese, Japanese (Luong Ninh, 2006: 171).

Thus, in the policies of China and Japan in Southeast Asia, Ayutthaya had an important position not only in terms of economy and trade but also politics and military. With that position, Ayutthaya always received the attention of two major countries with different purposes during the 16th and 17th centuries.

2. CHINA AND JAPAN'S POLICIES TOWARDS AYUTTHAYA

The 16th - 17th centuries were the period of the Ming Dynasty (1368 - 1644) in China that developed strongly. With its stable domestic politics and ambitions, the Ming Dynasty strengthened its influence and expanded its influence to the South. China repeatedly sent emissaries to Southeast Asia, South Asia and West Asia to demonstrate its prestige and strength and entice countries in these regions to submit to the Ming Dynasty. The most notable was the focus on Southeast Asian neighbors by increasing the "tribute trade" between China and countries including the Ayutthaya kingdom.

From the very beginning, the Ming Dynasty implemented a policy of "sea ban" (banning private ships to go out and foreign trade activities were only dedicated to the fleets of the emperor and countries to China) in form of embassies to tribute), but at Chinese ports, especially in Guangzhou, ships were still busy. From 1567, the Ming Dynasty loosened the policy of "sea ban", making China's foreign trade activities become more vibrant. The Ming Dynasty allowed merchants to trade with countries in the South, including the Ayutthaya kingdom. China's policy towards Southeast Asia became increasingly more active and further strengthened China's foreign trade relationship with Ayutthaya and vice versa. Commenting on the position of Ayutthaya, the Ming court said that Siam (Ayutthaya) was near and most important (The Tang, 1980: 4).

From 1511, Portugal occupied Malacca and began to control the shortest route from India to China, Ayutthaya played a very important role in trade among countries. Most merchants in Eastern countries (including many Chinese merchants) after coming to Ayutthaya did not want to carry their goods far away but sold them right here and then purchased necessary goods on the spot. Therefore, trade between Ayutthaya and China in the 16th century through Chinese and Thai private merchants was very developed. In addition to trading imported goods from other countries, Ayutthaya also traded with Chinese merchants a large amount of locally produced goods such as tin, lead, sulfur, ivory, precious woods (biancaea sappan, teak), including deer and buffalo skins. This trade brought the Ayutthaya kingdom great sources of income, promoting the development of foreign trade in the 16th century.

At the beginning of the Qing Dynasty, the Chinese court implemented a policy of "moving people from the coastal region" and "banning people to go to the sea" (Cat Kiem Hung, 2003: 474), thus trade with foreign countries were very limited, taking place only in Macao. At the end of the 17th century, when the Qing dynasty quelled Taiwan, the "ban on going to the sea" was loosened (1683). In 1685, the Qing Dynasty set up customs authorities in localities such as Guangdong, Fujian, Zhejiang..., took Macao, Chuong Thau, Ningbo and Van Dai Son as a trading border gate with foreign countries. Accordingly, China allows foreign merchants to conduct business with the Chinese in those localities, including Ayutthaya. Despite certain limitations, China's friendly policy towards Ayutthaya in the late 17th century continued to be maintained.

The Ayutthaya kingdom was located in the center of the Central Indian peninsula, its strategic location in Southeast Asia attracted special attention of China. The Ming dynasty historical materials recorded that: "The great and small foreign countries have 149 countries, Siam (Ayutthaya) is near and most important" (The Tang, 1980: 4). With that important position, if the Chinese emperors were able to entice Ayutthaya into China's influential and dependent zone, Chinese feudalism could easily control other countries bordering Ayutthaya in Southeast Asia such as: Laos, Cambodia, Burma, Malacca. For that reason, the Chinese emperors constantly sought ways to entice and bribe Ayutthaya to submit to them. Obviously, not only Ayutthaya attached great importance to its relationship with China but also the Chinese feudal state also did that. This was one of the reasons for China's rather friendly policy towards Ayutthaya at this time.

It could be seen that, in the 16th and 17th centuries, China's policy towards Ayutthaya was more consistent and sought every way to subdue Ayutthaya in order to seek economic and political benefits in the most effective way. Therefore, China still maintained the form of tribute to Thailand: "from 1500 to 1579, within 80 years, there were 9 times when Ayutthaya paid tribute to China" (G. Willam Skynner, 1962: 6). Even after the fall of the Ming Dynasty (1644), the Ayutthaya kingdom under the Prasart Thong dynasty (1629-1656) continued to pay tribute to China. "From the ninth year of Thuan Tri dynasty (1652), Siam dispatched emissaries to pay tribute for the first time" (Luu Minh Han, 2002: 752). Historical sources recounted that "within 36 years (1620-1655), there were 7 times Ayutthaya sent tribute missions to China" (G. Willam Skynner, 1962: 12). Thus, during the reign of King Pasart Thong, Ayutthaya maintained close diplomatic relations with China. During the Qing Dynasty, China remained effective in its policy towards Ayutthaya. Ayutthaya still often went to China, on the contrary, the Qing Dynasty also had a very close connection with Ayutthaya. From that

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policy, more and more Chinese came to Ayutthaya. At the end of the seventeenth century, many Ming (Chinese) groups, mostly in Southeast China: Fujian, Guangdong, went to Thailand (Ayutthaya), Malaysia... (Nguyen Hien Le, 1996: 183), thereby creating the Chinese community in Ayutthaya.

China's "friendly" policy towards Ayutthaya not only brought political benefits, but also brought great economic benefits to China as well as to Ayutthaya because Ayutthaya's foreign trade relation during the period were established mainly with China.

On the side of Ayutthaya, compared to many countries in Southeast Asia, Ayutthaya played a relatively great role. The development of domestic trade strongly promoted foreign trade in particular as well as the economy of Ayutthaya in general, contributing to providing very abundant products, serving the exchange and trade with countries in the region, including China and Japan. Realizing the role of the Chinese in commercial activities, since the 30s of the 17th century, King Ayutthaya granted business right to the Chinese, which contributed significantly to the association of trade relations between Ayutthaya and China. This was also one of the reasons why China's "open and friendly" policy towards Ayutthaya was maintained.

Entering the 40s of the 17th century, China was in the transitional period between the Ming and Qing dynasties, which made Ayutthaya's trade with China partly affected. However, the objective of obtaining Ayutthaya in China's policy remained consistent in order to gain benefits from both sides.

On the side of Japan, Ayutthaya was equally important in its regional policy. With the policy of open foreign policy, mainly developing trade, in the late 16th century and early 17th century, Japanese merchant ships appeared more and more in Southeast Asia. In addition to Ayutthaya, Japan also went to many territories of Dai Viet (Annam), Indonesia, Cambodia and Malaysia to trade. Among Southeast Asian countries, Ayutthaya was seen as the target center of Japan's regional policy. From 1409, the Shuri government sent a mission to Ayutthaya to officially establish relations with the Ayutthaya court. Diplomatic relations between Ayutthaya and Japan were officially established under the reign of King Agathorasot (1605-1609) and in Japan during the reign of shogun Tokugawa Ieyasu (1542-1616). It could be said, "The Ayutthaya-Ryukyuu trade relations were established the earliest, and also maintained most regularly and for the longest time among all countries in Southeast Asia" (Nguyen Van Kim, 2003, 77). In 1606, Ieyasu sent a letter to King Ayutthaya to offer to buy cannons and aloe wood. Tokugawa Ieyasu also pledged to create the most favorable conditions for Ayutthaya's merchant ships to come to Japan to trade.

During 1633 – 1636 period, the Edo government gradually implemented a closed-door policy. However, determining the importance of Ayutthaya in Southeast Asia, Japan still had an easing policy, the relationship between Japan and Ayutthaya was still maintained. Because it was outside the focus of closed-door policy, when the source of goods imported directly from Japan was delayed, Ayutthaya took the initiative to send many merchant ships to Nagasaki, "within 53 years (1647 - 1700), total of 130 merchant ships of Ayutthaya came to Japan" (Nguyen Van Kim, 2003, Japan and Asia....: 217). Thus, on average, more than 2 Ayutthaya merchant ships came to Japan each year. Compared to other Southeast Asian countries, Ayutthaya was considered to be the focus and great concern of Japan's policy. The geographical advantages, economic development and expanded diplomatic relations of Ayutthaya with the region and Western countries were valued by the Japanese government. "The frequent appearance of Ayutthaya merchant ships in Japan during the closed-door period could be considered a peculiar phenomenon. That showed the attractiveness of the Japanese market as well as initiative of Thai authorities and merchants" (Nguyen Van Kim, 2003, Japan and Asia....: 217). Thus, it could be seen that Japan's policy towards Ayutthaya was quite open, mainly focusing on economic purposes, to some extent showing equality and mutual benefits. However, Japan's policy towards Ayutthaya was not always favorable. Japan faced fierce competition from Western European capitalists such as Spain, Portugal, and especially the Netherlands. This made trade relations between two sides encounter many obstacles.

Japanese merchants were particularly well known in Ayutthaya, in the late 20s of the 17th century, trade between Ayutthaya and Japan could be greater than total value of Ayutthaya's trade with other countries. Because if comparing with other countries in Southeast Asia, it could be seen that "total number of red seal ships (Shuinsen) from Asia to Siam (Ayutthaya) was 56, Manila: 54; Cambodia: 44; Batavia (Indonesia): 2; Brunei: 2, Pehu (Myanmar): 1, Malacca: 1 and the Maluku Islands (Indonesia): 1" (Li Tana, 1999: 90 – 91).

By the end of the seventeenth century, the domestic situation was relatively stable, the Edo shogunate somewhat eased the closed-door policy and allowed a number of merchant ships from other countries to trade, including the Ayutthaya kingdom. Ayutthaya often sold and exchanged with Japan items such as animal skins, precious wood, lead, tin, rhino horn, bird's nest... mainly based on exploiting the potential of nature. The items sold by Japanese merchants in Ayutthaya were mainly silver, copper, iron, sulfur and some handicrafts.

On the side of Ayutthaya, under the reign of King Prasart Thong (1629-1656), the Ayutthaya economy was very developed, especially foreign trade. In the field of foreign affairs, Prasart Thong's policy was basically to reject wars that drained the country and prevented from the development of Ayutthaya's trade. Even during his years in power, he sent his missions with peace proposals to Japan and Indonesia (Le Van Quang, 1995: 83).

From the 60s of the seventeenth century onwards, after consolidating power in the country, the Ayutthaya government began to actively fight against the influence of the Netherlands, rapidly build up its merchant fleet and "relations with China and Japan were expanded" (Le Van Quang, 1995: 92). It could be affirmed that Thai feudal dynasties always showed a positive attitude and goodwill in relations with Japan in order to strengthen other relationships with this maritime kingdom, especially commercial activities.

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Thus, during the 16th and 17th centuries, Japan's policy towards Ayutthaya was quite open and equal. Although there were many internal "problems" in Japan at this time, in its policy towards Southeast Asian countries, especially Ayutthaya, Japan always tried to maintain it well.

CONCLUSIONS

During the 16th and 17th centuries, Southeast Asia was the destination of many major countries in the region and in the world. With a particularly important position, located in the center of the Indochina Asia, the Ayutthaya kingdom not only created a convenient trading place but also played an important role and position on the way of expansion of sphere of influence of China and Japan in Southeast Asia.

Both China and Japan had a policy of attaching importance to Ayutthaya, both economically and politically. Therefore, in diplomatic relations, China and Japan both sought to expand two-way trade and exchange activities, making the market of Thailand as well as the whole region become more bustling in the early modern centuries.

China and Japan's policy towards and attaching importance to Ayutthaya ensured mutual benefits and developed fairly equally. China and Japan needed Ayutthaya as a transshipment terminal where goods were consumed, and Ayutthaya needed two major countries as political patron to easily expand its influence in the region and at the same time seek economic benefits through trade.

However, it could also be seen that two countries China and Japan in implementing policies towards Ayutthaya had different purposes and methods. On the side of China, the policy towards Ayutthaya was quite friendly but implied its own purposes. The Ming and Qing dynasties all sought to subdue and entice Ayutthaya to depend on the Heavenly Court, thereby turning Ayutthaya into a springboard for China to easily expand its influence to surrounding countries. On the side of Japan, Japan's policy towards Ayutthaya was quite open and more equal. Japan attached great importance to Ayutthaya's position in the region, the purpose of Japan was to expand trade and economic rather than political purpose. Therefore, the relationship between Japan and Ayutthaya had few constraints and was quite equal, mutually beneficial.

Thus, in the 16th and 17th centuries, in the regional policy of China and Japan, Ayutthaya was seen as a strategic focus not only in economic aspect but also in political aspect. Compared to other countries in the region, Ayutthaya was almost given more attention due to its geographical position and political strength in Southeast Asia.

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