

VĂN LÝ HẦU TRẦN TỊNH AS A KEY PERSON OF THE HISTORY OF JAPAN – VIETNAM TRADE IN THE 17TH CENTURY

PhD. Hasuda Takashi

*PhD. candidate in Asian history, Osaka
University Graduate School of Letters; JSPS
Research Fellow*

In the 17th century, Vietnamese foreign trade developed. But there is mere information in indigenous sources as *Đại Việt sử ký toàn thư*, *Khâm Định Việt sử thông giám cương mục*, for instance. Because of this restriction, past works have been based on foreign sources, especially Western sources. On the other hand, almost works which are based on Japanese source materials are belong to "Japanese history" and investigations from the view point of Vietnamese history are still insufficient. This short essay aims to add some knowledge through a comparison between Vietnamese sources and foreign sources on Văn Lý hầu.

Văn Lý hầu 文理侯 was a very important person in the 17th century Vietnamese foreign trade with Japan. In the early 17th century, he resided Nghệ An province and controlled foreign trade. His letters which were sent to Japanese great merchant and officer in Japanese diplomatic sources, for example *Gaiban tsusho* 外蕃通書, indicate his important role clearly. A report of Japanese merchant dated 26/3/1605 said that trade procedures was postponed though Japanese vessels had arrived Nghệ An because Văn Lý hầu had not returned there yet. Korean source also has an information about him, that is "biography of Jo Wan-byeong 趙完璧". According to his report, Văn Lý hầu resided at Hưng Nguyên prefecture and he was charged of diplomatic task in this region although he was about 80 years old. These are coincidence with information of Japanese sources.

On the other hand, there is no mention of him in Vietnamese major sources. There is only one inscription which is named Văn Lý hầu Trần Công Bi temporarily by Hàn Nôm institute, dated 05/1606. According to this inscription, Văn Lý hầu's real name is Trần Tịnh 陳靖. He served Trịnh lord and render distinguished service to the state.

There is no mention of foreign trade, and his real name disagrees with Korean source. But the building year of inscription and the date of diplomatic sources correspond. Coincidences of the official title (Tổng thái giám thượng giám sự Văn Lý hầu 總太監掌監事文理侯) also show that persons who were called as Văn Lý hầu in Japanese, Korean, and Vietnamese sources are the same person.

Generally speaking, Vietnamese sources and foreign sources have few common information of foreign trade. It is too optimistic what we will find out more details on the Vietnamese foreign trade in the 17th century through collecting Vietnamese and foreign source materials much more. For mandarins, it is probably not worthwhile to write down of foreign trade in their works.

Judging from official titles (tổng thái giám, thượng giám), Văn Lý hầu was a eunuch, and eunuchs were the people who were close to Trịnh lord essentially. It shows possibility that foreign trade in the 17th century is a private undertaking. What bureaucratic sources and law codes have on little provisions of foreign trade also support this idea. On the other hand, Vietnamese source indicate that eunuchs have grate authority in the 17th century, like Bùi Sĩ Lâm. Nederland source also show that they are charged of foreign trade, especially raw silk.

Of course, foreign trade was not monopolized by eunuch; some princes and son-in-law of Trịnh lord were charged of it too. But the hypothesis which the upsurge of eunuch based on foreign trade is reflected the birth of "giám ban" is worthwhile to be examined.