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The Silk Route and Viet Nam

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First of all, I must beg your pardon as well as your permission to deal with the title of this intervention. Looking at this title, everybody could have the desire of knowing how Viet Nam had attended to the Silk Route. But the author of this intervention hasn't or more exactly, can't have the condition to satisfy the said desire. The reason is simply that during the first active existence of the silk route in some centuries B. C. and A. D., Viet Nam had not appeared as a nation name. Therefore, the aim of this intervention is only to show a diachronically comparison between two events: one is the silk route from China to Roman Empire, and the other is the silk production on the territory now called Viet Nam. The author of this intervention tries himself to find out some real relations between the two above events. This entire comparison should be carried on just two moments: Around the beginning of our era and the period of the 13th and 14th centuries. Why do we have two moments? Because according to our knowledge, after a long time of discontinuation by historical troubles in Asia, Europe, Middle East and Orient, the famous silk route at the beginning of our era had been restored once again in the 13th and 14th centuries, accompanying the extension of the Mongolian Empire and the well-known voyage of Marco Polo. In the conclusion, the author of this intervention wants to insist on the historical significance of the silk route in several aspects of society, economy, etc to which humanity nowadays needs to pay much attention. Many researchers in the world agree that the excellent handicraft profession of rearing silk worms and making silk began primarily and originally in China. According to several legends, from the period of Phuc Hi (2852-2738 B. C.) China already had the profession of making silk, even of embroidering on silk. That time, until the beginning of our era the profession of cotton weaving had not appeared. But after some other documents, under the reign of Chu family B. C the populations in Ping Chou Province, in the North of Son Tay Province, already knew how to make silk and cotton cloth. Also during the time of the Chou family, under Chou Li's reign (1115-1079 B.C) the silk making developed enormously in China. Raw materials for weaving profession not only composed of silk filament but several

sorts of vegetative filaments. It's quite natural that the exportation of silk only appeared when the production of these goods became numerous. Therefore it's possible to believe that the Pre-Han period, especially the Han Wu Ti (140-87 B. C.) period, was certainly the opening and active stage of the silk route from China to the Roman Empire, via India, Persia, Afghanistan Pamir etc. After some centuries of busy activities, this road gradually declined by important political troubles in Central Asia and West Asia.

Thus during some hundred years of action of this silk route around the beginning of our era, did the silk production appeared in the Giao Chi region, or Viet Nam nowadays? And how was the silk in exchange or in trade? The immediate answer is that the rearing of silk worms and silk making also appeared early among the populations of Viet Nam. Vietnamese Archaeology discovered already several vestiges of weaving handicraft from the late period (first half of Second Millenary B. C.). Many spindles, vestiges of bamboos spinning strings and fine filaments left on ceramic objects, some ceramic fishing net plumb were found put. On the surface of Dong Son bronze objects belonging to the Hung Vuong period (beginning of the first millenary B. C.) There are numerous images showing that the populations of Lac Viet wore already shirts or short skirts etc... In an ancient tomb at Chau Can village (Ha Son Binh Province) dating about webs made of some sorts of thread as silk filament, or vegetative filament or cotton. Through these pieces of webs aren't defined by all researchers as being made of what thread, but it's certainly the silk one, if we conceive that in Asian countries, silk thread appeared before cotton. From the year of 179 B.C., the Au Lac nation was a prefecture of Nam Viet country, called Giao Chi, and from the year of 111 B. C. the populations of Giao Chi began to contact with the intervention of West Han dynasty through the material tribute to Han Kings and the trade with Chinese merchants. Ancient books of China stated that with Chinese merchants came torrentially Southward to Giao Chi "trading in Rhinoceros horn, ivory, diamonds, silver, bronze, fruits, webs etc and most part of them became rich" (Pre Han Book). This book, as well as the famous History of Tu Ma Thien, all stated that The Lac Viet populations planted the mulberry-tree, jute, reared the silkworms, spun silk thread, weaved webs, and produced also fine cotton webs by small filaments". Thus we can agree that before the arrival of Han in Giao Chi from the first years of Second Century B. C. to the beginning of our era, the peoples of Giao Chi known already how to produce silk webs and then cotton webs. This appreciation would be more certain if we know that many villages along the Red River and the Rapid River in the North Viet Nam nowadays still reserve their ancient names as villages of Dâu, or villages of mulberry tree. The planting of mulberry trees always aims at

rearing silkworms and making silk webs. Otherwise numerous legends about Trung Trac, Trung Nhi (silkworms' eggs of first class, silkworms eggs of second class), about women officers of the two sisters Trung, show clearly the Lac Viet peoples' origins of silk producers.

Another example: a temple exists that celebrates the founder of silk handicraft in a village which is famous for a long tradition in silk making, called village of Co do in the suburb of Hanli. The legendary history of this village tells us that its silk production appeared in the period of Hung Dinh Vuong. All these above statements point out that during the active existence of the silk route in the North and North West of China, there were also in the South of China a silk production among the populations of Giao Chi country and a silk trade between Giao Chi and China. The Southern route contributed indirectly its part to the Northern route. When treating of the silk route in the North, we need not to forget the Southern route.

In the second existence period of silk route during the 13th and 14th centuries, the ancient Giao Chi country became already a strong state of Dai Viet. At that time the silk route related directly with the military extension of the Mongolian-Nguyen Empire. It's the Dai Viet Nation who was an offensive aim in three times successively of the above Empire, while in China the Sung dynasty was replaced by the Nguyen one. After all three times, the peoples of Dai Viet gained successively victories. During this period we can say that between the Dai Viet and the silk route there was not any a relation. But it is existed the situation that the rearing silkworms and silk making among the peoples of Dai Viet developed intensively and skillfully. Tran Phu, one among the envoys of Nguyen Court to Dai Viet in the end of 13th century, made a description of what he had seen in his book, entitled *Annam tuc su* (Events Annam). He uttered: "Mulberry trees are planted every year for rearing silkworms, each household has about three or five m² of mulberry land". This means that in general each household had from 2 to 3 ha of mulberry land, and the mulberry production was quite important. Quantity and quality always develop from one another. According to another envoy of the Nguyen Court, arriving at Dai Viet in 1289, named Tu Minh Thien, he was astonished when perceiving that in this country the peoples produced already a sort of fine silk in 5 colours, colour embroideries of silk etc. Under Tran dynasty (1225-1400), after ancient history books, the holy people of Dai Viet wore silk clothes in dark colour, with fine silk around the neck, green silk around the heads like bonnets. The Emperor didn't take this sort of bonnet, but bound up his head with highest class silk. We need to remember that before the Tran dynasty, it's the Ly dynasty (1010-1225) Emperor Ly Thanh Tong decided

the only use of self-made silk throughout the country. Therefore Tran dynasties the silk production within Dai Viet had much more developed. But this progress was a development of handicraft economy, of peaceful construction in Dai Viet. This fact had not any relation with the silk route of Mongolian Nguyen Empire. Marco Polo served already the Khans as an envoy from the Nguyen Court, arrived in the Central sea coast of Viet Nam nowadays, which was at that time the Champa country. Here, the Champa populations had their own traditional silk production skillfully developing. It's a precious legacy for the peoples of the Central Viet Nam later.

Humanity's past time points out that politics and military actions follow after economy or commerce, then economy and commerce again run after politics and military action in their turns. But following merchandises and commercial goods, first of all it's civilization and culture Politics and military actions would remain in the past but civilization and culture exist certainly among the peaceful life of humanity. The handicraft production of any nation always represents economy as well as civilization and in the same time its national culture. In the present epoch, when the humanity self makes its own history consciously, not only the silk route, but hundreds and hundreds of other goods routes were and should be opened as of results and origins for the civilization and culture development between nationalities under the condition of peace, conscience, construction and cooperation. It's certain that many difficulties remain, but nowadays the culture and civilization routes cannot be as painful as the silk route at the beginning of our era. It's also certain again that in these cultural routes. Asian countries would play also an important role even more important than the ones they played in the silk route at the beginning of our era.