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The development of Japan's commercial economy in the 14-16th Centuries

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Abstract

Japanese political history from the 14th to the 16th century was a difficult and turbulent period. This was the period when the power of the Emperor was increasingly neutralized by the power of the bakufu, moving towards complete neutralization. And it was also a period of wars between feudal lords competing for power, making Japan extremely chaotic. However, in contrast to the gloomy political picture, the economic situation in Japan during this period was very prosperous, especially the trade economy. The article clarifies the major changes of the Japanese commercial economy in the 14th - 16th centuries in the following aspects: The development of wholesale trade; The development of ports and the birth of new cities; The monetary economy develops strongly and extensively; The outstanding development of foreign trade.

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Introduction

Although the fifteenth century was an important period with many changes in Japanese history, including the civil war in Japan, for various reasons, this period has not been adequately studied. John Whitney Hall (1977) ^[5], commented: "The XIV - XV centuries are the most neglected and misunderstood period in Japanese history". Most Japanese researchers focus on the Muromachi shogunate, typically: Sansom (1990, 1994) ^[12-15]; Hall & Toyoda (1977) ^[5]; Hall (1992) ^[6]; Grossberg (1981); Mason & Caiger (2008) ^[8]; Reischauer (1994) ^[10]. Besides presenting the collapse of the manor regime, the emergence of a territorial economy, feudal wars caused Japan to fall into a state of political crisis. The authors also affirm that this was a period when Japan's commercial economy was very developed, laying the foundation for the golden age in the 16th - 17th centuries.

Nguyen (2007) ^[4] are the first Vietnamese scholars to systematically research the economic situation of medieval Japan. In particular, Japan's trade economy in the 14th - 16th centuries is presented during the Kamakura and Sengoku Jidai periods, and the Muromachi period. The authors also believe that the disintegration of the manor regime and the formation of the territorial economic regime were the foundation for the development of the Japanese commercial economy.

Methodology

The article applies quantitative and qualitative methods to analyze key references as well as previous studies on the Japanese economic and trade situation in the 14th - 16th centuries. While the quantitative method used to examine the abundance of commodities, the qualitative method is useful for assessing the inevitability of the birth of cities and ports.

Research Results

1. The development of wholesale trade

The manorial regime disintegrated and the closed self-sufficient economy was also broken. Thanks to that, trading activities have expanded in both scope and method. If in the past they had to pay rent to the lord by transporting a large amount of goods to the lord's house, now they can sell agricultural products at markets and then pay money to the lord. Merchants will buy their agricultural products and then store them until it is profitable for them to sell. By the early 15th century, due to the strong development of trading activities, the wholesale trade was also born and developed strongly.

The main wholesale items are cereals, the most important of which is rice. Wholesale merchants gradually monopolized the purchase and sale of these goods. Especially when cities are born and develop, the population is large, and the demand for agricultural products increases, which only wholesale services in large quantities can meet. In the Kyoto region, the amount of grain harvested does not meet the needs of farmers, so they have to buy it from traders from far away regions to sell. Thanks to that, a large rice trading market was formed in Kyoto.

Due to abundant supplies, the rice merchant class tends to monopolize this market. They expanded rice trading rights and adjusted rice prices from Kyoto to regions throughout the country, increasing rice prices to trap consumers. In 1431, in Kyoto, rice traders hoarded rice without selling it to the people, waiting for an opportunity to sell it at exorbitant prices. This action caused famine in the capital. The shogunate government ordered them to sell rice to the people, they carried out that order for a few days and then stopped. Not only that, they also told each other to stop sending rice to the capital. The government was forced to order the hoarding speculators to stand trial. Those arrested refused to plead guilty. A penalty is given. According to this punishment, suspects must dip their hands in boiling water; if their hands are burned, they are guilty. At that time, officials in the Samurai dokoro government were ordered to punish the guilty, but they accepted bribes and did not carry out punishment against the oligarchs. Having bribed high-ranking officials of the Bakufu government, rice speculators became even more rampant. Samurai dokoro government officials disregarded the law and continued to take bribes. History records that even Marshal Yoshimasa's wife took bribes.

The discipline of the shogunate government in the years 1441 - 1449 was very lax towards wholesale merchants (especially since Yoshinori died in 1441) and Yoshimasa was his successor (in 1449). Wholesale rice traders are completely in charge of supplying rice to Kyoto. They not only had a monopoly on rice trading but also controlled the rice routes into Kyoto such as Sakamoto and Otsu. King Gosuko's diary written in 1418 said that there were several thousand carts carrying rice from Otsu to the surrounding area to Gion, causing chaos in the whole region. These people had many demands and threatened that they would burn down all the buildings if their wishes were not met. The Samurai dokoro government mobilized a large force to keep order and many arrests occurred.

Details surrounding the rice trade in Kyoto show that the trading organization was quite developed in the early 15th century, making it impossible for the Muromachi Shogunate to fully control it. During this period, rice merchants were divided into wholesalers and retailers. This distinction had both economic and social significance, signaling the formation of a new class, the wholesale merchant class. This class is not yet the upper class in society but has the ability to resist the government because they hold the right to provide and manage essential goods.

Not only were there traders selling rice, during this period there were also traders of cattle, horses, seafood, fish and salt. Along with the diverse development of wholesale types, an intermediary business form has been born, Tonya - a very important transportation method for wholesale trade. Later, the Tonyas developed into freight transport companies, logistics companies or cargo contractor organizations.

2. The development of urban ports and the birth of new cities During the 14th - 16th centuries, on the basis of pre-existing commodity exchange systems, a number of new markets and trading routes were established. On trade routes, many towns and economic centers were born. In Kyoto, new trading areas were established such as: Shichijo, Gojo, Shijo and HoriKawa, where bustling trading activities always take place. On the coast, based on the prosperous economy of the ports, port towns were born.

Due to the need to exchange goods and economic exchanges between regions throughout the country, the East Coast and inland sea shipping routes established in the last century have developed strongly all along the Japanese coast. Ban, becoming the lifeline in the waterway transportation system. To control trade and protect security, many lords built checkpoints on rivers and ports. During this period, there were up to 380 such checkpoints and ports on the Yodo River. On the Kuwara - Hinaga line, which is only about 7 miles long, there are 6 checkpoints. The fee for each inspection station is 1 VND. In addition, cargo owners also have to pay taxes depending on the boat's tonnage and the type of goods traded. In the archives at the Koto Kuji monastery there is a statement about the cost of transporting two parasols to a church in Mino, less than 100 miles from the monastery. The transportation fee is 1466 mon while the transit tax here at 28 different stations is at least up to 1496 mon. The total cost based on the price of rice is about 30 pounds (1 pound = 450g), of which more than half is tax.

The development of waterway transportation has made trading activities at ports increasingly bustling and bustling. On that basis, urban ports were born and developed strongly. In these places, goods from further inland were transported and piled up. In Japan in the 12th - 15th centuries, road transport was not developed because there were often a lot of goods, the roads were difficult to navigate, and the vehicles were rudimentary, mainly horse-drawn carts or oxen-drawn carts. Therefore, in any region with a dense population, that region has a port city. The Kyoto region has Yodo port, the Nara region has Kizu port, Ise province has Ominato port, and in the Western provinces there are Hyogo and Sakai ports, which are ports for both ocean-going and river-going ships to dock. In port cities, there are often wholesale stores and large-scale transportation businesses, including warehouses, ship repair equipment and motels for sailors.

A typical example of this type of port town is Sakai city. This is a very convenient location not only economically but also a strategically significant location. During the war between the South and the North, Sakai was a place to supply food to the army. From 1333 to 1392, Sakai continuously suffered the consequences of the two forces of the Southern and Northern dynasties competing for this position. Through many ups and downs, this city became a port and a bustling commercial center under the Muromachi Shogunate. Therefore, Sakai city, which was previously just a royal fiefdom specializing in salt production, became a gateway to Kyoto, a military supply center, and a departure port for ocean-going merchant ships. Since the Onin Rebellion (second half of the 15th century), Sakai became a thriving center for both domestic and foreign trade. This city enjoys many privileges, including the establishment of a self-governing apparatus selected from reputable people among the citizens. The business community also established a Council of 36 people to manage common affairs. Sakai also has its own army, a system to protect its citizens and has the

ability to prevent interference from outside lords... The people of Sakai city have the right to self-governance and partly enjoy legal autonomy... Therefore, some scholars believe that, in the 14th century, Japan's Sakai castle was similar to a free city in medieval Europe.

If in the previous period, when the manor system flourished, every manor had a market system that periodically held meetings on certain days of the month, then by the middle of the 14th century, all over Japan, there had been established markets. bustling trading center with a network of markets and dense population. The number of market sessions also increased from 2 market sessions/month (13th - early 14th centuries) to 3 to 6 market sessions/month. Merchants built warehouses near the market and also built houses for themselves in the vicinity. More and more sellers appeared in the markets, bringing goods from the provinces. For light items such as clothing they were carried on their backs. As for heavy items such as salt and iron tools, they were carried on horseback or oxback. These trading centers gradually developed into towns. By the end of the 15th century, many towns had become modern cities. Yokkaichi City is a type of city that represents this process. Initially, Yokkaichi was just a market place held 4 times a month on the 4th; 14; 24 every month. But gradually, that market place became a town with bustling trading activities.

Besides the cities that appeared due to the needs of trade, there were also cities that appeared due to the needs of religious establishments, travel and rest requirements of imperial officials, farmers, and craftsmen. But these needs only appeared when the self-sufficient economy was broken (the manorial regime was disbanded), so the development of these cities and towns was much later than that of port cities or other cities. trading center. At the end of the 16th century, the town of Otomo in Bungo grew up with many beautiful buildings, had a bustling market and had a large population (about 8,000 people). Another town also built in the architectural style of the capital Kyoto, located in Yamaguchi in Suo, is a place with beautiful landscapes, convenient for travel and trade, and is also a place where aristocrats often visit and rest.

3. Monetary economy develops strongly and deeply

It can be said that monetary economy has appeared in Japan since the late 12th century, but it was not until the early 14th century that money trading really developed and currency trading also became one of important economic sectors.

In exchange, the use of metal coins is becoming increasingly popular. Besides the coins imported from China, the lords also minted their own coins. In the 13th century, two resistance wars against the Mongols and Yuan invaders interrupted the import of coins from China. During the Ming Dynasty, when trade resumed, the Japanese government signed an agreement with the Chinese government, which included importing a large amount of copper coins into Japan. People divide coins into 3 types based on value: "large" coins, "medium" coins and "small" coins. "Small" coins are more susceptible to counterfeiting, so the government has had to introduce penalties for the production and sale of counterfeit money.

At the end of the 16th century, a number of precious metal mines, including gold and copper mines, were discovered in Japan, creating a necessary source of raw materials for Japan to proactively mint money. Powerful lords such as: Takeda (Vu Dien) in Kai; Maeda (Tien Dien) in Kaga and Toyotomi Hideyoshi are considered the first to mint gold coins and

circulate them on the Japanese market.

The fact that money trading becomes popular is a condition for money business to develop more widely than before. In the 15th century, usury was also a very developed profession. Many large merchants and craft workshop owners are also heads of loan sharking establishments. The constant wars between feudal corporations during this period were a lucrative environment for this business to develop. The war caused many nobles to lose their positions, land and houses, and many became debtors of merchants. Despite being heavily taxed by the government on this type of business, in many different ways, currency and loan traders still make great profits. Therefore, in some cities such as Kyoto, Sakamoto, Sakai... separate areas of people specializing in currency exchange and money lending have been formed.

Comments and conclusions

It can be said that the abundance of exchanged goods is one of the manifestations of the development of Japanese trade. If in previous centuries, Japan's import and export goods were limited to agricultural products and raw materials, then in this period, Japan's import and export goods have become increasingly richer and richer. more diverse, including industrial and handicraft items.

Regarding exports, Japan not only exports to countries sulfur, gold, mercury and pearls, but also a large volume of handicraft products such as swords, silk, lacquerware, and painted folding fans. and screen. Thousands of Japanese swords were exported to countries in the region and around the world during this period, especially to China. The Japanese curved sword is forged from a sharp, stainless steel. Folding fans are also an item that Chinese people love and are quite commonly used by Chinese aristocrats. In addition, silver is also a profitable export commodity for Japanese traders. Many Chinese and Portuguese merchant ships came to Japanese ports to buy this valuable raw material.

Japan imports tropical products from Southeast Asia and India such as rice, grains, pepper, spices... and imports from China handicraft products such as silk, porcelain, and printed books. and copper coins. Unique trade products between Vietnam and Japan are blue and celadon ceramics with many different types, mainly household utensils such as bowls, plates, bowls, candle holders... In fact, from the mid-sixteenth century, the Japanese began buying guns from the Portuguese to use as a new weapon in battle. The lords ordered large quantities and found ways to produce this type of gun. However, bows and arrows and swords were still the two commonly used weapons during this period.

One of the important reasons why the Japanese commercial economy, especially foreign trade, developed strongly in the 14th and 16th centuries was the dissolution of the manor regime and the emergence of a territorial economy. land. The disintegration of the manor regime led to the disintegration of the closed self-sufficient economy, with narrow frameworks that constrained commercial activities in the previous period. During the chaos, the lords became the leaders in developing economic and trade within their territories, and actively traded with the outside world. While the feudal court proved ineffective in running the country, the daimyo were the ones who made important contributions to helping Japan's foreign trade integrate with other countries in the region and the world. Thanks to that, Japan's commercial economy continues to grow stronger than ever.

It can be said that since the 16th century, when handicraft

industry was truly separated and became an independent economic sector with agriculture, it created conditions to promote the strong development of commercial activities, bringing the industry to a new level. This economy has become a decisive factor in the Japanese economy. At the same time, the change in economic structure has had positive impacts on the lives of residents. Just as Edwin O Reischauer (1994; pp.92) ^[10] commented: “Japan entered the feudal period in the twelfth century as a weak, small and economically backward country, in on the margins of the civilized world. During the sixteenth century, Japan emerged from a long period of feudal anarchy into an economically progressive, capable and multifaceted nation. compete on equal terms with newly encountered European peoples, and with the Chinese as well.

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