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## VIETNAMESE CUISINE CULTURE DURING THE 17<sup>TH</sup> AND 18<sup>TH</sup> CENTURIES THROUGH WESTERN MATERIALS

*Truong Anh Thuan*

PhD (History), Associate Professor

The University of Danang

University of Science and Education

No. 459, Ton Duc Thang St., Danang city, 550000, Vietnam

tathuan@ued.udn.vn

ORCID: 0000-0001-9682-882X

Based on the exploitation of material sources recorded by Europeans, including missionaries, traders, and travelers, who were present in Vietnam or researched about this country during the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, the article focuses on studying and clarifying the appearance of Vietnamese cuisine culture in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, expressed through the ingredients of Vietnamese meals, strange dishes, sauces and spices, dish processing methods, eating styles, popular drinks, and differences in the cuisine life between classes in Vietnamese society then. From there, the author analyzes and evaluates the advantages and limitations of Western material sources recording Vietnamese cuisine during this period. To carry out this research, the author relied on original material sources from Western missionaries, traders, and travelers (reports, letters, works, diaries, etc.) who once set foot in Vietnam or researched this country in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. The article will contribute to researching the cultural exchange process between Vietnam and the West in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries and “restoring” the picture of Vietnamese cuisine culture in this period as objectively and accurately as possible.

**Keywords:** Europeans; food; missionaries; travelers; Vietnam; Vietnam cuisine

### *Introduction*

During the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, Western missionaries, traders, and travelers arrived in different areas of Vietnamese territory for spreading the Gospel, trade, and tourism. In the process, they could see and experience Vietnamese cuisine life firsthand. Curiosity, as well as the desire to clarify the similarities and differences between Vietnamese cuisine and European countries, have led these Westerners to learn and record types of food and drinks, processing methods, and unique flavors from the dishes of the indigenous people at that time. This happened randomly in a relatively simple way: wherever they went, they directly observed or heard about and felt impressed with Vietnamese food and drinks and would record it. Furthermore, living and operating for a long time in Vietnam – where food sources originating from Europe are scarce – Westerners have no choice but to use native residents’ foods and drinks for their survival needs. That experience is one of the significant factors for Westerners to record Vietnamese cuisine in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries from different perspectives. Researchers can find some contents directly or indirectly related to this issue in the works, reports, and letters of Jesuit missionaries who

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had operated in Vietnam or recorded about this country in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, including Christoforo Borri<sup>1</sup> (*Relation de la nouvelle mission des pères de la compagnie de Jésus au royaume de la Cochinchine*), Alexandre de Rhodes<sup>2</sup> (*Histoire du Royaume de Tunquin and Divers Voyages et Missions*), Giovanni-Filippo de Marini<sup>3</sup> (*Histoire nouvelle et curieuse des Royaumes de Tunquin et de Lao*), Joseph Tissannier<sup>4</sup> (*Relation Nouvelle & Singulière du royaume de Tunquin avec plusieurs figures & la Carte du País*), and Jean-Baptiste Gabriel Alexandre Grosier<sup>5</sup> (*Histoire générale de la Chine*).

Meanwhile, contents referring to the cuisine life of Vietnamese, from the ruling class to the ordinary people in Vietnamese society, are also found in the materials of some European traders or travelers, including Samuel Baron<sup>6</sup> (*A Description of the Kingdom of Tonqueen*), Jean-Baptiste Tavernier<sup>7</sup> (*Relation nouvelle et singulière du Royaume de Tunquin*), William Dampier<sup>8</sup> (*Dampier's voyages consisting of a new voyage round the world*), Alexis Marie de Rochon<sup>9</sup> (*Voyage à Madagascar, a Maroc et aux Indes Orientales*), and John Barrow<sup>10</sup> (*A voyage to Cochinchina, in the years 1792 and 1793*). Suppose these “puzzle pieces” are arranged together logically and scientifically. In that case, scholars can restore a relatively complete picture of “Vietnamese cuisine culture during the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries”, from the ingredients of Vietnamese meals, strange dishes, sauces and spices, dish processing methods, and eating styles to popular drinks and differences in the cuisine life between classes in Vietnamese society at that time.

#### ***Vietnamese Meals: Diversity of Foods and Processing Methods***

In the eyes of Westerners in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, Vietnam was a country that had abundant, diverse, and rich food sources [Borri 1931, 316]. Among them, one of the most numerous and widespread foods in Vietnamese's lives was raw rice [Dampier 1906, 574; Tissannier 1858, 92; Borri 1931, 316], a product of wet rice – one of the country's most widely grown food crops. Raw rice is cooked into rice, and the Vietnamese, whether rich or poor, common or noble, consider rice a staple food [Rhodes 1651, 48], just like bread in Europe. Therefore, in the daily meals of Vietnamese in the past and present, there may be many different dishes on the dining table, but in general, Vietnamese still call it “eating rice”. In *Relation de la nouvelle mission des pères de la compagnie de Jésus au royaume de la Cochinchine*, Jesuit missionary Christoforo Borri recorded the Vietnamese way of cooking rice. Accordingly, to make rice more manageable to eat, when cooking rice, Vietnamese do not add any spices, whether oil, butter, salt, or sugar, but only put an amount of rice in the pot corresponding to the number of people eating and along with that is a sufficient amount of pure water, to prevent the rice from sticking to the pot or burning, and when cooked, the rice grains still retain their shape but are softer. And because the rice was not seasoned, it was easy to digest. The residents in the Orient, in general, and Vietnam, in particular, eat much rice. This happens four times daily to meet the body's natural needs [Borri 1931, 313]. Eating rice in this country is so popular that even Westerners, who are only familiar with foods and cooking methods originating from Europe, after living and working in Vietnam, also gradually change their eating habits and only feel delicious when eating Vietnamese rice [Borri 1931, 316]. Besides rice, in daily life, Vietnamese also used several other foods to make dishes, such as corn, sweet potatoes, and taro [Horta 1843, 580; Dampier 1906, 574; Barrow 1806, 315], although these foods were only secondary compared to rice. Westerners also mentioned Vietnamese glass noodles made from rice, called *lock-soy*, which was entirely transparent and very popular in Japan and China [Barrow 1806, 315].

The indispensable vegetable in traditional Vietnamese meals at Tonkin and Cochinchina was a specific characteristic recognized and recorded by Westerners, with several vegetable species associated with the daily lives of residents living in these two areas, such as purslain, water spinach, plantago, radish, pumpkin, chicory, cabbage [Dampier 1906,

575; Borri 1931, 295] (see more: [Taylor 2020, 305–306]). The Vietnamese also used some types of aquatic vegetables in wetlands (*Salicornia*, *Aremaria*, *Crithmum*, *Maritimum*, *Samphire*) combined with other foods to prepare salty dishes or use some types of seaweed and algae (*Alga*, *Fuci*, *Ulvae*) to make jelly [Barrow 1806, 314], like the *Chin-chou* jelly of the Chinese.

Materials from Westerners who were present in Vietnam in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries also recorded that the Vietnamese used many types of fish [Borri 1931, 295; Dampier 1906, 561; Marini 1666, 45] and meat from domesticated livestock and poultry (cows, buffaloes, horses, goats, pigs, dogs, cats, pigeons, chickens, ducks, geese [Dampier 1906, 582; Borri 1931, 289, 295, 358, 360; Barrow 1806, 312]), some wild animals (frogs, elephants, turtles [Dampier 1906, 582; Barrow 1806, 312; Tissannier 1858, 93; Grosier 1785, 218; Tavernier 1718, 178] (see more: [Taylor 2020, 305–306]) and some insects (locusts [Dampier 1906, 578]), made raw material for processing into dishes. Chicken and duck eggs are also quite familiar foods to Vietnamese [Tavernier 1718, 181]. In addition, the appearance of many fruits associated with the Cochinchina and Tonkin regions (watermelon, jackfruit, durian, pineapple, banana, cluster fig, roxburgh fig, pear, mango, litchi, lemon, orange, tangerine, coconut, guava, papaya, longan, custard apple [Borri 1931, 291–293; Rhodes 1651, 49–50; Dampier 1906, 575–576; Rochon 1801, 299; Tavernier 1718, 204; Baron 1811, 609, 661]) (see more: [Taylor 2020, 305–306]) in the records of Westerners during the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries to a certain extent have helped researchers have a solid documentary basis to confirm their existence and popularity in the cuisine life of Vietnamese at that time.

Regarding the preliminary treatment and processing method of Vietnamese foods in Cochinchina and Tonkin in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, it can be seen that this issue was not mentioned more directly, concentrated, specifically, and in detail in the materials of Westerners who operated in Vietnam during this period. However, that does not mean any research on it is entirely impossible. Through several materials related to Vietnamese cuisine recorded by Western missionaries, traders, and travelers, researchers can still understand some common ways of preliminary treatment and processing Vietnamese dishes at that time. In fact, Vietnam's hot, humid, and rainy climate has created an environment unsuitable for preserving fresh foods. Furthermore, the excess of a specific type of food at a particular time or the indispensable requirement for using a specific kind of food in meals has made Vietnamese, not only beginning in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries but from ancient times, find ways to preliminary treatment and preserve these food sources. One of the ways to preserve foods that are somewhat simple but quite popular with the Vietnamese in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries was salt-curing. Researchers can know this through the records of William Dampier in *Dampier's voyages consisting of a new voyage round the world*, and Jean-Baptiste Tavernier in *Relation nouvelle et singulière du Royaume de Tonquin*. Among them, they describe the method that Vietnamese in Tonkin salted locusts or eggs (chickens and ducks) [Dampier 1906, 578–579; Tavernier 1718, 181] to use gradually over a long period afterward. This method was also applied to fish and shrimp to make fish sauce (*balachiam*, *balachuan*) [Dampier 1906, 579–580; Borri 1931, 295–296], just as Christoforo Borri and William Dampier once recorded.

Meanwhile, dishes in the daily life of the Vietnamese in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries were also processed quite simply and closely. Vegetables could be eaten raw, cooked in soup, stewed, or mixed with other foods [Barrow 1806, 288, 314–315]. Western materials also mention that the Vietnamese cook foods by grilling them over charcoal (locusts, beef, gecko meat, rhinoceros meat [Dampier 1906, 578–579, 581–582; Borri 1931, 297]) or fermenting and brewing them until cooked (fermented pork roll) [Dampier 1906, 581–582]. From these somewhat fragmentary and scattered records, later generations knew methods of processing Vietnamese food in Cochinchina and Tonkin during the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries.

***Vietnamese Cuisine from the Westerners Perspective:  
Some Strange Dishes***

Westerners in Vietnam in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries also mentioned some Vietnamese dishes that, to their subjective feelings, were quite strange and even horrifying. In *Relation de la nouvelle mission des pères de la compagnie de Jésus au royaume de la Cochinchine*, Christoforo Borri once talked about grilled gecko dish of the Vietnamese in Cochinchina. According to his description, the geckos in this country were bigger than the gecko specimens from many different regions of the world exhibited in Italy that he had seen. Christoforo Borri said that a friend of his bought several strings of geckos and threw them into the fire. When the geckos' tether was burned, they slowly crawled around until they felt the heat of the fire, then the geckos could no longer resist and were wholly burned. At this time, his friend pulled them out of the fire and used a knife to scrape off the scorched skin, revealing the white flesh. Then he tore the gecko's meat, dipped it in a butter-like spice, ate it deliciously, and invited Christoforo Borri to taste it, but Christoforo Borri did not dare to eat it [Borri 1931, 297]. In *Dampier's voyages consisting of a new voyage round the world*, William Dampier also wrote about a popular and cheap dish made from raw pork, a favorite dish of the Vietnamese. Still, Europeans seem to be afraid of it because it causes them severe stomach pain. To make this dish, the Vietnamese will cut the pork into small pieces with a mixture of fat and lean, roll it into handfuls like sausage chains, and press it until it hardens. Then, they wrap it in a white cloth and eat it gradually without adding other spices. Meanwhile, raw beef was also a popular dish in the capital city of Cachao (Tonkin). It also made William Dampier feel pretty curious. From his description, it can be deduced by guessing that this is probably a dish of dilled veal balls still present in Vietnamese lives today. Accordingly, people kill a cow and burn it. When the beef was still hot, they cut large pieces of lean meat from the cow's body and soaked it in sour vinegar for 3 to 4 hours or longer until the meat was soft enough. Then, they take it out and enjoy eating it without further processing [Dampier 1906, 578–579]. William Dampier also mentioned that the Vietnamese in Tonkin caught locusts for food. According to his records, this insect was about the size of a finger. The locusts lived mainly in riverbank areas or around lakes, and most appeared in January and February of the solar calendar. They were pale white then and had tiny wings like a bee's. The locusts fly up from the ground and quickly fall into the water because they do not have enough strength to fly across the river. People in Tonkin often wait at river mouths and use small racquets to scoop up countless locusts. They can eat it fresh, grill it over charcoal or salt to preserve it, and eat it gradually. According to William Dampier's records, the people of this area, not only the poor but also the rich, love this insect because of the greasy and delicious feeling it brings. They considered it a tasty and healthy dish, whether fresh or salted [Dampier 1906, 578–579].

***Sauces and Spices: Typical Flavors of Vietnamese Cuisine***

Regarding sauces and spices used to process foods or eat directly at Vietnamese meals, this content also attracted the attention of Westerners who operated in Vietnam during the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. It must be emphasized that, when recording traditional Vietnamese cuisine, it would be a big mistake not to mention fish sauce. Among the bibliographies compiled by Westerners in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries related to Vietnam, *Relation de la nouvelle mission des pères de la compagnie de Jésus au royaume de la Cochinchine* by Christoforo Borri and *Dampier's voyages consisting of a new voyage round the world* by William Dampier not only mention the name but also have pretty detailed descriptions about this particular sauce. They all said that the abundance and surplus of caught seafood, especially fish, has made the Vietnamese in Cochinchina and Tonkin think of processing it into fish sauce. However, the content and level of records by Christoforo Borri

and William Dampier about this type of food were also more or less different. Christoforo Borri only provides readers with the most general information about *balachiam*, i.e., fish sauce. He said this food was made from salted fish and incubated in big jars to create a sauce with a strong flavor similar to mustard [Borri 1931, 295–296].

On the contrary, William Dampier has quite a clear distinction between types of fish sauce and describes it in quite a detail. According to his records, the fish sauce that the Vietnamese processed from kinds of seafood includes two types: *balachuan* and *nuke-mum*. In particular, to make them, people mix fish and shrimp with salt water, put them in clay jars, and then seal them. Because salt water has low salinity, it does not make fish and shrimp solid; on the contrary, they will shortly rot into a pasty mixture. People would filter the water for meals, which was called *nuke-mum*. The fish carcass was called *balachuan*. *Nuke-mum* was probably fish sauce, gray-brown in color, clear, and very delicious [Dampier 1906, 579–580].

Meanwhile, *balachuan* has a slightly pungent smell; the taste is not necessarily unpleasant, but on the contrary, it seems pretty delicious once people get used to it. Of course, Vietnamese meals cannot lack fish sauce, but according to William Dampier, even Europeans love this sauce equally after living in Vietnam. Christoforo Borri and William Dampier all recognize the popularity of fish sauce in Vietnamese cuisine in Tonkin and Cochinchina. Although this wasn't the leading, most consumed food in meals, it stimulates the taste buds when the Vietnamese eat rice – the dish does not have any spices added when cooking. Because it was an indispensable ingredient in meals, Vietnamese people stored a large amount of fish sauce in big jars placed in the house for gradual use, similar to the method Europeans used to preserve wine. Vietnamese could use fish sauce to eat with rice, chicken meat, or duck meat [Dampier 1906, 579–580]; without it, the meal would become blander than ever.

Besides fish sauce, William Dampier's records in *Dampier's voyages consisting of a new voyage round the world* also said that another type of food was also frequently used by the Vietnamese in meals, with the effect of stimulating the taste buds and increasing appetite, similar to fish sauce, which was soy sauce. He had heard that Vietnamese soy sauce was partly made from shrimp and fish, so its taste was similar to fish sauce. However, a close friend of his who specializes in trading trips between Tonkin and Japan – the originator of genuine soy sauce – told him that this food was made from soybeans, water, and salt. When processing foods and eating rice, the Vietnamese also habitually use some flavorings and spices, such as sugar, salt, chili, pepper, and lemon [Tavernier 1718, 179, 204; Barrow 1806, 315; Rochon 1801, 299], to make meals more delicious with a combination of sweet, salty, sour, and spicy flavors.

### ***Vietnamese Eating Style: Oriental Cultural Specific Characteristic***

Vietnamese cuisine culture in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries was not only shaped by the richness, diversity, and uniqueness of flavors and methods of processing dishes but also showed in the eating style of the Vietnamese. When eating, the Vietnamese belonging to the ordinary and poor class often sit on the ground or a mat [Barrow 1806, 316; Tissanier 1858, 116] with their legs crossed [Borri 1931, 314], and in front of them is food cut into small pieces. This was a common way of eating among the Vietnamese then. Meanwhile, meals for noble and wealthy Vietnamese families are organized more elaborately. Usually, if a meal has only family members (husband, wife, father, child), everyone sits and eats together [Borri 1931, 314]. The dishes were on small wooden plates painted with red and gilded, and many flowers were drawn [Tavernier 1718, 195]. These food plates are placed on a large wooden tray or a table [Borri 1931, 314]. However, when they hold a party with the participation of many people, each guest will be arranged a chest-high banquet table that is not too wide, carefully carved, and sometimes plated with gold or

silver, depending on the homeowner's wealth level [Borri 1931, 314]. The above way of organizing parties was mentioned by Alexandre de Rhode in *Divers Voyages et Missions* when he described Lord Trinh in Tonkin welcoming and entertaining a group of nuns. Accordingly, each person will be arranged a round table painted with red and gilded, with snacks and many delicious meat dishes displayed on top [Rhodes 1653, 242–246]. The Vietnamese often habitually wash their hands, face, and mouth before eating. Whether during daily meals or parties with many people participating, the Vietnamese were reticent. Talking activities while eating were often left to the elders to start first. That shows the Vietnamese tradition of respecting elders. The Vietnamese did not habitually ask about health during meals but frequently asked others how many bowls of rice they had eaten and whether they felt delicious [Tavernier 1718, 195].

Regarding utensils used in meals, unlike Europeans, Vietnamese did not use tablecloths or napkins [Tavernier 1718, 195], bottles, cups, knives, or forks [Barrow 1806, 288; Tavernier 1718, 195]. They replaced those things with two small sticks, round and long, about the size of a smoking pipe [Dampier 1906, 16]; the English call them “*chopsticks*” [Tavernier 1718, 195; Tissannier 1858, 116]. The Vietnamese often keep many chopsticks at home for daily use and in case strangers come to dine [Dampier 1906, 17]. They usually hold chopsticks in their right hand, one between the index finger and thumb and the other between the index finger and middle finger. Chopsticks are made from many different materials depending on the social forces' status: rosewood and bamboo for the ordinary and poor classes of society, sandalwood, and sometimes tipped with silver [Dampier 1906, 17–18] or *tootanague* white copper [Barrow 1806, 288]; perhaps it is only for high-ranking people with a lot of money and wealth, but the civilian hardly has the opportunity to use it. Christoforo Borri, Jean-Baptiste Tavernier, and William Dampier expressed great interest and admiration for the Vietnamese's skillful use of chopsticks. They show great skill, grace, agility, and flexibility in using chopsticks to pick up food, especially the smallest rice grains [Tavernier 1718, 195; Dampier 1906, 17]. Therefore, they do not need to use napkins, and their hands never get dirty because they do not have to touch any dishes directly [Borri 1931, 314].

### ***Tea and Arrack: Two Popular Drinks in Vietnamese Life***

Research on Vietnamese cuisine in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries will be a significant shortcoming if scholars only pay attention to the dishes and forget the drinks. Fortunately, this issue has been recorded sporadically in *Relation of la nouvelle mission des pères de la compagnie de Jesus au royaume de la Cochinchine* by Christoforo Borri, *Histoire du Royaume de Tunquin* and *Divers Voyages et Missions* by Alexandre de Rhodes and *A voyage to Cochinchina, in the years 1792 and 1793* by John Barrow. Westerners have reflected very accurately that the Vietnamese rarely used, or even did not, milk from livestock (cow, buffalo) as a source of nutrition to feed young children [Barrow 1806, 315; Borri 1931, 298] and make daily foods. However, the Vietnamese in Cochinchina and Tonkin use the following two drinks quite commonly:

The first is tea. In *Relation de la nouvelle mission des pères de la compagnie de Jésus au royaume de la Cochinchine*, Jesuit missionary Christoforo Borri said that during the day, the Vietnamese often had the habit of drinking hot water boiled from the roots of an herb, called *chia* (i.e., tea). This drink is very familiar to the Vietnamese, effectively preventing stomach discomfort and helping to ease digestion [Borri 1931, 315]. In *Divers Voyages et Missions*, Alexandre de Rhodes said tea had three uses. First, tea can cure or prevent headaches. Second, it has magical effects on the stomach and digestion. Third, this drink helps cleanse the kidneys and fight gout and measles [Rhodes 1653, 51–53]. Christoforo Borri and Alexandre de Rhodes realized that tea was popular not only in Vietnam [Dampier 1906, 601] but also in China and Japan. However, in each country, tea has specific differences: the Vietnamese use roots, the Chinese use leaves [Rhodes 1653,

49–51], and the Japanese grind tea leaves into powder to drink [Borri 1931, 315; Rhodes 1653, 51–52]. This drink also became a “cultural phenomenon” associated with urban and rural spaces in Vietnam in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. *Dampier’s voyages consisting of a new voyage round the world* by William Dampier and *A Description of the Kingdom of Tonqueen* by Samuel Baron, mention the typical image of tea shops under banyan trees along the road [Baron 1811, 660–661], in markets, or Vietnamese villages [Dampier 1906, 582].

The second is arrack. Jesuit missionary Alexandre de Rhodes in *Histoire du Royaume de Tunquin* and *Divers Voyages et Missions* said that because Vietnam did not have grapes, the people here also did not have wine [Rhodes 1653, 65; Rhodes 1651, 47]. Instead, they use alcohol distilled from rice (arrack) [Baron 1811, 660; Rhodes 1651, 48] with the same color, taste, properties, and concentration as European brandy. At the same time, to increase the value and delicious taste of arrack, the Vietnamese also mix this drink with the essence extracted from the agarwood tree [Borri 1931, 315]. Arrack is produced so abundantly that people can drink as much as they want, and it also gives the same feeling of intoxication as drinking wine for Europeans. In *Dampier’s voyages consisting of a new voyage round the world*, William Dampier recorded the partying and drinking of the Vietnamese in Tonkin during the Lunar New Year. He realized they loved drinking much hot arrack, especially at the beginning of the new year when the climate in this area was quite cold. Not only that, but they also soak snakes and scorpions in arrack and consider it an excellent tonic and a very effective antidote in treating leprosy and against various types of venom [Dampier 1906, 602]. Therefore, the regale of this valuable soaked arrack shows the respectful and hospitable attitude of the Vietnamese in Tonkin.

Meanwhile, the drinking preferences and the high capacity for arrack of the Vietnamese in Cochinchina were also reflected by John Barrow in *A Voyage to Cochinchina, in the years 1792 and 1793*. According to his records, these Vietnamese do not like beer or wine but are very fond of highly concentrated alcoholic beverages (i.e., arrack) like pure rum or brandy. They drank many arracks and returned drunk the first time they visited the British embassy ship docking in Turon (Danang city) [Barrow 1806, 287]. From some materials recorded by Westerners above, researchers can partly understand the popularity of arrack in the lives of the Vietnamese during the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries.

### ***Social Stratification and Contrast in the Cuisine Life of the Vietnamese***

From materials of the Westerners, researchers have partly understood the richness and diversity of food sources and the methods of processing and preserving Vietnamese dishes in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. However, that does not mean that all Vietnamese enjoyed the same whole and prosperous eating conditions then. In fact, Vietnamese society during this period still had a significant gap in many aspects, in general, and in cuisine life, in particular, between different classes. It is an inevitable and common rule in every country, whether in the East or the West. This is due to differences in social forces’ political status and economic strength. Among them, the meals of ordinary or poor people in Vietnamese society in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries were often quite rustic and simple, popular with rice, dried fish, or salted eggs. Meat for them was a rather luxurious food, only eaten on a few critical occasions each year, just as Jean-Baptiste Tavernier once said [Tavernier 1718, 194]. Meanwhile, the sophisticated and lavish cuisine picture of the noble and wealthy Vietnamese ruling class at that time was in complete contrast to the cuisine life of most of the civilians also recorded by Westerners. Even in the daily meals of the Vietnamese upper class, there was also an excess of meat and fish [Tavernier 1718, 195]. Not to mention, there were many delicacies whose use seemed to be an inherent privilege reserved only for the rich. In the works *Histoire du Royaume de Tunquin* and *Divers Voyages et Missions* by Alexandre de Rhodes, *A Description of the Kingdom of*

*Tonqueen* by Samuel Baron, *Relation de la nouvelle mission des pères de la compagnie de Jésus au royaume de la Cochinchine* by Christoforo Borri and *Relation nouvelle et singulière du Royaume de Tunquin* by Jean-Baptiste Tavernier all more or less mentioned bird's nests. Although differences in approach and recording of this type of product are inevitable, they all meet one common point: thinking this was one of the most luxurious, rare, and nutritious foods. Therefore, it does not seem to be a dish that belongs to most civilians but only to the Vietnamese society's noble and wealthy ruling class [Rhodes 1651, 48; Borri, 1931, 297; Rhodes 1653, 65–66] during the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. Meanwhile, John Barrow recorded in his work *A Voyage to Cochinchina, in the years 1792 and 1793*, that the Vietnamese in Cochinchina used several marine worms (*Médues, Holoturies, Actines, Ascidies, Doris*), especially a sea cucumber (*trepan*), to process high-end foods [Barrow 1806, 312] that perhaps at that time, only rich Vietnamese could afford.

The difference in the cuisine of the upper-class Vietnamese compared to the civilians in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries was also shown through the organization of sumptuous receptions and parties on the occasion of a specific event taking place (funeral ceremonies, death anniversaries, welcoming foreigners, etc.), with the grandeur, rarity, diversity, and richness of the dishes, entirely beyond the imagination of Westerners. In *Relation de la nouvelle mission des pères de la compagnie de Jésus au royaume de la Cochinchine*, Christoforo Borri described quite meticulously and in detail the organization of Vietnamese parties in Cochinchina with the size of guests ranging from 40–50 people to 200–300 people and sometimes more than 2000 people [Borri 1931, 314]. These banquets are often held in ample space to efficiently arrange the number of tables and chairs corresponding to the number of guests. Each banquet has hundreds of dishes made from seafood, poultry, and wild meat, cleverly arranged in a pyramid shape, and along with that comes countless types of fruits. The impressive number of dishes allows the party host to express respect and hospitality. Highly respected people will be invited to dine first with their favorite dishes during the party. Then, it was the turn of those who served this upper class, including essential servants, less important servants, and finally, the lowest-ranking servants. They will take turns participating in the party according to status and position. Since it is not allowed to leave food on banquet tables, so after have eaten fill, the humblest servants of the mandarins and powerful nobles mentioned above will go to each banquet, collect the remaining food into large bags, to bring home to share with their children and the poor [Borri 1931, 314]. Especially during the preaching of the Gospel in Pulucambi (Cochinchina) from 1618 to 1621, Christoforo Borri said he directly witnessed the solemn parties organization that lasted for eleven days during the funeral of the head mandarin of this area. In particular, the family of the deceased mandarin organized many parties with the participation of nearly 2,000 local nobles. Each person will be arranged a separate banquet with more than 200 plates of food [Borri 1931, 357–360].

In 1626–1627, while preaching the Gospel at Tonkin, Jesuit missionary Alexandre de Rhodes established a good relationship with the Trinh Lord. Therefore, he had the opportunity to witness the particularly solemn party organization that takes place every year on the death anniversary of this influential political figure's father. On this occasion, people from everywhere must bring offerings to worship Trinh Lord's father or contribute to the cost of organizing the death anniversary. Many luxurious and large banquet tables were arranged in order during the death anniversary ceremony. These banquet tables were twelve or fifteen hands high, painted with red and gilded, and many places were decorated with pieces of gold inlaid in the wood. There were many meat dishes displayed on the banquet tables. In addition, some banquet tables also had a whole fatted calf and a roasted pig, not to mention all kinds of unique jams and candies displayed on all tables. After the banquet tables were set up, Trinh Lord and his relatives worshiped his father's soul according to traditional Vietnamese rituals. After that, he returned to his palace so that his father's soul could freely enjoy the feast offered. And as if the deceased had already feasted



to their heart's content, the next day, Lord Trinh would distribute offerings and meat, first to the mandarins, then to the soldiers, and the remainder to the people [Rhodes 1651, 86–88]. Jesuit missionary Joseph Tissannier, during his mission in Tonkin (1658–1663), also recorded that non-Christian people living in this area must have been very wealthy to be able to kill up to 30 or 40 cows and lots of pigs, at the same time, they made 400 to 500 feasts filled with meat, steamed glutinous rice, and fruits, to worship the souls of relatives (father, mother) [Tissannier 1858, 133].

In *A Voyage to Cochinchina, in the years 1792 and 1793*, John Barrow also devoted a significant portion of this work to describing the organization of a reception banquet for foreigners by Vietnamese mandarins in Turon (Danang city). He felt that the Vietnamese were even more generous than the Chinese when, on each banquet table, foods covered the table and were arranged in high piles. John Barrow also said that he rarely saw a party organized by Vietnamese mandarins that he attended with less than 200 bowls of food, not to mention the bowls of rice moved to the guests to eat to replace bread. At these parties, he did not see dried, roasted, or grilled foods. However, dishes made from beef, pork, and fish combined with other foods were very popular [Barrow 1806, 288]. John Barrow also mentioned the elephant meat feasts that the Vietnamese rulers at that time treated to foreign envoys on hunting trips [Barrow 1806, 290]. That has partly helped researchers see the excess and extravagance in the cuisine life of the Vietnamese ruling class, in complete contrast to the situation of the majority of the people of this country, which was neither prosperous nor joyful [Barrow 1806, 289].

### Conclusion

During the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, the presence in different areas of Vietnam created opportunities and conditions that were more favorable for Western missionaries, traders, and travelers to directly observe, experience, and record the cuisine life of the Vietnamese from different perspectives. Although not too comprehensive and complete, through those materials, the appearance of the picture of Vietnamese cuisine culture in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries has also been sketched with the most basic color arrays. Western missionaries, traders, and travelers who operated in Vietnam or studied this country during the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries paid attention to the ingredients of Vietnamese meals, methods of processing dishes, and popular drinks in this country and put all of that in comparison with other countries in Europe. They also feel curious and excited when specifically recording unique dishes, sauces, and spices used to process dishes, as well as the eating style of Vietnamese as a cultural phenomenon. In particular, due to their work, Western missionaries, traders, and travelers often travel between places, interacting and having relations with many classes in Vietnamese society. Therefore, they have reflected quite honestly, objectively, and accurately on the differences in cuisine between these social forces. Among them, the rich and noble ruling class enjoyed a culinary life of excess, sophistication, and luxury.

On the contrary, the meals of the majority of Vietnamese at that time were needy, simple, and frugal. However, that does not mean that scholars in Vietnam and other countries worldwide no longer doubt the authenticity of Westerners' records of Vietnamese cuisine in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. The difficulties encountered in integrating into Vietnamese society, especially the language barrier, made it impossible for them to fully and deeply absorb all other aspects of Vietnamese cuisine culture. Therefore, the appearance of a lack of similarity<sup>11</sup> or shortcoming<sup>12</sup> in the perception and content of records of Western people in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries on this issue is also completely understandable. Despite this, from the perspective of historical research, it can be seen that the above-mentioned Western records have become significant material sources, helping researchers compare, collate, identify, and restore the authentic appearance of Vietnamese cuisine culture in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries.

<sup>1</sup> Christoforo Borri (1583–1632) was an Italian Jesuit missionary. He went to Cochinchina to spread the Gospel during the period 1618–1621. He recorded the natural condition, political, economic, social, and cultural life of the area in his work *Relatione della nuova Missione delli P. P. della Compagnia di Gesù al Regno della Cocincina*, published in Europe in 1631 [Maybon 1931, 269–276; Chinh 1972, 34–35].

<sup>2</sup> Alexandre de Rhodes (1593–1660) was a French Jesuit missionary. From 1624 to 1645, he went to Cochinchina and Tonkin (Vietnam) to preach the Gospel. He recorded many aspects of Vietnam in his two works, *Histoire du Royaume de Tunquin* and *Divers Voyages et Missions*. This historical material has helped today's researchers partly understand Vietnam's natural condition and political, economic, social, and cultural life of Vietnam in the 17<sup>th</sup> century [Chinh 1972, 106].

<sup>3</sup> Giovanni Filippo de Marini was born in 1608 in Taggia (Italy). He joined the Society of Jesus in 1625 and was ordained a priest two years later (1627). From 1646 to 1658, he spread the Gospel in Tonkin (Vietnam). He wrote the work *Delle Missioni de' padri della Compagnia di Giesù nella provincia del Giappone, e particolarmente di quella di Tumkino*, which reflects many different aspects of the Tonkin land that he directly observed or experienced. He died in Macao in 1682 [Montézon et al. 1858, 387, 391; Dehergne 1973, 72–73; Robson and Stedall 2009, 163–164; Marillier 1995, 55–62; Saraiva and Jami 2008, 179–183].

<sup>4</sup> Joseph Tissanier (1618 – after 1688) was a French Jesuit missionary. From 1658 to 1663, he preached the Gospel in Tonkin (Vietnam). He wrote the report *Relation du Voyage du P. Joseph Tissanier de la Compagnie de Jésus depuis la France Jusqu'au Royaume du Tonkin*, which not only reported on missionary work but also directly or indirectly reflected various aspects of the Tonkin area in the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century [Pfister 1932, 370–371].

<sup>5</sup> Jean-Baptiste Gabriel Alexandre Grosier (1743–1823) was a French Jesuit missionary, literary and art critic, and Sinologist. He spent a lot of time studying China and the surrounding nations influenced by this country. In 1788, he published the book *Histoire générale de la Chine*, which included research on the Tonkin and Cochinchina areas (Vietnam) [Hoefler 1858, 178–179].

<sup>6</sup> Samuel Baron (year of birth and death unknown) was a businessman whose father was Dutch and whose mother was a Vietnamese woman. During 1678–1783, he worked mainly in Tonkin (Vietnam) as an employee of the British East India Company. He wrote *A Description of the Kingdom of Tonqueen*, which deals with this land's natural condition and political, economic, social, and cultural life [Dror and Taylor 2006, 74–83].

<sup>7</sup> Jean-Baptiste Tavernier (1605–1689) was a famous French traveler. During 1631–1668, he made six journeys to different parts of Asia. He recorded that process in his work *Six Voyages de J. B. Tavernier*, published in Europe in 1676. Three years later (1679), he continued to publish *Recueil de plusieurs relations et traitez singuliers et curieux de J. B. Tavernier*. One of the book's contents records the natural condition, politics, economy, society, and culture of the Tonkin region (Vietnam) in the 17<sup>th</sup> century [Dror and Taylor 2006, 80; St. John 1831, 167–191].

<sup>8</sup> William Dampier (1652–1715) was an English explorer. He made three trips around the world in 1679, 1703 and 1708. In 1688, he arrived in Tonkin (Vietnam) and recorded many aspects of this land. That content was included in the book series *A New Voyage Round the World*, published in Europe in 1697 [Funnell 1707, 1–46, 83–84; Pike 1966, 277–278; Rogers 1712, 124–125, 145, 333].

<sup>9</sup> Alexis Marie de Rochon (1741–1817) was a French astronomer and navigator. In 1765, he was nominated to the French Royal Academy of Navigation at Brest and became a French Academy of Sciences member in 1767. In 1769 and 1777, he joined two expeditions to search for a new maritime route between Isle de France and India. In 1801, Alexis Marie de Rochon's *Voyage à Madagascar, a Morocco et aux Indes Orientales*, consisting of three volumes, was published in Paris. In particular, the description of Cochinchina is in volume 1 of this book (from page 289 to page 313) [Chinh 2017, 33–35; Plan 1878, 123, 392; Allanic 1964, 1253; Taillemite 2002, 224].

<sup>10</sup> John Barrow (1764–1848) was an English geographer, linguist and traveler. From 1792 to 1794, he joined the British diplomatic corps led by Earl George Macartney to China. During that journey, John Barrow had the opportunity to set foot in Touron (Cochinchina-Vietnam). Many different aspects of this land, from natural, political, economic to social and cultural, were reflected by him in the book *A Voyage to Cochinchina, in the years 1792 and 1793*, published in Europe in 1806 [Chisholm 1910, 440–441].

<sup>11</sup> When recording daily Vietnamese meals, the materials of Christoforo Borri and John Barrow are different. In *Relation de la nouvelle mission des pères de la compagnie de Jésus au royaume*

*de la Cochinchine*, Christoforo Borri said that Vietnamese ate rice 4 times a day. Meanwhile, in *A Voyage to Cochinchina, in the years 1792 and 1793*, John Barrow affirmed that Vietnamese only ate rice two meals a day: one meal around 9–10 in the morning and the other in the late afternoon [Barrow 1806, 315–316; Borri 1931, 313].

<sup>12</sup> When studying Western materials related to Vietnamese cuisine in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, researchers can't help but doubt the accuracy of these records. Even some of the contents are pretty unfamiliar to Vietnamese's understanding of foods, drinks, or food processing methods that existed in the past and are still present in the lives of the Vietnamese today. In *Dampier's voyages consisting of a new voyage round the world*, William Dampier said that the Vietnamese in Tonkin ate raw locusts. In *A Voyage to Cochinchina, in the years 1792 and 1793*, John Barrow affirms the absence of dry, roasted, or grilled food at Vietnamese feasts in Cochinchina. In particular, some Westerners (William Dampier, Christoforo Borri) had a subjective, short-sighted, and apprehensive attitude towards some dishes that were very close to Vietnamese's lives at that time (grilled gecko, locust, dilled veal balls, fermented pork roll). This has made restoring the exact picture of Vietnamese cuisine in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries somewhat tricky, requiring researchers to do an excellent job of collating and comparing documents to discover the historical truth [Dampier 1906, 578–579, 581–582; Barrow 1806, 288; Borri 1931, 297].

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#### Чионг Ань Тхуан

#### Культура в'єтнамської кухні в XVII–XVIII ст. за західними джерелами

Стаття, в основу якої покладені письмові свідчення європейських місіонерів, торговців і мандрівників, що перебували у В'єтнамі чи досліджували цю країну протягом XVII й XVIII століть, зосереджена на вивченні й проясненні того, який вигляд мала культура в'єтнамської кухні в цей період. Досліджуються складники в'єтнамської кулінарії, екзотичні страви, соуси й спеції, способи приготування їжі, стилі харчування, популярні напої та кулінарні особливості, притаманні класам тогочасного в'єтнамського суспільства. Аналізуючи це, автор розглядає переваги й недоліки писемних джерел Заходу, що фіксують в'єтнамську кухню того періоду. Для проведення дослідження автор спирався на звіти, листи, праці, щоденники тощо західних місіонерів, торговців і мандрівників, чия нога колись ступала на землю В'єтнаму в XVII–XVIII ст. або які досліджували цю країну. Стаття сприятиме дослідженню процесу культурного обміну між В'єтнамом і Заходом у XVII–XVIII ст. та максимально об'єктивній і точній "реставрації" картини культури тодішньої в'єтнамської кухні.

**Ключові слова:** В'єтнам; в'єтнамська кухня; європейці; мандрівники; місіонери; харчування

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