

the ports of Ke Cho and Pho Hien (on the bank of the Hong River about 130 kilometers from the sea, and two to three days by boat from the capital Thang Long) flourished. Other Europeans sought opportunities in Hoi An: the British attempted to set up a factory, but were not given royal permission.

Hoi An's location on the Thu Bon River proved not only an ideal location for oceanic trade, but allowed for inland access. Le Quy Don wrote in 1776: "The merchandise is transported by water or by horseback over land, and everything converges on the port city of Hoi An. Here, Chinese merchants buy products to bring back to their country; the products are so abundant that even one hundred large junks would not be sufficient to load them all at one time." He lists the local products found in the marketplace: pepper, nutmeg, various pharmaceutical products, rhino horn, birds' nests, deer ligaments, shark fins, dried shrimp, tortoise shells, elephant tusks, hemp, sugar, gold fabric, cinnamon, and red sandalwood.<sup>67</sup> These goods were traded during the lengthy fair that took place during the six-month period when foreigners were in residence in Hoi An. One of the more exotic goods, birds' nests, continues to be an important product of Hoi An (fig. 8), and up until the booming tourist industry the town now experiences, they provided 20 percent of the local economy.

Just as the Japanese trade ban kept most Japanese traders from the sea, the Ming proscription against trade from 1368 to 1644 meant that the Chinese acquired foreign goods either through tribute missions, illegal traders, or intermediaries.<sup>68</sup> Since the Chinese and Japanese did not have diplomatic relations at this time, a covert triangular trade existed between China and Japan; Hoi An functioned as one of the offshore markets for their exchange of goods.<sup>69</sup> The Chinese brought "fine silk, silk-yarn and other goods" (fig. 9), while the Dutch, once they gained control of the Japanese market, imported silver, copper, and copper coinage.<sup>70</sup> The trade in perishable goods, such as silk, or metals that were reused and reworked



FIG. 9

*Chinese Plate* for the Dutch market, 1723–35, Ca Mau shipwreck, Porcelain, Diam.: 29.4 cm, National Museum of Vietnamese History, Ha Noi, LSb30792.