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**VIETNAM-SIAM RELATIONS IN THE PRE-COLONIAL PERIOD
(1835–1848): FROM CONFRONTATION TO DIALOGUE**

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The article draws upon a comparative analysis of multiple sources from Vietnam, Siam (Thailand), Cambodia, and international documents to systematically and objectively reconstruct the trilateral relationship between Vietnam, Cambodia, and Siam during the period 1835–1848. This era followed the political upheavals after the first war, when Vietnam achieved victory and established direct control over Cambodia through the establishment of Tay Thanh garrison, simultaneously eliminating Siamese influence in the region. Confronted with the rise of Dai Nam, the Rama III dynasty of Siam – as an emerging regional power – deployed interventionist activities aimed at restoring its influence, including supporting opposition forces in Cambodia. The confrontation between the two largest powers on the Indochinese Peninsula reignited in 1841, after Dai Nam decided to withdraw its troops from Tay Thanh. The second war lasted from 1842 to 1845, unfolding across a vast territory stretching from Nam Ky (Dai Nam) through Cambodia to the present-day borders of Siam. A notable feature of this period was the progression of all three parties – Dai Nam, Cambodia, and Siam – toward signing a ceasefire agreement in 1845. The treaty not only marked mutual recognition among the three neighboring nations but also contributed to establishing relatively clear national boundaries before Western colonialism penetrated the region.

Keywords: Cambodia; confrontation; Dai Nam (Vietnam); dialogue; Indochinese Peninsula; pre-colonial; Siam

Introduction

In the history of mainland Southeast Asia during the 19th century, the triangular relationship between Vietnam, Cambodia, and Siam (present-day Thailand) generated profound political upheavals, reflecting the competition for influence among indigenous nations before Western colonial penetration [Chandler 1973; Khin 1991]. The period 1835–1848 was particularly significant, as Vietnam, following its military victory in the 1833–1834 war, established direct control over Cambodia while simultaneously pushing back Siamese influence [Nguyen et al. 2024]. However, as an emerging regional power, Siam under Rama III refused to accept diminished influence and undertook interventionist activities aimed at reestablishing power in Cambodia [Vella 1957]. The confrontation

between the two largest regional powers led to a second war lasting from 1842 to 1845, concluding with a tripartite ceasefire agreement – a turning point in the process of establishing borders and pre-colonial international relations in the region [Eiland 1989; Bun 1981].

The article aims to systematically reconstruct the triangular relationship between Vietnam, Cambodia, and Siam during 1835–1848 through comparative analysis of multidimensional sources from all three nations and international documents. The research seeks to clarify the political motivations driving each power's strategic decisions, examine the intervention strategies employed by both Vietnam and Siam in their competition for Cambodian influence, and analyze the diplomatic processes that led to the innovative 1845 tripartite agreement.

The broader significance of the investigation consists in illuminating how indigenous Southeast Asian polities responded to modernization and territorial consolidation challenges preceding European colonialism. The diplomatic solutions developed, particularly the innovative dual tributary arrangement for Cambodia established in the 1845 agreement, offer insights into indigenous approaches to sovereignty and interstate relations soon to be displaced by colonial frameworks [Raoul 1998]. The 1848 settlement, which granted King Ang Duong relative autonomy to govern Cambodia while maintaining tributary relationships with both Vietnam and Siam, represented a unique form of shared sovereignty that provided temporary resolution to seemingly irreconcilable territorial claims [Chandler 1973; Vella 1957]. Understanding these innovations contributes to scholarly discussions about state formation, territorial sovereignty, and diplomatic practice in the non-Western world during the transitional period between traditional mandala systems and modern international frameworks, particularly as Western colonial pressure increasingly influenced regional dynamics from the 1840s onward.

Literature Review

The trilateral relationship between Vietnam, Cambodia, and Siam in the first half of the 19th century has attracted the attention of numerous scholars both within and outside the region, with diverse research approaches and source materials. In Vietnam, official historical compilations such as *Đại Nam thực lục* (Volumes IV–VII) [National History Institute of the Nguyen Dynasty 2007a; 2007b; 2007c; 2007d] and *Đại Nam liệt truyện: Chính biên: Sơ tập* (Volume II) [National History Institute of the Nguyen Dynasty 2024], compiled by the Nguyen Dynasty's National History Office, constitute important primary sources reflecting the official perspective of the Hue court regarding events and foreign policies during this period. Additionally, Kieu Oanh Mau's work *Bản triều bản nghịch truyện* provides insightful perspectives on Vietnamese history across nearly a century (1801–1901), with considerable content devoted to Vietnam-Siam relations [Kieu 2023].

In modern research, Duong Duy Bang's work represents a notable contribution, focusing on Vietnam-Cambodia-Siam relations during 1834–1848 [Duong 2008]. The author clarifies political-military developments, Vietnam's intervention strategies in Cambodia, and Siam's responses. The paper by Nguyen D. C., Tran X. H., & Nguyen T. B. "Vietnam and Siam: from Friendship to Confrontation (1802–1835)" analyzes the early phase of Vietnam-Siam relations from the establishment of the Nguyen dynasty to the establishment of Tay Thanh (1835), providing an important foundation for current research [Nguyen et al. 2024]. Tran Trong Kim's *Việt Nam sử lược* (2020), though general in nature, still provides an overall view of the historical context and Vietnam's role in the region [Tran 2020]. Furthermore, Dang Van Chuong's comprehensive research *Quan hệ Việt Nam – Thái Lan từ cuối thế kỷ XVIII-đầu thế kỷ XIX (Vietnam-Thailand Relations from the Late 18th Century to the Mid-19th Century)* approached the bilateral relationship process relatively comprehensively, though still limited in deep analysis of influencing factors and regional impacts [Dang 2010].

Conversely, international works have expanded the analytical scope, providing supplementary perspectives from Cambodia and Siam. David P. Chandler, in his doctoral dissertation “Cambodia Before the French: Politics in a Tributary Kingdom, 1794–1848”, examines power structures and the tug-of-war between foreign powers in Cambodia [Chandler 1973]. Khin Sok’s work, *Le Cambodge entre le Siam et le Viêt Nam (de 1775 à 1860)*, continues to clarify Cambodia’s intermediary role and survival strategies in the 19th century [Khin 1991]. Regarding Siam, W. F. Vella with *Siam under Rama III* analyzes Siamese foreign policy in the context of competition for influence with Vietnam [Vella 1957]. Michael Dent Eiland with his doctoral dissertation “Dragon and Elephant: Relations between Viet Nam and Siam 1783–1847” approaches Vietnam-Siam relations from a regional strategic perspective, emphasizing geopolitical factors and power conflicts [Eiland 1989]. Bun Srun Theam’s research “Cambodia in the Mid-Nineteenth Century: A Quest for Survival 1840–1863”, with relatively rich source materials from Thai and Cambodian sources, has contributed to reconstructing the Siamese perspective on Vietnam-Siam relations during 1840–1863 from a Cambodian viewpoint [Bun 1981].

Overall, the aforementioned works have laid the foundation for identifying historical, political, and diplomatic dimensions in Vietnam-Cambodia-Siam relations. However, gaps remain in integrating multidimensional sources to comprehensively reconstruct the tripartite interaction process, particularly during 1835–1848 – a period that shaped pre-colonial international relations in mainland Southeast Asia. The paper aims to fill that gap through an interdisciplinary approach and comparative analysis of sources from multiple origins.

Methodology

The study employs a multi-layered methodological approach that combines historical analysis, comparative source criticism, and regional studies perspectives to examine the complex trilateral relationship between Vietnam, Cambodia, and Siam during 1835–1848.

First, the historical method serves as the primary analytical framework, enabling systematic reconstruction of chronological developments and causal relationships within the political-military dynamics of the period. This approach facilitates examination of how specific decisions, military campaigns, and diplomatic negotiations unfolded within their temporal contexts. *Second*, the regional study methodology situates the Vietnam-Cambodia-Siam triangle within the broader geopolitical landscape of mainland Southeast Asia. This perspective identifies structural factors – including geographical constraints, cultural influences, and economic dependencies – that shaped state behavior beyond immediate political calculations. The pre-colonial analytical framework provides essential context for understanding how indigenous states conceptualized sovereignty, territorial control, and interstate relations before Western colonial legal and political systems were introduced. *Third*, to reconcile often-contradictory records from different national perspectives, the study applies comparative historical methodology. Given the political nature of territorial disputes and military conflicts, Vietnamese, Siamese, and Cambodian sources frequently offer divergent interpretations of identical events. This methodological challenge necessitates careful cross-referencing of evidence and acknowledgment of inherent biases in court-sponsored historical records.

Besides, primary sources form the foundation of this research, drawing extensively from Nguyen dynasty court chronicles and administrative records, including the *Đại Nam thực lục* (Volumes IV–VII) [National History Institute of the Nguyen Dynasty 2007a; 2007b; 2007c; 2007d] and *Đại Nam liệt truyện: Chính biên: Sơ tập* (Volume II) [National History Institute of the Nguyen Dynasty 2024]. These sources provide detailed accounts of military campaigns, diplomatic correspondence, and policy deliberations from the Vietnamese perspective. Contemporary administrative documents such as the *Quốc triều*

chánh biên toát yếu offer insights into bureaucratic decision-making processes [National History Institute of the Nguyen Dynasty 2021]. Siamese perspectives are incorporated through royal chronicles and Thai administrative records, accessed via secondary analyses by scholars including Vella [Vella 1957] and contemporary Thai researchers. Cambodian viewpoints are primarily reconstructed through the work of French colonial administrators and modern scholars such as Chandler (1973) and Khin Sok (1991), who accessed Khmer court documents and oral traditions [Chandler 1973; Khin 1991].

Source criticism involves systematic evaluation of each primary source for chronological accuracy, internal consistency, and potential bias. Court chronicles, while invaluable for understanding official policy, typically obscure military failures, exaggerate enemy casualties, and minimize internal dissent. To address these limitations, the study cross-references multiple accounts of identical events, particularly focusing on points where sources from different traditions corroborate specific details. The analysis employs both internal criticism (examining consistency within individual sources) and external criticism (comparing accounts across different source traditions). Special attention is given to discrepancies in troop numbers, casualty figures, and territorial claims, which often reflect political considerations rather than empirical accuracy.

Finally, the research encounters significant constraints regarding source availability, particularly concerning Cambodian perspectives during this period. Much Khmer court documentation was lost in subsequent conflicts, necessitating reliance on later scholarly reconstructions and French colonial authorities' accounts. This creates an unavoidable bias toward Vietnamese and Thai viewpoints, which are more thoroughly documented. Vietnamese sources, while abundant, reflect official court perspectives and may not accurately represent popular sentiment or local conditions in border regions. Similarly, Thai sources tend to emphasize Bangkok's policy decisions while providing limited insight into provincial implementation or Cambodian responses to Siamese intervention. These limitations require careful interpretation and acknowledgment of gaps in the historical record.

Vietnam-Siam Relations after the 1834 War

Following the continuous upheavals of the regional situation in the early 19th century, the Indochinese Peninsula had become the focal point of competition between two major powers: Vietnam and Siam. Beyond their ambitions to expand influence, both were acutely aware of Cambodia's strategic role as an important buffer zone in maintaining the regional balance of power. The 1833–1834 war was not merely a military conflict but also a turning point that reshaped the regional geopolitical balance [Nguyen et al. 2024]. In this context, Vietnam quickly leveraged its victory to consolidate its position while gradually imposing direct influence over Cambodia, opening a new period of turbulence in Vietnam-Siam relations.

After defeating the Siamese invasion in 1834, the Nguyen dynasty established absolute dominance, completely eliminating Siamese influence in Cambodia. This reality led the Nguyen and Chakri powers to adopt different policies regarding the Cambodia question. Immediately in 1834, the Minh Mang court deployed activities to completely eliminate Siamese influence and strengthen Vietnamese influence in Cambodia: establishing a series of fortresses, dividing troops to garrison key positions, stockpiling military supplies in camps, rewarding and punishing Khmer officials in the recent war with Siam, suspending the dispatch of Cambodian envoys to Siam... [Duong 2008]. It is evident that after the 1833–1834 war, the Nguyen dynasty had completely seized control of defense and diplomacy in Cambodia, pushing Siamese influence out of this buffer state between the two countries.

Taking a step further, in 1835, King Minh Mang decided to establish the Tay Thanh garrison, comprising 33 prefectures and 2 districts. All of these administrative units received

Vietnamese names¹. The administrative organization of Tay Thanh garrison included: 1 General, 1 Senior Counselor, 1 Admiral, 1 Military Affairs Coordinator, 2 Colonels, 2 Lieutenant Colonels, and many other officials. Thu Dong Palace Grand Scholar and Governor-General of An Giang-Ha Tien, Truong Minh Giang, was appointed as Tay Thanh General, bearing the seal of Tay Thanh General. An Giang Prefect Le Dai Cuong was appointed as Tay Thanh Senior Counselor. Minh Mang also stipulated: "...the entire Tay Thanh garrison territory shall be placed under the administrative authority of these two persons, not bearing the seal and title of Protector of Cambodia" [National History Institute of the Nguyen Dynasty 2007a, 165]. The Nguyen court also established an artillery unit and an elephant regiment, while recruiting 1,000 non-native people from the Phu Xuan region to migrate and settle here, forming the Left and Right Guards of Tay Thanh [National History Institute of the Nguyen Dynasty 2007a, 497]. Additionally, the administrative offices of Nguyen court officials and military personnel were constructed with tiled roofs. With this direct rule policy, the Nguyen dynasty considered Cambodia as part of its territory. Minh Mang himself told his court ministers: "Now Cambodia has been incorporated into our map, I want to divide and establish prefectures and districts for governance and education" [National History Institute of the Nguyen Dynasty 2007a, 700]. In 1837, the Nguyen court further proposed the policy: "...teach the frontier people to all learn the capital language and script" so that "...when there are matters, they can report together, all will understand, and there need be no worry about disagreement" [National History Institute of the Nguyen Dynasty 2007a, 800]. Through this series of policies, the Nguyen court gradually asserted its domination and transformed Cambodia into part of its territory.

Conversely, after its defeat in 1834, Siam had to withdraw its forces from the border, losing its traditional sphere of influence with border security somewhat affected. Siamese political influence in Cambodia was virtually eliminated under conditions where the Nguyen dynasty stationed troops and appointed officials to govern Cambodia. Naturally, as an emerging regional power, Siam could not accept this. The Bangkok court constantly monitored political developments in Cambodia with utmost attention, waiting for opportunities to restore its position. Siamese King Rama III declared that he was always prepared so that when the opportunity arose, he would "turn Cambodia into a forest" if the people of this country opposed dependence on Siam [Chandler 1973, 128]. Although unable to directly intervene militarily in Cambodia, Siam employed two strategic cards at its disposal: princes Ang Im and Ang Duong, who could help Siam create contradictions within the Khmer royal family and draw the people to follow Siam against Vietnam [Nguyen et al. 2024].

In the process of organizing the direct rule apparatus and implementing economic, social, and cultural policies at Tay Thanh, the Nguyen dynasty created clashes and conflicts regarding political, economic, traditional, and cultural interests with the Cambodian nobility and people². Additionally, corruption and exploitation of the Cambodian people by some Vietnamese officials and soldiers aggravated contradictions between the Cambodian people and the Nguyen ruling class, leading to numerous uprisings against Nguyen authority throughout the Tay Thanh region starting from 1839 [Tran 2020, 366]. Nguyen officials and military struggled greatly to respond, suppressing uprisings in one area only to see them flare up elsewhere.

The Siamese court recognized that the opportunity had arrived. In 1840, the Siamese king sent the general who had been the commander of the 1834 attack on Vietnam, Chao Phraya Bodin³, to lead troops bringing Ang Duong back to the country, proclaiming the restoration of the kingship and kingdom of Cambodia to win support from the Cambodian people [Khin 1991, 95]. Two main forces were formed: one attacking Cambodia north of Tonle Sap, the other in the south. The northern force, comprising approximately 11,000 Cambodians and 2,000 Laotians, began advancing in November 1840, coordinating

with Cambodian rebel groups and advancing to Chikreng. The southern force, totaling approximately 9,000 soldiers, mainly Laotians, reached Pursat in late November [Vella 1957, 102]. After several days of fighting at Pursat, Chaophraya Bodin received news that the northern force had encountered strong resistance and been held up. Meanwhile, in the Nam Ky provinces of Vietnam, numerous uprisings against the government by Cambodians living there and some Vietnamese also erupted. Nguyen forces in Nam Ky provinces and Tay Thanh were placed in a state of continuous alert, frequently having to divide their strength to support each other [Dang 2010, 151–152].

It can be seen that from 1834 to the end of 1840, the Nguyen army had basically controlled the situation in Cambodia. To restore its dominance, Siam employed both military force and the two princes Ang Im and Ang Duong to oppose the Nguyen dynasty's protectorate policy. This was an intense political-military struggle between the Chakri and Nguyen courts. On the Nguyen side, Truong Minh Giang had implemented some rather autocratic policies that were incompatible with Cambodian traditions and religious culture, thus facing opposition from the majority of Khmers. This very situation created favorable conditions for Siam to exploit and incite resistance against the Hue court. By the end of 1840, the situation in Cambodia began to shift in Siam's favor.

Amidst this complex situation, in early 1841, Emperor Minh Mang died. His successor, Emperor Thieu Tri, determined that it was necessary to focus on pacifying Nam Ky first, and then concentrate on settling Tay Thanh affairs. Therefore, in November 1841, he ordered the army and officials at Tay Thanh, led by General Truong Minh Giang, to withdraw to An Giang, temporarily abandoning governance rights at Tay Thanh. Siamese forces immediately seized the opportunity to bring Ang Duong into Tay Thanh citadel. In December 1841, Ang Duong became king of Cambodia and was completely dependent on Siam [National History Institute of the Nguyen Dynasty 2007c, 197, 200]. This was an important victory for Siam in the struggle for influence with the Hue court in Cambodia.

From Bangkok, Siamese King Rama III, after recognizing that he had restored his position in Cambodia, immediately urged Chao Phraya Bodin to quickly advance into Vietnam, ostensibly to support Cambodia in liberating remaining territories and eliminating military forces, destroying military bases, and eliminating the possibility of Nguyen forces returning to Cambodia, but internally continuing to pursue the ambition of invading part of Vietnamese territory. Notably, the Nguyen side had assessed the situation very correctly, recognizing that Siam might invade Nam Ky when Nguyen forces withdrew from Tay Thanh, and had proactively organized defense.

In the context where the Nguyen dynasty temporarily abandoned control in Cambodia due to serious political and military difficulties, combined with instability in Nam Ky, Siam exploited this opportunity to quickly reestablish its sphere of influence in Cambodia. Siam's objectives were not only to avenge the defeat in the 1834 campaign but also to expand power and increase influence in the Southeast Asian region. From this point, the power struggle between the two largest powers in the region escalated, leading to fierce conflicts on Cambodian territory that spread to Nam Ky of Vietnam.

In general, the period from 1834 to 1841 thus represented a critical transitional phase in regional power dynamics. Vietnam's initial success in establishing direct control over Cambodia through the Tay Thanh garrison demonstrated the dynasty's military capabilities and administrative ambitions. However, the challenges of governing a culturally distinct territory, combined with internal rebellions and the death of Emperor Minh Mang, revealed the limitations of direct imperial control. Siam's strategic patience and exploitation of these vulnerabilities, particularly through the deployment of rival Cambodian princes, illustrated the sophisticated nature of pre-colonial Southeast Asian diplomacy. This phase set the stage for renewed military confrontation, as both powers recognized that Cambodia's strategic position made compromise impossible without decisive action.

The Power Crisis in Phnom Penh and Siam's Nam Ky Ambitions in 1841

The return of Ang Duong to Phnom Penh by Siamese forces was not merely a military move but also a strategic step aimed at reestablishing Siamese influence in Cambodia after a period of deep Nguyen domination. Ang Duong, formerly pro-Siamese but deposed by Nguyen forces, served as a political tool for Rama III to assert Siam's position amid Vietnam's regional weakness.

In the context of Nguyen forces having just withdrawn from Phnom Penh, Cambodia's internal situation fell into a power vacuum. Phnom Penh became a site of intense dispute between pro-Siamese and pro-Nguyen forces. Bringing Ang Duong back implied that Siam wanted to urgently reestablish influence there, not only to control Cambodia but also as a springboard for plans to attack Nam Ky. The return of Ang Duong, under Siamese military escort, further destabilized Cambodia internally. Some local factions feared being forced to follow Siam, while others who had previously supported the Nguyen dynasty found themselves threatened. This situation transformed Phnom Penh into a "political epicenter", forcing Rama III to act more quickly and decisively.

According to Michael Dent Eiland's assessment, Rama III's objectives were not only to "control Cambodia" but also to "revenge against the Vietnamese" – showing ambitions beyond current borders, aimed at completely neutralizing Nguyen influence in the region. Orders for Bodin to attack Chau Doc and intensify plans to fill the Vinh Te Canal clearly reflected strategies of blockade and prevention of Vietnamese counterattacks, thereby consolidating Siamese power in Cambodia and opening the path for direct attacks on Nam Ky [Eiland 1989, 151–152].

The Vinh Te Canal, also called Vinh Te River, in the early 19th century served as a strategic waterway directly connecting Ha Tien and An Giang – two vital areas in the southwestern border region of Nam Ky under the Nguyen dynasty. From the main flow of the Vinh Te River, boats could successively navigate through Chau Doc River, Hau River, and access Tien River via Vam Nao confluence. This interconnected waterway system allowed deep penetration into Nam Ky's interior while facilitating logistics, military activities, and trade from border regions to central provinces. In the context of Vietnam-Siam competition for influence in Cambodia, Vinh Te was not only significant for transportation but also served as the vital military axis for Nguyen forces when deploying to Cambodia. Clearly recognizing this waterway's strategic role, Rama III advocated completely cutting water connections between Nam Ky and Cambodia, considering this an essential step to prevent Nguyen reintervention and clear the path for plans to penetrate Vietnamese territory. This intention was clearly expressed in letters to Chao Phraya Bodin, when Rama III requested Siamese forces to coordinate with Ang Duong in building dams and filling sections of Vinh Te Canal to prevent Vietnamese boat traffic:

Now, because Ong Ta Tuong Kun [Truong Minh Giang] has withdrawn all troops from Phnom Penh, Phnom Penh city belongs to Ang Duong. You should discuss with Ang Duong, deploy troops to build dams blocking the new canal [Vinh Te Canal] in sections and fill them to make them shallow, preventing Vietnamese boats from navigating the canal [Bun 1981, 93].

Clearly, blocking Vinh Te was not merely a technical solution for terrain control but also reflected Siam's geostrategic policy – aimed at eliminating Nguyen counterattack capabilities, breaking western defense lines, and creating advantages for deep attacks into Nam Ky.

Tensions escalated further when Rama III promoted expansion back into Cambodia and Nam Ky (Vietnam). To conduct the attack, Rama III continued to trust and assign Chao Phraya Bodin as commander-in-chief of the expeditionary forces. Synthesizing records from Nguyen historical texts (*Đại Nam thực lục*, *Đại Nam liệt truyện: Chính biên*:

Sơ tập, Quoc Trieu Chanh Bien Toat Yeu) and several foreign scholarly works on this war, we observe the following notable points in Siamese military planning and preparation:

First, Siamese forces were divided into two naval and land routes to attack Nam Ky (Vietnam). The land route, comprising Siamese and pro-Siamese Cambodian forces, would attack Chau Doc (the administrative center of An Giang province under the Nguyen dynasty) and all Nguyen military posts along Vinh Te River (Siamese sources indicate Nguyen forces had established 19 posts along Vinh Te, each with 200–500 troops). The naval route, entirely composed of Siamese forces, would cross the Gulf of Thailand to attack and occupy Ha Tien and Nguyen positions at Banteai Meas (Sai Mat, then belonging to Ha Tien province under the Nguyen dynasty; now part of Kampot province, Cambodia). Siamese forces decided to attack Ha Tien and Chau Doc because they recognized these as “gateways to Gia Dinh and the key to destroying southern Vietnam as a base from which Cambodia could be threatened” [Eiland 1989, 152].

According to the plan, Chao Phraya Bodin would directly command the land forces. However, in late 1841, Chao Phraya Bodin fell ill and could not personally lead the army. Therefore, Rama III appointed another high-ranking official, Phraya Yumarat, to command the land forces. Accompanying this army were Ang Duong and pro-Siamese Cambodian forces. The naval forces were placed under the command of Rama III’s brother (Nguyen historical records call this person the King of O Thiet)⁴.

Second, Siamese forces exploited the rebellious situation in Nam Ky to recruit part of the rebel forces (commonly called by official Nguyen historians “indigenous bandits” or “rebels”) to support the invasion. *Đại Nam liệt truyện: Chính biên: Sơ tập* (section on Cambodia) clearly records that when attacking Ha Tien, Siamese forces “on the land route connected with indigenous bandits, from Chu Nham to Loc Giac Mountain, establishing military posts” [National History Institute of the Nguyen Dynasty 2024, 267]. In military developments at the An Giang front, the Nguyen historical record *Đại Nam thực lục* repeatedly mentions officials and military fighting Siamese-rebel forces in the Tien Giang (Tien River), Hau Giang (Hau River), and That Son areas. These details show the cunning tactics of Siamese forces in exploiting and combining with rebel forces to increase their strength while reducing Nguyen morale and power.

Third, to deceive the Nam Ky people, Chao Phraya Bodin erected a false political banner. Bodin had a Vietnamese person claim to be the son of Prince Canh (eldest son of Emperor Gia Long, elder brother of Emperor Minh Mang), styling himself as Imperial Grandson, then helped this person recruit several thousand followers including Siamese, Laotians, and Vietnamese. Forces under the Imperial Grandson would follow Siamese land forces into Nam Ky. Siamese forces hoped this false Imperial Grandson banner would assist them in dividing people’s hearts in Nam Ky, creating additional political and social challenges for the Nguyen dynasty.

Fourth, regarding Siamese war strategy and tactics, according to Bun Srun Theam: “The strategy of the Thai and Cambodians was to surround Vietnamese posts at Banteai Meas, Chau Doc, and all posts on the canal while Thai naval forces attacked enemy fleets in coastal areas to prevent reinforcement and supply through the canal to break the siege” [Bun 1981, 94–95].

Fifth, regarding Siamese troop numbers. Works by Michael Dent Eiland and Bun Srun Theam, based on Siamese sources, indicate land forces comprised 12,000 troops and naval forces comprised 3,000 troops [Eiland 1989, 152]. Total Siamese-Cambodian forces numbered 15,000. However, in subsequent war developments at Ha Tien and An Giang fronts, according to Nguyen historical records, Siamese forces were not so “modest”. At the Ha Tien front, Siamese forces brought over 160 warships with “several tens of thousands” of troops [National History Institute of the Nguyen Dynasty 2007c, 303]. At the An Giang front, over 3,000 Siamese-rebel troops occupied the Hau Giang (Hau River)

region [National History Institute of the Nguyen Dynasty 2007c, 321]; over 20,000 Siamese-rebel troops established camps along Vinh Te River [National History Institute of the Nguyen Dynasty 2007c, 323]; several thousand enemy troops attacked some Nguyen military posts in the Tien Giang (Tien River) region [National History Institute of the Nguyen Dynasty 2007c, 326]. Thus, according to *Đại Nam thực lục*, total invading forces present on Nam Ky (Dai Nam⁵) territory numbered over 40,000, including Siamese forces, pro-Siamese Cambodian forces, and rebel forces in Nam Ky supporting Siamese forces. Clearly, compared to initially mobilized forces, Siamese forces had expanded both in numbers and composition during the process of conquering Dai Nam and regaining the dominant position in mainland Southeast Asia.

In general, the crisis in Phnom Penh and Siam's ambitious plans for Nam Ky in 1841 revealed the sophisticated nature of pre-colonial Southeast Asian geopolitics. Rama III's strategy demonstrated a comprehensive understanding of regional power dynamics, combining military force with political manipulation through puppet rulers and false legitimacy claims. The detailed planning for blocking the Vinh Te Canal showed remarkable strategic thinking about controlling key transportation networks. Moreover, the expansion of Siamese forces from 15,000 to over 40,000 troops illustrated both the scale of their ambitions and their ability to mobilize diverse ethnic groups including Siamese, Cambodians, Laotians, and local Vietnamese rebels. This multi-faceted approach to warfare – incorporating naval and land campaigns, political deception, and alliance-building – represented a mature military-political strategy that would soon collide with equally sophisticated Nguyen defensive preparations.

Siam's Attack on Nam Ky (Dai Nam) – the War Between the Two Largest Powers in Mainland Southeast Asia Erupts

In early November of the Year of the Metal Ox (December 13, 1841 to January 10, 1842)⁶, Ha Tien Prefect Luong Van Lieu submitted a report stating that after the army's withdrawal from Tay Thanh, Ha Tien, being “remote in coastal areas, with mainland bordering enemy territory, truly a vulnerable frontier position”, now required even greater attention to defensive preparations. Luong Van Lieu proposed establishing a military post at Loc Giac Mountain with 500 troops stationed there, and another large post along the Cai Lan tributary with 1,000 troops. However, recognizing that it was not yet possible to immediately increase troops for Ha Tien due to the need to concentrate on suppressing uprisings in Nam Ky, Emperor Thieu Tri did not approve additional post construction. Nevertheless, the Emperor also required Ha Tien to focus on defense, train soldiers, repair beacon towers at Loc Giac Mountain, and regularly send scouts to monitor Siamese and Cambodian forces [National History Institute of the Nguyen Dynasty 2007c, 244–245]. This can be viewed as the Nguyen dynasty's first preparatory move to respond to the possibility of Siamese attack.

In November of the Metal Ox year, Luong Van Lieu compiled intelligence reports and informed the Hue court of important news. Siamese forces and pro-Siamese Cambodian forces under Ang Duong were about to divide routes and advance into Nam Ky. Emperor Thieu Tri assessed: “Siamese enemies want to exploit vulnerabilities and assist trouble-makers; this news is probably accurate. Currently entering the winter defense period, we should intensify strict defense to secure the borders” [National History Institute of the Nguyen Dynasty 2007c, 250]. The Dai Nam court deployed a Nam Ky defense plan with a relatively comprehensive force deployment system, focusing on strategic positions along rivers and borders. Specifically: Bao Vinh Thong (An Giang) was defended by Colonels Mai Van Tich and Doan Quang Mat; Hau Giang and Tien Giang areas (An Giang) were controlled jointly by Prefect Nguyen Cong Tru and Colonel Nguyen Luong Nhan; Vinh Te River (An Giang) was overseen by Acting Admiral Doan Van Sach of Vinh Long; Loc Giac Mountain and Chu Nham post (Ha Tien) were defended by Lieutenant

Colonel Ton That Mau; Bao Tay Ninh (Gia Dinh) was managed by Colonel Ngo Van Giai; Dinh Tuong Province sent troops to defend Thong Binh or Hung Ngu posts.

Additionally, Gia Dinh, Dinh Tuong, Bien Hoa, Vinh Long, and An Giang provinces were ordered to prepare boats and recruit volunteer forces when needed. Generals active in Nam Ky including Pham Van Dien, Nguyen Tri Phuong, Nguyen Cong Tru, Doan Van Sach, Nguyen Cong Nhan, and Nguyen Luong Nhan were tasked with coordinating discussions, dividing forces to defend strategic positions along Tien Giang, Hau Giang, and from Vinh Te to Ha Tien, with authority to conduct combat operations according to actual situations [National History Institute of the Nguyen Dynasty 2007c, 251].

In December of the Metal Ox year (January 11 to February 9, 1842), the Hue court received news that Siamese forces had erected a figure falsely claiming to be Prince Canh's son, styling himself as Imperial Grandson, commanding several thousand troops and stationed at Nam Vang (Phnom Penh) [National History Institute of the Nguyen Dynasty 2007c, 274].

In February 1842⁷, over 160 Siamese warships invaded areas within Ha Tien's maritime boundaries. Siamese forces demonstrated power at Tieu Luc dock and O Mai Lam island, attacking Phu Quoc island and Hung Chuong island (Mong Tay island). Nguyen forces could not resist and had to retreat. Subsequently, Nguyen forces deployed 8 warships to advance to Phu Quoc but encountered large waves and strong winds, forcing them to withdraw [National History Institute of the Nguyen Dynasty 2007c, 279]. This Siamese action opened the invasion of Nam Ky Dai Nam, preparing the way for subsequent large-scale attacks by Siamese naval forces.

Subsequently, the false Imperial Grandson led over 5,000 Siamese and Laotian troops to occupy Sach So (located between Tien River and Hau River, then in Nam Ninh Prefecture of Tay Thanh, now part of Cambodia). Nguyen generals in Nam Ky immediately divided responsibilities for defense and patrol in Ha Tien province, at Vinh Thong post area and Tien Giang (An Giang province) [National History Institute of the Nguyen Dynasty 2007c, 280]. Acting Admiral Doan Van Sach of Vinh Long directly led troops to reinforce the Ha Tien front. General Nguyen Tri Phuong also requested increased troops for Thong Binh and Hung Ngu posts (Dinh Tuong province), and An Lac and Tan Chau posts (An Giang province), which was approved [National History Institute of the Nguyen Dynasty 2007c, 281].

On the Yi-Chou day (16th) of the first month of the Nham Dan year (February 25, 1842), Emperor Thieu Tri issued an edict to high officials in Nam Ky, emphasizing that he would soon travel to Hanoi to receive Qing (Chinese) envoys for the investiture ceremony of the Vietnam King title, while requesting civil and military officials in Nam Ky to strive to "help each other suppress enemies, unite for the country" [National History Institute of the Nguyen Dynasty 2007c, 288–289].

In the second month of the Nham Dan year (March 13 to April 10, 1842), Siamese naval forces led by Prince Nghe An began attacking Ha Tien. Siamese forces occupied the area from Loc Giac Mountain to Chu Nham, plotting to surprise attack Lo Khe (Rach Vuoc, the coastal area south of Ha Tien), capture To Mon (Dong Ho mouth, near To Chau mountain), then attack and capture Ha Tien provincial city. On the Giap-Ngo day (15th) of the second month of the Nham Dan year (March 26, 1842), Emperor Thieu Tri received urgent reports and hastily established a resistance command in Nam Ky, appointing Governor-General Le Van Duc of Dinh-Bien (Gia Dinh, Bien Hoa) as supreme commander. Simultaneously, Thieu Tri also ordered Nam Ky provinces to recruit additional local troops: Gia Dinh and Vinh Long provinces, 1,000 each; Bien Hoa, Dinh Tuong, and An Giang provinces, 500 each [National History Institute of the Nguyen Dynasty 2007c, 304].

At the Ha Tien front, around late second month of the Nham Dan year (late March 1842)⁸, while Supreme Military Commander Le Van Duc's forces were gathering and

moving, Siamese forces launched fierce attacks. Siamese forces established 18 camps from Loc Giac Mountain to the overland route at Chu Nham, then positioned warships to blockade Kim Du (Ha Tien sea entrance) and Lo Khe, subsequently opening fire on Nguyen positions. Nguyen forces returned fire, causing many enemy boats to be holed and damaged. Siamese forces remained undeterred, continuing to pour firepower day and night to pressure Nguyen forces. The highest commanders at Ha Tien, Doan Van Sach and Luong Van Lieu divided responsibilities to urge soldiers to resist the enemy with all their strength. Doan Van Sach and Chief Justice Dinh Van Huy personally went to defend the fortress at Kim Du sea entrance; later others including Luong Van Lieu, Tran Van Thong, Mai Van Tich, and Huynh Man Dat all led troops there, arranging like a long wall, resisting decisively.

Finally, Nguyen forces gradually gained the upper hand, eliminating many enemy lives and damaging many enemy warships. Siamese forces became frightened and had to flee. Nguyen forces pursued, capturing many enemy cannons. Siamese forces became even more terrified, retreating in disorder to their country [National History Institute of the Nguyen Dynasty 2007c, 313]. Nguyen forces recovered areas captured by Siamese forces, completely controlling the Ha Tien situation. Siamese forces later brought warships to hover offshore but dared not attack. With this victory, Nguyen forces had defeated the enemy's naval wing. Ha Tien returned to stability, and Nguyen court generals could now concentrate all efforts on the An Giang front.

At the An Giang Front

In late March and early April 1842, Siamese land forces numbering tens of thousands, with participation of pro-Siamese Cambodian forces and support from rebel forces in Nam Ky, advanced to An Giang province. Along Vinh Te River, they established successive camps: on the right bank from Vinh Thong to Tien Nong, on the left bank from Vinh Lac to Tinh Bien. Subsequently, they attacked Tan Chau and An Lac posts at Tien Giang and Da Phuc and Can Thang at Hau Giang [National History Institute of the Nguyen Dynasty 2007c, 316]. Along both banks of Vinh Te River and some areas near Tien and Hau rivers, Siamese forces established over 50–60 military posts [National History Institute of the Nguyen Dynasty 2007c, 372]. Previously, Emperor Thieu Tri had ordered Nguyen Tri Phuong and Nguyen Tien Lam to position troops along Tien River; Nguyen Cong Tru and Nguyen Cong Nhan to position along Vinh Te River; Pham Van Dien and Nguyen Luong Nhan to position along Hau River [National History Institute of the Nguyen Dynasty 2007c, 311]. Now, he again required generals to fully support each other against the enemy.

From late March to early April 1842, Nguyen forces conducted numerous attacks on Siamese forces. Governor-General Pham Van Dien of An-Ha (An Giang, Ha Tien) decisively defeated over 3,000 Siamese and rebel troops at the Hau Giang front. Enemy forces had to flee, and Nguyen forces immediately destroyed their posts, capturing numerous weapons [National History Institute of the Nguyen Dynasty 2007c, 321–322].

Subsequently, Pham Van Dien and Nguyen Cong Nhan led forces to the Vinh Te River area in Ha Am district, An Giang province. At that time, tens of thousands of Siamese forces and rebels relied on Truong Luy⁹ from Vinh Dien to Tien Nong to establish 8 posts, each with 2,000 troops. They also established 13 military camps along mountains, each with about 2,000 troops. They plotted to attack our cities and posts on both sides of Vinh Te River including Vinh Thong, Tien Nong, Thon Nhan, and Vinh Lac. Recognizing that enemy forces were concentrated in large numbers and built posts and camps to support each other, thereby wanting to expand the invasion, generals Pham Van Dien and Doan Van Sach, despite having only over 5,000 troops, still decided to attack enemy forces vigorously. Pham Van Dien consulted with other generals, stating: “The enemy is numerous, we are few; if we attack in unison, they will have to divide their forces; even if they have

reinforcements outside, it will be difficult to provide timely support” [National History Institute of the Nguyen Dynasty 2007c, 323]. From this, Pham Van Dien divided forces into three routes:

- First route: over 1,000 troops, commanded by Doan Quang Mat, attacking the enemy’s left posts. Ton That Nghi brought over 500 troops for support.
- Second route: over 600 troops, led by Nguyen Luong Nhan, attacking the enemy’s right posts.
- Third route: over 1,300 troops, controlled by Nguyen Cong Nhan, attacking three central posts. Pham Van Dien personally commanded over 1,600 troops for support.

The decisive battle occurred on April 8, 1842¹⁰. Siamese forces established numerous camps with large forces but were attacked decisively by Dai Nam forces from multiple directions, causing posts to collapse successively. Faced with encirclement, Siamese forces fled, abandoning elephants, horses, and weapons, with many camps self-dissolving without combat. Nguyen forces pursued, eliminating hundreds of enemies and burning remaining posts [National History Institute of the Nguyen Dynasty 2007c, 323–324].

According to Bun Srun Theam: At dawn on April 8, 1842, Vietnamese forces launched surprise attacks causing Thai-Cambodian coalition forces to suffer heavy losses, with thousands of soldiers and many high-ranking officials killed. The Thai commanding general was wounded, his son died in battle, forcing enemy forces to retreat in chaos to Phnom Penh. Thai chronicles recorded: had Vietnamese forces pursued, casualties would have been even greater [Bun 1981, 96].

This battle at Vinh Te (called “Battle of Ha Am” by Nguyen historians according to contemporary administrative units) was a bold but decisive proactive attack by Nguyen forces, despite numerical disadvantage, directly engaging the most important, strongest, and most numerous enemy force at the An Giang front. The decisive victory at Vinh Te crushed the majority of enemy forces, broke the main invasion spearhead in the An Giang direction, and dealt a deserved blow to their invasion will. This was a turning-point victory that, together with the victory at Ha Tien, decided the resistance situation in favor of Nguyen forces.

After the painful defeat at Vinh Te, most Siamese forces had to flee to Cambodia. However, part of their land troops, which had occupied some areas along Tien River and the That Son mountain range with rebel forces, remained stubbornly resistant. Additionally, the Imperial Grandson’s forces still held Sach So despite this figure having fled with Siamese forces after the Vinh Te battle.

In the remaining time of April 1842, Nguyen forces in An Giang continued attacking remaining enemy positions. Pham Van Dien with Nguyen Cong Nhan and Ton That Nghi brought 3,000 troops to attack Sam Phu (or Tham Phu, a location between Vinh Te and That Son areas). Enemy forces holding strategic positions resisted but were still eliminated by Nguyen forces [National History Institute of the Nguyen Dynasty 2007c, 325–326]. Immediately after, Acting Governor-General Nguyen Tri Phuong of Long-Tuong (Vinh Long, Dinh Tuong) also led troops to attack the Tien Giang area. At that time, Siamese forces established camps near our Cuu An, Tan Chau, and An Lac posts, then brought several thousand people to besiege and attack. Nguyen Tri Phuong sent generals to deploy troops for combat, forcing enemy forces to flee far [National History Institute of the Nguyen Dynasty 2007c, 326]. By this point, Hau Giang, Vinh Te, and Tien Giang areas were completely cleared of Siamese enemies, with only That Son and Sach So areas remaining unliberated.

In May 1842¹¹, Nguyen forces under Supreme Military Commander Le Van Duc’s control attacked the That Son area for the first time. Previously, when Le Van Duc’s main force reached Ha Tien, Siamese forces there had already been swept clean, and the An Giang front had also achieved successive great victories at Hau Giang, Vinh Te, and Tien

Giang. Therefore, only at this point did Le Van Duc's forces truly engage in combat. After joining forces with Pham Van Dien at That Son, Le Van Duc assigned Pham Van Dien to hold position at Cam Son (Cam Mountain), then personally led troops to attack enemy camps at Tuong Son (Elephant Mountain) and Ta Liet Mountain [National History Institute of the Nguyen Dynasty 2007c, 346]. Enemy forces at these two locations were scattered, but at other mountain peaks, they still desperately established camps and held out.

In June 1842¹², Le Van Duc ordered a second attack on That Son. Nguyen forces divided into 5 routes, each with 1,000 troops, taking different paths to attack enemy strongholds at Sa Ton and To Son. The Sa Ton-To Son battle was a great victory, destroying over 10 enemy posts and camps [National History Institute of the Nguyen Dynasty 2007c, 353–354]. Nguyen forces completely controlled the That Son area from this point. In the sixth month of the Nham Dan year (July 8 to August 5, 1842), Nguyen forces went from Vam Nao River to Tien River, advancing upstream to Sach So. Enemy forces at Sach So were terrified, offered weak resistance, then fled in disorder. Le Van Duc petitioned the court to divide forces for Nam Ky defense to avoid passivity if Siamese forces invaded again. Emperor Thieu Tri agreed with this proposal [National History Institute of the Nguyen Dynasty 2007c, 365–367]. Subsequently, Le Van Duc received orders to lead troops in triumphant return. The second anti-Siamese resistance war under the Nguyen dynasty achieved complete victory. In 6 months (February to July 1842), Nguyen military and civilians under Emperor Thieu Tri crushed the invasion aimed at Nam Ky by tens of thousands of Siamese troops. Rebel groups in Nam Ky from before and those supporting the enemy, along with Imperial Grandson forces, were all completely defeated.

In general, the 1842 campaigns demonstrated the resilience and tactical superiority of the Nguyen military machine when fighting on familiar terrain. Despite being outnumbered at key battles like Vinh Te, Nguyen forces employed superior coordination, local knowledge, and decisive leadership to achieve stunning victories. The success at both Ha Tien and An Giang fronts revealed the effectiveness of the Nguyen defensive strategy, which combined strategic withdrawal with concentrated counterattacks at carefully chosen moments. More importantly, these victories restored Nguyen confidence and military prestige after the earlier withdrawal from Cambodia. However, the war's outcome also highlighted a crucial limitation: while the Nguyen dynasty could successfully defend its core territories, projecting power into Cambodia remained problematic, setting the stage for continued regional instability and the need for eventual diplomatic resolution.

The War Continues on Cambodian Territory and the Tripartite Agreement Is Signed

By late 1842, Siam's situation in Cambodia also faced many difficulties, especially food shortages due to distant supply lines and lack of local resources. In a report sent to King Rama III, Bodin acknowledged the dire reality: we do not have enough food. The people flee to forests, living on leaves and roots. About a thousand of our soldiers have died from hunger. The people "fleeing to forests" showed that Khmer people also could not live in areas occupied by Siamese forces. Bun Srun Theam also noted: Thai and Cambodian forces retreated to Phnom Penh in serious chaos. There, they faced severe food shortages. The main food supplies for the expeditionary campaign only reached Kampot in late April – when Thai forces had already withdrawn from the area after the early-month disaster. Therefore, the food transport convoy was forced to return to Chanbury [Bun 1981, 96]. Faced with the unresolvable difficulty of food shortage and after reconnaissance showed Nguyen forces had no plans to attack, in early 1843 Bodin requested Rama III's permission to withdraw a large portion of Siamese forces home [Chandler 1973, 167].

After Bodin withdrew most forces to Siam, Nguyen pressure on southeastern Cambodian provinces increased. Taking this opportunity, some Cambodian officials who did not

submit to Siam sought help from the Nguyen dynasty. In September 1844, Governor-General Nguyen Tri Phuong of An Giang-Ha Tien reported to Thieu Tri:

Recently, Tra Tri Me requested to bring Sa An post to respond and serve with all effort. Cao La Ham Moc requested to bring Nam Ninh local people to submit. Phu Phu Lich Dot requested to bring local people of 4 prefectures Lu An, Binh Tiem, Ky To, and My Lam to follow our troops for effectiveness [National History Institute of the Nguyen Dynasty 2007d, 129].

Nguyen Tri Phuong proposed that Thieu Tri authorize immediate military deployment. Thieu Tri and court civil and military officials believed this was an opportunity for “legitimate military deployment, truly the best strategy” [National History Institute of the Nguyen Dynasty 2007d, 130], but also needed to investigate the situation carefully “without being rash or hasty”. Though cautious, Thieu Tri immediately ordered Vinh Long, Dinh Tuong, Gia Dinh, and Bien Hoa provinces to “repair boats, weapons, train soldiers” [National History Institute of the Nguyen Dynasty 2007d, 130]. The Nguyen dynasty again prepared for new military intervention in Cambodia.

Faced with this situation, Ang Duong immediately sent an embassy carrying large quantities of cardamom to the Bangkok court requesting Rama III to have Bodin return to Cambodia with troops. In reality, this was Cambodia’s first tribute payment to Siam since the 1833–1834 war. Rama III immediately sent Bodin back to Cambodia with much larger forces than before. Bodin’s army reached 30,000 people, including Siamese, Khmer, and Laotians [Chandler 1973, 168].

The Nguyen dynasty immediately deployed troops to Cambodia (June 1845). In just a short time, with support from some officials and people in southeastern Cambodian provinces, Nguyen forces quickly defeated Khmer forces and controlled these provinces [National History Institute of the Nguyen Dynasty 2007d, 284–296]. According to Siamese history in July 1845, the Annamites began attacking. Siamese forces hastily assembled an army, and Chao Phraya Bodin, who had just returned to Bangkok in early 1845, was ordered back to Cambodia. Meanwhile, the Annamites had overwhelmed Cambodian defense forces in the south [Vella 1957, 105]. Ang Duong and Bodin with soldiers retreated to defend Udong. This was a major victory for Nguyen forces in the struggle to recapture Cambodia from Siam. Thieu Tri generously rewarded participating generals and soldiers.

After capturing Phnom Penh, Nguyen forces advanced to Udong, besieging the citadel. Here in October and November 1845, many fierce battles occurred between both sides. In these battles, “casualties (of both sides) were nearly equal” [National History Institute of the Nguyen Dynasty 2007d, 347], but neither side achieved decisive victory. After many failures and with main forces besieged at Udong, Siamese general Bodin proposed negotiations. Nguyen historians recorded:

Our forces besieged Udong very urgently. The Siamese head Chao Phraya (Bodin) two or three times sent people with letters to military camps requesting peace. The letters generally said: the two countries had always been amicable, recently because of Cambodia causing trouble, leading to discord. What has passed, we dare not mention again. Cambodia is a small, confused country, we also dare not blame. Please submit this matter for consideration, to restore old amicable relations. Ang Duong’s relatives also request to live in unity, to serve both great countries [National History Institute of the Nguyen Dynasty 2007d, 340].

Nguyen generals after many years in Cambodia also recognized they could not continue prolonging this war, therefore “temporarily suspended military operations” and awaited court instructions [National History Institute of the Nguyen Dynasty 2007d, 340]. Receiving generals’ reports, Thieu Tri assessed: “fighting would certainly succeed, but holding would be difficult” [National History Institute of the Nguyen Dynasty 2007d,

340]. Court high officials also believed: “If we fight and take it, we cannot avoid adding hardship to military affairs; how does this compare to accepting their repeated humble requests, temporarily granting peace so our military and people can enjoy rest, this is also the best strategy” [National History Institute of the Nguyen Dynasty 2007d, 341]. Thus, Nguyen royalty and officials also clearly saw that achieving victory in this war was difficult. Moreover, at that time, Nguyen forces in Cambodia also faced many difficulties because “the weather had reached dry season, plus hot winds”, therefore “troops had no access to water, many fell ill; if the army remained exhausted long, not only would there be no benefit, but only waste of provisions and people’s labor” [National History Institute of the Nguyen Dynasty 2007d, 368]. Additionally, the Nguyen dynasty then had to worry about confronting the increasingly threatening French colonial invasion, so Bodin’s peace proposal was a good opportunity for the Nguyen dynasty to withdraw from war. However, according to Siamese history, because Nguyen forces could not break through Bodin’s defenses, they proposed peace negotiations, ending hostilities and returning Cambodia to Duang, with the condition that Im be returned to Annam if Duang wanted to maintain friendly relations. Taking this opportunity, Bodin analyzed the situation with King Rama III and proposed accepting the peaceful solution [Vella 1957, 105–106].

Based on analysis of materials from both sides, it can be seen that both the Nguyen dynasty and Siam recognized the war had reached a stalemate and both wanted to end the conflict. However, the sensitive issue for both sides was finding a way to exit the war while maintaining dignity. The Siamese side blamed Cambodia for “causing trouble” leading to discord between the two great countries, while the Hue court also found justification for its ceasefire decision in Bodin’s “peace request”. Both sides agreed to negotiate.

Peace talks occurred in December 1845 between Bodin, representing the Bangkok court, and Nguyen Tri Phuong and Doan Uan, representing the Hue court. Ang Duong also participated in these talks. The negotiation content revolved around the following main issues: Ang Duong’s kingship, prisoner exchange, and withdrawal of both countries’ armies from Cambodia [Leclère 1914, 433]. On the first issue, the Siamese side proposed that the Hue court accept Ang Duong as King of Cambodia, and Ang Duong would “serve both countries”. Nguyen Tri Phuong agreed to immediately convey this proposal to Hue for Thieu Tri’s opinion, but with one formal condition: Ang Duong must “submit a letter requesting forgiveness”. When news reached Hue, the Nguyen dynasty agreed with the Siamese proposal [National History Institute of the Nguyen Dynasty 2007d, 367]. Accepting Ang Duong as King of Cambodia was a concession by the Nguyen dynasty to the Bangkok court and the main result of negotiations, as this agreement was the basis for resolving remaining issues and ending disputes between the two countries in Cambodia, restoring autonomy to this kingdom [Raoul 1998, 85–89]. After negotiations, within days Nguyen forces withdrew to Phnom Penh, and Siamese forces also retreated to Pursat.

Subsequently, in January 1847, Ang Duong sent an embassy carrying letters and gifts to Phnom Penh to ask Nguyen officials there to present to Thieu Tri, requesting to “become a vassal, pay tribute” [National History Institute of the Nguyen Dynasty 2007e, 198]. When this reached Hue, Thieu Tri agreed and ordered casting the seal “King of Cambodia” to confer on Ang Duong. In March 1847, Ang Duong’s embassy came to Hue for tribute. This event received great attention from the Hue court. Thieu Tri issued an edict: “from military quarters to the capital, hospitality along the way (for the embassy) must be generous, to honor national dignity and reassure distant peoples” [National History Institute of the Nguyen Dynasty 2007e, 223–224]. Subsequently, Thieu Tri sent an embassy carrying edicts and seals to Udong to proclaim Ang Duong as “King of Cambodia” [National History Institute of the Nguyen Dynasty 2007e, 238–239]. After agreements with Annam were completed, Cambodians resumed tributary relations with Siam. In May 1847, a tribute mission was sent to Bangkok, and it was subsequently determined

that tribute would be sent to Siam annually. In June, Chaophraya Bodin and the Siamese delegation were ordered to return to Siam. In January 1848, Rama III sent envoys with full royal regalia for Duang's (Ang Duong's) coronation as King of Cambodia, and the ceremony was held at Udong in March [Vella 1957, 105–106]. Also in May 1847, prisoner exchange between both sides was carried out in Phnom Penh. In the same month, the Nguyen dynasty withdrew all troops home [Khin 1991, 105]. Finally, in April 1848, Ang Duong's official coronation was held at Udong [Chandler 1973, 184], witnessed by representatives of both Siam and Vietnam.

From 1848, the power situation on the Indochinese Peninsula entered a notable transition period when the Hue and Bangkok courts agreed to grant King Ang Duong relative autonomy to govern the Kingdom of Cambodia. This event marked a turning point in triangular power relations between Vietnam, Thailand, and Cambodia. In this context, the Nguyen dynasty in Vietnam faced increasing pressure from French colonial military presence and strategy, particularly in Nam Ky. This threat forced Vietnam to adjust foreign policy priorities, reducing direct intervention in Cambodia. Conversely, Thailand (Siam) proactively restructured regional relations by maintaining deep influence in Cambodia while skillfully balancing between Western powers like Britain and France to protect national sovereignty amid increasingly intense commercial and maritime competition [Bun 1981, 4].

Although Vietnamese and Cambodian historical sources from this period are relatively limited, Thai archival materials along with French records provided important evidence of King Ang Duong's unsuccessful efforts in the 1850s to escape the stranglehold of both Vietnam and Thailand. This king sought French protection as a strategic option to restructure internal power and minimize dependence on two neighboring countries. Notably, Thailand emerged as a particular threat to Cambodia, as the Bangkok court gradually established nearly absolute hegemonic position after King Ang Duong's coronation. Thai control was not merely symbolic but manifested through political surveillance mechanisms, military intervention, and cultural influence, causing Cambodia to fall into prolonged semi-dependence lasting many decades.

In general, the extended conflict from 1842 to 1845 and its diplomatic resolution represented a watershed moment in pre-colonial Southeast Asian international relations. The tripartite negotiations demonstrated that indigenous powers could develop sophisticated diplomatic mechanisms for conflict resolution without European mediation. The dual tributary system established for Cambodia – serving both Vietnam and Siam – created a unique form of shared sovereignty that, while unstable, provided a temporary solution to seemingly irreconcilable territorial claims. However, this arrangement also revealed the inherent contradictions in traditional Southeast Asian mandala systems when confronted with modern concepts of exclusive territorial sovereignty. The 1845 agreement thus marked both the culmination of indigenous diplomatic traditions and their limitations in the face of changing regional dynamics driven by increasing Western colonial pressure.

Conclusions

The prolonged confrontation between Vietnam and Siam in Cambodia during 1835–1845 not only caused serious human and material losses for all three countries but also profoundly transformed the political structure of mainland Southeast Asia. Cambodia, with its strategic geographical position, became a battlefield and buffer zone between two major feudal powers, leading to weakened national strength and serious social consequences for the people. Faced with pressure from domestic uprisings and increasingly strong intervention from Siam, the Nguyen dynasty was forced to change strategy, leading to the signing of the 1845 Armistice Agreement.

The Agreement marked a turning point in trilateral relations, as Vietnam and Siam both recognized Cambodia's autonomy and clearly defined each side's sphere of influence.

This was the first time three indigenous nations established a relatively balanced form of power, laying the foundation for establishing modern borders between Vietnam, Cambodia, and Siam (now Thailand). Although not reaching the level of clear demarcation as in the later colonial period, the 1845 Agreement contributed to regional stability, reduced direct conflicts, and created precedents for subsequent border negotiations.

However, this reconciliation also reflected limitations in the territorial control capacity of indigenous courts while opening space for increasingly deep intervention by Western colonial powers. Therefore, the war and 1845 Agreement were not only milestones in Vietnam-Siam-Cambodia relations but also pivotal chapters in the process of shaping Southeast Asian geopolitics before entering the colonial period. Analysis of this period contributes to clarifying how indigenous nations interacted, adjusted strategies, and established regional order in the transitional context between the pre-colonial world and the colonial era.

¹ Including: 1. Nam Vang, 2. Thi Thu later changed to Ky To, 3. Tam Don, 4. Tuy Lap, 5. Ba Nam, 6. Ba Lai, 7. Binh Siem, 8. Kha Bat, 9. Lo Vien, 10. Hai Dong, 11. Kim Truong, 12. Thau Trung, 13. Ca Au, 14. Vong Van, 15. Ha Binh, 16. Trung Loi, 17. Son Phu, 18. Son Boc, 19. Tam Vu, 20. Khai Bien, 21. Hai Tay, 22. Kha Sam, 23. The Lap, 24. Cam Bai, 25. Lo Viet, 26. Long Ton, 27. Quang Bien, 28. Hoa Di, 29. Chan Tai, 30. Y Di, 31. Chan Thanh, 32. Mat Luat, 33. O Mon. Two districts are: Can Che and Can Do. Reference the records about the establishment and personnel assignments in the Tay Thanh garrison when it was established (in 1835) in *Đại Nam thực lục* [National History Institute of the Nguyen Dynasty 2007a, 544–545, 600, 700, 800].

² According to: To transform Cambodia into a province of Annam, the Cambodian government was dissolved in 1840. The queen and royal family were taken to Cochinchina after her relatives were accused of colluding with Siam. Cambodian nobles were summoned to Saigon to meet Annam officials, marking comprehensive control from Annam's side. The new administration conducted population surveys and property registration, causing much opposition. These measures were implemented under the supervision and support of external forces [Vella 1957, 101].

³ His real name was Sing Singhaseni, also known by various titles such as Chao Phraya Bodin, who held high-ranking positions in the Siamese court under King Rama III such as Minister of Defense, Interior, and Grand Tutor Regent. He was one of the most powerful military figures of the early Chakri dynasty and once commanded the attack on Vietnam in 1834. In Vietnamese Nguyen-era history, he was called Phi nha Chat tri, a high-ranking military title.

⁴ Information about the change in infantry commanders and the identity of the leaders of the two naval and land armies of Siam is based on Bun Srun Theam [Bun 1981, 94]. Nguyen dynasty historical records claim that Chat Tri (i.e., Bodin) led the land army. However, in this case, information from Siamese historical sources (exploited and used by Theam) has higher reliability.

⁵ During the Nguyen Dynasty, in 1804, King Gia Long established the national name as Vietnam. This name was maintained until 1838, when King Minh Mang changed it to Dai Nam. Therefore, in this article, we use both names to refer to Vietnam depending on the respective time periods.

⁶ The official Nguyen dynasty history, *Dai Nam Thuc Luc*, almost only records months, not specific dates of events. For converting from lunar to solar calendar, we follow [Le 2000].

⁷ *Đại Nam thực lục* records this event after the Dinh Ty day (i.e., the 8th) and before the Tan Dau day (i.e., the 12th) of the first month of the Nham Dan year. These two days converted to the solar calendar are respectively February 17, 1842, and February 21, 1842. At that time, according to regulations from the first year of Minh Mang (1820), news from Cochinchina sent to the capital Hue took 9–12 days depending on whether it was urgent or routine, from Bac Thanh (Hanoi) to the capital Hue took 4–6 days depending on whether it was urgent or routine [National History Institute of the Nguyen Dynasty 1993, 243]. Based on this inference, the Siamese army's invasion of Ha Tien occurred in early February 1842. We follow this to establish the timeline for this event.

⁸ *Đại Nam thực lục* records that Emperor Thieu Tri, who was then in Hanoi, received news that Doan Van Sach and Luong Van Lieu repelled the Siamese invaders at Ha Tien during the period from after the Canh Ty day (i.e., the 21st) of the 2nd month of the Nham Dan year (April 1, 1842)

until the end of the 2nd month of the Nhan Dan year. At that time, news from Cochinchina to Hue, if urgent, took about 9 days then transferred to Hanoi took about 4–5 days. That is, victory news from Ha Tien had to take 13–14 days to reach Hanoi. Based on this inference, the large-scale Siamese attack on Ha Tien and subsequent defeat by Nguyen forces occurred in the latter half of March 1842. We follow this to establish the timeline for this event as presented above.

⁹ Truong Luy was a long wall built by Nguyen forces, earthen embankment, planted with thorny bamboo, along the Vinh Te River. During the early French colonial period, this relic still remained.

¹⁰ The timing of this battle is based on Bun Srun Theam's determination through related Siamese historical sources [Bun 1981, 95–96].

¹¹ *Đại Nam thực lục* records that Emperor Thieu Tri (who had now returned to the capital Hue) received news of the Nguyen army's first advance attack on That Son and victory during the period from after the Binh Than day (i.e., the 18th) of the 4th month of the Nham Dan year (May 27, 1842) until the end of the 4th month of the Nham Dan year. The time for news to travel from Cochinchina to Hue was about 9–12 days (if urgent, only about 9 days). Based on this inference, the advance attack on That Son occurred in May 1842. We follow this to determine the timeline for the event as presented above.

¹² *Đại Nam thực lục*, volume 6, records that Thieu Tri received news of Le Van Duc's victory in the second Battle of That Son during the period from after the 5th day of the 5th month (June 13, 1842) to before the 11th day of the 5th month of the Nham Dan year (June 19, 1842). News reports from Cochinchina to Hue, according to the 1820 regulations under Emperor Minh Mang, took about 9–12 days. From this, it can be inferred that Le Van Duc's second attack on That Son occurred in early June 1842. We follow this to determine the timeline for the event as presented above.

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**В'єтнамсько-сіамські відносини в доколоніальний період (1835–1848):
від протистояння до діалогу**

Стаття спирається на порівняльний аналіз різноманітних джерел з В'єтнаму, Сіаму (Таїланду), Камбоджі та міжнародних документів з метою системного й об'єктивного відтворення тристоронніх відносин між В'єтнамом, Камбоджею та Сіамом у період 1835–1848 рр. Ця доба настала після політичних потрясінь, що сталися слідом за першою війною, у якій В'єтнам здобув перемогу та встановив прямий контроль над Камбоджею через створення гарнізону Тайтхань, одночасно усунувши сіамський вплив у регіоні. Зіткнувшись зі зростанням могутності Дайнаму, династія Рами III в Сіамі, як нова регіональна сила, розгорнула інтервенційні дії, спрямовані на відновлення власного впливу, зокрема шляхом підтримки опозиційних угруповань у Камбоджі. Протистояння двох провідних держав Індокитайського півострова відновилося 1841 року, після рішення Дайнаму вивести війська з гарнізону Тайтхань. Друга війна тривала з 1842-го до 1845 року, охопивши широку територію – від Намкі (Дайнам) через Камбоджу до нинішніх кордонів Сіаму. Визначальною ознакою цього періоду стало поступове зближення трьох сторін – Дайнаму, Камбоджі та Сіаму, – яке призвело до підписання мирної угоди 1845 року. Цей договір не лише засвідчив взаємне визнання трьох сусідніх держав, а й сприяв формуванню порівняно чітких національних меж до початку проникнення західного колоніалізму в регіон.

Ключові слова: В'єтнам; Сіам; Камбоджа; Індокитайський півострів; доколоніальний період; конфронтація; діалог

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