War and trade: Siamese interventions in Cambodia, 1767-1851

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WAR AND TRADE: SIAMESE INTERVENTIONS IN CAMBODIA,
1767-1851

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the
requirements for the award of the degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

from

UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG

by

PUANGTHONG RUNGSWASDISAB

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY AND POLITICS
1995
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Abstract

Cambodia's status as a "weak vassal" of Siam and Vietnam has been a matter of consensus amongst historians. Most previous studies on Thai-Cambodian relations are based on the framework of tributary relation, emphasising the factor of political and ideological conflict among the courts of Siam, Cambodia and Vietnam. Based on such a framework, scholars have tended to conclude that Siam had no real economic motivation in Cambodia. This thesis aims at reexamining the history of the Thai-Cambodian relations between 1767-1851, in terms of two economic factor: trade and manpower. This thesis argues that trade and manpower, which were the basis of power of traditional states in Southeast Asia, were the economic reasons for Thai interventions in Cambodia.

The consolidation of Thai power over Cambodia, as part of the trans-Mekong basin, was essential for the development of Siamese economy between the Thonburi and early Bangkok periods. The effective control of trade and manpower in the trans-Mekong basin enabled Siam to rebuild its devastated economy after the fall of Ayudhya and return to its former position as one of the most powerful states in the region in the early nineteenth century. However, the presence of the Vietnamese created difficulties for the Thai consolidation of power over Cambodia as well as other parts of the Mekong region. The major factor stimulating conflict between the Thai and the Vietnamese in Cambodia was the attempts by these two rivals to control local trade networks in the area.

As for the Cambodian state, the economic conditions significantly determined the political configuration of Cambodia in the mid-nineteenth century. Its economic basis was either appropriated or largely destroyed by successive wars, devastation
and depopulation by its powerful neighbours. Besides, economic interest and external interventions further exacerbated factionalism in the Cambodian state. The role of the Khmer nobles in northwestern Cambodia, Battambang and Siemreap, was critical in sustaining Thai domination in Cambodia. The development of Battambang and Siemreap reveals a regional diversity in history of Cambodia. The two provinces not only retained different administrative systems from other Cambodian regions, but were also cut off entirely from the jurisdiction of the Cambodian rulers in Udong/Phnom Penh.

Since Cambodia’s basis of power was destroyed, its rulers lacked effective means of implementing policy and securing the loyalty of the okya. The weakness of the Cambodian state revealed in its vulnerability to both local revolts and external incursions. Such conditions were an obstacle for the Cambodian state in achieving real independence from the domination of the Thai and the Vietnamese. In fact, by the mid-nineteenth century, Cambodia ceased to exist as a viable political entity.
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I feel that I have always been very fortunate to have had many good khru, teachers, and this thesis would not have been possible without help and kindness from them. I am in debt to Melanie Beresford, my supervisor, for her devoted time, suggestions, criticism and encouragement throughout my study. The friendship and hospitality Melanie and her partner, Bruce McFarlane, have given me, particularly during my stay with them for eight months at the house in Woonona in 1989-90, is unforgettable. My great gratitude also goes to Adrian Vickers. Although he generously became my co-supervisor just two years ago, his sharp criticisms, comments and suggestions contributed a great deal to my work. I will never forget the help and kindness of Ben Kieman, my first supervisor from July 1989 to July 1990. I am grateful for his guidance with the topic of the thesis and particularly his help during my first year in Wollongong. Although now he is in Yale University, he helped reading the first draft of this thesis.

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Note on the Transcription

The transcription in this thesis follows Romanization Guide for Thai Script, of the Royal Institute, (Bangkok, 1968). This system is also applied to Khmer words. For the name of the Thai provinces, I adhere to The Proclamations of the Prime Minister Office and the Royal Institute, (Bangkok, 1981) except Ayutthaya. I prefer "Ayudhya", which has been widely used among historians. In the case of some personal names, I have to adhere to the owners' transcription.
Abbreviations Used in Footnotes and Bibliography

AOM Archives Nationale dépôt d'outremer, Aix-en-Provence

BSEI Bulletin Société des Études Indochinoises de Saigon

CMH. R.II Chotmaihet ratchakan thi song (Record of the Second Reign of the Chakri dynasty)

CMH. R.III Chotmaihet ratchakan thi sam (Record of the Third Reign of the Chakri dynasty)

CMH. R.IV Chotmaihet ratchakan thi si (Record of the Fourth Reign of the Chakri dynasty)

C.S. Jula sakkarat (Lesser era). C.S.+ 638 = AD

JRAS Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society (Great Britain & Ireland)

JSEAH Journal of Southeast Asian History

JSEAS Journal of Southeast Asian Studies

ISS Journal of the Siam Society

PP Prachum Phongsawadan (Collected Chronicles)

RI Revue Indochinoise

R.S. Rattanakosin sok (the Bangkok Era). R.S. + 1781 = AD

R.V Ratchakan thi ha (the Fifth Reign of the Chakri dynasty)

TNL Thai National Library, Bangkok

TNA Thai National Archives, Bangkok
Map I Cambodia in relation to Siam, Laos and Vietnam.
Map II  Cambodian Provinces in the Nineteenth Century.

Please see print copy for image
Map III  Thailand