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

Puangthong Rungswasdisab  
*University of Wollongong*

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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

## Erratas

Page 5, line 13	pay labours	change to	paid labourers
Page 9, para 2, line 5	Cambodia		Cambodian
Page 9, next to last line	Meleka		Melaka
Page 11, line 7	the reward		the rewards
Page 13, line 7	kingdom		kingdoms
Page 15 para 2, line 2	network		networks
Page 17, line 5	labours		labourers
Page 18, line 10	it's		its
Page 26, para 2, line 4	covered		cover
Page 30, para 2, line 2	tend		tended
Page 45, line 2	was...its		owed much to its
Page 46, para 2, line 5	facilitate		gain for
Page 54, para 2, line 7	1882		1782
Page 71, third line from bottom	held Bangkok		held in Bangkok
Page 84, para 2, line 9	meanwhile		while
Page 91, line 1	reimposed...post		reopened a customs post
Page 96, line 14	to say		as
Page 100, line 10	go		use
Page 101, para 2, line 1	monopolise		force
Page 104, last word	that		than
Page 115, table under cardamom	qualtiy		quality
Page 119, line 6	reported		report
Page 131, para 2, line 8	burden		burdens
Page 133, lines 4-5	and...appeared		and neighbouring states appear

Page 151, last para, line 2	close	subject
Page 154, line 7	the loss of enormous	the enormous loss of
Page 160, line 7	Le	Les
Page 169, third line from bottom	minister	ministers
Page 169, last line	casket	caskets
Page 175, line 3	father	father's
Page 177, para 2, line 1	Thai	Thai, Battambang's
Page 178, line 3	wishing	hoping
Page 181, line 5	under	to
Page 182, para 2, line 2	troop	troops
Page 186, footnote	the above positions	Information about these positions
Page 194, lines 4-5	the latter	he
Page 210, line 5	was	were
Page 211, quotation line 4	se	ses
Page 212, last para, line 2	its	their
Page 221, last line	will entered	will be entered
Page 236, Willmott, second title	Prio	Prior

## 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.

### Acknowledgements

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 Kiernan, 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.

There is, however, one thing in common among these three supervisors. They have been very supportive and patient with my slow progress. They showed me what I had heard about the farang before I came to Australia was wrong. Not all farang are cold.

Chaiwat Satha-Anand, my former teacher at Thammasat University, has always been ready to help me whenever I am in a difficult situation. The friendship and moral support Chaiwat and his wife, Suwanna Satha-Anand, are most invaluable. Another teacher of mine to whom I am grateful is Thawit Sukhaphanich. His care, support and sense of humour always helped me out of the depression which is a usual symptom for PhD students.

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Assistance from staffs of the following archives and libraries have to be thankfully recorded as well: the National Library and National Archives of Thailand; the Archives Nationale dépôt d'outremer, Aix-en-Provence, France; Archives du Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, Paris; the Public Records Office, London; the Menzies Library of the Australian National University; the National Library of Australia; the Wollongong University Library; and the Thammasat University Library.

Niti Pawakapan, my husband, has been very supportive and helpful in many ways. His company has helped me overcome all difficulties and contributed a great deal toward the completion of this thesis.

Finally, throughout the period of the thesis writing, there are two important persons whom I always think of. I dedicate this work to my mother, who has been ill since I began to write this thesis, and to the memory of my dearest friend, Sukanya Boontanont.

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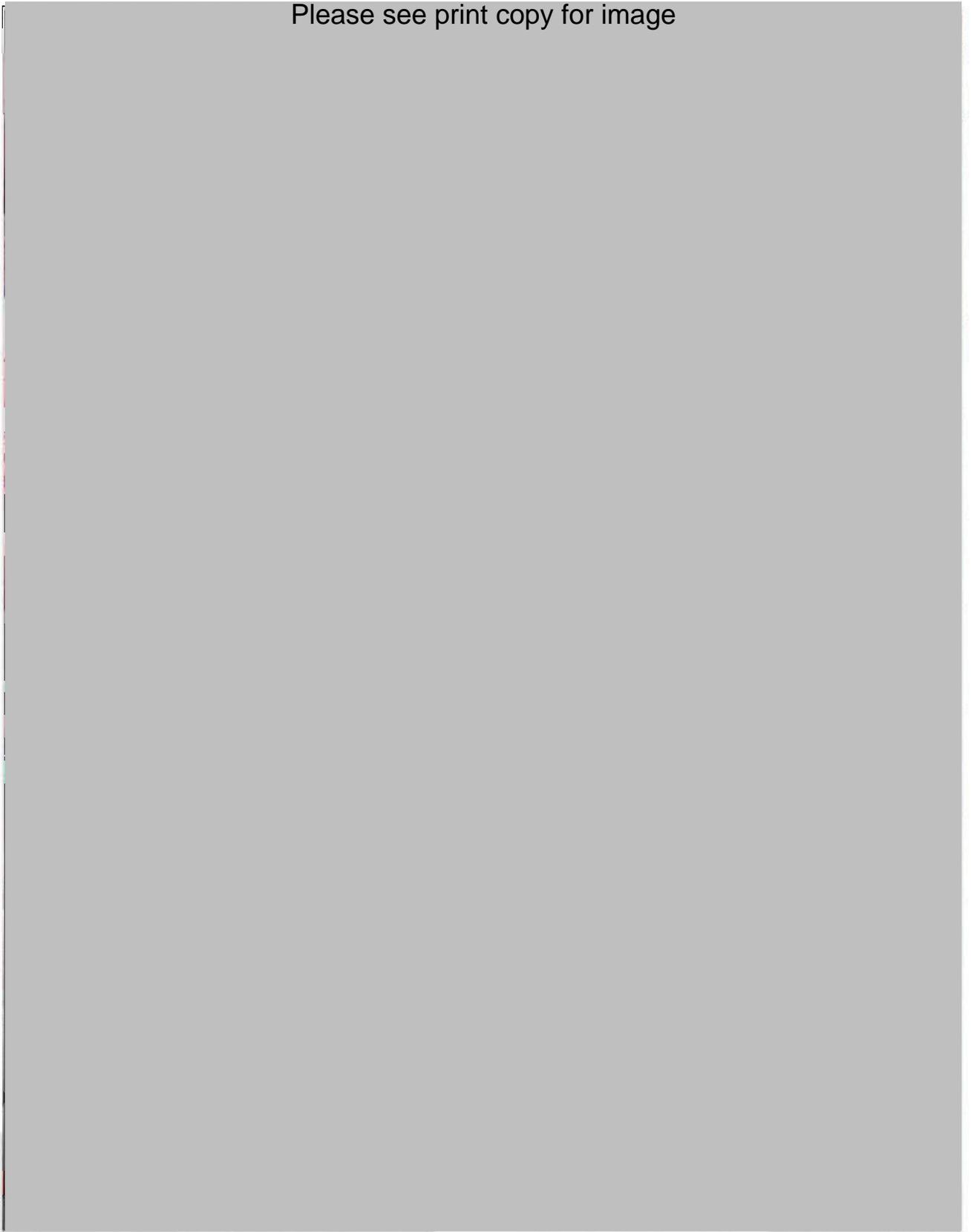
### **Note on the Transcription**

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
<u>BSEI</u>	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
<u>JRAS</u>	Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society (Great Britain & Ireland)
<u>JSEAH</u>	Journal of Southeast Asian History
<u>JSEAS</u>	Journal of Southeast Asian Studies
<u>JSS</u>	Journal of the Siam Society
<u>PP</u>	Prachum Phongsawadan (Collected Chronicles)
<u>RI</u>	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

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**Map I Cambodia in relation to Siam, Laos and Vietnam.**

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**Map II Cambodian Provinces in the Nineteenth Century.**

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**Map III Thailand**

(Source: Charles F. Keyes, Thailand: Buddhist Kingdom as Modern Nation-State, London, Westview Press, 1987.