1995

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

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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

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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.
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.

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.
Many other people both in Thailand and Australia are also part of my thesis. I appreciate valuable discussions and comments from Chalong Suntharawanich, Adisorn Muakphimai, Anthony Reid, Phuwadol Songprasert and Gehan Wijeyewardene. I would like to thank a number of my friends who assisted me in many ways: the late Sukanya Boontanont, Phetcharat Tang, Suwimon Rungcharoen, Theeraphot Sirichan, Somsiri Chua, Chumsri Nathawongse and Thiphawan. Special thanks are due to Patrick Jory, who helped reading the final draft and correcting my English. Friendship from Patrick and his wife, Chantakarn Chantarachota, made the lives of my husband and I in Canberra more worthwhile.

This thesis was possible because of financial support I received from a few organisations: the University of Wollongong provided a four-year scholarship for my study; the Mennonite Central Committee (Bangkok) funded my first year enrolment fees; the Asia-Pacific Development Study Program of Wollongong University assisted my field research expenses; special thanks go to Professor Edward Wolfers, Head of the Department of History and Politics, for granting financial assistance. I am indeed grateful for their generosity.

I also would like to thank the following organisations which gave me chances to present parts of the thesis as research papers: the Department of History and Politics at the University of Wollongong; the Thai-Yunnan Project of the Department of Anthropology, Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, the Australian National University; the Chakrawan Witthaya Group and the Department of Humanities of Chiangmai University; and the Core University Program organised by Thammasat University and Kyoto University.
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
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.
Map III  Thailand