**THE VIETNAMESE-SIAMESE WAR (1833-1834) AND ITS IMPACTS ON THE BALANCE OF POWER IN SOUTHEAST ASIA MAINLAND**

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**Abstract.** Vietnam and Siam emerged as the two strongest powers in Southeast Asia in the first half of the 19th century. These two countries increasingly seek to exert influence over neighboring countries as well as mastery over the Lower Mekong River basin. In 1833, the war between the two countries broke out with the Siamese army’s attack on Vietnam led by General Chao Phraya Bodin. The resistance war against Siam won, the Siamese army withdrew and Vietnam asserted its supremacy in the region, driving the Siamese army out of Cambodian territory. This article focuses on analyzing the relationship between Vietnam and Siam in the first half of the 19th century, especially analyzing in depth the causes, developments and impacts of the Vietnam-Siamese War (1833-1834) on the future power in mainland Southeast Asia in the early 19th century. During the first two decades of the 19th century, Vietnam and Siam always maintained friendly relations, even supporting each other against external threats. However, relations between the two countries became tense during the reigns of Rama III (King of Siam) and Minh Mang (King of Vietnam) because of the dispute over influence in two neighboring countries (Laos and Cambodia). The Vietnam-Siamese War (1833-1834) was a war consisting of two attacks by the Siamese army on Vietnamese territory, the first wave started in November 1833 and ended at the end of 1834, with victory belonged to Vietnam. Based on comparing Vietnamese sources with documents from Siam, Cambodia, and contemporary sources to evaluate the causes of the outbreak, key battles and draw impacts from the war with the two countries as well as the mainland Southeast Asia region in the 19th century.

**Keywords.** Vietnam-Siamese War, Southeast Asia, balance of power,19th century.

**Introduction**

The early nineteenth century witnessed a fundamental restructuring of geopolitical dynamics in mainland Southeast Asia, characterized by the emergence of two dominant regional powers: Vietnam under the Nguyen Dynasty and Siam under the Chakri Dynasty (Duong 2008). This period, following the consolidation of both kingdoms after prolonged civil conflicts, marked a critical juncture in Southeast Asian history where competing imperial ambitions would inevitably clash over spheres of influence and territorial control. The Vietnamese-Siamese War of 1833-1834 represents a pivotal moment in this broader narrative of regional power competition. This conflict, initiated by Siamese forces under the command of General Chao Phraya Bodin, constituted the first direct military confrontation between the two dominant mainland Southeast Asian powers of the 19th century (Nguyen 2022). The significance of this war extends beyond its immediate military outcomes, serving as a crucial determinant in reshaping the regional balance of power and establishing Vietnamese hegemony in the Lower Mekong Basin.

When examined through the lens of realism international relations theory, this conflict exemplifies the classical dynamics of great power competition within a regional system (Unoki, 2016). The Vietnamese - Siamese confrontation in nineteenth-century mainland Southeast Asia can be understood through the renowned concept of “balance of power” representative of the realism school, wherein emerging powers seek to expand their influence while preventing rival states from achieving regional dominance (Choudhary, 2023). This war represents a significant test case for understanding how traditional Southeast Asian feudal state systems adapted and competed with more centralized territorial state structures during the modern period. The scholarly significance of this conflict lies in its demonstration of how regional power transitions occurred through direct military confrontation rather than gradual diplomatic accommodation. Unlike the more extensively studied cases of great power competition in European contexts, the Vietnamese - Siamese War provides insights into how indigenous Southeast Asian powers navigated the complexities of territorial expansion, tributary relationships, and buffer state management without significant external intervention from European colonial powers.

This study seeks to achieve several interrelated analytical objectives: *First,* we aim to provide a comprehensive examination of the structural factors driving the Vietnamese-Siamese confrontation, moving beyond traditional diplomatic history to analyze the deeper geopolitical imperatives that motivated the expansionist policies of both kingdoms. We investigate how the consolidation of centralized state structures in both Vietnam and Siam created inherent tensions over control of intermediate territories, particularly Cambodia and Laos. *Second,* we endeavor to analyze the military and strategic dimensions of the conflict, examining how the military capabilities, tactical innovations, and logistical systems of each power influenced the course and ultimate outcome of the war. This includes a detailed assessment of how geographical factors, particularly the complex river systems of the Mekong Delta, shaped military strategy and tactical decision-making processes. *Third,* we seek to evaluate the long-term implications of Vietnam’s victory for the regional balance of power, particularly its impact on the tributary system and the subsequent development of Vietnamese-Siamese-Cambodian triangular relations. This analysis extends beyond immediate territorial adjustments to consider how the war’s outcome influenced administrative practices, cultural policies, and diplomatic protocols throughout the region.

In general, the Vietnamese-Siamese War of 1833-1834 offers valuable insights into the dynamics of regional power competition that remain relevant for understanding contemporary Southeast Asian international relations. The conflict demonstrates how rising powers manage competing claims to regional leadership, the role of buffer states in great power competition, and how military outcomes can fundamentally alter established patterns of interstate relations. Furthermore, the war’s resolution through Vietnamese victory and the subsequent establishment of a new regional order provides a case study of successful power transition that avoided prolonged instability or external intervention. This outcome contrasts with other historical examples of great power competition that led to systemic conflict or foreign domination, offering lessons for understanding how indigenous actors can shape their own regional security environment.

**2. Literature Review**

The historiographical examination of the Vietnamese - Siamese War (1833-1834) reveals a multifaceted scholarly discourse that has evolved across temporal and geographical boundaries, reflecting diverse analytical perspectives on this pivotal regional conflict. This body of literature, while demonstrating considerable depth in certain areas, also exhibits notable asymmetries in national perspectives and methodological approaches that warrant careful consideration.

The scholarly foundation for understanding this conflict rests upon comprehensive analyses of the broader geopolitical transformation that characterized early nineteenth-century mainland Southeast Asia. Seminal works by Hall (1997), Kiernan (2017), and Vella (1957) have established the essential framework for comprehending how both Vietnamese and Siamese polities emerged from prolonged periods of internal fragmentation to assert regional hegemonic ambitions. These foundational studies illuminate the process through which both kingdoms consolidated centralized state structures following their respective civil conflicts, thereby creating the structural preconditions for inevitable territorial competition. The theoretical sophistication of this analytical framework has been further enhanced by contributions from Winichakul (1994) and Gaultier (2021), whose works examine the ideological and cartographic dimensions of state formation in the region. Their analyses demonstrate how the conceptualization of territorial sovereignty and administrative control evolved during this period, providing crucial insights into the cognitive frameworks that informed strategic decision-making in both courts. Complementing these perspectives, Vietnamese scholars including Dang Van Chuong (2005, 2010) and the comprehensive documentation provided by the National Historiographer’s Office of the Nguyen Dynasty (2007) have contributed invaluable primary source analysis and administrative perspective on the Vietnamese strategic calculus.

A particularly sophisticated strand of scholarship has emerged around the examination of Cambodia and Laos as contested buffer zones whose allegiance became central to Vietnamese-Siamese competition. The pioneering work of Chandler (1973) established the analytical framework for understanding Cambodia’s precarious position between two expanding powers, while Sok (1991) provided crucial insights into the internal Cambodian political dynamics that both Vietnamese and Siamese courts sought to manipulate. These studies reveal how the tributary system, rather than representing a stable diplomatic arrangement, became a contested terrain where competing conceptions of sovereignty and suzerainty collided. The complexity of Lao involvement has been illuminated through the collaborative research of Smukarn and Breazeale (1988), whose ethnographic and historical analysis demonstrates how ethnic minorities became instrumental actors in the broader strategic competition. Their work reveals the sophisticated manner in which both Vietnamese and Siamese authorities attempted to leverage existing tribal networks and traditional allegiances to extend their respective spheres of influence, highlighting the multidimensional nature of regional power projection.

The military dimensions of the conflict have received considerable attention, though with notable disparities in source availability and analytical depth. Vietnamese scholarship, particularly the works of Dang Van Chuong (2002), Nguyen Dinh Co (2018), and Nguyen Thanh Tuyen (2022), has provided detailed tactical analyses of key engagements, drawing extensively from the rich documentary heritage preserved in the Privy Council and Cabinet records of the Nguyen Dynasty (2012). These studies demonstrate sophisticated understanding of riverine warfare tactics, logistical challenges, and the integration of naval and terrestrial military operations that characterized this conflict. However, the analytical balance has been significantly enhanced by Vella’s (1957) comprehensive examination of the Siamese perspective during Rama III’s reign. This work provides essential insights into Siamese strategic planning, military organization, and the internal court dynamics that influenced operational decision-making. Vella’s contribution is particularly valuable for its documentation of the Siamese multi-front strategy and the coordination challenges faced by Bangkok in managing simultaneous operations across diverse geographical theaters.

Despite the substantial scholarly attention devoted to this conflict, several analytical lacunae remain apparent. The existing literature demonstrates a pronounced imbalance in source availability, with Vietnamese documentary evidence far exceeding accessible Siamese materials. This asymmetry has inevitably influenced scholarly interpretations and may have contributed to an incomplete understanding of Siamese strategic calculations and internal political dynamics. Furthermore, while individual military engagements have received detailed treatment, the broader strategic implications and long-term consequences of the conflict’s outcome remain underexplored in comparative regional perspective. The literature would benefit from enhanced analysis of how this conflict influenced subsequent patterns of interstate relations, administrative practices, and diplomatic protocols throughout mainland Southeast Asia. Additionally, the economic dimensions of the conflict-including its impact on regional trade networks, resource allocation, and demographic patterns-represent an area requiring more systematic scholarly investigation. The existing focus on political and military aspects, while valuable, has left important questions about the conflict’s socioeconomic ramifications inadequately addressed.

The scholarly examination of the Vietnamese-Siamese War extends beyond historical inquiry to encompass broader theoretical questions about power transition, regional security dynamics, and indigenous state-building processes in Southeast Asia. The conflict serves as a crucial case study for understanding how traditional Southeast Asian polities adapted to changing geopolitical circumstances while maintaining their autonomy from European colonial intervention-a pattern that distinguishes this regional system from contemporary developments in other parts of Asia and Africa. This literature review reveals both the substantial scholarly foundation that exists for understanding the Vietnamese-Siamese War and the significant opportunities for future research that would enhance our comprehension of this pivotal moment in Southeast Asian history. The interdisciplinary nature of existing scholarship, combining political, military, social, and cultural perspectives, provides a robust foundation for continued analytical development while highlighting areas where additional research would contribute substantially to our understanding of regional power dynamics in the pre-colonial period.

**3. Methodology**

This study employs traditional historical methodology in historiographical research; however, its distinctive feature lies in the systematic integration of comparative source analysis, cross-cultural documentation, and temporal contextualization. The research process fundamentally involves classical historical triangulation, wherein multiple documentary traditions are examined to construct a comprehensive narrative that transcends the limitations of single-perspective historiography. The methodological foundation of this study centers on comparative documentary analysis, utilizing primary sources from Vietnamese, Siamese, and Cambodian archives to achieve analytical balance and avoid the subjectivity inherent in historiographical research that relies solely on single-nation sources when investigating multinational phenomena. This research is most notably distinguished by its treatment of the “Đại Nam thực lục” (Veritable Records of Great Vietnam) and the “Khâm định tiểu bình Nam Kỳ nghịch phỉ phương lược chính biên” (Imperial Compilation of Strategic Methods for Pacifying Southern Rebels), which serve as the documentary backbone for Vietnamese sources. This approach is methodologically reinforced through the incorporation of Siamese court records and contemporary observations, thereby mitigating the inherent bias present in single-nation historical narratives.

Furthermore, the research adopts a chronological approach to trace causal patterns from structural antecedents through military engagement to long-term consequences. This methodology enables us to demonstrate how immediate tactical decisions reflected broader strategic calculations while revealing how short-term military outcomes generated long-term geopolitical transformations. Concurrently, we systematically compare competing scholarly perspectives on identical events across different documentary traditions. This is particularly evident in the treatment of the battles of Vàm Nao and Cơ Ho, where contemporary Vietnamese, Siamese, and neutral sources are analyzed to establish factual accuracy and interpret divergent perspectives on tactical outcomes and strategic significance. This research process situates the Vietnamese-Siamese conflict within broader patterns of Southeast Asian state formation and regional power dynamics. This approach transcends mere military history to examine how the war reflected deeper structural tensions between competing models of territorial sovereignty and administrative control.

In general, this methodology enables us to extrapolate broader implications from specific historical events, demonstrating how the Vietnamese-Siamese conflict illustrates universal patterns of great power competition while reflecting the unique characteristics of mainland Southeast Asian political culture.

**4. Results and discussion**

**4.1. Context of Vietnam and Siam in the early 19th century**

In 1782, Phraya Taksin and his entire family were assassinated by a group of nobles, ending the Thonburi dynasty. The leader of this coup aristocratic group, Chao Phraya Chakri, became king and took the title Rama I[[1]](#footnote-1) (1782-1809), moving the capital to Bangkok (Luong, 2015, p. 173). Siam entered a new historical period. During the reigns of Rama I (1782-1809) and Rama II (1809-1824), the kingdom of Siam restored the country after the war with Burma and civil war, entering a period of development. The state apparatus is increasingly being improved in the direction of concentrating power in the king. The blood kinship system was consolidated, forming a group of powerful royal and noble families, holding the main power of the state. According to D. G. E. Hall, by the early 19th century, Siam became stronger than ever and continued to pursue an expansionist policy to extend its control over the Lao kingdom of Luang Prabang and Vientiane to the north ancient Khmer Cambodia to the east and Malay states to the south (Hall, 1997, p. 676). During the reign of King Rama III (1824-1851), the process of high centralization of the centralized state was promoted even more strongly. From the beginning, King Rama III arranged royal relatives to high positions in the court, especially princes and princesses. This is a basis for maintaining the long-term dominance of the Chakri family in Siam. At the same time, Rama III also advocated expanding the country to the northeast, digging new river systems to make trenches and developing waterway transportation, to promote agricultural and commercial development. The King of Siam also has policies to encourage foreign traders to trade (especially the British) to both develop trade and economic development, buy weapons, and learn techniques to promote national defense. Thanks to that, the Siamese army became more powerful (Dang, 2010, pp. 68-69).

Meanwhile in Vietnam, in 1802, Nguyen Anh defeated the Tay Son movement, established the Nguyen Dynasty, set up its capital in Phu Xuan, and established a unified state institution. Vietnam’s territory under King Gia Long was basically shaped like today, extending from the border with China to the Gulf of Thailand, including the Hoang Sa and Truong Sa archipelagos. Administratively, King Gia Long divided Vietnam into 2 governorates: (Bac Ha, Nam Ha), 2 regions (Central and Kinh Ky), including 23 towns and 4 camps. During the reign of King Minh Mang (1820-1841), the central administrative apparatus of the Nguyen Dynasty was strongly reformed. Administrative agencies from central to local levels were arranged and improved in parallel with the redefinition of hierarchical structures. Locally, to unify administrative units throughout the country, in the years 1831-1832, King Minh Mang carried out a major administrative reform, thereby eliminating governors and changing palaces and towns. into a province and this is the first time a provincial administrative unit has appeared in Vietnam (Truong, 2003, p. 436). Regarding the army, King Gia Long and especially under King Minh Mang, the Nguyen army paid attention to Western military science as a model for the organization of the army, aiming for the army to be elite, not needy winter. The Nguyen army during the Minh Mang period was a modern, advanced military force, somewhat superior to other countries in the region.

In general, the early years of the 19th century was the period when both Siam and Vietnam were reunited after the civil war. Both kingdoms are gradually developing and demonstrating their ambitions in the region. Especially during the reigns of King Rama III (1824-1851) and King Minh Mang (1820-1841). An unfortunate coincidence of history is that Rama III and Minh Mang were unexpected opponents of each other. Many issues created disagreements between the two ambitious emperors of Vietnam and Siam, especially influencing the two buffer countries: Laos and Cambodia. This was the root cause of the outbreak of the Siam-Vietnam war.

**4.2. Siamese troops attacked Cambodia and Vietnam**

The event that created a favorable opportunity for Siam to send troops to intervene in Vietnam was the Le Van Khoi uprising in Gia Dinh. In 1833, Le Van Khoi (adopted son of former Governor of Gia Dinh citadel Le Van Duyet) started an army against the court and quickly took control of the entire Cochinchina. Minh Mang sent generals Tran Van Nang, Tong Phuc Luong, Truong Minh Giang, Nguyen Xuan, Tran Van Tri, and Truong Phuc Dinh to bring more than 10,000 troops to defeat the enemy. After initial difficulties, the imperial army gradually reclaimed the Cochinchina provinces. Le Van Khoi withdrew to defend Gia Dinh citadel, sent people to ask for Siam’s aid, promised to submit, provide pearls, silk and beautiful women, as well as divide Cochinchina after victory. King Rama III is promoting his plan to advance east, seizing the opportunity and sending his troops to attack the southern territory of Vietnam. According to Walter F. Villa, the Siamese army brought about 60,000 troops divided into three main armies to attack Cochinchina. Among them, the first group: consisting of 40,000 troops, led by Chao Phraya Bodin (called Phi Nha Chat Tri in Vietnamese history), followed the road to attack Chan Lap, occupied Nam Vang (ie Phnom Penh) and then entered Saigon. W. Vella recorded the mission of the main army as follows: “Bodin’s army-accompanied by Im and Duang, the Cambodian princes sup-ported by the Siamese (Sanguan had died in Siam in 1826)-was to sweep through Cambodia and on to Saigon to aid the rebels besieged there” (Bodin’s army – escorted by Im and Duang, Cambodian princes supported by the Siamese (Sanguan had died in Siam in 1826) – would sweep through Cambodia and went to Saigon to support the rebels (Le Van Khoi) who were besieged there) (Vella, 1957, p. 97).

The second army of about 10,000 troops, led by Chao Phraya Phrakhlang (called Phi Nha Phat Lang by Nguyen Dynasty historians), followed the sea from the Gulf of Siam to occupy Ha Tien and then followed the Vinh Te River to capture Chau Doc; then continued marching to reunite with General Bodin’s first army in Gia Dinh. The third army consists mainly of forces gathered from Laos, following the Mekong River down and then integrating with the above two armies in Cochinchina (Vella, 1957, p. 97). According to Dang Van Chuong, there were only two main armies attacking Cochinchina: one attacked by land into Cambodia to attack Gia Dinh and the other by water to attack Ha Tien. Three other smaller armies attacked Cam Lo (Quang Tri, Vietnam), Cam Cat, Cam Mon, Tran Ninh, and Xiem Khou for the purpose of diversion and dispersion of the Nguyen Dynasty’s forces (Dang, 2005, p. 23). However, in *Đại Nam thực lục*, historians of the Nguyen Dynasty also noted that there were three armies attacking Cochinchina: “In the past, when Le Van Khoi rebelled, he sent a letter to Siam, asking Siam to send troops to attack Chan Lap and then go straight to Gia Dinh. He promised that after the work was completed, he would offer land and surrender. The Siamese people were confused, so they loudly brought in troops and boats, three groups advanced: one group came from the North Tam Bon road, used Phi Nha Chat Tri as commander and brought with him the two younger brothers of the King of Chan Lap, Nac Yem and Nac Worm went together; An army poured down from the Tonle Sap waterway, using Phi Nha Phi Muc Thiep Mang as its commander; Another group pulled up from the Chan Bon sea route, using Phi Nha Phat Lang as the commander” (National historiographer’s office of The Nguyen Dynasty, 2007a, pp. 891-892).

This can be confirmed: Cochinchina was the main direction in the invasion of Siam, the other two armies in Laos and Central Vietnam were diversionary directions. In November 1833, the Siamese army invaded Chan Lap. According to Marcel Gaultier, in December 1833, the Siamese court sent three armies to Cochinchina. The first column commanded by General Chat Tri crossed the Do Suc border near Battambang. The second army was commanded by General Thiep - Mang along the Mekong River. The third army followed the sea route from Chan - Bon (Gaultier, 2021, p.107). In *Khâm định tiểu bình Nam Kỳ nghịch phỉ phương lược chính biên* of Privy council & Cabinet of The Nguyen Dynasty (2012), from the end of the 11th lunar month (1833), upon hearing that the Siamese army intended to violate the border, King Minh Mang ordered Dinh Tuong and Vinh Long to take rice from the border. warehouse of 5,000 boxes to grind rice and transport it to An Giang. On November 20 (lunar calendar), according to the report of Ha Tien, Guard of Trinh Duong Palace: “An Giang province promptly issued a notice to the Khoi enemy detective to send a letter asking the King of Siam to send troops to attack Cambodia straight to Gia Dinh citadel. So the King of Siam sent Phi Nha Luc Khon, Phi Nha Lam Phan Pha Nha, Phi Nha Bac Nom, Phi Nha Chom Bon, Phi Nha Thong Dy in the direction of the sea. Africa’s Nha Phat Lang did the thing to fight the navy” (Privy council & Cabinet of The Nguyen Dynasty, 2012, pp. 1228-1229). The King of Chan Lap, Nac Chan, panicked and fled to An Giang for refuge. With overwhelming force, Siam quickly captured Ha Tien and threatened An Giang (Vella, 1957, p. 97).

In Cochinchina, the generals were ordered to quickly send troops to recapture the two lost provinces and prevent enemy troops from advancing deeper inland from An Giang. At the same time, the court also mobilized more troops, war elephants and guns to guard the areas of Quang Hoa and Quang Phong districts (in present-day Tay Ninh) bordering Cambodia. Another important border area in the Southwestern region, An Giang, was reinforced by the royal court with 10 warships, 2,000 pounds of gunpowder, 10 ancient guns, and 80-100 bullets for each gun; Talented and battle-hardened generals were sent to An Giang to join forces to fight the enemy (National historiographer’s office of The Nguyen Dynasty, 2007a, pp. 891-892). In the secondary direction, from the end of 1833 to the beginning of 1834, to disperse the Nguyen army, King Rama III ordered Siamese army units and Lao soldiers from bases located in Luang Prabang. and Nong Khai moved to Tran Ninh, Xiengkhuang and the Vietnam-Laos border areas from Nghe An to Quang Tri to attack, harass, and capture people and take them to the right bank of the Mekong River. This act of arresting people and harassing the border continued to be carried out by King Rama III until the 40s of the 19th century (Smukarn, 1988, p. 23). Those were just small troops consisting of Siamese and Laotian troops combined with some forces of ethnic minorities forced by Siam. The above actions have two goals: both to expand their control over Eastern Laos after Vientiane became a province of Siam with the purpose of causing border disorder, and to disperse Vietnamese forces to Siam easily concentrated its forces to win in Cochinchina. Determining that the Siamese army’s attacks in these places were “just creating a reputation” to focus on attacking Cochinchina, the Hue court ordered the generals guarding the border areas in Nghe An to strengthen the ramparts, increase the number of troops, and be on guard furthermore.

However, King Minh Mang’s policy was still proactive defense, not causing conflict first. He advised the generals: This matter has something to do with the border, of course we should prepare in advance, we should not cause conflict in advance (National historiographer’s office of The Nguyen Dynasty, 2007a, p. 899). Obviously in the early stages, King Minh Mang still believed that the Siamese army did not dare to send troops to violate the borders of Vietnam’s Central period. This can be clearly seen in the secret edict of the provinces of Quang Tri and Nghe An: “Now there is a Siamese enemy in the South, the court has immediately sent a large army to guard it, surely the enemy will not dare to cross the border cause trouble. But considering that the highlands in your county are far away and bordering neighboring countries, you should not neglect to take precautions before the incident occurs...” (National historiographer’s office of The Nguyen Dynasty, 2007a, p. 938). At the end of 1833, the Siamese army mobilized another 10,000 troops from Van Tuong to attack the continents of Tam Bon, Mang Bong, Poland, and Lang Thin in Cam Lo district, Quang Tri. King Minh Mang sent troops to defend. A few days later, the Siamese army attacked Tran Ninh (Nghe An) again, and the Vietnamese army withdrew to Giang Man. The Siamese army sent troops to flood Ha Tinh, the Vietnamese army brought troops to hold, but the Siamese army did not advance anymore. The Siamese and Laotian coalition also tried to harass the border areas in Nghe An and Ha Tinh, capturing people and causing chaos to disperse the Nguyen army. From January to May of 1834, Siamese troops increased their attacks, harassed, and arrested people in other areas more fiercely (Dang, 2002, p. 75).

Meanwhile in the South, in December 1833, Phi Nha Chat Tri brought most of his forces to Chau Doc. General Phi Nha Liem Cam Hien also brought a fleet of about 200 ships with 6,000 troops to Chau Doc. In Chau Doc, Phi Nha Chat Tri and Phi Nha Phat Lang discussed the upcoming military advance and agreed to follow the Hau River to the Vam Nao River and then to the Tien River to expand the invasion of the South of Vietnam. The Siamese army chose the direction of the Tien River to advance because they wanted to quickly go deep into the territory of Cochinchina and be able to conveniently capture the provinces of Vinh Long and Dinh Tuong. Following the Tien River estuaries to the sea, Siamese troops could go to Gia Dinh province to support Le Van Khoi’s rebel army and proceed to occupy the whole of Cochinchina. When the Siamese army arrived at Vam Nao, they immediately set up strongholds on both banks to guard the vulnerable place. These fortresses and the forces stationed in Chau Doc citadel create a solid guarantee from behind so that the army can feel secure in moving deeper into Vietnam country’s territory (Nguyen, 2022). Nguyen Dynasty historians describe: Previously, the Siamese invaders invaded Chau Doc province (An Giang), then followed the Hau Giang river to Thuan Cang [Vam Nao river], then set up strongholds on both sides of the Vam Nao bank to prepare war against with the Nguyen army. At the same time, Truong Minh Giang and Nguyen Xuan also arrived. The Siamese army brought more than 100 warships, both large and small, to fight. The Nguyen army attacked, immediately fired cannons at the vanguard general Lien Cam Hien, and the enemy withdrew into the port. When Truong Minh Giang defeated the enemy post on the left bank, destroyed 15 ships, and captured many weapons. As for the enemy’s right bank posts, the enemy’s defense was even more vigorous. The battle was fierce when reinforcements from Gia Dinh just arrived, increasing the prestige of the Nguyen army. Within just one day, the Nguyen army defeated the right bank post; The Siamese army fled to large warships. The enemy soldiers fired guns to hold back, and at the same time placed embankments on both sides of the river to defend. Realizing that the enemy army was still large and the wind was not favorable, Truong Minh Giang and Nguyen Xuan ordered the troops to withdraw (National historiographer’s office of The Nguyen Dynasty, 2007a, p. 948).

The Vam Nao victory was a glorious victory of the Nguyen army in An Giang. With a force of only about 1,000 troops, thanks to brave ingenuity, the Nguyen army defeated an army many times larger (tens of thousands of troops, with more than 100 large and small warships). This was an important victory that blocked the advance of the Siamese army to Cochinchina, creating a psychological state for the Nguyen army to continue winning decisive victories to wipe out the Siamese invaders from the land.

At the end of January 1834, the entire Nguyen army from Vam Nao, following the Tien River sub-branch, retreated to the location of the old Chien Sai base at the confluence of Tien River - Co Ho River[[2]](#footnote-2) to build a battle position. If the Nguyen army failed in this battle, the Siamese army would flood into Sa Dec and My Tho, the Southern region could be lost to the Siamese army, so this battle was extremely key and important. The Nguyen army-built strongholds on both sides of the Co Ho River, stationed warships on the Tien River, and formed a defensive position. The navy and land army are firmly combined. Reinforcements also arrived one after another. Siamese infantry followed the left bank to attack the Nguyen army stronghold. The battle took place from the hour of the Snake to the hour of the Monkey (about 9-17 o’clock) on January 25, 1834. The Siamese army suffered many casualties and had to retreat. That night, the Siamese army came to attack again, divided into many waves, but failed so they had to withdraw, preserving their forces. After 6 days of fighting, the Nguyen army broke off the attacks of the Siamese army and maintained the battlefield (Nguyen, 2022). The Co Ho victory was a victory of the art of defense combined with counterattack of the Nguyen army. The imperial army relied on the river terrain in the Tien - Co Ho River confluence area with the previously built Chien Sai defense to form a solid and flexible defensive posture in transitioning to a state of defense attack when favorable. This victory turned the tide of the war. From now on, the advantage belonged to the Nguyen army. The increased position and strength helped the Nguyen army wipe out the Siamese army from the territory of Cochinchina, as well as in Cambodia.

On the road direction, in January 1834, about more than 5,000 Siamese troops came down from Xi Khe canal (Tay Ninh canal), plotting to attack Gia Dinh, in order to rescue Le Van Khoi. The Chan Lap army (with the help of Gia Dinh’s second army) defeated the invading army, forcing the Siamese army to retreat deep into Chan Lap territory. This battle took place on December 19, the year of the Snake (January 28, 1834) (Nguyen, 2018, p. 38). The Siamese army lost the battle and had to flee, the Siamese army’s hope for the land army seemed to have disappeared.

At the Co Ho front, due to suffering a disastrous defeat, two senior Siamese generals, Phi Nha Chat Tri and Phi Nha Phat Lang, disagreed deeply. Phi Nha Chat Tri wanted to continue to advance, while Phi Nha Phat Lang advocated retreat. In the end, Phi Nha Chat Tri was forced to withdraw his troops. On January 31 and February 1, 1834, the Siamese army conducted a number of diversionary attacks on the Nguyen army stronghold, allowing the main force to retreat. Siamese land forces withdrew to Chau Doc and warships withdrew to Ha Tien. The Nguyen army took advantage of the victory and immediately pursued. On February 4, 1834, the Nguyen army recaptured Chau Doc citadel. The Nguyen army continued to pursue and liberate areas previously occupied by the Siamese army (Vella, 1957, p. 98). On February 6, 1834, Ha Tien citadel was reclaimed. The Siamese army was knocked out of the territory of Cochinchina, Vietnam.

After taking back Chau Doc and Ha Tien, the Nguyen army coordinated with the Cambodian army to attack the Siamese army in Cambodia. King Minh Mang closely followed the battle situation and issued an edict to his generals: “Now that the Siamese enemy has lost many big battles, they must be scared; But our army’s morale is a hundred times stronger. In addition, the company of soldiers and ships sent by the Capital continued to arrive, and the momentum would increase even more. The Generals and Tam Tan should follow the previous edicts, choose a vulnerable place, surround and attack, chase long, advance straight, take back An Giang, Ha Tien, pacify Nam Vang, and soon bring the red flag to announce the victory, quickly report great merit” (National historiographer’s office of The Nguyen Dynasty, 2007a, p. 11).

With that spirit, the Nguyen army continuously won, advancing all the way to the capital Nam Vang. Without stopping, the Vietnamese army continued to pursue the Siamese army to the border, at the same time bringing Ang Chan II back to the throne. In 1834, Truong Minh Giang and King Ang Chan returned to Phnom Penh. Vietnamese influence in Cambodia has been established. At the end of 1834, King Minh Mang officially declared Cambodia to be Tran Tay Thanh, meaning “the stronghold of the Western protectorate” (Kiernan, 2017, p. 283).

In Nghe An, in February 1834, Vietnamese and Siamese troops clashed at Giang Man, the defeated Vietnamese army had to retreat. King Minh Mang sent Imperial Ambassador Nguyen Van Xuan and Deputy Ambassador Pham Van Dien to bring troops to the capital of Tran Ninh (Nghe An) to repel the Siamese army. In June 1834, in Quang Tri, Guard Lieutenant Le Van Thuy sent troops to fight the Siamese army and continuously won. The Siamese army gathered more troops to attack but were repelled one by one.

The Vietnam-Siamese war ended with victory for Vietnam. The Siamese army retreated, Le Van Khoi rebel army in Phien Am citadel no longer had support forces and could only defend in the citadel until the citadel was defeated in September 1835. When fleeing, PhraKlang robbed a ship and brought with him 2,000 Vietnamese people, most of whom were Christians (more or less related to the Le Van Khoi uprising) and brought them to live on the outskirts of Bangkok. Siam later used these people to disrupt the Vietnam-Cambodia border area. Before leaving Phnom Penh, the Siamese army burned and destroyed the palace of King Ang Chan, and at the same time took advantage of the situation when retreating to capture Khmer people living along the banks of the Tonle Sap River and a few other places brought back to Siam (Sok, 1991, p. 82).

**4.3. The Regional Balance of Power Changes**

This was the first direct clash of the two strongest powers in mainland Southeast Asia in the 19th century. The war (1833-1834) profoundly changed the positions of Siam and Vietnam in Cambodia. Suffering a heavy defeat in this war, Siam’s political influence in Cambodia seriously declined, while the position and power of the Nguyen Dynasty in Cambodia became stronger than ever. The war also left severe consequences for Cambodia and pushed relations between the three countries in mainland Southeast Asia into a new phase, a period of prolonged conflict and war (Duong, 2008, p. 20).

As for Vietnam, the successful resistance war affirmed the country’s position on the region’s geopolitical map, balancing power, even surpassing Siam in the issue of influence over Cambodia. Already in 1834, the Nguyen dynasty took full control of defense and diplomacy issues in Cambodia, removing Siamese influence from the buffer zone of the two countries. Going one step further, in 1835, King Minh Mang decided to establish Tay Thanh town, including 33 palaces and 2 districts[[3]](#footnote-3). These administrative units are all named after Vietnam. The governing organization in Tran Tay Thanh includes: 1 Tướng quân, 1 Tham tán đại thần, 1 Đề đốc, 1 Hiệp tán cơ vụ, 2 Lãnh binh, 2 Phó lãnh binh, and many other officials. Thự Đông các điện đại học sĩ, governor of An Giang Ha Tien Truong Minh Giang was appointed as General of Tran Tay, bearing the seal of Tran Tay General. An Giang Governor Le Dai Cuong was appointed as Counselor of Tran Tay Thanh. Minh Mang also stipulated: “The entire Tran Tay citadel is under the management of these two people, not bearing the seal and title of Protector of Chan Lap” (National historiographer’s office of The Nguyen Dynasty, 2007b, p. 700). With this policy of direct rule, the Nguyen Dynasty considered Cambodia a Minh Mang himself told the courtiers: “Now that Chan Lap country has entered the map, I want to divide and divide the government and district to teach” (National historiographer’s office of The Nguyen Dynasty, 2007b, p. 780). In 1837, the Nguyen Dynasty also proposed the following policy: “Teach the people to learn the Kinh language and script” so that “when there is an issue, report together, everyone will be understood, and there will be no worries about conflicting opinions” (National historiographer’s office of The Nguyen Dynasty, 2007b, p. 800). By a series of policies stated At the Nguyen court, the Nguyen Dynasty gradually asserted its dominance and turned Cambodia into a part of its territory.

On the contrary, after the defeat in 1834, Siam had to withdraw its troops from the border, losing its traditional area of influence, and border security was somewhat affected. Siam’s political influence in Cambodia was almost eliminated under the conditions that the Nguyen Dynasty stationed troops and placed mandarins to rule Cambodia. Of course, as a rising power in the region, Siam does not accept this. The Bangkok court always closely monitors developments in the political situation in Cambodia and waits for an opportunity to restore its status. King Rama III declared that he was always prepared to “turn Cambodia into a forest” (Chandler, 1973, p. 128) if the people of this country objected to dependence on Siam. Although it cannot directly intervene militarily in Cambodia, Siam has used two strategic cards in its hands: princes Ang Im and Ang Duong, who have the ability to help Siam cause conflicts among the Khmer and Khmer royal families way to pull people to follow Siam against Vietnam.

The persistent confrontation between Vietnam and Siam continued until the mid-40s of the 19th century, when the two countries realized, they could not fight defeated each other and especially each country had to return to take care of their own problems in the face of the imminent danger of Western colonialism. In the mid-1940s, an armistice and territorial delimitation treaty was signed between the three countries Vietnam - Cambodia - Siam, demonstrating the balance of power in the region of the two major countries. As a powerful kingdom along the southern part of the Mekong River, Cambodia, however, was located between two more powerful kingdoms, Siam and Vietnam. Since its decline in the 14th century, Cambodia had no choice but to accept the power competition of both its neighbors Vietnam and Siam (Winichakul, 1994, p. 84).

**5. Conclusion**

The Vietnam-Siam War resulted from the power competition between two great powers in mainland Southeast Asia in the early 19th century. To realize his goal of “Advancing East” at the end of 1833, King Rama III of Siam sent troops to attack Cambodia and Ha Tien and Chau Doc (An Giang) of Vietnam. The Nguyen army organized resistance, defeated the Siamese invasion, knocked the invaders out of the territory and, with that momentum, attacked Cambodia to expand its area of influence. The end of the war was a period of affirming Vietnam’s position in the region, overwhelming Siam in exerting influence in the buffer country of Cambodia. The Hue court even expanded its territory to the border with Siam. However, for a developing power with great ambitions, Siam does not accept the reality of having its area of influence narrowed. King Rama I continued implementing many policies to implement the “Advancing East” strategy. The Siamese - Vietnamese confrontation continued to take place, continuing to break out a fierce war and ending with an armistice agreement (in 1845) between the three countries involved in the Southeast Asian region of mainland Vietnam - Siam - Cambodia.

**Funding:** This research is funded by Vietnam National University Ho Chi Minh City (VNU-HCM) under grant number “C2025-18b-03”.

**Conflict statement:** The authors do not have any conflicts of interest in this manuscript, and have no conflicts with any individuals and organizations.

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1. In history books of the Nguyen Dynasty (Vietnam), the transliteration is Chat Tri (質知), often calling the kings of the Chakri Dynasty as Buddha Kings (佛王), due to the influence of the title Phra Buddha. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Tra Thon River, or Co Hu River, under the Nguyen Dynasty, also called Co Ho River, Tu Dien River (today called Tra Thon Canal), is a river located south of Tien River, flowing southwest, the first point connecting with Tien River, the end point connects with Ong Chuong River (Le Cong River). Today, Tra Thon canal has a length of 4.2 km, flowing through the territory of two communes Long Dien A and Long Dien B, Cho Moi district, An Giang province. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. The 33 districts include: Nam Vang, Ky To (Thoi Thau), Tam Don (Tam Worm), Tuy Lap (Xui Rap), Ba Nam (Ba Cau Nam), Ba Lai (Ba Lai), Binh Tiem (Bong Xiem), Kha Bat (Loi Y Bat), Lu Vien, Hai Dong (Bong Xui), Hai Tay (Phu Lit), Kim Truong, Thau Trung (Phu Trung), Ca Au (Ca Khu), Vong Van, Trung Ha, Trung Lai (Trung Le), Son Phu, Son Boc, Tam Vu (Mat Tam Vu), Khai Bien, Kha Lam (Ca Rung), Ca The, Lap Cam, Bai Lo, Viet Long, Ton Quang, Bien Hoa, Di Chan Tai, Y Di (Phu Phu), Chan Thanh (Chau Chiem) (later part of Ha Duong district, An Giang), Mat Luat (later part of Tay Xuyen district, An Giang), O Mon (later part of Phong Phu district, An Giang), and 2 men were Can Che and Can Do, then appointed officials to rule. Abolished the native official title of Cambodia, applied the Nguyen Dynasty’s official system. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)